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THE

RAJAH'S HEIR

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A NOVEL

A NEW EDITION

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THE RAJAH'S HEIR

PROLOGUE

'A DREAM and a forgetting. Is our life that? The sages who have searched into the past and future say that it is even so. A dream—another dream; a beginning—an ending; a beginning again—an ending again; in all the world no halt for the trembling spirit until the dizzy height be reached. And that—when will it be? I accept not the priceless boon alone. Ye Holy Ones, who have been my companions from my boyhood, whose wills have wrought upon my will, whose bodiless voices have counselled me, ye know what is in my heart. If I had separated myself from my kind, from the children who depend upon me for their daily bread, I might now have attained to the goal of my spiritual desire; instead of going forth upon this weary flight I might have been basking in the light of knowledge, as the Divine—nay, the very Divine myself. But it cannot be. For their sakes I must begin again.'

Slowly and brokenly the words fell upon the silence. He who spoke them—a man but a few hours ago in the full pride and glory of life—was dying. Early that morning he had gone out as was his wont from his palace, he had ridden over fields which he had redeemed from the wilderness, he had visited the fair markets that his munificence had opened; he had gone on foot, as he had often done before, through the crowded streets of the city he governed, when the hand of an assassin struck him down. The blow was dealt before the eyes of the loyal throngs that pressed round their rajah; yet the miscreant who did the foul deed made no effort to escape.

'He is a Feringhee,' he muttered as (the wounded prince

having forbidden violence) the people led the assassin to prison. 'He is a Feringhee. He will take away from us our religion and customs, and give us foreigners to rule over us.'

Weeping and moaning, the attendants of the rajah had dressed his wound with such cool unguents as they could procure on the instant, and, while some carried him to his palace, others went in hot haste for the European doctor at the Residency. He let them do what they would, knowing that the doing would ease their pain; but, for himself, he was well aware that the end of his life, as master of these good people and lord of loyal Gumilcund, had come.

When everything that skill and care could devise had been done he begged his attendants to leave him. He wished to be alone.

He had been brought back to his palace at midday, and now the evening was drawing on. The golden light of the westering sun stole in through perforated marble lattices, and lay in patches on the white pavement, and made the water that flowed tinkling through a trough in the centre of the apartment shine like rubies and sapphires. The Arabian carpet on which, propped up with cushions, the rajah lay, had been drawn by his request close to this trough, and his long brown fingers played aimlessly with the water. As he lay, his lower limbs covered with shawls of the richest Oriental workmanship, and the upper part of his body wrapped in a padded cloak of silk embroideries, exhausted as he was with suffering, the peculiar dignity and beauty of his appearance must have struck anyone who saw him for the first time. It was a grand face, finely wrought, noble in form and expression. Those who looked upon it loved it.

The jewelled turban, which he was never more to wear, lay beside the rajah on his pillow, and close at hand was a lacquered tray, containing a gold cup, an alabaster casket, and a silver bell.

The words given above, only a few out of many, were spoken aloud. The effort of thinking was too great for the strength so swiftly ebbing away. Smiling sadly, the rajah put out his hand for the gold cup. He reached it, but he could not raise it to his lips, whereupon he touched the silver bell. While the sound was still vibrating through the air, one of the many dusky forms that were thronging the doorway stood before him.

'Hoosanee,' he said, 'call Chunder Singh.'

Swift and silent as the shadow that sweeps across a ripe corn-field were the feet of the servant. But he had not far to go. In less than a minute a man, slender, but of commanding stature, dressed in snowy white and wearing a red turban, stood, with head humbly bowed and eyes so dim with tears that he could scarcely see, before the rajah.

'My master wants me at last,' he said, an accent of reproach in his voice.

'I am tired. Give me to drink,' said the rajah.

Chunder Singh raised his head and put the golden cup to his lips. He drank, and the deathlike languor left his eyes. 'That is enough. I am stronger,' he said.

'I would it were the elixir of life,' murmured Chunder Singh, who was weeping bitterly.

'Your words bring back the past,' said the rajah, his lips parting in a sad smile. 'The Elixir of Life! Long ago, when we were boys together, how diligently we sought for it, Chunder, poring over the ancient Arabic manuscripts! We were to drink of it and live, age after age, age after age. We were to bring our grey experience to the use and service of the nations. We were to mould a new world, where righteousness would be the law and happiness—happiness, instead of misery—the common lot.'

He paused. 'Dreams!' said Chunder Singh. 'Yet I wish now that they might return.'

'Dreams!' echoed the rajah. 'We know—you and I—that we are deathless. What need of elixirs for us? Though I seem to die—though to-morrow you will take out this body and burn it—the chain of existence has not run out to its limit. *I* remain.'

'But not with us—not with us!' cried Chunder Singh, flinging himself down with his face to the marble pavement.

He was aroused from his paroxysm of grief by the voice of the rajah. 'You are mistaken. Rise and sit beside me, and I will tell you what will make your heart leap with joy.'

Then Chunder Singh rose and dried his eyes, and the rajah spoke. 'There was a moment when I thought that this death would be my last; that when I left the prison of this mortal body I should go forth into the liberty of unconditioned existence; for I have lived as a sage. By day and by night, at the ordered hours, I have meditated upon the sacred books. I have conquered appetite and passion, and have worked for

the sake of others, looking not for reward. Is this true, Chunder Singh?'

'It is true, my lord.'

'I know that it is true, and I know that the door into the highest heaven stands open. But,' in a low and broken voice, 'I may not enter in.'

'Why will my lord say so?'

'I say what I know, what the Invisible Ones have revealed to me. It is two years now since they spoke to me of this. "Brother," they said, "the door stands open. Enter in." I bowed down with my face to the ground. "And my people," I said, "they will enter in with me?" "Nay," said the Holy Ones; "have they lived as you have done?" And I said, "They will." And the Holy Ones answered, "Who will teach them when you have gone? There is no communion between gods and men." Then I trembled, and my knees smote together. "There will rise up others," I said, "like-minded with us; and these will teach them." And they said, "So it may be; yet who knoweth aught of that which is to come?" "Promise me," I said, "that they shall be led into the path that I have trodden." But to my prayer no answer was vouchsafed. After that, Brother Chunder, many days went by. Morning, noon, and night I thought of my people, humbly beseeching the Invisible Ones to grant me the assurance of their final emancipation; but the heavens were as brass over my head, and my words as empty air. But one night, when I was musing, I heard a voice that I had never heard before. "Sacrifice," it said, "is the salt of devotion." As I pondered what this might mean there fell upon me suddenly great awe, and a horror of darkness enveloped me. More days and nights passed over me, and then I spoke again. "It is enough," I said; "I will return again to the dark forest of conditioned existence, and my people shall live." Then at last the Invisible Ones spoke clearly. "So be it," they said. "For your brothers' sakes you shall go through another incarnation, and a body is ready."'

Here Chunder Singh trembled.

'Be still,' said the rajah, laying a long brown hand upon his arm. 'Hear me to the end; for I have still stranger things to tell. Across the sea, in the land from which my father's father came, there lives a youth, to whom I desire to send you. He thinks himself wholly of the West; but our blood runs in his veins. Into him it is decreed that I shall

enter, that, through him, I may return to my people and city. Listen, Brother Chunder, and consider carefully what I shall say to you. When these eyes are closed, and you have carried out this body to the burning, you must go to the land where my father's father lived; you must find that youth of our race; you must be faithful to him as you have been faithful to me.'

'But how shall I know him when I see him?' said Chunder Singh.

'You will know him by this, that he is my heir. My last will and testament is in England, in the hands of our agent, with whom you have often communicated by letter. He, if you present the credentials that I leave with you, will give you all the information you require. Understand, Chunder, while the youth is in England, amongst the friends of his boyhood, I do not desire that you shall press yourself upon him. When he has—as I know he will—made up his mind to become one of us, then you will wait upon and help him. Will you?'

'My lord, thou knowest,' cried the poor fellow, weeping. 'Of what value is Chunder's life to him now, save as he can carry out the wishes of his master?'

The rajah smiled. 'That is well,' he said, 'I am satisfied. This,' laying his hand on the alabaster casket, 'I give to you. It contains gold and English notes, and my secret instructions. Strike the bell three times!'

Chunder Singh obeyed. On the instant the marble pavement round the rajah's couch was thronged with the figures of men in white and coloured garments, whose weeping and lamentation filled the air of the apartment.

But when the rajah lifted his hand there was silence. Then every one of them fell down with their faces to the ground. In a voice that faltered with weakness he bade them rise and listen to his last words. They obeyed him trembling. 'Listen, my children!' he said. 'It is the will of the Supreme, who doeth as He listeth in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, that I should leave you for a season; but when the times are fulfilled I will return. Until I come the elders of the city, Chunder Singh and Lutfullah and the others'—he looked smilingly from one to another—'will rule you under the English Resident, whom I have seen to-day, and to whom you will refer in case of difficulty. I call you all to witness that to my faithful minister, Chunder Singh, I give this casket with

everything it contains. Hoosanee, my bearer, will take the gold cup out of which I drink, and the diamond star in my turban. To him and all of you there are legacies of which you will hear in the proper time and place. It is my desire that the palace be kept as it is till your lord's return. The treasury is in the hands of the Resident, and he will give you your pay. My faithful servants, farewell! Thank you for your service. I can say no more. As you love me, I beseech you to withdraw quietly.'

Stifled sobs followed the rajah's words, but not a single word was spoken. One by one, with lingering looks of love, they left the apartment. At last there were none left but Chunder Singh, his foster-brother, and Hoosanee, his bearer. He looked with yearning affection from one to the other, said feebly, 'Chunder will tell my Hoosanee,' and fell back dead.

CHAPTER I

THE HEIR

In a little green box by the banks of the silver Thames, far from the busy haunts of men and commerce, yet near enough to a busy little county town not to be altogether cut off from the society of their fellows, there lived at the time of the death of the Rajah of Gumilcund, known amongst his Indian contemporaries as Byrajee Pirtha Raj, a widow and her son. They were English. The widow was of middle age. She had been handsome, and she was still comely and pleasant to look upon. The son had just turned his twenty-first year.

The two were somewhat of an enigma to their neighbours, one of whom—the well-known Lady Winter—used to say that the good folks of Surbiton and Kingston ought to be thankful to the Gregorys, without whose eccentricities they would not have had anything to talk about.

Now, it was very well that Mrs. Gregory did not hear this kind speech, for, however she may have affected her neighbours, it is very certain that she had not the least desire to be eccentric. And indeed the peculiarity which set all these busy tongues wagging had more to do with her son than with herself. His appearance, to begin with—how did he come to be so curiously, so abnormally different from his mother? No one seeing them together could have imagined that they were closely related. She was one of those large, fair women—placid in temper and gentle in manner—who develop naturally out of the lily-white blonde of poetry and romance when she is foolish enough to step across the boundary that divides youth from middle age. He had the lithe figure, the olive skin, and the dark melting eyes that are supposed to belong to the great southern races.

The observant said there was something more. They said that the boy's expression of face divided him more completely from his mother than its colour and form. I am speaking now of his childish years. They say—I did not myself know him in these days—that there was a wonderful stillness, a curious, unchildlike spirituality about him; that he looked now and then as if his little soul were in the presence of visions which

made the things of earth strange to him. This was noticed once to his mother by a garrulous neighbour, and the anger with which she received the remark was remembered long after in the neighbourhood. As a fact, the poor woman, placid as she seemed, had her own strongly-marked ideals. When her infant was born, and she called him Tom—a name which the neighbours said did not suit him in the least—she had visions of him in the future as a fair-haired, white-skinned Anglo-Saxon athlete, a cricketing and footballing hero, winning the plaudits of the crowd and provoking the envy of meaner mortals by his magnificent feats. Nature, however, had other views for the lad. But of this we shall see more hereafter. In the meantime it must be mentioned that the curious difference between the mother and son was not their only peculiarity. It was whispered that there was something strange—and we all know how much may lurk behind those two little words—in their past history. That Mrs. Gregory had spent several of her early years in India, where her grandfather, Sir Anthony Bracebridge, had been one of those fine old Anglo-Indian officers who by their military dash and political genius laid the foundation of the vast English empire that was then slowly growing up in the East; that her father had in his turn entered the service of the East India Company and won distinction; and that her husband, Captain Gregory, had belonged to the same order, and had been killed in one of the little wars about which no one in England knew anything;—so much everyone had heard, and this, it might have been thought, was sufficient for the most exacting of neighbourhoods. And no one, doubtless, would have asked for any more but for Mrs. Gregory's curious reticence with regard to the past.

She was naturally an expansive and garrulous woman. Everyone knew that. She was not in the least like Lady Winter, for instance, who measured her words carefully. She loved talking and kissing, and the genial company of intimate friends. Dearest Tom, and his little smart sayings, the house, the servants, the tradespeople, her own and other people's ailments; she was ready at any time to discuss these with effusion. But let one of her acquaintances touch upon India or her early years, and her lips were sealed immediately. So marked was this, that, curious as some of her neighbours were—and those were the days when India was, to the generality of people, a land of romance and mystery—it was

tacitly agreed that it should not be mentioned before her, and so by degrees the gossip died down. Mrs. Gregory was an excellent neighbour and a genial companion. She had a pretty cottage, a good-looking, dutiful son, and she gave charming tea-parties. The neighbourhood accepted her and let her past alone. The coming of General Sir Wilfrid Elton and his family to Surbiton set tongues wagging again. Some one found out that the Eltons and Bracebridges were friends of old standing. Some one else suspected that Mrs. Gregory had not been particularly pleased when she heard they meant to settle near her, and two or three of the sensationally disposed looked forward to what they were pleased to call 'revelations.' None, however, came. The General was far too busy a person to gossip. Lady Elton, a pretty, timid, domestic woman, took to no one in the neighbourhood but Mrs. Gregory; and the girls either knew nothing, or had no inclination to tell what they knew. Our story dates from the summer of the Eltons' visit to Surbiton.

Tom Gregory, who was then just of age, had, in one respect, fulfilled the promise of his childhood. He was a handsome man, for all that his beauty was not of that Anglo-Saxon type which was so dear to his mother's heart. An artist who met him one autumn day wandering by the riverside just as dusk had fallen, described himself as startled by his beauty. He attended one of Lady Winter's receptions later, and asked her in the presence of Miss Vivien Leigh, her pretty and eccentric niece, who the young Greek god of the river was. Her ladyship lifted up her eyebrows and wondered what upon earth he could mean. But Vivien smiled. 'He's met Tom Gregory in his boating flannels, aunt,' she said, in her light airy voice, which seemed always to have a ring of mockery in it. 'And do you know I think I shall keep the illustration; it's a remarkably good one. Which god, Mr. Walters—Apollo or Mars?'

'Scarcely Mars—not fierce enough; but the warlike element might develop. Educate him, Miss Vivien.'

'Mr. Walters,' said Lady Winter, holding up her finger reprovingly, 'my niece is quite naughty enough. She doesn't want any stimulating.'

I give this little scrap of gossip to show the effect which Tom produced in those days on some of the most stylish of his contemporaries. But although, not altogether, it must be confessed, to his mother's approbation, Tom had kept his re-

markable appearance, he had changed in many ways from the beautiful boy who had woven golden visions in the garden by the river. He had been educated, and educated well. Acting on the advice of her friends, and chiefly of old Mr. Cherry, legal adviser of the Bracebridges for three generations, Mrs. Gregory had sent him first to a good preparatory school, then to Eton, and lastly to the University of Oxford, where he had just finished his term with credit. It was the general opinion that this elaborate and costly training, which was supposed to have eaten largely into Mrs. Gregory's slender resources, had been thrown away upon Tom, who declined to belong either to the church, the bar, or the army—the only professions which were in those days considered admissible for a gentleman. But Mrs. Gregory was satisfied. 'It has made an Englishman of him,' she said.

This was a little puzzling to the friend to whom the remark had been made. 'Why Englishman?' she said; 'he was English before.'

'I ought to have said "gentleman,"' she answered; 'but, to my mind, the one includes the other.' She was certainly no fool, this fair, placid-faced widow.

Unfortunately, to be an Englishman, or even an English gentleman, is not remunerative as a profession, and it having been constantly impressed upon Tom that, if he were ever to live in that atmosphere of refinement which is supposed to belong to a gentleman's condition, he must make money, it became necessary for him to cast about for some means of doing so.

He pondered for several weeks, visiting London two or three times in the interval. All this time he said nothing to his mother, and she, knowing his temperament, would not urge him to speak.

Then one evening he asked formally if he might have a little conversation with her, and she knew, by the light in his face, that he had come to a decision.

'Well,' she said, smiling, 'what is it to be? Will you take Mr. Cherry's advice and be a lawyer? He will help you, I know, for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne."'

'So he was kind enough to say,' answered Tom. 'But I thanked him and said "No." I should make a poor lawyer. I want something practical to do. If I were a rich man I should enter the diplomatic service. As I am poor, I wish to make myself an architect.'

'An architect!' cried his mother, wondering within herself what possible connection there could be between the two professions. 'A builder of houses, do you mean?'

'Houses, churches, cathedrals, playhouses, anything I may be put to,' said Tom, smiling at his mother's look of dismay. 'You see there is something permanently useful about building—always supposing that you build well—and it leaves the other half of the mind free.'

'The other half! What in the world do you mean, Tom?'

'I don't know that I am very clear about it myself, mother. But I think it will be good for me to have my fingers and the constructive side of my intelligence occupied.'

Of course Mrs. Gregory argued the point. She had never heard of a Bracebridge being an architect. Even the Gregorys, so far as she could learn, had always belonged either to the army or to one of the clerical professions. Were architects gentlemen? Did they take a place in Society? Could they make money?

Her son quoted one or two great names out of ancient and modern history; but these did not satisfy her in the least. When he continued to urge his views she begged for time to consult their friends; but Tom would not hear of it.

'No, mother,' he said, 'this is a question for you and me, no one else. Can you put down the money'—he mentioned a comparatively small sum—'which will be necessary to bind me as an apprentice, and will you undertake to keep me for the next two years?'

'As to keeping you,' said the poor woman, tears filling her eyes, 'I should do that under any circumstances. What have I to live for but you? But——'

'Then, dearest mother, let us settle it so. In any case I shall not be losing my time. Every art acquired is an additional power and resource. If I find I am mistaken, if I wish to take up what you think a loftier walk of life, I can always do it; and, in the meantime, we are together.'

Yes, they were together, that was the great sweetener of everything; and she was not one to do battle for ideal excellence, or to stand firm against well-sustained importunity. 'After all, it is you, not I, who are choosing a profession,' she said feebly. 'And—and—you are not quite like others. If things come to the worst——' And here she broke off and set her lips together, as if she had a secret to guard.

'If things come to the worst,' said Tom, who was accustomed to these little breaks, and did not mind them, 'we should manage to battle it out somehow, little mother. I am not in the least afraid.'

They arrived at this decision early in the spring. It was then that General Sir Wilfrid Elton, who was at home on a year's furlough from India, paid a visit to his old friend Mrs. Gregory, and fell in love with the cottage adjoining hers that had been empty since the previous summer. She was very frank in pointing out its deficiencies: the tumbledown condition of the fences and outhouses, the close neighbourhood of the river, the likelihood of damp. 'It would be pleasant to have neighbours,' she said wistfully, 'but I should be sorry for such old friends as Lady Elton and you to do anything so important with your eyes shut.'

'We shall certainly not do that,' said the General, with his hearty laugh.

'But consider the girls!' said Mrs. Gregory, a pink flush mounting to her face—the General was such a curiously quizzical man. 'This is a dull place for young people.'

'Dull!' echoed the General, clapping his hand to his knee. 'You have spoken the word. The good people in London have tired us out with festivities. Since we came home it has been one rush. Lady Elton is beginning to be sick of it, so am I. As for the girls, they must make the best of it. Two or three months of eclipse in holland frocks and brown straw hats will do the little monkeys all the good in the world.'

Of course there was nothing more to be said. Mrs. Gregory smiled sweetly, and with a tremor at her heart, and an unuttered hope that if Lady Elton and the General knew more about her former life than her neighbours—a circumstance concerning which she could not be perfectly sure—they would be discreet, entered, with the enthusiasm of a friend, and the practical ability of an experienced housekeeper, into the arrangements necessary to make the new *ménage* comfortable. As a fact the Eltons proved most delightful neighbours. Lady Elton and Mrs. Gregory struck up a friendship which, while it had the charm of novelty, drew much of its sweetness from the past. The girls, who were not little schoolmisses, as might have been imagined from their father's reference to holland frocks and straw hats, but young women ranging from twenty-two to seventeen, flashed in and out of the widow's rooms, dragged her off with them for picnics on the river, and

filled up her somewhat barren days with the overflowings of their exuberant life. As for the General, who had become a great gardener in his retirement, he looked in upon his neighbour, as a general rule, once a day, to inquire after her health, and discuss the condition of their respective crops of roses and strawberries. Tom meanwhile came and went, going to town early in the morning and returning home in the evening. To the surprise of everybody he seemed to like the life. He showed a curious enthusiasm about his work, which he would call neither a business nor a profession, but an art. The evenings and the whole of Saturday and Sunday were his own property; and then he would doff his city clothes and put on the flannels that became him so well, and either spin himself up and down the river in his outrigger, to the admiration of the Elton girls, or dream on his mother's lawn, or take tea, a little primly, but withal satisfactorily, in their neighbour's charming rose-garden, whither his mother and Lady Winter, and Sir Reginald her son, and that pretty enigma, Vivien Leigh, would come; and sometimes after these tea-parties he would find himself strolling along the river with one of the girls—occasionally Grace Elton, oftener Vivien Leigh—while the ringing voices of the rest of their little party sounded behind them; until the sunlight faded, and the little stars twinkled out in the pale zenith.

And so we come to that memorable day in June, from which, as Tom was accustomed to say later, everything dated.

It was that loveliest moment of all the English year, when summer, which has been coquetting for weeks with the enamoured earth, breaking out one day into sunny smiles, and on the next hiding her sweet face in mists and clouds, has issued forth at last in her full beauty. In the irresistible magic of her presence the meadows had become gemmed with flowers; the beeches and elms, and even the tardy old oaks, which are of too ancient a lineage to be beguiled by mere promises, lifted up golden green canopies to the heavens: the birds—nightingales and larks, and linnets and thrushes—made the copses and hedgerows resonant with joyful music. For three whole days the sky and the river had been penetrated with sunlight.

In weather such as this Tom Gregory spent as little time as possible in town. On the particular day which I am trying to recall he found, to his contentment, that there was not much doing, and he gained permission easily from the head clerk of his department to leave earlier than usual.

His mother was out when he reached the cottage—at Lady Elton's, the servant said. Proposing to himself to join her there a little later, he ran up to his room, threw off his city dress, put on his flannels and went out into the garden.

There was a certain tree at its further end, a weeping-ash with long pendent branches, under whose shadow it was often his pleasure to hide and dream. He would take out a volume of poetry—Shelley and Coleridge were his favourites—and lying on his stomach, with his head propped on his elbows, would read a few stanzas, just, as he would express it, to set himself going. After that, if he had nothing particular to think out, he would give a free rein to his fancy, which would range over heaven and earth with the unbridled, glorious luxuriance of youth. Meantime he would watch the waters as they flowed past his retreat, taking absent note of the procession of boats and the laughing music of young voices, which blended sweetly with the sighing of the wind and the chanting of the birds.

This evening, as he remembered later, he had taken out Coleridge. The volume opened of its own accord at that magnificent fragment, 'Kubla Khan.' He read it over twice, with that curious rapture of satisfaction which nothing but the greatest poetry can call out; and then the mystic imagery in its stately setting of miraculously beautiful words set his mind wandering on a wild vision quest of its own.

What the vision was, or whether he was bold enough to imagine that *he* could build

> That dome in air—
> That sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice—

I must not venture to say, lest I should suddenly find myself, 'like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,' floundering in depths whither few will care to follow me.

The dream lasted for an hour, and the boy came to himself with a start, for an image, which he did not in the least wish to detain, was haunting him. He sprang up, gave himself a shake like a dog after a swim, and went slowly towards the boat-house, murmuring, as he walked, the words which had called up the unwelcome image—

> A savage place! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover!

'I wonder why that always makes me think of Vivien Leigh?' he said to himself with a perplexed smile. 'I couldn't

imagine her wailing for any one, least of all a lover, demon or human. Perhaps it's because she's a little inhuman herself. I'm sure she would have been put down as a witch in the middle ages.' He began to whistle a lively air to put Vivien out of his head. Then her image was expelled by another.

> Her face resigned to bliss or bale—
> Her face, oh call it fair not pale,
> And both blue eyes more bright than clear,
> Each about to have a tear.

'What a contrast!' he said to himself, as he stooped over his boat to loosen the painter. '*She* is human—exquisitely, beautifully human.'

At this moment he heard his mother calling him, and, tying up his boat again, he went out of the boat-house and on to the lawn.

'Tom, Tom! where are you?' She looked flushed and excited and out of breath.

'Here I am, mother!' he said. 'I thought you were at the Eltons. I was just going to take my boat round and see if any one was in. You look tired, dear. Come and sit down by the river.'

'Oh, dear! I have had such a hunt for you,' she said. 'I went in to the Eltons after lunch to get them to show me a new stitch, and the girls and their father were out; he has gone to town, for a wonder. So Lady Elton and I sat chatting about old days, forgetting altogether how the time went, and then I came in to see about your supper, and Sarah told me you had been in an hour.'

'An hour or thereabouts, and I was just going out for a stretch. Can it be time for supper already?'

'No, not quite; but——'

And here she pulled up, for she perceived to her annoyance that Tom was not listening to her.

'Do you hear me, Tom?' she said. 'The post has just come in, and there is a letter——'

The boy held up his hand beseechingly. 'One moment, mother!' he pleaded. 'The letter will keep and that will not.'

Now Mrs. Gregory did not agree with him in the least; as a fact, she had come out to find him, being moved with an irresistible feeling of curiosity concerning the contents of his letter, which was of an unusual character, and addressed in an

unusual hand. Tom had very few correspondents, and his mother generally knew from whom his letters came by merely glancing at them. But she knew from experience that Tom was not to be forced. Pliant as he seemed, there was a certain backbone of stubbornness about him. So, keeping herself in check as well as she could, she looked out at the sight 'which would not keep.' It was certainly a pretty picture. Anybody would have been bound to confess that. A pleasure-boat full of young girls, gliding softly along a broad tranquil stream; their light garments and brown and golden hair steeped in the rosy evening light. Of course it was pretty. Mrs. Gregory, who liked and admired the 'dear girls,' from beautiful Grace, the eldest, down to mischievous, tiresome, delightful Trixy, the privileged baby of the two establishments, thought it not only pretty but interesting. There was nothing new, however, nothing to provoke that irritatingly intense look on her son's face and delay the gratification of her curiosity.

But Tom! Ah! 'alchemy of youth and passion; how it transforms everything it touches!' To him not Cleopatra in her barge of state, floating proudly down her river to the strains of spirit-quelling music, was so beautiful.

There were no less than five girls in the boat. Two of them had been rowing, and, as the impetus given by their last vigorous strokes carried it along, they leaned forward on their oars, gazing dreamily into the shadows; the third, a little golden-haired creature, lay in the bows with her face towards the water, and two sat in the stern—one, a royal-looking girl, whose tense expression, direct gaze, and upright attitude showed that she liked the post of directress, steering; the other, a much softer, and, at the same time, a lovelier woman, sitting back with hands folded, and singing in a rich low voice a beautiful old English ballad.

As long as the voice could be heard, and the boat seen, the boy on the river bank looked out and listened. Presently the air carried the sounds away, and the outlines of the boat were lost in the shadows of the willows that fringed the opposite bank. Then he turned to his mother.

'Only the Eltons,' she said. 'I thought, from the way you called out, I was going to see something wonderful. My dear boy, for pity's sake, don't look so intense!'

'I am afraid I can't help my looks,' said Tom a little stiffly. 'Shall we go back to the house? It is getting damp here. You will be having your rheumatism again.'

'Yes, discretion is the better part of valour, said Mrs. Gregory. 'Give me your arm, Tom. I am not so young as I was once. You know, dear'—apologetically—'you mustn't mind what I say about your looks. To me it is just the same, though, of course, I don't *like* to see you dreamy and romantic, for I know to what these things tend. I was so once myself.'

'And it hasn't brought you to any great harm, little mother.'

'I don't know that, Tom. However, I am a woman, and I had friends to look after me—not that they always—but that is neither here nor there. You, my poor dear, *know* what is before you. A man in your position, with his way to make in the world, must keep all his wits about him, or he will soon find himself nowhere.'

'A country about which I have always been rather curious,' said Tom, to whom these admonitions were not new. 'How if I tried a little wool-gathering, just to have a look in?'

'Oh, well, you may laugh; but you will remember my words some day, and I only hope it may not be too late for your own comfort. And now, perhaps, you will take your letter.'

'A letter for me!' said Tom. 'Why'—scrutinising it—'this looks important—blue paper, black seal!'

'I thought it rather funny myself,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'But don't stare at it, child! Open and read it!'

'Come inside first,' said Tom.

They went through a pretty little verandah, well furnished with plants, into Mrs. Gregory's drawing-room, which, though very far indeed from the daintily æsthetic apartment that ladies haunt now, was pleasant and comfortable—well supplied with books in handsome bindings, and fine engravings, and furnished with a low couch, an ottoman, and several lounging-chairs. Into one of these Tom plunged, and, having thrown down his boating-cap on the table, broke the seal of his letter. His mother, who was watching him curiously, saw his face flush red. Then she knew that there was something in his letter which surprised him. It seemed to her at that moment as if all the blood in her body were rushing to her heart, which bounded as if it would burst. The next thing she knew Tom was looking at her, with the strangest expression in his face.

'Did you know of this, mother?' he said.

'Know of what?' she cried. 'Oh, Tom! Tom! what is it? Something has happened!'

'Yes,' he said; and she fancied now that there was a curious, unusual glitter in his eyes. 'Something has happened.'

She caught at his arm. 'It is something dreadful. I am sure of it from your face.'

'Dreadful!' echoed the boy, breaking into a laugh which rang unnaturally in his mother's ears. 'I think few people would call it so.'

'But what is it? Oh, Tom!' besought the poor woman, as her son turned his soft meditative eyes upon her. 'Speak at once, and don't look at me in that way. Child! child! It is like a dream come to life again. I can't bear it. Tom, I say! Speak to me. God help me! He hasn't looked so since he was a baby.'

It was Tom's turn to look surprised. 'My dear mother,' he said soothingly, 'what is the matter? I am afraid I have been frightening you. It is very stupid of me; but the news in this letter is so extraordinary—so unexpected. I have read over the principal part of it twice, and I feel still as if I must be dreaming. But Mr. Cherry is a man of business; he would not be likely to make a mistake.'

'Mr. Cherry! Is the letter from him?'

'Yes; he tells me he is the agent and solicitor—— Mother, what is it?'

'Nothing, dear, nothing—only you are telling the story rather slowly. Mr. Cherry, you say——'

'Perhaps you had better read the letter yourself, mother. I can't say I understand it quite.'

'Yes, give it to me! Quick! I hear the General coming up the garden. My dear boy, don't look like that before him—don't, for pity's sake!'

As she spoke she seized the letter, glanced over its contents, put her hands before her eyes as if the lamplight dazzled her, read it again, and then, with a cry of mingled joy and sorrow, flung herself into her son's arms.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL SIR WILFRID ELTON

THE General was an intimate friend, who never waited to be announced. He would come up through the garden, examining its condition critically, with a view to a report for Mrs. Gregory's benefit, and, frequently, her gardener's confusion. Then he would poke about the verandah, where, on these fine evenings, his neighbour was often to be found, and, failing that, he would look into the drawing-room. If Mrs. Gregory was not there, he would make up his mind that she was either dressing, eating, or visiting; and, keeping a careful mental note of the particulars he had intended to report, would return to his family.

The General was a man of whose friendship anyone might have been proud. Simple as he was in his speech and manner, it was well known, even in Surbiton, that, in his own line, he was a brilliant and distinguished person. Though no longer young, he was a fine man—a soldier every inch of him—not tall, but spare and muscular. His hair was plentifully sprinkled with grey; his face was bronzed by years of exposure to weather; his light blue eyes looked at you keenly and steadily from beneath finely pencilled brows that gave an air of refinement to the face; and his mouth, for all that it was half hidden by a grey moustache, had, in its lines, an expression of firmness and self-dependence which would have won him respect anywhere. The most superficial observer saw at once that the General, debonair as he might be in his manners, was not a person to be trifled with. This evening he came up the garden, as he was accustomed to do, but rather more rapidly than usual, and neglecting to take notes.

He was actually in the verandah when Mrs. Gregory threw herself into her son's arms; and, had not Tom seen him and begged him to come in, he would certainly have retreated.

'I fear I am intruding,' he said, as Mrs. Gregory, who looked curiously shaken, turned to greet him. 'Just like me. Lady Elton said to me, "Much better wait;" but we are such intimate friends; besides—why, Mrs. Gregory, my good old friend, you have borne so much bad fortune with resolution, you are surely not going to break down when good fortune

comes knocking at your door? She's a jade we don't generally find it difficult to welcome. Tom, my boy, I congratulate you. No more building now—eh! You'll be giving orders instead of taking them—a very different sort of business. You look surprised—only just know yourselves? Well, curiously enough, it got wind at the club—how, Heaven only knows. I believe that rumours have wings. I was interested, of course, having known all the family so well, and I called in at Mr. Cherry's on my way home to ask him if there was any foundation for the rumour.'

'And he told you it was true?' said Mrs. Gregory.

'Yes, he was civil enough to answer my questions. The rajah's will, he says, will be public property to-morrow, so it is no breach of confidence.'

As he spoke he had settled himself in an armchair and put his cane and wide-brimmed straw hat on the floor beside him. 'Now, really,' he said, looking from mother to son, 'you are the very funniest people I ever met. I expected to find my young friend Tom dancing a war-dance. Why, young man, do you know what it means to be rich?'

'I think I do, General.'

'Oh! do you? Then all I can say is, wait till you see. It means a good many things, my boy, that you can't so much as guess at. But come, Mrs. Gregory, you can't feel it so much! How many years is it since you met your cousin, the rajah?'

'I am really afraid to think,' said Mrs. Gregory, rousing herself with an effort. 'Still, a death is a death, and it was so unexpected.'

'You were in correspondence with the rajah?'

'Oh no! And that's what makes it so strange. I might have thought—expected——'

'Just so. You might have expected to be remembered.'

'I don't know why,' said the poor woman, with a wan smile. 'But, of course, there was the relationship. Very distant, as you know. My poor father and the late Rajah of Gumilcund's father were only half-brothers. If it hadn't been for the infatuation of my grandfather, Sir Anthony—but I am giving you ancient history——'

'On the contrary, you are interesting me very much. Sir Anthony was always staunch to his Indian connections.'

'Yes; I wondered myself that he married a second time.'

'Oh! he was bound to have an English heir,' said the

General smiling, 'a determination to which you may be said to owe your existence. But about this fortune, are there any particulars? Your cousin, the rajah, you know, is said to have been phenomenally rich. I heard something of it when I was in India last, and, if I hadn't been so busy, I should have got the resident Montgomery to have me invited. A discovery was made in the state the other day—a ruby mine—think of that! I suppose it is Tom's now. They say the city is a perfect little model. The rajah was reviving lost arts and setting a new civilisation going. Will Tom be expected to take the supervision of it all?'

'Oh, no, no. There are absolutely *no* conditions. Mr. Cherry says so expressly,' cried Mrs. Gregory.

'So much the better,' said the General. 'But most probably the state will lapse to the Company. What is the matter, Tom? Are you waking up at last?'

'I don't know,' said the boy. 'It is, of course, a little bewildering, especially as I know nothing whatever of the family history of which you and my mother have been talking. But this I do know. If I take up this responsibility I will carry it through to the best of my ability.'

'But there is no responsibility,' said Mrs. Gregory, wringing her hands. 'General, my old friend, tell the boy so. He needn't surely become an Indian rajah because a rajah has left him a fortune.'

'Of course he needn't,' said the General lightly; 'though, really, do you know'—looking at him—'I think he would play the part pretty well. Tom, take your mother's advice. She has ten times more common sense than you have. But'—rising with reluctance—'I must be going. Supper? No, thank you. Uncommonly good smell, though. We have cold meat. It's always cold meat here. Those young monkeys of mine have such confoundedly good appetites. Did you see them on the river, by-the-by? Look well, don't they, in their boating get-up?'

'Very well indeed, General. Grace looks as well again since she came down here,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'And Trixy ought to be strong. The liveliness of that child——'

'Keeps you awake, does she?' said the General, stroking his iron-grey moustache and looking out before him with a flash of satisfaction in his keen blue eyes. 'Tell you what, ma'am, that child has the courage and wit of the family. She is a splendid little creature. You see how she'll come out if

ever she's tried! And that reminds me—the little witch has persuaded me to let her go back with us this winter.'

'Oh, General!'

'It is very weak, I know, but, positively, I can't help it. You see, I am taking out the other four, and it seems hard to leave her behind, poor monkey.'

'Yes; but five girls in India!'

'You may well exclaim. I consider that the responsibilities of a rajah's wealth are nothing to mine. Fortunately they are as good as gold, and then, you know, I am not like a griff: I know the ropes, and can make them pretty comfortable. That new bungalow of mine at Meerut will be in first-rate order by this, and I mean to send them up to Nainee Tal in the heats. Well, I must really be trotting. I am carver, you know, and I shall be scolded as it is. Come and see my wife and the girls when you are a little resigned and can talk it over calmly.'

He was talking when he crossed the verandah, and when he left off talking he whistled a lively air and then sang lustily an old barrack-song of his juvenile days, which brought him to his own garden gate. He had no sooner opened it than he was fallen upon by a troop of girls with light garments and flowing hair. He flourished his cane and made a feint of trying to escape, but they took the cane from him, wound their arms about him, and held him fast. Then, as they moved forward in a troop towards the house, drawing him on with them, they all began to chatter together.

'You're not at all a good strategist, dad,' said one. 'We heard you a mile off.'

'And we have been waiting about an hour,' from another.

'Supper's on the table; and I'm as hungry—as hungry—as a bear,' from a third.

'Oh! never mind Trixy,' cried a fourth silvery voice, 'she's always hungry. Tell us about *them*.'

'Weren't they frightfully surprised?'

'They must have thought you an angel for going in to see them at once.'

'But how did they look? What did they say?'

'Has Tom put on any airs yet?' This last was from Miss Trixy.

'Girls! girls!' from the highest of the golden heads, 'how is it possible for dad to answer you if you all speak at once? Come in, father——'

'No, dear, don't! Stay with us; we're quite as fond of you as Grace.'

'And as fond of gossip, you cupboard-love young women! Come, clear off, Grace and all. There's not a pin to choose between you.'

He spoke in what was known as his voice of thunder—a voice which had often made a thousand dusky warriors quake; but these mischievous girls only chattered the more rapidly, and clustered round him the more persistently.

'Where is your mother?' said the General.

'In the dining-room,' said Trixy, 'sitting like patience on a monument, waiting for you.'

'Dear, dear! Am I so very late? I suppose I did forget the time a little. Well, never mind. Here we are! Mother, my dear,' stooping to kiss the forehead of a pretty elderly lady who was sitting in an armchair by a little wood fire, stitching at white work and smiling placidly, 'you must excuse me. I am afraid I am late.'

'Are you late, dear?' she said, rising and folding up her work, 'I didn't know. The time slips away so quickly when one is busy. Oh, the girls!' looking round affectionately. 'But they are always hungry. River air and strong exercise, I suppose. Trixy, dearest, father would like to get rid of his coat and see his letters. Call Yaseen Khan.'

Trixy, who was afraid to leave the room lest interesting news should be given in her absence, went to the door and called out, and in the next instant an Indian servant, old, but handsome still, and dressed in gay garments of white and red and gold, a voluminous snow-white turban crowning his dark eyes and dusky face, appeared upon the threshold. The General asked him one or two questions in rapid Hindustani; he answered submissively, and then, going about his business as steadily as if the issues of life and death hung on its due performance, removed the General's upper coat, his hat and gloves, and laid before him the letters which had arrived by the latest post.

The girls and their mother were in the meantime taking their places round the table, which was plainly furnished with cold meat, bread, and salad. A dish of exquisite pink and yellow roses occupied the centre, and there was a handsome tea equipage opposite Lady Elton, and a large silver bowl, heaped high with snowy rice, at the General's end of the table. There was certainly nothing luxurious here; but in the ar-

rangement of the meal, no less than in the appearance of those who were partaking of it, there was an unmistakable air of distinction and refinement.

The girls were hungry after their day on the river, and for a few moments there was little heard but the clatter of knives and forks. Then there was a little pause. The General, who had glanced over his letters and laid them aside, was looking across at his wife. 'I saw Mrs. Gregory and her son,' he said tentatively.

Immediately five pairs of inquisitive eyes were turned upon Lady Elton.

'Well!' she said, smiling. 'They had heard the news, of course?'

'Cherry's letter had just arrived.'

'Only just! I am afraid you were a little in the way, Wilfrid.'

'So I was, at first; but I think now it was as well. They were curiously upset.'

'Poor dear Mrs. Gregory!' said Lady Elton gently. 'I can well understand it.'

'I don't think I should be upset if I heard that I had come into a large fortune,' said a mutinous little voice at the General's end of the table. 'But Tom—how did he take it?'

'Do be quiet, Trixy; let father speak,' whispered the girl at her elbow.

'Yes,' said Lady Elton, whose kind face had grown curiously soft. 'Tell us about Tom. The dear fellow is such a favourite of mine! Do you know it is quite delightful to me to think that he is well off—not, of course, that riches mean happiness. I hope I am not so foolish as to imagine that. There are other things'—looking round her with a glow of happiness in her sweet old eyes—'that come far, far before riches. Still it is pleasant to have a competence. A number of little anxieties are knocked off at once, and then you can do kind things without counting the cost.'

'But, my dear wife,' said the General, 'permit me to say that I don't think you have quite grasped the position. The boy is the Rajah of Gumilcund's heir—his heir, mind you. Why, he will be ridiculously—phenomenally rich!'

Lady Elton's colour rose, and she gave a little troubled glance round the table, whence a prolonged 'Oh!' had risen. 'Then I can understand his mother's uneasiness,' she said in a

low voice. 'It is always troublesome and dangerous to be exceptional.'

'But think of the pleasure and triumph if you can be it well,' said Maud, the second girl. It was she who had held the rudder-strings in the boat that evening.

Then came the mutinous little voice in the corner again.

'We are wandering from our point,' it cried discontentedly. 'The point is Tom. Tom the fortunate man, Tom the handsome man, Tom the heir of this romantic person in India, what did he say? How did he look? Did his eyes shine? He has such expressive eyes, you know! Never shake your head at me, Grace. You said so yourself—I heard you—to mother, "capable of expressing every shade of feeling"—those were your very words.'

Upon this Grace blushed, a circumstance which seemed to give the keenest satisfaction to the mutinous little person in the corner; the other girls laughed, and Lady Elton called them to order. In a momentary lull the General was heard to say:

'You young ladies observe pretty minutely, I must confess.'

'Yes, yes!' cried Trixy. 'Girls, do let father speak.'

'I was going to say, Trixy, that my eyes, I am afraid, are not so clever as yours. As far as I can remember, Tom took it very quietly, didn't dance, didn't laugh, didn't put on height. His eyes may have shone; but, as I am not a competent observer, I refuse to pledge myself. My impression is that when you see him next you will know him.'

'Father, do you know that you are not at all interesting?' cried the irrepressible Trixy.

'Oh! if you want romance you shall have it. Give me five minutes——'

'You *know* we don't want romance. We want facts.'

'Which I have given you, Miss Monkey.'

'A very meagre supply, dad.'

'Limited intelligences——'

'Excuse me, dad; people with powers of observation and inference——'

'Take this girl away!' cried the General, laughing. 'Inference, indeed, you monkey! Why, there will be no living with you soon. You have finished supper. Go, all of you! Come, I dismiss you with my blessing! And, Trixy——'

'Yes, dearest,' bleated the little creature. 'May I stay? I'll be as quiet as a mouse.'

'And drink in every word I say. No, thank you. Tell Yaseen Khan to bring my hookah, and then make yourself as scarce as you can. I want to have a talk with mother.'

'I wish I were mother,' said Trixy, looking back discontentedly. But she obeyed her father.

CHAPTER III

'IN VISIONS OF THE NIGHT'

LEAVING the girls to think over what they had heard, we return to the heir and his mother. Unlike as they were in appearance and temperament, a strong affection united them. Mrs. Gregory had her weaknesses—her tremors, her hesitations, her curious infelicities of speech and action; but all of these her son tolerated, even, in a sense, loved. What to him rose grandly above them was the self-forgetting affection which throughout his life had shone out before him.

She, naturally, adored him. He may not have been altogether what she would have liked him to be, but he was hers. She had watched him through his infancy; in his childhood she had made herself a child again that she might love the things he loved; she had nursed him in his little sicknesses; she had taught him his catechism, and creed, and collects, and the beautiful old stories of the Old and New Testaments; with a full heart and passionate prayers she had sent him out to the perilous little worlds of school and college; and now it was her chief interest and delight to provide him with the physical comforts which, she always maintained, kept the mind serene and the body vigorous.

Sometimes she was dimly conscious, poor soul, that he was moving away from her spiritually. Having caught scraps of his conversation here and there, she had begun to feel afraid that his ideas strayed beyond the limits of the faith she had so patiently taught him. During the daytime, when he was away, she would take up the book he had been reading last—a volume of transcendental poetry or a dry philosophical treatise, and try—oh! so pitifully—to understand what it was

in it that interested him. Her efforts were all in vain. After an hour of patient effort she would put down the book with a heavy sigh. Her failure was a measure of the distance that separated them—a proof, if any were needed, that they moved in different worlds. 'What was the use of giving him to me,' she would say to herself sometimes with a curious bitterness, 'if he was only to belong to me in his childhood? He is very little mine now. He will soon not be mine altogether.'

But these were only moments in her life; moments, indeed, of which Tom knew nothing; and to say that to any appreciable degree they coloured the everyday existence of the mother and son would be extravagant. As a fact they lived together harmoniously and pleasantly, having entire confidence one in the other.

And so, on this strange evening, when the General had gone and supper was over, Tom, who was naturally burning to understand his new position, expected that his mother would sit down in her usual pleasant, gossipy way and talk it over with him. No such thing. She annoyed him by bustling about. There was a letter she had forgotten to answer. Wouldn't it do to-morrow? Certainly not (severely); to-morrow had its own duties. Then an account to be dotted up. Wouldn't Tom help her? she said feebly. She had a poor head for figures. While he was looking over it she slipped away, and half an hour later, when he went in search of her, he found her in the kitchen overlooking Sarah's performances. She was so worn out that he simply carried her away with him by sheer force of will, and laid her down on the couch in the drawing-room, where she remained with her eyes closed for some minutes.

Unfortunately for herself she was too active and restless to keep up any longer the feint of repose. She got up for her work, and her son, seizing his advantage, pursued her with questions. Not one of those questions would Mrs. Gregory answer directly. When he urged her, saying he would rather she should answer them than anyone else, she pleaded that she was as bewildered as he was. He could understand that, he said, but she must know more. For instance, she had met the rajah—he had heard her say so to General Elton. What was he like?

'Did I say so?' said Mrs. Gregory.

'Mother dear,' cried the boy, 'do you object to being questioned?'

'Oh no. Why should I?' she said, the colour mounting to her face. 'But it is so many, many years ago.'

'That you met the rajah?'

'Yes.'

'Still, you remember him.'

'As he was then?'

'Of course, as he was then. Couldn't you give me your impression of him? That will be some little guide.'

'Why are you so anxious, Tom?'

'Well, mother; but isn't it natural? He has come into my life as a new power—new to me, although, of course, he must have known of me, and been thinking of me for a long time.' Then breaking off: 'How pale you are, dearest; have I said anything to hurt you?'

'No, no, it is nothing. It is only that I see you moving away from me—so far—so far—and——'

'Mother!'

She came to herself with an effort. 'Forgive me, my son,' she said. 'I am not very strong, I suppose, and you know'—with a little smile—'a great change like this always gives one a certain shock.'

'I am tiring you with my silly questions.'

'Not at all; and I don't think they are silly. It is natural you should wish to know something of the man who has enriched you. But I had rather, on the whole, you went to Mr. Cherry. The business has been in his hands for a number of years.'

'It isn't the business, mother——'

'I understand, dear. I understand perfectly. Well!' drawing her lace shawl about her, 'another day. How curiously chilly it is becoming! Will you shut the window?'

'Certainly, mother.' He had been sitting close beside her. He now took a chair at a little distance and took up a book.

Mrs. Gregory watched him with a wistful pain at her heart. She was conscious to the finger-tips of his disappointment, and she hated herself for inflicting it; but there was nothing to be done. She could not speak. She would not if she could. Yet the distance he was putting between them wounded her intolerably. After she had borne it as long as she could she called him. He was at her side at once. 'I am afraid I have disappointed you, dear,' she said. 'Sit down near me again, and we will talk.'

He obeyed silently. He thought he would give her the

initiative this time, determining, whatever she might say, not to show his feelings again. By that delicate perception, which was one of Heaven's best gifts to him, he had long since learned to understand and shield his mother's sensitiveness.

She, poor woman, scarcely knowing what she said, drifted into mysterious warnings and entreaties. He must be wise; he must do nothing rashly; he must be guided by Mr. Cherry, who was a good man and a Christian. Tom gave her the assurances she asked; but they did not satisfy her; and, I think, it was a relief to them both when, on the stroke of ten, the little maid of the establishment came in with her Bible to take part in the pathetic ceremony with which their day always closed.

When his mother left him Tom sat down and looked round for a few moments, blankly. He was tired; but he could not rest until he had thought out this strange thing that had come to him, and here it was impossible to think. The atmosphere of the room oppressed him. He had a curious, irritating impression that, though his mother's bodily presence had gone, her spirit was haunting the place, preventing him from thinking freely. At last he opened the French window softly, let himself out into the garden, and, allowing his feet to carry him along mechanically, found himself presently on the lower lawn, close by the boat-house and willows. There he stopped and let his eyes wander at their will. Ah! what a world it was—this soft, mysterious midnight world of June! Think! How could he think? But, happily, there was no need yet. The hours of the sweet summer night were before him. With a deep inspiration, in which he seemed to be throwing off a heavy burden, he flung himself down on the grass, his face towards the sky, his feet towards the river, while he gave himself up to the rapturous sense-impressions of the moment. He saw the upper sky, veiled here and there with thin, vaporous cloud-wreaths; and it was so near it seemed to be stooping to embrace him. There was a streak of silver between the cloud-wreaths. It shone out, disappeared, shone out again, and the fleece about it was tinged with pale gold. It was a horn of the young moon—the moon on which Endymion's heavenly love descended, when on that starry night long ago she kissed his eyes open to behold her. Through 'the solemn midnight's tingling silentness' he could hear the swish of the water as it swept over the long grasses and reeds at his feet. Lovely water! and the fish that swam in it, were they awake too?

