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HELEN TREVERYAN



HELEN TREVERYAN

OR

THE RULING RACE

BY

SIR MORTIMER DURAND, K.C.I.E.

INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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CHAPTER I

THE TREVERYANS OF LANEITHIN

UPON a weather-beaten headland, at one of the most inaccessible points of the southern coast of Cornwall, stands the old parish church of St. Erroc. Even now there is no railway within several miles of it; and the parish is perhaps as isolated and old-fashioned as any in England. Its southern boundary is formed by a line of rugged cliffs, with one or two difficult landing-places which can be approached only when the wind is off shore. To the north is rough moorland, overgrown with gorse and the beautiful Cornish heath; and beyond the moorland are the bare treeless hills, eternally swept by the winds of the Atlantic. The parish consists of several scattered hamlets and farms at some distance from the church, which stands on high ground with some trees and a village clustering round it. The tall slender spire is a conspicuous landmark for ships at sea.

The principal house in St. Erroc is the old manor-house of Laneithin, a substantial building of gray stone, which stands in a wooded hollow near the edge of the moorland, about two miles from the sea. From an architectural point of view Laneithin is not beautiful or otherwise worthy of remark; but it is a fair specimen of a Cornish country-house, and in its way picturesque enough. About it are some clumps of fine trees; and from one side a deep glen runs down to a cove among the cliffs.

Forty years ago Laneithin was occupied by John Treveryan, generally known as the Squire, whose family had held the house, and some good land round it, since the days of the Tudors. John Treveryan had, when a young man, served for a time in the army; but he had retired on succeeding to his estate, and had soon afterwards married a very fair and very charming lady, who shared his Cornish home for nearly thirty years. When she died

she was deeply mourned, not only by her husband, but by the whole population of that wild district of farmers and fishermen. Of her children Margaret, the eldest, was then with her father. A son, Erroc, had entered the army, and gone to India with his regiment. A second daughter had married the curate of the neighbouring church of St. Kerle's, and had afterwards left the county.

After Mrs. Treveryan's death her husband seemed for a time quite broken by his loss. People pitied the 'poor old Squire,' and said he would never be the same man again. Perhaps he never was the same man again. But as time went on, it was found that John Treveryan had by no means done with life. When the violence of his grief abated, the Squire began once more to show an interest in what was passing around him; and after a year or two he was again to all appearances as cheery as ever. His daughter managed his house for him exceedingly well, and was soon as popular as her mother had been. In the sunshine of her love and care the Squire seemed content and even happy.

He was a singularly fine-looking man; tall and powerful, with a high-bred regular face and taking manners, hearty but courteous. His complexion and his blue eyes were clear and bright; and his reddish hair was still thick and almost untouched by gray. The broad rounded forehead and slightly aquiline nose, and the straight strongly-marked eyebrows, gave evidence of talent and character. Those eyebrows, rather broad than heavy, were the distinctive feature of the Treveryans. They were to be found in almost every one of the family pictures. The Squire shaved all but his whiskers, showing a mobile well-cut mouth, and a rather prominent underlip and chin. A handsomer man one could hardly see.

Unfortunately the Squire was not free from some dangerous qualities. He had a strong will, with undeniable talent and originality of mind; but his judgment was not altogether trustworthy, and his reckless disregard for money had often been a trouble to his wife. It was not extravagance of the ordinary type. He spent little on horses, or shooting, or dress, or wine, or any of the usual luxuries. He rarely drank anything but water, and though he had a magnificent appetite he liked the plainest of food; and in every way his tastes were very simple. But he seemed to look upon money as a worthless thing, to be given away with the most lavish generosity if any one wanted it, and to be spent without limit or calculation upon any object

which might for the moment have aroused his interest. Hitherto the steady common sense of his wife had kept him within bounds; but now that she was gone he began to give himself more rein, and to enter upon schemes of which she would certainly have disapproved.

Margaret Treveryan had all her father's good looks, and much of her mother's capacity; but she was still comparatively young, and, moreover, she did not know all that was going on. So, having no check upon him, John Treveryan began to get through his money a great deal faster than he could afford to do. He rebuilt two or three farmhouses, which were certainly in bad repair, and amused himself by making them examples of what in his opinion farmhouses should be. The work afforded him a great deal of pleasure, and in a sense he did it very well; but the result was that the homely Cornish farmers found themselves absurdly overhoused, and that a good many thousands were sunk without the smallest return. Then the Squire, who read largely and had an active mind, took to buying novelties in the way of agricultural machinery. Each fresh toy was more wonderful than the last, and each was in turn thrown aside and forgotten, and each cost money. The Squire had also a taste for mechanical invention; and he indulged it without regard for expense. He set up a small workshop in the house, and used to turn out very creditable models, which went off to London or elsewhere to be developed. They were useless, but they were very ingenious, and they helped to get rid of the sovereigns.

After a time Margaret Treveryan began to see that her father's inventions were more clever than practical, and that the money must be going very fast; but her hesitating half-playful attempts at remonstrance met with no success. The Squire told her with a good-humoured smile that she did not understand anything about the matter; that it always paid to do things in the best possible way; and that he was determined to develop the estate to the utmost. Ten years after Mrs. Treveryan's death he had developed the estate to such an extent that he had got through all his ready money, and was beginning to borrow. And there was nothing whatever to show for it.

In the meantime the Squire had become a grandfather. Erroc Treveryan had married, soon after his arrival in India, the only child of the General commanding the division. Mary Ford was a gentle pretty girl, and made him a good wife; but she and her children suffered severely from the climate. Two of them died

before they were a year old; and when the terrible storm of the Mutiny broke upon our countrymen in India, the third child, a lovely little fair-haired girl, eighteen months of age, was beginning to look white and fragile. It was a fearful time for the ladies and children. Mary Treveryan in common with others was separated from her husband, whose regiment was sent up to the disturbed districts. She remained for a time in Calcutta, and there gave birth to a fourth child which only lived a few hours. The poor mother, worn out with grief and anxiety, very nearly followed it; but at last she grew a little stronger; and then, very pale and wasted, she gave way to her husband's request and sailed for England. His one desire was to know that she and little Helen were safe at Laneithin.

They arrived in the early autumn, after a trying voyage in the monsoon, and the Squire went all the way up to Plymouth to meet them. He received them with a warmth and affection which completely won their hearts. Nothing could be good enough for them. He had engaged the best suite of rooms to be got at the best hotel, and had tipped the servants all round to a perfectly ridiculous extent; and he ordered sumptuous meals for them, and tried hard to make his daughter-in-law drink champagne three or four times a day; and was generally charming and troublesome. As for the child, he idolised her from the first moment he saw her; and she evidently understood the position. It was pretty to see them together—the tiny dainty child, and the old man with his massive frame and powerful limbs. She was not the least afraid of him, and he was never tired of playing with her, and teasing and petting her.

When he considered that they were sufficiently rested, he took them on to Cornwall. There was a reserved compartment in the train for Mrs. Treveryan and Helen, who could not of course be crowded up with other people. 'Expense, my dear? What is a few shillings compared with your comfort? Money is given us to spend.' At Laneithin Erroc's wife and child found another warm welcome. Margaret was at the door as soon as the carriage drove up, and her face was a welcome in itself. It was a thoroughly good face, handsome and honest and kindly; and both mother and child took to it at once.

They remained at Laneithin a year, the strong Cornish air doing wonders for little Helen; and then Mrs. Treveryan insisted upon returning to India. The country was quieting down, and Erroc wrote that he hoped she would soon be able to rejoin him.

She would go out to Calcutta again and wait there on the chance.

It was a cruel wrench. Helen was three years old now, and as pretty a child as one could wish to see, and she was the only one. It was bitter to think of leaving her, even at Laneithin. 'In a few months she will have forgotten me,' the poor mother said to herself, with an aching heart; 'she will never really be mine again.' During that last sad fortnight, Mary Treveryan's wistful eyes followed the child unceasingly. Then the day of parting came; a dark wet October day, with a high wind from the sea; and Mary Treveryan kissed for the last time the sweet serious baby face, and unfastened the little arms from her neck, and went away into the wind and the rain of the lonely Cornish roads.

Do you ever think what those partings mean, you happy English mothers? They are going on around you every day. Do you ever think what it is to hand over to others, perhaps to neglect and unkindness, the children you would die for, and to go away out of their lives? It is part of the price England pays for her Indian Empire; part of the cruel tale of blood and tears. But it is not you who pay, so it matters nothing to you. Stay at home in comfort, and thank God that you are not as other women are.

A year later Mary Treveryan was at rest for ever. She lived to rejoin her husband, and to spend a few happy months with him; and then she was laid in her grave, with a tiny dead form by her side.

After her death Erroc Treveryan remained some time longer in India. He was then holding an important post. During the Mutiny he had been selected for service with a corps of irregular cavalry which was being organised, and before the end of the campaign he was commanding it. The work suited him well, and he speedily became a marked man. When the fighting was over, Treveryan, now a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel, was offered the charge of a district which had been one of the centres of disaffection; and, as the appointment seemed to offer a fine opening, he accepted it. At that time the nation appeared to be deeply interested in Indian affairs; and it was supposed that the transfer from the Company to the Crown was the inauguration of a new and splendid era. Treveryan did not foresee how soon India would be forgotten again, and how completely he was cutting himself off by entering upon an Indian career.

Once he had taken up his new duties he found he could not

leave his post for some time ; and it was not until eighteen months after his wife's death that he at last obtained furlough and returned to England.

His child was then nearly six years old. She was a pretty little girl, with large serious gray eyes and dainty ladylike ways ; but apparently as strong as a child could be. The race had touched its mother earth, and was springing up again, healthy and vigorous. Helen tyrannised over her grandfather, and was spoilt by every one in St. Erroc except Margaret Treveryan, whose hand was as firm as it was gentle. The child obeyed her to the letter, and thought her quite faultless.

Helen was very gracious to her father. She took him by the hand and introduced him to everything and everybody at Lan-eithin ; to the servants and the garden, and the horses, and the cows, and the pigs, and to her big retriever Dash, and to the turkeys and ducks and fowls, and all the surroundings of her country home. She had inherited the Treveryan love for animals, and her aunt had strongly encouraged it ; so that Helen was on terms of fearless intimacy with every beast and bird in the place. Horses that could have eaten her picked the bread gently from her tiny palm, and rubbed their heads on her shoulder when she went to them in their boxes : and the ducks waddled out of their pool under the ash tree when she passed by ; and Dash would have died for her a hundred times over.

Sometimes Helen took her father out in the yacht. The Treveryans had sailed the Cornish coast for many generations, and they had some stirring traditions of war and adventure at sea. Helen was to the manner born, and delighted in being afloat. The *Dreadnought* was a handy little cutter of about fifteen tons, fit for getting into and out of all sorts of places ; and her captain, James Tregenza, was a steady old sea-dog who knew every inch of the coast from Plymouth to the Land's End. He belonged to the little village at Carne cove, and was a fisherman by early training ; but he had served in the navy. Tregenza loved the 'little lady' as much as if she had been his own child, and was never so happy as when he had got her on board.

It was a thoroughly healthy life, and the father and daughter spent a happy summer ; though with him there was always present the sense of his loss. If only he could have seen them together, the little graceful child and the soft-eyed patient mother, who had loved her so dearly, and left her for his sake. To him

life could never be very bright again. Erroc was anxious too about his father. Margaret had told him of her doubts as to money matters ; and he soon saw that she had some cause for them. However, it was very pleasant to be together, and for all at Laneithin the time passed happily until the autumn, when Erroc went back to India.

For the next eight or nine years Helen remained at Laneithin, living a quiet country life, and learning from 'Aunt Madge' nothing but what was good. Margaret Treveryan was, like her mother, a well-educated and accomplished woman ; and her influence and teaching were just what a girl required. Helen grew up straight and strong, in body and mind, with refined feelings and tastes, and a complete want of affectation. Aunt Madge taught her to be courteous and considerate to all men, and to all living things : to birds, and beasts, and flowers. She imbued Helen with her own gentleness of thought, and with her own chivalrous old-world pride in all that was good and noble. She taught her to be proud of the Treveryans who fought so well for King Charles ; to be proud of Cornwall ; to be proud above all of England, and the great things England has done. She taught her that cowardice was dishonourable, even in a woman ; and that anything like deceit was cowardly, and therefore beneath her—beneath a Treveryan. She taught her in fact to be, in the truest and fullest sense of the word, a lady. And she taught her to fear and worship God. A woman without religion is hardly a woman. As for the less important matters which are generally called education, Helen got on well enough. It was difficult in Cornwall to get masters, but she was still young ; and with the help of a good governess she learned as much as most girls learn in the schoolroom. She had decided talent for music, like most of her family, and promised to sing well.

At fifteen she was a graceful and beautiful girl ; a child still in many ways, and rather impetuous in thought and speech, but very taking. She could walk, and ride, and row, and she could steer the *Dreadnought* on a wind very nearly as well as old Tregenza ; and yet she was above all things gentle and warm-hearted. From her babyhood she had possessed the peculiar charm of manner which makes some women attract all around them. Added to her good looks and her real goodness of heart, that charm was irresistible. The man had no music in his soul who could see Helen Treveryan for five minutes and not love her. Even Tregenza's two troublesome boys, the wildest young scamps

that ever sailed a boat, would do anything for the little lady who lectured them and got them out of their scrapes. And in all the hospitable houses of the most hospitable county in England Helen Treveryan's face was as welcome as the day. It was a very happy girlhood.

In the meantime, however, things had been going from bad to worse with the Squire. As he got more involved, he seemed to grow more reckless, and larger in his views, and more irritable in temper. To Helen he was always kind; but at times he spoke sharply to his daughter, who was obliged to trouble him for money. He got a worried look too, and lost some of his old heartiness of manner. A year or two after Colonel Treveryan left England the old man opened a quarry which was going to make all their fortunes. It failed of course, after a considerable sum had been sunk in getting out stone and constructing a tramway. The place was inaccessible, and the same stone could be shipped much cheaper elsewhere.

For some time after that the Squire was more careful. He used to sit and make models in his workshop, or go out sailing with his daughter and Helen. They were very happy then. He was so cheery and handsome and good; like a big courteous boy, full of fun and mischief. He even went so far as to admit that he had been imprudent about money matters, and promised to be very cautious in future. Unfortunately the fit did not last. Margaret saw that he was getting absorbed again in some scheme about which he would not talk. He was carrying on a brisk correspondence; and once or twice he went away for a day or two.

At last she heard what had happened from a woman in the village, who spoke as if the thing were generally known. The Squire's curiosity had been aroused by the chance discovery of a disused and overgrown mine-shaft on the edge of the moor. He had set to work to search the ground; and had almost immediately found what he expected. Now he was convinced that it only required a little money to open at St. Erroc one of the richest tin mines in Cornwall. He would soon be worth millions.

The Squire said nothing to his daughter. He knew she should be afraid of the scheme; and he did not want to be discouraged. 'They will all believe in me when I have done the thing,' he thought; 'they will see the old man was right then. Meanwhile it is no use saying anything about it.' Margaret did not press him, but she grew more anxious as the weeks went on.

The district was notoriously a bad one from a mining point of view ; and the practical experts who came down to examine the Squire's discovery looked doubtful, and showed no inclination to help him. Their caution, or, as he called it, their stupidity, only made him more obstinate. He was not going to be put off like that. His indignation incited him to tell Margaret about it ; and she begged him to be very careful, which annoyed him. He went away for a week, and returned one evening in great spirits, bringing with him a pale, thickset, hook-nosed man, with a big head and broad shoulders, and a slight foreign accent, whom he introduced to his daughter as Dr. Stein, and described as 'an Austrian mining fellow, who knew all about it. Come down to see that find of mine, you know. He's got a head on his shoulders, and saw through the jealousy of the other fellows at once.'

During the summer of 1870, while all Europe rang with the clash of arms, the end came at Laneithin. Pushed on by Dr. Stein, the old Squire had got together every halfpenny that he could raise, and had practically put the whole in the hands of his guest. A considerable sum was really spent on the spot. The greater part Stein professed to be spending in London, promoting a company. This required a heavy outlay ; but everything was going well. Success was certain.

One morning at breakfast the Squire received a letter which he opened eagerly. As he read his face grew white, and an awful change came over it. Margaret looked at him in alarm.

'What is it, father?' she said anxiously.

The old man stood up, and a hoarse inarticulate sound broke from him. The letter dropped on the table, and he made two vain attempts to pick it up again. Margaret and Helen were by his side at once, and Helen picked up the letter and gave it to him. He could not speak, but he raised his left hand to his mouth, and then tried to walk out of the room.

With the help of the servants they got him upstairs, and sent for the doctor, who came two hours later.

It was a paralytic stroke. Dr. Carlyon hoped all might yet go well. In the meantime there was to be no mention of business, nothing to excite or worry the sick man. Alas ! he bore his death-wound in his heart. He never lost consciousness, and after the doctor had gone he succeeded in making Margaret understand that she was to read the letter. As she did so, he lay watching her face with eyes of pathetic anguish.

It was a cruel letter : Dr. Stein curtly informed the Squire that

he had failed in his efforts, that the money was all spent, and that he was leaving England at once. There was hardly an attempt at further concealment.

Margaret put down the letter and looked at her father. His mouth was trembling, and the look in his eyes was more than she could bear. 'Never mind, father dear,' she said. 'It will all come right. Don't worry yourself about it. It's only a little money. What does that matter?'

He shook his head despairingly. He knew it was hopeless. In the presence of Death the Revealer many things became suddenly clear to him. He lived only a few weeks longer. For a time he recovered in a measure the use of his speech, and his head seemed clear; but he would accept no consolation. He had ruined them all, and his self-reproach was sad to see. While his son was on the seas speeding homeward, hoping to see him once more, the old Squire was stricken again and died. The end came quietly; they hardly knew when it was over. He was laid among his own people, under the shadow of St. Erroc spire; and all who had known him were sorry for his death. He had lived long among them, with a handsome face, and an open hand, and a kindly heart.

When Colonel Treveryan came he found things even worse than he had feared. How his father had succeeded in raising such sums of money he could not understand. One thing was clear, that with the utmost efforts, by letting the house and saving every penny he could save henceforward, he could hardly hope in his lifetime to discharge the debt; and, meanwhile, if he died his sister and child would be almost destitute. It was ruin, complete and crushing.

While he was reflecting sadly over the position, he received an offer which gave him a chance of getting out of his difficulties. A rich landowner of the neighbourhood, who could afford to pay a fancy price for anything he wanted, came forward at this moment with a proposal to buy Laneithin. At first Erroc Treveryan shrank from the idea with something like horror. Laneithin had been in the family nearly three hundred years. He could not let it go. As he thought on, however, the thing assumed a different aspect. The price offered was very large, much more than he could have hoped to get; and after all what would he gain by refusing it? They could never live at Laneithin, any of them, and he had no son to keep up the name. Was it right in the interest of the others to refuse the offer? The brother and

sister talked it all over together, with many fluctuations of feeling; and at last they agreed that it would be wisest to accept. The old home must go. It was hard, cruelly hard; but it was the right thing to do.

So Laneithin passed away to other hands, and the name of Treveryan disappeared from St. Erroc. Henceforth their place would know them no more.

CHAPTER II

CHANGE OF SCENE

WHEN Laneithin had been sold, Colonel Treveryan went back to his work in India, and his sister took Helen abroad. France and Germany were locked in their death-struggle, so Helen and her aunt went first to Italy, where they spent a very pleasant year. A complete change was the best thing for both of them ; and the education would be good for Helen. They had with them one old Laneithin servant—Miss Treveryan's maid Power, a little brown-eyed woman who loved her mistress from the bottom of her honest heart, and had petted and spoilt Helen ever since she first saw her. She followed them now, and would have followed them to the world's end.

Altogether, in Italy and Switzerland and France, and finally in Germany, they spent four years. Once, for a few months, Colonel Treveryan joined them, and they had a delightful summer about the Swiss lakes. He was very proud of his daughter now. She grew prettier every year, and her voice was delightful ; and she was just as unaffected and natural as a child. It was settled during his visit that when she was nineteen she should go out to him in India, and that Aunt Madge should go too. But when the time drew near, the doctors interfered. Since they had left Laneithin, Margaret Treveryan's health had never seemed so strong as before, and lately she had suffered acute pain from some affection of the heart. She was now forbidden to leave Europe, and Helen had to go alone.

She went with a painful conflict of feeling. She had learned to love her father during his visits to Europe ; but Aunt Madge had been everything to her since she was a baby. It was hard to leave her, even to go to him ; and it was doubly hard to leave her in failing health. Aunt Madge was very firm. 'No, dear.'

she said. 'Your first duty is to your father. Don't ever let him know you had the slightest hesitation about it. I shall miss you of course ; but think how lonely his life has been for the last ten years.'

'But you are not well. You ought not to be left alone.'

Aunt Madge smiled. 'I can take care of myself, and Power will take care of me. I might live for twenty or thirty years. You could not stay with me for twenty or thirty years because I am not perfectly well.'

A few weeks later Helen had said good-bye and sailed for India, and Aunt Madge had settled down in a tiny house at Torquay, where she had been advised to go. It was a very tiny house, for she was troubled at being a burden on her brother ; and it was lonely. Her sister had died long before, leaving only two sons, who had grown up anything but agreeable. Their father was a rough, rather coarse-bred man ; and they seemed to have taken after him entirely. There was nothing of the Treveryan in them. In the old times they had come once or twice to Laneithin ; but they were not nice boys, and Aunt Madge did not think them good companions for Helen. There was no one else belonging to the family.

However, Aunt Madge had not long to endure her solitude. She began to lose strength fast. She seemed to feel that her work was over ; and though she was brave and cheerful to the end, she had no wish to live. A year after Helen left her she was gone.

It was not until then that they knew how ill she had been. She would never let Power tell them ; and her last letter was as beautifully written as ever, and as full of brightness and interest in their doings. She died as she had lived, thinking of others. It was one of those lives which are so hard to understand. As a girl Margaret Treveryan seemed to have been given everything which could make life sweet : beauty, talent, education, charm of manner, a true warm heart. Then, at two-and-twenty, the man she loved was taken from her by a miserable accident ; and from that time she never seemed to think of herself. In making others happy she found contentment ; but it seemed a waste somehow, a waste of love and beauty, and capacity for happiness.

In the meantime Helen had settled down in her Indian home. Colonel Treveryan was now in a prominent position, and she had to manage his house for him. It was difficult work at first, while everything was strange to her ; but she soon learnt enough

Hindustani to make herself understood by the servants, and the other ladies helped her over her early troubles. Before she had been two years in India, Colonel Treveryan's house was everything it should have been ; and her presence had brightened his life to an extent which he could never have believed possible. People said he had grown young again.

She was very happy too. Her father's one aim was to make her so ; and she had everything the heart of a girl could desire. She had learnt to know him thoroughly now, and she loved him as much as if they had always been together ; she could hardly believe at times that they had not. It was a delight to her to be with him and work for him ; to surround him with care and comfort ; to relieve him of all petty worries ; and to make his house pleasant for his many guests. He had cleared off all the Squire's debts by this time, and there was plenty of money for everything ; so she was free from that most wearing of troubles, the anxiety about ways and means. The difficulty was to prevent her father from spending too much on her and her pleasures. He had given her the best Arab horse he could get ; and had brought out for her all the way from England a beautiful deer-hound, which was a real delight to her ; and he was constantly trying to find out something she wanted. It was not very prudent perhaps, for his income would die with him ; but he was so fond and proud of her, and it was the Indian way to be open-handed. We have changed all that now. The Indian Services are half ruined by the fall in the value of silver, and the old open-handedness is dying out fast ; but it was the fashion then.

One Sunday evening in the month of September, a small party of guests were gathered round Colonel Treveryan's dinner-table. It was an understood thing in the hot weather that any one who liked to come in after evening-church could do so ; and generally three or four men availed themselves of the chance. That night some of the officers of a Hussar regiment which was quartered at Syntia had driven over from cantonments.

The regiment was to be relieved two months later ; and the conversation at dinner turned upon this subject. They began talking about the Thirtieth Lancers, who were coming to Syntia in their place ; and Colonel Treveryan said he knew Colonel Aylmer, who commanded ; they had served together in the Mutiny. One name after another was mentioned, and then a Major Hodgson said : ' The only one I know well is young Guy Langley. He comes from my part of the country. You are sure to like

him. He is a real good boy ; does everything well ; and a hand some fellow too.'

'I have met him. He's a good-looking fellow,' another man said ; ' but he puts on a lot of side, doesn't he ?'

'Oh no. He doesn't mean it. He really is a very nice young chap. It's only the Thirtieth swagger.'

Helen sat listening in silence. 'I shan't like *him*,' she thought ; and she pictured to herself a conceited young gentleman with a supercilious manner. She had seen some like that, and objected to them strongly.

But Guy Langley was not like that. The idea one forms of a man from the casual conversation of others is often curiously incorrect.

CHAPTER III

THE LANGLEYS OF WRENTHAM

THE Langleys of Wrentham Hall in the county of Warwick were a good old family, with some reason to be proud of themselves. They were not the original occupants of the Hall, which, like most of our English country houses, had changed hands more than once. The Langleys bought it from a family of the name of Blunt, who were ruined, like many others, in the disgraceful days of Charles the Second; when the Dutch were burning our ships in the Thames, and Society was gambling and drinking at Whitehall. John Langley, the first of the name at Wrentham, was a London merchant, who had made a fortune in the Eastern trade, and had been knighted by the King in return for a loan of which nothing was ever more heard. Sir John rebuilt the Hall, which was then a picturesque Elizabethan house, or rather he added to it. The original house was left standing, but the court and subsidiary buildings were cleared away from the front, and in their place arose a lofty façade of stone, with narrow windows and pointed gables. From this block two wings were carried backwards to meet the projecting wings of the old house, and the whole building thus assumed the shape of a square, the original porch and front looking across a flagged courtyard into the back of the new block. Taking a hint from what he had found at Wrentham, Sir John then threw out a stone portico in front of his new main door, and a walled court in front of the portico. A panel in the great stone gateway bore the representation of a chained leopard instead of the bull's head of the Blunts, which was relegated to a smaller gateway on the right of the court, leading into the garden. The stables were rebuilt just outside the court, also to the right, an iron gateway giving access from the court to the stable-yard. Sir John Langley had been struck

by the hall of the old house, with its mullioned windows and high oak panelling, and this he determined to reproduce. His new front door was therefore made to open into a large panelled hall, at one end of which was a wide fireplace of the ancient type, and at the other end a broad oak stair leading to the rooms above. For the sake of warmth the front door was covered by a small inner porch or anteroom, which projected into the hall, breaking the stiff outline of the walls and forming two pleasant recesses to right and left of the entrance. From each of these recesses a broad carved window with cushioned seats looked out upon the court.

A walled garden lay to the right of the house, sloping gently towards a stream a hundred paces distant. This stream turned in its course a little lower down, and the road leading from the Hall to the village of Wrentham crossed it by a massive stone bridge.

After the time of Sir John, Wrentham remained substantially unchanged. The walls became mellowed in colouring, and covered in parts with lichen and moss and ivy; the oaken stairs and panelling grew darker and darker; the garden-wall was levelled, and the old enclosed garden gave place to a smooth sloping lawn dotted with fine trees; while flower-beds and shady walks and hothouses gradually grew into being beyond the stream; finally, a considerable extent of country round the house was enclosed and turned into a park, full of grassy mounds and grand old trees and pleasant glades, which ran up into the bracken and underwood of the pheasant covers. But substantially the Hall remained as Sir John Langley had built it, only improved by the hand of time, and the loving care of successive generations of occupants. As a specimen of architecture it was very far from perfect, and at times a stranger might have thought it somewhat gloomy; but in spring or summer, when the lawns were smooth and trim, and the flower-beds bright with colour, and the great oaks and beeches in their glory, a man would have been hard to please who could find fault with such a home. It was a thoroughly English house, such as no country but England can show, and fit to be the cradle of a sturdy English race.

The Langleys were worthy of their birthplace. They could not boast of a chivalrous descent, and they had made no great mark in history; but they had given to their country a fair number of stout soldiers and honest country gentlemen, and in

their own part of England their name stood high. At the same time the family was not wealthy. Since the days of Sir John the Langleys had never made money, or largely increased their possessions by marriage. The younger sons had been obliged to seek their living all over the world, very much to their own advantage and that of the world as well.

That evening in September 1876, when the little Sunday party were sitting round Colonel Treveryan's table at Syntia, the sun was still bright in the English sky. It was one of those clear exquisite days of early autumn when the north wind brings with it a gentle warning of the dark days to come.

The Langleys were gathered about the open hall door in readiness for their usual Sunday ramble across the fields. They were a handsome family. Charles Langley, the master of the house, was fully sixty years of age, but he was still a man to be envied as he stood there among his sons, straight and broad-shouldered and powerful, with the clear eyes and fresh complexion which can only be kept by a healthy country life. His wife stood near him, a tall graceful woman, with a determined face. Lady Mary Langley was the granddaughter of a successful lawyer, whose abilities had won him a peerage. His son, the second peer, had rendered some service to his party, and had been rewarded with an earldom. When he died in his turn he left behind him a son who succeeded to the title, and a daughter, Lady Mary, who inherited little in the way of money, but a large share of the pertinacity and rather imperious temper which had distinguished her father and grandfather.

When she married Charles Langley he was a Captain and Lieutenant-Colonel in the Guards, and one of the best-looking men in the service. She never rested until she induced him to leave the army, for which he was in some respects well fitted, and to enter upon a political career, for which, as he well knew, he was not fitted at all. She succeeded in getting him into the House, but there her success ended. He detested the life, and was beyond measure pleased when, after a couple of years of weary drudgery, he was beaten at the general election by a Radical candidate. Nothing would induce him to stand again. It was, he said, worse than being in jail; there at least you got regular meals and a good night's rest; in the House you got neither. Lady Mary did her utmost to rouse him to a sense of what she described as his duty, but on this point he was immovable; and at last, with many secret tears of mortification and anger, she

was forced to recognise her defeat. She had spoilt a good soldier in Charles Langley, and she could make nothing else of him.

The two girls, Barbara and Evelyn, had much of their mother's gracefulness, but with more of the Langley type, the fair hair and blue eyes which were so common in the family pictures. They looked well in their trim gray ulsters and honest walking-boots ; and they were thoroughly good girls, well mannered and sensible if not highly accomplished. Their brothers were like them and each other, though not cast in the same mould. Henry, the eldest, was a typical Langley in face and figure, with his father's broad shoulders and fair colouring. He had unfortunately married when at Oxford a woman of humble extraction some years older than himself. Husband and wife were now separated, and there were no children of the marriage. It had been a severe blow to Lady Mary, who could have forgiven almost anything sooner than this ; and poor Harry, who was a good fellow at bottom, found himself so uncomfortable at Wrentham that he did not care to come down very often. He lived by himself on his allowance, which was liberal, hunting a little and shooting a good deal, and getting through his time with tolerable satisfaction to himself and not much harm to any one else. Guy, the second son, of whom they were talking in India, had been three years in the army. There was perhaps a touch of swagger about his manner, which was, however, singularly pleasant and winning ; and his tall clean-cut figure was topped by a well-shaped head and handsome face. He was like his mother ; but his features, though regular, were not so determined in their expression. Guy was the best looking and cleverest of the Langleys, and the most popular with men and women. Finally, there was Roland, the youngest son, a good-looking young fellow too, but perhaps at that time the least attractive of the family. He was only a couple of years younger than Guy, but he had always been more or less delicate, and the difference seemed to be much greater. Roland had done better at school than either of his brothers, and had left Eton with a certain conceit about him which Oxford was not eradicating. Guy disapproved of the tone Roland had brought back from college ; and expressed his disapproval with candour. 'Ro, you are an infernal young prig,' he said ; 'you ought to go back to Jones's and get it swished out of you. I thought you would come to a bad end when you began to bring back all those beastly prizes. You won't do us any credit if you go on like this.' And Guy had set to work in a

good-humoured but very scientific manner to take Ro down a peg.' However, Roland was an affectionate boy, with the makings of a man in him, and if he was inclined to be priggish he had some excuse. He had been the most prominent oppidan at Eton; and his tutor, a very distinguished classical scholar, who thought the highest thing in life was to be a schoolmaster or a college don, had said to him at parting, 'Well, Langley, I am glad your people recognise that *you* are too good to be wasted on the army.'

Most families fall into natural subdivisions, and the Langleys were no exception to the rule. Harry and Barbara had always been firm allies. Evelyn and Roland, though given to sparring with each other, never failed to present an unbroken front to an external enemy. Guy, who came between the two pairs, was a general favourite, but he was from the beginning his mother's boy and had taken all his childish confidences direct to her. Now it was his last day at Wrentham, and Lady Mary's eyes rested on him wistfully as he stood on the steps in the sunlight, his left arm carelessly linked in Evelyn's, and his face turned towards the stable, in front of which two or three dogs were barking madly and straining at their collars, hindering by their impatience the boy who was trying to loose them. A few seconds later they were racing across the courtyard, old Saxon, the deerhound, a dozen lengths ahead; and after a stormy greeting the party set out for their walk.

'Come with me, Guy,' his mother said, and she thought with a sudden pang that this was perhaps the last time, the last of so many since he had been a sunny-faced baby of four. How well she remembered his first Sunday afternoon walk, his pride at his promotion, and his scornful refusals to admit that he was tired. 'Twenty years ago,' she thought, and sighed. Then she repressed the feelings that were crowding upon her, and went on with an air of half-assumed disgust: 'You wretched boys! Poisoning the pure air of heaven with your horrid tobacco.' Guy laughed. It was an old subject of discussion between them, and had been a sore subject once; but Lady Mary, like a sensible woman, had yielded upon this point, and many others, when she found her sons growing out of leading-strings. 'You know you like it really, mother,' he said. 'I had hard work to educate you, and you must not be ungrateful.' She answered him with a smile, and they passed out together under the great stone gateway.

It was a walk both mother and son often thought of in after years. Away in India Guy would sit at times with a far-off look in his eyes, dreaming of the old home, and that afternoon seemed to come before him with special clearness. He could see the sunlight on the grass slopes, and the autumn tints on the trees, and he seemed to feel again the still cool air just touched with the scent of the coming winter. And his mother remembered it too, poor lady, gazing out upon the path they had trodden side by side, and longing, with a longing that was physical pain, for one look of those straight gray eyes and the ring of the cheery voice. The walk was rather a sad one. Charles Langley and his eldest son went on ahead, talking of the pheasants and the prospects of the hunting. Lady Mary spoke little. The young people laughed and chatted about the familiar objects they passed, but their laughter seemed a little out of tune, and once or twice the talk slackened into silence in a way that was unusual with that somewhat noisy family. When their heads were turned homewards the breaks of silence became longer, and by the time they arrived at the Hall they all felt tired and depressed.

There remained a couple of hours before dinner, and Guy strolled off to spend a part of them in saying good-bye to his friends at the stables. He was a favourite with man and beast, and his welcome was a pleasant one. It was dark when he finished his chat with old James the coachman in the saddle-room, and knocked, as he had promised to do, at the door of his father's study. Charles Langley was sitting in a leather-covered arm-chair, with his feet on the fender, reading *The Field*. Early as it was a fire was agreeable. 'Well, Guy,' he said, as his son walked into the room and drew a chair up opposite to him, 'so you are off to-morrow.'

'Yes, father.'

'I wish you could have stayed in England a little longer; but you are quite right to stick to your regiment, though your mother does not agree with me there. I don't like to see a soldier shirking foreign service.'

'I wouldn't leave the regiment for anything in the world,' Guy answered warmly; and his father looked at him with approving eyes.

'You are all right about money?'

'Yes. I owe a little, but not more than I can manage.'

'That's right. It's a stupid thing to get into debt. All the same, you must have extra expenses just now, and you may want

something in India at first,' and he took a closed envelope from the table at his side and handed it over to his son.

'Thank you, father,' Guy said, 'I daresay I shall know what to do with it; but I told you I would manage on my allowance if you let me go into the cavalry. It has been rather a tight fit sometimes, but I have never troubled you, have I?'

'No, never. But I felt sure you would keep straight,' his father answered; 'and I am sure you always will, about everything else as well as money.'

Guy did not reply, and there was a pause which neither seemed able to break. Both would have liked to say something more, but both were embarrassed. Then Charles Langley put an end to the silence and the interview.

'Hallo,' he said, with a glance at the clock on his mantelpiece; 'it is time to dress for dinner. I did not know it was so late. I never heard the gong.'

Guy pushed back his chair slowly, and stood for a moment in front of the fire, and then walked out of the room. As he passed behind the armchair, he laid his hand gently upon his father's shoulder. Charles Langley looked round with a smile and a nod, and then, as the door closed and the sound of Guy's footsteps died away down the passage, he sighed and stood up. He felt that they should have been more to one another; that in his indolence he had let the boy drift away from him. Now it was too late.

After dinner, as the Langleys sat round the great fireplace in the hall, the talk and the laughter were bright enough. It was a way they had in all but the coldest weather. The hall was a fine lofty room, the walls covered with trophies brought back by sporting or fighting Langleys for generations past. Great heads of moose and bison from America, the tapering twisted horns of Indian and African antelopes, and swords, and spears, and shields, and strange old firearms were mixed together overhead; while the polished wooden floor was half covered by the skins of tigers and leopards and bears. At either side of the projecting carved fireplace stood a figure in full armour, supposed to have been worn by some of the bygone Blunts. These motionless figures, with their closed helmets, were rather ghostly companions; but they had stood there ever since the days of Sir John, and the hall which they had so long guarded seemed to be the representative room of the house and the race. It was the room the Langleys dreamt of when they were away; and for

the adornment of it the boys incurred many a hard day's work, and faced many a danger.

There they gathered to spend their last evening together. Charles Langley and Harry sat near a lamplit table reading, while the rest grouped themselves about the log-fire, Guy's long limbs stretched out across the bearskin hearthrug, and his head resting upon a cushion which he had comfortably disposed against his mother's knees. Nobody but Guy would have dreamt of such a thing in that house, but Guy could do anything. For an hour or more the talk and the laughter went on, Lady Mary alone being silent, her hand moving softly at times about Guy's head. Then the bell in the courtyard suddenly rang out the summons to prayers. Guy got up, rather unwillingly, and they all passed into the inner room, where the servants were awaiting them. As they went Roland put into words the idea which had struck more than one of them. 'How dreary the old bell sounds to-night,' he said in a rather sentimental tone, 'as if it were tolling for Guy's departure.'

Evelyn turned upon him with sudden wrath. 'What an *idiot* you are, Ro,' she whispered savagely. 'Can't you see what it is to mother?' and he went to his seat feeling hurt but penitent.

Charles Langley read a few verses, and then they knelt and listened again to the beautiful evening collects, and rose, none the better perhaps some of them, but quieted and calmed by the solemn words. They generally gathered in the hall again when prayers were over, but that night Lady Mary could stand no more. 'You have to be up early,' she said, laying her hand on Guy's arm as the servants left the room; 'go and have your cigar, and come to my room for a minute when you are going to bed.'

So they broke up, the girls following their father and mother, and the young men going off to change their coats and assemble in their den in the east wing.

That night they did not stay long smoking. In less than an hour they parted; Guy walking down the passage with his arm over Roland's shoulder. 'Good-night, Ro,' he said, as they stood by the door of their mother's room. 'Be a good boy, and don't think me a beast for sitting on you. It's my way, you know.' And then, as he caught a glimpse of the boy's face, he turned hastily round and knocked at the door.

When Guy left his mother an hour later he had realised more clearly perhaps than ever before the strength of her love for him.

She spoke to him quietly, never breaking down for a moment, but he saw how hard it was to her ; and when at the last he lifted and kissed, as he used to do, a mass of the beautiful brown hair which hung down below her waist, she threw her arms round him with such a passionate cry that he was startled. ' Now go,' she said, with a sudden change of manner, and her ' good-night ' sounded hard and constrained.

Guy's room looked rather desolate with his little remaining luggage packed ready for the start, but he was young and had the world before him, and he was soon asleep. For an hour afterwards his mother sat before the fire thinking of all he had been to her. Now and then a smile came over her face, but for the most the steady brown eyes were very sad. At last she shivered and got up. The fire was almost out and the room felt cold. She walked across to her dressing-table, and stopped a moment before it. Then she lifted up the mass of hair that Guy had kissed, and cut away a heavy tress. ' He will like to have it when he is away,' she said to herself, ' my own boy.'

CHAPTER IV

GUY LANGLEY LEAVES ENGLAND

THE London train which Guy wanted to catch left Wrentham Road before seven, and as the Hall was four miles from the station, the household was astir by candlelight.

Guy himself woke before the man came into his room with his clothes and hot water. He opened his eyes with a sense that something was to happen, and though his next thoughts were regretful, there was enough novelty in the prospect to make it not altogether unpleasant. He lay awake for a few minutes, thinking of the past and all his happy days at Wrentham, but thinking more of the future. He was young, and though there was in his nature a poetic element which made him quick to feel, yet youth and health and a cheerful temper preserved him from any morbid excess of depression, and he was not on the whole unhappy as he threw off his bedclothes. There was a blazing fire in the grate, for the nurse who had looked after him as a child, and was still in the Langleys' service, had come into the room an hour before and made it up for him, determined that 'Master Guy' should be comfortable to the last.

Half an hour later he was in the dining-room, where he found the rest of the family, except his mother, assembled to see the last of him. It was a cold gray morning, and Guy felt little inclination to eat. With the faces of his brothers and sisters about him he had a sudden revulsion of feeling, and his heart sank as the thought came across him: 'I wonder when we shall all be here again together.' Roland had given expression to the same thought just before he came down, and the remark had been received in silence.

Now, in spite of his father's cheery voice, Guy felt low-spirited, and wished that it were all over. Yet he lingered, sipping his

tea, and shrinking from the pain that he knew he must go through in his mother's room, until Charles Langley looked at his watch. 'I don't want to turn you out of the house,' he said, 'but I heard the dog-cart come round ten minutes ago, and you have not much time to say good-bye to your mother.'

Guy left the room and walked slowly upstairs. He had expected a painful parting, and painful in a sense it was ; but she had nerved herself to go through it, and was resolved that no weakness on her part should make matters harder for him. He was conscious of a feeling of relief as he saw her standing ready to receive him, perfectly composed, with a smile on her face. 'I thought you were going off to India without coming near me,' she said, as he stooped and kissed her. 'Now you must not stay long, or you will miss your train. I know that new mare Harry got for us takes a good deal longer to do it than old Tom Brown. I hope we shall have taught her to trot by the time you come back.' Then she took up a little packet off her dressing-table. 'Only some of my hair, Guy. I thought you would like to have it. God bless you, my boy. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, mother dear. Don't be unhappy. I shall be back soon.'

She held him for a moment and looked in his face, as if to fix in her mind the remembrance of every line, and then kissed him with a stifled sob, and let him go.

Three minutes later the wheels of Guy's dog-cart were crunching the gravel at the end of the courtyard. He hardly knew how he had got there ; but as he drove through the gateway he looked back over his shoulder and saw his father and brothers on the steps under the porch, and the faces of the girls at the window by the side of it.

That day was a dreary one at the Hall. There was a general sense of slackness, and a disinclination to settle down to anything. Lady Mary did not appear till lunch-time, and then she looked white and spoke little. The afternoon dragged heavily, the more so that most of the family had got up in the morning some hours before their usual time. It was not until another night had passed over that things really began to go on again in their usual way.

It must be confessed that in the meantime Guy's spirits were not at a very low ebb. The rapid drive through the morning air was exhilarating. The new mare, though a little raw, and inclined to shy and break on small provocation, was a really well-

bred one; and with a light cart behind her she got over the ground very creditably. Guy knew and liked a good horse, and it was a real pleasure to him to make the little chestnut go as she should go. By the time he arrived at the station they were on the best of terms, and he was thinking more of her trotting than of anything else. 'She will do, Charles,' he said to the groom, as he handed over the reins and got down. 'Take her home quietly. Good-bye. I shall be back in England before long, I expect.'

'Good-bye, sir. I hope you may, sir.'

The train was punctual, and Guy had not much more than enough time to get his ticket and see to his luggage, which had been sent on in advance. Somehow he never could travel, even for a day or two, without a large amount of it. He settled himself comfortably in the corner seat of an empty carriage, with his rug tucked round his legs, and early as it was lit a long cigar. Having fairly started it he sat back with a sigh of contentment, and began to think.

Naturally his mind soon reverted to his mother and her farewell. His eyes softened as he pictured her standing in her room, as he had last seen her. 'Dear old mother,' he thought, 'how plucky she was.' Then he remembered the packet she had given him, and felt hastily in his pocket for it. He found it and took it out, and put it away in his dressing-case. That done he sat back again, and his thoughts gradually drifted away to other matters. Before the train reached Paddington they had travelled over a great variety of subjects, and on the whole with satisfaction to himself. He had every reason to be content with his condition in life. He was barely four-and-twenty, and in perfect health, with a large capacity for enjoyment, and nothing to prevent his taking full advantage of it. Compared with some of the other men in the regiment he was not well off; but one of his father's sisters had left him two hundred a year, and his father allowed him a similar sum, so that he could count on four hundred a year besides his pay. This was not wealth, but with care he could make it do. At the present moment he had in his dressing-case his father's cheque for a sum which would pay off all he owed and leave him a good balance in hand to start with. He liked the best of everything, and he had the instinctive open-handedness of the English gentleman; but he was not extravagant and rarely wasted money. He could therefore live in his regiment without discomfort. Good-looking and popular and heartwhole,

with no serious cause of sorrow or self-reproach in his past life, how could he help being happy? Happy he was, and looked, as he stepped out on the platform at Paddington, and proceeded to gather his effects together with the help of a porter, who had marked through the window his good-tempered face and generally prosperous appearance, and had at once set him down as 'good for a bob.'

The next few hours were spent in town. He had still to make one or two purchases to complete the outfit which he thought necessary for a residence in the East; and there were some solemn parting words to be said to the tailor and bootmaker whom he could not hope to see again for months or years. These and other farewell visits over, he made his way to Waterloo, and the same evening he found himself once more seated at the regimental mess.

Two or three days later Guy was standing on the quarter-deck of the *Ganges*, one of our Indian troopships, watching the English coast disappear in the haze as the great ship steamed away down channel towards the open sea. She bore away with her the Thirtieth Lancers, five hundred strong, and some drafts for other regiments, and a few stray officers who were going out to rejoin their several corps in India.

CHAPTER V

THE THIRTIETH LANCERS

THE Thirtieth Lancers was one of the most popular regiments in the service. Colonel Aylmer, who was taking it out to India, had the reputation of being an excellent commanding officer. Though a comparatively young man, little more than forty, he was by no means a young soldier. When a boy he had served in the Crimea, and had even then distinguished himself by his coolness and courage. Afterwards he had seen service in the Indian Mutiny and in China. He wore several medals and decorations, and among them the one which every true soldier covets above all—the Cross ‘for valour.’ He had won it in the dark days of 1857, by riding single-handed at a knot of native troopers who, in the confusion of a surprise, had surrounded and almost despatched an English officer. Colonel Aylmer was a fine-looking man, spare and soldierly, with a peculiarly attractive face and courteous manner. His heavy moustache and close-cropped hair were hardly touched with gray; and when in the saddle, with his easy seat and upright youthful figure, he looked the model of a *sabreur*. As a cavalry leader he had few equals. He knew exactly what horsemen could do and what they could not do, and was as careful as he was bold.

The senior Major, ‘Bob’ Dangerfield, was a man of good abilities, and an exceptionally sound judge of a horse, but rather too heavy for a cavalry soldier. He was not however a bad officer, and he was popular in the regiment, for he was open-handed and good-natured. If he had been a little less fond of good living, and a little slighter about the waist, he would have been more efficient, but you cannot have everything. The junior Major was a big fighting Englishman, of the heavy dragoon type, with a huge yellow moustache and a bald head, which gave him

rather a German look. He rode as no man of his size and weight has a right to ride; and he was generally known as the Baby. He was a merry companion, and champagne seemed to have no more effect upon him than water.

The Adjutant of the Thirtieth was perhaps the keenest soldier in the regiment. Succeeding to an earldom before he was out of long clothes, he had set aside the appeals of his mother and friends and insisted upon entering the army. He was now one of the smartest Adjutants the Thirtieth had ever had, conversant with every detail of his profession, and an enthusiastic cavalry man, convinced that British horsemen well led could do anything in the world, from riding down unbroken infantry to boarding an ironclad. The men, who always love a lord when he is at all lovable, and often when he is not, idolised Lord Enleigh and would have followed him anywhere. His brother officers liked him too, but some of them were a little inclined to vote him a nuisance, and to sneer at his enthusiasm, which was a rebuke to themselves. Some of the wilder spirits resented the extreme courtesy and gentleness of his manner, which perhaps savoured a little of affectation.

Of the other Captains the two whom Guy Langley knew best were St. Orme and Beresford. The first, St. Orme, looked and spoke as if he had stepped from a novel of Dumas. He was a tall, rather loosely built man, who wore his fair moustache fiercely twisted upwards, and affected in all respects the manners and conversation of the typical hussar. Both men and women liked him, for his magnificent swagger was in no way offensive, and it was known to be accompanied by the reckless courage which belonged to the part. St. Orme did not profess to have deeply studied the science of war. That, he would tell you in a fine deep voice, rolling his r's, and speaking from the back of his throat, was all infernal nonsense. The British cavalry in old days had not learned to fight by reading books. Then he would swagger away, showing a great deal of cuff and collar, with his trousers ostentatiously turned up, as was then the fashion. Some people did not take St. Orme quite seriously, thinking that the cuffs and the collar and the rest of the properties were the whole man. In this they were wrong, for he was a fine fellow. His 'get up' was merely a correct and necessary portion of the performance. George Beresford, generally known as 'Berry,' was an Irishman, or rather what the Irish of the present day would call one of the English garrison. His laughing eyes were very

blue indeed, and his face was burnt by constant exposure to a deep brick-red. He had a strong though hardly an elegant seat on horseback, and gave promise of turning out a bold and capable soldier when his natural daring and dash should be regulated by experience. Berry had begun his career in an infantry regiment, but had eventually induced his father to let him exchange into the cavalry. He explained that he really could not 'march.' If a fellow had been intended to march he would have been given four legs. The argument was a little confused, but it served its purpose, and before long Berry was one of the cheerist spirits in the Thirtieth Lancers.

One of the subalterns, Denham, was Guy Langley's special aversion, and the most unpopular man in the regiment. How he came to get into the Thirtieth no one knew, and it was not easy to understand why he had entered the service at all. He was dark and slight, more like an Italian than an Englishman in appearance, and extremely reserved. No one ever heard Denham speak of his people, though, as a matter of fact, he had nothing to conceal. He held himself apart, making no intimate friends, and giving no one the right to treat him with familiarity. In his way he was a good officer, cool and ready on parade, and thoroughly versed in the ordinary duties of his profession. So far as his work was concerned, he rarely laid himself open to criticism, or failed to do well whatever was required of him. He was a beautiful horseman, and one of the best steeplechase riders in the army. Yet Denham was essentially unpopular, both with officers and men. The former never felt that they knew him better than at first, and they resented his reserve and cynicism. The latter, though he never lost his temper with them, disliked him cordially. They felt that he despised them, as indeed he did. He regarded the British soldier as a drunken brute, and the feeling showed very plainly through his level manner. Denham had never owned a dog, and never touched one if he could help it. He said dogs were dirty, as they doubtless are. Curiously enough he was not unpopular with women. He seemed to interest them, and they admired his dark eyes and swarthy skin. Perhaps his apparent indifference to their beauty attracted them. He could dance well, when he chose, which he rarely did.

A strong contrast to Denham was little Hugh Dale, one of the junior subalterns and Guy's inseparable companion. They had been gazetted to the Thirtieth within a few months of each other. 'Chimp,' as they called him at Harrow, for obvious reasons, was

short but strongly built, with a plain face which no one could help liking. It was a bright and thoroughly honest face, with good brown eyes and white teeth, and a keen merry expression. Physically Chimp was 'good all round.' Hard and quick, and practically in constant training, for he rarely drank and never smoked and was always on his legs, Chimp could probably have thrashed any man in the regiment. He could jump very nearly his own height; and could run in very fair time any distance from a hundred yards to a mile. He was an exceptionally pretty bat, without much reach, but with a good eye and great quickness and pluck. It was very hard indeed to bowl him, and if once he got set and began hitting, the other side had a bad time of it. In the field he was equally useful, a smart point, and not bad at the wicket, worth having anywhere. He could bowl too to a certain extent. In fact, there was nothing in the way of athletic exercises that came amiss to him. He could ride of course, not very scientifically perhaps, but very hard and straight. Chimp's two main characteristics were keenness and pluck. He was always ready to do anything, and he would go till he dropped. His weakest point was his language. It was the language of a boy, and altogether too simple for the expression of complex emotions. He disliked books, though he was by no means wanting in practical brains. Finally, he was a thorough little gentleman in his feelings and an almost universal favourite. His two great objects of admiration and love were his father and Guy Langley. The former was an officer who had once commanded the Thirtieth, and was still well known to the regiment. He was a rich man, and almost alone in the world, so that his son was kept well supplied with money, which he spent royally to the old General's entire satisfaction.

The other subalterns of the Thirtieth were in their several ways a delightful set of boys, of the usual pattern. Who does not love the British subaltern? Is there, on the whole, anything in the world to equal him? As wild as a hawk, but so full of good feeling and honour, and so gloriously reckless of life and limb. Our officers are better than any other officers in the world if we only would believe it. They cannot help being so. There is no material in creation like the English boy.

As for the men, the Thirtieth had in 1876 a large number of old soldiers, and the discipline was admirable. Lancers always look well, for their uniform and their arm are greatly in their favour, but the Thirtieth looked better than most. The men

were perhaps a little big for rough work ; but they were steady and smart on parade ; and altogether it was a beautiful regiment, and certain in Colonel Aylmer's hands to distinguish itself if sent on active service. Throughout all ranks there was a feeling of content, of respect for their commanding officer, and of pride in their corps.

There were not many ladies with the regiment when it sailed for India, but there were two or three of marked individuality.

Mrs. Aylmer, the Colonel's wife, was almost as much liked as her husband, and rather more feared. She was a few years younger than he was ; small and slight, with steady brown eyes and a low forehead, from which the hair was brushed off in a thick smooth wave. Mrs. Aylmer was always perfectly dressed, and her manners were those of a gentlewoman born and bred. She feared no living thing, and was an uncompromising opponent, but a most warm and loyal friend. A truer woman never stepped ; but she expected you to be quite honest with her. Anything approaching dishonesty or cowardice she met with a quiet but undisguised contempt which was extremely disconcerting. The Aylmers had one child, a daughter about six years of age, who would have been hopelessly spoilt if universal petting could have spoilt her. She was a pretty child, with her father's light brown hair and blue eyes, but she had inherited or caught from her mother a certain directness and self-possession of manner which in so small a person were odd and captivating. Mrs. Aylmer was the only person who kept her in order.

Mrs. Dangerfield was a strikingly handsome woman in a rather animal way, with large dark eyes, and red lips, and a faultless figure, and a very merry wit. There had been something a little doubtful about her past life, and though society had now agreed to overlook it, she was made to feel in numberless little ways that her antecedents were not altogether forgotten by her lady friends. The best of them were not intimate with her, and the others were occasionally unpleasant. Naturally enough she preferred the society of men, who were more charitable and less particular. With them she was a favourite, and not without reason ; for she was bright and good-looking, and though perhaps a little *canaille* she had a good heart. Men always like that combination of qualities : the women who are ' pretty and witty, wild, and, yet too, gentle.' Mrs. Dangerfield rarely if ever spoke unkindly of others, even of those who had treated her badly. For an intentional slight or insult she would retaliate by

some act of open warfare which generally left her with the balance in her favour. That done the matter was forgotten or at least forgiven, until some fresh provocation was offered. She was perfectly reckless of appearances, but capable of behaving properly when she thought it desirable to do so ; and even at her worst you could hardly say that she was unladylike. Hers was a wild untamed nature, in which the animal qualities predominated over the intellectual ; but she was not vulgar.

Mrs. Stewart, the wife of one of the senior Captains, was a woman of an altogether different stamp. She was handsome too, in a picturesque style, with voluminous plaits of copper-coloured hair, and a complexion of unusual purity, which was rendered all the more striking by a very white and even row of teeth. Women said she painted, which was malicious, and men were a little afraid of her. She read a good deal, and was fond of talking about literature. Stupid men jeered, and said it was all humbug, that she only read up reviews. Some of the clever men thought her 'metallic.' She was an entertaining companion, with an acute sense of the ludicrous and a rather quick tongue, but by no means devoid of softer qualities. Between her and Mrs. Dangerfield there was an armed truce. They had met in open fight more than once, and were not close friends ; but as opponents they respected one another. Mrs. Stewart had far more skill of fence ; but, as a rule, Mrs. Dangerfield fairly rode her down. Now Mrs. Stewart avoided provoking Mrs. Dangerfield to conflict, and Mrs. Dangerfield never attacked any one who let her alone ; so that they generally met and parted peaceably.

With the ladies as well as with his brother officers and his men Guy Langley was popular. It was no wonder altogether that he loved his regiment, and felt satisfied with life.

CHAPTER VI

OUTWARD BOUND

THE *Ganges* was a fine vessel, though not a fast one ; and if the life on board was somewhat monotonous, it was not altogether disagreeable or uninteresting.

In 1876 England had not established herself in Egypt as she has since done ; but even then an Englishman had good cause to be proud of our great highway to the East, guarded by its chain of fortresses. It warmed one's heart to come upon them, one after another : Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, with their towering batteries and crowded ships, and to see everywhere the familiar red coats, and flying out above them the brave old Union Jack.

A man does not know what England is until he leaves England. Then by degrees, if he has in him any power of thought and feeling, his eyes are opened, and it comes home to him as it never did before that he has a right to hold his head very high. The howls of party fight grow fainter and fainter, until they no longer vex the ear ; the little angry politicians are seen no more ; and in their place, from the mist and the foam of the northern seas, there rises a majestic form with calm and fearless eyes : England, the mother of empires.

To Guy Langley the voyage was a revelation. He had started for India thinking very little of these things ; but his was a nature which could not remain insensible to the meaning of all he saw ; and long before he reached Indian waters it dawned upon him that he had hitherto been strangely ignorant and indifferent. A few chance words first aroused him from his carelessness.

Among the officers on board was a Major Russell of the Engineers, a man of striking presence, very tall and powerfully built, with dark grave eyes, and a reserved but courteous manner. He

had distinguished himself both on service and at the Staff College, and, though only a few years older than Guy, had already gained a high reputation as a scientific soldier.

One fine calm morning about a week after their start, the *Ganges* was gliding over a quiet sea, moved only by the rolling lines of the ground-swell. Guy was sitting on deck, half asleep in an easy-chair, with a novel in his lap, when Russell's hand was laid on his shoulder. 'Do you know where we are, Langley?'

Guy looked up, rather surprised at the question. 'No, I don't, Major. Are we anywhere in particular?'

Russell was standing by the ship's side, looking away to the northward. 'There is Trafalgar,' he said, as he pointed towards the blue line of the Spanish coast. For a few seconds he was silent, then he went on: 'We must be close to where the fight was, a little south of it, and everything must have looked just as it does now. Do you remember? It was a calm day, about this time of year, or a little later, with a long smooth swell, and hardly a breath of wind. The French and Spaniards were lying out there to the right, more than thirty men-of-war, and we came slowly down upon them from the westward, with just breeze enough behind us to fill our topsails, and drove right through their line. What a fight it must have been! Sixty men-of-war pouring their broadsides into each other, and often so close that their yard-arms crossed. Isn't it hard to realise that all that was going on here, and only seventy years ago? The world seems to have changed so completely. Some of the sunken ships must be lying there still, perhaps under our very feet. What would one give to have seen such a day?'

Guy Langley stood gazing at the smooth blue sea, carried away by the strong feeling in Russell's voice and manner, and trying to picture the scene to himself. After a time he broke out. 'We may live to see it yet. We are bound to fight the French again some day, and we shall thrash them as we always have done. They never could stand up to us.'

Russell turned, and the pensive retrospective look died out of his face. 'That is a fine old theory, but I don't know that it is altogether a sound one, or a safe one. They stood up to us well, even at Trafalgar, poor fellows. It was not simply superior courage that beat them.'

Guy looked incredulous. 'What was it, then?'

'Training chiefly, I think. We had been blockading their ports for years, and our ships' crews were thoroughly seasoned,

while theirs were made up largely of landsmen. Of course we could manoeuvre much more smartly than they could. And our gunners served their guns faster, and shot straighter, so that they suffered much more than we did.'

'I don't like to think our victories were all owing to that sort of thing,' Guy said.

'I don't say they were. I believe our men have more fighting devil in them, somehow. But it is as well to look at these things fairly, and not to run the chance of deceiving ourselves as the French did a few years ago. Besides, we have every reason to be proud of being better seamen and better gunners.'

Guy did not look satisfied. Russell laughed. 'You don't agree,' he said; 'you prefer the old way of putting it—

'Two skinny Frenchmen, one Portuguese.
One jolly Englishman will lick 'em all three.'

Well, of course pluck is the best foundation in the world, and I believe we have got it as no one else has. All I mean is, that it does not do to trust to pluck alone. You may win that way now and then, at a heavy cost, but three times out of four the men who have been trained to play the game will beat you, as they would beat you at cricket or football.'

'Of course you are right, Major,' Guy answered; 'but one likes to think our fellows are better in themselves.'

'I don't say they are not. I believe they are. All I mean is that we must not rely on that and neglect the rest. What happened to the French in 1870 is a terrible warning. I can't help feeling uncomfortable when I think how near we have been sometimes to ruinous disasters. We have had luck with us as well as pluck, and luck may change.'

Then he was silent again. He was thinking of the miserable rabble of French troops he had seen on the Swiss border when Bourbaki retreated before the Germans. 'No, we could never come down to that,' he said to himself.

Guy had gone back to Trafalgar. He was trying to remember what he had read about the fight, and to imagine the great battle-ships lifting slowly forward with the swell, their bows going up like the bows of the *Ganges*, as the long smooth waves rolled away in front of them towards the line of the enemy's broadsides. 'Didn't Nelson go in for cutting their line?' he asked. 'I do not quite see how that acted. It always seems odd to me that we beat the French on shore by fighting in line against their

column, and beat them at sea by fighting in column against their line.'

The idea had never before clearly presented itself to Guy's mind, but conversation brings one's thoughts to a point, particularly if one is inclined to be an indolent thinker.

'That has struck me too,' Russell answered. 'I believe the reason was simply want of training. If the French ships and guns had been properly handled, they would have destroyed the heads of our columns at sea just as our well-trained infantry destroyed the heads of their columns on shore; but their fire was comparatively harmless, so we were able to get to close quarters without suffering much, and then to rake them horribly in going through, and to split up their line into separate fragments. That is what the French say themselves. I expect Nelson only attacked in that formation because he knew he could take liberties. All the more credit of course to his generalship. But if the French, instead of being merely brave men, had been trained to fight their ships properly, he could not have done it. We could not have attacked an American fleet like that.'

'An American fleet! Do you believe in the Yankees?'

'Don't you?'

'I don't know much about them, but I can't say I admire them. Those I have met seemed to me infernally vulgar and bumptious.'

'Some of them are vulgar of course. It's a country where one can rise rapidly. But I am always sorry to hear Englishmen abuse Americans. They are our own flesh and blood, and it seems to me that we ought to be very proud of them; we soldiers particularly.'

'Why? Of course they are a big nation, because they have lots of room to grow in, but what have they ever done except grow, and swagger?'

'Fight. They have shown the world what war means with men of English race on both sides.'

'You mean in their civil war? I never read much about it: I was a small boy when it happened; but I always thought it was a case of two armed mobs.'

'No doubt they were not highly trained troops when they began; but look at the pluck and endurance they showed. I don't believe any other troops in the world except our own would have stood up against such awful losses. Look at Gettysburg,

for instance, where there were fifty thousand men killed and wounded, a full quarter of the total numbers engaged, or the last campaign against Richmond, when Grant lost a hundred thousand men. I believe I am right in saying that altogether the North put a million and a half of men into the field ; and that more than a quarter of a million, one man in six, were killed or died in hospital. The South probably lost quite as many out of a smaller total.'

'I never realised that there was anything like that.'

'But there was. And nine out of ten on both sides were men of our own blood. Isn't that something to be proud of?'

'They hate us now. They would not thank you for calling them English.'

'I know that. Of course they think they have improved on the old stock ; and I am afraid they don't love us. They were very sore with us during the war. It was not fair, I think, but it was natural enough. We were ignorant and careless ; and the North thought we encouraged rebellion, and the South thought we did not sympathise with them in their fight for freedom. I hope the soreness will disappear in time ; and whether it does or not, that makes no difference. Even if they hate us, I can't help being proud of them. They belong to our race, and they are a grand nation.'

'I suppose they are in some ways ; I never thought of it in that light. But they always behave badly to us. They tried to stab us in the back when we were fighting Napoleon ; and they always back up the Irish against us.'

'Our own parties use the Irish against each other, and always did. You can't expect the Americans to care more for us than we do for ourselves. Besides, they know they will have to deal with the Irish question themselves some day. It is only natural they should shelve it at our expense as long as they can.'

'It may be natural, Major ; it isn't nice, in the way they do it.'

'Well, I don't mean to say the Yankees always behave well to us. I don't think they do. But we must get to look beyond our own island. It can't hold us all ; and anyhow those of us who have the good luck to remain in it ought not to regard as aliens those who live elsewhere, and to sneer at them for little differences of dialect, and manner, and habits. We ought to think of the English race as our own people wherever they may be, from Canada to the Cape. It will make us all the better Englishmen.'

As he ceased speaking Mrs. Stewart passed, looking for a chair, and Russell went off to help her. He did not return, but he had set Guy thinking, and during the course of the long voyage it happened more than once that the two found themselves together, leaning over the ship's side, and talking of various events which had gone towards the making of our Empire. Russell was a well-read, thoughtful man, very proud of his country and jealous of her honour. His influence upon Guy was in all respects a good one. It did something to widen his sympathies, and remove from his mind the narrow prejudices of the stay-at-home Englishman. He began to understand that the men whose names were familiar to him were many of them mere political gladiators, who served to keep the mob amused while the real work of the race was being done. It came home to him that generation after generation, while statesmen had been wrangling and reviling one another, and carrying on their eternal struggle for place and power, millions of Englishmen all over the world, regardless of party squabbles and party cries, had been steadily bearing forward the English flag. So it has been, and so it is still. They colonise America and Australia and New Zealand, and conquer India, and open out Africa, so that the English tongue is heard and the English flag is seen in every quarter of the globe. They are a heterogeneous force; peers and ploughmen, soldiers and sailors, merchants and magistrates, squatters and parsons, women and children; and they fight loosely, without much combination, and suffer heavy losses. Their graves are everywhere; the earth and the sea are full of their dead. Many of their countrymen who stay comfortably at home are too ready to believe evil of them, to lecture and condemn them on the smallest evidence, or on none at all, to impede them in their work, to support against them any man of another colour, even at times to look on with indifference while they are fighting for their lives; but the English flag goes forward nevertheless, and with it, into all the dark places of the earth, go freedom and order and justice.

Guy Langley began to understand it all before the *Ganges* had finished half her voyage, and his Colonel remarked that he was taking an interest in these things. 'I like that boy,' Aylmer said to his wife. 'He has more in him than most fellows of his age. He thinks, and he is a gentleman.'

Mrs. Aylmer put her work down on her lap, and sat looking out over the sea. It used to vex her sometimes to see how

quickly Guy's moods seemed to change: how, for example, he would turn in a moment from a quiet conversation with her or her husband, in which he had been talking 'so nicely,' to a rather noisy chaffing match with Mrs. Dangerfield. She wondered whether one could quite depend upon him.

Some doubt of the kind she now expressed. Aylmer rebuked her in his gentle way. 'I think that is rather hard, wife. He is very young, and has high spirits. You would not wish him to be always serious.'

'No, dear. I suppose I am uncharitable. He *is* a nice boy.'

'Nevertheless the doubt recurred and remained, and Guy with his quick perception detected it, and felt hurt at it. He knew that he had many moods, but he would never admit to himself that this implied any lightness of feeling. He could honestly sympathise up to a certain point with totally different characters and lines of thought. That was all. Perhaps he was right. A quick sense of humour, and a tolerant spirit, which are commonly found together, may at times cause an honest man to be somewhat hardly judged by those whose minds are made of less flexible stuff.

One morning towards the end of October at daylight the *Ganges* cast anchor in Bombay harbour. The screw had hardly ceased to revolve when all on board were stirring; and soon the decks were covered with men.

Weary of their long confinement, all alike hailed with pleasure the sight of the Indian coast, and longed for the hour of landing. In the meantime, however, there was plenty to see. The wide bay full of shipping and small native craft; the fine buildings of the town; the low shore fringed with palms; the blue hills in the distance; the cloudless sky, in which the night mists were rapidly melting away under the influence of the rising sun and cool morning breeze; all combined to make up a very pleasant picture.

Guy Langley was one of the first on deck, and he stood for a time alone, leaning over the ship's side. To a man of his temperament there was something of poetry in the first sight of India, the land of adventure and romance of which he had read so much. A momentary feeling of annoyance came over him as the silence was broken by Dale's cheery voice.

'By Jingo! that's a stunning view,' the boy said as he walked up, looking as usual aggressively fresh and clean; 'we shall be off this beastly old tub before long now.'

Guy's dreams broke up, and he turned slowly round and looked at his friend. A smile came over his face, but he spoke rather reproachfully, and both smile and voice had in them an unintentional touch of contempt. 'Rum beggar you are, Chimp. That's "India's coral strand." I don't believe you ever think.'

Chimp was nettled and answered hotly. 'Yes, I do. I think just as much as any one else; only I am not always talking rot about things.' Then he recovered his temper and laughed. 'Anyhow, we'll have a jolly good time on India's coral strand; won't we, old chap?'

Guy assented, and they were soon in conversation about the doings of the coming day.

What a hot day it was! Bombay is always hot, even in November—hot with a soft, damp, sticky heat which is very infuriating. Sit near a window undressed in the sea breeze, and it is bearable; but put on a shirt and collar, or pack a box, and life becomes a burden. To an Englishman fresh from Europe, the heat is not so trying as it is to the old Indian. For the former there is at all events something of novelty in the sensation. But even to new arrivals it is not pleasant. Go into a greenhouse heated up to 90°, you who have never seen the East, and imagine how you would like to live and work in it. That is Bombay in the 'cold weather'; happily it is not much worse in the hot.

The baggage was landed during the day, and the men in the afternoon. Then came the long railway journey, first through the magnificent gorges of the mountain range which fringes the coast, and afterwards through the tamer but still novel and beautiful scenery of the great central plateau of India. The Thirtieth, however, did not see much of it, for they travelled at night only, spending the day at the various rest-camps. They were heartily glad, one and all of them, when one morning at the end of October, in a cool pleasant climate very different from the climate of the coast, the train drew up by the side of the long stone-flagged platform at Syntia, and they knew they were at last at their journey's end.

CHAPTER VII

SYNTIA

CAVALRY cannot be quartered on precipitous mountain-sides, and Syntia, like all cavalry stations, was therefore in the 'Plains'; but the plains of India afford a great variety of scenery and climate, from the arid deserts of stone and sand which lie along the northwest frontier to the moist, densely wooded flats of Bengal and the fine plateaux of Malwa and the Deccan. Syntia was situated in the midst of a rolling well-timbered district at a considerable height above the sea.

During the summer months the place was hot enough. From March to June the dry west wind blew steadily throughout the day. At this season the country looked very parched. The sky became a dull yellow; the trees were covered with dust; and the earth was brown and cracked, and almost bare of vegetation. Occasionally a welcome thunderstorm and shower, brought up by a sudden nor'-wester, came to cool the air for a few hours and wash the dust from the trees; but the next day it was as hot as before. The regimental grass-cutters were sometimes hard pushed to find fodder for their horses. Yet somehow, morning after morning, as the sun grew hot, they might be seen returning to cantonments, their little gaunt ponies staggering under great loads of the creeping *doob* grass, laboriously collected with the aid of small curved sickles. It looked terribly uninviting, half roots and dust, but when it was carefully shaken and cleaned the horses liked it and throve on it. Then followed the monsoon. Towards the end of June the sky became overcast, and the clouds gathered and darkened and broke; and the parched earth was covered with pools of water; and on every side green grass and crops sprang up with magical rapidity; and the poor half-starved cattle, with their shiny ribs and pointed hip-bones, grew merry

and strong. The rain lasted until September. Then the clouds began to lighten and disperse, and there followed a month of muggy rather disagreeable weather, while the sodden earth steamed and dried in the autumn sun. And then the wind set in from the northward, and the vapours and heat fled away before it, and the sky became an exquisite cloudless blue. The air was cool and delicious, so that it was a pleasure to live ; and the flowers were bright, and the trees looked fresh and beautiful as the breeze rustled through their leaves, and flocks of little green parrots wheeled about them at lightning speed, shimmering like winged jewels. Then in the morning the horses snuffed up the dry life-giving air, and began to reach at their bits again, and to beg for a gallop ; and as the turf flew away under the strokes of your big Australian, and the wind whistled past your ears, you felt that the world was good. Even in the hot weather it was always possible for the ladies and children and sick men to escape in a day or two from the sun and the dust to the pines and breezes of the 'Hills.' Syntia was within reach of the Himalayas.

For a man in sound health, who did not mind a little heat and could exist at a distance from Pall Mall, the place had its attractions. It was in the centre of one of the best sporting districts in India. During the cold season there were plenty of snipe and duck to be got among the reed-fringed meres and flooded rice-fields which lay in all directions glistening and slowly shrinking under the clear blue sky. Later, as the weather grew warm, the game little quail arrived in countless numbers, and an early riser could have many a good morning's shooting in the grain-fields and the low *jhaw* jungle which covered the broad sandy bed of the neighbouring river. Twenty brace before breakfast for a single gun was no extraordinary feat. Before this, away to the north of the central station, the night sky had begun to glow with fires, and soon the long jungle grass was thinned, so that it was possible to work through it, and to get a shot at the game with which it swarmed : 'hog-deer,' and leopards, and tiger, and buffalo. Farther north again were forests where one could stalk the graceful spotted deer ; and to the west hills where the big sambur stags were to be found, and plains which the antelope loved ; and almost anywhere in the district, if there was nothing else, one could shoot alligators. The great beasts lay floating on the water, with the top of their heads and the end of their snouts just out of it, or basking on the river-banks, printing a delicate pattern of scales on the wet sand. To riding men the

country to the south was a paradise, for in parts the pig abounded, and the ground was fairly open, and with the help of a steady Arab or Waler, and a hog-spear, you could enjoy such sport as England knows not. Altogether, for a sportsman there were few better stations in the British Empire, and so Guy Langley and Dale speedily concluded. The outgoing regiment had entertained them at dinner the first evening after they arrived ; and Dale, always keen for sport, had found out all about it from some kindred spirits.

The society of Syntia was not large. The 'Station' consisted of two clearly defined parts. At one end were the cantonments, in which were quartered the Thirtieth Lancers ; while at the other end, three miles distant, were the 'Civil Lines,' for besides being a military station Syntia was also the headquarters of a civil 'Division,' or small province.

It is not usual for a regiment of British cavalry to be quartered in an Indian station without other troops ; but for special reasons it does occasionally happen. At Syntia there were some fine old barracks and other buildings which it seemed a pity to leave unoccupied, and an exceptionally good stretch of grass land. The last is, or was, an absolute necessity for a cavalry regiment in India, where horses were not fed on hay, but on fresh-cut grass. Twenty miles off, at Baner, was a large cantonment containing a force of all arms. Practically, the Thirtieth Lancers at Syntia belonged to this force, which they could join at a few hours' notice ; and communication between the two places was frequent, both on business and pleasure. For balls, and races, and the like, the residents of one place always expected to be joined by the residents of the other. Nevertheless, an interval of even twenty miles is an appreciable obstacle ; and for the pleasures of their daily life the officers of the regiment quartered at Syntia were mainly dependent upon themselves and the Civil Station. The only military residents not belonging to the Thirtieth were two young officers of a native infantry detachment, which supplied a guard for the Civil Treasury and other public buildings. This detachment was relieved every month.

The Civil Division of Syntia was a province about the size of Ireland, with a population of eight millions, and was divided for executive purposes into four 'districts,' corresponding to the four 'kingdoms' of Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connaught. In charge of the whole was an English officer called a 'Commissioner,' who was responsible for the maintenance of order, the

collection of the Government revenue, and generally for the administration of the province. To help him in this work, he had in charge of each district an English 'Deputy Commissioner,' who commanded the services of an English police officer, and two or three English assistants. There was an English judge at the headquarters of the division, who, with the help of the Deputy Commissioners and their subordinates, practically disposed of all judicial business, civil and criminal. Such is the simple framework of our empire in India. There are, of course, various departments—Public Works, Telegraph, Post-Office, and so on; but British India is, in fact, governed by a small number of English district officers wielding very extensive powers, and charged with every kind of work. Their difficulties are increased now by over-centralisation and other evil influences; but, cheered by the occasional smile of the British bayonet, they still manage to keep the country in order.

Besides being the headquarters of the Division, Syntia was also the headquarters of one of the districts of which the Division was composed. The Civil residents therefore comprised the district staff as well as the divisional staff. Even so, they were not numerous.

The most important person in Syntia was the Commissioner of the division, Colonel Treveryan.

Since the Mutiny he had risen steadily. He had found the service a disappointment in some ways; for, as India quieted down, and our methods of government grew more and more regular, the soldier administrators, who had been so useful and necessary in time of trouble, came to be regarded as somewhat out of place; and they were in many cases superseded by younger men belonging to the Civil Service, whose training was possibly more suitable to the altered condition of affairs. Looking for a career of personal rule enlivened by active service, Treveryan had found himself gradually reduced to a steady grind in court and office, with no chance of military work or distinction. He chafed against the peaceful monotony of the life, so different from what he had expected, and against the centralising tendency of the authorities. The power and influence of the district officers began to be lowered year by year; more and more regularity of form was demanded from them; and, in Colonel Treveryan's opinion, the country was worse ruled. Nevertheless, he did his work conscientiously, and on the whole with success. Though not elaborately trained in civil and judicial work, he

had common sense, and he rarely made a mistake of more than form ; while in all practical matters his knowledge of the people and their ways, and his popularity among them and ready acceptance of responsibility, made him a very valuable officer. He was sometimes sneered at by young gentlemen who had come out to India fresh from their examinations, and full of conceit in themselves and their acquirements ; but he was worth more than most of them would ever be.

What you want in a country like India is courage and judgment and common sense rather than technical skill. In England the uncertainty of the law is proverbial ; and probably the main result of the elaboration of our Indian judicial machinery has been to make justice more doubtful than it was. But even supposing that justice had been made somewhat less doubtful, this is little in comparison with other things. By bad advice given to the ruler of a Native State, by ignorance of Indian ways and feelings, by slurring the practical management of a British district, a man may do infinitely more harm than by a series of sentences which can be reversed on appeal. An Indian district officer is one of a few hundred Englishmen who are ruling an empire of two hundred and fifty millions. He should be capable of hewing out a colossus if need be ; but it matters comparatively little whether he can carve cherry stones. Yet you try to keep him carving cherry stones all his life ; sitting in court or office, and submitting multitudinous returns, and letting the real work go. Then he suddenly finds himself facing great danger and responsibility, perhaps surrounded by armed revolt ; and you expect him to stand out a heroic figure, like our great men of old, to whose hands the sword was as familiar as the pen. The whole thing is wrong. India cannot be held by clerks and lawyers. And even supposing that English specialism were desirable in India the country cannot afford it. You would want ten times the number of men, and you cannot pay for them.

Next to Colonel Treveryan in the official scale was Mr. Oldham, the judge. He was a quiet, retiring man, of gentlemanly manners and good abilities, but weighed down by the burden of a very large family. He lived alone, his wife having been forced to leave him in order to look after the children in England. She, poor little woman, lived in Bedford, with a houseful of boys and girls whom she found it difficult to manage, while her husband toiled on in India to find the wherewithal for food and clothing. He could not afford to take his pension and retire, or

to go on leave, and his life was a dreary one, like the lives of many Indian officials, with too much work and very few pleasures. Helen Treveryan liked the gentle, silent man, with his uncomplaining ways, and she did her best to make things brighter for him, but without much success. He was not a sportsman, and he had no prospect of further promotion in the service. He could not hope to see his wife or his children for years, if ever. It was a sad life, patiently borne for the sake of others.

The Deputy Commissioner of the Syntia district, Montague Hunter, was a man of very different character. Tall and stoutly built, with a cheery manner and hearty ways and imperturbable good temper, he was a general favourite. He had a constitutional dislike to mounting a horse, and was rather indolent in mind and body; yet he was a useful officer, very clear-headed and decided in his opinions. The natives liked and respected him, and the district was in excellent order. Mrs. Hunter was a pretty woman, inclined to be stout, but bright and active. She danced well, and enjoyed her dinner, and was given to snubbing her husband, whom she regarded as very inferior to herself in ability. The Hunters had no children, and were well off. People often wondered why they stayed in India; but the fact was, that he liked the easy life and was too lazy to uproot himself, and she liked it too, though she had the snobbish habit of perpetually sneering at all things Indian.

Then there was the Civil Surgeon, who also had charge of the jail. Doctors in India seem to be mostly Irish, and George Beamish was no exception to the rule. He was rather rough in appearance and manner, but not a bad fellow, or a worse doctor than others. His wife was Irish too, with good eyes and a bad mouth, and a dreadful brogue. She was the mother of a considerable family, but most of the children were in England. There was only one with them, a troublesome young ruffian of seven, whom she could not make up her mind to part with. Mrs. Beamish was a good-hearted woman, but a bad manager, and not a lady by birth or education.

Major MacLean, the Superintendent of Police, was, like Colonel Treveryan, a military officer, who had taken to civil work after the Mutiny. Bodies of military police were then being organised, and MacLean, a Scotchman with a taste for fighting, thought he saw his chance, and left his regiment for the command of a police corps. Very soon, as the country grew quiet, the military character of the corps disappeared, and MacLean found

himself, to his great disappointment, condemned to a career for which he had no inclination whatever. It was too late then to return to the army, as the military authorities would not take back officers who had elected for police work. Nevertheless, though disappointed, MacLean did his duty efficiently. He was a good shot and sportsman, and in his way a handsome man, with a dark, resolute face and grizzled hair. His greatest pleasure seemed to be whist, which he played unusually well.

The clergyman of the parish, or 'Chaplain of Syntia,' was one of the cheeriest men in the Station, always ready to join in any fun that was going, and to do his best for the happiness of others. With the help of Helen Treveryan and Hunter, who had a good voice and some taste for music, the Pádre had succeeded in raising a very respectable little choir; and his services were bright and well managed. His religious views were so broad and tolerant that they shocked some of his congregation, but no one could doubt his earnestness and sincerity.

The European society of Syntia included also two junior officers of the Civil Service, who were known respectively as the Joint Magistrate and Assistant Magistrate.

The former, James Anderson, was a Scotchman of a not very pleasant type. He had his good points, among them a considerable power of work and some courage; but he was not a gentleman in his manners or appearance. He thought a great deal of his position as a member of the Covenanted Civil Service; and was proud of having passed the severe competitive examination by which the service is recruited. He looked upon military men with a mixture of jealousy and contempt. He dressed badly, and did not shoot or ride or play any English game; and he would accept an invitation with a slow, 'Well, I think I will,' which did not strike one as particularly courteous. He lived on much less than his pay, and, without apparently meaning it, was habitually rude to his wife, a harmless, rather pretty little woman, who was too good for him. Anderson was absorbed in his work, and was always talking 'shop,' a particularly uninteresting kind of shop, full of strange abbreviations and Indian technical terms. He knew the 'Civil List' by heart, and was great on the subject of appointments and promotions. Natives of India disliked him, and said he was 'not a Sahib.'

The second of the young civil servants, Arthur Goldney, was a boy just out from England. His father, an officer of the Indian army, had died some years before, leaving a widow and several

children, among whom he was the only boy. Mrs. Goldney was a brave little woman, and though left with a very small income, she had managed to educate her family and to bring them up in decent surroundings. The boy was of course a household hero from his childhood, but he was too modest to be spoilt; and, moreover, his mother, with all her affection, was sensible, and treated him properly. He did well as a 'day boy' at Tonbridge, and to his own great surprise passed for the Indian Civil Service direct from the sixth at the age of eighteen. Goldney was small and rather delicate-looking, with a very fair skin and light brown curly hair. He was shy and nervous in his manner, and had a girlish trick of blushing which caused him untold misery. Some one had christened him the 'Pink 'un,' and the name had stuck. The Pink 'un did his work well, and was cruelly robbed by his servants. Anderson said he was 'soft,' and greatly despised him.

Then there was the officer in charge of the Public Works Department, Captain Lee of the Engineers. He was a good-looking man and a very hard rider. He had married, a year or two before, a young Irish girl, with pretty eyes, and a bright, warm manner which was very taking.

Practically this completed the small circle of Syntia 'society.' There were one or two planters in the district who were occasionally seen at headquarters; and very good fellows they were in their way—hard riders and pleasant companions; but, except for a few days in the year, they lived away in the country in their thatched bungalows, where they were always ready to welcome a visitor with the most profuse hospitality. There were also a few men of mixed blood, who held minor posts under Government or pleaded in the Courts. They and their families were seen at church, and some of them at the Commissioner's ball on the Queen's birthday, but they did not associate with the English residents.

And then . . . then there were the eight millions of 'natives,' who stood almost wholly apart from the little knot of white men. There were many gentlemen of good standing in the division—nobles and landowners and officials. These paid more or less formal visits to the European district officers, and some received a formal return visit. Occasionally one of them gave a dance or other entertainment to the European community. If it was a dinner, the host came in when the eating was over, and sat in a chair at some distance from the table while his health

was proposed and drunk. In return, the Europeans generally asked the chief native residents to garden-parties, and sometimes to balls, where they looked very uncomfortable and out of place. But, except in the case of one or two Mahometans, who would accept an invitation to dinner, and one or two Hindus, who played Badminton and lawn-tennis, there was little social intercourse between the races. Imperfect acquaintance with each other's language was in itself a serious bar to such intercourse, and there were other obstacles. Natives and Europeans alike were more or less uncomfortable and bored in each other's company.

It was not altogether a satisfactory state of things. There were faults on both sides. The fault on the English side was a tendency to show too little politeness and consideration ; to take advantage of the want of independence which characterises the oriental. In a man like Treveryan this fault did not exist. In a man like Anderson it was marked. On the other hand, it was very difficult to become socially intimate with people of totally different habits and views, who thought it a disgrace for a woman to be seen, and a pollution to touch your food.

Nevertheless, there was much good feeling and mutual respect between the two races. A certain amount of stiffness in social intercourse does not prevent this. Some native gentlemen were greatly liked by the Europeans, and in their turn they trusted their English friends, and came to them freely for help in all their difficulties and troubles. The district officers were their natural advisers and protectors against all kinds of injury, and the duty was honestly and kindly performed. It was a curious state of affairs altogether, to English ideas, but the Indian Empire is in all ways a marvellous structure.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME MORNING CALLS

THE Thirtieth Lancers had been a few days in their new quarters, and were beginning to settle down, when Guy Langley and Dale made their first attempt to become acquainted with their fellow-countrymen in Syntia.

There are two customs in India which strike a newly-arrived Englishman as curious. In the first place, newcomers are expected to call on the older residents, who, unless for extraordinary reasons, always return the call, and then take or avoid steps towards a better acquaintance. In a small and peculiar society like the English society of India, where, except at one or two commercial ports, almost every one is a servant of the State, the call and return call are in the nature of official formalities. After this preliminary people sort themselves ; but every one holding a certain rank knows every one else as a matter of course. Secondly, for no imaginable reason, the visiting hours are in the extreme heat of the day, from twelve to two. Except among people who know one another very well indeed an afternoon call is a discourteous exhibition of 'side.'

One night after dinner, having mastered these facts, and obtained some information about the inhabitants and the geography of the Station, the two young men made up their minds to set forth on a round of visits.

Next morning, shortly before twelve o'clock, Guy Langley sauntered out on to the steps of the little house which he shared with Dale. He had arrayed his handsome person in a light morning suit which showed some creases from long confinement in a box, but was as good a fit as most of Poole's masterpieces ; and, on the whole, he was satisfied with the result.

The sky was cloudless, and a faint northerly breeze stirred

the blossoms of the purple creeper which covered the pillars of the porch. Under its flat roof, in front of the steps, was standing the dog-cart in which they proposed to make their expedition. Dale had bought it from one of the officers of the outgoing regiment, and was now standing on the steps looking over his purchase with evident complacency. It was a very light cart, with varnished woodwork, rather high, but not too high for the little mare which stood in the shafts, very neatly turned out in brown harness with bright brass mountings.

The mare was a picture. She belonged to a class which was to be found in India in those days, the 'stud-bred.' Horses raised in the Government breeding establishments, if they proved unsuitable for cavalry or artillery work, were sold to the public, and very good horses they were. 'Bess' was a good specimen of the class. She stood barely fifteen hands, and was certainly light; but there was no other fault to be found with her. In colour she was a bright bay. The beautiful head, with tapering muzzle and large full eye; the satin skin through which the network of veins stood out; the small foot, as hard as iron; all showed Arab blood, but Arab blood crossed and improved by the blood of the English thoroughbred. There was more reach and length than one can find in the Arab, possibly less compactness for those whose eyes are trained to the Arab shape, but a look of greater stride and speed. She had a good shoulder, with the higher withers and longer slope of the English horse, and was almost too high in the quarters, which from behind showed squarer than one would have expected, though they were a little light and ragged. That was perhaps partly owing to the fact that the mare carried no flesh. At the moment Bess was behaving in a manner characteristic of her sex. Her ears were laid back, and her teeth showing, and every two or three seconds the pretty fidgety head made a quick snap at the man who stood in front of her. Her near hind leg was up, and the glittering shoe struck sharply at times upon the iron edge of the step next the house door. It was all feminine nonsense, as Dale well knew. Though she answered his voice by a turn of the head and a series of vicious-looking snaps over her shoulder, she had never bitten any one in her life; and she would not have dreamt of kicking at the step when any one's foot was on it. She was impatient of restraint, and would be troublesome at times if kept standing; and the cut of a whip made her furious; but she was a high-bred lady, and incapable of any vulgar tricks.

Pooran, the native groom, or *syce*, who had charge of her, was a good fellow and very proud of the mare. He had followed her when she was sold, and Dale was glad to get him. Dark and slight, with a smooth face and white teeth and a waist like a girl's, Pooran looked and felt very smart in his tight-fitting livery of dark blue cloth faced with a lighter shade of the same colour. He wore a silver crest in the front of his turban of intertwined blues; and his brown legs emerged, free to run, from light drawers of pinkish cotton. Those thin bare legs, without a sign of calf, could carry him over the ground in a very surprising way. Englishmen in India do not adhere to the native custom of making *syces* trot behind their carriages; but even now these men seem to have a wonderful hereditary power of running. Pooran, if required, could go for an hour at a time, and finish fresh and cool, having hardly turned a hair. He had one slight failing: like many of his caste he was too fond of drink; but he was a good boy, and turned out his mare most creditably, her skin shining with a metallic lustre, and her bit as bright as the burnish would make it. To him the mare's corn was a sacred thing, not to be stolen even for his own dinner, and woe came upon the grass-cutter who dared to bring her bad grass.

'At last,' Dale said as Guy came out; 'I have been waiting a good half-hour, and the mare has kicked the trap nearly to bits. Now I would not mind betting you have forgotten your cards.'

'Get in, Chimp, and don't be childish. She wants to be off.' Dale walked round to the off wheel, and the two of them got up smartly, together, the mare making a dash to the front directly they were alongside. The boy Pooran held on to her head for a second until they were fairly up; then he let go, and she went off with a bound, while he scrambled up behind. The cart fairly flew down the short drive and out into the road, the mare lurching up into her collar in a way that must have tried the brown harness. Then gradually Dale's strong little hands pulled her into a regular though rather vehement trot, and they went bowling down the smooth road towards the Civil Station. In India, before local self-government was imposed upon a wondering people, the district officers knew how to keep up good roads. With a centre of tough *kunker* conglomerate, and grassy side-pieces fringed by lines of trees, these roads were equally pleasant for riding and driving. The mare of her own accord kept to the centre, and the cart travelled fast. In less than a quarter of an hour they were at the entrance of the Civil Lines.

The first house on the road was Oldham's. It was a low, flat-roofed house, standing in a square grass compound which was enclosed by a mud wall about four feet high. One of the whitewashed pillars of the gateway bore the name W. Oldham, C.S., painted on a small board. The house was whitewashed also, and though the grass looked dry and dusty, the general effect of the white house, lying under the bright blue sky, with a few mango trees about it, was not unpleasing.

The Judge Sahib was out of course, gone to his Court, and they left cards for him.

Then they drove through another gateway in another mud wall, to another flat-roofed house, and asked for Mrs. Anderson. Mrs. Anderson was in, and received them in a stiff, barely furnished drawing-room with a round table in the middle. The walls were painted light green and picked out at the corners with a pattern in darker colour. Mrs. Anderson was shy and had not much to say, and the visit soon ended. Her husband was out, she said—gone to *cutchery*, and would be so sorry to have missed them, which was more polite than true.

When they came out the mare was wrenching to get her head free, and she went off with a jump again. She had only a few hundred yards to go before she came to the house where the Hunters lived, and she was pulled up in front of their door very unwillingly. The house was smarter-looking than those already visited. There were some shrubs and flower-beds in front, and the gateway and drive were neatly kept. Mrs. Hunter was at home, and Dale said 'Blow it!' in a very audible voice. She was pleasant enough, however, and he rather liked her.

Then the mare began to give trouble. When they came out they found her pawing the ground and backing, while Pooran hung on to her head and made libellous remarks about her female relatives. She stood still when Dale called to her, and the boys got up and told Pooran to let go, but the mare did not move forward. She shook her head and bored downwards at her bit, and planted her forefeet firmly. Thereupon Dale was foolish enough to touch her sharply with the whip. She jumped forward with a loud snort, and then began to back—rapidly this time, and in such a way as to twist the cart round against the steps. When she had the wheels pasted against them she snorted again, defiantly, and pawed the ground. Dale began to lose his temper and swear. Guy was laughing gently. 'Don't be an ass, Chimp,' he said, 'and don't hit her. She's not that sort.' Next moment

he was down and at her head. She snapped at him, or rather towards him, but he took her by the rein close up, and petted her until she grew quieter. In a minute or two she let him lead her forward, throwing up her head at first, but soon giving way, though reluctantly. Then Guy got back into his seat, and the mare was coaxed into a slow and precarious trot. Finally she settled down again, and when they drove through another gap in another mud wall, and pulled up at the door of another flat white bungalow, the 'Vicarage,' she seemed to have recovered her temper.

The Pádre Sahib was in, and received them warmly, with offers of a brandy and soda, and conversation about pig-sticking. He came out and admired the mare when they left, showing a considerable knowledge of her good points. He measured her carefully under the knee with his pocket-handkerchief, in spite of her snapping, and rejoiced at the result; and then stood bald-headed in the sun, smiling at them as they drove away. 'Nice boys,' he said, as he went back to his room to write his sermon, and Dale was delighted with him. 'Jolly old chap,' was his verdict. 'Pity all parsons are not like that. We'll get him over to dinner and give him a skinful of fizz.'

Then they left cards for MacLean and the Pink 'un, who had already called at the mess, and went on to the Lees. Mrs. Lee was not receiving visitors that day. *Darwáza bund*, the man said, the door is shut. After that they made for the Civil Surgeon's. They proposed going last of all to Colonel Treveryan's and staying there to lunch if they were asked.

The way to the Doctor Sahib's house was a very bad one. The house lay off the metalled road, and was approached by a narrow lane in which the dust lay six inches deep, between low mud walls topped with a kind of cactus or prickly pear. Here and there a tall palm or a group of feathery bamboos overshadowed the wall. The boys drove down this lane until they came to a house smaller and barer and dustier-looking than any of the others. There was not a vestige of flower-garden; nothing but dust and dry grass. The front of the little square house had a narrow piece of verandah in the middle, but no portico. The plaster was hanging from the pillars of the verandah, and peeling from the two steps which led up to it. At one end of the verandah, on the broken plaster floor, was a tin plate, with some dog-biscuit sticking to the bottom. At the other end was a little strip of drugget, upon which lay some unfinished needlework.

In the middle was a door, covered by a *chik* or hanging transparent mat, the straws of which were broken and protruding. Above the door, nailed to the whitewashed wall by a strip of skin, and hanging rather crooked, was a very badly cured antelope's head, the rough bone showing at the root of the spiral horns, the ears broken, and the face gone bare in patches, with some dirty cotton wool in the nostrils.

There was no servant to be seen about this dreadful abode, and after calling out once or twice Dale proposed to give it up. 'What a beastly hole,' he said. 'They live in rum places out here, but this licks everything. Let's leave cards on the verandah and go.' Guy agreed doubtfully, and they were about to do so when they were stopped by the appearance of a small boy who came round the corner of the house.

The boy was worthy of his dwelling-place. He had a dirty white face and sandy hair, half hidden by a broken pith hat. His clothing consisted of a blue jersey, blue serge breeches, too short for him and badly frayed at the knees, and a pair of lace boots without laces, above which one could just see the tops of some loose wrinkled stockings. The thin white legs were covered with cuts and bruises. This was young George Beamish, generally known as the Limb. He stopped in front of the mare and called out with an accent in which the Irish brogue of his parents struggled through the nasal twang of the country-bred child: 'The bearer's gone to his dinner, and mother says you're to come in. She'll be coming directly.'

Guy and Dale looked at one another and got down, and walked through the doorway, lifting the broken *chik*. As they came into the room another door opposite, from which the wind was blowing out a thin red curtain, was hastily closed by some one in stockinged feet. It was Mrs. Beamish, who generally spent her mornings in a back verandah, clothed in her dressing-gown, with her fine hair rolled into a loose knot, discussing household questions with her native servants. She was now dressing rapidly to receive her visitors.

They sat down in the little untidy room, finding it rather pleasant to be out of the sun, and the boy pushed aside the *chik* and stood looking at them. Guy saw him and called him in. He came with his hat on, holding in his hand a rough wicker bird-cage, the pointed top downwards. There was something black inside, and Dale asked him what it was. He held it up, showing a dead bat, curled into a shapeless lump, and unpleasant

to the senses. 'Poof, how it stinks,' Dale said. 'What do you bring the disgusting thing in here for?' The boy laughed and went out of the room, as his mother came in, full of apologies for keeping them waiting.

She was a good-tempered woman, with rather coarse features not very clearly cut, and she spoke volubly with a magnificent brogue. From the first she and Dale were on familiar terms, and in a few minutes he was imitating her to her face. The imitation was bad of course; an Englishman, not bred in Ireland, can never talk Irish; but it was impudent and obvious. 'Ah! now you're laughing at me,' she said. 'What a shame;' but they parted the best of friends—the lady seeing her guests to the door. She called the mare a 'beautiful harse,' and begged them to come again whenever they could spare the time, and Dale promised freely.

As they were about to drive away they heard a sharp twitter of alarm, and saw one of the little gray squirrels which swarm about Indian 'compounds' throw up its tail and race along the ground towards a tree, pursued by the Limb and a fox-terrier puppy. The squirrel got safely up the trunk and lay on a branch looking downwards, twittering at intervals and flirting its tail up perpendicularly. Then the Limb proceeded to have some sport. He had exchanged his dead bat for a *galél* or pellet-bow, and he now fitted a clay pellet on to the double string with an ease which showed constant practice. His first shot was excellent. The pellet shattered itself on the branch just under the squirrel's feet, and sent the little creature scurrying up the tree in terror. After that it was more wary, and kept under cover, dodging rapidly from branch to branch. The Limb soon grew tired of looking for it, and Dale, who had been watching the sport with keen interest, let the mare have her head. She was getting impatient again.

As they drove towards the gate, he called out to the boy with a laugh, 'What a little duffer you are. You can't shoot a bit.' It was a rash speech under the circumstances, and it was fearfully punished. The Limb saw his chance and jumped at it. 'I will shoot you,' he called out with his nasal twang, and turned his bow upon them. Then he changed his mind and ran towards the mud wall along which they had to pass on turning out of the gate. 'Look out, Chimp, the little devil means it,' Guy said, and they sent the mare out of the gate and down the lane at a smart trot. They were just too late. The Limb knew his ground and had them

'on toast.' They were ten yards from the gate when his bare sandy head and eager eyes topped the wall just ahead of them. The mare shied wildly across the road, frightened by the sudden apparition, and almost as she did so the bow twanged and the hard clay pellet struck her fair on the quarter with a crack like a pistol-shot.

How they got through the next minute or two without a smash they never quite knew. As the blow came the mare plunged forward with a mad snort of pain and rage, then landed both heels hard against the splash-board and went off at a furious gallop. As they bumped along the dusty lane, they heard behind them the Limb's yell of triumph, and a second pellet flew over their heads. In a few seconds they were out of range, but by no means out of danger, for the lane was only a quarter of a mile long, and it met the road at right angles. It seemed impossible that they could turn the corner without an upset at the pace they were going, and Dale seemed quite unable to moderate it. The mare's ears were laid back touching her neck, and she was galloping as if the light cart which bounded behind her was no impediment whatever. Nothing saved them but the mare's own good sense. You could always depend upon her in a difficulty. As they neared the end of the lane her ears went up, and there was a falter in her stride. Before them, twenty yards off, was the yellow strip of metalled road, and beyond it the opposite bank. If the bank had been bare, she would probably have gone at it, for there was little time to think, and she could jump like a deer; but luckily it was at this point closely fringed with bamboos, and in all her excitement she was not going to jump into a bamboo thicket. As she came to the road she broke and tried to stop, and went round the corner to the right. It was a very close thing, and for a second Guy gasped as he hung on to his seat. The off side lifted, and the cart came spinning round on the near wheel, which whirled upon the hard *kunker*. But it did get round, and a moment later Pooran was at the mare's head, and she was standing by the road-side, trembling all over and bathed with sweat, her crimson nostrils dilating rapidly and her eyes very wild, but in hand.

Till then Dale had been taken up with their own danger, but now that it was over his thoughts recurred to the cause of it, and the language that he used was dreadful. Very little encouragement from Guy would have sent him back to catch the child and give him condign punishment. Fortunately Guy could

sympathise with the other side of the question. 'Bosh, Chimp,' he said with a laugh. 'The little beggar scored all round. You began it, you know. He's a horrid little beast; but it was very funny.'

'Devilish funny, I daresay; but you wouldn't have laughed if you had found the cart on the top of you at the corner. Little brute! I'd like to break his neck.' Dale's wrath was not decreased by seeing a broad smile on the face of Pooran. However, to do him justice, he was not vindictive, and though he growled a little more it was not long before he was pacified. Then they got the mare quiet and resumed their road. They still had to call on Colonel Treveryan, and if possible to get some lunch.

The Treveryans' house was a contrast to the one from which they had just been hunted. It stood high, facing to the north, in the centre of a piece of grass land covering perhaps a square mile. Good roads surrounded this land on all sides, and from them well-kept drives, running through avenues of tall trees, led to the hall door. As Guy and Dale drove through the main gateway from the eastward, they passed on their right a fine grove of mango trees, behind which were the stables and connected buildings, while on their left was an open sward. A little farther on, where the mango grove ended, they came upon a covered swimming-bath, a flock of pigeons wheeling in the blue sky above it. On the other side the grass had given place to a garden, separated from the road by a thick hedge and some flowering shrubs, and then they came to the house steps. In front of the house, to the north, the ground sloped down towards the river, which was perhaps a mile away. Looking in that direction one could see the yellow sands, from which the floods of the rainy season had receded, and beyond them a stretch of well-timbered undulating country fading into the blue distance. Over the river and up the grassy slope came the cool dry northerly breeze, just stirring the pendent white blossoms of the lofty cork trees in the avenue and sighing through the feathery branches of the casuarinas about the house, with a sound like the sound of a distant sea.

As the dog-cart pulled up, a native servant, well dressed and beautifully clean, his forehead bearing the caste marks in sandal-wood powder, came down the steps with a low *salaam*, and received upon a silver waiter the cards which the two young men sent in. At the same time he asked them to follow him. They alighted and walked up the steps into an anteroom lined with book-shelves. In the centre of this room was a low square ottoman

heaped with cushions, while overhead some canaries were singing their little hearts out as the breeze faintly rocked their hanging cages.

Dale said they were making a beastly row, and Guy reproved him, as the servant led them on to the drawing-room. This was a large and lofty room, in the centre of the house, and was lighted from the ceiling. Upon the painted walls, of a delicate shade of pink, were hung a few good pictures. A piano stood near the corner to the right, and some chairs and couches and small tables were scattered about the room. Underfoot, instead of a carpet, was cool smooth matting, with some leopard-skin rugs. A number of doors opened into the dining-room beyond, and into other rooms at the sides. These doors were all open, to let the air play through, but curtains of bright striped colours were hung across them, and separated one room from another. Opposite the main entrance, between the two curtained doors leading to the dining-room, was a large mirror, in which, as he walked in and found the room empty, Guy Langley was able to contemplate the lie of his hair and the fit of his clothes. .

The whole bore traces of a woman's presence, and her taste was specially evident in the arrangement of the flowers with which every corner was filled. They were there in masses, great clusters of Gloire de Dijon roses, and yellow and purple pansies, and fragrant violets, the flowers of the old country mixed with the blossoms of Indian flowering trees. Guy was quick to notice these things, and all he saw of Helen Treveryan's abode during the minute that he was waiting for her arrival seemed consistent with what he had heard of her. He was therefore prepared to see some one different from Mrs. Beamish or Mrs. Anderson. But when the curtain of a door near the piano was drawn aside and she walked forward to receive her visitors, both of them were fairly taken aback, and Guy's handsome eyes opened with an expression of pleased admiration which an older woman would not have failed to recognise.