Did they go on swimming all the night through? Lovely water! And lovely, lovely little earth! Ah! how sweet it was to live—only to live and breathe in her arms on such a night as this!

It might have been a moment, it might have been an hour, that the boy lay upon the river bank. He could never tell. Of the prick—the tiny throb of self-consciousness, that called him out suddenly from his Eden, he would often speak later with a smile. He sat up, frowned, drew his relaxed muscles together. *This* was not what he had meant when he came out into the solitude, he said to himself severely. He was a man, not a thing; it was a weakness, a folly, to allow himself to drift into mere sensuousness.

Ha! what was that? He turned round suddenly. It was a sound like a silver bell ringing close beside him. If he had been a child he might have thought that a fairy in a lily cup was laughing at him; the sound was so definite, so curiously round and clear.

Giving no attention to it, he set himself sternly to his task, and two or three ideas about the relative values of riches and poverty—ideas far too fine and exalted to be put down here—followed one another through his mind. It was a young mind, as we know. Young minds are superior. If we have ever tried to walk on a tight-rope, get up early in the morning, or take a precipitous hillside at a rush, and succeeded, we shall know how they feel. It is their newness which we experienced people should not grudge them. In a little time—we know how very little—they will find out that there is nothing new under the sun.

Now the young heir, who was exceedingly new, felt a certain throb of exultation in the circumstance that he was able to feel as a serious man should when a great change comes into his life. The train of thought being pleasant he followed it out. I believe he made one or two correct resolutions. He would not be led away into foolish and selfish extravagance; he would avoid flatterers; he would do as much good as he could with his money. Not original. Oh dear no! commonplace, I am afraid. But goodness is just the one thing that does not require genius to conceive it. I wonder if that is the reason why it is so often thought dull? The kind of thinking on which Tom was engaged tends to restlessness, and hence the downfall which I am about to record.

He got up from the grass, and walking on aimlessly left

his mother's garden, and went on for a few paces down the road. Presently he pulled up with a smile and a start. He was at the side gate of the Eltons' garden. An irresistible desire seized him to go in. Trying the latch, and finding the gate unlocked, he stole in noiselessly. He was in a narrow path that led through a thick shrubbery. In its midst he paused. All his wise thoughts, all his correct resolutions, had flown, and his heart was beating fast and furiously. What was this—what was this—which was rushing through him, tingling in his veins like wine of Paradise? 'And a spirit in my feet' —he murmured the words half aloud—

'A spirit in my feet
Hath led me—who knows how?
To thy chamber-window, sweet.'

Slowly he went on along the dark little path. It came out on the rose-garden, Grace's special pride and care, which was now in its full glory. By the faint light of the summer dawning, for the night was already on the turn, he could see the clustered blossoms, crimson and pink and yellow, hanging from trellises and pillars, and weighing down the branches of the young standards. But it was not this that made him pause and catch at a pillar of the verandah for support. Once already that night the beauty of the earth had touched him. Now it was something more. As he stood the branch of a tall standard was swept towards him by the breeze. There were roses on it, opened and half opened. He caught at it passionately. Ah! how well he knew the touch of the soft pale petals, the odour they exhaled! It was a La France, Grace's favourite rose. The last time he saw her she had worn one in her girdle. Scarcely knowing what he did he kissed the sweet flower that had touched him. But in the next instant the colour had flooded his face, and he was passing on rapidly to the lawn by the river, for it was as if he had stolen what he had not won, as if his lips and her lips had met on the petals of the flower that was her darling.

At the end of the lawn there was a bank crowned with willows, at whose roots purple loosestrife and rosy willow-herb were growing. He could see these things dimly as he looked out before him. Under one of the willows was a rustic seat, where the girls often clustered in the evening. Tom sat down upon it and gave himself up to the dreams that were crowding upon him. Dreams! Dreams! In a misty radiance of lovely shapes they swept by him. What a fool he had been! It

was the beauty of nature; it was love that binds young lives together; it was passion, whose feet were on earth and whose soul was in heaven, which was the reality. These other things—reason, philosophy, maxims of prudence—they were an illusion—webs that the dull of heart weave to hide their own dulness from themselves. And, after all, why should a man think; why should a man be serious when happiness such as this—*this*! was opening out before him?

He got up and walked on for a few steps. His feet were unsteady, and, with a smile of self-ridicule, he sat down again. He spread out his arms with a low cry. 'Grace!' he murmured. 'Grace! do you know that I love you?'

He paused. The faint, sweet kiss of the pale-petaled rose was lingering about his lips. He was remembering how, two days ago, only two, when he and she were together here—here at this very spot, he had longed to speak but dared not. That rose was in her girdle. His lips had been open to ask for it. Something had sealed them. He was too young—too insignificant—his fortunes were too uncertain. For her sweet sake he had held himself in check.

Now—ah! everything had changed. He was no longer insignificant—he was the heir of a man of wealth and distinction—his fortunes were certain—he could make a future for the woman he loved. If, as he had imagined, dreamed——

But he could go no further. He flung himself on the grass. His lips were towards the earth, and it was as if he was speaking to *it*—telling it the secret ecstasy that he had not breathed to any living soul. 'I could not speak then, but I can now. This wealth has freed my hand. They will listen to me—they must! And she! Oh, Grace! oh, my darling! Come to me and I will make the earth a Paradise to you! Others do not know what love means. They promise and they forget. I never will. My love! my beautiful love! Come to me, and let me care for you. I will, I will. Care for you as never woman was cared for before. Your lightest wish shall be my law. Your very imaginations and dreams shall come to pass. You and I, Grace, you and I—our two lives shall flow on together, loving and beloved until——'

What was this? He pulled up short. It was a pang, sudden and swift, like a cold hand on his heart. He rose slowly, and found that his limbs were stiff, and that his clothes were wet with the night dews. Like one in a maze he went on, for a few steps, blindly. The roots of a willow stopped

him, and he saw that he was on the edge of the sloping bank that ran down to the river. He stood where he was, gazing out before him, with eyes that saw nothing. In that little instant all his ecstasy had gone, to be replaced by a dull misery such as he had never felt before. Between night and morning there is a moment when life is said to run sluggishly in the veins of earth's children. It is then that the long-tortured drop into blissful, if brief unconsciousness; that watchers nod drowsily; and that the dying fall on the sleep that knows no waking. That moment had come.

Tom lifted his heavy lids and looked round him. A chill stole through his frame, penetrating to the very marrow of his bones. He buttoned his coat up to the chin and turned to leave the garden. But in the next instant he was transfixed. It was as if a hand of iron was laid upon his wrist, compelling him to stand where he was.

He passed his hand before his eyes dreamily.

When, after a brief interval, he looked up, it seemed to him that the colour of the water had changed from the pale crystal of the morning to deep blood-red. The trees were changing too, taking strange and undistinguishable shapes, while there came towards him on the breeze a confused murmur as of a multitude of steps and voices.

Again he closed his eyes; again he strove to shake off the leaden weights that held his feet in prison; but it was useless. He looked up to find all the familiar features of the landscape gone. What had been the river was a zone of burning sand over which hung a sky lurid and awful; the confused murmur was still in his ears; but it had drawn nearer, and the crimson cloud that had hung between earth and heaven seemed to be descending and distributing itself in multitudinous forms. Then, in a moment or less, the zone of sand is filled with figures—figures dark of face and threatening of aspect, that brandish steel-bright swords in their hands.

He looks, but he cannot stir. It seems to him in those awful moments that there is more to come—that he is waiting for it. Suddenly it rises—or has it been there all the time and has he not seen it?—the vision of a woman, in white garments, with golden hair and sad, wild eyes. *Her* face—not as he has ever seen it; but hers. A groan breaks from his lips. 'It is a dream,' he says to himself. 'It is a dream.'

But a sound rises above the fierce cries of the warriors, a sound piercing and shrill; it is the voice of his love, wild with

terror, calling out upon his name. Passionately he tries to reach her but he cannot, and all the time, like the wild insulting chorus of fiends, his own words, 'Come to me, and I will make the world a Paradise to you,' are running through his brain.

His limbs are trembling now, and the cold drops of anguish stand upon his brow. 'O God!' he cries, 'I have sinned. Be merciful! I can bear no more!'

Scarcely are the words out of his lips before the blood-red pavement, the fierce faces, and the lurid sky have gone. But she—his love—is still before him, a pale, sweet phantom, with wonder and a wistful tenderness in its eyes.

In that same instant the chain that had bound his limbs is loosened. Crying out 'Grace! Grace!' he dashes forward blindly.

In the next instant our dreamer found himself sprawling on his back upon the grass, two hands of iron holding him down, and a pair of glittering grey eyes above him.

'No, you don't,' said an irate voice, as he tried to release himself. 'No, you don't, sir. If you must commit suicide I can't help it, of course, but it shall not be in my compound. Keep still, I tell you, madman! I'm not so young as I was, but I'm strong enough to fight you, and, by Jove, if you attempt to stir, down you go again.'

By the time this harangue was over Tom had recognised the features of his captor, realised the absurd nature of his position, and was laughing heartily.

'Is it you, General?' he said.

'You know me, I hope,' said the old soldier sternly.

'Oh yes, perfectly. Would you be kind enough? Thank you,' as the General, who was reflecting that intending suicides did not generally preface their last exit with so natural a laugh as this of Tom's, relaxed his hold. 'Do you know, General, your hands are like iron?' Tom sprang to his feet as he spoke.

'Like iron, are they?' he said. 'Well, they have had to do hard work in their time. But come, boy—seriously—I should like to know what you mean by it.'

'By what, General?'

'By being here at this extraordinary hour to begin with. I don't believe, myself, that you have been in bed all night.'

Tom looked sheepish. It would not quite have done to quote Shelley's couplet to the General, and there was absolutely

no other reason to give for his presence in the garden save that 'the spirit in his feet had led him thither.'

'I am really very sorry——' he began.

'Understand me,' interrupted the General, mollified by his penitence, but feeling bound to express his displeasure; 'I have no objection to see you either in the garden or in the house. I have begged you again and again to come and go as you please. Lady Elton has done the same. She has a strong regard for you, and so have I. But, sir, when you go in for extraordinary athletic performances, I must beg you to find another field than mine for the display of your talent. Also'—and here his very hair seemed to bristle with indignation—'to find another name than my daughter's to hang rhapsodies to. A very pretty little story would have got about if anyone but myself had been here. And,' he added as he turned away, 'there's too much talking as it is.'

The reddest of Grace's roses was scarcely as red as Tom's face when the General turned away from him.

'Did I?' he stammered. 'I beg your pardon—hers, I mean. I must have been dreaming. I couldn't sleep last night, General, and——'

Now, a confession was the very last thing the General desired. He broke in hastily:

'All right, my dear fellow, all right. I mustn't be too down upon you. It was a tremendous piece of news that you received last night, quite enough to set a young man's wits wool-gathering. But take it quietly, if you can. In six months, if I know human nature, you will be so much accustomed to it that you will feel as if you had been rich all your life.'

'But it isn't the riches,' began poor Tom tremulously. 'It is——'

'Yes, yes. I understand. The change—prodigious, as you say. Now don't talk any more. Go home like a sensible fellow and have a good sleep.'

'If I might have a little conversation with you first, sir——'

'Impossible, my dear boy. Quite out of the question. Look at these'—pointing to the pot-plants—roses and geraniums and fuchsias and lilacs, which Yaseen Khan and the gardener were bringing down in batches and placing beside the river—'all to be seen to before the sun rises.'

'I shall not be long. I only want to ask you a single question.'

'But how long will it take to answer? No, no; I am not going to be betrayed into an argument. It takes all one's wit, I can tell you, to deal with one's plants.'

As the General talked he worked. He had thrown off his coat and tucked up his shirt-sleeves, and lighted a small briar-wood pipe, and he was moving about briskly among the plants, watering them, syringing them, washing blight off their foliage, loosening the earth about their roots, and drenching them with tobacco-smoke.

Tom meanwhile held his ground, watching him. Whenever there was a pause he would jump up, as the old man said to himself discontentedly, 'like a Jack-in-the-box.' But he never found an opening for the little conversation that he so earnestly desired, and finally the flight of time and the General's perseverance carried the day. In a few moments, if he remained where he was, a bevy of laughing girls would be down upon him, pouring out questions which he might find it difficult to answer.

So he rose regretfully. 'I will come again, when you are not so busy,' he said.

'Yes, yes; certainly,' said the General cordially. 'Come again, by all means. You are always welcome. But if I don't look to the plants early they suffer. Good rest to you, my boy, and a pleasant awakening.'

When Tom had gone he breathed a deep sigh of relief. But his work flagged, and in a few moments he left the gardener to finish it, and went up slowly to the house, to see if 'mother' was awake.

'That's the worst of having girls,' he said to himself discontentedly. 'There is always something brewing. Now, if four of them were boys——'

Ah! but which four? That was the difficulty. It seems unreasonable, but it is the simple truth: for 'a wilderness of boys,' each of them as handsome as Tom Gregory, the General would not have given the least of his little girls.

CHAPTER IV'

A MYSTERIOUS LEGACY

MR. CHERRY, head partner of the firm of Cherry & Lawrence, sat in his private room, expecting the young heir. A japanned box, bearing the Bracebridge name on its lid, was at his feet; a bulky packet, sealed with many seals and addressed 'Thomas Gregory,' was on the table beside him; and the parchment wrapper, out of which, apparently, the packet had been taken, lay spread out on his desk. The wrapper bore the following inscription:

'To William Cherry, of the City of London, solicitor.—My will and last instructions are sealed up in this packet, which I desire may be opened by you after my death, or, in case of your dying before me, by the representative you may appoint. By the love you bear me, I beseech you to see my last wishes carried out.

(Signed) 'BYRAJEE PIRTHA RAJ.'

Four years before this mysterious packet had been conveyed to Mr. Cherry by a secure hand. He was an old man, and the rajah was in the prime of life. It had never, therefore, occurred to him that his would be the hand to open it. But the unexpected had befallen. The rajah had fallen by the knife of an assassin; and when Mr. Cherry, in the presence of two witnesses, opened the parcel left with him, he found a formal, unusually brief will, duly signed and witnessed, with the packet already mentioned, which was to be given as it was into the hands of the heir.

By this time Mr. Cherry had recovered from his first shock of surprise, but to any who knew him well it would have been evident that he was still extraordinarily moved. He was a person well known in London at that time. His mellifluous voice, his gift of well-balanced and persuasive speech, and his dignified manner, with the snow-white hair that became him so well, the broad, massive forehead, determined mouth, and calm, blue eyes, made him the very prince of family solicitors. The world said Mr. Cherry had mistaken his vocation: lawn sleeves and a bishop's crozier would have suited him far better than a

lawyer's gown. Mr. Cherry agreed with the world. But Providence—a power towards which he maintained and instilled the deepest reverence—had decreed it otherwise, and he accepted his lot with cheerfulness, bringing the gifts that would have adorned another profession to the service of that into which he had been thrown. It must be confessed that the gifts had proved useful. Mr. Cherry had a large and distinguished flock of clients, enriched by whose gratitude he could have retired years before from the arena of public life. But to retire was just the one thing that they would not let him do. It was whispered that men and women went to him as to a father-confessor; that secrets which would have staggered the brain of an ordinary man were hidden away securely behind that calm, wide brow, and that the reputations and fortunes of some of the noblest families in England were in his keeping. However that may have been, it is certain that no one ever repented having confided in him. His clients were his children, whom it was his pleasure, no less than his duty, to protect and guide.

The Bracebridges had for years belonged to the number of Mr. Cherry's flock. The rajah who had just died was their last male representative, for the English branch had long died out, and the family property, to the profound grief of the old lawyer, had passed into other hands. Mrs. Gregory, whose small patrimony he had nursed carefully, was the only one left of the family; and although he was on perfectly good terms with her, he had allowed her, when she married Captain Gregory, to pass out of the sphere of his influence. He was sorry to-day that he had not seen more of her boy.

'It is a great responsibility to fall upon young shoulders,' he said to himself, 'and I fear the instructions won't help him much—a mysterious, a *most* mysterious dispensation of Providence. May God help and guide the poor boy!

This was not a mere form. Mr. Cherry did believe firmly in a Power overruling the seemingly capricious allotments of what fools call fate. That he felt it expedient from time to time to remind this august Ordainer of the consequences that might flow from His mysterious dispositions was a fault rather of the head than of the heart. He had himself in his small way more than once played the part of a human Providence, and he was conscious, even to morbidness, of the importance of the rôle.

While he sat thinking Tom was shown in. He rose and

saluted him gravely. 'Mr. Gregory,' he said, 'I congratulate you. This is a great change in your fortunes.'

'So great, Mr. Cherry, that I have not been able to realise it yet.'

'I can understand that. But sit down. I will try, with your leave, to make things clear to you. Mrs. Gregory, of course——'

'One moment, Mr. Cherry,' broke in Tom. 'I must begin by telling you that my mother has told me nothing. I did not know, until yesterday, that we had any Indian relatives at all. I asked her to explain, and she referred me to you.'

'Very strange! very strange!' said the lawyer musingly. 'Mrs. Gregory was surprised?'

'She was more than surprised.'

'Shocked?'

'Yes; I believe she was really shocked,' said Tom. 'My mother told me, you know, to speak to you freely,' he added.

'Certainly. I should be pained if you did not,' said Mr. Cherry in his most impressive manner. 'Mr. Gregory, I have been the friend of your mother's family for three generations. They have all treated me with confidence. You, it seems, are chosen to carry on the traditions of the race. Why this is, I must tell you frankly, I cannot even guess. But it is so. If you permit it, I will be your friend as I have been theirs.'

'Thank you,' said Tom, grasping cordially the hand which the old lawyer extended to him. 'I accept your offer with pleasure. And I only hope I may prove worthy of your friendship.'

These preliminaries over, they proceeded to business. In a few clear words Mr. Cherry explained to Tom what the relationship had been between his mother and the rajah. The will, which should be laid before him presently, was of the simplest. There were a few legacies to servants and retainers, a bequest to Mr. Cherry, and the remainder absolutely, in the words of the will, to 'Thomas Gregory, my cousin's son.'

'Are there no conditions?' asked Tom.

'None whatever. I gather from a private letter, which I will put in your hands, that you are nominated as your cousin's successor in the raj. But, as Gumilcund has been for some years a protected state, the Company will have something to say about that. You had better put yourself in communication with the Lieutenant-Governor. There is a Resident, who will look after things there meanwhile. I have *heard* that

Lord Dalhousie had a particular affection for Gumilcund. But this is all for the future.'

'Whatever my responsibilities may be,' said Tom, 'I assure you that I have no desire to shirk them.'

'Well said,' answered Mr. Cherry. 'But we must be patient. We must do nothing in a hurry. I may tell you, in the meantime, that your cousin had a considerable amount of property in England. He sent over his surplus revenues for us to invest. This was with the view, I believe, of carrying out some new scheme. We have large sums in our hands now waiting to be dealt with, and you can draw upon them as soon as you like. I keep a clerk on purpose to deal with what we call the Indian-Bracebridge property—an intelligent fellow, and a keen man of business. He shall wait upon you at whatever time you like to name, and give you every sort of information.'

Here he paused and cleared his throat. The dramatic moment of the interview had come, and it had to be met with proper dignity.

'You have something more to tell me,' said Tom.

'Yes,' said Mr. Cherry impressively. 'I have something more to tell you. A will, as I have often said, is public property. It is the duty of the law to see it carried out. But men may have wishes as well as intentions, although they may not think it prudent to complicate their last will and testament by inserting them. In such case they will often leave them behind in other forms, leaving it to their successors to carry them out. This, I imagine, your cousin the rajah has done.' He drew forward the sealed packet. 'Inside the wrapper which contained the rajah's will,' he went on, 'I found this.'

'How strange! How very strange!' said Tom. 'This is just what I was hoping for.'

'Take it away with you,' said Mr. Cherry, 'and open it at your leisure. But let me say one word first. There can be nothing legally binding in these papers. You will read them, of course, and no doubt you will try to act in their spirit; but I should not advise you to attempt to follow them slavishly. Your cousin, though he had an English grandfather, was an Asiatic of the Asiatics.'

'Was he a Mohammedan?'

'No; nor, I believe, a Hindu; but he was not a Christian. I am afraid he had no settled religion, unless at the last;

there is just the hope. The truth was put before him faithfully, though in weakness,' said Mr. Cherry, his voice faltering. 'What I mean by his being an Asiatic is that his sympathies were rather with the East than with the West. He was one of the greatest Sanskrit and Persian scholars of our generation. I am told he knew the Vedas and the Zend Avesta, not to speak of all the great Hindu poems and the mass of Buddhistic literature, as we know our Bibles. It was marvellous that one mind could have carried so much learning. Yes, and he was a delightful man to meet—courteous, gracious. He had the most wonderful way of setting his friends at their ease and overcoming their prejudices. I think sometimes now that, but for this charm of manner, I might have been more faithful with him. But'—very sadly—'the opportunity has gone.'

As he spoke he rose from his seat. He saw by the strained look in Tom's face that he was listening to him with an effort. 'Excuse me,' he said, 'I am an old man, and, I suppose, garrulous. You are anxious to be alone with your papers.'

'I shall open them at home,' said Tom quietly. 'I am much obliged to you, Mr. Cherry. I will come again when I have read them, and perhaps you will tell me more about my cousin then. I assure you'—smiling—'I cannot hear too much.'

'The boy has *their* manner—their look too,' said the old lawyer to himself when he was left alone. 'I wonder where he got it? Harking back, I suppose. A very strange thing this heredity is—a very strange thing indeed!'

It was afternoon when Tom returned to the cottage. Finding, no little to his relief, that his mother was out, he hurried up to his room, shut and locked the door, and drew out his mysterious packet. As he sat with it before him his heart beat more quickly than usual, for he felt like one called upon to converse with spirits and to enter into the secret counsels of the dead.

Then, his excitement increasing as he proceeded, he began to break one by one the seals with which it was closed. At the last seal he paused, and cast a rapid glance round the room, whispering half aloud: 'Is anyone there?' There was no answer, and his glance, which had been merely mechanical, for he *knew* no one had come into the room with him, strayed to the window. 'I am dreaming as I did last night,' he said

to himself bitterly. 'If this sort of thing goes on I shall be a perfect visionary soon, fit for nothing but a lunatic asylum. Ah!' he interrupted himself, 'what is that?'

At the word he leapt up, crossed the room in one bound, threw the Venetian shutters open, and looked out. There was no one—absolutely no one—not a human being within sight or sound. The Sleeping Beauty's palace could scarcely have been more still than this green garden world, as it lay basking in the light of the golden afternoon.

Calling himself by a variety of contemptuous names, Tom strode back to his seat. There should be no more of this foolish nonsense, he said, and he broke the last seal. The wrapper at once fell open, revealing a little pile of papers, which appeared to be covered with minute handwriting. Tom's heart was by this time beating like a sledge-hammer. What was he going to hear? What was he going to see? He took up the first paper and examined it closely; but how great was his disappointment when he found that he could not make out a word of it! He passed rapidly to the next. It was as unintelligible. Two—three—four he unfolded; the result was the same. To his eye, unpractised in Oriental writings, one was exactly like the other. This, he said to himself bitterly, was like offering a man bread and giving him a stone. At last, when he had gone through nearly the whole of the pile of papers, he came to one different in appearance from any of the others. It was smaller in size, but thicker, and the leaves were gummed together at the edges. He was about to open it when he saw that there was an inscription on the outside, written in characters exceedingly minute, but not Oriental. He held it up to the light and read as follows: 'Unless you are capable of forming a firm resolution, go no further!'

While he was wondering what this might mean he turned the roll over, and saw that words were written on the other side also. These were still stranger: 'If you are brave and resolute, open without fear.'

He paused to think. It was so silent in the room that he could hear the beating of his own heart. He was asking himself if he had the qualities required by his mysterious benefactor, and wondering what could be the nature of the secret which must be approached in so resolute a spirit. Weird stories of dim antiquity—of beautiful things grasped at by eager hands and won, but won through strife, and blood, and tears—floated through his brain as he sat hesitating, the un-

opened roll before him. Suddenly he found himself speaking, uttering the thought that was passing through his mind. 'I think I could act with resolution if the necessity arose. I am not all I should be; of that I am well aware; but——'

And here he broke short, for the impression he had combated a few moments before had come to him again, and this time with a force that there was no denying. For an instant he sprang up wildly. Then, feeling dazed and helpless, he sank back, covering his face with his hands.

In the next moment a clear, low voice was sounding through the room. 'You mistake. It is not a question of worthiness, or even of ability. The qualities we want are four: humility and honesty—and these you have proved that you possess; courage, which you do not deny yourself; and an obedient mind, which you may possibly have to learn. Open the paper and learn its secrets.'

'Who are you that presume to command me?' said Tom tremulously.

'That I may not tell you. I have been near you all your life, but never so near as now, when the Holy Ones have permitted me to be the bearer of their message. The good that is given, they say, must be expended in good.'

'Do you doubt that I feel it?' cried Tom.

'It is because I do not that I encourage you to open the paper.'

'But why——'

'I can tell you nothing. The past has gone from me. You must learn, moreover, as it is given to you to learn, not altogether, but little by little, and learning first an obedient mind.'

'To whom is my obedience to be given?'

'That will be shown to you. First steps must ever be taken with faith. Have courage!'

'It is not cowardice that makes me hesitate.'

'You are right. It is honesty. Then take time. To-night you will decide.'

At this moment, when all Tom's nerves were tingling, there broke upon his ears sounds so familiar that in an instant they put to flight the weird impressions under which he had been labouring. 'Tom; I say, Tom! The dear boy is asleep or he would answer. I will go and see.' It was his mother's cheerful voice that rang up the stairway. In another moment her hand was on the door. 'Why, it is locked!' she cried

'Are you asleep, dear? Let me in!' And she gave a series of impatient taps.

'In one moment,' said Tom.

He gathered up the heap of papers, threw them into his writing-drawer, looked searchingly round the room, and then, whispering under his breath, 'Until to-night!' opened the door to admit his mother.

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE MOON AND RIVER SAID

'WERE you asleep, dear?' said Mrs. Gregory gently.

As she spoke she cast her eye timidly round the room. It fell on the writing-drawer, which Tom had not been able to shut on account of the quantity of papers. 'You have been busy?' she said with a vague smile.

'My business will keep,' he answered. 'Only some papers, mother—about the property, I suppose. Mr. Cherry gave them to me this morning. They were with the will—addressed to me.'

'How strange! And you have read them?'

'Not yet. They seem rather elaborate. I expect they will take time.'

Mrs. Gregory brightened. 'Then they must keep,' she said cheerfully, 'for I want you. Lady Winter and her son are in the drawing-room. They have come on purpose to congratulate you, and I should like you to see them.'

'Very well, mother. Just let me make myself tidy first.'

'All right, dear, and I will entertain them. You know,' she lingered, looking at him wistfully, 'Lady Winter has always been so nice to me; and Sir Reginald knows everyone. He could help you on in society. You will make yourself pleasant to them—for my sake?'

'My dear mother,' said the boy, turning his strained-looking eyes upon her, 'I will do my best. No one can do any more.'

With a little sigh she left him and returned to her visitors.

Society has some curious arrangements. It reverses, as a general rule, the Scriptural order. Those who honour them-

selves it delights to set on high in its banquets, while the humble are allowed to fill perpetually the low seats that they have chosen. Lady Winter honoured herself, and her honour was accepted as the true estimate of her worth. She seldom paid calls. She received them. Her parties were general, for if anyone who could by any possibility be said to belong to society had been shut out there would have been painful heart-burnings, and her neighbours, many of whom were far richer than herself, were flattered when she accepted little services, such as the use of their carriages, and presents of flowers and fruit, game and vegetables. Besides preserving this comfortable worship she could do three things well. She could dress so as to hide the ravages of time; she could manage a small income with grace and success; and she could say pretty things with an *abandon* that marvellously enhanced their charm. She had in consequence many friends. Amongst these Mrs. Gregory, as she was telling her to-day, had always taken a high place. Some people might have thought that the change in their fortunes had quickened the flame of friendship. Mrs. Gregory did not. She was a simple woman, and Lady Winter, as she had told her son, had always been very nice to her.

But her face flushed a little at the kind words.

'And to think that you are rich!' said Lady Winter.

'It isn't me,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'It is my boy.'

'But it is the same thing, of course. An only boy—and one so devoted. Ah! you may smile. We all know. I only wish my Reginald were half as nice to me! Well, as you know, I don't think much of riches myself. I had them once. Sir Thomas was a millionaire when we married—supposed to be one at least. Poor man! he thought nothing good enough for me—nothing! I tried to protest. It was of no use. If I didn't accept the lovely things he gave me it made him miserable. The riches took flight, and, curiously enough, I am as happy. A few years and it will not make much difference whether we have been rich or poor. We all stand on the same ground at last. But,' as the door opened, 'here is your son. My dear boy,' holding out an exquisitely gloved hand, 'allow your mother's old friend to congratulate you on your good fortune. I know *someone*,' with a flattering smile, 'who will be enchanted to hear it. But I think I shall keep *her* out of the way a little while.'

'Good fortune, indeed!' The voice came from the depths

of a low lounging-chair, in which a long-limbed, handsome youth was reclining. This was Sir Reginald Winter. He rose languidly, and went forward to meet Tom. 'When my mother has done,' he said with his sleepy smile, 'perhaps I may be allowed to shake hands with you. Many happy returns of the day! Isn't that the proper form. By Jove, though,' laughing, 'if you had more than one, there wouldn't be room for anyone else. I hear you are a millionaire.'

'I think he scarcely knows how he stands,' said Mrs. Gregory nervously.

'Of course not,' said Lady Winter. 'I believe you only heard of it yourselves last night. Some of the Eltons told *us*. Charming people the Eltons! I am positively in love with those dear girls. But such gossips. Ah!' lifting up her grey-gloved hands, 'how they can talk! If I had secrets I had rather confide them to the town-crier than to that amiable family.'

'But this is no secret,' said Mrs. Gregory, the colour mounting to her face.

'Tom's good fortune! Oh dear, no; why should it be? I only wished to explain how it was that we knew so early. You know,' in a low voice, 'I couldn't help being a little excited. We are both mothers—both left alone early. I have so often sympathised with you in your anxieties——'

'I know—I know,' answered Mrs. Gregory affectionately. 'And I can't tell you how pleasant your sympathy is to me. We have so many kind friends here. Their interest and affection have touched me deeply.' She cast an appealing glance at Tom, who looked painfully wooden and irresponsive. 'I am sure my son feels with me,' she added.

This seemed to arouse Tom, for he murmured something indefinite about being much obliged.

'Never mind,' whispered Lady Winter to Mrs. Gregory. 'Young men are all alike. They don't care for congratulations. Reginald was just the same. When my poor old aunt died the other day, you know, and left him that little bit of money, and people told me how glad they were, he behaved quite naughtily. "Really," he said at last, "I wish she hadn't; I'm sick of hearing of it."'

'Then I think he was very ungrateful,' said Mrs. Gregory severely. 'A pretty sort of place the world would be if we had no one to rejoice and grieve with us!'

'That is the woman's view, my dear friend. But men, you know——'

'Men!' echoed Mrs. Gregory scornfully. 'Boys!'

'Oh come! my friend Tom is not quite a boy,' said Lady Winter, with a smile of exquisite graciousness towards that irresponsive person.

'Well done, mother. I shall treasure that up,' laughed Sir Reginald. 'I am called a boy often enough, Mrs. Gregory, and I am ages older than Tom. I say, Gregory, what do you say to a stroll and a weed? A fellow is taking my new outrigger up and down. I should like you to see it.'

'Take Sir Reginald to the summer-house, Tom,' said Mrs. Gregory; 'it has such a cheerful look-out. And bring him back to tea. Yes, Lady Winter, you must stay, both of you. The boys will like to have their chat out quietly, and Lady Elton and two of the dear girls are coming in presently.'

'But we shall be too many for you.'

'Not at all. I must tell you,' whispered Mrs. Gregory as Tom went off with Sir Reginald, 'that I had in additional help to-day. Such a smart little servant; a capital cook, and knows how to wait at table. She was five years in her last place, and has *such* a character! It seemed almost a Providence, if it isn't irreverent to say so. It was my dear boy'—she looked out with dewy eyes to where she could see her son's tall, slender figure on the sunlit lawn. 'He says I have slaved for him long enough, and now I shall have everything done for me. No one would believe what a heart that boy has. Positively, I am afraid of what he may think of doing now he is rich.'

'It is very nice to see young people like that,' said Lady Winter pleasantly. 'Reginald is wonderfully soft-hearted too. But I have tried to bring him up reasonably, and I do believe he has no crazes. Seriously, I don't think your boy could have a more suitable friend just now. You see Regy has sown his wild oats. I am bound to confess that the crop was innocent enough, but it cost me something. Now he is as steady as old Time.'

'I am very glad that the two boys should be together,' said Mrs. Gregory simply.

Here, to the annoyance of Lady Winter, who had more to say about Tom, Lady Elton and two of her girls, Maud and Trixy, were shown in.

Lady Elton had been feeling a little nervous all the morning, wondering what she should say; but the moment she saw Mrs. Gregory all her nervousness fled. Her sweet face flushed a rosy red, as she went forward impulsively, holding out her

two hands. 'Dear friend!' she said, 'we are so glad—so very glad—to hear of your good fortune.'

'I knew you would be,' said Mrs. Gregory, and, forgetting the dignity of their respective positions—a General's wife and a millionaire's mother—they kissed each other again and again, like two schoolgirls.

Maud meanwhile stood aside, and waited her turn. She was a handsome girl of the aggressive type. No one would pass her over in a crowd. She had flashing brown eyes, a profusion of silky brown hair, which she wore, after the fashion of the time, in a sparkling beaded net, regular features, and a determined mouth and chin.

Maud was never nervous. She considered herself equal to every conceivable emergency. When Mrs. Gregory turned to address her she had her little speech ready. 'We were delighted with father's good news last night,' she said, smiling prettily, 'and we hope you and Tom will be very happy.'

'"We" includes me,' said Trixy. 'Maud speaks so well, you know. We always let her speak for us. But I really am tremendously glad.'

'Thank you, dears,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'I love to feel that you are glad. We are so like one family that I feel as if it ought to be good news to you all. And now,' looking towards Lady Winter, 'what do you all say? Shall we sit out on the lawn until tea? It is just pleasant now.'

'If you ask me, I should like nothing better,' said Lady Winter, rising gracefully.

'But where is he—Tom, I mean?' said Lady Elton, as they went out. 'I heard he had come back from town.'

'Reginald has carried him off for a smoke and a chat,' said Lady Winter. 'I expect they will join us presently. But young men will have their quiet hour in the evening.'

'I see them!' cried Trixy. 'They are just outside the summer-house. I'll run and tell Tom you are here, mother.'

'No, no!' and 'Wouldn't it be rather a pity?' came simultaneously from Lady Elton and Lady Winter. But Trixy did not hear them. She knew instinctively that her friend Tom wanted deliverance, and she was off across the garden with the speed of a lapwing.

So far the conversation had been rather a one-sided business. Sir Reginald had talked. He was giving information. Tom had listened. He had heard of magnificent chambers in town

going for a song; of shootings and fishings to be had for very little more than the asking; of horses perfect in wind and limb, concerning whose purchase Sir Reginald would be glad to interest himself; of cellars of priceless wines waiting for a buyer; of furniture, china, pictures, bric-à-brac to be had at phenomenally low prices—of a world, in fact, that was offering itself for purchase. The curious thing was that none of these interesting pieces of intelligence seemed to move him. He sat, as Sir Reginald said afterwards, like a wooden image, gazing at nothing. He would not even take the excellent cigar he was offered. Then, just as his companion hoped he was becoming a little interested, the wild little Elton girl rushed down upon them, and his opportunity was at an end.

Tom showed plenty of animation to Trixy; and when he heard that Lady Elton had come over to the cottage with her, he said he would go back to the upper lawn and see her. 'What will you do, Winter?' he said.

'Oh, thanks. Don't mind me. I'll finish my cigar out here, and join the rest of you later,' said Sir Reginald.

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly by. Tea, which was a composite meal such as women love, proved a complete success. Nothing could have been prettier, Lady Winter said graciously.

After tea Tom devoted himself to Lady Elton, Sir Reginald made Maud happy by talking down to her sleepily, Lady Winter chatted amiably to Mrs. Gregory, and Trixy teased everyone in turn.

Presently came some music—the drawing-room music of that period, which was before the days of amateur artists. Maud, thinking of handsome, languid Sir Reginald, warbled a sentimental love ditty; Mrs. Gregory was induced to play an old-fashioned fantasia; and Trixy rattled her last piano piece, making her mother hot and cold by turns as she stumbled over the difficult passages.

The Winters left early. She was enjoying herself so much, Lady Winter said, that she *could* stay all night; but she was bound not to keep late hours. She was going to have some visitors—one in particular, whom she believed they would like to meet, and she mentioned an early day for tea at their house, begging Lady Elton to come too, and to bring Maud and dear little Trixy with her.

To her son she said as they walked home: 'A little of

that kind of thing goes a long way. I wonder if those dear good people will ever learn to be rich?'

'Tom won't. He is a regular muff,' said Sir Reginald. 'I shall take no more trouble about him.'

'Oh! but you will, dear,' said his mother sweetly. 'For Mrs. Gregory's sake. She is such a dear good soul! Not quite—well, you know what I mean—but very nice;' and she added after a pause, for her son had not thought it necessary to answer this appeal, 'I have written to Vivien. I rather think she will be with us to-morrow.'

'I must say, mother,' said Sir Reginald, 'that you don't allow the grass to grow under your feet. I shall be surprised if even Vivien, clever as she is, gets anything out of that moonstruck youth.'

'Well, we shall see,' said Lady Winter.

In the cottage the departure of the Winters brought a certain sense of relief, more especially to two of the party, Tom and Lady Elton.

There was a strong sympathy between these two. Sometimes, indeed, it made Tom's mother jealous to see her son hang about her old friend as he was doing to-night. After she had watched them for some time wistfully, she said, her voice quivering:

'Haven't you appropriated Lady Elton long enough, Tom? Come over here and entertain Maud and Trixy, and let me have her for a few moments.'

'I am afraid I am not in an amusing mood,' said Tom, rising with reluctance.

'When you are next in an amusing mood perhaps you will let us know,' said Trixy saucily.

'Those are things people ought to find out for themselves,' he said, taking a seat beside her.

'How can they,' said the child, 'if there are no indications——?'

'Which means that you have always found me dull.'

'No, no, no. But I can't say you are ever very funny.'

'You see, Trixy, you give no one a chance.'

'Bravo, Tom! not bad for a beginner,' cried Trixy, clapping her hands. 'Maud'—to her elder sister—'how *ridiculously* grave you look!'

'I see nothing to laugh at,' said Maud, whereupon the incorrigible child folded her hands and looked down her nose

demurely. The copy of Maud's expression and attitude was so good that Tom could not help laughing.

'Stop a little longer ; the young people are just beginning to enjoy themselves,' said Mrs. Gregory to Lady Elton.

'Thank you very much, but I am afraid we must really go,' she answered. 'The General will surely be at home by this. He took Grace up the river this afternoon.'

'And he wouldn't take anyone else,' said Trixy, who was still smarting under her grievance. 'I am *sure* they were going to talk secrets. Good-bye, Tom.'

'I mean to take you home as usual, Trixy.'

'Pray don't,' said Maud icily. 'It's only a step.'

A peal of laughter from Trixy greeted her speech.

'Maud,' she cried, 'you are too funny for anything. You will freeze us up to nothing. I feel the process beginning. Don't you, Tom?'

'Trixy, you wild little creature, do you mean to stay all night?' said Lady Elton, who was waiting hooded and cloaked in the verandah.

'No, mother, here I am,' said Trixy, 'and Maud is following me. Maud can't walk very quickly, you know. Good-night, dearest, sweetest Mrs. Gregory. Tom——'

'Tom will go with you, of course,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'Good-night, dears. Come and see me again soon. Yes, the night air is a little chilly, so I will shut the door. You may say good-night to me too, Tom. I am tired, and I think I shall go to my room at once.'

The door of the cottage shut, and all but Mrs. Gregory went out into the throbbing silence of the summer night. Its enchantment made even wild little Trixy quiet for a few moments. As she looked up and saw the little moon, half entangled in a web of rainbow-tinted clouds, floating like a spirit in the dark spaces of the starlit sky, she said in a stifled whisper that she didn't in the least wonder that looking at the moon made people feel sentimental. In the next instant, however, sentiment was put to flight.

A cheerful, sonorous voice, which they all knew, came ringing across the lawn, while from under the shadows of the witch-elms a little band of figures appeared. The General, and Grace, and Lucy, and Mildred had come out in search of them.

'Good-evening, Tom ; good-evening, everybody,' said the General. 'We began to think you meant to keep my lady altogether, so we came out in a body to fetch her back.'

'It was unnecessary. I was taking the greatest care of her,' said Tom; 'but I am glad to see you all the same, General.'

'Thank you, my boy, thank you,' said the General cheerfully. 'Well, good-night to you!' And then he tucked his wife's hand under his arm—he was her true lover still, as he would be to the end of his days—whistled up the girls as if, stately Maud was saying to herself discontentedly, they were a pack of harriers, and started off at a quick pace for their own gate.

Tom fell behind with Grace. He did not know exactly how he had managed it, or whether any management at all had been required; but so it was that when they came out into the moonlit road, he and Grace were together. He looked down upon her with a beating heart. Words came thronging to his lips, but he could not speak them. She seemed to have moved further away from him than ever. This white light of moon and stars in which she walked was, to his excited fancy, like the mystic world that was her home, and she in her light garments, her pale gold hair all ruffled by the breeze, making an aureole like a saint's halo round her beautiful face, was as lovely, and alas! as unapproachable as a vision. Silently they go along the interval of road that separated Mrs. Gregory's grounds from those of General Elton. And now they are in the little dark shrubbery behind the lawn and rose garden.

Here Tom, who has been sighing like a furnace, pulls up in desperation, for he feels that his opportunity is slipping away from him.

'Are you tired?' he says in a shaken voice.

'Oh, no!' answers Grace, only a little more firmly. 'I am not at all tired.'

'Then won't you come down to the river for a few moments?' he says pleadingly. 'It looks so pretty in this light.'

His heart is thumping against his ribs, and there is a singing in his ears which nearly deafens him. He hears indeed so imperfectly that he is on the point of apologising humbly for having made a preposterous suggestion when he realises that Grace has fallen in with it, that she is, in fact, leading him to a little tangled path through the shrubbery that leads straight to the lower lawn. 'Mind how you go!' says the sweet voice. 'It is dark here, and the branches are low. To the right; now to the left. Trixy calls this the maze.'

In a few moments they emerge from the shrubbery, cross an interval of lawn, and stand on the bank above the river, at the very spot where Tom saw his vision of the night before.

'Isn't it lovely?' says Grace, in a low voice. 'Come here, under the willows, where the shadows are deep, and look down!'

'How dark and silent it is!' says Tom.

'Silent, but never still. I don't know how it is,' says Grace, with a little sigh, 'but flowing water always makes me feel tired.'

'It is the constant movement. I have felt that too. But sit down, darling. Don't look at it——'

She interrupts him a little impatiently. 'No; you don't understand. It is not *that* weariness; it is of the mind. I think of life: how it is going on, always, always. No rest, not for a single moment; dying, being born, loving, hating, thinking, fighting, suffering, sinning. It is terrible.'

'But it is beautiful too, Grace.'

'It may be, or perhaps indifferent. To one here and there; one like the river that receives but cannot give.'

'What do you mean, Grace?'

'I don't know that I quite know myself,' she says wearily. 'But look at the river. It is very old, isn't it? I imagine how, when it began to flow, the big primeval world, with its forests and monsters, was about it—ages upon ages—and then came men and their inventions—huts and houses, and castles, and palaces, and cities, rising and falling as the river flows on, the old, old river. And sometimes I think of the dead it has hidden, of the tragedies it has seen, of the miseries it has stilled. And *it* is always the same; smiling in the sunlight, sleeping in the shadow, making pictures of the trees and flowers on its banks. Could one hope to like that?'

'But we do not see what the river does, Grace.'

'Some of us do. We carry in our hearts the passion and pain of the past. I had rather not, much rather. Sometimes I feel as if it would kill me, and then I long to be as this water is, smiling and insensible. But when they have touched you once,' says the girl, her voice vibrating strangely, 'you know that you can never be as you have been; never, never!' She turns her back to the river. 'Come back to the house,' she says abruptly. 'I hear my sisters laughing.'

'Must you go? Will you not give me two or three moments? I have so much to say to you. So much' (smiling a little

piteously) 'that I scarcely know where to begin. Grace, dearest, my life is flowing on like the water in the river, and this little hand of yours can turn it whatever way it pleases.'

'Hush, hush!' says Grace. 'You must not say such things.'

'I must, for it is true. Grace! Grace! I love you.' He pauses. The light of the moon is veiled by clouds, so that he cannot see her face; but she is silent, and silence sometimes means more than speech. 'I am not worthy of you'—his words leap out fervently—'so unworthy that it is little short of madness to imagine you might care for me. But I love you. I know'—with a catching back of the breath—'there is nothing strange in that. Everyone who has seen you must love you. But I think—I think—no one will ever love you as I do. My heart, my soul, my life; everything I have and am are yours, if you will only take them.'

And here suddenly he stops, the eloquent words frozen on his lips. Grace has covered her face with her hands. 'What is it?' he whispers very low. He would draw one of those little hands down and cover it with kisses; but he dares not. In the next instant he is trembling. She has lifted her sad eyes; she is looking at him, looking at him—oh, God!—with the very eyes of his vision.

'I wish you had told me this before,' she says brokenly. 'Is it only now you know that you love me?'

'No, no. I have known it always, the first moment I saw you. But why, in the name of Heaven, do you ask me such a question?'

It was a foolish question'—she is trying hard to speak calmly. 'Forget it.'

'I cannot, Grace; for pity's sake tell me!'

'Because, dear Tom—I will call you so this once—*then* it might have been; *now* it cannot.'

'You might have accepted my love, oh, Grace!'—he tries to seize her hands, but she will not give them.

'Not now, not now,' she says. 'It is too late.'

'But how can it be?' cries the poor fellow wildly. 'Grace, you are torturing me. Two days ago—such a short time—we seemed to understand one another quite well. I would have spoken then, but I had nothing to offer you. It was for your sake, darling, because I could not—dared not—run the risk of dragging you into poverty. My circumstances have changed, nothing else. And, dear, if you object to being rich, there is

no need for us to spend our wealth as rich people generally do. For all I know I may be only steward of my inheritance. To-night when I leave you I am to read the papers which I believe will give me the real wish of him who left it to me. Grace, I shall go to them with such hope, such heart, such courage, if I take your promise with me. Answer me, my darling, may I believe, may I hope, that whatever I may be called upon to do may be done, not by me alone, but by you and me together?'

That question has never been answered.

Grace had turned away from him. Suddenly she cries out and grasps his arm convulsively. 'Look! look! What is that?'

For an instant horror holds him spellbound. In the next he is rushing headlong across the garden, crying out 'Fire! Fire!'

CHAPTER VI

AN IRREPARABLE LOSS

THE Gregorys' cottage was on fire. While Grace ran back to the house calling her father, Tom leapt over the fence, ran along the road, and tore into their garden, where, to his great relief, he at once saw his mother and the two servants. The girls were weeping and wringing their hands. Mrs. Gregory looked dazed. 'Thank God that you are all right!' cried Tom, as he swept past her towards the burning house.

'Come back!' cried his mother. 'I beg you. I command you!' But Tom had already gone.

The General joined her. 'All right so far!' he said. 'The fire is all on one side. We may save the cottage yet. How did it happen?' turning to the shrinking maids.

'I was going to bed,' sobbed one.

'But if I hadn't been up,' said the other, 'goodness knows what mightn't have happened! It was like this here, sir——'

'Go to the General's, both of you,' interrupted Mrs. Gregory impatiently. 'General, I am to blame, and only I. I put down a lighted candle on the window-sill in the hall and forgot it. The curtains caught.'

'Just so. Those new-fangled decorations are like tinder.

I've said so again and again,' said the General, grimly triumphant. 'It's a good thing you got out safely. Here are Grace and my wife. Now take my advice and go quickly to our house with them. I'll look after Tom.'

'Come with us, dear Mrs. Gregory,' said Grace.

'The General will do all he can,' said Lady Elton.

By this time the garden was alive. People were hurrying up from every direction : water was being poured over the roof of the cottage, and all sorts of things—from tables and chairs to millinery—were being flung out of the windows. 'I can't go in till I know that Tom is safe,' cried Mrs. Gregory.

'Why, here he is!' said the General, 'and by Jove! he looks as if he had seen a ghost!'

Tom carried a lantern, the light of which, streaming upwards, showed his face as white as death. He strode up to the little group, and, taking no notice of the ladies, seized the General by the shoulder. 'Robbery has been done,' he said hoarsely.

'What? Money! jewels! Lady Elton, for God's sake take Mrs. Gregory away!' said the General. 'Now,' as the three ladies moved away slowly, 'don't rave ; but tell me plainly what has happened!'

'My desk has been ransacked and papers of incalculable value to me have been taken out.'

'Taken out? You are sure of that?'

'I am positive. I put them away in my escritoire. It has been forced open.'

'Anything besides papers gone?'

'Nothing. I put a twenty-pound note there—the price of my last design. It is there still.'

'And these papers—what are they?'

'I don't know. That is the cruel part of it. They were given to me by Mr. Cherry as explaining my inheritance, and I was to have looked over them to-night. But we are wasting time. Come back with me to the house and watch the people there. I have a suspicion that the papers were seized and the house fired by the same hand.'

'Impossible, Tom! I know how the fire arose.'

They had been hurrying back to the house ; but, on hearing this, Tom pulled up. 'You know!' he ejaculated. 'How can that be?'

'My dear boy, for Heaven's sake don't be so melodramatic,' said the General tartly. 'You will be accusing *me* of stealing

your papers next. The fire broke out in the simplest way. Your mother put down her candle on the window-sill in the hall, and those muslin curtains of yours, against which I have preached till I am tired, caught fire. Now don't, like a good fellow, stare at me so! I am repeating your mother's own words.'

'Where is my mother?' asked Tom.

'She is with Lady Elton, and there she shall remain for the present. I refuse to permit you to ask her a single question to-night.'

They were, by this time, in the midst of the little crowd that surrounded the house. Water was still playing over it, but the flames were dead. 'Pretty safe now?' said the General, addressing one of the policemen.

'Yes, sir; and we saved a goodish lot of things.'

'So I see. Any strangers about?'

'No, General; not a single soul. I was up here from the first. Do Mr. Gregory think——?'

'Mr. Gregory has missed some valuable papers.'

'If they were on this side, General, 'taint wonderful like.'

'They were on the other——'

'We must see after it to-morrow,' interrupted Tom hastily; and then, raising his voice: 'I am much obliged to you all for helping me to-night, and to-morrow, if you come to me, I will reward you for your trouble. I believe there is nothing more to be done now.'

'Two of the police had better stay on the premises. There are all sorts of things lying about,' said the General. 'You, Tom, will come back with me.'

'I am much obliged to you, General; but I think I had rather not. My own room is perfectly safe, I believe.'

'But the furniture is out, isn't it?'

'No; there was nothing of value but the papers; and, for reasons of my own, I had it left as it was. Good-night, General.'

So at last Tom was alone. He had given up his lantern to the policeman; but he would not strike a light. He sat on the side of his bed, listening while the sounds of the many footsteps died away, and gazing out into the darkness, which was strangely empty to him. At last, being utterly worn out, he flung himself down on the bed and slept. He awoke early. Of course his first thought was the papers, to the loss of which

he could not reconcile himself tamely. Thinking it just possible that he might have been mistaken in supposing he had left them in his writing-drawer, he turned the room upside down in search of them. It was all to no purpose. After a few wild moments of alternating hope and despair, he made up his mind that they would not be found in the house.

He dressed and went down into the garden, which was choked up with *débris* from the gutted rooms. His mother's servants, under whose directions some of the furniture was being carried in, were there already. He questioned them closely about the night before, wishing particularly to know if any stranger had been hanging about during the afternoon or evening. But they could give him no satisfaction.

He went on into the Eltons' garden. Early as it was, the General was out. Dressed in morning *déshabille*, he was sitting on the lawn, taking the early cup of tea which strengthened him for his work amongst his plants, while Yaseen Khan, his Indian servant, stood behind him, holding up a white umbrella.

The General welcomed Tom warmly. 'Good-morning, my dear boy!' he said. 'Got over last night's shock, I hope. Sit down. Yaseen Khan, another cup. Yes, I insist. No sedative like tea.'

'Can I see my mother?' said Tom.

'Not yet, I am sure. She was very much excited last night, and seems to have had difficulty in resting. The last I heard was that she was asleep and not to be disturbed. You may as well take things quietly. Papers found?'

'No, General.'

'Dear! dear! And you say they are important?'

'They are of the deepest, the most incalculable importance to me.'

'You don't mean to say so? I wonder Cherry let them out of his hands.'

'But they were mine—the legacy of the dead man who has enriched me. I hoped to find his wishes, his instructions.'

'In fact,' said the General with a bland smile, 'they had no value except for you. Set your mind at rest, then. They will certainly be found. In the meantime here is your cup. Cream? Sugar? Now then, Yaseen Khan—that fellow is moving like a snail to-day. Don't stare, you son of an owl, but bring up that small table. Understand English? Of course he does. See him when Trixy-sahib speaks to him.'

A smile had overspread Yaseen Khan's passive countenance, and he began to hop about briskly. 'There! her very name is enough,' said the General. And thereupon, beginning with Trixy, he talked about his little girls, giving anecdotes illustrative of their peculiar ways of meeting discipline, and of his own wise and subtle methods of bringing them to what he was pleased to call reason.

Grace came out while this tirade was in progress, and she caught the words: 'A firm hand, Tom. That's the secret. Let them know you mean what you say.'

'Are you making Mr. Gregory believe that you are a tyrant, dad?' she said, putting her arms round his neck and kissing him first on the forehead and then on the cheeks. 'Because——'

'Now, pull up, young woman,' said the General, winking mischievously at Tom, 'or I shall say that you are showing off before our young friend here.'

'Father!' Grace was erect at once, with blazing cheeks and eyes.

'You see,' said the General, in high delight. 'That's how I do it.'

Grace laughed and kissed him again. 'You are the dearest old goose in all the world, father,' she said. 'How you ever manage to make your men obey you is a mystery to me. They are afraid of him, Tom. Can you imagine it? I can't.'

'Another cup, Yaseen Khan!' said the General. 'We must stop this girl somehow.'

'Not a cup for me, dear,' said Grace. 'I came out with a message. Mother and I are having tea with Mrs. Gregory. She heard Tom's voice and she wants to see him.'

'Thank you. I was very anxious to see her,' said Tom, rising.

'But mother says you must be sure to say nothing to excite Mrs. Gregory,' said Grace, as they walked together towards the house. 'Her nerves seem a little unstrung by the shock.'

Tom promised to be careful, and he was shown into a room where he found his mother sitting up in bed, a fine Indian shawl of Lady Elton's thrown round her shoulders. She did not look ill—in fact, there was a brighter colour than usual on her face, while the only sign of the excitement of which Grace had spoken was in her eyes, which shone curiously.

'Why, mother,' said Tom, stooping to kiss her, 'I don't believe you are any worse for the shock.'

'No, I don't think I am,' she answered, looking at him fondly. 'It is such a relief that we are all safe. Did you hear that it was my fault?'

'I heard that you thought it was, mother.'

'But I should like to tell you how it really came about,' she said a little eagerly. 'I told you I was going to my room. Well! I lighted my candle and was on my way across the hall when I heard all the voices in the garden. I wanted to see if Grace was there, and knew I should know her by her light dress, so I put down the candle and went up to my room in the dark. And then, dear, I don't quite know what happened to me. I suppose I was dreaming about you, and dreaming of dear Grace too. I must have fallen into a dream or trance, for I certainly knew nothing until the servants came rushing out with cries of "Fire!" At that moment I remembered the candle on the window-sill, but, of course, too late. That's all. An accident, and happily, as Lady Elton says, no very serious consequences. Just imagine what we would have felt if it had happened a week ago.'

'I wish it had,' said Tom, 'and then my papers might not have gone.'

'Papers?' echoed his mother, her voice fluttering strangely. 'Are they burnt, Tom?'

'Speak of them another time,' said Lady Elton.

'Remember your promise,' whispered Grace.

The colour had leapt to Mrs. Gregory's face, and her eyes, which glittered feverishly, were fixed upon her son.

'They can't have been taken away!' she whispered. 'Who would? Are you sure—are you sure they were not burnt?'

'Of course they were burnt,' said Tom, bending over her in great alarm. 'What else could it be? If you excite yourself like this, you will be ill, mother.'

'Oh, no!' she said. 'It is all right now.'

The excitement had died away as soon as it had arisen. She fell back upon her pillows, pale and smiling. Tom left the room relieved on her account, but feeling more baffled than ever about his papers.

CHAPTER VII

THE RAJAH'S HEIR SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF

It is at this point that the troubles of the writer of the above record began. For Thomas Gregory—the Tom whom he had been following through these curious vicissitudes of condition and fortune—became suddenly dim to him. He heard rumours indeed—the rumours which were circulating in the neighbourhood at the time, but these were vague and contradictory. Moreover, they touched only the surface of Tom's life. That he tried, or pretended to try, to find the lost papers; that he was unsuccessful; that he passed through a period of severe mental depression; that his mother, feeling alarmed at his condition, tried her utmost to make him marry and settle down; that her wishes were frustrated, some said by his wilfulness, others by the pride and folly of the girl he loved, who, having been twitted about her attentions to a wealthy man, was piqued into holding Tom at arm's length; and that, at length, to his mother's great distress, he resolved to go out to India; all this the writer has heard from those who were living in Surbiton at the time. There were rumours, too, of spiritualistic visitations both to the boy and to the girl. Those were before the days when spirits played their pranks, for a monetary consideration, before public audiences; and some said it was in obedience to these bodiless voices that they kept apart.

But all this is mere guess-work. I know, however, as a certain fact, having heard it on no less authority than Lady Winter's, that Tom's first care, after he came into his property, was to surround his mother with all the comforts and luxuries that money can give. A pretty house, which became later one of the show places of the neighbourhood, was built for her after his own design; and, in the meantime, she had carriages and horses, and good dress and good living, with, what was more to her than all her other luxuries put together, the opportunity of doing boundless kindnesses to her friends, and of exercising a large and benignant charity. Had it not been for her son's eccentricities, which were more marked after he came into his inheritance than they had been before, Mrs. Gregory, the world says, would have been perfectly happy.

Lady Winter and her son, neither of whom had the least taint of peculiarity, did their best to bring round the young

heir, so at least I have heard, to more healthy views of life; and Mr. Cherry backed them up with his wise counsels; but Tom declined absolutely to do anything like other people.

Now this I could understand; but when I heard of other things—of the flirtation, for instance, between him and handsome Vivien Leigh, who, it was reported, had thrown off a former lover for his sake; of days and nights when no one, not even his mother, knew where he was—eclipses from which he would emerge with a white face and sunken eyes that made his friends shake their heads dolefully over him; of some of his doings at Surbiton, and in particular the magnificent river-fête that he gave just before he left for India, and the fame of which lingers in the neighbourhood to this day—then, I confess, I was surprised, beginning at last to wonder if *my* Thomas Gregory did really exist, or if he were only a dream of my imagination. Various other reports, dealing mostly with his life in India, some of them curiously minute, had fallen under my notice; but they did not seem quite to fit in one with the other.

Then came the difficulty of selection. I had formed my own conception of his character—a conception seriously shaken already by what I had heard of him in Surbiton. Would not my selection, if I tried to choose amongst the materials offered to me, be coloured both by the conception I had previously formed and by the shock it had sustained, so that the image produced would be distorted, and in no sense answering to reality?

I was in this state of perplexity—on the point indeed of giving up the task of tracing the fortunes of the rajah's heir, when, by the mediation of a friend, who was anxious that the curious story should not be lost, a diary, kept spasmodically by Tom himself for some years, was placed in my hands, with liberty, under certain restrictions, to use it according to my own judgment.

It has been of inestimable service to me, not only in filling up blanks that would otherwise have remained vacant, but also as giving such a mental image of the man himself as no one but himself could draw. It is partly with a view of presenting the first outlines as it were of this picture—partly because they form a good introduction to the stirring events of his Indian life, that I have decided to give, almost as they stand, the daily jottings in Tom's diary during his first voyage to India.

S.S. 'Patagonia,' *September* 1856.—I will do as I have been advised. I will write down my experiences, and some of the strange thoughts and contradictory impulses that are constantly with me. It is possible that in this way my purposes and aims may become more distinct to myself. I don't think there could be a better moment than this for beginning my record. In the little state-room which for the next few weeks is to be my home there is a perfect quietness. I can hear the movement of feet up above, and the throbbing of the engines as they beat the water, but there is nothing else. After the excitement of the last few days it seems like a blessed lull—a pause in my life.

It is three months now since I heard of the change that had come into my life. I look back upon those months as I might on a tumultuous stream that had borne me on its surface. Hurried from one mental and physical sensation to another, I have not had time so much as to think. I have felt like a foam-bubble on a wave, a toy ship in a storm. Before the tumult begins again, as it will, I suppose, when my feet touch the opposite shore, I must try to realise and define my position.

I am heir of my cousin, the Rajah of Gumilcund, and I am going out to take possession of my inheritance. Besides land and money, he left me the succession of his ideas, which succession I have lost through my own cowardly delay, and liability to be guided by the *ignis fatuus* of passionate impulse. It is this succession which I am seeking to recover. From the lips of the men who knew him I may learn something of what my papers would have taught me. Meantime, and with a view to taking the best advantages of my opportunities, I am studying the Oriental languages, and trying my hardest to grapple with the difficulties of the Indian philosophies and religions. Until I know what my task will be I have made up my mind not to take up any strong personal interest into my life. I will live for this, and for nothing else.

Sometimes—I will confess it here—there have been moments when my nature has rebelled wildly against its self-imposed restrictions—moments when I have forgotten that the inheritance came to me with conditions which I must understand and fulfil before I can so much as know that it belongs to me—when I have craved passionately for the enjoyments of the senses.

Such a moment was that of my river-fête. Yes—and even

now, although I know how illusive are the brief, sickly-sweet pleasures of the senses—my pulses will throb as I look back upon it. A night that seems like a century! Beautiful Vivien Leigh, the designer of the festival, as she was its queen, sat beside me. I remember a moment when she and I and some others were floating down the river on a painted barge. She was dressed in a robe whose colour was like that of ruddy flame; the white glitter of diamonds lighted up her dark hair; her wonderful, witch-like eyes, resting on mine, were drawing my soul away. I was close to her—I was going to speak—when—oh! Grace! Grace! this once let me write your name. It was your boat, all lighted and dressed with streamers, that passed us by. You, my dearest, were there, with the rudder-strings in your hands, and your sisters—stately Maud and gay little Trixy, and gentle Lucy and Mildred—held the oars. How lovely you all looked in your white dresses! One of you called to me—it was Trixy I think—and I left my flame-coloured lady, and stepped down amongst you, and you gave me a pair of oars, and as I grasped them, carrying the boat forward by a vigorous stroke, I knew that the witchery had lost its power; that I was once more free.

I saw Mr. Cherry the day before I started. He is an admirable person, perfectly sincere in his creed and in his life; but how singularly illogical! I believe he thanks Heaven for the loss of my papers, feeling convinced that it came about in answer to prayers of his own, for my salvation and guidance. He warns me, too, on Scriptural authority, against spirits that peep and mutter. And yet, because I think that the curtain which hides the invisible from our senses has been once lifted for me, he calls me a mystic. 'My dear sir,' I could not help saying to him one day, 'I do believe that at this present moment you are far more a mystic than I am.' Mr. Cherry's keen head and clear judgment, when matters of business are in question, have, however, been exceedingly valuable to me. He has advised me concerning my correspondence with the Lieutenant-Governor, mapped out my route in India, and given me the names and addresses of those known to him in the East as the chief friends and associates of my cousin, the rajah.

— I have just been up on deck seeing the last of the English coast. We are off the Isle of Wight, where we stopped, for a few moments, to put off the Channel pilot. It is late in the

afternoon, the atmosphere misty and irradiated with the hues of sunset, so that we seem to be floating in a rosy haze, through which the pale green shores of the land we are leaving gleam faintly. There is scarcely any wind, and the sea is as smooth as a lake in midsummer.

— I have been fortunate enough to find a person on board who can help me in my Persian and Sanscrit studies. He is, or seems to be, a pure Indian, by name Chunder Singh, such a handsome fellow, tall, well put together, with a face whose fine cast and quiet dignified expression impress one at once! This afternoon I saw him looking at me with interest, whereupon I spoke, and finding he understood English well, talked with him for some time. I have spoken about him to the Captain, who says he is needy, and will, no doubt, be glad to give me lessons.

— Chunder Singh has met my advances with a gentleness and benignity that have charmed me inexpressibly. He was so princely in his manners that I felt half ashamed of offering him money for the help which he seemed so ready to give me; but when, with English awkwardness, I blurted out that, if he gave me lessons he should be adequately paid for them, he accepted my offer with a grace and dignity that caused me to blush over my own hesitation. This morning we met for the first time over my books with the crabbed characters to which I am extraordinarily glad to return. Chunder Singh, I am sure, will prove an admirable teacher.

— We are in the Bay of Biscay. There has been a considerable swell on all day, and the decks have been empty of passengers; but Chunder Singh and I have kept our feet. I like him more and more as the days go by; but I confess he puzzles me exceedingly. I think he is more than a professor of Eastern languages. His conversation, although free from any sort of bombast, leads me to believe that he has occupied a superior social position, and he has certainly mixed with men of mark. Then I fancy I can detect in his manner a peculiar anxiety about me—an interest, in fact, stronger than our respective positions and the period of our acquaintanceship seems to warrant.

I mentioned this to Colonel Trent—an intimate friend of General Elton's—who is travelling with us, and I put down his answer because it may be useful to me hereafter. I must be on my guard, he says, against inferring too much from manner in the East. The educated Asiatic has a courteous-

ness far exceeding ours. We, when we wish to be friendly, speak to our companions about ourselves. He waits for his friend's confidences, and listens to them with the most courteous attention, which generally, however, is mere manner.

'I have spent twenty-five years in the East,' said Colonel Trent. 'I am not without acuteness, and I believe I know the Asiatic better than most Europeans. Well! I don't know him at all. That's just the difference between me and those others. They think they do, I know I don't. Between us and the native there is a great gulf fixed. I defy any man living to bridge it. Yes, it is so. You may see them in their hosts. You may have, as you suppose, friends amongst them. You may study their history, their language, their ways; but are you any the nearer to understanding them? Take one of the men whose characteristics you have been studying. Look into his eyes! Have you any distant idea about his thoughts? Watch his ways! There is not an antic he performs—not a word he lets slip unconsciously—that will not be a mystery to you. I would venture to lay a heavy bet that in a year that man would give you so many surprises and shocks that you would give up thinking you knew the native mind.'

This is certainly not encouraging for a man of so much experience; but I reserve myself. I shall find out more presently. In the meantime, and in the light of this conversation, it was no little curious to hear what Chunder Singh had to say on the relations between England and India. Our conversation took place this evening; in fact, as I have only just come down from the hurricane-deck, which we have pretty nearly to ourselves, every word of it is fresh in my mind.

'The situation is a strange one,' said the Indian meditatively. 'I doubt if the world has ever seen a stranger. You have come to us—not as a great nation that conquers another by the resources of a higher civilisation—but as a company of traders. Money-making—that was your object. Yet you sent us of your best—great soldiers, high politicians, men of lofty will and noble aims. And we, Asiatics, who adore in others the qualities we lack ourselves, have paid them homage, and fought under their banners in defence of the rights won from the weakness of our rulers. And so, out of the acts of a trading company, a great empire has grown. But let me tell you,' said Chunder Singh impressively, 'that the quality of the rule smacks of its origin. It is just in most cases, but it is not sympathetic, nor is its policy large and beneficent. With any

other nation under the sun the results would be disastrous. But you English are a strange people. You go straight on. In your wildest flights you cannot forget that you have a conscience, and so you have won the respect of some and the superstitious dread of others, and your empire goes on increasing.'

'But you do not love us,' I said.

'How can we?' answered Chunder Singh. 'As in the Divine—which is the model of all excellence—the Supreme Spirit, from whom all flows, and to whom all must return—love must begin from above. Do you love us? You know you do not. I am not speaking of you individually, or of any other man. One here and there, considering the greatness of our land, may take an interest in us. But, as a nation, do you care for us?'

It was impossible for me to say that we did, knowing full well the contrary, and then those strange words, which echo still in my ears, were spoken.

'Let England look to it! Let her listen to the voices of her wise men! Let her know that if she does not bestir herself now the time will come when she must! She is standing to-day on the thin crust of a volcano, which, at any moment, may crack under her feet, sending her down into a gulf of fire, which it will take all her strength to quench.'

He would not explain what he meant, though I pressed him earnestly. No doubt his words were merely rhetoric—an idea of his own, coloured with Oriental exaggeration; but they haunt me in a very curious way. Can this, I ask myself, have had anything to do with the rajah's secret?

We are passing the coast of Portugal, a low, barren-looking country. Rain clouds are floating about; the sea is lumpy, and a veil of white mist covers the land; but this is sometimes lifted, and then the low, sandy coasts gleam out with a startling brilliancy. I hear that, if this wind holds, we shall put in at Gibraltar to-morrow.

— We did not put in yesterday. We were kept out at sea by a gale of wind that came rushing in from the Atlantic. What a day it was! No rest for anyone. The waves swept us from stem to stern, knocking us about till our timbers creaked; and the wind howled dismally in the rigging; and all day long there were shocks of crashing pottery and racing engines. It was a perfect Pandemonium. Being new to this kind of work, I thought it alarming at first; and I shall never forget the chill that swept over me when, early in the morning, I looked

out into the grey wilderness of leaping waves. I was quickly reassured by my friends. Colonel Trent laughed at the storm; the officers looked, if anything, more cheerful than usual; and the pale-faced ladies, who sat about in the saloon, were as calm as if they had been in their own drawing-rooms at home. I made acquaintance with several this morning, notably one Mrs. Lyster, whom I think I shall like.

In the night the wind abated, and when I looked out this morning I found that we were entering the Straits. The weather was delightful, much warmer than it had been, the sun flooding the sea with silver light, and a pleasant breeze blowing. The ship is steady, too, which, after yesterday's experiences, has been a great comfort to us all.

— I meant to have written every day; but since we left Gibraltar it has not been possible to do anything that requires attention, and writing has been out of the question. What a Mediterranean it has been! Stormy days, nights of black darkness and pelting rain; hurricanes that seem to drive the ship before them; and every day, and all day long, the wild symphony of the tempest in our ears. I think, however, looking back, that I have liked it. I have had a curious inexplicable feeling of relief. I have not been obliged to do anything—even to think. That sense of responsibility, which, since my life fell into its new conditions, has weighed upon me so cruelly, was for the moment taken away. Sometimes, with an awe that was not altogether painful, I would wonder how it would be with me if I knew that the freedom was not for a few moments, but altogether; if, with one of those shocks of wave and wind, the engines should break, and the helm cease to work, and the ship settle down into the boiling sea, and the officers come with white faces to bid us prepare for death. After the first unspringing of passionate regret—I suppose there must be that while we are human—would there be this sense of relief intensified? No more beating about of the troubled spirit, seeking the right way and finding it not; no more pricking, heart-tearing activities; but in their place resignation, a quiet acceptance of the decree of the All-Merciful!

I was not so much engrossed in my own sensations as to be oblivious of what was going on around me; and I have, in the meantime, made one or two friends. The chief of these is Mrs. Lyster. She impressed me favourably at first, and I like her better and better every day. I find that she is Irish,

which perhaps accounts for the delightful vivacity and naturalness of her manners. Though she has quite a host of troubles, having just left a party of boys and girls whom she adores, to join her husband in India, she never gives way to depression; and, in fact, it is only at odd moments that she allows herself the indulgence of thinking of her own affairs at all. The most of her time is taken up in making things as comfortable as possible for everyone else. I like her appearance, too, her head, and slender upright figure, her well-bred delicate face, with a sad look in the dark eyes, and a humorous expression about the mouth, and her clever little hands that are always busy about kindnesses. As she is travelling alone, she has allowed me the pleasure of looking after her a little. At Gibraltar, where we spent the greater part of a day, I was her escort on shore. In the course of that excursion I found out, to my surprise and pleasure, that we have mutual friends. She knows Lady Winter very well indeed, and, having met my mother at Surbiton, where it appears she spent two or three days this summer, she may almost be said to know me.

Since then she has given me a piece of news which surprised and staggered me more than I could have thought possible. Vivien Leigh, the heroine of my river-fête, is married to a Captain Doncaster, in the 3rd Bengal Foot, a gentleman whom she has known since she was a child, and to whom she has been betrothed for the last year at least. They were married the day before our ship left the Docks, and will start for India in the course of the autumn. I sincerely hope that we may not come across one another. I never wish to meet Vivien again.

— The weather is much better. We have blue skies and sunshine, and a beautiful silken sea. What a change it makes in the ship! the decks, completely deserted a few days ago, are gay with people, and the ladies have brought out their pretty dresses and their dainty sewing work, and two or three children are playing about, and there is talk amongst the energetic of music, and dancing, and charades. Mrs. Lyster, of course, takes the lead. She is everybody's friend; and, besides being the most persuasive and genial of women, she is an old traveller, who has studied the art of organising talents. For my sake, I am sure—she will insist that I think too much—she has made me her lieutenant, and now all the time I can spare from my Oriental studies, which are in full swing again, is devoted to the task of persuading people to make themselves

amusing, and, when I have succeeded so far, in bringing them up to Mrs. Lyster to be 'organised.'

— Since I wrote last we have passed Malta. We lay in the harbour of Valetta for a day and two nights, having freight to land. I went on shore, with Mrs. Lyster for my cicerone, as she knows the little town well. It was an enchanting day—the sky of the deepest blue, and the sea like sapphire—and I enjoyed everything: the little streets that seemed to slant up into the radiant sky, their whiteness making the blue more intense; the feel of the earth under my feet; the cathedral of the Knights, with its thrilling memories; the rush of quaintly-dressed people in the cathedral square; our drive into the barren-looking country outside the town; our saunter through the curiosity shops. And Mrs. Lyster was as charming and sympathetic a companion as one could wish.

In the course of our ramble through the shops we met several of our 'Patagonia' friends. The result of all this buying will, no doubt, be seen to-morrow, when, if this fine weather holds, the little masquerade which Mrs. Lyster and I have been planning is to come off on the quarter-deck. The idea was started by Mrs. Lyster, and we all think it excellent. A reception is to be held by the handsomest girl on board in the character of Britannia. Everyone presented is to wear a disguise, and to speak and act in character with the impersonation. The first officer, to whom the names are to be given beforehand, will act as usher, introducing the guests. When they are all assembled, the Captain, and one of the elder ladies, are to pass them in review, in order to award a prize to the most striking and best sustained personation.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASQUERADE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

THE masquerade, which came off this evening, is over. I have taken part in it, and I am tired and bewildered; but I know I shall not be able to rest until I have tried to recall and to understand what has happened. So I have asked for a longer supply of light than usual, and I am sitting alone in my cabin writing it all down.

As soon as the masquerade was arranged I determined on

my disguise. I would be an Indian of high rank. I consulted Chunder Singh, who with the most obliging readiness entered into my project, undertaking to dress and instruct me for the part. With this view we retired to his cabin in the early part of the day. He happened to have in his possession such a dress as Indian rajahs wear upon state occasions, decked out with jewellery which appeared to be of great value. In these he dressed me. Then he stained my face and hands a light brown, deepened the colour of my hair and eyebrows, and wound a magnificent turban round my brows. This done, he began to show me the proper gestures to use and speeches to make, I in the meantime watching him closely, and trying to mould my behaviour on his. At first, so far as I was concerned, it was a mere game; but presently I felt as though an indescribable and mysterious change were coming upon me. I was not copying him only—his mind was being reflected upon my mind. I was, in fact, stepping out of my own individuality and into that of another. I might have thought myself the victim of a curious illusion had it not been that there was an answering change in Chunder Singh. For a few moments I saw him stand as if paralysed, then a wonderful light overspread his face, and with outstretched arms he came towards me slowly, murmuring 'Brother! Brother!'

To the end of my days I shall remember the misery of that moment. I retreated before Chunder Singh. I would copy his gestures no longer. I took off the dress and sent him away. As soon as it was done, however, I laughed at myself for my folly. What did my uneasiness mean? I was the successor of a rajah and the inheritor of his wealth. If I could play the part of a rajah, so much the better. When the evening came I sent for Chunder Singh, and said that if he would forgive my abruptness of the morning I would put on his dress again. I had told no one what I intended to be; not even Mrs. Lyster. Why I made all this mystery I can't exactly tell. It was partly, I think, to humour Chunder Singh. I remember even pretending that I should not appear at all, not being able to rig up a suitable dress. Only the first officer, to whom the names were bound to be given in, was in possession of my secret.

I think, at the last moment, I should have drawn back, if it had not been for Chunder Singh. As it was, almost everyone was out before I could make up my mind to be presented. In the meantime the curious change of the morning had come

over me again, and I felt not so much acting a part as living in it. That others shared my illusion was evident from the puzzled faces of the little motley crowd, when I appeared among them, and was presented in my turn to pretty Britannia, under a high-sounding Indian title.

Gravely and reverently I made my salaam, and then stood aside. Colonel Trent was close by, looking well as an Arab sheikh. He looked at me scrutinisingly, and addressed me in Urdu. I had studied this dialect with Chunder Singh; but I confess I was surprised by the readiness with which I understood and answered the Colonel. We exchanged a few more words, and then he turned away from me, and I heard him say to one of the officers in English: 'I thought it was young Gregory; but I see I am wrong. Who is it?'

The answer I did not catch.

And next I saw the light figure of my friend, Mrs. Lyster, who was dressed as a gipsy, detaching itself out of a group, whose fortunes she had been telling. There was an expression of mingled triumph and malice in her face, which looked extraordinarily young, under its fantastic head-dress. I saw that she expected to find her friend, Tom Gregory, under the Indian prince's magnificent mask, and that she was jubilant over her own penetration in detecting him. I think I wished her to find me; but I could not help myself. For that hour I was the Indian rajah. When Mrs. Lyster had received my profound reverence, and gazed for a few moments speechlessly into my impassive face, the red colour flamed to her cheeks, and she turned away. But the first officer, who knew me, looked more bewildered than anyone else. Two or three times during the evening I caught him taking up convenient posts for observing me; but he did not seem to be able to satisfy himself. I happened to be near him when Mrs. Lyster, who was really mortified by her failure to detect me amongst the masqueraders, begged him to give up his secret.

'I promise not to make any use of it,' she said coaxingly.

'But I am bound, Mrs. Lyster,' he pleaded; 'and then, you know'—he was looking straight into my face—'our friend, Mr. Tom, might be nearer than we imagine. Think of his wrath if he heard me betraying him!'

'Nonsense; look for yourself. There is no one here,' said Mrs. Lyster.

'Except the rajah,' said the first officer, in a melodramatic whisper.

She started and glanced at me. 'What a turn you gave me!' she said pettishly. 'As it happens I know all about him. He doesn't understand a word of English.'

'Oh! doesn't he?' said the first officer, trying to tip me a wink, but breaking down in the process.

'Now don't you pretend to be so innocent,' said Mrs. Lyster. 'I have it all from the Captain. We took him on at Malta, and he has been living in his cabin ever since, and Chunder Singh persuaded him to come out in his war-paint and mystify us all. You see!' nodding her head triumphantly. And she added in a lower voice, 'What a handsome fellow he is! If it were possible really to like a native——'

But here, with a pang at my heart, I turned away, for I did not wish to hear any more.

Shortly after this the deck-lights were extinguished, and the little crowd of masqueraders went down to the saloon, where, over a champagne supper, the Captain was to announce his award. And now came what, to me, was the most curious part of it all. My name was called as the winner of the prize; but I did not respond. Thereupon there was a little explosion of laughter and ironical cheering; and Chunder Singh, who had been sitting beside me, pushed me forward. With the curious sensation of one awakened from a dream, I rose to my feet, said something, I don't remember what, and received the congratulations of my friends.

'You are a fine actor, my young friend,' said an old fellow near me. 'I never saw a thing carried off so well. You might have been amongst the darkies all your life.'

'I protest, I am not sure of him yet,' said another.

'Is he sure of himself?' This was from Mrs. Lyster, who sat exactly opposite to me at the table. I noticed, with a little pang, that her tone was chilly, and she looked at me with a gleam of something like anger in her eyes—I am afraid she will not forgive me for having disappointed her——

— My trick has produced consequences which I was far from expecting when I planned it. All of my 'Patagonia' friends, with the exception of Chunder Singh, who is almost irritatingly affectionate, have been giving me the cold shoulder. The Captain and the first officer are excessively busy whenever they catch sight of me. Colonel Trent has chosen to adopt a short, reserved manner which prevents me from addressing him much. Mrs. Lyster is politely cold, and several ladies, who had condescended to be gracious to me, have quietly relegated me to a much less intimate footing.

So far as these last are concerned I do not mind; but Mrs. Lyster and I have been too friendly for me to be able to give her up without a struggle. I asked her this morning how soon she meant to forgive me. She answered hurriedly, but with a spice of resentment in her manner, that she did not know what I meant; there was nothing to forgive, and then, to avoid more questions, she left me abruptly. In the afternoon she approached me of her own accord, and made an effort to be cordial; but the effort was too apparent for me to be able to feel very grateful.

What is the meaning of it all? Can she, can any of them, imagine that I am only playing the European? Mrs. Lyster cannot, for she knows all about me. But even allowing that it were so, not that I am an Asiatic, for that would be impossible, but that my sympathies reach out into the land where the ideas which have measurelessly enriched the spiritual heritage of the nations had their birth; nay, more, that some secret tie of blood or mental kinship does actually bind my life to that of the East—why should they, therefore, despise me? Ah! what a puzzle it is! What a strange, inexplicable tangle! Who, who, will ever set it right?

— This has been a busy week, for it has included our landing at Alexandria, our day up the Nile, our night at Cairo, and our caravan journey across the Desert to Suez, where we took ship again. It is night now. I have just come down from the hurricane-deck, where I have been talking to Chunder Singh. We are steaming quietly down the Gulf of Suez, with the shores of Arabia and Egypt looking dim and ghastly in the moonlight rising on either side of us.

My mind is full of the strange thing Chunder Singh has been telling me. I was right in my original suspicion. He did, and does, take a peculiar interest in me. It was for my sake that he came over to England, and for my sake that he is returning; but he would not seek to know me until I had bade my home friends farewell, and was launched, as it were, on my new life. He was the intimate friend and counsellor of my cousin, the rajah, who himself desired that he should make my acquaintance in this way. Other of his servants and retainers are to meet me in Bombay, and put themselves at my disposition.

This is, of course, rather startling news. I have scarcely realised it yet; but in the meantime my feelings are mingled. On the one hand I am thankful; I find it pleasant to know

that I have been thought of and provided for in the great new land which will presently open out before me. On the other, I have a sensation of something like fear. It is as if the new life were seizing me, drawing me in, as if I should never again return to the old life, with all its sweet, homely ways. No doubt this is merely a sentiment. I ought to be thankful, and I am, that there is someone to whom I can speak of the future, and who, for the sake of those who have gone before me, as well as for my own sake, will advise and guide me.

One of the principal events of this week is that I have made a new friend. My friend is a little girl about seven years of age, though she looks much younger. She has white skin, just touched here and there with the daintiest rose-colour, tiny bewitching features, yellow hair soft as spun silk, and grey eyes that have a curiously pathetic look in them. In figure she is the lightest, airiest little creature; such perfect hands and feet, and so ridiculously small. Light as she is, I wonder sometimes that those feet can bear the weight of her. She trots about the deck in pink shoes that are like fairy's slippers—the most absurdly beautiful things! One of them fell off the other day, and she came to me to have it put on, and I never had such a difficult task in all my life.

It is only since the masquerade that Aglaia, who is quite a little queen in her ways, has deigned to take any notice of me. Before that she would not respond to my advances at all; now she is more friendly to me than to anyone else.

Her languid, sickly mother, who I do believe is taking the child out to India because she lacks energy and resolution to leave her behind, is only too glad of what she calls, no doubt, the child's infatuation, so that Aglaia is my constant companion. She is never in the way, dear little soul! flashing in and out of my cabin, carrying me off to the other end of the ship, where there is much more amusement for her than on the quarter-deck, sitting by gravely while Chunder Singh and I have what she calls our lessons, and falling asleep with her two dear little hands in one of mine, and her yellow head nestling up against my shoulder; she is always the same gentle, delightful little being. 'I love you,' she whispered to-night, just before her eyelids closed. I had been called in 'to help her,' to use her own expression, 'to go to sleep.' 'Don't go away ever!' I wish I could keep you, my little darling!

— It has been very hot lately, and some of us have slept on deck. I did so last night for the first time. Before I went

to bed Chunder Singh had been talking to me on the ancient philosophies and religions of the East. The last subject we discussed was the old doctrine of metempsychosis, in which he is a profound believer. As I fell asleep under the stars I seemed to be listening to an argument respecting it. 'Why should it not be?' said a voice.

'There is no evidence,' said another.

'Is there evidence for anything spiritual?' said the first.

'For this there would be. Show me one with memory of a past!' persisted the second.

A mocking laugh floated through the air. Then the voice I had first heard spoke again. 'Come with me, sceptic,' it said, 'and I will show you.'

In the next moment I found myself in Aglaia's cabin. There lay my darling wide awake in her berth, her yellow hair tossed back upon her pillow, and her large grey eyes looking up into mine sorrowfully.

'Are those the eyes of a child?' said the first voice.

I turned and fled.

And next I was in a large church full of gaily-dressed people. A newly-wedded pair were moving slowly down the aisle to the music of a triumphant march. Suddenly the bridegroom vanished, and the bride stood alone. Wondering what this might mean, I looked into her face and I knew it. The eyes, glittering with a fierce light which held mine, were those of Vivien Leigh.

It seemed to me then that the blood ran cold through my veins as I heard the mocking voice say:

'Are those the eyes of a woman?'

'A woman! A tigress!' I murmured.

The shock passed. I was on the ship again, lying out upon the deck, and a face, beautiful with tenderness, was stooping over me. 'Grace!' I cried, but the shadowy form eluded me. Then I heard a voice—*her* voice—'Not Grace,' it said, 'Aglaia.'

'No, no,' I cried out piteously.

'Hush!' whispered the dear voice. 'She is lost, poor little creature! But be patient. I am coming down to help her presently.'

Here the voice died away, and while I was straining my ears to catch it I felt myself touched.

It was a real sensation this time, for my little friend Aglaia was at my elbow. She was in a white robe daintily trimmed

with lace that went down to her tiny bare feet, and her pretty yellow hair was all ruffled with the wind. 'Look!' she said, pointing to the east. I obeyed her, and oh! what a spectacle it was. For while we had slept the rosy fingered dawn, descending, had opened the windows of heaven.

Lost in rapture I was gazing in, when my little friend's small, plaintive voice recalled me to the earth.

'Aglaia is cold,' it said. 'Carry her.'

I stooped, wrapped her from head to foot in my plaidie, and took her up in my arms, whereupon she laughed out joyfully.

'That's nice,' she said. 'I'm glad you're so big. Let me look at heaven, and then I'll go down to mammy.'

CHAPTER IX

DELHI : VIVIEN : A MALCONTENT

THE part of Tom's diary which deals with the early days of his stay in India is too elaborate and introspective to be largely used here. But the service it has rendered to the writer of this story in enabling him to trace its somewhat labyrinthine mazes is incalculable. He has, however, other sources of information. The servants whom Chunder Singh gathered round the young heir as soon as he arrived in Bombay—intelligent men all of them, and trained to their work by that notable man, Byrajee Pirtha Raj, the late rajah of Gumilcund—have given him many useful details. He has also been in communication with the friends and acquaintances whom Tom made on the road.

Chunder Singh, after making every arrangement for his comfort, left him in Bombay and proceeded at once to Gumilcund, Tom himself having determined not to go thither until he should have acquired a far greater familiarity with the language, and some insight into the manners and sentiments of the people. This knowledge he hoped to gain by travelling.

The glorious winter of 1856–7 was just opening when, accompanied by a retinue of servants and a string of camels and carts which contained everything necessary for a long camping-out tour, he left Bombay. He had been a great success amongst the little society of that picturesque Eastern

capital, and he took with him a host of introductions to English people of the civil and military orders on his route, any of whom would have received him with pleasure; but he seldom took advantage of his privileges, mixing by choice with the people of the country. Hoosanee—the bearer of the late rajah and his own principal servant—was the medium of communication. When the work of the day was over—the long march, or the patient quest into the secrets of antiquity—Brahmin priests and Brahmin beggars, old soldiers, dispossessed landowners, and native merchants both Hindu and Mohammedan, would be introduced by him into the tent where sat the English-bred youth in his Oriental dress, ready and anxious to discuss the questions that separate East and West. On these occasions Tom would sometimes surprise himself. He would sit down ignorant. He would listen to what his visitors had to say and keep silence. Then suddenly, and to himself most mysteriously, a flash of inspiration would come, so that he would speak to them—not as a young man and a foreigner—but as one who knew the land, and had authority amongst its peoples.

It was a critical moment in the history of English dominion in India. Lord Dalhousie's policy of annexation had added to the empire vast provinces, the new rulers of which, impatient to see the fruit of their labours, made, in many cases with a stroke of the pen, such changes as, in the natural order of things, it would have taken years upon years to effect.

But society remained what it had been. There was no relaxation of the tyranny of caste—no attempt to educate those in whose hands lie the influences that mould the lives of the young. The people clung to their old customs with all the more tenacity for the change in the political order.

Meanwhile, to the eye of the ruler, satisfied with the good he had effected, the tranquillity seemed to be absolute. The terror which in the following year was to sweep through the land, making the enlightened mad and the mild cruel, had not begun to work. Yet, to those who had the courage and wit to look below the surface, signs of agitation were not wanting. Fiery prophets rushed through the land predicting the speedy end of the new dominion; there were curious panics amongst the people and soldiery—curious outrages, put down at once, of course, and repented in dust and ashes; while sullen-hearted men, whose claims to dominion had been set aside, moved slowly through the cities of the Punjaub and the North-

West Provinces, whispering to one and another that the measure of the stranger's tyranny was full, and that the times were ripe for revolt.

One of these malcontents Tom Gregory met.

He had been spending two or three days in and about Delhi, his camp being pitched under the shadow of that glorious monument of Moslem dominion—the Kootub Minar, which is several miles distant from the city.

The season was midwinter, and the weather had been enchanting. He spent his days in exploring the tombs, temples, and palaces of the city, and in the evening he rode back to camp over the desolate plain that lies between old and new Delhi.

One evening he was later than usual. The glow of the evening had faded and the darkness of a moonless night had fallen before he reached his camp. Hoosanee came out to meet him.

'Is all well, my lord?' he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

'All is well,' said Tom, laughing, 'except that I am a prey to hunger and thirst and fatigue.'

Hoosanee raised a silver whistle to his lips, and in a moment all the camp was in commotion.

Smiling to find himself the centre of so much subservience, Tom went into his tent, took off the European clothes he had been wearing, bathed, put on an Oriental robe, and, having dined in some haste, seated himself at the door of his tent.

Presently there fell a deep silence upon the camp. The syces were lying down beside their tethered horses; the servants and camp-followers were asleep; only Hoosanee, the ever-watchful, sat behind his master, motionless as a bronze image, but with eyes and ears on the alert.

It was not so dark as it had been. The moon, an orange ball, was swimming into sight, slowly and mysteriously, above the rim of the silent plain, and the fields of space were strewn with the white fire of an innumerable host of stars. By their light Tom saw dimly above his head the tapering shafts of the Tower of Victory, and the glorious arched gateway close by. On the other side, and but faintly discernible in this light, was the famous mosque, once a Hindu temple, beautiful with sculptured pillars, where the Rajpoots and their followers worshipped before the foot of the Moslem trod down their holy places.

With a throbbing heart the English-bred youth gazed around him. What was this that he felt—an understanding, a sympathy, a reaching out of his spirit as if these things were not new to him, but old—nay, as if they were a very part of his being? He tried to think it out, but he was tired both in body and mind, and, try as he would, he could not keep his thoughts in order. He was entering, indeed, upon that delicious drowsiness which is the prelude of sleep earned by hard labour, when a furtive movement aroused him. Alert in a moment, he sprang up to see before him a tall, lean figure, wrapped in a ragged robe.

'Who are you?' said Tom, 'and whence do you come?'

'I came out of the darkness,' returned the figure, 'and I go into the darkness again.'

'Come in and rest,' said Tom, lifting up the curtain of his tent.

The stranger hesitated. 'You are the new rajah of Gumilcund,' he said.

'I am the heir of the late rajah. Did you know him?'

Here Hoosanee stepped forward. 'Excellency,' he said, 'I know this man, and he was known to the late rajah, my master. He is a Brahmin youth, and the adopted son of a prince.'

'Call Ganesh,' said Tom, 'to give him food and drink.'

Ganesh, the chuprassie, or steward, a man of the highest caste, was, as Tom knew, the only person in camp from whom the Brahmin stranger could accept food.

He turned to him and entreated him courteously to enter.

'My brother will rest,' he said, using the picturesque form of speech of the country, 'and food and drink shall be brought to him.'

Without a word the stranger flung himself down on a pile of cushions. He looked around him boldly; but Tom noted with compassion the wild hunger of his eyes. From under his vestment he drew a cup and platter of silver, richly wrought, which contrasted strangely with his ragged robe. These Ganesh, the stately Brahmin steward, filled, the one with new milk and the other with rice and chupatties, whereupon the stranger, having saluted his host, turned away and ate and drank in a silence which Tom preserved until the meal was ended.

'Is my brother satisfied?' he said then.

'For to-day,' said the stranger. 'But the hunge will return.'

'Come again to-morrow.'

'And the following day?'

'Come the following day also.'

'How long will your tent be here?'

'Three days and nights.'

'And then?'

'I will go on to the higher country—to Nepaul—perhaps to Cashmere—but first——'

'Go to the higher country at once,' interrupted the stranger, 'or'—he looked at his host fixedly—'become one of us.'

'What do you mean?' said Tom.

'I will answer by a question. You are an Englishman?'

'I am.'

'But you do not love your people?'

The hollow voice had risen, and the question sounded almost like a threat.

Tom was surprised, but he answered quietly, 'Of course I love my people. Why do you ask me such questions?'

'I ask because I seek to know; because you are a mystery. See! You dress as we dress. You understand our language. You know our ways. There is sympathy in your face. Twice within this hour you have called me brother—me whom the Feringhees have cast out. Why is this?'

'I have a stake in your country,' said Tom gravely. 'The Supreme Spirit, who is over us as He is over you, has decreed that I shall take up the work of a great and good man, who was of you, and who has gone out from you. I do not know all I wish to know of his ideas; but I am convinced that he loved his people, and I am learning to know them that I may love them too. I call you brother because I am of your kin. From the same great Spirit we came forth.'

The stranger bowed his head. 'And unto the same Spirit we return. My brother has spoken truly. He has spoken as a sage.'

And thereupon, without answering Tom's entreaties that he would stay or return, he rose and took his leave.

The next day a strange thing happened. Tom was busy in camp all the morning, having letters to write and the accounts of his chuprassie to examine and settle. Early in the afternoon he rode into Delhi. He rode in by the Delhi gate, and made straight for the Chandni Chowk, the principal street of

the town, where he intended making one or two purchases. Here he dismounted and gave his horse to the syce, who led it behind him. The Chandni Chowk was, in its way, a beautiful thoroughfare. It was very wide, and a double avenue of trees, having a canal of flowing water between them, ran along its centre, while on either side of the street were the stalls and booths where jewellery and curiosity dealers exhibited their wares. It being a Hindu holiday, the town was crowded with people dressed in all manners of colours. As Tom walked along under the trees and basked in the golden glory of the evening he enjoyed keenly the life and movement about him. A little body of fat Mohammedan merchants were following him meanwhile with anxious looks, and he was thinking that he must give himself up as a prey to one of them when he heard loud shouting, Looking round to find out what it meant, he saw a smart English carriage drawn by two spirited ponies coming at a tremendous pace along the street. He had scarcely time to see that the driver was a lady before he became aware that a man, whose head and upper limbs were wrapped in a thick chuddah, was right in the way of the horses. In less than a moment he had dashed forward, seized the man, and drawn him back under the trees. In the next moment the horses were pulled back, and he heard a high, clear voice:

'So you are the knight-errant, Mr. Gregory?'

'Miss Leigh,' he cried. 'Vivien!'

'Excuse me,' said the lady, 'Mrs. Doncaster!'

'I beg your pardon; I had forgotten that you were married.'

She laughed. 'Are you married too?'

'No,' said Tom shortly.

'What are you doing, then?'

'I am travelling.'

Mrs. Doncaster laughed, then turned her pretty head round. 'By-the-by,' she said lightly, 'where is the unhappy person I nearly ran over? I ought to give him something to soothe his terrors.'

'Pray don't,' said Tom, who had recognised in the scowling passenger his guest of the previous evening. 'He is not a beggar.'

'Oh! isn't he? He looks very much like one, then, and they love money, all of them, the sordid wretches.'

'Here!'—she threw out a rupee—'take that! It's all I can spare, and it will be wealth to you.'

She spoke the last words in halting Hindustani.

The man whom she addressed—he had been gazing at her fixedly for the last few moments—spurned the coin with his foot, and it fell amongst a group of misshappen, half-naked beggars, who fell upon it fiercely, fighting one with the other for its possession. The noise drew the people together, upon which two or three of the native police ran into the midst of the *mêlée*, shouting and striking right and left. The whole city seemed to be in commotion.

'You will be surrounded,' said Tom hurriedly. 'Whip up your ponies and drive through them!'

'Not at all,' said Vivien. 'This is a piece of fun to me.'

As she spoke the man whose action had provoked the disturbance drew himself up to his full height, gathered his chuddah about him, and having cast a glance of mingled hatred and scorn on the fair Englishwoman, took himself off.

Vivien looked after him, laughing. 'That's the best specimen of a native I've seen yet,' she said. 'I wonder who he is. Doesn't he just hate me?'

'Is it wise, do you think, to make these people hate you?' said Tom.

'Wise or not, it's amusing,' said Vivien. 'But Beauty and Prince are impatient, and those two idiot syces of mine look half dead with fear. Aren't they a handsome pair, by-the-by? I mean the ponies, of course—not the syces. Come and see me, Tom. I live in Cantonments. Ask for Captain Doncaster, of the 3rd Foot. Anyone will tell you where it is. You are staying some time longer?'

'Three or four days.'

'Then be sure to come. I'll introduce you to my husband, and show you my serpents.'

'Serpents!' echoed Tom.

'Yes; serpents. Funny pets, aren't they? But they amuse me. I cow them, and then pinch them, and watch them hiss and spit. I have a cobra; he is grand when he's in a rage. That man reminded me of him. Wouldn't he just sting if he had the chance?'

'The crowd is thinning. Now is your chance,' said Tom, standing away from the carriage.

'Good-bye, then, till to-morrow, shall we say?' said Vivien; and she drove off, leaving Tom more disgusted than he had ever felt before.

He was thinking it all over in the evening, and wondering why he could not make up his mind never to see Vivien again,

when, suddenly, the lean figure he had seen the previous night rose before him. 'My brother has come back, then?' said Tom kindly. 'I bid him welcome.'

The man did not answer, even by a sign. He stood erect and rigid in the lighted space before the tent.

'Come in and rest,' said Tom, 'and I will call Ganesh, and he shall give you to eat and drink.'

'Rest!' cried the Brahmin bitterly, 'rest is for men, and I am no man. I am a dog, a creeping thing, to be spurned by the foot of the passer-by. If you have any pity, kill me!'

'My brother is raving,' said Tom pitifully. 'Fatigue and want are breaking his heart. When he has rested and eaten he will be glad of the good gift of life.'

'Does your Excellency speak like a sage now?' said the Brahmin, with a sombre derision in his voice. 'Does he know what he says when he calls life good? I tell him that it is not good—it is evil.'

'Life need not be evil unless we make it so.'

'We!' shrieked the Brahmin. 'We! I see now that you know nothing. Look at me—this ragged robe, these wasted limbs, these eyes bright with the fever of famine, and say if I have made myself what I am. I was brought up as a prince. My father, who had no sons of his body, adopted me, and I lived in his palace, sharing his wealth and dominion, which were one day to be mine. He died, and your people denied my claim. I was not, they said, of my father's kin, and I had no right to succeed him. They would inherit for me and fulfil my duties. The fools! Can *they* raise up children to the departed to keep green his memory upon the earth? Can *they* pay to his ashes the observance that is due? The funeral feast, the oblation of water and rice, the garment to clothe the shivering spirit, and the gifts to priests and teachers to redeem it—who will give them? Will they? Can they? They know that they cannot. While I wander homeless and ragged upon earth, my father and my father's fathers are in the pit, herding with demons and unfriended spirits. Never can they be redeemed; never, through all the crores of ages that are to come, can they ascend into Swarga. By the treachery of your people must the memory of the pious die out. And when the Feringhees become masters of us all, as they intend, there will be no more offerings for the dead. Childless our great ones will depart, and the pit will be fed with the savour of their beauty and Swarga shall be a desert, and the gods will lament.'

He stopped, breathless, the veins standing out like knotted cords from his temples, and tears, that burned as they fell, chasing one another down his cheeks. As for Tom, who had been searching for something to say, he stood silent. What comfort could there be for trouble such as this?