The girl made, in truth, a very pretty picture. Tall and erect, with a well-shaped head and graceful movements, Helen Treveryan would have attracted notice anywhere. Though slight in figure she did not look delicate. There was health and strength in every line and gesture. The broad chest, not yet fully developed; the pale but clear skin through which the blood showed so brightly when she blushed; the firm step and upright carriage; all told of a good constitution and a country childhood. Her

hair was of a bright beautiful brown—English brown—neither dark nor red, nor flaxen; neither Celtic nor German. It grew rather low on a broad straight forehead, and was very thick at the temples. Her eyes were dark and rather deepset; they looked at you quite fearlessly, but they were gentle eyes, without hardness or criticism. You felt at once that you could trust Helen Treveryan, and you felt it more when she spoke. That steady low voice was a thing that could not deceive. She had small ears, very prettily shaped, small wrists and small firm hands, white and womanly, and yet capable of giving you an honest welcome. She wore a gray dress, trimmed with a little dark gray velvet. In the breast of it she had fastened a bunch of violets. By her side stood the deer-hound 'Rex,' her inseparable companion.

She came forward with a faint flush on her cheek, and stood for a moment looking from one of the young men to the other, with something like an inquiry in her eyes. Guy guessed her doubts, and smiled as he shook hands with her. 'It is puzzling to have two of us strangers coming together,' he said; 'my name is Langley.' She smiled slightly too, and said, 'Thank you. That is a real kindness. Every one is not so thoughtful.' Then they fell into conversation, helped out by Rex. He approved of both the young men, and especially of Guy, to whom he returned, pushing up Guy's hand with his head, to be petted.

They talked on for a few minutes, and Guy was charmed. From the first Helen Treveryan's sweet face and frank unaffected manner won him completely. She was composed and dignified in all she said and did, but now and then he saw her eyes brighten with fun, and he knew she understood him. Before they had been a quarter of an hour in the room together they were good friends, and it pleased him greatly to feel it. Dale liked her too, but he felt a little shy with her. She was in a sense too old for him.

Guy was beginning to think with regret that they must bring their visit to an end, when Helen said, 'Here is my father;' and Colonel Treveryan walked into the room.

He was a tall spare man, with a good figure and handsome face, neatly dressed and booted. His wavy brown hair, of the same colour as his daughter's, was thick and almost untouched by gray. His eyes were hers over again, but his fair skin was bronzed by the sun, and his mouth was covered by a heavy moustache. At a short distance, in the saddle particularly, or

in flannels on the tennis-court, he seemed a young man still. It was not until you looked closely into his face, and saw the lines about his eyes and mouth, that you could believe he had seen his fiftieth year.

Colonel Treveryan shook hands with the two young men as his daughter introduced them, and then said, 'I hope you are going to stay to lunch. It is just two o'clock.' Guy assented willingly, with a look at Dale, and a few minutes later lunch was announced.

The morning's drive in the sun and their mad gallop had made them thirsty, and a long tumbler of iced whisky and soda seemed to them very delicious. Guy noticed with illogical satisfaction that Helen drank nothing but water; and her father, like many men of Indian experience, was equally abstemious. As they ate their lunch, Helen told her father about the flight from the Doctor's. 'What a little scamp that boy is,' Colonel Treveryan said. 'It is very lucky he did not break your necks. Beamish ought to keep him in order. He wants a good whipping occasionally.'

Helen demurred at once. 'Poor little fellow! I won't have him abused. We are great friends. He is not really a bad boy, father; only he is so much alone and he gets into mischief. He is never troublesome when he comes here.'

Colonel Treveryan looked at her and smiled. 'I believe you would stand up for the Old Gentleman himself if you heard anything said against him.'

'No, I shouldn't, daddy; and you must not be wicked. But I am sure Georgie did not mean any harm, and you know it was really Mr. Dale's fault, wasn't it?' she said, turning towards him.

Dale objected indignantly; and Guy took Helen's side, and they had a merry discussion, which ended in an agreement that the Limb had got the best of it all along the line.

By the time lunch was over, Guy was thoroughly at home with the Treveryans; and when Colonel Treveryan remarked that it was Saturday afternoon, and that he meant to take a half-holiday, Guy agreed without difficulty to stop and have a cigar, and Dale, though he did not smoke, made no objection.

They walked out to the broad south verandah, which at that time of the year was only pleasantly warm, though the sun had been on it all day. It was screened by one or two *babul* trees, with light green foliage and round fluffy yellow blossoms, which grew close by the wall of the house. Beyond them was a level

stretch of grass almost big enough for a cavalry parade-ground, and beyond that a hedge and road, backed by a dark line of mango trees, with some slender palms standing out against the horizon above them. Just inside the road, on the grass, was a giant banyan, with hanging boughs which had touched and taken root, forming a grove thirty or forty yards in diameter. Nearer, to the right, a single cork tree, with hanging white blossoms, reared its straight tall form into the cloudless sky.

The three men sat in easy cane chairs, looking out through the light branches of the *babul* trees and chatting, while the breeze came through the house behind them. Helen Treveryan had left them, to write letters, she said, much to Guy's disappointment; but her father was a pleasant companion. His cigars did not appeal to Dale, who was a little restless, but Guy, with his indolent nature and his enjoyment of all things beautiful, was perfectly happy. He was surprised when he heard a clock in the drawing-room chime four. 'Is it really four o'clock?' he said, looking at his watch. 'I had no idea it was so late. We must be going. May I ask for our trap?'

But Colonel Treveryan objected again. 'Don't go,' he answered, 'unless you've something to do. It will be warm driving over just now. Come round and have a look at my horses, and then, I daresay, my daughter will give us a cup of tea.'

They strolled out by the front of the house to the swimming-bath. The green venetians all round it were closed, and the water looked very cool and inviting. Then they went on through the mango grove to the stables, scaring on their road a gaunt yellow pariah dog, who was stalking a pigeon on the ground. He trotted off a few yards, and stood looking at them, satisfying his conscience by a low, lazy, yelping bark which had no heart in it.

Colonel Treveryan's stables were very different from what Guy and Dale were accustomed to see in England, but they were well suited to the climate. They were airy buildings of unburnt brick, heavily thatched, and very neat and clean, with a pillared verandah in front, and a roomy loose box for each horse. The native servants, in a comfortable undress of cotton jacket and drawers, were sitting on the smooth earth outside in the sun smoking. One of the animals heard his master's voice and whinnied. Colonel Treveryan was a good judge of a horse, and all he had were worth having. He considered it part of a district-officer's duty to be thoroughly well set up in that way. There was a pair

of Australian carriage horses, Walers as they are called in India. These were good-looking bays about fifteen-two, with plenty of substance and not badly bred. A Waler is not quite as good as the best English horse, but the breed is improving yearly; and a good Waler is not to be despised, either for saddle or harness. Then there was a pair of stud-bred chestnut geldings, better looking than the Walers but lighter, which Colonel Treveryan generally drove in a stanhope. Two more Walers filled up the six loose boxes in the main stable. These were real beauties,—Romulus and Remus, a brown and a bay, almost as handsome as English thoroughbreds. Both were well up to Colonel Treveryan's weight; and both would go perfectly straight at a charging boar, which is the best possible test of a horse's courage. Their master gave them many a chance of showing it, for he was a keen sportsman. In a smaller stable detached from the main building was Helen's horse, Sultan, a little gray Arab about fourteen-two. To Guy Langley and Dale he looked like a pony, with his compact frame and low round withers; but they could appreciate the clean short legs, and admire the beautiful blood head, with its broad jaw and forehead and intelligent eye. Like most good Arabs, Sultan seemed small in the stable, but stood double the size—another animal altogether—when mounted and moving.

People write to *The Field* that Arabs cannot hold a candle to English horses. Of course they cannot if you put the two together on a racecourse. You might as well expect a Brixham trawler to run before a summer breeze against a racing crack. But try both in a beat to windward against a south-west gale with a big Atlantic sea coming round the Lizard, and you will see. And try the Arab and the English horse on rough service, with scanty food and bad water and long marches, and you will see again.

Away in another stable by herself was Bess, who laid her ears back and snapped when they came to her. Colonel Treveryan admired her duly, and thereby won Dale's heart. Then they told Pooran to put her in the cart, and walked back to the house.

They found tea ready in the drawing-room, and Helen Treveryan ready to dispense it. She had looked beautiful before, but to Guy's eyes, and to Dale's, she looked still better now. She generally rode with her father in the evening, and she had dressed for her ride before coming out. Her habit was light gray, in deference to the climate; but it fitted her like a glove, and showed off to perfection the straight well-made figure. In those

days women did not wear waistcoats and loose jackets, and ride with their elbows out. There was no dress in which a graceful woman looked so graceful as in her riding-habit. Helen Treveryan was essentially graceful, and the dress was exactly what she required. The shade of gray too was well suited to her light brown hair and clear skin ; and with a round gray hat to match, and trim white cuffs and collar fastened by the plainest of little brooches, her whole get-up was thoroughly workmanlike.

A few minutes later, when Colonel Treveryan had finished his tea and changed his clothes, they all came out together on to the front steps. The two horses were standing on the gravel below. They looked up with a low whinny as they recognised Helen's voice, and she came down and petted them both, and made them each happy with a piece of sugar. Guy watched her with keen satisfaction, and asked if he could mount her. She hesitated for an instant, and looked round for Colonel Treveryan. 'Thank you,' she said ; 'my father always mounts me ;' and then fearing from the look on Guy's face that she had been ungracious, she added, 'But he has deserted me to-day. Would you really not mind helping me ?' As she said it, Guy saw a sudden delicate flush come over her cheek and neck. It was still there as a little foot in its smart boot of yellow Russia leather was disengaged from his hand, and she settled herself in the saddle. Then Colonel Treveryan mounted, and the two rode away together, followed by their *syces* on foot, old Remus stepping off as quietly as if he were returning from a long march, his straight-cut tail swinging regularly at each step, while the Arab danced alongside as if his pasterns were made of india-rubber, his neck and long swish tail arched, trying to look as if he were fifteen hands high, and succeeding fairly well. His rider sat him perfectly, her figure erect but supple, and her hands in her lap.

When the boys had got into their dog-cart and given the mare her head, there was a moment's pause, and then Guy said, 'By Jove, Chimp, what a jolly girl ! and as handsome as paint.' And Chimp answered, 'Stunning ; about as nice as they make 'em in these parts.' And they drove back, enlarging upon the subject with all the poetical freedom which characterises the language of the British subaltern.

CHAPTER IX

AN INDIAN COLD WEATHER

YOU cannot talk of winter in the plains of India. There is something dark and cold in the very sound of the word ; and you cannot use it when week after week the sky over your head is a cloudless blue, and the flowers are in blossom. It is more like spring, and yet it is not spring. Englishmen in India call it simply the 'cold weather.'

The cold weather of 1876-77 had one distinctive feature. Early in the year Lord Lytton, Disraeli's Viceroy, had succeeded Lord Northbrook, and an active policy was in favour with the new Government. Before the rainy season came to an end and the sky cleared, it was known that there would soon be a grand gathering at Delhi, the old capital of the Moguls, and that the Queen would be proclaimed Empress of India. All over the country great preparations began to be made for the ceremony.

Moreover, rumours began to circulate as to the possibility of stirring events beyond the north-west frontier. It was said that Lord Lytton had come out determined to bring the 'Central Asian question' to a head. Russian aggression was to be faced in Afghanistan as well as in Turkey. The old policy of inaction was to be abandoned, and our relations with the Amir were to be put upon a proper footing. Those who could understand the signs of the times foresaw trouble ; and the minds of men in India, Europeans and natives alike, were filled with a sense of coming excitement.

Nevertheless, in a quiet place like Syntia things went on very much as usual. The Thirtieth Lancers were not to form part of the army which the Viceroy proposed to assemble at Delhi ; and though there was to be a *darbar* on the 1st of January, the younger members of the community were not

greatly concerned in these matters. To Guy Langley and Dale they promised a little more amusement, and this was all.

The cold weather being the drill season in India the Thirtieth had plenty of work. Colonel Aylmer was not a man to let them rust. The mornings were spent in parades or inspections, and no small portion of the rest of the day was also filled up. It is a mistake to suppose that a soldier in India has little or nothing to do. During the long summer months, no doubt, he has much time on his hands, but even then there is work to be done; and from the middle of October to the middle of April the military machine is in full swing. Still after all there is, as there should be, a considerable margin of leisure and pleasure in a soldier's life. You pay him next to nothing, and you expect him to die for you whenever called upon; it is only reasonable that he should have some compensations.

Colonel Aylmer was always ready to give his officers leave within reasonable limits, and he liked them to be sportsmen. Many a bright cloudless day Guy and Dale spent walking over the wet rice-fields, or wading through the *jheels*, in that most fascinating of occupations, snipe-shooting. They caught the knack before long, particularly Dale, who was the steadier shot of the two; and in the evening, when they had changed their wet clothes under a spreading *peepul* tree, and were in the cart again with the mare stepping out for home, they usually carried with them, for distribution among their friends, a goodly number of birds. Occasionally a bag of twenty or thirty couple of snipe was increased towards sunset by a dozen wild duck, shot at some favourite piece of water round which they would come wheeling again and again before giving up all hope of settling. All this means chills and fever at times; but the boys were young.

Sometimes they drove away in the early morning, after a hasty breakfast, so as to arrive by daybreak on the edge of the grain-fields, where the antelope came from the great grass plains to feed on the growing crops. Often enough this ended in disappointment. A watchful doe gave the alarm, and there was a hasty useless shot or two at a hundred and fifty yards, as the beautiful beast they had been stalking went away in tremendous bounds over the long grass before settling down to his gallop. At times, however, they were rewarded. As they lay in some dry water-hole or thick patch of cover, the young buck came quietly within reach of them, unsuspecting of evil, his brown

back and yellowish belly showing clearly against the morning sky ; or some veteran of many summers, almost coal-black above and white below, his long slender spiral horns lying along his back, gradually approached them, stalking slowly forward alone, or playing with his brown does. Then there was a sudden report from Guy's rifle, or the little '360 express, with a bullet like a bit of pencil, which Dale used for buck-shooting ; and as the smoke cleared away, they saw the does scattering through the grass, and a dark shape on the ground struggling vainly to get up ; and the native *shikaris* ran in and cut the poor beast's throat, to make it lawful food—*halál*.

Then the pig-sticking ; the drive out in the evening to a camp under the trees ; and the merry camp dinner ; and the long sweet sleep in an airy tent ; and the mounting in the morning light ; and the wait at the edge of the jungle, spear in hand, while the sound of the beat came nearer and nearer ; and the sudden sight of the great gray boar, galloping out defiantly, straight before him ; and the mad pursuit over broken ground, and the fierce swerve and charge, and the thrill of the spear as the point went home, and the long savage fight, and the dogged, pitiful, gallant death. Lee managed the pig-sticking. He knew the country thoroughly, and he was always well mounted, and he rode as if he had no neck. He soon taught Guy and Dale to understand the game ; and such a game. There is no sport on earth, not one, like a fight with a fighting boar.

Apart from sport, there was always something to do in the cool clear evenings. Polo had not then been worked out to a science, but it already had taken strong root in India, and directly the Thirtieth had got some ponies together they began playing twice a week. Most of the Civil officers were away in camp, but all the ladies used to assemble to watch the game ; and it was very bright and sociable. At first the Thirtieth played extremely badly, and did their best to kill themselves and each other, but they improved fast, which was more than the ground did. A few weeks after the rains ceased it was as hard as iron ; and the clatter of the ponies' hoofs sounded as if they were galloping on pavement. A fall then was no joke ; but when one is young nothing matters.

When there was no polo, there was tennis and Badminton at the Colonel's, or the Commissioner's, if the Commissioner was in the Station ; or a ' lady's evening ' at the racket-court among the mango trees. There was a very fair racket-court at Syntia. It

had been built many years before by some sporting civilian who lived in the days when Indian Civil Servants remained in one place half their lives, and were rich enough to do these things.

Then there was always the Club. This was a great institution at Syntia. The Club consisted of a small thatched house containing a billiard-room, a card-room, and a reading-room, where one could see the papers and magazines. Close to the house were some good tennis-courts, while the racket-court and swimming-bath were not far off. Every afternoon almost you could get a rubber after lunch if so disposed; and in the evening about five o'clock, if there was nothing else to be done, a number of people came round, riding or driving, to play or look on at the tennis. After the play was over they sat looking out over the great river which flowed close by under the steep sandy bank, until the quick night came down upon them and the dew began to fall. Then there was a general lighting of carriage lamps, and many friendly good-nights, and they scattered away in the darkness, as often as not to meet again in batches at various hospitable dinner-tables. The wine was generally good; and if the conversation was not highly intellectual, it was cheery and free from dullness. Every one knew every one else pretty well, and no one was shy or stiff.

Occasionally the afternoon was varied by a riding party on the racecourse, a fine open plain with a few palm trees in the centre, where you could have a two-mile gallop; or there was an evening picnic. All who cared to go met and rode out together along the soft country roads, until they came upon the little encampment where the native servants awaited them. Perhaps the spot chosen was some old ruin in the forest, where the trees rose through the shattered masonry of a neglected temple, or overhung the stone steps of a tank which some forgotten great man had made, and named with his name. The darkness was generally beginning to gather before the party set out on their homeward ride, and the stars were bright before they got back.

Then there was a small fortnightly dance at the mess-house, which had a very good floor. Sometimes, when no one came over from Baner, there was rather a dearth of ladies; but the few ladies who were there did not seem to mind. Once there was a big ball at Baner to which all Syntia went off together by

Altogether the weeks passed rapidly and brightly enough, and before Christmas came round Guy Langley was surprised to find how contented he was with his Indian life. It seemed to him that the country was delightful, and that people who could see in it nothing but weariness and vexation of spirit must be strangely constituted. He was no doubt perfectly right ; but he had seen Indian life under favourable conditions, and had not seen much of it. Moreover, he had seen Helen Treveryan. Though as yet he did not fully recognise the fact, that was really the main cause of his contentment. No doubt he owed it in part to his good-tempered disposition, and to the artistic sense which made him appreciate the picturesque side of his new life. His books too helped him. He was a desultory reader, but he read largely, and a man who reads cannot be dull. But at the bottom of it all was Helen Treveryan.

It was no wonder ; indeed, the wonder would have been if Guy had failed to be attracted by her. Always quick to appreciate beauty, he could not help admiring Helen's sweet face ; and to his rather fastidious taste there was something even more pleasing in the gracefulness of her movements and the look of refinement and breeding which is above all mere beauty of colour or shape. Moreover, Guy was a gentleman, and could recognise and appreciate the straightness and purity which made her so frank in her manners.

They were thrown constantly together in the easy familiar intercourse of a small Indian Station, where acquaintance naturally ripens fast. They met almost daily, and met after a few days on a footing of unaffected friendliness. Helen Treveryan was fond of riding, and Guy was very often by her side as the party cantered round the racecourse, or when they rode slowly back from their picnics through the early moonlight. She danced well, and Guy always got a couple of waltzes with her in the evenings at the mess-house. She played tennis, gracefully, if not very strongly ; and they often found themselves paired off together on the smooth cement courts at the Club. Even in his reading Guy found Helen a companion. She had a taste for poetry as well as for music, which is not a very common combination ; and Guy was surprised to hear her speaking naturally and easily of books which not one woman in six knows anything about. She cared more for Longfellow and Scott than for Shelley and Dickens ; but though he did not agree with her, he thought none the less of her for that. Her want of affectation too was

very delightful. She enjoyed life heartily, and was full of quiet fun. Yet she could be very dignified on occasion. Once Denham had presumed on her pleasant manner, and had said something to her which he ought not to have said to any girl. She did not understand him, but she knew instinctively that he meant harm, and she treated him at the time and afterwards with a quiet coldness which effectually prevented any repetition of the offence. Guy did not know the cause, but he noticed and was pleased at her evident avoidance of his enemy.

On Sundays Guy was generally free to do as he liked ; and he gradually got into the way of spending his day in the Civil lines instead of attending Mrs. Dangerfield's rather wild lunch parties. He used to ride or drive over in time for the morning service. He had not till then been by any means a regular churchgoer, and he did not perhaps attend very closely now ; but he liked to sit in the pretty little half-empty church, with the soft air coming through the open windows ; to hear at intervals the singing of the small but carefully trained choir ; and to listen for the clear sweet voice, which came to him through the rest, until sometimes it seemed to him as if all others had faded away, and Helen was singing alone. The Pádre's sermons were short, and good enough ; but by that time Guy was getting impatient, and they used to seem to him very uninteresting. Directly they were over he was out under the porch, answering friendly greetings and looking for the beautiful face, which he knew would come out of the little stone doorway at the foot of the staircase when the last notes of the voluntary had ceased.

Then, if Colonel Treveryan was in Syntia, which he often managed to be on Sundays, Guy would receive and accept the invitation to lunch, which was always ready as a matter of course for any one who had come over from cantonments. Occasionally, though not often, he was the only guest ; and though Helen left the gentlemen to themselves after lunch he was able in these Sunday visits to see a great deal of her. He saw nothing that was not thoroughly pure and ladylike.

It was all very pleasant, and very certain to end in one way ; and before long a few quick eyes in Syntia had begun to perceive what was coming.

Mrs. Stewart was the first to suspect that Guy was seriously attracted. Her apprehension was quickened by something of the nature of jealousy, for she had been accustomed to regard the intellectual side of him as her peculiar property. She was sur-

prised and rather annoyed to hear him discussing a passage of *In Memoriam* with Helen Treveryan, and still more so afterwards to find that a somewhat sarcastic remark on the subject was not at all well received. Something she said about this opened the eyes of Mrs. Dangerfield and Mrs. Aylmer. Mrs. Dangerfield, in her reckless marauding way, at once attacked Guy, and accused him of deserting old friends for new. He repelled the charge warmly, but he failed to remove her doubts. He failed equally with Mrs. Aylmer. She was attracted by Helen; and did not like the idea of Guy being too constantly with her, if, as was probable, he 'meant nothing.' She had an interest in him as well. A few days after Mrs. Dangerfield had attacked him, she got an opening. Guy had come to lunch, rather early, and was sitting in the drawing-room talking to her. He said something about the Treveryans, and she took up the subject quite naturally. 'What a dear girl Miss Treveryan is,' she said; 'I don't think I ever saw a girl I took such a fancy to.'

Guy's eyes brightened. 'Yes; isn't she awfully nice?' he answered in the ridiculous language of the day. 'It isn't only that she is pretty, but she does everything so well. She is the best dancer I ever knew, though they can all dance out here; and she rides like an angel, and she is such a lady all over.'

Mrs. Aylmer smiled at his enthusiasm. 'Take care, Mr. Langley,' she said. 'I am afraid this is getting serious.'

Guy coloured. 'Oh no, there is nothing of that sort. I have never said a word to her that I might not have said to any one.'

Mrs. Aylmer dropped the subject. What Guy said was quite true. They had met and enjoyed being together, with a young honest pleasure, but neither of them had thought of anything more. Nevertheless, they were on the old road, and it was not long before Guy began to confess to himself that Helen Treveryan's presence had become an intense pleasure to him. If she failed to appear any evening when he had expected to see her, he felt a disappointment which was sufficient to spoil everything. If she seemed inattentive to anything he said, or too much interested by the affairs of others, particularly if she got into close conversation with Lord Enleigh, whose soldierly enthusiasm she liked, he felt hurt and depressed. Then a few gentle words from her dissipated his soreness like a cloud.

Gradually the magic of her presence grew upon him and overcame his senses, until the sight of her face, and the touch

of her cool white hand, became his one delight and longing. He could not look at her without feeling that his eyes betrayed him ; and if he spoke to her, it seemed to him that he could no longer trust his voice. The very brush of her dainty dress made his heart beat.

Others were not watching him so closely as he imagined. They had their own affairs to think about, and if he had kept quiet his feelings might perhaps have been unnoticed by the bulk of his neighbours ; but he tried to conceal them by ostentatiously professing his admiration for Helen Treveryan's beauty and goodness. This was powerless to deceive those who had gone through the fever, and it attracted the attention of those who had thought nothing about the matter before. People began to see and to talk.

Helen Treveryan saw nothing. She was enjoying herself thoroughly, and she liked Guy Langley better than any of the other young men, who all joined in making things pleasant for her ; but he had never spoken to her of love, and she had never thought of it. As yet she was quite free and unembarrassed in her behaviour towards him.

He felt this, and was nettled by it, and as the weeks went by, there came over him an uncontrollable longing to stir her heart and make her care for him before all. He did not allow himself to follow out his thoughts to their legitimate end. Marriage was a thing that hardly ever crossed his mind. If any one had suggested it to him, he would have laughed at the idea. But he longed to feel that Helen Treveryan was not indifferent to him. Whether he wanted her altogether for life he did not stop to inquire, but he wanted her to love him then. The rest might take care of itself. He was not dishonourable. He would have repelled with unfeigned horror the idea of doing her wrong ; and he did not deliberately intend to make love to her and desert her. He was simply young and thoughtless. The desire of the moment excluded from his sight all other considerations, and the desire of the moment was to enjoy Helen Treveryan's presence, and to know that she preferred him to all others.

Meanwhile Colonel Treveryan, who was generally absent in camp, and was of a straightforward simple nature, suspected nothing. Mrs. Hunter, who, in the absence of her husband, also in camp in his district, had come over to stay with Helen, was perhaps not equally blind ; but Helen volunteered no confidences, and seemed quite heartwhole.

Hugh Dale did not fail to see that Guy's inclination for sport was lessening, and that his attendance on the ladies was becoming more and more regular ; but Guy's temper did not seem to have improved, and Dale found it better not to make any remarks on the subject. Being thoroughly good-natured and loyal, he accepted the position and said little about it to others.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS WEEK

SUCH was the state of affairs when the Civil population of Syntia reassembled for the festivities of Christmas week.

Colonel Treveryan and his officers all came in from camp, and the preparations for the ceremony of the 1st of Janury were rapidly pushed on. A great programme had been arranged. Colonel Treveryan was to give a dance at the Club, and there were to be two mornings' sky-racing ; and Syntia had pluckily challenged Baner to play them at polo, and rackets, and cricket, and tennis ; and the regiment was to give a dance too ; and then there was to be the *darbar*, and after it, in the evening, a ball given by a Raja ; and throughout the week every one was to keep open house, and put up as many friends from other stations as could be induced to come ; and altogether Syntia meant to have a thoroughly good time. And Syntia certainly did have as good a time as an Indian '*mofussil* station' can manage to have.

Christmas Day that year fell on a Monday. During the Saturday and Sunday the visitors came pouring in from all sides, by road and by rail. The houses were soon full, but those who could not find room in the houses were put under canvas. On the grass behind Colonel Treveryan's house there was a considerable camp ; the white tents, all of one size and pattern, beautifully pitched in two level rows, and comfortably furnished. The other houses too had their gardens full of them. At every turn one saw the white points among the heavy green of the mango trees and palms, or glittering against the blue sky. Even the Andersons put up some unlucky visitors who had no particular friends ; and the Pink 'un dispensed a royal hospitality to a party of very noisy young men who had been billeted upon him by Mrs. Hunter.

On Christmas morning the little church was full to overflowing. It all seemed very English. Helen Treveryan's white hands had been busy there as well as in her father's house, and she had found ready help from others. Pulpit and lectern and pillar and rail were wreathed with flowers and evergreens ; and though the sky was blue outside, and the sun was shining brightly, many of the English men and women who gathered there that morning forgot for a time, as they listened to the Christmas service, that they were exiles, thousands of miles from 'home.' Their hearts were stirred by the familiar words. As the service went on, they joined in the singing until the whole building was filled by the unwonted volume of sound, and the little Pádre's eyes sparkled with pleasure ; and through it all rose sweet and clear and true, like the song of a bird, the voice of a happy girl.

She and her father did their best to make it a 'merry Christmas' to all about them. There were no English poor in Syntia, but there were a few people of mixed blood to whom Colonel Treveryan's liberality was welcome ; and the native servants were given a feast in honour of the great day ; and they were also allowed to carry off the innumerable trays of fruit and sweetmeats which the native gentlemen of the district had sent to the Commissioner Sahib. They wrangled over the division of the spoil, and some of them ate too many good things and suffered for it, but they seemed to be happy.

Meanwhile the white Sahibs amused themselves after their kind. There was a sumptuous lunch in almost every house ; and they spent the afternoon in playing tennis, in riding, in boating on the river, and in hunting up old acquaintances ; and then they all had merry Christmas dinners and rejoiced over blazing mince-pies and plum-puddings, and were more English than in England, while the champagne flowed like water.

When the ladies broke up, some of the men went off to the Club for the race lotteries. There was some quarrelling there between a sporting planter and a clean-shaved, square-jawed racing-man who was staying with Denham ; but this was stopped before much harm was done. Afterwards some of the Pink 'un's guests sat up drinking whisky and soda and singing songs, which gradually grew stronger until they made the poor little fellow hot all over. His mind was sorely divided between the obligation to be polite to his guests and the duty of protesting against their language. He solved the difficulty by pleading hard work next day, and asking leave to go to bed. Then he said his prayers humbly,

kneeling by his bedside with his hands over his ears, trying to shut out the sound of a specially horrid chorus, and asking forgiveness if he had done wrong in not speaking out.

As to the racing next day, perhaps the less said the better. The British subaltern, and generally the Englishman in India, is not at his best when he is pony-racing ; and the meeting was not altogether a success. There was some bad language used, and some very inferior running. Dale unexpectedly pulled off a race on a new purchase of his, which was about the only thing Helen Treveryan enjoyed. Sitting on the carpeted steps of an earthen bank, watching the performances of a lot of second-rate ponies, generally badly matched and not too well ridden, is an amusement of which it is possible to have enough.

In the evening there was the Commissioner's dance at the Club. Helen and some of her father's guests had worked hard to prepare for this ; and the place was prettily got up, and the floor good. The Thirtieth came over in force from cantonments, and every one seemed to enjoy the dance heartily.

On the Wednesday there were the rackets and lawn-tennis matches. Dale and Harrison of the Civil Service, also a Harrow boy who belonged to one of Colonel Treveryan's districts, represented Syntia at rackets. Dale was to play tennis in the afternoon, but he scoffed at the idea that it would be too much for him. 'Rot !' he said contemptuously. 'I'm not quite so soft as all that. I can play a set or two of pat-ball in the evening if we do have a close game.'

There was a large gathering in the gallery after breakfast, and they saw a first-rate fight. Dale and Harrison pulled off the doubles at last after a very close finish ; but Dale was beaten in the single match by Spencer of the artillery, a tall, well-built man with a long reach, who never seemed to exert himself and was always at the right place, and had the most detestable service.

At tennis in the evening it was worse. There was to be a double for ladies and gentlemen, and a single for men only. Dale and Mrs. Lee represented Syntia. Mrs. Lee got excited and broke into voluble Irish, and made every one laugh, and then blushed furiously and looked very pretty. In the end they lost, the lady on the other side being too strong for Mrs. Lee. When it came to the singles a clumsy-looking man in a woollen jersey, Greenfield of the Hundred and Tenth, came forth to do battle for Baner. He could play no other game, and made tennis the business of his life. His style was so ugly and his returns so

slow that Syntia were very confident. Nevertheless he won, after a long fight, Dale's quickness and hard wrist-play being fairly overmatched at last by the other man's unfailing certainty to get a ball up somehow, and his careful placing. Possibly Dale was a little tired too, in spite of his good condition, and besides, he did not profess to play 'pat-ball.'

So far Baner was one event ahead.

Next morning there was some more racing, and in the afternoon the polo-match. That was good fun. The play was not very scientific, but the teams were even, and throughout the result was doubtful. It was two goals all until the very end, and the excitement was tremendous when Guy Langley got away with the ball about the middle of the ground, and galloping and hitting like one inspired, succeeded within half a minute of time in making another goal for the Thirtieth.

It was a sweet moment to him, and the sweetest thing of all, as he cantered back past the line of carriages, was to see Helen's face flushed with excitement, and to hear her bright, 'Well done, Mr. Langley.'

On the Thursday evening the racing contingent departed. There remained the cricket, which would now be the deciding event. Syntia rather fancied themselves at this. They had expected to be beaten at polo, but they thought they could pull off the cricket-match. They had one exceptionally good bowler, a corporal in the Thirtieth, who was very fast and got on a big break at times. Two or three of the men could bowl a bit too; and so could Dale and Guy, and Harrison used to be good at lobs. Then they had discovered that the little Pink 'un had been in the Tonbridge eleven, and kept wicket rather well. They had plenty of batting. The regimental doctor, Evans, a tall young fellow with sloping shoulders and a rather ugly private school style, who went in first with Dale for the Thirtieth, was almost certain to make runs; and there were several others—among them a sporting superintendent of post-offices, a very hard hitter with an extraordinary eye.

Dale had taken great trouble with the ground, and by dint of watering and rolling had really managed to get a very respectable pitch. He could not get Guy to practise as much as he wished, but on the whole he was confident, and the men were ready to back themselves at any odds.

There had been a good deal of chaff about the match, and both sides were now really keen to win. They began within two

hours of the stated time, which is rare in India ; and there was a considerable gathering to watch the game from the start. Syntia won the toss and went in. The men in the field wore helmets or pith hats or felt wideawakes, which looked odd ; but the bowling was not to be despised, and the scoring was only moderate. Dale and the doctor made a good stand ; but after that the wickets went down rapidly. The post-office man hit one ball out of the ground to square leg, and was then taken with a yorker. Guy, after making three or four runs very prettily, played forward at a rather short-pitched one, and put up an easy catch. The Pink 'un stayed some time, and was then badly run out. The innings was over by lunch-time for 120.

After lunch Baner made almost the same number. Their captain, Major Clifford of the Hundred and Tenth, a Winchester man, played real cricket. He had bowled well in the Syntia innings, slow medium pace, without much break, but with a very good length, and a most unpleasant spin. Now he set a good example by going in first and keeping his wicket up until very near the end of the innings, which closed for 123. He was well seconded by Spencer, the racket-player, who batted well for five-and-twenty. Guy Langley let him off once at cover-point, but it was a hard catch.

That night it was the Thirtieth dance, and there was much speculation and a little betting about the cricket-match. Dale and Guy Langley were still very confident. They thought they ought to have done much better ; and that they would do so the second innings. Dale drank nothing all the evening except a little whisky and soda, and tried to induce Guy to follow his example. It was a very pleasant dance, but people were beginning to get a little tired now, and Colonel Treveryan's party left early ; after which Guy thought it stale, flat, and unprofitable, and consoled himself by a second supper, and another glass or two of champagne.

The next day cricket began at eleven o'clock ; and in spite of the dance the play was keen. Syntia were in all the morning. Guy failed again, getting bowled, to his great vexation, just after the Treveryans had come on to the ground. But Dale played up well ; and he and the post-office man had one very merry half-hour, during which they hit the bowling all over the ground and made fifty runs, to the great delight of the Thirtieth, who applauded wildly. The Pink 'un also did well, playing very steadily and making some nice cuts ; and a private of the Thirtieth, who

went in last, after lunch, without pads or gloves, and hit across at every ball, knocked up twenty in half as many minutes. Baner was left with nearly 200 to make.

'They can't do it, sir,' Corporal Humphry said decidedly to Dale, and Dale agreed.

But they meant to try. Major Clifford and Spencer went in, and for more than an hour they kept their wickets up, and not only kept their wickets up but scored fairly fast. They collared Humphry completely; Clifford putting him away to leg for threes and fours, and Spencer sending him several times to the off boundary with a very pretty late cut. Dale tried a number of changes, and at last got Spencer's wicket; but Clifford remained, and though the wickets began to fall pretty fast now the score rose steadily. Dale put on Harrison with lobs; but Clifford, who was still in and thoroughly set, hit him clean out of the ground three times in one over. Guy went on for a couple of overs, but could not get on the spot. The soldier change-bowlers were freely punished, and the telegraph showed 150, and 160, and 170, and two easy catches were dropped in the long field. It was really getting very unpleasant, and Dale began to grow warm. At last Clifford stepped out to one that he ought to have played, and the Pink 'un put his wicket down very smartly. Two more to fall and twenty runs to make. Twelve of the twenty runs were made, and still there were only eight wickets down. The excitement was getting almost painful. Then, amid a scream of delight, Dale, who had put himself on again, ran up and got a man off his own bowling—an almost impossible catch, with one hand, low down, not ten yards from the bat. Nine down and eight runs to get; every ball was watched now with breathless interest. During the next over three runs were made by a lucky snick. Four to tie.

Dale had sent Guy out to the boundary for a catch. He was within twenty yards of the Treveryans' carriage. Clifford and Spencer had walked round and were standing by it talking to Helen. As they stood, the batsman at the opposite end, a hard-hitting artillery bombardier, who had made twenty runs and was playing very well and pluckily, stepped out to the first ball of the over, which was pitched up a little too far. He caught it, a fair half-volley, and the ball flew away high in the air straight for the place where Guy had been put. Dale, in his excitement, turned round and called out, 'Now you've got him!' and waited with a confident anxiety for the result. Guy was a pretty safe

catch as a rule, and as the ball rose he rejoiced at his chance ; but he had too much time to think about it. As it hung in the air, he remembered that he had dropped one the day before, and a horrid doubt suddenly came to him that he might drop this too. Who does not know the miserable suspense of a moment like that, when you are waiting for a ball to come down ? How slowly it seems to move at first, and with what a diabolical swiftness it gets through the last twenty feet. Guy stood watching it steadily. There was no judging required. It was hit right into his hands, and he scarcely had to move a yard. Would it never come ?

He was hot with rage and disgust as he heard the involuntary 'Oh' of disappointment all round him, followed by an unseemly shout on the part of the enemy. 'Very sorry, Chimp,' he called out rather sullenly as he threw the ball up, and cursed his luck. Only two to tie now. The next ball was a good one, and the third was better. It grazed the bombardier's leg stump close by the bail, which shivered and settled again. Then the bombardier stepped out once more, and drove Dale to the boundary, all along the ground, and the match was over.

Poor Guy ! It really was cruelly hard lines. To miss an easy catch like that and lose the match by it, and right in front of Helen's eyes. He walked back to the pavilion-tent feeling sore and ashamed of himself. He little knew how her woman's heart went out to him in the humiliation of the moment. As the catch fell, Clifford exclaimed in a tone of delight, 'Muckered it, by Jove ! and right into his hands.' Then he went on : 'I wonder what year Langley was in the Eton eleven. They must have been weak, I expect. He doesn't seem to be much good.'

Helen's big eyes flashed. She was very young still. 'Mr. Dale said it was a very strong eleven,' she said. 'He told me they beat Harrow that year ; and I think they beat Winchester in one innings.' Clifford looked up in surprise and laughed. 'That is one for me. I am sorry I spoke.' She caught his look, and turned the conversation rapidly. A minute later the match ended. Soon afterwards her father joined her, and Guy came with him, looking crestfallen. 'Beaten after all,' he said, 'and all my fault. I feel horribly ashamed of myself.' Helen was a little out of temper at the moment, and Guy's humility did not soften her heart. 'I thought you were a little too sure of winning,' she answered, in a tone that was unusual with her. Colonel Treveryan laughed, and she turned upon him with a

wrath that was only half assumed. 'Don't laugh, father. I hate being beaten. I think Syntia played abominably.' Then the grays stepped off, the carriage wheels rolling noiselessly over the short dry grass, and Guy turned away, hurt and unhappy.

The Sunday's rest was needed, for several of the party, men and women, were beginning to feel the effect of the past week's dissipation. Guy Langley, after some doubt, rode over to the Civil Station for morning church; and Helen, who was feeling guilty, came and asked him to stay to lunch. There were a number of people there, and she said little to him, but there was an unspoken apology in the tone of her voice.

After tea Guy sent for his dress-clothes, and went on to dine with the Hunters, who were always glad to see him. He got home late, as the clocks were striking the last hour of the old year. On the whole it had been a very happy one.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPIRE

DELHI, the city of the Moguls, was to be the scene of a splendid pageant on the first day of 1877. Following up a suggestion made by Lord Ellenborough many years before, the Viceroy was that day to proclaim to the assembled chiefs and notables of India that Her Majesty the Queen had assumed the Imperial title.

Vast preparations had been made for the event. The native princes had been brought together from every part of the country. Rajput and Mahratta and Mahometan and Sikh, great and small, from the ruler of millions to the ruler of a few thousands, all had assembled to do honour to the English Queen. The rulers of British provinces were present also, each with a large camp; and there were some thousands of troops. Looking down from the historic Ridge, where a little body of Englishmen and loyal Indians had stood at bay, besieging and besieged, through the terrible summer of 1857, one saw in every direction long streets of tents—a real city of canvas. There our fiercest fighting had been twenty years before; there the English Empire was now to be formally proclaimed. It was proclaimed with great pomp, and on the whole Lord Lytton was successful in a very difficult task. There were murmurs of course. The heralds and tabards and banners and trumpets made the enemy blaspheme. There was too much sky-blue satin, too little gray steel. The ceremonial undoubtedly savoured of Drury Lane.

Still it did good. The immense concourse impressed the native chiefs, many of whom then met for the first time—met to do homage together at the foot of the English throne. Among them were men who could remember the days when the English power was still struggling for supremacy. The first who rose in his

place to hail the Empress-Queen was one whose own soldiery had stood against us in two bloody battles thirty years before. Throughout the continent of India men felt that the ceremonial had a real meaning. It was not all burlesque.

In connection with the grand gathering at Delhi were minor ceremonies at all the local centres.

In Syntia the day began with a parade of the Thirtieth and the detachment of Native Infantry; and the Colonel announced in the presence of all who cared to attend that the Queen was now Empress of India. There were three ringing cheers and a *feu-de-joie*, and much fluttering of pennons and shimmer of lance-points and bayonets.

After breakfast there was the *darbar*. This was held in the grounds of a large house which had been built by a wealthy planter many years before. It now belonged to one of the principal landowners of the district. The house stood high, overlooking the river and the flat country beyond. The grounds were open and extensive. It had been arranged that the *darbar* should be held in a large *shamiana* or tent pitched in the garden.

Eleven o'clock was fixed for the ceremony. Long before that time the native gentlemen whose rank entitled them to a seat had begun to assemble. Many of these had come from the outlying districts of the province, and had found quarters in the town of Syntia, or were encamped in the neighbourhood. The day was a great one, and it furnished occasion for a fierce rivalry between the more important families, who had been open enemies in days gone by. Now the Pax Britannica had descended upon them, and they were obliged to refrain from attacking one another; but the old feuds were alive. The Civil officers had had much trouble in settling the relative precedence of some who had not before met in public ceremonial, and there had been quarrelling between the rival retinues, and eventually an affray in which three or four men were wounded. However, all had passed off without serious disturbance, and on the morning of the 1st of January, though there was still some smouldering discontent, all outward differences had been composed. They came to the *darbar* with evident interest and enjoyment, in every variety of dress and vehicle.

The fine old Raja of Jainagar drove up in a lofty barouche lined with primrose satin, the harness bright with massive silver mountings, and half a dozen horsemen cantering behind him.

The silver-mounted harness was broken in one place and tied up with cord ; and the horsemen were dressed in badly-fitting uniforms, imitated from our Native Cavalry ; and the animals they rode were miserable ponies only fit for the knacker's yard. But in the East splendour and squalor always go hand in hand. The silk and the silver made a brave show, and the horsemen raised a most impressive dust, and who cared for the cord-tied harness and the broken knees of the horses ? Not the crowd. They said, '*Shárásh !* The Raja Sahib has a fine *sowarree*.' And the Raja Sahib sat alone on the back seat of his carriage, looking very magnificent in his coat of brocade, with a necklace of huge pearls round his neck, and his gold-hilted sword in his hands ; while two very fat sons sat opposite to him. Behind him clung three grooms in coats of red English cloth. Two had hats of the same pattern, while the third had a dirty white turban, and the tail of his red coat bore as an ornament some gold lettering, W. F. 104 A. 3, which marked the end of the piece.

The Raja Sahib and his retinue looked funny to English eyes ; but he was a gentleman and a power in the countryside. He had done loyal service to us twenty years before, during the Mutiny, when the hearts of men all round him were failing them for fear ; and he was held in high esteem by the English Government, who had made him a Knight of the Star of India.¹

Close behind the Raja Sahib came a plain close carriage, in which was seated Ram Lal Das, the great money-lender, who was only too well known to the leading families of the neighbourhood. Ram Lal Das was a rather handsome man, very simply dressed in white, with a short well-groomed beard, and one large pearl in each ear. He was a powerful man too in his own way, and a sincere friend of the English, as well he might be. There was no periodical squeezing of money-lenders under the British rule.

Next to the money-lender's carriage came another of the same description belonging to Mr. Chatterjee, the Bengali pleader. Mr. Chatterjee was a stout, smooth-faced man, wearing a flat hat like a solidified halo, and a kind of frockcoat of semi-transparent yellowish silk, which in no way concealed his ample proportions. In the fastening at the breast was a gorgeous gold watch-chain. Mr. Chatterjee was connected with the vernacular press, and was ready to declaim on any subject in the world at a moment's notice. He professed to have discarded many of the prejudices of his fathers, but was, in fact, as superstitious as the most ignorant villager. He was pleasant enough to talk to, but you could not

trust him, and he was an ass, though a cleverish ass. He had relatives in every Government office in the Bengal Presidency, and received from them information on all sorts of subjects, which he turned into rupees.

Threading his way through the block of palankeens and carriages came Moulvi Roshan-ud-din, the most influential man of the Mahometan community in the town of Syntia. He had been to Mecca, and had the reputation of being a great scholar and a very devout follower of the Prophet. It was difficult to get on with Roshan-ud-din. He was extremely polite to any Englishman; would *salaam* to you deeply with his eyes cast down, and would speak most softly and courteously in answer to any question. But there it ended. The dark eyes, with their discoloured whites, were hardly ever lifted to yours, and the thin bearded face showed no sign of expression. There was always the hand gently moving the beads along the string of the rosary; and the low voice, with its guttural Arabic pronunciation. You got no further. What would this man be in time of trouble? What had he been twenty years before? A friend perhaps. Who knows?

They assembled in the grounds of the *darbar* house—Rajas and money-lenders, and pleaders and preachers, and all the rest of the community, and were marshalled to their seats by the English officials. The *shamiana* was a large square tent, or canopy, the flat canvas roof supported by wooden pillars draped with twisted cloth. In the centre was an open space, round three sides of which were disposed, in the shape of a horseshoe, the seats of the principal persons. At the top was a chair for the Commissioner, Colonel Treveryan, who represented the British Government. To his right the front row of chairs was filled by English officers, military and civil, the former in full uniform, the latter in evening dress, which looked very odd in the bright sunshine. To the left sat some of the chief native gentlemen in order of precedence. The rest of the tent was filled with rows of chairs occupied by Europeans and natives. The centre space and the broad red carpeted road to the doorway were kept clear by a few men of the Thirtieth Lancers in full uniform, facing inwards. They were picked men, and looked very fine as they stood there, motionless as statues, the embodiment of English discipline and military power.

At last all the guests were seated, with the help of little Goldney, who was very shy and courteous, and Anderson, who was very fussy and dictatorial, in spite of a coat which was not in a

condition to face daylight. Then word was sent to Colonel Treveryan, who came in, wearing his military uniform, and walked up to his seat, the assembly standing to receive him.

The ceremonial that followed was very simple. When the band outside had played a bar or two of the national anthem, and the assembly had sat down, Colonel Treveryan, who remained standing, addressed them and informed them that Her Majesty the Queen had assumed the Imperial title. At the most impressive moment of his speech something occurred in the part of the tent where the ladies were sitting, and one or two of them laughed. Women have no bump of veneration; no respect for solemn things. Otherwise the oration was received with decorous silence until it ended. Applause was beginning; but Colonel Treveryan checked it by holding up his hand, and repeated his words in Hindustani. Then he said, 'Gentlemen, the Queen, Empress of India.' And a hearty cheer was given by the Englishmen present—the natives sitting silent and motionless. As the cheer died away a gun pealed outside. The Raja Sahib had asked to be allowed to send two guns in to Syntia to fire a salute.

While the salute was going on, Colonel Treveryan gave the signal for departure by leaving his place and leading the Raja Sahib to the entrance of the tent. Then the great men drove off in order of precedence with much crowding and shouting, most of the Europeans walking away in the cool January sun to some corner where they had left their carriages. The ladies had an exit of their own at the back.

An hour later the great tent was empty, but for a few nearly naked coolies who were removing the chairs in order that the tables might be laid for the ball supper in the evening.

The management of this entertainment had been confided by the Raja to his own district officer, Hunter; the only condition being that the Sahib should do everything in the best possible way, so that the Raja might give pleasure to his white guests and show his loyalty to the Queen. Money was no object; but the ball must be the best ever given in Syntia.

Hunter, or rather Mrs. Hunter, was thoroughly competent to carry out the work. The house was tastefully decorated, and the pretty rolling grounds were lighted up, and the floor was almost too good. No sticky wax was allowed to profane it; but all day long a line of coolies, carefully supervised, were tenderly rubbing the boards with smooth-cut cocoanuts, until the surface had assumed a hard true polish and shone like a pebble. The band of

the Thirtieth were to play in an adjoining verandah, which was tented in to retain the sound. All round the hall were well-furnished rooms ; and behind, in nooks of the cool dark terrace overlooking the river, were a number of seats. The supper was everything it should be, and the wine was the very best. The *programme was characteristic of Mrs. Hunter. She liked her dancing strong, and objected to wasting the evening in squares.* There was a quadrille to begin with, and then a succession of waltzes, with a very rare polka or gallop and three sets of Lancers. Supper at twelve, with about half a dozen couples told off for the centre table, and every one else to make his own arrangements. As aide-de-camp and general assistant she had secured Dale, who was as keen about a dance as he was about everything else. He had worked nobly and succeeded well ; and he was at her elbow when the guests began to arrive.

It was a beautiful night as Guy climbed to his place on the Thirtieth's drag after dinner. The stars were shining out of a cloudless sky ; and there was just cold enough in the air to make an ulster comfortable. Away towards the native town a rocket occasionally rose and broke against the darkness. As they drove on a faint glow appeared in this quarter, and it gradually brightened until they topped the last rise in the road and the town lay below them. It was a pretty sight.

There is perhaps no country in the world where illuminations are so beautiful as in India. Instead of the hard glitter of gas, and the still harder and whiter glare of the electric light, and the stiff decorations which hurt the eye in an English or French or German town, there is the soft deep glow produced by countless thousands of the native *chirāghs*. These are little earthenware saucers, with a few spoonfuls of oil in them and a loose wick of twisted cotton. The light they give, when in large numbers, is peculiarly warm and rich ; and the very simplicity of the instrument used makes it the more flexible and effective. Instead of being confined to artificial patterns, expressed in gas-pipes, the Indian puts rows of lamps along the edge of his flat roof, along the sills and arches of his doors and windows, at every point where the little saucers will easily stand or hang. An Indian street is full of picturesque variations of architecture, and these are picked out in lines of yellow light which adapt themselves to the graceful forms of the buildings. Sometimes the Indian spoils the whole thing by erecting stiff horizontal lines of bamboos along his roads, and stringing lamps on them, which shows that

the beauty of the usual illuminations is not wholly due to artistic taste ; but this is rare. The rolling ground upon which Syntia was built, and the masses of dark trees which broke the lines of street and wall, and the smooth surface of the river beyond reflecting innumerable lights, all added to the beauty of the scene. Away to the right Guy could make out the *darbar* house, which stood alone and high at some distance from the town. The drive was picked out by a line of lights, and he could see the carriages going slowly up through the glare. There and in the town was much noise and confusion. An Indian, like an Italian, can do nothing without shouting.

As the party from the cantonment walked up the broad stone steps, they saw at the top, waiting to receive them, the giver of the entertainment. The Raja Sahib was resplendent with silk and jewels, and looked a striking figure. Fully six feet in height, with a handsome face and courteous dignified manner, he was an admirable specimen of his class, the Rajput aristocracy, who are ready to be our firm friends if we will have them so, and who can bring the country side with them.

Shaking hands with the Raja Sahib and the two fat sons, who were magnificent but very inferior to their father in appearance, Guy made his way into the ballroom, which was already pretty full. His first look was for Helen Treveryan, whom he saw a little higher up the room, standing by her father and surrounded by applicants. He was welcomed with a bright look of pleasure, and secured a waltz, No. 4.

‘Only one, Miss Treveryan,’ he said in a tone of disappointment ; ‘can’t you give me another?’

‘I think you are very ungrateful, Mr. Langley. I kept that one for you, although you were so late, and I have made an enemy of Mr. Anderson for life.’

Colonel Treveryan was listening with a smile on his face. He had seen with pleasure the admiration which Helen had aroused among the men about him, and he felt generously inclined. ‘Give him one of mine, Nellie,’ he said. ‘It is selfish of me to keep two for myself.’ Guy looked as if he quite agreed, but Helen refused at once. ‘No ; I won’t do anything of the kind,’ she answered. ‘I am not going to lose my best waltzes. No one dances as well as you do.’ The difficulty was compromised at last. Guy was to have an extra, if there were any extras, and a square.

It was a delightful dance. The floor was perfect, and the

band was good, and there were many pretty dresses. Guy's first waltz was real bliss. He and Helen both had a good ear, and they had thoroughly caught each other's step. As they went smoothly round, steering through the crowd about them with an ease born of perfect sympathy and confidence, they were the handsomest and best matched pair in the room. Colonel Treveryan, a good dancer himself, watched them with pleasure; and the little Pink 'un gazed at them with envy.

Between that waltz and supper they sat out their square on the terrace. Helen had been dancing steadily and was glad of the rest. She was looking perfectly beautiful, Guy thought, as he led her out of the room; her eyes bright and her face a little flushed with the exercise. They found a seat overlooking the river, and sat down. 'Are you sure it is not too cold for you?' Guy said, as she took her hand from his arm, and his voice had a tender solicitude about it which might have betrayed him. But Helen was young and untrained, and she did not notice. 'Oh no,' she said. 'It is delightful to be out of the heat.'

It was very pleasant. Behind them, in the house, they could hear the quick music of the Lancers; but the terrace was broad and the sound was muffled. Twenty feet below them lay the river. The house stood at the end of a curve; and looking to their left they could follow the line of the southern bank as far as the buildings of the town a mile away. The light from the illuminations was reflected in the water; and boats bearing torches were moving upon its surface. From these boats men were launching little lamps of various colours, which floated slowly down the stream into the darkness below the town. Many of these frail vessels disappeared before they had gone far, but many survived. Guy and Helen Treveryan watched them as they came on—a fairy fleet, forming and scattering and reforming in countless combinations upon the dimly seen surface of the river, as the air or the eddies drifted them. They floated slowly by and disappeared under the palms and bamboos which fringed the bank to the right. Across the river, to the north, was the blackness of the earth, and above it the northern stars.

Neither Guy nor Helen spoke much. She was conscious of nothing but a sense of exquisite happiness. To him, as he sat by her side, with her dress touching his hand, and her beautiful face and throat dimly seen in the starlight, there suddenly came an almost overpowering longing—the fiery reckless passion of a young man's love. His heart began to beat hard, and in another

moment he would have been carried away, when she broke the spell. The Lancers were over, and there now came through the open doors the first notes of a waltz. Helen heard and got up at once. 'You must take me in now, please. The next is my father's dance. I must not be late for that.' As they passed across the terrace she stopped again for an instant, and looked back towards the river. 'How beautiful it is,' she said with a slight tremor in her voice. And Guy answered fervently, 'It is like heaven to me.' Like heaven! A pretty girl, and a starry sky over a silent Indian river, and a little dance music to set one's heart going. Well, we have all had our moments of heaven on earth, and were they more poetically constituted? Later in the evening Guy tried to revive the dream, but when do such dreams revive? He got his extra waltz during supper, and after it he took Helen out to the terrace again; but her mood had apparently changed. She was talking about something that had amused her, and seemed in no humour to sit down. Moreover, a surprise had been prepared for the guests, which soon brought the whole of them out to the back of the house.

If there is one thing which natives of India, high or low, love with all their souls, it is *âtish bâzi*—fireworks, or fire-play as they more accurately call it. They will spend any amount of money in this way, and seem never to have enough. Much against his judgment Hunter had agreed, in deference to the earnest desire of a great native landholder, who was heavily in debt, but very jealous of the Raja Sahib's ball and very anxious to show his loyalty, that at twelve o'clock there should be a display of fireworks upon a little sandy island which lay on the opposite side of the river, midway between the town and the *darbar* house, so that Europeans and natives alike might profit by the sight.

The display was announced by some explosions like fog-signals, and then began the usual thing. Rockets whizzed into the sky, singly or in bouquets, and broke in showers of gold and green and red; Catherine wheels whirled and hissed; squibs spouted; half-lit crosses and stars gleamed through the smoke, and half-extinguished blackening circles swung slowly round, and came to an inglorious end; two floating forts as big as hay waggons blazed into one another for some minutes with a tremendous noise of cannon and musketry at a distance of ten yards; an elephant and a horse of strange proportions arose outlined in fire; and finally there was a splendid trophy, consisting

of an imperial crown over the motto 'God bless the Queen-Empress of India.' The effect of this work of art was somewhat marred by the resolute refusal of the two n's to do their duty, which made ribald subalterns jeer, and by the powder smoke, which had drifted across the river and made the ladies cough ; but it was very fine.

The giver of the entertainment had come to the *darbar* house, and it was necessary in common civility to put seats on the terrace and enjoy the show ; but after a time it became a bore. The young men and maidens murmured, and every one was tired of it. However, it was over at last, and the calm stars shone out again, looking rather contemptuous ; and the Civil officers were very complimentary to the Thakur Sahib, who seemed pleased and went away smiling. The crowd said there had been a great *tamasha*, and that it had cost a lakh of rupees ; and the dancing began again more vigorously than ever. It was nearly four o'clock before the ladies had all gone, and the young men sat down to the substantial second supper which some of them rued so bitterly later in the day.

CHAPTER XII

MR. PITT WRIGHT

AFTER the ball Syntia soon settled down into its wonted quiet. Most of the guests dispersed next day. They enjoyed a 'Europe morning,' and rose to a very late breakfast ; and in the course of the afternoon they scattered in all directions, as they had come, by road and rail and river. Then the white tents, which had become yellow with ten days' dust, disappeared from among the mango trees ; and the Civil officers went back to their regular grind again, and the soldiers to their parades and musketry ; and there was peace in the land.

There was a sense of dreariness too at first, after all the racket of the past week, and the ladies looked rather fagged ; but this passed off in a few days.

To Guy all seemed a delicious dream. There was no doubt about it now. Since the evening of the dance he had been hopelessly fascinated. Others had noticed his manner to Helen that night, if she had not ; and he made little attempt to deny to his own heart that he had fallen at her feet. Yet, with characteristic indolence and enjoyment of the present, Guy Langley did not even now seriously put before himself the idea of marriage. He was in love with Helen Treveryan, and he let his love have full course ; he did his utmost to be with her, and to make himself pleasant to her. But he said nothing to her that need change for good or evil the easy familiar footing upon which they stood to one another. Helen was still unconscious of his feelings. She had plenty of happiness in her life, and none of that vulgarity of mind which keeps so many young women always on the look-out for a 'follower.' So the matter stood, and so it might perhaps have remained for a considerable time longer if something had not come to disturb the even tenor of their lives.

Not long after the festivities of Christmas week there arrived at Syntia a young Englishman who was travelling in India, and had been passed on from headquarters with a letter of introduction to Colonel Treveryan. Mr. Pitt Wright was a man of about nine-and-twenty, with a fine place in the Eastern counties and an income vaguely spoken of as twenty thousand a year. He had lost his father when he was a boy, and had grown up without much home discipline. He was by no means a fool; but he was proud of his money, and extremely careful in spending it; and he had a conceited, supercilious manner, particularly with women, which was not agreeable. He contemplated entering upon a political career, and had some ideas on the subject of India; but at present he was travelling for pleasure and sport.

This unbidden guest settled down upon Colonel Treveryan's house as if it belonged to him. He had first fallen upon the ever-hospitable Viceroy, and had attached himself to the headquarters establishment with a calm tenacity which became first amusing and then infuriating. The aides-de-camp cursed him, and to all concerned he made himself an intolerable bore. He was sent away for a time to see the native capital of Jeypore, and the Taj, and the Golden Temple; but he turned up again for the great assemblage at Delhi, and had to be accommodated with a tent in the camp. There he grumbled at everything provided for him, and added appreciably to the troubles of the staff, who were already worked off their legs. When the Delhi camp broke up he was at last shaken off, very much against his will. He had still to get rid of a fortnight or more before the beginning of the shooting-party in which he had been given a place, and as Syntia was in the midst of some of the recognised sights of India, and he had nowhere in particular to go, he consented with a not very good grace to pay a visit to the Commissioner.

He arrived by train one evening in January, and was met by Colonel Treveryan, who drove him up from the station. He seemed to be in an indifferent humour; complained in a hard level voice, very much at the back of his throat, of the filthy food which he had got at the refreshment-rooms; and was strong against the shameful slowness of the trains, and the way in which the native porters clamoured for *bakshish* at every turn. Helen was out riding when he arrived, but they met soon afterwards at dinner. Mr. Pitt Wright did not make a favourable impression upon her. He talked rather cleverly, but he talked too much. He evidently considered himself of very much greater importance

than his host, or the few people who had been asked to meet him. He interrupted and corrected without scruple, and his manner to Helen herself was familiar and patronising. More than once she felt tempted to object strongly to some of his remarks ; but she restrained herself, and her father saw only that she was rather cool and distant.

When the ladies left the room, Colonel Treveryan walked round to the other end of the table where the stranger was sitting, and took his daughter's chair. Pitt Wright had pulled out his cigarette-case, and was lighting a cigarette from a candle in front of him. Having started this to his satisfaction, he sat back in his chair and began to talk again.

'How disgraceful the native carriages are on your Indian lines,' he said. 'I wonder the people stand it. Some one ought really to take the matter up. They are frightfully crowded, and the seats are nothing but narrow boards, and the whole thing is like a cattle pen.'

'Natives can travel by any class,' Colonel Treveryan said. 'The third-class carriages are very crowded at times no doubt, but the people who travel third-class in India are not accustomed to sitting on cushions, and would vote them a nuisance, I fancy, in hot weather. It is difficult to see what one can do. The fares are very low indeed, a farthing a mile or less, and I suppose the Companies can't afford to give better accommodation for the money.'

'Ah! you are like the rest, my dear Colonel. You've got accustomed to it. Anything is good enough for a nigger. But I assure you the thing would not be allowed for a moment if the British public knew of it. You will have to treat them better one of these days.'

'I don't think they would tell you that I am inclined to treat them very badly,' Colonel Treveryan answered ; and he repressed the feeling of irritation that his guest's words had stirred up. Were they not always the same, these ignorant globe-trotters, always ready to take for granted that their countrymen were brutal oppressors? What was the use of arguing about it? He carried off the conversation to other topics, trying to find out what were his guest's tastes and wishes and what could be done to amuse him. The result was not very encouraging.

Mr. Pitt Wright did not much care about going to see the old 'City of the Dead' in the forest, which was one of the sights near Syntia. It had once been a great Hindu capital, and there were

ruined temples and houses and tanks, all deserted now, tenanted only by bats and jackals, and overgrown by jungle trees. 'I have seen such quantities of these ruins,' he said, 'about Delhi. They are very picturesque no doubt, but they are very much alike. A little of them goes a long way.' Would he care to go down by boat to the great religious fair on the river-bank at Ramgunge? Pilgrims came to it from all parts of India, and one could see a great variety of types. 'Er, yes, I don't mind; I think that would be rather interesting; but don't they have cholera at these places?' Would he go and pay a visit to the Raja of Leree and see the famous rock fortress which had never been taken? No, he thought not. He had seen some of these hill forts already, and they really were rather a fraud. Then there was the position held by our people in the Mutiny, when the contingent revolted. Week after week a party of English officers and civilians and a company of British infantry, backed by a few faithful natives, had held a large enclosed house on the river-bank; the men fighting grandly against hopeless odds, and the poor ladies sharing the danger and privation, and doing their best to help by nursing the sick and wounded. The house was still there, all shattered and pitted with round shot and musketry, and the feeble earthworks round it had not yet wholly disappeared under the wash of the rains. It was a sight to fill any English heart with pity and pride. Surely no Englishman could turn carelessly away from the spot where his countrymen had made that desperate stand. 'Thanks,' Pitt Wright said. 'I don't much care about battlefields. I don't profess to understand military matters; and after all, these little fights out here were not of much importance. Some day, if you happen to be driving round that way, you might show it me.' Finally Captain Lee, who was one of the party, arranged to show Pitt Wright a day's pig-sticking; and it was also settled that he would try a morning with the snipe in a neighbouring *jheel*. 'I have no doubt,' he remarked, 'that I shall make myself happy enough somehow, until the tiger-shooting begins.'

Then they joined the ladies. Helen had avoided asking a large party the first night in case her guest should be tired with his journey; but Mrs. Hunter was there, and Mrs. Stewart, and Mrs. Lee. Pitt Wright went and sat down near Mrs. Stewart, whom he had been looking at during dinner, and they were soon in an apparently friendly conversation.

After a time Hunter asked Helen to sing. She knew that

Hunter and Stewart both liked it, and as none of the other ladies sang she went to the piano as usual. She turned over her music and took out a volume of German songs which Hunter always demanded. Then the beautiful voice rose clear and sweet and true, every word audible and every note easy and sure. And through it all, through the soft wail of Schubert's *Ave Maria*, and through Mendelssohn's dreamy love-flight, *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges*, to the banks of the sacred stream, came at intervals the hard throaty tones of Pitt Wright, who was seated in a long low chair, with his head lying back and his legs stretched out, discoursing to Mrs. Stewart about the position of the Liberals in Norfolk. It was not her fault. She was fond of music herself and knew better. Her husband looked at her and shook his head, and she answered with an expressive shrug of the eyebrows. What are you to do when a man will talk whether you wish it or not? She returned him nothing but low monosyllables, and looked absently towards the piano; but it was no use. She had set him off, and if she was not more interested in his conversation than in the music he was. At the end of each song he stopped to say, 'Bravo, excellent,' and then went on talking.

When Helen had sung three or four songs in succession, she turned to Hunter, who had been sitting listening in calm enjoyment, qualified only by Pitt Wright's strident voice. A good dinner and then music was exactly his notion of happiness. 'Come along, Mr. Hunter, and join in a chorus. What shall we have? *Gaudeamus igitur*?'

Hunter sighed and got up. 'I am much too old to sing that, and it is pleasanter listening to you.' But he came nevertheless, and so did the Lees, and then Mrs. Stewart took advantage of a pause in Pitt Wright's remarks and offered to play for them, and they started the bright cynical student song.

Mr. Pitt Wright declined to join of course. He did not sing. He lay out in his chair, with his head back and his hands in his pockets, and yawned unrestrainedly at intervals.

They had one or two more songs, and after that the party broke up. The men had put on their coats and lighted their cigars, and were standing on the steps waiting for the ladies, who were wrapping themselves up in a side room. Pitt Wright had risen, with an evident effort, to say good-night to them, and sank into his chair again as they walked out. Hunter turned to Treveryan and nodded his head sideways towards the drawing-

room. 'You will find him an awful bore, Treveryan. How long is he going to stay?'

'Lord knows; but I daresay he is a very good fellow.'

'H'm. I daresay. I don't like the species myself. Come along, wife. We're keeping every one waiting.'

Treveryan waited until the last carriage had driven off, and then returned to the drawing-room. He found his guest in his former position: his legs stretched out, and the soles of his dress shoes facing the door. Helen was in the corner behind the piano gathering up her scattered music. As Treveryan came in, he heard Pitt Wright's voice talking of Mrs. Stewart. 'Not a bad-looking woman, and decently dressed too. Quite refreshing after what I have been going through of late.' Helen did not answer, and he went on: 'Seen the last of them off, Colonel? Who were all these respectable people?' Then, without waiting for an answer, 'By the way, where did we say you were going to take me to-morrow?'

'I am afraid I shall not be able to get away to-morrow morning,' Treveryan said. 'I have some work; but I thought you might begin by driving over to cantonments and calling on the regiment. In the afternoon we could go for a ride if you liked, or to tennis at the Club.'

'Oh, very well. I have no doubt I shall get along all right. Now I think I will say good-night. No, no more smoke, thanks; I am rather tired.'

When Pitt Wright had gone, Treveryan changed his coat and went to his writing-room for a cigar. Soon afterwards Helen joined him. She had put on what she called her smoking-coat, a loose tea-gown of Tussa silk, soft and gray and comfortable, but well made, like everything she wore. Her father looked at her with loving admiration in his eyes. 'What a nice thing that is, Nell. I always think you look even better in that than in your swell dresses.'

Helen passed her fingers through his brown hair and then bent down and kissed it. 'Dear old daddy! you would think I looked nice in anything. Father, what are we to do with that horrid man? Do you think he will stay long?'

'I don't know, Nell. They said a few days, but that may mean anything. I daresay we shall find him pleasant enough. We must not be inhospitable.'

'I don't want to be inhospitable, daddy; but it does irritate me so. They are all alike. They just use your house like a

hotel, and they seem to think you have nothing in the world to do but to amuse them. I am not going to have you wasting your time upon him, and then sitting up half the night working to make up for it.'

'Don't, Nell; I don't like it. It is a nuisance, of course; but you must be civil to a man in your own house, and they don't understand. I daresay they think we are paid for it; and they have not the least idea what the work is in India.'

'I expect they understand well enough, but they don't care. So long as they get all they want, it does not matter to them what trouble it costs. One never realises how detestable Englishmen can be till one sees them travelling.'

'Nell, Nell, you really are not fair. Some of them are capital fellows. Who could have been nicer than young Wenley last year?'

'Yes. I liked him; but very few are like that.'

'Well, a good many of them do seem to leave their manners in the Suez Canal; but, after all, it is natural enough. They feel that they are in a strange country where nobody knows them, and so they don't much care what they do. I remember having that feeling myself when I first came out. You must settle down into your place and get to know people round you before you care for their opinion.'

'I daresay, father; but I am certain you always behaved like a gentleman. They don't behave like gentlemen, many of them. There's no excuse for that.'

Colonel Treveryan put his hand on his daughter's: 'Never mind, Nell. Let's talk of something pleasanter than T. G.'s. How did Sultan go this evening?'

Helen shook off her little trouble with an effort, and the two were soon chatting happily about other matters.

By seven o'clock next morning Colonel Treveryan had finished his early tea and was at his work. Helen came out a couple of hours later, looking as fresh and bright as if she had never left England. She had not yet fallen into the bad Indian habit of early rising, which is responsible for more illness than anything else in the country.

She and her father sat down to breakfast, and finished it alone. A servant was sent to inquire whether their visitor would have anything in his room, but the answer was that he would come out soon. It was past eleven before he appeared, and Colonel Treveryan, after waiting some little time, had gone to

his office. Helen had finished her morning interview with the servants, had taken some breakfast to Jacko the monkey and was looking after her birds, when Mr. Pitt Wright walked out of his rooms into the hall. Her hands were full, but she smiled a bright good morning to him. She had reproached herself while she was dressing for her rather hasty condemnation of the night before, and had determined to make things as pleasant as she could. 'I hope you are rested,' she said. 'Did you sleep well?'

'No. I can't say I did. Some confounded dogs were howling all night and kept me awake.'

'I am very sorry. The pariah dogs do make a noise sometimes at night, and it worries one till one gets accustomed to it. You must have a quiet day. Now you must want your breakfast.'

She took him into the dining-room and poured out his tea for him, and sat with him while he ate his meal. He seemed to enjoy it, and talked agreeably enough, in a rather irritating free-and-easy way, until it was over. When he had done, he took out his cigarette-case. Helen got up. 'I will leave you to have your cigarette,' she said. 'My father said I was to tell you that you are to order the carriage when you want it; and if you want to speak to him about anything, I am to let him know.'

'Oh, don't go. What is your father doing?'

'He is in his office-room trying cases, I think. He is dreadfully hard-worked always.'

Mr. Pitt Wright was examining his cigarette, which had got a little flattened, and gently coaxing it into shape. 'Is he, really?' he said carelessly. 'I thought he was a great swell, and had lots of fellows to devil for him. Look here, don't you go. I know you've nothing to do, anyhow. Come and talk to me while I have a smoke. You won't have one yourself?'

He had remained seated when she rose, and his manner was very much the manner of our golden youth towards a barmaid. Helen's head went up, and her temper began to get the better of her; but she tried not to show it. 'I can't stop now,' she said, and walked out of the room. Her guest looked at her and laughed in a rather embarrassed way.

'Don't be cross. Please come back. I shall be miserable if you don't. It's very rude to leave me all alone.'

Helen returned to her birds, but the brightness had gone out of her face. She stood in the hall for a second, and a hot flush rose over her cheek and neck. 'If it were not for father,' she

thought to herself, 'how I should love to have it out with him.' Then she pulled herself up. 'How silly I am to be troubled by it. I won't let him worry me any more. But he is not a gentleman.'

For the next week Helen succeeded in avoiding any unpleasantness, but Pitt Wright was a great nuisance. He had nothing on earth to do apparently and took no interest in anything, so that it was hard to amuse him. Colonel Treveryan took him out snipe-shooting one day, and he shot rather well; but he disliked getting his feet wet, and came to the conclusion that snipe-shooting was not good enough. Then the hospitable Colonel, with a pang of regret, mounted him for a day's pig-sticking. He did not ride badly, but he got flurried and very nearly came to grief over a jinking boar, and then he laid the blame on Remus. The horse funkcd, he said, and put him off. Funkcd! Remus, who loved the sport, and would have carried his master straight at the biggest pair of tushes that ever gleamed. On other days Pitt Wright loafed about the house smoking, or drove over to cantonments. He had struck up an acquaintance with Denham, and would sometimes go and lunch or dine with him, ordering a horse or a carriage and keeping it out for any length of time without the smallest consideration for man or beast. Sometimes he went to the Club in the afternoon for a rubber, but not often; and as he did not play tennis he did not care to go in the evening, and Colonel Treveryan gave up playing. He would not call on any one in the Civil station; not even on the Lees, though Lee had taken a good deal of trouble in helping him to see some sport, and every one was ready to be hospitable. 'What is the use,' he said, 'of calling on a lot of people I shall never see again, and never want to?' Altogether Helen fairly longed to see the last of him. After the first day he was perhaps a little more careful in his manner towards her, but it was always more familiar than she liked.

So things went on for three weeks, and Pitt Wright had shown no sign of going. Then one morning at breakfast came a letter to say that his shooting-party had been put off, and was not to begin until the 1st of February. 'Well, I'm hanged,' he said, reading his letter with a face of disgust. 'That is too bad. I have been waiting for those fellows a month already, and now I shall have to kick my heels for another fortnight, just because some silly old Colonel won't give some of them leave. It doesn't seem to occur to them that my time is limited. I must get away

by the middle of February. I expect it will be beastly hot in the Red Sea even then. I shall write to the Viceroy's people and have them stirred up. Confound them !'

Helen sat looking at the table, with her mouth set. Colonel Treveryan answered quietly : 'It is disappointing, but I expect they can't help it, and you will have time enough. I daresay the shooting will be all the better for being a bit later. I wish we could find something for you to do meanwhile.'

Pitt Wright dimly recognised that he had not been very gracious. 'Oh, it isn't that,' he said ; 'I am perfectly comfortable here, and I'm much obliged to you for putting me up. Only, I don't like staying for ever, you know.'

'My dear fellow, please don't think of that. We are very glad to keep you as long as you like to stay.'

So the unbidden guest remained at Syntia, hardly concealing his weariness and impatience to be gone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DIE IS CAST

DURING all this time Guy Langley had seen much less of Helen, and he was concerned at the deprivation. It troubled him greatly when she failed to appear at the tennis-ground in the evenings. It troubled him still more to know that she was driving or riding with Pitt Wright, even though her father was with them. He would have been pleased if he had known how she disliked the duty ; and he might have guessed it from her evident pleasure when at times she did break away ; but a man in love is never reasonable. The net result was that he saw less of her, and knew she was constantly with some one else. It seemed odd to him that Pitt Wright should stay so long except for one reason. Guy was getting sore and jealous. It was not surprising. Helen controlled her dislike bravely, for her father's sake, and she said nothing to others against her guest. They seemed to be on the best of terms.

One Saturday night before dinner, when Guy walked into the anteroom of the mess rather early, intending to spend a quarter of an hour in reading a magazine article which he had begun, he found Pitt Wright sitting near the fireplace. He had come to dine with Denham, who was also there. As Guy came in, the two were laughing, and he heard Denham say : ' You had better bolt before it is too late. She is a determined young woman.' The conversation was interrupted by Guy's entrance, and in a few minutes several other men came in ; but during dinner Guy could not get those words out of his head. He spoke little, and ate less, and looked so glum that St. Orme, who was sitting next him, attacked him on the subject.

' What the devil is the matter with you ? ' St. Orme asked in his fine, slow, rolling voice, after several attempts had failed. ' You look as if you were going to be shot, or married, or some-

thing. By Jove, I believe that's it. *A ses beaux yeux !*' and he drained his glass.

Guy flushed guiltily, and Chimp's ringing 'Ha ! ha !' by his side irritated him ; but the words made him rouse himself, and for the rest of dinner he was less silent. Unfortunately the provocation soon recurred.

There was a very small party at mess that night, and Pitt Wright was the only stranger. When the cigar-box came round, several of those who had dined went off ; some of them were going to drive out to camp for a day's shooting. Guy was listening to a story of St. Orme's about an adventure of his in Egypt. St. Orme had seen some odd things, and his stories, told in his swaggering manner, were amusing enough. Suddenly Guy caught a few words which made him start. On the opposite side of the table, a few places from him, Denham and Pitt Wright were smoking cigarettes. Pitt Wright was sitting back in his chair with a self-satisfied smile, and Denham was leaning with his elbow on the table talking in a low voice. During a momentary pause, Guy heard him say : ' My dear fellow, any one can see the girl is hard hit. You have taken our one ewe lamb, like the beggar in the Bible.'

For the life of him Guy could not have helped listening to the answer. ' Well, she certainly is getting rather affectionate. I think it's about time I cleared out.' Denham laughed at the lie, a sneering contemptuous laugh, though the lie was of his own making. Guy's heart sank, and he felt as if he could have killed the man who was smiling opposite to him ; but what he had heard none the less smote him with a conviction of truth. He sat through the remainder of St. Orme's story with a dull pain gnawing at his heart ; and directly the story was ended he got up.

' Well, I'm off now,' he said ; ' I am not very fit to-night and must turn in early,' and he walked out into the air.

St. Orme looked after him curiously, and then yawned, and twisted up his moustache, and strolled into the anteroom. He did not like Denham or Pitt Wright, and as he turned he looked them over with an open insolent contempt which both saw and resented. They spoke evil of him when he was out of hearing, and he said to himself : ' Little cads, those two.' He would have preferred saying it aloud ; but one cannot say all one thinks.

Guy walked across to his quarters and dropped into a long cane chair in the sitting-room which he shared with Dale. He

felt a burning hatred for Pitt Wright, and some indignation against Helen herself. 'They are all alike,' he thought, as he called to mind how little he had seen her of late. 'She knows the brute's got money and chucks me over like an old glove.' It did not occur to his mind that she had never professed any love for him, and that he had never asked her for it.

Dale was absent. He had gone over to Mrs. Dangerfield's after dinner. She had asked them both, but Guy would not go when the time came. It was rather unlucky for Guy's peace of mind. He was in a humour when a longing for sympathy might have been too strong for his reserve; and, if he had spoken to his friend, Dale's breezy common sense and belief in him would have swept away the mist. As it was, Guy sat alone smoking and drinking whisky and soda-water, and brooding in silence, for an hour or more.

Nevertheless, as he sat, a feeling gradually came to him that after all he was perhaps distressing himself unnecessarily. Denham's assertion and Pitt Wright's reply might be quite untrue. The one might have been more chaff than earnest, and the other merely the conceited boast of a flattered man. How often he had heard chaff of the kind before and attached no importance to it. His mind swayed this way and that in alternations of fear and hope, but gradually the hope became more definite. 'Anyhow, I will go over and settle it one way or another,' he said to himself at last. 'Anything is better than this.' Even then Guy did not put clearly before himself the idea of marriage. He was only filled with desire to know that Helen loved him. It would be enough for the present if he could make certain that Pitt Wright had been lying, and that he himself was dear to her. If he had been older, he might perhaps have been more cautious and have thought it all out more definitely before acting, but he was young and reckless. It did not occur to him that if he married Helen he would be throwing himself away, or that any one could think so. Few men are snobs at three-and-twenty. He did not entertain any exaggerated idea of his own value; and if he thought of his own people at all, he thought they had only to see her. But, in truth, he hardly thought of them yet. With all his indolence, perhaps because of it, his natural tendency was to act without troubling himself much beforehand as to the opinion of others. In a few words he was young and in love, and he was goaded by jealousy. Who stops to think it all out at his age? Have we not life before us, and strong hands and hot hearts?

Guy was happier when he had made up his mind. He straightened himself in his chair with a sigh of relief, and called for another 'peg' in a voice that was no longer despairing. Then he got into bed and fell asleep, dreaming of love and happiness.

In the small hours of the morning Dale arrived. He had walked home after a merry evening and supper. The servants were rolled up on the floor in the back verandah, fast asleep, and the lamp in the sitting-room had burnt itself out. Dale felt his way cautiously across to the door of his own room with his hands in front of him; but he stumbled over the wooden arm of Guy's long chair, upon which Guy had left his empty tumbler. This fell on the edge of the seat and broke, and Dale swore. The shiver of glass woke Guy up, and he heard Dale grope his way into the next room. A miserable sense of something being wrong came upon him, and looking into his memory he recalled Pitt Wright's words. The sudden remembrance made him groan and turn upon his bed in a torture of jealous wretchedness. Then his mind rapidly recaught the line of thought which had comforted him before, and he felt better again. After that he began to tell himself that things always looked black at night, and that all would be brighter in the morning. The thought of the day, with its sunshine and action, soothed him, and he fell asleep. When he finally woke at eight o'clock, he did so with a beating heart and a sense of excitement; but the excitement was not altogether unpleasing. His natural hopefulness had come to his rescue.

It was Dale's turn for church parade, which Guy was not sorry for; and he drove off alone after breakfast to the Civil station. The cold weather was lasting well and the air was still pleasant, but the sun was strong and the little church felt cool and refreshing. He was just in time, and as he took his seat he noticed with satisfaction that his enemy was not in the Commissioner's pew. Colonel Treveryan was sitting in it alone. 'I'm glad the brute isn't there,' Guy thought in a truly Christian spirit. Then it suddenly struck him that Helen might have stayed at home too, and he looked round at the gallery. No, she was there all right. He caught her eyes, and it made his heart jump. He turned round hastily, and did not see the blush that sprang to her face. Hunter saw it and smiled to himself.

The prayers seemed long that morning, and the sermon longer. At times Guy caught Helen's voice in the singing; it

was his only pleasure during the service. At last it ended, and he was able to go outside and await her. When she came down from the gallery and saw him, there was something in his face which attracted her attention at once. It was a look of inquiry and eagerness which was unusual to him. He was embarrassed, and his embarrassment communicated itself to her. However, this was only momentary. They had hardly shaken hands when they were joined by Colonel Treveryan, who had been talking to Mrs. Hunter. 'Good morning, Langley,' he said. 'Are you coming over to lunch?'

'I shall be very glad, if you will have me.'

'That's right. Is Dale coming too?'

'No, Colonel, he is on duty to-day.'

'Come along with us then, and tell your man to bring your trap round.'

Guy followed Helen into the Treveryans' carriage, which was open, and drove up with them. Helen was looking very bright and happy, with a warm colour in her face; and as he sat opposite, her dress touching him and her sweet eyes looking straight into his when she spoke, he wished the drive were ten miles long. When they got near the house Colonel Treveryan said: 'I am going on if you will excuse me. I want to see Oldham, and he was not in church. I shall be back in half an hour. Shall I bring him over to lunch, Nell?'

'Yes, do, father. Tell him it is my order. We have not seen him for a week.'

Guy and Helen got out of the carriage, and walked up the steps. At the top, between the pillars of the porch, they found Pitt Wright sitting in an easy chair smoking a cigarette. He had been reading some papers, which were lying about on the matting. He nodded slightly to Guy, and, without any attempt to rise from his chair, said to Helen: 'Well, did the little Pádre give you a good sermon?'

'Yes, very good,' she said, and was passing on into the hall when he lazily put out his hand over the arm of his chair as if to stop her.

'Don't go,' he said in his throaty voice. 'Come and sit down, and tell me all about it.'

Helen moved aside. 'I must go and take my things off,' was all she said in answer; but the tone of her voice pleased Guy in the midst of his wrath. He would not trust himself to stay outside with Pitt Wright, and he followed her into the hall,

passing straight through to the drawing-room as she disappeared into her own rooms to the right. He had not waited long when she came back. Something in her face and carriage emboldened him, and he said: 'Let us go and sit in the south verandah. It is pleasanter there.'

She looked back through the hall to where Pitt Wright was sitting; then she turned and walked through the dining-room. As they came into the verandah Guy said to her, 'How long is Mr. Pitt Wright going to stay?'

The answer was emphatic. 'He is going to-morrow, thank goodness.'

'Then you don't like him?'

'Like him!' she said, with a flushing cheek and something very like a stamp of the little foot. 'Like him! I detest him and his insolent ways. He would never dare to behave in England as he does out here. Oh, if only he were not in our house and I were not obliged to stand it!'

Guy's delight only gave the spur to his indignation. 'I am not obliged to stand it,' he said. 'Shall I take him in hand and give him a kicking? There is nothing I should like so much.' Guy was very young.

Helen was young too, but she was a woman. 'I wish some one would,' she could not help saying; then she laughed and pulled herself up. 'But you must not talk like that. I daresay he means no harm. It is only that I am not accustomed to be treated in that sort of way, and it makes me lose my temper. It is very silly of me.'

Guy was supremely happy in his position of confidant. 'Do hand him over to me,' he said; 'I have often longed to have it out with him on my own account. He's a horrid cad; and I don't think I should have stood him till now if he had not been your guest.'

Helen began to be embarrassed at Guy's earnest face and manner, and she felt rather ashamed of what she had said and let him say. 'No, no, Mr. Langley,' she answered, 'you must behave properly. I ought not to have spoken like that. Please don't think anything more about it, or it will make me very uncomfortable.'

Guy could not look into her eyes and restrain himself. 'I wish you would give me the right,' he began in a voice that was a caress.

With all her innocence Helen understood now, and she inter

rupted him hastily. She was not prepared for this, and not quite in a humour for it. It startled her at the moment more than it pleased her. There were so many people about. The servants were walking in and out of the dining-room behind them; and everything was so public. It was a relief to her to see at this moment Goldney's dog-cart coming up the drive. 'Oh, there is Mr. Goldney,' she said, as if she had not heard; 'I suppose he is coming to lunch. I must go in.' Guy was only incited by the check. 'Stay one minute,' he said, but she walked on into the dining-room. As she did so he remembered that it was his only chance for the day. In the afternoon there would be the usual gathering for tea, and then church again. Guy was desperate. 'Miss Treveryan,' he said, as he walked in with her, 'I must speak to you. I shall come to-morrow.' Her only answer was a burning blush, which covered her cheeks and forehead and ears as she turned to meet her visitors. Guy could see it mantling into her bright brown hair at the nape of her neck. Goldney saw it too. He was a little surprised at the warmth of his welcome, but he was not deceived by it. It was a warmth born of embarrassment, as he guessed with a pang at his heart.

A few minutes later Colonel Treveryan arrived, bringing the judge with him, and then the luncheon gong sounded. During the meal Guy did not speak to Helen. Oldham and Pitt Wright sat next her, and she talked to the former. But there were only six of them, and once or twice the talk became general. Once he met her eyes, and again she blushed crimson. He saw that it distressed her, and he refrained from speaking to her any more. Directly after lunch she left them. Guy could not resist stopping till tea-time, but it was useless; and when the gathering began he ordered his dog-cart. She shook hands with him when he went, and their eyes met again. Guy knew then that she was not angry with him, but she had cut short his offer, and he knew no more.

As he drove home he felt disappointed, but he was not altogether unhappy. At all events, Helen did not care for Pitt Wright. That maddening doubt had been laid. Did she care for him? She had not shown much sign of it, but he had hopes. It was clumsy of him to spring a mine upon her like that. Perhaps if he had had a quiet chance it would have been all right. At all events, he was now determined to know. The next day should decide.

CHAPTER XIV

SUSPENSE

DALE had spent a fairly cheerful day during Guy's absence. He had done his duty in the morning, and had then gone over and called upon his Colonel's wife and tried to play with Mabs, but Mabs had rather snubbed him. She had not much respect for Chimp. After that he had taken his cheery smile on to Mrs. Dangerfield's, and joined her lunch party. She asked him where Guy was.

'Gone over to church at the Civil station.'

'As usual. We shall have him reading the lessons soon. And on to lunch at the Treverys', I suppose?'

'I expect so. He said he should stay if they asked him.'

'That girl is a nuisance. I wish she would take the little "Pink 'un" and leave you boys in peace.'

'She is a jolly girl all the same.'

'I daresay, but she is poaching, and I object.'

'I am afraid it's no use, Mrs. Dangerfield. Guy can be pretty obstinate when he chooses.'

'Well, there are some more of you, that's one comfort; only he was about the best. I am sorry he has taken to evil courses.'

Dale did not answer, and the subject dropped.

After a very merry lunch the party broke up. For a wonder Dale had been tempted to drink some champagne, a ruinous thing to do in India in the middle of the day, and he felt lazy and bored. He strolled over to his quarters and sat down in Guy's long chair, with his little muscular legs up on the projecting arms.

His dog Jock came in from the compound, where he had been chasing a squirrel. Jock was a queer-looking beast. Dale had

bought him as a puppy under the belief that he was going to be a fox-terrier ; but long before he was full-grown it became clear that something had gone wrong. He was leggy, and his coat was rougher and thinner than a fox-terrier's has any right to be. You could see the spots on the skin below. His manners, too, bore unmistakable mark of a plebeian origin. They were the manners of the immortal Crab ; he never could be taught the least respect for capons or farthingales. At this moment Jock was covered with yellow dust, and Dale told him he was a dirty little devil, and tried to make him lie down on the floor, which he declined to do. He was a republican sort of dog, affectionate enough in his own way, but thoroughly disobedient. If he did not approve of your orders he trotted off quietly, and went to stay with a friend until you were in a more reasonable frame of mind. Sometimes he would stay away a day or two.

For a few minutes Dale sat quiet, cogitating upon the nature of dogs in general and fox-terriers in particular. He still regarded Jock as a fox-terrier. 'Rummy little beggars,' he thought to himself, 'always chivvying something. Wonder why they can't leave squirrels and things alone.' Then it gradually dawned upon him that he was always chivvying something too.

'I'm blest if we're not rather like that ourselves. Small blame to us either. Life would not be much good if there were no sport to be got.'

Abstruse thought, however, was not Dale's line, and he looked round the room for something to amuse him. His eye fell on a small square table, upon which lay a pile of Guy's books. It was within reach, and he pulled it towards his chair, and turned over the volumes.

'Poetry books,' he said to himself, with a face of disgust. 'I can't make Guy out. He can shoot and ride and play polo and all that, so it's not as if he was an ass and fit for nothing else ; and yet he will sit reading this rot by the hour together.' Chimp was not born under a rhyming planet. .

He took up a copy of Wordsworth, and opened it at random, and turned over a page or two until he came to a passage Guy had marked. Chimp read it out aloud—

A violet by a mossy stone,
Half-hidden from the eye ;
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

'That *is* rather jolly,' he said. He read the preceding verse, and then the last. The closing lines he repeated—

But she is in her grave, and O !
The difference to me !

'Well, I suppose, that would make one feel a bit cheap, but I don't see many points in it all the same—as poetry. There's no go about it. Besides, any fool could say a thing like that.' After this he looked at *Harry Gill*, but Wordsworth did not suit him. 'Drivel,' he said, as he put it down, and opened Shelley. The volume was scored in all directions by Guy's pencil-marks, but to Chimp's mind Guy's admiration was not comprehensible. He looked at bits of *The Skylark* and *The Cloud*, and other marked pieces.

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

'Very pretty, I daresay. I don't see the force of it myself. Milton,—oh, that's the old bird who wrote the *Allegro*, that they made us learn at Bob Sayers's before I went to Harrow. There it is, by Jove ! How I hated it, and the other thing, *Penseroso*; that was worse. It's a beastly shame to make little beggars of ten or eleven learn those hard pieces, all full of Latin names and things, when they can't understand them. I believe that is what set me against poetry. I daresay I should have been no end fond of it if I had had a chance. I like really good poetry awfully now.'

But hark the cry is Astur, and see the ranks divide,
And the great Lord of Luna comes with his—something—stride ;
Upon his ample shoulders clangs loud the fourfold shield,
And in his hand the mighty brand that none but he can wield.

'That's the sort of thing. That makes you sit up.'

He looked for a copy of Macaulay, but it was not there. 'I know he has got it,' Chimp said ; 'I have heard him spout it by the yard.' He went back to Milton with a sigh, and made a heroic attempt to read some of *Paradise Lost*, but he could not. He found a marked passage in *Lycidas*—

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise,
That last infirmity of noble mind,
To scorn delights and live laborious days.

'Oh, I daresay, old man. I think I see you scorning delights and living laborious days.'

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?

'Beastly untidy of Neæra, but that's more his form just now, poor old chap. It is a dangerous game. If he gets bowled over, won't old Lady Mary cut up rough neither? She's a jolly girl, but I don't expect she's got a bob; and he hasn't got too much. I wish I could give him some.'

Chimp remained in a brown study for a while, thinking of his friend, and his friend's home, where he had spent a week the year before; then he returned to his poetry. He opened Coleridge, and skimmed through the *Ancient Mariner*, and then came upon the Vision of Kubla Khan. He read how Coleridge had composed the poem in his sleep, and how it had been driven out of his head by the man on business from Porlock. 'What a jolly lie,' Chimp said; 'I bet he got stumped, and did not know how to finish it. Don't wonder either.'

Then he tried Keats, but that was hopeless. The would-be classical pictures seemed to him eminently foolish, as indeed they were; and he did not care for the verse. He managed to read through *Lamia*. 'Beastly shame,' he said. 'Why couldn't the old beggar leave them alone? She was not doing any harm, and they were having a real good time. Awful hard luck on both of them.'

Chimp had reached the bottom of the pile now, and there he found an unpretending little volume in brown. 'May as well go right through,' he thought. 'Guy will laugh when I tell him I have read the whole lot. Gordon,—Scotchman, I suppose. All about bonny lasses and wee bit bairns.' He opened the book and read a marked passage—

She rose when I hit her, I saw the stream glitter,
A wide scarlet nostril flashed close by my knee,
Between sky and water the Clown came and caught her,
The space that he cleared was a caution to see.

'By George, that's something like.' He read through the piece with keen enjoyment and then turned to the title-page again. 'Gordon,—Adam Lindsay Gordon. I remember now Guy asked me whether I had ever read it. That's a ripping

piece.' He turned over the leaves and found a mine of wealth—the *Sick Stockrider*, the *Bushranger*, the *Ride from the Wreck*, *Britomarte*. Chimp was reading half-aloud now, reading with enjoyment and enthusiasm. It was a full hour before he put down that delightful book—unequal, even poor in parts, but so full of vigour and poetry.

At last he yawned and stretched himself: 'Done the whole jolly lot. Guy is having a real innings to-day. Stayed to tea, I suppose.'

It was getting on towards evening, and Spot, a puppy of Guy's which was tied up in the stables, was making a diabolical noise. It had slept at intervals during the afternoon, but was now broad awake and mad to get loose. Its occasional yelps had changed into an almost ceaseless paroxysm of shrieking. Close by it two *syces* slept unconcernedly, rolled up in their sheets, and one was quietly smoking. He felt neither pity nor annoyance; and the other two were in no way disturbed. Natives of India do not seem to mind any noise when they are asleep. Those who are awake never think of moderating their voices on account of a sleeper. Dale was not so philosophic. The hoarse yells of the poor little wretch, as it tore at its rope and half-strangled itself, were more than he could stand; and, moreover, he thought he would go for a ride before dinner, by way of clearing his head. He strolled out towards the stables and ordered his horse, and let Spot loose. Jock had come up, and the puppy immediately began worrying him, hanging on to his ears and biting, till he turned upon it with a snarl. It looked surprised, and then stood barking at him, with its head down between its paws. But Jock hated the puppy, and would not play.

When Dale had looked at the horses he went into the house to change his clothes, and thought no more of the little beast, which had disappeared. It came into the sitting-room soon afterwards, carrying a very nasty bone which it dropped on the floor. The draught was stirring the hanging corner of a table-cloth, which looked bright and inviting. Guy was fond of pretty things, and had covered an old-fashioned round table at one side of the room with a piece of embroidered Delhi work. The puppy fixed his sharp little teeth in the hanging piece and worried it savagely, backing across the floor and shaking his head. Before long a book was pulled to the edge of the table and fell on the matting with a slap, which startled the puppy and made him jump away with his tail down. His terror, however, was only momentary.

He stood looking at the book for a second or two with his head on one side, and then came back and smelt it. Apparently the result was satisfactory, for his next move was to lie down on the floor and treat the book as a bone. He got his side teeth well home on a corner of it, and chewed off a bit of the cover, leaving a very ragged edge and some sharp tooth-marks beyond.

This was the condition of affairs when Dale came into the room. The puppy looked up, with the book between his fore-paws. Next moment he yelped piteously as he was held up by the skin of the neck. 'You mischievous little brute,' Dale said, administering punishment to the small hanging shivering body. 'I can't leave you for a minute without your being up to some devilry.' Yelp, yelp, yelp!

Then the sweeper was called and the culprit taken away whimpering, and Chimp picked up the book. It was a handsome edition of Tennyson's minor poems bound in red morocco with gold edges. 'By Jove, won't Guy swear!' he said; 'he is fond of that book, I know. What beasts puppies are.' After which he put the remains back on the table and went out to the doorstep. Everything was right there. The horse's coat was like satin, and his bit like burnished silver. Dale was getting more and more particular about these things. He mounted and rode out of the gateway, and down the road towards the Civil station. On one side of the road was a bit of country which seemed promising for a paper-chase course, and he wanted to look at it.

As he rode a verse of Gordon's kept ringing in his ears, and he repeated it aloud with a twirl of his riding-crop—

But I clove his skull with a back stroke clean,
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline.

He had not gone far when he saw Guy in the distance. They pulled up and spoke to one another for a minute, and Dale offered to go back with him if he would come out too. 'No, thanks, Chimp,' he answered. 'I think I will have a quiet smoke before dinner.'

'Lazy beggar. Are you dining at mess?

'Yes.'

'All right. So am I. I shan't be long.'

He rode off, thinking that Guy looked happier, and wondering whether Helen Treveryan had anything to do with it; but in a few minutes his thoughts turned to more serious matters. As he had guessed, it would do very well. There were some very pretty

jumps, chiefly mud walls with ditches, which could be improved in parts ; and one or two artificial water channels, and some rolling ground, with thick timber in patches, and here and there impassable lines of wall and water. Altogether a good, varied, broken country, not too open, but within the powers of any one who meant going and had a horse that could jump a bit. Chimp put his Waler over one or two mud walls with much satisfaction to himself, the good beast taking them freely even in cold blood. It is curious how kindly most horses will go at mud walls. Then they had a difference of opinion about a little ditch with some water in it, but Dale eventually persuaded the Waler that it was all right. When he got back to his quarters, he had worked off his lunch and was in good spirits.

So apparently was Guy, for when Dale went into his room, where he was dressing for dinner, Guy was whistling *John Peel*. It is true that he was rather abstracted, and did not appear to take much interest in the account of the paper-chase course ; but he was cheerful. Suddenly his cheerfulness vanished. 'Confound it !' he said with fiery emphasis, stopping in the act of brushing his hair.

'What on earth's the matter ?'

Guy hesitated, with a scowl on his face. 'Oh, nothing,' he said ; 'only I had forgotten that infernal court-martial.' Poor fellow ! he had been calculating that he could get away after stables and be at the Treveryans' by one o'clock. The disappointment was severe, and he went in to dinner as silent as the night before. Directly it was over he walked back to his quarters again ; and there, after a short time, he was joined by his faithful friend, who could not understand his sudden depression.

Dale found him sitting in his chair, without a book and looking very gloomy, one hand pressed deep into his pocket and the other holding a cigar.

'What *is* the matter, old man ?' Dale inquired, seating himself and looking at him curiously. 'You're not seedy, are you ?'

'Oh no. I'm all right.'

'You're *not* all right. I'm certain there is something bothering you. Nothing wrong about money ?'

'Money ? No. I'm all right—really.'

Dale looked at him rather sadly ; and there came upon Guy a sudden longing for sympathy which he could not control. He sat up in his chair and paused for an instant, and then broke out : 'After all, I don't see why I should tell lies about it. Look here,

Chimp, I know you won't talk. It's the old story. I have made a fool of myself ; at least, I don't mean that ; but—well, you know what I mean. I'm awfully hard hit, old chap, and I dare say you know who it is.'

There could not be much doubt, and Dale said at once, 'Miss Treveryan, I suppose.'

'Yes.'

'Have you said anything to her?'

'No ; at least, not exactly.'

'Are you going to ? She's an awfully nice girl, Guy ; but do you mean that you're going to marry her?'

'Yes, if she'll have me. I can't go on any longer like this. You don't know what it is, Chimp. I thought she cared for that brute Pitt Wright, and it nearly drove me mad.'

Chimp made a sound expressive of unmitigated scorn. 'Pitt Wright ! What an ass you are ! She wouldn't touch him with the end of a barge-pole—not while you are there, anyhow. Well, I suppose you know best, old chap ; but how will they take it at home ?'

Guy moved uneasily in his chair, as a vision of Lady Mary came across him, but he answered stoutly, 'I'm sure they would be delighted if they knew her ; and anyhow, when I marry, I mean to choose for myself.'

'Of course ; quite right too. I only meant that sometimes one's people get in a rise about one. Do you think there's any tin ?'

'I don't know, and I don't care. I wish I knew whether she would have me.'

'Have you ? Of course she'll have you. I'd bet my bottom dollar on that.'

'Do you think so really ? I believe I should shoot myself if she refused.'

Dale burst out laughing. 'What rot, Guy ! She won't refuse, and you would not shoot yourself if she did.'

Guy was getting happier every minute. The secret was out, and Dale's cheery confidence raised his spirits. As to the future, let that take care of itself. Had he not a whole lifetime before him ? Whatever came of it, he must hear those sweet lips say they loved him. All would come right somehow ; it always did. They stayed talking over it for an hour, and as he talked Guy grew more and more enthusiastic. The slight undercurrent of doubt and warning in Dale's words and manner only spurred him on. Before they separated he had made up his mind.

'Well, good night, old man,' Dale said at parting. 'Think it over well. It's a big jump to take. Good luck any way, whatever you do.'

'I have thought it over,' Guy said. 'Good-night.'

He went into his room and began to write to Helen. At first the words came glibly enough, but then there was a check, and he could not get it exactly right. Dale had been sleeping peacefully for a full hour, and Guy—it sounds unromantic—had been obliged to refresh himself with a long tumbler of whiskey and soda before he was satisfied. Everything was silent as he read over his final copy of the letter which was to decide his fate. The weary bearer who brought him his 'peg' had put out the lights and rolled himself up in his sheet and gone to sleep again in the verandah. There was not a sound to be heard, except at intervals a horse moving sleepily in the stable, and the faint, distant barking of some village dogs. The house and all around it lay calm and still in the moonlight. Guy's letter was as follows :—

DEAR MISS TREVERYAN—I hoped to have been able to come over to-morrow, but I find I am on duty and cannot get away until the evening, when you said you had some people to tennis. I cannot wait another day on the chance of seeing you, and must therefore write. I think you know what I wanted to say to you. It is no use my saying much. If you can give me what alone I care to have—your love—you have given it to me already. If you have not given it to me, no protestations on my part would make you do so. Will you send me a few lines as soon as you can, and tell me whether I have had the wonderful good fortune to win what is more to me than all the world? I shall await your answer very anxiously. You have given me no right to speak to you as I have done; and you must not reproach yourself in the slightest degree for any pain that you may have to cause me now. Whatever comes, I shall always be glad that I have had the happiness to know you. Please forgive me for writing if I have troubled you by doing so. One line in answer will be enough. Only let it come soon.—Yours very sincerely,

GUY LANGLEY.

Please show this to Colonel Treveryan if you like; but let me have my answer from yourself, whatever it may be.

Guy lit a match and carefully burnt the scored and altered sheets which bore his first efforts. There were three of them, each beginning with a good, boldly-written sentence or two, and ending in a chaos of scribbles. He pressed the charred remains into powder in a waste-paper basket which he kept by his writing-

table ; then he went over his letter again. It read to him rather curt and broken up, and the words 'You have given me no right' worried him. He had got two 'givens' before. But he could not alter the sentence quite to his mind. 'I have no right' was not what he meant. He left the point open and passed on to the ending. In his second attempt he had left out the 'Yours very sincerely,' which seemed to him a cool conclusion to such a letter, and, after rejecting some other forms, had written simply, 'let it come soon.—GUY LANGLEY.' When writing the final copy this struck him as rather theatrical and French, and he had put back the conventional words. Now he thought he had better leave them in. They accorded better with the tone of rather proud submission in which he flattered himself his letter was couched. Finally, he concluded to let the other sentence alone too. After all, it conveyed what he meant to convey ; and the mere verbal inelegance, if noticed, would only show that he was not thinking too much of the manner of his communication. 'Let it be,' he thought to himself, 'till morning at all events. I can always alter it then.' He put the letter in an envelope, which he closed. An odd thought crossed his mind that if, by any chance, he died in the night he would like Helen to get the letter ; and he addressed it carefully to 'Miss Treveryan, Syntia.' Then, with a sigh of relief, he undressed and got into bed, thinking how curious it was that he should be acting in such a calm and matter-of-fact way at the great crisis of his life. In a few minutes he was asleep.