But the man had a comfort of his own. All at once his demeanour changed. His tears stopped; his lips set themselves together; his frame seemed to dilate, and the ragged garments which he drew about him were like the raiment of a king. 'Did I say for ever?' he cried out. 'I was wrong. I see the imprisoned spirits rise, and my flesh is stirred, and the hair of my head rises up. The hour of release is coming—it is near. On the dial of eternity it is written. In blood and fire the dominion of the stranger-race shall come to an end.'

'Hush! Hush!' cried Tom. 'You are beside yourself.'

For an instant the man glared at him fiercely, then his eyes fell. 'Take me in,' he said hoarsely, 'and give me food and drink.

Ganesh was called, and his wants were supplied with reverent care; he, in the meanwhile, accepting what was done for him with the docility of a child. The meal over, he lay for a long time with closed eyes on the pile of cushions. At last, night having fully come, he rose. 'Sahib,' he said to Tom, 'you saved my life to-day, and I have not thanked you. At the moment I was angry. I had said to myself, why should I live? I will die. The proud-hearted daughter of the Feringhees shall trample me under foot, and my people will avenge me. But I have thought better of it, and now I thank you. The day may come when I may give you more than thanks. In the meantime, take this.' It was a piece of parchment, inscribed with strange characters, and tied round with a crimson thread. 'Do not seek to know what it contains,' went on the Brahmin, 'but keep it with you! If trouble or danger comes, and you desire help, show it to one of our people, and ask for him to whom it belongs. And now farewell!'

In the next instant the stranger had gone, and Tom was left alone with his amulet.

'The man is certainly mad,' he said to himself; and it was in memory of a curious incident rather than from any belief in the scrap of parchment's virtue that he hung it round his neck.

CHAPTER X

MEERUT AND THE ELTONS

For reasons of his own, which he could not have explained to anyone, Tom determined not to see Mrs. Doncaster again; so marching orders were given to Hoosanee and Ganesh that night, and early on the following morning the train of bullock-carts and camels that carried the tents and baggage were on the move.

Tom followed them, taking one more ride round the town before he went. The last place he visited—this he remembered long afterwards—was Hoomayun's tomb. He entered within battlemented walls, mounted the massive platform on which the palace of the dead stands, and saw the marble tombs of the Emperor and his friends, lying each in the frost-bound silence of its vaulted hall. Then, from the elevated platform he looked out on the soft green fields that surround the city, and the river flowing peacefully on its way, while the towering minarets of the glorious Jumma Musjid, and the swelling cupolas of the Pearl Mosque, and the red battlemented walls of Shah Jehan's palace loomed mysteriously through the amber-coloured mist of the morning.

Silent and peaceful it lay, like a dream of past greatness; the city, incalculable ages ago, of proud Hindu warriors and earth-spurning priests; the capital, in later years, and the stronghold of Moslem dominion; the city swept by wave after wave of revolution, sacked, devastated, shifted hither and thither over the plain, but never destroyed; to-day the city of a shadow; to-morrow, what? As he gazed into the tranquil plain, he felt his soul shuddering within him. Grey antiquity seemed to be throwing its arms about him and pressing out his life. He panted for breath like one stifled. What was he, and his people, with all their greatness, what—what were they? Time, that, like the fabled monster devouring its own children, moves forward irresistibly, had brought them into being, and Time, when their days ran out, would thrust them from the path of the living. Or was Time also an illusion—a shadow thrown by shadows on the whiteness of eternity? Did nothing really exist? Nothing—the awful word echoed through his brain

like the knell of a dying faith. He groaned and pressed his hands together.

Hark! What was that?

'Is anyone there?' he said, looking round him.

He saw no one; but a voice answered, 'I am here.'

'Who are you?' said Tom.

'The same who spoke to you before. I came to you with your inheritance. You ask if there is a reality. I tell you that there is.'

'Then, in the name of Heaven, where is it to be found?'

'Listen!' said the voice. 'You are like many others who search afar off for the thing that is close at hand. Look within; not without. It is there that you will find reality, for you carry it about with you. You, not your body, but the self that animates the body, are the reality of which you are in search. Know this and you are free, but you cannot yet.'

'Why cannot I?'

'Because for the good of others you are bound to action. But be of good cheer! Give yourself to the influences that are carrying you along. Resist the solicitations of sense, and, in time to come, the knowledge that makes free shall dawn upon you.' Whether it was a voice outside of himself or a mere colloquy between contending trains of thought he could not tell. Little could he have imagined meanwhile that here, where he had stood, dreaming of the past, here, where the son of Babar and the father of Akbar slept, the last of his race would hide as fugitives, and that thence they would be taken to imprisonment and death by a rough English soldier, with a few troopers at his heels. Verily Time devoureth its offspring!

Tom's next place of rest was Meerut, a large military station about forty miles from Delhi.

It was afternoon when the cavalcade arrived. The camp was pitched in a little mango-tope near the native town, and in the evening—such an evening as is common in North India in winter, when the air is crisp and the sky cloudless—Tom, who was in European dress, mounted an Arab pony and rode into the station.

When he entered the Mall, which intersects the cantonments, and is the pride of every Englishman in the district, he found it full of life. Buggies, drawn by fast-trotting ponies, were flashing past; well turned-out English carriages, full of ladies and children in gay summer dress, were passing more

slowly up and down, officers in mufti riding beside them ; and here and there came an elephant, slowly pacing the ground, his driver between his ears, and a gorgeously dressed Indian gentleman in the howdah on his back.

Tom was looking out on the gay scene when suddenly he was pulled up ; for a group of smiling faces were coming to meet him along the drive. For a moment he fancied himself in England again. There was his dear Lady Elton, as pretty and soft as ever, lying back amongst the crimson cushions of a phaeton, and Maud was holding the reins, and Trixy and Lucy were smiling at him from the back seat.

'Tom !' they cried in one breath, as he drew rein.

'You here !' he exclaimed.

'I don't wonder you are surprised,' said Lady Elton, whose face was pink with excitement. 'We left home much sooner than we expected. The General wished for the girls' sake to take another summer at home. But he was wanted.'

'And as father wouldn't go out without mother, and mother wouldn't go out without us, we are all here,' said Trixy, putting her charming little face forward.

'I am afraid that is about the truth of it,' said Lady Elton. 'Where are you staying, Tom ?'

'In camp. I have been living under canvas the last month, and a delightful life it is.'

'I should love it,' breathed Trixy.

'But you will come to us now, of course ?' said Lady Elton. 'Now do. We are a household of women. The General is out inspecting.'

'Tom likes women far better than men,' said Trixy.

'Can't you be quiet, scatter-brain ?' said Maud, who had been waiting impatiently for the opportunity of putting in a word. 'Mr. Gregory' (turning her dark eyes upon Tom), 'I hope you will come. It will seem like old times.'

'When we sang and played together long, long ago,' piped Trixy.

'One of you at least hasn't changed,' said Tom, smiling at Lady Elton. 'Thank you a thousand times. If you will show me where your bungalow is and let me give directions about my things, I shall be only too glad to join you for a couple of days.'

Good boy,' said Trixy, kissing the tips of her fingers to him, and Lady Elton smiled benignantly, telling him to come at his own time—everything should be ready for him, and

Maud, who was even more dignified than she had been at Surbiton, gave him a courteous salutation and whipped up her ponies that Tom might see how well she could manage them. As for gentle little Lucy, who had been dumb throughout, she was wishing that Grace had been in her place.

And in fact that was the one drawback to an otherwise charming fortnight. Grace was away visiting. The pleasant haphazard people did not quite know where she was. She had left them to visit an aunt at Lucknow, who was feeling dull after an only daughter's marriage, and had begged Lady Elton to spare Grace to her for a few weeks. She might possibly have gone on to Cawnpore, or perhaps to Agra, in both of which places the Eltons had intimate friends. They were expecting a letter daily. It was the hope of this letter coming that caused Tom to delay so long at Meerut. He certainly enjoyed the little break. For those few pleasant days he was able to fling off the burden of Orientalism that had been oppressing him, and to forget that there was such a thing as philosophy in the world. He was his old self—the Tom who had picnicked with the girls on the Thames, bantering Trixy, laughing at Maud, adoring Lady Elton, and losing his heart to Grace. The General came into Meerut two days after Tom's arrival. He had been inspecting troops in the district, and was exceedingly jubilant over the apple-pie order in which he had found everything. In the evening, when, the ladies having withdrawn, he and Tom sat together over coffee and cigars in the large cool verandah, he expressed his satisfaction freely. 'It is becoming the fashion,' he said, 'to run down our native contingent. Nothing more absurd! Properly trained and led, they are a splendid force.'

'But supposing fanatics got amongst them?' said Tom. 'There are a few of that sort about. I have met them.'

'So have the rest of us, my dear boy. You don't suppose I have served for thirty years in India without meeting religious and political maniacs? Why, the East is a hotbed for the species. They flourish like a bay-tree by a river. But look at the matter reasonably! Remember, it is to the soldiers they must appeal. Now what, in the name of Heaven, can the poor devils offer that our men should run after them? Money? They don't possess it. Plunder? Well, to be sure, something might be picked up at that little game, but the fellows have sense enough to know that it couldn't last long. No, no. They get more out of us than they could out of anyone else.

And don't tell me, sir,' went on the General, working himself up to what Trixy called his boiling-point, 'that there is no sense of honour amongst them. For I know there is. Yes, sir,' bringing down his fist upon the table, 'I repeat it, there is! I am speaking from experience, mind, not hearsay. Why, I have had jemadars under me who have been proof against temptations that would have corrupted half the Englishmen I know.'

It struck Tom that the General was trying as much to convince himself as to refute anyone else; but he was careful to give no hint of his suspicion, which, however, on the following day was curiously confirmed.

It was early in the forenoon. They had returned from their ride, and were sitting out in the verandah, the ladies busy over fancy-work, while Tom entertained them with a dramatic account of his travels. He had come to his experiences at Delhi, and the singular encounter with Mrs. Doncaster in the Chandni Chowk, when the General strode in, his face purple with indignation.

'Read this!' he said, striking the news-sheet in his one hand with the doubled-up fist of the other; and as Tom, at a sign from Lady Elton, who was not much affected by these outbursts, took the sheet from him, he muttered down in his throat, 'The fools! To make so much of a trifle.'

The trifle was the well-known incident at Dum-Dum, near Calcutta. A Lascar asked drink of a Sepoy. The Sepoy, being of high caste, refused haughtily to allow his drinking-vessel to be defiled by the lips of a low-caste man, whereupon the Lascar retorted that he would soon lose his caste altogether, as the Government were making cartridges greased with the fat of cows and swine.

It appeared from the article which Tom read aloud, that this story was flying through the length and breadth of the land, and the writer feared that, if something was not done promptly to reassure the high-caste men in the army, serious consequences would ensue.

The General heard it through, and then burst into a torrent of wrath. A nothing! Such a quarrel as might be seen going on any day in the bazaars to be magnified in this way! It was absurd. It was worse than absurd; it was criminal! If there was a panic, men like the writers of the article in question would be responsible for it. For himself, he knew the native army. They had their faults, but a finer body of men never

breathed. He was glad—he was proud to say—that any day he would trust his life and honour in their hands.

Having delivered himself thus, the General calmed down, sent his bearer for a cooling drink, swallowed it at a draught, and, looking round on his wife and daughters, apologised for his heat, and begged them not to be disturbed.

They were not thinking of such a thing. Saucy little Trixy, whose eyes were twinkling merrily, pointed out that he was the only disturbed person present, except, perhaps, Tom, who did look a little serious; but then Tom was a 'Grif.' Tom protested with her; but she held to her point. He might be a rajah's heir ten times over, but he was a 'Grif' all the same. Why, the way he treated natives showed it. In the midst of which little discussion, Maud observed, tossing her shapely head, and with a fine expression of scorn on her face, that things would have come to a pretty pass if *they* could be afraid of *natives*. So far as she was concerned, she would not mind meeting any number of them with only her riding-whip in her hand. 'You know they are an inferior race; one can't help feeling it,' she said. And Lady Elton said, with her tranquil smile, that in Meerut, at least, they did not need to be afraid, as they had soldiers from England to protect them. So the incident passed off, and in a few hours it was forgotten; but Tom remembered it long afterwards.

The life at Meerut, meanwhile, was a very pleasant one. There were not many girls at the station, and the Eltons, being pretty, well-bred, charmingly dressed, and full of life and go, were considered a great acquisition by everybody. They were made the excuse for all sorts of gaieties. 'We mustn't let those girls be dull,' the men would say, and the unmarried consulted the married, and balls and picnics, riding-parties and military sports were got up in their honour. This was all in full swing when Tom arrived, and he, as the Eltons' guest, was included in their invitations, so that he had never been so gay before. Feeling bound to return the hospitality showered upon him, he took counsel with Hoosanee and Ganesh, and one evening his camp was decked out with flowers and bunting, and coloured lamps were hung upon the trees, and waxed cloths were laid out upon the ground in front of the tent, and at night, when the large full moon was rising, nearly all the European population of Meerut flocked out to dance and gossip, and sip champagne and coffee, and enjoy a picnic supper in the quarters of

the mysterious Englishman, who was known already through India as the 'Rajah's Heir.'

That night brought Tom's stay at Meerut to a close. Hearing, on the following morning, that Grace was at Lucknow, and that as she had several more visits to pay there was not the least chance of her returning home for some considerable time, he could no longer be persuaded to delay. Early in the forenoon his camp was struck, and he followed it towards sundown; Maud and Trixy, with two or three young officers, riding out with him for some little distance.

Whan he insisted at last upon their drawing rein, Maud, who was riding in front with him, looked into his face with steady eyes.

'Good-bye, Tom,' she said. 'What message to Grace?'

'Will you take it if I send it?'

'Certainly,' holding out her hand.

'Thank you,' said Tom, grasping it warmly. 'Give her my dear love, Maud.'

'I will. Anything more?'

'Tell her,' hoarsely, 'that, whatever happens, I shall not lose sight of her.'

'Isn't that——?'

'A curious message,' broke in Tom, with a smile. 'I am afraid it is; but I can't help it. Good-bye.'

Then Trixy and her escort, a dashing young cavalry officer, called Bertie Liston, rode up, and the last farewells were spoken. The English party returned to Meerut, and the Rajah's Heir, followed as usual by his faithful servant, set his face towards the desert.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE BORDERS OF NEPAUL: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE JUNGLE

THE marching for the next fortnight was delightful. Anything to equal the climate of this Indian winter Tom had never seen. Morning after morning there would be the same brisk, invigorating air; day after day the same dark blue heavens, unbroken by the lightest cloud, would overarch, like

a blessing from the Almighty, the vast plains through which they were travelling; and evening after evening the same rose-lilac hue, wonderful beyond the power of words to describe, would steal over the sky. Hoosanee was their guide, and his ways afforded some amusement and occasionally a little annoyance to his master. While humble and reverent in his manner, he kept the control in his own hands. If Tom struck for independence hitches occurred. The meals were half-cooked, the beasts of burden were unmanageable, the coolies had fever. And the artful Hoosanee had adroit methods of making it appear that these annoyances were due to the disturbed arrangement. 'As his Excellency desires, very right indeed!' he would say when an order was given to him; but Tom soon saw that if it was not Hoosanee's desire also someone would suffer. So at last he gave up the struggle. At Bareilly, which lay on their route, Tom spent a few days, the Resident being an intimate friend of General Elton's. From him he heard that Lord Canning's policy was disliked by Europeans, and that there were rumours of disaffection in the magnificent army of Bengal. That this, even it were true, would affect the security of India, of the North and North-West, did not seem likely, yet some were holding themselves on the alert. Leaving Bareilly, they crossed the Goomtee, and were soon on the borders of Nepaul proper, whence several days' quick marching brought them near the foot of the fine mountain range, within which, as in a basin, lies the heart of the valley kingdom. But the dangerous Terai—a region of marsh and jungle, difficult to traverse at all times, and in the rainy season deadly to travellers—had yet to be crossed. The road through this jungle was not so good as it has since become. Here and there it was so deeply encumbered with rank weeds and the stems of giant creepers that the coolies had literally to hack a way through for the carts, and this made the travelling slow and difficult. They accomplished it, however, without accident, encamped one night above the belt of miasma, and the next day, by dint of hard climbing, came to Sisagarhi, a peak in the second and higher of the two ranges that shut in the valley of Nepaul.

It was near sunset when they reached the camping ground. The day's march had been long and fatiguing. The gradients were excessively steep, and Tom had relieved his pony by walking for long stretches. When he reached the wished-for summit, he was so tired that he could scarcely move. But in

the glory of the scene that lay before him his fatigue was speedily forgotten. Far, far below, lying in the deepest shadow, was the long fertile valley that forms the centre of the mountain kingdom. From it, as from a basin, rose the nearer mountains—range within range—green slopes running up into wild, naked crags, that flamed like beacons in the rose-red of the evening, and beyond these, radiant and awful, receding into unimaginable distance, the gleaming snow-peaks of the Southern Himalayas.

Tom was, as he would have expressed it, steeping his senses in the beauty of this marvellous spectacle, when he caught sight of Hoosanee, who was standing close by in a reverential attitude, and looking at him wistfully. 'Is anything wrong?' he asked.

'No, my lord,' answered Hoosanee.

'Then why do you look at me in that way?'

'His Excellency's dinner is served.'

'Dinner, when that is before me! Look out, man, and be ashamed of yourself!'

'If my lord will not eat, he will die,' said the Indian servant humbly, 'and then what use will these mountains do him?'

'Fine logic!' said Tom, laughing. 'And, strange to say, convincing.'

Hoosanee led the way to the table, which was at the door of his young master's tent. A dinner that would have satisfied the requirements of an alderman was spread out; but Tom was too much excited to do it full justice. 'A pity!' he said, as he pushed the untasted dishes away. 'But it can't be helped. Don't look so doleful, Hoosanee. I have taken enough, I believe, to keep me from dying until to-morrow.' Hoosanee bent his head, and was turning away. Tom called him back. 'Come here,' he said, leading him to a little distance from the camp, 'I have something to ask you.'

'It is time your Excellency should rest.'

'Leave that to my excellent self, Hoosanee, and do as I tell you. Now, then, sit down! This is a quiet corner, where none of them will see or hear us. Don't crouch, man; sit! and don't, for Heaven's sake, look at me in that pitiful way, as if you thought I was bent on committing suicide to-morrow' I can assure you I have a thousand reasons for wishing to live a little longer. But tell me—why do you take such an interest in me?'

'Am I not my lord's servant?' said Hoosanee in a troubled voice.

'Of course you are; but that doesn't account for it altogether. Can love and devotion like yours spring up in a day?' The bantering tone in which Tom had begun to catechise his servant had gone. He was very much in earnest.

'The faithful servant is born, not made,' said Hoosanee.

'That is no answer,' persisted Tom. 'Speak to me plainly. Is it for my own sake or for the sake of others that you are so anxious about my safety?'

'It is for my lord's sake.'

'But how can it be?'

'Is it possible that my lord does not know?'

'I know nothing, my good friend. Enlighten me!'

Swaying himself to and fro, and speaking in a subdued whisper, Hoosanee said: 'When my master, the rajah, was dying he sent for me. Chunder Singh had been with him, and received his last wishes. I was sad that no word had been given to me, for not even his foster-brother loved my master as I did. He looked up, and saw that I was sad. He smiled, for he was ever glad that we should love him. "Chunder Singh," he said, "will tell my Hoosanee everything." And with that, Excellency, he fell back and died.'

There was a pause. The light of the evening had faded, and the glory of colour had gone. Pale and livid, like ashes of burnt-out fires, lay against the horizon the palaces of snow and ice; overhead, entangled in a wreath of vapour, flitted a white ghostly moon, and the little stars were twinkling out above the hills. Tom shivered, and drew his cloak about him.

'And what did Chunder Singh tell you?' he said, with a poor pretence of indifference.

'What he said, my lord, will sound strange in the ears of one of your Excellency's people. To them there is one life upon earth, and beyond is the infinite, and the man who misses his chance here is lost beyond the power of even the Supreme Spirit to redeem. Is this not true?'

'It is, at least, what some of our religionists teach,' said Tom. 'But how did you learn all this, Hoosanee?'

'From my master, Byrajee Pirtha Raj, who would often let his servant be present when he spoke of these things with wise men from the West. Sahib, our belief is not as theirs. We do not so limit the power of the Supreme. It is taught by our saints and sages that the life we lead here is but one in

many—that we come and go, changing into new forms perpetually. While we are low, so they tell us, we have no power over these changes. Unconsciously we work out our destiny, and expiate the offences of which we have no memory. But to those who rise in being it is given to rise also in knowledge. These see behind them the path by which they have come, and the road they must travel on their way to the Supreme lies open in front of them. To this stage, my master, the rajah, had come. Once more, it was revealed to him that he should return to the earth.'

Here Hoosanee stopped, and looked at his master in a strange, wistful way, like one pleading for a boon.

'Well!' said Tom. 'Go on! How was your master to return?'

'Does not my lord know? Has not his own heart told him?'

'I know this—that if I listen to you much longer I shall go mad. I was a fool to ask you anything.' So saying, Tom started up and strode off into the darkness.

He turned after a few moments, and saw Hoosanee following him. 'Come here,' he said, in a hoarse voice, 'and tell me who I am!'

'You are my master, Sahib.'

'Which master, Hoosanee? Him who has gone?'

'I see no difference, my lord.'

'Then I am both. Is that what you say?'

'I say nothing. Will not my lord rest?'

'You have put a maggot in my brain, Hoosanee, which will keep me from resting, I expect,' said Tom, speaking now in English.

But he was wrong. Contrary to Hoosanee's advice, his bed was laid out under the stars; and when, after an interval that seemed like a moment, he opened his eyes, to see a pale white dawn, ghastly as the face of the dead, stealing over the sky, and touching with cold fingers the gleaming tabernacles of snow and ice in front of him, he was conscious of having slept for many hours, and of feeling extraordinarily strengthened and refreshed.

So that day they went down to the foot of the hills, travelling thence by a good carriage road to Katmandu, the capital of Nepaul

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT TO JUNG BAHADOOR

At Katmandu, the capital of Nepaul, Tom spent several days pleasantly. He was delighted with the city, the quaintness of whose architecture and the gay costumes and kindly ways of whose people gave him many new and agreeable sensations; while the reception accorded to him, both at the Residency and at the palace, which was presided over by that great and enlightened prime minister, Jung Bahadoor, left him nothing to desire.

Ever since he left Bareilly he had been thirsting for news; but news travelled slowly in the days before the Mutiny, and no one in the valleys had heard of the occurrence, which was looked upon by the enlightened as the breaking of the storm. On February 28, when Tom, with a light heart, was setting out to visit the English Resident at the Court of the King of Nepaul, the 19th Native Infantry, standing trembling in their lines at Berhampore, were listening with dull hearts to the harangue of their irritated colonel, and refusing point-blank to receive the percussion-caps handed out to them.

From the wise and wily Jung Bahadoor Tom learned much concerning the true state of Indian affairs. He was relieved to find that in spite of the faults of the British raj—faults which this sagacious person was not slow to criticise—he had a profound belief not only in its general justice and beneficence, but that it was the only power which could for the present guarantee the land against anarchy. As such he and his people would support it.

At other times he spoke of the late rajah of Gumilcund, who had been one of his most intimate friends, giving the young heir much valuable information with regard to his character and aims. One evening, which Tom remembered long afterwards, on account of the influence it was destined to have upon his life, Jung Bahadoor invited him to a pavilion in the palace where he often spent his evenings. To the young heir their conversation was peculiarly interesting, although he did very little of the talking. Over his long hookah, which induced a meditative vein, the great minister recalled scene after scene out of the past—a past in which the late rajah of Gumilcund's

name often figured. Tom heard of his cousin's wealth and magnificence, of his fine personality, of the adoration felt for him by his people. 'I believe,' said Jung Bahadoor, 'that they refuse to believe in his death.'

As he spoke he was looking at Tom absently. All at once his expression became tense and significant. 'What is the exact relationship between you and the late rajah?' he said.

Before that question could be answered Gambier Singh, captain of the king's bodyguard, who was frequently the bearer of messages from the court to the chief minister, and had the privilege of entering unannounced, came out on the pavilion. Seeing the minister engaged in conversation, he was about to deliver his missive and retire when, catching a full view of Tom's face, he pulled up short.

'What ails my friend Gambier Singh?' said Jung Bahadoor.

Recovering his presence of mind in a moment, the young Ghoorka captain turned to Jung Bahadoor's guest, and saluted him reverently.

'The sahib must forgive the mistake of his servant,' he said; 'but by my head it is a wonderful likeness. I thought the dead had come to life.'

'My guest is the heir of our friend the good rajah of Gumilcund,' said Jung Bahadoor. 'I was myself struck with the likeness, though, strange to say'—turning to Tom—'I did not observe it till this moment.'

'The rajah was my friend and father. I salute his successor,' said Gambier Singh, making another deep salaam as he withdrew.

But his curiosity and interest were too strongly aroused to be thus easily satisfied. Late that evening, when Tom was resting in his tent, he introduced himself, making many apologies for the intrusion. A long conversation, of the deepest interest to them both, followed, and when they parted, somewhere about the small hours of the morning, they shook hands after the kindly English fashion, and exchanged promises of undying friendship.

Tom spent a week in and about Katmandu, enjoying Gambier Singh's friendship and the hospitality of the palace. Then he began to think that he ought to be on the move. He was actually making arrangements for a start, writing letters and studying maps by the light of a lantern which swung from the pole of his tent, when one evening Gambier Singh, whose invi-

tation to an evening of revels he had just declined, strode in. The flash in his eyes and the abruptness of his movements showed that he was labouring under strong excitement. 'Have you heard the news?' he said, before Tom could speak.

'No; I have heard nothing. What has happened?'

Gambier Singh answered with a question. 'I am told,' he said, 'that you are leaving us?'

'Have I not told you so myself?' said Tom. 'I must go soon, or I shall be tempted to stay with you for ever.'

The young Captain bowed himself and pressed his palms together. 'Sahib, my friend and brother,' he said, 'if you are happy with us, as you say, let me beseech you to remain. We are peaceful, and the Ghoorka soldier, if savage to his foes, will be true to his salt. Over there,' and he pointed across the mountains, 'there will be wild work soon.'

'What do you mean? What has happened? cried Tom, springing to his feet.

'I mean, my brother, that the revolt has begun.'

'Revolt! When? Where? Speak to me plainly, I entreat of you.'

He was pale to the very lips. In that instant of time, while the dim mountain range which a few days before he had crossed so joyfully frowned down upon him like a fortress, a hundred torturing images pressed upon his brain. The family-circle at Meerut, the General who would trust his soldiers to the death, gentle Lady Elton and the girls, Grace, wandering Heaven only knew where, reckless Vivien flinging her defiance at the crowd of Asiatics, his friends of the voyage, Mrs. Lyster, tender little Aglaia—what would become of them all if this dreadful thing were true? Oh! for wings to carry him over the mountains, that he might see with his own eyes what was going on! In the meantime, Gambier Singh's voice, which was much calmer than it had been, came to him as if from a great distance.

'Let my brother compose himself. It has only begun. The North and North-West are at peace.'

'Thank God!'

'But,' went on the young Captain, 'it is a hollow peace. Of this my master is assured. If your rulers are prompt, if they crush out the insurrection with an iron hand, there may still be peace, for the loyal will be strengthened, and the discontented will fear to rise. If not, the torch of rebellion will flame out fiercely. From province to province it will be

carried, and the wild heart of the Asiatic, which discipline has kept down but not subdued, will take fire and leap out in rapine and murder.' Then, in a few words, he told the story of the mutiny of Berhampore. It was ominous, but not nearly so dreadful as Tom had imagined. He began to breathe more freely. 'Are you sure there is nothing more?' he said. 'You are not keeping anything from me?'

'No, by my master's head! But is it not bad enough?'

'Yes, it is bad. Still it is a warning. The evil cannot have gone very deeply yet. We have time before us.'

'Who knows?' said Gambier Singh, shaking his head; and he added, 'My brother will stay with us till the storm blows over!'

Tom paused for a moment, then turned his face, which was as white as death, to his companion. 'I cannot,' he said, 'a fire is consuming me. What it is, or whence it comes, I cannot tell, but I know that it will not let me rest. See, do not hold me back! I must recross the mountains. I must know what is happening. I must see the terror with my own eyes.' His voice sank, and then, in a moment, rose again, shrill and penetrating, 'I must save my people,' he cried, and fell back fainting into the arms of his friend.

CHAPTER XIII

LUCKNOW AND SIR HENRY LAWRENCE

It is early in the morning. The golden dawn is breaking over the eastern hills, and the awful snow-peaks of Himâla shine like the gates of Heaven, when, in the pathetic dream of earth's children, they rise before the eyes that have looked upon the river of death. Here and there some lower point, leaping up from the confused mountain-world, has caught the glory of the morning, and stands forth, a pale herald of the full glad day; but the valleys, with all their wealth of cornfields, forests, and clustering villages, are in the deepest shadow.

They are the valleys we have just left, for we are on Sisagarhi again. A single tent is pitched here, but coolies are already busy loosening its cords, while the four small horses tethered close by are sniffing the morning air and neighing loudly. This, with the grunting of the camels as they kneel

to be laden, and the harsh guttural cries of their drivers, breaks discordantly on the stillness of the morning.

The two young men who have been occupying the tent, and who are standing outside, watching with full hearts the preparations for departure, walk away together to a quieter spot. For a few moments they stand silent, gazing out upon the world of mountains. Then the taller of the two holds out his hand, which the other grasps.

'I have much to thank you for, Gambier Singh,' he says, in the Oordoo dialect. 'You have been a brother to me. I wonder when we shall meet again.'

'I think we shall meet before long,' says the young soldier, whose dark eyes gleam triumphantly in the morning light. My masters think that our help may be called for down below there. If it is so, I shall be given a command. We Ghoorkas will stand face to face with the proud Brahmin warriors who despise us and defeat them. Then my brother will seek me out, and we will tell over again the dreams we have dreamed in our valley.'

'They may not always be dreams,' says the young Indian; and, after a pause, 'You are sure my disguise is good?'

'It is no disguise. This is your true dress. This is your true character. If my brother had heard his own words when the fever was in his blood he would hesitate no longer. But the morning is advancing. Let us eat together before we part.'

'You will eat with me?' says the other in surprise.

'I am not a Brahmin,' answers the soldier. 'Have I not told you, besides, that you are one of us?'

They retrace their steps in silence, and, while the laden camels move off, partake together of the rice and kecheri, and chupatties which Hoosanee has been preparing for them, pledging one another, after the English fashion, in a glass of Persian sherbet. Then Gambier Singh rises.

'I would I could go with you,' he says, 'but I know it cannot be. Before we part tell me plainly what you will do.'

'Yes; I will tell you,' says Tom. 'I have been thinking all night, and it is only this morning that I have made up my mind. I intended to spend this summer in travelling. I wished to be more fully informed about the country before I presented myself to the people in Gumilcund as the successor of Byrajee Pirtha Raj. Then, again, I thought I would go to Meerut, warn my people there, and pass on the advice which

Jung Bahadoor has given to me. But it has come to me that my words will be, in their ears, as empty tales. Besides, there are many of our soldiers there, so that they could surely hold their own in any rising. It would be well also, in case of the crisis you fear, that I should be in Gumilcund and should have made the acquaintance of her people beforehand. In this way, I shall be better able to guide her safely, and it is just possible that her loyalty may be of service to the State. Therefore I have decided to go to Gumilcund at once, trying by the way to pick up what intelligence I can. Hoosanee, who knows the road, will guide me. The people, I believe, will accept me for the sake of him who has gone from them. If it is so, I will stay in their city watching the course of events.'

'Should it be as we fear,' said Gambier Singh, 'what will you do?'

'I cannot tell yet. I must be guided by circumstances.'

'Promise me not to expose yourself unnecessarily.'

'Unnecessarily? No!'

'But——'

'My friend,' says Tom, holding out his hand, with a winning smile, 'it is impossible for me to say more. Before both of us the future is invisible. God has willed it so. Farewell! I dare not stay. Here or there we shall meet again.'

'May the gods grant it!' says Gambier Singh.

And then he throws himself into his friend's arms, embraces him with tears, mounts his horse, and turns to ride down the hill.

Tom meanwhile, with many a backward look at the retreating figure, goes off slowly in the opposite direction.

And so the rajah's heir entered upon his next important journey. I find, by referring to his diary, which is my chief source of information, that, although wearisome and full of perils, it was not without interest, and even enjoyment. He was much calmer, for he had laid out his plans for the near future, and the conflict between the old life and the new, that had helped to aggravate his illness, was over. Whether the fantastic belief of his Eastern friends was true, or whether having, as he now believed, blood of the East in his veins, the life and doctrines of the Indian sages did really, in some strange way, appeal to him, he did not ask himself. The result was the same. He was actually, for the time, an Oriental amongst Orientals.

The season was advancing. When he left the hill region and entered upon the plains he found the heat almost insupportable; but the deadly Terai was healthier than it had been a month before, when it was still reeking with the vaporous distilments left behind by the mid-winter rains, and they did not experience much discomfort in crossing it.

The chief object of his journey being to find out as much as possible of the state of the country, he determined when they touched upon the borders of Oude to turn aside from the direct route and visit Lucknow, the capital of the province.

Oude was at that moment in a critical condition, and Lucknow was a perfect hotbed of agitation. The lately installed Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence, was indeed struggling manfully with the task of reconcilement and reorganisation, and, if a crisis could have been averted, his was the only hand that could have done it. But it was not to be. He had come into his duties too late. Fanatics, suffered to flourish unchecked, had poisoned the minds of the people. Misunderstandings that might have been explained, little grievances that might have been removed, had given weight to their words and fuel to the smouldering fire of disloyalty, and now not even Sir Henry Lawrence, keen and far-seeing as he was, had any idea of the depth and extent of the disaffection. As for Tom, when he crossed the Goomtee, and saw the beautiful city, with its splendid palaces and mosques, lying spread out before him, still and beautiful as a dream, in the evening's golden glow, he could scarcely bring himself to believe that its peace was dangerously threatened.

Mounted on one of the elephants which Hoosanee had bought for him in Oude, and clothed in the richest Oriental dress, he rode through the city and its environs. Through the English quarter he passed hastily. He had been warned not to betray himself; but the sight of his countrymen and countrywomen taking their walks and drives was almost too much for his resolution. He had an insane longing to hasten back to his tent, throw off his Oriental garb, and mix amongst them as an English gentleman. In the native town he was received, much to his surprise, with every demonstration of respect. As, mounted on his royal beast, with two syces, dressed in gay clothes, running before him to clear the way, he passed through the narrow crowded streets, many left their work and bowed themselves reverently to the ground.

Gradually the crowd increased. Strange rumours flew from

mouth to mouth. The agitators had promised the people a leader—a deliverer. Was this comely youth the leader they were to look for? It was whispered that he was; and, before he had reached the centre of the town, it was choked, as far as he could see, with swaying figures and eager expectant faces. Never in his life had Tom beheld such a scene. It was a sea of humanity, in which he felt himself swallowed up. In terror lest some of the crowd should be trampled by the feet of the monster he rode, he stood up and cried out frantically to the driver to stop, and to the syces to clear his way.

As he stood, raised high above their heads, the confused cries of the multitude seemed to gather themselves into one cry, which echoed like thunder through the streets of the city. 'Speak to us!' From a thousand throats it rang out simultaneously—passionate—imploring—a herd of helpless creatures asking to be led. 'Speak to us! Speak to us!'

Then a single voice, winged with menace as well as entreaty, rose above the others. 'Will not my lord speak to us?' Again it rolled forth like the growl of a wild beast whose prey is escaping him, 'Speak! speak!'

Tom's uneasiness was increasing every moment. What should he do? To speak might have been to betray himself and to provoke a disturbance that he would give his life to avert. Yet every moment's delay made the danger of an accident more imminent. Hoosanee, who was riding close behind, came forward. 'For shame,' he cried out to the people. 'Will you presume to dictate to my lord? And what think you, that he will break the vow which does him honour, and tell his designs to such as you? Wait patiently, each one in his place, and you shall see what shall be!'

There was a moment's pause, for the people of an Asiatic crowd are easily put down; but all could not hear the words of the speaker, who, after all, was only the prince's servant, and presently the tumult began again.

Tom was in despair. He looked back to Hoosanee. Should he try to quiet them with quiet words; but what could he say—he who was a stranger amongst them? Hoosanee's agonised face gave him no help; but help came. All in an instant, and mysteriously, the crowd thinned away. It had flashed, like an electric current, through the city, that one known to the people—a prophet, who, under pretence of stirring up a religious revival, had been detected preaching sedition in the towns and cities of Oude, and shut up, had escaped from his prison and

was now making his way in disguise to the place where the city malcontents had been accustomed to meet him. This was a vast underground tank and gallery, which, being approached through one of the most sacred of the Hindoo temples, was safe from the prying eyes of Europeans. Thither flocked the greater number of the people who had been blocking Tom's way; but many a backward look was cast at the royal youth, as, his eyes fixed and his brow sombre with thought, he was carried slowly through the throng which remained.

'Your Excellency has found favour in their sight. They would make him a leader,' said Hoosanee, when, an hour later, they were resting thankfully in camp.

'Why did my cousin die?' cried Tom, bitterly, 'or why was I brought up in ignorance of the people amongst whom my lot was to be cast? If I had known a little more; if I had been sure of myself, I might have spoken to them, and they might have heard me, and the destruction which is coming upon my people might, perhaps, have been averted.'

'Let his Excellency have patience,' said Hoosanee, soothingly. 'He is learning every day.'

That night Tom wrote to his mother. He had written in the same strain before, but never so earnestly. 'I beseech you,' he wrote, 'not for my sake alone, but for the sake of others, to lift, if you can, the veil of secrecy which covers our past. I am certain—how I dare not tell you—that I belong to this people, and I believe it is by birth; and, if so, I am passionately anxious to know the nature of the tie. Pardon me, dearest mother! I know how strongly you feel on this subject, and, but for dire necessity, I would not vex you by alluding to it. Say to me, once for all, that there is no kinship, by birth, between us and the East, and I will trouble you no more. I will be content to believe that there exists between me and this people a mysterious spiritual affinity. If, on the other hand, there is such a tie—if, through you or through my father, I draw my origin as I inherit my wealth from the East, it is time that I should know it.'

The letter written, he thought he would go out again and see the city by night. Wrapped in a long white chuddah, and attended by Hoosanee, he left his tent, which was pitched near the Martinière palace, on the banks of the Goomtee, and, after going through several narrow lanes, entered a broad road lined with palaces and gardens and English bungalows. The gates leading up to one of the palaces lay open, and its courtyard,

with the windows and balconies above, were streaming with light from innumerable candles and oil lamps. Having sent Hoosanee to inquire what was going on, Tom heard that it was a *tomasha*, or entertainment, given by the English to one another. Hoosanee intimated further that there would presently be a crowd of native men, and entreated his young master not to run the risk of detection by lingering amongst them. This, however, was precisely what the wilful young fellow meant to do; so Hoosanee, seeing that resistance was useless, stood back, while his master placed himself in the front rank of the crowd that were gathering together to see the show.

Presently carriages began to roll up. The night being clear and beautiful, most of them set down their loads at the gates. Tom could in many cases not only see his compatriots, but hear their voices. All of them seemed to be gay and light of heart. The scraps of talk which fell upon his ear were of the dance that evening, and of a concert and amateur theatricals that were coming off soon. Once he heard a high shrill voice exclaim, 'Provision the Residency? What nonsense! But Sir Henry can't be in earnest;' and another, a man's voice, answered, 'I can only say that I heard it. Preposterous, of course. If we want a revolt, the surest way to have it is to show that we distrust the people.'

That pair swept past him—a young English officer in uniform and a dashing, handsome young woman. Then came a sensation in the crowd. Many heads were bowed reverently, and a mingled cry—of adoration from some, and of contempt and defiance from others—broke forth. The excitement was caused by the arrival of the Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence, whose carriage, drawn by four handsome little horses, preceded by outriders and followed by a native guard, was coming slowly along the street.

There was abundance of light from lanterns swung on poles above the road and flaming torches carried by footmen. Tom looked out and saw a picture which he will never forget. The chief—his lean, soldierly figure wasted with anxiety for the people whom, as he fervently believed, God Himself had committed to his charge; his face, that face which to see was to love, strong, yet curiously tender, deeply seared with lines that told of such spiritual conflicts as shake the soul to its depths; with mobile lips, round which a smile, half humorous and half melancholy, was hovering; and deep-set eyes that looked out steadily from under massive brows—was before

him, and instinctively he bowed his head; he knew that he was in the presence of a hero. So far he had seen no one else in the carriage, he had eyes only for the chief; but as it swung round to enter the gates of the courtyard he became suddenly aware of another presence—'Grace Elton!' Wildly his heart throbbed as, in the disguise which it would have been the height of imprudence to throw off, he saw close in front of him the woman he loved. She was sitting back in the carriage, her eyes, pensive as ever, fixed meditatively on Sir Henry. She seemed to have been speaking, for her lips were half parted, and it appeared to him as if a shadow rested on the face which, with its divine expression of seraphic purity, was so infinitely dear to him.

A moment, and the vision was gone, and he saw Hoosanee at his elbow, looking grave and disconcerted. He told him that he was being noticed, and implored him by all that was sacred to come on.

'Have I a European dress with me?' said Tom, as they moved away.

'Not one,' answered Hoosanee. 'My lord will remember that the baggage-waggons were left behind us.'

'But you might have kept out one. I would give all I possess to be able to go into that ball-room to-night.'

Hoosanee hesitated. 'My master might go in native dress,' he said, 'if he would not betray himself.'

'Would it be possible?'

'It would be easy, my lord. Other Indians of rank have gone in. If my lord gives in his name as the Rajah of Gumilcund, and presents a largesse to the door-keeper, he will certainly be admitted.'

The result was as Hoosanee had predicted. When, an hour later, Tom was borne in a palanquin to the gates of the palace, his embroidered robe and gorgeous turban, with the magnificent fee he presented to the door-keeper, gained him immediate respect. No little to his embarrassment, he was taken straight to the daïs on which sat the Commissioner, surrounded by English officers and grandees of Oude. After the first shock, however, he played his part correctly. Sir Henry, supposing him to be an accredited guest, received him graciously, and conversed with him for a few moments. Then, feeling glad the ordeal was over, he stepped down and set himself to watch the dancers.

With a face like a mask—for he had learnt the trick of

Oriental passivity—Tom moved about the hall. He was in search of Grace, whom he presently saw dancing in a waltz with an elderly civilian. After they had danced two rounds her partner led her to a seat. Tom passed them, making a low salute, and then stood back, as near as he dared, with his face averted lest Grace should recognise him. Her light whisper penetrated to where he stood.

'Who is that Indian?' she asked.

'I really can't tell you,' answered her companion, 'which is a little curious, for I know all the natives of distinction hereabouts. He was certainly not at the last durbar. I must ask Sir Henry about him.'

'I should like to know,' said Grace. 'He has a fine face——'

'For a native,' broke in her partner.

'For a native, if you will; and do you know, it strikes me that I have seen it before.'

Here it occurred to Tom that he was doing a mean thing, and he moved away.

The next time he saw Grace she was taking her place in a quadrille, in the company of a young and very handsome cavalry officer. Tom did not feel quite so comfortable as he had done, but he held his peace. While they waited for the other couples to come her partner was protesting with her earnestly.

'You will break all our hearts,' he said.

'Then somebody else must mend them,' answered Grace.

'But seriously, why are you going? Do you think it will be safer at Meerut?'

'I am not going to Meerut.'

'Not? I thought your home was there.'

'So it is; but I have promised to pay a visit to Nowgong.'

'Really! Such an out-of-the-way station. Excuse me; but are you wise?'

'Wise or not,' said Grace, her every word falling clearly on the ears of the tall Indian in the background, who did not think it wrong to listen now, 'I am bound to go. My poor little cousin—you will remember her, by-the-by; she married Captain Richardson——'

'Yes; I remember—a muff! I beg your pardon, Miss Elton. I mean the gentleman, not the lady. She was an angel. I hope nothing is wrong with her.'

I hope not, too; but we have been receiving rather

miserable letters lately, and Uncle is going to see her, and I have promised to go with him, and stay with poor little Lucy for a week or two.'

The quadrille had at last been got together, and Grace and her partner were called to attention ; but the Indian had heard enough. When the dance was over he left the hall.

CHAPTER XIV

A MODEL STATE.

ACTING on the urgent recommendation of Hoosanee, who saw reason to fear for his master's safety, should he continue any longer in this dangerous locality, Tom and his servants left the neighbourhood of Lucknow early the next morning. Two days' march of a perfectly uneventful character brought them to the English port and station of Futtehgur. There they crossed the Ganges and travelled on quietly over roads shaded with acacia, pipul, and cork-trees, into the wide and fertile plains of Central India. Gumilcund was included within the bounds of what was called the Central Indian Agency, a district more or less under the Company's control. Like several other small native states that lay clustered together in this region, and that formerly had lived a life of pillage and internecine warfare, it had acknowledged the British as the paramount power, and an English Resident had been accredited to its court. The government of the little State had, however, been so wise, just, and beneficent, that the position of the Resident was a mere sinecure. During the late reign his chief function had been to supply the rajah, whom he, in common with the rest of the world, admired and revered, with European society.

There were few amongst the English who did not enjoy a visit to Gumilcund. The courtesy and urbanity of the rajah, in whose manners the grace of the Asiatic and the simple dignity of the well-bred Englishman seemed to meet, with the novelty of the life to which he introduced his own and the Resident's guests, made the city popular. Some said that nowhere on the face of the earth was there a place to

compare with it. Such statements, no doubt, savoured of extravagance ; but Gumilcund did certainly possess certain advantages that are not to be met with elsewhere. For fifty years—ever since the son of Sir Anthony Bracebridge was given the title and dignity of rajah—it may be said to have been governed by one man, for although in that period son had succeeded to father, the ideas of the two, with regard to government, were practically identical.

The first rajah was a man of experience. He knew not only the barbarities of Indian social life, but also the plague-spots of Western civilisation. He was, moreover, a strong man. When he undertook to weld the chaos of the State that had been given to him to govern into the ideal that lived in his imagination, every one of his measures, planned out beforehand with deliberateness, was carried through unflinchingly. He had wealth, which was one great factor in his success. He had besides—and this quality his son inherited—a power over men almost amounting to fascination. Reforms which, if introduced by any other ruler, would have certainly induced rebellion, were accepted from him without a murmur. When, after an unusually long reign, he left the State to his son, it was already well started on the path of progress.

The reign of the second rajah was no less fortunate than that of the first, while his wealth, which was drawn from other than Indian sources, continued to increase.

His life, as we know, was cut short by an assassin, a man from a neighbouring State, who translated into this violent deed the jealousy felt by many of the outlying peoples of the prosperity attained by Gumilcund under those who were spoken of far and near as her foreign rulers.

To the immediate friends and followers of the rajah his death was a terrible blow. They honoured him as a master : they loved him as a friend : they had been looking forward to the wonderful things which he would do in the future, and, in him, all their hopes were crushed ; but, so far as the State was concerned, his work was done. Any one of the wise men he had been training could have governed it now, for every-one within its borders was aware of the exceptional advantages of their position. And in fact there existed at that time in Gumilcund such a social order as was scarcely to be found elsewhere. The State was prosperous, for all its resources had been wisely developed, and this prosperity was

felt in every corner. There was no seamy side in Gumilcund. The back slums and dismal alleys that lie hidden in the centre of our own great Western towns were not to be found in its bright little capital. Idleness and beggary did not thrive in its streets, and they had long ago departed to find a home elsewhere. There were no intoxicants, and therefore there was little crime. Everyone who chose to work could find work to do; so, although there were inequalities of condition, there was no grinding poverty. Oppressive acts of any kind being promptly discovered and punished, the people had become tired of practising them. The women, too, were freer than in other parts of India, for although here, as elsewhere, they were shrouded in the graceful saree, they could move about the city at their pleasure. Taking it altogether, the State presented a curious example of what can be done by one-man government, when the people are pliable and the rulers wise and enlightened.

Of course such results could never have been reached had it not been for the tranquillity which the power of the British name, and the authority of her rulers, had given the district. In former days the very prosperity and quietness of the little State would have attracted towards it the hostility of its neighbours, which, indeed, the disastrous death of the late rajah proved. He had never been slow to recognise his obligation to the Paramount Power and to impress it upon his people; and this, combined it may be with the circumstance that the English had never been their actual rulers, but often their guests, was the cause of the love, amounting, in many cases, to reverence, with which English men and women were regarded in the city and territory of Gumilcund.

The sympathy was mutual. Little Gumilcund was tenderly regarded by the English. Even Lord Dalhousie, the great annexer, when the rajah wrote to him, that, being without heirs, he had adopted a son, who, with the permission of the Governor-General, would succeed him, could not find it in his heart to decree the separation of Gumilcund from her native rulers. Had he known that the heir was, to all intents and purposes, an Englishman, the decision might have been different; but the rajah, in his letter, had given Tom the title which he would assume were his heirship to the estate recognised, stating that he was being trained and educated in England, and it was allowed to remain an open question. Under the English Resident the rajah's heir should govern

the State, and if his rule proved as beneficent as that of his predecessors, his title would be confirmed. If, on the other hand, he acted as so many young rajahs had done when they came to the supreme power, the rule would be taken from him and vested in an English Governor. So the Governor-General decreed, and then, having weightier matters to dispose of, he dismissed Gumilcund from his mind. Little could he have imagined, in days to come, it would prove a bulwark of the dominion which he had taken so much pains to build up, and a refuge, sorely needed, for his distressed fellow-country people, in the midst of a hostile, rebellious continent.

Returning from this digression, which was necessary if we would understand the position of the little State, the government of which our venturous young Englishman had come over to assume, I must briefly follow his further movements. He marched on quietly, for there was nothing to indicate that the convulsion which his friends had predicted was close at hand, and though he wished to reach Gumilcund, he was not in the least impatient.

Day after day, in this smiling tract of country, the same prospect met him. There were fields of green paddy and rustling sugar-cane, and sheets of feathery dâl, with which the large blue-green leaves of the castor-oil plant contrasted curiously; and, interspersed with these, were tracts of marsh and jungle, and a few pleasant groves of mango and neem. April had opened. The heat was terrible in the day-time; but it was a dry heat, and Tom stood it marvellously well. For the most part they travelled at night or very early in the morning. During the forenoon, and in the awful noontide, their camp would be pitched either under a huge banyan tree by the wayside—whose dry, thirsty roots were hanging down raggedly to seek the soil, while its glorious over-canopy of leafage made a shelter from the sweltering sunlight—or in a grove on the outskirts of a village or town. Sometimes he slept, but oftener he thought and listened. How silent it was in these noontide hours! Now and then he would catch a rustle as a lizard or snake crept through the dry grass, or there would be a flutter overhead, where the little wild birds—parroquets and mynas—sought a precarious shelter, or a scream when some bird of prey swooped down upon them. But for the most part, even the vultures and the hawks, and the hideous flying-foxes, that hung in uncouth bags from the trees, were quiet. Man, meanwhile, was at peace, having no energy even for

labour. Through the woods came no ring of hammer or axe ; the tramp of the wanderer had ceased along the road, and long, swathed figures, motionless as the sheeted dead, lay under the trees and in the shadow of walls and houses. The whole earth lay weltering in a fiery bath. With the drawing on of evening there would be movement. Flocks of parroquets would rush out of the tree-tops screaming discordantly : birds of prey would prune their wings and set off slowly with harsh cries, in search of food ; and the confused murmur of a restless humanity would begin again.