When Guy woke in the morning he had to decide whether to send off his letter or not. He opened the envelope and read it again. It did not quite please him. He had a certain artistic sense of finish, and he would have liked to alter it a little ; but he shrank from the trouble and anxiety involved, and he had hardly time. After a few seconds of hesitation he put it in a fresh envelope, which he addressed to Helen. Then he called for a *syce*, and told him to take the letter to the Commissioner Sahib's and bring an answer.

When he was gone, Guy felt in thoroughly good spirits. The thing was done ; and he believed in his heart that he knew what the answer would be. Throughout the day he did all he had to do smartly and attentively, without any apparent pre-occupation, and though at times the remembrance of his letter flashed across him and made his heart thrill, he waited patiently enough, his strongest feeling being still a feeling of wonder at

his own calmness. It was not until the afternoon that he began to be at all uneasy at the non-return of his messenger ; and even then, though it surprised him a little, he accounted for it sensibly in a dozen different ways. He was even pleased at the reflection that, when the answer came, he would be free and able to think about it, instead of being in a room with a lot of other men and obliged to attend to what was going on.

CHAPTER XV

ENGAGED

WHEN Guy Langley left Colonel Treveryan's house there was only a short interval before evening church, and several of the party drove down together. Helen always went as she had to play the harmonium, and Hunter went to support her.

That evening's service was one never to be forgotten. As she drove down she was still feeling very restless and upset ; but when she got to her seat she made a resolute effort to control herself. As she knelt with her face in her hands, praying, with a woman's ready self-reproach, that her thoughts might be kept from wandering, a sense of stillness and peace came upon her. She accepted it thankfully as an answer to her prayer, and rose with quiet happiness in her heart. Guy's name had not passed her lips. Not even upon her knees could she confess as yet the love of which she had hardly recognised the existence. All she asked now was that she might be made less unfit for the worship in which she was engaged—as if love were a sin. After that, with the help of the music, she had no difficulty in keeping her thoughts upon the service, and even upon the little Pádre's sermon. Then came the evening hymn. She sang it with a full heart, the sweet *Abide with Me* that has brought comfort to so many, putting the seal upon the day of rest and driving away for a few hours the last relics of the fret and striving of the week. There were some quiet good-nights in the church-porch, and then Helen drove back through the darkness.

The evening dragged. Helen felt as if so much had happened to her, and so long ago. She wanted to get away and think it all over quietly ; and Pitt Wright's voice and conversation jarred on her more than ever. He had somehow found an opening for one of his favourite arguments, and was engaged in demonstrat-

ing with much satisfaction to himself that patriotism was only a form of selfishness. He thought his hearers did not understand him, and was very urgent in his explanations. As a matter of fact, both of them understood him perfectly well; but they were bored by the foolish old conceit, the truth and falsehood of which they had long before realised. Helen was always impatient of this class of reasoning. She felt that, whether it was selfishness or not, a man who was without a strong love of country was never worth much. When Pitt Wright went on to scoff at our insular conceit, and to say that in many respects we were inferior to our neighbours, and that sooner or later we should of course fall to our proper level, as others had done, she fairly lost her temper. 'If those are our feelings we deserve to fall,' she said hotly. 'We should certainly never have been what we are if Englishmen had always thought as you do.'

Colonel Treveryan looked at her and abruptly changed the conversation, and she was silent. Then she began thinking of Guy Langley again, and of what he had said to her. She could not help contrasting him with Pitt Wright. How different he was, with his straight eyes and courteous manners and gallant bearing. This man had not a spark of soldierly feeling in him. You could not imagine him risking his life for anything in the world.

When ten o'clock struck, Helen suggested that it was time for her father to have his cigar. Pitt Wright wished to smoke too, so she said good-night and went to her room. She had been debating in her own mind whether she ought to tell her father what Guy had said. She shrank from doing so, for, after all, he had said very little, and might say no more; and she had not thought it all out yet. It was a relief to put off saying anything.

When she had dismissed her *ayah*, Helen sat down in a low chair and gave herself up to her thoughts. Now that she could look quietly back upon what had passed, she felt that, if she had allowed him, Guy would certainly have asked her to be his wife. She remembered, with a thrill at her heart which made her colour hotly even now, the eager look in his eyes. Yes, she could not be mistaken; he did care for her. The discovery had startled her at first; it rejoiced her now. Then she put it to herself: Did she really care for him in return? The answer was not long in coming. He seemed to her everything that a soldier should be—manly and gentle and courteous, and withal so bright and handsome. Whatever the men about him could do he could do,

and do well ; and not one of them had his deep feeling, his love for all that was good and beautiful, his taste for poetry and music and art, his faith in her God. She deceived herself, of course, to some extent. She did not realise how a quick sympathetic nature can catch, and reflect for a time, the most beautiful feelings of others. Nevertheless, it was not surprising that she thought highly of him, and that, with her romantic girlish heart, she should have imagined herself unworthy of so perfect a knight. 'What is there in me,' she thought, 'that he should care for me?' She sat long pondering over it all—a motherless girl who had to work out her life problem alone ; and when she rose from her chair, her way had become plain to her. Since the morning, when she had risen as innocent and thoughtless as a child, love had laid his finger on her heart, the scales had fallen from her eyes, and the woman in her had suddenly leapt into life. She was innocent still, with the marvellous snow-white innocence of a pure-hearted girl ; but she could never again be a child. As she rose, trembling at the new-born feeling within her, and yet rejoicing, it came to her with a sudden pang that perhaps after all Guy would never speak again as he had done ; but this time she drove away the thought. She knew now that she loved him, and she would not doubt. Already she felt as if doubt were disloyalty to him.

When Helen Treveryan laid her head on her pillow and fell asleep, Guy Langley was finishing his letter to her ; and at the same time her father's guest, on the other side of the house, got into bed, leaving a closed envelope on his writing-table. It was addressed to Mrs. Pitt Wright, Mereham Hall, Norfolk, and contained the following letter :

SYNTIA, INDIA,
28th January 1876.

MY DEAR MOTHER—I don't suppose you have the vaguest idea where Syntia is. I never heard of it till I came here. I know it well enough now, worse luck, having been condemned for my sins to spend a whole month in the wretched place waiting for my shooting-party to get ready. They have taken their time about it, but I join them to-morrow, and hope to get some tigers. I shall come home by a steamer that leaves Bombay about the middle of February, and shall not be sorry to get back to civilisation, though I am rather glad I saw the Delhi business and the Taj, etc. I suppose you got my letter telling you all about it.

I don't know why on earth I was sent here. It's the slowest hole

you can imagine—nothing to do but snipe-shooting or pig-sticking. They wanted me to go and see some ruins in the jungle, and other 'sights,' but I have had enough of that sort of thing, and politely declined. I have been staying with some people of the name of Treveryan. The father is what they call a Commissioner. He is regarded as a great man out here, and gets absurdly high pay—three or four thousand a year, I believe. He is not a bad fellow in his way, and has done me well enough; but out here people are only too glad to put you up as long as you like to stay. They don't get a chance very often of seeing any one. It's about time I went now, though. The old boy has got a rather pretty daughter, and he leaves us alone a good deal. I'm obliged to be civil to her while I am staying in the house, so she's got me in a corner. However, I have defended myself successfully so far, and I am off to-morrow, so I think I am safe. If I don't write again, you can expect me about the middle of March. I shall stay a day or two in town, and then come on to Mereham.—Yours ever,

H. PITT WRIGHT.

After breakfast next morning, Pitt Wright gave over this letter to Helen Treveryan, asking her to have it posted; and then he shook hands with her and looked into her honest eyes, and said good-bye, and added, 'Thank you for a very pleasant visit. I hope some day we may meet again in England,' and was gone. And the native servants, who had hung about in expectation of a tip, hiding themselves from their master's eye, saw the rich English gentleman upon whom they had waited for a month depart with all his boxes, leaving never a rupee behind him to comfort their souls. The poor sweeper and water-carrier, who were accustomed to neglect, only gazed at him wistfully from outside the verandah, and turned away to their labours with a sigh; but Mohun, the head bearer, looked scornful; and Maula Baksh, the Mahometan table servant, who had been specially obsequious and attentive, said to his fellow Daulat Khan, while his black moustache quivered with indignation, 'What sort of a custom is this? This is not a *Salib*.' But what was the use of giving them anything? He would never be there again.

Helen Treveryan stood on the steps with Rex to see the carriage go off, Colonel Treveryan driving his guest down to the station. As they drove away, she re-entered the house with a hearty expression of relief.

It was a trying morning. She felt sure that Guy Langley would come over, but she did not expect him before one o'clock, as he would have 'stables' after parade. She had therefore

some hours before her. She made a resolute effort to think of other things, and for a time she was able to find occupation in her household work. This, however, did not last very long; and by eleven o'clock she was beginning to feel very restless and unsettled, and to wonder why her father had not returned. She took out some breakfast to Jacko the monkey, who lived on the top of a pole by the front door, and she paid a visit to the stables and gave the horses some bits of sugar-cane, and then went into her room and stood for a time at her window, thinking with a beating heart of what was coming upon her. As she looked out upon the dry grass sward, a little gray squirrel ran across from the clump of casuarina trees and jumped on to her verandah. The tiny creature attracted her attention, and roused her from her day-dream. She looked at it for a time as it ran about in little jerks, with its nose on the ground and its tail in the air, and then she thought she would go to her piano and do some practising. She was on the point of turning away when she saw a man walking up the avenue of mango trees from the western gateway. Something told her that his coming was of importance to her, and she watched him as he advanced towards the house, walking easily as if in no way pressed. He wore no livery, but she could see from his dress, as he passed in and out of the tree-trunks, that he was a *syce*, and when he came close to her she recognised Guy Langley's servant. He passed by the corner of the house, going towards the front door, and as he did so, Helen dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Her heart stopped for a second, and then throbbed heavily once or twice, and she felt the blood rush to her face. She had barely time to control herself when she heard the bearer's voice calling to her at the door of her outer room.

'Miss Sahib?'

'Yes. What is it?'

'A letter.'

She walked to the curtained door, behind which the man was standing, and put her hand out. It seemed to her that he must guess her secret if he saw her face, and even her voice sounded as if it must betray her. She need not have been troubled. Her correspondence was large, and Mohun regarded the letter as an invitation, or an answer to an invitation. He asked whether the man was to wait for a reply, and Helen said she would see, and went back into her bedroom. There she opened her letter with trembling hands and read what Guy had written. For a minute

or two afterwards she sat with the letter in her lap, and her heart beating wildly; then she read it again, and thought it the most beautiful letter that ever was written, proud and tender and manly, just what she would have expected from him. She felt as if she had had it a long time, as if it had come many hours ago and become quite familiar to her. One lives fast at the supreme moments of life.

Helen's next feeling was one of impatience for the return of her father. Until he came she could do nothing. In the meantime she went out and told Mohun to keep the *syce* waiting; she would send an answer after she had spoken to the Commissioner Sahib. She could face Mohun boldly now. There was still a tumult at her heart; but in place of restlessness and fear there were rising in it pride and joy, and a sense of power. She knew well enough now what her answer would be.

Colonel Treveryan did not keep her waiting long. Ten minutes more and she heard the trot of his horses in the distance, and saw him drive up, a cigar in his mouth, wholly unconscious of the crisis. He had taken advantage of the break in his morning's work to drive round and see Hunter about some business-matter which he wanted to settle. Now he would have gone straight into his office, where some native officials were awaiting him, but Helen came out and caught him as he got down. 'Can you spare me a minute, father?' she said. 'I want to speak to you.'

The tone of her voice struck him, and he looked up at her with some curiosity as she stood on the steps above him. 'All right, Nell. Fire away.'

'Would you mind coming into my room?'

He walked up the steps and put his hat on the stand and followed her, wondering vaguely whether anything was wrong. When he was safe in her room she handed him Guy's letter. 'This came while you were out, father.'

Colonel Treveryan read the letter in silence, and then it went slowly down, and he looked at her. She was standing in front of him with her eyes fixed upon his face. They dropped, and her cheek flushed. 'Look at me, Nell,' he said gently, and he put his hand on her shoulder. Helen looked up, and a pang came to her heart. She had never realised until now what it would be to him. Now she realised it suddenly as she saw the look of sad inquiry in his eyes. The doubt faded out of them without a word being spoken, but the sadness deepened. Poor

fellow ! she was all he had now, and he had got to love her very dearly. The blow had fallen quite unexpectedly too ; and just at first he could not help feeling sore and miserable. His home must be desolate again, and she who had seemed to care for him so much was ready to leave him for a boy whom she had never seen until a few months before. It was hard. After a second or two he said, ' Why did you not tell me before, Nell ? '

' I did not know, father. He said nothing until yesterday, and then . . . it was only just a word or two. I meant to speak to you last night, but I had no chance ; and . . . I was not sure. '

' I wish you had told me. You have not answered yet ? '

' No, father. '

' You want to answer now, I suppose ; and to give him what he asks for ? '

Helen felt depressed ; but she remembered Guy's letter and answered gently : ' I have given it already, father dear. '

Colonel Treveryan sighed—a long sad sigh. ' Very well. Ask him to come over and see me to-morrow morning. He could come to breakfast, I daresay. ' Then he stooped and kissed her, and turned away sharply, his lips quivering.

Helen could not let him go like this. A wave of contrition and sorrow came over her, and she felt for the moment as if she could give up even Guy for his sake. She laid her hand on his arm and stopped him. ' Don't be angry with me, daddy. I really did not know. Tell me what you want me to do. '

Her father turned and drew her towards him until the bright brown head was against his breast. He kissed her hair and stroked it, trying to control his voice. ' Forgive me, Nell, ' he said at last, ' I'm a selfish beast ; but I do want you to be happy. '

Helen caught one of his hands and held it. ' You do like him, father ? '

' Yes, I like him very much indeed. I think he is the finest young fellow I know, and I ought to be ashamed of myself. It was only that I could not stand the thought of losing you. '

' You will never lose me, father dear. I shall always be just the same to you. '

Colonel Treveryan smiled and kissed her head again very gently. He knew too well. ' Now, Nell, I must go and get to my work. Don't let yourself be bothered by anything I said. I am really very glad indeed ; and I shall soon get accustomed to the idea. I must have been blind not to have seen it before, but somehow it never struck me. '

He went away, like the simple-hearted gentleman that he was, trying hard to look cheerful and to rejoice for his daughter's sake. He did not worry himself at the moment about any secondary considerations. In India these things are looked at from a more old-fashioned point of view than in England. Guy Langley was a gentleman, and 'in the service'—that was sufficient. Treveryan was soon hard at work in his office, forcing himself to devote his whole attention to a rather complicated revenue case, and to forget all about his private affairs.

Meanwhile, Helen sat down in the quiet of her own room to answer Guy's letter. Her heart was full of joy and pride, and though she found it unusually difficult to say what she meant, the task was a pleasant one. She was helped by the feeling that Guy would be waiting impatiently for her answer. She wrote a few lines only—

DEAR MR. LANGLEY—Your letter has made me very happy. My father wishes me to ask you whether you can come over and see him to-morrow morning. If possible come to breakfast.—Yours very sincerely,
HELEN.

She hesitated before signing it, and then wrote simply 'Helen.' 'He will like to feel that I am not Miss Treveryan to him any longer,' she said to herself. It was a delightful act of surrender.

Helen addressed the letter carefully and sealed it with the Treveryan crest, lest the *syce* should open and read it : *syces* who do not know a word of English being so likely to do these things.

Mohun took the precious missive out as callously as if it had been a mere invitation to dinner, and handed it over to the man who was waiting for it. He added that it was urgent, and that the messenger must run with it ; but this was a formula which meant absolutely nothing, as Sew Ratan well knew. He had never received a letter without it from the lordly Mohun, who loved giving orders to his inferiors. He accordingly twisted the note into a fold of his turban and walked off in a very leisurely manner, past the window at which Helen was standing, and down the avenue of mango trees. She thought he went very slowly, but if she had seen his proceedings after he got out of her father's grounds, her slight impatience would have given place to a warmer feeling. At the corner of the road near the Commissioner Sahib's gateway was a spreading banyan tree, and under the tree a seller of sweetmeats had had his stall from time immemorial. It was not a bad corner, for there were cross-roads

at this point, one of which led to the district *cutcheries* or courts, and was largely used. Sew Ratan came into the shade of the tree and bargained for a minute or two with the sweet-seller, who sat on a little wooden platform in the middle of his baskets. Finally a bargain was struck, and Sew Ratan became the possessor of a pound or so of some sticky compound that looked like whitish barley-sugar twisted into bracelets. He received his purchase in a large green leaf, and after a desultory conversation strolled off down the dusty road, eating the bracelets and yodeling softly to himself. At the entrance to the cantonments, which he duly reached about an hour later, there was a house in which one of his friends was employed. Feeling rather thirsty from the effects of his walk in the sun and his pound of sweets, he went round to the stables and got his friend to give him some water. After that the two sat down on their heels under a tree close to the stable and smoked a pipe together, putting the tobacco at the end of a long upright stem, and sucking at the cocoanut bowl with that cussedness which characterises the Oriental. When he had spent another hour in this pleasant manner, Sew Ratan rose with a sigh and proceeded on his journey, at the end of which he eventually delivered himself of his letter. By that time one of its corners was broken, and it bore a very dirty thumb-mark, which would have made Helen miserable if she had seen it. She wrote a pretty hand, clear and legible, with some character in it, like Aunt Madge, and was rather proud of the neatness of her letters.

Guy's bearer had gone to his dinner, which included a quiet afternoon's sleep upon a string-bed in his hut, and he was not going to get up for any of the Sahib's ridiculous letters; besides which, the Sahib was away at court-martial. So Helen's loving little note was put down upon the wooden stool outside the great man's hut, and there it remained until the sun was sloping westward. Then it was taken over to the house and placed upon the sitting-room table.

After lunch she sat in her room trying to read, until it was time to change her dress. There were a number of people coming to tennis. In the evening it was better. The tennis helped to pass the time, and then her father and she went out to dinner at the Hunters', and there were other things to think of. But all the time the secret was lying in her heart; how strange it seemed that no one of them knew.

CHAPTER XVI

GUY WRITES HOME

WHEN Guy at last got his letter it was evening. The court-martial had lasted an unusually long time. Directly he was free he mounted his pony, which had been waiting for him for some hours, and went over to his quarters at a gallop. 'Langley seems to be in the devil's own hurry,' St. Orme remarked, as he disappeared round the corner, leaving a trail of dust behind him.

The moment he was in the house he saw his letter on the table. 'When did this come?' he said, with an affectation of indifference, as he took it up.

'It has just come, Sahib. The Commissioner Sahib was out, and the *syce* had to wait until evening.'

Guy went into his room to read his letter. Dale was out apparently, but he might come in at any moment.

Guy looked at the seal as he turned the envelope over to open it, and noticed what a perfect impression it was. His first feeling was almost one of disappointment at the extreme shortness of the letter; but as he read it over and realised all that it meant his heart bounded within him. Then he was seized with a furious impatience to see Helen. It was hard to be so near, and yet unable to get to her. Should he ride over and try to see her now? He looked at his watch. No, it was hopeless. There would be a dozen people at tennis, and he would have to come back early, as he was dining with the Aylmers. Besides, he had no right to go. She had asked him to come in the morning, and it might embarrass her if he came earlier. He must possess his soul in patience. Then it occurred to him that he could write, and he sat down at once. That would be a relief, and it would be delicious to feel that she had his letter before night. This time

he let himself go. She had accepted his love, and let him know that he had won hers. What need for further restraint?

MY DARLING—Your letter has just reached me, and I must send you one line of thanks for it. You cannot know what mad delight it has given me. I had been trying all day to harden my heart for the answer which I feared would come; and I hope that if it had come I should have taken it like a gentleman, but when I saw your letter all my courage was gone, and for a moment I could not open it. Now that I have done so the joy is almost more than I can bear. I must not weary you by writing any more, but you will forgive me for writing this much? I cannot let the night pass without telling you what happiness you have given me, and I cannot tell you except by letter. It does seem cruel that I should be obliged to stay away from you when I could be with you in a few minutes; but you are right of course, and your wish is law to me. It always will be. I shall ride over early to-morrow morning and hope to see you for one minute before breakfast. Don't disappoint me if you can help it. Till then, good-bye. I feel as if I could not stop writing. Why cannot I go to you instead of these cold words?—Ever your own
GUY.

This letter took some time to write, and the darkness had closed in before Guy entrusted it to his servant, with orders that it must be delivered the same evening, and that there was no answer.

When Helen received it, which she did on return from her dinner-party, Guy's words did not strike her as being by any means 'cold,' but she was far from resenting their warmth. It seemed to her strange and delightful that she should have aroused such fiery devoted love. She locked up the two letters together when she went to join her father over his cigar. If he had asked to see the second, she would of course have shown it to him, but she felt no inclination to do so. Already there was that between her and Guy which was not for other eyes. Colonel Treveryan did not ask to see the letter; but after a time he put his hand out and laid it on Helen's. 'Did you write to Langley?' he said.

'Yes, father. He is coming to-morrow morning to breakfast.'

There was silence for a time, and then Colonel Treveryan ventured one more question. It all seemed to him so sudden and unexpected that he could not quite get over a feeling of doubt even now. Girls were apt to imagine themselves in love with the first man who admired them. 'Forgive me, Nell,' he

said, in a hesitating tone ; ' you know how much your happiness is to me. Are you quite sure you really care for him ? '

There was no hesitation about her answer. ' Quite sure, father dear.' Her voice was low, but it was level and steady.

' You have not known him long, Nell.' Helen was silent, and he went on : ' Two or three months is a very short time, and you have not seen much of one another.'

Helen leant her head against his shoulder with a mute caress. ' I am quite sure, daddy.'

Colonel Treveryan gave in. He remembered his own marriage. He had not known his wife three months when they were engaged, and they had been very happy. The time had not seemed short to him then ; and, in truth, three months at a small Indian station, where people are thrown together almost daily, as much as on board ship, may mean a fairly close acquaintance. ' Very well, I won't say any more. You ought to know best, and he is a very fine fellow. I don't wonder at your liking him.'

Of course Helen read over his letters again before she got into bed. Was it possible that she had received them both since the morning ? It seemed as if the day had been a month long. Her prayers that night were an outpouring of thankfulness and love. For the first time Guy's name was mentioned in them. It was never omitted again so long as he lived.

Next morning Helen was up early. She used to go down to the church sometimes before breakfast to practise, and the church was on the road to the cantonment by which Guy must ride in. She felt sure that if he saw her carriage at the door he would come to her, and she knew they would be alone. It was an innocent plot, which she would not have been ashamed to confess, and it succeeded as it deserved to do. Riding past the church at a slow walk, half an hour before the earliest time at which he could present himself at Colonel Treveryan's, Guy heard the sound of music and saw the brougham near the porch. He turned into the church enclosure and asked the coachman whether Helen was inside. The answer was as he expected ; and handing over his horse to a *syc*e he walked up the narrow stone stair to the gallery. Helen heard his step, and rose to her feet ; and there, while the last note of the broken music still lingered in the echoing roof, he saw her standing, her sweet eyes turned towards him, and her sweet face flushing to the temples.

There for the first time he kissed her lips. It was a solemn

betrothal, but she never felt that there was any unfitness in it. She was plighting her faith to the man she loved. What better place than the quiet empty church, where they would be alone but for the presence of the God who had been so good to her? And Guy cared not a straw whether he was in a church or anywhere else so long as he held her in his arms.

They drove up to the house together, one of the *syces* bringing up Guy's horse, and shortly after their arrival Colonel Treveryan appeared. His manner was quiet but friendly, and that breakfast was a pleasant one to two at least of the three. When it was over, Colonel Treveryan carried Guy off. 'Come along,' he said with a smile, laying his hand on the young man's arm, 'we must talk this business over seriously. You have not done with me yet.' They went away to Colonel Treveryan's smoking-room and sat down. Guy would not smoke. Colonel Treveryan's cigar took some time to light, and while it was getting ready he was thinking how he should begin. He had spent a very sleepless night pondering over it all. Life with a cavalry regiment was an expensive thing, and he knew little about Guy's circumstances. His own means were not large, and he could not do much to help. All this must be cleared up, though it was doubtless all right.

At last the cigar had caught evenly all round and was fairly started. 'Well, Langley,' Colonel Treveryan said, 'my daughter showed me your letter, and I understand that she has given you the answer you wanted.'

'Yes, sir.' Guy went on with a hesitation and an earnestness which became him well: 'I hope, sir, that you do not disapprove. I know I am not worthy of her—no one could be; but if I do not make her happy it will not be for want of trying. I do care for her, sir, from the bottom of my heart.'

His eyes seemed trustworthy. 'I am sure you do,' Colonel Treveryan answered; 'and apparently she does not think you unworthy of her. It has taken me by surprise, and it is rather a wrench to me; but I daresay I shall get accustomed to it in time, and so far as you are concerned, I can only say that as I must lose her I know no one I would rather have in your place.'

'Thank you, sir. Of course I can understand what you feel about it.'

Colonel Treveryan sighed. 'Can you? Perhaps you can. Well, now about business. When do you want to rob me of my daughter?'

'Whenever you will let her go, sir; the sooner the better.'

'That is plain speaking. But—you must excuse my asking these questions; I am her father, you know,—how do you stand? Are you in a position to marry at once?'

Guy was conscious of an uneasy feeling, but he drove it away and replied confidently enough: 'I am not well off, sir, but I think we could manage. I have four hundred a year beside my pay, and I daresay my father would do something more for us.'

Colonel Treveryan did not look convinced. 'Four hundred a year is not very much to marry upon in a cavalry regiment,' he said, 'unless things have altered since my time; and I am afraid I cannot do very much to help. I could give my daughter three or four hundred a year now, but in case anything happened to me she would have very little.'

'I don't care in the least about that, sir,' Guy said warmly.

'No, but I do. You see it is a question of her comfort and happiness. I want to feel sure that she will be provided for whatever happens. Is the money your own?'

It was a little cruel, and Guy felt hurt. 'Two hundred pounds is my own. My father allows me the other two.'

'Then if anything happened to him you might find yourself with only two hundred a year altogether?'

'I suppose he would leave me something.'

'Suppose he did not, or suppose that he objected to your marrying?' The idea had not occurred to Colonel Treveryan before, but his anxiety for his daughter's welfare had quickened his apprehension.

'I am sure he would not do that, sir,' Guy answered confidently. 'My father and mother have always been very fond of me, and I am sure they would do anything for me.' Nevertheless, as he spoke there rose before him a vision of his mother's face, hardening against anything she disapproved; and his voice faltered a little.

Colonel Treveryan looked grave. 'You must not think me mercenary, Langley. So long as Helen is happy, I don't care in the least about money; but I am older than you are, and I want to make sure that there is just enough. I have seen very pitiable things happen for want of it.'

'Yes, of course, sir, I quite see that. Shall I write to my father and find out exactly how things stand?'

'I think you had better, and meanwhile let us say nothing about this business. I don't want to be disagreeable. We will

manage somehow if Helen and you remain of the same mind. Only let us clear the ground first, and have no chance of misunderstanding. It will be time enough to give out your engagement when everything is settled. Don't you agree with me ?'

Guy felt keenly disappointed. He had never contemplated this ; though he had certainly not thought of money when he wrote to Helen, yet there had been a latent assurance in his mind that no money difficulties would intervene. She was an only child, and Colonel Treveryan was in a high position and seemed to be well off. Still he could not but acquiesce in the justice of Colonel Treveryan's views. 'I suppose you are right, sir,' he answered dejectedly. 'I will write at once. I hope I may see Miss Treveryan meanwhile.'

'Oh yes. I don't want to be hard upon you,' Colonel Treveryan answered, touched by Guy's face ; 'only you will be careful, won't you, for her sake ? Don't let people have a chance of talking until all is settled. Now go and see her, and then write your letter. The mail goes out to-morrow.'

Guy got up, and Colonel Treveryan walked with him to the door. 'Good-bye, Langley,' he said, as he shook hands with him. 'Don't be down-hearted. We'll pull through somehow. It's only a delay of a few weeks, and you can come over as usual meanwhile until we go into camp.' Nevertheless, when Guy had gone out, he shook his head doubtfully. 'I ought to have thought of it all before I let Helen answer his letter, and he ought to have thought of it all before he wrote to her. What a boy it is, after all !'

Guy found Helen in the drawing-room, and with some hesitation and many apologies he told her how matters stood. It was horrible to him, he said, having to speak to her about money. It would, in fact, have been very much pleasanter to avoid such troublesome subjects, and give himself up to the unmixed enjoyment of his dream. It was a disappointment to her too. She had never thought of any obstacles arising. Being a woman, she would have liked to let her happiness be known ; and to her frank and rather proud nature anything that savoured of concealment was humiliating. It certainly was a disappointment. However, she took it bravely. She laughed at his rather sentimental regrets and protestations. Was it not enough for her that he should sit holding her hand and gazing at her with his beautiful sad eyes, and passionately wishing that he could shield her from every breath of trouble, from the very knowledge that there was

such a thing as money? What more could a woman want? 'No, no,' she said, though the incense was sweet to her; 'I am not made of sugar and spice, and all that's nice. I can be quite horrid sometimes; and I am not going to be treated as if I were too delicate to take my share of whatever comes. You will find me dreadfully hard and practical.'

He felt a little chilled, a little dissatisfied with her. She did not seem to appreciate the poetry of his love, the desire to set her up and worship her and keep her apart from all worldly things, like a goddess. He never thought that she was repressing and hardening herself, and trying to be cheery and sensible for his sake, when she would have dearly loved to give rein for a little to the romance of her nature. 'After all,' she said, 'what does it matter? You will get an answer to your letter in six weeks, and we shall be away in camp most of the time. It will pass very quickly.'

Guy thought this cold, and was hurt; but she would not let herself admit that they had any cause of complaint.

At last she began to feel that he was unjust to her. 'Do you think I do not feel it?' she said. 'It is just as hard to me as it can be to you. I hate the idea of keeping it all a secret, and so far as I am concerned I don't care one atom whether you are rich or poor. If you had not a farthing in the world, do you suppose it would make any difference to me?'

He knew it would not, and he thought she looked more beautiful than ever as her face grew serious and her gray eyes flashed with something like contempt at the thought. Yet when they parted he rode away feeling depressed, and she saw him from her window and knew that it was so. He took his horse down the road between the mango trees at a walk, instead of cantering along the grass at the side as he used to do, and his seat and figure were significant. When he had gone Helen turned away and sat down in her easy chair, and then her head went forward on her hands, and she burst into tears. Already!

That night after dinner Guy told Dale all about it. He knew so much that it would have been difficult to tell him no more, and Guy could trust him. Dale's remarks were few. 'I'm awfully glad for you, old chap,' he said. As to the engagement, he thought Colonel Treveryan quite right. 'That's sound enough. You can't expect him to let the thing go on until you've squared your people and know where you stand. But you say there will be no trouble about that.'

Guy looked uneasy. He did not say much more, but he asked Dale to promise that he would not talk about it.

'All right. I will keep it dark,' was the answer. 'You know me.'

Before he went to bed that night Guy wrote his home letters. It was an awkward thing to do. Facing his mother quietly in the silence of the night, he felt convinced that she would receive the news with anything but pleasure. She knew nothing of Helen, and she would not like his marrying in India. Moreover, he knew she had formed other views for him. Not many years before a family of the name of Schneider had bought a house near Wrentham and settled down. The father, a quiet old German stock-broker whom no one knew, had died soon afterwards, leaving a widow and one daughter. Then it transpired that little Clara Schneider, with her fair hair and colourless eyes, was, or would be, a very rich woman. Before long the Schneiders had become very intimate at Wrentham, and when Guy was at home on his farewell visit his mother had shown him very clearly that nothing would please her better than his taking a fancy to the heiress. Guy had laughed it off at the time, but he reflected now that Lady Mary was a determined woman. Then again it was not pleasant having to ask his father about money. It was especially disagreeable asking what he might expect to have at his father's death. However, the thing must be done, and Guy sat down to write soon after dinner. At midnight he was writing still, but soon after that he laid down his pen with a sigh. His letters, after all, were short enough.

DEAREST MOTHER—I have been very bad about writing lately, but there has been a good deal going on in one way or another, and I have been rather busy. Now I find it very difficult to say what I want to say, but I know I can be sure of your love and sympathy in everything that comes to me; and just now I am very happy. I have met my fate. You remember my writing once or twice before about the Treveryans? Lately I have got to know Miss Treveryan very well, and I feel that she is everything that a woman can be. This morning I have seen her, and she has promised to be my wife. I am afraid you may think I have been hasty in this, but I really have not. It is three months now since I came here, and in that time we have seen a great deal of each other. I have got to know her thoroughly well, both in her own house and in society; and I am certain that she is exactly what you would like your daughter to be. I wish you knew her; but as you do not, you will trust my word.

taste? Helen is tall and graceful, with the truest eyes in the world, and an absolutely bewitching manner. I never saw anything like it. Every one here thinks her quite perfect. Naturally I quite agree, though she says she is not. Her father is a fine old gentleman, and was in the Thirty-First Hussars years ago. He did splendid service in the Mutiny, and is a great man out here—Commissioner of a Division, which means a sort of governor. Do write me a few lines by return, and wish me good luck. We are of course saying nothing about our engagement until you have heard of it and approved, but I am longing to let it be known. Don't, please, think I have been wrong in not telling you before. I had not said a word to Helen until last Sunday, and then the whole thing came upon me suddenly. Of course I had thought about it a great deal, but till then I did not think she cared for me, and it was no good talking about it. Good-bye now, dear mother. I think it will be the happiest day of my life when you and Helen meet each other. Meanwhile, believe me ever your loving son

GUY.

P.S.—I am writing to my father about the business side of it.

MY DEAR FATHER—You will have seen, or will see, my letter to my mother, and I need not repeat what I have said in it. I hope you will approve what I have done. I am writing to you now to ask you very kindly to let me know how I stand about money matters. Colonel Treveryan wishes to know this before he agrees to our marriage, and I have promised to write to you. I told him that at present you allowed me £200 a year, and he remarked that this might not be permanent. I hate entering upon the subject, and for my own sake I would never do so; but as he wishes for exact information, would you mind helping me in any way you can? Colonel Treveryan says he can allow Helen three or four hundred a year while he lives, but that, in case of his death, she would have very little. I hope by that time I shall be a field-officer at least.—Believe me ever your affectionate son

GUY LANGLEY.

Guy read over these letters carefully, and did not feel satisfied with them; but he did not know how to improve them, and they went out unaltered.

The next few weeks were not altogether a happy time, either for him or Helen. A few days after Guy's proposal Colonel Treveryan went into camp, taking Helen with him. He had to make a tour of inspection through a part of the country where ladies could travel, and he felt that it was better she should not be left in Syntia. Helen and Guy were therefore separated from each other. Moreover, the departure of the Treverys was not enough to prevent some idea of the secret leaking out. Colonel

Treveryan's servants had formed their own conclusions with regard to Lâli Sahib, as they called him, and from this cause or some other it soon became known to Guy that the thing was in the air. Dale, when questioned by the ladies, replied steadily that he knew for a fact that Guy and Helen were not engaged; and Guy himself tried to deceive his friends by casual references to the Treveryans, but it would not do. He felt that Helen and he were suspects, and Helen felt it too. Altogether, the position was trying.

There was, however, for both of them the consolation of the post. Wherever the Commissioner Sahib might go his mail followed him closely. The horsemen who cantered along the soft country roads to the cluster of white tents under the trees carried in their locked canvas bags many a letter from Guy to Helen. She used to sit and answer them in her tent, while the soft breeze played through the open doorways, and the little bronze-green fly-catchers glittered in the sunlit air outside, and the kingfishers hung quivering over the blue waterpools. Guy's letters were the more cleverly written—full of untrained poetry and passion, and touching enough at times in their youthful chivalrous enthusiasm. Hers were quieter and shorter; indeed, he felt and complained at times that they seemed curt and cold; but they were very sweet letters nevertheless. She wondered at his power of words, and humbly apologised for her own want of it; but now and then, in her simple language, without exaggeration and without effort, she wrote some little perfect womanly thing which brought the tears to his eyes, and made him conscious of his own inferiority. 'My darling,' he once answered her, 'never say again that your letters are not worth having, or that you wish you could write like me. Your letters are far better than mine. They are to mine what a violet is to a passion-flower. It is not, I hope, that my love is less true than yours. I do not believe that. But all your thoughts are so exquisitely pure and good that your words cannot help being beautiful. The thought shines through them. If ever other eyes should see our letters, which God forbid, it will not be yours that suffer by the comparison.'

And he was right. He was beginning to learn the lesson which is vouchsafed to so many of us. There was being revealed to him a purity of spirit, a tenderness of perception and feeling, of which he had never before imagined the possibility. He was gazing into the wonderful depths of a woman's heart.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEWS ARRIVES AT WRENTHAM

It was a fine spring morning when Guy's letters reached Wrentham. The winter was past; the rain was over and gone; the flowers appeared on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds was come. There were some crocuses and violets in the garden, and the golden burnished stars of the celandine were beginning to glitter in the hedgerows. One or two primroses had been seen. Evelyn had found a blackbird's nest in a thorn-bush as yet uncovered by leaves; and in the home wood the rooks were very busy indeed. Below them, in the little corner where a woodcock sometimes lay, the daffodils were fluttering and dancing in the breeze. The air was cold, but clear and sunny. Life was stirring in it.

The postman generally arrived at the hall during breakfast, and as it was the day for the Indian mail, the Langleys were on the lookout for a letter from Guy. Old Pantling, the butler, knew Guy's hand very well, and his decorous manner was a trifle more interested than usual as he brought the post in to Lady Mary. 'Dear me,' she said, as she looked through it, 'we are in luck to-day. There are two from Guy. I wonder what makes him write to us both.'

There was a letter for Barbara from some one else, but both the girls turned to their mother to hear the news from India. Pantling cut some wafery slices from the ham on the sideboard, and deliberately offered them to each member of the family in succession. He was rewarded by seeing Lady Mary lay down her letter with a face like a thundercloud, and by hearing his master, who had also opened his, give vent to a smothered whistle. The girls looked up inquiringly, and Evelyn said, 'What is the news,

mamma? Is anything the matter?' Then the discreet Pantling saw that he was not wanted, and went away.

Charles Langley finished his letter, and looked at his wife with a face of doubt which rapidly changed to one of dismay. 'We must talk this over after breakfast,' Lady Mary said sternly, in answer to his look, and then she turned to the girls. 'Guy is quite well, but he has got into a foolish scrape; nothing serious.'

The girls saw that for the present they were not meant to know more, and they asked no questions. Lady Mary read her other letters, and spoke about them to her husband as if nothing had happened. Then Charles Langley walked off as usual, Lady Mary saying she would come to his study in a few minutes.

After she had given some orders to the housekeeper, which she did in a perfectly calm and level manner, though not very pleasantly, she walked into her husband's room. He was leaning with his back against the mantelpiece, and one heel hooked over the fender, but as she entered he stood to attention, and moved to one side of the chair which he had put near the fire for her. She came up to him with a very hard-set face, and remained standing. 'This is a nice business,' she said, with a tinge of contempt in her voice.

'Yes; what on earth are we to do?'

'Of course it must be stopped at once. I thought Guy had more sense.'

'Yes, young ass; but how are we to manage it?'

Lady Mary was inclined even then to resent any depreciation of Guy, and she answered rather sharply and inconsequently: 'He writes to you about money matters, and of course you must tell him plainly that you won't allow it. I don't suppose it is his fault. They have taken him in somehow.'

Charles Langley looked rather helpless. 'I will write of course, but . . . aren't you going to write too? I really don't quite know what to say. You see, he is his own master after all. Supposing he were to insist on taking his own line?'

'Nonsense, Charles. He is a great deal too sensible, if the thing is put plainly to him. Just write and tell him that you cannot approve of the marriage. Say that you are giving him already as much as you can afford, and that, under the circumstances, he must see how impossible it would be for him to marry. It is easy enough. I will write a few lines too, and make it quite clear that the thing must be given up. I hope you see now who was right about his exchanging from his regiment.'

After a few words more Lady Mary went off to her own room and sat down to write. Before she began she thought the matter over quietly, and, considering all things, her letter was judicious enough. She did not expect any serious resistance on Guy's part. She was unused to opposition, and did not doubt that in this matter, as in other matters, she would get her own way. She was able, therefore, to keep her temper under control. As to the expediency and propriety of stopping the marriage, she never hesitated for a moment. Such a thing would be Guy's ruin. Altogether, she faced the question in a resolute but temperate frame of mind. It was annoying of course ; but boys would be boys, and, after all, a little firmness would put an end to it all. There was no need to write harshly. It would hurt poor Guy, and make matters harder for him. The best way would be to appeal to his affection and common sense. Before lunch-time the letter was ready.

MY DEAREST GUY—We received this morning your letters of the —th February, and I don't think you will be surprised to learn that they have caused us much distress. You are quite right in feeling sure of my love and sympathy, for you would always have that under any circumstances ; but, my own boy, how can I tell you I approve of what you have done ? I do not wish to say a word against Miss Treveryan, who is no doubt everything you think her ; but you know that as it is you have not more than enough to live upon in your regiment. How are you to support a wife and family as well ? Your father can allow you no more than he does already, as he will tell you. Where is the money to come from ? You say Colonel Treveryan might allow his daughter something ; but, even supposing he did so, this is only a temporary help. In case of his death or your father's, you would be in dreadful difficulties. I feel certain that, if you will think it over quietly, you will see that such a marriage is impossible. I daresay you thought we could afford to do more for you, but indeed we cannot. We are not rich, and we have very heavy expenses. Don't think me unkind, my boy. If I believed that this marriage could be for your happiness, far from hindering it, I would do everything in my power to bring it about. Knowing as I do that it could only end in misery, I am obliged, even at the risk of your thinking me hard and cruel, to tell you that I can never consent to it. Do take leave and come home to us for a few months. How I wish you had never gone to that dreadful country ; but it is too late to think of that. Come back to us now, for a time at all events, if you will not exchange to a regiment in England, as I asked you to do before. When you have seen me, you will under-

stand it all quite clearly. Go straight to Colonel Aylmer, and say it is very important for you to go at once, and that you must do so. In the meantime I need not say that I feel for you most deeply, for I know too well how painful such a thing must be to you ; but there is no help for it, and I am sure you will be brave and sensible.—
Ever your loving
MOTHER.

Charles Langley's letter was shorter. He had tried to remember and reproduce his wife's words.

MY DEAR GUY—I have received your letter, and I am sorry to say I cannot answer it as you would like. I am not able to approve your engagement. I already allow you as much as I can afford to do, and in the circumstances you must see how impossible it would be for you to marry. I am afraid you will be disappointed, but I don't know what else to say.—I remain your affectionate father,
CHARLES LANGLEY.

'That is exactly what she said,' he thought, when he had read it over ; 'but it doesn't read very well, and I don't see that it tells him what he wants to know. I wonder what the girl is like.' And there came over him a serious doubt whether they were acting altogether kindly and wisely in cutting the matter short without further inquiry. Guy would have at least ten thousand pounds at his death, and he had five or six now, and evidently she would have something. At a pinch too they could be helped. If she was a nice girl, and the boy really wanted to marry her, it might not be such a bad thing after all. Every one cannot be a millionaire, and in the service one can live pretty cheap if one

Lady Mary had no such doubts. She felt that she was acting solely in Guy's interests, and that for his good it was her duty to deny him this thing, just as she used to deny him some little indulgence in his childhood. It never occurred to her that she might be wrong. She was never wrong. Her mission in life was to keep others right.

Lady Mary was a loving mother, with a very high idea of Guy's value. He was a boy of whom any mother might have been proud, and to her eyes his price was above rubies. She overestimated his talents, and his good looks, and all belonging to him. Moreover, she firmly believed in her heart that all connected with herself were in some way a peculiar people. Though her grandfather was merely a successful lawyer, and her husband's ancestors were country squires descended from a success-

ful tradesman, she had persuaded herself that she was a person of very blue blood indeed, and that the Langleys of Wrentham were something altogether out of the common. She had the pride of birth in its commonest English form. Naturally she thought it would be a terrible *mésalliance* for Guy to marry in India. She knew nothing of Helen Treveryan ; and she rightly attached no importance at all to Guy's brief description of his lady-love. If she had given herself the trouble to analyse her own idea, she would have found that she pictured the girl to herself as a young person of questionable parentage, with bold black eyes and a shady character and vulgar manners, whom it would be impossible to present to her friends. She had been brought up, as most Englishwomen are brought up, to know nothing whatever of India. In her time she had seen an Indian crisis or two, when the British public had been suddenly fired with an intense interest in the country, and society had seized upon and made lions of any Indian officers who happened to be in the way—probably the wrong men. Then the excitement subsided, and well-bred England forgot India again as completely as if that wonderful empire had no existence. If Lady Mary thought of it at all, she thought of it as an unhealthy and immoral place, where some depraved white men loafed about in straw hats, beating Hindus and making them smoke opium ; and where the women were no better than they should be. An Indian marriage was a thing that Guy must be rescued from at all costs.

Lady Mary's ignorance of India was but an example of the ignorance of Englishmen in general about the Colonial Empire. It is not wonderful that our colonies grow restive at times. It is rather wonderful that there is any loyalty left among them. Even now, though some men of mark have been able to look beyond party interests, and have tried to rouse the nation to a sense of its greatness and its responsibility, how many Englishmen in the old country know anything, or wish to know anything, of the vast England beyond the seas ? With India perhaps a spirit of indifference does comparatively little harm. We are safe enough there. India is not a colony but a possession, and Englishmen in India must always remain Englishmen. They will always of necessity continue to fight for the English flag, though at times they may fight with sore hearts. Perhaps it is the better for them that they should work on in obscurity, far from the applause of their countrymen, cheered only by the sense of duty done. Even in India, however, there is one danger. Our

own people will never be goaded into disloyalty. They are only a few thousands in number, and they are constantly recruited from England ; but if we teach or permit the three hundred millions of Indians about them to look upon them with disrespect, if we weaken their hands and encourage all who oppose them, then sooner or later we shall have again to fight for empire. Remember the Mutiny, when your churches were full of black-robed sorrowing women, and realise in time that you cannot with impunity permit India to get out of control. The way to do so is to regard your countrymen in India as aliens, and to take for granted that they are always in the wrong. They are not aliens : they are your own kith and kin ; and what they are doing you would do if you were in their place. They are English men and women, who have walked on board an English steamer at Dover or the London docks, and are in no way different from yourselves, except that they have seen something more than England and have learnt to face danger and responsibility.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

GUY received his answer one hot evening towards the end of March. He had stayed at home, waiting for the English mail, instead of going to the Club; and was sitting in his long chair trying to read when his servant came in with the letters. Guy took them from him, and saw that they were what he was expecting. There was one from his father, and one from his mother.

He began with his mother's, and as he read it his heart sank. His first feeling was one of conviction and self-contempt. Why had he been such a fool as to rush into this impossible thing and make them despise him? He opened his father's letter, and a smile came into his eyes. He knew the history of that letter almost as well as if he had been present when Lady Mary sketched it out.

Then he read both letters again carefully, and as he did so a change of feeling came over him. After all, he had not been so very unreasonable, and their objections were at least open to argument. No doubt, if he married Helen they would not be rich, but so long as his father and Colonel Treveryan lived they would not be so very badly off; and Charles Langley had said nothing about what would happen after his death. Probably he would leave something to all his children. Altogether, though of course he was not surprised that his mother should be unwilling to see him marry a girl without money, yet it was what men did every day, and there was no other objection to his engagement. As he worked it out his depression gave way to resentment. They might have helped him if they had chosen.

Then a vision of poor Clara Schneider came before him, with her plain face and light eyelashes. 'I'm hanged if I'll do that anyhow,' he said to himself.

It was very hard and very embarrassing. Things would come right yet somehow ; but he knew of old how terribly resolute his mother could be, and in any case, for the present at all events, he must confess to the Treveryans that he had met with a distinct refusal. It would not be an agreeable task. Guy did not admit to himself that he had the slightest thought of giving Helen up ; on the other hand, he did not at once set aside Lady Mary's decision as regrettable but immaterial. He was fond of his mother, and accustomed to look up to her. He was not weak enough to submit without resistance ; but he was not vehement enough, not old enough perhaps, to see his way clearly at once. His mind was full of trouble and doubt. No help was to be got from Dale. He had gone away for a couple of days' quail-shooting, and his room was empty.

The next day was Thursday, a holiday, and after a restless night Guy mounted his horse to go over to the Civil station. The mornings were still pleasant, and as Guy rode on through the cool fresh air he felt his spirits rising. They sank again when he reached the Treveryans' door, and realised that he had to break his news.

Colonel Treveryan had just returned from an early ride, to see a new bridge which was being built by the Public Works Department. He was sitting in the south verandah, still booted and spurred, smoking a long cheroot, and reading the official letters which had come by the morning *dakk*. A pile of them lay on the table with his helmet and hunting crop. He sent out a *salaam*, and Guy came to him through the dining-room.

'Well, Langley,' he said cheerily, as he got up and shook hands, 'what is the news?'

Guy hesitated. 'Not very good, I'm afraid, sir.'

Colonel Treveryan looked grave. 'Have you heard from your people?'

'Yes. They—I am sorry to say they are not very encouraging. In fact—I think perhaps you had better read what they say. I have got the letters here,' and he took them out of his pocket and held them out.

Colonel Treveryan read them slowly through and put them down on the table. After a moment's silence he looked up at Guy : 'You should have thought of all this before you said anything to us.'

'I wish I had, sir, but I had no idea there ~~would~~ be any objection. I am awfully cut up about it.'

Colonel Treveryan's soft heart was touched at once, and he answered not unkindly ; but Helen's happiness was concerned, and his manner still conveyed disapproval. Guy was seized with an ardent desire to clear himself from any suspicion of weakness or fickleness, and he broke into earnest assurances. Nothing he said could ever make him change, and he felt certain his mother would come round in time. It was only a question of time. The warmth of his professions was increased by the silence of his hearer. Colonel Treveryan listened quietly, and was inclined to believe him ; but he could not help feeling that Guy's assertions were rather vehement than steady. There was a ring of doubt and trouble running through them. It was not a tone of confident self-reliance. 'The boy means well,' he thought. 'I hope he really has good stuff in him. I hope Nellie has not made a mistake.' To Guy he said at last, 'Well, Langley, I don't quite know what I ought to do at present. I must see Helen and speak to you again.'

'I hope I may see her too, sir.'

'Yes, if you wish it. Perhaps it will be just as well. You had better stay to breakfast and see her afterwards, and come over again to-morrow when we have thought it all out.'

Guy accepted the invitation, and he sat down in the drawing-room to wait for Helen while Colonel Treveryan was dressing. She had seen Guy ride up, and had got ready as quickly as she could. Guy had not been five minutes alone before she came in, as he had first seen her come, by the side door from her own rooms. This time, though she looked to him more beautiful than ever, he met her with an air of embarrassment which she perceived at once ; and as she sat down the smile died out of her face. Then he began his confession.

Poor fellow, it was hard work. He had known that it would bring her unhappiness ; but he had relied upon her love and sympathy and strength, and had not thought of her pride. It was wounded at once by his first hesitating words : 'I have heard from my mother. I am afraid I ought to have written to her before. She objects altogether.'

'Objects ?'

'Yes ; she says it is impossible. Of course,' he went on slowly, 'it makes no difference to me—you know that ?'

Helen sat silent, her hands clasped in her lap. In her heart was rising a fiery indignation, mingled with a sense of intense disappointment. At best it was all at an end again, for the

present at least, and there must be another long period of waiting and concealment. Why should Guy's mother have the power to 'object' to her? Why should he stand it? As Guy spoke on she too caught the note of doubt and inquiry in his voice, and it vexed her. She loved him and told him so; but he got little help from her. She was hurt and humiliated; and, moreover, what could she say to him? If his heart did not tell him what to do, was it for her to tell him? Altogether the interview was a sad one. It ended in silence and constraint, and in a sense of injury on Guy's part. Before it was over the daily hot wind had risen and was moaning dismally round the house, filling the air with dust and veiling the sky.

When Colonel Treveryan came in the three of them went to breakfast, and for the sake of appearances they tried to talk as usual; but the meal was short and uncomfortable. Directly it was over Guy asked for his horse, and rode off. It was a dreary dusty ride, and Guy was disheartened and sore. Everything seemed to have gone wrong at once. Surely it was hard that he should be blamed, as he felt he was blamed. He had done everything he could.

When he reached his house he bathed and dressed, and felt momentarily better, and then sat down in solitude to think it out. How lonely and wretched the house was. The doors and windows were shut now and it was half-dark, and outside there was no sound but the ceaseless moan of the hot wind. Whatever he touched was parched and covered with dust. After some hours of anxious restless thought which seemed to end in nothing, Guy could stand it no longer. Mrs. Aylmer lived close by, and the longing for sympathy and help was more than he could resist. She could be trusted, and she had met his mother, and knew something of the world. She might be able to show him a way out of his difficulties. Would Helen like him to go to Mrs. Aylmer? Perhaps not, if he asked her just now, but she would be glad of Mrs. Aylmer's help hereafter. Yes, he would go.

He walked over in the afternoon heat. Mrs. Aylmer was at home of course, and the very feeling of her cool dark drawing-room was a comfort to his spirit. When she came in a minute later, with her firm hand and friendly resolute eyes, Guy felt his burden was already lighter. She saw at once that he had something to say, and she helped him out. He found it much easier than he had expected. When he had told her everything, and made her, rather against her will, read his mother's letter, she

sat for a time in silence, thinking. To her unconventional mind the position seemed clear enough. 'If they care for each other,' she thought, 'there is really nothing to prevent them marrying and being happy. They won't be rich, but they ought to manage well enough—if they care for each other. I wonder how long Harry and I would have hesitated if we had been in their place.' She smiled at the idea of any such thing standing between her and her husband, and Guy saw the smile go across her face.

'Well,' he said at last, 'what do you think?'

Mrs. Aymer gave him back his letter. 'Mr. Langley, you won't mind my speaking quite plainly?'

'Of course not. That is just what I want you to do. Please say exactly what you think.'

'Very well. Then I think it all depends on one thing. Do you really care for Miss Treveryan?'

'If I had not cared for her I should not have asked her to marry me.'

'I am not so sure. You may have cared for her enough to marry her if all went well, and yet not care very deeply in reality.'

'That is not complimentary to me.'

'Perhaps not, but I want to make quite sure. What is the very worst that could happen to you if you married? You might possibly be left with your profession and £200 a year. Isn't that right?'

'If my father died, and if he left me nothing; but that is very unlikely.'

'No; I mean if he refused to agree to your marriage and stopped your allowance.'

'He would never do that.'

'But he could if he chose?'

'Yes—of course he could; but he wouldn't.'

'If he did you could not remain in the Thirtieth. At all events, you could never go home with them?'

'No, I suppose not.'

'Well, when I say do you care for Miss Treveryan, I mean do you care for her enough to stick to her even then, to give up your own people for her sake, if necessary, and to leave the regiment and stay in India?'

'That is a long way off, and besides, Colonel Treveryan said he could help us.'

'Just now, yes; but if anything happened to him she would have little or nothing?'

'I believe not—not much anyhow.'

'Very well—then it might possibly come to that?'

'Yes, I suppose it might.'

'If it did, do you care for her enough to marry her and not to repent your marriage afterwards, and let her know you repented it?'

'I don't believe my people would ever behave like that.'

'But if they did? You really must face this, Mr. Langley, and not trust to chance.'

Guy was silent for a time; then he raised his head and met her eyes steadily, with a look of defiance in his own.

'I should never repent it if Helen did not. I care more for her than all the world put together.'

Mrs. Aylmer was watching his face. What she saw and heard seemed to satisfy her. 'Then I don't see why you should be troubled. Make up your mind that you won't let anything come between you. She won't repent it if you don't. You may take my word for that; and you know it as well as I do.'

'Yes; I think I do. Then you don't think we need be unhappy about this?'

'Not in the least, if you really care for each other. But don't deceive yourself about that.'

Guy got up, and came to her with his hand out. 'Thank you a thousand times. You have made me happy again. I am so glad I came to you. You will help me through, won't you?'

Mrs. Aylmer rose too, and took his proffered hand. 'Yes, I will do all I can to help you, but you will be true to her? My only real doubt has been . . .'

'Yes?'

'You will not be vexed?'

'No—nothing you could say would vex me.'

'My only doubt has been whether you quite understood your own good luck. There are very few girls like her, Mr. Langley.'

In his present mood the words went straight to his heart. He did not resent them in the smallest degree—far from it. In a sense they were flattering to him, for they showed that others could see what a prize he had won. Moreover, just then he would have stood anything from Mrs. Aylmer. For the moment he was more than half in love with her as well as Helen. His eyes grew moist. 'I know I am not worthy of her, and never can be,' he said; 'but I will try.'

When Guy left Mrs. Aylmer's room, his courage had returned

to him, and he wondered that it had ever fallen so low. She had promised to write to Lady Mary herself. 'But I must see Miss Treveryan first,' she said with a smile; 'perhaps she will be glad of the chance of getting rid of you.' Guy met the suggestion with a happy laugh; he had no fears on that point.

When he was gone Mrs. Aylmer sat for a time thinking. 'I wonder whether I have done right,' she said to herself. 'I wonder whether he really cares for her? It is no business of mine either, and I daresay I shall get no thanks for meddling. Well, it can't be helped now. He is a dear boy, and she is too good to be made unhappy if I can do anything to stop it. What a pity she has no mother—poor child.' Mrs. Aylmer was a woman of action, and she felt that the sooner she saw Helen the better. Colonel Aylmer was at home, in his den, and she went to tell him about it; but before doing so she ordered her brougham. He took her news quietly enough, and made no objection. It was not their business, he said; but if his wife thought fit to take it up, he had no doubt she was right. Langley was a fine young fellow, and he could not have fallen in love with a nicer girl. 'If you do get a rap over the knuckles, you must make the best of it, and be more careful another time.'

When Mrs. Aylmer drove up to the Treveryans' door, she wished for a moment that she had kept out of the whole thing, but she had not much time for regret. Rather to her surprise she was told that Helen was at home, and she walked into the drawing-room and sat down. A minute later Helen came in, with a smile on her face. Mrs. Aylmer could not help doubting for the moment whether the girl knew her own mind. Surely, if she cared for Guy Langley, she would have been more distressed and upset by the morning's news. Mrs. Aylmer did not know that Helen had half guessed her errand, and was meeting her resolutely, hoping for comfort, but determined to show no sign of suffering if her guess were wrong. 'How nice of you to come and see me,' Helen said brightly, with her hand out; and as she came close it was evident, in spite of her efforts to hide it, that she had been crying.

Mrs. Aylmer's heart smote her as she thought of the motherless girl alone in that big empty house. She kissed Helen gently. 'I came to help you, dear, if you will let me. Mr. Langley has been to see me to-day, and I thought perhaps I might be a little comfort to you.' She knew then that she had done right in

coming. The flushing face, full of gratitude and hope, drove away all doubts.

Helen asked Mrs. Aylmer to come into her own sitting-room where they were secure from interruption, and there the two sat for an hour or more. As the elder woman's sympathy and gentleness won Helen's trust, her reserve disappeared and she laid bare all her sorrow. She told Mrs. Aylmer that she had been talking to Colonel Treveryan, and that it had been very miserable. He had been inclined to blame Guy, and had seemed very worried and upset. She had not known what to do, and she did not know now. She could not say she did not care for Guy, or that she was ready to give him up if he was unchanged; and yet she did not want to come between him and his people; and she would not remain engaged to him for a single hour if it would be happier for him to be set free. 'Only, if that is to be the end,' she said, with a momentary break in her voice, 'why did he make me care for him? We were so happy before.'

Mrs. Aylmer drew the brown head on to her shoulder, and petted it as she would have petted a child's. 'It won't be the end, dear. All this will blow over in a few weeks, and you will be as happy as the day is long. You would never have doubted it if you had heard him speak to me to-day. He told me he cared for you more than all the world, and I am certain he does. It is your comfort and happiness that he is thinking of. He never expected this; and of course it is very troublesome, but it will all blow over. You must never think of giving him up. You would only make him unhappy.' So she went on, comforting the girl with gentle words, and telling her what she longed to hear, and was only too glad to believe, until the sore young heart was whole again, and the sad young eyes bright with happiness. Then she sent Helen to see whether Colonel Treveryan had done his work. 'He will think me a horrid meddling match-making woman, and very likely turn me out of the house, but I don't care.'

Colonel Treveryan had done his work. It was half-past five, and he was just coming into the drawing-room for some tea when Helen met him. He was looking very weary and sad. Throughout the day the remembrance of Helen had been before him, making his work doubly hard; and he had found himself thinking more bitterly than ever of the grave where his wife was lying. If she could only come back now for one hour, not for his sake, but for the sake of her child—the child whom she had

loved so dearly and given up. Never! Never! She was far beyond the reach of his longing. Never again would he see the pale tired face and gentle patient eyes, and hear the low voice that had been music to him. 'But for India,' he thought, 'she might be living now. Why did I let her come out to me?' How many men have writhed under the torture of that thought, and cursed the land of exile?

Mrs. Aylmer found Colonel Treveryan by no means disposed to resent her interference. He knew too well the value of a woman's help, and he liked Mrs. Aylmer herself. He spoke to her quite openly. He was hurt at the idea of his daughter being placed in such a position, and he said so; but he saw that her happiness was involved, and he made no secret of his hope that the marriage might not be broken off. He could, he said, give them five hundred a year, and would give them as much more as he could save after spending what it was his duty to spend in entertainment and the like. He was very glad to hear that Guy had spoken so strongly, and seemed so determined in the matter. It seemed to him inconceivable that a man could hesitate in such a case. Eventually it was agreed that an effort should be made by Mrs. Aylmer and Guy to settle matters with Lady Mary, and that, in the meantime, the affair should be kept quiet. Helen was to go to Mussooree, and take care of Mabs and her French governess whom Mrs. Aylmer wanted to send to the hills at once. The young people were not to be forbidden to write to one another, but until things were settled it would be better to let others have no chance of talking.

Mrs. Aylmer went away that evening with a light heart, leaving Colonel Treveryan's brow cleared and Helen's eyes shining with happiness. Nevertheless, as she drove through the gathering darkness, enjoying the cool evening air which came through her window, she felt that there might be trouble ahead of her. She knew little of Lady Mary, but she had seen her and recognised in her a determined character. 'Well,' she thought, 'if her ladyship chooses to stand out, it is Mr. Langley's affair. He will have done all he can, and will be in the right. I daresay he can be pretty obstinate too if he is once roused; and really, they have not the smallest cause to object. It is quite as good a match as they could expect for him.'

A week later Helen was away among the pines and rhododendrons of Mussooree, and two letters addressed to Lady Mary were on the high seas. Guy's letter was fuller and more circumstan-

tial than his first had been. He dwelt upon his affection for Helen, and the impossibility of his giving her up ; and he wrote at some length about Colonel Treveryan's position and services. He begged his father and mother not to make him miserable by continuing to withhold their consent. He did not in so many words declare his determination to stick to her whatever they might do, but he said no word which could be held to imply that his eventual decision would depend on theirs. Guy asked Lady Mary to show his letter to his father ; and he referred to the fact that Mrs. Aylmer was going to write. ' You know her,' he said ; ' she is not a bad judge, and she swears by Helen. If you don't trust my judgment, you can trust hers.'

Mrs. Aylmer's letter was as worldly wise as she could make it. She began by apologising for her interference in a matter with which she was not concerned. She would not have thought of interfering if Mr. Langley had not come to her of his own accord. As he had done so, and as he was in her husband's regiment, she hoped Lady Mary would not mind her writing and doing what she could to clear up matters. She could quite understand Lady Mary's reluctance to let Guy marry in India. Many of the girls one met out there were anything but desirable. But in this case she could assure Lady Mary that there was no reason whatever for regret. Miss Treveryan was a charming girl in every way, thoroughly ladylike and refined, unusually well educated, and exceedingly pretty. Her father was a man of the highest reputation, and came of an old west-country family. He had served with distinction in the army, and was now holding a high position in India. He was not a rich man apparently, but during his life he was willing to allow his daughter £500 a year, and at his death she would no doubt have a little. Altogether, though Guy was young to marry, she could not help saying that he seemed to her to have made as good a choice as he could have made. He appeared to be thoroughly in earnest in the matter. She felt sure that if Lady Mary could bring herself to sanction the engagement, she would not repent it.

It was near the end of March when these letters were despatched. The answer could not come till they were well into May. In the meantime, as before, the uncertainty was trying to all concerned. Colonel Treveryan could not help feeling a little sore with Guy for having brought on the affair without being sure of his ground, and he could not help letting his feeling appear. He liked Guy, but he thought Helen in all respects

Guy's equal, to say the least of it, and he resented the position for her. Guy felt he was blamed, and thought it hard, and at the same time he was conscious of a doubt as to the thoughtfulness of his behaviour. Helen felt humiliated by the knowledge that she had given herself into a family who did not want her, and also at the idea that her position was probably known in Syntia.

It was not altogether a pleasant time for any of them.

CHAPTER XIX

TRYING TO DO RIGHT

THE drill season was over now, and the hot weather had fairly set in. All day long the westerly wind moaned about the silent houses. The air was full of driving dust, which covered the trees and the earth with a yellow pall, and hid the blue sky, though there was never a cloud. The earth was hard and cracked. The thin bony cattle found some kind of food on it, but there was not a sign of green in the burnt-up grass. Towards evening the wind dropped and the dust settled a little, and the white people came out of their closed houses to breathe the air, which was hot still, but endurable. It was a bad time for the poor women at the barracks and the sad languid children, who could not ride or drive, and had nothing to do but to saunter about on the dusty grass.

Then as ever those got on best who were employed. Over in the Civil Station the work went on as usual. Colonel Treveryan and his assistants got through their daily task somehow, though the heat of their courts and offices was at times almost more than the European brain and heart could bear. They solaced themselves with hard exercise, after the manner of Englishmen, riding and shooting and playing racquets and tennis. The jungles had been thinned now by the spring fires, and the game could be seen. Near the station, on the sandy river-bed, the quail were still plentiful; and the pig-sticking was at its best. In some ways the hot weather was bright enough. No one was away in camp, so that the Civil Station was full. There were always the evenings at the Club, and the friendly dinners, and the moon-light picnics. They got through life without much grumbling after all, though the thermometer was often near 100° in the shade, and one could not sleep at night except under a punkah.

Among the soldiers there was more idleness and more ill-health. Colonel Aylmer knew of old that in the heat of India there is no enemy so deadly as want of employment, and he tried hard to keep things going ; but there was not much to do. Through the long afternoon many of the men lay on their cots, idle and miserable, cursing the day they were born ; some of the officers gave in too, and suffered for it. Guy Langley and Dale, however, got on well enough. The latter was as keen and merry as ever, 'chivvying things' and playing racquets ; and though Guy had fits of depression and repining against the injustice of his fate, he too found comfort in hard physical exercise. Then he had Mrs. Aylmer's steady sympathy to turn to, and his correspondence with Helen. No doubt it was dreary work sometimes, particularly in the afternoon, when he felt too dull to take any pleasure in reading and sleep only made him worse. It was fairly cool, with the house shut up and the west wind blowing through the wet, sweet-scented *kuskus* mat, but it was dark and dreary ; and the dinners and the picnics seemed to him utterly lifeless without Helen's face to brighten them. However, on the whole, he did not find that the time went very slowly.

Up in Mussooree, among the pines and rhododendrons, Helen was living quietly with Mabs and the French governess. Some of Colonel Treveryan's friends were there for the summer, and they were glad to be kind to her, taking her out to dances and tennis-parties, and trying to make her life happy. They would have done it for her father's sake, and they soon came to do it for her own. It was a pleasure to have charge of a girl who was always well-dressed and well-behaved, and was ready to leave the pleasantest party at any moment with a cheery willingness which threw into strong contrast the discontented looks of others. Both with young and old she was soon a favourite, and the budding warriors who got away from their regiments at the beginning of the leave-season were soon crowding round the tall graceful girl who looked so handsome and danced so well. But Helen took their admiration very calmly. She was cheery and open and frank with all of them, but she seemed in no way overwhelmed by their attentions, or eager to be in the thick of the fun. She was young enough to enjoy herself at times among the bright faces that thronged the 'Happy Valley' ; but her heart was often sadder than a young heart should be. In her present mood she found more comfort in the society of Mabs and Rex than in the pony races and the dances ; and many an afternoon, when she

might have been among the young men and maidens, she was wandering with the child about the wooded hillsides. Mademoiselle Dufour, the French governess, was a quiet, rather dull woman, who found Mabs a handful and was always glad to be rid of her for a time. She used to get away then and enjoy her only pleasure, poor lady,—a chat with a compatriot who was also a governess in a family at Mussooree. Before long Helen and Mabs became very close friends. Mabs liked Guy Langley, as all children did, and sometimes she used to talk about him. This in itself was a bond of union, and they had others.

So the time passed until the middle of May, and then at last came Lady Mary's answer. It was one about which there could be no possibility of mistake.

When she first received Guy's letter, and Mrs. Aylmer's, Lady Mary had hesitated in her purpose. Her native good sense was not yet wholly extinguished by years of successful tyranny over the wills of others; and for a moment she had dimly recognised the danger of further opposition. Her husband had more than once expressed his doubts. Now Mrs. Aylmer had built her a golden bridge; should she accept it, and retire with honour from a position which was really untenable if seriously attacked? Unhappily her hesitation was shortlived. Since she had written to Guy, she had allowed her mind to dwell upon the idea of bringing about an engagement between him and Clara Schneider. Guy's indiscretion had made her feel that it was desirable to get him safely married, and the more she thought over it the more the plan grew upon her. In all ways it would be an excellent thing for him. The girl was a good girl, and she had, or would have, eight or ten thousand a year. He could not do better. Lady Mary had now made up her mind to this scheme, and she could not give it up. Moreover, the thought of these women coming between her and Guy was unendurable. It would have been bad enough to have her plans upset; but to have them upset in this way; to have her clear warning set aside, and Guy encouraged to dispute her will, that was not to be borne. The girl's behaviour she could understand. Of course she would do what she could to catch Guy and keep him, but Mrs. Aylmer ought to have known better. Her interference was simply impertinent, and she should be made to understand it.

Once started, Lady Mary rapidly worked herself up to a state of fiery wrath. The thing she could least endure was insubordination. It enraged and blinded her, and made her fight wildly.

Unluckily, a few hours only after Guy's letter arrived, she received from another source some information which increased her anger, and completely removed all doubt from her mind. A friend of hers, Mrs. Danby, had a brother who was holding one of the highest positions in India, and Lady Mary had written to her in the hope of getting Guy an appointment on the great man's staff. She had not mentioned her real reason, but had said that he was quartered in Syntia, a dreadful place, very hot and solitary, and that she wanted to get him out of it. The poor boy would be moped to death.

Mrs. Danby's answer was cordial. She would gladly write to her brother. 'I wonder whether I have guessed,' she added, 'why you are anxious to get your boy away from that horrid place. When I was staying a few weeks ago with Jane Pitt Wright, whom I think you know, she told me she had just heard from that clever son of hers, and that he had been shooting there with some Indian man, and had been positively so hunted by the daughter that he had been obliged to pack up his boxes and run away. I wonder whether she has transferred her attentions to your boy. It is quite shameful the way these people are allowed to go on.' It really was too bad. There could be no doubt of the fact. She could remember that Guy had once mentioned Pitt Wright as staying with the Treveryans. Now she was asked to let him marry this bold unprincipled girl, who was probably as bad as she could be; and the story of Guy's folly must be made known to every one. She felt angry and humiliated, and she felt that she did well to be angry. Poor Helen! It was a dirty trick that her guest played her when he shook hands and looked into her honest eyes, and gave over that lying letter to her charge; but men do these things sometimes—English men.

This time Lady Mary did not go through the farce of making her husband write. She was too much in earnest, and he was really too stupid. But for Mrs. Danby's letter he would have seriously advised a compromise, if not surrender. So her ladyship sat down to her work, and, as Chimp would have said, 'let herself rip.' She could still write affectionately. Though she was stern and clear, she yet knew the value of a few loving words as an appeal to Guy's feelings, and she would not believe that a few months could be enough to overthrow her empire and make another better loved than herself. If Colonel Treveryan had thought it strange that he should be so quickly supplanted, it was natural that she should think such a thing impossible.

MY DEAREST GUY—I have received your letter of the —th March, and it has made me more unhappy than I can say. It is impossible that I can ever change my decision about this miserable business. In fact, I have even more reason for it now than I had before. I know you believe all that you say about Miss Treveryan, and perhaps you will be hurt with me for telling you the truth; but, my boy, she is not fit to be your wife. You remember that young Pitt Wright was staying with these people a few months ago? I have now learned on the best possible authority that they took advantage of having got him into their house in order to try and entrap him, and that she literally gave him no peace until at last he was forced to go off quite suddenly to avoid open unpleasantness. As she cannot get him, she has transferred her attentions to you. You see I know more of what has been going on than you knew yourself; and I have good reason for saying what I said to you before, that such a marriage is out of the question. Now, my boy, I beg of you to come home to me at once. I can explain things to you more clearly in five minutes' talk than I could do in any number of letters. Don't let yourself be influenced by any feeling of duty to a girl who has behaved so badly to you, and don't permit Mrs. Aylmer to interfere in the matter. It is no affair of hers, and I am astonished at her presuming to write to me about it as she has done. I never cared about her, but I thought she had more sense. Remember what I wrote to you before. Even if this girl were all you think her, it would be impossible for you to marry her. Your father and I know too well what misery such a marriage would entail, and we can never consent to it. If you were to persevere in disregarding our wishes, which I know you will not do, you would have nothing left to you but your own small means, for your father would at once withdraw the allowance he now gives you. Do, my darling boy, trust my love and care for you, and come back to me. You may think me unkind now, but you will live to see how right I was, and to thank God for your escape. It is the *knowledge* that I am doing what is right which enables me to be firm in inflicting pain upon you. The girls are well, and send you their best love. Roland is getting on very well at college.—Ever your loving

MOTHER.

Guy read this letter with rage in his heart. 'Cowardly brute!' he said, with his teeth set. Then a doubt flashed across his mind, from outside as it were, whether there could be any truth in the story. He drove the doubt away instantly, with disgust, remembering Helen's eyes and voice; they could not deceive. How he hated that man, for the baseness of the lie he thought; really, perhaps, in part, because Pitt Wright had

despised the woman he loved, and made him seem weak and contemptible.

The letter to Mrs. Aylmer was as follows—

DEAR MADAM—I have received your letter of the —th March. You are right in supposing that your interference in this matter appears to me wholly unnecessary. I must decline therefore to continue the correspondence, and can only regret that before offering your opinion with regard to my son's private affairs you did not think it desirable to make more careful inquiries about the character and antecedents of the young woman to whom your letter alludes.—I remain, yours faithfully,

MARY LANGLEY.

Mrs. Aylmer put down this letter with a dangerous glitter in her brown eyes. 'What intolerable insolence !' she said. 'Who is Lady Mary that she should dare to write to me like this ?' Then she repressed herself and laughed, a rather grim laugh. 'Well,' she thought, 'it is a lesson to me with a vengeance. Never again will I interfere in other people's affairs. But what a vulgar letter to write ! Even if I was wrong in trying to help them, she might have been decently civil. I thought she was a lady at least. I wonder what she means about Helen. Some nonsense she has heard, I suppose.' Mrs. Aylmer was honest, and admitted to herself that she had laid herself open to the rebuff ; but Mrs. Aylmer was human, and she resented it none the less. Lady Mary had made a mistake in letting her imperious temper vent itself upon a woman who was quite as determined as she was. From that time Mrs. Aylmer, who also thought herself in the right, fought against her *con amore*.

Guy came over after dinner, and asked her whether she had received a letter from his mother. She said yes, and he was too much engrossed with his own feelings to ask any further questions. 'Then you know her answer to me,' he said. 'Well, I have been thinking it all over, and I have come to the conclusion that the only thing left now is to take my own line. I am very sorry my mother cannot see it in the right light, but I cannot let this interfere with Helen's happiness. I shall write and tell her so, and ask Helen to have me as I am.' He spoke a little pompously, with a touch of affected calm in his voice. As a matter of fact, he was not perhaps quite so determined as he wished to appear. He had come expecting that his announcement would be received with surprise, that Mrs. Aylmer would be a little alarmed at the prospect, and inclined to argue about it, or at all

events to advise consideration and caution. In any case she would think it somewhat heroic of him, and applaud his unselfishness and resolution. This being his view, he was just a little disappointed to find the sacrifice taken very quietly. His tone had jarred upon Mrs. Aylmer, and it made her reply seem cold.

'I don't see that you can do anything else,' she said. 'You have gone as far as you can in trying to make things run smooth. Now, if Helen will have you, and Colonel Treveryan allows it, your conscience is clear and you have a perfect right to please yourself.'

This was not quite what Guy had expected, but he answered pleasantly; and very soon they were talking it over in entire agreement. Finally Guy asked what his mother had said to Mrs. Aylmer. She hesitated, and then produced Lady Mary's letter. After all, why should he not see it?

As Guy read it, he felt his face grow hot. 'I am awfully sorry,' he said. 'I never dreamt of your being exposed to this kind of thing,' and his indignation was aroused against his mother. It is almost always a mistake to be rude.

Next morning Guy rode over to see Colonel Treveryan, who was ready with his answer. 'My dear fellow,' he said, when he had heard Guy out, 'I thought this was not impossible. The end of it is that you can't count upon anything beyond your pay and two hundred a year.'

'Yes, sir, I suppose so.'

'You can't live on that as a married man in the Thirtieth.'

'No.'

'Then what do you intend to do now?'

'I thought, sir—you were good enough to say that you would help us at first.'

'Yes, I did say so, and if my daughter has not changed her mind I am still willing to do it. I have no one else to think of now, and even when I retire I suppose I can always manage to find her five hundred a year. I shall not want much myself; but you see that depends on my life. If I were to die, she would have very little. What would you do then?'

'I hope there is no chance of that, sir; and besides, I believe my people will give in sooner or later. They're awfully fond of me, really.'

'No doubt; but they might not. If it came to the worst how could you manage?'

Guy sat looking at a picture on Colonel Treveryan's wall—a

couple of men driving to cover in a high dog-cart. At last he said, 'There would always be one way, sir; I could go in for the Indian service.'

'Are you willing to face the chance of having to do that?'

'You did it, sir; why shouldn't I? And I would do anything in the world for her.'

Colonel Treveryan looked at him hard. He seemed earnest and truthful. 'Very well, Langley. I will abide by Helen's decision. If she still wishes it, I will give her what I have said. I shall write and tell her so to-day.'

'Thank you, sir. I am very grateful to you,' Guy said. 'I don't care what happens if only she will have me.'

He rode off with joy in his heart. After all, why should he worry? His mother was sure to come round, and meanwhile they would have enough. It would be all right. Directly he got home he sat down to write to Helen.

MY DARLING—I wish I had better news to give you; but I hope that you will not after all think my news so very bad. My mother still refuses to agree to our engagement. She says we cannot live on what we have, and that it would end in misery. She also tells me plainly that if we are married my father will stop my allowance, and that I shall never get anything beyond what I have of my own. I have been over to see your father and tell him this, and he has been very good and generous about it. He says that if you will have me, he will not stand in my way, and that he will give you five hundred a year so long as he lives. With what I have, that will be plenty to begin upon, so you will write to me now and tell me that my long waiting is over? It has been so hard—almost more than I could bear sometimes. I can't imagine why my mother is so unreasonable about this; but you know what mothers are. She will come round in time I am certain, and, anyhow, we have done all we could. I do not care a straw what happens to me, if only I have you and your love. There is nothing I would not give up, gladly and proudly, in exchange for that. It almost made me laugh when your father asked me whether I was prepared, if necessary, to give up the regiment and go into the Indian service. It seemed such a little thing in comparison with you. My darling, I am afraid I was very hasty when I first wrote to you. I ought to have thought of all these things before; but you will not be hard upon me for overlooking them? It was my love for you that drove out of my head every other consideration. And you will not think less of me now if I come to you with little besides my sword? I know you will not. Write soon, and believe me ever your own

GUY.

Colonel Treveryan's letter was affectionate and businesslike. He told Helen exactly how matters stood, and spoke kindly of Guy's behaviour in the matter. What was the use of blaming the boy if she loved him? And really he was not much to blame after all. Colonel Treveryan begged her to think it all over very carefully before she answered, but he assured her that if she were still of the same mind, there was no cause for hesitation. He could quite well afford to make them the allowance he had offered. As to Langley's people, they probably would come round, and he would not lose anything in the end by his marriage. In any case he was apparently earnest in his desire to win her, and quite ready, if necessary, to make up his mind to an Indian career, which would remove all difficulties. They would never be rich, but they would have enough, even if he were to die, 'Which,' he added, 'I have no present intention of doing if I can help it.'

The two letters reached Helen one morning after breakfast, and they aroused in her a painful conflict of feeling. After reading them, she put on her hat and walked out of the house. Mabs was 'practising' with Mademoiselle Dufour, and though she had a nice firm touch for so small a child, the sound of her piano pervaded the house in a rather distracting manner. Rex followed Helen, as he always did, and the two of them went away by a stony path through the wood until they reached a place where Helen often sat. There was a broken gap in the trees below, and looking down through it one could see the plain of the Dera Dun, and the jagged peaks of the low range beyond.

It was a quiet spot where Helen knew she would be alone, and as she sat down in the shade there was hardly a sound to break the stillness about her. The rainless hot weather had lasted some months now, and though on the heights the air was comparatively cool, the hillsides looked very brown and bare. The crimson blossoms of the rhododendrons had long disappeared from the woods. The snowy peaks to the northward were hidden by the summer haze, and there was a dull yellow glare over the plains to the south. Mussooree itself was dry and dusty.

Helen took out the two letters again and read them carefully, word by word, and then she sat for an hour or more gazing out through the interlaced branches of the trees, deep in thought. Now and then she altered her position unconsciously, crossing her gauntleted hands over her knee, or joining them in her lap, or leaning her head upon them, and every time she moved Rex

opened his eyes and looked up at her without raising his head from the ground. Her face seemed sad and troubled, as if she were working out some problem that was too hard for her, as indeed she was—a motherless girl with all the romance of girlhood in her heart. At last she put her face down upon her hands and burst into tears; Rex whined and got up and pushed his head into her lap; then she brushed her tears away and controlled herself. ‘Dear old Rex,’ she said, with her face working, and her big eyes full; ‘I have always got daddy and you; haven’t I? and that is a great deal more than I deserve, my king. I am going to be very brave, and not let the noblest man in all the world sacrifice himself for my sake.’ And then it all came over her again suddenly, and the brown head went down, and the sobs came thick and fast. ‘Oh, I can’t, I can’t, Guy, my darling; I cannot give you up.’ The storm of grief swept over her and left her, and when she got up she was calm again and there was a resolute, almost cheerful, look in her eyes. What woman is there who is not capable of that exaltation of spirit when she is sacrificing herself for the man she loves?

She walked home with her head up and her graceful figure erect as ever, and went straight to her room. The post for Syntia left in the evening; she would not delay. What had to be done had better be done at once before she faltered again. The words came to her readily, and she felt strong and almost happy. ‘I am doing right, and God is helping me,’ she thought, in her simple, natural faith.

MY DEAREST—What I am going to say will give you pain, but some day you will see that I was right, and this makes me able to say it. I cannot accept the sacrifice you are ready to make for me. It would be a cruel thing to take advantage of your unselfishness and let you throw away everything to make me happy. If your mother’s answer had been different, you know how gladly I should have done whatever you wished, but I cannot come between you and her, and cut you off from all your own people. I should always feel I had done wrong, and in time you might come to hate me for it, and we should both be miserable. I could not bear that. We shall not be very happy now just at first, for I know you do care for me; but you will soon see that it was best for you, and once I know that you are content I shall be so. Don’t ever think of me. I shall always be glad and proud to think that I was something to you once, and that I was not selfish enough to ruin your life. Now, good-bye. Send me one line to let me know that you understand me and forgive me,

but don't try to make me change my mind. I know it would be wrong, and I cannot do it. God bless you, and make you very happy some day.

HELEN.

This letter was duly despatched the same evening, with one to Colonel Treveryan, telling him what Helen had done. She said that she had thought it over very carefully, and felt it would be wrong to accept Guy's offer. She had therefore told him so, and everything was at an end between them. 'So you will have me turning up again, daddy, like a bad halfpenny, and will have to make up your mind to keep me for good.' Her self-sacrifice was none the less true and brave for the fact that she sobbed herself to sleep that night after hours of despairing grief, the grief which comes only to the young; and if at times, during the next two days, she felt a sudden passionate regret for what she had done, and entertained for a moment a hope that she might not be taken at her word, yet she would not, if she could, have withdrawn her letter.

Mademoiselle Dufour and Mabs noticed her altered looks, and Mabs was evidently concerned about her. Helen saw the child gazing at her with serious eyes, and when Mademoiselle Dufour left the room after breakfast the first day, Helen found a little hand stealing into hers. 'Are you sure there's nothing the matter, auntie? You look so sad, like mummie did when Uncle Charlie died.'

Helen caught the child up and kissed her, and laughed off the question; but Mabs went away unconvinced, and more than once Helen found the serious blue eyes fixed upon her again.

Mademoiselle discouraged the subject. 'Miss Treveryan has de headeck,' she said.

And Mabs answered, 'She wouldn't cry just because she had a headache; and I know she's been crying. It's awful fag having a headache, of course, but English people don't cry for those sort of things.' With Mademoiselle Dufour Mabs was always patriotic; and in familiar conversation her language generally bore some traces of her last letter from her brother, who was at school in England.

Guy Langley's first feeling when he received Helen's letter was one of surprise which rapidly changed into one of alarmed impatience. He thought Helen cared too much for him to resist successfully if he pressed her with all his strength, but he was not perfectly sure. There were hidden depths in her nature which he had not yet sounded. She was not yet his own. The doubt and

the opposition incited him, and made him all the warmer in his resolve. He could not, at the first check, go back from all he had said, and seem light and changeable. If she had been put out of his reach by some power against which it was hopeless to contend, he would no doubt have resigned himself before long to the inevitable, and possibly, in time, he might have come to feel that it was better so. But this was a different thing. He could not let her put him aside. Love, and pride, and obstinacy, and an inherited dislike of opposition, and a sense of chivalrous pity for Helen, combined to urge him forward.

His answer was masterful, and yet humble. Instinct teaches most men to blend the two things in dealing with women. 'I will not accept your answer,' he wrote; 'I will never accept it. You have confessed that you love me; and having once confessed that, you have no right to ask me to give you up. It would be a folly and a wickedness to ruin both our lives in order to humour my mother, who is not in a position to judge, and nothing will ever induce me to agree to it. Does not your own Bible tell you that a man will give up father and mother and cleave to his wife? If you have any other reason for what you have written, if you have lost trust in me, and feel that I am unworthy of you, then I will submit without another word. So long as I live I will be loyal to every wish of yours; but the thought is such intolerable misery that I implore you, if indeed you do love me still, not to leave me in doubt an hour longer than necessary. Yet, if that is your true reason, if you no longer feel for me what you once felt, do not hesitate to tell me so. I can bear any pain that your dear hands inflict upon me. I shall never for one moment reproach you or regret that I loved you. You have given me a happiness nothing can ever take from me.'

Poor Helen! She had meant to be very brave and determined, but Guy's answer made it cruelly hard, and her resolution was further shaken by a letter which she received from Mrs. Aylmer. It was a little loving note. 'You are the dearest girl in the world,' Mrs. Aylmer said, 'but indeed you are wrong in this. He is very fond of you, and if he ever accepted your decision, which, by the way, I am sure he won't, you would only have made him wretched as well as yourself. His mother will see reason sooner or later, and in any case she has no right to come between you. I should think very badly of him if he allowed her to do so. He ought to be, and is, proud of having won you, and you have a perfect right to please yourselves. You will not be

doing him harm, but, on the contrary, bringing him great happiness; and some day you will wonder that you ever doubted it. You may trust me, dear. I would not say it if I did not believe it. Don't think it must necessarily be right to do whatever is hard and painful to you. We were not sent into this world to make ourselves miserable. And don't be angry with me for interfering. I feel as if you were my big daughter, and I can't help trying to keep you from spoiling your own life.'

Helen did not answer that day. She could not do so. She felt unable to come to any decision. It seemed to her as if she had been left without guidance. She had meant to do right, and it had been so hard. Could all that striving and sorrow have been unnecessary and useless, and even foolish and wrong? If only Aunt Madge had been alive! It was not the poor loving mother of whom she thought in her distress; she had never known her mother. The pale tired face and the patient eyes had passed out of her life when she was little more than a baby; when a brave, heartbroken woman had driven away alone through the stone gateway at Laneithin into the darkness and rain of the desolate Cornish roads, leaving behind, to forget her, the child she would have died for.

Helen Treveryan was awake far into the night, fighting her battle alone; but there could be only one end to such a conflict. At last, as she knelt by her bedside, her hands clasped before her, and her beautiful earnest face white with suffering, while the lamplight fell like a glory about the bright brown hair, conviction and peace came to her, and she ceased to struggle against her happiness. She rose with shining eyes and a deep joy in her heart. It was long past midnight, and everything was silent as she walked to her window and drew aside the curtain. The night was fine and still, and the stars clear. She could see the dark rounded outlines of the hills against the sky, and a single light gleamed faintly from a house among the trees to the northward. She stood a few minutes at the window, with her hand on the curtain, and then came back to her writing-table and sat down. This time she wrote a few words only—

MY DEAREST—I cannot try to be brave any more. I have never changed for an instant. How could I think you anything but good and true and unselfish when you are giving up so much for me? You said your mother pressed you to go home. I want you to write by this mail and say you will go directly, if you can get leave. When

you come back, if you still want me, I will come to you whether she will have me or not. I only hope I am not doing wrong. I shall never forgive myself if I find in the end that I have brought you unhappiness. Please don't refuse to go home. I could not be happy unless I felt I had done all in my power to prevent things going wrong. You will not distress me by refusing?

Ever your own

HELEN.

CHAPTER XX

HOME AGAIN

GUY did what he was asked to do. He hesitated, of course, and he would have dearly liked at all events to see Helen before leaving India ; but this would not have been altogether easy to manage, and after ascertaining that the leave was to be got, he made up his mind to go. To this resolution he was largely influenced by Mrs. Aylmer, who knew that Helen was in earnest, and felt that the sooner the thing was done the better.

Guy wrote a week in advance to his mother, and said he was coming, but he warned her that this meant no change in his feelings. 'As you wish it,' he wrote, 'I have asked for leave, but please do not misunderstand me. I cannot give Helen up, and Pitt Wright's lies only make me care the more for her. She is the only woman I can ever marry.'

Before the end of May Guy was on board the P. & O. steamer *Indus* in Bombay Harbour. It had been a frightfully hot journey down by train. During the day the sun beat through the roof and sides of the railway carriage, and seemed to beat into his very brain as he lay half undressed on the leather-covered seat, and even at night the heat was very oppressive. Bombay was comparatively cool, not more than 90° or so in the shade, and by the time he got on board ship he was happy again.

He stood leaning over the side, just before the start, thinking how short a time it seemed since he first saw that coast, and how much had happened to him. It was a curious scene. The deck amidships was covered with baggage and chairs. Passengers and their friends were gathered here and there in knots, while the stewards and lascars were at work about the gangways.

Close to Guy, on the same side of the ship, stood Colonel Jackson, lately a Civil officer in Berar, who was leaving India

'for good,' after thirty years of hard work. One or two old acquaintances who happened to be in Bombay had come to see him off; but he was not a Bombay man himself, and his only real friend was his native bearer, Sri Kishen, who had served him faithfully since he was a young man. Sri Kishen had cheated him throughout, in a small patient way, and Jackson had been very angry with him at times; but they had never parted, and now the two men stood looking at one another in a silent, life-long farewell that was very pathetic.

Still more pathetic was the little group near the stern—a man and his wife and small daughter, six or seven years old. All three looked white and ill, but the husband, a district officer, was going back alone to his work in an out-of-the-way station among the rice-swamps, to manage a couple of million of Bengalis. He hoped to join the others 'in a year or two,' but he could not afford to go on leave yet. The child was sobbing on his shoulder, with her arms round his neck, and his wife was begging him to let them go back with him even now; but he only shook his head and tried to speak cheerily.

Near them was a young girl in widow's mourning. She was alone, and was looking at them with envy. What was their sorrow to hers? She had come out hardly a year ago—a bride of nineteen, just married to Ronald Stewart of the Punjab Cavalry. And now Ronald Stewart was lying in a little desolate cemetery on the frontier, dead of typhoid fever, and she was going back to her people. Two or three young men were laughing and talking not far from her. Jenkinson of the Indo-Chinese Bank was going home on his first leave, and his friends were seeing him off, amid a good deal of noisy chaff savouring of pegs at the Yacht Club. 'Take care, old chap,' said one of them, a mealy-faced youth with prominent blue eyes, looking at the young widow; 'they're always dangerous. She's got her eye on you already, I'll bet.' But she was thinking of her dead husband, with his strong hands and steady eyes, who could have taken young Jenkinson and shaken the soul out of him with hardly an effort.

At last all the mails had been brought on board, and the final signal was given. Colonel Jackson shook hands with his college friends, and patted Sri Kishen on the shoulder with something very like a caress; and the Bengal man kissed his wife, and unfastened the child's arms from his neck, and walked away, with his sallow bearded face working all over; and the young

men went down the side into the boat, laughing and talking still ; and then the screw throbbed and churned up the foam, and the ship's head was brought slowly round to the westward, and they steamed away into the sunset—homeward bound.

Guy soon settled down. He had sent off a farewell letter to Helen, protesting a little too much perhaps, and had then gone off and bought himself a very comfortable long cane chair, with a hole in the arm for a soda-water tumbler, and a place for books.

In this chair he spent a large part of his time, comfortably dressed in flannels and tennis-shoes, reading novels and poetry. It was very hot under the double awning, but the lazy uncereemonious life suited him well. He was a good sailor, and, moreover, there was no rough weather. Day after day the great ship glided on over a calm blue sea without a ripple. Now and then some flying fish would rise and skim away in the sunlight, just touching the surface at intervals, their reflections moving in the water below them. Looking over the ship's bow it seemed as if the stem were cutting through deep blue ice, the foam falling in a white heap to right and left like snow. The nights were very beautiful, soft and starlit. One or two of the larger planets made a clear separate track across the sea. The long smooth wave which went away from the ship's side was luminous with phosphorescence, and the water which was pumped out with every beat of the engines seemed full of living fire.

After five or six days' voyage, the ship stopped for a few hours at Aden, where Guy landed and posted a letter for India. Then he went on board again, and sat watching the wonderful sunset colours upon the rocks, and talking to Mrs. Stewart.

He had got to know her well by this time. She had been placed next to him at meals ; and he had been touched by her sad face and gentle manner. She was a slight fair woman, and looked very pretty in her plain black dress. At first she had been rather afraid of him, but he seemed and was so unaffectedly sorry for her, and his manner was so tender and respectful, that she soon got over her shyness, and found his conversation a real help and comfort. He put her finally at her ease by telling her all about Helen, and by being good to the Bengal man's child, little May Burton, who took to him at once as children always did. The mother, poor woman, hardly left her cabin, and Mrs. Stewart had almost taken charge of May.

When they got into the Red Sea there was a smart easterly

breeze, which caught the *Indus* abeam and made her roll ; but it was a pleasure to watch the blue waves in the sunlight. As they struck the vessel's side and broke, the spray went high into the air, and then fell back into the dark trough below, glittering like a shower of diamonds. The easterly breeze lasted until the *Indus* entered the Gulf of Suez, when the wind went round to the north and the air grew much cooler. At Suez the passengers were to disembark for their railway journey across the desert ; and here Guy and Mrs. Stewart were to say good-bye, as she was going to England by sea while Guy was going overland by Brindisi.

The night before they landed Guy was leaning against the rail after dinner, smoking a cigarette with a couple of other men, when young Jenkinson strolled up to them. He had drunk as much wine as was good for him, and was inclined to be familiar. There was something in Guy's manner, pleasant as it was, which did not encourage familiarity from a man he did not fancy, and he did not at all fancy Jenkinson, whom he had seen 'sniggering' once or twice when he had been with Mrs. Stewart. Guy had not kept away from Mrs. Stewart in consequence, but he had treated Jenkinson with very decided coldness. To-night, however, Jenkinson was emboldened by wine, and by the fact that the other two men were well known to him.

It happened that at this moment Mrs. Stewart came up from below, and stepping out on the other side of the ship, passed along the deck to her chair. They could see her plainly in the lamplight, with her black dress and graceful walk. One of the men said, 'What a pretty little woman that is.'

Jenkinson broke into a laugh. 'So Langley seems to think,' he said pointedly. His manner, and a laugh from one of the others, filled Guy with a sudden irritation.

'What do you mean ?' he asked.

If there had been light enough to see his eyes, Jenkinson would have understood that he had better not go much further ; but he did not see, and Guy's tone was quiet. 'Well, it seems to me you have been going it rather strong with that young woman. It's a good thing we are breaking up to-morrow, or we should have the skipper interfering. They are rather particular on board ship. No kissing allowed after lights out.'

One of the other men laughed again, in a doubtful way. Guy was boiling over with wrath, and his answer was young and violent. 'Look here, Jenkinson,' he said, with a voice which was not

quite steady, 'I suppose you can't help being a cad, but you can help telling lies, and if you say another word about Mrs. Stewart, you will get the biggest hiding you ever had in your life. I daresay it won't be the first. Oh, don't begin that,' he went on, straightening himself swiftly, as Jenkinson seemed inclined to resent the threat, 'or, by George, you shall have it now.'

It was a very unpleasant moment for all concerned, but happily Jenkinson took the insult more quietly than might have been expected, and after a few angry words he sheered off. What is a man to do when he is in the wrong and too weak to fight with any hope of success? 'Serve him right,' one of the men said. 'He ought to be well kicked ;' and the other cordially agreed.

Guy walked away to the stern and lit another cigarette, and sat down on the low woodwork by the wheel. He felt rather upset by the row, now it was over. 'By Jove, I'm well out of that !' he thought. 'What an ass I was ! But the little beast deserved it.' Then there came across him a doubt whether Mrs. Stewart's society had not, in fact, become a little too pleasant to him. He could not altogether deny it when he put the question to himself, but he excused himself readily. 'She's a dear little woman,' he thought, 'and I can't help being taken by her ; but I have never said a word to her that I might not have said to Evie ; and she's as good as gold, poor little thing.' So she was ; and he had treated her with the most perfect respect ; but, nevertheless, he was conscious that she had for him a certain fascination. It was, he knew, an evanescent emotion of the senses ; a week hence he would have forgotten it. Nevertheless, he felt a pang at the idea of saying good-bye to her ; and though he would not admit for a moment that he loved Helen any the less truly, he recognised that he would not have liked Helen to feel towards any other man as he felt towards Mrs. Stewart. 'But women are different,' he reflected, 'and I shall never see her after to-morrow,' and he went over and sat down by her side. He could no more help loving a pretty face or a graceful manner than he could help having brown hair. His was a dangerous temperament ; the chivalrous temperament that means well, and is full of good and tender feeling, overlying warm passions. A mere brute is not half so dangerous.

Next day they parted. Guy missed her badly during the three days' voyage in a fresh vessel across the Mediterranean. It was rough and cold and squally, and he had no friends, and wished himself back again on the *Indus*. She missed him too ;

but, as he had observed, women are different. 'How good he was to me,' she thought, 'and to May. I hope he'll be happy. I'm sure he deserves to be.'

Mrs. Stewart was no longer a living memory to Guy when he stepped out at the Wrentham station a few days later. She had taken her place, as he had known she would do, among the sweet-faced phantoms of the past. He would have said she was a dear little woman still, but he would not have walked five miles out of his way to see her.

Guy had sent a telegram in advance from Dover, and he found the dog-cart awaiting him. How extraordinary it seemed to be back again, with everything just the same as if he had never left England. He could hardly believe that nine months had passed. There was the little quiet country station, with no passenger but himself on the platform after the train had disappeared round the corner, between the high banks. The two ruddy young porters, whose faces he knew so well, touched their caps to him as if he had been up to town for a week; and when he gave one of them his ticket and walked out through the booking-office, there were Charles and the mare standing in the evening sun, as if they had been there ever since. He could remember even the feel of the step as he got down last year; it seemed like yesterday. We get accustomed to the feeling as we grow older—get reconciled to the sense of our own nothingness; but to the young it is a source of ever-recurring wonder, almost of resentment, to find how little nature seems to care for the events of their lives.

'Well, Charles,' Guy said; 'here I am again. I told you I should not be long. How are you?'

'Very well, sir, thank you.'

'The mare's looking very fit. She has filled out a bit since I left.'

'Yes, sir; she is doing nicely.'

'Where is the luggage-cart?'

'Just coming round the corner now, sir. The train was almost before time.'

'All right. Then we need not bring anything with us,' and he got up and took over the reins.

As he drove down the old road, the feeling of surprise at the want of change in everything about him haunted him still. He was almost silent as he drove along. The mare had got steadier since he left, and trotted out quietly and fast. This was a

change, but it only made him notice the sameness of other things. It was early summer now instead of autumn, but he knew the very trees, and almost the very flowers by the roadside. There was the little oak in the hedgerow, with the ivy-covered stem, in which he had caught sight of a wren's nest last year as he drove past; he thought he could see the little round hole now. There was the old clump of ragged-robin in the tangle at the corner by Rudge's farm, and the yellow bird's-foot along the grassy bottom of the hedge; and there was Wrentham, dear old place. Ah! it was pleasant to be at home again.

Guy had nothing in his heart but happiness and goodwill when he jumped down from the dog-cart and walked into the hall. The doors were all open, and the summer air was playing through them. He walked on into the drawing-room, which was empty, and out upon the gravel walk at the back.

As he came out he heard Evie's voice. 'There he is. Guy! Guy!' and he looked down the sloping lawn to his left and saw them all there together—his father and mother and the two girls gathered round a little tea-table under a spreading cedar. Evie came running up the smooth grass, and he walked down to meet her; and then the rest of them gathered about him, and there was joy and love in every one's eyes, and all was forgotten except that he was at home again.

They sat there until near dinner-time, telling Guy all the news. Harry was away yachting. They had written to his address in town to tell him Guy was coming, but they had received no answer and did not know where he was. Ro was coming in a day or two; he was getting on splendidly at college, and every one said he rowed so well that he was sure to be in the University boat some day. And Mr. Ridsdale, the curate, had gone over to Rome. 'By Jove! Poor old Bar,' Guy said, and Barbara answered with a look of silent scorn. And they had had a lovely three weeks in town; and the Academy was not worth seeing; and so on, and so on.

And about them was the sweet English evening, and the blackbirds whistled slowly in the beech trees by the stream, and the thrushes sang their rich repeated songs, and all was soft and warm and exquisite. We know it who have had to live in exile. There is nothing on earth,—nothing—to be compared to an English spring and summer. You tire of it,—you to whom has been given the infinite blessing of spending, if you will, your lives on English soil. Some of you see more beauty in the coarse

an Italian sky, and bring yourselves to think, or say, that a bare sun-beaten hill, dotted with little shimmering olives, is lovelier than a grassy English knoll shaded by great English beeches or oaks. Some of you are even so blinded by love of variety, which you call artistic feeling, as to say that the Italian and the Greek are more beautiful than the Englishwoman, whose beauty is as immeasurably above theirs as light is above darkness. May Heaven forgive you! But it was always the same: 'Farewell, Monsieur Traveller: look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.' How well he knew you, three hundred years ago!

The Langleys came out again after dinner and sat listening to the birds and enjoying the long twilight; and when the big bell rang for prayers Guy was sitting on the grass, in his old way, at his mother's feet. For that evening, at all events, it was Pax, and he would not show any sign of change. He was, indeed, very glad to find himself received as if nothing had happened. His mother would hear him lovingly, and all would go well. India seemed to have faded away. It was Maya,—a delusion and a dream; this was the real life.

Guy went to sleep quickly that night, and Lady Mary lay awake thinking. When she got up next morning she saw her way clear before her. Partly from accident and affection for Guy, partly from calculation, she had come to the conclusion that she would say nothing to him about Helen Treveryan. It would, she felt, be both easier and wiser to treat the affair as ended,—to assume, in spite of his warning, that his coming home meant acquiescence in her wishes, and to leave the initiative to him. There should be no recriminations on her part. She would be very loving and gentle, and would make things as pleasant as possible to him, and let home influence soak in. Everything about them would work for her and against that wretched girl. In the meantime, Guy would be constantly thrown into the society of Clara Schneider. Lady Mary's instinct was not at fault. She was a clever woman, and could make excellent strategical dispositions. Where she failed was in temper and patience. Like Lord Gough at Chillianwallah, a round shot or two dropped into her ranks invariably 'drew' her, and made her lose sight of her plans.

However, for the present, Lady Mary was manœuvring coolly

and steadily, intending to work round the enemy's flank, and perhaps dislodge him altogether without firing a shot. Guy made no counter-move. He had a glimmering suspicion of her object, but he felt confident in his own position, and he shrank from an attack. His indolence and dislike of mental conflict made him do so ; and his keen enjoyment of all that was pleasant and beautiful strengthened his reluctance. There was no hurry, he thought, and it was all so delightful. Instead of the howling hot wind and the sun and the dust, there was the cool green English summer with its birds and its flowers. Everything in England was so luxurious too, so finished. From the trim hedges and fields and velvety lawns to the perfectly-furnished rooms, all spoke of the loving care of successive generations. Everything in India was so rough in comparison. There Englishmen were an army in camp. No one could hope to remain in the same house more than a few years. The taste of an individual might throw a momentary charm over a barrack-like bungalow or a hastily raised flower-garden, but the next occupant might neglect the garden and furnish only one room of the house, and in a year everything would have fallen into decay, like Eastern buildings and things in general. The contrast struck Guy very strongly. He could rough it, and he could see the picturesque side of Indian life ; but the comfort and luxurious beauty born of wealth and time and quietness were a real delight to him.

He spent his morning wandering over the stables and the grounds with the girls and his mother. In the afternoon they all went to the Schneiders for tennis, and the drive was beautiful ; and every one was glad to see him, and Clara Schneider looked quite pretty with her heightened colour and bright eyes. When they came back they dined by the open windows ; and after dinner Guy went out with his mother, and they strolled down the lawn to the stream. They stood leaning over the little wooden bridge, and chatted, and watched the water-rats playing under the bank, until the long twilight closed in. Nothing was said by mother or son to mar the peace of a happy day.

So it went on for two or three days longer. They seemed to have completely forgotten Helen Treveryan, who was waiting alone in the pine-clad mountains, trying hard to be patient and not to doubt, but wondering sadly at times whether her lover would ever come back to her. If he did not ? Well, it would be very dreadful ; but so long as it was for his happiness she bear it.

CHAPTER XXI

A DRAWN GAME

It was Roland who brought matters to a head. Roland was always putting his foot in it. He duly arrived two or three days after Guy, looking sensibly bigger about the chest and less boyish. Oxford evidently agreed with him.

That night, after the family circle broke up, the two brothers met in the smoking-room and had a quiet hour over their tobacco. Roland was going to colour a new meerschaum. He lit it carefully with a fusee, to avoid burning the edge, and held it scrupulously by the amber to avoid touching the bowl, which was just tinted with a faint primrose colour. Guy lighted a cigar, and then sat back in an easy chair, and started Roland with a question or two. The boy was always ready to talk about Oxford, and he went on merrily for some time, only interrupting himself at intervals to worship the sacred pipe. Owing to a very high meerschaum plug it only lasted a few minutes; and it could not be smoked again till it was cool, lest the colour should burn. The pleasures Roland got out of it were the pleasures of hope rather than those of fruition. How young Roland was, Guy thought; but he could remember when he had done just the same thing. This was not improbable, as it was only three or four years before. Roland did not think himself young. On the contrary, he was a man among other men; and he was just a little inclined to look with diminished reverence upon Guy, who was supposed to have followed Harry's example and 'made an ass of himself about a woman.'

After a time, emboldened by his own conversation, and by Guy's good humour and abstention from chaff, Roland was im-

prudent enough to introduce that delicate subject. 'By the way, old chap,' he said, 'the mother seems quite happy again, so I suppose you have got out of that business all right?'

Guy was taken by surprise. He coloured hotly, and his face showed extreme annoyance. He objected altogether to Roland's interference in the matter; and he resented the rather patronising tone in which the question was put. 'Got out of what business?' he said.

Roland began to feel embarrassed, and laughed uneasily. 'Oh, I meant, you know, about the lovely young woman in India.'

'I don't know why you should suppose anything of the kind,' Guy said, in a rather lofty tone. 'I am not in the habit of changing my mind in those matters, and the affair is exactly where it was before.'

'Oh, I am awfully sorry,' Roland answered, floundering heavily; 'I did not know it was really a serious business. I thought from the mother's being so chirpy that it was all over. I am very sorry I said anything about it.'

For a minute Guy was silent. Roland's words had irritated him and aroused his pride or his vanity. He felt angry with his mother for treating him like a child, and a little vexed with himself at finding that he had been so easily influenced. Then he thought of Helen, and what a shame it was on her account. Anyhow, it was impossible that he could acquiesce and drop the whole thing without a word. For the sake of his own self-respect he must make a fight of it even if he were going to give in eventually; and he was not going to give in eventually. Before he had got his thoughts quite clear he broke out into a rather vehement protest against the way in which he had been treated, and against the part which his mother expected him to play. 'If she thinks it is all over,' he said, 'she is very much mistaken. I have said nothing about it, because so long as I am not attacked I don't want to be disagreeable; but I feel exactly as I did before, and I am not going to be forced into doing what is dishonourable.'

'Dishonourable?' Roland answered; 'I did not know there was anything of that sort.'

'Well, wouldn't it be dishonourable to give a girl up if you had proposed to her and she cared for you? And besides, I don't want to give her up. You don't know what she is, or you would understand.' And Guy's objection to being thought capable of having made a mistake, and his love for Helen, com-

bined to give him an eloquence which surprised both Roland and himself. He described in glowing terms her beauty and her goodness, and the merits and services of her father, and the honour in which both of them were held. Guy spoke well when he was roused, and he spoke admirably then.

Roland, with his simple, straightforward nature, was quite carried away by his brother's warmth and chivalrous feeling. He was specially moved by Guy's description of the way in which Helen had refused to sacrifice his future, and had finally sent him to England. 'By George! that was splendid of her,' Roland said, his honest young eyes bright with enthusiasm. 'I am awfully sorry I ever thought badly of her; but I did not know all that. Mother had some story about her going on tremendously with that fellow Pitt Wright who was staying with them, and of course I thought she knew all about it.'

This was a sore point with Guy, and he lashed out savagely about Pitt Wright. When he had finished his story, Roland was quite overcome. 'What a mean brute!' he exclaimed; 'I shouldn't have thought a man could be such a cad as that. He was at Eton, too, and Oxford.' Then he went on to confess his repentance and complete conversion. He begged Guy to speak to his mother at once. Of course she would understand, and would withdraw all her objections. No one could help seeing that Guy was perfectly right. It was only that they did not know the facts and had been told what was not true. There could not be two opinions about it. As to money, it seemed to him that Guy would have plenty; and even supposing, for the sake of argument, that everything went wrong, did Guy suppose for a moment that any of them would touch his share? Of course he was right to stick to Helen, and Roland would be proud to feel she was his sister. Guy might count upon him, whatever happened. He never suspected that even then Guy was wondering a little at the rapidity of his enthusiasm. Guy certainly seemed, and was, pleased at it; and when at last they had finished their talk, he took his brother into his own room and showed him Helen's photograph. Roland looked at it for a minute and gave it back. 'Just the sort of face I should have expected,' he said; 'I don't wonder at your sticking to her against all the world. Give her my love and tell her I long to know her.'

When Roland left the room, Guy stood looking at the photograph and thinking over the conversation. 'What a good boy

Ro is,' he said to himself. 'He would back one through thick and thin.'

Next morning, before breakfast, Roland saw his mother walk out alone on to the gravel among the flower-beds. He finished his dressing quickly and joined her. 'Good morning, mother.'

'Good morning, Ro.'

'I am glad I found you, mother; I wanted a chance of speaking to you. We've been all wrong about Guy and Miss Treveryan.'

Lady Mary looked at him with surprise and contempt. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, I have been talking to Guy, mother. She seems to have behaved awfully well, and she is awfully pretty, too, and Guy is really fond of her. I am certain he will stick to her, whatever happens.'

This was just the way to rouse Lady Mary. 'We will see about that,' she said. 'In any case, you had better let Guy speak for himself. You cannot possibly know anything about it except what he has told you, and he was not likely to think her anything but "awfully pretty."'

Ro felt rebuffed. 'All right, mother,' he answered humbly. 'Of course it is not my business. I only thought you would like to know. I am certain he did mean it.'

'I daresay. We shall see,' Lady Mary said again, and she walked in through the dining-room window. Her manner to Roland was sometimes very insolent, if such a word is applicable to a mother.

Soon afterwards the ball opened.

Guy came in to breakfast rather late, and seemed out of spirits. He spoke little and ate little, and looked preoccupied. After breakfast he smoked a cigarette outside with Roland and the girls, but Lady Mary had hardly finished a short interview with her housekeeper before he tapped at the door of her writing-room. She knew his step, and was ready for him. 'Well,' she said, looking up with a smile, 'what do you want with me? You look as if your business was very serious.'

'So it is, mother,' he said, and he came up near her table and leant back against the chimneypiece. 'Can you spare me a few minutes?'

'Of course, dear, as many as you like. What is it?'

'I wanted to speak to you about . . . your letters.'

'Yes?'

‘Well, mother, I only wanted to say that I cannot think any differently about it all. I am awfully fond of Helen, and I cannot see any reason why we should not be married.’

Lady Mary had profited by Roland’s warning. She had determined to keep her temper under control, and to play the game steadily. She got up and came over to Guy’s side and laid her hand on his shoulder. ‘My boy,’ she said, ‘do you think I don’t feel for you? Do you think I would say a word against this wish of yours except for your own sake?’

‘I know, mother; I am sure you don’t mean to be unkind; but really, you don’t know how things stand. You think Helen is like Harry’s wife, but she is not in the least. She is a perfect lady, and as good as she is pretty. It was she who made me come home now. She absolutely refused to marry me unless I did.’

This was not pleasant for Lady Mary to hear; and though she suppressed with an effort the look of anger which came into her face, she did not attempt to suppress the feeling at her heart. With the inconsistency engendered by a prejudice such as hers she thought it obvious that Helen’s object in urging Guy to go home, if she really had done so, was to make sure of the money. Yet she believed the girl would have jumped at Guy, money or no money. Was he not a Langley of Wrentham, and was he not Guy? However, her answer showed no trace of her annoyance. ‘I daresay, dear. She may be everything that is nice, but is not that all the more reason for you to do nothing imprudent? If anything happened to her father, would you not be very badly off with four hundred a year?’

‘Yes, I suppose we should; but I don’t believe she would mind.’

‘If she did not mind for herself, surely she would mind for your sake? If she is a good woman, and really cares for you, it would make her very unhappy to think that she had brought you to poverty. The better she is, the more unhappy she would be. And you should think of her too.’

There was a flaw in the argument somewhere, but it had force; and Guy did not answer at once. Lady Mary saw she was making way, and she pressed her advantage. ‘Remember, dear, that whenever Colonel Treveryan dies she will be left with nothing. He tells you so himself; and he cannot live for ever.’

‘He might live longer than either of us.’

‘No doubt he might; but it is not likely, is it?’

Guy felt he was getting the worst of the argument. ‘Well,

mother,' he said, 'supposing he did die, we should not starve after all. We could get along, in India, at all events.'

'Possibly; I don't know. But your regiment won't be in India more than a few years.'

'No, but I could exchange and stay out there. Some fellows do.'

Lady Mary was startled, and showed it. Guy saw the look in her eyes, and knew he had got in over her guard and touched her. 'Surely,' she said, 'you would never think of doing that?'

'Why not, mother? India is a very good place in its way; lots of sport and soldiering. For a poor man I fancy it is about the best thing to do.'

Lady Mary could only fall back on her former argument. 'I am quite sure that if Miss Treveryan is all you think her, she would be horrified at the idea of dooming you to spend your whole life in India.'

'I don't know, mother. Her father has done it, and she is quite ready to do it herself.'

'That's a different thing altogether.'

'I don't see how.'

Lady Mary was beginning to lose patience. 'My dear boy,' she said, 'if you can't see it, I can,—very clearly. They are Indian people, and naturally like the country. To you it would be exile for life.'

'They are no more Indian than I am, mother. It is just as much exile to them as it would be to me. Colonel Treveryan went out in the service just as I have done.'

This was getting intolerable. 'It is no use arguing, Guy,' she said. 'I am sure your father would never consent to go on giving you your allowance in order to help you to banish yourself for life.'

Lady Mary's tone roused Guy. He did not like being threatened. 'Very well, mother. It is no use my saying any more. I daresay we could get on in India with two hundred a year, and besides Colonel Treveryan won't die yet.'

There the matter ended for the time. A few more words were spoken, and then a servant knocked at the door, and Guy took the opportunity to leave the room. Lady Mary had held her ground and repulsed the attack; but Guy felt that the idea of his staying in India had shaken her. On the whole, the fight had been pretty even. Both the combatants drew off with a feeling that for the present they had had enough of it, and with a disinclination

to come to close quarters again unless obliged. As they cooled down, this disinclination grew stronger. Guy was glad enough to delude himself with the idea that what he had said would gradually come home to his mother's mind. He wanted to enjoy in peace all the pleasant things around him. He was even a little inclined to resent Roland's enthusiasm in the cause ; and the boy returned to college a day or two later puzzled and somewhat discomfited by his brother's change of manner. Lady Mary, on her side, after much serious thought, resolved to adhere to her original plan. She was more impatient than Guy, and found it harder not to force another fight ; but as she saw how thoroughly he was enjoying himself, her mind was quieted. His resolution would melt away gradually under the influence of his surroundings.

Guy was, in fact, curiously content. He never seemed bored by the slowness of the life. Once he went up to town to see his tailor and so on, but to her surprise he came back two days later in the best of spirits, and appeared to be perfectly happy, reading, and wandering about the grounds and stables, and going out for rides with his father and the girls, or driving with her. Even a few weeks of hot weather in India had made him appreciate in some measure the pleasures of an English summer. He was always contrasting the two, much to Lady Mary's satisfaction. Once or twice he played cricket, and made some runs, which pleased him ; and they had some tennis-parties, when he managed everything admirably, and was most cheery and useful. All this time the sore subject was avoided as completely as if Helen Treveryan had never troubled their peace of mind. Now and then each knew that the other was thinking about her, but nothing was said. As to the girls, they really came to forget that such a person existed ; and Charles Langley was glad to leave the matter to his wife. It was characteristic both of him and of Guy that Helen's name was never even mentioned between them.

Meanwhile Lady Mary hoped, and was inclined to believe, that the constant presence of Clara Schneider was beginning to have its effect. Oddly enough, she had found Mrs. Schneider quite ready to fall in with her views on this subject. Clara might have looked higher, and her mother knew it well enough ; but though the old lady was a parvenu and a snob, she had a warm heart. She wept bitter tears in secret when Clara gently but decidedly refused young Lord Faughaballagh, with his impudent handsome face and his Irish peerage ;

but when she realised that her daughter really loved Guy Langley she never attempted to force her inclinations. They gave one or two smart parties in their big house in London, and then they came quietly down to Warwickshire. Clara was told plainly enough what the reason was ; but Clara had not much pride, and she was in love.

Guy seemed quite prepared to play into their hands. Clara and he had always been good friends, and a man likes to be appreciated. Moreover, in the short time since he had left England Clara had improved. She had fined down a good deal and got more expression, and she was beautifully dressed. Her manner had always been gentle and pleasant ; it was gentle and pleasant still, very pleasant. There was nothing effusive about her, but she evidently liked and admired Guy, and she let him see it. When he came near her her face lighted up, and the colour came into it. Sometimes, when her eyes were bright and her manner animated, she looked really pretty. By the side of Helen Treveryan she would not have been noticed, but she was by no means a disagreeable companion when Helen was not to be had.

There could, in fact, be no doubt about it that Guy flirted with her shamefully. He did not go much out of his way to seek her, but there was no necessity for that. In one way or another they were constantly thrown together. Every one combined with this object, and as Clara was on intimate terms with Barbara and Evelyn, the matter was easy enough. Guy did it with his eyes open too. He knew perfectly well now what his mother wanted, and he felt pretty sure of Clara's feelings. Yet he did not avoid her, either for Helen's sake, or for the sake of Clara herself. He could not seem cold to a woman if she liked him. It was painful to him to inflict the momentary humiliation, even though it might be a duty to do so, and a kindness in the end.

He persuaded himself that he meant no treason to Helen ; on the contrary, he wrote and told her he was flirting desperately right and left, which hurt her, though he laughed about it, and gave her to understand that he was doing so in order to carry out her wishes to the utmost, and to convince his mother the more decisively in the end. 'But, my own darling,' he wrote, 'it is hard work sometimes when the thought of your face comes before me. I have to force it away before I can be decently civil to any one else. And it is always coming, night and day, wherever I am. Sometimes I am sure I must say the most extraordinary

things, for I wake up to find myself talking fluently, when I have been thinking of nothing but you and longing to be with you. Oh, when will they understand! It seems as if the term of probation you inflicted upon me would never end.'

Certainly Guy did not take the obvious means of making them understand. He occasionally spoke to his sisters about Clara in a way which was intended to show them that he did not care for her; but he behaved very much as if he did, and the girls hoped for the best; so did Lady Mary, who never dreamt that she was tempting her son to do a dishonourable thing, or reproached herself or him in any way. The more he committed himself, the better she was pleased. What did anything else matter so long as Guy got the money? He might not be really in love with Clara; he might even be in love with another woman, but those were trifles. And the other woman? Well, that was her own affair. She was an Indian pirate, who deserved no quarter or pity.

At last, about a week before Guy's leave was up, Lady Mary could control herself no longer. They had all been over to the Schneiders' to lunch, and had spent an idle afternoon wandering about the grounds, and seeing some improvements which were being effected. Guy had been interested in it all, and in Clara's conversation. He liked her simple way with her people,—the gardeners and the workmen; and he had been rather impressed with her capacity and taste. She was very happy in his company, and was looking her best.

Lady Mary had driven Guy over in her pony-carriage, his father and the girls riding. When they got into the pony-carriage again, Guy was very cheerful and talkative. He was telling his mother about some of the new shrubberies and walks that Clara had designed, and what his advice had been. 'Of course it is not like coming in for an old place,' he said; 'but still it must be very jolly to have a free hand and lots of money, and be able to do just what you please. One could make it wonderfully pretty. She will, too, I expect, if the old lady lets her alone. She has uncommonly good taste, and is much cleverer than one gives her credit for being. It is her nervous manner, I suppose.'

'Yes. She does not do herself justice. She is too diffident. But she is a dear girl, and has a great deal of character.'

'I daresay she has. It's a nice manner, too. She talks like a lady, and has none of her mother's vulgarity.'

'My dear boy, there is no vulgarity about Mrs. Schneider.

She comes of a very good family indeed. I think she is charming,—so warm-hearted and honest.'

'Yes, I daresay, mother, but you know what I mean. She need not trot out the whole peerage whenever she meets you. Clara's a cut above her somehow.'

'Well, Clara certainly has very nice ways; and she is as good as she seems. He will be a lucky man who gets her. It is not often one sees a girl with that money so thoroughly unspoilt.'

'No, I suppose not.'

There was a moment's silence, and then Lady Mary gave way to the temptation. 'Why don't you try to get her, Guy? I think I know what her answer would be if you asked her.'

'I, mother? You forget.'

'What do you mean? Surely you are not still worrying yourself about that old affair?'

'I am not worrying myself, mother, but of course I am not free.'

Lady Mary caught at the word. 'Not free? Why not? You are not bound. You told me so yourself.'

'No, I am not exactly bound, but . . .'

'Then no one could blame you.'

'I don't suppose any one would blame me, mother. I was not thinking of that.'

At the same time he remembered that he had been blamed already. He allowed himself to be diverted into that train of thought, and it annoyed him. 'All the same,' he added, 'I think Colonel Treveryan did blame me before.'

'What for?'

'Well, for proposing before I knew I could afford to marry. He was not very pleasant about it.'

'Mercenary wretch,' Lady Mary thought, but she did not say so. Indeed, she did not quite know what to say. She could not say Guy had been blameless in proposing without consulting her; yet she resented his being blamed by others. 'That is all the more reason,' she said. 'If he did that, he certainly could not blame you now for not proposing when you know you can't afford it.'

Then Guy got on the right line again. He said it was after all not a question of blame. He was fond of Helen, and had asked her to be his wife, and he could not marry any one else. But he spoke without fire, and Lady Mary pressed him to promise that he would think it over. He resisted, but eventually, in his

indolent dilatory way, he closed the discussion by giving the required promise. He was not inclined to go on fighting that day ; it was a nuisance. 'Very well, mother,' he said. 'It's not the slightest use ; but I will think it over if you wish it.'

'That is a dear boy,' she answered ; and already she felt that success was within her grasp. He was beginning to give way ; this was merely a demonstration to cover his retreat. For the rest of the drive she spoke of other matters, and was very affectionate. Helen's name was not again brought forward.

The remaining week passed rapidly away, and Guy had only one more day at home, but still he had made no sign. Lady Mary was getting impatient. Nevertheless she was hopeful enough. Since their conversation Guy had twice met the Schneiders, and had been very attentive to Clara, who looked happy. To-day would probably settle the question, if it were not settled already. The Schneiders were coming over to lunch, and he would have another chance.

Everything fell out as Lady Mary intended. Her husband was away at a Conservative meeting, which bored him greatly. The day was fine, and after lunch they all strolled out upon the lawn. The ladies, old and young, were disposed to favour any arrangement which would leave Guy and Clara alone ; and as Guy had no objection, though he perfectly understood his mother's manoeuvres, the two soon found themselves on the sloping grass near the stream, out of sight of every one.

It was a perfect summer afternoon in the end of July. The air was still and balmy, and the sun bright. The stream murmured softly between its grassy banks, making sweet music with the enamelled stones. Close by, in a little nook among the trees, was a seat where Guy used often to come and sit, reading and smoking. He knew very well that he had no business to be behaving as he was. He even recognised the fact that it was rather a dangerous game. But Clara was looking bright and pretty in her perfectly-fitting dress ; and he was young and hot of blood, and the day was made for love. His voice and his eyes had a significant softness in them as he spoke to her. 'Let's sit here a little. It is such a delicious day, and you must be tired of walking.'

Clara sat down willingly enough. She was not tired : she thought she could have walked by his side for ever ; but this was better still. Surely it was coming now, what she had longed for. He had been so tender and good to her lately, as if he cared for

her. Her heart was beating wildly, and her hands were trembling. Poor little woman! He did not realise to the full what it was to her, and besides, he did not mean to go much further; but one cannot always stop just where one likes.

'Ah!' he said with a sigh as he sat down, 'this is perfect.' There was a moment's silence, and then he went on calmly: 'How delicious the sound of running water is.'

She did not answer, and he sat looking out before him, and slowly repeated a verse of Lermontoff's:

'When dark and cool within the hollow places,
Among the worn wet stones the waters murmur low,
And through their dreamy song my fancy traces
Some strange old saga borne from lands left long ago.'

Then he roused himself and laughed. 'Only the stream comes straight from the dam up there, and I don't suppose it is five miles long, all told. What an absurd little country England is. There are a lot of pike in the lake above the dam, and there are some trout in the stream. When I was a bad little boy I used sometimes to shoot them under the bank. Even if you miss them they get stunned or something, and float up as often as not.'

Clara said 'Really?' but she did not seem interested. Her heart was beating more steadily now, but her relief was mingled with disappointment. She was not inclined to talk about fishes. The next moment Guy set her off again. 'Oh dear,' he said; 'it is very dreadful to think that I have to leave the old place to-morrow.' He looked at her, and she flushed a little, but she said nothing. 'Don't you think it's very hard lines, Miss Schneider?'

'Yes, very.'

'Aren't you sorry for me?'

She was pained by his tone, which was only half serious. 'I don't think you are very sorry yourself, really.'

'Oh, what a shame!' he said, looking up in her face and making her colour again. 'Do you think it is pleasant leaving all my people, and—and you?'

'I don't know,' she answered rather feebly; 'I suppose not.'

She was looking pretty now, with her eyes down and the blood bright in her cheek and neck. Even then Guy noticed with disapproval the short colourless lashes, but he could not resist going on. 'You know it is not,' he said; 'and I think you are sorry

for me.' She did not answer. 'Are you a little bit sorry on your own account? Shall you miss me just a little at first?'

It was a cruel shame, and he felt it directly he had spoken. Clara's face was very pathetic as she raised it. Her eyes were full, and her lips were trembling, but she tried to smile. 'Perhaps, a little, just at first,' she said, and dropped her eyes again.

Then Guy did what a good many men would have done who had got so far. 'Dear little woman,' he said, and drew her to him, and kissed her. And she hid her face on his shoulder and let his lips wander at will.

Before another word had been spoken, Guy and Clara were startled by the sound of voices, and through their leafy screen they saw Lady Mary and Mrs. Schneider strolling towards them along the path. The two ladies desired nothing less than to interrupt such an interview. They would have been only too delighted to know it was going on, and would have avoided the place as if it had been a dissenting chapel. But Fate was too strong for them, and as they approached the seat Guy and Clara got up and spoke. Lady Mary's first feeling was one of intense vexation; then after a searching glance at the young people her vexation gave way to a confident hope. Guy was steady enough. It was not the first time he had kissed a pretty girl; and if you had given him the chance he would probably have told you he sincerely hoped it might not be the last. But Clara was blushing crimson, and in spite of her embarrassment there was in her eyes a radiant joy which was new to them. Both the mothers understood, or thought they understood. They would have left the young people again, but Guy began talking volubly to Mrs. Schneider, and Lady Mary and Clara walked after them. Lady Mary let them get some paces ahead, and then she laid her hand on Clara's arm, and said with a smile, 'You look very guilty to-day; what have you been doing?' Clara blushed again; then she took in her own the hand that was touching her.

'I am very happy,' she said, looking at Lady Mary.

'I am so glad, so very glad. Guy has spoken to you?'

Clara hesitated. 'I think he cares for me,' she said at last; 'but, please, don't ask me any more just now. I ought not to say anything.'

Lady Mary looked a little disappointed, but she only said, 'Very well, dear,' and they began to talk of other things.

The Schneiders went away soon afterwards, and the parting between Guy and Clara was ordinary and formal. He might

have secured another opportunity, but he did not accept his chance. She did not quite understand ; but she thought he would come or write to her, and she shook hands with him cheerfully. And he held her hand for a second and looked in her eyes, and said, 'Good-bye. *Auf widersehen.*'

Guy knew he was 'in for it' when his mother asked him to come into the garden after their departure. Directly they were alone, she turned upon him with an inquiring face. 'Well, Guy?'

'What, mother?'

'Have you nothing to tell me?'

Guy looked uncomfortable. 'Not much,' he said.

She waited a little in hopes that he would say more, and then went on : 'My boy, you know how anxious I am about you. I was in hopes that something had happened to-day which would have made me very happy.'

Guy was looking away and digging holes in the grass with his stick.

'Didn't you speak to Clara?' Lady Mary said at last, desperately.

'Do you mean, propose to her?'

'Yes.'

'No, mother. I didn't propose to her.'

'Surely, Guy, you said something that made her think you cared for her? I am sure she did think so.'

Guy felt annoyed with poor Clara, but on reflection he had honesty enough to admit that the fault was his. 'Well, mother,' he said at last, 'I am afraid I have made an awful mess of it. I expect I have let her think something of the kind.'

'Oh ! I am so glad. I cannot tell you how glad I am. God bless you, my boy.'

'But, mother, you forget.'

'No, Guy, I forget nothing ; but I am certain this is for your real happiness ; and I know that now your honour is concerned you will never hesitate again.'

Guy winced. 'My honour, mother? If that is concerned at all, it is the other way.'

'No, it is not. Miss Treveryan deliberately set you free, and you are in no way bound to her. You are bound to Clara if you have let her believe you cared for her.'

Guy was not deceived ; but it was not easy to answer at once. He was beginning to realise that there are some situations from

which one can only escape *relictâ non bene parmula*, leaving one's honour behind. For the moment Guy was rescued from further trouble by the arrival of his father, who appeared out of the drawing-room window.

The evening that followed was not so sad as the one which preceded Guy's first departure for India. They had all got accustomed to the idea now, and they had seen Guy come back in a few months. Moreover, they were deeply interested and excited about the game that was being played. It was different altogether.

At bedtime Lady Mary asked Guy to come to her after his cigar; and when she had him alone she pressed him very hard. She felt that the decisive moment had arrived, and she attacked with fiery impetuosity from the position she had manœuvred to attain. She tried entreaties and appeals to his love for her, then appeals to his honour, and anger and threats, doing her utmost to force him to clinch matters there and then by writing to Clara Schneider. 'If you do not,' she said, 'I can never look them in the face again. It will be an intolerable disgrace. I shall feel that we have betrayed our best friends, and in our own house.'

She seemed on the point of succeeding, but still Guy would not quite surrender. Now and then he gave ground, but with the lazy tenacity which characterised him he still refused to write; he would not be rushed. His very indolence helped him; putting all else aside, he really could not sit down at that time of night, when he wanted to go to bed, and write a proposal. Moreover, he was not going to be overlooked like a child; it was too much altogether.

At last Lady Mary was forced to give up in despair. Nevertheless, Guy had suffered in the conflict. His mother had brought him to admit that Helen had left him perfectly free, and that he had committed himself with Clara, and that he would be behaving badly to her if he did not come forward now. He had also been brought to see the pleasantness of becoming master of Clara's wealth. Though he did not surrender he was badly shaken, and his last words to his mother were full of doubt. 'I will try to see it, mother, but don't press me any more just now. I really feel completely stumped about it all; and anyhow,' he added, with a rather hard laugh, "'it's as well to be off with the old love before you're on with the new.'" He certainly had a 'damnable iteration.'

Once away from his mother, he put off the question till the morrow and went to sleep. He had still a day in London, and need not decide till then.

The next morning Guy went off. His mother was engrossed by her plan, and she could speak of nothing else. Her last words were: 'Do be a dear boy, and make my heart happy by writing before you leave England, and then come back directly you can get leave and be married.'

'I will see, mother,' was all he could answer, and he kissed her and begged her not to worry about it, and was gone.

That morning after breakfast Lady Mary discussed the whole question with her husband. She spoke very confidently. Though she could not assert that her success had been complete, she felt and insisted that it had been very considerable. The question was no longer whether they would help him to marry Helen Treveryan. Guy, she said, had practically made no attempt to shake the resolution she had intimated to him. He was now convinced that they would never agree to that marriage, and he had evidently recognised the imprudence of it. Finally, he was committed by his behaviour to Clara Schneider. All would go well. To clinch matters, Lady Mary now wanted her husband to write to Colonel Treveryan and tell him definitely that the thing could not be.

Charles Langley listened with a growing sense of doubt. Being a man, he understood the danger of letting Guy return to the presence of Helen Treveryan; and being a gentleman, he felt uncomfortable at the whole thing. Lady Mary bore him down as usual. She admitted that it would have been better not to let Guy see Helen again; but she argued that Guy had never really cared very much about the girl, and that he had resisted only for form's sake. He was ready to give way now, and they had only to be firm. Besides, they could not desert the Schneiders and let Guy behave badly to them. There was only one thing to be done. They must screw their courage to the sticking-place, and then they would not fail. Lady Mary always found it difficult to recognise the possibility of defeat. She was determined to get her own way, and hitherto she had almost invariably got her own way. She was blinded in this case by her strong will and strong feelings; but it must be confessed that she had some cause for self-deceit. And, blinded or not, what more could she do?

The letter to Colonel Treveryan was not nicely or prudently

worded. It was curt, and it was written *de haut en bas*, which was a mistake.

SIR—I understand that before leaving India my son informed you of my inability to approve or sanction his projected marriage. Since he has been in England, my objections have been fully explained to him, and I write to let you know that he now recognises the force of those objections, and views the matter in an altogether different light. I trust, therefore, that you will acquiesce in the termination of an affair which could only result in disappointment and unhappiness to all concerned.—I remain, sir, yours faithfully,

CHARLES LANGLEY.

Colonel Treveryan,
&c. &c.

Charles Langley showed considerable reluctance to copy out and sign this letter. Men have more sense of fair play than women, and in some ways more gentlemanly feeling, so to speak. 'I cannot see why on earth I should write at all,' he said. 'He did not write to me, and Guy surely ought to manage the business himself.'

'Yes, but it will strengthen his hands very much if you write, and save him a great deal of trouble.'

'I don't like it. He's in the service, or was, and they seem very decent sort of people. It isn't a pleasant thing to do.'

'Perhaps not, but one can't expect to do nothing but what is pleasant, and they have brought it upon themselves.'

'Well, I suppose you know best, but I wish I need not be dragged into these matters.' Then he wrote the letter and signed it, and gave it to her. 'I hope we are not making Guy behave badly,' Charles Langley said, with a last faint protest, and she answered: 'I should have thought you could safely leave that to me.' He said no more, and the letter was duly despatched.

Then Lady Mary felt that she had done her duty; she could only leave the rest in God's hands and await the issue. Before sleeping that night she thanked Him for having helped her to make her son unfaithful, and she prayed very earnestly that He would be pleased to drive out from his heart the love of a true, unselfish woman, and to fill it with the love of money. Lady Mary did not know Helen Treveryan, but she had Mrs. Aylmer's letter, and if she had chosen to think and inquire she might have learnt more. She did not want to learn more.

CHAPTER XXII

BACK AT SYNTIA

GUY had made up his mind on one point when he reached Paddington. He certainly would not propose to Clara Schneider before leaving England, whatever he might do later. It was a bright summer morning, and he found it hard to keep his thoughts steadily to the subject as he looked out upon the beautiful country through which the train passed. How different, he thought, from the brown Indian plains; and how he wished he were going to stay for the partridge-shooting. He wandered off from this to other matters, and his efforts to ~~get~~ back to Clara Schneider worried him. After all, there was lots of time. He could think it all over thoroughly in that horrible railway journey to Brindisi.

He had a busy day in London, and when he stepped into the train for Dover he had not sent to his mother the news she was longing to receive. He disappeared like some deity of old behind a golden cloud.

DEAREST MOTHER—I have had a very tiring day and am dead-beat, so I cannot write much. Good-bye. I hope I shall not be long away this time. I will write to you from Brindisi.—Ever your affectionate son,

GUY LANGLEY.

The express went rushing down through the lovely Kentish country, and then there was the ever-rough passage to Calais; and then the India mail steamed away across France, with its eternal lines of poplar trees, like the valleys of Kabul, and through the Mont Cenis tunnel, and down among the vines and olives of Italy, until at last, close by on the left, Guy saw again the blue Adriatic, with a red-sailed fishing-boat nearing the shore. He had had plenty of time on that comfortless, wear-

some journey to think out his thoughts ; and his thoughts had not been altogether pleasant. What was the net result of his voyage home ? So far as Helen was concerned it was a defeat, or at best a drawn game. No definite conclusion had been reached, and he had certainly gained nothing. His mother had stood to her guns, and he if anything had rather gone back. Then he had committed himself most infernally with Clara Schneider. He had deliberately allowed his mother to draw him into that trap with his eyes open, and now she had completely turned the tables on him. When he came home the question had been whether he could persuade Lady Mary to approve his marriage with Helen ; now the question was whether he was to accept her view and marry Clara. There was a great deal of truth too in what she had said. If he married Helen they would be badly off. Was it right to Helen herself ? And yet, they would not be so very poor after all if his people came round. He could not give Helen up. How pretty and good and graceful she was ! The idea of having her in his arms again came to him with a sudden thrill of delight. And Clara ? Well, Clara was a good little woman too, and he liked her, but he certainly was not the least in love with her. Even if Helen were not concerned, it would be an awful nuisance to be tied to a woman he did not care about. The money would be very jolly, no doubt, and it would make the old mother awfully happy. What a stableful of hunters he would keep, and everything else of the best ! But it would all be hers, and he should not like feeling he was living on his wife. What was the use of thinking of that ? He was not going to sell himself for any money in the world ; he had always scoffed at such an idea. His mother said his honour was involved, but he had said nothing to Clara really. As to her caring for him, if she really did, he was sorry ; but it was not just his kissing her that had done it. Anyhow, she would probably get over it soon enough, and marry some one with a title, which would be much better for her and would delight that dear old snob of a mother of hers. Perhaps he ought to write, but what could he write ? The best thing would be to treat the whole thing as if it had been a mere flirtation and say nothing. After all, he had only kissed her. She was not the first, and the others did not suppose he meant anything serious.

*L'amour fait passer le temps,
Et le temps fait passer l'amour.'*

If anything happened to prevent his marrying Helen, then it might be possible, but not now. And so on, and so on, round and round in circles, with only the negative result that he would write nothing, for the present at all events. There was lots of time to think on the sea-voyage.

From Brindisi, therefore, he merely wrote a little ordinary note to his mother, telling her about the journey, and saying nothing about Clara. And poor Clara waited and wondered and wept, and tried to think it would all come right somehow, just as if she had been a little village maiden without a shilling in the world.

The sea voyage was detestable. It was very rough monsoon weather ; the few ladies were sick, and the ship was wet and cheerless, and Guy longed for Bombay. There was no Mrs. Stewart on board, and nothing to do but read in a rolling saloon. He was not seasick, but it depressed him and made him bilious and miserable. Now and then the thought of Helen came across him, and his heart thrilled again ; but he should not see her for weeks, and besides . . . Was he making a mad mistake and ruining both their lives ?

The voyage did come to an end at last, and then followed the railway journey to Syntia. Guy found a great change since he had travelled down. Everything was green and rank. Water lay about him in all directions. Where the railway had passed over great empty river-beds of yellow sand there were now mud-coloured torrents, hundreds of yards in width, swirling down between steep banks. There were flooded pools along the embankment, where the earth had been dug out, and the black and white kingfishers hung quivering over them, or folded their wings and dropped like a stone with hardly a splash. Guy wondered where the fish came from. The sky was full of dark clouds. It was hot, a heavy sultry heat, but nothing to what it had been in May.

On the day that he neared Syntia, Guy lay at full length on the carriage seat, smoking, and reading, and thinking, and watching the beautiful alternations of rain and cloud and sunshine on the broad green plains. They were carefully cultivated here, and dotted with fine clumps of palms and mango trees. In the distance the fields and the trees formed glades which looked almost like pieces of an oak-timbered English park. Even now he did not know exactly what he meant to do. He loved Helen as much as ever, he thought, and did not mean to give her up, but it was

very puzzling. Even now, with the afternoon sun upon the fields and Syntia within an hour of him, he had not clearly mapped out his line of action. Helen would be away still, and he would talk to Mrs. Aylmer. Practically, this was a decision, as he would have known if he had chosen to think it out ; but it was an unconscious decision, and gave him no trouble. He sighed and leant back against his pile of rugs, and went on with his book,—a novel of Ouida's. He used to laugh at Ouida's heroes and their impossible deeds, and to criticise her work as reckless and unfinished ; but, nevertheless, he felt that she had a touch about her somehow. He looked up with moist eyes from a page of *Tricotrín* as the train rumbled on to the Loonee bridge. Ten minutes more and he would be in Syntia.

Through the iron side of the bridge Guy gazed at the rushing river below and the native houses on the shore, and then the deafening rattle ceased, and the train ran on to solid ground again, and he lay waiting for the scenery which had become so familiar.

There it was,—the great open racecourse, with its clumps of palms, looking greener than he had ever seen it, but otherwise just the same. How well he remembered some of his canters there with Helen. Once in particular, when they came round the corner into the straight, parallel to the railway line, and his big new 'Waler' plunged and kicked and set off Sultan ; he could see it now. It was just opposite there, not a hundred yards from his carriage window. He could see the little Arab throw up his head with a snort and a sudden bound, and then go off as if the devil were at his heels. How well she sat him ! The first jump somehow loosened her hair, and her whip-hand went up to it, but it came pouring out in a bright brown shower. Then, as he wrenched at his Waler's stupid head, he saw her sailing away in front of him, her hands down, and her slight figure as erect as ever, till Sultan's impetuous rush gradually slackened into a steady gallop, and she pulled him up. How beautiful she looked when Guy rode up to her full of apologies, the brown hair down below her waist, and her face flushed with exercise and confusion. She blamed herself for her carelessness ; and he dismounted and held Sultan's rein as she hastily coiled her hair up in a massive knot, and fastened it with one or two hairpins that were left to her.

Guy was still picturing the scene to himself, and his heart was full of Helen's beauty, when the train ran into the station,

and standing on the platform, within a few feet of the carriage, was Helen herself. She was speaking to a servant and did not see him, though he was so close to her. After the first instant of surprise, he noticed that she looked thin and white, and his heart grew big with pity and shame. As he got up from his seat she raised her eyes and saw him. He sprang down from the step on to the stone flags, and all was over. He could not have looked in her face, as she stood there all unprepared, and have shown her any sign of change. It would have been like striking her a sudden blow ; and he could not have endured the pain in her eyes. Moreover, he felt not the slightest desire to show any change. He saw her flush up with a sudden delight which, in her surprise, she made no attempt to conceal, and he stepped forward eagerly and held out his hand. What did he care for all the world with the thrill of her presence running through him ?

‘ You have not changed ? ’ he said quickly, holding the little gauntleted hand, and thrusting aside all else but the feeling of the moment. And she, knowing he loved her still, and half-dazed with the suddenness of her joy, looked up at him with beautiful radiant eyes and smiled at the question.

‘ I ? Never ! You know that. ’

It passed in a second, and then they stood talking quietly in their empty corner of the station until Colonel Treveryan came up. He looked surprised to see Guy, and troubled, but he shook hands and asked him how he was.

‘ Very well, thank you, sir, and delighted to get back. ’

‘ I didn’t think you could be in till to-morrow at the earliest. ’

‘ We were a day earlier than we expected, and I just managed to catch the mail train. ’

The fact was, that Colonel Treveryan was taking Helen away on purpose that she might not be in Syntia when Guy arrived. There had been no letter from him announcing that all was settled at home, and, failing that, Colonel Treveryan did not want them to meet until he had seen Guy himself. Helen had come down from Mussooree a fortnight before, as Mrs. Aylmer had gone up to Mabel, and though she had said little, Colonel Treveryan could see that she was not happy. It had now been arranged that she should go away to some friends for a day or two. This was in all respects a convenient arrangement, as it happened that Colonel Treveryan wished to go out shooting. For some weeks past a village a few miles down the line had been

disturbed by a tiger, which had killed a number of cattle and eventually a woman. The jungle was thick and difficult, but there had been a longish break in the rains in this part of the country, and it was reported to Colonel Treveryan, who knew the ground well, that the animal had taken up his quarters in a small piece of jungle where he might be got at even now. It was worth trying, at all events, as the people were much alarmed, and the postal runners could hardly be induced to go through. Young Goldney, when he heard of it, was very keen to see whether the beast could not be killed; and it was settled that they should send out a couple of tents and make the attempt. They had chosen this day for a start, because Guy had written to Chimp that he intended to stay a day in Bombay and try and pick up a horse. He could not, therefore, be in until the next day or probably the day after.

The whole party got into the carriage together, the poor little Pink 'un much taken aback when he saw Guy, but polite and pleasant as ever. They had only a few minutes together before reaching the cantonment station, but during that time Guy asked for and obtained Colonel Treveryan's consent to join the party.

'How I wish I could come with you,' he said wistfully.

Colonel Treveryan reflected. There was room and food in camp. Why not let the boy come, and hear what he had to say? Helen was doubtless anxious, and apparently things had turned out all right. 'Would you really like it?' he said. 'It will be very uncomfortable, and we shall probably get nothing.'

'I don't care about that, sir. I was in hopes of coming over to you to-morrow and having a talk, and it is very disappointing to find you going off.'

Helen could not hear. She was sitting on the opposite side of the carriage in her light gray silk travelling-dress, talking to Goldney, and looking very happy.

'Very well; come along then,' Colonel Treveryan said, and he turned to Helen: 'Langley is coming to take care of us.'

Helen understood, and looked a little embarrassed.

Goldney's pleasure was quite spoilt. He smiled a sickly smile, and tried to seem, and be, pleased at the news, but he could not like being with Guy. However humble and hopeless a man's love may be, it is hard for him to like the favoured rival.

'What guns have you got?' Colonel Treveryan said.

'A '450 express and a ten-bore rifle. Will that do?'

‘Yes ; but it is likely to be snap-shooting if we see the beast. If you don’t mind firing ball out of your shot-gun, and have got any cartridges, I think I would bring that instead of the express. Probably you will find it handier at close quarters, and it hits very hard.’

‘All right, sir. I only hope we may get a chance.’

‘I do hope you will all be careful,’ Helen said.

Colonel Treveryan laughed, and Guy looked at her lovingly ; then the whistle sounded, and the train ran into the cantonment station.

Guy said good-bye to Colonel Treveryan, with a promise that he would come on by the next train, which left Syntia about half-past ten at night. Helen shook hands with him from the window with a grave look in her face. Her happiness had been suddenly dashed by a presentiment of evil. ‘You will be careful ?’ she said hastily in a low tone, and he smiled up at her troubled eyes and nodded.

He waited till the train left the station, and then gathered up his things and got into a carriage. As he drove off, he was whistling the *Lorelei*. Fate had decided for him, and relieved him of all further bother. Now that he had no longer before him the trouble of making up his mind he was perfectly happy. What were Clara and her money to him ? He thought of Helen, and wondered how he ever could have hesitated. ‘I never did really hesitate,’ he said to himself, and believed it. In a sense he was right. Unknown to himself, almost in spite of himself, his heart had remained true to his love. His hesitation had been real enough, but it had been superficial. Until he returned to Helen he had not seen to the bottom of his nature. There are things in us that surprise us at times, both good and evil. The eye of the mind cannot search the depths of the heart, even when the heart is at rest ; and when the slightest breeze comes to ruffle the surface, everything is hidden for the time.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAMP

GUY reached his quarters about six o'clock and found them empty. Chimp did not expect him till next day, and had gone out to tennis,—*kirikit*, as Guy's native servant called it. That invaluable person took charge of Guy's boxes and keys, and soon had everything in its place. Guy meanwhile walked over to the Aylmers to get his leave, which, indeed, was hardly necessary as two or three days of his three months still remained unspent.

Mrs. Aylmer was away in Mussooree, but the Colonel was in his room. He had returned from a ride, and was smoking a cigar before dinner, which his wife would never have allowed him to do. He received Guy cordially, and made no objection to the leave. He liked his boys to be sportsmen. 'Only take care, Langley,' he said; 'a cat as big as a bullock is a nasty thing to deal with. However, Treveryan knows the game. Will you have a cigarette?'

'Thank you, sir, I think I will go back and see about my guns and clothes. I haven't unpacked yet.'

'Very well. We shall meet at mess.' Then, as Guy was going out, the Colonel put his hand on his shoulder. 'All settled satisfactorily, I hope?'

Guy hesitated. 'I hope so, sir. I think it will be all right.'

'I am glad to hear it. Well, good-bye for the present.'

Guy went out, and Colonel Aylmer sat down again. 'That doesn't sound very promising,' he thought; 'I wonder what will be the end of it.'

Guy found his clothes laid out ready for him, his mess-dress on the bed, and his shooting-kit and open gun-cases on the

matted floor. The bearer was an old regimental hand, and understood young men and their ways.

Guy took out his barrels and looked through them against the light. Chimp had not forgotten his promise to take care of them during the rains, and they were all as clean and bright as the day Guy bought them. The locks and breech had been carefully cleaned too, and everything worked quite smoothly. He put together his shot-gun and his heavy rifle, and then took them to pieces again and put them back in their cases. A minute's examination showed him that everything else was ready, down to the large cross-handled hunting-knife in its leather sheath, which was to be worn for the first time in case of accidents. He had still half an hour before he need dress for dinner, and it struck him that he would spend a few minutes in writing a line to Roland, who would be at home by this time. He sat down with a cigarette and wrote.

DEAR RO—I got back here all right an hour ago, and had the luck to meet the Treverys at the railway station. They were just going away. Helen looked sweeter than ever, and if ever I could have thought of giving her up, the sight of her would have been enough to drive such an idea out of my head once and for all. She is a little white and thin, poor darling, but I am conceited enough to hope that I shall be able to bring the old colour back before long. She was very pleased to see me, I think, and to know I had not changed. She need not have been afraid. No man who had had the marvellous good luck to win her love could be so mad as to throw it away. I am afraid the mother does not like my refusing to fall in with her plans, but what could I do? It is a pleasure to feel that you at all events take my view. I must write to her next week and tell her once more that come what may I will never give Helen up. I am going off to-night to join Colonel Treveryan in killing a man-eater not far from here. I hope we shall have some fun. Good-bye. Be a good boy.—Yours ever,
GUY.

This letter Guy read over and folded up, and as he did so, a puzzled smile came over his face. It was odd to think he was beginning to take Ro seriously, and to value his opinion. As he finished addressing the envelope, he heard Chimp drive up to the door; and he went out to meet him.

‘Hullo, Guy! This is jolly. I thought you weren’t coming till to-morrow.’

‘Well, I wasn’t, but I changed my mind. It was beastly hot

in Bombay, and I wanted to get back. Now I am going off again.'

'Where to?'

'Well, I met the Treverys at the station. The Colonel has heard of a man-eater at some place near Ranipore, and is going down to shoot it, and I arranged to go on to-night and join him.'

'No! What luck some beggars have! I would have given my head to go, and they never thought of asking me.'

'Well, they didn't exactly ask me,' Guy said with a laugh.

'Oh! you asked yourself, of course—just like your confounded cheek. You might have got me into it too while you were about it.'

Guy had never thought of that, but he did not say so. 'I couldn't, Chimp. I don't suppose there is much spare room in the tents, or grub, or anything.'

'Well, it's always the way,' Chimp answered with a sigh. 'I have kept your rotten old guns clean for you.'

'Yes. Many thanks, old chap. I have just been looking at them. By the way, have you got any ball cartridges for my smoothbore? Colonel Treveryan says it's better than an express for close quarters.'

'I haven't got any ready, but we can load up a few after mess in ten minutes. I've got a lot of bullets; I cast them one wet day while you were away. When does your train go?'

'Not till 10:30.'

'Oh, that's all right. By George, how I wish I were going with you.'

'I wish you were.'

There was a moment's pause, and then Chimp said, 'I suppose you've squared your people?'

'Well, I'll tell you all about that afterwards. I think it will be all right. We had better dress now, or we shall be late.'

They dressed and strolled over together, and Guy was received in the anteroom with a hearty welcome. Several of his brother officers were away on leave, but St. Orme and Berry and others were there; and all seemed really glad to see him. Even Denham was civil,—for him. It was very jolly, Guy thought; after all, the regiment was his real home now. And then the reflection came to him, 'What if you have to leave it?'

The night was hot, and when they sat down Guy said, 'Chimp, I am going to have some fizz.'

Chimp objected at once. 'Don't be an ass. It's the worst

thing you can do. You may have to shoot straight to-morrow. Take a whiskey peg and keep your eye clear.'

'Bosh, Chimp. A glass or two won't hurt me.'

Chimp gave in. He liked his wine too; indeed, he liked a good 'whack' of it on occasion. Temperance with him was simply a sacrifice to his deity; he could not drink much and keep 'fit.' That night, however, they were very moderate, and immediately after dinner they went off together to get their cartridges ready. While Guy changed his clothes, Chimp cleared the sitting-room table of books and tablecloth, and put upon it a tea-cup full of powder, and some cartridge-cases, and the various things required for loading them. 'How many do you want?' he said, as Guy came in.

Guy suggested fifty.

Chimp scoffed aloud. 'Fifty! My dear old boy, you don't suppose you're going to put them up in whisps, like snipe?'

'No; but I like having plenty of ammunition. One never knows what one may want on a shoot.'

'You can't want fifty, anyhow. Why, you'd fill him up with lead like the jumping frog. Ten's plenty.'

Eventually they compromised for twenty-five, and by the time these were ready it was nearly ten o'clock, and the dog-cart came round. Chimp drove Guy down and saw him off, envying him deeply, and wishing him all good luck.

As the train steamed slowly out of the hot bright station into the darkness, Guy put his legs up on the seat, and sat looking out of the open window while the cool night air blew on his face. It was a very pleasant hour's journey. The sight of Helen had set all his blood going again, and he was more in love than ever; and to add to his happiness there was the strange new excitement of his first attempt at tiger-shooting. He had been a little tired that afternoon, after the long journey from Bombay, but his arrival had shaken him up and he felt quite fresh again now. How jolly it all was!

At half-past eleven the train ran into Ranipore, and stopped with many jolts, after the manner of Indian trains, and Guy got out. It was a very small station, with two or three rooms on one side of the line, and a covered waiting-shed on the other. The native station-master came up to him as he stood on the silent little platform and told him there were some coolies to carry his baggage to the camp, and that the Commissioner Sahib had sent a pony for him. He mounted and rode away down a soft un-

metalled road, the barefooted coolies walking behind him with his boxes on their heads. The night was cool enough now, and not very dark ; there were clouds, but the stars were shining in the blue openings between them, and all promised a fine day. About midnight they reached the camp, which consisted of a couple of square tents for the white men under some mango trees, with smaller tents behind for the servants.

There was a light in one of the tents, and there Guy found Colonel Treveryan and Goldney having an interview with a native *shikari*, whom Colonel Treveryan had sent out to bring the latest news. The man's report was satisfactory enough. There had been a bullock killed the night before ; and the tiger had been tracked to a patch of jungle, where it lay up during the day. The footmarks were quite clear in the soft earth. In the evening, after dark, it had returned to the kill. The man had been watching in a tree in the line of its approach, and had seen it pass. After remaining some time over the kill, where he could hear it feeding, it had repassed him and gone away towards the same jungle to which it had been tracked in the morning. There was water there. Having waited some time, he had come down from his tree. Early in the morning, directly it was light, he would follow up the pugs and make sure where the beast was. Meanwhile, he said, he was not sure that this was the same animal. He had seen the marks of the one that killed the woman, and he thought they were smaller, but it might be the same.

Colonel Treveryan asked a few questions and then dismissed the man. 'I don't quite understand it,' he said ; 'some of the things they have been telling me don't look as if the beast were a man-eater. However, I suppose there is no doubt that the woman was killed, and the people are certainly in a great funk. Anyhow, we had better turn in now ; it's getting late. We shall know more in the morning. We have got a bed for you, and put it in Goldney's tent,' he added, turning to Guy. Goldney got up and said good-night ; as he walked out Guy said to Colonel Treveryan, 'Can I speak to you for a minute before I go ?'

'Certainly. Sit down ; I am in no hurry.'

Goldney walked out into the darkness with a tightening at his heart, and Guy took his chair.

'Well, Langley,' Colonel Treveryan said, 'what is your news ?'

'Well, sir, I don't quite know what to say, except that I believe it will be all right in the end about my people.'

'Did you come to any understanding?'

'Not exactly, sir; but I think it will be all right now. The fact is, my mother wanted me to marry some one she has taken a fancy to, but I think she understands now that this is impossible, and that if she insists it may mean my staying in India for good.'

'Then they did not withdraw their objections?'

'Not openly, but I am sure they will give in now.'

'Then you stand very much where you were?'

'Yes, just at present, but it won't last, and meanwhile we can manage, sir, I'm sure.'

'What do you want to do, then? Do you intend to stay in your regiment?'

'I really am not sure, sir. I thought I would ask your advice. I am ready to do anything you think right, if only,—you will agree to our marriage.'

So that was the end of it, Colonel Treveryan thought. Everything just in the same position as before. Well, it was too late to think it all out to-night. After a minute he got up. 'We had better sleep on it, Langley. 'I can't see my way clear yet, and it is getting late. We must be up early to-morrow. Good-night. Breakfast at seven.'

'Good-night. I hope, sir, you don't blame me; I have done my best.'

'No, my dear fellow; I wish things were all settled, but I'm sure it isn't your fault. We'll talk it over to-morrow. Good-night.'

Guy walked over to Goldney's tent, and found the little Pink 'un kneeling by his bedside in a night-shirt, like a child, saying his prayers.

Guy motioned to his servant to stay outside, and began undressing very quietly. 'What an honest little beggar it is,' he thought, with a touch of pity, and a feeling that all the same it was not quite the thing for Goldney to be saying his prayers like that, with the native servants about. But the native servants thought the better of him; they did not practise or understand reserve in these matters.

The bed was a comfortable one with a spring mattress of broad woven tape, Goldney having, in fact, handed over his own for Guy's use, and taken for himself a short native *charpoy*,

strung with cord, which his men had got from a neighbouring police-station. The night was calm and still. A faint breeze occasionally rustled the leaves above the tent, and from the distance came the barking of some village dogs ; the frogs were croaking in the tank behind the trees ; the *shikari* was refreshing himself after his labours by smoking a pipe, and Guy could hear the gurgle of the water in the cocoanut bowl : with these sounds in his ears he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MORNING'S SHOOTING

GUY woke with a delightful sense of excitement; and as the occurrences of the previous evening came back to his mind, he felt supremely happy. He sat up in bed, and found that Goldney was drinking a cup of tea, while another cup was on the chair by his bedside.

The young men were dressed and out of the tent half an hour later; and having put his guns together and got ready his cartridge-belt and bag, Guy strolled off to see what was going on in camp. It was a bright sunny morning. Colonel Treveryan was in his tent, and Guy did not like to disturb him. Under the trees at the back Guy found the servants cooking breakfast in round pans, which were placed on the ground across two wedge-shaped fire-holes. In an open space near the tank some elephants were having their howdahs fastened on with girths made of hide and massive iron chains; it seemed a slow and troublesome process. Guy walked up to one of the kneeling beasts and stood looking at its little pig-like eye and bristly scalp till he was warned that he had better not come too close; it was sometimes vicious. He went back to the tents, and found Colonel Treveryan standing in the open talking to some natives, with Goldney near him.

'Come along, Langley,' he said; 'it's all right. They say the tiger is in the same patch. We shall know for certain when Khema comes in; but they say they are sure of it. The sooner we're ready the better. It will take us a good hour to get there.'

They had breakfast,—a very substantial one,—and then climbed up on to their elephants, Colonel Treveryan going alone in one howdah, and Guy and Goldney together in another.

As Colonel Treveryan started he lighted a cheroot, and opened the canvas bag containing his letters, which had been sent on from Syntia the night before. Before breakfast he had answered one or two telegrams, and disposed of everything requiring immediate action. Now he went through his *dak* again quietly, putting aside two or three private letters which he stuck into the rack by his rifle-stocks. The letters bearing official stamps he read and put back one after another into the bag. There was nothing particular in them, but the Government was worrying him again, in a rather nasty tone, for some useless returns which he had found much difficulty in extracting from his subordinates. The Government was itself being worried by the Secretary of State for India, who was being worried by a troublesome Member of the House of Commons. But Treveryan did not know all this. 'Confound those secretariat fellows!' he said; 'always the same. There is not a man up at headquarters who knows anything about the country; nothing but old office-hacks and boys who think it clever to write impertinent letters.' He sighed and tied up the bag again. How tired he was sometimes of the whole thing! Success and reward always went to the unscrupulous and the pushing. It was useless to do your duty like an Englishman; writing was everything, particularly writing oneself up in the newspapers.

He put the bag away under his seat and took up his private letters. There were only three,—one was from England in an unknown hand, and two bore Indian stamps. He opened the Indian letters first. Nothing to answer, thank goodness. One was a receipt from a tradesman in Bombay, and the other a few lines from a friend thanking him for a small service. The English letter Colonel Treveryan opened without curiosity. Some one, he supposed, who had an idle son to be provided for and wanted his help in getting an appointment. It was Charles Langley's letter about Guy.

As Treveryan read it his bronzed cheek grew red, and an angry light came into his eyes. 'Damn his impudence!' he said; 'he writes as if he were a duke and Helen were a barmaid.'

Then his anger turned upon Guy. The letter was strangely inconsistent with Guy's account of the state of affairs. For a time Colonel Treveryan chafed hotly against the whole thing; and if Guy had been in the howdah with him at the time, there would have been some sharp words spoken. Happily Guy was some way behind chatting with Goldney, and looking at the low wooded

hills which they were approaching by a cart track through the long rank grass. Colonel Treveryan had plenty of time, therefore, to think matters over, and as he was an eminently placable man, his anger soon cooled down. After all, he thought, it was not so much the boy's fault. He had stuck to Helen in spite of them, and apparently had done his best. Very likely the letter misrepresented him deliberately, in the hope of making mischief. Anyhow, Helen's happiness was concerned. She evidently cared for him, and he certainly was a fine young fellow, and seemed to be in earnest. He was young and rather sketchy, 'but we have all been young.'

By the time the elephants had crossed the grass plain and reached the hilly ground, Colonel Treveryan was himself again. Here they were met by the *shikari*, who told them there was no doubt about the *khubber*; the tiger had been marked down to a certainty. They went a little farther, by a rocky path through the woods, the great heavy beasts climbing slowly over the most difficult places, where a horse could not have been ridden or even led. Then they came to an open patch where the party dismounted; the rest of the way had to be done on foot. It was not far, perhaps half a mile, and the late break in the rains had dried the jungle, so that the walking was not very bad. In a quarter of an hour they reached their ground.

They stood on the crest of a wooded spur which ran down from the hills above on the right, and formed one side of a ravine about three hundred yards in breadth. Both sides of this ravine were in most places rocky and rather precipitous, though of no great height. At the bottom was the bed of a mountain stream, which made its way down through several rocky channels, enclosing two or three long jungle-covered islands. In one of these was their game.

They had two difficulties to contend with. In the first place, though the weather had been fine for some days and the stream was almost dry, yet the grass and jungle were very thick. Secondly, the ground was such that they could not use elephants, and the beaters were very much afraid of the tiger, who bore a bad reputation. They did not much fancy their work, and were not likely to do it very thoroughly. However, there was nothing to be gained by delay. While Khema had come in to report, his brother had collected and placed the beaters, two hundred of them, who were hidden away on the wooded hillside to the right, forming a crescent round the top of the ravine. The brothers had

communicated with one another when the Sahibs arrived, and all was said to be in readiness, though the little army was as completely invisible as Roderick Dhu's clansmen on the side of Bendedi. After a short conversation, carried on in low tones, it was arranged that one of the guns should be posted near the spot where they stood, but lower down the side of the ravine, so as to command the bed of the stream, or one channel of it. Another gun was to be placed across the ravine on the opposite side, to command the farther channel. The third was to occupy a rock in the bottom of the ravine to the left. This rock formed the upper end of an island, the bed of the stream joining in front of it, and parting again to right and left. There was a broad open space in front of the rock.

It fell to Guy's lot to remain on the left bank. Colonel Treveryan was to go across the ravine, and Goldney to have the centre place.

Colonel Treveryan went off, taking Goldney with him, and leaving Khema to look after Guy. As a parting injunction he said, 'Now, look here, Langley; find yourself a good place where you can use your guns freely; a tree or a rock twelve or fifteen feet high at least,—a rock where you can stand up for choice. If possible, don't fire till he is past you, and then aim behind the shoulder; and remember, whatever you do, don't be tempted to go down into the jungle if you've hit him.'

Guy said 'All right, sir.' And the little procession disappeared silently in the wood to the left.

When they had gone, Khema crept off down the side of the ravine, carrying Guy's rifle. Guy followed him until they came near a large rock, which caught the man's eye. Motioning to Guy to stay where he was, Khema examined the rock, and found a way to get upon it, with the help of a wild mango tree which had grown through a cleft. Guy climbed up without difficulty, and found himself in an ideal position. He was almost hidden by thick boughs, but he could see through them in all directions, and there was plenty of room to use his weapons. Twenty yards below him was the broad river-bed, with the water lying here and there in pools among the boulders. His right was covered by one of these pools. To get across it an animal would have had to swim. To his front, across the channel, was a piece of rough broken ground, a low island in fact, with a good deal of thick new grass on it, but with bare patches of water and rock. To his left the bed of the stream was broad and open. The face of the

rock was sheer, indeed slightly overhanging, and about ten feet in height ; at the back it was more broken and less precipitous. Guy lay down with a contented mind upon the hard gray stone. 'Well, I'm safe enough here,' he thought. 'Nothing but a bird could reach me ; and I can see all round.'

He had to wait some time, for Colonel Treveryan had a long circuit to make, and the stony couch began to cramp Guy's unaccustomed limbs ; but he had everything a man can have in this world to make him happy, and he was happy. The morning was very still. There was not a sound to be heard in the jungle but the occasional faint whisper of the breeze, and the distant ringing note of the 'coppersmith' barbet,—*tonk, tonk, tonk*. It was frightfully hot, and Guy was bathed in perspiration. At last, in about half an hour, after he had shifted his position several times, Khema touched him and pointed to a rock on the opposite side of the ravine. Knowing exactly where to look, he had seen Colonel Treveryan take up his place. Goldney was doubtless in his, though they could not see him.

A minute or two later a lookout man on a high point up the hillside to the right gave the expected signal, and the drive began. Guy's heart beat fast as the first distant sound of the drum broke upon his ears, and was followed by an outburst of wild yells. He fixed his eyes on the river-bed below and waited with growing excitement, every sense on the stretch, lest the tiger should rush past and escape. In this way minute after minute slipped away. The shouting and the drumming came nearer and nearer, falling at times almost into silence and then rising again with a sudden burst, but always coming on ; and now he could occasionally make out in the distance a dark form standing for a moment upon some rocky point and then sinking into the jungle again. He felt himself trembling with excitement. Would it never end ? Surely if there were a tiger he must have broken before now. The beaters must be within three or four hundred yards. He could see them distinctly now when they showed out of the jungle. As he looked away towards them he felt his leg gently pressed, and turned his eyes. Khema was gazing out straight in front of him into the bed of the stream.

Guy never forgot that moment. He had been waiting to hear a rush through the grass, and to get a glimpse of a tiger galloping past him from the right at a speed that would almost defy a shot. He looked up now to see about fifty yards off, in an open stony place between some bushes, a great yellow beast that stood

motionless in front of him, its head turned in the direction of the beaters, and its broad white throat and breast offering a perfect mark. For an instant he could hardly believe that such luck had come to him, or that any tiger could be as huge as this. Then he raised his gun, and as he did so, the tiger's quick eye was attracted by the movement, and it turned its head towards him with a start. Guy fired and felt he had hit. Through the smoke he saw the animal bound aside into the bushes, and then he thought he could make it out dimly, crouching with its head towards him. He fired his second barrel, but rather hastily, without a very clear aim. There was a waving in the bushes and grass, and he could see nothing more.

'*Laga, Laga,*' Khema said ; 'you have hit him,' handing up the loaded rifle, which Guy took in exchange for his gun.

As the shots rang out the shouting and drumming had suddenly ceased. Now they burst out in the wildest uproar, which went on for a few seconds and ceased again. Looking away to the right, Guy could see several men standing on high points out of the wooded hillside. The line seemed to be stationary. He was wondering what would be done next when he heard two shots almost simultaneously on his left, and looking round saw Goldney standing out in full view at the edge of his rock. The tiger had evidently sneaked through the bushes and tried to get away down stream. A few seconds later Goldney fired again, and then Guy caught sight of the animal. Turned by Goldney's first two shots, it had broken back, and was now galloping through the bushes along the opposite side of the ravine, straight for the point where Colonel Treveryan was posted. It was useless for Guy to fire again. The bushes and grass were thick and he only caught a glimpse of the yellow skin at intervals as it flashed across some small opening. He waited in breathless suspense, gazing at the rock in front of him, where he could now clearly make out Colonel Treveryan, who had stood up in readiness. Suddenly Guy saw him step forward and fire down, one shot ; then he slowly lowered his gun and seemed to be looking over the edge of his rock.

At the foot of it the beast lay dead, with a bullet through the back of its skull. When fired at by Goldney it had chosen for its line of escape a track leading straight over the face of Colonel Treveryan's rock, which projected horizontally from the steep hillside. As it came within a few yards, Colonel Treveryan's man, who was crouching near him, had jumped to his feet in

sudden alarm, brandishing his hatchet, and the tiger, instead of charging over them, had 'shied' and tried to pass underneath.

There was silence among the beaters now, and Guy asked Khema what was up; but his Hindustani was small, and he could not make out the answer. Khema was looking across the ravine with an attentive face. At last Colonel Treveryan called out, 'All right, he's dead,' and disappeared from his rock.

Guy was about to get down too, intending to go over and see the tiger, when Khema stopped him. Guy did not know what the man said, but he seemed very earnest and evidently objected to the move. Guy accordingly sat down again and waited as patiently as he could. Then Khema called across the ravine with a long-drawn wailing note, 'Eh, Juggoo—oo—oo!' There was an answering call from Juggoo, and then a short conversation in unintelligible patois. After two or three minutes of this Khema seemed satisfied; he shouted back a word or two which evidently signified agreement, and then he turned to Guy and motioned to him to sit quiet. Eventually he succeeded in making Guy understand that Colonel Treveryan was coming round to him, and that perhaps the tiger which Colonel Treveryan had killed might not be the same one as he had fired at; he held up two fingers and said '*Do!*' For a full quarter of an hour Guy possessed his soul in patience. There was not a sound to be heard from the beaters; nothing but the whisper of the breeze again, and the ringing note of the coppersmith in the distance. The whole thing seemed to have been a dream. Guy's mouth felt parched, and he was very thirsty. At last Khema turned and looked into the jungle behind; his trained ear had caught the sound of approaching steps. Shortly afterwards Colonel Treveryan appeared, with Goldney and their two gun-bearers. Making as little noise as possible, the two Englishmen joined Guy on his rock, and then Colonel Treveryan had a short conversation with Khema which seemed to please him. He turned to Guy.

'Khema is sure you wounded the one you fired at, and he does not think it could have got away to the left from where it was without his seeing it. If you did hit it there must be two, because the one I killed was not touched. He has only one bullet in him. Do you think you hit him?'

'I'm almost sure I did. I felt I was on him, and it was an easy shot.'

'Well, we must look him up somehow. I wish we could bring an elephant round. Where was he when you fired?'

Guy and Colonel Treveryan stepped forward to the edge of the rock. Guy had been seen on it, so there was no use in concealment now. Goldney, who was overwhelmed with misery and shame, having got flurried and missed at thirty yards with both barrels, stood close by them, but on the other side of the tree which grew through the stone. Standing in full view, and holding his rifle in his left hand, Guy stretched out his right arm and pointed to the place where he had seen the tiger. 'That is where he was standing when I saw him first, between those bushes. When I fired he jumped into that bush to the right, and I fired again. It seemed to me that he bolted in that direction.'

As Guy spoke there was a sudden disturbance in the grass and bushes at the place towards which he was pointing, and a sound which made his heart stand still. It was not a roar, but a quick guttural *wuh, wuh*, of such tremendous depth and power that it seemed to shake the very rock upon which they stood. The next instant Guy saw through the grass the great yellow beast rushing upon them.

He fired both barrels, and Colonel Treveryan did the same, with a little more deliberation, but apparently with no greater success. It does not take a tiger long to cover fifty yards of ground, and through the smoke of the fourth shot Guy saw the vicious-looking head, with its flattened ears and gleaming teeth, rise straight at the place where he stood. He was no coward, and he gripped his rifle for a blow, which would have been quite useless; but as he did so he stepped back involuntarily, and his foot slipped upon the sloping stone. In trying to save himself he fell forward on his hands, scraping his knuckles severely and cracking a piece almost loose from the point of his rifle-stock. Within a few feet of him were the bloody head and forepaws of the wounded tiger, which had reached the edge of the rock in its bound, and was struggling to draw itself up.

That momentary struggle saved them. Goldney had luckily not seen the charging beast in time to throw away his cartridges; and now, being as staunch a little gentleman as ever walked, he lowered his rifle, and with the muzzle almost touching emptied two barrels into the beast's throat and neck, and fairly blew it off the rock.

When Guy scrambled to his feet, Colonel Treveryan was reloading swiftly. Having done so, he looked over the edge. Guy followed his example. The tiger was lying on its back, with gasping mouth and twitching limbs.

Then the three of them looked at one another for an instant, as men do after a house has been struck by lightning. The Pink 'un was not pink, but very white, and his hand was trembling. Guy felt he was looking shaky too, and even Treveryan was breathing hard. 'By Jove!' he said at last, with a deep sigh of relief, 'that was a close shave. You deserve a V. O., Goldney. If you had not been so steady it would have gone hard with us. You saved us all.'

Then the boy's colour came back in a wave, and he looked supremely happy. He had redeemed himself and shown that he was not a coward, thank God! He did thank God, humbly and earnestly, from the bottom of his brave young heart, as he stood there in the sun, his blushing face covered with sweat and grimed with smoke—an English gentleman.

Khema and his fellows had naturally vanished when the scrimmage began; but they were not far off, and they soon reappeared, Khema the first; he had only got up the tree.

Then the tiger was cautiously examined, and found to be quite dead. Poor beast, it well might be. Guy's first shot had passed through its forearm close to the body, which had probably prevented it from getting on to the rock at once. The skin was grazed in two places—one on the head and one on the shoulder, apparently by bullets fired at it while it was charging. The right side of the throat and neck was blackened by Goldney's shells, and one of them had torn its way right through and out on the other side. This animal was a fine young tigress. The other which Colonel Treveryan had shot was an old male, with blunt yellow teeth.

It was a very happy day. They had a sup of whisky and water all round, and the natives slung the two dead tigers on poles and carried them down to the place where the elephants were waiting. There, while the Sahibs sat in the shade of a tree and ate some lunch, the game was transferred to the backs of two pad elephants, after much trumpeting and objection on their part; then the beaters were dismissed with a lordly *bakshish*, and the procession started for camp.

What a luxurious warm tub that was in the evening, and how delicious Guy's loose clean flannel suit felt, and how impossible it seemed to him that he would ever slake his thirst; and how enormous the bare limbs of the tigers looked when the skin had been stripped from them and pegged out, and the twisted rolls of muscle were shown in all their tremendous strength. No

wonder a blow from such an arm meant death. Under the old male tiger's skin, over the ribs, they found two small round bullets which had been fired long ago by some native *shikari*.

They had a delightful dinner in Colonel Treveryan's tent, and then sat smoking and discussing every feature of the day's adventures. They decided that the old male tiger had killed the woman, and that there was no sport in the world like tiger-shooting, and many other things. The young men did most of the talking; Treveryan listened to them with pleasure in his eyes, throwing in a word now and then. At ten o'clock, much against his inclination, Goldney, who was always thoughtful, felt that it was time for him to leave the others to themselves. He got up and went off to bed, and as he went Colonel Treveryan said to him, 'Good-night, Goldney; but for you we should not all be here.'

Then he turned to Guy. 'What a game little chap that is,' he said. 'Now, Langley, let us have our talk.'

'I'm ready, sir.'

'Well, in the first place, I suppose you did not see your father's letter to me before he sent it?'

'No. Did he write? When?'

'I got the letter this morning.'

'What does it say?'

'Well, it gives a rather different account of things from what you gave me. I think you had better see it.' Colonel Treveryan took it out of his pocket, where he had put it before dinner.

Guy read it, and gave it back with surprise in his face. 'I cannot imagine what made my father write like that. The fact is, that he did not know much about it. It was my mother who always talked to me about these things.'

'Yes; but I suppose he would speak to her before writing.'

'I suppose so,' Guy answered, well knowing that the letter was really his mother's writing; 'but I cannot understand it. I warned my mother most distinctly that I could never change, even if it involved remaining in India for good.'

Colonel Treveryan would have understood without difficulty if he had known all Guy knew, but he had never heard of Clara Schneider, and the whole thing puzzled him. On the one side was this letter, on the other Guy's eager eyes and confident assertions. He did not answer, but sat smoking silently, trying to think it out. Seeing the hesitation in his face, Guy went on again: 'I am sure of one thing, sir, that if my people really had

any doubt when I was in England, they cannot possibly doubt much longer. Before I left Syntia last night I wrote home and said I had met you and spoke quite plainly about it all.'

Guy persuaded himself that this statement was not untrue. They sat together an hour longer, talking across the camp table on which they had dined. A brass wall-lamp was hung by a strap from the tent pole above them, and some insects had got into the tent and fluttered round it. From his position opposite the doorway Guy could see in the darkness, beyond the palm trees, an occasional shimmer of lightning. On the table were a couple of long tumblers, and a brass saucer which Colonel Treveryan used for an ash-tray. The night was very hot, but they were in loose cool clothing, and did not feel it much. As the talk went on Guy's eagerness increased; he was inclined to take a very bright view of everything that night. India seemed to him a delightful land of adventure and romance, and he wondered how he could ever have wished to stay at home and shoot partridges. His face looked strikingly handsome in its enthusiasm, and Colonel Treveryan could not help liking and trusting him. His voice and his eyes seemed true, and he spoke well and boldly.

At last Colonel Treveryan got up. His cheroot was nearly finished, and, lifting the hanging mat, he tossed the end out of the doorway into the darkness; as it struck the ground it flashed and threw off some sparks. 'Well, Langley,' he said, 'we must make the best of it. I feel sure you have done what you could, and we will manage somehow. Good-night now. It is time we went to bed.'

Guy got up too and held out his hand. 'Good-night, sir. I am very grateful for your kindness. You shall never repent it.'

They stood looking at one another for a second, and then dropped each other's hands and parted. As they did so, Colonel Treveryan said to himself, 'I think it is all right. I can trust him.'

Guy went to his tent and undressed quietly. Goldney was asleep. A cool wind had risen, and was soughing fitfully through the trees overhead, making the palm fronds clatter at times and rustling the mango leaves. There was lightning in the sky, and now Guy could hear a distant rumble of thunder. Some peacocks woke up and screamed to each other through the darkness. Then it began to rain, a few heavy drops, which fell like bullets upon the roof of the tent. As the shower ceased Guy got into bed and almost immediately fell asleep.

The storm came up an hour or two later, and the rain was heavy ; but Guy was tired and knew little about it. In the morning, when he woke, he was vaguely conscious that there had been thunder during the night, and the air felt cool, but he had slept peacefully through it all.

CHAPTER XXV

AN ACCIDENT

It was a delightful morning, cool and bright. They had breakfast and sat smoking in Colonel Treveryan's tent, while the servants packed for a start. The train left for Syntia at half-past nine. When they mounted to ride to the station their things had gone on; the tents and heavy baggage were to follow by a later train.

The animals had had a day's rest in camp, and the rain-freshened air had acted upon their spirits. Goldney's *tattoo*, a cream-coloured country-bred with pink extremities, which was generally said to be exactly like its master, came up quietly enough; but Guy's pony kicked and squealed, and Colonel Treveryan's young Waler mare, which he had lately bought to replace old Romulus, who had suddenly taken to roaring, gave some trouble before he could mount her. He got the better of her before long; but even when he had settled himself into the saddle she was very fidgety, sidling along with quivering ears and little jumps of excitement; she evidently wanted exercise.

The road to the station was soft, and the dust had been laid by the rain. As they got on to the road Colonel Treveryan said, 'Come along, let us give them a canter,' and the mare sprang off impetuously. They had about a quarter of a mile of open ground before them, and then the road turned sharply to the right behind a large grove of mango trees, which prevented them from seeing any farther. The mare seemed to be going steadily enough when she came up to the bend, and Guy, cantering a few yards behind, was admiring her easy level action. The trees were to their right; to the left was an open field, separated from the road by a low mud wall or bank, in bad repair and overgrown with tussocks of coarse grass. Under this bank, in the hollow by the

roadside, a little water was lying. Unluckily, as they turned the corner they came suddenly, at a distance of a few yards, upon one of the camp elephants, which had started on its way to the station. Something had gone wrong with its load, and it had been stopped on the right-hand side of the road, while the driver put matters straight. As the horses came round the corner, the great timid beast rushed forward in sudden alarm. Guy saw the mare shy violently and swerve to the left, slipping as she did so on the wet sloping grass. The next instant she had splashed through the water, and had gone headlong over the mud-bank into the field beyond.

It was a nasty fall. In her fright and hurry she took the jump sideways, looking away to the right at the object that had frightened her. It seemed to Guy that she hardly rose at all. She struck the bank and turned fairly over, and he caught a glimpse of an upturned belly and some glittering shoes in the air. The whole thing did not last a second. Guy's pony shied too, but not badly, and he pulled it up without trouble. As he did so, the mare struggled to her feet and trotted off across the field with her head high, trailing a broken rein. Her rider lay still where he had fallen.

Guy jumped off his pony and scrambled over into the field. 'Are you hurt, sir?' he called out anxiously. Treveryan did not answer. Guy knelt down beside him and lifted up his head. He groaned, but seemed insensible. There was a little blood on his mouth.

After a time, as he showed no sign of reviving, they sent for his bed, which was still in the tent, and placing him upon it, had him carried back to camp. He lay quite still, with his eyes shut, moaning a little at times. While Guy went back with him, Goldney galloped off to the railway station and sent a telegram to Dr. Beamish, telling him what had happened, and begging him to come at once; there was a train which he would just be able to catch.

For the next two hours the young men watched anxiously by Colonel Treveryan's bed. They had loosened his clothes, and moistened his lips with brandy, but without effect, and they did not know what else to do.

The telegram luckily caught Beamish at home, and he arrived about twelve o'clock; but directly he had made his examination, it was evident that he regarded the case as a very serious one. There was apparently some injury to the spine; it might be only

a temporary shock, but it might be more. Colonel Treveryan was not to be moved, and Miss Treveryan had better be summoned.

Guy sent off a message to her : ' I am sorry to say Colonel Treveryan has been hurt by horse falling with him. Dr. Beamish is here, and says he must not be moved at present, and wishes me to tell you. Can you come ? There is a tent for you. Will meet you at station.'

Helen's heart sank as the telegram was brought to her. The Rushtons had breakfasted late ; and she was sitting at the table when the servant came in with the brown envelope.

Her host saw it, and said, ' Hurrah ! Now we shall hear what luck they had.'

She opened the envelope, and they saw her turn very white. ' When does the next train go for Ranipore ?' she asked.

' In about an hour,' Rushton answered, and Mrs. Rushton said, ' What is it ? Nothing wrong, I hope ?'

' Yes ; my father is hurt,' and she gave the telegram to Mrs. Rushton. ' Oh, I am afraid it must be something dreadful. Do you think he is killed, and that they have not told me ?'

Mrs. Rushton read over the telegram. ' Oh no, dear. Your father rides very hard, and has had a good many accidents of that kind. He broke his collar-bone out pig-sticking with Henry two or three years ago. You must not imagine anything dreadful.' But her face belied her words. She felt that if there had been any definite injury they would have said so. Rushton was silent, and Helen went off to get ready for her journey, with a horrible fear at her heart. Mrs. Rushton offered to accompany her, but Helen preferred to go alone. Her *ayah* was accustomed to camp, she said, and would take care of her ; if she wanted help she would telegraph. An hour later Rushton had seen her into the train, and she was on her way to Ranipore.

It was still early in the afternoon when she arrived. She had done all she could on the journey to strengthen herself for whatever might be before her, trying to be prepared for the worst, but praying hard that all might be well. The poor old *ayah* was voluble in her attempts at consolation ; but she saw it was useless, and gave it up. She crouched on the floor of the carriage, gazing at her mistress, who sat upright in motionless impatience, or leant with closed eyes against the window frame. As the train slackened to run into Ranipore, Helen looked out to the place where she knew the camp stood ; she thought she could

make out a white tent among the trees. Perhaps he was lying there dead ! The moment the train stopped, Guy was in her carriage.

‘How is he?’ she said eagerly. ‘He is not dead?’

Guy looked at her pleading eyes and longed to be able to comfort her. He kissed her gently. ‘No, darling. I hope he may be all right soon, but the mare came down and rolled over him, and he has been unconscious ever since. Beamish is with him, but can say nothing yet, except that he thinks there are no bones broken.’

‘Thank God he is alive,’ she said, and she got out of the carriage. ‘Never mind the things. My *ayah* will bring them on. Let us start at once.’

Guy had brought some men over to carry her baggage, and for herself there was a native palanquin. Guy told her all about it as they went, walking beside her in the fierce August heat. They could hardly have talked to each other if he had mounted his pony. She listened to him quietly, pressing back the tears that would come to her eyes. ‘They are going too fast for you,’ she said, as she saw Guy striding out hard to keep up with the pattering trot of the *palki* bearers, and she made them go more slowly. When he had told her all she thanked him for what he had done. ‘I’m so glad you were with him. I know you have done everything that is possible. It was a great comfort to me to feel that he had you here. Is Mr. Goldney here still?’

‘Yes.’

‘How are you going to manage about tents? I am afraid you will be very uncomfortable.’

‘Oh, we’re all right,’ Guy said. ‘We have got one of the servants’ tents, and there is a police-station not far off.’

‘I must see when I get there.’

Guy was wondering at her. He had not expected her to break down and be useless, but her quiet business-like tone was a surprise to him. They were both silent for a little while, and then he said, ‘We are close by now. That is where it happened.’

Helen looked out and saw the place. There was a long downward cut in the wet turf and mud where the mare had slipped, and the bank beyond was newly broken. She fancied she could see her father lying out there in the field, motionless and moaning with pain. A half-suppressed sob escaped from her, and after a moment she spoke with a voice which trembled a little. ‘Guy.’

‘Darling.’

‘How long shall you be able to stay?’

‘As long as I can be of the smallest use.’

He put his hand on hers as it lay by her side. She did not answer, but she took his hand and held it hard till they reached camp.

All that afternoon and evening and through the night Colonel Treveryan remained insensible. Helen and Beamish watched him, and Guy and Goldney lay in the servants’ tent behind. At dinner-time Helen came out and saw that they had some food. She sat with them for a few minutes at a little table in the open, and they made her eat something too. Then she went back to her father. In the early morning, before sunrise, the clouded brain cleared and Colonel Treveryan awoke to consciousness. He lay for a minute or two thinking it out, and then opened his eyes and saw Beamish sitting by him. He seemed to know all that had happened, and the only question he asked was, ‘Is my daughter here?’

‘Yes. She came last night. How do you feel now? Are you in pain?’

‘No, not much.’

Helen was in her tent. Beamish had insisted upon her trying to get some sleep, promising that he would wake her if there were any change. She was not asleep, but kneeling by her bedside begging for her father’s life. Over and over again the same prayer: ‘Let him not die! O God, let him not die!’ It seemed to her that she could not get the prayer *home*; there was always something barring the way, and it fell back upon her. Was it her want of faith? Would her father die because she had no faith? The thought tortured her, and she prayed desperately. ‘I do believe. I do believe,’ she said to herself, with her teeth set and her hands clenched tight. ‘I do believe. I will believe.’ Suddenly she raised her head, her eyes dilated, and a listening look on her face. She could hear them distinctly speaking in her father’s tent. She could not make out the words, but she recognised Beamish’s gruff voice, and now and then her father’s softer tones.

Her first impulse was to go to them at once, but she restrained herself. Beamish would surely call her, and perhaps she ought to stay where she was until he did so.

She waited impatiently, minute after minute, but still no message came. At times there was silence, and then the murmur

of voices began again. At last she could bear it no longer. Perhaps Beamish thought her asleep and did not like to wake her. As if any sleep could do her as much good as the news that her father was safe. She rose from her knees, and stole over to the door of the other tent. Through the hanging mat she could see her father clearly. Beamish had turned up the lamp, and was standing by him. Her hand was on the doorway when her father spoke, and she stopped as if turned into stone. His voice was low and not perfectly clear, but she had no difficulty in catching the words. 'My dear fellow,' he said slowly, 'you need not be afraid of telling me the truth. I know it is all over with me. How long do you think it will be?'

Beamish hesitated, and then he answered in a gruff but not ungentle tone, his Irish brogue very strong upon him: 'I can't tell you at all; but I hope there will be no change till the evening anyway.'

Colonel Treveryan was silent, and Helen shrank back by the side of the doorway to control herself. For a full second her heart stopped beating; then it began to throb violently, and as it did so, a convulsion of grief came upon her. She was standing in the darkness, struggling to repress the sobs that would rise in her throat, when her father spoke again: 'Then don't wake Nellie yet. Let her have her sleep out. Poor little Nell!'

All attempt at self-control was over then. The next instant she was kneeling by his bedside, with her face buried in the clothes, weeping passionately. Then she sprang to her feet. 'Oh, it is not true! It can't be true! Surely you can do something for him?'

Beamish could not meet her eyes. He shook his head and turned away in silence.

Treveryan was the first to speak. 'Sit down, Nell. I want to talk to you.'

She fell on her knees again and took his hand in both of hers. She was quieter now, and felt ashamed of having made things worse for him. Beamish walked out of the tent. 'I shall be just outside,' he said. 'Call me whenever you want me.'

The father and daughter remained alone for an hour or more, and most of the time the dying man was the speaker. He began by asking her a question which jarred upon her. 'Forgive me, Nell,' he said, 'for asking you again, but are you perfectly sure you care for Langley still?'

'Don't let us talk about that now, father dear.'

‘But I must, Nell. Don’t you see what it is to me now? If I know that is all right it will make me perfectly happy. Are you quite sure you care for him?’

Helen felt at the moment as if she cared less than she had ever done, but she answered steadily: ‘Quite sure, father.’

It was the answer she had always given him, and he was satisfied that it was true. ‘I am very glad, Nell. You don’t know what a comfort it is to feel that I am not leaving you to face the world alone.’

How strong his voice sounded now, almost as strong and clear as ever. Was it possible that he had only a few hours to live?

When the morning broke Treveryan had settled everything. He had told Helen where to find his will and other papers which he wished her to see, and had made her promise that she would not delay her marriage longer than Guy wished. She shrank from this, but her father pressed her. ‘I could not be happy,’ he said, ‘if it were put off. Don’t distress me by making me feel that I stand in the way.’ Then she gave in, the more readily perhaps because at the moment her thoughts were running on something altogether different. With her strong religious belief and her woman’s nature she was anxious now that her father should see a clergyman. She believed he was as good a Christian as ever lived; but he had always been rather careless of religious observances, and this troubled her now. When he seemed to have said all that he had to say, and was lying silent, she suggested it to him.

‘Father dear.’

‘Yes, Nell.’

‘Would you like me to send for Mr. Sladen?’

‘Yes, I think I should.’

In reality he cared very little about it. He had no great belief in anything a priest could do for him now. At the same time he had no objection, and he felt that it would be a comfort to Helen.

His answer did comfort her, and she sent off a telegram asking Sladen to come at once. Beamish took it from her. He had come in two or three times to see that all was right, and make Colonel Treveryan take some nourishment, and had then returned to his cane chair and tobacco outside.

It was daylight now, and the little camp was beginning to stir. The sky was clear, and everything gave promise of a fine day. Lying with his eyes closed, Treveryan heard the sounds of

awaking life, and thought how he had lain listening to them at the same hour the morning before. What a change between now and then ! Yet he did not feel unhappy. He would see Guy in the morning ; and if, as he felt confident, the boy behaved well, he could die with an easy mind. He wished he could see them married, but that was impossible. He wished too that he had insured his life as he had intended to do, but it was no use thinking of that now. After all, it would not make a very material difference to them. Then his thoughts turned to his wife. He felt sure she was waiting for him somewhere. He was loose on doctrinal points, like most of us who have lived long surrounded by millions of non-Christians, many of them God-fearing men, but he had a strong belief in a future life, and he had tried to do his duty. The confident hope of rejoining the one woman he had ever loved robbed death of its terrors. With her gentle face before him he fell into a quiet sleep.

When he woke again the sun was high, and Beamish was sitting at the bedside. He had sent Helen away to dress and get some food.

Colonel Treveryan asked for Guy, who came to him at once. ' I am awfully sorry to see you like this, sir,' Guy said, as he took his hand and sat down.

' It was rather sudden, wasn't it ? But these things will happen. How is the mare ?'

' She's all right, sir. I wish she were dead.'

' Poor little lady ! It was my fault. I ought to have been looking out.' After a moment's silence he went on, ' I wanted to speak to you about Helen.'

' Yes, sir.'

' You know what a difference this will make to her. I said I would give her five hundred a year. Now I am afraid she will not have anything like as much. When everything is settled, there will be perhaps six thousand pounds. That will bring in about two hundred a year. I was going to insure my life for five thousand more, but I have not done it, and the two hundred a year is all she will have.'

' Yes.'

' Under the circumstances, are you still . . . Do you still feel as you did about it ?'

' I am not quite sure that I understand you, sir,' Guy answered slowly.

' Well, Langley, it is just this : I am very anxious about her ;

she will have very little now. Do you still ask her to marry you, or does this alter the case ?'

Guy's face was working, and his eyes were full. 'You can't mean that, sir? You can't mean that you think me such a hound as that?'

Treveryan put his hand out. 'I never thought it would make any difference to you. I did not mean to hurt you. But I wanted to make quite sure that all would be right. She will be alone when I am gone.'

Guy took the outstretched hand and held it. For a few seconds he could not speak, then he answered: 'You may trust me, sir, on my honour. She is far dearer to me now than she ever was; and nothing on earth shall come between us. My one thought in life will be to make her happy.' He meant it thoroughly, and Treveryan saw that he meant it.

Guy stayed with him a little longer, and it was settled that the marriage should take place about Christmas. Guy was still confident, indeed more confident than ever, that his father and mother would not continue to oppose it. If by any chance they did so, he would enter the Staff Corps. With what he had they could live quite well in India. But he was perfectly sure that Lady Mary and her husband would give in now.

Then Treveryan sent for Goldney, and gave him some instructions about official matters. There was nothing of special importance going on, but he wished the boy to take down a few notes which might be of use to his successor. He gave his instructions clearly, and Goldney had no difficulty in following him.

Treveryan's last request was characteristic. One of the landholders of the province, Rajah Jeswant Singh, had got into difficulties, and was being hard pressed by his creditors. He had been very extravagant, and had given much trouble to the District officers, who had already pulled him through more than once. Treveryan was now trying to induce the Government to help him again with a loan. 'Please speak to my successor about it,' he said. 'I think the Government has been rather hard on the poor old fellow. He is extravagant, of course,—they all are,—but he is thoroughly loyal, and we surely ought to stretch a point for men who stood by us when we had our backs to the wall. We shall repent it some day if we forget these things. It is not the University Babus who will fight for us when trouble comes again. You'll be a friend to the old man, won't you? He feels that the generation that knew him is passing

away, and that he has few friends left among the Tell him I did my best for him to the end.' He was silent for a minute, and lay with closed eyes. Then he continued, 'That's all, Goldney. I can think of nothing else that I need trouble you with.' A faint smile came over his face. 'Those boys in the Secretariat won't get their return out of me after all. But try to get it for them,' he added; 'we must obey orders.' He was getting tired now, and Goldney got up. Colonel Treveryan opened his eyes again. 'Good-bye, Goldney. You are sure to do well. I always felt I could depend upon you, and you behaved splendidly the other day. I wish we had more like you. Good-bye.' The boy held his hand for a second, and walked out of the tent in silence, with a great lump in his throat.

As the hot August day wore on, it was evident that Treveryan was sinking. When Sladen came he roused himself, and he seemed to listen attentively while the Communion service was read to him. Afterwards he thanked Sladen quietly, and said good-bye to him. 'My mind is quite at rest,' he said; 'I am perfectly happy. Don't worry yourself about me.' Helen remained with him, sitting by his bedside and doing what little she could to give him relief from the heat, which was very oppressive. His hair and pillow were wet with perspiration; otherwise he did not seem to suffer. Shortly before he died he opened his eyes and looked round the tent. 'Where is Langley?' he asked. Guy was called, and came to him. 'Stay here, Nellie,' Treveryan said. His voice was very faint now, and not clear. Then he went on: 'You have made me very happy, Langley. You will be good to her?'

'Yes, sir, I will.'

'In sickness and in health,' he said slowly, twice over,—'in sickness and in health, till death do you part.'

Guy knelt down by her, and put his hand on hers. 'I will, I will, sir. Before God I will!'

Colonel Treveryan's eyes closed again, and a look of satisfaction came over his face. After that he hardly spoke again, or gave any sign of consciousness. As the swift Indian night came down upon the earth, and the air grew cool, he passed quietly away,—so quietly that they hardly knew he had gone. He had done his duty honestly to the end, like an English gentleman, without self-assertion and without much personal success, but with lasting benefit to many thousands of dark-skinned men, some of whom were not ungrateful.

They buried him the next day in the little English cemetery at Syntia, under the coarse, rank Indian grass. All around him were the mouldering tombs of men and women whose names have long been forgotten. They had done their duty too, no doubt, and died serving their country, which knew them not. God rest our English dead.

CHAPTER XXVI

GUY LANGLEY LEAVES THE THIRTIETH

THE news of Colonel Treveryan's accident reached Mrs. Aylmer at Mussooree on the day that it occurred. Knowing that she would be painfully interested, her husband had telegraphed to her: 'Colonel Treveryan hurt this morning. Horse fell with him. Has been unconscious several hours. Doctor thinks case very serious.'

Mrs. Aylmer received this message about sunset. It was a rainy afternoon, and she was sitting in the drawing-room with Mabs in front of a comfortable fire of rhododendron logs. She got up and walked to the window, and stood for a minute or two looking out. It was a very dreary prospect. The hill-tops were invisible. Clinging gray clouds hid them from sight, and filled the valleys below them, and curled slowly about their steep, wooded sides. Even the pine trees close to the house were half blotted out; they stood gray and ghostly against the gray sky, and she could see the cloud drifting through their sodden branches. Now and then a light wind shook them, and made the cloudy veil swirl for a moment, and waved the long hanging festoons of the Virginia creeper. On the gravel in front of the window there was a pool of water, bristling with raindrops, and the wooden gutter outside the verandah was full to overflowing. Mrs. Aylmer sighed and came back to the fireside.

Mabel, who had looked up for a moment, was now deep in her book again. She was sitting curled up in a big armchair, in company with Alice, and the March Hare, and the Hatter, and the Dormouse.

'Mabs, darling.'

'Yes, mummie.'

'I have just had a telegram saying Colonel Treveryan is badly hurt, and I must go away and leave you here for a little

with Mademoiselle Dufour. You will be very good, won't you, and not give any trouble? If I have to stay away any time I will send for you.'

Mabel's face was one of dismay. 'Must you really go, mum-mie?'

'Yes, darling. Poor Aunt Helen will be in great trouble. You wouldn't like me not to try and help her, would you?'

'No.'

'That's right. And you will be a brave little woman and not make it hard for me? It will be only for a few days.'

Mabel nodded. Her blue eyes were clouded, and her mouth was not quite steady, but she bore up gallantly. 'When must you go?' she said.

'Now, at once, darling. Will you come and help mother pack?'

They went off together, and an hour afterwards Mrs. Aylmer walked out on to the rain-beaten verandah in her gray waterproof. She could not easily have got men to transport her luggage at that hour, and she took with her only what her own people could carry,—some bedding rolled up in a waterproof valise, and her dressing-case, and a small box. She had already sent off a message to her husband: 'Telegram received. Hope to catch mail train to-morrow morning.'

It was a weary journey. First she had to be jolted down hill for two or three hours in a *jhampán* on men's shoulders. It was dark, and raining hard, and the mountain road was muddy and cut up by the wash of water, and sometimes the men slipped badly. This part of the journey seemed very tedious. It was not made less so by the doubt whether she would be able to get a carriage at the bottom of the hill for the long night drive down to the railway. However, Mrs. Aylmer was determined to get through if possible; and she had telegraphed, and sent a trusty native servant on ahead of her. The carriage was there all right,—a comfortless *dák gári*, like a long box on wheels. In this vehicle she spread her bedding and slept as best she could, the relays of ponies trotting on hour after hour through the rainy night. Early in the morning she was at the railway station, where she got a cup of tea, and her troubles were over. All that day she spent in the train, and all the next night. In the morning, at a large station where she had got out for some breakfast, she received another telegram: 'Colonel Treveryan died last night. Funeral this afternoon.'

She stood on the noisy platform, thinking of the dead man, and of Helen, her brown eyes soft with pity. 'Poor child, poor child,' she said; 'I wish I could have been in time.'

Mrs. Aylmer arrived in Syntia late on the evening after Colonel Treveryan's funeral, and found awaiting her a note from Mrs. Hunter.

DEAR MRS. AYLMER—I have been with poor Helen since she came this morning, and shall stay with her to-night; but I told her you were coming, and I am sure that if you can go to her instead of me she would like it. She said she hoped you would come and see her to-morrow morning, when you were quite rested. She is bearing up wonderfully.—Yours sincerely,

ALICE HUNTER.

Mrs. Aylmer hesitated whether to go over at once, but she decided that she had better not. She scoffed at the idea of being tired; but Helen might be asleep, and it would be a pity to disturb her. Next morning she drove over after an early breakfast, and found Helen waiting for her. She was rewarded then for her unselfishness in the way such natures are most truly rewarded, by seeing that she had brought real comfort to a grieving heart.

It was arranged that Mrs. Aylmer should take the place of Mrs. Hunter, who was unfeignedly relieved to get away. She was not an unkind woman, but she did not like sorrow, and she had never been on really intimate terms with Helen. Mrs. Aylmer was to remain in the desolate house until things were settled, and then Helen was to go to her.

It was miserable work breaking up the house, dismissing servants, making out lists of property for sale, sorting and disposing of Colonel Treveryan's effects,—all the bitter dreary labour of such a time. But it was over at last; and when they drove away from the house, Helen, though she was sad enough, was conscious of a deep sense of relief.

In the meantime, it had become known that she was engaged to Guy Langley, and Guy had written to his mother to explain the position. All the chivalry in his nature had been stirred by the incidents of the last few days, and he would have stood by Helen now against the world. His letter was full and clear. This time there should be no possibility of mistake. He told Lady Mary exactly what had happened, and appealed to her to say whether, under the circumstances, it was possible for him to withdraw from his engagement, even if he wished it.

Not that I do wish it, mother dear. Please do not misunderstand me for a moment. I know I did not behave well when I was at

home, and you had only too much cause for thinking that I did not really care for Helen. But I do care for her from the bottom of my heart, and nothing will ever induce me to give her up now. I promised her father on his deathbed that I would be true to her, and my honour is pledged; but even if my honour were not pledged, it would make no difference. I love her more than I can find words to say, and it would be utterly impossible for me to desert her now in her misery and loneliness. I feel sure you will see it as I do, and that you will send me a few lines by next mail to say so. You could not wish me to behave otherwise than I am doing. I know it will be a great disappointment to you, and I am very sorry, but you are too good and loving not to forgive me. If unhappily I have even now failed to convince you, then I have no choice. I must leave the regiment at once, and go into the Indian Staff Corps. In order to be ready, whatever happens, I am sending in an application for it at once. But I feel sure your letter will enable me to withdraw it. Write soon.—Your loving son,

GUY LANGLEY.

Guy wrote in a similar strain to Roland, and he sent in a formal application for the Staff Corps.

These letters were the result of a long talk between Guy and Colonel Aylmer. They came to the conclusion that Guy could not live as a married man in the Thirtieth if his father withdrew his allowance, and that he had better not lose any time in providing against the possibility. After he had joined the Staff Corps on probation, there would still be a year before he need finally cut himself off from his regiment, and in that time anything might happen; but he had better act at once, and, if necessary, join his new regiment before marrying. The marriage was fixed for Christmas; in the meantime Helen was to stay with the Aylmers.

Roland's answer was written the day he got Guy's letter, and was just what Guy had expected. The boy was heart and soul on his side. His mother could not possibly hesitate now, Roland said, whatever she might have thought before. There could not be two opinions about the matter. If Guy had not behaved as he had done, he would not have been fit to speak to. Of course his mother must see it. He wished he were at Wrentham, but he was staying with a college friend for a few days. He sent his love to Helen, and a tender message of sympathy which brought the tears to her eyes. 'He must be a dear boy,' she said; 'give him my best love and thanks.'

Roland's confidence proved to be misplaced. Lady Mary was

shaken, and for a moment she was inclined to give in, but then she began to doubt again. After all, was not the whole thing an accident? Guy had been taken by surprise and drawn into a position where everything had combined to work upon his feelings. Whatever he might say about his affection for Helen, his own letter showed that his real feeling was one of reluctance to desert her in her trouble. His promise had been the result of pity, not love. Was it not her duty to save him now that he could not save himself? Besides, he had committed himself to Clara Schneider, poor dear Clara, who really cared for him for himself. He really was behaving shamefully to her. Was it not a duty to keep him from that? Lady Mary welcomed the doubt, and it opened the door to other and less worthy feelings. If she gave in it would be a defeat, and those detestable women in India would triumph over her. She could not bear that thought. Then came the recollection that she had spoken very confidently to Clara and her mother. They evidently believed in her power. Was she to be shamed in their eyes too? Guy said he would go into the Indian army if they still held out; but even if he meant this now he would not stick to it when he had to face the reality. She knew him well enough. It was a mere threat; and it was a very indefensible and foolish threat too. He ought to know by this time that this was not a line that answered with her. Lady Mary was right there. Guy ought to have seen that the close of his letter was rather illogical and injudicious; but he had overlooked this in his anxiety to remove all doubt. So in the end Lady Mary's heart was hardened. No, she would not give in; so long as there was a chance she would fight it out.

It was in this frame of mind that she went to her husband with Guy's letter. It was a disagreeable interview for both of them. Charles Langley irritated her to begin with by letting fall the remark that it was very much what he had expected when Guy left them. She answered sharply, and stung him into reminding her that he had warned her at the time. Even he was setting up his judgment against hers now. It made her angry, and it made her obstinate, and she pressed her view with redoubled heat. Charles Langley still resisted. He could not see it, he said. It seemed to him that Guy was right, and that they ought to let him have his own way. Besides, they could not force him to give the girl up. He had told them plainly that he would sooner leave the regiment and stay in India. Lady Mary fought on desperately, and rather unscrupulously, exaggerating

Guy's obligations to Clara Schneider, and pouring scorn on his protestations, and professing unbounded confidence in the result of continued firmness. Eventually Charles Langley gave in again, but the contest had been much harder this time, and he did not pretend to be convinced. He washed his hands of the thing, and let her have her own way, but he did not conceal his opinion. Perhaps he might not have given in even so, if she had not reminded him that after all they could always change their mind later on if they found Guy really meant what he said.

Lady Mary went away victorious, but she was not happy. For the first time she did not feel certain that she was right. She was conscious that she had stretched her assertions to the verge of unfairness before she could overcome her husband's resistance; and she had an uneasy sense that it might have been better for her if she had not prevailed. However, she was committed now, and her answer to Guy showed no sign of a faltering heart. The act of writing to him worked her up; and perhaps her very doubts made her write more strongly. Besides, it was necessary to strike hard if she was to win. Any appearance of hesitation would be fatal. She told him, therefore, curtly and plainly, that their former decision was unalterable, and that their opinion was in no way shaken by what he had written. She fully understood his action. It was natural, under the circumstances, that he should be carried away by a feeling of pity, and should imagine it his duty to sacrifice himself. But they could look at the thing dispassionately; and they saw no reason whatever for changing their view of the case. She was even tempted into something like a sneer. 'As to your honour being pledged, I think perhaps the less we say about that the better. It was pledged before you left England.'

So the reality had come upon Guy after all, and he had to make his choice. He had received and refused the offer of the aide-de-camp's place which his mother had tried to get for him. As an aide-de-camp he could not marry. Now the military authorities were ready to transfer him at once to a native cavalry regiment for his year's probation, and if he did not mean to withdraw his application he must go. It was a painful wrench, and for a time he was disposed to try whether he could not manage to live on with the Thirtieth. Helen was distressed at the idea of his leaving it, and he was sorely tempted. Perhaps his people would give in if he were actually married. Dale jumped at the idea. He was miserable at Guy's going, and thought any-

thing better than that. But Guy found Colonel Aylmer dead against him. 'No, no,' he said; 'I advise you to go. You can get back if your people do give in, but your best chance of showing them you are in earnest is to go at once. It will never do to hang on in the regiment on an off chance when you really can't afford it. I shall be very sorry indeed to lose you, but if I were you I would go.'