Then the rajah's heir would emerge from his shelter, and, while his tent was being taken down, and his camels laden, would stroll into the nearest village. There he would often take his seat on the chiboutra, under a spreading tree, where the talkers met together to discuss, over their hookahs, such important matters as the price of grain and cattle. They welcomed him with the grave courtesy of Indians ; but whether they spoke freely in his presence he could not tell. Except in one or two cases, when a Hindoo priest or a Moulvie from a distance had visited the district, he heard nothing which could lead him to suppose that there was any widespread spirit of disaffection, while English magistrates were often spoken of in his presence with a respect bordering on adoration. So he went on towards Gumilcund with an easier mind.

CHAPTER XV

THE RANEE OF JHANSI

AMONGST the introductions which Tom took with him to India was one to Dinkur Rao, Dewan or Prime Minister at the Court of the Mahratta Prince, Sindia, Maharaja of Gwalior. The Dewan was one of those remarkable men who, at critical times, stand out boldly from their fellows. Subtle of mind and sagacious, and possessing to a degree which, in a full Asiatic, is unusual, the executive talent through which great theories can be brought out in action, he had already steered the State, to the government of which he had been summoned when the youthful Maharaja attained his majority, through

more than one dangerous crisis. Like Jung Bahadoor, he had fully realised the importance to his country of British overlordship in the peninsula; and, unlike the Nana, Kunwer Singh, and the host of fanatic priests and prophets, who thought that to exhaust England and to drain her of her population would be an easy task, he held firmly to his belief in the strength, no less than the beneficence, of the Paramount Power.

As regarded his policy, both internal and external, Dinkur Rao might almost be said to have been the pupil of the late Rajah of Gumilcund; and although, being hampered by obstacles from which that enlightened ruler was free, such as an intriguing court, and a young sovereign of unstable mind, who had on one occasion at least deliberately reversed the wise measures of the Dewan and shut him out from his counsels, he could not give to his own people such happiness and security as was enjoyed by the people of Gumilcund, he was able, through the superior position of Gwalior and her larger resources, to exercise a more commanding influence on the policy of the nations of Central India than Gumilcund could have done, even if her wise ruler had lived to tide her through this dangerous crisis. The Dewan had heard of the probable arrival at Gumilcund of the rajah's heir. A certain amount of mystery surrounded him; but he believed him to be, like his predecessors, of mixed blood, and was not, indeed, altogether indisposed to suspect that he was actually the son of the late rajah by an English mother. As he had loved the father, he was ready and anxious to make the acquaintance of the son. When, therefore, having passed through the cantonments and pitched his camp on an open space outside the native city and fort of Gwalior, Tom sent in a messenger with his letter of introduction and a note from himself requesting permission to pay his respects to the Maharaja and the Dewan, Dinkur Rao started off, attended by a guard of honour, to meet and welcome him. Then, having received him with Eastern ceremony, he escorted him back to the city, and introduced him to the Maharaja, who set apart rooms in the palace for his use.

Tom spent three days enjoying the hospitality of Gwalior. Before the end of that time, he and the Dewan had become firm friends. In the long nights that they spent together on one of the palace balconies, while the Dewan smoked his hookah and looked up meditatively into the starlit sky, Tom

unburdened himself of some of the thoughts and feelings that had possessed him since he entered upon his new life.

He was troubled by his inability to lay out the future. 'I make plans one day,' he said, 'and I change them the next, and I find no firm standing-ground anywhere.' He was troubled still more by the dual impulses that governed him, and by the way in which startlingly new thoughts and unbidden imaginations forced themselves upon his mind. 'I thought I knew myself,' he said sadly; 'but I find that my very will is not my own.'

The Dewan consoled him. 'It is a time of transition with you,' he said. 'The new has not yet accommodated itself with the old. Western ideas, and, if I may venture to say so, Western prejudices, are warring in your mind with the Orientalism which is its true element. You will settle down in time and then you will take the best out of both. Who knows that the Great Spirit may not have decreed that you shall be one of the reconcilers for whom the world is waiting? Your father, the great Byrajee Pirtha Raj, of blessed memory, believed that such would be, and that only then, when the East learned from the West and the West from the East, as now they interchange terrestrial products, would the earth and her long-troubled children enter upon the holy path that leads to spiritual freedom.'

'And do you think this time is near?' said Tom, trembling.

'Nay,' answered the Dewan, smiling. 'I am no prophet. The future is with the gods.'

'But you think that England does well to maintain her power in India?'

'I know that in England is our only hope. They are preaching independence to the people,' cried the Dewan, his excitement rising as he spoke. 'Govern yourselves, they say. Be free men! Throw the invaders from the West into the sea! The fools! Do they know what they mean? Are we then one nation in India? Can we be governed by ourselves? They know very well that we cannot. There is not one preacher of sedition at this moment who is not well aware that the retreat of the English would introduce a period of anarchy such as even our unhappy country has never known. And how could it be otherwise? Moslems, Hindustanis, Bengalis, Mahrattas, Sikhs, Punjaubis, Ghoorkas, hill tribes of the north, and hill tribes of the south—we are far more foreigners

to one another than French and English, Spaniards and Germans. Which of all these, I ask you, shall govern the others? Who are to be the free and independent men, and who are to be the slaves?'

'The strongest would come to the front,' said Tom.

'The strongest, yes; and think of the sea of bloodshed and misery through which we should have to wade before that was proved! They know it very well, these preachers. I caught one, a Moulvie of great sanctity, preaching rebellion to my soldiers. Before I sent him to Yama I asked him this question: who is to govern us all, I said, when the English have gone? I asked it in the presence of the poor fools he had been trying to delude. If he could answer me I said I would spare him. There were three different religions amongst them, and he knew that if he pronounced for one the votaries of the other would tear him to pieces. So he stood dumb and was led away to death. No,' said the Dewan, 'however it may be in the future, those amongst us who are wise know that for the present the Paramount Power is needed. We may regret the necessity; but we should feel gratitude rather than aversion towards the strong hand that, by compelling our mutual animosities to be still, gives us time for such internal development as can alone make us great and prosperous. That at least is our attitude, and my master will maintain it—of this I am certain. Yes, even if his own soldiers desert him.'

In after days, when Sindia and his State were put to the test, Tom remembered those brave words well.

He paid one more important visit before going on to Gumilcund. It was to Jhansi, a little state and town lying to the south of Gwalior, which was one of the kingdoms tributary now to the English, formed out of the ruins of the Peishwa's dominion after the Mahratta War. The late rajah was the last representative of the reigning family. His widow survived him. She was beautiful, talented, and strong. Her energy and ambition, held all her life long in reserve, were ready to leap forth when the moment for their exercise should come. She would govern the state—she a woman, and govern it as none of the voluptuaries who preceded her had done!

Her dream was destined to disappointment. The petition which she presented to the Paramount Power praying for the succession, first to herself and after her to her adopted son, was rejected. But the Government of India would not be unjust. A pension should be allotted to the widow of the

rajah, and she should be permitted to reside in her own palace at Jhansi.

The Ranee gnashed her teeth. Had Jhansi been strong and rich she would have flung the Governor-General's pension in his face, and dared him to do his worst. As it was she bided her time. Yearning for vengeance with the fierce, concentrated passion of the strong in mind and helpless in body, she sat at home, brooding over her wrongs, but doing nothing. Her guaranteed income, so petty to her magnificence, was, in the course of time, reduced. The late rajah had left debts. The present governor refused to settle them. The Ranee stated, mildly enough, her inability to pay, and the governor of the province decreed that her pension should be mulcted of a certain yearly sum until the amount due from the late rajah's estate had been paid. And still the Ranee said nothing. Being too weak to rebel, she was too proud to murmur. But the sore in her spirit grew. Sitting with bowed head in the retirement of her palace, she heard of the worship in Hindoo temples being stopped for lack of funds, of priests and Brahmins wandering homeless through the land, and of kine being slaughtered in the very heart of the stainless city; but still she made no sign. Then, at last, the year of prophecy, with its strange portents, dawned. Flat cakes, the sacrament of union in life and in death, were carried from village to village. From one to another, through the crowded bazaars and markets, and into the temples defrauded of their gains, there flew a mysterious whisper of impending change. It penetrated to the palace where the Ranee sat, nursing her vengeance, and with a rapture, such as she had never hoped to know, her darkened spirit leapt to meet it. Destruction —death—torrents of blood—a great dominion established on strength and cemented by terror, passing away for ever. What could it mean but that the hour for which she had so long and so hopelessly craved had come? And now the Ranee put on a smiling face. She welcomed the English to her palace, and entertained them royally. 'We must bow to the will of the Supreme,' she said, when one and another expressed surprise at her changed attitude. She would even confer gravely with the English authorities on the emergencies of the time, and recommend measures for their security. But all the time she was adding to her body-guard, and secretly drawing the discontented about her, and exercising her magnetic power of fascination on the troops.

Such was the state of Jhansi when the rajah's heir came knocking at the Ranee's door.

She had heard of his probable accession, and of his progress through Central India, and she was exceedingly anxious to see him; as soon, therefore, as he gave in his name he was admitted.

It was evening, the Ranee's reception-hour. This the captain of her lately enrolled body-guard, a man of splendid stature and dull, forbidding face, told the visitor. Following him, he wound his way through some narrow passages, until a heavy curtain before a closed door pulled them up. The captain threw the curtain aside and opened the door, and a curious spectacle presented itself to Tom. He was in a large hall, paved and lined with marble, and lighted by beautiful perforated windows, through which streamed softly the golden light of evening. It fell on a motley crowd, barefooted and dressed in every variety of Eastern costume.

To Tom's eyes, dazzled by the sudden change, there seemed to be nothing but a confusion of swaying forms and faded colours. Halting for a moment to recover himself, he saw that the crowd which was spread thinly over the hall concentrated at its upper end. Thither his conductor led him, the throng parting right and left to allow him free passage. In front of him was a marble daïs, raised a few steps above the level of the hall. To this he lifted his eyes and found himself in the immediate presence of a woman of queenly figure. It was the Ranee. He thought, as he looked at her, that he had never seen a finer sight. None, indeed, knew better than the Ranee of Jhansi the effect of the senses upon the imagination; no one has ever been more skilful in use of the arts by which such influence as she desired was won.

That evening she was dressed in a robe of curiously figured satin and woven gold; a gauze veil, which softened, but did not hide her proud and beautiful face, was thrown over her, and her seat was a finely carved and gilded chair.

For an instant the English youth was bewildered; in the next he remembered the part he had to play; while the Captain was recounting his name and titles, he prostrated himself reverently. When he lifted his head, he saw that she was standing—a noble figure in her splendid raiment—and making signs to him to approach nearer to her. He mounted the daïs, the lady encouraging him by a smile. An attendant,

in the meantime, brought forward a low chair, upon which, in obedience to the Ranee's invitation, he seated himself.

What was to come next? The experience being totally novel, he thought his most prudent course would be to wait. He sat silent, therefore, feeling conscious in every nerve of the keen and fervent gaze which, from under that silvery veil, was enveloping him.

'Are you one of us, my lord?' said the Ranee at length.

'I am the slave of her Excellency,' he answered, bending low.

'I have many slaves in name,' returned the Ranee, a proud and bitter smile playing about her lips.

'Surely her Excellency is unjust to her servants,' said Tom.

'You are right, Sir Stranger,' said one who stood by—a ponderous and unwieldy figure of a man, clad in white muslin tunic and crimson sash.

'Is he, Nawab?' said the Ranee, a flash of what looked like irony darting from her eyes. 'Then let me beseech you, who have repeatedly called yourself my slave, to dismiss our friends, and to retire yourself. I would confer with this youth alone.'

For an instant the Nawab's eyes gleamed ominously, and his fingers played with the hilt of his sword · but the Ranee's gaze was upon him, and he recovered himself. 'Your Excellency's orders shall be obeyed,' he said.

He went down into the hall to make her wishes known, whereupon one after another made their salaams; so that in a few moments the hall was cleared. Our hero, as we shall imagine, was feeling anything but easy. What could the Ranee wish to discuss with him secretly? Had she any dangerous designs to communicate, and, if so, how could he—a man in disguise—receive such confidences?

The Ranee was too keen not to read the perturbation of his mind; but not keen enough, fortunately for him, to trace it to its true source. He was impressed, she believed, by her beauty and dignity. This was no new thing to a woman accustomed to homage; but the youth, fair looks, and ingenuousness of her new acquaintance made the incense of his adoration peculiarly sweet. She was unscrupulous, as we know; where she had wrongs to avenge she could be cruel; yet she was not without the generosity which is the redeeming virtue of strong characters. Looking at Tom she formed a hasty resolution. He should not be drawn into the plot they

were framing. She would prevent it. He had nothing to avenge. If he threw himself into the quarrel it would be for her sake; and, in the event of failure, he would lose not his raj only, but his life; while the fearful rapture of gratified hatred to which she looked forward as the sweetener of her fall would not exist for him. And so, to Tom's surprise, for the Dewan had begged him to listen with caution to anything the Ranee might have to say, she gave him prudent counsels.

'You have come to us at an uneasy moment,' she said. 'The hearts of the people are hot within them, and none of us knows what may happen. Had I been continued in the government of my state, I could have led it safely through this difficult time. But it was not to be. The English are wise, and they have dispossessed me.' Into her dark eyes there came a gleam of anger, and her brows knit themselves fiercely together; but in a moment she recovered herself. 'What is all that to you?' she said. 'You are a stranger. Take the advice of one who wishes you well, and wait and watch. Your state is small. Nothing will be asked of you by the English. Agitators will be afraid to trouble you. Until you know what turn things will take, you can keep quiet; and, if you loose your raj, you will preserve your life.'

Tom was deeply touched by the care for a stranger's safety which these words implied; but they unloosened his tongue, so that he said unthinkingly, 'You see danger of a rising?'

For fully a minute the Ranee looked at him. She seemed to be searching him through and through. Then her words dropped out slowly, as if hissed through her teeth, 'There *will* be a rising; I am certain of it.'

Everything—her beauty, her kindness, her solitary position, a woman alone among all these men, and the fearful nature of the crisis to which she looked forward—seemed to rush together to Tom's brain in one overwhelming tempest cloud of thought. Wild with pity and terror, he flung himself at her feet. 'Gracious lady,' he cried, 'can you do nothing? Think, in Heaven's name! Do not be angry with me, I beseech you! It is stronger than I am. I must speak. I have seen your face; I have listened to your voice with its words of good counsel, and I know its power. Speak you to the madmen who are stirring up strife. They will—they must listen to you!'

'You magnify my ability, Sir Rajah,' said the Ranee. 'I am only a poor pensioner of the English.'

'You are a queen,' said the boy chokingly. But he rose to his feet.

'I thank you for your good words,' said the Ranee gently. 'They are pleasant to me, and I shall not forget them. But say I did speak, and say my people listened to me, what then? Will the English give me back the power of which they have robbed me? Will they atone for the insults offered in their name to our families and our faith? Will they give us men of our own blood to be our rulers? I know they will not, and I, who, if they had been true to me, would have thrown the whole weight of my influence into their cause, I wipe my hands of them. If those who were once my people revolt—they revolt—what is that to me? I would not lift my little finger to prevent them.'

'But,' said Tom chokingly, being moved to the heart, 'you will at least——'

'I will listen to you no longer, lest you make me angry. I have warned you, and that is enough. And now tell me about England. I have seen the name of the Island written on one of our maps. It is a small place, but the people must be restless and clever. I hear that they have dominions in other parts of the world, in America and the islands of the sea. How do they defend themselves when their soldiers are scattered?'

'Your Excellency,' said Tom, smiling, 'can have no idea of the power and resources of England. I have lived there since I was a child, so I ought to know. She has cities of vast size and overflowing with people. She has armies to which those you see here are but a handful ready at a moment's notice to be sent to the ends of the earth at her pleasure. She has great Generals—men of nerve and power and endurance—in her service. She has cities of workmen, who are forging every day the munitions of war; and she has fleets in constant readiness to transport her soldiers across the sea. You in India, who have never been over the black water, can have no idea of what England is.'

'Jung Bahadoor told me something of this, but I believed that he spoke largely for his own purposes,' said the Ranee. 'He has always cultivated the friendship of the English. You assure me that it is true!'

'How could I dream such wonders? It is true, every word of it,' said Tom, 'and I could tell you more.'

'Nay,' said the Ranee with a smile, 'you have told me enough. To know that they are strong will not make me love them more. Tell me of yourself. You are going on at once to Gumilcund?'

'With your Excellency's permission, I will start between night and morning.'

'Stay one more day, and look round you.'

'I thank your Excellency humbly.'

'That is well. Then I shall see you again at this hour to-morrow.'

He rose and bowed low, and having called some of the servants who were hanging about the ante-rooms, she committed him to their care; but Tom, acting on Hoosanee's advice, preferred sleeping in camp to sharing the noisy hospitality of the Palace.

Had Hoosanee had his will, they would have started that night, but Tom felt bound to visit the Ranee again. Never before had he met a woman of her type. She fascinated his imagination, so that he could scarcely sleep for thinking of her, and it was after a vivid dream in which the Ranee figured as a new Joan of Arc, leading her troops to victory, that he opened his eyes the next morning.

Hoosanee was standing over him with a cup of coffee. 'If my lord wishes to see anything of Jhansi, this is the time,' he said.

'All right, Hoosanee. Have Snow-queen saddled,' said Tom.

Snow-queen was an Arab mare of the highest lineage, which Tom had brought up with him from Bombay. She was full of spirit, could race like the wind, showed no signs of flagging until she was completely dead-beat, and was as gentle as a well-trained child in the hands of those who used her kindly. No one but her master and the syce, Subdul Khan, who had been with her since she was a foal, ever touched Snow-queen. To him, as to Tom, she was more like a human being than a beast of burden.

A few minutes after Hoosanee had given the order, Subdul Khan, who had already groomed and fed the beautiful white mare, was leading her gently up and down in front of their master's tent. A second syce led a horse for Hoosanee. Dressed in the half-Oriental, half-European style, which is the out-of-doors costume of many an Indian gentleman, Tom came out. His face, which had been pale and sad that morn-

ing, brightened when he saw his favourite, and he gave a low whistle, to which she responded by arching her neck, and pawing the ground.

'The White Ranee is impatient,' he said smilingly to Subdul Khan, as he gathered up the reins and vaulted on to her back.

'She will go like the wind, your Excellency. The day's rest has done her good,' said the groom, looking, with pride in his dark face, at his young master and the snow-white steed.

'Then let her go,' said Tom.

'One word, sahib,' said Subdul Khan, whose hand was still on Snow-queen's bridle. He spoke low and mysteriously, and Tom, fearing that he had made some uncomfortable discovery about his mare's soundness, stooped down to listen. But all Subdul Khan said was, 'Let me entreat my master to be careful. There are traitors in this place.' Before Tom could ask him to explain, Snow-queen, free at last, had set off, with her long, easy stride, tossing her mane and snorting joyously. The rapid movement was exhilarating. Tom's spirits rose till he felt ready to defy the universe. 'What do we care for traitors?' he said to his horse in English. 'We could escape, you and I together, if we were put to it, old friend! I can see you dashing through a crowd of them like a whirlwind. There! gently! gently!' Snow-queen, excited by her master's voice, and in mere wantonness of heart, had tossed up her heels and redoubled her pace. 'We are coming into civilised quarters, Snow-queen, and we must behave like civilised beings.'

They had crossed the Maidan, a wilderness of burnt-up grass, where the native troops, whose huts could be seen as a low, white line in the distance, were drilled and trained under their European officers. They were coming now upon a road, on either side of which the bungalows of the English military and civil officers, with the humbler dwelling-places of Eurasian and European clerks and mechanics, were scattered.

Here Tom drew up and waited for Hoosanee, who was some distance behind him. Tne gallop over the Maidan had satisfied Snow-queen for the moment, and she stood perfectly still, while her master, stroking her glossy neck caressingly, looked out before him.

It was very early indeed. The sun had not yet leapt over the rim of the vast plain ; but the eastern heavens were glowing like a furnace, and from the dreadful zenith star after star was fading out. Beneath the sky the plain, with its villages

and groves and burnt-up fields, and multitudes of freshly-kindled morning fires, round which, like busy ants, the people clustered, lay outstretched mysteriously. Not the Elysian fields themselves could have been more peaceful than this early morning scene.

Hoosanee came up, and they cantered quietly along the pleasantly-shaded road that led through the European quarter. Early as it was there were many stirring. Slender, pale-faced English children, dressed in white blouses, were mounted on ponies led by dignified Indian servants. Several ladies were riding and driving, and from the bungalow-gardens came sounds of laughter and chattering, as little groups gathered round spread tables under the trees to enjoy the freshness of the morning.

Tom was looking out on this absently, his heart full of the wistful longing, which always possessed him when he saw English faces and heard the English speech, to mix with his compatriots as one of themselves, when a small face, which had been for some moments looking up into his face with questioning eagerness, detached itself from the multitude of confused impressions about him. He looked down and saw as quaint and pretty a group as it would be possible to imagine. The child who had been looking up at him—a little girl dressed like a fairy in blue and silver—formed the centre of the group. A ridiculously small pony, decked out in gay trappings, and led by a smart little Indian groom, carried the child, and an ayah, swathed in spotless white, walked beside her.

'Why,' said Tom, pulling up, 'it is Aglaia!'

At the sound of his voice, the child, whose little face had been looking troubled, clapped her hands and laughed; and Tom, feeling quite unable to preserve his character of Oriental passivity, leapt to the ground, and caught her in his arms.

The ayah, who had taken him for an Indian of rank, looked at him in the utmost bewilderment; but her attention was happily diverted, for Hoosanee, too, had leapt from his horse and he was looking at her with a curious fixity. No sooner had she seen him fully than she broke into a little cry of 'Hoosanee! How did you come here?'

Tom looked back. 'Your Excellency,' said the man, his dark face glowing, 'the young woman is my sister Sumbaten!'

'Why,' said Tom, 'this is quite a romance. And where do you and Sumbaten live, Aglaia?'

The child pointed with her small forefinger to a small building on the outskirt of the maidan, which looked more like a tomb than a house. She was clamorous that Tom should go home with her at once. 'I've such lots of things to show you,' she said. '*Three* new dollies, and a tea-set, and a sweet little bird. Then there's my dada—you haven't seen my dada yet, have you?'

'No,' said Tom gravely. 'Is he nice?'

'He's lovely,' said the child. 'Come and see him now!'

'I am afraid I can't, Aglaia.'

'Why can't you, Tom?'

'I am going on to another place, where I have a beautiful house with all sorts of lovely things in it. You and your mother and father must come and stay with me there some day.'

'But you're quite close to *my* house,' persisted Aglaia. '*Do* come!'

Here Hoosanee stepped forward. 'His Excellency is being observed,' he said in a low voice. 'He would do well to mount and ride on.'

Two of the Ranee's body-guard, dressed in gaudy but ragged clothes, were strolling down the road, their swords clanking behind them. Hoosanee had been right in his surmise. Their master, the Nawab, had pointed Tom out to them the previous evening as a person to be suspected, and they had come out with the object of spying his movements. Had they heard him speak to the English child in English, his fate would have probably been sealed, for these men, who had served in British armies, knew the sound of an English voice. But Hoosanee's watchfulness had, for the moment, forestalled theirs. When they came up, Tom, who looked all the Oriental, was mounted and giving directions in Hindustani to Aglaia's servants. With reverent salaams the men passed on, and Hoosanee whispered to his sister that she should take the child away.

'Sahib, it is for their sakes,' he exclaimed hurriedly to his master. 'We should draw suspicion upon them. The *budmashes* respect nothing. They only wait for an opportunity to do wickedness.'

Aglaia was resisting the efforts of her ayah to draw her away. Her sweet violet eyes were full of tears, she could not understand the change in her friend Tom, or why he should look at her so solemnly, when she was so glad to see him. 'Won't you come?' she sobbed. 'I want you to see my dada.'

'Yes, yes,' said Tom low and hoarsely. 'Go home and I will come some day. Perhaps when you want me the most.'

'I want you now,' said Aglaia.

'Missy come away; come quick!' urged the poor little ayah whom Hoosanee's frantic signs were goading into desperation. 'The sun it is coming, and mem sahib she scold poor Sumbaten.'

'Go on, dear,' said Tom, lingering and feeling half disposed to follow her, while Hoosanee was writhing over his young master's folly and at his own inability to make him do what was wise, and then Snow-queen, the wisest of them all. as Subdul Khan said later, settled the question for them. She was impatient of standing, and Tom touched her inadvertently, and all in a moment she bounded away. She was seen darting like a flash of light across the Maidan and into the wilderness beyond. It was a wonderful sight, so said the few Europeans who witnessed it, marvelling at the daring and perfect horsemanship of a native. Later it was said that there was something uncanny in the business, for the beautiful white horse and its rider, though looked for diligently by one or two, were not seen again in Jhansi.

When Aglaia had finished her usual prayer that evening, she stopped. 'Mother,' she said, 'may I say something from myself?'

'Certainly you may, darling,' said Mrs. White.

Then Aglaia shut her eyes up tightly and clasped her hands. 'O God,' she said, 'thank you for sending Tom. Please may he come back soon!'

After that she lay down contentedly. 'I was going to cry,' she said. 'But I won't now. He's sure to come, isn't he, mother?'

Before her mother could answer she was asleep, and every night, up to a certain night that I shall have to tell of presently, she insisted upon adding this petition to her prayers.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAJAH'S RECEPTION

HOOSANEE, who was by this time in daily communication with Chunder Singh, was careful so to time the arrival in Gumilcund of the rajah's heir as to make it interesting and impressive. Tom, indeed, who wished to test the truth of the likeness to the late rajah which so many of his friends had observed in him, and at the same time to put to the severest trial his own power of maintaining the character of an Indian prince, insisted that the people should not be prepared for his arrival, and, Chunder Singh agreeing with him, Hoosanee was obliged to give up his dreams of garlanded houses, and throngs of expectant people in holiday raiment. He indemnified himself by arranging that they should enter the city on the evening of a holiday, for then all the workers would be out of doors, and Gumilcund would look her best.

It was in the forenoon of a burning day that the little cavalcade halted. They were now within the boundaries of the Gumilcund State. Tom, who was looking at everything with the deepest interest, had already seen evidences of a higher prosperity than he had met with elsewhere. The splendidly kept roads were overshadowed with fine trees; there were wells and tanks in every direction; the villages, which echoed to the sounds of industry, were neater and more comfortable looking than any he had seen in India; and, throughout the day's journey, he only saw one or two of the hideous vermilion-painted shrines to Mahadeo, which, elsewhere, were to be found at every corner.

They halted in a grove of fig trees, about two miles distant from the city. Here Tom's tent had been pitched, and, though far too much excited to sleep, he threw himself down for a few hours' rest.

'His Excellency will sleep in his own palace to-night, if we continue to meet with the favour of Heaven,' said Hoosanee, as he left his master to his repose.

Hour followed hour. The sun blazed down with the most terrible fierceness. Tom got up and went to the edge of the wood, and returned reeling and almost blind. He could do

nothing, he could not even think ; and he felt as if the day would never pass away. At last, towards afternoon, Hoosanee came in with the pleasant news that his meal and his bath were ready. Tom knew what was expected of him, and he was not surprised to see the finest of his Oriental suits, with jewels that had often caused him anxiety on the road, but that were now most carelessly displayed, laid out for him to wear.

'We are in Gumilcund,' said Hoosanee, with a proud smile, when his young master looked at the display. 'There are no *budmashes* here.'

Not without some sense of amusement, and curious consideration of what his friends at home would say if they could see him, the rajah's heir decked himself out. He wore a crimson satin tunic, sown with pearls, and the sash from which his sword hung was of golden tissue, and his turban of fine muslin richly embroidered shone with the fire of rubies and diamonds.

It was an absurd magnificence, which, Tom felt, would dwarf him, and, with an Englishman's impatience of merely personal display, he was about to fling aside these gaudy weeds and ask for something plainer, when, glancing into the mirror which Hoosanee held up to him proudly, he was aware of such a change as he had experienced on board the 'Patagonia,' on the occasion of his first putting on an Oriental robe. It came, this time, with a force that there was no resisting. For an instant his brain seemed to reel with the shock. Then, making a strong effort to draw himself together, he looked again, and tried to look calmly. For several seconds he gazed fixedly into those strange eyes that were gazing into his. Then he drew a deep breath. It was true. This image before him was not Thomas Gregory. There was a dignity in the figure, a determination in the face, a mingled fire and sadness in the dark eyes, such as he had never seen in the English youth whom he thought he knew.

What did it mean ? Was he dreaming a madman's dream, or was it, could it be, that the awful thing which ever since he left home had been haunting him was true ? Could another personality enter into and possess him ? Would he never in all the future be certain at any moment of being himself ? Questions such as these were forcing their way through his mind, when, all at once, the curtain at the door of the tent was slowly lifted, and, looking round impatiently, for he was in no mood to be intruded upon, he saw his friend Chunder

Singh standing, with bowed head, before him. At the same moment his perplexity and distress vanished, and he knew that the curious conflict, so often renewed, was over for the time. The English youth had gone. It was the Indian prince and chief who addressed his follower.

'Welcome to my tent, Chunder Singh,' he said, heartily. 'What news do you bring?'

'I bring good news, my lord,' said Chunder Singh. 'We are at peace, and all the State is well-disposed to your Highness. It was your will that we should not warn the people of your approach; but the wind of rumour has been busy amongst them, and I find that they expect the return of their rajah. When my lord enters he will be received with acclamations.'

'I will only go amongst them upon one condition,' said the young rajah. 'You know that, Chunder Singh.'

'I know it well; but let my lord have no fear! We know by whose favour we live and prosper, and in all Gumilcund I believe there is no one who would be traitorous to the Paramount Power.'

The eyes of the young rajah glistened as he held out his hand, over which Chunder Singh, whose eyes were wet with tears, bent reverently, for he knew now that his old master had come back to him.

After this they made their arrangements. Hoosanee, who was called into their counsel, was in favour of their all entering together; but it was decided against him. The rajah should ride in on his own snow-white horse, with only Subdul Khan, whose face was unknown to the people of Gumilcund, behind him; and the rest of the train should follow after about half an hour's interval.

The sun had by this time gone down; a rose-red glow of colour streaming over the plain transfigured the burnt fields into gardens of Paradise, and a thin white veil rising from a multitude of evening fires covered the face of the plain.

Feeling as if everything, and most of all himself, were unreal, Tom mounted Snow-queen, and, following the road pointed out to him by Chunder Singh, rode on rapidly for two miles. Then he drew rein, for he was within sight of the city. Dreamlike and wonderful in the evening light, the broad shield of the full moon rising above its battlements, it lay before him. It was all new; but he did not feel that it was new. It seemed to him rather as if he were coming to a spot where

everything was familiar. He pushed on again, riding more slowly. A bridge thrown across a deep gully lay in front of him. He crossed it at a footpace and found himself under walls of red sandstone, thick and high, in the midst of which was a massive gate, flanked with towers, which lay hospitably open.

By this time Subdul Khan, his only attendant, was close behind him.

They rode in together, no one challenging them, and again Tom drew up and looked round him. He was in a dazzling little world of pink and white—pink houses that stood back from a wide white road, through the midst of which ran a canal of fresh water overshadowed with young trees, and white poles uplifting lanterns above the heads of the people, who in gay garments of pink and white were streaming along the road, and towards the centre of the city.

Keeping under the shadow of the trees so as not to attract the attention of anyone, the rajah's heir followed the crowd. It was at once the gayest and the most orderly crowd that he had ever beheld. As he went on it grew thicker. Beautiful white kine, with garlanded horns, moved amongst them; flocks of white pigeons hovered overhead, alighting wherever there was a vacant space, and taking toll from the stores of yellow grain that were spread out on sheets at the doors of the houses; and the lowing of the quiet beasts, and the whirr of the doves' wings blended pleasantly with the buzz and rumour of the city. Subdul Khan urged his master to show himself; but he kept in shadow still. He was interested and moved as he had never been before. He felt more strongly than ever the mysterious kinship between himself and these people. He was tempted to prolong the dreamlike sensations of the moment, and to put off the time when it would be necessary for him to act.

Moving on under the grateful shelter of the trees, with the unconscious crowd about him, he was aware of coming into a finer part of the city. Large and lofty houses, which were very much in the gingerbread style of architecture, being decorated lavishly with balconies or pavilions and pretty perforated stone lattices, stood back from the road, and here and there, as, going with the stream of the people, he followed the broad main road, he caught glimpses of quiet side streets and little open squares, surrounded with lighted houses, all in the same fantastic style. 'This is like a magnified toy city,' he said

to himself. And now he had traversed the full length of the broad high road that leads from the principal gate to the market-place, and the avenue of trees which had been sheltering him from observation came to an end abruptly. Here for a few moments he pulled up. To plunge into the sea of light and movement that lay before him would be to attract the attention of the crowd, and before doing so he wished to understand what was going on.

The market-place, of wide extent and planted here and there with groups of trees, was the centre from which the principal streets of the city radiated. It was here that all the fun of the evening culminated. After a little observation, Tom made out that the festival had to do with Rama, hero of the great Indian epic. His name was to be heard on every side. Processions of women, decked with garlands of flowers, were making the round of the market-place, chanting his praises; men in long white robes, and elevated on small platforms above the heads of the people, were reciting fragments of the Ramayana; and in booths, closely surrounded with eager crowds, pictures of the hero and the companions of his exile were being exhibited.

This much he saw himself. Subdul Khan in the meantime, who had alighted and tethered his horse to a tree, was, by his orders, mixing amongst the people. In a few moments he returned, his dark face all aglow with excitement. 'Allah is favourable to my master!' he exclaimed. 'He has come at a good moment. It is the festival of Rama's return to his city after his seven years of exile, twice told. There could not be a better omen. Let my lord ride down amongst them!'

Snow-queen had been standing like a marble image under the trees. Her master shook the bridle rein, and she moved forward. They had been in shadow, and they were now in full light. The effect was magical. In an instant the white horse and its rider became the centre towards which all that multitude of swaying figures converged. They were silent for a few moments. The suddenness of the apparition had struck them with awe, and it was to some as if a spirit had risen from the dead. But in the East the crowd is more attuned to marvels than in the West. The sense of awe was followed, in a moment, by a rapture that was almost intoxicating. Like an autumn wind that sweeps over the yellow corn fields, bowing the ripe ears to the ground, so the wild rumour ran, and hundreds of heads were bent, while the cry of 'Rama, Rama!'

rent the air. In less time than it takes to tell, the trees in the market-place and the balconies of the houses that bounded it, and the platforms from which the reciters had been declaiming, were thronged with eager faces. Then from some one in the outskirts of the crowd there came another cry—a cry that thrilled Tom to the heart—'Rajah jee! Rajah jee!"

Those behind pressed upon those in front. Subdul Khan could with difficulty keep a little space between the horse and the people, and had not Snow-queen been as gentle as she was swift there would have been imminent danger of accident. But she stood quiet, or moved forward slowly as she was directed, arching her beautiful neck, and tossing her mane; and Tom, who, for a moment, had been uneasy, looked round him calmly and proudly. Then the acclamations were redoubled. They echoed and re-echoed through the square; they came rolling up the streets that opened into it; they dropped down like thunder from the roofs and pavilions of the houses. 'Rajah jee! Rajah jee! Protector of the poor! Cherisher of our city! Master of our lives! He has come back to us from the grave, and we are orphans no longer. Byrajee Pirtha Raj, our prince and deliverer, is here!' These and a hundred other cries rent the air, so that the whole city was in an uproar.

Tom, meanwhile, was silent. He would have spoken if he could, but the tumult was too great. He moved forward slowly across the great square, looking to the right hand and to the left. In the centre of the square he came to a full stop, the throng being so great that he could not go further; and then, all of a sudden, there was a lull, and a single voice, as of a herald, was heard to exclaim, 'Vishnugupta has come hither from his hermitage. Give place to the priest and prophet!"

In the next instant the crowd divided reverently, and, through this living lane, a tall supernaturally lean figure, dressed in a long white robe, its one arm, that was bare, holding aloft a silver cage, through which shone the glowing red of living brands, came slowly. It stopped in front of the white horse and its rider. The sudden apparition of the weird, white-bearded figure, with the glowing brands, and the smell of smoke in her nostrils, were almost more than Snow-queen could bear. To the consternation of Subdul Khan, she fell back upon her haunches, snorting violently. But Tom kept

his seat firmly, soothing her with his hand and voice, and in a few moments she was quiet again.

Then the deep sepulchral voice of the priest came towards him. 'I have come up from the grave,' he said, 'to see you. Who are you, and whence have you come?'

Firmly and proudly his answer leapt out. 'I have come from the Islands of the Sea, to be the rajah of this city and state. They who were the rulers of this people have sent me to reign over them. Take me to the prince's house and I will speak to them there!'

He was scarcely given time to finish, for the acclamations, which broke forth more tumultuously than ever, mingled now with sounds of weeping, as if, for some, the shock of gladness was too great to be borne.

'Our eyes have not deceived us. The voice is the voice of our rajah. He said he would come back to us, and he has kept his word. Rajah jee! Rajah jee! Come in with rejoicing!'

Tears filled the young ruler's eyes, and his heart throbbed passionately. Oh, if he could only speak to these people as he would! For in the pity and rapture of the moment all his own hopes and wishes were melting away. He was ready to give up everything, even his personality, which seemed to be slowly receding from him, for the sake of this people—this flock without a leader—that surged round him. Strange and solemn, as some of us dream the entry into the new life—the life of the resurrection—may be, were the moments that followed. The voices of the crowd seemed to be drawing him towards them, while, far away, like a half-forgotten image in a vanished dream, he saw the English youth with whom he had lived since his infancy. Only an hour before he had fought passionately to retain his hold on what he vainly called himself. Now he was conscious of no self. He belonged to this people, and to the power that was working in him, transforming all his impulses to its own creative will.

Slowly—the priest with the cage of living coals in his hand making a way for him—he passed through the lane of mute figures and silent expectant faces, in which the rapture of his own heart was reflected, till he reached the north side of the square. Right in front of him towered a structure, larger and even more fantastic and brilliant than any other he had seen in the city. In colour it was a pale yellow, which, under the many lights, looked like gold, and the whole of the façade

was covered with balconies, pavilions, and pillared alcoves that, narrowing up from a broad base, had its apex in a small open tower of glass and shining metal. Within this tower was a lamp with powerful reflectors, which cast a beautiful moonlike radiance over the whole building, and into the small enclosed court in front of it.

Before the arched gateway that opened into this court Vishnugupta paused, and muttered a few words of invocation; at the same moment a tongue of white flame issued from the cage of fire in his hand. 'It is a good omen,' he said joyfully. 'Let my lord enter without fear! The spirits of fire and air bid him welcome. His rule will be as spotless as his heart is pure.'

CHAPTER XVII

HOW THE NEWS FROM MEERUT WAS RECEIVED AT GUMILCUND

Of the days that followed the young rajah's entry into his capital but little record remains. He ceased almost altogether to write in his diary; Chunder Singh, being always reticent with regard to this period, there was no one about him who could supply the deficiency; and, to the deep distress of his English friends both at home and in India, he gave up writing to them. When, preceded by Vishnugupta, and followed by Chunder Singh, Hoosanee, and the foremost of the citizens of Gumilcund, he went into the palace, he entered upon a seclusion which might have been that of the grave.

But, though unheard of outside the state, he was busy within it. I gather from hints scattered through his later writings that, as day followed day tranquilly, he entered more completely into the life of the city; and that the people—many of whom believed with Chunder Singh and Hoosanee that in this comely stranger their own rajah had returned to them—received him as one of themselves.

It was not a happy time; no period of transition can be altogether satisfactory to oneself. Being highly strung by temperament, he felt the mental strain more than others, while the complete severance with the old life affected him

painfully. Up to this there had always been something to connect him with the past. Jung Bahadoor, Gambier Singh, Dinkur Rao, and the Ranee of Jhansi had all spoken to him of England. Wherever he had been he had seen English faces and heard the English tongue; here he met no one but Indians. Even the Resident was absent. Owing to the death of the late rajah, he had been on duty for some time; his health, he said, was suffering; so, after welcoming the new ruler, he had started with his family to take holiday in a hill-station.

At first Tom felt disposed to congratulate himself on this isolation. He remembered what had been said to him on board the 'Patagonia'—that between East and West a great gulf is fixed. If, as he would sometimes imagine, he was to lay the first stone of a bridge to unite them, he must learn to stand firmly on both sides. Then, too, he had little time for vain regrets. He had begun to realise the magnitude of the task that lay before him, and all the energies of his nature were bent on preparing himself for it. The language, the religion, the laws, and social customs of his new country had all to be made separate subjects of study before he could presume to say that he understood its people; while, in addition, there was the duty—peculiarly sacred to him—of finding out what the aims of his predecessors had been, and of looking for and examining any records they had left behind them.

But after those first few days, filled to the brim with hard and unremitting toil, there came a sense of want. His old feelings might be stifled, but they were not dead. A dull craving, which he could not formulate, haunted him perpetually. During the night, which was his only time of relaxation from mental labour, there would come to him vivid visions of home, from which he would awake with a sick anguish that brought tears to his eyes and throbs of pain to his heart. Like a nightmare the sense of his isolation would weigh upon him; dear faces from the past would gaze at him reproachfully, and he would stretch out his arms to them with a bitter cry. He could not—he could not let them go.

Meanwhile, with the passion born of despair, he clung to what remained to him of his past life. He had brought away with him a little English New Testament, his mother's last gift to him. In the silence of his marble chamber, when everyone in the palace was asleep but himself, he opened and read it. How different it was from the subtle philosophies

into which he was painfully working his way! Could it be only that the words were familiar and therefore dear to him? Or was there indeed some sweet majestic power in them, such as is to be found nowhere else in all the world? With a trembling heart he read them over:—'He that loveth his life shall lose it.' 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' 'This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.'

They were not new to him; from his childhood up he had been instructed in them. They were so familiar to his ears as almost to have lost their sense to his heart. But now, coming fresh to him from these other religions, they smote upon his mind with a new power and beauty.

From the utterances he turned to the record of the life, and his wonder and enchantment grew. Its purity—he had never thought of this before, for he had not seen how men build up their deities—its selfless love, its courage, its devotion; these came upon him like a revelation. More than once in these silent nights he asked himself if this might not be the secret, this the reconciling element which, after these many ages of ignorance and disunion, would blend the two continents together so that they might move forward to a new era of blessedness. But as yet he said nothing, even to Chunder Singh.

The sultry month of April ran its course; the heat continued to be terrible; but the young rajah, in his large marble-lined rooms, artificially darkened and cooled with flowing water and the spray of fountains, suffered little inconvenience from it.

He heard daily of the outside world, and what he heard was reassuring. In these latter days of April it seemed to the English in the North-west Provinces—who were for the most part as ignorant of the inner life of the people about them as the infant is of the feelings of those who dandle it in their arms—that any danger which might once have existed was over. The soldiers had been convinced by a variety of telling examples that to fight against their salt would be the height of folly; and the people, even if they were disaffected, as a few acts of incendiarism, with a sullen demeanour towards the English, seemed to indicate, could do nothing without the army.

May opened, and still they held on their way quietly, and

the rajah's heir began to hope that the fanatics were silenced by hard and stubborn facts, and that the bitterness, so long foretold, had run its course. Then, like a flash of lightning flaming across the blue of a cloudless sky, came the news of the revolt at Meerut.

There are many still living who will remember the horror and sickening dismay which flew from station to station as the story, discredited at first, pressed itself home to the minds of the conquering race. We had heard unpleasant rumours before, here and there a mutinous regiment, bungalows set on fire, outrages committed, muttered insults in the public highways; some of us, indeed, had been visited with vague apprehensions. But there was always someone of experience at hand to point out how foolish it was to be afraid either of the people or the soldiers, and we were only too glad to be reassured. So much the greater was the shock of this terrible intelligence. It is true that it was nothing like so dreadful as what we were to hear later. The mutineers were young in crime and fearful of punishment. As a fact, it was rather a herd of frightened wild creatures that rushed madly out of the burning station on that awful Sunday night than a victorious army triumphing in its first success. But this we did not know. All we saw and understood was the extraordinary audacity of this first definite move. Through the breathless days that followed we were momentarily expecting to hear of the mutineers being pursued and punished. Our servants looked at us strangely. Native officers and soldiers, who, in the first flush of surprise, had passionately sworn to be faithful, began to lift up their heads. Old English commanders, of the type of General Elton, who was away from home on a tour of inspection in the outlying districts, gnashed their teeth with impotent fury, and wondered what the people at Meerut were about. For the news we expected never came. The next distinct intelligence was that flashed from the telegraph station at Delhi by the young signaller, who, with the messengers of death yelling in his ears, was working his instrument quietly: 'The Sepoys have come in from Meerut, and are burning everything; we must shut up.'

Not till then did the full magnitude of the disaster that had come to us break upon our minds. Ah! what a change it was! Few of us can have any conception of its horror. From a life that is quiet, simple, and secure, to be plunged all in a moment into the dark strenuous world of tragedy, nerves

strung up, senses on the alert, affection made lurid by passion, heart-consuming anxiety the companion of our solitude. Can we imagine it? If so, we shall have a faint picture of the experiences of many of us in that terrible May and June.

When the rajah of Gumilcund heard of the uprising, his brain seemed to reel with the shock. His impulse was to go to Meerut himself, but Chunder Singh dissuaded him. 'The English,' said this wise minister, 'have troops enough to defend themselves; and if my lord were stopped, as he well might be, for the roads will be infested with evil characters, of what profit will that be to his friends? My advice is that we take time to consider, that we look to ourselves, that we strengthen our defences and provision the city.'

'You are right. Yes, I acknowledge it. You are wiser than I am. Call the people together! Let us have a public council!' cried the young rajah, springing up. 'If the people side with me now, they have my affection and gratitude for ever.'

'They will,' said Chunder Singh.

In the beautiful Dwan-i-Khas, or public hall of audience, which was a large pillared pavilion, standing in the midst of an open court, surrounded by an arcade or corridor, all the principal people of the city were gathered together that evening. The court was literally packed. Within the pavilion, on a marble platform ten feet high, stood the young rajah, with Chunder Singh on his right hand, and Vishnugupta on the left.

Chunder Singh, to whom, as chief minister, it fell to open the proceedings, was deeply anxious. His voice trembled as he stood out and announced, in a few brief words, the calamity that had happened, with the rajah's orders that his people should attend to what he had to say upon the subject. But, in a few moments, his anxiety was gone, and he looked out before him with radiant confidence.

The young rajah's speech was admirable. Fortunately for himself, he had studied not only the religion and philosophy of this people, but their history. He stood before them, his mind stored with pictures out of the past. Better than anyone in that crowd he knew what the life of the peninsula had been before the strong hand of the English, guided by their orderly methodical minds, had undertaken to weld the great chaos of contending states into one peaceful empire.

Of the internecine warfare that led to Mogul and Tartar

invasions, of the brief prosperity that, however, did not penetrate to the smaller states, when the Moslem empire became consolidated under wise rulers, of the selfish and cynical policy of Aurungzebe that broke up the empire, of the horrors that accompanied its disintegration—piratical incursions on peaceful coasts, sackings of wealthy cities, forced contributions from those who, through industry and shrewdness, had attained to comfort, languishing in a slavery worse than death of hundreds of innocent people, fields ravaged, harvests swept away, and monuments of antiquity destroyed by a brutal soldiery—of these the young rajah spoke. He spoke quietly; but there was a repressed power in his voice and manner that told upon everyone in the assembly. Then, when their hearts were hot with passionate memories, and a tremor of vague apprehension was running through them, he told, in a few brief words, of the power that, for these hundred years and more, had been growing up amongst them.

Here he appealed to the more intelligent amongst his audience, the wealthy merchants, and clever artificers, who had made Gumilcund what she was, and the reasonableness of his words impressed them.

He did not, he said, seek to deny that it was the lust of gain which had first brought the English to their shores. Other nations had come on the same quest, come and gone so far as their influence on the national life of India was concerned. But this nation had stayed. Why? In answer he bade them follow him while he showed how the conscience of a great nation had been struggling with its cupidity, and how conscience had conquered, so that by degrees the majesty of right became the majesty of might, till the English name was a watchword for those who strove to live righteously, and the English power was a refuge for the oppressed. Even the late annexations, the wisdom of which so many called in question, had been made in the spirit of mercy, and to stave off the anarchy which would surely have resulted from the continuance in the peninsula of selfish and oppressive governments. And what, he asked, were the men who had been set over the annexed provinces? Had England sent from her superfluous population men who desired only to enrich themselves? No; she had given India of her best. Brave, true, strong and noble, denying themselves, and thinking sternly and simply of their duty, were the citizens whom she had sent to govern India. 'I speak what I know,' cried

the young rajah, 'for though I belong to you now, none of you are ignorant of the fact that England has been the home of my childhood. I am English and I am Indian, in a sense which it would be impossible for me to explain, and I speak with a full knowledge of the political position of both countries, when I say that England and India are necessary one to the other. I need not urge this upon you, my people, who are, I believe, deeply conscious of the benefits which have come to us from a strong and unselfish Imperial government. It is our desire that this power should be strengthened rather than weakened, and set on a broader rather than a narrower basis. But I would that my voice could resound through the land. I would that every citizen of this great empire could, at this awful crisis which some of us believe to be impending, see on which side his interest and safety lie. Then the army, which is being led astray by fanatics, would swiftly return to its allegiance, and peace and security would again reign amongst us.' He paused for a moment, and then his voice rose, and a passion of prophetic woe seemed to tear him, as he cried, 'I know the English; they are fierce when they are roused, they are dogged when their hearts are set upon an object, and if they seem to fall back it will only be for a moment. They will triumph, and the vengeance they will exact will be in proportion to their consciousness of rectitude. Thousands will die the death of felons. Thousands will lose their all. Thousands will wander homeless through the land, cursing those who betrayed them. But that is not all. That is not even the worst, for death and the flight of years will dissipate the anguish upon which we may have to look. The disturbers of our peace will pass away, and a new generation will arise. But the sore left behind by the struggle will remain. The new civilisation, which we so fondly hoped to establish, will be thrown back. The seeds of a mutual distrust will be sown, and the Union between East and West, to which my predecessors looked as enshrining the secret of the future, and holding within it the promise of a peace and happiness greater than the world has ever known, will be indefinitely delayed. For this,' cried the young orator, his voice rising and his frame seeming to expand, 'that the calamity which I foresee might be averted, I could wish that our little Gumilcund was a million-fold stronger and greater than she is. To take the van in the great contest which we see coming, to make for order

against anarchy, to force upon others the views which we hold ourselves, and which we believe to be beneficial to us all, to cure the blood-fever which has seized upon the heart of these unhappy peoples, and to lead them back into the paths of reason and quietness—this we would do if we had the strength. We know that we have not. By the Supreme Spirit, which, call it by what name we will, every one of us acknowledges, our place amongst the nations has been allotted to us. We are to this people as a single grain in a heaped-up storehouse, as a little one in a multitude. But we can do something, and what we can do we will. We can be faithful to our convictions; we can make sacrifices for our faith; we can govern ourselves; we can be wise, prudent, firm, and watchful. This, which I ask of myself, I ask of you.' His voice dropped, and there crept into its tones a curiously soft inflection as he went on. 'I am new to you, the tumult of your welcome is still ringing in my ears. I came to you an unknown man, and you received me with an honour and distinction such as are seldom accorded to a stranger. That I owe this not to my own merits, but to the merits of those who went before me, I am well aware; and when I say that it is in response to this welcome I venture to come forward as your leader, you will not mistake me. I am speaking in the name and by the power—present, as I believe, at this moment amongst us—of your late rajah, done foully to death by the hands and heads that are plotting this rising. Tell me then what your desire is. Let us confer together about the measures we should take for the proper defence of this city. Let us agree to open our gates to the fugitive and to shut them to the oppressor; and whatever may be in the future, we shall have our reward, for we shall have within us what a Western scripture would call "the answer of a good conscience towards God and towards men," or, in the not less striking words of the Bhagavad Gita, the sacred lore, the divine wisdom, "worshipping by the performance of our duties Him from whom is the endeavour of men, we shall attain perfection."'