And so, in the beginning of November, Guy said good-bye to the Thirtieth. He had not quite abandoned the hope of returning to it some day, and this helped him; but it was very hard. What good fellows they were, and how happy he had been among them; and the men too,—how unfeignedly sorry they were to lose him. Soldiering would be a very different thing when you had not Englishmen to deal with. Well, it was no use thinking about that now.

Guy dined with the Aylmers his last night, and then sat up some time talking to Chimp, who was very depressed. 'Nothing will ever be half so jolly again,' he said; 'I wish we could go shares. It does seem such rot that I should have twice as much as I want, and that you should have to go for want of a few hundreds a year.'

Guy left early next morning, and a number of his friends saw him off. Helen was there, with Mrs. Aylmer and Mrs. Dangerfield, and most of the officers of the Thirtieth. After all, he went off cheerily enough. He had been appointed to Baillie's Horse, which was supposed to be one of the best cavalry regiments in India, and he was to be back in six or seven weeks for his marriage if he could get a few days' leave. If not, Helen was to go to him. And there was the charm of novelty about it all.

Helen, on the contrary, was in very low spirits. It was all she could do to keep herself from giving way. She could not understand it. Never before had she felt like this, so utterly desolate, and so nerveless and weak. She did control herself, and sent him away with a bright good-bye; but then she had to wait for a minute or two, while Mrs. Aylmer was speaking to St. Orme, who had come up to say good morning, and as she stood by herself in her black dress her face and her whole attitude showed such dejection that Mrs. Dangerfield, who was looking at her, was struck and touched by it. The good-natured reprobate came up to Helen and held out her hand. 'It's not for long, Miss Treveryan,' she said gently; 'he will be back very soon.'

Helen coloured with surprise. She did not like Mrs. Dangerfield's ways, and had always avoided her. Now, as she shook hands, she saw in Mrs. Dangerfield's face a look of such honest kindliness that she was filled with remorse. 'Thank you,' she said; 'I know it is very foolish of me to be unhappy. It is very good of you to forgive me,' she went on, with a flickering smile. 'I have been feeling so guilty this morning, as if you must all hate me.'

Mrs. Dangerfield laughed. 'I think I did at first, but I don't now; though I always say you have taken the best of the lot.'

Dale drove back to the Thirtieth mess by himself with a very sore heart. When he got there he walked up the steps into the anteroom and called for a servant. There was no one in the room but Denham, who was sitting in an armchair reading a newspaper. Chimp ordered a whisky and soda, and spoke rather sharply. Denham looked up, and Chimp fancied he saw an expression of surprise on his face. 'What the devil has that got to do with you?' he said angrily; 'I suppose I can have a peg before breakfast if I choose.'

It was a thoroughly unprovoked attack. Denham's black eyebrows went up with a slight smile, which doubled Chimp's irritation. 'Certainly, my dear fellow,' he answered quietly; 'a dozen if you like. It has nothing to do with me.'

'Then leave me alone,' Chimp growled out, and he said to himself, 'Curse the brute, I'd like to wring his neck.'

Denham shrugged his shoulders and returned to his paper.

CHAPTER XXVII

A YEAR'S PROBATION

GUY's new regiment was quartered at Sangu, a station on the north-west frontier, and he had a long and weary journey before him. It began with two days and nights in the train. This was not so very bad, as the weather was cool now, but the dust and confinement were irksome. The floor crackled with dust, and the leather cushions were covered with it; and if he took down anything from the net-racks overhead the dust fell into his eyes, and the little washing-room was full of dust, and the water was brown. As Guy went northward, the country became less soft and green, and the climate colder, and the men finer. At night the cold was sharp. Finally, he found himself in a dry, bracing air which was cold even at midday, and the railway stations were full of big black bearded men with broad shoulders and fearless looks. But it was a rough, hard-looking country, the cultivation alternating with stretches of barren land and stony ravines: the trees were fewer and poorer; and instead of the picturesque villages down country, Guy saw nothing but clusters of flat-roofed, mud-coloured houses which could hardly be distinguished from the sterile soil around them. At the station, where at last he got out of the train, he found a note awaiting him. His new commanding officer, Colonel Graham, had a room ready for him, and had sent him a few lines of welcome and some hints about his horses and his farther journey.

Guy's first inquiry was whether his horses had arrived. He found they had come in the day before. They were standing under a tree behind the railway station and whinnied when they heard his voice. Guy walked up to them; and Remus, whom he had taken over after Colonel Treveryan's death, rubbed his soft muzzle against Guy's shoulder. The *syces* reported that they had

borne the journey satisfactorily ; and they looked well and comfortable. That was all right. Guy gave instructions to his *syces* for bringing them on, and then had some breakfast at a neighbouring *dāk bungalow*, and got into the *tonga*, or curricie, in which he was to finish his journey ; his heavy luggage was to follow.

It was a bright, crisp morning, and though the road before him was apparently a very dusty cart track, through a wilderness of stones and sand, he felt cheerful enough as the little ponies went off at a canter under their iron bar. Then followed a long day of jolting and dust. Guy could understand very little of the rough Punjabi spoken by the driver ; but the man laughed aloud, like an Englishman, and they were soon on very good terms. After a time some blue mountains appeared in the distance, and here and there they saw some bright crops, and the people they met were a new type altogether. They were as different from the slim down-countrymen as a Norwegian is from a Greek. Occasionally Guy saw gray or blue eyes, and even brown hair. At last, soon before sunset, when Guy was beginning to get very tired of his seat, the driver pointed with the handle of his short whip to a mass of trees in front, and said, 'Sangu' ; and Guy knew that he was approaching his future home. As they came nearer he made out a considerable native town of flat-roofed houses, and caught sight of some white buildings among the trees, and of a church steeple. A few minutes more and they were cantering along a well-kept road by the side of a cavalry parade-ground. There were trees and running water, and smooth roads crossing at right angles, and a pretty little stone church, and a racket-court, and a building that looked like a club, with people playing tennis on a piece of nice grass. Altogether, the little oasis looked very fresh and green and inviting. A few miles to the west were the rugged blue hills beyond our frontier, —the home of the fighting border tribes.

They drove in at a gateway upon which Guy saw a painted board bearing the name, 'Lieutenant-Colonel Graham, Baillie's Horse.' Guy was received as he got out of the *tonga* by a native servant, who told him the Colonel Sahib and the Mem Sahib were out, but had left word that he should have everything he wanted if he came before they got back from their ride.

He had a wash and something to eat and drink, and then returned to his room to see what his man was doing with his things. Shortly after it had got dark he heard the tramp of hoofs

outside, and a deep voice inquiring whether he had come ; then there was a rap at his door, and Colonel Graham walked in.

He was a tall, straight, well-built man, with a handsome face which could be nothing but Scotch ; there was a kindly though rather satirical smile about his eyes, and his accent was the agreeable accent of a Scotch gentleman. Guy was attracted by his new Colonel from the first. Graham was, in fact, a fine professional soldier of a type not rare in the Indian army ; a steady, sensible man, who thoroughly knew his business, and had not a particle of military swagger about him, and yet looked a soldier all over.

After a few words of inquiry he took Guy into the drawing-room and introduced him to Mrs. Graham, who was waiting for them in her riding-habit. She was very small and slight, with a shy manner and a gentle rather plaintive voice ; she wore glasses, through which Guy could see a pair of dark-blue eyes. That little short-sighted woman was one of the most daring riders in India ; she would mount anything in creation, and her small thin hands seemed to be as strong as they were light.

Guy had a pleasant dinner and evening. He found the Grahams very kind and friendly, and came to the conclusion that he had fallen on his feet. Before they parted for the night it was agreed that he should ride out with Mrs. Graham next morning and see the regiment on parade. His Colonel could mount him, and would take charge of him when the parade was over.

They did not turn out very early in the cold climate of Sangu, and Guy had a long sleep, which did him good ; when he got up he felt fresh and ready to begin his new life.

Mrs. Graham rode a thoroughbred Waler mare, as black as jet and very handsome, with wide crimson nostrils and a skin like satin. She was too lively to have suited many riders, but Mrs. Graham seemed perfectly happy, and Guy could not help fancying that the blue eyes were looking at him rather critically through their glasses as he rode off by her side on a charger of the Colonel's.

The first thing that struck him when they reached the parade ground was the smallness of the horses. After the Walers upon which the Thirtieth had been mounted these little country-breds looked very light for their riders, who were big men. 'Yes,' Mrs. Graham said, 'they do look small ; but they carry more weight than you would think, and they are suited to our rough

country ; they are handy, and they can stand the hard ground ; the men look bigger than they are too.' Then there were very few English officers, about half a dozen altogether ; and the whole thing to Guy's unaccustomed eyes seemed irregular and slovenly. The men were not smart, and the drill was very loose ; and without the flutter of lances the regiment looked poor. They were going to be rearmed with lances, but they had not yet received them. Guy could not help feeling intensely disappointed. 'That a crack regiment,' he thought. 'Good heavens ! one troop of the Thirtieth would ride down the whole lot.' Was his life to be spent in that kind of soldiering ? His heart sank at the prospect.

Mrs. Graham guessed his thoughts and laughed. 'You don't think much of them after the Thirtieth,' she said.

Guy answered rather confusedly ; but she soon put him at his ease. 'Oh, you need not mind saying so to me. My husband said you would find it a contrast after your own regiment ; and I thought them a dreadful set of ragamuffins myself when I first saw them. But one's eye gets accustomed to some of the things one dislikes at first, and they really are very fine fellows. I am sure you will get to like them.'

'I have no doubt I shall,' Guy answered. 'I know I am very lucky indeed to get such a favourite regiment.'

Then she told him what the men were,—a squadron of Sikhs, a squadron of frontier Pathans, and a mixed squadron of men from the eastern districts of the Punjab. She seemed to know as much about them all as if she were serving herself. It was odd to hear a delicate little Englishwoman chatting familiarly about these wild-looking warriors.

As the regiment came off parade the horses were watered at some troughs in front of the lines, and Mrs. Graham said she would go home. Guy was to join the Colonel. 'But I don't like leaving you to ride home alone,' he said.

Mrs. Graham laughed aloud, a happy, bright laugh, like a child's. 'I think Bess and I can take care of ourselves,' she said, with a nod of farewell ; and before he could say any more Black Bess broke into her beautiful long canter and was gone.

Guy rode up to the little group of English officers, feeling rather out of place in his mufti, and Graham introduced him. The second in command was a Scotchman too, George MacPherson. He was a broad, thick-set man, with a grave face and a heavy moustache. He did not look as well-bred as Graham, or

as pleasant about the eyes. He said 'How d'ye do?' rather gruffly, and did not smile. The others were all cordial enough. Guy liked the look of one particularly, a bright-faced boy of the name of Lawrence, the junior officer of the regiment. The native officers came up when their troops had filed into the lines, and Guy made their acquaintance also. They were fine-looking men, with good manners, especially one Amar Singh, Ressaldar Major, a grand old gentleman whose breast was covered with medals and decorations. Guy could not understand what was said, and he felt uncomfortable among all these men, to whose language and ways he was an utter stranger; but he reflected that others had had to begin like himself. After a few minutes' talk they went on to 'stables,' and Guy felt more at home. He still thought the horses small and light, but he saw some good blood, and for an hour or more he enjoyed himself very well.

Then came what seemed to him a curious function. Colonel Graham walked over to a building near the quarter guard and took his seat at the top of a long room. His officers, English and Native, sat about him to right and left, while the non-commissioned officers sat on the carpeted floor, or stood with the men at the other end. For a quarter of an hour or so this *darbar* sat and discussed regimental business, and then Graham got up and took Guy away. It was nearly midday, and Guy was getting hungry.

A bath and a late breakfast followed, and then a smoke with the Colonel, after which Guy went off to his own room for an hour or two. In the afternoon, Graham said, there would be the weekly sports, and Guy would find them worth seeing. It was a curious sight. The men came down in their own native clothes, looking bigger than ever, the Pathans particularly, with their square shoulders and broad chests and flowing lower garments. Every one turned out very well. There were turbans of beautiful delicate colours, and fresh white linen clothing that rustled bravely in the wind, as the men came galloping down at the peg with their lances high in air; and there was much chaff and laughter and good fellowship. The English officers took their share in it all, and Guy had his first try at a tent-peg. Lawrence lent him a horse, which went as hard and straight as a horse could go. Twice Guy's lance-point passed over the wooden mark and struck the ground beyond it; the third time he got home, and the peg came beautifully away, and swung round in the air with the steel through its centre. '*Shábásh!*

Shábásh ! the men said. And Guy thought, 'By Jove, how easy it is ! With a little practice, and a horse that will go straight, one ought never to miss.' He found one could miss, nevertheless, many a day afterwards. Then some of them rode at the peg with their sword-points, and there was lime-cutting and shooting on horseback, and Guy enjoyed the whole thing extremely.

When he sat down to write to Helen that night his letter was bright enough. He was resolved to make the best of things, and he found no difficulty in doing so. His first day had been far from disagreeable, and he felt that, after all, the life would not be so very bad.

The next day was Sunday, and Guy did not feel so happy. There was, of course, no church parade, but he went off with Mrs. Graham to the little church he had seen among the trees. There was a very small congregation and no music, and the service depressed him ; he longed to be back in Syntia and to hear Helen's voice again. Well, it would not be many weeks before he heard it.

On the Monday morning he moved over to his new quarters. He was to share a house with Lawrence, as he had done with Dale, until he could get one ready for Helen and himself. In the meantime, he had discovered that Lawrence had been at Eton. His father had lost money, and he had been obliged to take to an Indian career, but Guy and he had been at school together. Though they had a very faint recollection of each other, this was a bond of union at once. 'Do you know,' Guy said, 'I thought directly I saw you that you looked as if you had been at Eton ; one can almost always tell.'

The next six weeks passed rapidly enough. Guy had his hands very full, for he had not only to learn his new work, but to spend some hours every day over the native languages. In the intervals he did what he could, with the help of Mrs. Graham, to get ready the little house he had taken. It was very small and very bare, and he could not help feeling that it was a poor home to bring a wife to ; but he knew that Helen would not care about that, and there was no other house available. After all, it looked rather pretty when it was finished. Mrs. Graham and he had spent many a pleasant hour over it together. She really seemed to enjoy the work, and was very clever and sensible and good-natured, laughing at him incessantly, and lecturing and helping him as if he had been her younger brother.

It was the middle of December now, and Guy was quite at home in Sangu. He was beginning to understand the men, though their language was very different from what he had heard before; and he had made friends with all the officers, who evidently liked him. MacPherson was perhaps the only exception; he was inclined to sneer at the British cavalry and all its ways; he regarded them as show soldiers, very fine on parade, but quite helpless and useless on service, and he resented their swagger; then he held very strongly the opinion that 'a young man married is a man that's marred.' He could not find much fault with Guy, who was smart and willing to learn; but he thought him a little too smart in some ways, and he was occasionally rude in his manner. However, one cannot have everything, and though Guy thought MacPherson coarse-bred, the man was a stout, capable soldier, and he did not seem really ill-natured.

Altogether, things were pleasant enough. In another week Guy was to be married. The Colonel had given him ten days at Christmas, and on the morning of the 22nd he was to start for Syntia. His heart had begun to throb very hard at times as he thought of what was before him. Poor fellow! he had many a long month to pass before he got his bride.

His letters from Helen had been regular, but he had been a little hurt more than once by their seeming short and cold. On the morning of the 20th he received his post as usual. She was not feeling very well, and had nothing to say, so he must excuse a stupid letter. The next morning it was worse. She said she had a touch of fever. 'Nothing serious, so don't worry about it. I shall be all right to-morrow. I only tell you because I promised to tell you everything.' But she was not 'all right to-morrow.' The same evening Guy received a telegram from Mrs. Aylmer. 'Helen has sharp attack of fever. Better await further news before starting. Some postponement necessary.' Guy hesitated. He was longing to go. On the other hand, he knew he could not expect leave again during the winter; and if his marriage had to be postponed, it would be better to put off going now. He gave up his journey, therefore, in bitter disappointment and waited.

Day after day the news became worse. Helen's letters stopped. She was seriously ill now, in very high fever, at times even delirious. At last, one day soon after the beginning of the new year, when he had hoped to be settled in his own house with his bride, a letter came which brought him a heavy blow. The fever

was typhoid. Mrs. Aylmer added that Helen had apparently been sickening for weeks past ; she had been in very low spirits and unlike herself. They had attributed it to her father's death and Guy's absence, but probably it was the beginning of illness. 'I am very distressed to tell you this,' Mrs. Aylmer wrote ; 'but let me beg of you not to come down. You could not do anything, or even see her, and it would be altogether a mistake. You may trust me to take care of her as if she were my own daughter, and if there is any real danger I will send for you at once.'

So Guy stayed in Sangu, trying to do his work and learn his languages, while the girl he loved lay a thousand miles away tossing in pain and delirium. It was a bad attack, and time after time Mrs. Aylmer was on the point of telegraphing for Guy. At last, after weeks of doubt, Helen's strong constitution got the better of the disease, and he received a telegram to say that unless a relapse occurred she was fairly out of danger. A few days later, directly she was able to do so, she wrote to him. It was a poor little pencil note, in a very shaky hand :—'MY DARLING—I am much better. I am so sorry to have behaved like this. Please forgive me.—Ever your own HELEN.' After that the pencil notes were pretty regular, but for some time the writing remained uncertain and feeble.

Throughout these miserable weeks Guy found Lawrence a real comfort to him. It was touching to see how the boy set himself to work to help his new friend, cheerfully giving up his time and his pleasures to lighten the trouble of another. Guy was too much absorbed in his own anxiety to realise fully at the time how much was being done for him, but he came to understand it later, and to be grateful for it. There are so many good fellows in the world ; one finds it out when things go wrong, and nowhere more quickly than in India.

At last, towards the end of February, the letters became more satisfactory. Helen had begun to make real progress. Mrs. Aylmer reported that she was gaining strength daily, and her letters began to show it. There was now little or no fear of a relapse, and Guy could again breathe freely. At the same time Mrs. Aylmer brought home to him a fact of which he had for some weeks past been growing dimly conscious. It was out of the question, the doctors said, that after such an illness Helen could be fit to face a summer in the fearful heat of Sangu. She ought to go to England, or at all events up to the hills, and her marriage must be postponed. Mrs. Aylmer suggested his getting

a few days' leave now if possible, and coming down to talk it all over.

Early in March Guy started. It was cold at Sangu, but he found it much warmer as he went southward again into the green country, and at Syntia it was beginning to get hot.

The meeting was a shock to him. Helen seemed more beautiful than ever, but very white and thin. Her eyes looked unnaturally large, and the blue veins showed in her temples and hands, and the brown hair was in short, wavy curls about her head. She was lying on a couch when he was brought in, but as he came forward she sat up with a cry of delight, and in a moment his arm was under her, and her head on his shoulder. 'Oh, Guy,' she said, after a minute of silent joy, 'don't you hate me for being such a trouble to you? No good ever,—nothing but trouble and worry and unhappiness.'

And he answered: 'My darling, you are all the world to me. Only get well and come to me, and my life will be one long dream of delight.'

Helen made a marvellous advance during the four days that Guy spent in Syntia; she began to laugh and talk, and to get some colour; then he had to go. It had meanwhile been settled that she should remain with the Aylmers. She would go up to Mussooree again almost immediately, and the marriage must be put off for some months. Possibly Guy might be able to get away on leave during the hot weather and come up to her. If not, they must wait till October. It was a long time, but there was no help for it.

So Guy went back to his wild horsemen in that frontier wilderness and set to work again. In some ways it was a trying time. In spite of Lawrence's company he felt lonely and cut off, and the heat was fierce, such as he had never imagined possible; it was difficult to force himself to study those crabbed characters with the thermometer at 110°. However, he stuck to it gallantly, and with success. He soon found that he was getting really interested in his men, and beginning to understand and take a pride in the traditions of the regiment, and he got on well with the languages. In all respects the 'year of probation' through which he was passing was doing him good.

As the hot weather wore on, it became evident that leave to Mussooree was out of the question. The regiment was unlucky that year; there was some sickness, and they were short of officers. He was in his first year too, and there were other

reasons. Before the summer was over it began to be rumoured in the mess-rooms of the Punjab that things were going wrong across the Afghan border. Our relations with the Amir Sher Ali were strained ; he was showing signs of an inclination to turn to Russia. Lord Lytton's government was determined to come to a clear understanding about our position ; they would stand no nonsense. If the Amir did not fall into line, the beginning of autumn might see us at war. Baillie's Horse might spend their Christmas in Kabul. There had been a long peace—*Vive la guerre!*

Many a long hour of the night, when the fierce sun was down, Guy sat writing to Helen, and the chance of war gave food to his pen. Perhaps his coming to Sangu might be the making of him. The regiments in the north would surely be sent forward, and Baillie's Horse was bound to be one of the first. The Colonel was known to be the best officer of Native Cavalry in India. They could not be left behind. And Helen would be a true soldier's wife, and rejoice to see him get a chance of winning his spurs. 'It seems strange of me to write like this when war might mean putting off our marriage again, but I know you will understand me. It is not that I do not long for that with all my heart and soul, but I am a soldier.'

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more."

Helen did not reply enthusiastically. 'If you have to go,' she said, 'I will try to be glad, but I cannot wish for it. To sit here helpless, day after day and month after month, knowing you were in danger, would be very dreadful to me.'

From his mother, meanwhile, Guy had heard nothing. She meant to play the game out to the end. So long as Guy was not actually married there was always hope, and the less she wrote the better. Her mother's heart ached over it all, but she was a brave woman, and she would not give in. Moreover, Guy's refusal of the aide-de-campship had really made her very angry. She thought it so excellent a thing for him, and when she had asked for it his refusal was unpardonable. Roland wrote occasionally ; he said his mother was very determined, and would not speak to him on the subject, but that he did not care. Guy was quite right, and she must see it in the end.

Before the autumn Guy had qualified in all respects for the Staff Corps ; his term of probation would expire in November ;

then, unless some unforeseen event occurred, he must take the final step.

The time was coming very near when suddenly all India was thrilled by the news that a Russian embassy had been received in Kabul, and that our ally the Amir had struck us a blow in the face. There was a violent outcry, and a fiery ultimatum was sent to Kabul. A British mission was pushed into the Khyber, and its road was barred by armed Afghans. Then war was declared, and our columns crossed the frontier.

To their intense disappointment Baillie's Horse were not sent forward. It seemed to them impossible, incredible. MacPherson was furious, and extremely rude to all around him; he went about blaspheming in Scotch, and it was not safe to speak to him. Guy ventured to express sympathy, and was roundly abused for his pains. 'You! Precious lot of difference it would make to you. You don't suppose they would let you go on service? It's just because the regiment is half officered with children who don't know their work that we're kept back now. And I have been waiting twenty years for this chance. It's enough to drive one mad.'

It was a short campaign. Our columns pressed into the Afghan hills and struck a few heavy blows, which shattered to pieces the regular army the Amir Sher Ali had created with so much labour. The wretched Amir fled towards the Russians, but found himself repelled. Then, deceived and humbled and heartbroken, he died on his northern border, and all seemed ended.

At last, when things were quiet, and there was no chance of service, Guy Langley and Helen Treveryan were made one. Guy came down to Syntia, and they were married in the little church where they had been so often together. Dale was best man, and Colonel Aylmer gave Helen away. The Thirtieth were in great force; they were determined, St. Orme said, to stand by the poor beggar to the last and help him to die game.

Among all the presents Guy and Helen received, perhaps the most beautiful was a half-hoop of large diamonds sent to Helen by Denham. 'How lovely!' she said, surprised out of her usual composure; 'but what could have made *him* send it? Oh, Guy, I don't like taking it from him!' Guy did not like it either, but he did not see how she could refuse. When she thanked Denham, he smiled and wished her all happiness. 'I'm sure you deserve it,' he said gently, and she could not help looking surprised.

There was nothing from Wrentham, of course, but there was a pretty pair of earrings and a letter from her 'loving brother' Roland.

And then they went away together, and Guy Langley understood how wonderful a treasure is a pure girl's love.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIMLA

GUY LANGLEY and his bride had only been a few weeks in their own house, which Helen declared to be delightful, when Guy received an offer which changed the course of their lives.

His story had become known, and some interest was felt in the handsome young couple. Directly he had finally thrown in his lot with the Indian army, it happened that an opportunity of helping them presented itself. There had been a rush to the front from the headquarters offices, and the absentees could not return until the campaign was formally concluded. Meanwhile, there was some want of men to carry on the work. An old friend of Colonel Treveryan's, who was holding an important post in Simla, thought of Guy for a temporary appointment where he would have a chance of showing his abilities, and he was asked whether he would like it.

There was no prospect of active service, and Guy decided to accept the offer. He felt that it was a great thing to spare Helen the fearful heat of a Sangu summer, and he knew she would not go to the hills alone. Moreover, it seemed to be a chance of gaining useful experience, and of making himself known at headquarters, and the prospect of a season in Simla was in itself a pleasant one.

Colonel Graham said it was a pity in some ways, but advised him not to refuse. After all, it was only for a few months.

MacPherson snorted. 'H'm! So you're going again, are you? Just as you were beginning to learn something. Precious lot of good you'll be up there. But I daresay you'll know just as much about the service as the rest of them,—set of scribbling

clerks. They'll make you an aide-de-camp before they've done, or a C.I.E.,' and he laughed aloud in his scorn.

Then the little house was shut up and left, and before the weather had begun to get hot Guy and Helen started for the hills.

One of their chief pleasures in going up was the prospect of meeting the Aylmers again. Mrs. Aylmer had decided to go to Simla that year, and her husband was coming up to join her later in the season. She had already settled herself when the Langleys started, and with her usual energy she made everything ready for them.

They had asked her to find them a small house. Guy would not hear of living in a hotel. 'I could not stand it,' he said. 'It's our first year; let's have a good time. I won't have you kicking about in these beastly Indian hotels.'

'I'm afraid it will be very expensive.'

'Never mind; it's only once in a way, and it's only for a short time. We'll economise when we go back to Sangu.'

'But, Guy, those bills you showed me are dreadful. Your tailor's bill alone is nearly a hundred pounds. I did want to get all that clear.'

'Base is the slave that pays,' Guy answered, with a laugh. 'We shall never get on if we fritter away our income on tradesmen's bills. Charity begins at home, and we cannot afford to be generous. And Poole hates having money sent him; he was quite hurt last time I did it. Don't look so solemn, darling. Let's have a good time; we shall only be young once. Besides, I am sure it pays for a man to do things decently; and really, I have never been a bit extravagant.'

Helen sighed. 'Oh, how I wish I had a lot of money,' she said; 'I feel such a burden to you.' But she ceased to resist, and they telegraphed to Mrs. Aylmer to get them a house.

When they arrived at Umballa, where they had to leave the train, they found the place crowded. The yearly move of the Government offices was in full swing, and it was difficult to get a bed or a conveyance. However, they did get on eventually, in a *dāk gāri*, the two of them sitting very uncomfortably inside, and their necessary luggage and two servants and Rex finding a place on the roof. It was a horrid forty-mile drive. All the ponies were overworked, and some of them jibbed obstinately; and they were lashed and beaten by the native drivers until Helen could not stand it, and Guy was vexed at her for interfering; and the sun was hot, and the dust and the flies dreadful. However, all

things have an end, and about sunset they found themselves among the stony spurs at the foot of the Himalayas. Soon afterwards they drove up the main street of Kalka, with much blowing of bugles, and alighted, dusty and cramped, at the door of a hotel.

An Indian hotel is a strange place. They found they could have a little whitewashed bedroom and dressing-room in a low thatched building a few yards from the road. You entered from a verandah by a latched glass door, the panes of which were covered on the inside with thin red *saloo* muslin. The furniture consisted of a drugget, one bare bedstead strung with tape, and two wooden chairs. In the dressing-room was a small table and looking-glass. Travellers were expected to provide their own bedding. Their boxes were deposited in the verandah near their door, and a hotel bearer brought them two candles. Dinner was at seven o'clock in a neighbouring building. It was not luxury, but they were glad to be at rest, and quite prepared to be content with everything. The water felt pleasantly cold ; and after getting rid of the dust of the road they had some food in the little common dining-room, in company with a few other way-worn travellers.

Then Guy went off and made inquiries at the Post-Office. It was all right. His telegram from Sangu had secured them a *tonga* for the next morning. They must start at six o'clock.

They got up before daybreak, and made ready for their drive. It was cool and fresh, and the note of the 'hot-weather bird' sounded pleasantly in the distance. They were young, and had slept well enough, though Helen had been conscious of much bugling and the sound of many carriage-wheels during the night, —fresh arrivals from Umballa, and mails going through.

They could take little luggage with them in the *tonga*, a low two-wheeled cart with a canvas top, just able to seat four, so the bearer was left behind to bring up the boxes on the backs of coolies, and Guy and Helen and old Kesa, the *ayah*, packed themselves into their vehicle, carrying nothing but dressing-bags, and a little bedding, and enough clothes to last them over a couple of days. They stowed away Kesa and Rex in front by the driver, a big black-bearded man, with blue spectacles and a bugle. Guy and Helen sat side by side behind. The handy little cart, with its cantering ponies and strong simple harness, was a contrast to the cumbrous 'diligences' of France and Switzerland. The whole thing was very English,—all for use, nothing for show.

It was pleasant enough at first as they rattled out of the little street and over the bridge, with much bugling and clanking of the iron currie bar, and for a time afterwards as they went up and up in ever-increasing cold. They had a good broad road with a rough stone parapet, and the ponies pushed along merrily. The mountain-sides, across which the road wound, were brown with drought, and even the pines looked burnt and poor ; but the scenery was on a grand scale, with immense ravines and sudden precipices and fine bold summits. Here and there they saw an eagle soaring over the blue depths. They were only in the lower hills as yet, and the great Himalayan peaks were invisible ; but even among the lower hills there were many places where you might have dropped the 'Mighty Helvellyn' head down into a quiet chink, without any one being much the wiser. To Guy it was all novel and striking.

They passed under Dugshai, with its dreary-looking barracks, and stopped for lunch, after four hours' drive, at another bare brown hill, Solun. They were getting tired of it by that time, for the motion of the *tonga* was anything but easy, and sometimes they got a jolt which nearly shook the breath out of them. The dust was bad too, and the incessant rattle of the iron bar gave Helen a headache.

'Half-way,—nearly thirty miles,' Guy said, as he got out and shook the thick of the dust off him. 'By Jove ! what a ghastly place for European troops to be quartered in. I hope Simla is not like this.'

It was a depressing place to look at,—steep hillsides covered with dry grass and little stiffly-built barracks. They felt better when they had washed their faces and hands in the cold mountain water in a little room that smelt of pine-wood, and had eaten some lunch in the dining-room at the end of the verandah ; then they packed themselves into their *tonga* again, and the ponies went off at a canter, and Guy smoked. The relief did not last long. The air grew colder and colder in the shade, but the sun was hot ; and the *tonga* bumped and jangled, and the dust flew over them from the front, and came curling in over the low footboard behind ; and the sulky bullock-carts and the strings of stupid frightened camels would not get out of the way, in spite of the driver's bugling and abuse. Old Kesa, in front, began to grumble with weariness and disgust : and Guy and Helen took to watching for the milestones ; and altogether they were heartily sick of it, when at last they crossed the neck that divides Simla from Tara Devi.

Simla had been in sight for some time past, and they had had a good look at it when they got down for a few seconds to stretch their cramped legs at one of the four-mile change stations.

Eastward, away to the right, was a dark, round, wooded hill dotted with houses ; then a mass of buildings clustering about the top of a steep ridge, and extending some way down its face ; then to the left some smaller hills, also dotted with houses ; and two or three miles farther west again two bare conical points, the military station at Jutóg. Simla itself was not pretty, but there were some magnificent valleys to right and left, with patches of terrace cultivation and tiny villages clinging to the steep mountainsides. The green of the young wheat was very bright, and the fruit trees were in blossom, looking in the distance like puffs of white or pink smoke.

They drove under the cliffs at the back of Tara Devi, where the huge *lammergeyers* were wheeling in the air, and crossed the neck, and then wound in and out round the wooded spurs which jutted from the Simla ridge. It was still early in the afternoon, but they were longing to get to their journey's end, and these windings seemed numberless. At last, as they came jangling round a corner in the midst of a choking cloud of dust, there was a call from a little pathway in the trees above them, and the *tonga* came to a stop. A servant whom they had sent on in advance had come down to watch for them and save them an unnecessary journey to the *tonga terminus*.

They got out of their low seats, feeling very stiff and cramped, on to a road where the dust lay three or four inches deep. Helen, with her gray silk travelling coat and gray veil, did not show it, so much, but poor old Kesa was half-smothered with dust, and very cross, and Guy's moustache and eyebrows were gray, as were the black beard and blue *puggree* of the driver.

They took out their things and climbed up by a stony path, through a wood of pines and rhododendrons, until they came to their own house. This was a tiny one-storied chalet of rubble and pine, roofed with wooden shingles. It consisted of half a dozen small rooms, and was built upon a shelf cut out of the hillside. At the back it almost touched the perpendicular rock. There was just room to walk round it. In front, to the south, was a wooden verandah four or five feet broad, running the whole length of the house. The site was so narrow that this verandah was supported by posts. There was no garden ; not a yard of flat ground anywhere, except in front of the ' hall door '

at the eastern end, where the end of the shelf was big enough to turn a horse upon. The kitchen and servants' houses and stables formed two rows of little stone huts, clinging to the face of the slope some way from the house.

The whole thing from a distance of a hundred yards looked like a toy,—a rather pretty toy. The rooms were small, and miserably furnished with a few rickety chairs, and tables, and couches. The ceilings consisted of whitewashed cloth, the fire-places of whitewashed stone and earth. The pine-wood doorways and wainscots sloped, as if the house were going to slide bodily down the hill. There was not a horizontal line anywhere, and it was a physical impossibility to hang a picture so that it looked straight. This was the house about which they had been so extravagant. For seven months' rent of it they were to pay more than a hundred pounds. There was only one thing to be said; it was clean, and smelt deliciously of pine-wood.

Unaccustomed to Himalayan houses, Guy walked through the rooms in silence, but with ever-increasing astonishment and disgust. When he came back to the drawing-room, after a long and unsuccessful attempt to wash the dust out of his eyes, he was looking very gloomy indeed. Helen had got back before him, and was making preparations for some tea. She looked up at his face and then broke into a laugh.

'What is the matter?' she said, with her hand on his arm. 'Are you very disappointed? I think it's a dear little house.'

'I think it's perfectly beastly. I can't imagine how Mrs. Aylmer took such a place. I don't care a rap where I am, but this is really not fit for you to live in.'

'You don't know, Guy. All the hill houses are the same, all the small ones at least; and you will see how comfortable we shall make it with a few cane chairs and hangings and nicknacks; and look here, isn't that worth something?'

She drew him out through the window on to the verandah. Below them lay a valley, many hundreds of feet in depth and several miles across, bounded by thickly-wooded hills. The rocky stream at the bottom was hidden by overlapping spurs. Towering above the valley, to their left, was the dark rounded form of 'Jakko,' and more to their front, over two long pine-clad ridges, rose a mountain whose broad summit was still white with snow. The afternoon sun fell full upon it, and showed up snow and rock and deep ravine. Then the sky-line of the hills swept round to the right, to the great mass of Tara Devi with its wooded sides

and rolling grassy top. To the right of Tara Devi was the neck over which they had come. The picture was framed by the tops and boughs of the near pine trees, which, springing from the hill-side about the house, stood out against the deep blue sky on both sides and against the deeper blue of the valley below. At one point, to the left, a great bough of rhododendron, covered with crimson blossom, broke into the upper blue. A light cool wind came through the wood, with a sound like the distant murmur of the sea, and here and there the pine needles moved and glistened in the sun. All round them was the faint chirp and hum of insects, which, in these great mountains, needed rather the warmth of day than the coolness of nightfall to wake them into life.

Guy stood looking out in silence. Helen had clasped both her hands over his arm and was standing by him. After a few seconds she put her brown head against his shoulder. 'Isn't that something to be grateful for?'

And he bent and kissed her and said, 'I'm not human. I'm a beast, a vulgar unpardonable beast.'

Then they came in again and had some tea, and started off to reconnoitre. They examined their small estate, and made out their plans, and found their way to the Mall, the main road of Simla, which was just above them. 'I'm not very tidy,' Helen said; but Guy looked at her with admiration in his eyes.

'We shan't meet any one we know, and they would none of them be fit to black your boots, if we did.' She was neat enough in reality. Her gray travelling dress showed little sign of dust, and she had somehow evolved a rather smart hat and jacket.

They walked a little way up the Mall,—a dusty road along the crest of the ridge towards Jakko—and saw a good many men riding ponies, and some ladies in *dandies* and *jhampons* carried on men's shoulders. Away to the north, beyond another great valley, were some fine mountain masses, and the peaks of the snowy range rose beyond them on the sky-line. Every one seemed extremely cheerful, but at first there was something a little depressing about the bright stillness of the air. Rex did not find it depressing. He came across a monkey, which sat on a tree and chattered at him, and made him very wild and happy.

Mrs. Aylmer had sent word that she would come over about five o'clock, and they met her as they got back to their own turning.

'There they are,' they heard Mabs say; 'there's the Lieben

Longen dog,' and the next moment Rex was covering her with kisses. She repressed him as they came up.

'Isn't it a jolly place?' she said to Guy. 'I like it ever so much better than Mussooree. Only perhaps that's because I've got mummie. It is always horrid without mummie. Unless of course I've got Auntie Helen,' she added politely.

Guy laughed. 'You little humbug,' he said; 'I don't believe you care for Auntie Helen a bit.'

'Yes I do. I care for her very much. Only of course I love my mummie just one little weeny bit the best.'

Mrs. Aylmer sat and chatted for a time, and they watched the sunset flush come up in the eastern sky over the snowy summit of the 'Chor,' and fade into gray. Then Mrs. Aylmer went off.

'The cold comes on so suddenly,' she said, 'as the sun goes down. I must get Mabs in. Don't you two stay out and get a chill.'

They had a pleasant dinner *tête-à-tête* in their tiny dining-room, which looked very cosy with the curtains drawn and a bright wood fire blazing. Then Guy had his cigar in front of it, and they went to bed and slept the sleep of tired young people.

Next day their Simla life began. It was enjoyable enough. Guy was, of course, raw at his work, but he was clever and had a turn for writing, and he worked hard. Before many days were over he was really interested, and he had made a good impression upon his superiors; his manners and appearance were in his favour. Helen supported him well; her experience in her father's house had been of use to her in many ways, and it had cured her of girlish shyness, or at least of girlish awkwardness. Every one called on the young bride, and most people, most men certainly, went away charmed with her. Before long they received hearty greetings at every step as they rode along the Mall in the evenings; Guy, with his slight, tall figure and easy seat looking very well on his big charger, and Helen looking even better on Sultan, with Rex by her side.

Altogether, the year opened brightly for Guy and his wife. They had everything they wanted. They were young, and handsome, and healthy, and in love. They had not had time to feel any difficulty about money, or other troubles; the gloss had not begun to wear off. The world seemed to wish them well.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIMLA

THE real 'season' in Simla, the dining and dancing and drumming, did not begin until the Queen's Birthday. By that time the Langleys had settled down to their life and knew every one. Helen had gone round in a jolting *jhamphān* duly returning her calls, a hundred or more, in the sun and dust of the summer noontides. Sometimes she rode Sultan, but it was a trouble getting on and off without help, and though she looked very nice in her smart gray helmet with the silk *puggree*, she felt the sun.

On the morning of the Queen's Birthday, Guy went off with all the rest of the world to pay his respects to the Viceroy. It was a curious sight. The Mall was covered with civil and military officers, in full uniform, riding all sorts and conditions of animals. The majority were mounted on ponies, some on ridiculous shambling ponies, all mane and tail. A distinguished warrior, his helmet covered with plumes and his bosom with medals, riding a thirteen-hand split-eared *goont*, with a head like a portmanteau and a mane like the falls of Niagara, is a sight to move wild laughter in the throat of death. Guy Langley was glad to feel his big charger under him.

It is worse now, they say. When you leave the Viceregal Lodge you see Her Majesty's army being carted away in *jinrik-shas*. Imagine an officer commanding a cavalry regiment being taken to a party in a perambulator pushed by four little Hindoos !

There was little room for the crowd in the small uncomfortable Government House where Lord Lytton had to receive his subjects ; but these things are well managed in India, and the *levée* was soon over. The Englishmen went past with every sort of salute, one or two facing the Viceroy fairly and bowing, some

making a deep reverence sideways, some nodding hastily over their shoulders, some smiling a familiar smile, some looking as pale and frightened as if they were being led out for execution. Most were in military uniform, some in diplomatic blue and gold, a few in plain evening dress. The natives, who do not share the English horror of ceremonies, wanted more time in order to make their bow with dignity, and were rather hustled in consequence. The most awful hash was made of their names, chiefly because, in spite of requests to the contrary, they would persist in handing up cards covered with a very detailed description of themselves and their condition in life, expressed in very small writing. The officer who had been reading off 'Colonel Green—Colonel Jones—Mr. Brown—Major Robinson—Captain Smith,' as fast as he could go, was filled with despair when they handed him one of these terrible conundrums, and he saw a stately gentleman in gold brocade standing motionless before him. If, in the anguish of the moment, he made a hasty and very unsuccessful shot at the answer, was it altogether surprising? But the stately gentleman in gold brocade salaamed sadly, and went his way with a reproachful look. Had he come hundreds of miles for this? How would the Lord Sahib ever recognise him hereafter? The native military officers saluted and presented the hilt of their swords to be touched by the Viceroy, which looked graceful and soldier-like.

After the *levée* was over, office men took advantage of the holiday to go about calling, in spite of uniform. Guy dropped into the Aylmers'. 'They won't know me in this get-up,' he thought, with a pang of regret, though the uniform of Baillie's Horse was handsome enough.

He walked into the little drawing-room and waited for Mrs. Aylmer, who would be in directly, the servant said. After a minute or two Guy went up to the window, which looked out northwards towards the snowy range. Mabs was sitting near the corner of the verandah with a kitten in her lap, apparently doing nothing. He tapped on the pane, and she looked round and nodded, but turned away again and took no further notice. Guy opened the window and walked out. 'You little wretch,' he said, stooping down and kissing the top of her head; 'why don't you say good morning?'

'I did,—at least I bowed.'

'Bowed! you image! Give me a kiss.'

Mabs complied, but with a grave and preoccupied manner.

'Why, what's the matter, Mabs? You are not going to drop me, are you?'

Mabs hesitated. 'I haven't been very good to-day,' she said at last, with a look of trouble in her face.

'Haven't you?'

'Not particularly *extra*.'

'Why, what have you been doing?'

'I haven't been nice to Mademoiselle.'

'Oh dear, that's very sad. Tell us all about it.'

'Well, do you think it's fair to have to talk French on holidays?'

'Certainly not.'

'Well, that was it. When Mademoiselle came to breakfast I said, "Good morning," and she said, "*Bonjour*," and that I ought to talk French. So I said, "But it's a holiday." And she said that didn't matter, and that I could talk French just as well on holidays as other days. And I said, "But it's not a common sort of holiday; it's the Queen's Birthday." And she said I was talking nonsense. And I said, "It's not nonsense. I don't think it is at all right to talk French on the Queen's Birthday. I'm sure she would be very vexed indeed if she knew it."'

Guy laughed.

'Well, don't you think she would?'

'Yes, of course; she would probably say, "Off with her head!" like the White Queen in Little Alice. Go on.'

'Well, then, she said, "*Allons, ma chérie*." And I said, "I'm not sherry; I'm a little girl. Sherry's wine that you have with your soup. I think French must be a silly sort of language not to know the difference between little girls and soup-wine." And then she said, "It is you who are silly." And I said, "No, I'm not."'

Guy interposed for the sake of principle: 'I say, Mabs, that wasn't quite up to your usual form; in fact, I think it *was* a little feeble, besides being rude. Don't you?'

Mabs reflected. 'Yes; I suppose it was, a little. Only . . .'

'Only what? Only you got out the wrong side of your bed this morning, and you did not care what you said so long as you could be aggravating?'

Mabs nodded.

'I see; excellent sentiment. Well, we've all been young. What happened next?'

'Well, then, Mademoiselle said, "Don't contradict; you are

very silly." And then she said, "Besides, I didn't say sherry, I said *sherree*," like French people do, you know, all down inside their throats, kind of. So I said, "Well, then, *sherree*." And then she got very cross, and said I was a beast.'

'Oh come, Mabs!'

'She did. She said, "*Que vous êtes bête*," and that I was rude and she would tell mummie.'

Mabs stopped. 'Well?' Guy said.

'Well, then, mummie came in, and she told her, and, and . . . mummie was vexed with me.'

She looked up at him with a pathetic break in her voice. The blue eyes were quite full now, and the corners of the little mouth drooped and quivered. Guy's principles vanished into thin air. What did it matter to him that she had been naughty and troublesome? 'Poor darling,' he said; 'what a shame. Never mind. Mademoiselle's a horrid old cat, and it was all her fault.'

Mabs was a thorough woman; she had got the sympathy she wanted, now her loyalty rose in arms. 'No,' she said, with her tiny finger up. 'Naughty boy! Mother said it was very rude of me, and I must beg pardon.'

Guy was corrected. 'Oh, did she? Have you done it?'

'Yes. I didn't want to at first, but I have now; and I do so want mummie to come. Do you think she'll come soon?'

'Yes, very soon. But you're sure you did just what she told you?'

'Yes. I said, "*Mademoiselle, je suis bien fâchée que j'ai été méchante, et je ne serai jamais méchante encore, et je parlerai Français si vous voulez*."'

'And what did she say?'

'Oh, I don't know; but she's all right now.'

'Quite sure?'

'Yes. Oh, I know what she said. She said she hoped this would be a lesson to me, and that I was to go away because she wanted to write letters.'

'Then come along, and let us see your garden. You said you'd show it me.'

'Yes, but I do want to see mummie first. I can't really enjoy gardens or anything when she is vexed.'

'But she won't be vexed now. She'll be quite satisfied.'

'Do you really think so? Really and truly? Honour bright?'

'Yes, honour bright. Come along.'

Mabs deposited the kitten on a flower-stand with a parting

kiss and a word of warning. 'Now, pussy, be a good child, and don't get into any mischief while I am away; and *mind* you're not rude to your governess, because that's not at all lady-like.' Then she took Guy off and showed him her garden, a little slip of earth with a few nasturtiums in it. After that she led him to a corner of the lawn where there were some shrubs. 'Inside there's my visiting place,' she said. 'Let's have some fun; I'll go in, and you pretend you've come to call. Will you?'

'All right, but how do you get in?' Guy said, with a rueful look at his uniform.

'Oh, I'll show you. It's awful jolly when you're inside.' She dived in under an overhanging branch and disappeared.

'Come on now,—I'm ready.'

Guy looked at the ground. The grass was quite dry. It could not hurt his clothes much. Next moment his head and shoulders were in Mabs's drawing-room. There was no room for more of him, as it was only about four feet square. His long legs protruded from the bushes, spurs up.

'Oh, *how* d'ye do?' Mabs said; 'I'm *so* glad to see you, dear Mrs. Jones. I hope you are quite well again.'

'Quite well, thank you.'

'That's right. No more colds, or fever, or,—or typhoid, or anything?'

'Well, yes; now I come to think of it, I have had a touch of typhoid two or three times.'

'Dear, dear, *how* troublesome! You really ought to be more careful of yourself, dear Mrs. Jones, for the sake of those sweet children.'

'What are you two babies doing there?' Mrs. Aylmer's voice said outside, and Mabs jumped up with a cry of delight. Guy backed out of the leafy doorway with a laugh, and Mabs's sweet face followed him. In a moment she had her arms round her mother's neck, and was telling her all about Mademoiselle Dufour. Mrs. Aylmer listened quietly, and then kissed her. 'That's all right, darling. Now we won't talk about it any more.'

When Guy had stayed a few minutes and gone on, Mrs. Aylmer sat in the drawing-room thinking about him. 'I was hard on him,' she said to herself. 'Arthur was right: he has stuck to Helen as well as any one could have done; and a man who is so good to children can't have much the matter with him. And yet, I never feel quite certain of him somehow.'

As the weeks went on, Mrs. Aylmer's vague feeling of doubt

recurred and deepened. She had really not much to go upon, but occasionally she met Helen alone, and fancied that the girl seemed a little confused and anxious to explain Guy's absence. Then she saw Guy enjoying himself very heartily at dances and elsewhere, without much apparent reference to his young wife. He seemed to have made very great friends again with Mrs. Dangerfield, who had also come up to see Simla. Mrs. Aylmer did not like it altogether.

There was some slight foundation for her uneasiness. The time had come when Helen must undergo the inevitable process; her husband was beginning to let her see his real self, and occasionally she came upon some stratum of his character which made her uncomfortable. She could not help being troubled by his want of steadiness in religious matters. Sometimes he seemed serious and full of strong feeling; at other times he was careless and inclined to be flippant. One Sunday he had been looking about him and yawning all the service. Afterwards, when he had mounted and ridden up to her *jhampán*, he said, 'What an infernally long sermon that was. The old beggar bored me so that I very nearly gave him nothing.'

'Oh, Guy! I thought you would like to give to that. It is such a really good thing, and it's for the army.'

'Oh yes. It wasn't having to give that I minded; it was the sermon. As the Frenchman said of the flea, "*Ce n'est pas la piqûre, c'est la promenade.*"'

Helen laughed, but she did not like it. The preacher had been so earnest, poor fellow. It seemed unfeeling.

Then Guy had taken to Sunday afternoon tennis. 'You don't mind, do you?' he said, well knowing that she would not like it, and a little uncomfortable at broaching the subject.

'My darling, it isn't my affair,' she answered. 'If you see no harm in it I suppose there is no harm,—for you.'

'But you'll come too? I accepted for you.'

'I would rather not.'

'Oh, do come. I can't leave you all alone. What harm can there be in a game of tennis any more than a walk?'

She gave in and went at once; but she would not go any more. 'You go, Guy,' she said the second time. 'I would rather not. I don't care about it. Don't ask me, please.'

He tried in vain to change her mind. 'You are sure you don't mind my leaving you?' he asked at last.

And she laughed and answered, 'Don't be so conceited. Do

you think I can't get on without you for an hour or two?' But she spent a rather sad afternoon, and the thought came to her: 'I wonder whether he is beginning to get tired of me already?' She drove the thought away, and told herself that men must have exercise and amusement; but it pained her a little.

After that she and Rex used to go for a walk on Sunday, generally round Summer Hill,—a pretty winding road where there were some beautiful views, though the crimson rhododendrons had gone now, and the hill-sides were very brown, and the snows were hidden by the summer haze. After a few Sundays she fancied that people noticed her being alone; then she gave up going out. In the evening Guy used to be very dear and loving, and she forgot her afternoon; but it came again next week.

Then the war was wound up, and officers began returning from the front. Helen was keenly interested in it all. It was a real pleasure to her to listen to stories of the campaign instead of personal gossip about those around her. Guy did not seem to care very much. He had been keen to go on service; but he was bored by the recital of other men's experiences. 'It's stale now,' he said, 'and we read it all in the papers.' She could not understand him altogether, and again she was conscious of a slight sense of disappointment.

Then at the dances it seemed to her that Guy was not quite so fond of being with her as he used to be. He still said no one danced liked her, and seemed to enjoy their waltzes together; but he also evidently enjoyed his waltzes with others, and sitting with them in very remote corners; and occasionally he did not turn up when she was engaged to him. It was quite natural, she argued, and quite right. She would not have it otherwise, and yet somehow, at times, she felt a little out in the cold. But, after all, she had not very much to trouble her. She loved her husband, and believed he loved her, and these things were but crumpled rose-leaves. She would have been very much surprised, and very angry, at any hint that she was not perfectly happy with Guy, who was warm and loving and good to her.

Altogether, the life was very pleasant in many ways. They went out a great deal to dinners and dances; and Helen was young enough and bright enough to enjoy going out when there were not too many nights of it in succession. Occasionally, when Guy could get away, they went to a picnic in the woods.

In the evenings they generally rode or played tennis. The courts were cut out of the wooded hill-sides ; and the kites and the great yellow-headed eagles came and looked on from the blue sky above ; and if you hit a ball over the wire-netting it probably went down five or six hundred feet through the trees. Then there were the merry *gymkhānas* at Annandale, a grassy basin among the pines. All Simla used to gather there one afternoon a week, and the *jhampāns* and *dandies* were put down on the bank by the cricket pavilion ; and there was pony-racing and tent-pegging, and tilting at the ring for the ladies, and all sorts of sport. At sunset it ended, and the crowd went streaming up through the darkening woods to the Mall. There was some good music to be heard too, and there was the little theatre ; and altogether, people managed to amuse themselves very well indeed.

Behind all the fun was a great quantity of solid work. Many scores of men who were on duty in Simla, filling the various Government offices civil and military, were, as a rule, not only hardworked but overworked. They began early in the morning and ended late, and had little time for amusement. But there were plenty of idle men on leave, and the fiddling and dancing went merrily on ; and the district officers down in the burning plains, and the perspiring merchants in Calcutta and Bombay, imagined that the fiddling and dancing were the whole thing.

As to the people one met, Helen and Guy came to the conclusion that they were very much like their countrymen elsewhere, which, on the whole, was not surprising.

Mrs. Stewart of the Thirtieth, who was fond of an epigram, said the Simla ladies were all either rowdy or dowdy ; but, in fact, the rowdy element was very small indeed. In a society consisting of a few hundred people crowded upon a hill-top, where every one knows every one else, the fast set makes a great noise for its size ; but the large majority of the ladies were sensible, well-bred Englishwomen of the usual type. The men were mostly soldiers, and almost all professional men who knew their business. Their conversation was apt to be a little shoppy ; but, taking them all round, the average of gentlemanly feeling and intellectual culture was, at least, as high as among the professional classes in England. Being Englishmen, they had, of course, snobs among them, in high positions and in low, and the way of these snobs was to sneer at everything Indian ; but such

vulgarity was unusual. True snobbishness does not flourish out of England ; it droops and dies in the opener air of Greater Britain.

Altogether, though it had its drawbacks, Simla was by no means a disagreeable place of exile, and so Guy Langley and his wife speedily concluded.

CHAPTER XXX

A SIMLA DINNER-PARTY

THE dry weather was over and the rains had set in. The Government of India were not depressed by the change. Their skies were clear. The campaign in Afghanistan had been short, and thoroughly successful. The old Amir was dead; and the new Amir had seen the folly of further resistance. He had signed a treaty, giving us all we wanted. An English resident was about to be established in Kabul, and the Russian Mission had disappeared into the desert. Our influence in Afghanistan was predominant. The star of England was bright in the Central Asian sky, and the star of Russia looked faint and pale. It had only needed a little boldness. Lord Lytton had stepped forward and struck one determined blow, and all was over. Was this the bugbear that had frightened us for so many years? The Forward school were triumphant. Here and there a man who knew the Afghans, or had read the history of our empire in the East, said, 'Wait; we're only beginning.' But the majority scoffed. They had had enough of masterly inactivity. Difficulties, like Afghans, disappeared if one tackled them boldly. Five hundred men and a couple of mountain guns, properly handled, could go anywhere in Asia; and for the future we were not going to be afraid of anything or anybody. If the Russians ever troubled us again, then *Vive la guerre; à Tashkent!*

Still it was raining heavily. Day after day the great gray clouds came rolling through the gap by Tara Devi, or over the ridge from the north, and filled the valleys and swallowed up the hill-tops. It generally cleared in the evening; and sometimes there were beautiful sunsets, when the snowy range stood out clear and close, above a foreground of wooded hills and deep blue valleys fresh-coloured by the rain; and to the southward one

could see the plains fifty miles away, and the great rivers winding through them; and around the sinking sun the clouds grouped themselves in gorgeous masses of brown and crimson and gold. On the other hand, it sometimes rained persistently from morning till night, and then it was unpleasant.

One Saturday afternoon Guy Langley had come home early from office. Just before lunch-time there had been a break; the rain ceased, and away to the westward there was even a little patch of blue sky; white clouds like carded wool lay in the valleys and rested on the hill-sides; in places they were drifting slowly upwards as if they meant to rise into the sky and disappear. Guy looked out of his wooden verandah and thought it was going to be fine. He would go home to lunch, and they would ride round Jakko in the afternoon. The week had been one of hard work. The horses wanted exercise, and so did he. He asked and received leave to go, and walked home. The roads were very wet; and from the wooden drains brown torrents went roaring down the hill-sides through the pines. The walls and the mossy limbs of the oaks and rhododendrons were green with delicate ferns. They would have a jolly ride. On a fine evening nothing could be pleasanter. There was no dust now and no heat-haze; and the view away to the snowy range, over the deep blue *khuds* and the great jagged Shali peaks, was always lovely. They would have a spin down the straight bit at the back, from Sinjowlee village to the convent. His Waler always shied a little at the end, where the road sounded hollow under the black rock. What an awful smash it would be if he ever went over the stone wall there; they might go down hundreds of feet. You could get another good long canter from Chota Simla to the corner by Oakover. That was the best way round Jakko, from north to south. There was very little of the road where you had to walk; the downhill part was short.

Guy reached home without rain, and was received with acclamations. 'Oh, I *am* so glad!' Helen said. 'I was beginning to be afraid you had not been able to get away. I'm longing for a ride, and Sultan was so fresh last time that I could hardly hold him.'

But as they sat at lunch it grew darker, and a gray veil came across the window. 'Only a cloud drifting up the hill-side,' Guy said.

Then it began to rain, harder and harder, until they could hardly hear each other speak for the noise on the wooden roof.

‘Confound the rain. What a nuisance it is! I can’t see what I’m eating. It’s as bad as a London fog.’

‘Never mind. We’ve got plenty of time. It is sure to clear in the afternoon.’

It did not clear in the afternoon. On the contrary, the clouds settled down more and more heavily, and the sky became one uniform dull gray without a sign of light anywhere, and the gravel outside the porch became a pool.

About four o’clock, having smoked a cigar in the verandah and read the *Pioneer* down to the last advertisement, Guy began to get thoroughly bored. What is more disgusting than a wet afternoon after a hearty lunch and a smoke, when one has arranged to go out and cannot settle down to anything? Helen had left him to his paper, and had gone indoors to write letters. He called to her, and she came out with Rex through the drawing-room window.

‘What is it, darling?’

‘Isn’t this beastly? The only afternoon I can get too. We might have had such a jolly ride.’

‘It is very disappointing, but it may clear yet. Only it will have to be quick. We must get in again by half-past six.’

‘Why? we’re not dining out?’

‘Yes; don’t you remember?—with the Ashtons. And it will take me nearly an hour from here. It’s right at the very top of that dreadful hill.’

‘O Lord! that licks everything. It’s sure to rain the whole way there and back; and I can’t stand that woman. She thinks a major-general is a sort of little god, and patronises one in the most disgusting way.’

‘I don’t think she means it really, and you won’t see much of her.’

‘I hope not. What a cursed nuisance it is!’

Helen examined the sky. ‘I really think it is a little lighter now,’ she said. ‘I will go and get my habit on, and if it does clear we can have a cup of tea and set off at once. I will tell them to get the horses ready.’

‘All right.’

Then Guy proceeded to make himself thoroughly miserable by setting his heart upon the rain stopping in time to let him have his ride. What children we are! There is only one thing, working against time, that tries one more than waiting against time.

Guy sat gazing at the sky, and smoking, and looking at his

watch, and using bad language, which had no sort of effect. The clouds drifted through the trees, and at times it looked as if it were going to lift, but the rain always came on again. On a fir tree opposite the verandah there were two of the big black hill crows; they kept under shelter close to the trunk, and occasionally one of them took a little exercise by hopping up or down from one branch to another, round and round the body of the tree. Then they cawed to one another faintly, in a bored, listless kind of way, very much at the back of their throats. Close by, on the very topmost shoot of a deodar, sat a kite defying the rain. Occasionally he shook the water from his feathers. Guy looked at the keen aquiline head, and thought what a fool the kite was to get wet when he might keep dry, and what a good shot it would be for his express. But as this thought struck him the kite came to the conclusion that he could not stand it any longer. He screamed his shrill whistling scream, and dived off into the air, and went skimming down the hill-side into the great gulf of cloud. On a wooden railing to the right, also in the rain, some monkeys were sitting. Their tails hung down perpendicularly, and they looked very dejected. The only bright thing to be seen was the roof of a servant's hut, which was made of wood patched with kerosene tins; the tin was shining with wet.

Rex got up and walked deliberately out on to the gravel, and stood in a pool looking round him. He saw the monkeys, but took no notice of them; then he came into the verandah again and threw himself down on the boards with a slump and a deep sigh. It really was sickening!

At half-past five Guy came indoors. They had some tea in the drawing-room, and Helen tried in vain to make him happier. He sat in an armchair, silent, with his hands crossed at the back of his head. Life was not worth having. At last she got up: 'Well, I must go and dress now. I feel just as if it was the day after to-morrow. Don't sit here and get late, will you?'

'No,—all right.'

When they were ready to start they found Helen's *jhampán* and Guy's pony in the verandah. It was raining still, pouring. Guy mounted in the verandah, the pony fidgeting upon the sounding boards as the waterproof apron was tied round his rider's waist. They got safely out under the low end, and then the *syce* handed Guy an open umbrella, which nearly sent the pony backwards down the *khud* among the pine trees. Helen stowed herself away in her *jhampán* under a square canvas top,

with blanket curtains round her. She was fairly well sheltered if the wind was not too strong. Her *jhampáns* went bare-legged, so as not to spoil their shoes, and had blankets fastened over their heads. A native of India always keeps his head dry and warm if possible, even if his body is exposed.

Then the procession started, a *syce* with a lantern walking first.

It is pleasant enough riding out to dinner on a fine evening if you have not got a gray pony who sheds his coat over your black trousers ; on a wet evening it is horrid. You cannot get over the ground fast for fear of splashing yourself with mud, and it is difficult to keep the wet out. So Guy found. First the wind got under his umbrella and nearly blew his hat off ; he managed to press it hastily down, but it was most uncomfortable, and he knew it would make a mark across his forehead ; then another gust came and wetted his face ; he could not get out his handkerchief to wipe it, because he could not hold his reins and his umbrella with one hand for more than an instant, and his handkerchief was in the pocket of his dress-coat ; then his apron flew up on the weather-side, and his foot got wet. Unless you wear fishing-stockings, that is only a question of time. Then he felt cold inside one thigh, and was convinced that the rain had got in somehow on to his saddle. All this he could have borne, with the help of a little bad language, but before he had got half-way there came a final sorrow which utterly broke him. In a struggle against the wind at a corner his sleeve was exposed, and he became aware that one of his shirt-cuffs was soaked and softened. That really was too much. How the devil could he sit down to dinner with a cuff like a boiled rag ?

When they arrived at Mrs. Ashton's porch they found themselves rather late. Helen's men had slipped about going up the greasy hill. The verandah was full of *jhampáns*, the men sitting huddled against the wall in their wet blankets. All about the porch were standing ponies, with dripping manes and tails.

'I'm afraid we're late, Guy,' Helen said, as she got out of her blanket prison.

'I don't care. People have no right to ask you out in such beastly weather.'

Helen was dry, and fairly cheerful ; she had been glad to get a little fresh air, even in the rain. 'It is rather inhuman,' she said with a laugh ; 'but they could hardly know what it was going to be, could they ?' And she went into the ladies' room to

take off her cloak and 'cloud.' With Guy in his present humour she felt that a change of company might not be altogether undesirable.

Guy's ill humour soon gave way. The room was full of people when they came in, and he fancied that their hostess looked them up and down rather haughtily, as if a subaltern and his wife had no business to be the last to arrive. She was just the sort of woman to think that,—a vulgar woman half the age of the General, who had lately married her and brought her out from England. She had not yet realised that in India generals were pretty numerous. Guy's shirt-cuff was not very bad after all; and when he went in to dinner and searched the name-cards, he found himself placed next to a very pleasant lady with whom he was on the best of terms. 'This is luck,' he said as he sat down; and she nodded and smiled to him.

Mrs. Hatherley was a pretty woman, with merry eyes, and a good substantial figure, and full red underlip. She was always laughing, not to show her rather irregular white teeth, but because she had a happy heart and could not help it. She dressed well, and lisped rather prettily, and the boys called her 'Kiss me Quick,' which was a shame, but struck one with a certain sense of fitness.

Helen was seated nearly opposite, at a corner of the table. She had been taken in to dinner by a Colonel Thurlow, whom she hardly knew. Guy's board-ship acquaintance, Major Russell, now in the Quartermaster-General's Department, sat on the other side of her.

It was the usual thing,—a dinner of about twenty people, chiefly military or quasi-military. One of the colonels was a judge, and another was a Director of Public Instruction, but they had served in the army. Then there was a Member of Council, and a Government Secretary, and an A.D.C. to give the party tone, and make the young ladies happy. An A.D.C. at a Simla dinner-party is like the dash of liqueur in a claret-cup; without him the thing is not quite perfect.

Mrs. Hatherley's lawful guardian, the Government Secretary, was a man who had been at work since seven in the morning, and was dead-beat. His head ached, and he was only too glad to be neglected. Mrs. Hatherley chaffed him a little in her good-natured way, but she could not get a rise out of him, nothing but a weary smile and a few half-absent words. So she said, 'You've been overworking yourself as usual. I shall leave you in peace

till you have had some dinner,' and she turned to Guy. In a minute or two they were rattling away as hard as they could go, and Mrs. Hatherley's lisp and merry laughter came to Helen's ears. She looked across the table and saw how happy Guy seemed. 'I'm very glad,' she thought. 'He has had such a dull day. I wish I were as bright and amusing as she is.'

A few minutes later she looked up again and caught their eyes fixed upon her. Mrs. Hatherley was laughing as usual at something Guy had said. Helen could not help feeling that it was something about her, and the thought hurt her a little. She was right enough. She had got into conversation with Colonel Thurlow, who was a pessimist of the most exasperating type, and he had been telling her that England was in her *décadence*, and that English troops were now in all ways inferior to Russians.

'I wonder how you can bear to say that,' she had answered warmly. 'If I believed England was going down I should never be happy again.'

The colour had come into her face, and the light into her eyes; and Guy, looking across the table, had understood it all. 'There's my wife on the war-path,' he said to Mrs. Hatherley; 'I bet she'll make the poor old Colonel sit up. I know that expression as well as possible.' He did not add what he thought: 'How handsome she is looking.' Mrs. Hatherley laughed, and it was her laugh that attracted Helen's attention.

Helen glanced at them for an instant with something like displeasure rising in her face. She tried not to be vexed, but she did not like it. It was perfectly innocent of course, some nonsense of Guy's, but she would have preferred his not making fun of her with other women. However, she only smiled and shook her head slightly, and turned to her right-hand neighbour, who was sitting silent at the bottom of the table, crumbling his bread up and evidently in dreamland. 'I hope you don't hold the same views as Colonel Thurlow does, Major Russell.'

He looked round, with the absent look fading out of his big eyes. A smile came over his face. 'What about, Mrs. Langley?'

'Well, he has been telling me that the Russian troops are better than ours, and that it will be an evil day for us if we have war.'

'What an alarming subject to discuss at dinner!'

'That was my fault. I was asking him about the fighting in Afghanistan. But you don't agree with him, I hope?'

Russell saw that she was speaking seriously, almost anxiously. 'No, I don't. I should be very sorry indeed if I did. I believe our troops are much better than Russians; they would show it if they ever had a chance, as they did in the Crimea.'

'Then you are not afraid of a war with Russia?'

Russell was silent for a few seconds. Then he said: 'A war with Russia would be a big business, and it would mean a stirring time for us all in India. The Russian power in Asia seems to me to be in some ways on a sounder basis than our own. Russia is a big nation, advancing gradually by land, and absorbing small Asiatic populations, while we are ruling three hundred millions of men, whom we can never absorb, in a country separated from England by thousands of miles of sea. The Russian position is natural, so to speak, while ours is artificial. Still, if England chooses to put out her strength, we need not be afraid.'

'I wish you would convince Colonel Thurlow of that. It makes my heart sink when I hear Englishmen talking about the *décadence* of England.'

'I don't think Colonel Thurlow means all he says,' Russell answered with a smile. 'He is rather fond of frightening us all.'

Helen turned to the other man, who was listening in silence across the corner of the table.

'I do mean it all,' he said, 'every word of it. You all laugh now because you have beaten a few thousand half-drilled Afghans, but you will know who was right some day. Our officers know nothing of European warfare, and our troops can't march, and they are useless unless they are very highly fed, which they cannot be in Central Asia; besides, we have hardly enough of them to make up an Army Corps. What is the good of that against a power like Russia? They would be about as useful as Fairshon's army—four-and-twenty men and five-and-thirty pipers.'

Russell looked at Helen. 'I am not going to talk any more shop, Mrs. Langley. I'm afraid we cannot settle the Central Asian Question over the dinner-table.'

'Which means that I am too frivolous to understand anything about it,' she said rather indignantly. 'That is the way we women are always treated. But I am not going to be put off. Is it true that the British soldier will not fight unless he has quantities of roast beef and beer? I have heard that said before, and I don't believe it.'

'That's a very old story,' Russell answered,—'old even in Shakespeare's time. It's one of the many which the French have

invented about us. We answered them at Agincourt and Blenheim, and in the Peninsula, and at Waterloo, and by hunting them out of India and Egypt and America ; but they go on saying it, with that sublime disregard for facts which characterises them. Of course, it is true that the British soldier is accustomed to better food than the Russian, but I can see no sort of reason why we should be unable to give it him, even in Central Asia. If we cannot, he will manage without it, as he has done before, and will still be a better fighting man than the Russian is. Surely that was proved in the Crimea, where we used to beat them one to three.'

'The Russian soldier is very different now,' Thurlow said, 'and so, unfortunately, is the child they call the British soldier.'

'Possibly ; I don't know. The Duke of Wellington spoke evil of the British soldier seventy years ago, but the British soldier went on beating Napoleon's troops until a French general said our infantry was the best in the world.'

'Well, I only hope you are right. But I know the British soldier cannot march, certainly not on black bread, like the Russian.'

'Marching is a great thing, of course, but it is not everything. The Mahrattas could always outmarch us on their own ground, but there was never much doubt as to the result of any war between Englishmen and Mahrattas. After all, the first thing is fighting-power. The man who has most fighting-power is the most useful soldier, even if the other can march better. And I am not at all sure about the marching even. English troops have done some good marching before now.'

'Not on black bread.'

'I decline to admit the black bread. With our organisation we ought to be able to feed our men decently. The Russian is almost an Asiatic, and has no organisation. That has always been his weak point, and that is where we ought to beat him.'

'I don't agree with you in the least. Our organisation has always broken down, and I never yet heard any one doubt that the Russians could outmarch us ; and I am not at all sure about the actual fighting-power. Their troops are men, and ours are boys, or will be. But even supposing our men are as good as theirs, thirty or forty thousand British troops cannot fight practically unlimited numbers of Russians, and you won't be able to put more than thirty or forty thousand over the border, or to keep up so many. Russia is unlimited in numbers.'

‘I don’t think Russia is unlimited in numbers. Even if we are fighting without allies in Europe, the nature of the ground, difficulties of supply, and so on, will limit the numbers she can bring to bear. But there again I decline to admit the thirty or forty thousand. Why should we be limited to numbers any more than Russia?’

‘Where are you going to get more? The British army does not possess the men to give you, and would not give them if it did. They would be wanted in Europe. Very likely some of our garrison will be taken away from us.’

‘It is simply a question of money, I think. If you will pay you can get the men.’

‘Untrained recruits.’

‘Yes, but they will soon be worth having.’

‘Nowadays wars don’t last long enough to train raw material. They are over in a few months or weeks.’

‘Not in Asia. The circumstances are quite different. Even in Europe they last some time. The French levies gave the Germans a lot of trouble.’

‘They did very little in the end. But even supposing your raw recruits were any good, how many do you suppose you could

‘As many as you wanted.’

‘But speaking practically. It is difficult to keep our small army up to strength now. How can you possibly hope to get say double the number?’

‘By doubling the pay.’

‘You would be ruined, and then you would not get them.’

‘I think we should get them if we gave enough. Suppose, for example, that we gave five shillings a day, do you suppose we could not raise as many men as we cared to have?’

‘Perhaps; but that is out of the question. India could not pay them, and England would not if she could. She would not even let India do so; it would spoil her own market.’

‘If England goes to war with Russia, and then will not raise an army or let India raise one, we shall no doubt be in a bad way. We cannot fight Russia without an army. But I think England will realise that fact. As to the expense, the mere pay of troops is not very expensive. Even half a million of men at five shillings a day would be what? Say fifty millions a year. Fifty millions a year for two or three years would not crush England, or even India.’

'All this seems to be out of the range of practical politics. Such heroic measures are not really possible in the present day.'

'I don't believe it. We have done big things before, and we shall do them again when pressed. One soon gets accustomed in war time to ideas which in cold blood beforehand would have seemed amazing. We must do big things if we are to stay with the big nations.'

Thurlow smiled rather contemptuously. 'You certainly take a very large view of the question.'

'I do not see why we should despair of the republic. It seems to me that we are greater and stronger than we ever were. If our grandfathers could fight Napoleon, we can surely fight the Czar.'

'Possibly. I confess I never anticipated that you would seriously propose to raise half a million of men in England.'

'We had, I think, something like that number under arms seventy years ago, when we had hardly a third of our present population; and in their civil war the Americans had over a million. They were not then as big a nation as we are now. But I took the number as an extreme case. To repel Russia from India we cannot want nearly so many. I daresay too that Australia and New Zealand would give us some thousands of fine Englishmen at a pinch. We ought to be in close touch with them, lending them officers, and helping them with their military organisation. The English race ought to stand together all over the world.'

'They would not be soldiers.'

'Not highly trained troops perhaps at first, but the best of material. Think of the effect of ten or twenty thousand white men landing in Calcutta in the middle of a row on the frontier. Every man would be worth his weight in gold. And we have our native army, which you have left out of the account.'

'They will be our greatest danger; and even if they were true to us, can you really suppose they are fit to face Russian troops?'

'I do not believe they will be a danger if we treat them wisely. If they see us fighting strongly and confidently, they will go with us. They know well enough that they would gain nothing by a change of masters. Of course they will fail us if we fail ourselves—small blame to them. As to being fit to face Russians, I think some of them are. The Sikhs and Goorkhas,

for instance, faced us well, and with English officers to lead them, why should they not face the Russians? No doubt the supply of real fighting men is limited, but we could get a very considerable number.'

'I don't believe the native army will ever be trustworthy. They have seen the Russians advancing steadily in Central Asia and beating down all opposition, while we have stood still. They naturally think Russia is the stronger power, and that we are afraid of her. So we are.'

'So am not I for one. It always seems to me extraordinary to hear people talk as they do of the Russian doings in Asia. As a matter of fact, Russia has subdued two or three wretched little *khanates*, whose so-called armies were a rabble without any war-like spirit. She has never had any real fighting to do, nothing to compare with our Sikh or Goorkha or Afghan wars. She has hardly ever had five thousand men in line, very rarely half that. The whole population of Russian Central Asia, even including the Turkomans, whom of course Russia will absorb, is hardly a tenth part of the population of our native states. It is hardly a fiftieth part of the population of India; and it is not a fighting population. The Russian difficulties have, in fact, been geographical and climatic. Of course she has overcome them. It was only a question of time. But we have had infinitely more fighting, and have actually annexed in the last fifty years five or six times as many people as she has.'

'That is not the view taken by the Russians, or in Asia.'

'Perhaps not, but it is a plain fact. I fancy we do not at all realise how much Asiatics think of our own power; but they may exaggerate the power of the Russians, as they do that of China. If so, it is largely our own fault. If we had not shown alarm we should not have been distrusted. In our English way we have never ceased to depreciate ourselves; and our pessimists have prophesied all sorts of evil, until India has perhaps begun to think we are really afraid. If so, it serves us right.'

Thurlow answered rather hotly; and Helen, who had been listening in silence to the storm she had provoked, thought it time to interpose. 'Well,' she said, 'I feel more grateful to you both than I can say. It's the first time any one has been good enough to enlighten me. You won't mind my saying, Colonel Thurlow, that my sympathies are on the other side?'

'Of course they are; so are mine. It is part of the unpleasantness of trying to face the truth that every one's sympathies are

on the other side. We are accused of moral cowardice and want of patriotism and every other evil thing. I only hope we may prove to be mistaken; but I am very much afraid that Shakespeare was prophetic. If we do not mend our ways now, before war comes, we shall "run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear and have our heads crushed like rotten apples."

The conversation dropped into other channels, and soon afterwards the ladies rose.

When the men came into the drawing-room after their cigarettes and coffee there was some music. One of the ladies played a difficult piece, not very well, and one of the men sang *The Message*. He had a good true voice, and Helen enjoyed it. Directly the song was over she heard Mrs. Hatherley's laugh, and was vexed to see that Guy was again the cause of it. It seemed to her that he ought not to go on the whole evening in this way. It was not nice; there was a certain vulgarity about it. Immediately afterwards she was asked to sing, and she walked to the piano with a feeling of semi-contemptuous wrath. To do them justice, they were quiet while she was singing, but they began again soon afterwards, and it annoyed her.

Her host came and talked to her, and she fancied he noticed it. He was a very polite but not very interesting old gentleman; and she felt relieved when he was taken away by his wife, who did not like his sitting and talking to good-looking nobodies.

Then Major Russell came and spoke to her again. 'I am quite ashamed of myself,' he said, 'for boring you so at dinner. I am not usually given to lecturing like that.'

'I was not bored. I enjoyed it immensely. I always feel it so hard, almost insulting, that gentlemen will not talk to us about anything but dances and so on. That really bores me.' After a pause she went on: 'I was so glad to hear you speak as you did. It seems to me that men like Colonel Thurlow must do a great deal of harm.'

'Colonel Thurlow is a very good officer; but I think it does harm, particularly by misleading people in England who don't know the facts, and by taking the heart out of the natives.'

'Do you really think our native army will be true to us? It would be a terrible thing if they turned against us.'

'Yes; it is our only real danger. If all India stands shoulder to shoulder we can laugh at the Russians. I believe the natives will be true to us if we are true to ourselves. Some few are actively disloyal, but not the mass of them. If we begin to

falter they will go, of course ; but if we show them we mean fighting they will fight too.'

'So my father used to say. But it always seems to me that, if my country were held by foreigners, I would take the first opportunity of getting rid of them.'

'So would I, but you must remember that India is a mere geographical expression. There is really no national feeling in India. The frontier Pathan and the Madras Brahmin have less in common than the German and the Spaniard. If ever such Indian national feeling could be created, it would, I suppose, be a danger ; but it does not exist yet.'

'But there must be race feeling surely. For instance, the Sikhs or the Rajputs would rather be independent than subject to us ?'

'The Sikhs no doubt would. As to the Rajputs, if you mean the Rajput chiefs, we raised them from the most miserable condition ; they were under the heel of the Mahrattas, and were cruelly oppressed. They owe their very existence to us. They know this well enough, and they know also that if our hand were lifted from them they would soon be in trouble again. I think that is the real secret. Most of these races know that it is not a question of being independent, but a question of changing one master for another. They have been accustomed for centuries to foreign rule ; the Mogul was at first a white man and a foreigner, as the Englishman is. On the whole, I think they are not dissatisfied with us as the supreme power. We hold the balance fairly, we oppress no one, and maintain peace with the strong hand ; and under our rule all India has order and liberty such as it never had before, and never would have again. Whatever may be said in England by the party who think the Englishman abroad is necessarily in the wrong, we have done a grand work in India. A few thousand Englishmen have taken and ruled, and given peace and prosperity to, an empire of two hundred and fifty millions. There is nothing like that in all history ; England will be proud of it some day.'

'I hope she will. Of course, we have done India a great deal of good ; but still somehow, if I were a native, I think I should feel that I would rather get rid of the white man.'

'Yes, if you could be independent ; and no doubt there is some general race feeling of the kind. The native press, for example, certainly seems to be against the white man who created it. But I think the feeling is stronger in the writing classes than

in the fighting classes. A soldier loves to be well led. In a war against another white race, I believe the natives will stand by us so long as things are going fairly well—some of them longer.'

'And you think they are good enough to be of use?'

'They are not as good fighting men as we are, of course; if they were, we should not be here. But some of them are really good. They fought very well at times against British troops, when they practically had no officers. With the best officers in the world they ought to fight well against Russians.'

'Do you really think our officers are the best in the world? I'm a soldier's wife, so you won't mind my saying it; but some of them seem to me to care so little for soldiering.'

'Of course that is true; but Englishmen often feel more than they seem to feel, and men develop wonderfully on service. Our officers are a fine set all round, brave and masterful; just the men to lead Asiatics. Altogether, my belief is that our only real danger is in ourselves. Our native army won't fail us if we are true to ourselves; but if the Englishman in England encourages the native to go against the Englishman in India, our fall is only a question of time. A house divided against itself cannot stand.'

As Russell spoke there was a stir. The great lady of the evening was saying good-night, and the party broke up.

It was still raining a little when they got away, and Helen had to keep her curtains drawn and could not speak to Guy. She felt vexed with him still. He and Mrs. Hatherley had been talking and laughing till the very end. It really was not nice, or polite to other people.

When Helen reached home, Guy was sitting in an armchair by the drawing-room fire smoking a cigarette; he had trotted on in advance when they got near their house and had changed his coat, and now, with a long tumbler of whisky and soda-water by his side, seemed quite satisfied with himself.

'Well, Nell,' he said pleasantly, stretching his hand out to her as she walked up to the fire, 'you have been going it to-night.'

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Well, the way you were flirting with those two old busters shocked me a good deal.'

'I think the less you say about that the better. I think you were behaving disgracefully. No, Guy, I am not joking,' she

went on, as he made another laughing advance. 'I do think so. It wasn't nice of you, and I didn't like it at all.'

'My darling old girl,' he said, 'I always flirt when I get a chance; I can't help it. It is as natural to me as singing to birds. I don't mean any harm, bless you. Besides, you in your solemn way are just as bad. It's only a difference in the manner of doing it.'

'Guy, you know that is not true. Of course, I like talking to people sometimes, but there is not an atom of flirting in that. I like talking to them simply because I find them interesting.'

Guy whooped with joy. 'So do I, Nell; so do I. That is precisely what I find them, very interesting. Oh, you dear old humbug, it is just the same thing.'

'It is *not* the same thing, Guy, and you know it perfectly well,' she answered hotly.

But Guy only laughed the more. 'Now you're going to be cross and make me miserable,' he said. 'It's the old story—

"Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives,
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives."

'Guy!' she said, with a little stamp of her foot. 'Stop—you shall not say those horrid, *dirty* verses to me.'

He looked up at her with a triumphant laugh and mischievous mocking eyes. 'Drawn again, Nell; I thought that would do it.'

Helen stood looking at him, her irritation gradually giving way to a sense of amusement. He seemed so perfectly good-humoured and so entirely impervious to any sense of shame. At last she smiled too, and gave up the attempt. 'He could not look at me with those eyes,' she thought, 'if there were any harm in it.' After all, it was nothing serious. She stepped up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. 'You're a bad boy, Guy, and don't deserve to be forgiven; but I suppose it is no use quarrelling with you.'

'Not the least,' he answered; 'besides, you couldn't if you tried.'

She ran her hand through his hair and then stooped and kissed him. 'Good-night, darling; I must go to bed. Don't make me vexed with you; I do hate it so.'

When she left the room, Guy sat back in his chair, and the laugh slowly died out of his face. He felt that he had been suc-

cessful in carrying the war into the enemy's country, and his success amused him. At the same time he was conscious of a slight feeling of self-reproach. 'Dear old girl,' he thought, 'she is as good as gold; but she really is too particular. It was pure fun. I never said one word to-night that I should have minded her hearing; at least—I never said a word that had any harm in it.' But then the thought came to him, 'Should I like her to behave exactly as I have been doing?' And his heart's answer was quite clear, 'No, I should not.' He felt that she was above it, that if she followed his example it would lower her in his eyes. Well, men and women were different. Men had to rub along in the world; they could not maintain the same ideal standard.

Is it so? Cannot a man, with the passions of a man, be too proud to lower himself?

CHAPTER XXXI

WAR

It was the beginning of September, and the rainy season of 1879 was drawing to a close. There had been thunderstorms, and delicious breaks of fine weather when a fresh breeze blew from the northward, from the long line of snowy peaks which glistened against the cloudless sky. A few days more and the rain would be over for good.

Guy Langley was to rejoin his regiment in a month. He was sitting in his office-room on the 5th of September when one of his senior officers walked in. Guy looked up.

‘Very bad news, Langley.’

‘What is the matter?’

‘They say there has been a rising in Kabul, and that the whole of our mission has been massacred.’

‘Good God! Is anything really known, or is it only rumour?’

‘I have not seen the report yet, but I believe there is not much doubt about it. A telegram came early this morning from the frontier.’

‘How horrible,’ Guy said; and he thought of Cavagnari as he had last seen him, a few weeks before, on the tennis-ground at the Foreign Secretary’s house, ‘Innes’s Own.’ Every one was congratulating him on his good luck, and Guy had wished he were going up to Kabul with him.

‘I suppose a force will be sent to Kabul at once?’

‘I don’t know. We shall hear more to-morrow; meanwhile, please say nothing at all about it. I thought I would tell you, as you will probably hear some rumours this evening, but the less said the better.’

‘All right, I won’t say a word.’

When he was alone, Guy sat back in his chair and thought over it all. He felt sorry for the mission, particularly for Hamilton of the Guides, whom he had met; but his regret was overlaid by a sense of excitement. There must be an advance surely, and a march on Kabul. Perhaps his regiment would form part of the force. Heavens! what luck that would be.

For some time he sat thinking, and as he thought his excitement grew stronger. At last he could not stand it. He ascertained that he was no longer wanted, and that no further details were to be got, and then he left his office. He was dining that night with a friend at the Club, and he had arranged to send his things over and dress there. He walked some distance along the Mall beyond the church, and back again; and on his way he met men with the news in their faces, but they did not speak to him about it, and he said nothing. After dinner, when Guy left the Club to ride home, the story had got about. It was being eagerly discussed, and all sorts of rumours had been added to it. The night was one of general disquiet in Simla, and one of deep distress to those most closely concerned.

As Guy rode home he debated in his mind whether he should tell Helen. Better not perhaps, as he had promised not to say anything; and yet the report was all over the place now. When he reached home it was past twelve, and Helen had gone to bed. She woke up when he came into the room, but he was tired himself, and he decided to let the thing be till morning. He was still asleep when old Kesa knocked at the door and said there was an urgent note for the Sahib. Guy got up and took it, and found that the head of his department wanted him to come over at once, as soon as he could get ready.

‘What is it, Guy?’ Helen asked.

There was no time to go into the story then, and Guy answered briefly: ‘Oh, only a note from Colonel Grant; he wants me to go over at once. Some business to be disposed of before breakfast.’

‘What an odd thing. I hope there is nothing wrong.’

‘Well, I’m afraid there is. There was a report yesterday of trouble beyond the frontier. I will find out, and tell you all about it when I come back.’

‘You’ll be back to breakfast?’

‘Oh yes, I expect so; but if I am not, don’t wait.’

When he had gone Helen did not fall asleep again. She was far from guessing what had happened. In India there is

generally trouble beyond the frontier somewhere, and she was accustomed to it. As one of the best of Indian viceroys used to say, the bottom is always dropping out of the bucket. Even Englishmen cannot manage an empire as large and populous as Europe, surrounded by savages, without a certain amount of worry. Helen Langley understood this well enough. Nevertheless, an uneasy feeling had come over her, and she was anxious to know more.

Guy dressed rapidly, while his pony was getting ready. In ten minutes he was cantering over to Colonel Grant's house. He found his chief busy with a number of confidential orders which had to be sent off without delay. There was no doubt about it now. Full details were not known yet; but the Residency had been attacked by revolted Afghan troops, and apparently all the English officers had been killed.

A few hours later it was known that a force under General Roberts was to be pushed forward at once upon Kabul, and that Baillie's Horse was to form part of it. Guy was to rejoin at once. His wish had come to him. What glorious luck! How little he had thought when he entered the Staff Corps what the result would be! He left the office amid the envy and congratulations of less fortunate men, and went off to secure a *tonga* for the next day, Sunday.

Then he thought of Helen. He had not been able to go home to breakfast, and she knew nothing. Now he must tell her suddenly that in the morning he would be gone. He began to realise that he had a painful task before him. 'Poor darling,' he said to himself; 'she will feel it terribly. It is doubly hard luck for her just now. She will have to face her trial alone when it comes upon her.' Well, the thing must be done. It was no use riding slowly, and trying to imagine ways of softening the blow.

Guy found Helen awaiting him. She heard him ride up to the door, and came out into the verandah to meet him. 'I have been longing for you to come. What is the matter, Guy? The servants have got hold of a story that the Kabul mission have all been murdered, and they are very excited about it. It isn't true?'

'I am afraid it is. We don't know all the details yet; but there seems to be no doubt that there has been a rising, and that the mission has been cut up.'

'Oh, Guy! have none of them escaped?'

'I am afraid it is very unlikely.'

'Oh, how dreadful! Did not the escort fight?'

'Yes, I believe so; but what could seventy men do against thousands?'

'Poor fellows! What horrible treachery. What is going to be done?'

'I came to tell you that, Nell,' Guy answered. He had linked his arm in hers and walked in through the drawing-room window. When they were inside he turned and faced her. 'You will be brave, I know. A force is to be sent up to Kabul, and we are under orders to go.'

As he spoke a startled look came into her eyes, and he saw her face grow white. For a moment she was silent, then she answered, with the ghost of a smile quivering upon her lips, 'You have got your wish after all. When must you go?'

'To-morrow morning.'

'To-morrow?' she said faintly.

'Yes; I must join as soon as possible.'

She lingered as if waiting for him to say something more, but he did not speak, and she turned quietly away. 'I must go and see about your things at once.'

Her quietness did not seem natural, and it distressed Guy, who put his hand on her shoulder as if to stop her. She did not look at him, but shook her head slightly and went out of the room. He saw that she wished to be alone, and let her go in silence. If they had been married longer they would not have parted then.

Helen walked into her room and knelt down by her bedside. The shock was great, and at first she found it hard to control herself. 'O God, help me!' she was saying. 'Let me not be selfish and make it hard for him. Help me to be brave.' Then courage and strength came to her, and she rose from her knees.

A minute later she walked into the drawing-room with a face on which there was not a trace of grief.

Guy was talking to a servant about his packing.

'I don't know what you will want to take, Guy,' she said; 'but there are two mule-trunks that we brought up with us. I suppose they are the best things?'

'Yes; we have to go very light. I shall get everything into them. We are only allowed eighty pounds all told.'

They went away together and turned out his wardrobe on to the floor of his small dressing-room.

In less than an hour all he was going to take was packed. There were a few things he wanted from the town, and he said he must go and get them—some tobacco and a wooden pipe or two, and some revolver cartridges, and some shaving-soap.

Helen laughed. 'Shaving-soap!' she said. 'On a campaign? I expect you will come back with a long beard.'

'I shan't have time for that. I don't suppose it will last more than three or four months altogether.' He said it to cheer her, and she knew it, and did not answer.

They made out a list of Guy's wants, and Helen added to it a flask and a portable writing-case, and paper and envelopes and stamps. 'I am not going to leave you any excuse for not writing,' she said.

Then they had lunch and went off together to the town. It was hard for her. Every one they saw congratulated Guy. 'Lucky beggar,' the men said, and the ladies smiled and wished him good-bye, as if he were going away for a week's tour in the mountains. Did they realise what it meant, she thought—that he was going on service, and that he might be killed? However, Helen smiled too, and talked brightly enough; and Guy, half wondering and half understanding, and wholly relieved, seemed, and was, as happy as a schoolboy at the beginning of the holidays. Helen stowed away ten pounds of cake-tobacco and three wooden pipes and a quantity of other things in her *jhampan*. 'Ten pounds!' she said when Guy ordered it. 'If you only have eighty pounds of baggage, how are you going to carry ten pounds of tobacco?' But he would not come down.

She walked back by his side, tall and erect and resolute, her face a little flushed with excitement. 'How handsome she looks!' he thought. 'I wish she could come with me. I believe she would do it fast enough if she could.' He was right; she would have gone with a laugh of joy.

On their way they met the Aylmers, and Guy said good-bye to them.

'It is lucky for you that you left us, Langley,' Colonel Aylmer said. 'We are so far away from the frontier that we shall never be sent up, whatever happens.'

Mrs. Aylmer, as they parted, held his hand firmly for a second, and said 'Good-bye. I will take care of Helen.'

It was still light when they got home; and Guy found an old wine-case and pinned a paper target on it, and had some pistol-practice. He made Helen try too; and they both came to the

conclusion that a revolver was a very poor weapon. 'Hanged if I would not rather shy stones,' Guy said, 'like the Guards at Inkerman. But it doesn't matter. I shan't want the beastly thing. I shall have a horse, and can always go home if it gets dangerous. That's the beauty of being a horse-soldier.'

Helen protested at once. 'No, Guy. You mustn't say those things, even in fun. People might think you meant them.'

'My dear old girl, I'm not in fun; contrariwise. As the Neapolitan officers used to say after a stampede, "*Mais mon cher, il s'agissait de la vie.*"'

Helen shook her head. 'Don't, Guy.'

When it got dark they came in and sat in the drawing-room talking; there was little more to do, and Helen was beginning to feel the strain.

After a time the bearer brought in Guy's service sword and Sam Brown belt, and asked him to look at them. There was something wrong in the fastening. 'Put them down,' Guy said; 'I will see directly.'

When it was nearly time to get ready for dinner he got up, and took the sword out of the belt into which the man had stuck it, hindside before.

'What an ass Mohun is!' Guy said. 'I wish he would leave things alone.'

Then a playful fancy struck him. Helen was standing by him and looking on. Guy drew himself up with a salute, after the graceful Indian fashion, and held out the sword for her to touch. She smiled and laid her hand on it, and then, with a sudden movement, bent down and kissed the steel hilt. 'Bear it with honour,' she said; and she looked up in his face with eyes that were full of pride and tears. Guy put his arm round her and drew her towards him, but she disengaged herself with a sob; she could not bear any tenderness now.

After dinner Guy and Helen finished all preparations for his start, and then went back to the wood-fire in the drawing-room. He was in good spirits, and she seemed cheery enough. He told her again that the campaign would not last more than a very few months. Probably, the troops who had risen would scatter without fighting; but if they did fight the settlement would be all the quicker. They were a contemptible enemy, as the last campaign had shown. He would be back by Christmas at the latest.

At half-past ten Helen resolutely put an end to the evening. It was hard to leave that room for the last time: but Guy must

be up early, and it was necessary for him to get a full night's rest. He was not long awake. As Helen lay with her head on his arm, still feeling his kisses on her lips, his breathing grew deep and regular, and he was asleep. She waited a few moments and then gently left him, lest he should move his arm and be disturbed. After a time she too fell asleep, but her slumber was broken and restless. She dreamt he was gone, and started up more than once to find him still lying by her side. At last the gray light of dawn began to steal into the room, and with it came to her a chill miserable consciousness that before the next night he would be far away. How dreadful it would be to wake and find herself alone! She raised herself on her arm and watched him as the light broadened, showing up his straight features and close-cut, wavy hair and long dark lashes. She longed for him to wake and speak to her; but he slept on, and she would not disturb him; the more he could sleep the better. She lay down and waited, looking at the opposite wall. There was a little silvery fish-insect running along the paper just under the white-washed ceiling, and she followed its course foot by foot, as it stopped and went on in jerks.

After a time Kesa came with the tea, and Guy woke up. In little more than an hour the *tonga* would be in the road under the house.

As Guy opened his eyes he realised what was before him; and mingled with the excitement of the prospect came a sense of sorrow, almost of fear. Who could tell what might be coming to them now? At all events they must part, and for an indefinite time. How he had got to love her in those few months, since she had given herself up to him, a white-souled maiden, as innocent as a child. Now she was a woman, and his own.

He lingered as long as he could, and then got up and went to his dressing-room.

Soon afterwards his baggage was in the verandah. Helen's *jhampānis* were to carry it down to the *tonga* road below. As they went off with it Helen came out. There were dark rims under her eyes, and her face was white, but she was quite steady. She sat opposite to him while he ate his breakfast and reminded him of one or two things he had promised to do. He was to telegraph from Umballa, and to write as often as he could; and he was to be good when he was in the *tonga*, and keep on the gauze veil she had made for him. There were so many accidents to people's eyes from flying splinters of stone or iron...

He had finished his breakfast, and they were still sitting at the table, when from the pine-clad hill-side below them came the sound of a bugle and the faint jangle of the iron bar upon the harness. The *tonga* was in the road waiting for him. Guy looked up and saw the sudden anguish in his wife's face.

He took her back into their room, and then she had a moment of weakness. She clung to him, sobbing wildly, with her face in his breast. 'Oh, Guy, Guy! what shall I do, without you? What shall I do? What shall I do?'

He kissed her head and stroked it as if she had been a child. 'Darling, it won't be for long,' he said; 'only a month or two.' But his breast was heaving and he could hardly speak. His agitation quieted her at once.

'What a wretch I am,' she said, raising her head, and controlling herself. 'Never mind me, Guy. I shall be all right directly. God bless you, my darling. You must go now. You will be careful, for my sake?'

'Yes.'

'Good-bye. God bless you and keep you.'

He kissed her passionately, and then he left her. As he passed through the door she fell upon the bed with her face hidden in her arms. She lay so for a few seconds and then sprang up and went to the window; perhaps she might catch sight of him turning the corner of the path on his way down. She was just in time. As he came to the corner he looked back for an instant, and she saw his face. She called out to him, 'Guy, Guy!' but she was under the shadow of the verandah roof, and he did not see her or hear her. It was all over.

Guy walked down to the road and got into the front seat of the *tonga*, and fastened the veil over his face as he had promised to do. Then the *jhampánis* salaamed, and the driver got in beside Guy, and blew another blast from his bugle, and the ponies jumped off, and they went jangling down the muddy road. Guy's heart was full of love and pity for his wife, but he was glad the parting was behind him.

A few minutes later Helen came out into the south verandah. She had mastered herself and could face the servants now, and she knew that from one point she could see the *tongas* when they came to a piece of road near the gap two or three miles away. It seemed to her that Guy's *tonga* was a long time getting to the place, but it came at last; and she stood leaning against a pillar and watching it going round the corners of the winding road,

until it crossed the gap, and dwindled almost to nothing, and finally disappeared behind Tara Devi ; then she turned with a deep long sigh and went indoors.

How empty the house seemed,—empty and lonely and silent. She could not settle down to anything, and yet she felt that she must find some employment or she should give way altogether. She went into Guy's room and packed up his things, tenderly, as if they were sacred. When this was done she came back into the drawing-room and sat down.

How difficult it was to realise. Twenty-four hours ago she had been perfectly ignorant of what was coming, and now it was all over and he was gone ! It seemed like a week since yesterday morning. If every day was to go as slowly as this, how could she bear weeks and months of solitude ? How little use she had made of the time she had had. There were so many things she might have said to him. She seemed to have thought of nothing. It had all been so sudden. He had gone without her having time to think. She had never really said good-bye to him.

About mid-day her first ray of comfort came. Mrs. Aylmer had walked over to see her. Helen was in the verandah again, looking out through the gap towards the plains, and thinking that Guy was still only half-way down to them, almost in sight, if it had not been that the road wound about among the great hills. Mrs. Aylmer remembered what she had gone through when her husband was on service, and she understood what Helen was feeling now ; her sympathy was very tender and loving. She stayed until the afternoon, and when she went Helen's heart was less sore. At all events she had one good friend near her ; she was not quite alone.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON SERVICE

BEFORE starting Guy Langley had received orders from his commanding officer to join the regiment in the Kurram valley instead of going to Sangu, which was out of his way. The advance was to be from Kurram, because at this point we had already secured a gateway into Afghanistan. The direct route would have been the historic route from Peshawar on Kabul, through the Khyber ; but during the first campaign we had forced another entrance through the long wall of the Afghan hills, and this had remained in our hands. It was more convenient now to use this circuitous route, where the physical obstacles were less formidable and our troops already held a forward position, and to open out the direct route at leisure. Guy Langley nevertheless made for Peshawar, whence he was to march down the frontier to Thull, at the mouth of the Kurram valley. Lawrence was to bring on the horse he had left with the regiment. Remus could not be brought from Simla, as there was not time to march him up to the front from the line of rail.

Guy found that there was crowding and excitement everywhere. In the railway carriage with him were three officers of the Ninth Lancers who were rejoining their regiment in the hope that it would be sent to the front. At Jhelum, where he left the hot and dusty railway, it was very difficult to get a conveyance, and he could only do so after more than a day's delay. The road was crowded with officers going northward, and the posting service was completely overdriven.

Guy utilised the time by seeing the place, and writing a long and loving letter to his wife. She seemed very dear to him then.

At Peshawar the crush was greater than ever. In his innocence Guy had hoped to be able to get a good second horse here, a good pony at least, as the town was very large, and on the high

road for Kabuli horse-dealers. But Peshawar had been swept clean.

After some hours of search the only four-legged things that he could find were a screaming cream-coloured *tattoo*, under thirteen hands high, and a gaunt chestnut Waler of immense age with protruding ribs and a Roman nose, either of which he could have for one hundred and fifty rupees. He chose the Waler ; it would, at all events, be able to carry him till he could join the regiment. It trotted with its feet within an inch of the ground, snorting, its ugly ewe neck bent back, and its ugly head in the air ; but it was better than the pink-nosed *tattoo*.

But for private kindness Guy would not have found a bed. He owed that to the Commissioner, Colonel Waterfield, who came upon him by chance, and immediately took him in and made him comfortable. Many scores of men had reason to bless that hospitable house, and its graceful mistress, during the two years that the war lasted.

After a day's stay in Peshawar, Guy pushed down the frontier to Kohat, forty miles away. For the first half of the distance, up to the Kohat Pass, he had managed to secure a cart which carried him and his servant. At the entrance of the Pass he was to mount his new purchase, which he had sent on in advance the afternoon before.

The start was not promising. Guy found his horse picketed in the open, and walked up to it to make friends. As he did so, he heard a warning shout, and at the same moment the beast came at him open-mouthed, with mad white eyes and gleaming yellow teeth. He jumped hastily aside and it missed him, and then lashed out savagely with its heels. Happily the picket ropes held. 'You devil !' Guy said when he was in safety, and he called up the *syce*, Purai, who had taken service with the horse. 'Why did you tell me yesterday the horse was quite quiet ?'

The man put his hands together. 'Sahib, what was I to do ? I am a poor man. I will never lie to your honour. He is slightly a *budmash* ; but he won't bite while I am holding his head.'

'You idiot ! Supposing I want to dismount when you're not there, or get a fall ?'

'Sahib, I have committed a fault ; without doubt this horse is an evil liver. He does not like the *Sahib-lóg*.'

Purai's calm confidence in his good nature made Guy laugh in spite of himself. 'Well,' he thought, 'I must manage not to get pipped, that's all.'

With his horse Guy had hoped to find a mule for his baggage, but there were none. Transport was the great want of the advancing force, and mules were being swept up all round. At last, after considerable difficulty, Guy's servant succeeded in discovering four donkeys of the tiny Indian breed, and upon these his mule-trunks and his servant's bundles were somehow loaded up; then he mounted his Rosinante and rode off.

It was a funny procession, and must have seemed so to the sullen Afridi clansmen, who stood here and there in the Pass and watched it go by. But Guy cared little so long as he got through, and he pushed on as fast as he could get the laden donkeys to move, laughing to himself at times. It was so different from anything he had ever imagined, so exceedingly unlike the pomp and circumstance of glorious war. Well, that would come.

When they got fairly started, and he found his strange mount had no desire to bite his legs, or throw him, or do anything but stalk along snorting with its head in the air, his thoughts began to wander. Before long he was dreaming of wonderful combats in which his own was the central figure. Now he was charging at the head of his troop into a dense mass of Afghan infantry, and wheeling in their rear and sweeping through them again, slaying and scattering. Now he was fighting hand to hand with a huge bearded warrior who rose in his stirrups to smite him down, but before the heavy arm could fall Guy's point took him fair in the body, and the long sword passed through him till the hilt clashed on his breast-bone. Now he was out with a small party doing escort to the General. Suddenly, as the great man and his staff stood dismounted watching some movement through their glasses, there was a sound of galloping hoofs, and a body of the enemy's cavalry, which the carelessness of others had allowed to approach, came swooping upon them. There was just time for him to shout a word of warning, and to draw his sword and ride straight at the head of the enemy's horsemen. Then a desperate struggle, and perhaps a dozen wounds, but he had given them time to mount, and support soon came up, and all was glory.

'What an ass I am!' he said to himself when he had slain innumerable Afghans, and arrived at a Victoria Cross and the command of a regiment of cavalry. And yet wonderful chances had come to other men. Why not to him? If they did come they should find him ready. By his side was the sword that his darling had kissed. Please God he would 'bear it with honour.'

But day-dreams, good as they are to shorten a march, will not go on for ever. Guy got tired of killing Afghans after a time. He had killed them in every way they could be killed, and they were lying about in heaps. Then a thunderstorm gathered to the westward, and the wild barren hills around him looked doubly wild under the lowering black clouds. Before long the party had to seek shelter under a mass of rock from the heavy bullet-like rain-drops. 'Look here, Purai,' Guy said to his *syce*, 'catch hold of this very quiet horse of yours, and don't let him eat me. I am going to get off.'

The man came up with a grin, and Guy cautiously dismounted, and got into a comfortable spot. They were detained for half an hour or more. Guy spent it in wondering why we had allowed a rough bit of tribal territory, jutting out between two important military stations, to remain not only independent but even without a good road. He failed, as other men have done, to find a satisfactory reason.