CHAPTER XVIII

HOOSANEE'S MISSION

So ran the speech which the young rajah of Gumilcund addressed to his people on that memorable night. The effect was tremendous. As from one man the voices of the multitude rose in shouts of applause. 'It is the voice of the dead. Byrajee Pirtha Raj, our father, has come back to us from the grave. We will do his bidding.' So the tumultuous cries rang out.

Presently a herald went down amongst them, and imposed silence. Their rajah was pleased with their warm reception of his address; but business and not acclamation was the purpose of their coming together. There fell then a great silence on the assembly, in the midst of which the rich men and elders of the city came forward and proffered their help. The working guilds followed—manipulators of metal and precious stones, finance agents, masons, and provision dealers, from amongst each of which the rajah chose out one to represent the others, so that, in addition to his official retinue, he might have about him a council conversant not only with the wants but with the resources of the city. Surrounded by these, he left the Dwan-i-Khas and entered the Dwan-i-amm, Vishnugupta the priest charging himself with the task of dismissing the greater multitude.

All night long the young rajah and his people sat up in counsel, and when the morning of the 12th of May dawned, that day which in distant Delhi was to witness such terrible scenes, their measures were taken. The rich men contributed money; the mechanics promised their labour; volunteers offered themselves to reinforce the little army, and a special band of trustworthy soldiers were told off as the body-guard of the rajah. It was universally determined that if the mutineers came to Gumilcund, they should have a warm reception.

On the following day the rajah drew up an address, which, after being signed by himself and the principal men of the state, was to be forwarded to the Lieutenant-Governor of the province. In it the loyalty of the state was set forth, and a refuge within the walls of its chief city was offered to any of the English ladies and children who might be thought to occupy positions of peril.

The public address was accompanied by a communication from himself of a much more urgent character. The Lieutenant-Governor, who had lately, he said, done him the honour of congratulating him on his accession, was well aware of the fact that, although an Indian rajah, he was more than half an Englishman. Nevertheless, owing no doubt to his position, he had gained an insight into native character which, he believed, was rare amongst English-speaking people. It was his profound conviction that what he had seen and heard was only the beginning of troubles, and he implored the English authorities to take their precautions. Then he reiterated his offer of refuge, mentioning several stations, amongst which were Jhansi and Nowgong, as to his certain knowledge eminently unsafe.

The letter was sent, and duly acknowledged. Whether it was believed or not, he never knew. Possibly, he said to himself, with a bitter smile, it was looked upon as a blind to hide some deep design.

As a fact, his offer was made known to those most nearly concerned, the civil and military officers of the suspected districts, and they smiled at it. They did not want a man more than half a native to instruct them as to their duties. Their chief duty was to preserve the allegiance of the troops, and if they sent away the ladies, those susceptible beings would be justly offended—precipitated, in fact, into the very jaws of ruin. The people at Jhansi were specially tickled by the solicitude of a foreign ruler on their behalf. They, with such an ally and friend as the good Ranee, whose affection for the English was well known, to show themselves afraid ! It was ridiculous. Such pusillanimity would meet with its proper desert in the alienation of the faithful and the triumph of the mutineers.

So the rajah of Gumlcund was answered, as were Sindia, Holkar, and Dinkur Rao, with calm reserve ; and if one or two poor mothers, as they clasped their children in their arms, wished that the chiefs could have seen it fit to send the little ones away, they bowed to the inevitable and tried to believe that all would be well. As for our rajah, he gnashed his teeth with impotent rage, for, with the answer to his letter and address, came like a grim commentary the echoes of the explosion at Delhi.

He had as yet heard no details. Sick with anxiety for his friends and compatriots in the now hostile city, he was com pelled to hold himself in check, and attend to the business of the hour. Now and then, amidst his many preoccupations,

the vision of pretty Vivien Doncaster, as he had seen her last, driving carelessly and proudly through a crowd whose cringing servility filled her with contempt, would return to his mind, making it reel with a curious, indescribable passion. Heaven knew he did not wish to humble her; but—and there, not being able so much as to formulate his wish, we would fling the thought of her aside.

It was with a very different feeling that he thought of others—Aglaia and her delicate mother, in the very heart of the district which he knew to be unsafe; and Mrs. Lyster, whom he had seen for a few moments, but without her recognising him, in the English quarter of Futtehgarh; above all, Grace! He had ascertained that she was at Nowgong, a small station about equidistant from Gumilcund and Jhansi, and garrisoned with detachments from the Jhansi regiments.

In addition to his public body of advisers, Tom had an inner council, consisting of Chunder Singh, Hoosanee, and others of tried faithfulness. Through these men he had organised a secret service commission, which came and went, bringing him certain news of the progress of affairs in the solitary English stations scattered amongst the native dependent states of the Central Indian Agency. It was in this way that he heard of the ardent profession of loyalty made by the garrison at Nowgong when it was known that insurrection was stalking abroad through the land, and of the relief and confidence amongst the little English community there. He knew, too, that Jhansi had made no sign, and that the Ranee was, or appeared to be, more friendly than ever. All this blinded neither him nor his advisers.

While they made use of the breathing space afforded to them by putting everything in the city on a war footing, Tom succeeded in conveying a warning to Grace and her cousin.

It happened on this wise.

Hoosanee, who could read his young master's mind like an open book, perceiving that this enterprise was of deep moment to him, and wishing on his own account to be brought in contact with the young Englishwoman, for whose sake, as the shrewd servant believed, the rajah had resisted the blandishments of the fairest and most fascinating women in India, determined to undertake the mission himself.

In the garb of a merchant travelling from station to station with specimens of the pretty garnet and silver ornaments for which Gumilcund is famous, he left the city late one night.

He was alone; but, as he dressed poorly, carried little of value with him, and travelled at night and by the most unfrequented routes, he met with no hindrance. Between night and morning on the third day after he left his home he entered Nowgong. This done, it was a matter of little difficulty to gain access to the verandah of the small bungalow where, he had found out by careful inquiry, the little mem sahib Robertson and her big sister lived. He was in the verandah just after dawn. The chuprassie, believing him to be a respectable man, accepted a small fee, and the promise of a good commission if the visit resulted in business, for the corner of the verandah, where he allowed him to seat himself.

Here, then, Hoosanee took up his position. He squatted on his heels, after the Indian fashion, his face a mask, his long fingers busy with the small wares, which he had arranged against a background of azure blue satin in the most attractive fashion possible, and his ears and eyes on the alert.

Presently a calm, contemplative person in tunic, dhootie, gay crimson sash and turban, crossed the verandah and spoke to the chuprassie, who called out in authoritative tones for the Captain Sahib's horse. It came up, and a young Englishman in military uniform crossed the verandah. He did not look in the best of tempers. Muttering in English that these morning parades were the very mischief, he threw an angry word to the groom, who was trying in vain to check the fidgetiness of the horse, asked the chuprassie how much those fools of pedlars gave him for allowing them to hang about the compound, flung himself on his horse, and rode off at a quick trot. Two serious persons were busy meantime over a small table in the verandah. They laid it out with delicate china, brought in a steaming urn, and plates of fruit and cake, and waited with folded arms and melancholy countenances for their sahib-log to appear. In a few moments Hoosanee, who sat like an image in his corner, heard the sound of rippling laughter, followed by a rush of light garments through the house. A little white dog came bounding on to the verandah. It saw the stranger in the corner, and ran back barking vigorously. 'What's the matter, Vick?' said a small silvery voice. 'Ah!' as the owner of the voice, a pretty little woman with flaxen hair and soft blue eyes, came out upon the verandah. 'It's another of those pedlars. With garnets too! I love garnets!'

Hoosanee rose and bowed low. The little lady, who could

only stammer a few words of Hindustani, asked him where he came from, and when he answered humbly that he was a poor man, who had no fixed home, but that the ornaments were entrusted to him by a merchant from Gumilcund, she nodded her pretty head. 'See about you after breakfast,' she said. 'Have you eaten this morning? Oh! by-the-by,' in English, 'these people don't like you to know anything about their meals. I forgot that. Where did you say you came from?' again in halting Hindustani.

'My garnets come from Gumilcund, noble lady,' said Hoosanee.

'Gumilcund! Gumilcund!' murmured the little lady, gazing at him and thrusting forward her under lip. 'Now, where have I heard of that place? Was it—oh, yes! I remember. Grace saw the rajah at Delhi. Handsome fellow, like an Englishman she once met. As if a native could ever be like an Englishman. But Grace has such funny ideas.'

All this Hoosanee, who had studied the English language in the rajah's school at Gumilcund, understood perfectly.

The little lady ran back into the house, crying out, 'Grace! Grace! Come quickly! There's a man with garnets here; such beauties!' And, in the next moment, a young and very beautiful woman came out. From his corner Hoosanee looked at her. He had seen Englishwomen before, and some of them had been fair of countenance and of stately presence. But he had never seen one to match her who stood gazing at him now. At *him*—not at his wares, as her little friend had done—that was what was strange to the Indian servant. Diplomatist as he was, and skilled in hiding his feelings, he could not keep the curious tremor which her questioning gaze excited in him from appearing in his face. His eyes dropped, and when he looked up again she had turned away. 'Come to breakfast, Lucy,' she said. 'I am sure the good man can wait. He has patience written in his face. By-the-by' (looking round), 'where is Tikaram?'

Tikaram was the chuprassie. He had been keeping out of sight, for fear of being called in question about the salesman in the verandah; but hearing his name spoken in Grace's friendly tones, he stepped forward. 'Tikaram,' she said kindly, 'will you mind going into the village for me? If it is too far to walk, you can take my pony.'

'Too far! What a little molly-coddle you are with these servants, Grace,' interposed Lucy. 'You spoil them! Let me

give the order. I know enough Hindustani—servants' Hindustani, which is what they understand.'

'My dear Lucy, allow me! I like to speak in my own way,' said Grace. She gave her order, which was that a certain small account should be paid, and Tikaram, bowing low, turned away; but, before he went, he glanced at the salesman in the corner.

'We will keep him till you come back,' said Grace, with a smile, for she knew the customs of the country, and believed that the small backsheesh which Tikaram might exact for his favour would not be a heavy toll.

They sat and chatted together in low tones. Hoosanee did not catch all they said: but he judged that they were anxious. Suddenly Grace, whom her cousin accused of being in a fidgety humour, thought of another errand, and the table-servant vanished. The bearer was sent after him, so that, before they had finished their breakfast, there was no one about but the ayah, who was squatted in the corner of the verandah, opposite to that occupied by Hoosanee, watching him sleepily.

To see the two English ladies alone was precisely what Hoosanee wanted. He now waited their pleasure with a lighter heart.

Breakfast over, they approached his corner, and while Lucy fingered his trinkets, asking the price of one and another, Grace continued to look at him earnestly. He ventured now to allow his eyes to respond. Then he said in a low voice, 'Does my noble lady understand Bengali?' The question was asked in the Bengali dialect.

'Yes,' said Grace quietly. 'Are you from Bengal?'

'What gibberish are you talking now?' interposed Lucy, discontentedly. 'Do let us keep to business. Tell me the price of this?' holding up a pretty little garnet brooch.

'*Tin rupya*,' said the man, spreading out three of his long fingers.

'Too little if they're real – too much if they're not,' said Lucy in English. Then in Hindustani, with a little affectation of sternness, 'If you cheat me I will have you put in prison.'

'Why not take it into the house and compare it with my garnet necklace?' said Grace. 'Ayah will show you where it is.'

'Not a bad idea,' said Lucy.

She went in, the ayah following her, and Grace said hurriedly, in the dialect in which the salesman had just spoken, 'You have come to speak to us. From whom?'

'From one who wishes my noble lady well,' said Hoosanee. He paused, and then, 'Will my lady deign to look at these poor baubles instead of at her servant. In these evil days the leaves and the flowers have eyes.'

'Not here,' said Grace. 'Our servants, I am sure, would be faithful, for we have treated them well, and they love us; and the soldiers of the station have professed their goodwill and devotion. We did not ask them. They came forward of their own accord; if'—her large eyes distending—'I were only as sure of the safety of others as I am of our own, I should be happy. But we are strangely cut off here.'

They were continuing the little pantomime which the salesman had originated, and their voices were low and even.

'My noble lady is wrong,' he said, holding up one of his brooches to the light. 'Does the eagle who looks into the face of the sun behold, far below him, the fowler with his snare? Does the king of the forest, roaming at his will, see in the jungle the iron teeth gaping to devour him?'

'What do you mean, and who are you?' cried Grace. 'I am sure you are no mere salesman.'

'Such as I am, does my noble lady trust me?'

'Yes, yes. I cannot tell myself why, but I do. It seems to me that I have seen your face before.'

'Could it have been at Lucknow? I was with my master there.'

'At the door of the Dilkoosha,' cried Grace excitedly. 'Yes, I remember. Your master was the man in the long chuddah, who was watching the crowd. I saw his face when he looked at Sir Henry. It was as a man looks in prayer. He came into the reception afterwards.'

'Miss Sahib has a good memory,' said Hoosanee; 'but let me entreat her to speak with more caution!'

'Caution! Caution!' said the poor girl. 'I shall die of caution. I wish no ill to these people. Why should they wish ill to me?'

'Even because of your goodness—and your beauty,' said Hoosanee in a low voice.

Grace trembled. But before she could speak again Lucy came running out. 'What an untidy girl you are, Grace!'

she said. 'Ayah and I hunted everywhere for your necklace, and found it at last in your bath-room. You deserve to be robbed, and only that these people are ten times better than they are painted you would be.'

'But how about the stones?' said Grace, making an effort to speak lightly.

'Well! I think they are all right. They look very much the same. But I am such a little idiot about these things, and so are you, my dear—worse, I think—because you believe everybody. Oh, dear! I do wish I could have a trustworthy opinion.'

'Mrs. Durant is considered a good judge of Indian jewellery,' said Grace.

'Why, of course she is,' cried Lucy, clapping her hands. 'You have a head, if you have nothing else; I will say that for you, Grace. And I wanted to hear how Colonel Durant was received by the troops this morning. Ayah, tell them to bring round the palki-gharry at once. Too late!' in answer to a mild protest from Grace. 'Why, the sun isn't up yet—and I'll try to bring her back with me, shall I? She has just arrived, and has something to talk of besides servants and mutineers.'

'Do!' said Grace; 'and bring my little lover, Kit, too, if you can. I will keep the pedlar.'

In a few moments Lucy, accompanied by her ayah, drove off, and Grace turned her pale face to Hoosanee. 'Go on,' she said. 'Your master has sent you. He is the Rajah of Gumilcund.'

'You are right, most noble lady. My master, the rajah, has sent me. He has only lately come to rule over us; but already he knows the hearts of his people. He loves the English, and he would, if he could, avert these troubles. But he knows it to be impossible. The storm has broken, and it will sweep over the land and devastate it, and none can stay its course. This he bids me tell you, beseeching you to seek a refuge while you can.'

'That is easy to say,' said Grace faintly. 'But where are we to seek a refuge, and to whom is it offered? Flight was spoken of before; but we have been assured that, if we leave the station now, it will displease the men, who have again and again promised to be loyal, and so revolt would be hastened. God knows,' she went on passionately, 'that it is hard to wait. When I think of them all—my poor little cousin, who

will not believe in danger, and that beautiful child, and the young men and women—it is like a burden at my heart. I can scarcely breathe. I seem to see all sorts of horrible things; and,' slowly, 'horrible things have happened already. It is no dream.'

'They have happened; they will happen again. But you, most noble lady, could escape. Could you—would you trust yourself to me?' Hoosanee spoke breathlessly.

'Alone?' said Grace, drawing back.

'No, not alone. I could arrange for the escape of two, perhaps of three.'

For a few moments Grace sat silent, with bended head, thinking; and the rajah's messenger watched her with a beating heart. He was thinking a little of himself, of the triumph it would be to enter Gumilcund as the protector and deliverer of the first of the English fugitives, of her, in particular, on whom his master's heart was set. But he thought of her too. He in his own humble way had fallen in love with the beautiful and gentle lady, whose manner to natives was so different from that practised by the generality of her countrywomen. He knew, moreover, as even his master could not, how cruel and shameless an Eastern mob could be; and the idea of her falling alive into the hands of the mutineers made him sick with horror. Hoosanee, we must remember, belonged to Gumilcund. Except during the last few months, when he had served the new rajah, who was much gentler in his manners to those depending upon him than any grandee of the East, he had never been brought into direct contact with English people. The bitter personal hatred, compounded partly of race and religious antagonism, and partly of spite for a long series of small wrongs and humiliations—the hatred which made servants betray their masters and mistresses, and peasants gloat over the misery and degradation of Englishwomen, and villagers flog Englishmen in the presence of jeering crowds—was strange to him. But he knew that it existed, and the knowledge made him shudder for the fair woman his master loved.

Presently Grace looked up. 'We are not many,' she said. 'Would it be possible for us all to escape? The men, I believe, would be freer without us.'

'I could return for the others,' said Hoosanee, evasively.

'I think we might persuade my cousin to go, and sweet little Kit and his mother,' said Grace.

'Will my noble lady pardon me?' said Hoosanee, bending

low. 'She must come first, or I must return whence I came alone.'

Grace looked at him as if she did not quite understand what he said. He repeated his words, speaking with a still deeper humility.

'Is it so?' said Grace, raising her head proudly. 'To save myself I must desert them?'

'In saving yourself, most noble, you will save others.'

'I will save all, or I will save none,' said Grace in a low voice.

At this moment the palki-gharry drove up, and a beautiful little boy, with long golden curls like a girl, sprang out and leapt into Grace's arms. 'Why, my Kit,' she said softly, 'my little Kit!'

'We're going to stay all day,' he cried, 'mother and me. Where's Vick? Oh, there she is! Mayn't I go and play with her?'

'Yes, darling, run and play,' said Grace, releasing him.

'A pale-faced lady, in a white dress and large straw hat, was in the meantime stepping out of the gharry. Lucy followed her. Both of them, Grace thought, looked scared.

'Well,' she said, smiling, 'have you asked Mrs. Durant about the garnets?'

'Send the man away,' said Lucy pettishly. 'They have all been scolding me; Captain Durant, and Mr. Graham, and Mrs. Cockburn, and even Emily,' turning to Mrs. Durant. 'They say I ought not to have left you alone with a man like that. I'm sure one doesn't know what to do. If you're frightened, that's wrong; and if you try to forget things a little, and be cheerful, you're heartless. I wish I was dead and out of it all.'

'So would I if it were not for the child,' said Mrs. Durant. 'Grace! Grace! do you think they would have the heart to do anything to him?'

'We won't give them the opportunity,' said Grace firmly. 'If the worst comes to the worst we will escape. I will find a means.'

They smiled. These were brave words; but the peril was not actually upon them. And yet, for what reason neither of them could tell, they felt encouraged. Grace was one of those who inspired confidence.

'Well,' said Mrs. Durant, with a stifled sob, 'if it is to be done I hope they'll do it quickly. Only for Kit, I don't think

I'd mind so much. Charlie is so cross, and they come in with such dreadful tales, and the servants scowl at him when he scolds them; and he won't—he won't see that it would be so much wiser to conciliate everybody. Only for Kit I couldn't bear it! You see,' with a rainbow-like change, 'he has his curls still.'

'Yes,' said Grace, smiling. 'I thought you would not have the heart to shear Kit's curls. But come! you are both tired. Leave Vick and him to me, and go in and have a rest.'

'But how about the man?' said Lucy.

'Oh, he is a good simple soul. I will buy one or two of his trinkets and dismiss him.'

A few minutes later the salesman left the compound. He looked all round him carefully, and chanced upon Tikaram, pacing back slowly on his mistress's pony. Both of them pulled up.

'I was looking for you, O brother,' said Hoosanee. 'The sale has been good, and she of the lotus eyes has charged her servant to return. Here is backsheesh for my brother's goodwill.'

Tikaram, though surprised at the generosity of the gift, took it carelessly.

'Their raj is nearly done,' he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the bungalow. 'The treasures of the land will now be for its own, and not for the sons and daughters of strangers. But the lotus-eyed has a soft tongue and a noble presence.' He spoke meditatively, almost sadly.

'I know nothing of your politics,' said Hoosanee, indifferently; 'I am a poor man, and I love those who bring me gain.'

'Then come back our way,' said Tikaram, 'and I will keep the lotus-eyed for thee—if she is not by that time food for her masters.'

'Will my brother keep her?' said Hoosanee, his face brightening as if a new idea had struck him.

'I might,' said Tikaram.

'I have a master who is a prince. He would give a lakh of rupees for the two women and the child.'

'A lakh!' said Tikaram, his mouth watering.

'A lakh of rupees if they were given to him unhurt.'

'But three! What can he want with three?'

'Who knows? Great men have their caprices, and if they will pay for them, let the little keep silence! Perhaps he will keep a museum, and show them as curiosities when the

English are all swept into the sea. But this is what he said: 'Bring me three of these English—a small woman, a large woman, and a child with golden hair. Let them be well nourished, and of fair countenance. I will pay a lakh to thee for thy trouble, and another lakh to the man who helps thee." What does my brother say?'

'I would save the lotus-eyed without money,' said Tikaram, and then he turned away. 'There is time, O brother; they have not risen yet,' he murmured.

CHAPTER XIX

GENERAL ELTON'S MARCH

HOOSANEE did more good work at Nowgong. Professing to be a discontented native official from Gumilcund, he insinuated himself into the confidence of the two or three uneasy spirits in the station, and made one of them promise to communicate with him when matters should seem ripe for a revolt. He was relieved to find that the discontented were in a minority, and that they had no present hope of increasing their numbers, or of being able to take any decided step. As it was in Nowgong, so it was elsewhere. Whether from fear of the vengeance that seemed so strangely to halt, or from some remnant of right feeling, it is impossible to say. Possibly the revolt at Meerut, hurried on by the punishment of mutineers, and the consequent taking of Delhi, took the native as well as the English army in India by surprise. However this may have been, it is certain that, between the middle of May and the beginning of June, there was a lull, during which the scattered groups of English, who were absolutely in the power of native troops, took heart once more. A body of Ghoorka soldiers, sent across the Nepaul border to strengthen the hands of the English, under command of that gallant young soldier, Gambier Singh, was recalled by the Governor's orders, and a proclamation, promising pardon to the mutineers who had not actually taken part in the murder of Europeans was issued.

This last was a most disastrous step. No one understanding

the nature of Asiatics could have taken it. The mutinous troops and agitators, staggered by their own successes, and secretly dreading the vengeance of the White Man, whom they had insulted and defied, began now to breathe more freely. The White Man was afraid, or he would not seek to propitiate them. And who could wonder? They were but a little number in the land, and England, which at best was a small country, and hemmed in, as some of them had heard, by hosts of enemies, was hundreds of miles away across a stormy sea. Let them but be true to their colours for a short time, and the word of prophecy would be fulfilled. The raj of the stranger-race would pass away for ever.

Thinking thus, they were ready to bide their time and do nothing rashly.

It was this lull which threw dust in the eyes of the English officers.

One of these was General Elton.

He had, as it happened, no distinct command. What his personal influence might have effected if he had been at Meerut when the storm broke it is impossible to say. He might have shamed the authorities into action, and saved the honour of the English name. But he was absent, in pursuance of the mission that had been entrusted to him. As an old regimental and brigade officer, supposed to be well versed in the native character, he had been deputed, on the first rumour of discontent in the army, to travel through the North-West Provinces and the Central Indian Agency, examining into grievances, and reporting on the general condition of the troops.

On the terrible Sunday afternoon when the storm broke he was at Jhansi, enjoying the hospitality of the Ranee, and conferring with her on the curious portents of the time. They were actually together when the news came, and the General, who prided himself on his knowledge of character, was more than satisfied by her surprise and indignation.

Alarmed for his safety, she entreated him to remain at Jhansi until he could obtain more certain news, but the General, while touched by her solicitude, would not hear of delay. He took horse at once, and, surrounded by the small body of English soldiers with whom he had been travelling, set out on a forced march to Meerut.

A tremendous march it was, and fuller of peril than any one of the little band imagined! Their audacity served them for strength. Those who plotted their destruction hesitated to

strike, for some at least must fall victims to these watchful and resolute men. Besides, who could say that an army was not marching at their heels? As, in their dress of scarlet and gold with their sabres flashing in the sun, the General and his guard rode through the country, every one made way for them. From the villages, hostile as many of them were, and infested with *budmashes* and disbanded soldiers, they had no difficulty in obtaining supplies. To many of the workers of mischief, the gallant old soldier, with his hard face, keen sight, and short sharp words of command, came as the first of the avengers, while those amongst ourselves who saw him ride by were inspired with fresh confidence.

I was one of these. I was exercising the sullen-looking handful of troops for which I was responsible, on the parade-ground outside our station, when the General passed. He halted for a few moments and watched us. I and my men saluted, and it seemed to me that they drew themselves together and stepped out more briskly.

I looked at him—a small man, muscles tense, face stern, lips set firmly together, blue eyes, full of fire and energy, looking out steadily. He was in full-dress uniform, all his accoutrements as spotless as if he were on Court parade at home. He rode a little Arab horse, well-fed and groomed, and as highly bred as himself. 'Game to the very finger-tips,' so I said to myself, as I looked at him. While England had such men as the General in reserve, our raj would not pass away. The General rode on. In spite of the fearful anxiety which, as we all knew, was consuming him, he did his duty gallantly. He called at the most important stations on the route, at Gwalior, Agra, Mynpoorie, and Secunderabad, doing what he could to encourage the loyal and to awe the discontented. But to Delhi, the most important of them all, he was obliged to give a wide berth, for he knew that the rebels were congregating there in force.

It was nearing the end of the month before he reached the neighbourhood of Meerut. He had not, in the meantime, met any of the English force. He had not so much as heard of it; and he grew more and more troubled and perplexed. Was, then, the awful tale which he had heard true? Were his countrymen taken so completely by surprise that not one of them was left alive to fight for the honour of his country? A thousand soldiers, Englishmen all of them! It was impossible. And there was one native regiment at Meerut which he had

made up his mind would be faithful. He had commanded it himself for years. Its native officers were veterans, men of high birth and fine breeding, who had fought by his side in many a frontier war. One of them had saved his life at the imminent risk of his own, and to the General he had long been as a personal friend. He would almost as readily have believed in his own failure from duty as in Sufder Jung's. As for the men, he had called them his children. Big children and little children, the old men, who were recruits when he took up the command, and who had learned under him the warrior's art, and the young men, only lately enrolled, who were learning it from others, he loved them all. Riding through the desolate plain, with the fierce rays of an Indian sun beating upon him, and this awful thing at his heart, the old man felt a curious moisture bedewing his eyes Only a few weeks before he had held a review of all arms at Meerut, and his pet regiment had distinguished itself beyond all the others. Like a picture it flashed before him, the noble stature, proud carriage, flashing eyes and perfect accoutrements, and again, sweeter than the incense of flattery, there fell upon his ears the shouts of applause which broke forth on every side, as, at a double-quick march, but moving with the precision of a machine, his children swept by the saluting point. 'Efficiency could not be carried further,' he had said, shaking hands warmly with the colonel of the regiment. 'I congratulate you.' And now to hear it said that these men were disloyal, that then, when they were responding with joyful shouts to the shouts of their English comrades, they were actually plotting to betray them ! It could not, it should not be.

With stern face the General rode on. No one molested them ; but, in the deserted huts and silent villages, in the procession along the road of trains of frightened peasants, men and women, with all their household utensils about them, and in the occasional presence of bands of ragged, fierce-looking men, armed with clubs and ancient rifles, he saw ominous signs of disorder and panic.

They came at last to within five miles of Meerut. No one came out to meet them, although the General had sent forward native scouts, nor could they hear anything of the English troops. It was now the hottest hour of the afternoon, and the men, who had been in the saddle since early morning, were dead beat. Not knowing what they might have to meet at Meerut, the General, desperately anxious as he was to be at

his goal, determined to call a halt. There was a little grove of mango and neem trees a few yards from the road. He led his men thither, and while some were set to watch, the others, exhausted by their long ride under the burning sun, emptied their drinking flasks and flung themselves down for an hour's rest.

The General was amongst the watchers. He would not even unsaddle. He stood by his horse, his left arm flung over its neck, and his right grasping a loaded revolver, while his wide-open, sleepless eyes were piercing the recesses of the wood. For an hour he watched. There was no disturbance, nothing to break the deep silence of the camping-ground. Then his men changed guard. One of them, his personal servant, came up to him and entreated that he also would rest for an hour. But the General refused, and again there was silence.

Evening was drawing on. His eyes had begun to smart with the long strain of watchfulness, and it was on the tip of his tongue to give the order to saddle and mount, when his practised ear caught the sound of stealthy movement in the wood.

'Some one is skulking about the ground,' he said to the nearest trooper, 'perhaps a messenger from Meerut. Beat round cautiously and find out!'

The man disappeared amongst the withered underwood, and emerged a few moments later with a tall figure, shrouded from head to foot in a white chuddah, at his heels.

'Who are you?' said the General, 'and what are you doing here?'

At his word the chuddah dropped, and he saw the uniform of his own favourite regiment, while, in the next moment, he recognised the dark features of the officer who had saved his life in battle so many years before.

'Sufder Jung!' he said reproachfully. 'You here! Where are your children?'

Sobbing like a child the man prostrated himself on the ground. 'Let not my General look at me so!' he cried. 'Is it my fault that they rebelled?'

'They *have* rebelled?' said the General, drawing a deep breath.

'Not all, my General. There is a detachment which is faithful yet.'

'In Meerut?'

'No, my General. They forced us away with them, and, to save our lives, we went on escaping one by one, and banding ourselves together, for we hoped in a few days to meet your Excellency. But before we went we provided for the escape of those in your Excellency's house, the mem Sahib, and the Miss Sahibs. The house was on fire and the fiends were yelling round it, crying to the servants to throw out to them the Sahib-log, and let them deal with them as they would. We forced them away and put out the flames, and carried the ladies to a place of safety within the walls. One was hurt. I know not which. I carried her in my arms and she moaned with pain.'

A groan broke from the General. 'This is true?' he said; 'you are not deceiving me?'

'True by the Prophet's beard, your Excellency! Why should Sufder Jung deceive you?'

'But where were our own troops? Did they look on like frightened children?'

'The English were taken by surprise, your Excellency.'

'Do you mean to tell me they were slain, every one of them?'

'Pardon me, my General. Some were killed; but there are still a thousand men within the walls of the city.'

'A thousand, within the walls, doing nothing! Now I know that you are lying, Sufder Jung.'

'Let his Excellency have patience, and he will see whether his servant has spoken the truth. I hear, from friends of my own, that to-morrow a detachment will set out for Delhi.'

'To-morrow!' burst out the General. 'To-morrow! and how long has Delhi been in the hands of the rebels, Sufder Jung?'

'It was on the 11th of May that the rebels rushed out of Meerut. If his Excellency will believe me, they were like a herd of frightened sheep. I and my men could have taken them all, without help from the English, if the whole of my troop had stood firm. They entered the Imperial city on the 12th.'

'And it is now the 23rd. A fortnight lost—lost in inaction!' said the General. 'By Heaven it may cost us the raj! And we deserve it.' But here, remembering to whom he was speaking, he pulled himself up. 'I speak hastily,' he said. 'No doubt the General in command had reasons of state, about which we know nothing. You, in any case, have done well to

come to me. What boon would you have, Sufder Jung? Will you join my body-guard, until I can find you a command?'

'If I were alone, your Excellency,' said Sufder Jung, joining the palms of his hands together and bowing low, 'I would ask to be made your Honour's servant, and I would follow you to the ends of the earth. But I am not alone. A little remnant of our troop has remained faithful. They are crying out to be led against their mutinous brethren; but some of them are fearful lest their professions of faithfulness be discredited. They are encamped not far from here. It is their hope to re-enter the city of Meerut under the protection of his Excellency. Will not my lord see and comfort them?'

By this time the English soldiers constituting the body-guard, several of whom had been near enough to the General to hear every word that had passed between him and Sufder Jung, were closing round them, and an angry murmur rose from their ranks. The General caught it and looked round on them sternly. His personal servant stood near him. 'Beg your pardon, sir,' he said, saluting. 'We didn't mean no harm like; but——'

'But what?' thundered the General. 'Go on, now you have begun!'

'Them pandies isn't to be trusted, sir—not a mother's son of them all.'

'You know so much about them, Tommy,' said the General. 'How long have you been in India?'

Six months, sir.'

'And you?' to another.

'Same time, General.'

'Six months' service, and you can judge the people in this sweeping way! Bravo, my men! Now, I have spent thirty years of my life in India. I have marched for hundreds of miles with the men whom you despise, and they have fought by my side like gallant gentlemen. I have lived with them in times of peace as a father lives with his sons. I have called them my children. Again and again I have owed my life to their care. Here is one,' pointing to the Soubahdar, 'who interposed with his own body between me and destruction. And yet, I confess,' his strong voice faltered, 'I do not understand them as I thought I did, or as I should wish to do. This that has happened is a mystery to me. I cannot fathom it. But that all are faithless, that a man like Soubahdar Sufder Jung should come to his General with affection on his lips and black

treachery at his heart, this I can never believe. Stand back, while I hear what more he has to tell me.'

Reluctantly the men fell back, while the Soubahdar, who, understanding part but not all of this discourse, had been standing aside, with bowed head and streaming eyes, approached the General again, and spoke in a voice so low that none of the English soldiers could catch what he said.

Presently the General addressed them. His face was radiant, and his voice was strong and full. 'Wait for me here, my men,' he said, 'but be ready to start at the word of command. We have friends and comrades close by. I will join you with them in less than half an hour.'

This time no one, not even the General's servant, ventured on a word of protest, for the will of the old soldier was known to be like iron; but as, the Soubahdar riding at his right hand, he went off slowly to where the wood was thickest, they clustered together and held a council of war.

CHAPTER XX

THE SOUBAHDAR SUFDER JUNG

'AND where are our friends?' said the General, when they had ridden for some considerable distance, leaving, in the meanwhile, the wood in which his men were stationed, and entering another of wider extent. 'I thought you said it was within a stone's throw.'

'We are close upon them now,' said the Soubahdar. He gave a low whistle, and instantly the ground seemed to tremble and there was a rumbling as of thunder beneath their feet.

In the next instant a native officer, of a lower grade than Sufder Jung, but as well known to the General, appeared, and saluted.

'What is the meaning of this Jack-in-the-box business?' said the General, frowning.

'We are in hiding from our mutinous brethren,' said Sufder Jung abjectly.

'Then there are only a few of you?'

'Nay, your Excellency, there are a hundred good men under this wood, all waiting for a word of encouragement from their General.'

'They would have understood their duty better if they had remained in their lines till they were ordered out on duty,' said the General. 'Where is your captain?'

'Alas! your Excellency, our captain Sahib is dead. He was one of the first to be struck down.'

'By his own men?'

'By his own men, Excellency.'

In the meantime the men were coming up one by one from the cave where they had hidden themselves. They were the veterans of the regiment, and the General knew them all; as in the dim light of the wood they fell into their ranks, he called one and another by their names.

'I did not think to see *you* hiding in caves and holes of the earth, my ancients,' he said. And a voice from the ranks muttered, 'The General Sahib will see stranger things than these.'

'Who spoke?' said the old soldier, his hand closing on his revolver.

'Silence!' thundered Sufder Jung; then to the General with the deepest humility, 'Forgive them, Excellency; they have been waiting, in hunger and darkness, for your presence, and some of them are impatient.'

'But what are they doing now? Do you see, Sufder Jung, the line is wavering? By Heaven, they want to surround us! Back, you hounds, back!' shouted the General. 'Is discipline at an end, or have you forgotten to stand at attention? Halt, I say, this instant, and ground your muskets, or, by the beard of your Prophet, the life of some of you will be short!'

As he spoke, his revolver was raised and pointed at the men, and they, being awed by his presence and manner, and none of them wishing probably to be the first to bite the dust, obeyed him sullenly. Scarcely had they done so before the General's horse, which was an old campaigner, and accustomed to stand like a rock, gave a sudden plunge. With the shock the revolver went off, lodging its contents in a tree. Then Sufder Jung seized the rein of the horse, which was snorting with pain and fear, and immediately the silence that had followed the General's stern command was exchanged for the fiercest excitement. Uttering yells of hatred and defiance, the men in the ranks swung round, closing in as they moved, so as to make a circle about the two men and the horse. In a moment the General saw what they were about, saw that he was alone in the midst of enemies, but he lost neither his spirit

nor his presence of mind. Quick as thought, he faced round to where the line was weakest, encountering, as he did so, the ashen countenance of Sufder Jung. 'If you are not the son of a traitor,' he roared, 'open a way for me!'

He had dropped his revolver, which was useless to him now, and had drawn his sword.

'My General,' moaned the wretched man, 'it is useless. Let his Excellency wait to hear what his children will say to him.'

'You are false!' said the General, and with a lunge which sent his sword through the Soubahdar's arm, provoking a yell that echoed through the wood, he set spurs to his horse.

The poor beast, which had been wounded already, was wild with terror and pain. It gave a mad plunge right into the living wall that was forming in front of it. The General sat as if he and his horse were one. His face never moved from its stern composure. To some of the guilty and unhappy men in the ranks his eyes were as the eyes of an avenging deity. As, like a whirlwind, he plunged on, his naked sword swinging through the air, there came from one or two a cry of 'We repent! Come back to us.'

But while those in the front were wavering, those in the rear and not under the immediate spell of his presence were plucking up heart.

One of them sprang forward and levelled his musket. A bullet whizzed through the air, the General's horse gave one bound and fell, and he, having been prepared for some such treachery as this, sprang to his feet.

What was he to do? To attempt to fly on foot would be useless, and result in such humiliation as he did not intend to encounter. There was nothing for it but to stand his ground.

Quietly he turned and faced the men. The high soul of him had risen to meet the danger that threatened him. Death it might be, but he would meet death, as he had met life, a soldier—a man in possession of himself.

'Now then,' he said to the men, who were rushing up to seize him, 'what is it that you want with me? Speak at once!'

Not a voice answered, and one or two of the foremost slunk back.

'Do you want your precious leader, Sufder Jung, to speak for you?' said the General. 'He has spoken to good effect

already. Wounded, is he? Then let him be brought before me and we will confer together.'

No one spoke, but there was an ominous sound of clanking arms.

'Perhaps you would prefer to kill me at once,' suggested the General ironically. 'There is nothing to prevent you. I ought to know how excellent your aim is. You have won many a prize from me for your efficiency. It never occurred to me then that I should one day be your target. I am angry with myself, my men, that I did not know you better.'

'You did know us,' sobbed one or two.

'What!' said the General, 'are some of you faithful still?' A party of about twenty men—privates all of them—rushed across the space that separated the General from the mutineers and ranged themselves on his side. 'Welcome!' said the old man, in a strong, hearty voice. Then two or three came up, dragging Sufder Jung between them. 'So!' said the General, 'this is the spokesman of the loyal troops. Quick, Soubahdar! What do you and these want of me?'

'Will his Excellency pardon me?' whined the wretched creature, who was faint with loss of blood; 'I am the instrument of others. For myself——'

'Do I want to hear about yourself, hound? You are a traitor. That is enough. What do the rascals yonder want?'

'They want the promise of your Highness to stop the troops marching from Meerut to-morrow.'

'And if I give this promise?'

'Your Excellency will be conducted back safely to his guard.'

'And if I do not, you will shoot me?'

'His Highness knows that there is no dependence to be placed upon these men. They might do worse.'

'Well said, Sufder Jung! You are an admirable spokesman,' said the General. 'And now listen to me! You deserve death, and it is in my heart to kill you as you stand there. But, as you are in some sort an envoy, I will let you live out the miserable remnant of your days. Vengeance will overtake you. Mark my words, and call them to mind when your hour comes! You and the miserable creatures who have sent you will suffer the penalty of your deeds. I suffer for having trusted you, for I can have little doubt now that, instead of saving my family——'

'No—no, by my master's head, by the beard of the Pro-

phet!' cried Sufder Jung. 'What I have told my lord is true. We guarded his house, and it was only when we had put the women of his Honour's family in safety that we left the city.'

'If you speak truly, your folly is all the greater. I would have rewarded you. I would have treated you as friends. But that is over now. Go back and tell the rascals out yonder that I refuse their conditions. Yes,' said the General, 'and tell them further that I will hold no parley with rebels. Let them kill me if they can. I defy them!'

The loyal twenty closed round him. It was time, for the ping of bullets began to echo through the woods. One or two were wounded. The General had them picked up by their comrades, as they moved back slowly with their faces to the foe. 'See what it is to be a traitor!' he said to the man nearest to him. 'The villains are shooting wild. If they had shot so under *me*, there are a few of them who wouldn't have survived to see this day. Come on, you hounds! Come on, if you dare!'

The foremost of the dark mass, almost indistinguishable in the gloom of the evening, were so near that they could have touched him; but they did not. Muttering curses of baffled rage, they fell back confusedly, and their comrades received them with yells of derision. 'Seize him yourselves!' they said sullenly. 'The gods fight for him. He has a charmed life.'

The little band, meanwhile, with the General in the midst of them, were nearing the outskirts of the wood. They had increased the distance between them and their assailants, who, in the gathering gloom, could scarcely catch more than the outline of their figures. 'Fools!' cried one of them—the man who had killed the General's horse—'you are letting him escape.' He was known as the most deadly shot in the regiment, and he had eyes like a cat's. Over and over again the General had boasted of his powers.

This man took aim deliberately, the scarlet coat serving him as a guide. Almost by a miracle the General escaped; but the nearest of his escort fell. 'That was Koolraj Sing, I know, rang out the voice of the indomitable old man. 'Well aimed! Another like that, my man, and—ha! You villain—would you? Others can see in the dark as well as you. Have at him, Kullum Khan! Steadily, my friend! Aim low! There is the moon, thank Heaven! Now! Halt and fire'

Ping! Ping! Sharply and clearly the detonations rang out. The smoke cleared away. The General still stood his ground, but Koolraj Sing, the dead shot of the regiment, the man whose eyes could pierce through a stone wall, was writhing in the agonies of death.

'Well done, Kullum Khan!' said the General. 'You shall have a medal for this! Keep together, my little ones! We shall be out of this soon."

'They are coming up behind,' said Kullum Khan. 'Listen, Excellency!'

For a moment the General halted. Kullum Khan had spoken truly. Close in their rear they could hear sounds, the crackling of the dry branches of the underwood, and the heavy breathing of men and animals. 'Who's there?' cried the General in English. He was answered with an English cheer. 'Courage, my men,' he cried joyfully to the little band of the faithful, 'and keep close to me, lest they mistake you for the rebels. Hurry up, my hearties!' to his own men, who, having missed him and feeling certain that treachery was on foot, were searching the wood. 'These,' pointing to his escort, as one and another of his troopers rode up, 'are comrades. I owe my life to them. They have stood by me gallantly. Your horse, Tommy,' to his own servant, who was first to come up. 'Never fear, you shall have your hand in the fun. Now then, are we all ready? You see those black-hearted scoundrels out yonder. Three times our number, boys, but cowards every mother's son of them. Charge for old England's sake, and mow them down!'

A ringing cheer, clear and joyful, which echoed and re-echoed through the wood, that seemed peopled by hundreds instead of tens, greeted these gallant words. The mutineers answered it with a scream of defiance. Then, crash, crash, thundering over the dry underwood, came the tramp of the English horsemen. The Pandies, who were on foot, stood their ground, firing wildly. Several horses fell, and their riders joined the faithful Indians, who were coming up behind them at a quick march.

'Force them into the open,' cried the General. 'See—where the light shines in!'

At his word the little band of horsemen swung round to the left. The mutineers, expecting a front attack, were taken by surprise, and, instead of facing round, as the only surviving officer commanded them, they broke into confused groups, some

of which stood their ground, while by far the greater number took to their heels. Uttering a cry of despair and hatred, the officer drew his tulwar across his throat and fell at the very feet of the General's horse, which started and plunged aside. At the same moment a mutineer, who had been lying in ambush close by, sprang forward and discharged his musket at the General. The gallant old man's bridle arm fell helpless by his side; but he gathered up his reins in his right hand and pressed on. As for the men, English and Indians, they had eyes and ears for nothing but the foe. Stumbling and plunging, now in close order, and now separately, they rode and ran over the broken ground. Meanwhile, with the fatality that comes of abject dread, the mutineers were rushing towards the open.

Night had fallen, but the moon, which rose early at this season, was flooding all the plain with silver light, and when the Englishmen emerged from the wood they saw the fugitives —grey figures in the ghostly light—only a short distance in front of them. 'Halt!' cried the General, 'and fire!'

They obeyed with alacrity. Every shot took effect. Some who had not been touched fell prone with fright and weariness, and over the plain the bodies of dead and dying lay scattered.

'Quick march!' cried the General.

It was like the loosing of an arrow from a bow. In skirmishing order, but keeping well in line, they cantered madly across the plain. Passionate wrath and the wild thirst for vengeance made demons of them all. There was no quarter given. The black-hearted wretches they were pursuing had laid a net for the feet of their open-hearted General, and had nearly succeeded in entrapping him. For their treachery they should die. Group after group was overtaken. Some were speared, some were shot. Not one of them all turned to bay, or lifted up his hand against the avengers. For, lying heavy as lead at the heart of each one and making him a coward, was the consciousness that he had played the part of traitor.

A short half-hour, and it was all over. Some few, who were the first to fly, and were particularly fleet of foot, escaped into the country. The others lay dead on the plain outside Meerut. One of them only, Soubahdar Sufder Jung, who had been wounded, but not mortally, remained behind in the wood. All that night and the following day he kept in hiding. Then, having stripped off his uniform, and clothed himself in the,

garments of a peasant, whom he slew in the fields, he took to the road.

Their work done, the English soldiers halted, and, discovering that the General, who up to the moment when they emerged from the wood had been foremost in the advance, was not with them, they rode back to seek him. Loss of blood from his wound, with the exhaustion which followed hard upon his excitement, had been too much for the old man, who, for the first time in all his life, had swooned away. Fortunately his English servant was by his side. He saw him reel in his saddle and caught him in his arms. By this time, however, the General's senses had returned. When his men rode back for him, he was sitting on the ground under a tree, Kullum Khan supporting him on one side, and his soldier-servant on the other.

CHAPTER XXI

WITHIN THE WALLS OF MEERUT

WITHIN the walls of Meerut, meanwhile, all was confusion and despair. Those of the English and Eurasian residents who had escaped from the massacre of the 10th of May were gathered together, in much closer quarters than they had ever occupied before, tremulously expecting the worst. The British soldiers, burning to be led against the mutineers, were kept day and night upon guard, for the rebels' return with reinforcements, to finish the deadly work they had begun, was hourly expected; but they did not come, and at last it dawned upon the minds of those in authority that, seeing they were within entrenchments, a smaller number of soldiers might serve to guard them. It took some time for this idea to work in the official mind; but, at last, to the intense satisfaction of the soldiers and regimental officers, five hundred men were told off to join the English force which was supposed to be marching on Delhi.

It was on the 23rd that the General encountered the detachment from his mutinous regiment in the wood; and, early on the 24th, the force from Meerut was to be in readiness to march. Hence the ambush. The rebels, whose intelligence

department was much better managed than ours—they had spies everywhere—knowing exactly what was going to happen, had imagined that, through the General, whom, they believed, they could easily entrap, they might paralyse the action of the English, so far, at least, as to delay, for some days, the march of a detachment from Meerut.

They had, as we have seen, most grossly miscalculated. But, meanwhile, the firing had been heard at Meerut, and a gallant young officer, well known to the General, who had been burning to distinguish himself and to redeem the honour of the English arms, gained permission to go out and reconnoitre with a party of fifty horsemen.

It was late in the evening; but the moon was well up, and there was light enough to guide them to the scene of the little skirmish. It was over by the time they rode out upon the plain. The General and his men had taken their own vengeance; but, exhausted as they were, their chief wounded, their horses dead-beat, and their situation precarious—since, for all they knew to the contrary, the woods behind them might be full of rebels—the sight of this little band of their countrymen coming out to meet them was, beyond expression, cheering.

'They are not all dead, then, thank God!' said the General. 'Two of you gallop out to meet them, boys, and tell them how it is with us.'

'Can you sit a horse, sir?' said Tommy, 'or shall we send for a litter?'

'Litter! Nonsense! I'm not going to give up the ghost yet,' said the old soldier testily. 'But,' to himself, 'I shan't mind being at home. I believe the scoundrel spoke the truth so far. Poor little monkeys! I wonder which of them is hurt. Oh, God, if I had only listened to reason, and left them all at home!'

'Do you want anything, sir?' said one of his men, who saw him speaking, but could not catch his voice.

'No, thank you,' he answered, 'except to get away from this. Ah! here they are! Friends this time, not foes! Welcome, Bertie,' to the young officer who had sprung from his horse and was looking down upon him mournfully. 'Don't look so glum, you young rascal. They are safe?' sharply.

'Your people escaped, General. One of the young ladies was hurt, not seriously, I believe. Lady Elton has been in the most terrible state of anxiety.'

'No doubt! No doubt! Well, I shall hear all about it from themselves soon. Lift me into a saddle, Bertie. We'd better be moving.'

Kullum Khan, who was sobbing like a child, took the General under one arm, the young officer under the other, and in a few moments they had him mounted on the quietest and strongest of the horses, a trooper getting up behind him to keep him in his place. Then, carrying the wounded Indians between them, the cavalcade set off across the plain.

The mango grove where the skirmish had begun was within three miles of Meerut; but as, for the sake of the wounded, they were obliged to move slowly, the transit took some time. Scouts, meanwhile, were thrown out in every direction, to keep the coasts clear and warn them of danger. But there was not even an alarm. The combatants, as the General said grimly, were on their faces, and the non-combatants kept out of their way.