By the time the rain was over the evening was beginning to close in. Then they had a long dark climb to the crest of the Pass. It was a very hot night, almost hotter than the day, and even on horseback Guy found the perspiration pouring down his face. He held his helmet in his hand to get a little air. At last they reached the summit. Guy did not know in the least where he was, but the owner of his humble baggage-train pointed out into the darkness, and said, 'Kohat.' As he did so, there was a flash in the plain below, and the sound of a gun. It was ten o'clock.

Guy might have been murdered at any time since sunset if the Pass Afridis had chosen to murder him, and nobody need have been much the wiser. But that is our way in India. Our empire is based on confidence, or, as an American once said, on impudence; but he said it with shining eyes and a good New England grip of the hand.

Guy and his men scrambled down the broken pathway, the animals slipping and floundering among the stones, until at last they were on flat ground. Not long afterwards Guy found himself riding along a good smooth road amid trees and running water, and by midnight he was at rest in the *dāk bungalow*. He had had no food since the morning, and was desperately thirsty, but all he could get was some water in an earthen *serai*, and some bread and a dry morsel of yellow cheese in a tin, which were brought to him by a very sleepy *khansama*. Alas for his visions of iced beer and a good supper! However, with the help

of Helen's flask he made himself happy enough, and was soon asleep.

The next four days were spent in impatient idleness, only relieved by the receipt of letters from Helen, and the unfailing hospitality of a frontier station.

Guy had secured a seat in a hill-cart running to Thull, but it was useless to start at once, as his servants and baggage must march, so he resigned himself to the delay. Helen's letters were very bright and plucky; she said she was quite well, and gave him a budget of Simla news. He was not to worry about her, as Mrs. Aylmer was taking great care of her, and she was as happy as possible. But he would be careful for her sake?

At last the day came for a start. Guy was to share his pony-cart with two other officers, who were also going up to join their regiments. One belonged to the Goorkhas, and another to a regiment of Punjab infantry, and both were good fellows.

They started at eight o'clock in the morning. It was supposed to be an eight hours' drive, but the ponies had been worked almost to a standstill; and the road in places was very sandy, and they broke their harness twice. They took it all very cheerfully, chaffing each other and the driver, and at times putting their shoulders to the wheel in earnest after the manner of the thrice-blessed British subaltern; but still they got on slowly. They had been warned that it was unsafe to travel at night, as the road lay along the border and was infested by marauding hillmen; but the sun set and there was no help for it, and they went on through the darkness, keeping their weapons handy. A little after midnight they arrived without adventure at Thull.

There they found the rest-house full to overflowing, and apparently nothing to eat. However, Polden of the Goorkhas went foraging, and was fairly successful. He broke his shin against a chair, and stumbled over a prostrate form which sat up and swore at him with extraordinary readiness and presence of mind; but he found a pot of marmalade and some Commissariat bread, and they shared this between them, with a little whisky from their flasks and a whiff of tobacco, and then spread their blankets on the mud floor of the verandah and slept.

The next morning they were up very early. They had to get rations for three days, and start their little party off across the frontier. It was a troublesome business. Thull seemed to be the most desolate, disorderly place in creation. Though there were lines of mules picketed in all directions, they were too few,

and they were worn out. The Commissariat and Transport officers were overdriven, and nearly broken down with worry and want of sleep. It was physically impossible for them or their animals to do one-half of the work suddenly thrown upon them. Everything seemed to be in confusion, and apparently those got most who helped themselves to what they wanted. Was this always the state of affairs, Guy wondered, on a campaign? Was this our boasted organisation? He had yet to learn how rapidly good men could bring order out of chaos. All was settled at last, and in the afternoon, nearly a fortnight after leaving Simla, Guy Langley found himself riding across the border, bound for Kabul.

There are few things on earth, if any, to come up to the joy of starting on a first campaign, when the head and the heart are young. Behind lies civilisation and its trammels; before is freedom and excitement, and the hope of seeing great deeds, and the chance of distinction. And so, though the little party of Englishmen were riding into a stony wilderness ringed round by barren hills, though the sun was fierce and the pace was slow, for they could not leave their servants and baggage, yet it seemed to Guy Langley that everything was delightful. Before his eyes floated a golden haze—the light that never was on sea or land.

What a jolly march they had! How they laughed and chaffed and told each other the best of stories! And what a pleasant dinner it was that night in the little hut at Mundooree, where the first road-post was stationed. The post consisted of a dozen or so of native troopers, some in bad health, poor fellows, from months of overwork and exposure, very patiently borne. They held a square enclosure, encumbered with transport animals, and surrounded by a wall which a boy could have jumped over. One rush by fifty determined enemies would have made an end of the young Englishmen and all about them, but they never thought of that, and the troopers were accustomed to the idea. It was the Sirkar's orders, and they were the servants of the Sirkar. If they were killed, it could not be helped; it was their fate. And some people say these men are not faithful, and not soldiers.

Next day Guy Langley rode on up the stony valley to another post, a long, hot march. He found that the sun had peeled his face, and his neck was very sore where it was rubbed by the rough upright collar of his brown service coat. No linen now,

nothing but flannel shirts and fighting-kit ; but he had a delicious bathe in the pebbly Kurram river, and dined with some officers of the Fifth Punjab Cavalry who were in camp close by. They were very hospitable, and full of good-fellowship.

It was a Mahometan religious festival, and the tribes were seething all round ; so they went to bed fully expecting that the camp would be fired into before morning, but nothing happened. Nothing ever does happen as it ought to happen.

On the third day they marched into Kurram itself, and there Guy rejoined his regiment, which had been halted there for a day or two.

The Chief of the staff, MacGregor, was in Kurram, making arrangements for the advance of the force, and inspecting the transport. It was in a miserable state ; the mules insufficient in number, with many sore backs and bare bones among them. It seemed impossible that they could collect enough animals to go forward without long delay. That treaty in the spring had been a very excellent treaty, but in India at least it is as well to keep your powder dry, even after the best of treaties. The lesson has been well learnt now.

How pleasant it was to be with the regiment again ; they all seemed so glad to see him, officers and men. MacPherson jeered of course, but even he shook hands as if he meant it. The Colonel was kindness itself, and the native officers and men crowded round him to make their *salaams*. They were all in high spirits, and Lawrence reported them as keen as mustard. The Sikhs particularly were wild to get at the enemy ; they had an old race hatred to gratify, and some Sikhs had been killed with Cavagnari.

'The Singhs mean business,' Lawrence said, as he and Guy sat in the little tent, seven foot square, which was to hold both of them,—'the Singhs mean business ; we shall see what they are made of now.'

'If the Afghans give us a chance ; I am very much afraid they may scatter without fighting, and leave us to hunt them down all over the country.'

'O Lord, I hope not ! Is that what the swells thought up at Simla ?'

'Well, I don't know, but I think that was the feeling.'

'By Jove !' Lawrence said in a tone of blank dismay. This was depressing intelligence to be brought by a man who had just come from headquarters, and of course knew all the innermost

thoughts of the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, who doubtless knew all the innermost thoughts of the Afghans.

Lawrence soon cheered up when they gathered for dinner round the small mess-table outside the Colonel's tent. It was a very close fit; there was barely room for the seven of them, though they sat close together on cane camp-stools and mule-trunks. And there was no wine of course, only a little whisky and water; soon they would not have that. Nevertheless, they were very happy, and the senior officers laughed at the idea of having no fighting. MacPherson scoffed aloud. 'No fighting! Aha! Once let us get into their confounded country, and if we don't kick the hogs up somehow, I'll eat my hat. The Singhs are just spoiling for a fight.'

Colonel Graham smiled and said, 'I think you'll have fighting enough before you see British territory again. The Simla people said there was going to be no fighting in 1839, but there was just about as much as anybody wanted. You can't go and stamp on a hornet's nest without bringing some of them about your ears. Besides, the Russians say they are coming with twenty thousand men to turn us out. If they come, there'll be wigs on the green.'

'No, are they really, Colonel?' Guy said. 'I haven't seen any news for days. What glorious fun it would be!'

The idea was hailed with acclamation. What did it matter that we were pushing forward with only five or six thousand men, and not transport enough for half that number? It was not for them to count the odds; were they not soldiers? English luck and English pluck would pull us through somehow.

After dinner, the little party sat and smoked; and then had some more whisky and water, and turned into their little tents and slept. How jolly it all was!

Next day they marched to the foot of the Peiwar ridge, where the fight had been in the winter. It closed up the end of the Kurram valley like a wall. When they got near, they saw it was a very steep pine-covered hill-side with a zigzag road going up it. To the left were some towering cliffs, upon which, when we attacked them, the Afghans had planted guns. Dugald Dalgetty could have told them that guns would be useless up there—'perched like to scarts, or seagulls, on the top of a rock;' but probably they had never heard of that immortal soldier. The present generation, of Afghans, do not read Walter Scott.

Upon the summit of the ridge was the cantonment which our troops had held all the year. It was a dreary, dusty, cold

place,—a clearing in a pine wood, with some log huts plastered with mud. Some bearded officers were walking about it in sheepskin coats, *posteens*, embroidered with yellow silk and faced with astrakhan,—a picturesque dress.

The climb was very long and severe, and took it out of the horses ; but, once up, the view back over the Kurram valley was very fine. The barrenness of the plain was mellowed by distance, and the hills formed a fine amphitheatre. Guy stood and looked at it, and then turned to his squadron commander, Bradford: 'What a place for troops to let themselves be kicked out of ! It seems an impossibility that any force could take it.'

It was an impossibility, but British troops well led can do impossibilities against Asiatics. Englishmen in India have long recognised and acted upon that principle, or we should not be in India now. It is a principle which has led us into some disasters ; and it would doubtless be contemned by the philosophic Radical, who thinks one man is quite as good as another ; but it has been the foundation of our empire.

From the Peiwar Kotal Baillie's Horse pushed on by a good newly-made road through the mountains to Ali Khel, where General Roberts had his headquarters. Guy had seen him at Simla, and at once recognised the cheery face, and neat, well-dressed figure, as little 'Bobs' rode up to the regiment and spoke a few words of welcome. He knew the value of such timely acts of courtesy, and never omitted them ; they did much to help his growing popularity.

But the cavalry were wanted on the other side of the range, so they pushed rapidly forward through the wooded defiles. Near Ali Khel Baillie's Horse met on the road a deputation which had come from the Amir. There were three or four high officials, bearded men with Jewish features, dressed in tall astrakhan caps and voluminous cloth coats, with gold braid upon them ; and some very villainous-looking attendants, with dirty arms and faces and insolent expressions. The headman spoke as he passed them, and they saw that he had no front teeth.

'What a horrid set of brutes !' Guy said to Lawrence as they stood and watched the party go by. 'I don't think we need be much afraid of any number of them.'

'I only hope they will give us a chance of getting at them ; how the men would enjoy it ! Look at them now.'

The men certainly did not look friendly. With their neat workmanlike uniforms and well-kept arms they formed a very

pleasing contrast to the savage ruffians they were gazing at ; but it would have been hard to say which scowled hardest, Afghan or Indian. Lawrence was right ; the Singhs evidently meant business.

The next few days were full of interest. The defile was in parts rough and difficult, and the tribes were out ; small parties were always in danger of attack, and some were cut up. It was necessary to move with caution.

One night some shots were fired into the camp. Guy Langley was awake at the time and talking to Lawrence ; they had just turned in. Suddenly there was a shot, followed by several more, apparently at some distance, and then the two young men heard for the first time a sound with which they were destined to become well acquainted, the ping of a hostile bullet. 'By George, it's an attack,' Guy said ; and they jumped out of bed in some excitement. But the affair was soon over. The Colonel took it very coolly, and the enemy did not wait to be punished. In half an hour all was quiet again ; no one had been hit.

In a day or two Baillie's Horse saw open country before them ; and once out of the treacherous mountains they knew they could give a good account of themselves.

Some days before the end of the month, which had opened so peacefully among the Simla pines, Guy Langley rode down with his squadron of Sikhs on to Afghan soil. Only fifty miles away lay the guilty city. It was tantalising for the cavalry to feel that they were so near, and that they could do nothing. They were pushed forward a few miles into the plain ; but until the whole of the small force was collected, there could be no real advance ; and the transport difficulties were heartbreaking. It is a miserable thing, that feeling that you are crippled for want of mules and camels ; but an army without transport is like a fleet without steam or sails. In England these matters have, of course, been thoroughly worked out. If we put down our two army corps in any foreign country now they would not be put down like the army in the Crimea, without means of motion.

While they were waiting for the advance Guy Langley and his brother officers had plenty of time to realise the difficulties of the enterprise upon which they were engaged. Behind them lay a long line of communication flanked by rough fighting tribes, who could strike in upon it at almost any point, while everywhere the line was very weakly held. Indeed, our attempt to hold it as we did savoured of 'impudence.' These tribes numbered their fight-

ing men by scores of thousands. In front lay a hostile country, and at Kabul, when they got there with their scanty transport, they would find awaiting them an enemy whose numbers it was impossible to guess. Some accounts put it at twenty regiments of Regulars, or about twelve thousand men, besides the tribes; and the tribes were the real danger. They might easily have fifty thousand men on their hands.

During this time Guy got his first lesson in practical soldiering. If it was tantalising it was yet pleasant enough. The country looked dry and bare in most parts, but there were villages here and there—that is to say, square mud forts with dwelling-places inside them, and running water and some fine trees. No one offered resistance. There were reports of gatherings to right and left and in front; and occasionally a few men could be seen on the sky-line of the hills, but they never met an enemy. The villagers sat at the doorways of their forts and pretended to be friendly; and the cavalry managed to get some supplies. Guy was in the saddle all day on one duty or another; but the weather was good, and the nights clear and warm with a bright moon. Altogether, he was quite happy, except for the longing to get on and avenge the slaughtered Mission.

Meanwhile, the Amir himself had come in to our camp. He had fled from Kabul under pretence of taking a walk, and had thrown himself on our mercy. We professed to be advancing to restore his authority overthrown by rebels. What more natural than that he should join us? Yet he did not seem comfortable somehow, perhaps because our people, when they had got him, were a little too pointed in their attentions. There was something rather grim about that guard of Highlanders with their fixed bayonets.

Guy saw him and was not favourably impressed. As a boy Yakub Khan had been the Hotspur of the Afghans, and his reputation had stood very high. Now he was a rather good-looking man, with a short black beard, and a gentle plaintive voice, and his manner was not undignified, but the forehead retreated in the most abnormal way under the round Astrakhan cap, and there was a shifty, furtive look about the eyes. Guy noticed it as he rode in with the Amir on escort duty, and wondered whether he was a guilty man,—guilty of the treacherous massacre of our Mission—or merely a weak one. There seemed to be only one opinion in the camp. Almost every British officer with the force would have voted for hanging His Highness as high

as Haman. Men's blood was excited to boiling pitch by stories of the massacre, and they were not in a condition to judge dispassionately.

But the forms of friendship were duly observed. The General in command paid a public visit to His Highness, and His Highness paid a return visit to the General in command, and they were exceedingly polite to one another; and in front of the tent was the guard of honour, with the sun on their bayonets; and all around the bronzed, half-contemptuous faces of English officers in their brown fighting-clothes.

It was more than a month after the fall of the Residency when the first measure of retribution was dealt out. On the 2nd of October the little force advanced from the foot of the mountain down the long valley that led to Kabul. The march was slow and toilsome for want of transport; but our people were cheered by the news that the enemy meant to fight. Soon after the start, a *sowar* of Baillie's Horse, himself an Afghan who had been on leave, came into camp and reported himself. MacPherson was speaking to Guy at the moment, but he knew the man at once. 'Ah, Jelal-ud-din!' he said, 'I have been expecting you. Why did you not join before?'

The man gave some explanation, and MacPherson asked him whether the rebels meant to stand.

'Yes, Sahib.'

'Are you certain?'

'Yes, Sahib; they are coming out to meet you, and say they will kill every man in the force.'

'*Shábásh!* But they will only talk big, and run away when we come.'

'No, Sahib; they will fight. There are thousands of them who have not seen the Sirkar's troops, or eaten a defeat. They mean to fight.'

MacPherson's face grew brighter and brighter as the man's confident tone and detailed assertions brought conviction home to him, and at last he was fairly beaming with happiness. All that evening he was so pleasant and jolly that his brother officers hardly knew him. They were just as much delighted themselves, each in his way. It really was coming at last. They would see some real fighting, perhaps a big battle and a storm of Kabul. Good Lord, what luck to be in the force! So they marched on happily until the 5th, still further cheered by a little attack on their rear-guard which, however, fizzled out rapidly like a bad squib.

Then it came. They were at the end of the valley now, with a barrier of stony hills in their front ; behind that barrier lay Kabul. There was a narrow gap, through which the Logar river and the road ran into the Kabul plain. If the Afghans were going to make a stand that was their chance, to hold the range and the gap.

Before daybreak on the 6th Guy Langley's squadron was in the saddle, and had begun to push out towards the hills. The enemy was not to be seen the evening before. Would they be there now? As day broke the question was answered. There they were in strength all along the sky-line, their banners planted, and their disorderly swarms covering the hill-tops, right in our path. Hurrah ! they meant to meet us fairly. There would be real business now.

It was a pretty fight ; but the cavalry had little to do, and Baillie's Horse got no chance of distinguishing themselves. They stood and watched from the open ground below while the infantry went up the heights, and forced back the enemy, and took their guns, and eventually drove them from all their positions. MacPherson was growling savagely at the inaction to which the cavalry were condemned. 'The hogs will all get away,' he said. 'They can't cut them up without cavalry. Why the devil don't they send us forward? It is enough to drive one mad to see the whole thing chucked away like this.' But still the order did not come, and still MacPherson swore and chafed in impotent wrath. His feeling was the general feeling of the regiment, and their impatience spoilt the day for them. Still it was a day of excitement and interest.

The next morning the cavalry were pushed forward. The gap was in our hands now, and our horsemen streamed through it and out upon the plain beyond. They saw before them a fine open valley, with rich cultivation in parts ; and then, as they rode on, away to their left under the range of hills they caught sight of the mud-coloured buildings of Kabul, topped by the lofty walls and citadel of the Bala Hissar. At last ! It was not quite five weeks since the massacre.

The cavalry reconnoitred the plain, and got within two or three hundred yards of the walls. As they rode back to camp in the afternoon, old Gulab Singh, a native officer of Guy's squadron, said to him, 'Sahib, this is a great day for us Sikhs. By the fortune of the Sirkar we have come to Kabul. The Afghans used to come to the Punjab. *Shábásh ! Shábásh !* To-morrow, by the grace of God, we will loot the city.'

Guy laughed. 'I hope we may,' he said; 'but we are not in yet.'

'We shall be to-morrow, Sahib. These people are nothing.' Gulab Singh was a fine old man, who remembered the days when the Khyber hills were a terror to the Sikhs. He was happy now; the tables were fairly turned.

Next day the cavalry were out again, and this time they got farther. They worked right round Kabul by the eastward, and came upon the Amir's great cantonment of Sherpur, which they entered unopposed. It was deserted, and on the flat open ground inside were over seventy Afghan guns. As the cavalry occupied the place, and congratulated themselves on their capture, they saw something which gave them still greater pleasure. The steep stony hills, a mile away to the north of Kabul, were seen to be crowded with Afghans; and it was soon ascertained that there were some thousands of them, with several guns. Hurrah! they meant fighting again. After all, there might be a storm of Kabul.

The cavalry pushed on, officers and men in high spirits, and rode right round the enemy's position by the north. In the afternoon Guy's squadron was out to the west of it, and there were detachments on all sides. If our infantry could only come up before nightfall we should account for every man on the hill, in spite of all their guns and banners and rough stone walls. Our Mission would be avenged then. These were the very men who had been foremost in the massacre; they should be slain where they stood or speared as they ran, and not one should be left to tell the tale.

Alas! the infantry came up too late. Old Gulab Singh chafed as hotly as MacPherson had done two days before, but still the attack was not delivered, and when the darkness fell there had been nothing but some artillery fire.

When the day broke again the enemy had disappeared. Not a man was to be seen on the rocky heights. The chance had been lost, and it would never recur.

Our weary horsemen started off in pursuit, and all day long they rode without food or rest, until in the evening the horses were dropping and dying by the roadside. But they never saw the enemy.

When Guy Langley dismounted that night he could scarcely stand for fatigue. Those three days had been cruel work for men and horses; and they had nothing to show for it.

So Kabul fell without a second fight, much to the disappointment of the troops. Perhaps the cavalry were more disappointed than any, for they had not had one real innings, and they were even jeered at for letting the enemy get away. MacPherson's language was indescribable, and the others were nearly as bad. Only the Colonel said, 'It's all right; you will have plenty of chances yet. Don't fash yourselves.' Well, at all events, it was something to be where they were.

On the 12th of October, six weeks after the massacre of our Embassy, the English General made his triumphal entry into the Bala Hissar. The road from our camp on the eastern heights was lined with troops; and as Guy Langley sat on his horse, in the midday sun, and saw the now well-known face of our victorious leader go slowly past, his heart swelled with the pride of the sword, and with joy that he was one of the little force that had taken Kabul. Henceforth, nothing could rob him of that. It was a dashing exploit,—rash perhaps—to push on six thousand men without the possibility of support into the heart of a hostile country, straight at a populous capital held by a superior force. Defeat meant annihilation, for it would at once have brought upon us an innumerable gathering of tribesmen. Happily in the East a bold stroke generally succeeds, and when the clans came together they were too late to dislodge us.

As the General and his staff rode slowly through the long line of troops, it was remarked that the Amir was not of the party. His son rode by the General's side, but the ruler whose authority we had come to re-establish was not to be seen. Then it began to be rumoured that Yakub Khan was Amir no longer. He had been unable to endure the humiliation of entering his capital in the train of a foreign conqueror, and that morning he had walked almost alone up to the English camp and tendered his abdication. Now, while the guns pealed and the citadel of Kabul glittered with English bayonets, and the faithless nobility of Afghanistan gathered to do homage to the English General, the Amir lay crouched in a corner of his tent, his eyes red and swollen with weeping, a broken, dishonoured man, who could not look in the face either his rebellious countrymen or his English friends. That morning his capital was placed under martial law, his ministers were arrested and deprived of power, and the English General assumed the government of the country.

Of all these matters Guy Langley knew little or nothing, but his heart was hot against the miserable Amir and all the treach-

erous Afghan nation. When the parade was over, and the regiment returned to camp, he managed to get away with Lawrence, and the two of them rode over to the Residency. As they reached the entrance they overtook Major Russell, who had come up with the force in a staff appointment. He shook hands with Guy. 'I am glad to see you here,' he said. 'This is better than sitting in an office in Simla.' Guy assented heartily, and they went on together to see the place where the last desperate fight had been.

It was a perfectly hopeless position. The Residency buildings lay under the wall of the upper citadel, from which they were completely commanded, almost within pistol-shot. They were also weak in themselves, and closely surrounded, except on one side, by other buildings which gave good cover to the swarming enemy. Retreat was out of the question. On one side the Residency looked out upon the open country, for it formed part of the outer wall of the lower citadel; but if our people could have got down the wall and scarp and across the moat, they would have been immediately surrounded in the plain, where there was no sort of cover. In other directions the only outlets were by narrow lanes between high mud walls; and, moreover, they had no place of refuge. In this miserable trap the four English officers and their little escort of seventy-five men had fought on desperately, hour after hour, against the ever-increasing numbers of their savage enemy.

Guy Langley stood on the flat roof of the murdered envoy's quarters and looked up at the frowning citadel. Below him to his left was the moat, and the open country towards India. With what passionate longing the doomed men must have looked out over that smiling plain! To Guy's right was the courtyard of the Residency. The buildings which formed its sides had been partially destroyed by fire, and the walls which still remained were thickly pitted with bullet-marks. In one of the ground-floor rooms of the house upon which he stood, a search party had placed some objects found in the ruins,—a few books and charred pieces of books, and human bones. At the foot of the wall above the moat was a great pit, into which, not six weeks before, the Afghans had thrown the bodies of the slaughtered escort. There, on the bullet-marked roof, with the relics of the fight all round him, Guy Langley and Lawrence heard the story told by a Mahometan who had himself escaped from the massacre.

It was a story that stirred their hearts with mingled pride and

sorrow. The man did not know how Cavagnari himself had died, but he spoke warmly of the death of young Hamilton, who had charged out time after time at the head of a few of his men to drive back the swarming enemy, and had fallen at last, covered with wounds, upon the gun he had taken. 'All the Afghans talked of him,' the man said; 'they talk of him still. They say he was *shaitán*, a devil.'

Guy and his companions were silent for a time, then Russell said, 'Thank God they died hard, like Englishmen.' Lawrence said nothing, but he drew his breath sharply, and Guy looked at him and saw that his teeth were set and his boyish face was working.

Then Russell asked how it all ended, who were the last left fighting.

'I did not see the end,' the man answered, 'but people said that two Sikhs were the last. They got into that little room there under the wall and fired through the doorway. The Afghans had taken all the other buildings, and they fired across the courtyard at the door, from all sides, but the Sikhs only laughed and kept calling out, "Come on, why don't you come and kill us? How many Pathans does it take to kill two Sikhs?" At last some Afghans got into the next room and bored through the mud wall, and shot them from the side.'

'Do you think that is true?' Guy asked.

'God knows! The people in the town said it was true, and that they killed many Afghans.'

Russell walked across to the spot. The room was the last of a row of little rooms built against the wall, and used by the native servants; the roof had fallen in, and the room was full of *débris*; but all round the doorway were scores of bullet-holes, some with bullets still sticking in them. Evidently the doorway had been a special mark for Afghan riflemen. They removed some of the heap which covered the floor, and came upon a human hand and a skull; attached to it was a coil of long black hair, the uncut hair of the Sikh.

As the two young men rode back to their camp they did not speak much. Each of them had seen and heard that day what he would never forget. Their hearts were very hot within them, and a fierce longing for revenge overpowered every other feeling. That would pass away in time. There was something below it that would not pass away,—a deep resolve to die well if death should come; and pride, a rightful pride, in the courage of their

countrymen, and a rightful pride too in the dark-eyed soldiers whom it was their privilege to command. War's lessons are not all bad, and the worst of them are those most quickly unlearned.

That night Guy spoke savagely at mess, and he used words which he would hardly have used a month before, words which made the Colonel look up in surprise and disapproval; but he lay on his camp-bed afterwards and wrote to Helen a letter which rejoiced her by its depth and earnestness of feeling. There was no flippancy and want of enthusiasm now. Service was bracing his character. It was what he had wanted to make a man of him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FIGHTING IN AFGHANISTAN

HELEN LANGLEY was still in Simla. She had arranged to stay there until the cold weather. It was dreary work. Letters from the front came very irregularly ; and when they came they were a fortnight old, and she could not help feeling that anything might have happened since they were written. She had no intimate friends in the place except Mrs. Aylmer, and she could not bring herself to accept the good-natured invitations which at first she received from others. Day after day and week after week were passed in the same dull *anxious* monotony, and to a great extent in solitude. In the afternoon she used to go out for a walk, but she was afraid of becoming a trouble even to Mrs. Aylmer, and as often as not she went alone. She used to come back in the evening when it grew dusk and settle down to her long lonely night.

The day that she received Guy's letter of the 12th October she walked out with Rex for her only companion. She was happier than she had been for a long time. The campaign had been successful, and apparently it was over. Perhaps now the troops might soon be coming back ; and in the meanwhile Guy's letters had become more and more tender and loving. He seemed delighted at the chance of seeing service, but it had made him turn to her more than ever. She felt so much brighter that evening that she faced the people on the Mall, and walked a considerable distance round the hill above the church.

It was a beautiful evening. The rains had long passed away, and the sky was cloudless. The ferns had gone from the trunks and boughs of the trees. The vivid green had slowly faded out of them, and they had become colourless and almost transparent, or touched with exquisite pale shades of brown and yellow ; then

they had drooped and fallen. The deafening twilight choruses of the cicadas were over too, and the long humming chirrup of the sun-cricket sounded from the branches of the deodars, which were covered with bright upright flower-spikes. As the breeze swept through them it bore away with it clouds of golden pollen.

The air was dry and cold and life-giving. To the northward the snowy range stood out clear and glorious in the light of the setting sun. Helen saw the broad red disc go down behind the western hills, and then stood and watched the snow peaks as the rosy flush faded slowly from them and left them cold and gray.

When she got back to the church the short twilight was closing in. Across the gap by Tara Devi, where the clouds used to come pouring through in the rains, there now stretched the straight 'cold-weather line' of mist. Above it the sky was still red, and below it, in the gap, a little pool of water caught and reflected the glow. To the right of the gap, over the tall dark head of Prospect Hill, a single planet was shining.

Helen stood for a few minutes gazing at it all. Through that huge mountain gateway Guy had gone, and her eyes had often turned to it in bitter remembrance and longing. This night she could look at it less sadly. The planet brightening in the sunset sky seemed to bring her a message of hope and comfort. 'I wonder whether he is looking at it too!' she said to herself as she turned away.

Guy had been looking at it too, above the stony crest of a rugged Afghan hill, and if it had not brought Helen to his mind he was hardly to be blamed. He had had a long day in the saddle, and was sitting in his sheepskin coat, tired and cold and hungry, by a camp-fire of logs, waiting for some food which his servant was getting ready. For the last fortnight the cavalry had had a hard time of it, scouring the country and collecting supplies. It seemed very difficult to get anything, particularly forage, and the winter was coming on fast. The force had only a few days' stock in hand, and once the snow began it would be almost impossible to go on working. Already the nights were cold, and snow had fallen on the hills to the northward. The fact was, that our difficulties were beginning. The mountain tribes had risen upon the line by which our troops had advanced, and had completely severed our communications with India. An attempt was being made to open the direct line by the Khyber, but here also the tribes were stirring. Rumours of disaffection and disorder came from other quarters also, and the Amir's

commander-in-chief reported that the country-side was full of disbanded soldiery with arms in their hands. Everywhere it seemed that the people were excited and sullen. It was not altogether surprising. There was no government. The broken Amir was lying in his tent in the English camp, and would give no orders; his ministers were under arrest; his nobles had little influence for good. No one knew whether the English meant to go or stay, and every one therefore was afraid to do them service. The little English force woke up to find itself in the centre of a shattered and disorganised kingdom, amidst a hostile population. It could get no trustworthy intelligence, and it held nothing but the ground covered by its fire. Meanwhile its presence and its smallness were provoking to the Afghans, who hated the Ferinjee as they hated the devil. Some few of them hated him even more than they loved his rupees.

Guy Langley's squadron had been as hard worked as any. For the most part it had been on detached duty in the valleys near Kabul, with or without a small force of infantry. Bradford and Guy were the only officers with it. They were good friends; and the duty was a very useful experience to both of them. They got to know their men more thoroughly, and to learn a hundred little details which can only be learnt in the field, and to understand something of the Afghans and their ways; but it was tiresome work. Both soon got sick of it, and longed for a prospect of some more fighting. The escape of the guilty regiments from the Asmai heights had made the cavalry doubly keen to get another chance. They were returning now from a week's expedition, and were to march into Kabul next day, with a fair amount of grain and forage.

'O Lord!' Guy said with a sigh, 'I wish they'd bring the grub. I'm infernally hungry;' and he twisted his legs away from the fire which was burning them, while his back was half-frozen. Such legs; not beautiful now in long cavalry boots, but swathed in brown *puttees*, and finished up with rough ammunition high-lows. The *puttee* is the most serviceable leg-gear in the world, and so, after a time, one's eye begins to see the latent beauty in it, but it is not striking at first.

Bradford yawned. 'I'm hungry too,' he said. 'I wish we had some liquor. I am not good at teetotalling.'

They had nothing now, not even rum rations, only green commissariat tea.

At last dinner came, a plateful of tinned beef boiled up with

onions, and a loaf of stale commissariat bread. They ate heartily and drank some tea; then they sat round to the fire again and lit their pipes.

'I'm deuced glad we're to be back to-morrow,' Bradford said; 'and I shan't be sorry when we get into our quarters. It's getting cold for tents.'

'Yes; that little fort the General has given us looks as if it ought to be warm. The walls must be ten feet thick; but I expect it will be beastly dirty. The Afghans are filthy brutes.'

'Never mind. The first thing is to be warm. One can't be clean on service, and it doesn't matter really; you soon get used to being dirty.'

'Yes, I've found that already. How miserable one would have been if one had been done out of one's tub for a single day in India. Now I don't care a blow if I go without for two or three.'

'Rum, isn't it? And the way one gets used to a flannel shirt and no collar, and sleeping in blankets instead of sheets.'

'It is funny. I say, I wonder why the General didn't put the force into the Bala Hissar instead of going down to where our old cantonment was in 1840. Absit Omen.'

'Oh, it's a very different thing now. With our breechloaders we could lick any number of hogs in the open. I only wish there was a chance of their attacking us. No such luck this time. Besides, the Bala Hissar is all blown to bits.'

'What a smash that was!'

'You saw it go up, didn't you?'

'Yes. I was up on the Siah Sung in Dunbar's tent, and there was a bang outside like a big gun going off. We went out to see what it was, and there was a column of gray smoke hundreds of feet high over the Bala Hissar, and from the bottom of it a cloud of smoke was spreading out over the town. It was a wonderful sight. There was another explosion later in the afternoon,—another column of smoke, black this time, with shells going off in the middle of it. The noise all night of shells and rifle cartridges was like a general action.'

'I expect it was done on purpose.'

'Daresay. It was hard luck on poor Shafto and the Ghoorkhas inside.'

They talked on a little longer, and then began to feel sleepy, and turned in. They had no beds, but lay side by side on the

floor of their little tent, with a waterproof sheet under each of them.

Next day they marched into Kabul, and were very glad to get back to the regiment. Their winter quarters were not yet ready, but they were 'in society' again, and the little mess-tent looked very home-like. MacPherson, who understood these things, and always insisted upon being comfortable on service, had had a pit dug about four feet deep, and the tent was pitched inside this. There was a big earthen fireplace at one end, with a mud chimney outside ; and altogether it was warm and snug, except about the doorway. The only thing they wanted was some liquor, which they were probably much better without.

Guy found some letters awaiting him, and he read a newspaper or two, and heard the gossip of the camp, and was happy. His holiday, however, was not of long duration. A day or two later the regiment was split up again, and this time his squadron formed part of a small force which was sent out to march through some country to the eastward, about the Peshawar road. It was a toilsome march, not relieved by any exciting incident, but Guy went through some fresh country, and had the opportunity of seeing the route followed by our unhappy force on the disastrous retreat of 1842.

That march was full of painful interest. He rode with his squadron through the Khurd Kabul Pass. The road lay for miles along the bed of a shallow stream, which they constantly crossed and recrossed, the horses floundering badly at times among the boulders and water-holes. In every shady corner the stream was already well coated with ice. In places the rocks rose precipitously on either side, and almost met overhead. The Pass could easily have been seized and held, but to push into it an unwieldy mass of troops and followers, without previously clearing the heights, was to ensure a murderous disaster. A few score of matchlock men among the rocks, firing quietly down into the blocked mass below, could not fail to do fearful execution. As he went, Guy thought of the poor English ladies,—some in sore sorrow for the loss of husband or brother, some great with child, riding through ice and snow and the shower of treacherous Afghan bullets. The idea of Helen in such a position came to him with a sudden vividness that made him draw his breath sharply and clench his fingers on the reins. 'Thank God, we have no ladies here now !' he said to himself. 'What madness it was !'

Bradford and Guy got back to Kabul again before the middle of November. They found things going on much as before, and the force seemed to be getting bored. Supplies were still scarce, particularly forage, and the cold was increasing. The day they rode in there was a fall of snow, and it had begun to lie thickly on the northern hills. There were rumours of trouble in various directions, and in one or two cases small parties of our men had been fired upon, but no real enemy could be found, and no one believed there was going to be fighting. The Afghans would not stand and give us a chance; they had 'no more valour than a wild duck.' If only we could get a few thousands of them together; but it was hopeless. A company of infantry could go and trail their coats anywhere. Daud Shah, the huge Afghan commander-in-chief, said, 'Take care; these small expeditions are dangerous.' But no one minded him; they thought he wanted to stop the foraging.

It really was very wearisome. The exposure and fatigue and reaction were telling on men and horses alike. Even the General's roan mare looked like a greyhound, and all but the real soldiers were beginning to grumble and wish themselves back in India. If they could have any fighting, *à la bonne heure*; but even a few weeks of discomfort without fighting had been quite enough for many. It struck Guy Langley as strange. He was young, and he had enough romance in his character to enjoy the picturesque side of the thing. Moreover, his soldierly feeling and the indolent tenacity within him had been stirred. He could not understand men longing to get away now who had been mad to go on service two months before. Nevertheless he saw that it was so.

The cold got more and more severe. Long before the end of the month it was freezing hard in the shade all day long, and Guy's stirrup irons made his feet ache. One morning he tried to write a letter, and found his ink a solid block.

Then they had to go out again. A famous old Mullah, or fanatic priest, was said to be stirring up the faithful in the country to the south, and his emissaries were causing trouble nearer at hand. Some of the village headmen in the neighbouring valleys began to show signs of hostility and to obstruct the collection of supplies. This kind of thing must be stopped. Our troops must be seen again.

As the little force to which Guy's squadron was attached marched away westward he had plenty of time to look about him.

They rode for hours through a great valley dotted with villages, that is to say, with square mud forts of various sizes, their corners crowned with towers. The flat ground was cut up by irrigation channels and straight rows of poplar trees, now quite bare of leaves. From the main valley small branches ran up into the barren treeless hills which surrounded it on all sides.

The cold was bitter. There was no snow, but a keen wind was blowing, and everything was frozen hard. Altogether a bleak and wintry prospect; and yet, looking away to the northward over the blue ranges to the grand line of snowy peaks, Guy Langley thought it was a view he would not have missed. Behind, through the bare gray valley, the little column of infantry wound slowly along, the wintry sunlight glinting here and there on the frozen steel.

The force spent a cheerless night in camp, and then marched on again, reaching its destination about mid-day. The cavalry were sent on a few miles in advance to escort a Political Officer, who was going to pay a visit to one of the principal headmen of the neighbourhood. The man was suspected of disaffection, and it was thought desirable to see what he was about; if he gave trouble he was to be arrested.

Bradford was getting tired now. 'By George!' he said with a sigh, as they mounted again after a short halt for lunch, 'we shall have had enough of it by the time we get back to-night. This pottering about at a walk all day long knocks up the horses worse than anything, and the men too. I wish we could get a little real work to cheer them up; they are getting stale. We shall have some of them down soon.'

They rode on for an hour or so along a rough stony track, and then arrived at the mouth of a narrow valley between two rocky spurs. There were three or four villages of the usual type in the valley. The headmen lived in the largest of them, under the hillside.

Douglas, the Political Officer, who knew the ground, pointed out their road, which lay along the right of the valley near the hill-side. They went on, Bradford and Douglas riding together, Guy a few paces behind with old Gulab Singh. They passed the smaller forts at some little distance on their left and saw no one about, but a little farther on two or three men showed themselves for a moment on one of the side spurs to the right.

'I wonder what those fellows were doing,' Guy said.

Gulab Singh was looking at them attentively. 'God knows,

Sahib,' he said ; ' but I think we had better take care. There may be some devilry up. The valley seems empty, as if they had sent their women and children away.'

Guy was riding up to Bradford to ask whether he had seen the men when several more appeared on a little spur which jutted into the valley in front of them. The road wound round the base of the spur, and the advanced guard were within a hundred yards of it.

'Hullo ! what does that mean ?' Bradford said, pulling up his horse and taking out a pair of glasses. 'I think they have got rifles,' he added, after a good look at them.

Douglas had a look too and agreed. 'I daresay they are only frightened,' he said ; ' but they may mean mischief.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when all doubt was dissipated. The main body of the cavalry had halted in the road about two hundred yards from the hill-side, which at this point was quite bare, but high and rugged and covered with huge rocky masses. As Douglas spoke a sudden volley was fired from among the rocks. Two horses were struggling on the ground, and for an instant it seemed to Guy as if a swarm of bees were whizzing about his ears. There were a few seconds of confusion among the Sikhs, and a considerable number of the enemy sprang up with loud shouts and opened a galling fire upon them. The thing was very prettily planned, and the surprise was complete. The squadron got off with remarkably little loss,—one man wounded and three horses killed ; but there was nothing for it but to retire and leave the enemy in possession, for directly the firing began more of them showed themselves, and before long there were several hundreds with half a dozen green and red flags. They waved their swords and shouted ; and one man, with a Snider rifle, went on firing steadily, his bullets knocking up the dust near them.

Bradford was very angry, and sent off a *sowar* at a gallop with a note to the officer commanding the force, asking for infantry ; but he soon realised that it was too late. They could not arrive much before dark, when it would be useless to attack. The punishment must be deferred till next day. The squadron fired a few rounds with their carbines, which had the effect of making the enemy shout derisively and lie down behind the rocks ; then they reconnoitred the ground as completely as possible. The gates of the smaller forts were closed, and no one was to be seen in or about them.

As Bradford had expected, the *sowar* soon came back with a message to the effect that it was too late to do anything, and that the cavalry were to return to camp. They rode back in impotent wrath, but the brush had done them good. Officers and men were excited and eager now; there would be a fight next day. Even the wounded man was cheerful, and keen for further work, though his *puttees* were covered with congealed blood. 'It's nothing, Sahib,' he said; 'the bullet only went through a bit of my leg; I can ride all right.'

They were to be disappointed again. The camp was struck at daybreak, and the force moved off, but after a rapid march they arrived only to find the valley deserted; not a man was to be seen near the forts or on the hills. The neighbouring spurs were crowned by the infantry, and the cavalry rode over the open *kotuls*, and round on both sides of the valley; there was not a sign of an enemy. Then it was decided that the deserted villages must be as far as possible destroyed, and this was done. The massive wooden gates were forced, and the insides thoroughly searched. Not a human being was found in them, but in the corner towers, and in some of the little rooms under the wall, were stores of fuel and grain and chopped straw. There was not carriage enough to remove it, and it was all set on fire. Soon a thick smoke was rising from the forts, and streaming away to the southward. On the sky-line of the hills to the north, miles away, they saw men gathering, and through their glasses they made out two or three hundred with some flags; they were quite out of reach.

Guy was standing with Bradford on a stony *kotul* above the main fort. He had dismounted, and had been stamping up and down to keep his feet warm, while a *sowar* held his horse. 'What a sell this is!' he said; 'I'm afraid it is hopeless. They will never give us a chance.'

Bradford was sitting moodily on a big stone, with his pipe in his mouth, and one hand deep in the breast of his *posteen*; he growled out something about 'skunks.'

'I wonder,' Guy went on, 'whether this game is any good. It seems to me that it must rile them horridly, and yet not hit them hard enough to frighten ~~them~~. Besides, you can't tell whether you hit the men who do the mischief. I suppose there would always be some reckless devils about who would snipe at us if they got a chance, even if they knew it would make us burn some one else's village; I expect we should do the same. Sup-

posing England were invaded by Afghans, and we saw a few cavalry within range, I know my feeling would be, "Oh, blow Jones's haystack! Let's have a shy at them;" and then the unhappy Jones would suffer while I sat and smiled on the summit of a neighbouring hill. After that Jones would shoot too.'¹

'They were all in it,' Bradford said; 'they had sent away the women and children, and were ready for us.'

'That may have been merely funk.'

'Perhaps. Anyway, they are cowardly beasts who won't fight, and they deserve anything they get.'

Guy laughed. 'Oh, I quite agree there! It is beastly unsporting of them to scratch after we have come all this way.'

When the villages were thoroughly in flames the troops marched back to camp, and after a day or two they returned to Kabul. They had not seen another shot fired, and were very weary of the cold and wind and dust.

On return Guy's squadron got into their quarters, and found themselves very snug indeed. The little fort had required a good deal of cleaning and fitting up, but it was in order now, and after tents it was deliciously warm. They had a large store of wood, chiefly beams from dismantled buildings in the Bala Hissar, and they could keep up rousing fires, and have hot tubs and be clean again; it was real luxury. Guy had a little room to himself, and he bought a felt carpet for it in the Kabul Bazar, and had a good solid bed made, not like his wretched little camp-bed, which was always breaking down under him, and a small table and chair. He could sit and read at night, or write to Helen, before a blazing fire. It was much pleasanter than freezing in a windy tent where one could hardly keep a candle burning, and where your only bath was a hole in the ground, with a waterproof sheet in it. Then they had a jolly little mess, and plenty to eat. They were able to get vegetables and fruit in the town, and plum-cakes with pistachio nuts in them, and shortbread, and flat unleavened loaves, and great jars of apricot jam. Those who cared for it could even get bad Afghan wine and spirit, the latter tasting like concentrated essence of dried raisins. Altogether, they lived like fighting cocks, and though there was still plenty of work to be done they were very happy.

December came, and with it increasing rumours of risings in all directions. On the first of the month, in the darkness of the

¹ It is still a Highland proverb, 'He whose house is burnt must become a soldier.'—*Legend of Montrose*.

early morning, the wretched Amir went off to India under a guard of English troops ; and from this time the reports became more and more frequent and circumstantial. Still no one seemed to believe that serious trouble was coming, and when some Hindus in the city mooted the idea that Kabul itself might be attacked their fears were treated as utterly ridiculous. Daud Shah said the insurgents meant to attack our cantonments, but this provoked laughter. The one desire of the force was to get enough of the enemy together to make a fight of it. 'I would sit still and let the hogs gather,' MacPherson said. 'If we keep moving out troops directly we hear of two or three hundred men dancing about on a hill-top with a green rag, we shall never get them to stand. We ought to lie still and encourage them to come round us until there are a respectable lot, and then make a dash at them with a good force of cavalry and some guns and bag the whole boiling.' The sentiment was generally approved.

One morning a day or two later, having nothing to do before breakfast, Guy and Lawrence determined to stroll over to the cantonment and see whether they could pick up any news or letters. Their little fort was six or seven hundred yards from the western side of the cantonment, and they walked towards the western gateway, which was the General's headquarters. When they were within twenty yards of it two men came out, and breaking into a trot went swinging past them. One was a well-built, athletic man, with a clean-shaved face, in clerical black ; every one knew Pádre Adams, now a Victoria Cross. The other was a big man with a brown beard.

'Who is that ?' Lawrence said, as they came up.

'Oh, Durand. He's a Political ; one of the fellows Government send up to interfere with us and prevent us doing our business.' Then he called out, 'Any news, Durand ?'

The man addressed turned his head over his shoulder and called back, 'No, nothing.'

'Confound him !' Guy said ; 'they always make a secret of everything.'

It was freezing again, and there was a little frozen pool near the gateway. Guy walked over it, and then they both went back and had a slide. After two or three successful attempts Guy's heels went up, and he came down heavily.

'Hurt ?' Lawrence asked.

'No,' he answered, struggling up and dusting his breeches ; 'but everything is confoundedly hard in this country. Come on.'

They walked into the covered gateway, and saw standing at a door on the right the Chief of the Staff, Macgregor, a powerful man with short legs and a massive frame, and a commanding face and thick, crisp, copper-coloured hair, now touched with gray. His nose was aquiline, and he wore a moustache and pointed beard, like a French soldier of the Second Empire. He was peeling an apple with a penknife, and singing to himself in a deep, low voice. They saluted him, and he stopped singing and nodded, and said, 'Morning,' gruffly. He was too big a man to speak to, so they passed on.

Outside the gateway Colonel Hastings, the Chief Political Officer, a tall man with a big, fair moustache, was talking to a long, furtive-looking Mahometan. Hastings returned their salute very courteously, with a pleasant smile in his blue eyes, but they left him alone too.

A few yards farther on, in the sunshine, they found Neville Chamberlain, of the Central India Horse, one of the General's aides-de-camp. He was stamping up and down and whistling cheerfully.

'Any news, Chamberlain?' Guy said.

'Yes, dear boy; fifty thousand Russians marching down from Turkestan, and the General was just going to send for you to take command of the Cavalry Brigade. He feels this is not a time for trifling. By Jove! here he comes; you had better stop and get your orders.'

Guy looked up and saw the well-known figure of the General, as trim and smart as if he were at Aldershot, coming out of his own doorway. The boys saluted and walked off, leaving the laughing aide-de-camp to meet his Chief, who called out to them: 'Good morning, Langley; good morning, Lawrence.'

'Isn't it extraordinary how he knows our names?' Lawrence said, as they got out of earshot. 'Of course he saw you at Simla; but how does he know me?'

'Oh, everybody knows you; that's what comes of being such a good-looking beggar.'

'Don't be an ass. Don't you think it's odd?'

'Very. He is awfully good at that; all great men are, or pretend to be. Come on, we'll go to the post-office and see if there are any letters, and then try to get hold of Hensman of the *Pioneer*; he always knows everything.'

They looked into the little post-office tent, but there were no letters. Then they went on and found the war-correspondent.

He had been playing whist until past midnight, and then writing until four o'clock, and was now rather fresher than usual, with clear eyes and an innocent, child-like colour. He told them all the news there was,—nothing very definite, but more rumours of gatherings here and there.

They walked back to their quarters rather disappointed. 'Same old game,' Guy said; 'risings on all sides, and not a fight to be got out of them at any price. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink. I believe the whole thing is skittles; those infernal Politicals getting their legs pulled. We shall never see another shot fired.'

On the morning of the 8th of December there was a review on the open plain behind our cantonments, and such of the Afghans as cared to look on had an opportunity of seeing how small was the force which had seized their capital. There were less than five thousand men on the ground; they were beautiful troops, but they were few, too few, and the little serried line looked lost in that broad plain.

In the afternoon Baillie's Horse were out again, the whole regiment together this time. There was a small gathering of malcontents to the west of Kabul, fifteen hundred or two thousand men; and two brigades had been sent off to try and surround them, and prevent their being joined by tribesmen from the north. Baillie's Horse went with General MacPherson's brigade.

No one expected any fighting; there had been too many false alarms; and they were all surprised when, on the 10th of December, they found themselves in presence of some thousands of Afghans who had come down from the north to join the gathering. A number of banners were flying on the hill-tops, and our cavalry were received with a fire which forced them to fall back.

Then the infantry advanced and attacked the enemy in form. Guy enjoyed the sight; it was pretty to watch the shells bursting over the swarms of men on the hill-sides, and the lines of rifle-puffs creeping up to them. But it was not a very hard business, and the regiment did not get a chance. The flat ground below the hills was cut up with watercourses and enclosures, among which cavalry could not act with effect; no luck again.

The next day the dulness was over with a vengeance. Marching southward, in pursuance of the plan to surround the original gathering, MacPherson's force became aware that a smart action was going on in the direction of Kabul, and swinging round

towards the sound and smoke of the guns, they came in the afternoon upon the field where the action had been fought. It had evidently not ended in our favour.

The ground was deserted now, but as the brigade pressed eagerly forward the cavalry came upon some wounded horses limping painfully about the plain, and then upon a more painful token of defeat,—the bodies of some English dead, horribly mutilated by Afghan knives.

The despised gathering of fifteen hundred or two thousand men had suddenly risen to at least ten thousand, and leaving in its rear the brigades sent to surround it, had dashed straight at Kabul. A small force of cavalry and guns which tried to stop it had been overthrown, and nothing but the extreme narrowness of the gorge behind which Kabul lay had saved the city from falling that night into the hands of the rebels.

It was a bold stroke, and deserved success. If, instead of making for the city, the enemy had only pushed on towards the English cantonment, with its weak garrison and its precious stores of ammunition and food, they might have dealt us a deadly blow. As it was, Baillie's Horse learned with something akin to amazement that an Afghan force had received and repulsed a charge delivered by two squadrons of British cavalry, and had actually for a time captured four horse-artillery guns. It was a bolt from the blue.

Nevertheless, as they sat round their fire that night and speculated on the chances of the morrow, they were in the best of spirits. The Ninth Lancers had suffered severely, and the ill-treatment of our dead was such as to arouse a fiery thirst for vengeance; but we had not been disgraced by the struggle against such hopeless odds, and the morrow would give us a chance of inflicting a heavy punishment. The enemy were there in force, occupying the hills south of Kabul. There must be some real work now.

There was plenty of work during the next three days. On the 12th of December we did little more than hold our own and keep the enemy in play, but that evening the second of our detached brigades marched in, and on the 13th the enemy's position was seriously attacked.

It was a real soldier's day, with a quantity of fine mixed fighting to suit all tastes. The guns shelled the enemy's positions, and the infantry stormed one after another the rugged heights upon which their banners were planted; and the cavalry

fell upon them in the open ground to the east and west. To do them justice, they fought boldly, advancing into the plain and trying with their great numbers to envelop our attacking force, and receiving with much steadiness the onslaughts of our small bodies of horsemen. Unfortunately there was never an opportunity of striking a heavy blow with a mass of cavalry together, but there were a number of separate actions in different parts of the field.

Our squadrons charged repeatedly, and got well home, doing much execution and suffering some loss. It was difficult to say who showed most keenness and dash,—the magnificent English troopers of the Ninth, or the rough, strong fighting men of the Guides and Fifth Punjab Cavalry, or the picturesque *sowars* of the Fourteenth Bengal Lancers,—all seemed to be enjoying their work and doing it well.

In one of these affairs Baillie's Horse were particularly successful. A large body of the enemy, seeing that the bulk of our cavalry were already engaged, pushed out from the hills to the south, and made an effort to get round our left. Baillie's Horse were sent at them, and a very warm time every one had of it.

Graham divided his regiment, and came down upon the enemy with beautiful precision, from two sides at once, just in time to cut them off from some broken ground they were trying to gain. He had tempted them out of one bad piece into the open, and he waited until it seemed as if he were going to let them get across unmolested. Guy was beginning to chafe at seeing them stream away, firing and shouting defiantly. One or two horses were hit, and the Sikhs began to grumble. Then, exactly at the right moment, the Colonel turned, his tall figure very erect, and his handsome Scotch face alight with pleasure, and gave the word they were longing to hear. They advanced at a trot, and then he pointed at the enemy with his sword and sat down and rode as if he were riding for a spear. And with a wild shout the three troops went after him.

What a mad gallop it was! Faster and faster over the level ground, with the enemy's swarms running across their front, and the thin charging lines opening and doubling and losing all regularity in their eagerness. It was all Guy could do to keep in front of his Sikhs. He turned right and left in his saddle to see if they were all going in straight. Going in straight! There was a long broken line of racing horses and glittering lance

points and eager eyes. God help the Afghan who got in their way !

It was beautifully done. The enemy were caught on the move, without cover of any kind, and smitten on both flanks. Their very numbers had betrayed them, and now their numbers increased their loss. They met the charge with much confidence. When they saw the cavalry were really coming on, their moving swarms began to halt and thicken into knots, and some of these little bodies of men held their fire until our horsemen were within a few yards. Guy Langley rode straight at one cluster, and was received with a volley of fire and smoke which nearly blinded him. The next instant he was into them with a crash, and he and his Sikhs were riding *hither and thither* in the smoke and confusion, slashing and spearing like men possessed. How long it lasted Guy never knew, but there were some minutes of it during which all order seemed to be lost. At one moment he found himself close to Lawrence, who had come in with the other wing under MacPherson, and was now riding bareheaded through the rout, followed by two or three of his men. 'Come on, Lawrie,' Guy cried out, '*Floreat Etona!*' As he spoke Lawrence's horse went down head first, killed by a shot from two or three Afghans who had turned and fired in desperation. The boy was on his feet in a second, before Guy could turn to his help, and avoiding a downward stroke aimed at his head, he had driven his sword right through his assailant's chest and killed him. It was a close shave.

A minute more and all was over. The Afghans had got away, backwards or forwards, into rough ground, leaving seventy dead on the open plain, and the cavalry reformed and retired out of fire of the walls and ditches. The horses were very blown, and five or six had been killed. MacPherson was wounded, but not badly,—a slash on the left arm. One *sowar* had been shot dead, and one pulled off his horse and killed with sword-cuts. Half a dozen more were wounded more or less severely. Guy himself found that his breeches had been blackened with smoke, and there was a piece out of his right sleeve which looked like a cut.

It had been a very warm thing altogether, and the regiment was pleased with itself. MacPherson had carried out his part of the work thoroughly well, as ever. He was grumbling now at not having killed more of the hogs, but he was fairly satisfied. Guy's Sikhs were laughing and talking aloud with happiness.

had been fairly mobbed into retreat and pressed back behind our walls.

It was rather an anxious night. The troops were tired, but many of them had to turn out to guard the long cantonment against an attack. Meanwhile the gates were rapidly blocked with gun-limbers and other obstacles, and the Engineers toiled all night to protect the open rear with trenches and wire entanglements and the like. Before daybreak our communications with India were severed by the cutting of the telegraph-line. The victorious force which had taken Kabul was now itself besieged. The Hogs had turned upon us to some purpose. An Indian force ought to have known that the hog is a dangerous enemy.

The huge Afghan commander-in-chief sat in his fur coat and drank quantities of green tea, and said to all who spoke to him, 'Sahib, did I not tell you all along?' But they said he was in it, and put him under arrest. Perhaps he was.

MacPherson was very angry. They had shot his horse the last day, and it had fallen on him and hurt his leg, and he had never once 'got in.' His wound was rather painful too; and he sat in the new cold mess-tent with a gloomy face, in silence.

It was all rather funny, Guy thought,—humiliating, but rather funny. He preserved a serious aspect and did not say so, but at last Colonel Graham gave the line.

'Well,' he said, 'we have done our best, and things might be much worse.' There was a twinkle in his eyes as he went on. 'It has been a lesson to me, and to some more of us, I think. You were afraid they would disperse without fighting, Langley, when you came down from Simla. Are you satisfied now?'

'Quite, thank you, Colonel,' Guy answered with a laugh, and they made merry over their own discomfiture. After all, they were not disgraced, and it was just as well to take the thing cheerfully.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SIEGE OF SHERPUR

THE enemy did not attack the cantonment that night, and Guy Langley woke up next morning to find that everything was quiet and looked much as usual.

Everything, however, was not as usual. The cantonment had been surrounded by the enemy, except on the northern side where the level plain afforded no shelter. Behind the crumbling mud walls and broken forts which in our confidence we had left standing, in pits and ditches, under every sort of cover, the Afghan marksmen lay and watched. Soon after daybreak they opened a desultory fire, and this was kept up all day long. Farther away the rude banners of the insurgents fluttered on the hill-tops, and at times bodies of men could be seen moving about them and waving their swords. But the enemy were too busy in the city to attack that day, and practically there was no fighting. It was a welcome respite, for it enabled the Engineers to correct and complete by daylight our hasty lines of defences.

For more than a week this state of affairs continued without much change. The force could hardly be said to be shut up. Troops moved out frequently, and when they did so the enemy at once gave ground. Occasionally messengers got through their lines into or out of the cantonment. The bare plain to the north and north-west was always open to our cavalry, who were out daily. Nor were the enemy's efforts very vehement. All day long they fired away, and after a day or two the fire grew heavier, and there were more casualties; but they made no real attempt to dislodge us. At sunset the firing stopped, and though every night an attack was expected, no attack was delivered. Nevertheless the force was fairly paralysed, and the position was suffi-

ciently humiliating. The city was in the occupation of the insurgents, who were gutting the houses of our friends, and even our outlying forts had been abandoned. If our troops sallied out and drove the enemy back a few hundred yards, they reoccupied their former positions as our men retired. The victorious force had been brought to bay. We had received a severe lesson, if an old one; we had despised our enemy.

Still the situation was by no means desperate. Five or six thousand good troops in a position too large for them indeed, but defended on three sides by a massive mud wall fifteen or twenty feet high, and on the fourth side by a rapidly-growing line of trench and abattis along the face of a stony hill, might fairly be expected to hold their own, so long as food and ammunition lasted, against any number of ill-armed tribesmen. If the enemy had had any guns, they could have searched every foot of the open low-lying cantonment, but they had none. There was food for a considerable time, and a fair quantity of ammunition, though not too much. Above all, there was confidence. The force had no doubt been surprised, and to some extent humiliated, by the unexpected incidents of the past week. Just after the overthrow of our cavalry and guns, while the north side was quite open and all the gateways unblocked, there had even been some anxiety, and here and there a few long faces might have been seen; but in a day or two all trace of apprehension had disappeared. Men ate and drank and laughed and chatted as if the whole thing were a big picnic. It was annoying to be mobbed and flouted by the enemy we had despised, but the inconvenience was only temporary. Reinforcements would come from India, and then we should have troops enough both to hold the cantonment and to take the field, and we would give it them with a vengeance. Far better have too many of the enemy for a little while than not have any enemy at all.

Baillie's Horse had lost two or three men, and had several down with wounds and sickness, and they had endured the mortification of seeing their own quarters in the hands of the Afghans. Nevertheless they were cheerful enough. They quite understood the situation, and all alike—Englishmen and Sikhs, Hindus and Mahometans—were content to wait for their revenge. They took their share with the infantry now in lining the trench to the north-east, and the men smiled and showed their white teeth when Guy spoke to them, as if it were all a very excellent joke. Many of them had seen service before, and

knew that even British troops cannot have everything their own way. It would not be any real sport if they could.

Gulab Singh fairly roared with laughter over it all. 'Do you remember, Sahib,' he said in his deep rough voice, 'a week ago we could not find an enemy? We were turning over all the stones for them. Now see, the whole plain is like a bazar. Ah, *shábásh! shábásh!* What a *tamásha* there will be when we get out,' and the long grizzled beard upon his portly bosom wagged with his mirth. It was the same everywhere. Tommy Atkins, in his snug room under the wall, said 'It was the first time he had ever heered of a blooming General being confined to barracks'; and then Tommy sang sentimental and melancholy songs, a sure indication of inward happiness. And the little Ghoorkhas gibbered and grinned, and held athletic meetings in front of their huts, as if there was not an enemy within miles.

The worst of it was the cold at night for the troops lying out. It was bitter work sleeping in the moonlit trenches, even when rolled up in a waterproof sheet and blanket. There was a keen north wind on the hill-side, and at times the sky clouded over and snow fell, and the sleeping forms were covered. One woke very chilled and stiff, and very thankful for a cup of hot soup or cocoa.

Guy Langley himself was well and happy. He liked his men, and felt that they had got to trust him; and he was also conscious that he had earned the approval of his seniors. Even MacPherson spoke to him now as if he were a person to be taken seriously. His one regret was the feeling that Helen would be in dreadful trouble. In India they would imagine all sorts of horrors when they heard the force was besieged. They could not know how matters really stood. But it was no use fretting about that. Another brigade was marching up from India, and when it arrived all would be well. She would soon know.

One afternoon, when the siege had lasted some days, Guy walked over with Lawrence to the western end of the cantonment to see what was going on. It was getting rather slow in their quarter. They had no enemy in their front to the north, and though the *pop, pop* of the musketry was incessant they were seeing very little of the fun.

They got into the broad main road which ran down the centre of the cantonment from east to west, and stepped out briskly for the headquarters gateway. As they walked they saw an occa-

sional bullet flick up the ground on their left. Fired at the top of the wall, the enemy's bullets fell all day long on the enclosed plain inside it ; but the zone of fire was pretty well known and avoided.

'That's one beauty of having lots of room,' Guy said. 'Of course MacPherson is right enough about the cantonment being too big for our force, but if it was a quarter the size we should lose more men. Now, if you keep close under the wall or well in the middle, you're as safe as a church.'

'Yes,' Lawrence answered ; 'it's ever so much jollier not being squashed up. Hallo !' he went on with a laugh, 'how about being as safe as a church ?'

Something had gone singing past their heads and struck the hard earth on their right not twenty yards away.

'That must be from a rifle,' Guy said ; 'let's go and see.'

They walked across, and Lawrence found the missile at once, a clean little Martini bullet, lying on the surface. He put it in his breeches pocket. 'I shall keep that,' he said, 'and send it to my old mater. She will think it no end of a treasure.'

When they got near the gateway there was evidently something going on. There had been a little sunshine, and our signallers had been sending heliographic messages from the roof to the Latabund post on the Peshawar road twenty miles away. The post was held by a stout old Christian soldier, Hudson of the Twenty-Eighth Native Infantry. His defences consisted of a low wall of piled stones, and his force was small, but he cared nothing for that. There lay his duty. No sign of unsteadiness or alarm where he held command.

Several officers were standing about the gateway in their *posteens*.

'What's up ?' Guy said to one of them. 'Any news ?'

'Yes. I don't know what it is exactly. Something about Gough. All the swells are in the General's quarters. They've been jawing away like blazes for the last half-hour.'

Guy and Lawrence waited a few minutes on the chance of hearing something more, and then got tired of it. 'Come on, Lawrie,' Guy said ; 'I daresay they will manage to settle it without us. Let's get on the rampart and have a look round.'

They made their way up and looked over the parapet at the brown plain below. There was snow in patches here and there. 'I should like to go and kick the beggars out of our quarters,' Lawrence remarked, gazing wistfully away to the south-west,

towards the walled enclosure that had once belonged to Baillie's Horse. 'How it will stink when we get in again!'

Then there was a puff of smoke on the wall, and the unmistakable prolonged *ping-g-g* of a rifle-bullet over their heads. 'Well, I'm hanged,' he went on, 'if that isn't adding insult to injury! Fancy getting sniped at from our own quarters.'

'Come down, old chap. That must be another Martini. They may get the range next time.'

Lawrence stepped down from the *banquette*. 'The parapet's very low,' he said.

'Yes. Some one told me they had to cut it down for the Ghorkhas; they couldn't see over it. What ugly little monkeys they are!'

'They're rare good little soldiers though, and they hate the Afghans like poison.'

'Yes; I believe they do. A regiment of them got cut up here in the old war, and they fight *con amore*. They are always good friends with Tommy too. But they are a bit spoilt, I think.'

The young men strolled on until they got near the south-west bastion. There were some broken walls within short range at this point, and firing was going on. A few of the enemy had planted a red flag on a low mud wall a couple of hundred yards off, and were steadily pounding away at anything that showed above the parapet. They saw Guy and Lawrence looking over, and fired two shots at them.

'Slugs,' Lawrence said, as the slow buzz went over their heads. 'I don't know how they expect to hit you with those things. I picked up two or three the other day. They are just chunks of lead, like bits cut off a stick of liquorice.'

It was no good shooting at the Afghan marksmen whom Lawrence despised. They had bored holes at the foot of the wall, and fired from a pit in the ground, so that they were completely covered. Our men were sitting here and there with their backs against the parapet, smoking and chatting. A tall Pathán gunner belonging to a mountain-battery came stalking along the rampart with his head very high indeed. He was a fine, square-shouldered, clean-built man, with courage and pride in every line of his face. As he went a shot was fired at him and struck the top of the parapet within a yard or two, knocking up some dust.

'That was close,' Guy said to him as he came up. 'Take care, or they will get you.'

The man smiled and twisted up his moustaches. 'No, Sahib.

These people are no use,' he said contemptuously. 'They do that all day and never hit any one.' The statement was not quite accurate, but it was a sound principle to go upon.

A little farther on they found a shooting-party on the lookout. There was not ammunition enough to let the men go on firing as they pleased, and volleys were more effective. A small squad of British infantry were kneeling by the parapet with their rifles in their hands, and an officer was standing by them with his glasses over the top, watching something in the distance. Suddenly he gave a word of command, and the men sprang up. Guy saw a score or so of Afghans leave the shelter of a high bit of wall and trot across towards another wall fifty yards off; as they got into the open a volley rang out, and two men fell, while a number of bullets hit up the ground close by them. A hot fire was immediately opened upon our people from other neighbouring bits of cover, and some of the Afghans ran back and pluckily carried the fallen men under shelter. One of the rescuers was himself shot in doing so, and himself carried off by others. The officer with the squad was laughing gently. 'We scored one that time,' he said. 'I think I got the distance rather well.'

Guy and Lawrence walked on a little farther, but there was no serious fighting to be seen, so they went and looked up a friend or two, and returned to their own tents. They had spent a pleasant afternoon, but they agreed that it was much better sport fighting on horseback than potting away at Afghans with a rifle.

'I should not like to shoot a man,' Lawrence said. 'It would make me feel awfully sick to see the poor devil kicking on the ground like a black buck, and to know I had done it.'

'Yes; I expect it would. All the same, you didn't seem to mind killing that fellow the other day.'

'He would have killed me if I hadn't; and it's different somehow in a scrimmage, when your blood's up. Besides——'

'What?'

Lawrence was looking troubled.

'I daresay you'll laugh,' he said at last, and Guy could see him flush through his fair, tanned skin to the roots of his curly hair, 'but do you know I would give a good deal not to have done it.'

'Would you really?'

'Yes. I can't get it out of my head. His face was so ghastly, and he gave a sort of horrible gasp when it went into him. I wish to God I had only wounded him.'

Lawrence's voice was rather unsteady.

'You're a good chap, Lawrie,' Guy said, 'but you must not take it like that. I daresay he helped to murder Cavagnari.'

Lawrence was silent for a little. 'I wish I were sure of that. I suppose you think me an awful ass.'

'No, I don't; but you know you had to do it.'

'Yes, I know. All the same, I'll never do it again if I can help it.'

They walked on in silence until they reached their tents.

A day or two later the long-expected attack was at last delivered. It was known that Gough's brigade was within a couple of marches, and the Afghans determined to try one rush before the two forces joined. Why they did not attack the two thousand men in the open instead of the five thousand behind a strong wall is not easy to understand. Perhaps they only wanted to make a demonstration for their honour's sake. Perhaps they were not sufficiently under control.

However that may be, on the night of the 22nd of December our spies brought information that a grand assault was to be made at daybreak, and that the signal would be the lighting of a beacon fire on the Asmai heights to the westward. There had been so many false alarms that every one was doubtful about this story; but the necessary orders were issued, and the force was kept in readiness. Shortly before daybreak the signal was given. Guy Langley had been awake and on the look-out for an hour or more, and had just shared with Bradford a jorum of hot cocoa. 'By Jove, that is good stuff!' he said. 'I feel ever so much better. I wonder whether they really mean business to-day. If so, it is about time for them to be lighting up. It is half-past five.'

He turned to the westward, and as he did so, there was a flicker in the darkness, where the rugged top of the Asmai hill could just be made out. For an instant there was perfect silence, then, as the flame caught and flared, there rose from the men around him a low involuntary 'Ah-h!' such as one may sometimes hear at Lord's when a dangerous wicket goes down. Then in the distance two musket-shots rang out, and after them a few more. Along the cantonment wall all was silent. Men stood with beating hearts awaiting the onslaught. For some minutes the suspense lasted, and then suddenly there burst from the darkness a wild storm of yells, 'Allah, Allah, Allah!' and fifty thousand Afghans came with a rush at the wall, shouting and firing.

The cantonment was surrounded by a broad continuous ring of rifle-flashes, and over the parapet and over the trenches on the hill the bullets began to stream. There was no doubt about it now. You could hear this shower sing in the wind. Then our troops took up the music, and there broke out a continuous roll of breechloading fire, which sounded like the grinding of a huge coffee-mill, and for a minute or two fairly drowned the Afghan musketry.

Baillie's Horse were doing their share of the work. They held a long piece of trench on the north-east side of the hill, and in the darkness a considerable number of the enemy had occupied a line of ruined wall and ditch below. Their fire was heavy. Most of it passed over the crest of the hill, but many shots struck the hill-side, and as the officers walked up and down behind the lines of trench where the men were lying, it seemed to Guy that they could not long escape without casualties. There was one incessant whizz and spatter of lead.

But still minute after minute they remained untouched, and still the enemy delayed the final rush which they were all awaiting, and awaiting with an impatience not wholly free from anxiety. There might be thousands of men down there in the darkness facing their little line. A few star shells were fired over them, and in the momentary glare they were seen to be in large numbers ; but it was difficult to make out anything accurately.

The Colonel was as cool as if the whole thing had been a field-day. He strolled up and down talking cheerily to officers and men, and restraining the fire. MacPherson was good too, but he was growling ; he wanted to get at the hogs.

Not long after daybreak it became clear that the attack had not been pushed home at any single point. The firing was very heavy on the south side and elsewhere, but looking through their glasses Graham and his officers could see that everywhere the enemy was stationary. Then they knew the danger was practically over. The one fear had been a swamping rush in the darkness, which, if successful at any one point, might have caused confusion and disaster throughout the long cantonment. In the daylight it was almost impossible for any Afghan force to advance into the open against walls and trenches lined with breechloaders. In fact, they soon began to give ground. In front of Baillie's Horse the cover was not sufficient for more than a few hundreds, and thick groups of men who had been crouching down below in the darkness were seen streaming off to safer

country when it became light enough for them to be made out. As they went several volleys were fired at them, and some fell and were carried off by their friends. On the other hand, the fire of those who remained became more accurate and effective. First a young Pathán, who was to the manner born and had been firing away at his countrymen with much coolness and enjoyment, was shot through the head and killed. His carbine fell over the front of the trench, and rolled some feet down the hill-side, which was steep at this point. Lawrence, who had been lying down by the Colonel's orders, walked out and brought it back; and the enemy shouted and fired at him.

Hardly a minute afterwards Greene, who commanded Lawrence's squadron, was hit in the arm, and had to be taken away; then two more men were wounded, one of them badly in the hand. Something made him put his hand up to his head, and he looked dreadful, his face and chest covered with blood. Almost every shot now struck the hill-side within a few yards, and went off with a ricochet, knocking up splinters of gravel in all directions. However, the damage done was not very great, and the men soon got accustomed to it. As the Colonel remarked, there is a great deal of room for bullets outside one. Guy himself suffered nothing more than a little indignity from some earth hit into his face; it stung, but did him no harm. The Colonel was the last man touched; he had exposed himself rather more than necessary, but escaped unhurt for some hours. At last, as he stood quietly looking through his glasses at some groups of men on the hills away to the left, he suddenly threw up his arm and fell backwards.

He was not far from Guy at the moment, and Guy jumped up and ran to him, fearing he was badly wounded; but he was able to get up, and found that he was only bruised. A bullet, fired apparently from a distance, had struck him on the right shoulder, and had cut through the thick skin of his *posteen*, but had not penetrated his clothes. When he opened his *posteen* it fell out of the sheepskin; he stooped and picked it up. 'Snider,' he said; 'that was a shave; but a miss is as good as a mile.'

'It wasn't a miss, sir,' Guy answered; and MacPherson, who had come up, added gruffly: 'I don't see the use of exposing yourself like this, Colonel; the next might not stop outside.'

Colonel Graham smiled. 'All right, Mac,' he said, 'I will take care,' and he strolled on.

Soon afterwards there was another attempt at a general

assault, but it was made in a half-hearted way, and was easily repelled ; and then the regiment received an order which filled them with pleasure and excitement. Some cavalry and horse-artillery were to move out by the gorge on to the plain to the northward, and they were to form part of the force. Their place in the line was almost immediately taken by a body of native infantry, which had been in reserve, and they were soon ready. How pleasant it was to be mounted again, to feel a good horse under one, and to attack instead of being attacked ! Now it was their turn,—at last, after ten days.

Guy was riding a little Kataghani horse he had got in Kabul ; it was handier for work over rough ground, and had legs and feet like iron, and would go for ever.

As they emerged from the gorge, and out into the open ground to the north, the enemy who had occupied the villages on the left of the cantonment began to fall back ; and soon, pressed by infantry and horse-artillery, they were retiring rapidly towards the city. Then the cavalry covered the plain out to the eastward, and drove the flying Afghans back into the broken country, and crowned the bare heights of the Siah Sung on our left front, where the old camp had been. They were all full of eagerness, and pushed forward vigorously, delighted to be once more on the offensive.

But it is possible to be too eager. They had not been long in possession of the heights on the flank of the retiring enemy when the Afghans, who quite understood the helplessness of cavalry on bad ground unsupported, threw out a strong body of footmen and attacked with considerable spirit. They swarmed up the rocky spurs on the western side of the heights, and opened a fusillade, before which the cavalry were forced to retire. It was a soldierly thing to do in the middle of a retreat, and the movement was smartly executed.

Guy Langley's squadron was on the extreme left of our cavalry advance, and had ridden right round the heights. They were leisurely moving along under the southern slopes when the check occurred, and, their view impeded by rolling and broken ground, they did not at once realise what was happening. Hearing the fire grow hot, they pushed forward and upward until they emerged on a plateau which was within rifle-shot of the advancing enemy. It was soon evident that the squadron could not get at them, on account of the deep stony *nullahs* which separated the different spurs. On their right Bradford and Guy could see

the rest of the regiment beginning to fall back. Bradford tried to check the Afghans with carbine-fire, but their numbers were too great. Then he realised that a body of the enemy was making a push to get on to a point which commanded his line of retreat. Some scores of men were running hard to a rocky hillock which the squadron would have to pass at short range, with nothing but a deep ravine between. It was an awkward fix, and they had to retire at a canter, getting rather heavily peppered meanwhile.

However, all went well until they were opposite the knoll. The bulk of the squadron got safely past, and Bradford, who had pulled up facing the enemy until all should be clear, was just turning his horse to follow. It looked as if they were going to get off scot-free.

Just at that moment a few of the foremost among the men who were running up saw that they were too late to intercept the retreat. They stopped and fired a hasty volley, and Bradford's horse was shot through the neck, and went down like a stone. There was a shout, and some more shots, and then to Guy's horror he saw Bradford lying on the ground within a few yards of the *nullah*, while some of the enemy had dashed forward, and were half-way down the side, evidently with the hope of despatching him.

Guy had only time to shout a word of warning to the men nearest him, and then he galloped back to where Bradford was lying. As he did so, he saw Bradford raise himself on his knees in a dazed kind of way and pick up his helmet, which had fallen off. 'Look out, Bradford, look out!' Guy shouted as he galloped up; they're close to you.'

Bradford sprang up with sudden understanding in his face, but as he did so half a dozen shots were fired from the other side of the *nullah*, and he staggered and fell again. Almost at the same moment a big clansman rose from the *nullah* with his *chúra* in his hand and ran forward, closely followed by a second.

There was only one chance. Guy drove his horse straight at the nearest man, and as he jumped aside slashed at him with a fierce back stroke. The Afghan tried to disable him by striking up at his sword arm, and narrowly missed doing so. Guy, less scientific but more lucky, got the Afghan across the neck and brought him down. There was no time to get a blow at the second assailant, but the handy, game little horse answered at once to the desperate pressure of his rider's legs, and catching the man fair with his shoulder, sent him rolling over and over

on the ground. Before he was up a *sowar's* lance was through his body.

The whole thing was over in a few seconds, and Guy was back by the side of Bradford, who was again on his feet. He sprang forward, and catching hold of Guy's stirrup, called out, 'Come along, it's all right; only my arm.' There was a wild yell from the other side of the *nullah*, and several shots were fired, but without effect; and in a few seconds more they got over the brow of the spur. As they did so, a dozen more men came galloping back to help them, headed by old Gulab Singh, and the rest of the squadron were pulling up. They had turned the moment they realised that anything had happened, but only one man had seen Guy go back. He was a young fellow, hardly more than a boy, the son of a native officer, and a gentleman by birth. His unshaved beard made a soft, downy fringe round his face, and as a rule his eyes and manner were rather sleepy; now he looked bright and animated. Guy thanked him, and said, 'You helped us splendidly, Atar Singh. That fellow might have done for us both.'

The boy laughed. 'It was nothing, Sahib,' he said; 'my luck is very good.'

The enemy crowned the spur, shouting and firing, but it was too late, and they had no further loss.

Directly they were out of range they examined and bound up Bradford's arm. It was not very bad apparently, a clean flesh wound; when his horse fell he had not been wounded, only shaken and half-stunned. 'I don't know how to thank you, old fellow,' he said; 'but for you I should have been cut up to a certainty.'

'Oh no; you were all right. Atar Singh was close up.'

'Not close enough. Well, it's no good talking about it; you know what I feel.'

Bradford was able to ride, and they mounted him on a *sowar's* horse. As they moved on again, a big English officer rode up with half a dozen *sowars* at his heels. Guy recognised Major Russell.

'Are you all right?' he said to Bradford.

'Yes, thank you, Major. A slug through the arm; it's not bad. But I have had a shave; Langley just saved me.'

'It was a shave; I was out there watching the business with my glasses, and saw your affair quite clearly.' Then he turned to Guy: 'Well done, Langley; I never saw anything better in

my life, and I thought it was you. You ought to get a V.C. for it, and it won't be my fault if you don't.'

'A V.C., Major!' Guy said, and there came over him a flood of astonishment and delight which made his eyes shine.

'Oh, I have nothing on earth to say to it, of course; and it may be out of the question. I am only telling you what I think myself. Any way, you did a fine thing.'

Russell rode away, leaving Guy's brain in a whirl of happiness. Could it really be possible that such luck would come to him? A quarter of an hour ago nothing had happened; and now perhaps he had won what he would have given almost anything to win. It seemed too good to be true.

Bradford said, 'You see I was not far wrong; I shall do my level best any way.'

But there was no time for talking about Victoria Crosses. The firing was still going on; there was plenty of work for them before the day was over.

That night they took all the sleep they could get. They were tired with their day's work, and they were to go out again next morning. But before he turned in Guy sat for half an hour in the empty mess-tent writing a letter to his wife. Bradford had made the most of Guy's exploit, and every one in the regiment had been full of praise and cordiality. It had covered him with confusion, but it had made him very happy; and in his excitement and joy he felt he must write and tell her all about it.

The beginning of his letter was taken up with a description of the fighting during the past week. It ended as follows—

Now, my darling, I am going to tell you what I hope will make you very happy. You told me to bear my sword with honour, and your dear lips were laid upon it. Do you remember? I have never forgotten. To-day, when we had got round the Siah Sung heights we were hotly engaged, and being nearly surrounded on ground where cavalry could not act, we had to retire. While we were doing so Bradford's horse was shot, and he fell heavily, and was half-stunned. The squadron was retiring at a canter over the brow of the hill, and I was the only one who saw him fall. I went back to help him, and was just in time to prevent his being despatched by two of the enemy, who came at him with their long knives. One of them I cut down, and the other I rode over; one of the men came up just at the moment and ran him through. Then we got Bradford off; he was wounded in the arm, but nothing serious. When we had got clear, Russell of the Quartermaster-General's Department rode up to

us, and told us he had seen it all. He spoke very warmly, and ended by saying I ought to get a V.C. for it, and that it should not be his fault if I did not. Bradford has been very nice about it too, and so have the Colonel and the others. My darling, are you pleased, and are you a little proud of me? I never thought of a V.C. when I did it, and I don't really see what else any one could have done; I could not have ridden away and left him. But they seem to think I did well. My greatest pleasure in it all is the thought of you. I know you well enough to be sure that this letter will warm your heart. Of course I may not get the V.C.; Russell warned me of that. You must not say a word about it to any one, and you must not be disappointed if it does not come. I never thought of it till he spoke. Whether it comes or not, I have done what you told me to do; I have borne your sword with honour. Now I must get some sleep. We go out again in the morning. Gough is within a march of us, and I think to-morrow will see the final break-up of our siege; he ought to be attacked to-night, but people seem to think the enemy have lost heart. They did not attack well to-day, and they suffered heavily; the villages were full of their dead, and they carried away all they could. Good-night, my own. You won't fret about it if I don't get the Cross? I shall reproach myself if I have only caused you disappointment in the hope of giving you pleasure. If you want to make me happy, you won't be troubled about that, or about anything on earth; not even if I were to fall, as many better men have done. I should like to feel that even that would not make your life sad.

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.

Good-bye, and God bless you. Are you not glad now that I met you, and that I left the Thirtieth? Have you not brought me . wonderful good fortune?—Ever your own,

GUY LANGLEY.

CHAPTER XXXV

HAPPINESS

HELEN spent her Christmas at Syntia. She had come down from Simla in the beginning of November, when Mrs. Aylmer left, and had taken a small house in the cantonment. She could not face Sangu all alone. Mrs. Graham had gone to England, and the place was almost deserted. Syntia was familiar and more or less homelike even now. The Aylmers asked her to go to them, and so did the Hunters ; but she would not do either. She preferred living by herself, and they did not press her.

She was at Syntia when the news of the Kabul rising reached India. A few days later, on the 15th of December, it was known that the British force had been checked if not defeated, and that it was now surrounded and besieged by an enemy of ten times its numbers. Men recalled to mind the disasters of the first Afghan war and the recent massacre of the Mission, and awaited in painful anxiety the arrival of further news. For the poor women who had son or lover or husband in Kabul the next ten days were very terrible. At any moment the veil might be lifted, and who could tell what horrors might be behind it ?

There were no doubt some grounds for hope and even confidence. The tone of the last telegrams had been cheery enough, and the force was a good one. Still it had been surrounded and shut up ; and our people were now fighting for their lives in the snow, two hundred miles from our border.

Helen Langley suffered with the rest. She tried to be steady and brave, and to pray with faith ; but it was very hard.

On Christmas morning she drove over to church at the Civil Station. The recollection of that happy Christmas three years before had come upon her with irresistible force ; and though she knew the contrast would be a painful one she could not

help going. There would be a certain bitter sweetness in it ; and perhaps it might do her good.

She had no carriage of her own, and the little *ticca gári* which they brought her was very straight-backed and uncomfortable ; but it was a beautiful bright morning, and she did not find the drive very tiring. When she arrived she told the driver to stop outside the church 'compound,' and waited until every one had gone in. Then she walked into the familiar porch, and went quietly up the stone staircase to the gallery. No one saw her come up, and she sat down at the back unnoticed. There were hardly half a dozen people round the harmonium ; Hunter was one of them, but she knew none of the others. The whole place was changed already, as is the way in India. The harmonium was being played, very badly, by the wife of the new clergyman. Little Sladen was gone ; Arthur Goldney was gone too, and Oldfield, and the Andersons. When Helen stood up she could see the eastern end of the church, and her father's pew under the pulpit. It hurt her to see it occupied by strangers. The new Commissioner sat at the end, where she used to see her father's wavy brown head, which always looked so young. In the seat where Guy used to sit, when he came, there was no one. It was a dull service, and the church looked empty and neglected. The decorations were scanty, and instead of the happy crowd of 1876 there were only thirty or forty people ; and her heart was cold and sad.

When the *To Deum* came she forced herself to sing, and Hunter caught her voice at once. He turned round with a smile in his eyes ; and then seeing her white face, drawn by ten days of terrible suspense, he got out of his place, and came in his boyish affectionate way and stood by her side. It gave them both pleasure. They were the only two of the old set left.

When the service was over the rest of the little choir walked out. Hunter stayed and talked to her and tried to cheer her up. After a few minutes she said : ' Now we really must go. Mrs. Hunter will be wondering where you are. I suppose most of the people are gone by this time.'

They walked down into the porch and found Mrs. Hunter in some indignation at her husband's absence. Every one had driven away except herself and her two guests, a civil officer and his wife, who were staying with the Hunters for Christmas. The grassy compound was empty, except for their carriage and Helen's little 'midge.'

'Oh, it's you!' Mrs. Hunter said to Helen, holding out her hand with her little half-sneering laugh. 'Of course he would let us wait all day to stay with you.'

Helen smiled. 'Dear Mr. Hunter, I have hardly seen him since I came down. It is so nice seeing him again. A merry Christmas to you!'

Mrs. Hunter's eyes were softer than usual. 'I wish your Christmas could be a little merrier. No news yet?'

Helen shook her head in silence.

'I am so sorry for you. But it will all come right. There's the telegraph-man coming now. I wonder whether it is anything.'

Helen looked up and saw out on the dusty drive in the sunlight the familiar red and blue *puggree* of the telegraph-messenger. Her heart throbbed. 'It can't be for me,' she said to herself. 'Of course it is some official telegram for Mr. Hunter. No one knows I am here.' Nevertheless she had a feeling that it had something to do with her.

She was not long in doubt. The messenger came straight up to her, and taking the telegram out of the leather pouch at his belt, presented it to her with a *salaam*. He had carried many a message up to Colonel Treveryan, and knew her well by sight.

Helen looked at the envelope. It was for her: 'Mrs. Langley, Syntia.' The telegraph-clerk who got the message had known where she was, and had sent it after her.

The messenger handed her a bit of pencil. She signed the receipt fastened to the envelope, and tore it off. As she opened the telegram with trembling fingers her mind sent up a hasty prayer. 'O God, let it be good news!' Then she read it. It was from Guy: 'All well. Enemy beaten and dispersing. Telegraph.'

The sudden shock of happiness was almost too much for her, and for an instant she felt faint and giddy. Then she controlled herself and handed the telegram to Mrs. Hunter. 'See what your good wishes have brought me,' she said; and her face was so changed that Mrs. Hunter was fairly startled.

'Oh, I am glad! Montie, look here.'

Hunter read the telegram and uttered a wild cheer. The telegraph-man looked round, and so did the Hunters' guests.

'Montie!' Mrs. Hunter said, 'do remember where you are.'

'I don't care a hang where I am,' he answered defiantly, shaking Helen's hand with such warmth that it almost hurt her.

'Didn't I say it would be all right? I can wish you a merry Christmas now, can't I? I wouldn't have missed this for a thousand pounds.'

Helen was laughing at him with bright happy eyes. What a dear warm heart he had! After a few words more he helped her into her narrow little seat, and she drove away, with her telegram in her hand, and deep thankfulness in her heart.

Hunter sighed as he got into his carriage. 'Poor girl,' he said, with his handsome face clouding over, 'how different this is from the old times. Do you remember what a nice turn-out they always had, and how bright and jolly she used to look when they came driving up together? Poor old Treveryan! What hard luck it was his breaking his neck like that; and all to make room for that stupid ass——'

'Montie!'

'Oh, all right, I'm not going to blaspheme. But what a difference it has made. Syntia isn't the same place now; never will be again.'

When Helen got home she sent her telegram over to Mrs. Aylmer, and asked her to pass it on to Hugh Dale. 'I shall come over a little before dinner,' she added.

Then she sent her answer to Guy: 'Telegram received. Quite well and very happy. A merry Christmas and bright New Year to you all!'

Helen did not go over to dinner at the Aylmers'. Shortly after lunch Mabs arrived, to thank her for a beautiful doll's house, with several rooms in it and a real kitchen, which Helen had sent her. Poor mite! she was very grateful, and very disappointed. She had found out by means of some transparent questions that Helen would like a copy of George Herbert, in place of one she had lost. Her little purse held a store of silver four-anna bits which she had earned week by week, and treasured up for Christmas-time, and she had set her heart upon giving Helen the book. Mrs. Alymer had duly written for it to a Calcutta shop ten days before, and had received an answer to the effect that it would be sent by the next post. Mabs had settled in consultation with her mother that she was to write on the fly-leaf: 'For dear Auntie Helen, from her loving Mabs;'; and she had practised the inscription on a piece of note-paper, sitting at the writing-table with the tip of her little tongue between her lips and a face puckered with toil. But the book never arrived, and her labour was wasted. She told Helen about

it, and said in a hard contemptuous little voice that it was just like those stupid shops, and that she would never trust them again. Helen understood, and petted and consoled her; and the child's arms got round her neck, and then there was a sudden breakdown. 'Oh, Auntie! I can't help it,' she sobbed; 'I did so want to give it you, and I have been thinking of it so long, and they said they were sending it.' Poor little woman! She was better when she had had her cry out; and Helen told her all about Guy and the fighting in Kabul; and she listened with much attention, and announced that she was going to write to him. 'Only he's a very bad boy, you know. He has never written to me once since he went away, not even when I sent him many happy returns for his birthday. And he promised he would.'

While the child spoke Helen's heart began to sink with a strange new fear. The hour of her trial was coming upon her. She sent Mabs away with a note to her mother, and summoned up all her faltering courage. What helped her more than anything was the thought of Guy's telegram. With that joy in her heart she felt that she could bear any pain and face any danger.

Mrs. Aylmer came to her at once and made her go to bed, and in the evening, an hour later, Beamish came to see her.

Rex had got into Helen's room, and was sitting by her bedside with his head close to her. 'You must send the dog away,' Beamish said.

'Very well, Dr. Beamish.'

'I will take him out,' and before Helen could warn him Beamish incautiously laid his hand on the dog's collar. He was always clumsy. He started back in alarm as Rex wrenched his head loose with a fierce snarl, showing a set of white teeth that would have done credit to a wolf.

'Oh, Rex!' Helen said, putting her hand over his head. 'What a shocking way to behave. Come and confess. I'm very sorry, Dr. Beamish. He won't let any one touch him when he is with me; but I'll send him away.'

She could hardly help laughing even then at Beamish's face of disgust and alarm.

Rex buried his head in the bedclothes and confessed. He said as plainly as silence could say it: 'I beg your pardon; I didn't mean to vex you, but he should not have tried to pull me away.'

Helen kissed his big head. 'Good-bye, my king; you must be good and go away now. Go out, Rex dear, go out.'

The dog lifted his head and looked at her, and then turned away with drooping ears and tail. As he came near the door he stopped and looked round with a low whine and a glance at Beamish. Must he leave her with that man, whom he despised and distrusted? 'Yes, dear, go out,' she said, and he went.

A few hours later they placed on the bed beside her a tiny little red-faced creature, whom Mrs. Baker, the nurse, wife of a soldier from the Thirtieth, declared to be the most beautiful boy she had ever seen in all her born days, and so like his father that she would have known him anywhere.

Helen looked at the child and tried in vain to see the likeness. She reflected that strangers did see family likenesses which were not always visible to the next of kin. 'Do *you* see it?' she asked Mrs. Aylmer.

'My dear, I never see likenesses, but it's a beautiful baby.'

'Is it? Do you really think so?'

'Yes, I do really. Now go to sleep and don't talk.'

Helen lay in the silent room trying to realise what had come to her, and very happy. It was such peace and rest after all the long sorrow and suspense and pain. The whole of her troubles seemed to have been lifted from her at once. She fell asleep before daybreak and slept for some hours. Soon after she woke she asked for Rex. He came gladly in to her, and then stood still, looking in surprise at the strange thing lying on the other side of the bed.

'That's my boy, Rex,' she said; 'you must love him very much, as much as me.'

Rex walked slowly round the bed, and for the first time Helen felt a slight thrill of fear. 'Be good, Rex,' she said anxiously, putting out her hand. She need not have been afraid. Rex stood looking down at the round red face in the bundle, and smelt the new creature doubtfully, then he licked the little crumpled red fist, and came back to Helen's side. 'Oh, you darling,' she said, and in her weakness her eyes filled with tears.

It was a very happy day. Her room was darkened and silent, but the sun was bright outside, and she could hear the birds twittering, and the soft breeze whispering in the trees. She lay in quiet enjoyment, and grew accustomed to her new treasure. Her only regret was that it had not come a day or two before, so that she could have told Guy in her telegram. Well, she must send another. What should they call him?—Guy too, or Erroc? Not Guy, she thought; but Guy should decide. She could easily

get an answer before baby had to be christened, and perhaps now Guy would be back in time for that himself. How her heart beat at the thought. Perhaps he might be with her in a month, one month more. What a meeting it would be ! What almost unbearable happiness, to look in his face again, and hear his voice, and feel his arms round her.

‘ Oh, Guy, come back to me soon, come back to me soon ! ’ she murmured, her sweet eyes eager with entreaty.

And Guy was lying under the drifted snow, dead, with the treacherous Afghan earth on his face.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A SOLDIER'S DEATH

ON the 23rd of December the Afghans had made their effort and had failed. That night, though Gough's little brigade lay out on the open, within a few miles of them, they did not attempt to destroy it, and there was no further attack on the cantonment. The dark hours passed quietly, and in the morning no enemy was visible. For the time the tribesmen were tired of fighting. They had lost heavily, and their stores of food were exhausted, and they wanted to go to their homes.

These people were very much like the old Scotch clans. They had no cohesion and no real head. They could gather for a few days' fighting against the English, but they were not capable of combination or of sustained effort. In a mountainous and sparsely-populated country tribal feuds are fierce, and they are perhaps specially fierce in Afghanistan. The Ban-i-Israil, as the Afghans call themselves, are brave and savage and fickle, like the people from whom they claim descent. The great tribal gathering had fallen to pieces even more quickly than it had come together. In defeat such a force had no solidity. On the other hand, if the tribal method of warfare has its drawbacks, it has also its advantages. In a country where every village is a fort, and every man a soldier, it is easy for an army to rise out of the earth, and in case of defeat it is equally easy for an army to sink into the earth. There are no long trains of artillery and waggons, no uniforms even, nothing but thousands of hardy fighting-men armed with sword and matchlock, and carrying a few pounds of grain in their waistcloths. Give them two hours' start and they are gone.

So when our cavalry rode out on the morning of the 24th of December there was no enemy to fight or pursue. Not an armed

man was to be seen. The great host which came rushing up out of the darkness the morning before had vanished as completely as if it had been composed of spirits.

What was to prevent it? During the night those who came from a distance streamed away over the mountains by numberless rocky paths, where cavalry could not have followed them even if their course had been known. Those who came from the open valleys about Kabul quietly dispersed to their homes. They put their weapons in a corner, and came and sat in front of their gateways and were peaceful villagers. If the cavalry rode up they smiled and saluted, or scowled and sat silent. They had nothing to fear. The *sowars* could search the fort no doubt, and might find arms. What then? Every man in Afghanistan possessed arms. The *sowars* might even find dead or wounded men. If they did, it would not matter. They could not harm the dead, and they would not hurt wounded men who did not resist. The village might be fined hereafter. That was the worst that could happen. The attitude of the people was no doubt a remarkable proof of their confidence in the humanity of their English conquerors, but it made the work of the cavalry very hopeless.

'It is confoundedly riling,' Guy said to Bradford, as they sat on their horses in front of a 'friendly' village. 'Look at that big blackguard there with the sneer on his face. Of course he has been out, and he knows we know it, and yet we can do nothing to him. It would be all right, of course, if the thing were all over, but he will shoot us in the back five minutes hence if he gets a chance. It's as bad as dealing with Irishmen. There's something rather funny about it too. I don't mind if they just laugh at you and don't sneer; but a brute like that openly despises you for being such a fool as not to kill him, and hates you all the worse. I feel as if I should not mind obliging him.'

The Sikhs felt the same, only much more strongly. There was no understanding the English,—fighting like born devils one minute, and then letting themselves be fooled and insulted to their faces. 'Sahib, what sort of warfare is this?' old Gulab Singh said sadly as they rode away. 'Of course you are wiser than I am, but I can't make it out. These people hate you, and you have beaten them. It seems to me there is only one way to treat them,—*Máro, máro, maeda karo* (Smite them and grind them to powder) !'

It was a dreary day, cloudy and cold; and as the cavalry went on hour after hour without seeing the smallest sign of an armed

enemy, the silence and solitude and emptiness of the country began to weigh upon their spirits. After all the excitement of the past fortnight it was intensely depressing. One missed the familiar puffs of smoke and the cheerful popping of rifles, and the deeper voice of the guns. Even the song of the bullet above one's head had come to be pleasant, when there were not too many singing at once. Officers and men had got used to the noise and life and stir. Now there was a reaction, and everything seemed 'weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.' In the afternoon it began to snow hard, and the snow balled in the horses' feet. This was the last straw. It was useless to go on any longer, so the pursuit was abandoned, and the heads of the weary beasts were turned homewards.

They had arrived within two or three miles of the cantonment, and the detachments which had been scattered over a great extent of country were fast closing in. Guy and his squadron had rejoined the rest of the regiment, and they were now in country which they knew well. As they came into their last piece of open ground before crossing the pass which led into the Kabul plain, they left behind them on their left a little fort under a stony hill-side nearly a mile away. The light was beginning to fade, and the snow made everything deceptive, but it struck MacPherson that he saw some mounted men on a low *kotul* above the fort.

MacPherson's fibre was a tough and rather a coarse one. He was not greatly depressed by the want of excitement, or worn out with his day's work, or at all inclined to let off any of the enemy because the gathering had broken up and dispersed. His business was to ride down and kill any Afghans he could find with weapons in their hands; and he was just as determined to do so now as when he rode out of the cantonment in the morning. Colonel Graham could not make out any enemy, and did not want to take the weary regiment so far out of their way without very good cause. He rode over to Bradford's squadron, which was out on some stony open ground to the left, and asked whether they could see men on the hill. Neither Bradford nor Guy could be certain, and Graham said, 'Well, I suppose we had better make sure. Will you take a few *sowars*, Langley, and ride over to the fort? I don't think there is anything at all, but if you think there is, don't push on too far.'

'All right, sir, I'll be careful.'

Guy rode off at a trot with Gulab Singh and half a dozen men,

and Graham saw the little party go right on into the gathering dusk. The snow was falling very slightly now, and the dark figures showed plainly on the white ground.

There was no enemy to be seen when the little party reached the fort; but MacPherson had been right in thinking he saw something on the *kotul*. Two or three men driving some pack-mules had just come down by a path from the north. They were now in front of the fort gate, in the snow. The fort itself was white with snow, which lay thickly along the top of the mud walls and towers. Guy spoke to the mule-drivers, and to the villagers who were standing about the gateway, and found every one civil and respectful. The cavalry were very plainly visible on the open ground within five minutes' canter. They remained halted for a few minutes, and then, seeing Guy and his men ride straight up to the fort, Graham continued his march, leaving the detachment to overtake him. From the fort there was a direct road to the pass, and it was not necessary for Guy to ride back across country. By making for the pass he could rejoin the regiment there.

He had been talking for a few seconds with the villagers when a man came up to him and gave him a military salute. Guy asked him whether he had served, and he said yes,—that he had been a *sowar* in one of our cavalry regiments, and had served all through the Mutiny. Some years afterwards the Amir Sher Ali had offered him a place, and he had retired from our service.

'And now I suppose you have been serving against us?' Guy said with a laugh.

'No, Sahib. Never! What could we do against the Sirkar?

'Where are the rebels gone to?'

'All scattered to their homes. They had thousands killed, and they have fled to the hills. They were all wild hillmen from a distance who did not understand.'

Guy knew better, but there was no use in arguing the point. He filled up his pipe, and asked his new friend to bring him a piece of firewood. When he had got the pipe well alight he raised his hand to his helmet with a farewell salute, and turned towards the pass and rode away. The regiment was now a good distance ahead, on his right front, and would reach the pass some time before him unless he trotted on. But the horses were tired, and they kept getting their feet full of balled snow. There was no necessity to rejoin. The country ahead was open and well known to him. On the left of his road lay a bare stony hillside; on the right was flat ground and cultivation, with some water-

cuts and low mud walls all white with snow ; there were no more villages, and not a living thing in sight. He looked at the bare crest of the pass in front of him and decided to go on quietly. Even his little Kataghani was showing signs of fatigue, and the *sowars'* horses were worn out. What was the use of pressing on ? They were just home now, and the regiment was in front of them. After a time he saw the lances upon the crest of the pass against the dark gray sky, and then they streamed over and disappeared. He and his men were alone in the valley.

They were all weary, and marched carelessly forward in silence. The night was closing in fast ; and a little fine snow was falling. It gathered about Guy's shoulders and the folds of his *posteen*, and lay thick upon his bridle arm. His right hand was in his breast, under the warm sheepskin, and his feet were hanging free of the stirrups, which chilled them. Now and then the little horse shook the snow from his head and neck ; but his master rode on without taking any notice of it. His thoughts had wandered far away from the wintry valley and all his surroundings. He was dreaming of a beautiful face held up to his own, and a sweet low voice that trembled with happiness. And he gave her his sword again, and said, 'I have done as you told me, darling. I have borne it with honour.'

There was a sudden flash in the darkness to the right, a shot, and a scattering volley. Guy Langley threw up his arms with a cry, and as the startled horse swerved across the road he fell with a dull thud upon the snow.

One of the *sowars'* horses was shot, and fell under its rider. There was a moment of confusion ; but the Sikhs, though careless, were good soldiers, and two or three of them, led by young Atar Singh, dashed towards the low wall from which the shots had come. They were just in time to see some men running across a bit of broken ground towards a deep water-cut, fringed with poplars. The horsemen were very quick after them, being light men on handy horses ; and one of the Afghans, a big man in a dirty sheepskin coat, fearing he could not get over the water in time, lost his head and ran down to his left under a bit of wall ; the others crossed the water-cut by a narrow plank, and made off behind the trees. The horsemen saw the position at once and rode to their left, after the man on their side of the trench. They were up to him in a minute, and Atar Singh made a lunge at him with his lance ; but the Afghan avoided it, and swinging up his heavy knife cut the boy across the hand, nearly

severing two of his fingers. Before he could turn to run again a second horseman was on him, and with a grim '*Hyun ?* Would you ?' drove the lance through his chest. As he fell off it, dead, the blood gushed from his mouth upon the snow, and his cap and *lungee* rolled away, exposing the huge shaven head. The *sowar* came back to him in an instant, and deliberately drove the lance point two or three times through the hairy uncovered throat into the earth. Then they helped Atar Singh to tie up his wounded hand with a bit of his *puggree*, and went back into the road.

They found Guy lying where he had fallen. A *sowar* was supporting his head, but he had never moved or spoken. The bullet, fired from behind him, had gone in under the left shoulder and passed out through the chest. They staunched the blood as best they could, and one of them galloped on to overtake the regiment, which on the other side of the ridge had heard nothing of the shots. But the Sikhs knew it was useless ; no help could save him now.

He was borne sadly back to the cantonment, and laid on the bed in his tent. The Indian mail had come in that day, and several letters from Helen were on the camp table by his side. There was also one from Roland and one from his mother. She had given way at last, and had written in words of passionate love and anxiety.

He was buried next day in the desolate cemetery at the western end of the cantonment, among the lopped stems of the willow trees. As the little party of his countrymen in their worn fighting-clothes stood by the open grave, the sun was shining and the sky was blue, and the great circle of mountains around them glittered in a dazzling garment of new-fallen snow. There they left him lying, his bright face very calm and peaceful, and his brave young heart for ever still. God rest our English dead.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SORROW

THE news of Guy's death was telegraphed to India, and Colonel Graham, who knew where Helen was, sent a private message to Colonel Aylmer. He described how Guy had been killed, and begged Aylmer to assure Helen of the deep sympathy of himself and his brother officers. 'Poor girl!' he said, 'I am afraid there is no breaking these things; but she must not learn it through the newspapers. I know Mrs. Aylmer is a great friend of hers.' Colonel Graham followed up his telegram by a letter speaking very warmly of Guy's character and services, and mentioning that he had intended to send in his name for the Victoria Cross on account of his conduct on the 23rd of December.

That Christmas night was not a merry one in Kabul. More than a twentieth part of our force had been killed or wounded during the past few days, and the hospitals were full of sick men; and those who were not sick were tired with want and watching. Guy's name was brought up at more than one rough mess-table, and they were all sorry for him. 'Poor chap!' they said, 'it was hard luck getting bowled over like that just at the end, when everything seemed to be quiet. He was a good fellow too, and a gentleman, and had behaved awfully well when the regiment got slated on the 23rd. Just like those cowardly hogs, to go and shoot him from behind in the dark.' In his own regiment officers and men talked of him very often for some days. Lawrence missed him badly, and old Gulab Singh fairly cried over it; and then his property was sold by auction, with the exception of his sword and a few other things which were sent down to Helen. After that he was soon forgotten, as dead men must be who make no material gap in other men's lives. The

living have no time to think of people who cannot do them any good, and do not write letters. How many of your friends do you suppose, even of your nearest and dearest, will ever go five miles out of their way to see your grave? How many dead men have you done it for? That has nothing to do with it; you have not forgotten them, but you can do them no good by going to their graves. If you say that, you have never loved.

When Guy had been dead a fortnight one man came and took a sketch of the place. Russell's big heart had been touched. Among the knot of bronzed and bearded English who gathered about the grave when the service was being read, his massive brow and dark, stern face were conspicuous. He stood bare-headed in the sun, towering above the men alongside him. When the service was over he walked away by himself. 'It does seem hard,' he thought; 'only twenty-seven. He was always plucky and bright, and he behaved really well the other day on the Siah Sung. He might have made a fine soldier. Well, he has died for the old country anyhow.' Then he wondered whether Helen was in India. 'Poor girl!' he said, 'it will be hard for her.'

When Colonel Graham's telegram reached Syntia it brought sadness to more than the one it chiefly concerned. The Thirtieth deplored Guy's death with real feeling, and Hugh Dale's loyal heart was very sore. The Aylmers were in painful distress and perplexity. The news coming now must be a terrible shock to Helen, and yet it seemed impossible to keep it from her long.

They did keep it from her for some days, and then Mrs. Aylmer made up her mind that she must delay no longer. Helen was gaining strength rapidly, and it was not right to leave her in ignorance. Besides, the nurse was very difficult to manage; it was impossible to make her behave as if nothing had happened, and there was no knowing what she might say or do.

Mrs. Aylmer was a brave woman, but for once she fairly recoiled from the task she had set herself. As she came to the door of Helen's room that morning and laid her hand on the curtain, she heard Helen's voice talking to the child. She stopped and listened. 'Only one month more, perhaps. Think of that, baby; only thirty days. But you won't know him when he does come, you unnatural little wretch; I shall have to introduce you, and I suppose you will both be very stiff and hardly speak to one another. Probably you won't speak at all,—won't even bow to him,' and she laughed a happy little laugh at her

own nonsense. Then she sighed, and was silent. Mrs. Aylmer knew well enough what her thoughts were. 'Will it really be only a month? If only I knew something for certain. Oh, when will he come to me?' Was she to step in now and say: 'Never, Helen; you will never see his face again. He is dead, and they have buried him far away in the Afghan snow'? She turned away from the door and stood irresolute. 'I cannot tell her,' she thought; 'it is too dreadful.' Her hesitation did not last long; she nerved herself with a desperate effort, and walked into the room. Helen looked round and smiled, and Mrs. Aylmer came to her bedside and kissed her and sat down.

'How solemn you look.'

'Do I, dear? I have had bad news to-day.'

'Have you? I am so sorry.' Then Mrs. Aylmer's silence and something in her manner struck a chill to Helen's heart. She looked up with frightened eyes. Mrs. Aylmer did not meet them.

'Helen, dear?'

'Yes.'

'You could be brave and strong, I know, if sorrow came to you too?'

Then she knew. There was nothing else that could bring her sorrow. She had no one but Guy. 'Oh, what is it?' she cried. 'He is not dead? say he is not dead!'

Mrs. Aylmer was silent. She held Helen's hand tight, but she could say nothing.

'Oh, tell me, tell me! He is wounded or ill; not dead, not dead?'

'God comfort you, dear!'

Helen sank back with a moan. After a second or two she spoke again; her eyes were wild, and her face was flushing. 'Tell me everything. When did you hear?'

Mrs. Aylmer told her of the telegram.

'Can I see it?'

'Yes, if you like, darling; but I have told you exactly what was said.'

'Let me see it, please.'

Mrs. Aylmer had guessed she would ask for it, and had brought it with her.

Helen read it slowly twice over, and Mrs. Aylmer saw her look at the date. Then she turned away with a low sigh, and covered her face with her hands and lay quite still. Mrs. Ayl-

mer sat by her, hoping that she might speak, or that the tears would come to help her, but she lay breathing quietly as if asleep. All that day it was the same. Mrs. Aylmer tried to rouse her by speaking of the child, but it was useless ; she seemed quite indifferent to it, and to everything, doing whatever they told her to do, and answering quietly when they spoke to her, but never speaking of her own accord, or showing any outward sign of grief. Only once she said to Mrs. Aylmer : ' Would you mind sending that telegram for me in the same words to Roland ? He is at home now, I suppose,—Wrentham Hall, Warwick.'

In the night she slept a little, and when Mrs. Aylmer came to her next day she said : ' They will write, won't they ?—Colonel Graham or some of them ?'

' Yes, they are sure to do that.'

' I suppose we shall get the letter in three or four days now ?'

' Yes, I hope so.'

' Perhaps he wrote too when he telegraphed.'

' Very likely, dear ; but he may not have had time to write.'

Helen said no more, but lay waiting. Whenever any one came into the room she looked up with an anxious inquiry in her face. Her eyes were big and hollow now, and she was very white ; the veins about her temples showed clearly.

It came at last, Guy's happy letter of the 23rd of December ; and Mrs. Aylmer, knowing the writing, brought it to her and left her alone.

It was a voice from the grave. Helen read it with dry, eager eyes, until she reached Guy's description of the fight on the Siah Sung. The thought of him riding back alone to save his friend brought a sob to her throat, and in a moment more, as she read on to the prophetic ending, her sobs came thick and fast, and she burst into a passionate storm of tears. She could hardly see to read the closing words, with their cruel, unintentional satire : ' My darling, my own brave darling !' she wailed, ' I have killed you ! I have killed you !'

Half an hour later Mrs. Aylmer went in to her and found her quiet and exhausted with grief ; her hand was under her pillow holding her letter. After that, with all her self-reproach, she could speak about Guy, and could pity the child.

The letters from Colonel Graham and the other officers were all very full of sympathy, and, what was more to her, full of heartfelt praise. There were some touching letters also from one or two of Guy's native friends in the regiment. Men who will

fight for you to the death can grieve for you honestly, in spite of your white skin. Finally, there came from Kabul a case containing all that had been kept back from the sale of Guy's effects. There was his sword, and the plain gold signet ring Helen had given him, which he always wore ; and a little Bible, her gift too, which he had often kissed and very rarely read ; and a number of her letters, the last still unopened ; and the packet with his mother's hair ; and a few other things.

By that time Helen was out of her room again. She was white and changed, but quite composed and steady.

Meanwhile, she had received from Roland an answer to her telegram. He assured her of his deep sympathy, and added that he was writing. When his letter arrived it was very tender and loving. He asked whether she was coming to England, and begged her if so to write to him and let him do all he could for her. He gave Helen an affectionate message from his father. His mother was very much upset by the news, and Roland had not seen her. For himself, he was about to settle in London ; he was going to do some work in the East-end. He could not offer her a home, for he had none ; but perhaps if she were staying in London they would meet, and it would be a great pleasure to him to know her, and if possible to do a little to help her.

Helen talked it over with the Aylmers. She was reluctant to leave India, where she really had more friends than in England, but she could not remain in India indefinitely without any object in life, and for the child's sake it was better to go. Mrs. Aylmer felt it was better for Helen's sake too ; a complete change of scene and a return to an English climate were very necessary for her health. Dr. Beamish thoroughly agreed. Helen's business affairs were in good order. Guy's will had been made after his marriage, and left everything to her ; and she had a little money in hand. Colonel Aylmer could settle everything that remained. Eventually it was arranged that she should start in March, before the hot weather set in. She was anxious to go to Sangu and break up the house herself ; but this Beamish positively forbade, and Helen gave in with a sigh.

The Sangu boxes duly arrived, and Helen had some bitter weary days of sorting and packing. It was hard to give up anything that had ever belonged to Guy, and she had so much. It was done at last. His books and his little personal treasures she kept, but a number of things had to go. All his clothing she set apart for the chaplain of the station ; it would do some good,

and the thought helped her, though she shed many tears as she lingered over the familiar things she had so often seen him wear. He was always so careful about what he wore. She remembered how worried he had been by a little wrinkle on the shoulder of the last coat sent to him from England, and how she had laughed at him, and tried to smooth it away, and kissed it, but he would not be comforted. She kissed it again now and put it away. These things are follies, no doubt. With increasing years one learns that it is wiser to avoid all such feelings; youth loves to burden itself with unnecessary loads. It is better to be sensible and practical. Burn your letters and your memories if you can. Bear only the sorrows that are laid upon you. Get hard; it is happier so,—perhaps.

If Helen was young in her feelings she was not young in her outward behaviour. She had seen all her old friends now; they came and sat with her, and she talked to them quietly, and asked about all that was going on. It was not her way to wear her heart upon her sleeve.

Poor Mrs. Beamish was shocked by it. She had come in with a very long face and eyes of tearful sympathy, and she could not understand being met as she was. Helen gently put aside all condolences, and asked her cheerfully about her own affairs and the doings of little Georgie. She had come prepared for a good howl, and Helen's manner chilled and repressed her; she went away unsatisfied and critical. However, Beamish turned upon her savagely when she said something about it, and being a humble good-natured woman she soon felt she had been wrong. She was reduced to tears of penitence next day when she received from Helen a little note asking whether it would be any help to her if Helen took the boy to England. 'I did not know until you told me,' Helen wrote, 'that you were thinking of sending him home this year. If it would be any comfort to you, let me take him. We have always been great friends, and I will take every care of him.'

It really was good of her. At first she shrank from making the offer; the charge of a troublesome, neglected boy is not a pleasant thing on board ship, and she had enough on her hands already. But Beamish had been very good to her in his rough way, both now and when her father died, and she forced herself to undertake the duty. The Aylmers protested vigorously when they heard what she had done; but the letter had gone, and she was the happier for having sent it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

GOOD-BYE TO SYNTIA

THE afternoon before Helen was to leave Syntia she drove over to the Civil Station. She wished to see her father's grave, and to have a few minutes alone in the place where she had been so happy. It was getting rather hot now in the day-time, and the dust wind had begun to blow, but she was hardly conscious of it.

The little cemetery was not more neglected-looking than other Indian cemeteries ; but even in her new grief it made her heart ache to leave her father there, among the tall mouldering monuments and the coarse rank Indian grass. She laid a bunch of his favourite violets upon the plain block of marble which covered his grave, and knelt for a few minutes by the side of it, thinking, not praying. What had she to pray for now ? Then she pressed her lips to the cold stone. 'Good-bye, daddy,' she said, and stood up and went slowly away.

At the church she stopped again. She walked up into the gallery and stood where she had stood when Guy first kissed her. She turned towards the narrow doorway, and tried to conjure up his figure, and the sound of his foot on the stones of the winding stair. How well she remembered the look on his face as she had seen it then,—bright and eager with love and expectation. She looked down at her father's seat, and at the place where she used to see Guy when she first knew him, only three years ago, at the end of a short pew near one of the pillars of the aisle. She could see him now, with his head leaning against the pillar, as he used often to sit during the sermon. And she could see the spot where they had knelt side by side in the marriage-service. Good-bye for ever ! Good-bye, good-bye !

She came out of the church, and went on with her pilgrimage of sweet self-torture. Her father's house she knew was empty.

The new Commissioner was a man of economical tastes, and he had taken a smaller house, where the Oldfields used to live. As she drove up to the door she noticed that the patches of flower-garden in front of the steps were neglected. The ground was hard and cracked, and the rose bushes untrimmed. Apparently there was no one in attendance, so she walked up the steps and entered the house. In the hall, where her birds used to be, and the books and the big divan, there was nothing but a string bed, with a dirty sheet upon it, belonging to the caretaker. All the rooms were empty and stripped, the mats rolled up, the plaster walls covered with dust, the floors unswept. She walked into her own bedroom, which in its emptiness looked huge and ghostly. One of the windows had been burst open by the hot wind, which was moaning through the house. She went and stood by the window and looked out, as she had done the day that Guy's letter was brought to her. That was where the man came up through the mango trees, just three years ago.

Rex whined and pressed his head into her hand. He had been looking about him unable to understand it all.

She went back into the drawing-room, where she had first seen Guy on the day that he called. It too looked huge and ghostly. Then she went through the dining-room into the south verandah. There at least was the old scene,—the level sward in front, and the great banyan tree by the road, with the line of mangoes and palms beyond it in the distance, and the tall slender cork tree on the grass to the right. That was where Guy said the first word of love to her that Sunday morning. It seemed like yesterday. Good-bye, good-bye for ever!

There was one more place that she felt she must see. She drove to the railway station. It was quite empty, and there was nothing to be heard but the low moan of the dust wind. In the telegraph-office there was one native clerk receiving a message, and everything was so still that she heard him click his acknowledgment of a word as she passed the open door. Helen walked along the echoing platform until she stood on the spot where she had been standing when Guy arrived from England. Outside in the sunlight the wind was stirring the leaves of the creeper upon the wall, where the name 'Syntia' was painted up. Some sparrows were pecking about on the flags. She looked at the straight double line of rails, narrowing into the distance among the palms, just as she had looked at them that day when she stood unwittingly waiting for the train which brought Guy to

her. Ah ! if that day could come again. It seemed so short a time ago, so near her still. She could almost grasp it. For a moment she tried desperately to do so ; to make her dream a living reality, as if by a supreme effort of will and prayer she might annihilate all that had passed since then. Alas ! there are things too strong for will and prayer.

She turned away and walked back towards the entrance. It was all over now.

As she reached the doorway the station-master came out of his room and walked up to her. She had hoped that afternoon to avoid meeting any one she knew, but now, after passing through the places where she had been so happy, and not seeing one familiar face, she realised with a sense of surprise that she was glad to see even this man. She had never known much of him, but he had been in Syntia some years, and had always been civil and obliging. He was a Bengalee of the old school, rather odd in some of his ways, but to those who understood him thoroughly loyal and trustworthy. He would have jobbed into Government employ, if he had been able to do so, every one of his relatives, and every one of his wife's relatives, however unfit, and he would afterwards have screened them from punishment whatever fault they might have committed. That he regarded as his duty to his kith and kin. But, though a poor man, his personal honesty was proof against any bribe ; and he would work day and night without a murmur ; and his accuracy was remarkable. So long as he was not surprised or frightened he was a very valuable servant.

The Bábu wore white clothes and a velvet cap with 'Station-Master' embroidered upon it.

The old gentleman stood before Helen with a bow, or rather with a sudden doubling up at the waist, as if he had been seized with a momentary cramp. She remembered with a pang that she had once seen Guy imitate this very action.

'Good afternoon, Bábu,' Helen said ; 'I hope you are well.'

'By your favour, madam. Thank you.'

'I am very glad. Good-bye, Bábu. I am going away to-morrow,' and she held out her hand, which he took respectfully.

She was passing on when he spoke again. 'We of the native community have all been extremely sorry for your honour. Your honoured father, our late Commissioner Sahib, he was always very kind upon us ; and Captain Langley too, though he was very young gentleman, he was also very kind. It was great pity that

he should be murdered and killed ; but it is the will of God. What can we do ? If it pleases Almighty God to afflict His fellow-creatures, we poor mortals can do nothing. It is impossible.'

Helen winced under the good old man's sympathy, but she thanked him and wished him good-bye ; and then, as he stood on the steps and suddenly doubled up again, she leant back and burst into a flood of hysterical tears and laughter.

Rex whined uneasily and pushed his head into her lap. After a time his distress forced itself upon her attention. She stroked his head gently, and her sobs grew quieter. 'It is all over,' she thought. 'I shall never see the dear old place again—never, never, never !'

That night she was less miserable. The bitterness of parting was over.

The Bombay mail train did not leave Syntia till five o'clock the next evening, and Helen had written to Hugh Dale, asking him to come and see her after breakfast. He had seen her several times since Guy's death, and his boyish sympathy had been very touching. When he came up this last morning Helen said to him : 'I wanted to see you before I went, to thank you for all your kindness, and to say good-bye. You will come and see me and your godson whenever you come home ?'

'You may be very sure of that, Mrs. Langley. You know I—cared for Guy more than for any one in the world ; and I think it was awfully good of you to ask me to be godfather to your boy. I shall never forget it.'

'You were his greatest friend. I know he would have asked you.'

They spoke a little about her voyage, and Chimp said : 'I *am* so sorry for you, going on that long voyage all alone.'

'Oh, it won't be very bad. I am a good sailor, and know how to look after myself.'

'Must you take that horrid little wretch with you ?'

'Georgie Beamish ? Poor little fellow ! he would have had to go all alone. I don't look forward to it in some ways, but he is generally good with me, and it would have been unkind not to take him. He would have been so miserable by himself.'

'I hate your doing it. Would you give it up if any one else were to offer to take him ?'

'It's too late now. Besides, no one is likely to offer.'

'I expect some one would turn up.'

'Do you ? Who is there going home ?'

'Well, I daresay you'll laugh, but I am thinking of going myself soon on three months' leave, and I'll take the little beggar if you will let me.'

Helen did laugh, though she felt almost as much inclined to cry. She knew Chimp would have done the thing loyally, and probably done it very well, but the child would have thought he was being handed over to the Evil One. 'No, no,' she said at last; 'I know you mean it, and it is very, very good of you, but I have promised Mrs. Beamish, and I must do it. It won't be any great trouble really. I'm taking as my servant the *ayah* who has always been with him, and they are fond of one another.'

'Well, I won't say any more. But I mean it really.'

'I know you do, Mr. Dale, and I am very grateful; but you must let me take him.'

Then she told Chimp that she wanted him to do her a favour, to accept Sultan from her and keep him. Chimp had meant to buy the horse after she left, but he could not refuse.

'It will be such a pleasure to me,' she said, 'to know you have him; but will you promise me one thing? If you have no further use for him you will not sell him? Find a really kind master for him, or shoot him, but don't sell him to any one. And you will be very gentle with him, won't you?'

Chimp promised, and the horse was sent for. Helen went out to the porch when Chimp left, and Sultan was standing ready. 'I want him to go with you now,' she said. 'Let me feel he is safe under your care before I leave.'

Rex had gone down to greet his old playfellow, who made a snap at him. Sultan always pretended to have an objection to dogs, as became an Arab. When he heard Helen's voice he whinnied. She went down and gave him a piece of sugar, and patted his smooth skin for the last time; and he rubbed his tan muzzle against her shoulder. 'Good-bye!' she said, with her head against his cheek. 'Thank you for many, many happy days. I shall never have such happy days again. Good-bye, dear,' and she kissed him and went back into the house.

In the evening the Aylmers and Dale saw her off from the railway station, and as the train moved she saw at the end of the platform several of Guy's old brother officers and Mrs. Dangerfield.

She had still to pass the Civil Station and to meet her charge; for a few minutes she felt anxious lest she might not find him. It would be just like Mrs. Beamish to be late, and then Helen

would be left not only without the boy, but without a servant. They could not catch her up before the steamer went off. However, when the train drew up there was Mrs. Beamish, poor woman, with the tears pouring down her face, and the Limb as dirty and untidy as ever, and the *ayah*, and Dr. Beamish himself, and the Hunters. The Limb's only luggage was an oval tin bath with a lid to it. The lock was broken, and the bath was tied round with cord.

Helen said good-bye to the Hunters, and the poor Beamishes said good-bye to their boy, and the train moved off.

The boy cheered up very quickly. Helen had taken the precaution of bringing with her a book of pictures belonging to Mabs, and a box of chocolate; and she gave him a piece, which consoled him immediately. Then she sat down and looked out of the window. She wanted to see the racecourse as they went past. It very nearly upset her again. Everything was so exactly as it used to be when her father and she used to ride round in the evening,—so still and quiet, with the palms in the centre, and their long shadows across the dry short grass. She remembered, as Guy had done, how his horse had plunged at the corner, and how Sultan had bounded off and galloped. It was gone,—the last bit of the dear place—gone for ever; and as she looked out upon the flying country the tears came to her eyes again, and one or two fell.

She was brought to herself by feeling a small hand laid upon her knee, and looked round to find the boy gazing at her with a troubled expression in his face. 'I say,—don't cry.'

'No; it's very silly of me, isn't it? Shall I tell you about the pictures?'

The boy looked doubtful. 'I say, look here. I want to show you something. You are awfully fond of pets, aren't you?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Well, look here. Father said I wasn't to take it, but I knew you wouldn't mind, so I just brought it in my handkerchief; but I had to leave its cage behind.' As he spoke, the boy produced from his trouser-pocket a handkerchief that was almost black with dirt, and unwrapped it carefully. In the centre was a small white rat with a pink nose, which smelt unpleasant.

'Oh, Georgie! you oughtn't to have brought it if your father told you not to.'

'Oh! he didn't mind really. It was only because he thought you would not like it. But you do, don't you? It's awfully

pretty, isn't it? And it is quite tame,—runs all round my neck, and feeds out of my hand.'

Rex, who had been brought into the long Indian carriage, was looking on in contemptuous disgust, and Helen found it difficult to be enthusiastic. However, the only way was to make the best of it. 'Poor little thing,' she said; 'it looks very frightened. Where did you get it?'

'The bearer gave it me. There were a lot of them, and he gave me three, but the others died. What a pity, wasn't it?'

'Yes, dear, a dreadful pity. Never mind, we've got one left. Where are you going to keep it? It can't live in your pocket.'

'Oh yes. I often keep it there for ever so long.'

'I don't think that is a very nice place for it, Georgie. Look here, suppose we make it a house. I think I know what will do.'

She went to the hamper and produced a biscuit-tin. 'There, —we can wrap up the biscuits in paper, and give him the tin.'

Georgie was deeply interested, and they spent a satisfactory half-hour in fitting up 'Moti's' new home. There were holes in the lid to give him air, and some cotton wool for his bed, and some bread and milk in a saucer. It was a quite a success. After that it was time to give Georgie some supper, and then he was put to bed in one of the top bunks; and altogether Helen found that the child had made her first evening less dreary than it would have been; and he really was as good as possible.

CHAPTER XXXIX

GOING 'HOME'

It was not so bad a voyage as Helen had expected. The railway journey was not very hot, and they got to Bombay without serious trouble. The baby slept almost all the way, and the Limb was quite a model child. He ate voraciously, finding the food at the refreshment-rooms most delicious ; and he occasionally tried to lose himself in the crowd on the platform, but Helen was on the look-out, and kept him from straying far.

He took to washing himself with ardour. He had not been more than locally dirty at any time. India is the cleanest country in the world, and its cleanliness is gradually extending to the whole of the English race, which washes itself more than any other race, but does not wash itself as much as it ought to do.¹ Bathing is so pleasant in India that, as a rule, even boys are substantially clean. But now Helen had explained to the Limb the advantages of having decent hands, and had presented him with a tooth-brush, which she found he did not possess, and a little of her tooth-powder, and the Limb seized upon the idea as a charming novelty. In fact, it became rather a nuisance. He wanted to brush his teeth a dozen times a day, and then he came and stood in front of her, and grinned like a dog, and demanded examination and praise. He also borrowed her nail-scissors to scrape his nails. Finally his rage for purity led him to put his white rat in the only basin in the bath-room, and to soap it thoroughly with a piece of Helen's best soap. He was absent a long time, and came back in triumph, having dried the shivering creature in her towel. However, he was very good, and gave little or no trouble.

¹ Besides the morning tub, England owes to India another blessed institution, the morning tea. Some day it may be hoped that she will take from India a greater blessing than either,—cremation.

It was the same on board ship. One unlucky morning, while the grown-up people were at lunch, some fiend tempted him, and he was caught by the quartermaster in the act of feeding the ducks with chess pawns from a board that some one had left standing; but this was his last offence. For the rest of the voyage he led a blameless life. In a tank forward were two tiny crocodiles, going home to some Zoological Gardens; and there was Rex, poor Rex, bearing his imprisonment with the calm, heartbroken dignity of a Bonivard; and there were a cow and a goat. The boy was always among these creatures, and after Helen had explained it to him, he began to understand that the pleasure to be got out of animals was really much greater if he did not tease them. It was a revelation to him, and it was not the only one which came to him during that month. Before the ship was in English waters, the Limb was smartened up and softened and humanised to an extent that would have amazed his mother.

Helen's unselfishness brought its own reward. She had always had a kindly feeling for the boy, and now his affection and obedience were a real pleasure to her. Moreover, he and the baby between them gave her plenty to do, and she had all the less time to brood over her sorrows.

The Limb's *ayah* left them at Suez. She had fever on board ship, and could not stand it any longer. She went away crying bitterly, and Helen was sorry for her. 'All humbug,' one of the ladies said, a lady who had been a year in the country with a British regiment; but it was not all humbug, as any old Indian would have told her. Make any woman's life a burden to her for six or seven years, and she will grieve sincerely when the time for parting comes, even if she be a low-caste Indian *ayah*. Helen luckily was able to engage in her place an English stewardess, Mrs. Barr, who was going home on leave.

They steamed slowly through the canal, and saw the mirage on the desert; and the Limb was wild to get out, and so was poor Rex, as mile after mile of land, or sand, passed under their eyes. Then there was a gray sky, and a feather-white sea, the blue Mediterranean.

With all her occupations Helen had many miserable times, particularly at night. Hour after hour, when the boys were asleep, she used to lie in her narrow bunk listening to the eternal throb of the engines, and the wash of water under her port, and the creaking of the timbers, and then her thoughts were very dreary.

What in truth was before her? Of her father's people none remained, but some cousins whom she had not seen since she was a child, and had not much liked then. She could not go back to her old Cornish home. Laneithin was gone, and she could not live alone and poor in that wild country of scattered farm-houses. The Treverys had had some good friends about St. Erroc, but they would almost have forgotten the girl of fifteen who left the place ten years before. Some of her father's Indian friends were now in England. She could be sure of a cordial welcome from them if she met them; but they were scattered, and she had never known them very well. Her own life with her father had only lasted two or three years. Her mother's people were strangers. The one person who might be really kind to her was Roland, whom she had never even seen.

It was a melancholy prospect, and at times her fortitude gave way. For the sake of her child, Guy's child, she tried hard to bear up; but even the thought of the child seemed in a way to add to her grief. If she died she did not know what would become of him, and if she lived she would find it difficult to give him a happy childhood or a proper education. As she came nearer to England, her thoughts began to fasten more and more upon Roland. Perhaps in him she and the boy might find a real friend. Oh, if she were only sure of one, just one true heart to turn to for sympathy and advice! Her fellow-passengers had been very kind, but she knew none of them well, and she had shrunk from any confidences. There were several now ready and anxious to help her with her baggage, and to do her any little service in their power; but when they left the docks their acquaintance would be at an end. Then she would be alone.

It was a dark wet day towards the end of April when the steamer drew alongside the jetty at the London Docks. All the way across the Bay of Biscay and up the Channel the sea had been as smooth as a pond. They had passed the Isle of Wight in soft gray rain. It had rained ever since, and though it was not actually raining now, everything looked wet and cheerless. The deck was covered with boxes, and the confusion and bustle made it all worse.

'I suppose some one will be coming to meet you, ma'am?' Mrs. Barr said to her.

'No, I don't think so,' Helen answered. She had written to Roland, and told him she was coming in the *Venice*, but she had not asked him to meet her, and he was not likely to find out

about the ship's arrival and do so unasked. Possibly Mrs. Beamish's sister, who was to have charge of Georgie, might come to meet him ; but this also was doubtful. She lived in Hammer-smith, and Helen was to send Georgie to her. Mrs. Barr tried another question. ' Will you be going straight home, ma'am, or to a hotel ?'

' A hotel, I think,' Helen answered wearily. The Aylmers had advised her to go to the Langham, where they generally went. She might as well go there as anywhere else. It was all the same to her. When she had seen Roland she would make some plans. ' I wonder whether he will come,' she thought ; and she looked at the little crowd on the jetty. The steamer was being warped alongside now, and she could see their faces.

Yes ; there he was. She knew him at once. He was very like Guy ; slighter and not so tall, but very like, in spite of his clerical dress. The likeness troubled her, but she was glad to see him. She would not be quite alone now. It would have been so miserable to find herself in this great busy city without one single friend.

' I think that gentleman has come to meet me,' she said ; ' the clergyman there. If he comes on board and asks for me would you kindly help him ? I will stay here.'

' To be sure, ma'am,' the woman said heartily, and she went off.

In a few minutes more Roland came on board. Helen was sitting on deck, at a distance from the crowded gangway ; but Mrs. Barr pointed her out to him, and he came straight towards her. She stood up, and he saw before him a tall, graceful figure in deep black, with the sweetest face his eyes had ever beheld. ' Helen ?' he said, holding out both his hands.

' Yes, Roland. How very good of you to come.'

He bent down and kissed her, and his face flushed a little. ' You didn't suppose for a moment I should do anything else ?' he said, and his voice thrilled through her. It was Guy's voice ; not his face, but his voice. She could hardly bear it.

' There was another man there,' he went on, ' who came to meet you,—a nice-looking man ; in the army, I should think, but he has gone off. I got talking to him before the steamer came alongside, and when I said you were my sister, and I was going to look after you, he said, " Oh, then I won't stay. It would only bother her." He said his sister, Mrs. Aylmer, had asked him to come and help you.'

his child. But she could not write warmly. Her feeling for Helen was still one of strong dislike, and her pride was high. Roland suspected when she gave him the letter that she had not written very cordially, and he said as he took it that he hoped it was a kind one. The speech was not happy, and Lady Mary was vexed. Roland was right, however, and felt it, and he would not stay to see Helen read the letter. It was better she should read it alone.

That night she sat over her fire for some time thinking it out. The letter was cold, no doubt, but it called her Helen, and asked her to go to Wrentham 'for a few days.' She decided that she would go. It would be a satisfaction to see Guy's people, and the places he had so often spoken of; and perhaps Lady Mary was only shy, and all would be well. At all events she would go. While she was thinking, Roland was writing a letter to his mother,—a long letter, in which he spoke of Helen in terms of almost rapturous praise. Lady Mary read it next day with a curl of her lip. Roland was intensely foolish at times.

Helen slept quietly that night. She was much less desolate than she had expected to be, and there was a sense of rest and peace in getting settled, even in a London lodging.

CHAPTER XL

WRENTHAM

ROLAND came in the morning, and found Helen rested and apparently cheerful. She was young, and healthy in body and mind, and she was determined to bear her sorrow bravely. The feeling that it was wrong to speak or smile, that the dead must be mourned with long faces and lugubrious tones, had never had much hold upon her. Roland did not misunderstand her composure. He saw that it was the composure of self-control, not of heartlessness ; and he honoured her for it. Like many men not blessed with the power of apt expression, he was quick in apprehension and sympathy. He could read the truth in her steady eyes ; and was more moved by the faintest momentary tremor in her voice than he would have been by tears and cries and self-pity. And Helen felt at once that it was so. Roland and she stood heart to heart from the first.

‘Have you read my mother’s letter ?’ Roland asked after the first inquiries were over.

‘Yes. It is very good of her. She asks me to go up to Wrentham whenever it suits me.’

‘Will you go ? I hope you will.’

‘Yes. I thought I would go in a few days, when I have got some things I want. Mrs. Barr is ready to stay with me till I get a nurse.’

‘That’s right. I will go too and take care of you. I have been intending to take a week’s holiday.’

‘Oh, I am glad ! That will be delightful !’

‘When can you go ? Why not start to-morrow ?’

‘I *could* go to-morrow perhaps, but wouldn’t it be rather sudden ? Lady Mary may not expect me so soon.’

‘Oh yes ; it’s all right. I will telegraph, and you can write a

line to-day. There's no one there now, of course, and I think they will like it.'

Helen hesitated. She did not want to rush at Lady Mary's invitation, and she really would have liked a few days to get some clothes for herself and the child.

Roland saw the doubt in her face. 'My mother's letter was—kind and nice, wasn't it?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' she answered with a blush. 'It isn't that. I only wanted to see Georgie Beamish and do a little shopping. But I think I can manage. Very well, I will go to-morrow if you like.'

'Well done. It will be much better for you than being in London. We might start by the afternoon train, which gets in about six.'

'That will suit me very well.'

'Hurrah! That's settled. I will come and lunch with you if you will have me, and we can go on together.'

When they had arranged this, Helen gave Roland a packet of letters and newspaper cuttings, all that bore in any way upon Guy's death. 'You will like to see these,' she said. 'Don't read them now, but take them away with you. You will be very careful of them, won't you?'

'Yes, dear. Thank you very much for letting me see them.'

Then she went on to talk of Roland's work. He was quite sure he could get away without inconvenience? Yes, quite sure. He was only working with a friend to try and learn something and do some little good if possible while he was waiting for a curacy. He had been intending to go away for a week, and really only stopped to meet her. Her sympathetic interest in his work soon set him off, and before long he was talking eagerly about it all; about the distress and destitution and misery around him, and about the hopes that he had formed—vain hopes, the visions of a hot young heart which had never known defeat and disappointment. It is a hard lesson to learn, the universal lesson, that success cannot be commanded; that you cannot beat down falsehood and cruelty and wrong; that if you behave like a gentleman you cannot even carve out personal greatness.

As Helen sat listening to Roland, she was constantly haunted by that likeness to Guy. Roland was not as tall or as handsome; in fact, she thought he looked rather delicate. He was wanting too in Guy's brightness of thought and manner. But the likeness was very strong; and there was his voice, Guy's voice, in tone and accent. Wonderfully like, she kept thinking; and very

gentle and loving and earnest. She felt that he would be as dear to her as a brother of her own would have been.

He lunched with her next day, and took her to the station, and looked after her in the most thoughtful way. He tipped the guard and got her an empty compartment, and he loaded her with literature enough to last her to the north of Scotland ; and he would have carried the baby if she had let him. At almost every station he appeared at the window and inquired whether there was anything he could do, until at last she fairly laughed at him, and forbade him to come any more. Dear Ro, was it possible that two days ago she had never seen him ? It seemed as if she had known him for years.

When they arrived at Wrentham they found the brougham waiting for them. Roland wished to walk home and leave it for Helen and her encumbrances, but Helen begged him to come with her. 'Do come,' she said ; 'it will be such a help to me. Mrs. Barr and baby can come in a fly ; there is one there.'

Roland saw she did want him, and he agreed at once. Baby was fast asleep and quite happy in Mrs. Barr's arms. As they drove along through the sweet spring evening, Roland showed Helen a number of things of which she remembered hearing Guy speak. There was One-tree Hill, and the cross-roads where the meet used to be sometimes, and the view over the country from Shersby corner, and the village, and the bridge. At last they drove through the lodge gates, and Roland said, 'Here we are ; now we shall be at home in three minutes.'

Helen's heart was beating fast. There was something of pleasure in the idea of seeing Guy's home and Guy's people, but there was more of dread. Roland guessed her feeling and tried to help her.

'It's rather an ordeal,' he said, 'being suddenly plunged into a whole new family, but it will soon be over ; you won't find us very formidable,' and he took the little gloved hand in his.

Helen smiled and said, 'I am not afraid ;' but the smile was rather nervous.

They were in the big courtyard now, and now at the door. She walked up the steps into the hall. How well she knew it by description !

Roland asked where Lady Mary was. 'In her ladyship's room, sir.' Mr. Langley and the young ladies were out.

'Come along, Helen, this way,' Roland said, and he took her through a passage at the back of the hall to the drawing-

room, where he left her. 'I will go and tell my mother you've come.'

Helen stood by the mantelpiece in the drawing-room for a minute or two, and then the door opened and Lady Mary walked in. It was an embarrassing meeting on both sides, but both went through it well. Lady Mary came forward not unkindly; she did not smile, and her manner was not warm, but she kissed Helen's forehead and hoped she was not very tired by the journey. Helen looked at her and saw the strong likeness to Guy, and saw also the lines of sorrow on the fine resolute face. She was touched, and answered gently; and Lady Mary reluctantly acknowledged in her heart that Guy's wife had an attractive face and manner. She asked where the boy was.

'I told my nurse to take him upstairs; shall I go and fetch him?'

'No; I will come up and show you where we have put you. You will be glad of a rest and some tea.'

Helen thanked her and followed in silence. It was a charming room, looking out upon the wooded knoll at the back of the house; and baby was awake, lying on the bed and kicking happily. Lady Mary went straight to the bedside and stooped over him and kissed him; she seemed really inclined to take to the child, and for the moment her manner to Helen became softer and more affectionate. When the tea came and she went away, she was talking pleasantly. There was still a shyness between the two, but it was a much better reception than Helen had hoped for.

She did a little baby-worship, and drank her tea; then she looked round her room, and there came to her, as there **had** come to Guy, a sudden sense of the contrast between Indian and English homes. She had not realised the difference so much while in India, but coming back it struck her vividly. Everything here was so old and settled and luxurious; everything there so rough and temporary. She looked out of the window. How beautiful it was, the great trees in their light spring foliage, and the grassy slope with the rabbits playing about it, and the glade beyond.

When Helen came down to dinner she found Roland and her father-in-law in the drawing-room. Charles Langley received her very kindly, and Helen liked him; he was a gentleman in his manners, courteous and frank. Then the girls came in; they were pleasant enough too, but she could see little likeness to Guy, and there was nothing about either of them that greatly attracted

her, nothing in the least like Roland's warmth of feeling. The evening passed off well enough. Charles Langley found his daughter-in-law a very agreeable neighbour; he was more than pleased, and showed it. Lady Mary looked on without saying much, her face wearing at times a slightly contemptuous expression; men were so easily taken in. Roland was glad to see his father and Helen getting on together, and he left them to themselves and chatted away to his sisters.

After prayers Roland suggested that Helen must be tired; and, as Lady Mary appeared to be going too, Helen went off to bed willingly enough. Roland lighted her candle and walked up to her room with her. She seemed much happier, and when they reached her door he said, 'Well, you see it wasn't very bad after all, was it?'

'No,' she answered; 'I can't thank you enough for all your goodness. I did dread it so.'

He laughed and kissed her, and went downstairs again, to find the rest of the family still in the hall. It was rather cold, and they were standing round the fire. 'Well,' he said as he came up to them, 'isn't she everything I said? Isn't she just the very sweetest woman you ever saw?'

'I must say I think she is as nice as she could be,' his father answered.

Lady Mary looked sarcastic. 'A pretty face goes a long way with all of you.'

'Oh no, mother, it isn't that; but she is so gentle and straight and plucky. I never met any one that struck me as such a perfect lady in all her thoughts and ways.'

'My dear Roland,' Lady Mary said, 'that is simply nonsense. She has good looks of a certain kind, and a self-possessed manner, but to speak as you do is quite absurd.'

'I am sorry you think so, mother, but I can't help feeling as I do.'

'No doubt, but very young men are not always very good judges in these matters.'

Poor Roland! he had hoped all was going so well. Had he set his mother against her now? 'Well, mother, anyhow I hope you won't let anything I have said prejudice you against her.'

'I am not much given to prejudices; I shall judge for myself irrespectively of anything you may say, and I hope I may come to think as you do, though I'm afraid it is hardly likely.'

Roland sighed, and looked worried.

Little more was said that evening, but the next day it became evident to Helen that Lady Mary's manner to her was certainly not more cordial than at first. There was nothing she could complain of, but at times she found Lady Mary's eyes resting upon her with a look of criticism which made her uncomfortable ; and Lady Mary neither spoke to her about Guy nor encouraged her to speak about him. The love these two women had borne to him was not a bond between them, but a barrier. Lady Mary could not help still looking upon Helen as the girl who had hunted and entrapped her son. She could forgive, she thought : she was righteous, and she had forgiven ; but the fact remained, and she could not forget. She had no inclination even now to recognise Helen's part in him by talking to her about him. It was an illogical state of feeling, when she had asked Helen as Guy's widow to come to Wrentham ; but feeling and logic are sworn foes. Helen, on her part, was very willing to accord to Lady Mary as Guy's mother the fullest measure of consideration. She had always done so ; but her view of the case was that in the past Lady Mary had behaved unfairly to her and unkindly to him. She thought she had much more to forgive than Lady Mary had, and though ready to forgive, she was not in the least ready to be forgiven and treated as a pardoned offender. Finally, Lady Mary irritated her by words and acts which gave her clearly to understand that her mother-in-law regarded her as a person wholly unacquainted with the usages of civilised life. Helen's experience of English travellers in India had perhaps made her unduly sensitive on this point, and she resented Lady Mary's behaviour as impertinent. She resented it the more from a consciousness that in some respects after years of Indian life she did feel a little strange to English ways.

So, as the days went by, the mother and the wife both realised that they were not coming together. They seemed, on the contrary, to be drifting further apart. If Guy was not to be a bond to them, what bond had they ? It was true that there was the boy. Lady Mary would have liked to keep him ; she would have liked it more than Helen ever suspected, but keeping the boy involved keeping the mother, and she could not make up her mind to that. For a time indeed she did actually bring herself to contemplate the possibility. She might take the line that the Treverys were a good old Cornish family, and that Helen was everything she should be. Unhappily she had committed herself too deeply to the opposite view. What would the Schneiders

think, and the many friends who had known her vehement efforts to break off the engagement, and had heard her incautious language on the subject? No, it was bad enough now; it would be intolerable then. She could not let them all see that this wretched Indian girl had beaten her all alone the line, and established herself at Wrentham itself. Besides, she rightly reflected that mixed households rarely answer; they would inevitably have disagreements. Even if Helen had been everything that was nice this would have been the case, and it would be doubly certain now. She felt she could not live with Guy's captor without occasionally showing some soreness. The girl had ruined Guy; she had hunted and entrapped him and ruined him. His own conduct when he came home made this quite clear. She had a cool, determined manner too, which might mean opposition and impertinence. Then there were the girls; who could say what harm she might do them? No, it would never do.

In the meantime, nothing would have induced Helen to make Wrentham her home, if she had been asked to do so; but this Lady Mary never suspected. And then an insane idea occurred to her. Why should keeping the child involve keeping the mother? Why not keep the child and let the mother go? Her mother's heart should have warned her that such a thing was impossible. She did, in fact, hesitate; but she was blinded by her pride and her dislike, and the idea grew upon her. After all, people did give up their children in certain cases; and Helen was poor, and she had never really cared for Guy. What was she, after all, but a common adventuress, the daughter of some disreputable old father in India who called himself a Colonel, and very likely was nothing of the kind? Probably she would jump at the chance. In dealing with this class of people it was a mistake to be too tender and delicate. If Helen did not agree, it could not be helped; better not have the child than have both. In any case, she would have done her duty.

Lady Mary broached the idea to her husband, and her husband strenuously objected. He was all for keeping Helen at Wrentham, if she cared to stay; but he begged Lady Mary not to offer to keep the child alone. 'For God's sake, don't do that,' he said; 'I shall never be able to look her in the face again.'

His opposition irritated his wife, and she replied scornfully, 'Nonsense! You imagine that because she has a pretty face she must have all sorts of refined feelings. Make it worth her while and you will see.'

Charles Langley looked at his wife with something very near disgust in his face. He realised more clearly than ever what had occasionally dawned upon him before, that her ladyship was at heart a snob.

She went on to argue that after all it was only what Helen would have had to do if she had remained in India, and Guy had lived. Indian children were always sent to England. As to letting Helen stay at Wrentham, it really would not be right to expose the girls to such a risk ; and so on and so on.

Charles Langley resisted warmly, almost angrily, and he finished as usual by washing his hands of the whole thing. 'You must do as you please,' he said ; 'but I don't like it, and I feel certain she won't.'

Lady Mary had got her own way again, and she was strong in protesting that her way was the right way. 'Whether we like it or not, we ought to do it ; and she ought to see that it is her duty to think of the boy's interests. I hope she will see it.'

To do Lady Mary justice, she was not perfectly clear in her own mind as to what she intended. She had some vague idea of a gradual separation between mother and child, and did not contemplate an immediate and absolute severance. The mother would very likely go back to India, and try to find some other deluded man to marry her, and then the severance would come about naturally. But in any case she meant to keep the boy, and not to keep the mother.

Accordingly when, after a week's stay, Helen remarked that she must bring her visit to an end, Lady Mary recognised her opportunity. They were alone, and not likely to be interrupted. 'Must you really go?' she said ; 'I am sorry you can't stay a little longer.'

'It is very kind of you, but I have a good deal to do in London, and am afraid I must go.' Helen did not add what she thought : 'Roland is going, and whatever he may say, I cannot stay here without him.'

'Well,' Lady Mary answered, 'of course if you must, you must ; but I hope you are going to let us take care of the boy for you. I have been intending to ask you about that.'

Helen thought the offer was merely a temporary one, made to oblige her, and, though surprised, she answered quietly : 'Thank you. It is very good of you to think of it, but I could not leave baby. He is a great traveller, and quite accustomed to roughing it.'

Her quietness emboldened Lady Mary, who thought the refusal a mere preliminary. 'I quite understand your feeling,' she said, 'it is a very natural one; but you must excuse my saying that in a matter of this kind it is not a question of feeling only. You must remember that the child's interests are concerned. He is a Langley, and it might at some future time make all the difference in the world to him whether he had been carefully brought up here in his father's home, or grown up away from us all. And it would be better for yourself too. I am sure that Mr. Langley would take care of that.'

As Lady Mary spoke she saw comprehension dawning in Helen's eyes, and with it such a sudden flame of wrath as made her realise before she stopped that she had made a mistake. She hesitated as she ended her sentence, and her hesitation was tinged with something like alarm as Helen sprang up and faced her.

Helen was in truth very angry. There were some things which were not to be borne. This woman who had scorned her, and tried to set Guy against her, who had driven him out of his regiment, and caused his death, now ventured to bring in his name as an excuse for offering to buy her only child away from her breasts. It was too much. Her face was white and her hands trembling.

'You dare to say that to me!' she cried, her anger sweeping away in a moment all self-control and sense of justice. 'You never loved him, never. I knew you did not. You tried to take him from me, and to break his heart and mine; and now you try to take his child from me too, the only thing I have in the world. Oh, why did I come here to be insulted?'

Lady Mary's alarm was only momentary. Helen's words brought the light of battle to her eyes, and as she caught a ring of misery in the girl's voice her heart hardened. Helen was her guest in her house, but Helen had chosen war, and she should have war with a vengeance.

'I think you had better sit down and try to control yourself,' Lady Mary began, with a face of stern contempt. 'I am not accustomed to scenes of this kind; but, as you accuse me of trying to break Guy's heart, I may as well tell you at once that there was never the smallest question of that. I did try to save him from making an undesirable marriage, which he had already begun to repent; and when he left us he had no intention whatever of going on with it. In fact he had made other plans. You

know best in what circumstances you succeeded in making him change his mind again, although your father was fully aware of the state of the case ; and you know the result. But for you he would never have had to leave the army, and he would be alive now. If you had really cared for him you would have set him free. Instead of that you chose to take advantage of his generosity, and you are responsible for his ruin and his death.'

Helen was listening quietly now. She was already ashamed of her anger, or rather of her want of self-control ; and though she felt that Lady Mary was unjust to her, cruelly unjust, she felt also that Guy's love for her had in a sense been the cause of his death. She had felt that bitterly enough before now. In any case there was no good in discussing it, and in quarrelling with his mother over his grave. For a moment she did not answer. She was wondering whether there was any truth in the statement that Guy had repented his engagement to her ; and then she thought of their meeting at the Syntia station.

'Guy never showed any wish to be set free,' she said at last. 'If he had I should not have stood in his way. He knew that.' She spoke gently, almost as if she were speaking to herself.

Lady Mary smiled, a smile which made Helen set her teeth hard. Then, as Lady Mary remained silent, Helen went on : 'Of course after what you have said I cannot stay here beyond to-night. I should prefer going at once, but that might be a trouble to others ; so, if you will allow me, I will arrange to go by the morning train after breakfast.'

'As you please. I hope you may not live to be sorry for your very intemperate, and I think very ungrateful, behaviour.'

Helen left the room without reply, and Lady Mary smiled again. She had very soon brought the girl to order. People did not attack her with impunity. And it was just as well the arrangement had fallen through ; it would never have answered. It was a pity in some ways, but at all events she had the satisfaction of feeling that she had done her duty.

CHAPTER XLI

REVOLT

BEFORE dinner that evening Helen tried to get hold of Roland, and tell him what had happened. She felt ashamed and unhappy. If only she had taken it quietly and refused without anger, how much better it would have been. Now she had put herself in the wrong, and she was afraid that the thing might make mischief for him. Unluckily Roland was out. He had gone for a walk with his father, and did not return till dinner-time. When he came down to dinner every one was assembled, and she had no chance of speaking to him.

Almost the first thing her father-in-law said was, 'So you really are going to run away from us to-morrow? I am very sorry you can't stay a little longer.' Lady Mary had told him all about it, and advised him to take it as a matter of course.

Roland looked up. 'Going to-morrow, Helen? Why, you never said anything about it this morning. Why must you go?'

'I am afraid I must, really,' Helen answered. 'I made up my mind this afternoon.'

'Can't you even stay till Monday?' Roland said; 'you can't have such very urgent business.'

Helen looked uncomfortable. 'I am afraid I must go.'

Charles Langley interfered. 'I am not going to have you worried. You shall do exactly as you like; only I hope you will soon come back again.'

Helen smiled and thanked him. Roland looked at his mother; she sat silent with a face of stone, and he began to see there was something wrong. The girls suspected something too, and looked at one another. However, the evening passed away without further reference to the subject. Helen and her father-

in-law talked to each other most of the time. Roland was very quiet.

After prayers Helen made her excuses and went to her room. Roland lighted her candle and walked upstairs with her. 'What is it, Helen?' he said; 'I hope there is nothing wrong?'

'I will tell you some other time. I am afraid I have been very foolish. You must not stay now.'

'I shall go up to town with you to-morrow.'

'No, please don't—to please me. It will only make trouble.'

'Then tell me what has happened.'

'Well, your mother said something that I daresay she meant kindly, and I lost my temper, and said things I ought not to have said, and made her angry. I meant to have told you before, but you were out.'

'Can't it be put right?'

'No. I know what she feels about me now; and I could not stay here a day longer than necessary. Now you must go, dear. Your mother won't like your staying with me. Good-night.'

Roland sighed. 'I am sorry,' he said. 'I did so hope it would be all right.'

'I am very sorry to have brought you any trouble. I have reproached myself ever since; but you must go, please.'

Roland walked downstairs gloomily, to find the circle breaking up. 'May I come with you, mother, for a few minutes?'

'Certainly. Come up to my room.'

When they were in Lady Mary's dressing-room, she turned upon him. 'Now, Roland, what is it?'

'What has gone wrong between you and Helen, mother?'

'Hasn't she told you?'

'She said she had made you angry, and I gathered that you said something which made it impossible for her to stay here any longer.'

'Oh, that is her account, is it? Well, if you wish to know the truth, she told me she was going away, and I offered to take charge of Guy's child. She chose to be offended at this, and was extremely rude and violent, as people of that kind always are. I never allow any one to be insolent to me, as you know, and I told her a few home truths which very quickly made her change her tone. Then she said she would not stay in the house, and I told her that she could do as she pleased. That is the whole story. I don't know that it is any affair of yours, but as you wish to know it, I have told you.'

'I can't imagine Helen being rude and violent,' Roland said. 'I suppose she misunderstood you in some way.'

'Whether you can imagine it or not, she was so; and she did not misunderstand me in the least. I was very careful to explain myself, and to point out that it would be for the child's interest and her own to hand it over to us. I told her your father would behave liberally to her.'

'Mother! you don't mean to say you offered her money to give up the child and go away?'

'What do you mean? I offered to take upon myself all the trouble and responsibility of bringing it up. There are not many people, I fancy, who would have done as much. Naturally, she could not stay here too.'

'Good heavens, mother! I should never have believed it if you had not told me. How could you expect her to be anything but indignant? What would you have said if any one had made you such an offer?'

That argument was fatal. It was the argument of a fool. Lady Mary fairly lost her temper over it, and there was a sharp difference of opinion between her and her son. Her view was that she had behaved with extreme kindness and generosity to a girl who had done her incalculable evil, and that she was now being requited with ingratitude and insolence. Roland's view was that his mother had treated the sweetest lady on earth as if she were devoid of all feeling and utterly mercenary, and that such treatment had been naturally resented. The two views were irreconcilable, and before the discussion was over both Roland and his mother had spoken rather pointedly. It ended by Roland saying, 'Well, mother, it is no use my talking any more. I shall take her up to town to-morrow. I am very sorry indeed that this has happened.'

'So am I. I dislike scenes of this kind excessively; but perhaps it is just as well to have got it over.'

'Good-night, mother.'

'Good-night.'

Lady Mary felt sore and angry. Both husband and son were ready to take the part of this wretched girl against her. What fools men were!

Roland went to his father's den, and knocked at the door. He found Charles Langley standing with his back to the mantel-piece, thinking. Apparently his thoughts were not very pleasant, for he looked worried. 'Well, Ro, what is it?'

'Has my mother told you about this trouble with Helen?'

'Yes.'

'I don't like it, father. It makes me feel very unhappy.'

'I am very sorry for it too, but I don't see what is to be done. Apparently she spoke in a way that your mother could not stand; and the thing has gone too far to be mended now.'

'I don't wonder at her being angry if she was asked to give up her child for a consideration.'

'That is hardly the way to put it, I think; but there is no use in discussing the thing. From what your mother tells me, it is out of the question that they can ever be on good terms again, and we must just make the best of it. Shall you have a chance of talking to her before she goes to-morrow?'

'I came to tell you that I am going with her.'

'Are you? Your mother won't like it.'

'I told her, and she made no objection. I don't want people to think there is anything wrong; and besides, Helen is very lonely and helpless in London.'

'You seem very fond of her, Ro.'

'Yes, I am. I believe she behaved as well as possible about Guy all through; and—I feel very guilty about her.'

Roland looked at his father, and Charles Langley understood. He sighed and shifted his position. 'I am afraid we were a bit hard upon her,' he said. Roland did not answer, and his father went on: 'I want her to let me give her what I used to give Guy. I suppose she is not well off. Do you think you could arrange it?'

'I can ask her if you like, but I don't think she will take it. Won't you ask her yourself?'

'No, I would rather not. Try to manage it if you can.'

'All right, father. Say a few kind words to her when she is going, won't you? She likes you and will feel it.'

'Poor girl! I can't let her suppose I think she was right in this affair, but I will say what I can. I wish this had never happened.'

'So do I, more than I can say.'

'Well, good-night, Ro. I must go to bed now; but remember I shall always be ready to help her if I can. Let me know if there is anything I can do.'

After breakfast next morning Helen said good-bye to Wrentham. Lady Mary was not down, she had a severe headache; but she sent word that she would like to see Helen in her room.

if Helen would not mind going up. Helen went accordingly, and found Lady Mary standing ready to receive her.

‘Good-morning,’ Helen said, as she closed the door.

‘Good-morning. I asked you to come to me, because I thought we had better not say good-bye in public. Don’t let me detain you now. I think the carriage has come round.’

‘Good-bye, Lady Mary. I only wish to say before I go that I am sorry I spoke to you as I did yesterday. I have no doubt you meant to do what was kind.’

Lady Mary bowed slightly. She was not to be taken in; it was too late now. Helen looked at her, and seeing that she did not intend any further acknowledgment, turned and left the room. She had brought herself to make the apology, but for the moment she repented it. Nothing had been said about the child.

Charles Langley’s farewell was more cordial; in fact, it was as warm and affectionate as it could well have been. He kissed Helen, and told her how he wished she could have stayed longer, and begged her to come again whenever she felt inclined. He knew he was safe there, but he meant all he said nevertheless, and Helen knew he meant it, and was really sorry to say good-bye to him. The girls were pleasant enough too. They had been taught to regard Helen with something more than suspicion, and they had held aloof from her at first with a mixture of fascination and fear; but they had failed to detect the cloven hoof. Really the terrible Indian woman was not very different from other people.

Helen soon settled down in London. It was very dreary, living in two or three rooms in a small house in South Kensington; but it was less dreary than going anywhere out of London. Roland came constantly to see her in the evening, and she began to take an interest in his work. She could not live where he did, as it would not have been healthy for the child; and having the child to look after, she could not do much to help him; but she learnt much from him, and her advice and her slender purse were always at his service. A few of her father’s Indian friends found her out, and were very kind to her. She did not want to meet any but real friends; but it did her good to see faces she had seen in her happy Indian days, and to hear her father spoken of, as he always was spoken of, with honest affection and regret. They had actually been with her in the dear old house, one or two of them, and could talk about Syntia, and had seen

Guy. It warmed her heart. Then she had her music, and Rex, and above all she had the baby, who was a most beautiful and surprising child, never ill and hardly ever cross, with eyes that became more and more like Guy's every day. She was not therefore wholly without interest and work in life.

As Roland had foreseen, Helen would not accept the allowance offered to her. When he spoke about it, she flushed up and interrupted him: 'Never, Roland; I would sooner starve than take a farthing of it. I know your father means to be kind, and I don't want to seem ungrateful. Please give him my love and thanks; but I could not do it. Please don't speak to me any more about it.'

The spring passed into summer, and the summer into autumn, and still Helen remained in London. At times she pined for a breath of country air, but she could not make up her mind to go. She did not like leaving Roland, and, moreover, she felt disinclined to face any change or exertion. Better stay where she was, and be quiet.

Helen had been a woman of strong religious feeling and belief, but on the day when Mrs. Aylmer had come to her with the news of Guy's death, her religion had received a heavy shock. She had suddenly found that in her time of need it was no help whatever. She felt that she did not love the God who had dealt so hardly with her, and she had nothing left to pray for. What was the good of prayer if she might not pray for death or for Guy's life? Besides, prayer would not be answered. She had prayed for Guy's life night and day, and the answer had been his murder. If she prayed for her own death, the answer would be long life. As time went on her heart only seemed to grow more cold and numb, and she shrank more and more from all religious observances. Roland tried hard to help her. He had soon found out that she had little or no comfort in such things, and it distressed and puzzled him. He could not understand her weary hopelessness in this respect. It seemed to him inconsistent with her composure and courage and sense. She went to church sometimes to please him, and occasionally it seemed to do her good. The music and the cadence of the old familiar words, and the dim religious light, all tended to soothe and quiet her. But at other times the service seemed to have the opposite effect. She felt she had no right to be there; that she was joining in prayers and praises which she did not feel; that the whole thing was a sham. Then she revolted, and Roland was disappointed

of the victory he hoped he had gained. Altogether he was greatly troubled about her. In his youthful ardour it seemed to him that his new-found panacea of religion ought to be sufficient for everything, and it was a constant wonder to him to find her so insensible to its power. Should not the Lord of all the earth do right? Surely she must know He would not lay this cruel sorrow on her but for her good. She shook her head at his platitudes.

'I know, dear,' she would say. 'I have said that to myself often enough, but it does not help me in the least. I have to bear it, I can't do anything else; but I cannot pretend to be content and thankful.'

He begged her to pray.

'I will if I can, Ro; but what is the use? I cannot believe now in prayers being answered; and if I do not believe, they will not be answered. You know that.'

'Try. Faith will come with prayer.'

But she shook her head, and was silent.

At times she even spoke bitterly, as if God had deceived her and mocked her. 'I had been praying so hard, Ro, not only on my knees, but all day in my thoughts, and I had faith. Then Guy's telegram came, and I was so happy and grateful. I did not forget to give thanks. I felt as if I never could thank God enough. For days my whole heart was full of love and thankfulness. And all the time Guy was dead! God had let him be murdered.'

Yet, in spite of all, Roland felt that Helen was true and good. If she was sore and bitter at times in speaking to him about the God who had crushed her heart, it was the bitterness of a noble nature. She still forgave the wrongs that others had done her. She spoke humbly of her own faults, and gently of his mother. She was kind and tender and helpful to all around her. She was never hard or flippanant. Surely the rest would come.

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small.

In the end she would find resignation and peace, if not happiness. Even now at times she seemed to feel more as he would have had her feel. The child seemed to be leading her into it. He was a beautiful boy, good-tempered and strong and handsome, in spite of all his mother's troubles. He and Roland were the best of friends. Helen used to look on sometimes with real happiness in

her eyes as they romped on the floor together; and she was beginning to regain a little colour. Often enough she would turn away with a sigh as her sorrow came back to her; but still at times it was driven off for the moment, and she could be cheerful and bright. She was not five-and-twenty yet.

Then came the final blow.

Baby had learnt to crawl about the floor at a great pace, and even to stand with the help of a chair, when one November morning his mother woke at the sound of a choking cough, and her heart stood still with fear.

It is needless to linger over the story of the next few days. Helen found it easy to pray then. While the child lay before her in its suffering,—the pitiful childish suffering that tears a man's heart to witness, and is a hundred times worse than death to a mother—she prayed incessantly, passionately, that its life might be spared, that her rebellion and ingratitude and want of faith might be forgiven, and that its life might be spared. And once more she prayed in vain. The child grew weaker and weaker, till its little thin hands could no longer be held up to the tortured woman, half maddened with her helplessness. At last there was an unavailing struggle for breath, and then the little hands were still for ever, and the little face lay white and lifeless on the pillow.

Helen and Roland stood by the side of the grave when the service was read. It was raining heavily, and the wind was so strong that he was unable to keep her sheltered from the wet. She was quiet and silent until they began to lower the coffin. Then she stepped forward with a sudden cry—'No, no!' and stopped, and was quiet again.

They drove back together, Helen still tearless and white, with her mouth set close. Roland tried to comfort her in his honest clumsy way, but it was useless. She seemed hardly to hear what he said.

At last, when they were near home, he took her hand and begged her to speak. 'For God's sake, Helen,' he said, 'try to say it. It will help you. You will say it in the end. Say it now, and take the relief it will bring you. Say, "Thy will be done."'

She took her hand away and shook her head in silence. 'Never,' she thought,—'never, as long as I live!'

CHAPTER XLII

ILLNESS

THE day after the funeral Helen went again to her child's grave. It was still raining hard, and everything looked unspeakably desolate ; and for the second time she came back cold and wet. That night she was seized with acute pains in the side and shoulders, and next morning she was forced to send for a doctor.

The illness that followed was very nearly fatal. She had been thoroughly overtried during the past year ; and, lowered as she was by want of sleep and food, the wet and exposure had been too much for her. The torture of pleurisy was increased by pneumonia, and for some weeks her life lay trembling in the balance. At times she was delirious, and then she suffered cruelly from the idea that something she had done had been the cause of her child's death. It was pitiful to watch her painfully striving hour after hour to see the face of the spectre which mocked and eluded her. When her mind cleared it was there,—the thought that if she had sold the child to Lady Mary it might be alive. Then relief came ; but with fever and delirium the idea assumed its spectral shape again, and she began once more the eager agonised chase.

At last youth and a sound constitution asserted themselves, and Helen began to gain strength ; but her recovery was slow. She had no wish to get well, to have life without any of the things which make life worth having. Getting well meant taking up her burden again, and she dreaded it unfeignedly. Roland tried hard to rouse her, but she seemed beyond rousing. She lay very patiently, doing all she was told to do, but showing no interest in anything. She hardly seemed to listen if he read to her, though she always thanked him. She never smiled now ; and she was dreadfully white and thin, with very big eyes, clearer

and more beautiful than ever, but intensely sad. The feeling had come to her that she was one of those doomed to suffer continual ill-fortune, and to bring ill-fortune on others. Everything had gone wrong with her and hers. She begged Roland not to trouble himself about her any more. 'What does it matter, Ro?' she said; 'I am no good to any one. Why do you worry yourself when you have so much to do?' But to Roland she was dearer now than all the world.

As she became strong enough to travel, the doctors advised her to leave London and go down to the west coast in order to avoid the cold and wet of early spring. It was an effort and she did not want to go, but Roland pressed her and she gave in. 'Very well, dear,' she said; 'I will go if you like. Where am I to go to?'

'They say South Devon or somewhere in that direction. Do you know any place on the coast?'

'No. I used to live in Cornwall when I was a girl; but our house is broken up, and I could not go back there. It was a very lonely country.'

Then it occurred to her that old Power was living in Torquay. After Miss Treveryan's death she had settled there, and supported herself by letting lodgings. 'Dear old thing,' Helen said, 'she would be delighted to have me if she could, I know; she thinks there never was any one in the world like us.' As she spoke the idea grew upon her. She would like to see that honest old face again; it would be like a bit of her girlhood. She would hear all about her aunt's death from the one who had been with her to the end; and she would be near Cornwall too. It would feel more like home to be among the soft-spoken West-country folk again.

Roland caught at the suggestion. 'But I thought the race of old family servants was at an end,' he said.

Helen's mind was back in the past. 'I used to be very fond of her. She came to my grandmother when she was a girl, and when my grandmother died she stayed at Laneithin as my aunt's maid. "Pow" I always called her. She was a dear merry little woman, with bright brown eyes like a robin's; and she was just as brave and impudent as a robin; and she had a shy, nervous manner which made her impudence all the more delightful. I don't believe she ever thought of herself. She was always at work, and did everything well, from cooking a dinner to making a dress. She would have gone through fire and water for a

Treveryan. Dear old Pow ! she used to go everywhere with me, and the more trouble I gave her the better she seemed to like it. I *should* like to see her again.'

It was a long time since Roland had seen Helen so much interested. She had a touch of colour in her face, and her eyes were bright. 'Why didn't you try to get hold of her before?' he asked.

'I did try, directly my aunt died, four or five years ago ; but I was in India, and it was too late ; she had joined her sister in taking a house to let in lodgings. I believe she would have come even then if she had not promised. When my aunt was alive her people tried to get her away ; some of them had gone to Canada and got on very well I believe, and they wanted her to join them, but she never would go. She never would marry either,—always used to laugh at the poor men and refuse. She really cared for us much more than she did for any one else.'

'Well, I think that is splendid. We will write and ask her ; if she can't have us herself she will help us.'

'Us, Ro ? You are not coming ?'

'Of course I am ; I shall take you down and see you settled. I want a rest badly, and I can get away for a week. I have been working nearly a year on end.'

'How good you are to me ! but you ought to spend your holiday at Wrentham.'

'I shall spend my holiday exactly as I please, and I please to spend it with you. Besides, I have been to Wrentham two or three times in the year.'

So it was settled. Helen wrote to Power, and got an answer by return of post, such a delighted, affectionate answer that it brought the tears to her eyes. It was not very elegantly written or very correctly spelt,—there were no school-boards in Power's young days,—but it was brimful of welcome and real downright honest love. By good luck a set of Power's rooms would be vacant in a week. It was just what they wanted.

Roland and Helen started for Torquay one morning in February. As they got away from London the sky grew clear, and before long they were in bright sunshine. The winter seemed to be over, the ground was soft, and there was a delicious feeling of spring in the air. Helen got through the journey very well, and seemed to enjoy the sight of the country through which they passed. 'How beautiful England is !' she said ; 'there is nothing like it after all, every mile has something new. When one has

lived out of it for a time one sees the beauty of our English trees and our soft rolling country. The flat plains of India are so monotonous in comparison, and the mountains so rugged and bare, and in some places even ugly.'

'I don't know India,' Roland said; 'but surely you don't think England as beautiful as Switzerland or Italy?'

'Yes I do. I suppose in some ways they are finer, and one admires them for a change, but it seems to me that they are not really as beautiful. They are like some faces one sees, very handsome and striking; but England has a sweet face. You know what I mean?'

'What a John Bull you are!' Roland said; 'but I know what you mean.' And he thought, 'If ever there was a sweet face on earth I see it now.'

When they touched the coast near Dawlish the sea was as blue and smooth as the Mediterranean in summer, and with the rich red colouring of the Devonshire earth it made a bright and lovely picture. At Torquay station the first thing they saw was a little slight figure in black peering in at the carriage windows. 'There she is,' Helen said; 'there is old Pow herself come to meet us.'

And Pow it was, with a face full of joy and affection; her smooth hair whiter than it used to be, but otherwise unchanged; there were the little brown eyes and the nervous manner, just as of old.

They drove away from the station in the warm western afternoon. The bay lay before them with hardly a ripple on its surface, and the sound of the tide on the sands was a low dreamy plash. Here and there people were sitting in the sun. 'How delightful!' Roland said; 'what a difference from London!'

'Burnbraes,' where Power lived, turned out to be a small square house on the opposite side of Torquay. It was as clean as a new pin from roof to cellar; and the neat tastefully-furnished rooms looked out upon a grassy slope beyond which, through the trees, shone a bit of bright blue sea. 'Well, we are in luck,' Roland said, as Pow finally disappeared, after placing a dainty little tea-service by the side of the sofa on which she had made Helen lie down. 'What a dear old soul it is! I shall feel quite comfortable in leaving you here. Why, no lady could have done everything more perfectly.'

'She *is* a lady in all her thoughts and tastes,' Helen said; 'she *always was*,—my aunt used often to say so. She can't spell,

and she is not sure of her h's, but she has not an atom of vulgarity in her.'

Here after a few days Roland left Helen established. She had been very tired the day after her arrival, but was quite refreshed by a long morning in bed, and on the following day she was able to go for a drive. They had several pleasant drives before he went, and got familiar with the broad bay, and the long straight line of Berry Head, and the bold rocks and clear water of Anstis Cove, and the white beaches of Babbicombe. They looked down from the high red cliffs upon the open sea, with its toy-like fishing-boats, and its masses of purple and green; and they saw and admired and avoided the steep rolling hills inland, with their bright-coloured earth and their springing crops and wooded summits.

After Roland's departure Helen found herself very lonely. Power saved her from all the ordinary discomforts and worries of such a life, and was a real companion and friend to her. There was Rex too, dear Rex, who never left her side; and she had an unflinching comfort in her music. She did not sing now, but she sat and played softly to herself hour after hour through the long evenings, her taste and touch becoming daily more and more chastened and refined. Then there were her books. Before her child died she had begun to read again, and Roland, who was a great reader himself, had encouraged and helped her; now she took to it once more. Still it was a lonely life, and there were times when it seemed very hard to bear.

As she grew stronger, and became more able to walk, she used to spend a large part of her days in the open air. Her graceful figure and sad face soon grew familiar, and people wondered what her story was. Then one or two friends who had known her father in India, or who had known Miss Treveryan, found her out and tried to be kind to her; but she did not know them, and though she felt grateful, she was not much drawn towards any of them.

The summer passed away, and nearly a year had gone since she lost her child, nearly two years since Guy's death. She felt quite strong now, and gradually, with returning health, there had come upon her a longing to go back to London and join Roland in his work. She felt that she must find work of some kind, and she wanted to be with him again. During the autumn she wrote to him about it, pressing to be allowed to come up and do some nursing, or anything else for which she might be fitted. Roland

protested on various grounds, and eventually referred to her doctor, who at once refused to sanction anything of the kind. 'In May next,' he said, 'if you go on as you are doing, I will make no objection; but it would be madness to go back to London for the winter.' Helen gave in perforce, and though it was a disappointment, she was soon reconciled to the delay. After all, spring would soon come; and in the meantime she would see Roland. He had written to ask whether he might come to her for a week early in January. She would not be alone all the winter.

CHAPTER XLIII

LOVE IS STRONG AS DEATH

ROLAND was coming, but not, as she had hoped, to brighten her new year and gain a little rest and strength for himself.

Soon before Christmas, the time of her mourning, she received a few lines asking her to receive him at once. 'I am afraid,' he wrote, 'that I shall be a great trouble to you. The fact is, I have broken down, and am ordered out of London. My chest has been troubling me a good deal for some time past, and lately the fog and cold have been very trying. I think old Jessop is fond of coddling people, but I do feel as if I could not go on much longer in this atmosphere. I have a longing to see that blue bay again, and to breathe the soft Devonshire air, and, above all, to set eyes upon your face, which will do me more good than anything. So, if your dear old Pow will take me in, I shall come down on Saturday. Only I warn you that you may have to begin your nursing experiences sooner than you expected. You shall try your prentice hand on me.'

Helen telegraphed in reply, 'Come as soon as you can. All ready.'

She went to meet him at the station, and was shocked at the change which had come upon him in a few months. He had a colour in his face, and his eyes were bright; but he was painfully thin, and suffered from an incessant cough. Nevertheless, he seemed quite happy as they drove away. 'I have done all I could,' he said, 'and am free to enjoy my holiday now without feeling guilty. That is one advantage of breaking down. You are spared any doubts as to whether you are doing your duty.'

'I wish you had come away before you broke down,' she said, with her soft eyes shining. 'It seems such a pity to go on too long. Prevention is better than cure.'

Roland laughed merrily. 'Yes, I know ; and discretion is the better part of valour, and "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day." You speak like a copy-book. Since when have you taken to those prudent maxims ?'

Helen shook her head, 'You know it's true, Ro. You ought to take care of your health for the sake of others if not for your own.'

'What did you say when I told you the same thing about your nursing ?'

'Oh, that is a different thing altogether.'

'Is it ? Well, we won't fight about it. Anyhow, I have struck work now, and I'm going to do nothing but eat Devonshire cream, and loaf about in the sun, and read the lightest of literature, and talk to you till you're tired of me.'

'You will have to talk a long time.'

When the excitement and pleasure of arrival had passed away, Roland looked even worse than Helen had feared. Afterwards, for a day or two, he seemed to revive a little, and his spirits were bright enough ; but he had no strength or energy, and his cough was distressing. At times he was feverish. Helen's sorrows had made her expect evil now, and not long after Roland's arrival she pressed the doctor to tell her whether there was any danger of the illness becoming serious. He hesitated, and then said, 'It is always a serious thing when the lungs are in question.'

'Yes ; but you know what I mean, Dr. Melliss. Do you think it is consumption ?'

'I cannot tell you exactly yet. I hope there is no organic disease.'

'Then you do not think he is in immediate danger ?'

'Oh, I hope not. But I shall be able to speak more definitely in a few days.'

A fortnight later Helen knew that her fears were true. She had walked down one morning to the library to change some books, leaving Roland lying on the sofa in the drawing-room. As she came back to the gate she saw Dr. Melliss's carriage in the road, and turning in, she met on the drive the doctor himself, talking to a tall well-dressed man by his side. His face was grave, and Helen felt a sharp foreboding of evil.

When he saw her Dr. Melliss stopped. 'I'm glad I met you, Mrs. Langley. I wanted to speak to you.' Helen shook hands with him, and he went on : 'I have just been to see your brother-

in-law, and as my friend Dr. Earle was with me next door, I took the opportunity of asking him to give me the benefit of his opinion.'

The tall man slightly raised his hat, and Helen was struck by his face. He was young, but there was a look of power about him.

'Yes, Dr. Melliss?'

'I am sorry to say that Dr. Earle's opinion coincides with my own; and that we think the case a very serious one.'

'Will you please speak quite plainly? Do you mean that it is consumption?'

'I am afraid so.'

'Then it is hopeless. He is dying?'

The two men looked at one another, and the elder continued: 'He may live some time yet, but a complete cure is impossible.'

'How long will it be?'

'I can't say. I fear it is a question of a few months. It might be a few weeks only.'

'Is that your opinion, Dr. Earle?'

'I am sorry to say that it is.'

Helen turned to Dr. Melliss again. 'Have you told him?'

'No, Mrs. Langley. I did not like to do so without speaking to you first.'

'Do you think he suspected anything from seeing Dr. Earle?'

'Oh no. He seemed quite cheerful, and I took care not to alarm him.'

'It is quite impossible that he can get well? It is no use taking him away to Madeira or anywhere?'

'I am afraid not. He could not have a better climate than this.'

'Shall you be coming again to-morrow?'

'Yes. I shall be here about the same time.'

'Thank you. Then I will think it over, and speak to you again. I am not sure what I ought to do.'

Helen said good-bye to the two men, and they went away together. Then she turned out of the gate again, and walked down to the sea-shore at Meadfoot. She wanted a few minutes to think it over quietly before seeing Roland. There was no great shock this time. Her heart had been deadened now, and it seemed to her that she had expected the news all along. Every one she loved was struck down; of course Roland would not be spared. She wondered whether she ought to tell him. It might

do him harm, and he was ready to die if any one could be ; and yet she felt he would not like to be left in ignorance. He would probably wish to see his own people as soon as possible. However, there was no necessity to decide until she had spoken to Dr. Melliss. She walked along the lonely sea-wall. It was a fine day ; but the tide was high, and there had been some wind from the south-east. The waves were breaking against the foot of the massive wall, and occasionally a shower of spray flew over the road. The pavement was shining with wet, and strewn with pieces of seaweed. Helen turned at the end of the straight, and walked back again. 'It seems hard that he should have to die so young,' she thought, 'and I shall miss him cruelly. What will it be without him?' But she thought quite calmly now. She could even stop to admire the great waves that smote the Shag Rock, and poured in white foam over its shoulder.

When she came in she found Roland lying with a book in his lap. She had made him promise to lie still now when she came in ; and he only smiled at her and held out his hand. She came and took it and stood by him.

'What a colour you have got,' he said.

'Yes ; I have been walking along the sea-wall in the wind. The sea is so fine to-day. It is breaking right over the road.'

'I should like to see it. I say, Helen.'

'Yes.'

'I have had two doctors at me to-day. Melliss brought in another, and they were here some time.'

She would not affect ignorance. 'Yes ; so I hear,' she said.

'Who told you ?'

Helen would have liked to avoid the question, but she could not. 'I met them going away.'

'Did they speak to you ?'

'Yes, dear. I caught them at the gate.'

She tried to answer as if nothing unusual had occurred, but she saw that he was not deceived. He looked at her quietly for a second, and then drew her hand up to his lips and kissed it. 'You need not be afraid to tell me,' he said in a steady gentle voice. 'I saw they were keeping back something ; and there can be only one thing to keep back. I would rather hear it from you. Nothing that you can say will hurt me. How long do they give me to live ?'

Then Helen knelt down and put her arms round him and told him ; and he lay silent, caressing the brown head on his

shoulder as if her presence gave him more happiness than death could give him pain. Love laughs at death.

Roland would not let his people be troubled. 'Let them be,' he said; 'when I am really dying I will tell them. Why should they be upset when they can do nothing? And I am perfectly happy with you.'

'But is it right, Ro? Ought you not to tell your mother? She is the one who has a right to be with you.'

'She has other things to do. She could not leave Wrentham indefinitely; and I might be an unconscionable time dying, like Charles the Second.'

'You must do what you think best, Ro; but it seems to me that she ought to know.'

'I think best to be all alone with you, if you don't mind the work and worry.'

'You know I don't mind anything if I can be a little comfort to you.'

'A little comfort! You have made my last year on earth the happiest of all.'

From this time forward Roland seemed to face the end as calmly as if he had been going on some short voyage. It seemed strange to Helen. He was so young, quite a boy still in some ways, and he had been so enthusiastic about his work. Occasionally he expressed regret at leaving it, but the idea never seemed to trouble him much. The only thing that did seem to trouble him at times was the thought of her future. He was anxious about that; and he was specially anxious that she should feel as he felt about religion.

Helen saw his anxiety, and did her utmost to relieve it. She had never really lost hold on her faith, and his example and his eager desire acted strongly upon her. To please him she forced herself to read and pray, and tried to be less cold and careless. It was not that she was playing a part, or trying to make her will overcome her reason. The belief was there still, at the bottom of her heart. It had been overlaid by a feeling of soreness, but it was there, and always had been. He was not asking her to believe for his sake; it was rather as if he were asking her to forgive, not to nourish resentment. If he had asked her to forgive a man or a woman who had treated her cruelly she would have listened to him. She listened to him now, when he asked her to remove from her heart any bitterness against his God. And the moment that she came and opened her heart and tried, the

bitterness was gone like an evil dream. Roland had bought by his death what he would have died many times to buy. The woman for whose soul he would have sacrificed his own was 'reconciled to God.' From that time, though she still had her hours of depression and reserve, her religion was again a living power and comfort, and the knowledge of it made Roland perfectly happy.

As the spring turned into summer Roland grew weaker. The warm moist air of the west coast seemed to make him languid, and he grew rapidly worse. Then he decided to tell his mother. For some time past he had written to her as if a fatal issue were possible, and had made her understand that he was forbidden to leave Torquay. Helen had persuaded him to do this much. Now he wrote telling the truth plainly.

The day after he had done so Helen was sitting by the side of his couch. They had been talking about Lady Mary, and the possibility of her coming down; and from that Helen's thoughts had wandered away to other matters. She had been silent for some time. Her hands were crossed upon her knees, and her eyes were gazing into the past. Roland looked at her, and put a thin white hand on hers. 'What are you thinking of so very solemnly?'

'I was thinking of something your mother once said to me.'

'What was it?'

Helen hesitated. Roland and she had more than once spoken of the interview she had had with Lady Mary before they left Wrentham; but Helen had always avoided repeating Lady Mary's words about Guy. It was painful to her to do so, and there was no use in it. Yet she had often been haunted by the idea that Guy had repented his love for her. Something now urged her to ascertain whether it was true that he had meant to give her up. She might never have another opportunity of knowing. She answered Roland's question by another. 'Will you tell me the whole truth if I ask you something?'

'Yes.'

'Well, that day before we left Wrentham, when your mother was vexed with me, she said something that has often made me miserable since. She said that when Guy came home from India he had begun to repent having cared for me, and that when he went back he had made up his mind to give me up. I think she meant me to understand that he cared for some one else. She said that he changed his mind again only out of pity for me, be-

cause he found me in trouble ; and that I had taken advantage of his generosity. Was it true that he was tired of me ? I never knew it, or had the least suspicion of it. If I had known I would never have married him. It was I who made him go home, Ro, and he was quite free ; but the moment I saw him, before I was in trouble, he spoke to me just as he used to do. How could I guess there was any change, if there was any ?

Roland looked pained. 'Of course you could not know. I am very sorry my mother said that.'

'Was it true, Ro ?'

'I don't believe he ever repented being engaged to you. He told me about it all, and spoke of you as warmly as any one could have spoken, and the night he got back to Syntia and saw you he wrote to me that he could never give you up.'

'Then what did your mother mean by hinting that he cared for some one else before he went ? Did you ever hear that ?'

'Well, I don't know exactly what happened. I was not there. But my mother had set her heart on Guy's marrying Clara Schneider, whom you met at Wrentham ; and I fancy she did her best to bring it about.'

'Did your mother ever tell you that Guy cared for Miss Schneider ? He had a perfect right to care for her. He was not engaged to me.'

'She did say so ; but I always thought there was some mistake.'

Helen sat silent. Was it true ? she wondered. Had Guy come out prepared to give her up and half engaged to another ? A vague sense of distrust came over her, not for the first time ; then she forced it down resolutely. She thought of his face when he got out of the train, and of his loving letters, and of all he had been to her. 'What a wretch I am,' she said to herself. 'He had a perfect right to do as he pleased ; and if he did only marry me from generosity it was all the more unselfish and noble. But I don't believe it. He did love me, both before and after ; I know he did. And yet——' She sighed wearily. What was the good of thinking about it ? What did it matter now ? She raised her eyes and found Roland looking at her with an expression of pity.

'Don't fret about it,' he said. 'Whatever happened then, you had all his love afterwards.'

So he doubted too !

Then the subject dropped, and they began talking about other

matters. After a time Roland said something about his will. He told her where to find it, and added : ' I have not much to leave, you know ; but I like to think it will add a little to your comfort when I am gone.'

' Oh don't,' she said. ' Please, Ro, don't leave anything to me. It is not right ; and I have as much as I want. Indeed I have. Let it go to your sisters. Please do what I ask you. I shall be so much happier.'

But he would not listen to her. ' They will have plenty now,' he said, and refused to make any change ; and she had to give in at last.

' Very well, dear. You shall do as you please. But I have as much as I want, and I hope I shall not want anything long.'

' Don't say that. It is not right. I don't like you to say anything the least bit unworthy of you. I want you to be always brave and patient, as you really are at heart.'

' Do you ever think, Ro, what life will be to me without you ? I shall not have one living thing that I care for but Pow and Rex.'

' You don't know what may be in store. You are young yet, and may have a long life before you. I want you to try to be happy. I believe you can if you try. You do so much to make others happy that you will find happiness yourself, I am sure. Don't refuse it if it comes to you. Don't be morbid. Remember that was one of the last things I said to you. For my sake accept happiness if it comes to you and thank God for it.' It was in reality one of the last things he said to her. He lived for some weeks longer ; but at the end he was generally unconscious from weakness, and it was not often that he spoke clearly.

Lady Mary came down when she got his letter, and she and Helen had to meet. They met with less difficulty than Helen had expected. Lady Mary had resented Roland's going to her ; but in the presence of death such feelings were stilled. Moreover, Roland spoke very earnestly to his mother about it, and Lady Mary could see that Helen had devoted herself to him. She found her daughter-in-law as gentle and respectful to her as if nothing had ever come between them ; and though there was no real cordiality there was no friction. After a fortnight Lady Mary returned to Wrentham, leaving Roland in Helen's hands. She had a nurse to help her now ; and she managed everything admirably, and Lady Mary felt that there was nothing more to be done. Evelyn was eager to go to him, but Lady Mary would not allow it.

When Roland was sinking Helen telegraphed to Wrentham, and they all came down except Harry, who was believed to be in America.

Roland died quietly one morning in the early autumn, a few days after they arrived. He had been lying unconscious all night. As the day broke his eyes opened and he looked for Helen. She had relieved the nurse an hour before, and was sitting near his bed. As she bent down over him a smile came into his face, and his eyes closed ; a faint sigh, and all was over. He was buried in Torquay by his own desire, and a day or two afterwards his people went back to Wrentham.

Before they started Lady Mary spoke to Helen not unkindly. She thanked her for her care of Roland, and asked her what she was going to do.

‘I don’t know,’ Helen said ; ‘I shall probably stay here a few weeks longer, perhaps over the winter.’

‘Mr. Langley is very anxious that you should come back to us at Wrentham. If you would care to do so it would be a great pleasure to him, and—I think you would not find me very difficult to get on with.’

‘Thank you,’ Helen said. ‘It is very good of you to think of it, and I am really grateful to you, but I could not leave Torquay just now.’

‘You must do as you please, but if you will come we will do our best to make you happy.’

Helen shook her head : ‘Please do not think I wish to be unkind, but it would be useless. You once said things to me that can never be unsaid. I could not. I know it is all the kinder of you, thinking of me as you do ; but I could not go back to Wrentham.’

Then Lady Mary felt she was free from all obligations. It had really been an honest attempt to do her duty. Her debt was paid off now, and her slumbering dislike revived.

CHAPTER XLIV

AN OLD FRIEND

AFTER Roland's death Helen remained in Torquay. She had some thoughts of going away to find work, but she did not know where to go ; and after all, though she did not much care for the place, she had Power. A friend like that was worth keeping. The dear old woman took just as much care of her as if they had been in their old relation to each other, and Helen felt that she could not afford to throw away the only real affection that was left to her. She had a few acquaintances too, whom she liked well enough. So she stayed on at Burnbraes, employing herself as best she could, and getting through life somehow.

In one way or another she found a number of her poorer neighbours to whom, without preaching or patronising, she could do some good. She had always had the power of attracting and managing children ; and as she went about her self-imposed tasks the sight of her graceful black-robed figure, with Rex in attendance, soon came to be the signal for a rush of small welcoming faces. Many a sick child learnt to bless the beautiful lady with the white hands and the dainty dress who came with books and toys and gentle words to help them through their troubles. Many a hard-worked mother blessed her too. She had not very much money to give, but she had time and sympathy, and she carried about with her the indescribable charm which makes the smallest service welcome.

Helen was reading systematically now, and thinking over what she read. The taste grew upon her, and books which would have been dry and hard to her a year or two before became easy and interesting. She was laying up a priceless treasure for herself.

She went out very little. The crowded afternoon tea-parties,

which seemed to be the main dissipation of the place, were not attractive to her ; and though many people were ready to be civil and pleasant to the pretty young widow, she was not in the humour as yet to mix much in society. A woman by herself is at a painful disadvantage unless she is prepared to accept attentions which may become embarrassing, and Helen shrank from the ordeal.

It was a very quiet monotonous life ; but it was not altogether without its pleasures, and it had its influence upon Helen's mind and heart. At seven-and-twenty she was a well-read thoughtful woman. Her character and her enthusiasms had become chastened and regulated. She was more patient, more temperate in her judgments, less crude in her modes of thought.

In the spring of 1883 Hugh Dale came to England. Helen had followed with interest the progress of the war in Egypt the autumn before, and had seen that he had been selected for a staff-appointment with the force. Since she left India she had received several letters from him, well-written, rather clever letters, more elegant than his spoken language, but just as warm and straightforward. She was glad to know that he had got a chance now ; and she was doubly glad when she read an account of a cavalry skirmish in which he had distinguished himself. He was said to have behaved with splendid coolness and courage in a hand-to-hand fight with some of the enemy's horsemen. She did not see his name again, and she was thinking of no one less when one morning, months afterwards, as she was walking down with Rex to the sea, she heard a familiar voice call out, 'Mrs. Langley,' and looking up she saw him walking out of a gateway close to her. 'I am so glad I have met you,' he said. 'I was looking for your house, and could not find it. I thought you would excuse my calling at Indian hours. I have come down from town on purpose to see you, and have to go off again to-morrow morning.'

Helen was looking at him with a delighted welcome in her eyes. It was very pleasant to see his honest face again. He was looking well, brown and strong. He had grown quite a respectable moustache, and he was broader and thicker set ; but the eyes were just the same, and his white teeth showed in his old bright smile. 'Oh, it is so nice to see you again !' she said. 'Come back with me and tell me all about yourself.'

'You were going out, weren't you ?'

'Only down to the beach for a walk with Rex.'

'Dear old Rex ! You see he knows me quite well. Let us go on. It's such a jolly day, and I shall enjoy it awfully.'

They walked down to the quiet beach and found a sunny sheltered spot and sat down.

'First tell me about that fight where you distinguished yourself so much,' Helen said. 'I felt quite proud when I read the account of it.'

'Oh, did you see that ? It wasn't anything wonderful really ; only I had to carry some orders for the General, and some of the enemy's cavalry tried to cut me off. I rode hard to scrape past them, but I could not quite do it, and two of them got in my way, so I had to go at them. I was riding Sultan, and he behaved splendidly, and I managed to do for them both, and get clear before the others came up. Once I was off they could not touch me,—you know how he could gallop—so they soon gave it up, and took to shooting at me. That was all. It was Sultan who pulled me through. He behaved like an angel, dodging in and out as if he understood the whole game.'

'I did not know angels did that. What have you done with him ?'

'Dead, I am sorry to say. He was shot through the neck at Tel-el-Kebir, and died almost directly.'

'Ah, my poor old horse ! Are you sure he was not left in pain ?'

'No, he was dead before I left him.'

'Poor Sultan ! I am glad he died a soldier's death.'

They sat on talking, and after some time Chimp said : 'Do you know, I am a major now ? They have given me a brevet.'

He laughed aloud as he told her, a merry boyish laugh, throwing as he spoke a pebble out into the water with a sharp overhand motion of the wrist. She laughed too. He had brought the colour to her cheeks and the brightness to her eyes.

'Fancy you a field-officer,' she said, in her old patronising way. 'Why, you're only a boy now.'

He threw another stone, which dropped into the sea with hardly a sound. 'By Jove, I wish I was ! Do you know how old I am ?'

'Yes, I think I do ; but you're a boy still, and you ought to be very glad of it.'

'So I am ; but I have got ten years' service now, and I am getting on for thirty, worse luck. Do you know, I am older than you are, Mrs. Langley ?' he said gravely. Helen laughed again.

Are you really? What a terrible age to come to.' Then the laugh died out of her face and she sighed. 'Ah well, some people live faster than others! I feel centuries old.' She drove away the thought, and went on to ask him about the Thirtieth and Syntia; and he told her all sorts of things that stirred her interest. The Aylmers, she knew, were coming on leave next year.

'You heard of Denham's death?'

'No, is he dead?'

'Yes. It was awfully sad. You remember how he hated the men; used always to say they were drunken brutes, and all that; and how you told him once that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that he had no right to be in the service if he thought like that? I remember just as if it were yesterday. You were quite—cross.'

Helen nodded.

'Well, there was some cholera in the regiment last year, and you can't imagine how well he behaved. He did everything he could for them,—used to go and see them, and all that. And one of them, when he was very bad, cursed him, and told him to go, and said they all hated him and hoped he would catch it himself and die. Then he did get it himself, and went out in a few hours. I felt an awful beast for having hated him so, and it seemed very sad altogether. He had not got a friend in the regiment.'

'Poor fellow! I wish I had known him better.'

'I wish you had. You might have found a soft spot in him. He used to go and ask Mrs. Aylmer about you. She told me so.'

The Pink 'un was getting on like a house on fire. 'He wrote a book or something,' Chimp said, 'and got tremendously patted on the head. He has come back to Syntia now, and has turned out no end of a sportsman. He is always shooting tigers, and he comes out pig-sticking, and rides like the—tremendously hard.'

'Like the what?' Helen said, with a laugh in her eyes, born of the recollection of an old Indian sporting-song she had found one day among her father's treasures.

Chimp laughed too. 'That's not fair, Mrs. Langley.'

'Isn't it? Very well, I won't ask any more questions. Go on.'

Chimp went on until lunch-time, throwing innumerable stones, and talking cheerily; and she sat enjoying it all, brighter than she had been for years. The air was delicious, though it was early in February, and the sun was warm, and the blue waves

were dancing round the Shag and the Thatcher, and there was a soft haze about Berry Head and out to seaward. At last she sighed and got up. 'Now you must come in to lunch,' she said. 'I don't know whether there will be much for you to eat, but you won't mind for once. I daresay you got accustomed to being starved in Egypt.'

'No, I didn't; I lived like a fighting cock; but I don't want much now.'

Of course the unfailing Pow found them plenty to eat; and she came and waited on them, and took a great fancy to Chimp.

After lunch Helen asked him whether he really meant to give her the whole day; and when he had made quite sure that she wished him to stay, he stayed. They went out for a long ramble together round by the cliffs to Anstis Cove, and then on to Bab-bicombe. Though it was afternoon the spring feeling was still in the air. They talked of all they had in common; and then, on the breezy cliffs, with the sea shining below them, Helen told him all about her child's death. It was a sad story, but she could talk of it calmly now; she was surprised to find how calmly. The wound was there still, and would be there all her life; but it was healing over. Chimp seemed the more moved of the two.

'I am so sorry for you,' he said, with a break in his voice; 'I wish I could do anything to make your life less lonely.'

She told him about Roland too, and Chimp was very full of sympathy. 'He must have been a real good chap. What hard luck his dying like that! Did you like the others?'

'He was the one I really cared for,' Helen said. 'Mr. Langley was very good to me too, but I never saw very much of him or the others.'

'I am going to Wrentham,' Chimp said, 'some time this year. I stayed there a few days once before I went to India, and they have asked me to come again.'

They came home, and Chimp went off to his hotel for a time, promising to return to dinner. When he came he brought with him a packet containing one of Sultan's little dark round hoofs polished and set in silver. On the top was an inscription: 'Sultan, killed at Tel-el-Kebir, September 1882.' He gave Helen also a piece of hair from the old horse's forelock. 'You remember what a broad head he had, and how the hair used to hang down in front and part in the middle. I thought you would like to have these to remind you of him. I have kept the same for myself.'

Rex stood looking on gravely as if he understood, and then he came and pushed his head under Chimp's hand.

They had dinner together. Afterwards Helen insisted on Chimp smoking his cigarette. Then at last he said good-bye and went away and left her.

She was happier that night than she had been for a long time. How good and honest and true he was. How kind of him to come all the way down from London to see her. Within a few hundred yards of her there had been living for months Sir George Eustace and his wife, rather smart people who had a house in Torquay. They had done the Indian tour some years before, and had stayed twice in her father's house,—once for a day or two, when they were sent by a great man, and again for a fortnight, when they invited themselves. Helen had done her best to entertain them, at some trouble and expense. Now they avoided calling on her, though they had met her at an evening party and had been surprised into recognition. That was not Chimp's way. It was pleasant to feel one had such friends in the world, even if one did not often see them.

CHAPTER XLV

A CHANCE MEETING

AFTER Chimp had gone away Helen settled down to her quiet life again. He had done her good. In the sunshine of his honest face she had thrown open some of the closed places of her heart, and they had been filled for a time at least with warmth and light. She wished he would come back, as he hoped to do, and she felt happier and more content. A week or two went by, and though it was still February the early western spring was coming on apace. The garden was bright with crocuses and daffodils and violets, and there were some primroses on the banks. On a chestnut tree near the house the brown buds glistened in the sun. The sky was clear and blue, and the air was delightful to breathe. It was the scented air of spring, full of life and joy. Will the air always feel like that, will it be an eternal spring, when we wake from the winter of death?

One lovely morning Helen took a book and walked out towards the sea-shore. The wind was from the north-east, and she knew a place where she would be perfectly sheltered from it. She went to the cliff above Meadfoot, where she was generally free from interruption, and removed a hairy brown-headed caterpillar from her favourite seat in the midst of some flowering gorse, and settled herself comfortably with a rug over her knees and her book in her lap. Somehow she did not feel much inclined to read, and as she was not pressed for time she sat back and let herself enjoy her idleness. One of the priceless lessons Aunt Madge had taught her was that a few hours spent in doing nothing, with God's glorious nature around her, need not necessarily be harmful. One must have time to see, Miss Treveryan used to say, and time to think.

It was very beautiful. Overhead a few broken white clouds

were sailing across the blue sky. The sun was deliciously warm. In front, to the south, perhaps two hundred feet below, lay the waters of Tor Bay. The town and the bottom of the bay were to the right, hidden by a bold projecting headland. From behind it, five miles or more away, the shore swept out eastwards, towards the open sea, in a straight blue line which ended with the clear-cut rocky point of Berry Head. The line was broken just opposite by the town and harbour of Brixham. The sun touched some of the Brixham roofs; and the gray smoke lay in the gap above them, showing the outline of the hills upon which the town was built, and separating them from the blue folds of land beyond. In the harbour mouth Helen could see the dark hulls of some trawlers at anchor. The horizon to seaward, to the left, was white and hazy, and the parting of sea and sky was almost lost. High above it was a bank of rounded clouds, whose summits stood out bright and clear against the blue. To the extreme left was the point of cliff which protected the bay from the northward, and seemingly close by it the great gray masses of the Thatcher and Orestone Rocks rose out of the water. There was more wind down below than in the upper sky. It came from behind the point to the left, and Helen could see the breakers and the spirts of foam about the flat Orestone. From there to the bold sides of the Thatcher, and beyond it into the mouth of the bay, the lines of white horses were racing merrily in the sunlight. Even across the bay under Berry Head, which caught the full force of the wind, Helen could see the foam flashing up at times, as a big wave burst on the rocks. Out to sea the water was bright green with purple shadows of cloud. In the bay it was blue. The sunlight lay in a broad luminous track right across the bay, from the southern shore to the rocky beach under Helen's feet. The nearer part of the track was broken and stirred, particularly about the edges, by the motion of the waves. From the middle of it stood out the squat triangular Shag Rock, very solid and black.

Helen sat dreamily enjoying it all, watching the occasional signs of life which came to stir the picture. First she saw the short white smoke of a train come out from behind the headland on the right and run along the blue coast-line close by the sea. It disappeared for a time, and then came out again, and circled round in front of her towards Brixham, and stopped. After that two of the black colony on the Shag Rock flew down to the water. They skimmed along the surface for some distance, and

dropped one after another nearly opposite to where Helen was sitting. She watched them diving, and tried to guess where they would come up again, and always failed. Then a small cutter with white sails came across from the direction of Berry Head. She had a good breeze, and was lying over so that the slope of her sails was just the same as the slope of the rocky point. The little vessel stood on until she was within a quarter of a mile or so of the beach ; then she came up into the wind, and her sails shivered in the sunlight, and she went plunging gallantly out to sea. Helen saw the black hull now high out of water, now disappearing in a flash of white foam, as she buried her bowsprit in a wave.

'I wish I was on board,' Helen thought, with a recollection of her young days ; 'but they seem to be getting very wet.'

The white sail went on past the Thatcher, and out to the open sea, until she seemed to be dancing on the shoulder of the great gray rock, and then she was hidden behind it. The shags had flown away now ; but a big white gull, with black tips to its wings, came round the point to the left, and remained for a minute or two high above the water, swinging up and down ; then it dropped and vanished.

After that Helen heard the trot of horses on the road below, between the cliff and the sea, and a carriage went by. As she was looking at it a little girl of seven or eight ran out on to the rocky beach, followed by a small rough-haired dog, and at some distance by a nurse. Helen could hear the child's shrill laughter, and the sharp bark of the dog. 'You dear little scamp,' she said to herself, 'you will get caught if you don't take care ;' and as she spoke a wave came in, and there was a stampede. The dog escaped to a safe place, and turned round barking furiously ; but the child slipped on a bit of rock and nearly fell, and was overtaken. Helen saw the foam come round her little hurrying legs ; and as it went back the nurse swooped down and seized her and dragged her away. 'Poor darling,' Helen thought, 'now you will have a bad time of it.'

A minute later two boys scrambled up the sloping cliff, and stopped not far from where Helen was sitting. She had made acquaintance with them before, but they did not see her. The smaller of them said to the other : 'I say, I bet you can't shy a stone into the water from here.'

'Rot ! I bet you I can.'

'Well, let's see you.'

Helen called out to them, 'Take care, you bad boys. There are some people somewhere just below.'

They turned round, and the elder of them said, 'Hallo, I didn't see you were there.' Then they came up and had a talk with her. They had got a whole holiday, and had been out fishing in the early morning; but it was too rough, and they were not doing anything particular now.

'Well, don't throw stones down there without looking, because you might hurt some one.'

'Yes, I know; it's beastly dangerous,' the elder boy said. 'Thanks awfully for reminding me. I did shy a stone from near here once, and hit an old chap in the road, and there was an awful row.'

'I don't wonder. What happened?'

'Well, there was another chap with him, and he came up after me, and I saw the other old chap sitting down with his hands up to his head, and I got in rather a funk, and thought I'd better cut.'

'Oh, you little coward! Did he catch you?'

'No; but he knew who I was, and he went and sneaked to my father, and my father got in a tremendous wax. He said I'd jolly nearly killed him.'

'I daresay you did, if you hit the poor old gentleman on the head.'

'Yes, I expect I did; but I didn't mean to, a bit; and you can't always tell just where a stone is going to drop when you've shied it, can you?'

'No, I suppose not. The best way is not to shy it unless you're sure there is no one about.'

'Yes, of course. Only old chaps like that get into such rum places sometimes, and they never look out a bit. It's rather bad luck to say it's all our fault for not looking out, when they don't look out themselves. But he was an awful nice old chap all the same. I met him on the road one day, and he knew me, and said something; and I said I was very sorry I hurt him; and he said it didn't matter, and gave me ten bob. So I was rather glad I did it after all. At least, I was awfully sorry I hurt him, of course, because he was such a jolly old chap, but I was glad for myself.'

Helen appreciated the distinction, and said so. After a few more words the boys went off, and there was silence again, but for the sound of the waves on the shore below.

On the hill to the left, above the point, they were harrowing a steep sloping field. The earth was a very rich red, and the

gray horses showed out clearly against it. Beyond was the bright green sea. Helen's eyes passed from one to the other with a keen appreciation of the warm Devonshire colouring, and then her thoughts went wandering far away. In the offing she could see a large steamer going down channel. Was it going out to India? she wondered. Oh, if she could go with it, and have those dear happy Syntia days again. How short they were! She began thinking of that bygone time, and all the quiet pleasantness of her life with her father,—the rides on Sultan, and the cheery evenings at the tennis-ground, and the merry friendly dinners, and the moonlight picnics, and the dances at the Mess, and the happy Sundays. How bright and delightful it was! Suddenly Rex raised his head with a look of attention. Some one was coming along the path.

A few seconds later two gentlemen turned the corner. There was hardly room for them abreast; and the one in front, a tall strongly-built man, was talking over his shoulder to the other. 'Don't believe that cant,' he said in a deep powerful voice; 'no other nation on earth could have done what we have done in India; and we ought to be proud of it, instead of trying to be ashamed. We have established our rule over two hundred and fifty millions of men, thousands of miles away from England, and are ruling them justly and well. It is the biggest thing a nation has ever done.'

The tone and something in the sentiment struck Helen as familiar, and she looked at the speaker and knew him at once. 'Major Russell,' she thought. 'How curious! I suppose he would not remember me.' She was sorry to think it; any one she had met in India seemed like a friend to her. But he did remember. As he came near he looked at her, and she could see the recognition come into his eyes. He lifted his hat doubtfully, and then stopped. As he did so, Helen got up, and he saw he was right. 'Mrs. Langley?' he said. 'I thought I could not be mistaken. Are you living here?'

She told him, and they stood for a minute or two talking. His friend had walked on. Russell said his father and mother had taken a house in Torquay for the winter, and he had some leave and had come to spend it with them. 'I hope you will let my mother come and see you?' he asked.

She had become shy of meeting strangers, but there was something very reassuring about Russell's manner. His dark grave eyes were as soft as a woman's now. He was thinking of

Helen as he had known her in Simla, a happy bride with everything bright before her. Now there was the lonely grave in the Afghan snow, and a sad solitary woman in widow's weeds. His deep voice was tender with pity.

'If his mother is like him I shall not be afraid of her,' Helen thought. She said she would be very glad; and, after asking her address, he shook hands and went off to rejoin his friend.

Helen sat down again, and Rex, who had been standing watchfully by her all the time, put his head in her lap. 'Well, my king,' she said, 'what is it? You will always take great care of me, but you wish I would not talk to strangers? Thank you, dear; but I don't think he would hurt me. I think he is rather like you, big and strong and gentle.'