They came upon the outskirts of Meerut. The General was moaning heavily, with pain and anguish. There was nothing now to keep up his proud heart, and it fell.

He knew all the landmarks, and each one had some memory for him. There was the little grove where, one glorious evening, he and his men had picnicked when they came down upon Meerut from the Sikh war, to enjoy a little rest after the hardships of the campaign. How splendid they had looked, and how handy and helpful they were, living on next to nothing, and going through fatigue and privation that would have floored half a European regiment!

And now they were close on the cantonments. He had built several of the bungalows here and laid out their gardens —the mess-house for the officers of his regiment, the colonel's house, the spacious and beautiful bungalow, finished while he was in England, to which only a few weeks before he had brought his wife and children. This last was outside cantonments and nearer to the native lines than any other English house.

He remembered now, pacing slowly and sadly over the blackened ground, with the charred ruins of what had so lately been a happy home staring him in the face, how one or two had warned him that, in case of a rising, the situation would be dangerous, and how proudly he had smiled at the absurdity of the notion. 'While my family and I are in the station,' he

said, 'a rising would be impossible, and I don't ask anyone else to occupy the house.' And now it was literally gutted.

As they were crossing what had been the garden of the General's bungalow, an old man came out from the ruins and confronted them. The young officer, who, with drawn sword, was leading the cavalcade, would have swept him aside, but he cried out so piteously to be heard that the General, who was some yards behind, ordered that he should be brought to him.

'I think I know your voice,' he said.

'The Sahib should know,' replied the man, weeping bitterly; 'for I have served him these twenty years.'

'You are Yaseen Khan, my bearer.'

'I am Yaseen Khan, Sahib General, and my son Kullum——'

'I am here, Yaseen,' said the sepoy from behind. 'I could not go on, and I slew Koolraj Sing, who tried to deceive me.'

'The gods be praised!' murmured the old man. 'Sahib, by the God you worship, I beseech you to take me on with you.'

'Why are you here, Yaseen Khan?' said the General.

'Have patience, Excellency, and I will tell you everything. They surrounded this house and set it on fire in three places. Then I ran to the lines and called my son Kullum, who with Soubahdar Sufder Jung and others came up, and the *budmashes* fled. Trixy Sahib was hurt; I know not how. They carried her in their arms—my son Kullum and the Soubahdar—as if she had been their own child. The others walked, for no carriage was to be found; but the men guarded them carefully, and not a hair of their heads was touched. I thought of the General Sahib's gold, and I went back to get it. I could not carry it away; but I buried it in a secret place. Then the *budmashes* came round the house again, yelling like evil spirits. They found me, and said they would kill me if I did not find them gold. I said I would find it, and in going I escaped. I was close to them, Sahib, and I heard their cries. They would have torn me to pieces if they had found me; but there was an alarm. Some one said, "The Sahibs are coming!" and they ran out, and I saw and heard them no more. But I dared not move; I kept in hiding, waiting for your Honour's return, and living on the food I could pick up. For two days I have not eaten. Have pity on me, Sahib, and take me on!'

'Mount him on one of the horses, and bring him on behind

me,' said the General. 'I believe that what he tells me is the truth.'

A few moments later they came upon the vedettes, and then, the young officer having answered the challenge, they entered the town.

Here the General insisted upon dismounting. 'I can't present myself to my wife and children in this guise,' he said. 'Dismiss your men to their quarters, Bertie, and let them find quarters for my men, and for the natives who were faithful. You give me your arm and we will find Lady Elton.'

The officer gave the necessary directions, adding, on his own account, that the surgeon of his regiment should be sent to the General's quarters, and they set off together, the General leaning heavily on the arm of his guide, and Yaseen Khan, the bearer, following them.

Lady Elton and her children were under canvas. They had preferred this arrangement to accepting shelter from any of the houses thrown open to them, and the Soubahdar and his men having succeeded in saving many of their things, they had been able already to give their new quarters a tolerable home-like appearance. It was only in this way—in exerting themselves to set things straight 'for father,' who, they felt sure, must come in soon—that the girls could keep their mother cheerful, or that any of them could chase away the terrible despondency and shuddering fear which would, at times, take possession of them. For upon these unfortunate ladies, bred up in the traditions of the old Anglo-Indian, who looked upon a native as a cross between a machine and an animal—a creature to be treated with kindly contempt when he behaved himself, and to be promptly licked into shape when he did not—the mutiny fell like a bolt of fire out of a clear sky. They had heard rumours of discontent, but nothing came of them. They were disposed to think that the repressive measures had not been sufficiently severe, and when on May 9 the mutineers of the 3rd Native Cavalry, who had been condemned by their own countrymen, and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, were stripped of their uniform and put in irons, while sorry for the unhappy men who had been so miserably deluded, they believed that this one severe example would be sufficient, and that no more would be heard of mutiny. Lady Elton was fond of quoting her husband in those days. 'The General says all they want is firmness. They are the best fellows in the world when you take them

the right way. He ought to know, for he has had so much experience.' And then Maud would repeat her saucy little phrase about the riding-whip, and the ladies, who had come to consult them, would go away reassured. 'You may depend upon it,' they would say, 'General Elton and his wife know more about these people than we do.'

To be awakened from this dream of security by the rattle of musketry from the lines, and, after a few minutes of terror-stricken silence, the tramp of armed men upon the plain, and the shock of contending forces, was terrible beyond description. How, stirred up by Yaseen Khan, who ran in hot haste for his son, they barricaded themselves into the innermost room of the bungalow, piling furniture against the doors to keep out the mutineers; how, sitting huddled together, clasped in one another's arms, they heard the defiant shouts and yells of rage come nearer and nearer; how Trixy, the first to recover presence of mind, climbed up to a peep-hole under the roof, and came back with the awful intelligence that the stables and kitchens were in flames; how they heard the wretches, who were mad with bhang and fanaticism, getting on to the roof; then the yell, when the thatch was torn aside, and one of the fierce creatures looked down on them; the screams of the girls, and brave little Trixy's pistol shot, followed by a shriek from the first scoundrel, and a shot from the man behind him, which brought the poor girl to the ground—all this lives still in these poor women's remembrance as a dream of horror!

They were rescued as we have seen. Those surrounding the General's house were *budmashes* from the bazaars and the criminals who had rushed out when the gaol doors were opened, and at the approach of the disciplined force under Soubahdar Sufder Jung every one of them took to their heels. The ladies, half dead with fright, and some of their choicest possessions, were escorted safely to the English barracks, where they lodged that night. Then began that weary waiting-time, which to poor Lady Elton was even worse than the scene of horror through which they had passed. Her husband was away. She had not heard from him for some days, and did not know where he was. Her beloved eldest daughter Grace and her niece, only lately married, were in the heart of a district said to be unsettled before, and which now, when this terrible news from Meerut went abroad, would be almost certain to rise. She had friends at Cawnpore, friends at

Delhi, friends at Jhansi. None of them all were so well guarded as they of Meerut. If massacre and destruction could run riot here, what would it be there?

Day by day she looked for her husband's arrival. She never feared for his personal safety. She had still the firmest belief in his power over the native soldiery; but if he came something might be done. For this made one element in the misery of the old soldier's wife and daughters. Nothing was being done. 'If I were in command here,' Trixy would say, clenching her little fists, 'not one of those brutes should have reached Delhi. Bertie Liston says the men were burning to be off. He could scarcely keep them quiet. I think I should have let them go—gone with them.'

'Trixy is a great warrior since she fired that pistol,' said Maud; 'but, seriously, mother, don't you think something ought to be done?'

'My dear children, be patient! We are women. We know nothing. Soldiers must obey orders,' said Lady Elton sadly. 'If your father would only come!'

'He will come soon, mother darling, don't be afraid,' said gentle little Lucy.

Some such conversation as this had taken place on the afternoon of the day when firing was heard outside the walls. The five women heard it distinctly as they sat over their tea in the tent. Then Bertie Liston came rushing in with a radiant face. 'Good-bye,' he said, 'I am sent out to reconnoitre. What will you give me if I bring you back the General?'

'Anything, everything—all we have,' cried Trixy impulsively. She was lying on a charpoy, for she had not yet recovered from her wound. Bertie looked at her, and her pale face flushed; but there was time for no more words. He went out; she heard his horse's hoofs clattering over the paving-stones in the compound of the barracks, and covering her face with her hands she burst into tears.

An hour or more passed by. The firing outside had ceased. Nothing could be heard but the pacing of the sentinels and the chowkedars crying out one to the other. Darkness had fallen; but the little company in the tent did not stir. Then Maud, crying out that she could stand it no longer, lighted a lamp; Trixy, who was very much ashamed of her little outburst, asked for a book, and Lady Elton fell back upon her never-failing resource—the silk stockings she

was knitting for the General. 'Do you think, dears,' she said to the two youngest girls, Lucy and Mildred, 'that you could sing one of your duets? If father did come home to-night, it would please him to hear your voices.' They said they would try, and in a few moments their sweet clear young voices rose above the stillness. It was one of the sentimental ditties that we used to admire in those days, neither the words of the song nor the music to which it was set of a particularly high order; but, as supported by his young friend, the old General approached the lighted tent, and heard in his girls' sweet voices of wild waves whispering and red roses fading away, his heart thrilled with a rapture such as no artistic music could have given. 'Bless them,' he said, in a low and heartfelt voice. 'All right, isn't it, Bertie? They couldn't sing like that if the shock had been too much for them. There! what an old donkey I am! I knew the children had the pluck of—Come on, Bertie. They are stopping. They hear us. Back, Yaseen Khan, you old fool! I don't want you to announce me.'

And now the curtain before the tent is thrown aside, and he sees them—his sweet wife and the children, who are dearer to him than his life—and his stern eyes fill with tears, and the voice of thunder, which only a few moments before had roared out defiance to a hundred foes, is as weak as that of a little child. 'Well, here I am! How are you all?' he says feebly.

He is in the gloom; they are in the light. They have not seen, but they have heard. In a moment they spring up, all but poor Trixy, who is crying quietly, and there are cries of 'Wilfrid! Thank God! Father! Father!' And a little voice from the corner is heard to say, 'Bertie has brought him. Don't let Bertie go away!'

All at once there is a lull. They have drawn him under the light, and they see that his face is pale and drawn, and one of them discovers that his arm is roughly bandaged. 'Father has been wounded. Children, don't press round him so,' cries Lady Elton. 'Will some one run for a doctor?'

'The Doctor Sahib is here,' says a voice outside; a quiet voice, which contrasts strangely with the agitated tones of those within the tent. In the next instant Yaseen Khan, the bearer, clad in snow-white tunic and dhootie, and having on his head a voluminous turban—how he had set himself in order no one ever knew—steps forward, and having, with his usual dignity, saluted those in the tent, ushers in the doctor.

Then from that irrepressible little person in the corner there comes a peal of laughter.

'Bravo, Yaseen Khan!' she cries. 'You are decidedly master of the situation. Have you been hiding yourself in a band-box all this time, you most unconscionable old man?'

Yaseen Khan merely salaams and smiles. He is busy attending to his master, and has no time for banter.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RAJAH SURPRISED

It was on that very night, the night of the 23rd of May, that Hoosanee returned to Gumilcund, after his unsuccessful effort to save Grace Elton and her cousin. He reported himself to his master at once, and gave an account of what he had done. It was his opinion that the rising at Nowgong would be speedy and cruel. Many of the Sahibs, he said, were disliked by the people and soldiers, and would not be spared. He did not venture to repeat his conversation with the chuprassie; but he said that he believed there was one servant in the Captain Sahib's service who might be trusted. 'The lotus-eyed,' he averred, must be saved at all hazards, and he offered, should his master desire it, to go to the station again, and to linger about in disguise, watching over her, until the danger was over, or the rising had come. In case of a rising, he would provide for some temporary refuge in the neighbourhood, whence, if they could not escape in any other way, his master would fetch them at the point of the sword.

Tom agreed to the proposal, suggesting only that he should go in place of Hoosanee; or, if that were impossible, that they should go together. But both his servant and Chunder Singh, who was present, pointed out to him so clearly that his presence, instead of helping, might spoil everything, that he was obliged to give way. Hoosanee should have the honour and joy of watching over the sweetest woman on all the earth. Chunder Singh should hold himself in readiness to obey the first summons to arms, and Tom had spies posted in the different villages on the route between Nowgong and Gumilcund, so that

Hoosanee's messages might be passed on from one to another, and that help could reach him speedily.

He was himself meditating a dangerous enterprise, nothing less than marching into Jhansi alone, presenting himself before the Ranee, and persuading her, under promise of his personal support, and his influence with the Government in case of her failure—for he had now certain knowledge that she intended soon to raise the standard of revolt—to allow him to carry off to Gumilcund the English women and children in the station.

But many things had to be done before he could start. June was nearly in when, riding Snow-queen, and dressed as an Indian of rank, he left Gumilcund. In despite of all Chunder Singh urged to the contrary, he was unattended, it being his belief that the Ranee would be more likely to listen to him if he entered her palace alone.

The hot season being well in, he travelled principally at night, resting by day in a grove or peasant's hut. He was treated with consideration everywhere. Now and then a grey-beard would reprove him for travelling so heedlessly in these unsettled times, and once or twice he was asked his business. To this he would answer that he was a kinsman of the Ranee of Jhansi, and that she had sent for him; but that what her will was he knew not. Everything, in fact, went well, so that, but for the adventure I am about to relate, he would have been in Jhansi before the rising; and it is just possible that, by his influence, the memory of a proud and not ungenerous woman would have been saved from a foul blot, and many innocent people delivered from destruction.

He came to within a few miles of the borders of Jhansi. For the last two days he had been pressing his pace, for sinister rumours were abroad, and he feared to be too late. But there had been terrible rain, and the ways were miry, and Snow-queen was hanging her head dejectedly. For her sake rather than his own he determined to rest for a few hours. There was a village close by. He rode in slowly, and asked for the house of the headman, where, after a little parley, he was allowed to rest, while he watched his horse being fed and watered.

He was on the little mud platform in front of the house. Snow-queen was tethered close by. It was mid-day and the place was silent as the grave, so that presently, in spite of strenuous efforts to hold his eyes open, he fell into a dog's sleep.

How long it lasted he could not tell. He was aroused by the trampling of feet and clamour of many voices. He sprang up, and almost at the same moment the headman came to him, with a strange look in his eyes.

'You must go on,' he said, 'the Ranee is here.'

'Ranee—what ranee—of Jhansi?' he asked.

'I know not,' the man answered; 'but we want this place.'

'And you shall have it. I am ready to go on,' answered Tom. 'First let me pay you for your trouble.'

The man took the money hurriedly, and Tom turned aside to where he had left Snow-queen, and vaulted into the saddle. He had scarcely done so before the foremost of the troop of horsemen that were clattering through the village came up with him and seized his bridle-rein.

'What do you want with me?' said Tom, trying to free himself.

In a trice two or three more rode up, and he found himself surrounded.

'Now, then,' he cried out, angrily. 'What is the meaning of this?'

'Our lady, the Ranee, would have speech with you, sir stranger,' said the first of the troop.

'Where is she; and what does she mean by stopping a peaceful traveller?'

'You are alone. She has armed men at her back,' said the horseman cynically. 'But she means you no hurt. You had better come quietly.'

'Loose my bridle-rein, then,' cried the young rajah. 'And you,' to the two or three ragged-looking figures that were crowding about him, 'fall back!'

They obeyed, and he went forward slowly, with all the dignity he could command. Had he seen any chance of escape, he would have given a touch to Snow-queen, and in a few moments she would have shown them a clean pair of heels. But he was not in open ground; he was in the long straggling street of the village, with horsemen in front of him and horsemen behind, and there was no possibility of getting away. Wit, he felt, must serve him for strength, and if, as these men had said, their leader was really a woman, he did not doubt that he would be able so far to humour her as to be allowed to proceed.

Presently he lifted up his eyes and saw her. She was in the midst of the cavalcade, borne in an open palanquin, and

covered from head to foot in a saree of black gauze richly spangled with gold.

As he approached, the men-at-arms who accompanied her separating to right and left to let him pass, she ordered her bearers to stop. Tom drew up in front of her and made a low salute. He could not discern the features of the lady's face; but he saw enough to make him sure that she was not the Ranee of Jhansi. A few seconds passed. He would not speak until she addressed him; he sat with head bowed humbly, after the Oriental fashion, while the piercing eyes behind the black and gold saree looked him through and through.

Then came a curious and unexpected shock. She was speaking. He thought, at least, that she was speaking; but he could not be quite sure that his senses had not deceived him. For this high, clear voice, winged, to his fancy, with mockery, was not, certainly, the voice of one of the daughters of the land. Yet the language was the supple Urdu that the educated natives use.

'Who are you, sir stranger? And what brings you to our dominions?' she said.

He gave an involuntary start, then answered, bowing low, 'Were it not that the whole world is under the dominion of beauty, I might ask my gracious lady her right to stop the traveller on his journey. As it is, I bow to her will. I am a kinsman of the Ranee of Jhansi, and I go in hot haste to confer with her on the strange portents of the time.'

From behind the saree came a sound like the repressed gurgle of laughter; but it was stopped instantly, and the high, disdainful voice went on. 'I believe that you are lying, sir stranger; but the truth of your saying shall be proved. We, too, propose to visit our sister of Jhansi. Remain you with our escort, and we will take you in with us. If you are really what you profess to be, the delay will be of no account to you, and you may save your skin.'

'My skin is not of so much account to me that, for its sake, I should neglect my duty. The business on which I have come is urgent, and I cannot delay. Will your Highness permit me to take my leave?'

There was another suppressed gurgle. He could have sworn, moreover, that from under the black and gold gauze there came a little English 'No;' but in the next moment he thought that his fancy must have been playing tricks with him, for the veiled lady was speaking in stern, slow accents.

'I will not permit you to leave us. Fall back, and take your place amongst my men.'

'Your Highness——'

'Silence! I have listened to you long enough. Abdul, seize his bridle-rein. If he resists, dismount him, and bring him on foot.'

Seeing that there was, for the moment, no possibility of successful resistance, Tom fell back amongst the escort, who, so long as he walked on with them quietly, did not seem disposed to show him any violence.

The headman of the village came out, meanwhile, to meet them, bringing provisions, and laying himself and all he possessed at the feet of the Ranee. She accepted his homage, but did not deign to speak to him, and, after halting for a few moments, she ordered her bearers and escort to proceed.

Tom had been longing to leave the village, for he thought that, on the open ground, he might easily escape; but he found himself so closely watched, that no such effort was practicable. Reluctantly he made up his mind to wait until the night.

He had gone over this ground before, making himself well acquainted with the bearings of the country, and when, soon after leaving the village, the leaders of the cavalcade swung round to the left, he knew perfectly well that they were going away from Jhansi, and not towards it. This he said to Abdul, but he was vouchsafed no answer. Tired and irritated, wondering what was to be the end of this strange adventure, and blaming himself bitterly for having halted when he was almost within a stone's throw of his goal, he went on the way he was led.

It was afternoon when the veiled lady met him, and they tramped on until nightfall.

By this time, so far as Tom, who had begun to lose his bearings, could judge, they were many miles distant from Jhansi. They encamped in open ground, there being no village or grove of trees at hand. A tent was pitched for the lady, who had been travelling for some time with the curtains of her palanquin closed. Tom, who felt that she was dealing treacherously with him, and who was haunted, moreover, by a bewildering suspicion that she was something very different from what she gave herself out to be, made an effort, when the cavalcade halted, to spring forward from his place in the rear, that he might speak to her, or at least catch a

glimpse of her figure ; but the fierce and burly Abdul placed himself in front of him. The vigilance of this man had never for one moment faltered, and it was evident to Tom that he was keeping up the other men to their duty of watchfulness.

Thinking it well to appear submissive, he dismounted with the rest of the horsemen, tethered and fed Snow-queen, and joined one of the groups that were assembled round the little fires that had been lighted to cook the men's evening meal. A place was made for him, and he was given a supper of chupatties and dâl, which, as he was simulating the manners of a person of high rank, he received in his own bowl, retiring a few yards distant from his attendants to eat it.

Then he returned to the spot where he had left Snow-queen, wrapped himself up in his chuddah, and, with his back propped against the tree to which she was tethered, fell into a deep sleep.

Tom was one of those favoured mortals who have the gift of sleep. No matter how anxious and harassed he might have been in the day-time, night always brought him peace and refreshment. Afterwards he thought of it as a strange thing. Here he was alone in the midst of strangers. What they wanted with him he did not know ; but he knew full well that he had upon his person what, if they discovered it, would tempt their cupidity past any reasonable limit of endurance ; he knew also that he had a great stake to fight for, and a hard problem to solve, and yet he slept—slept as peacefully as if he had been in his own little room in the cottage that looked down upon the silver Thames.

Two hours passed away. His attendants had looked at him several times, and, at last, being satisfied of his perfect unconsciousness, they had followed his example, and now no one but Abdul was awake.

Abdul had received his orders. He was to watch over the prisoner, but not to molest him in any way ; he knew very well that, if he were detected in any attempt at outrage or robbery, he would pay the forfeit of his life for the crime ; but the stillness of the moment and the perfect unconsciousness of the sleeping man were too much for his prudence. He would not hurt him. That would be to betray himself ; but he would cautiously feel about him to see if he had valuables concealed in his sash or turban. If he had not, no harm was done. If he had, and if Abdul purloined them, then Abdul would be so much the richer, and the high-born youth,

who would not venture, surrounded as he was by hostile strangers, to make any ado about his loss, would be the poorer. And that would be all.

Thinking thus he crept closer to Tom, and, having softly drawn his chuddah aside began to finger his fine satin tunic. Once or twice the sleeping youth stirred, and then the robber drew back, but, supposing himself in a dream, he settled down again, and Abdul went on with his work. The heart of the robber was jubilant and his fingers were light, for he was sure now that there was gold in the youth's waistband, gold which would soon be transferred to his own. The gold was almost within his grasp, he heard its jingle, his long fingers swept it, as they moved to and fro. Why then did he stop suddenly and draw back? Had he seen the youth's breast and shoulders white in the moonlight, and did he recognise him as one of the hated race, whom, in a few short weeks, the children of the Prophet would scatter and slay? But this should have given him courage, for he knew very well that he had but to say that a Feringhee spy had entered the camp, and the youth whom he purposed to rob would have his lips sealed effectually. Surely it was something more that stayed Abdul's hand. And, in that moment's pause, his prey escaped him. Strong, and with all his wits about him, Tom awoke; seeing his chuddah and tunic open, and Abdul glaring at him, like a startled wild animal, he sprang to his feet and struck out with the dagger which he carried in his belt.

At the same moment the robber was smitten from behind. As, with a muttered cry, he fell to the ground, a voice broke upon the stillness of the camp: 'So the White Ranee punishes treachery. Let all take notice and beware!'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SNAKE-CHARMER AND THE VEILED LADY

As for Tom, he laid himself down again, not to sleep this time, but to watch. There was, however, no further alarm, nor, when, long before dawn, the camp began to stir and the morning fires were lighted, was any remark made with regard to the incident of the night. A narrow trench was dug; the

robber was laid in it, and, once more, the cavalcade moved forward. Throughout that day they went on steadily. The prisoner was continually on the alert, but he was given no chance either of escaping or of speaking to the veiled lady in the litter. His passionate irritation over the delay grew, meanwhile, to such a height, that he was on the point once or twice of making some mad effort that would have had the effect of either seriously jeopardising his life or putting fetters on his limbs. That he restrained himself was due not so much to prudence as to fatality. He could never find a moment when his will-power and his surroundings leapt together. When he might have acted he could not. When all his nerves were braced and the blood coursed like fire about his heart, something would always happen to make action impossible. So, with throbbing brain and a heart as heavy as lead, he travelled on. Every hour was taking them further away from Jhansi, and nearer Gumilcund, although they were not shaping their course directly for the last-named city. The men were reticent before him, but he gathered from a stray word here and there that they were themselves uncertain about their movements, which would depend upon the result of an enterprise undertaken by some of their comrades.

Towards mid-day they halted, and a man, who appeared to be a moulvie, or priest, joined them, was admitted to the tent, and held a conference with the lady, travelling on with the cavalcade as far as the next village, where he took his leave. What news he brought Tom did not hear, but he judged from the jubilant faces of the men, and the laughter and rude jests, some of which made his blood curdle, that there had been another triumph over the Europeans, and that these men were expecting to share in its results.

Evening came, and they halted again. It was in the neighbourhood of a large village, to the right of which stretched a mere or shallow pond, half covered with red pond-weed and overshadowed with some fine acacia and fig trees. By order of the lady in the litter, her tent, which always formed the centre of the camp, was pitched on the shores of the mere, being separated from the village by its waters.

Immediately the men unsaddled, tethered and fed their horses, and lighted their evening fires. The villagers, meanwhile, who were hiding behind every tree and angle of wall, having satisfied themselves that those in camp had no hostile intentions, poled themselves over the mere in flat-bottomed

boats, bringing with them fruit and vegetables, and grain and milk, so that presently the camp was like a fair.

Sitting by the mere, and listening absently to the jabber and turmoil of the camp, where buying and selling and wrangling and gossiping were going briskly forward, Tom watched the curious scene. He was trying to devise some scheme either of escape or of making his situation known to Chunder Singh, when, suddenly, and in obedience to no act of volition of his own, so at least it seemed to himself, the current of his thought changed. It darted upon him with the force of an electric current that the scene upon which he was gazing was not new. The livid sky behind the mud walls of the village, the blood-red pavement at his feet, the fierce dark faces about him, surely, in some other life, he had seen them before. A moment more, and he remembered. He was living again over the strange night when all the conditions of his life were changed; his feet trod the banks of the stream that washed the gardens of his tranquil home; the dawn, the sweet dawn of an English June, was breaking, and the trees that he knew and loved were swaying to and fro over his head to the delicious breeze of the morning. *Then* he had seen *this*! It was his dream, his very dream; but not all!

The effect upon his mind was overpowering. His strength, and the presence of mind upon which he had always relied, seemed to be oozing away. Fate! Fate! and no hand of man was fighting against him! What could he do but submit? Shuddering, he covered his face with his hands. He must hide it away. He must forget. He must clear his mind from the stupefaction that was stealing over it, or all would be lost. But it was in vain, for, with his every effort, he seemed only to sink more deeply into despondency and bewilderment.

Suddenly a sound came to him. It was as vivid to his senses as is the light of morning to the belated traveller—a voice clear and strong. 'Why,' it said, 'should this thing startle you? If a vision was granted to you, if you saw, beforehand, what would be in the future, and if now the vision is followed by what is, or appears to be, a reality, is that any reason why your strength and presence of mind should desert you?' A pause, and then, answering the thought of his heart, the voice went on, 'Fate! That is true. Everything is fate. But our resistances are predicted and foreseen as well as our trials. Arise and be of good cheer. This is no omen of evil, but rather of good. You say that the vision is not over,

again you are right. There is more to come, and in due time and place you will behold it; but tie not your limbs from present use in consideration of that which they may have to do in the future. In coming hither you have chosen rightly. She, like you, must "dree her dread;" but the Holy Ones love her, and will have her in Their keeping. Listen!'

At this moment—it seemed a strange and incongruous thing—there broke in upon the eager spiritual colloquy a sound so ridiculously common and familiar that, uneasy as he was, Tom could almost have laughed. It was the discordant rattle with which, in India, a snake-charmer and conjuror calls his audience together. The sounds came from behind Tom. Turning in haste, he saw a hooded snake rearing up its ugly neck and head within a few feet of him. Behind the snake, sitting crouched together and eyeing him curiously, was an old man, with coal-black face, white hair, and supernaturally bright eyes. He was wrapped in a dirty white chuddah; a cloth, containing his implements of trade, lay outspread before him, and he held in his hand a light wand, with which he was directing the movements of the snake.

When Tom turned he stopped his jabber for a moment to beg him not to be afraid, adding impressively that if he would only have patience he would behold such a sight as he had never seen before. 'Others kill,' cried the old man, looking round on the soldiers who, pleased at any sort of fun, were crouching about him. 'They bring you a mongoose. There is a fight. The monster is killed. He lies stiff and stark before you. You clap your hands like silly children. But what is that? Nothing. I snap my fingers at them. No mongoose here, good sirs! No killing! I did not say no fight. Yes, you love fighting, and a fight you shall see! But a man will fight the monster; a man with his naked hands, and it shall be—not killed—but tamed! That is the true triumph, my masters—the true revenge! My enemy's blood, what is it? For a moment it fills my nostrils with its savour, in the next it is gone. But to tame him, to see him lie down at my feet and lick my hand, to spurn him once, and yet again; day after day to behold him grovel more deeply before me. This is joy! This is ecstasy! And it is this, in little, which I call you to behold.'

He spoke in a high key, and with the most extraordinary rapidity, holding his wand, as he spoke, over the head of the cobra, which moved uneasily from side to side as if it were trying to escape from some fascinating influence. His voice

dropped and there was a lull. The serpent gazed at him sleepily. He crooned a low song, which seemed to have a stupefying effect upon it, for it dropped and lay like dead. The soldiers, meantime, stirred to the entrails by his address, showed all the symptoms of intoxication ; some rolling about in speechless ecstasy, others dancing, singing, and shouting, so that, in a few moments, the camp was changed into a field of demons.

There came a cry from the snake-charmer. 'Give me room —room !' and, in the next instant, he had flung his wand aside, thrown off his chuddah, and leapt to his feet. At the same moment the serpent reared itself up, shot out its forked tongue, and threw its sinuous body at the man, who received it on his knotted arms. The hideous combat went on for some minutes. Now the man seemed to triumph and now the serpent. Tom was sick with loathing ; but he could not turn away. An invincible fascination, helped by a suspicion that the combat had some mysterious importance for himself, kept his eyes fixed.

Suddenly the silence of the camp was broken. There came a cry of 'Give place ! The Ranee is coming !'

The combat was at its height—the man almost lost in the folds of the cobra, and the awe-stricken circle falling back—when Tom, who had kept his position near the snake-charmer, saw her come out. She was dressed in the brilliant robe of black and gold in which he had seen her first, and covered from head to foot, so that he could not see her face. With slow and dignified step she advanced towards them. She had crossed half the space that separated her from the snake. It had loosened itself from the man, and was turning in this new direction. Unable to restrain himself, Tom darted forward. 'Keep back !' he cried in English. 'You are mad !'

She spread out her arms, waved him back imperiously, and moved forward. At the same moment Tom saw on the face of the snake-charmer a look of such anguish and dismay that he thought his enemy had conquered and given him a deadly wound. Yet the snake had dropped and was lying at his feet, not dead, but spent.

Confused and troubled, Tom fell back. The lady was advancing still. She was within a few feet of the snake. Its master warned her back, but she took no heed of him. Then Tom, who could bear it no longer, turned away and covered his face with his hands. There was a moment of absolute silence. His heart beat with curious rapidity, there was a singing in his ears that almost deprived him of the power of hearing, and,

though feeling that this would be the time to get away, he seemed to lack the power to move a step. All at once there was a shout. It was followed by another, and then by another, 'Victory! victory! Our Ranee-jee, daughter of the Prophet, protected of Allah, has triumphed!' The cries rang through the camp, were taken up by those who clustered round it, and echoed back from the village, so that in a moment all the country seemed alive.

At the sounds Tom turned, and this was the strange sight he saw. In the centre of the vast circle and at some little distance from the snake-charmer, who, recognising probably a master in his craft, had drawn back, and was now close at Tom's elbow, stood the Ranee. She stood with her head proudly raised, so that she looked taller than before. One little foot was planted firmly on the ground, the other rested on the neck of the cobra, which cowered before her as if smitten with sudden fear. But the strangest part of all was that the black and gold saree had been thrown back and that her face was exposed. With parted lips Tom gazed. It was the face of a little child, soft and white, with rose-red lips, and smiling eyes, in which the golden light of summer dawns seemed to be sleeping, and—if he was not mad—if he was not dreaming—he had seen it before.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUBDUL

TOM'S first idea was that she, like himself, was a prisoner, and he was about to commit the terrible imprudence of flinging himself at her feet, and begging her to accept his protection, when the snake-charmer, passing him by, brushed him as if by accident, and pausing, made a low salaam, and breathed an apology. There was a look in his face which arrested Tom's attention; under cover of the clamour which had not ceased, he said in a low voice and in Marathi, which was known to his spies, 'Are you a friend?'

'I am his Highness's servant,' said the man, 'and I will help him to escape; but he must be prudent. The White Ranee is black of heart.'

As he muttered the last words, speaking them in so low a tone that no one but Tom could hear, he was moving towards the Ranee. She greeted him with a smile of childlike triumph, and he prostrated himself at her feet. Then, resuming his wand, and singing his lullaby-song, he enticed the monster into its basket, while the Ranee, having looked round her proudly, threw the black and gold saree about her head, and returned to the tent. The snake-charmer began now to circulate among the soldiers. He was full of stories and jests, and wherever he went he was received with acclamations. Tom, who had taken up his station under the tree to which Snow-queen was tethered, watched him moving to and fro. Presently he noticed a strange thing. It was only as long as the snake-charmer was in the midst of each little group that its members were joyous or lively. As soon as he left them they became silent, most of them falling shortly into a heavy sleep. This must have been apparent to others besides himself, yet there were none who did not watch for and expect his coming. Night had fallen before he had made his round of the camp, and then all, with the exception of two sentinels outside the tent, were in a deep slumber. He crept now to the neighbourhood of Tom's station, and professed to curl himself up for sleep. The sentinels watched him drowsily. After a few minutes of perfect silence, one of them sat down and leaned his back against a tree. His comrade followed his example. They exchanged a few remarks to keep themselves awake. One drank from a bottle in his girdle and offered it to the other, whereupon their dropping remarks fell off into silence. And now no one in all the camp was awake but Tom and the snake-charmer.

It was nearing midnight, but the moon—which was on the wane, but which in this clear atmosphere diffuses a brilliant light—enabled them to see their way, and they both arose.

'Now is our time,' said the snake-charmer, chuckling. He was none other than Subdul, Snow-queen's groom.

'Are you sure they are well settled?' said his master.

'I have given them bhang, Highness. That, and the excitement of the evening, will make them sleep like the dead; no noise will awake them. But the nights are short; why does my master linger?'

'Are you sure *she* is not a prisoner, Subdul? Might she not come with us if we told her our design?'

'If my master means the Ranee, I tell him that she is

black—black at heart and false of speech. Let not my master trust her.'

'What do you know of her, Subdul?'

'I know what these have told me. Does my lord know Dost Ali Khan?'

'The adopted son of the rajah of that name?' cried Tom, with some excitement; 'why, I entertained him once. I have now a pass from him about me. Has he anything to do in this?'

'He has everything to do. He is the hope of thousands. They crowd round him as their lord. If my master has won Dost Ali Khan's favour he is lucky. This man, my lord, this so-called prince, has, as I hear, persuaded the White Ranee to join herself to him. She was married to an English sahib, and she saw him slain. She looked on at the slaughter of her countrymen and women, and now, in her new lord's name, she is taking command of the murderers. If my master wants any more proof that she is a traitress——'

'Silence, Subdul! She is coming!'

'Master! master!' cried the man in strong excitement, 'now is the time to fly!'

'I must let her speak to me first.'

'No, no; let my master listen to me! She is a witch; she will enslave him.'

'Nonsense, Subdul; I know her, I tell you. Be silent!' murmured Tom, whose heart was beating strangely.

And all this time the White Ranee, with veil thrown back, and face looking pure and spiritual in the moonlight, was making her way quietly through the sleepers of the camp towards the spot where Tom was standing. They were alone now, Subdul having disappeared. Tom did not move, for a spell seemed to be over him; so she went close to him and laid her hand on his arm. Then a sudden trembling seized him.

'Who are you?' he said, in a low voice.

'Surely you know me,' she answered. 'I know you, Tom Gregory. Why did you run away from Delhi without seeing me again?'

'Why are you here?' he said sternly.

'You are impolite, my dear boy. A question should be answered.'

'This is no time or place for amenities, and you know it. Answer me! Are you a prisoner? For if so I will take

you away with me and protect you honourably until I can restore you to your own people. If you are not a prisoner —if you have given yourself up to the enemies of your race, then I will leave you to reap your own punishment.'

The lady laughed. 'So stern all of a sudden,' she said.

'You are playing with me. You are wasting time.'

'Time was made for slaves, Tom,' said the lady, in a sweet girlish treble, 'and I am not a slave; neither are you. Sit down under this tree, and let us talk together quietly. Ah! how pleasant it is to speak to an Englishman again!'

'Vivien! are you mad?'

'Yes, I am mad, always mad, Tom; but madder than ever now. Be mad with me; you have no idea how delightful it is to live in a dream!'

'The dream will soon be over, my poor child. Do you think that you can tame men as you tame serpents?'

'Think? I am sure of it, Tom!'

'Then, if this is your dream, for Heaven's sake awake! Good God! why do you look at me so?' cried the young fellow, in a sudden transport.

She was standing before him in the moonlight, her golden hair blown this way and that way with the wind, her eyes full of laughter, an expression half-mocking, half-pitiful, playing about her lips.

'Do you know how awful this time is?' he said. 'Are you human?'

She laughed. 'No,' she said, 'I don't think I am. Take my advice, Tom, and be inhuman too!'

'Vivien, you are playing with me!'

'Of course I am; I never do anything but play. I played with you, and if it had not been for Grace Elton, who is a very serious young person, I should have won you over as a playfellow. I played with Charlie Doncaster, poor boy! But he had not my animal spirits, and he was beginning to be grave and tiresome when—but I don't want to talk of disagreeable things. Well! The next was his Royal or Imperial Highness Dost Ali Khan. I wonder, by-the-by, if you remember him. I was within an ace of running over him in the streets of Delhi. It would have been a good thing for some people if I had succeeded. You saved him, didn't you? Set that as a makeweight against all your good deeds, Mr. Tom, and see what the result will be! But to return, as the

story-tellers say. I was so much amused with his Highness that I took the trouble to cultivate him; and it was a very funny little episode, I can assure you. Heavens! how he hated me at first! I tell him sometimes that I am surprised he did not kill me, for I gave him heaps and heaps of chances. He let me live, however, against his better judgment, I believe, and now he is my slave. I can do whatever I like with him. What do you say to that for a game?'

'I say that you are mad—that you don't know what you are saying, and the night is passing. No more of this folly! Will you come with me or will you not?'

'Tom, what a baby you are! Never mind, I like you so! But be a wise baby if you can, and listen to me quietly. I am *not* going with you. It would be absurd to begin with, and highly dangerous all through. On the other hand, having found you, I don't mean to let you slip out of my fingers. So you must come with me. I must tell you that you have been so fortunate as to make Dost Ali Khan, his Imperial Highness of the future, your friend. He is the great man just now, for he is the only person in this part of the world who knows what he wants, so the rest of them look up to him. The soldiers, banded and disbanded, the native states, the fanatics of the towns, they are all waiting for his signal. When he gives it—Heavens! I begin to feel sane, as I think of it—what a conflagration there will be! However, that is beside the present question'—she stopped to laugh. 'I think I am speaking rather weightily,' she said; 'don't you? Now, to go on in the same strain, this exalted personage, whose ally I am, offers you his friendship. He doesn't wish you to fight for or with him, for he believes you would say "No," and he has a sort of conscience about destroying you. What he asks is that you will take me into Gumilcund—think of the magnanimity of it!—and keep me there until the explosion is over. Then, if the world doesn't meanwhile fall in ruins about us, we can decide about the future.'

She paused and went a little closer to him. A cloud had veiled the face of the moon so that, near as she was, he could only see her indistinctly; but he felt her—felt her in every nerve of his being, and for a moment he hesitated. Why should he not, after all, take her back to Gumilcund first, and leave her there in safety before setting forth on any other mission of rescue? He did not believe all she had told him. Either she was mad—as she said of herself—and in that case she

ought to be protected from the results of her own mad actions; or else she was playing with him. Yes, she had herself spoken the word. But was she accountable for her own strange nature? Should she be punished because she could not see the awful realities that lay about her? Since, by some strange freak of fortune, she had been able so far to gain protection, was he to deny her the asylum that would make her safety sure?

While he reasoned with himself she stood by him. She did not speak, she did not stir; but as the silence prolonged itself a sigh, soft as the breath of a sleeping child, escaped her lips.

'Vivien!' he said tremulously, 'is that you?'

'Yes, it is I; I am near you. You will come with me, Tom?' she murmured; and, in low caressing tones, 'Dearest Tom!'

'Why do you say that?' he said hoarsely.

'Listen to him! poor child,' she cried. 'Why? Can't you tell? Can't you imagine?'

'You are false!' he groaned; 'you have said it of yourself!'

'False to others, Tom; never to you!'

'False to one is false to all.'

'Listen to him!' she cried again. 'What an exalted standard! But, my young king, let me tell you that you are ungrateful and unjust. If I could only save *you* by being false to *others*; if every subterfuge, from the beginning, was planned for this—that I might have *you*; that I might hold *your* life in my hands—what then?'

'Is it so?' he said hoarsely.

'You see!' she cried; 'you were cold because you did not understand!'

At this moment, when his will was passing away from him, and his heart was as wax in the midst of his body, there came a strange and sudden disturbance. Subdul Khan had been crouching behind them; his ear was to the ground, and all his senses were on the alert, for he feared treachery. Whether he did actually hear in the distance the rumble of gun-carriages and the sound of armed men on the march, or whether he merely professed to hear them to arouse his master, cannot be certainly known; but the effect was the same. Suddenly, with a cry of, 'The rebels are upon us!' he sprang to his feet.

Snow-queen was saddled, and so was the horse of Subdul

Khan. They mounted them together, and while Vivien, with a ringing cry, to which none of the besotted men about her paid any heed, ran frantically through the camp, Snow-queen and her master, going like the wind, disappeared in the distance.

CHAPTER XXV

AN AWFUL RIDE AND A RESCUE

HURRY on, brave men ! let the wind be your messenger ; stop neither to eat nor drink : through the long sultry day and at nightfall, when the awful eye of day is closed and the stars come out pale and languid overhead, even until morning dawns and the terrible round of sweltering heat and blinding dust begins again—hurry on ! By narrow and unfrequented ways, through villages whose favour has been bought, under the shade of trees, and across tracts of jungle, where you are obliged to go at a foot-pace, giving breathing time to the gallant beasts that have carried you so bravely—on and ever on, for two dreadful days and nights, that to one of you seem ever afterwards like an awful dream. And yet, you are too late. And well it may be for yourselves that you did not arrive earlier. For the storm has broken. In fire, and blood, and fever it is spreading from city to city, and Jhansi, the home and citadel of a woman scorned, has caught the dread contagion.

Up to June 1 they were at peace. The Ranee still sat smiling in her palace, and still she added to her body-guard persons of proved loyalty, and still the English believed her promises, and still the troops within the city proclaimed their faithfulness loudly. And why did the English need to fear ? Meerut had not moved them. Delhi had not moved them. The native states, Gwalior and Gumilcund, and Rewah and Banda, were holding their hands. Nay, it was known that some of them had offered help to the Paramount Power in the re-establishment of order ; and even if they had feared, what could they do ? To show mistrust at this eleventh hour would be to undo all that had gone before, and to ruin everything.

On June 3 mysterious fires broke out ; but even these did

not unduly alarm them. They were attributed to accident. It was not until the 4th that their eyes were opened. Then the soldiers on parade, breaking away suddenly and causelessly as it appeared to those who had not heard of the secret messages that had been passing between the palace and the native lines, shot down their sergeant and seized the artillery, and with it made their way to the fort within the native city.

The Ranee still sat smiling in her palace ; but when the news came to her she ordered the palace gates to be opened, mounted her horse and cantered over to the lines with her own faithful body-guard, who in her name had seized upon the treasury, behind her.

Some of the English officers had been hurrying to her palace. They were told on the way that she was in the hands of the mutineers, and instantly the full magnitude of what had happened darted upon them. They dashed back to the cantonments, calling as they went on the English and Eurasians to follow them into the Star Fort, the only building belonging to them now that was capable of defence. It all happened in a moment. Some of them had not even heard of the disturbance on parade. In the little house, once a tomb on the maidan, something had been seen ; but no one clearly understood what had happened. 'Father will be in presently, and then we shall hear,' said Mrs. White to her little Aglaia, as she tried to soothe her off to sleep. But then the ayah rushed in like a wild creature, and with a cry of 'They are coming ; hide !' tore the child out of her arms. She knew little more. Some one came and dragged her out of the house, and she was mounted on a horse, to which, crying out for her child, she clung because she could not help herself, and there was a mad, sick flight across the blaze of the maidan, with yells at her heels, which seemed to recede as she flew on, and then all at once she was in the Fort amongst a circle of frightened women, and her husband, who had not come for her himself, having work to do, was with the men, but her child —her little darling—was nowhere to be seen. She made a wild rush for the door. Even amongst the rebels there must be someone who would have mercy upon her. When they held her back by force her shrieks and cries were piteous to hear.

But all were not so helpless. In the little spell of time given them by the rebels who were quarrelling over the booty, the men looked up the stores of ammunition, and barricaded doors and windows, and allotted to every combatant his post,

and to every non-combatant his duty ; and the women gathered together the food which the more provident had brought in, soothed the children, and made arrangements for the night.

No one, meanwhile, could tell poor Mrs. White anything of her child. It was known, however, that some of the little English community had yet to come in, and the sanguine hoped that Aglaia, who was a general favourite, might be amongst them. Others feared that the ayah, seized by panic, or deliberately treacherous, had given her up.

Late that afternoon, when those in the Fort had made all their dispositions, the mutineers came clustering round, crying out that they should surrender. They were received by a strong and well-directed fire, which laid many of them low. This was not what they had bargained for, so they retreated in some confusion to deliberate.

Slowly and awfully the first night in the Fort passed by. The women slept, or tried to sleep. The men, fearing surprise, were on the watch. Early in the morning such food as they had was distributed, with a little water and wine. Then two bold fellows—Eurasians—undertook to go out in disguise and try to bring relief from the nearest European station. Hopeless task ! They were cut down before they were well clear of the cantonments. Those inside, meanwhile, heard guns being dragged into position to batter them to pieces. This attempt was soon given up, for the defenders of the Fort, several of whom were dead shots, peppered the artillerymen so freely, that, after a score or so had been shot down, no one could be found to undertake the duty. If only there had been water and food in the Fort the defence might have been heard of with that of Arah. But hunger and thirst are to besieged men the deadliest of foes. No one could believe, moreover, that the good Ranee, though misguided by evil counsellors, could actually permit the slaughter of her English friends. After a little discussion it was decided that three officers, each of whom was well known to her, should go out as envoys, and treat with her for the surrender of the Fort. They went out gaily, but they never returned. 'What have I to do with English swine ?' said the Ranee, when they were brought before her. The haughty words were their sentence. At her palace gates they were cut down ; and the story of their fate was shouted derisively under the windows of the Fort.

Another council was held. The provisions, it was found,

would, with economy, last another three days. It was hoped that, in the meantime, their desperate situation might be heard of, and a relief attempted. For another dreadful day and night they held out.

The morning of the third day dawned. The watchers were half dead with fatigue and anxiety; the children were crying out piteously for water; the women were faint, weary, and disheartened. When the sun rose the rebels made an attack in force; but they were driven back, and there were two or three hours of rest.

Then the Ranee sent the besieged a message. All she wanted was the Fort. Let those within surrender it, and they would be allowed to go in peace whither they desired.

Upon this another council was held. The boldest were for holding out. There was, indeed, little or no hope of successful resistance; but, if they must die, it would be better to die at their posts, fighting, like brave men, than to fall into the hands of their cruel and treacherous enemies. Had they been all men and combatants, this is the course they would have taken. Unhappily the larger number of the fifty and odd souls who were clustered together in the Fort were women and little children and men of peace. To them, as others urged, this offer of the Ranee gave the one and only loophole of escape that they could hope for, and so, with heavy hearts and ominous forebodings of evil, the brave men, who had counselled resistance, laid down their arms, the gates of the Fort were thrown open, and the Ranee's body-guard marched in

On the afternoon which witnessed the surrender of the English into the hands of the Ranee, two horsemen crossed the boundaries of the state, and stopped at a small village where one of them had friends. These advised them strongly to go no further, alleging that something extraordinary had been happening in the city. The two men refreshed themselves and their horses, and galloped on to a grove, which lay off the road, at a little distance from the village. Here, their horses being completely spent, they dismounted and let them rest. As they stood, with their hands on their bridle-reins, ready to mount and gallop at the least alarm, there came to their ears a rumbling noise as of distant thunder, and one of them—the master—said, 'We are too late. It has begun.'

'We are too late, Excellency. There is nothing for us to do now but to return whence we came,' answered the man.

'Go back you, Subdul! I must enter Jhansi, and see with my own eyes what is going on.'

'My master is not wise. He will not be able to help, and he will risk his own life, which is dear to his people.'

'Listen, Subdul!' said the young rajah, impressively. 'I have a friend in that city—a little child. She loves me and believes in me. All night long, while we were riding and resting, she has been beside me. I tell you it is no dream; it is a reality. She is calling me, and I must go. I must save my poor little Aglaia, or perish in the attempt. But you have no such call; and why should two of us risk our lives? Stay here, where you are known, or go back to Gumilcund.'

'Does his Excellency think that I would desert him?' said Subdul Khan, sorrowfully. 'He has seen what I can do. Let him give himself into my hands, and I will take him safely into Jhansi.'

'Make your own arrangements, Subdul; but remember that life or death may hang on the next few moments.'

'I will use every diligence,' said Subdul, and he mounted his horse and rode off, leaving Tom alone in the wood.

For more than an hour he waited patiently, and then, just as dusk was beginning to fall, Subdul came back. He had changed his dress and the accoutrements of his horse, so that at first his master failed to recognise him; but, just as he was grasping his weapon to defend himself, he heard his servant's voice.

'Does not my master know me?'

'Scarcely. What have you done to yourself?'

'I am in the dress of the Ranee's body-guard, Excellency. I met one of them. He was drunk with bhang, and red with the slaughter of your Excellency's countrymen. I drew him into a solitary place, slew him, and took his garments.'

Tom gave an involuntary shudder, for he was new to this kind of thing; but he made no remark. Mounting his horse, he followed Subdul out of the wood. They avoided the high road, and, the dimness of the light favouring them, crept along under the shadow of trees and walls until they reached the outskirts of the city. The open maidan lay now between them and the Star Fort.

'Stop,' whispered Subdul, as his master was about to gallop across it. 'Let his Excellency stay here for a few minutes! I will go forward and see what has happened, and come back to him. In this dress I can mix amongst them, and they will suppose me one of themselves.'

'Go,' said Tom; 'but come back quickly, or I shall not be able to bear it.'

They were close to a mass of ruined masonry, which rose between them and the town. Sheltering himself behind it, Tom looked and listened. From the city came a tumult of fierce cries and trampling feet; here and there clouds of smoke darkened the sky, and tongues of lurid flame darting from their midst would, for a few moments, light up the scene of ruin.

Tom's heart sank, and his breath came and went pantingly. He knew that Subdul was right, that for him to rush into the pandemonium before him would be ruin to himself and useless for others, and yet it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could preserve his patience.