Gradually her thoughts drifted away again to other days and other scenes. She sat with her hand on Rex's head, gazing out over the sea; but instead of it there rose before her eyes the pine-clad mountains, with their rugged peaks and swirling clouds and glorious sunsets. She felt again the keen breeze from the snowy range, and watched the golden-headed eagles wheeling over the deep blue ravines. At last she sighed and roused herself. How low and smooth and round everything seemed here. The houses were nearly as big as the hills; and the sky-line was so close that you could almost touch it everywhere. There the houses dotted about the precipitous mountain sides looked like carved toy chalets; and you could see the plains fifty miles below you to the southward, and the white peaks cutting into the sky fifty miles away to the north. It was all very beautiful; though it was not England.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE RUSSELLS

NEXT day Mrs. Russell walked over alone, and Helen fell in love with her then and there. She was one of those old ladies who make one feel that age can be really beautiful. Her complexion was almost as perfect as ever, and her eyes as clear as a child's. They were like her son's, large and dark and steady ; but they had a singularly gentle and winning expression. Her thick silver hair was brushed into curls on each side of a smooth broad forehead. Something in her way of speaking and in her upright carriage reminded Helen of Miss Treveryan. It was a very sweet face and manner, and it was the face and manner of a gentlewoman born and bred. Helen felt at once that she could trust Mrs. Russell ; and when they had been ten minutes together they were on the best of terms. The liking was evidently mutual.

Before long Mrs. Russell said something about the difference between Devonshire and Cornwall.

'Do you know Cornwall well ?' Helen asked.

'No, I don't, but my mother's people were Cornish ; and after my husband left the navy we went down to see the county, and he took a fancy to it. Then we happened to see a house to let that just suited us, and so we made up our minds to stay.'

'Do you live there now ?'

'Yes, in the summer. We find it rather wet and rough in winter, so we have come here. We are to be turned out of our house after this year, and I don't know where we shall go then.'

'I come from Cornwall too,' Helen said ; 'I wonder whether I know your part of it.'

'Our house is not far from Falmouth, on the water.'

'I know Falmouth. We did not live very near it, but I have been there to see people when I was a girl. We lived in a place you would not have heard of, I am afraid,—St. Erroc. It's some way down the coast.'

'Oh yes, I have heard of St. Erroc,' Mrs. Russell said. 'One of my aunts married a Treveryan of St. Erroc.'

It was curious. They found out that the Treveryan in question was a grand-uncle of Helen's, her grandfather's only brother who had been drowned many years before while serving in the navy. They agreed that they were very glad indeed, and it helped to draw them together. 'I hope you will let us see something of you now that we have found each other out,' the old lady said as she was going away. 'I am afraid,' she added, with a slight hesitation in her manner, 'it must be a lonely life for you, my dear. Try not to think of me as quite a stranger,' and she looked at Helen for a moment with a tender pity in her eyes, and bent forward and kissed her.

Helen sat thinking over it after she had gone. What a beautiful old face it was; one that could look very firm, she felt sure, but so gentle and good and true. You could trust those eyes without the slightest reserve. How strange it was that they should have met, and how pleasant. Helen knew that she had found another friend that day, not a mere acquaintance.

And Mrs. Russell went away with her heart full of warmth and pity. 'What a sweet-looking girl,' she thought, 'and very young to be left alone in the world. I knew she was a lady directly I saw her. One can always tell. I am glad we are connected.'

For some weeks after that Helen saw the Russells very often. Admiral Russell was there when she first called, and he received her, and made himself perfectly delightful. He was a strong sailor-like old man, not nearly so tall as his son, but powerfully made, and in no way broken. It was a thoroughly green old age. 'Come in,' he said, walking out of the door to meet her, and shaking hands with outspoken admiration in his face. 'I have been longing to see you ever since my wife made your acquaintance. She could talk of nothing but her new cousin when she came back.'

'I am afraid I can hardly claim to be a cousin,' Helen said. 'I wish I could.'

'Oh, we're not going to let you cry off. You will have to

accept us ; Cornish cousins, you know, Cornish cousins.' And cousins they were thenceforward. No one could have been kinder and more cordial than the two old people were. They got Helen to come over to dinner with them when they were alone, and treated her as one of themselves ; and they made her go out driving with them ; and they strolled in to Burnbraes and 'looked her up,' as the Admiral used to say, at all sorts of odd times. At the end of a month, when they began to get ready for their move to Cornwall, Helen felt as if she had known them for years.

She liked Colonel Russell too. He was more reserved in his manner than his father and mother, but he was always courteous and kind. There was just the mixture of strength and gentleness about him which is attractive to a womanly woman. In repose his face was grave, almost stern, and the effect of it was increased by the great size of his frame. One could not help being struck and impressed by the massive head, and the broad chest and shoulders, and the unusual length of limb. The whole man was cast in a heroic mould. He looked as if a coat of mail would have suited him better than nineteenth-century broadcloth. You could imagine him, Helen thought, at Agincourt or Crecy, hewing out a way for the English flag ; or on some battlefield of the Holy Land, smiting and slaying and scattering the enemies of the Cross. And yet children never seemed afraid of him, though men often were.

Helen and he got on very well. Russell was a man who, with all his deep admiration and respect for women, perhaps because of those feelings, was generally silent in women's society. He was wanting in the current coin of conversation, and felt himself at a disadvantage. But with Helen he was at his ease ; she did not want him to flirt or flatter ; and she had read and thought and suffered. He liked her unaffected ways and straightforward speech, and he saw that she really sympathised in his vehement love for his profession and his country. Then her musical tastes were a keen pleasure to him. Though he neither played nor sang himself, he had inherited from his mother a deep feeling for music, and he thoroughly appreciated Helen's playing. After a time his mother succeeded in making her sing again. At first she shrank from it, but she did not like to refuse, and when she had once begun it soon became a real delight. She found that her voice had suffered little from her long neglect of it, and Russell was never tired of listening to her.

Shortly before the Russells left for Cornwall they asked Helen

to come and spend a week or two with them when they had settled down, and she readily agreed. They had made her feel so thoroughly at home that the visit seemed to promise unmixed pleasure ; and she also thought that she might find an opportunity of seeing Laneithin. It would be a sad return ; but she longed to be in St. Erroc again after all these years.

CHAPTER XLVII

MENARVOR

It was a beautiful evening towards the end of April when Helen found herself at the little Cornish station where she had to get out of the train. It had been a pleasant journey. Though she had not travelled much as a girl, she remembered some parts of the scenery ; and when she had left behind the rich red earth and soft rolling lines of Devon, and was in Cornwall again, it all came back to her. How friendly and familiar the country seemed ; the deep valleys with their streams and their close-growing oak woods, and the bare gray hills of the mining districts, and the plain granite houses, and the far-away out-of-the-world look of everything.

Helen knew that the Russells lived some miles from the railway ; but on the platform was the old Admiral looking out for her ; and he got Rex out of his prison, and carried Helen off to a well-appointed phaeton that was waiting in the road, and they drove away together.

The evening was clear and warm, and she thoroughly enjoyed her drive. Around her in all directions the country was blazing with gorse. There were great golden hedges entirely made of it, and it bordered the roads and lay in broad patches of gold wherever there was a piece of waste land. Under the loose untrimmed hedgerows, and upon the grassy banks, the primroses were growing in countless numbers. There were violets too, and their scent mingled with the delicate fragrance of the primroses and the gorse, and made the whole air sweet. The trees perhaps were more backward than in Devonshire. The may was only beginning to thicken, and the oaks still held back ; but the beeches and limes were covered with fresh young green, the light spring green that is even more beautiful than the full glory of

summer. Here and there, standing out boldly from the brightness around it, was the dark mass of a pine clump. And the blackbirds whistled slowly in the branches overhead, and the air was full of life and hope and joy.

It was a long drive, and when they reached Menarvor the darkness was falling; but Helen could see that there was a broad sloping lawn below the house, with some trees at the end, and some water beyond them. 'Is that the sea?' she said.

'Yes. At least it's salt water. The open sea is three or four miles away. I have my boat moored just off the bank there in the summer.'

'How delightful! I long to see it all by daylight.'

Mrs. Russell gave Helen a warm welcome. Colonel Russell was away on business, but hoped to return in a day or two.

It was cool enough by the waterside to make a fire agreeable in the evening, and they sat round it after dinner and chatted. Helen felt strangely happy and at home.

When she went up to her room Pow came to her. The old lady had left the house at Torquay in charge of her sister, and had accompanied Helen as lady's-maid. 'Eh, ma'am,' she said, 'it is a lovely place. Just look out of the window and see.'

Helen laughed at her. 'Why, it's pitch dark, Pow; you can't see anything now.'

'Just look, ma'am,' she said, drawing aside the curtain, and Helen went to the window and looked out. It was very beautiful. From the gravel drive under her feet the lawn sloped gently down to a great Scotch fir, with ivy-covered stem, which stood out dark and clear against the moon. Behind and on both sides of it were some limes and beeches, and the water faintly moved and sparkled through their delicate spring foliage. Here and there the moonlight lay on the sloping grass between the long shadows of the trees, and showed the shrubs which were dotted about it, and darkened by contrast the dark nooks and corners where the lawn ran up to right and left under the pines and chestnuts and holly. Beyond the water Helen could see through the tops of the trees the dim straight line of the hills on the opposite shore.

She woke early next morning, while the room was still dark. Soon afterwards she heard the birds wake. A blackbird first broke the silence with a few low sleepy notes, and then a thrush began, and soon, as the daylight broadened, the whole choir burst into song. She fell asleep again with the sound in her

ears, and when she woke the second time the bright sunlight was showing through the sides and top of the curtains. Helen felt so completely rested, and so full of life, that she could not lie in bed. She got up and dressed, and went out and let Rex loose.

The sky was blue, and a very light easterly breeze just stirred the water and deepened its colour. The air was full of scent. Helen walked down a shady gravel path to the left of the lawn, and found herself by the side of an ivy-covered boat-house, looking out upon a landlocked lake or fiord. Twenty feet below her was the blue water. The tide was almost full, and along the shore to the right, close by, she could see it lapping a line of shelving rock indented by little pebbly bays, and overhung by trees which grew at the top of a precipitous earthen bank. Two or three miles away the masts of some vessels at anchor loomed faintly through the morning mist, and beyond them seemed to be the open sea, which, however, was hidden by a rounded hill with a long projecting point. A flock of gulls were out on the water to the left, some hovering over it, some floating upon its surface. They looked white in the sunlight.

Helen stood by the boat-house for a few minutes, and then went back into the garden. There was a long grassy walk through the trees which overhung the water, and she strolled down it. The birds were singing all round her ; and at her feet, under the bushes that topped the steep bank, and by the mossy roots of the limes and pine trees, the primroses grew in thousands. Among them were violets, and here and there patches of anemones. The brave little celandine had had its day with the March winds and the daffodils, and almost all its burnished golden stars had whitened and disappeared, but a few of them were still to be seen. In a patch of oak wood at the end of the walk, where the hanging boughs touched the sea, the ground was white with anemones, and among them a few blue hyacinths were breaking into flower.

Helen came back through the kitchen garden, and saw the mossy hole of a wren's nest in the wall close by the doorway. A pair of wood-pigeons had built in the big pine at the bottom of the lawn, and there was a blackbird's nest with young birds in it in a thorn bush on the sea-bank, and a thrush sitting upon her eggs in a rhododendron a few yards farther on. The whole of the old-fashioned rambling garden seemed full of birds.

She went back to the house, bearing a great dewy bunch of

primroses, and anemones, and violets. There were so many that they would not be missed. As she reached the porch, with her hands full of flowers and her eyes bright with spring, a tall square-shouldered figure stepped out into the sunlight to meet her. 'Colonel Russell?' she said in surprise. 'When did you come?'

'I got here half an hour ago. I came down by the night mail and walked over from the station. You are out early.'

'I couldn't stay in bed; it was too perfect a morning. How lovely the place is!'

'I see you have been in the sea-walk,' he said, looking at the flowers.

'Yes. Mrs. Russell won't mind my picking them, will she? They are in thousands. I never saw anything like them. I didn't pick anything in the garden.'

Russell smiled at her tone of apology. 'Pick anything you like,' he said; 'I will answer for my mother. But there is nothing so beautiful as the wild flowers.'

'That is just what I feel. I suppose going away to India makes one feel it more strongly. I remember thinking it so odd when my father came home and made me pick him bunches of daisies and buttercups. Now I understand. One can admire orchids and things of that kind, but one loves the English flowers.'

'Yes. There is nothing on earth so fresh and sweet as an English spring, but I think I never fully appreciated it till I had been some years away, "sighing my English breath in foreign clouds."'

'Nor did I. It is the same with everything. I never appreciated that play until lately, or any of Shakespeare. Now he comes home to me as no one else does, because he is English as no one else is.'

'I did not know you cared for Shakespeare. But that is what always strikes me about him. He is so English, and so proud of being English. You can see that he really loved his country, the "little body with the mighty heart."'

'Yes; how he would have rejoiced if he could have known that we should spread all over the world. And can't you imagine his contempt for the cant and sentimentalism of the philosophic radical, the Perish India school, who would let our empire go to pieces?'

Russell was looking out through the trees on to the blue water. 'That school enrages me,' he said, 'as nothing else does; it is

the embodiment of the detestable bourgeois spirit. They like to stay by their firesides and eat buttered toast and criticise others. I wish one could drive them all out to India and America and Australia and Africa, and make them work in building up the empire, and feel, and understand. What would England have been if all Englishmen had been like them? A tenth-rate power or a dependency of France.'

They had to go in to get ready for breakfast, and the conversation dropped; but more than once they recurred to something of the kind, and they found themselves very much in accord. With both of them the love of their country was a living force.

Helen stayed on with the Russells for some weeks. The primroses were dying away, though you could find them still in the wood with the anemones, and in the mossy nooks where the lawn ran up among the trees. The banks and woods and orchards were blue with hyacinths. A great bed of lilies of the valley burst into blossom, and for a time the house was filled with their silver bells and glistening leaves. The gorse was going with the primroses; here and there a little new bright blossom was to be seen on the bushes, but in most places the gold was turning to brown. The paler yellow of the broom was beginning to appear where the gorse had blazed. The swallows were skimming over the edges of the blue water, and the earth began to quiver in the sun, and the air was full of the hum of insects. The chestnut blossoms were coming out, and the pink may, and the lilac; the limes and beeches and sycamores were thickening fast, and even the oaks were green. Once or twice Helen said something about going; but the old people would not hear of her leaving them until June, when they were going away themselves on a visit. So she stayed on and saw the lilies die away, and the hyacinths grow few, and the columbine cover the sloping orchard where primroses and violets and hyacinths had been.

In the meantime she had found pleasure on the water as well as on shore. On the first of May the Admiral announced that his boat was ready, and suggested a sail in the afternoon. Helen accepted the proposal very gladly; the sight of the sea, and of the fishing-boats which passed and repassed before her eyes, had filled her with longing.

When they were at lunch the old gentleman, who was sitting with his face to the window, said, 'There she comes. There is the *Swallow*. Doesn't she look beautiful?'

Helen looked out and saw a little cutter tearing along with all

sail set towards the landing-place ; her canvas shone very white in the sunlight against the blue water, and she certainly did look as pretty as only a cutter can. She came on until it seemed as if she were going to bury her bowsprit in the bank under the Scotch fir ; then her helm went down, and she swept gracefully round to her moorings, and lay still, with her white canvas showing through the trees.

They finished their lunch, and went to get ready. Helen was impatient, and was out first. She was standing on the gravel by the hall door when a young sailor came up and saluted her, with a cheery smile and a nervous shrug of the shoulders. He was a short, strongly-built man of five-and-twenty, with brown hair and a reddish moustache, and cheeks like cherries. His blue jersey and red cap set off his bright complexion. He had a blade of grass in his mouth, and walked with his feet rather wide apart. 'Morning, miss,' he said ; 'you don't remind me,' and his red cheeks got redder, and he fidgeted a little.

Helen looked at him hard for a moment, and it came back to her with a rush. 'Not Dick?' she said ; 'Dick Tregenza? Oh, I *am* glad to see you ;' and Henry Russell came out to find his mother's guest shaking hands cordially with one of his father's boatmen. They had a few minutes' talk together, and Russell was completely 'out of it.'

'How is your father? Is he here?'

'Dead and buried, miss,—dead and buried. He died four or five years ago.'

'Dead? Oh, I hoped I might have seen him again.'

'Yes, miss ; he used often to talk of you. He died very sudden. He was getting old, ye see, and it was a very cold winter, and the cold struck him like.'

'I am so sorry. I wish I had seen him again.'

'And how is your brother Will?' she asked, after a time.

'He's gone too, miss.'

'Not dead?'

'Yes, miss ; he was lost at sea two years ago, aboard the *Susan* of Fowey. She was a smart craft too,—we did reckon she was the fastest schooner in the Channel—but she went down with all hands. It was very wild weather, and they do say her bulwarks was too high ; she got a lump o' watter aboard, and couldn't shake it off. That was a bad job, that was,—a bad *wish't* job.'

'Poor Will! Then you're alone now?'

'Yes, miss. I'm in charge of the Admiral's flagship,' he said, with a smile and a blush.

'Fancy you in charge of anything! *What* a naughty little boy you used to be.'

'So I have heered say, miss.'

'Are you really captain of the *Swallow*?'

'Yes, miss; captain and half the crew.'

'I shall tell the Admiral about you; I don't think it's safe.'

Tregenza laughed. 'Don't you, miss? I don't think there is much the matter with me; I reckon I can sail a boat as well as most.' He was quite right. He could not have taken charge of a cruising yacht, but, trained from childhood to a fisherman's life, he was just the man for a small craft like the *Swallow*. There was no smarter boat-sailor on the Cornish coast than Dick Tregenza. Always cool and plucky and good-tempered, and always keen, and as active as a kitten, he handled the little cutter as well as she could be handled.

The Admiral came out, and Helen soon found herself on board a pretty little vessel of about ten tons. She was intended chiefly for day work, and had a good-sized well aft, fitted to accommodate six or eight people; but there was also a very fair amount of room below. As they rowed alongside, Helen had time to admire the *Swallow's* graceful lines, and to wonder a little at the amount of sail she carried.

'There,' the old man said when Helen stepped on board; 'now what do you think of her?'

Helen duly and honestly expressed her admiration. Then she said, 'What a big mainsail; isn't it bigger than usual?'

'Well done, my dear; I see you're quite a sailor. It is big, —I'm not sure it isn't a little too big—but look at her beam. She is not built like a cigar, as yachts are nowadays.' She was not indeed. Her beam was much more than a quarter of her length; it gave her more room below, and enabled her to carry a lot of sail, and made her a fast boat for her size, as well as a remarkably good sea-boat.¹

'I see,' Helen said, rather doubtfully.

'Now, my dear, as you're such a sailor, do you think you could take her out to sea?'

'Yes, I think so.'

¹ A few years ago, before the alteration of the measurement rules, a yacht of such dimensions was a curiosity. Happily we are more sensible now.

‘Do you mean it really? Have you ever done it before?’

Helen laughed. ‘Oh yes, when I was a girl. I think I can do it if there are no rocks or sand-banks in the way.’

‘No. It’s all right, isn’t it, Tregenza? There is plenty of water now.’

‘Oh yes, sir, plenty o’ watter for we.’

‘Very well, Mrs. Langley; now, let us see what you can do. It’s her first cruise this year; you’ll bring us luck.’

Helen took the helm, and the old man looked on with an expression of amused expectation in his face. It very speedily gave place to one of surprise, and then to one of keen pleasure. He saw Helen settle down to her work with coolness and evident enjoyment. She got some way on the boat, and then sent her along, keeping her just a good full. There was a nice breeze from the south-east, and with her topsail set the *Swallow* fairly raced, lying over until the water spirted through the scuppers, and at times the rail went under. Helen was as happy as a girl, and the old gentleman was delighted. ‘You’re sure you don’t mind it?’ he said, as he saw the water washing along the little deck. ‘It’s quite safe, you know; it would take a good deal to upset her.’ Helen laughed merrily. ‘I think it’s perfectly delicious; I have not enjoyed anything so much for years;’ and she looked as if she enjoyed it, with the fresh colour in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling.

They went racing out southward towards the open sea. To east and west were the rocky shores of the inlet, with trees and fields coming down to the rocks. And as the little *Swallow* tore through the blue water, the dark woods and green fields and sharp point of Penarrow seemed to be falling slowly back, and Pendennis, with its gray tower and gorse-covered sides, came creeping out ahead of them. They flew past the tall side of the *Ganges* training-ship, whose white ensign was fluttering gaily in the breeze, and across the broad mouth of the inner harbour. They left to the westward the rounded fields of Trefusis, and Falmouth clustering on its hills, and the docks and the steamers. They ran close under the ornamented stern of a big Norwegian timber-barque, and across the bows of a queer-looking green vessel which Tregenza pronounced to be ‘Eye-talian,’ and through the midst of a score of other craft of all rigs and nationalities; and then they were between the gray castles of Pendennis and St. Mawes, and on one bow was the white lighthouse at the point of the wooded hill, and on the other the blue Manacles, miles away.

creeping out beyond Pendennis, and right ahead of them the tall beacon on the Black Rock, and the open sea.

'I remember it all now,' Helen said ; 'I remember running in under Pendennis, and being very glad indeed to get in, once when we were caught in a westerly gale.'

'I think you had better keep inside the lighthouse now ; with this easterly wind there is sure to be some sea. You can make it out now.' It did look a little rough beyond the Black Rock ; the waves showed against the sky-line, and were flashing white. 'Do you mind going out ?' she said ; 'I should like to feel what it is like again.'

'I don't mind in the least if you like to go out, but we may get wet.'

'It won't hurt me ; I have nothing on that will spoil.'

'Very well, my dear ; fire away.'

So Helen kept the little *Swallow* heading for the open sea, and soon, as they got out of shelter of the light-house point, her bowsprit began to swing up to the great green waves, and to plunge into the trough beyond, and occasionally a little water came over her bow and went pouring along the deck. Occasionally, too, there was a sharp flap of a wave against her side, and a shower of spray flew over her. The sun was bright, and the wind not too strong ; it was a perfect sailing day.

They went out until they saw the straight blue point of the Dodman to the east, and beyond it the dim line of the coast by Fowey and Looe. To westward were Falmouth Bay and the Manacles, and at last the Black Head opened out.

'My old home lies away down there,' Helen said ; 'with this breeze we could be in St. Erroc in a very few hours.'

'We will go some day if you like ; now I really think we ought to go about, or we shall not get in before dark.'

'The wind have flied round a bit to the south'ard,' Tregenza said.

Going home was not quite so enjoyable, the long lift and slide of the following waves instead of the plunge and shock. It was difficult to keep the *Swallow's* head straight ; still it was very pleasant. When they got home, after sunset, Helen's cheeks were tingling with spray and wind, and she felt as if she were a girl again. And the birds received them with a jubilant even-song as they walked up under the trees from the little stone pier at the landing-place. It had been a delightful afternoon.

After this Helen often went out with the old gentleman. Some-

times Henry Russell came too ; but Mrs. Russell was not fond of the water, and he generally stayed with her and walked or drove. Nevertheless he and Helen saw one another constantly, and under favourable conditions ; both were at their ease and perfectly natural. He had always admired her, and he now found himself strongly attracted by her straightforward, unaffected ways. She was perhaps a little afraid of him, for though his manner to her was gentle, he was very uncompromising in his views, and at times he seemed rather cold and reserved ; still she liked him, and learned to look up to him. He was a very earnest soldier, and a clever well-read man. Before long Helen began really to value his good opinion.

She remained until May had gone and June was well in. All the spring flowers were over now, but the fields were ablaze with buttercups and ox-eyed daisies ; and the tall red foxglove and the little bird's-foot lined the sides of the lanes, and in the big loose hedges there was the delicate pink of the wild rose, and the bryony was twisting over everything,—over the uncurling bracken, and over the nut bushes, and even over the tall grass stems. The white and the pink may were in full bloom, and the chestnuts. When they went out to sea they saw the fields about Penarrow Point, all yellow with charlock. It was an evil weed no doubt, but it was very pretty.

Before June was half over Henry Russell knew that Helen had grown very dear to him. He kept the knowledge to himself with characteristic self-restraint. He was perhaps oftener with her than he used to be, but his manner was certainly no warmer than before. They strolled about the garden together at times, or sat and talked in the drawing-room window on wet afternoons, when the south wind brought up a 'skew' from the sea, and all the landscape was blurred ; but they talked about nothing like love. Russell felt that she was not prepared for that, and he was too proud a man to risk a rebuff. She never for a moment suspected that he cared for her. He seemed perfectly indifferent as to her movements. He was always polite and ready to talk to her as his mother's guest, but it seemed to her that he did not care a straw whether she were present or absent ; and sometimes she fancied that he looked down upon her and her opinions. She saw, or imagined she saw, disapproval in his face, and it hurt her. The only thing that really seemed to please him was her singing. He never pressed her to sing if she showed the slightest sign of disinclination ; but he was evidently fond of

music. After a time she had got into the way of singing in the evening almost as a matter of course. The Admiral invariably went to sleep, but both Mrs. Russell and her son enjoyed it heartily, and at times he surprised her with the warmth of his thanks. Otherwise he seemed cold and careless.

The fact was, that Henry Russell was very much in love, and that it made him less easy and pleasant than he used to be. So long as he looked upon Helen only with pity he was gentle and tender and free from self-consciousness, as he would have been with a child. Directly he knew that he loved her, he shrank into himself, and became altogether different in his manner,—natural still at times, but at times cold and proud and reserved.

Meanwhile they had never succeeded in getting to St. Erroc. Two or three times they arranged to start next morning, but something always happened. The first morning they got up to find that the wind had gone round to the south during the night, and it was raining,—a soft persistent rain. This would have spoilt the expedition, so they gave it up. The next time they went slowly out to the lighthouse with a very light northerly breeze; and then the breeze died away, and they were drifting about in a flat calm till it was too late to go on. The third time it was blowing a gale from the south-west. The windows had begun to rattle during the night and the vane on the roof to groan, and when day broke the clouds were flying overhead and the trees were waving wildly. In the harbour the water was feather-white, and outside, Tregenza informed them, the sea would be 'running like a cliff.' It was very bad luck. 'Never mind, we will do it when you come back,' Mrs. Russell said. They had insisted on her promising to come back later in the year, and she had promised.

CHAPTER XLVIII

ST. ERROC

It was dreary work returning to Torquay after those pleasant weeks. The little house looked very small and hot and confined. There was no freedom ; nothing but 'villa residences' in all directions, and a crowd, and loneliness. Helen's heart was sad as she re-entered her rooms. She tried hard to be cheerful nevertheless. After all, she had her books and her music ; and there were the children, who came running about her when she appeared again. Their faces of unfeigned pleasure did her good. And in spite of villas there was always the sea.

Man marks the earth with ruin ; his control
Stops with the shore.

Still it was lonely, very lonely. Helen settled down to it again, but it did seem an aimless, useless life. 'I wonder why I am made to go on living,' she said to herself one day as she sat in her old seat, looking out towards Berry Head ; 'I do no good to any one. I don't want to live. I have nothing to live for,—nothing before me—no hope except the hope of a happier life hereafter. I suppose that is the meaning of it all,—to make one realise and long for another life. Well, I must try to be content.'

But the heavy summer air made her weary and languid in spite of her resolves. She thought of Cornwall, with its open sea and fresh country, and at times the anticipation of another visit to the Russells gave her pleasure ; but after all what was the good of it ? It only made her life seem all the darker and sadder when she came back. It was lonely, very lonely. At times she could not read, and even her music failed to bring her comfort. The fact was, though she did not know it, that the desire for action

and happiness had come back to her. She was less satisfied to lie still than she had been in the time of her prostration. She was not old enough yet to have learnt the final lesson, to have found the content which comes from resignation to the inevitable, from a proud acceptance of failure, of defeat in the battle of life. 'No,' she said, 'I cannot bear it any longer. I must do something. When I come back from Cornwall I will find work. I am quite strong enough for nursing now. I cannot go on like this.'

She thought over the idea very often during the hot summer months, and made inquiries. It was a rough life apparently, but she cared nothing for that. Power was horrified. A Treveryan to become a hospital nurse! Miss Helen, with her dainty ways and her beautiful face and her white hands, to live in a ghastly sick ward, in daily contact with disease and death! 'Oh no, ma'am, don't talk of it,' she said; 'that kind of work is not fit for you. It is very good for people like Mrs. Pratt, who came when Mr. Roland was ill. It is no work for you.'

'Do you think so, Pow? Which do you suppose he liked best to have about him?'

'Oh, he was so fond of you, ma'am; and besides he was a gentleman. You would be nursing all sorts of rough people,—common soldiers very likely.'

'Common soldiers, Pow?—the men who give their lives for us all over the world! Aren't they worth a little care and gentleness?'

Pow shook her white head. 'Oh, ma'am, you don't understand.'

'Yes, Pow, I do understand. You're a dear old thing, and you think I ought to be rich and happy and idle, and never do anything for anybody, and have everybody do everything for me; but I don't agree with you, and I am going to work if I can get work.'

Pow was not convinced, but she said no more; she only thought in her faithful old heart, 'Oh, I wish she would take a liking to that nice gentleman down in Cornwall.' Pow was a matchmaker like other women.

Helen walked out to the beach with Rex, and sat down. She read for a time, and then unconsciously she put her book on her lap, and began thinking of her future work again, and of what Power had said. She was roused from her day-dream by the
of voices, and looked up to see a small fair-haired girl talk-

ing to Rex, while a nurse stood some distance off calling to her in a voice of alarm. 'Come away,' she said, 'come away directly. He'll bite you.'

Helen recognised the child she had seen caught by the wave that day in the spring. The little Yorkshire terrier that was always with her was now walking round Rex with its legs very stiff, growling savagely. Helen called out, 'Don't be frightened, he is very gentle,' and walked quickly up to the group. But the child was not frightened in the least. She was stroking Rex's head with her tiny hand, and evidently quite happy. 'What's his name?' she said, as Helen came up.

'Rex. He is quite good, and won't hurt you. He used to be very fond of a little girl like you, and I daresay he thought he had found her again.'

'I'm not afraid of him. I think it's very silly to be afraid of dogs. Paw, Rex.'

Rex sat down and tendered his big paw, and she took it and kissed it. 'Oh, you darling,' she said; 'fancy being afraid of you!'

After that Helen and the child became great friends, and even Jack the terrier grew reconciled to the big rival who never oppressed him. They used often to meet, and walk together. Helen found that Ethel was the daughter of a rich widow, whose health was too delicate to stand children. She managed to go out a good deal nevertheless, but the girl was educated by a daily governess, and lived with her nurse. How strange it seemed. One child, and a dear brave little mite, who might well have been a mother's idol. 'If she were only mine,' Helen thought, 'how happy I could be! Why are these things?' Even as it was she found some happiness in it. The child grew fond of her, and they helped one another to feel less lonely. When Helen went away again she left behind her one little heart that had been touched and softened by love and gentleness. One can generally find some good to do without putting on a nurse's habit.

August was nearly over when Helen arrived for the second time at Menarvor. It was a sunny warm day, and the journey down had been pleasant enough; but summer was on the wane, and to any one who does not live for hunting or shooting there is always something melancholy in the approach of autumn. It is beautiful, but there is sadness in its beauty.

As Helen drove away with the Admiral, who had come for her again, she could not feel quite as bright as the first time she had

passed along that road four months earlier. It was no longer spring. The golden glory of the gorse had vanished, and there were few flowers about the hedgerows. The foxglove blossom had climbed to the top of the long stalk and disappeared, except here and there on the side shoots. There was some honeysuckle and clematis; and the great banks among the pine woods were covered with heath and heather and dwarf gorse. There was some blackberry blossom too, mixed with fruit in all stages, from green to black. But the bryony had turned, and the bracken was turning fast; and the fields that had been green were full of the dull pale yellow of harvest; and the trees, though they were green still, were a heavy green; the brightness had gone out of them. Not a bird was singing. Yet it was pleasant getting back, and Helen talked away cheerily enough as they drove on. When they reached Menarvor they found Mrs. Russell and her son together in the garden; and Helen's welcome was warmer than ever, and there was a delightful sense of being at home again. There was the little *Swallow* lying at her moorings; you could just see her bows and bowsprit through a gap in the trees.

It was an unusually warm evening for Cornwall, and after dinner they went and sat outside on the terrace under the stars. After a time a boat floated past in the darkness below, with some people in her singing. They sang well, and their voices came sweetly across the water. At times there mingled with them the sound of the oars in the rowlocks, as the men rowed a few lazy strokes and rested again. They finished a part-song, and then they struck up a hymn, after the Cornish fashion; and the little party on the terrace above heard the voices and the sound of the oars grow fainter and fainter until all was still again.

Helen was the first to break the silence. 'It reminds one of the *Tempest*. "The music crept by me upon the waters."'

'I think it is a hint to you, Mrs. Langley,' Colonel Russell said.

The Admiral broke in. 'What a selfish fellow you are! She is dead tired. Let her sit still and enjoy her first evening in peace.'

'I'm not tired a bit. I will sing with pleasure. No, you are not to come in, Colonel Russell. I can manage for myself.'

She went up to her room and got out some music, and sang them song after song as they sat by the open window. The Admiral dropped off to sleep as the sweet unstrained voice welled out upon the summer night; but the mother and son sat

listening silently. Under the cover of the darkness his strong face was stirred with emotion, and his dark eyes glistened. There was something in her voice that always affected him deeply. A few voices have that peculiar tone which goes straight to one's heart. Once or twice his mother heard him draw his breath with a sharp sound, almost of pain; but she knew, and said nothing. At last Helen closed the piano and came out. Russell got up with a sigh. 'Thank you,' he said. 'It was a shame to let you go on so long, but it is such an intense pleasure.' The Admiral woke as the music stopped, and shook himself up, and thanked her also; and Mrs. Russell said, 'My dear, your singing does me more good than anything I know.'

Helen woke very early the next morning. She remembered her waking four months ago, and was struck by the contrast. The birds were not singing now, and the morning broke quite silently. She would never again see one of those exquisite spring mornings at Menarvor.

When she had been in Cornwall a week or so, they succeeded at last in carrying out their long-deferred expedition to St. Erroc. It was lovely September weather, and the day before they started had been so beautiful that in the evening Mrs. Russell announced her intention of going too. 'I have always wanted to see St. Erroc,' she said. 'Now I have a double interest in it. If it looks really fine to-morrow, and if the wind is still off shore, I shall go.'

The Admiral was delighted.

'But it is some way from the coast,' Helen said, 'and we shall have to walk.'

'Never mind: I can walk two or three miles as well as any of you, and I want to go. Not that we shall ever get there, in all probability. We never get anywhere when I go. We shall sail a great many miles in every direction but the right one, and end by spending the night at sea in a calm, with steamers rushing about all round us, blowing fog-horns. But I don't care, I will try again.'

The morning was perfect, an ideal September day. The sun was shining brightly, and the few light clouds in the sky were drifting slowly overhead out to sea. The breeze was just what they wanted. It would be a regular soldier's wind both ways, and the water would be smooth. Nothing could be better.

All was ready by half-past seven, and when Mrs. Russell stepped on board the *Swallow* her eyes and her cheeks were as

bright as a girl's. 'Now, Tregenza,' she said, 'this is the last time. If you don't take me straight to St. Erroc and back without disturbing me directly I am comfortable, and swinging that great dangerous boom over my head every five minutes, I shall never come on board again.'

'All right, ma'am ; she'll go along as stiff as a church to-day. You won't know you're not to home.'

They ran merrily out to Pendennis, Helen steering, and then the Manacles Point came out nearly ahead of them, and with a nice light breeze they went skimming over the blue waters of the bay.

'Now,' the old Admiral said triumphantly, 'can anything beat this? Isn't it better than any steamer?'

'Nothing could be more charming. If it were always like this I should not mind how often I went with you. But I don't trust it, James.'

In an hour they were running through the jagged rocks that have gored so many good ships' sides. The bell on the Manacles buoy was inaudible. There was no sea to set it swinging, and they were a long way to windward of it. Then the breeze began to drop, and the *Swallow* moved more and more slowly through the water, and before long they were drifting upon a glassy summer sea. Astern of them lay the dark blue line of the breeze that had brought them out, and away in the offing a white-winged ship was making her way down channel. She looked beautiful with all her sails set, and was evidently moving. But the *Swallow* had not a breath of wind. She lay with her mainsail swinging just enough to lift the reef points, which were dry and loose, and make them drop with a soft sleepy rattle upon the canvas.

'I thought so,' Mrs. Russell said. 'Now, James, what have you got to say? Do you think a sailing boat is a good way of getting about? I suppose we shall be here for days.'

The Admiral laughed. 'Yes, you've got me again,' he said. 'I believe you are a witch. They've got a nice breeze out there too.'

'It's all right, ma'am,' Tregenza said with his cheery smile. 'There's a bit of a draft coming off now.'

'Yes ; here it comes,' Helen said, 'quite a hurricane. We shall be tearing along soon, rail under.'

'Then you will have to put me on shore, my dear. I decline to be dragged along rail under. You promised to take me quietly

to St. Erroc and back, and if you don't I shall never trust you again.'

The breeze duly came. It was very light, but enough to quiet the reef points and make the little *Swallow* slip through the water again, with a gentle tinkling of the wavelets against her sides. A light cloud drifted over the sun. Mrs. Russell expressed herself satisfied, and went on with her book.

'This is delicious,' Colonel Russell said; he had stretched his long limbs upon the deck, and was leaning on his elbow, basking in the muffled sunlight,—'this is delicious. I am a fair-weather sailor, like my mother.'

Helen looked at his face and doubted. It was not a fair-weather face. She could imagine him steering a Long Serpent down from the northern seas. 'I believe you care more for the sea than you pretend to do,' she said.

'I love the sea, but I love it best when it is just as it is now.' He was in a lazy mood that morning.

'My dear boy,' Mrs. Russell interrupted, 'don't be deceived into saying you love the sea just because it is smooth and pretty to-day. It is a horrible treacherous monster. One of the few really good things that old bear Dr. Johnson ever said was what he said about being at sea,—that it was worse than being in jail, because there was all the unpleasantness of a jail and danger besides.'

Helen demurred. 'Johnson was a cockney, and incapable of appreciating the sea or the country. He deserved to go to jail for saying so.'

Russell raised himself on his hand. 'Mrs. Langley, I wonder at you. Mother, if you call Dr. Johnson names I shall get up a mutiny and put you both under hatches, and carry this vessel out to the Azores.'

'I will risk it, Colonel Russell. I think he was an old bear too, and I think you are very ungrateful. I was trying to help you.'

'Gratitude ought not to make us acquiesce in wrong. I am grateful to you, but I cannot permit you to be irreverent to Samuel Johnson. Have you ever read Boswell?'

'What a question! Yes; and I think Dr. Johnson was a particularly disagreeable old man, overbearing and unpleasant in his ways, and rude, and altogether objectionable.'

Russell listened until Helen had ended her indictment, and then he began in his rather ponderous way. He never would

stand by and hear evil spoken of men he respected, even in fun. 'Now, Mrs. Langley, if you have any remains of good feeling in you,' he said, 'I am going to cover you with shame and remorse. I admit that he was not as particular as he should have been about his cuffs and collars; and that he used to eat and drink more heartily than was altogether nice, and that he was not always polite in his conversation. But think of the other side. To me he seems a singularly typical Englishman.'

'My dear boy, you appal me.'

'But, mother, think of it. Think how pluckily he bore up against lifelong illness and poverty and melancholy. And was there ever any one more generous and unselfish? How many men would pick up a poor sick woman in the street and carry her to their homes and look after her? How many men would fill their houses with broken-down old people, and bear all their peevishness without a word? If he was rude at times, he was magnificently independent. It was not the vulgar insolence of wealth or rank, but the impatience of a strong masterful nature to whom a fool or a scoundrel was disgusting. And he was so sensible. At almost every page of Boswell you find him saying something that strikes you at once as going straight to the point without sentimentality or cant. He does not rave against cant like Carlyle, but he has far less of it than Carlyle himself. Then look at his vehement patriotism and his honesty and courage. He never conceals his fear and horror of death, and yet when death comes he faces it calmly and bravely. Do you remember how he even refused all opiates at the last, though he was in great suffering, because he would not die with a clouded brain? In all little ways too he was so English,—in his love of animals, and his physical pluck, and even in his prejudices, his readiness to believe evil of Englishmen abroad, and his contempt for foreigners and for Irishmen, and his abuse of Scotchmen. And some of his nearest friends were Scotch and Irish. That was so English, to dislike the national character, and yet like and be good to the individual. Take him all round, surely you can forgive him his faults. He was a fine hot-tempered placable Englishman, full of courage and generosity, never hard on a man who was down, and with a steady Anglo-Saxon brain. Be just, and confess you were wrong.'

Helen and Mrs. Russell were silent for a few seconds. Then Mrs. Russell said: 'My dear boy, that is a very good lecture, but I don't agree with you. No doubt he had brains, and

courage, and kindness of a sort, but he was not a gentleman. I should not have liked him if I had lived a hundred years ago, and I don't feel called upon to like him now. He was not a gentleman.'

Helen felt the truth in Russell's words, and she liked to hear him speak up for a friend; but she had now got on another line of thought. 'Don't you think,' she said, 'that is a very foolish prejudice against the Irish and Scotch? It seems to me so narrow and wrong.'

'I have often thought about that and tried to work it out, because I am conscious of having the prejudice myself. I don't think it is all wrong.'

'Don't you?'

'No, I don't. I think that in so far as it is founded upon distrust of the Celtic character, it is perfectly right. The Celt is an altogether inferior creature to the Anglo-Saxon,—an undisciplined, untrustworthy creature—and it is right to recognise that.'

'Surely you don't call the Scotchman an undisciplined, untrustworthy creature?'

'No, I don't; but I think that is just the difference. The Scotch are largely of our own race,—Saxons. Any real dislike to them would be foolish, and I don't think it exists, or existed with Johnson. Of course there are old recollections of enmity, and little differences of dialect and character. We think them vain and argumentative and over-canny; and they think us not altogether perfect in other ways. But at bottom we respect and like each other, as we ought to do. There is nothing finer in the world than a real Scotch gentleman, and the whole Scotch character is sound and strong.'

'But how about the Celtic Highlander?'

'Well, I believe that where he is really a Celt, not a Dane or Norwegian, he is still a poorish creature.'

'That shocks all my notions. Surely the Highlanders have shown splendid loyalty and courage?'

'That is a long story, and I suppose they have their virtues. But it seems to me that they were always wild and unsteady. The Saxon was throughout the stronger and better man, or he would not have taken the Lowlands.'

'But look at our Highland regiments.'

'Our Highland regiments are in no way better than our English regiments. There has been a great deal of sentiment

and nonsense talked about the Highlanders since Scott's time, and the dress is showy, which goes a long way. Besides, the Highland regiments, if I mistake not, are merely Scotch regiments. A man is not a Highland Celt because he is dressed up in a kilt and says "ken" and "bonny" and "bairn," as Shakespeare did. That is English, or used to be. It isn't Gaelic.'

'I don't know enough about it to argue with you, but you are attacking some of my most cherished ideas. I always had Flora Macdonald and her countrymen held up to me as a type of all that was noble and chivalrous.'

'Flora Macdonald was a plucky little woman, no doubt; but I do not see that her countrymen were particularly admirable. However, I am not concerned to fight against the Scotch Highlanders, who, I believe, are largely Danish and Norwegian, and moreover are few in numbers. Ireland is the place where you have the unmitigated Celt, and there I think he is unpleasant, not to say contemptible.'

'Surely you can't call the northern Irish contemptible; and the army is full of Irish. Haven't they always been fine soldiers?'

'It depends upon what you mean by the word Irish; many of what we call Irish are Englishmen or Scotchmen settled in Ireland. I always think they are apt to be touched with Celtic untruthfulness, but of course they are good stuff; and even the Celt fights when led by Englishmen. But take what the Irish "patriot" calls the Irish nation,—that is to say, the Irish Celts who hate England—when did they ever really fight well on their own account? When were they ever anything but a set of wild, undisciplined savages, without cohesion or self-control, "rough, rug-headed kernes," whom anything like their own number of English could drive like deer?'

Russell was speaking earnestly now. Womanlike, Helen disengaged and broke away.

'Don't you think their being Catholics has made us very unfair to them?'

'Perhaps it has; but there again I think the prejudice is in a sense right. I don't believe I am a bigot, but the old English feeling of "No Popery" seems to me quite sound. We will not be priest-ridden ourselves, and we will not trust a priest-ridden people. The essence of Roman policy is priestly interference in temporal affairs.'

But that is no reason for being unjust, and depriving a

Catholic people of their rights in favour of a small Protestant minority ?'

'I daresay we were unjust in old days ; intolerance was universal, and I don't suppose we were free from it. I certainly would not uphold any injustice now, if there still exists any ; but that has nothing to do with the Celtic character.'

'Every one who knows the Irish says they are warm-hearted. If we do them justice they will be content and grateful.'

'Perhaps ; personally I don't think so. I would do them justice for our own sake ; it is not worthy of England to be unjust. But I would expect nothing in return. The Celt will remain a Celt, and will continue to hate the superior race, because it is superior. My belief is that Catholic Ireland is the cross which England has been given to bear, and we must not hope to get rid of it. We must do justice, and we must hit hard, harder than we have ever done, when there is treason and disloyalty, as there will be. I believe want of hard hitting has done at least as much harm as injustice. Spare the rod and spoil the Celt, who is only a child.'

The old Admiral had not spoken since the discussion began ; he interfered now : 'I daresay you're right, Hal, but I should be sorry to think it ; some of the finest fellows I have known have been Irishmen.'

'I don't doubt it, father. I have known some fine Irishmen too, apparently real Irish ; of course everything is comparative. Besides,' he continued with a laugh, 'you can't mix with Englishmen, and read English books, and try to talk English for generations, without gaining something from it.'

'Colonel Russell, I want to ask you one thing. How does your theory hold in Wales and here ? Why are not the Welsh and Cornish everything that is evil ?'

'Oh dear, this is hard ; I thought it would come. Well, I think the Welsh are not by nature quite as strong and steady as Englishmen proper, but they were not cut off from England by a sea. They were a small population in the same island, and came more thoroughly under English rule and influence ; and climate, and afterwards Protestantism, had some effect upon their character. But even now I think they have some Celtic characteristics.'

'What ?'

'They seem to me more excitable than Englishmen proper, and more prone to extremes in religion and politics, and more conceited. I am not sure that they have as much sense of fair

play. There is a distinct type about Shakespeare's Welshmen,—Fluellen, and Owen Glendower, and Parsons Evans—and it seems to me the type is not extinct.'

'Go on, Colonel Russell, don't spare us.'

'No, I shall not go on any more. But if you speak to the excellent old gardener at Menarvor he will talk to you about "pays" and "banes." There is the Celtic blood cropping out. If a man says "pays" and "banes" it is obvious that he is capable of shooting you from behind a hedge.'

'Poor old man, he is so good. He has been there all his life, and loves every bush on the place, and works day and night.'

'Yes, I know; but he says "pays" and "banes." He makes fritters of the Queen's English, like Parson Evans. Now I will not talk any more; it is not fair to make me defend my theories like this. What I mean is, that the solid steady part of Great Britain is the Anglo-Saxon part, including the Saxon Scotch. The Celtic fringes are not as good material, though they have been improved by Anglo-Saxon rule and influence. And in Ireland, where that influence has not been so strongly exerted, the Celt is still a very inferior creature indeed. And Englishmen, with their excessive generosity, have attributed to the Celt, whom they have conquered, all sorts of picturesque and attractive qualities which chiefly exist in the English imagination.'

'I see. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon is the salt of the earth, and any one who does not think so is detestable.'

'Certainly. If the whole world were Anglo-Saxon it would be immeasurably improved. Come, you don't doubt that yourself?'

'No, I suppose I don't. Still, I like the Cornishman, and even the unspeakable Irishman; and I believe if we like him he will in time get to like us. At all events, we ought to try. He never can like us if we despise him.'

'You are quite right, dear,' Mrs. Russell said. 'You are too hard, Hal.'

Colonel Russell was silent; he was thinking over what Helen had said.

Then they had another calm, and as they were opposite a pretty bit of the coast, Mrs. Russell persuaded him to make a sketch. He roused himself and did so, and Helen looked up at times and saw with surprise how the work grew under his big, shapely hand. Directly he began to do anything he threw his whole heart into it, and now his face was as grave and earnest as if he had been sketching for his life. He knew that a breath of

wind would interrupt him, and he worked fast, with a big brush. It was the style that suited him best. 'There,' he said, after half an hour's work, 'that is all I can do. There is another breeze coming,' and he handed over his pad to his mother.

'Very good,' she said; 'but I think it wants something to give it life.' She passed it over to Helen.

'I think it would be perfect if the *Swallow* were in it, or better still, that fishing-boat out to seaward. That would just supply the bit of colour it wants, I think; but I know nothing about painting.'

Mrs. Russell looked out at the boat. It was a small lobster-boat with a tan-red lug-sail. 'Put it in, Henry,' she said; 'Mrs. Langley is quite right, I think.'

'It isn't there, mother.'

'No, but it might be,—it is close by. And you can draw it from life. I really think that is fair.'

He shook his head and laughed. 'With the sun and the wind on the wrong side? Don't tempt me, mother. I could never trust my sketches if I began doing those things. I like to know when I look at a sketch that it is exactly what I saw, or as near as I could get it at the time. Here comes the breeze.'

It came well this time, and before long they were going fast down the coast. Suddenly Helen, who had been silent for a few minutes, said, 'There it is,—there is St. Erroc!' In five minutes more they could see it clearly,—a distant blue spike, the top of a church steeple, rising above some trees.

Helen took the *Swallow* round the rocky point, and brought up opposite the landing place. How familiar it was even now, after all these years! There was the little cove between the towering rocky cliffs, and the bit of pebbly beach, and the two or three stone-built fishermen's cottages, and the country road leading up the gully to St. Erroc. The water in the cove was perfectly smooth as they rowed in to shore, and they could see far down into its transparent depths.

They decided to bring their lunch-basket and have a picnic; so Helen took them up by the road between the high, solid Cornish 'hedges' to a quiet corner she remembered at the top of the hill. They got there sooner than she had expected, and there was St. Erroc half a mile from them, and away to the north were the bare moorlands, and below was the rocky line of the coast, and the beautiful green and purple sea with hardly a sail to break its solitude. How strange it seemed to be there again! Nothing

was changed, absolutely nothing. There was the very patch of yellow snapdragon on the wall by the gate; she had picked a blossom from it many a time. In the field inside there used always to be little wild pansies. She walked in, and saw them at once. It seemed to her as if one determined effort must bring her old life back in reality, and that she would walk into Laneithin and find her grandfather and Aunt Madge, and all just as before. She was impatient to go on now, and found it very hard to sit still and eat lunch.

However, it was soon over, and then they walked on into the little village. Nothing was altered there, except that the houses looked smaller and the road shorter. Yes, there was a little new shop near the inn, and the inn was smarter, for tourists had now begun to come to St. Erroc. They went into the old churchyard, stepping carefully upon the granite blocks under the covered gateway, and it seemed to Helen as if she were in a dream. She walked down the path, through the gravestones she used to know so well as a child, to the church door. Near it was the vault where her people lay, covered by a square tomb with the name 'Treveryan' carved in the granite on one side of it. They entered the church, which had never been 'restored.' There it was, exactly as it used to be, with its straight narrow seats of worm-eaten wood. On the right-hand side, near the pulpit, was the Treveryan pew, a large square pew rather higher than the others, and lined with what had once been green cloth. In the wall, above the raised wooden back, were two or three monumental slabs. How often she had read the inscriptions on them! There was one she had not seen,—her grandfather's. She read the inscription over now, and sighed as she thought of the handsome old man who used to sit there in the corner, and had been so good to her. She wished her father were lying with his own people too, instead of far away in his Indian grave. Then she found herself alone; the others had gone quietly on and left her.

She went into the pew and sat down in her old place. Not the slightest thing was changed; even the little hole in the cloth which she used to put her finger into as a small child was just as it used to be. Everything material absolutely the same, and yet everything in her life utterly altered! Was it possible that when she last sat there she had never known Guy, never really known her father?

After a few minutes she got up and walked out of the church, with a last look round at all the old familiar things, and found

the Russells looking away over the sea. They went to the village again, and she led them by the path through the fields, past the old farm, straight to Laneithin.

There it was, down among the trees, in the hollow. They came to the big stone gateway and walked in. The house looked smaller, and there was something deserted about it; no one was living in it now; but it was all so familiar. There was the little window of the room at the top, with the railed verandah, where she used to be sent when she was a naughty child. She remembered throwing a glass of medicine out of that window one day, and the glass fell on the flower-bed and did not break. She would not go in; she could see that the ground-floor rooms were dismantled and bare; it would only be sadness to her, and she must not keep the Russells waiting. So they went back into the road, and on a few steps to the big farm buildings and stable-yard which adjoined the house, and then turned back towards St. Erroc spire.

How often she had thought of Laneithin and St. Erroc when she had been thousands of miles away! Was she really there again, with the wild, solitary Cornish moorland about her? You do not know what it is, you who have never left England. You do not know how the old places and the old faces 'at home' become sweet and strange and sacred to those who think of them year after year among aliens in a foreign land. Alas! there were no old faces in St. Erroc,—none that Helen loved. She did see in the road one that she knew, the face of a man who used to work at Laneithin as a gardener; she spoke to him, and he remembered her, but seemed little interested to learn who she was.

She stopped on the way back at a cottage, the wall of which was nearly covered by a tall fuchsia which grew into the upper windows. In her day a dear old woman used to live here, Mrs. James, who told her Cornish stories and taught her Cornish words. The door was opened by a smart-looking young woman with a board-school manner and a fringe. 'Mrs. James? No. I have heard tell of an old Mrs. James who once lived here, but she died long ago.'

Helen walked on to the village. She had been with her aunt into most of those houses, but she had not the heart to try now whether there was any one left whom she knew as a girl. What did they care for her? She would have found plenty of the old folk about if she could have stayed; but it was time to go on, and she felt depressed and tired. How often she had thought of

coming back to St. Erroc, and of every familiar place she would go to, and of all the old people she would meet. And this was the end. A hasty half-hour or two, and no welcome; and the feeling that she was a stranger in the home of her fathers. She was very silent as they walked back to the cove. When they were on board again the Admiral looked at her face and patted her hand and said: 'Well, well, you could not have lived there alone.'

They sailed home with a gentle breeze off shore. Once or twice it almost failed them by the headlands, but they got round somehow, and found the breeze again behind the point. It was a beautiful evening as they threaded the Manacles and sailed into Falmouth Bay. The sun was low down over the round hills inland, but it showed up the gray tower of Pendennis, and the white lighthouse, and the blue line of coast away to the Dodman. They kept a little inside Pendennis, in case the wind should draw more ahead; but it held true, and soon after sunset they were under the gray castle. They were almost becalmed there, but a little air came down from the inner harbour and took them slowly home.

Helen felt happier now. When they landed in the summer twilight the tide was high, and the smooth clear water lay upon the pebbles, within a few inches of the bushes and silver weed under the garden bank. As they walked up under the trees Russell said to her: 'I am glad I came to-day. I feel now as if I had known you all your life. I can imagine you as a child in that house, and sailing along these coasts with old Tregenza.'

And for a moment she caught the thrill of feeling in his voice.

CHAPTER XLIX

A ROUGH SAIL

HELEN stayed on at Menarvor for some weeks longer. They seemed determined to keep her until they went themselves, and they knew she had no real reason for going except the fear of staying too long. And with their cordial faces before her, how could she doubt? She knew the old people really liked having her there, and still as they pressed her to stay she stayed and stayed. It was the last time.

The lime at the bottom of the lawn grew yellower daily, until its top shone very bright against the blue water. It was still delicate and beautiful even in decay. The chestnut got rusty and then brown in patches. It had been richer in its glory; it was coarser in its ruin. The oaks along the rocky water-line began to turn. The fields were covered with rows of corn shocks, looking in the distance like soldiers skirmishing; and then the corn was carried and the fields were bare. The tangled hedges were almost flowerless, except for a few belated blackberry blossoms and the soft green of the ivy. But they were still full of colour. There were the yellow and brown fern leaves, and the long festoons of bryony, with its heavy berries of red and green and yellow. There were other berries too,—the honeysuckle, green and red, and the wild rose, and the vivid glossy crimson and green of the holly, and the duller, deeper tint of the hips and haws; and over it all was the trailing corn left by the waggons.

They had some delicious autumn weather, blue skies and gentle breezes. Then they used to go out sailing, all of them together, and come back at sunset. Sometimes they were later, and the darkness had fallen, and the thousand lights of Falmouth glittered tier upon tier above the waters of the harbour. Mrs. Russell

had taken to it now. Her sail to St. Erroc had done something to convert her, and her next attempt won her over completely.

It was a warm and cloudless afternoon. A very light breeze from the southward just stirred the surface of the water here and there, leaving smooth patches which shone like polished metal. A slight swell was coming in from the open sea. As the little *Swallow* drifted slowly out with the tide, catching a breath of air at intervals, they could hear every sound across the still water,—the shrill cries of some gulls hovering over a school of fish a mile away; the bark of a dog in a field near St. Just, where two men were rabbit-shooting; the distant roar of the train as it passed over a viaduct miles inland. A boat was rowing across to the Ganges, and the sound of the oars in the rowlocks came to them with every stroke. Through it they heard six bells strike on the ship, whose ensign was hanging motionless. They went slowly out through the vessels at anchor in the harbour, and watched the smooth swell breaking in foam upon the rocks at Trefusis Point. There was a light haze ahead of them, over the open sea; and against it stood out the gray tower of Pendennis, and the dark form of a schooner with all sails set steering east, and the tall mark on the Black Rock. As the sun sank, a purple light came over Falmouth town; there was a flush above the haze to seaward, and a brighter flush over the long line of hill to the east. The water was coloured with exquisite shades of blue and rose as its smooth surface waved with the swell. Then the flush faded away from the eastern sky. To westward, over the wooded hills where the sun had gone down, there was a crimson glow which seemed to pass through the deep sapphire of the sky, and yet not to mingle with it, so that both remained pure and perfect, though together. At last two great planets came out, one to southward and one nearer the sunset, over the old church and oak-lined creek of Mylor. As they brightened, the *Swallow* glided up to her moorings under the shadow of the trees.

After that Mrs. Russell often came out and enjoyed her sail, or pretended she did. Perhaps she was not altogether thoughtless of others.

Then for some days there was heavy rain and wind, and looking down from the windows they could see the black gusts smite and spin upon the smooth water under the bank, while a little farther out it was white with crested waves. Now and then a hungry gull struggled past over the wave-tops, against the wind, with the spray flying past it. The leafy screen between the win-

dows and the sea had got thin. The trunk and branches of the lime were showing ; but it looked greener, more like spring again, —the wind had combed out all the yellow leaves. The little *Swallow* lay at her moorings, plainly visible now, with her head towards them. They could see her starting and moving uneasily as the gusts struck her. It was too wet and rough to go out.

After a few days the bad weather passed off, and it grew fine again. Helen came down one morning to find the sun shining brightly, and the wind gone round to the northward. Colonel Russell, who had been away shooting, had come back by the morning train. Then Helen and the Admiral settled that they would go out for one more real good sail down the coast.

‘Where shall we go?’ she asked.

‘I don’t care. It is all the same to me. Would you like to go to St. Erroc again?’

Helen shook her head. ‘No. If you really don’t mind, I would rather go the other way.’

‘Well, if it is fine to-morrow, why not start early and try Fowey or Looe? We might run over there to breakfast and get back to dinner comfortably if the wind is off shore as it is to-day.’

‘That would be very nice. I should like to see Looe.’

Mrs. Russell declined to be one of the party. ‘No, James, I will stay at home,’ she said. ‘You would only have a calm if I came; and in any case I don’t care to be out all day. It’s too much for me.’

‘Will you come, Hal?’ the Admiral said.

‘No, sir; I think not. I will stay with my mother.’

Helen was suddenly conscious that the pleasure of the trip had departed. She had thought they would all go. Mrs. Russell was too wise to discuss the question in public, but when they broke up for the night she made her son come into her room for a minute. ‘Hal, dear, I want you to go to-morrow.’

‘I would rather not, mother.’

‘My boy,’ she said, ‘I want you to go. You will go, to please me?’

‘Mother, dear, it is no use. I am only making myself miserable. She does not care a straw for me. It was plainer than ever when we met this morning.’

‘Try. You cannot tell. I believe she does, or will. You will go?’

'I will go if you wish it, but it is no use.'

'I am sure you are wrong, dear. It will all come right in the end.'

The mother and son understood one another now, and were plotting against Helen's peace. He had told his secret a few days before, and his mother had smiled in his face and said, 'I am so glad. I have seen it for some time past, and it has made me very happy.' Since then they had often talked of it.

There was much cooking of pasties and other good things that night, and in the morning all was on board.

When Helen got up and looked out of her window at sunrise it was a beautiful morning. The sky was almost cloudless, and through the branches of the lime she could see the blue water rippled by a light westerly breeze. The *Swallow* was lying with her head to the wind and her mainsail set. It was perfect, or would have been if they had all been going. She dressed and went down to the dining-room, and found Henry Russell making the tea. He had a handy soldier's way of making himself useful. 'Good-morning,' she said. 'You are up early.'

'Yes; I've changed my mind, and am coming with you.' He looked at her, and saw that she took the announcement with her usual pleasant frankness, the frankness of indifference.

'Are you?' she said. 'I'm very glad. I wish Mrs. Russell were coming too.'

'She would not,' he answered with a sigh; 'but she asked me to go, and I saw it made her unhappy that I should stay on her account, so I agreed.' How was he to know that his going had made the brightness of the morning tenfold more bright?

It was a little after seven o'clock when they got on board. The breeze was still very light, and the sky blue, with a few faint white clouds. 'There isn't no *weight* in the wind,' Tregenza said. When they were opposite Falmouth the breeze came off stronger. The flags on the ships were flying out now, and the *Swallow* began to move through the water. Before eight o'clock they had passed close to the lighthouse rock, and were round the point heading for the eastward. Then they set a spinnaker, and ran down the coast with the wind nearly astern. The sun was bright and pleasantly warm, but to the northward, over the land, some dark clouds had begun to gather. Under them were the pale stubbles, a few still bristling with corn shocks. In the offing was a ship under full sail going up channel. Falmouth Bay and the blue Manacles lay astern of them, and right ahead was the

flat, short-cut point of the Dodman. In-shore, on their bow, the big purple mass of the Gull Rock stood out against the cliffs.

They fixed a line and caught a mackerel. Tregenza held it writhing on his knees, and took his knife to cut a bright bit of skin from its back for bait.

'No,' Helen said eagerly; 'you shall not do that. I won't have it. Put the poor thing away. That is horrid of you.'

Dick looked up in surprise, and laughed. When he saw that she really meant it, he said, 'Very well, miss,' and threw the fish into a bucket.

Then they began to move too fast for fishing. They ran past little hilly Port Scatho, and Gerrans steeple, which stood out clearly against the dark sky. The blue of the sea was beginning to turn to a leaden colour as the clouds drifted over the sun; and the breeze was freshening, and small white crests began to form.

They ran past the Gull Rock, and Penare, which seemed to be covered with heather; and across Veryan Bay, with its high gray rocks and yellow stubbles. By ten o'clock they were off the bold rocky head of the Dodman. It did not look flat now. Over the sea the sun was still bright at times, but to the north the sky looked unpromising; and as they ran across the mouth of St. Austell Bay there was a heavy rain shower over Mevagissey, and over the white lines of the clay works on the hills. They could see Fowey now, Tennyson's 'haven under the hill,' with its great red and white beacon; and behind it, inland, were the blue peaks of the Cornish moors. They could see Looe Island too, farther up the coast; and farther again the point of Rame Head, which loomed faintly out like an island. Before noon they ran past Polperro, the smugglers' village, nestling under its lofty cliffs, and in a few minutes more Rame Head came out clearly, with the low blue line of the Devon coast beyond. They were in sunlight again now, and it lay bright upon the green top and gray rocky sides of Looe Island. The spinnaker was beginning to strain, and the little *Swallow* was lifting over a stern sea. Away to seaward, on their bow, they could just make out the gray spike of the Eddystone. Then they ran round the island and straight into Looe Creek. It was high tide, and the *Swallow*, with her very light draught, could run almost alongside the buildings.

They landed, and had lunch at the hotel; but they had little time to spare, as the wind would be almost ahead going back; so, after walking through the little narrow town, and seeing the

bridge, and the wooded river parting above, they got on board again and set sail. By that time a few drops of rain had fallen, and it was beginning to look very dirty outside. 'I don't like the look of it,' the Admiral said, with a glance at Helen. 'I am not at all sure that we ought to try it. It's a head wind and a rising sea. What do you think, Tregenza?'

'It is looking a bit dirty, sir, but we could always get into Fowey if it come on to blow. We shall see better what it's like when we get outside the island.'

When they got outside the island there was no doubt about it. The sea had risen and the wind was strong. It was raining hard ahead of them. 'We'll have a *stream* o' rain directly,' Tregenza said.

'What do you say, Mrs. Langley?' the Admiral asked. 'Shall we stop the night at Looe and go back in the morning?'

'Oh no,' she said, thinking they were hesitating on her account; 'let us go on. It may be only a shower, and it is quite early yet. We can go into Fowey if it gets bad.'

'Very well, my dear. As you like.'

Colonel Russell had been rather silent all the morning. He looked a little troubled now. 'I suppose it is all right,' he said; 'but it does not seem to me the sort of day for ladies to be out. It looks very much as if it were going to blow.'

Helen only laughed. But it was going to blow; before long they were beating against a heavy wind and sea, with a blinding rain in their faces. It was very disagreeable, and after an hour or two it became evident that they could not hope to make Falmouth before dark. 'I'm afraid we can't do it, sir,' Tregenza said; 'busy all.' It would be as much as they could do to get round the Dodman, and that would be useless. To make matters worse, the wind, which had gone round a little to the northward, and given them hopes, now shifted almost to south-west. They could not risk getting into a south-west gale at night on that rock-bound coast, with not a chance of shelter between the Dodman and Falmouth. So they gave it up, and went into Fowey, and found quarters at a hotel, and had a very pleasant evening. About sunset the rain passed off and the sky cleared; and they strolled about and saw the little town, and the yachts and coasting craft in the narrow harbour, and the pretty river above. It all seemed so quiet and peaceful that they found it difficult to realise that an hour or two before they had been struggling against that boisterous wind and sea.

When they went on board in the morning, after an early breakfast, it was still fine, but there was apparently some sea outside, and the breeze was strong from the south-west. They beat out of the harbour in the wake of two Brixham trawlers, and from the first they saw that they were going to have a roughish time of it. A heavy sea was breaking on the rocks at the harbour mouth, and the weather looked very unsettled. However, they were all good sailors, and they started merrily enough, with a bright sun overhead.

Dick Tregenza gave the first sign of care. His crew consisted of one man some years older than himself, who spoke strong Cornish when he spoke at all, which was very rarely. After the two had had a good look round, and out to windward, and a short consultation, Tregenza came and suggested that, instead of trying to make the Dodman 'to wance,' they should make a short tack or two in St. Austell Bay, and keep as much in-shore and under shelter as possible. 'It'll be smoother watter for the lady,' he said, and the Admiral agreed.

Soon afterwards one of the two trawlers went about and made for the bay too. The other stood boldly out to sea. Both had two reefs in their mainsails, but their topsails were set. Helen noticed it. 'They are able vessels, 'miss,' Tregenza said. 'They'll keep their topsails up a'most in any weather.' In comparison with the tiny *Swallow* they looked very big and strong. There was no other sail in sight.

They kept close in-shore by Par and Mevagissey, and managed to get a certain amount of shelter. The view was fine. Black rain-squalls gathered over the cliffs, and came sweeping down upon the sea. At times the sun broke out again for a few minutes ; but this occurred at longer and longer intervals, and the sky got darker and the wind and the sea got higher. And sooner or later they must come out of what shelter they had to get round the Dodman.

They ought not to have tried it, but Helen would not hear of going back. 'It will make me miserable,' she said. 'You know you would not think of it if it were not for me ; and I really enjoy this.'

They had a thorough dusting when they made the attempt. The sea was running very high indeed now, and the squalls fell upon them with a force that was almost terrifying. The wind literally shrieked as it tore through the rigging, and sent the spray and the rain flying across the little boat. It was difficult

to steer with that blinding storm on your face, and after a time the old Admiral found it too much for him. Dick Tregenza did not seem to mind. He stood at the helm singing softly to himself, with a smile in his eyes, as if everything had been perfectly comfortable. Nevertheless, it got worse and worse. The sky still grew darker and the squalls fiercer; and before long it needed all his watchful readiness of eye and hand to keep those huge green seas from breaking over her bows. It was beautiful to see how he met them, with a little drop of the wrist, sailing her all the time, and never losing way. But even he could not always keep them off; and now and then some solid water came on board, and Bob had to do some pumping.

Helen took it all very coolly. She had a waterproof with a hood to it, which she fastened tight over her head, and she faced the weather like one to the manner born. She could not go below, she said; it made her feel ill at once. She seemed to understand and enjoy Tregenza's steering. 'Oh, well done! Wasn't that good?' she said once or twice, as the little *Swallow* swung up dry and buoyant over a vicious curling hill of water; and Dick Tregenza laughed.

Then they had two accidents. An unusually fierce squall fell upon them and blew their jib to ribbons; and almost at the same moment their housed topmast was 'carr'd away,' as Dick said, about four feet from the truck. He handed over the helm to Colonel Russell with a word of warning, and put things to rights in an incredibly short space of time, and came back smiling.

But Russell thought this was too much. He had felt uncomfortable while Tregenza was at work on the mast. The outlook to windward was just as bad as it could be, and every time they went about again and headed for the open sea, in their endeavours to get round that horrible point, he was conscious of a feeling of excitement which was not entirely pleasurable. Helen showed no sign of alarm, but he thought she must be frightened, and he spoke to Tregenza about it. She was not frightened. The Admiral had got her into the shelter of the companion, out of the rain and spray. Now and then she looked at Russell and thought what a strong, resolute face he had. 'If I were a man I would follow him anywhere,' she said to herself.

'Are you sure it's safe?' Russell said to Tregenza. 'Remember we have got a lady on board. Hadn't we better give it up and run back to Fowey?'

'Please yourself about that, sir.'

'We could do it, I suppose?'

'Oh yes, sir, we could do it, of course. We should go along as dry as a merr. Ye see we should be before the wind then.'

'Are you sure we can get to Falmouth?'

'Oh yes, sir; bound to get there some time.'

'There is no port this side of it, is there?'

'No, sir; but we'll get a little shelter directly we're round the Deadman. We're all right, sir.' And he smiled cheerfully. 'Ye see we're a *sailing* of her all the time. If it got real bad we could always heave to.'

Russell did not feel convinced, but he was conscious of knowing very little about the matter, and he said, 'When do you think you will get in?'

'Can't say, sir. If the wind should happen to fly round to the nor'ard we wouldn't take long getting in.'

Russell gave it up, and Tregenza took to singing again gently, a hymn tune with rather indefensible words to it. But neither tune nor words were audible in that weather.

They got round the Dodman at last, and, as Tregenza had said, they found some shelter in Veryan Bay. Close in-shore there was much less sea; but the squalls were tremendous nevertheless. They seemed to fall from the top of the cliffs with a sudden slap upon the water, and the little vessel cowered and bounded under them like a frightened deer. Moreover, they had now to get round the Gull Rock and Penare. This was the Dodman over again; and long before they succeeded, both the Admiral and his son were heartily sorry they had attempted it. The weather was worse than ever. It was blowing almost a gale now, and away to the south-west both sky and sea were white with wind. Helen was quite steady, and laughed at it all; but she had had several hours of knocking about, without much food, and was beginning to look tired. Russell felt unhappy, and cursed his own folly for not protesting more strongly at first.

They got round the Gull at last, and worked away in short tacks under the coast to Port Scatho. The dark clouds were hurrying overhead at a pace that made one giddy. And they had still to get round the exposed piece of coast before the light-house point. That meant another long beat in the open, and it was past four o'clock. Their last tack before going out they ran in close to the rocky shore. In a field above the cliffs they saw some sheep under a wall, and two men were driving a cart across a bit of open ground close by; but the little cutter struggling

with the winds and the waves within a few hundred feet of them was as utterly out of reach of help under those iron rocks as if it had been in the middle of the Atlantic. One of the trawlers had gone out of sight round the point; the other was still in sight, but a couple of miles away to windward.

'We ought to get a little shelter from the Manacles, oughtn't we?' Russell said, as they got near shore.

'Not much, sir. We shall have a nasty sea outside now.'

They had a very nasty sea. The wind was stronger than ever, a real south-west gale from the Atlantic; the sea was shorter and worse than outside the other points; the tide was running against the wind. And unluckily they had what was worse than a nasty sea,—a nasty accident. As they went about under the cliffs, Helen was standing with her head just above deck. They were in comparatively smooth water, and she had perhaps got careless, or she was tired; but as the boom went over she missed her hold, and after a stagger was thrown heavily with her head against the edge of the well. The next instant Henry Russell had caught her up. It was no time for ceremony, and he got his right arm round her, and dragging himself up by his left on to the windward side of the boat, sat holding her firmly, with her head on his shoulder. His father pushed back the hood from her face, and they found a slight bruise near her left temple; there was no other mark to be seen. Her face was white and wet with spray. They gave her some brandy and kept her in the air, and in a few minutes she woke to find herself lying in Russell's arms.

It was a happy waking. The pain was not bad, and there was something in the touch of those strong arms which would have made up for any pain. She was glad to be there, at rest, though the great seas were tossing their white crests high above the *Swallow's* bows, and the wind was screaming about her, and the spray flying over the little vessel from stem to stern. But as Helen woke to complete consciousness a burning blush covered her face, and she disengaged herself from Russell's support. She thanked them both confusedly, and declared herself perfectly well, and made many apologies; and then took refuge below.

In her ears and her heart was the deep tenderness of Russell's voice, but the sudden recognition of her own love for him made her seem cold and shy, and he thought he had offended her. When she appeared again, unable to bear the restraint and motion of the tiny cabin, he was cold too, and polite and reserved.

They fought on for two hours longer trying to weather the point, and then, not long before dark, the *Swallow* made a final effort and got round. Her wings were sadly clipped now,—a small storm jib, streaming with water, and the merest strip of her big mainsail. They fluttered in the wind for a moment, and she was borne back, nearly too far again; but she had held on seaward until she had something to spare, and she stuck to it bravely, and at last she fairly won her fight and came in triumphantly over the big waves between the Black Rock and the lighthouse. At the same time a tall three-masted schooner ran in from the Manacles close reefed. Soon afterwards they were in comparatively smooth water under the shelter of Pendennis, and Dick Tregenza was singing softly to himself, with a smile in his eyes.

‘Well done!’ Helen said. It was easier to speak to him, and besides he deserved some thanks. ‘That was a splendid sail. What a good sea-boat she is!’

‘Yes, miss,’ he said. ‘We come along nicely, didn’t us? Them big trawlers didn’t bate us by very much after all. We was sailing of ’er all the time. It ’ud take a lot o’ weather to stop she.’

Helen laughed and turned to Russell. ‘Did you ever hear such west-country grammar? Still, he did sail her well, didn’t he—for a Celt?’

‘But Russell answered at random, and when they walked up from the little stone pier under the flag-staff he was silent and his heart was sore. And he could have taken her without a word, if he had only known!’

Next day somehow they were at a greater distance from each other. Russell felt intensely depressed. He told his mother all about it, and said he was afraid he had offended Helen. She assured him he was wrong, and begged him to pluck up courage and ask Helen herself. ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘not now, not under our own roof.’

‘If she cares for you she will not mind your asking her under your own roof.’

But he shook his head.

‘Shall I speak to her?’

No; his pride rebelled against that, and besides it would destroy all their friendship. His mother must promise to say nothing; if he was to fail, Helen must never know that his mother had known. So Helen went away and left them, and Russell had not spoken to her.

It was a beautiful morning when she said good-bye, and drove away with the old Admiral. There was a balmy feeling in the air, almost like spring. The sun was bright, and a robin was singing ; but Helen's heart was very sad. She was saying good-bye for ever to the house she had come to love in a few short months. Perhaps she was saying good-bye for ever to the Russells. Perhaps she would never see him again,—the man to whose face she had hardly dared that morning to lift her eyes. He shook hands with her quietly, and said 'Good-bye' in his deep, level, courteous voice, as if he did not care. The Admiral chatted away, and she answered him pluckily, but with a dull pain at her heart. She was glad when it was all over and the train was off.

As she steamed away towards Devonshire, it seemed to her that she had never known until now the very depth of depression and wretchedness. When the train came near Par she looked out of the window and saw the Fowey beacon and St. Austell Bay and the open sea. Ah ! if she were only out there again in the gale and the rain-squalls, with the great waves seething about her. What happiness it had been ! As the train moved on, and she lost sight of the sea, she sat back and, leaning her head against the corner of the carriage, broke into a passion of tears. After a time she roused herself, and dried her eyes hastily. 'I will not give in,' she said to herself ; 'I will find work and be myself again. It was a dream, and it is over.'

She was better for a time, but as the train passed into Devon the pang came to her heart again, and she looked back with her face working. 'Good-bye, Cornwall,' she said ; 'dear Cornwall, good-bye, good-bye !'

CHAPTER L

THE LESSON LEARNT

HELEN felt less miserable when she was at home again under old Pow's care. The little woman was so delighted to get her back. Her brown eyes were bright with happiness, and there was something very comforting about her merry laugh, and her nervous, impudent, loving ways. In spite of herself Helen felt better. But it all came back again at night, and she lay awake for hours, listening to the rising wind, and thinking sadly over all her life. Now there was added to her sorrows a feeling of lightness and untruth. She had been too happy of late ; she had forgotten Guy and her child. She had not even the melancholy consolation of knowing that she had kept their place sacred in her heart. She had let another come in and possess it, and one who cared nothing for his conquest. As she thought of her treason she thought also of him, and felt for a moment as she had felt when she lay in his arms. The remembrance made her heart beat wildly, even in the midst of her self-reproach. In the darkness the blood surged over her face and neck and bosom. Unconsciously she covered her face with her hands, and a storm of sobs shook her, sobs that were the expression of passionate love and despair as much as of shame and remorse. She fell asleep at last, worn out with the conflict.

In the morning the wind had dropped, and it was not raining. After breakfast Helen walked up to the cemetery, to see Roland's grave. All was in good order, but it looked very dreary in its solitary corner under the gray sky. She was alone in the place, and she stood dreaming of him and all his goodness to her ; and as she stood the thought suddenly came into her mind, ' I wonder whether he is here—whether he can see me and hear me.'

She knelt down upon the stone edge of the tomb. 'Ro, do you know it all? Do you despise me? You told me to be happier if I could, and I was so lonely. If I have been wicked, it is all over now; it was only for a little.' -

She listened for an answer, longing and half-expecting to hear his voice. She did not listen in vain. That loving voice was silent for ever, but another voice spoke to her heart. It seemed to her as if an angel bent down and said: 'He cannot hear you, but be comforted. He would not blame you; he would understand and pity.'

She turned away and walked home, and from that time it began to be easier. She set to work resolutely to find employment for herself, and she summoned up all her courage and pride to help her. Colonel Russell had never said a word, or shown any sign of love for her; his profession was everything to him. Why should she let him trouble her thoughts? After all, there was no great harm done. She had never let him see that she cared for him, and she never would now if she met him again. Besides, she did not really care; it was only a passing weakness, a sense of liking and admiration which she had mistaken for something deeper. With work she would soon forget; she would not let herself think of him, and in a little while he would be nothing to her. So she argued with herself, and perhaps if she had not seen him again she would have mastered her love for him; she might even have come to believe that it had never had any serious existence. At times the veil of self-deceit which she had been elaborately weaving between her eyes and her heart was torn asunder. The thought of him would come to her suddenly, in the midst of her reading, or when she was with others, and her heart would stop and throb in spite of her. She saw his dark eyes on her again, or caught the thrill of his deep voice as she walked up with him under the trees from the summer sea; and she knew that she loved him still. Then she would set to work once more and control herself, and laboriously piece together the flimsy network.

So it went on for a month. She had received one letter from Mrs. Russell, written after their arrival in Rome. It was full of affectionate inquiries and of anticipations of meeting in the spring. But Helen shook her head. 'I shall be at work long before then,' she said to herself. Her correspondence about her hospital nursing had come to a point now, and she was to start in a fortnight for London, to begin her training.

It was a lovely afternoon in December. For some days past there had been rough weather, south-westerly winds and rain. Now there was not a breath of wind, the sun was shining, and the bay was blue; it seemed more like July than midwinter. Helen had walked into the town and done some business, and she was tempted to go on along the sea-wall towards the railway station. The tide was low, and the water broke with a gentle murmur on the wet sands. Higher up on the sand, under the sea-wall, some boys were playing stump-cricket; and walking along the high pavement in front of her Helen saw little Ethel Henderson.

Ethel was, as usual, doing something her nurse had told her not to do. It is impossible for children to obey people who are always saying 'Don't,' and Ethel had given up trying. Now she was throwing a ball for Jack to run after. It was a new India-rubber ball with a gorgeously painted landscape on it, which Ethel had just bought, and the nurse strongly disapproved of her throwing it into the road. Ethel continued to throw it, much to her own enjoyment and Jack's, until Helen had nearly caught them up. Then she threw it again. The ball ran along under the high pavement, with Jack in hot pursuit, until it came to a large ungrated drain-hole, into which it rolled and disappeared. Jack stood over the hole barking, and Ethel went and looked into it, but could see nothing. As Helen came up Ethel was beginning to cry with anger and regret, and the nurse was on the pavement above, scolding. 'There, I told you so. You're a very naughty girl, Miss Ethel, and it serves you right.' Ethel answered hotly, and Helen interposed.

'My goodness, what is all this about?' she said, jumping down from the pavement close to where Ethel was standing; 'what has happened, Ethel?' The child told her, and Helen looked down and could see nothing. 'Never mind, dear,' she said; 'I expect those holes run out under the wall.' Perhaps we may find it down on the sand. Let's try.'

The wall was too thick to see over, so they walked back to some steps, and got on to the sand and came round. There were the drain-holes, and Helen clambered over the rough stones on to the sloping foot of the wall, and looked into two of them. She could see nothing of the ball; but then she thought of looking a little way off, and there it was on the sand, twenty yards away. Then there was joy where grief had been, and the two returned to the road. 'Let's throw it again,' Ethel said, as they came

up the steps, 'and make it go through again. It's such fun. Jack looked so surprised, and nurse will be so cross.'

'I don't think I would if I were you. It might stick another time, and then you would lose it. You would not like that, would you?'

'No, I shouldn't.'

Then Helen stepped out upon the pavement, and as she did so she started and coloured. She knew him directly her eyes fell upon him, though he had passed the opening and was ten yards away, walking towards the town. That straight square-shouldered figure and slow firm stride were like no other man's. It was all over, of course, and she did not really care; but somehow her heart was beating wildly again, and she longed, though she feared, to see him turn and recognise her. He did not turn, but went straight on and passed out of sight, and her heart sank. Then Helen walked home. She had to pass through the town, and until she had done so she was troubled; but they did not meet, and she reached home alone.

That evening she was very restless. She tried hard to reason with herself. Very likely she might not see him at all; and if she did it was useless. He might call and talk to her for a few minutes, and then he would be gone again. No, she would not think of it. He did not care for her, that was clear enough. She would not make herself miserable about him. It would really be better if he did not come. If she saw him again it would be all the harder to forget him. And yet she would like to see him just once, for a few minutes, and shake hands and say good-bye. She tried to read, and could not; so she went to her piano and began playing. Her thoughts went round the old subject still, but she played on mechanically, and in time the music had its effect upon her. It soothed her, and revived the feeling of somewhat romantic self-devotion with which she had begun to regard her future work. Unconsciously she passed from Schubert and Mendelssohn into some of her old church music, and as she did so she became more quiet and content; the words of the hymns rose in her mind and filled her heart. She passed from one to another until she struck the first chord of one she had never much cared for—'Thy will be done.' She played it over verse by verse to the end. Then she sat motionless with her fingers upon the keys, and the sound of the soft low notes died slowly away.

It had come to her at last, borne on the wings of the music,

the lesson she had to learn ; the lesson that had cost her so many cruel sorrows ; the lesson that Roland had tried to teach her in his blundering, youthful way. When she went up to her room her heart was at rest. She could kneel and say it honestly at last, and she did say it—‘Not what I will, O Lord ; what Thou wilt.’ Then she slept peacefully, like a child.

CHAPTER LI

WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOUR WOODED?

IN the morning Helen woke with a sudden recollection of what had passed the night before. She lay still for a time and collected herself for what might be before her, and when she got up she was quite steady. She would make no difference in her daily employments. She would not be restless and miserable. She would go about her usual work, and control herself. It would have been easier if the work had been heavier; but she managed to employ herself until lunch-time. After lunch she had to go to a sick child whom she had promised to see that day. It was perhaps not unnatural that she faltered a little as she went upstairs to get ready. She felt inclined to give up the visit, or at least to linger as long as she could before setting out. However, she repressed the inclination. 'Poor little fellow! How horrid of me!' she said to herself.

When she came down she was, as usual, daintily dressed. She had never permitted herself, or had any desire, to become slovenly in this respect. It would have been painful, almost impossible, to her to dress badly. As Helen walked out of the gateway of Burnbraes and turned to her right, up the hill, she saw Henry Russell coming towards her. He was a hundred yards off, but there was no mistaking his tall figure and his walk. When he came up to her she had forgotten all her resolutions, and her heart was beating hard, and her eyes were almost afraid to meet his; but being a woman, she was to all outward appearance cool and unmoved. She was, in fact, too cool, too indifferent in her manner. She could not honestly pretend to be surprised at seeing him, and the want of surprise made her seem as if she did not care. 'How are you?' she said as they met, and shook hands. 'Are you staying here?'

How cold it sounded. How cold it felt to him. He had come that day meaning to tell her he loved her; but he read indifference, or rather a frank and careless liking, in every word and gesture; and he recoiled again, proud and disheartened. 'I am only here for a few days,' he said; 'I am staying with the Hutchinsons.'

'Were you coming to see me now?'

'Yes.'

'How good of you to remember me in my solitude. Will you come back?'

'No; you were going out. Don't let me stop you.'

'I was only going to see one of my poor children. I can go later. I did not fix any hour.'

'May I come with you?' he said. It was a pleasure to be with her, and there would be no object in going back to her house for a few minutes before she started again. He could say nothing to her now. How was he to know that the graceful self-possessed lady who stood before him without a sign of embarrassment in her face was worshipping him with all the reckless passion of a woman's heart?

'Of course, I shall be very glad,' she answered; 'but it is a long way.'

'The longer the better. I want a walk.'

In her momentary happiness Helen laughed outright.

'Why do you laugh?'

'It was so like you. I thought you were going to pay me a real compliment, and then you spoilt it so completely.'

'I am afraid I am not happy at compliments. Have you begun your nursing work?'

'No, not till next month. I am only going to see a poor little boy who is ill and can't leave his bed. He has been weakly all his life, and now he has something wrong with his hip, and they say it is hopeless, that he will always be a cripple. He is so good and patient, poor little fellow. His father is a labourer, and he has no comforts or pleasures. It seems very hard.'

'Yes; it is difficult to understand why such things are allowed.'

'I often wonder, but it must be made up to him some day.'

'That is one way of looking at it; but it strikes some people—for instance, I think it struck your old enemy Samuel Johnson—in the opposite sense, as proving the possibility of predestination and eternal punishment. One thing seems not more unjust

than the other.' Russell's mind had become accustomed to handle these weighty subjects, and he used at times to pick them up unconsciously in the course of conversation, in a way that made one feel a little nervous.

'Surely you don't believe that horrible doctrine?'

'No, I don't; but logically I do not see any reason why it should not be true.' It was rather funny. He had started to propose to Helen, and instead of proposing he was talking to her about eternal damnation. His mind was not very quick to see the ludicrous side of a thing, but the incongruity struck him, and he went on with a smile in his eyes: 'I certainly don't cling to the doctrine, as a friend of mine once told me he did.'

'What did he mean?'

'He was speaking of some one he disliked, and he said that the man made him cling to the doctrine of eternal damnation.'

'I am glad I don't hate any one like that. It must make one very miserable.'

'I don't think he meant it quite; but certainly nothing pays so badly as hating people. One sees it very much with jealous men. They give themselves so much unnecessary misery. I sometimes think we soldiers are specially given to professional jealousy.'

'Oh, why? Surely the *camaraderie* among soldiers is proverbial?'

'Yes; on service at all events. But ambition is the soldier's characteristic too. You remember how Shakespeare dwells on that; and though he can't describe a fight, he describes a soldier to the life. Ambition is a dangerous feeling.'

'A man is not worth much without it. Surely it can be pure and noble?'

'I am not at all sure that it can. It is "the last infirmity of noble mind," but it is an infirmity. It is not noble in itself.'

'I do not believe anything would be done in the world without it.'

'Oh, there is no doubt that it is the cause of many great deeds; perhaps of most. "Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise." Many men will do for ambition what they will not do for duty.'

'Then it must surely be a good thing.'

'I suppose it is not an unmixed evil. It brings good. If men will not do great things for duty's sake, they had better do them for their own sake than fold their hands and not do them at all.'

‘It seems to me that a man must have an extraordinarily strong sense of duty to be able to dispense with ambition altogether.’

‘Perhaps ; but still one ought not to require it ; and it is a dangerous thing. I think one ought to try to repress it.’

‘But is it not perfectly natural that a man should care for the good opinion of his countrymen ?’

‘Perfectly natural, I think, but not noble. It is natural to wish for money, or any other pleasant thing, and I suppose the wish for money has had a great deal to do with the making of England. It has created our trade and our wealth. But at best that does not make the wish for money noble ; and at worst it may be very ignoble and harmful. Directly one begins to want money very much one is apt to become mean and unscrupulous in getting it. It is the same with other things.’

‘I hope that is not quite true. I hope one can wish for things and yet not do wrong to get them.’

‘I can only judge by what I feel. I know that in my own case ambition is a temptation. On service, for instance, I feel that I should be tempted to sacrifice men’s lives without compunction to gain my object.’

‘But it is necessary to be able to do that.’

‘Yes ; but one should only be able to do it, not be inclined to do it.’

‘I think you are too severe altogether. You expect ideal strength and perfection.’

‘Perhaps ; but personally I feel that ambition is bad for me. It makes me unjust, and everything I should wish not to be. What is ambition literally ? Going about—to get on. That cannot be noble. A man should go straight.’

‘But that may mean not going at all. You can’t go straight against a head wind. You must go about to get on.’

‘That is rather good ; but you don’t mean it. Getting on is not everything in life, whatever it may be at sea. Surely it will be far better than any success when the end comes a few years hence, surely it is better always, to be able to feel, “Well, I have held my head up all through. I have never shrunk from a fight, and never asked a favour.”’

‘Isn’t that rather——’

‘What ?’

‘Rather an *ungracious* creed ?’

‘Perhaps. Yes, I suppose it is.’

They walked on in silence for a time. Helen's thoughts were going back over what they had said. 'I cannot believe it is bad to be ambitious. I should be sorry if any one I cared about were not ambitious. If you have a strong sense of duty you can control ambition.'

'Possibly. I daresay it is better to have all the human qualities if you can keep them in order, but they are apt to run away with you.'

'I am sure it is better to have them. They all mean force. Some men may have too much force, but I am sure most men have too little.'

They went on together until they came to the sick child's house. 'May I come back for you?' Russell said.

'Have you nothing else to do?'

'No, nothing. How long shall you be?'

'About a quarter of an hour.'

Poor little Tom Barrett found his visit very short that day, and Helen felt guilty, and promised him another. Ambition and eternal punishment are curiously interesting subjects in certain circumstances. When Helen came out Russell was waiting for her.

'I'm not late, am I?' she said.

'No; very punctual. How is the child?'

'Just the same, poor little fellow. He is so cheerful and good. I think he is really glad at the idea of dying. He talks and asks questions about it exactly as other children do about some delightful place they are going to. He looks upon it simply as falling asleep, to wake in a wonderful bright land where he will have perfect happiness for ever.'

'Which I suppose you have taught him to believe.'

'I have tried to help in teaching it him.'

'It is a grand belief for those who are lucky enough to have it.'

'You speak as if you did not believe it yourself.'

'I should be very sorry if I did not believe it, or something like it. But I do find it very difficult to realise such a thing practically, as that child does.'

Helen was silent, and he went on: 'Who would not realise it if he could? It would make everything so easy. That kind of faith gives one a backbone that nothing else can give. "Thus did the martyrs die, I see, little to lose and muckle to win."'

'That is a very low view of martyrdom, isn't it?'

'Perhaps ; but it seems to be a logical view. However, it is no use talking about logical views in religious matters. Logic only seems to me to bring one up against a blank wall.'

'I don't understand you.'

'I mean, for example, that so far as my logic goes I can find no sufficient ground for believing in the existence of the human will. I cannot get out of the chain of reasoning by which all our actions are made out to be the result of external forces acting on a given nature.'

'I never could believe that. It always seemed to me a mere trick of words, that clever people must be able to expose.'

'I don't believe it either in reality. My instinct revolts against it. I was only saying that logic, my logic at least, lands me there, however hard I try.'

'Have you not a right to fall back on instinct if reason leads you into impossible positions?'

'That is what I have thought. You cannot solve the commonest question of human conduct by pure reasoning,—at least I cannot. For instance, my reason does not tell me clearly when it is justifiable to deceive, or how much we ought to give in charity. One has to rely on something other than reason in these matters. Perhaps we were meant to see that our reason is insufficient with regard to the greatest matter of all, and that we must rely on something else there also. But one feels that that argument is dangerous. It may be merely a shrinking from the truth in favour of what is pleasant, or a sort of unconscious attempt to "hedge," to keep on the orthodox side in case of accidents. Besides, different men seem to have different instincts.'

'It must be very miserable not to feel sure. I can't reason it out, and yet I feel as sure of free will and a future state and Christianity as I do that I am alive.'

'I am not miserable. I do not disbelieve. I feel sure there is an omnipotent and just deity. I only cannot understand and clearly realise. I wish I could.'

Helen longed to be able to help him, but she knew that she could not. He must work it out for himself, and she felt sure he would in the end. Still, it was a distress to her. 'I wish I could help you,' she said gently. Russell saw that she was interested and sorry now, and for an instant he was tempted to take advantage of this to try whether he could not win her through her pity and faith. It was only for an instant. His pride recoiled from the hypocrisy of such an attempt.

'I won't stoop even for her,' he said to himself, 'and I won't disturb her belief if I can help it.'

They walked on for a time in silence. They had settled to return home by the sea, and they were now in the road which leads from Anstis Cove through the fields to the Meadfoot beach. To right and left, on the hill-sides, there was some gorse in blossom. Before them lay the bay and Berry Head. A sheep-dog came running down from a field on their left and barked at Rex, who took no notice; but it turned their thoughts. 'Let us get up on the hill,' Russell said. 'We ought to have a beautiful view to-day.'

They walked up to Helen's favourite spot and stopped. The sun was warm and bright. There was hardly any wind, and what there was was off shore. Helen thought of the first time they had stood there together in February; of the waves breaking on the foot of the Thatcher, and racing into the mouth of the bay. Now the sea was calm, and the rocks below showed purple through the clear still water, no longer churned into foaming breakers. Two French fishing-boats, which had taken shelter in Torbay from the south-west gales, were now going out again. Helen knew them of old by their dirty white canvas, and their high bowsprits and heavy build. It was a Saturday, and the Brixham trawlers were coming in. There were a dozen or more making for Berry Head, with the sun on their tan sails. Two steamers were still lying under the point. There had been a number there until the day before. They looked very high out of the water. 'Our modern steamers are very ugly,' Helen said. 'How beautiful a fleet of old men-of-war would have looked sailing into the bay!'

'Yes; and it is so short a time since the days of the three-deckers. It is not seventy years since Napoleon was lying out there in the *Northumberland*. What a tragedy that was!'

Helen woke up from her dream of white sails and broadsides. 'Ah, do you admire him too?' she said. 'He has always had an overpowering fascination for me. If I had been a man I would have followed him anywhere. It was like the French to desert him after he had carried their Eagles into every capital in Europe. And now they can find no insult too great for his memory. They are not worthy of him, and never were.'

'I don't think you are quite fair. His victories ended by bringing the allied armies into Paris, and the French had suffered terribly, and were very weary of war. Besides, though he was a

great soldier, he was not admirable in some ways. He was selfish and unscrupulous, and in some ways, I think, very mean.'

'I suppose you are thinking of Joséphine; but if she really cared for him she must have been glad to stand out of his way.'

'That does not excuse him, rather the contrary. But I always felt the attraction too. He dealt with great things, and his character and his times are intensely interesting to me.'

'Could he have been what he was without ambition?'

'I don't think you are very happy there. If ever there was a case in which ambition brought evil on the world it was his. I never denied that ambition was a force. I said it was a dangerous force. He bought his glory very dear, at the expense of the nation.'

'The nation shared his glory. Of course they had to pay something for it. I do not think they were much to be pitied.'

'Don't speak like that. I don't like to hear you say those flippant things.'

'Colonel Russell!'

'I don't; it is not like you. You do not know how horrible war is, or you could not.'

'You a soldier and say that?'

'I say it just because I am a soldier, and have seen war. I don't think I feel very strongly about men being killed. They must die, and it makes little difference whether they die a few years sooner or later. But the misery inflicted on innocent women and children, and the pain and disease and suffering of all kinds which a great war involves, are something very awful. Nations have to go through it, and I believe occasional war is necessary to maintain a nation's character, but it is a horrible necessity. It is not a thing to laugh at.'

Helen felt wounded; he might have spared her that,—her of all women; but she answered humbly enough: 'I did not mean to laugh at war. At all events he has left a splendid example of what a man can do by force of brain and will and courage.'

'And unscrupulousness.'

Helen was silent.

After a time Russell said: 'Do you think his career is one to make men ambitious?'

'Yes, more so than any in history. If not, what career could do so?'

'I am not sure. I think it has the opposite effect on me. It used to fill my head with dreams; but now when I think of the

young artillery officer conquering Europe and giving away kingdoms it represses my ambition. After that, what is the use of such success as is possible to us? What is it to secure a few lines in that long romance which is called history, to be one of innumerable K.C.B.'s, or even to win a peerage? Those are such little things. He distributed dukedoms in handfuls.'

'It was very wonderful. It always rejoices me to think of all those haughty emperors and kings bowing down before the *petit caporal*.'

'What a Radical you are.'

'No, I am not; but I cannot help having some of the pride of the sword. And they were so insolent, and so stupid and cruel. I can never forgive the Bourbons for shooting Ney.'

'It was not much worse than shooting the Duc d'Enghien, if as bad. But I used to feel exactly as you do; and even now all my sympathy is with Napoleon, though my reason is against him. One cannot help feeling deeply for him when one thinks of the contrast between his former greatness and his miserable solitude and death at St. Helena; though I have no doubt that Irish traitor O'Meara made things out much worse than they were.'

'You are always hard on the Irish. Do you think it is fair?'

'Perhaps not. But, as a matter of fact, many of the Irish *are* traitors, who ought to be shot; and I believe O'Meara was one of them.'

Helen went back to her Emperor. 'At all events,' she said, 'if I were French I should be very proud of Napoleon.'

'Do you never think of the other side of the question? It seems to me that we have more reason to be proud than any one. Nothing the French did for him was so fine as our stand against him, for nearly twenty years, when all Europe was at his feet, and we were a little nation of ten millions of men. It *always* rejoices me to think how we "pestilent islanders" went on fighting, with our old contempt for numbers and prestige, hardening our hearts as things grew worse, and never giving in.'

'Yes; it was grand. I wonder whether we should fight like that still. I get frightened sometimes at what one hears and reads about the mob. I think it would break my heart if we disgraced ourselves and gave in to an enemy, and sank as Spain and Holland have done.'

'Don't let those doubts come to you,' Russell said, and as he

spoke his head went up and his eyes were alight with enthusiasm. 'Englishmen are the same as they always were,—the best fighting race in the world, the only civilised race that really loves a fight. I should feel there was nothing worth living for if I did not believe in the future of England. People talk of a democracy not fighting. Was there ever any finer fighting since the world began than the fighting in the American War? Think how they set their teeth and stuck to it on both sides,—Lincoln and Davis, and Grant and Sherman, and Jackson and Lee, and the hundreds of thousands of men in the blue and the gray who fell into line as the war went on. The fighting blood was just as strong in them as it was in their ancestors two hundred years before. It warms my heart to read of them all, with their English names, and English speech, and English ways, and dogged English pluck; and I feel as proud of the Stars and Stripes as I do of the Union Jack. I look forward to the time when all the empty places of the earth will be filled with Englishmen, banded together for good against the world. I wish there were more room for the race to spread. There is no other to compare with it, none. Only Englishmen must believe in themselves, and Englishwomen must believe in us.' He stopped, with a look of slight confusion, and turned away. 'I am really unpardonable,' he said. 'You must not get me on that subject.'

But she broke in impetuously. 'Ah, don't be ashamed of it! I wish all Englishmen were like you. I should have no fear then.'

Something in the ring of her voice caught his ear, and he turned and looked at her. A deep flush sprang to her face and crimsoned her neck and ears, and her eyes fell; but for an instant he had met the look in them, and it had been enough. A tide of unexpected joy flooded his heart. 'My darling!' he said, with a sudden vehement pride and wonder, and she did not rebuke him. Then, with the confidence of a man taking what was his own, he laid his hand upon the little gloved hands that were crossed beside him: 'My darling! look at me.'

She hesitated, and then looked up obediently into the glad, strong face above her, and he knew he could do with her what he would.

It was no place to stay now, and he said, 'Let us go on. I may come home with you for a little?'

'Yes,' she said; and as she turned she looked at the sea, and the rocks in the calm water, and the long blue line of Berry

Head. The whole picture stamped itself on her brain in colours that would never fade.

They did not say much as they walked on ; but when the door of Helen's drawing-room had closed upon them she understood, what she had dimly suspected before, the depth of fiery passion that underlay that grave exterior. It almost frightened her, but it was a very happy fear.

When he had gone the thought came over her that she had given herself away unasked. 'I don't care,' she said to herself ; 'he does love me.'

Her self-surrender was too complete and joyful to leave any room for shame. Perhaps it even increased her happiness to feel that she had laid her heart at his feet. He was so big and noble. What was she that she should think of having lowered herself ? She was not worthy to be his slave. 'He said he would never ask a favour,' she thought ; 'I am glad he never asked it, even from me.' The shame might have come later if he had been other than he was, but she was safe with him. The strong natures among men have the womanly quality of loving more, not less, because they are loved.

That night Helen told the one real friend she had near her. Rex knew already, and was inclined to disapprove. Old Pow did not know, and was much too respectful to show any signs of curiosity ; but she had seen Henry Russell leave the house, and there was something in Helen's eyes and manner that night at dinner which was unusual. Pow longed to see Helen happy, and she was attracted by the tall, soldierly man, with his courteous ways and look of command. Her hopes rose.

After dinner Helen sat playing quietly to herself. The happiness in her heart was welling up in music. She played on for an hour or more, and then she rang the bell. Pow came up herself as usual, and found Helen standing by the fire. 'Shut the door, Pow,' she said, 'and come here.'

Power obeyed.

'Pow, I have got something to tell you.'

'Have you, ma'am ? I hope it's something good.'

The little brown eyes were dancing with pleasure. She could see it was 'something good.'

'It is something very good, Pow. I am the happiest woman in the whole world, and I felt I could not go to bed without telling you. Now you know, don't you ?'

'Oh, ma'am, I am so glad ! I am so glad !' Her voice was

trembling, and the brown eyes looked up at Helen with a pathetic glory of tenderness and love.

‘There is no one else to wish me joy, Pow—no one but Rex, and he is cross. You might give me a kiss, I think.’

And Helen stooped to the little white head before her, and old Pow’s trembling hands held hers, and old Pow’s kiss fell on her forehead. ‘Eh, ma’am, I am so glad! I am so glad! God bless you, dear ma’am!’

CHAPTER LII

AT LAST

HENRY RUSSELL and Helen were married a few weeks later.

When Lady Mary heard of the marriage, her heart grew hard against Guy's wife. To forget him so soon, when he had given up all for her sake, and gone to his death for her ! Lady Mary hated her with a fierce hatred, and believed that she did well to be angry. Poor Lady Mary, hers is a sad life now, and her face shows it.

Another woman heard of the marriage too, and wept bitterly. 'Oh, how could she ! How could she ! Why did she take him from me if she did not love him ?'

And yet Helen had loved him well. Was her whole life to be sacrificed to the memory of his ? Was she to have no happiness in all the years to come ? Should her heart have been incapable of another love ? Yes ? Well, yes perhaps ; but Nature says plain, No. These things have been and are, and will be still, so long as earth endures.

Hugh Dale understood, though his loyal heart was sore for a time. 'I never thought she would marry again,' he said. 'Poor old Guy ! That long staff-college prig too.' But he got over his first feeling of indignation. After all she was a dear woman, and he was a fine soldier ; and you could not wish her to be alone all her life.

And Mrs. Aylmer understood. Knowing her views about these matters, Helen had found it hard to write to her ; and at first she found it hard to answer, but her answer in the end was very gentle and loving. Helen knew that she had not lost her friend.

It was a happy marriage. Henry Russell makes more friends

now, and fewer enemies. He is as determined as ever, but less proud, less unbending, more conciliatory. That he owes to his wife.

And she owes him more, she thinks, than she can ever repay. It seems to her that as the little *Swallow* came that autumn evening out of the fierce buffeting of the wind and sea into the shelter of gray Pendennis, so she has come from the storms and sorrows of life safe into the shelter of that great constant love. All is well with her at last.

THE END