Subdul, meantime, was pricking across the maidan. In the place where the cantonments had been, but which was now a shapeless mass of ruins, he met a body of sepoys. They had lanterns in their hands, and they were looking about for the gold and jewels which the Feringhees had left behind them. He pulled up, told them he had lost his way in the darkness, and asked where his comrades—the Ranee's body-guard—were. 'Guarding the Feringhees' treasure,' said one of the men. 'The Ranee has taken it, but we mean to have our share.'

'Tell her so,' cried another, with a rude jest.

'What is that to me?' said Subdul. 'I obey orders. The Feringhees are slain?'

'Every man, woman, and child,' answered the soldier, savagely.

'How was it?' said Subdul. 'I have come in from the country, where I have been visiting my father, and I know nothing.'

The party of sepoys, most of whom were intoxicated, for they had ransacked the officers' wine-stores, broke into a loud laugh.

'By Allah!' cried one, 'I never thought to see such a sight. The infidels were in the Fort, pouring out blasphemies, and shooting down the sons of the Prophet like sheep. The evil one helped them, for they were few in number. It was hot work, brother: and who cares to die in the moment of victory? Our mother, the Ranee, who is a true daughter of the Prophet, saw how it was with us, and promised them their lives if they would give her up the Fort. They believed her word, and came out. Then we bound them and carried them to

the Jokan Bagh, where we fell upon them with the sword. There were fifty in all; men, women, and children. The women cried for mercy, and some of us delayed to smite, that we might hear them. But the orders were to be swift, so we finished them; and there they lie, unburied, for the vultures and jackals to feed upon. So may all enemies of the Prophet perish!'

He was answered by a shout that rang through the ruins. Subdul's fingers were playing with his sword; but he restrained himself, and said mildly, 'My brother is a man of war, and his deeds will win for him a place in Paradise! Will he tell me where this garden is? I have an enemy amongst the slain Feringhees, and I would fain see him with my own eyes.'

The sepoy, to whom this was a most natural request, pointed with his finger to the opposite side of the maidan. 'There is a ruined mosque close by,' he said. 'The fathers of the devils we have slain desecrated it, and it has never been rebuilt since.'

'I know the place,' answered Subdul. Sweeping round, he left them to their devices, and, after a few minutes of rapid riding, rejoined his master.

'What news?' said Tom.

'The worst!' answered Subdul; and he repeated what he had heard, adding that the garden where the dreadful deed had been done was close by the spot where they were standing.

For a few moments Tom was paralysed. This was worse—far worse—than he had dreamed.

'Women and children!' he groaned.

'Every one of them, Excellency.'

'The brutes! The devils! Subdul, if we had only a score of our Gumilcund men at our back——'

'We could do nothing, Excellency. There are hundreds in the city.'

'Cowards! every mother's son of them. I should have come with an army; but it is too late now. Let us look for the child.'

'Have I not told your Excellency that all were slain?'

'Aglaia is not dead! I am certain of it. Are you afraid to come into the garden where they lie, Subdul?'

'I will lead the way!' answered the man.

It was within a stone's-throw of the ruined mosque where they had been hiding, an enclosed space surrounded with walls, and set out with grim old trees, plots of yellow marigold, and shrubberies where roses, Cape jessamine, champa, and the asoka

grew. Once it had been a haunt and favourite pleasure-ground of the Ranee, who, in the days of her power, had built a pavilion in its centre. Now it was seldom used.

The two men found the gates open and the place deserted. Not a single soldier was left on guard. The murderers had done their foul work, and had gone away to their triumph and plunder, leaving the speechless witnesses of their treachery behind them. As, putting his horse to a foot-pace, Tom groped his way through the darkness, his heart contracted and his limbs trembled under him. Rather a thousand times would he have met a hundred foes in fair fight than this. Eagerly, mean while, he looked and listened, hoping against hope that some might have escaped. Nothing was to be seen but the heavy foliage of the trees that blotted out the moonlight. Nothing was to be heard but the night-breeze as it played with their branches.

Suddenly a shriek, penetrating and prolonged, broke upon the silence. Another and another followed. They came up from the distance, and swept towards the riders, nearer and nearer, until, with a rush like a blast of wind in a narrow place, they passed them by. Sick with horror, Tom pulled up. Subdul struck a match, set fire to a torch of brushwood which he had been making as they went along, and swung it round his head, upon which there was another wild flight, and another prolonged shriek, which went on for a few moments and then died away in the distance.

'The wild creatures have scented the deed of blood,' said Subdul. 'These are jackals! And see, my master, see!'

As he spoke they came into an open space and Subdul waved his torch again. On the instant there was an awful, indescribable tumult, and in the next the heavens were darkened by the wings of gigantic birds. For a few moments they hovered overhead, casting their dread shadows on the moonlit earth, and then sailed slowly away to the grove which the riders had left.

'Does my master wish to see more?' said Subdul. 'They are there.' He pointed to a group of trees near the centre of the garden, under which they could faintly distinguish a mass of something dark.

'Subdul! Subdul!' cried the young fellow, piteously, 'I cannot bear it.'

'There is no need. I told my master that he could do nothing. Let us consider our own safety and go back,' said Subdul.

'But if any of them should be alive?'

'It is impossible. The fiends have done their work too well.'

'I must look for the child, Subdul. If she is there—but she cannot be; she cannot.'

'Listen,' said Subdul. 'What is that?'

They stopped. A low piping, sweet and clear, like the voice of an English song-bird in the fresh dawn of the summer morning, fell upon their ears. It came from a rose thicket, which lay to the right of the path. In a second Tom was on his feet and had thrown his reins to Subdul Khan. He stood for a moment listening, moving softly in the direction whence the sounds had come, and then stood again. He could now hear a little flutter, as of frightened breathing, and could dimly discern a white figure moving amongst the bushes.

With a beating heart he went nearer. A fugitive, probably a native servant, who would be able to tell him what he desired to know. He was almost afraid of moving, lest he should startle her, and was pondering how he could make known that he was a friend, when the piping bird-like voice, which he had first heard, began again:

> There is a happy land, Far, far away,
> Where saints in glory stand, Bright, bright as day.

Sweetly the baby-voice lisped the sweet words. He could scarcely restrain himself. He made an involuntary movement, and the voice of the woman, faint with terror, came towards him. 'Hushee! Hushee! Missy Sahib. Some one is near.'

'God is near,' piped the little sweet voice, 'I saw His wings. They were so big, so big! I want Him to carry us away. I am so tired, and I don't like hiding all this time. Do you think He will?'

'Missy! Missy!' cried the poor creature. 'Get up; come away. They have seen us.'

'Tom said he'd come,' murmured the child.

The poor woman seized the child in her arms, but, before she could run, a hand was laid on her garments, and a voice, which, paralysed as she was with terror, she recognised as the voice of a friend, called her by her name.

In the next moment Aglaia had leapt from her arms, and was lying in the close embrace of her friend. He could not speak. Man as he was, his eyes were full of tears and his voice was choked with sobs. Holding the child to his breast, he guided the frightened ayah gently over the broken ground.

Then, as he recovered, he began to murmur broken words of thanksgiving and endearment. 'My little darling! My treasure! You are safe! They may tear me limb from limb, but they shall not hurt you. Oh! thank God, thank God! that I have found you.'

As for the child, she said not a word. She clung to his neck. And so, coming back softly, they found Subdul and the horses, and set off together—the child in Tom's arms, and the ayah riding behind Subdul—for the village where they had friends.

They went slowly, keeping close under the shelter of trees and houses. No one molested them. Fortunately for themselves they were in the outskirts of the city and cantonments, and throughout that dreadful night the revolted sepoys and the Ranee's body-guard were too busy setting fire to the Europeans' dwellings, and raking the ashes for treasure, to pay any heed to stragglers. In a short time they were out in the open country, and now they rode on more securely.

Aglaia was fast asleep in Tom's arms. The ayah had regained her powers of speech, and she poured out her history of all that had happened. The sahibs had gone into the Fort. She would not take the child in, for she knew what the soldiers were and she did not trust them. She flew by a secret way to the garden, and there they hid, she feeding the child on what she could find.

Did little Missy ask for her mother? Oh! yes, again and again; but she (ayah) told the child that the Feringhees' God had taken her away to stay in Paradise with Him, and she was satisfied. They were in the garden when the English were brought in, all of them bound with cords. It had been a long and sultry day, and the little one was asleep. Sumbaten heard, she dared not look. There were cries, but they were soon over, and then the soldiers went away, and everything was still. 'Missy was dreaming of you, Sahib,' she said to Tom, 'to-day and the day before. She began to sing when she awoke, and she said you were coming. Did your God tell her?'

He did not answer, but he pressed the child closer to his heart.

Of their further journey there is no space here to tell in any detail, nor do I know much concerning its incidents. In my friend's diary it is only briefly mentioned, and he suffers from a curious confusion of ideas whenever he thinks of it. It was due, doubtless, in a great measure to the admirable arrangements which Tom and his servants had made beforehand that

they were able to carry it through successfully, for in every village on the route there were those who knew the Rajah of Gumilcund, and were ready to serve him. Once he was obliged to fall back on the pass given to him by Dost Ali Khan, who, as he presently found, was becoming a power in the land. What he most dreaded was an encounter with the White Ranee, but being careful to travel by night and along the unfrequented routes, all of which were well known to Subdul, he succeeded in avoiding her. He heard, however, that she continued to haunt the district, and that her armed train was constantly recruited by the soldiers whom Dost Ali Khan seduced.

After that first night, Aglaia and the ayah travelled in a litter, as ladies of high rank. The child's skin was stained, so that she might pass for an Indian, and Subdul, whose resources were boundless, managed to get a suitable dress for the ayah. As a general rule they camped out in the open, when Aglaia would amuse them with her quaint ways and sayings. Some days she would be as happy as if nothing had happened. At other times she cried piteously for her mother and father, and it was only when the ayah, who had a vivid imagination, assured her that she had seen God carrying them away to heaven that she would be pacified. 'Why didn't He take me too?' she would sometimes ask, a question which none of them found it easy to answer.

Happily for herself, she had not, like other little ones, seen the horror that would ever after haunt them like a nightmare; and day by day, as new scenes passed before her eyes, and fresh experiences greeted her, the memory of her nurse's frenzied flight, and of the two days in the garden, grew fainter. She still thought of her parents, but it was reproachfully, rather than sadly. They might have taken her with them when they went up to God. But this, after all, was ayah's fault, rather than theirs. Ayah had taken her away and hidden her. Tom said she had hidden her for him, which to Aglaia, who was now as deeply devoted to him as she had been on board the 'Patagonia,' was a sufficient explanation.

So, after several days and nights of travelling, they reached the borders of Gumilcund.

What an entry it was! Stranger even and more memorable than the young rajah's first arrival in the city that he was called upon to govern.

Runners had been sent out in every direction to seek for him, and when, late in the afternoon of a sultry June day,

one of these came back with the joyful news that their rajah, bringing fugitives with him, was actually within the boundaries of the state, the enthusiasm of the people could no longer be suppressed. They poured out in their hundreds, armed men accompanying them, while in front of them rode Chunder Singh, the minister, and Vishnugupta, the priest, and when they saw the little group—the litter and its bearers, and the two horsemen riding beside it—joyous acclamations and shouts of welcome, and ejaculations of praise and thanksgiving, rent the air.

CHAPTER XXVI

CAPTAIN BERTIE'S FAQUIR

In Meerut those days had been days of trouble. On the 24th of May, the day following General Elton's arrival in the city, a strong detachment had marched out to join the troops that were fighting their way to Delhi. Many of the residents were of opinion that this decrease in their defensive force would seriously affect their safety; and night after night there were panics. But nothing happened. The rebels, who were daily and hourly being recruited by fresh regiments, had higher game to fly at, and it would not have suited their purpose to sit down before a strong and well-provisioned place like Meerut and wait for its surrender. This the principal men of the station began to realise at last, so that there was a greater sense of security.

In the tent where the Eltons lived there was deep distress and sorrow, for the general was dangerously ill. Fatigue, exposure, and mental anguish, aggravated by the pain of his wound, which proved more serious than they had at first imagined, had done their work. So long as the strain was upon him he kept up. When it was relaxed he fell. But for the perfection of his health and the iron strength of his will, he must have died that night. For himself, it may have been fortunate that his senses soon deserted him; but piteous it was to the poor woman who loved and honoured him to hear the wild ravings of those awful days and nights. It was all about his soldiers. They were his children, his little ones. He believed in them as he believed in himself. Springing up

in bed, he would call the bystanders to witness how brave and true they were. He would challenge an imaginary adversary to question their faithfulness, asserting his own intimate knowledge of their character. Again and again he would recite the brilliant deeds of arms to which he had led them, and relate how they had delivered him from a cruel death. His gentle wife, waiting patiently by his bedside, wept bitterly as she listened. With all her dread of the future, and passionate sorrow and pity, she feared his returning to himself. If he was to be taken away, would it not be better for his sake that he should go now, before his heart was pierced by the dread knowledge of the truth? And as day after day went by, bringing little or no change in his condition, they began to fear that so it would be.

There was another anxiety pressing upon them. Through all these days no word had been heard of Grace. Whether the troops at Nowgong had been faithful, or whether they had risen, no one at Meerut knew. To poor Lady Elton, watching by her husband, and looking at the pale faces of her girls, as they came and went sorrowfully, doing what they could to help her, it would seem sometimes as if Grace was the dearest of all.

She was her first-born. It was her little plaintive voice, and the touch of her baby-hands, that had awakened in her heart the rapturous joys of motherhood. From beautiful girlhood she had blossomed under her eyes into a womanhood that was no less lovely. Always gentle, always good—too good, the mother said to herself now, with a contraction of heart that almost made her swoon. And it was not only the dread of losing her. If she had lain where her father lay, if they had known that in a short time she would breathe her sweet life away, bitter as the pang would have been, she might have borne it. It was this horror worse than death—this uncertainty—that slew her. It numbed her senses, till she wondered at her own indifference. It shattered her faith, so that, forgetting the others—the young creatures who depended upon her—she cried out piteously to a cruel God to slay her, and then wept and bemoaned herself over her own wickedness and hardness of heart.

Sometimes those about her saw a wild look in her eyes, as if she would do some desperate deed. Yaseen Khan, the faithful bearer, who could read her face as if it were an open book, saw it, and late one night, when he and she were alone

watching, he crept to Trixy's bedside and awoke her. 'Mem Sahib is ill,' he said, brokenly. 'Let Missy Sahib come and see.'

In a moment Trixy was on her feet. They all slept in those days so as to be ready for any alarm. 'What is it, Yaseen?' she said.

He led the way to the General's bedside, and Trixy saw her mother, whom she had left sitting beside him quietly in dressing-gown and slippers, putting on her boots and throwing a shawl about her shoulders. She looked up when the girl approached her. 'I am glad you have come, dear,' she said very quietly. 'Father is asleep; I think he will do now, so I I am going to look for Grace. You will help Yaseen to take care of him while I am away.'

'But, darling,' said Trixy, flinging her strong young arms about her mother, and making her sit down, 'you can't now. It is the middle of the night.'

'That is why,' whispered poor Lady Elton; 'don't you see, you little goose, that they won't let me go in the daytime? Now, like a good child, loose me. There will be plenty of time for kisses when Grace comes back.'

'Mother darling, you are dreaming. Will you leave us all, father and the rest of us? And you couldn't find her alone. Mother, listen to me. God help us!' cried the poor child, 'she doesn't understand. Yaseen, help me! She will die if she goes out.'

'She will die! she will die!' echoed the poor fellow. 'Missy Sahib, it is of no use.'

'It is of use, and she shall not die. Yaseen, you are an idiot,' cried Trixy. 'Call Maud Sahib, and run as fast as you can for the doctor.'

The interruption, meanwhile, had confused the unhappy mother, and she was looking before her in bewilderment.

'He left the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness,' she murmured, 'and went after the one that was lost. Why did it come into my head? I can't remember. And lost! Who is lost? Not Grace, you silly child! She has been sitting beside me all night. I thought she was being hurt, but it was all imagination. No one could hurt Grace.'

'No, no one,' echoed Trixy, whose eyes were full of tears.

'There; I was sure of it. But your father has been going on so strangely.'

'Father is asleep,' said Trixy. 'He will see things more

clearly when he awakes. You ought to sleep, too, mother, and then you will be ready to talk to him.'

'Sleep; yes, I should like to sleep, but I can't. There is something strange in my head and it keeps me awake. What is that? What is that?'

'Only the doctor,' said Trixy, springing to the curtain before the door of the tent. 'And—and—Bertie.'

Maud had joined them in the meantime.

She had more power over her mother than Trixy, and between her and the doctor Lady Elton was persuaded to take a composing draught and to lie down. Trixy in the meantime drew her friend Bertie aside. 'Something must be done,' she said, 'or my poor mother will go mad. Can't you help us?'

'God knows,' he answered earnestly, 'that I would if I could. I asked to be allowed to take out cavalry and scour the country. I feel certain that I should have brought back news at least. But I am forbidden. Lives, they say, are too precious to be wasted in profitless enterprises. If I had no command I would go out alone.'

'That would be much too dangerous,' said Trixy, shuddering. 'We must think of something else. How would it do for one of us to go out disguised?'

'One of *you*!' said Bertie with a sad smile.

'Well, *me*, if you will have it. I could dress up as a native woman, and I know their way of talking. Listen while I mimic ayah.'

'But, my dear girl, don't you know that the poor native servants are as much hated as ourselves? Numbers of them have been killed already. Besides, what would you do?'

'I might at least find out where Grace is, and then, perhaps, you would take out soldiers to rescue her.'

'An impossible plan,' said the young fellow. 'But——'

'Well, Bertie, go on for Heaven's sake! Have you thought of anything?'

'I have made no plan, if that is what you mean. I was only thinking—have you heard, by-the-by, where the young fellow is who visited you here two months ago? You called him Tom.'

'Curiously enough I was just thinking of him,' said Trixy. 'He has large estates somewhere in Central India, left him by a cousin or some one of that sort, who was an Indian rajah. Maud and I felt sure that he would become an Indian too.

He was very much changed when we saw him. In England long ago he used to be fond of Grace. What made you think of him now?'

'I have just had rather a curious piece of news. I meant to find out all I could about it, and tell you later. They say that a new sort of character has sprung up in these parts—an English rajah. The story is so romantic that I can scarcely believe it. The state he has come over to govern is an ideal place, a kind of little Paradise, so at least they tell me, where for the last two or three generations the most admirable laws have been in force. The late rajah seems to have been half a philosopher and half a saint. He bequeathed his rule to a young man brought up in England, recommending him to his people by a curious fiction. He said, it appears, that in the person of this young man, who seems to be strikingly like him, he would himself return to the earth. If it was a stroke of policy, it was clever and bold, for his people believed him. The story goes that they received their new rajah with acclamations.'

'It is Tom! I am sure it is Tom,' interrupted Trixy, breathlessly. 'I heard the beginning of the story at Surbiton. Father knows it all; and they said then that he had seen visions. Oh, how strange! how strange everything is! Can't we send to him?'

'Wait a moment,' said Bertie. 'I have more to tell you. The young rajah, who, of course, is on our side in this struggle, has spies everywhere, and he has managed to send one of them into Meerut. I saw the man just now. He looks like a faquir. They took him at the outposts an hour or so ago, and he has been with the General ever since. I heard from Hitchin, who was in the General's quarters, that he was from Gumilcund. I thought of waylaying him presently, and trying to send a message to his master.'

'You think of everything! What should we do without you?' said Trixy, her eyes glistening.

She lifted the curtain of the tent and looked out.

'I should like to go too,' she said. 'It would be so delightful to bring good news to dearest mother. But I suppose——'

'No, no; it would never do. You must wait patiently a few minutes. I will come back as soon as ever I can,' said Bertie.

In the silence of the tent, with only sleepers about her, Trixy waited. She would tell no one of the great hope that had sprung up in her heart, for fear it might be delusive; but she did not think it would be, and rosy visions floated before her as she sat watching. The darkness waned, and the light came pouring in, and, remembering suddenly her dishevelled condition, she ran back to her own compartment of the tent, and made herself trim and neat. Then she looked in upon her father and mother, who were, both of them, asleep. The doctor had been with them since Yaseen Khan brought him back. He smiled at the bright little maiden, and told her that if she would have a cup of coffee made for him he would remain with her parents until they awoke.

'They are both better,' he said; 'but I rather dread their coming to themselves.'

'Oh!' said Trixy, with a radiant smile. 'I think I shall have good news for them.'

By this time the three other girls were stirring, and Trixy, who wished to be the first to hear the good news, went out into the compound.

It was scarcely day, for the sun had not leapt above the hard rim of the horizon; but there was a bright diffused light in the sky, and the night-breeze was sinking to rest. This was the hour when, in the dear old days of peace and freedom, they used to return from their morning ride, she and Bertie, as often as not, riding together, and Maud and Lucy, each with her own attendant, laughing and talking in front of them. They never talked seriously. That was not their way. Grace was the only serious one of the family. Banter, and chaff, and jokes, whose very feebleness made them laugh, formed the staple of their talk. Then would come the gay little breakfast in their lovely verandah, crimson and purple and azure-blue flowers peeping in at them between the pillars, and the foliage of their glorious fig-tree making a screen against the sun. As in a dream Trixy saw it all—her gentle mother and Mildred, who was too timid to ride, waiting for them, and the guests who would drop in—the gallant young colonel of General Elton's favourite regiment, who had paid with his life for his reckless confidence in his men, and the judge of the High Court, with his delightful inimitable stories of Hindu and Eurasian pleaders: he had gone too, dying at his post like a gallant gentleman: and his daughter, pretty Ellice Meredith, whom they all loved, although she could not do

much more than quote 'papa;' Ellice, who had died of fright and anguish when she heard the awful news—these and many others, some with them, and some taken away; but all changed. 'I wonder,' said poor little Trixy to herself, 'if we shall ever, ever have the heart to laugh again.'

She did not feel much like laughing then; but in the next moment, to her own great surprise, she found herself laughing heartily. The figure which provoked this explosion—it was that of a tall man wrapped in a white garment, having his forehead streaked with red and white clay, and carrying a staff in his hand—joined in her laugh, and then said, with some touch of disappointment, 'I didn't think you would know me at once.'

'Didn't you, Bertie?' cried the girl. 'Well, I'm sorry I disappointed you; but I'm ridiculously keen-sighted, everyone says, and then I know you so well. Try some one else.'

'I have tried the General. He was quite at sea; thought I had come in with some wicked intention.'

'But what is it for?' asked Trixy.

'I am going out with the faquir.'

'Oh!' she gasped. 'Why?'

'Didn't we agree that some one ought to go?' he said.

'Yes; but——' She paused to check down her tears.

Bertie was looking at her strangely. He would think her a coward, a goose. And so she was, but she could not help herself.

'Go away!' she said, in a stifled voice.

'Go away, Trixy!'

'No; don't. I—I am a fool. Tell me——' And here, to her own consternation and wrath, she broke down completely, and began to sob and cry like a child.

Bertie went closer to her. His heart, too, was curiously soft. To see this wild, glorious, high-spirited little creature, whose courage and audacity he had so often admired, sobbing with childish abandonment, was almost more than he could bear. 'You are generally so brave,' he said, in a choked voice. 'Why——'

'Oh; don't ask me!' she sobbed. 'Everything has been so strange; and I was thinking of the old days. What fun we used to have! And—and—Bertie, you will take care of yourself?'

'Darling, I will try.'

The endearing word had sprung from him unwittingly;

but, having escaped, it could not stand alone. He paused for a few moments to collect himself, and then went on gravely: 'You will say that this is no time to speak of ourselves. I think so too; and yet, for one moment, just for one moment—Trixy, give me that little hand; let me hold it while I tell you what you are to me, you bright, beautiful, brave little creature!'

'Hush, Bertie! hush!' she interrupted brokenly. 'You mustn't; you don't know me in the least. It is you who—but I shall make you conceited if I say any more. And,' with a rainbow-like smile, 'we always tabooed tu-quoques in our nursery. Come back safely, and we shall see.'

'See what, Trixy?'

'That is for you to say, not me,' she said, dropping a little curtsey. 'But I am better now; and so, I hope, are you. Tell me about Tom. Does the faquir come from him?'

'I think so. The man brought a letter for your father or mother. It is only a scrap of paper. He carried it in a quill, which he says he could have swallowed if he had been searched. Will you take it in?'

'They were both asleep when I came out,' said Trixy, 'so I think I may venture to read it.'

She opened the little roll, read the words it contained, and gave a joyful exclamation. They were as follows:—

'I have just come back from Jhansi, with fugitives. Nowgong has risen, but there has been no violence; and my men are on the track of your daughter Grace. I hope she will be brought in to-morrow.

'THOMAS GREGORY,
'Rajah of Gumilcund.'

'There was another letter for our General,' said Bertie when Trixy had read these words to him. 'It contained an urgent request that some trustworthy and intelligent person should be sent to him. He suggested this disguise, and I got myself up in it with the help of the faquir.'

'When will you start?' said Trixy, who was trying to speak firmly.

'The faquir thinks we had better wait until dusk. After we are outside it will be all right, for our supposed sacred character will ensure us respect. But no one must see us leaving the station.'

'Then come in and breakfast with us, and we shall see if the others recognise you.'

The experiment was perfectly successful; for when, preceding Trixy, the strange figure of the priest appeared suddenly in the compartment of the tent where the girls were at breakfast, they flew away with stifled cries, and Trixy had some little difficulty in persuading them that he was a friend in disguise.

When they were all certain of one another it was decided that neither of their invalids should hear of the dangerous experiment until it was over.

To Trixy fell the joyful task of taking in the precious letter to her parents. She found them better. Lady Elton had forgotten her painful dream of the night before, and the General was returning slowly to consciousness. In the midst of the deep depression that weighed him down, as the reality of what had for so many days seemed like a vision forced itself upon his heart, this news of Grace came like a single ray of sunshine.

'If I bring you all safe out of it,' he said to his wife, 'I shall perhaps be able to forgive myself.'

Through the melancholy days which followed Bertie's departure, this was the burden of his cry—could he forgive himself? His wife and the girls reasoned with him. He had not, they said, been more deceived than others. That these Indians were inscrutable beings the curious inconsistency of their actions showed. One and another came in from outside to sit with him, and they spoke in a similar strain; but his answer was always the same: 'If I didn't know, I should have known. I am not fit for my post. I will lay it down.' Still more pitiful were his outbursts of wrath against himself for what he called his light-hearted folly, in taking his wife and five daughters from their quiet home, and exposing them to the danger and horror of this terrible time. 'I am a fool, an idiot,' he said to one of his friends one day. 'Think of it! Those six innocent creatures—so innocent and helpless, that they don't know the full horror of their situation—suffering for me, because I was a blind, credulous fool! God in heaven! It is almost more than a man can bear!'

This from the stern, self-contained man who, only a few weeks before, had ridden boldly through a hostile country, commanding the respect of the fiercest enemies of his race, by his magnificent audacity, was infinitely pitiful.

And meanwhile Trixy's brave little heart fell, for there came no news from Bertie. During the latter days of June they heard little news of any kind at Meerut. The surrounding country had fallen back into the state of anarchy from which the strong hand of the British Government had redeemed it. In all the towns where there had been risings, the gates of the gaols had been thrown open, and convicts, released from their fetters, joined themselves to men of their caste—robber tribes, who had of late years been compelled to earn their bread by honest toil, but who had never lost their longing for the dear old days of rapine. These roamed through the country, committing deeds of violence everywhere. Turbulent spirits—dispossessed landowners in many cases and adopted sons of dead rajahs—went, with their followers, from village to village, raising forced contributions for the Holy War. With them came men of professed sanctity, Indian faquirs and Mohammedan moulvies, who carried firmans from the emperor, enthroned, as they asserted, in Delhi, and distributed, in his name, high-sounding titles and robes of honour. There were, indeed, moments of uneasiness amongst them. The battle of Ghazee-ood-deen-Nugger, between Delhi and Meerut, on the 31st of May, and the still more notable victory at Budlee-Ka-Serai, only five miles from the Imperial city, showed them that the race they were defying had life in it still. But what they lacked in audacity they gained in numbers. The English victories, moreover, decisive as they were for the moment, had little permanent effect. The army was like a swimmer in a stormy sea. As, with force and skill, they clove one wave of humanity, others surged up behind them innumerable, and not the wisest could say whereto this thing would reach. The people were encouraged to think that it would have no end; that from north to south, and from east to west, the whole of the land would rise in insurrection.

It is difficult, however, to make any adequate picture of what the state of India actually was in that disastrous year. We who were in the midst of it have forgotten, our impressions have grown dim. Those who were not lack the sense which would enable them to grasp it. For security is the watchword of our modern life. To be robbed of this—to live consciously, day and night, on the brink of an abyss—to see the earth open, and the subversive forces, which are for ever underlying it, break upwards in ravage and desolating fury—to have all our softnesses and superiorities swept away, and, in their place, terror,

nakedness, and an aching sense of our own insignificance—who of us all can fitly image it? I cannot, I know, although I took part in it all long ago. Yet sometimes, even now, a nightmare vision will flash it all back again. I will hide, breathless, in the jungle; I will listen to the shouts of infuriated mobs that seem to be always at my heels; I will plunge into a river and strike out for dear life; I will crawl on shore at dead of night to rest my aching limbs, and measure sadly the distance that divides me from my friends; I will listen to tales that make the hair of my flesh stand up with horror, and try feebly to understand that they were our very own—the dear women and fair children that made the rapture of our lives—who have been hacked and hewn, and torn limb from limb, by fiends in human form. I will feel the blood in my body like fire, and the strength of a hundred will rush into my limbs, and I will grasp my weapon and slay—slay—till my heart is sick and my head faint; and still there will be the same awful, insatiable thirst that nothing can slake. And then, trembling, I will awake, and fall down on my knees and thank the Father of Mercies that the terror is over, and that the greater number of those who took part in it—Indians as well as English—are at rest.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BREAKING OF THE MONSOON

We return to Gumilcund, where Tom had been established several days. The warmth of the welcome he had received and the calmness and wisdom of Chunder Singh, his Counsellor, had helped him to regain the balance of mind which he had nearly lost in the late expedition. It was perhaps fortunate for him that he had no time to brood over the terrors of the hour. There was much stir in the city, and so soon as it was known that the rajah had come back, nothing was done without consulting him. It gave him a sad sort of amusement to find that he was looked upon by many not as a sovereign alone but as a supernaturally gifted oracle. And, in fact, he was often surprised by his own insight. Stranger as he was, he seemed to see instinctively into the heart of difficulties that puzzled the wisest heads in the city, and to propose solutions which were

only reached by other men after arduous and prolonged thought. No doubt this was due, in a great measure, to the study he had given to the politics of India, and especially to the constitution of his own state ; but it would come to him sometimes, with curious force, that this was not all ; but that another intelligence, higher and more original than his own, was working within him and producing ideas of which he, Tom Gregory, the English-bred youth, could never have dreamed in the days that had gone by.

His position was a critical one, for Gumilcund lay in the very centre of the seething mass of insurrection that was converting the fair region of Central India into a desert. Several of the smaller native states were looking anxiously towards her to see what she would do. Those who had already cast off their allegiance sent haughty messages, threatening untold horrors if she did not join in the Holy War. The English Resident, who had courageously forced his way back to his post on the first hint of danger, used his influence on the other side ; but this, as we have seen, was not necessary. Gumilcund had already taken her part. In one particular Tom was more fortunate than his loyal neighbours, his army, owing to the wise provisions of former rulers, being recruited from the lower and not the higher castes. Although, therefore, as a body of men, they were less magnificent to look upon, they had in them a root of loyalty that was altogether lacking in the haughty Brahmins and proud Mohammedan warriors who formed the bulk of the Company's native contingent.

It was now proposed by the Resident that a body of these faithful troops should be sent to Delhi to help in the siege. On consulting Chunder Singh and Vishnugupta, both of whom knew the minds of the people, Tom found that nothing would please them more than that the army should be employed in such service.

Being thus satisfied, he announced his wish, which was responded to joyfully. Throughout the city there ran a glad tumult of expectation. Hundreds of trained men offered themselves as volunteers ; and, out of these, a picked body of horsemen and foot soldiers was chosen, the command being given to a young officer of the Kshatriya caste, who had been brought up in the household of the late rajah.

Tom was overwhelmed, in the meantime, with sorrows of his own. He thought of his friends—the stubborn old General, of whom he had heard as travelling through the disturbed

districts with a weak escort—sweet Lady Elton and the girls—his companions of the tranquil voyage in the 'Patagonia,' which seemed so long ago; and all of them seemed to be crying out to him to help them.

One effort he had made, and this, as we have already heard, had been so far successful that his agent, the versatile Subdul Khan, who could be groom, snake-charmer, pedlar or holy man at pleasure, had forced his way into Meerut and delivered the two messages, for answers to which Tom was now impatiently waiting.

He had written hopefully; but he was far from feeling easy; and, in fact, as day after day went by, bringing no news of Hoosanee, an anxiety for which words have no name took possession of him.

During the day-time he managed to keep up an appearance of cheerfulness; but at night, when everyone was shut out, and that curious double consciousness which was at once a comfort and a bewilderment would retire into the background of his being, there would rise from his tortured spirit a great and bitter cry. Grace—his beautiful, tender darling—lovely as a vision, pure as a saint, Grace, whom he would willingly have shielded, if his own life were to be the forfeit—where was she? Then, with a groan, he would spring up and pace the marble floor of his chamber, and fling his arms about as if he were at war with demons, and cry out to the All Merciful to kill him, and to let his darling live out her sweet young life in peace.

It was one of these restless nights towards the middle of June. All day long he had been hard at work and almost unconscious of any special pain. It had been sultry exceedingly, the skies like molten brass, save over the western horizon, where leaden-coloured clouds were gathering in battalions, and the touch of the earth like a thrice-heated furnace. Tom, who was so much exhausted that he thought he must sleep, visited the little Aglaia, as was his nightly custom, listened for a few moments to the prattle of her and her ayah, and then retired to his own apartment. It was in this room that the late rajah had breathed his last; on which account partly, and also for its space and coolness, and the beautiful view from its low latticed windows of the fantastic Indian garden, and the little azure-blue lake, and the low green hills behind the city, Tom had chosen it for his own. When he went in that night he found it dimly lighted by heavy wax candles that stood in

sconces against the wall ; the water in the marble canal that intersected it and in the small fountain that sprang from a basin in a recess at its upper end murmured dreamily, and through one of the lattices there stole in the silver rays of a young moon. At first the space and silence had a soothing effect upon him. He flung off the sword which he had been carrying all day, drew his revolver out of his belt, and threw himself down, just as he was, on one of the thick padded mattresses that lay on the marble floor. But he could not sleep. The moment he laid his head down upon his pillow the torturing thoughts began again, and he was obliged at last to spring from his bed, and to court the physical weariness which might bring sleep by pacing his room rapidly. The heat was stifling, or was it the fever in his blood ? He could not tell ; but he thought that, with all his strange experiences, he had never felt so strange as now, and for a few moments he forgot everything, even to the horror that was continually haunting him, in watching his own sensations.

Flames ! leaping flames ! Every part of his body was enveloped in them. They rose above his head, filling his eyes with blood ; they made the veins of his body their pathway ; he saw them before him, lying in fiery pools on the marble pavement, so that his feet were rooted to the ground and he dared not stir. This for a few moments, during which he fought passionately to regain his self-possession. Then, shutting his eyes, he made a dash for one of the marble lattices and laid his forehead against the hard, cold stone. It seemed to him presently that his senses were slipping away from him—that he was falling into a stupor or swoon ; and he must actually have lost consciousness for a time ; but how long it lasted he could not tell. A breath of cool air, soft and tremulous as the kiss of loving lips, aroused him ; and, with a curious sense of refreshment at his heart, he looked out. At first he saw nothing. It was the hollow blackness of a moonless Indian night that smote upon his eyeballs. Then, gradually, he began to see dim ghostly shapes moving in slow procession across the face of the sky. He was aware too of a curious, subdued tumult, multitudinous whisperings, growing, now and then, into a low shriek or wail, and with them a rushing noise as if winged creatures innumerable were sweeping by. With a dreamy sense of relief, which was as incomprehensible to himself as everything else about him, he stood gazing and listening and the tumult grew ; shriller and more piercing

were the voices of air and sky; the earth strained and groaned as if the invisible forces hidden within her bosom were struggling for freedom; a mighty wind, that swayed the pendent branches of the banyan-tree in the court below, and shook the withered pods of the acacias, till they rattled like dead men's bones, rushed through the garden.

Then, suddenly, everything went. The heavens vanished away in abysmal depths of blackness. The ghostly shapes in the middle air—the dim outline of the trees, the dusty whiteness of the earth—all these were gone. The monsoon had broken, and, in all the world, there was nothing else.

How they fall—those torrents, those sheets of water, rushing through the air, making the sun-baked earth hiss as they touch it—falling, with dull, delicious splash into the lake!

Tom has pressed his face close to the lattice, and put out his hands to catch the drops of water that are running from the eaves of his house.

'Now God grant there are no fugitives abroad to-night!' he says to himself.

The words have scarcely escaped his lips before a sound, more definite than those of the tempest, strikes upon his ear. Some one down below is knocking for admission. In the next instant, just as he is about to go out and see who it is, he hears a brief parley, followed by the opening and shutting of the door that leads to his private apartment. There follow a few moments of suspense, and then Ganesh, the chuprassie, who is one of the most trusted of his servants, stands before him. Ganesh carries a torch, by whose light Tom sees that there is a strange glitter in his eyes.

'What is it?' he says. 'Who came in just now?'

'Excellency,' answers Ganesh, bowing low, 'Subdul Khan, his Honour's syce, has come back.'

'Subdul! Thank Heaven! Show him in!' cries Tom, in great excitement.

'Excellency——

'Do you hear me, Ganesh?'

'Yes, master, Ganesh hears.'

'Then why——?'

'Let my master have patience! Ganesh would speak with him before he sees the Sahib.'

'A Sahib—an English Sahib?'

'Excellency, he is in the hands of Hoossein Buksh, who

will give him all he needs. He was wet through with the rain, and stained with travel, and he asked for water and fresh clothes before presenting himself to your Highness.'

'Right! Quite right! You have done well, Ganesh. But where is Subdul?'

'He is close at hand, Excellency; but let him wait. Ganesh, too, has a message for your Highness.'

'From whom?' gasped Tom. 'Hoosanee?'

'No, Excellency; and yet it has to do with the errand on which Hoosanee was sent. Had his Highness been pleased to trust Ganesh with his confidence, he might—but'—dropping his voice to a still humbler tone—'I am delaying, and your Highness, I can see, is impatient. The message of which I have the honour to be the bearer is from the illustrious Dost Ali Khan.'

'A traitor and a rebel,' said Tom sternly. 'Do you mean to tell me that one of my servants has been in communication with him?'

They were still close to the marble lattice. The storm had increased in violence, and so fearful was the tumult that they could scarcely hear one another's voices. Tom moved to the centre of the room, and, feeling almost too weak to stand, threw himself down on one of the mattresses.

'Explain yourself,' he said, as firmly as he could. 'I would not condemn you unheard.'

Ganesh had followed him; he stood at the foot of his couch, looking down upon him.

'Your Excellency,' he said, with that curious dignity which generally characterises an Indian who respects himself, 'I knew Dost Ali Khan in the days of his greatness. Was I to forsake him when he was poor and deserted?'

'Certainly not, Ganesh; but, if I am to believe what I hear, he is poor no longer.'

'If your Excellency means that Dost Ali Khan, the son of the late rajah's friend, has raised the standard of revolt, he is right. He has done it to recover his own. But to my master he means well. He has not forgotten Delhi, and his food and rest in my master's tent.'

'But the message,' said Tom impatiently.

Ganesh hesitated a few moments, then he opened his vest and drew out a small roll of paper, which he placed in his master's hand, adjusting the light so that he could read it.

'Is this from Dost Ali Khan?' said Tom.

'Let my master read what is written,' answered the chuprassie.

Tom read the message, and re-read it. Then he looked up with blazing eyes.

'Do you know what is in this, Ganesh?' he said.

'Would Ganesh read a letter that was written for the eyes of his master?' answered the man.

'That is an evasion; and I do not ask if you have read. I ask if you know.'

'Where could Ganesh have seen the illustrious Dost Ali Khan?'

'Another evasion. Will you—can you—answer me directly? Do you know, or have you any suspicion of, the contents of this letter?'

Thus directly appealed to, Ganesh hesitated. He was a good servant, but he shared the weakness of his countrymen, in that the answering of a question with straightforward directness was so difficult to him as almost to amount to a physical pain.

'If,' he murmured, 'Ganesh has his ideas, why should he speak of them? They may be wrong, and then——'

'Wrong or right, I should like to hear them. Come, Ganesh, if you love me, as I think you do, answer frankly. God knows that, for the dear sake of the woman I love, I would willingly encounter any danger; but if it were useless, if I were to thrust my feet into a cunningly laid trap without helping her, of what good would that be to any of us? Answer me, you who know the man who wrote this letter. Is it a trap?'

'Master,' cried Ganesh, forgetting his caution, 'I beseech you to take the word of your servant. It is no trap. If it had been, does his Excellency think that Ganesh would have brought the message hither? Dost Ali Khan has not forgotten my master's kindness to him in the hour of his need—how he saved his life, and fed him, and gave him shelter, and comfortable words. Of this I am certain. Further, I know not.'

'But if you know so much, you must know more.'

Still more deeply Ganesh bowed his head, but he did not speak.

'Do you mean to say more?' asked his master.

'Excellency——'

'The time is passing. I must see Subdul and the English Sahib before the morning. Do you, or do you not?'

'If my master will deign to tell his servant——'

'No, Ganesh, I will tell you nothing. You must be frank with me before I can be frank with you. This, besides, is sudden. I must think and take counsel. You cannot speak, then leave me. Call Subdul, and let Hoossein Buksh tell the Sahib that I am ready to speak with him.'

There was no disputing this command. With a lingering look of perplexity and disappointment Ganesh left the room. A few minutes later, while Tom was still puzzling over the strange script, and wondering if any dependence was to be placed upon it, Subdul Khan, dressed in his faquir's disguise, stood before him.

He sprang up. 'You have succeeded, then?' he said eagerly.

'Yes, Excellency,' said Subdul, whose dark face was glowing with pleasure. 'I gave up your Highness's letters; and the Sahib who has come back with me brings word from his lords. We carried no letters, for there were two of us, and the task was so much the greater. But the face of the Sahib will be known to his Excellency, and he will be able to trust his word.'

'I would trust no one more than you, Subdul,' said Tom affectionately. 'My own brother—the son of my mother—could not have stood by me more truly than you have done. What would you have to mark my gratitude—gold, jewels, a robe of honour?'

'I would have nothing, Excellency, until these troubles are over,' said Subdul. 'For my master to call me brother is more than sufficient reward. And here comes the Sahib. Shall Subdul leave?'

'No. Stay where you are. You have earned a right to our fullest confidence. Have you eaten?'

'Yes, Excellency. While my master was talking with Ganesh food was brought to me.'

'Then sit down and rest,' said Tom, pointing to a pile of cushions close by.

Subdul obeyed deprecatingly, though as a fact his limbs, which had been in strong exercise for many hours, were nearly giving way under him from fatigue. Then, once more, the purdah before the door was lifted, and Bertie Liston, shaved and washed, and dressed in the whitest of English linen, and the most artistically built of Tom's English suits, which fitted him almost to perfection, came in. The contrast between

this trim English gentleman and his present surroundings was so fantastic a thing that, excited and unstrung as he was, Tom could scarcely help laughing. As for Bertie, he made no bones about it; he laughed outright. Poor fellow! he was to hear in a few moments what would make him feel, like Trixy, that he would never be able to laugh again. He apologised, in the meantime, in his airy and graceful fashion.

'Excuse me, Mr. Gregory; but really this is—well—like a chapter out of Haroun El Raschid, or the other fellow, don't you know. You are Mr. Gregory, I suppose. Couldn't that good fellow, Subdul, give us a little more light on the subject? Ah! thanks,' as a pair of heavy gold candlesticks were placed on the table at Tom's elbow. 'Now we can see one another, and I begin to recognise you. We met at Meerut, if you remember, in the spring. Capital dance you gave, by-the-by. Different sort of meeting this.'

'But a good meeting all the same,' said Tom, wringing Bertie's hand. 'And you look just as you did then. Sit down. Have they given you supper?'

'Enough to go on upon,' answered Bertie, laughing. 'A magnificent meal of some kind is being prepared outside. You are a regular Monte Cristo, old fellow.'

'Then if you can wait, and are able to talk, tell me for Heaven's sake how they all are—the dear old General and Lady Elton and the girls.'

'They are pretty well, thank you. It was hoped, when we left, that General Elton had taken a turn for the better.'

'Has he been ill, then?' asked Tom.

'Ill? He has been at death's door. Haven't you heard of what he did?'

'I heard that he was travelling through the country with a small escort.'

'Yes, actually, after the mutiny at Meerut, when the troops were going off, regiment after regiment, like so many fire-rockets. I should think such a feat was never done before—rode through the most disturbed districts with only about fifty men, and not a soul molested him until he was close to Meerut.'

Here Bertie gave a dramatic account of the ambush near Meerut, and of how, by his pluck and resource, the General had extricated himself from it.

'What a grand old fellow he is!' said Tom, who had been listening with the deepest interest. 'And he is better?'

'We hope so, physically at least; but his mind is, for the present, curiously astray. I am sometimes afraid that it is a case of heart-break. He can't get over the treachery of the troops, especially of his own pet regiment, and he can't forgive himself for bringing his people over. If he knew for certain that his eldest daughter was safe, I think it would go far towards restoring him.'

'Ah!' groaned Tom, 'that is just it. If any of us knew!'

'I thought you wrote——'

'What I wrote was true then. I had reason to believe that I had a clue, but I lost it again. I should tell you that I have been in constant communication with Nowgong for some time. One of the most trusted of my servants went there several weeks ago. We were certain the detachment there would rise, and I offered an asylum to all the ladies. The officers refused, and we tried to persuade Miss Elton to come away with her cousin and another lady, but she declined. In all the station there was the most insane confidence in the native troops. Seeing I could do nothing personally, I sent my servant to watch, and stationed men of my own in the neighbouring villages. I started for Jhansi, hoping to gain the protection of the Ranee for our poor friends there. But I was taken by a troop of Dost Ali Khan's soldiers, and kept prisoner for three days. When I got away it was too late.'

'What?' gasped Bertie, who had not yet heard this awful news. 'You don't mean to say that they were——?' He could not finish.

'Massacred, every one of them, except a little child whom I saved and brought back with me,' said Tom very sadly.

Bertie groaned. 'I had friends there,' he faltered. 'Poor devils! Well——'

'It was a swift death,' said Tom. 'They gave themselves up, as they had no food, and they were brought out together. The horror was soon over. I saw them lying out under the stars.'

'For the vultures and jackals to feed upon! God! God! Do you think there is a God, for I don't. Could He—would He——?' The poor boy, for he was little more, sank down and covered his face with his hands. When he looked up his eyes were bloodshot, and his face was ghastly pale. 'I had a sister there,' he whispered, 'lately married. She was—but what's the use of talking? A baby, too, a few months old. I

went to see them in the winter, and the little rascal held out his fist for my sword. We said he was to be a soldier. Here'—leaping up—'let me go out of this. I can't stand it. I must punish the brutes, or——'

'You will, all in good time,' said Tom; 'but you must wait. We must all wait. Sit down and try to be reasonable. Remember the living.'

'Have we any right to be living—we men? Great Heavens! The tender, the helpless, the innocent! No one to defend them. If I had only been there!'

'You could have done nothing,' said Tom sadly.

'Couldn't I? Who knows? At least I could have killed some of them. O God! O God! It will kill me.'

There was a pause. Bertie was sobbing like a child. Tom sat where he was, gazing out before him—his eyes hot and dry. He, too, would have wept, but he could not. The anguish of suspense, which is even more terrible than the horror of certainty, was working within him, and the solace of tears would not come.

After a few moments Bertie lifted his head. 'You will think me a poor weak fool,' he said feebly, 'but, by Heaven, who could help it? I heard of them only a few weeks ago. They were pitying us, and feeling confident about themselves. The good Ranee would take care of them. Had she a hand in it?'

'I dare not say,' answered Tom. 'All I know is that she had herself proclaimed as an independent ruler, so she has at least consented to it. But why talk about what is over? We have something to do in the present, you and I. Here in Gumilcund we are staunch, thank God! and our object is one. We are weaving a net about the feet of these murderers of women and children, and you must help us. That was my reason for sending to Meerut. Now at last I hope the English Government will find out who its true friends are. In the meantime, Captain Liston, we must forget our private vengeance. It will be swallowed up in the larger. Are you listening to me?'

'Yes, yes. Only tell me what to do and I will do it.'

There followed a conversation, into the details of which it is not necessary to enter here, for the daring plans which it initiated, and which were afterwards adopted by the English rulers in this region of India, form part of the general history of the war.

When morning broke over the storm-swept country they left Tom's sleeping-room and went out into the banqueting-hall, where a fine repast had been spread out by the rajah's servants.

In the course of the morning they parted. Bertie, accompanied as before by Subdul Khan, went back to Meerut to lay Tom's sagacious proposals before the General in command there, while the rajah rode in state to the principal gate of the city to bid farewell to the gallant little army that was setting out for Delhi.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A LITTLE BAND OF FUGITIVES

We must now turn aside for a few moments to relate as nearly as we can the experiences of a little band of fugitives who, late that evening, crossed the boundaries of Gumilcund. It was pitifully small, consisting of three ladies and one little child. For ten long days and nights these had been upon the road. Through the day they had lived huddled together in filthy huts and cattle byres, doing nothing, trembling at every sound, and passionately wishing the long hours away. At night, when the sun had gone down, and the brief twilight of the Indian evening had faded, the mysterious native guide, who from the beginning had stood by them, nobly risking his own life more than once in their defence, would come and lead them out to where an ekka or native cart drawn by two small bullocks would be in waiting, and while darkness lasted they would toil on.

It was a dreary journey, full of hardships and sickening anxiety, but, for the most part, uneventful; and as day followed day and night night, bringing no change, some of the poor creatures began to feel as if there was to be no end, as if they were destined so to go on for ever. Had they known what others were going through at that very time they might have been more reconciled to their own hard lot. For their strange guide was curiously regardful of their comfort. Every day and every night he brought them as good food as he could

procure, with fresh warm water to wash in, and such fruit as could be found in the markets, neither asking nor accepting payment, while in every possible way he consulted their convenience. What his motive could be it was difficult to imagine. One of the ladies may have had some idea, but she chose to be mysterious. Nevertheless her confidence, which was apparent from the first, gave confidence to the others, all of whom had followed her lead when they decided to trust this man. They were beginning, in fact, to live down their fears, and to believe that he did really mean well towards them, when their confidence was shaken by the awful occurrence which I must relate.

They had been travelling for nine days, and they were now only one day's journey from their place of rest. This their guide, whose face became more radiant as they advanced, assured them one morning. A day of confinement, a night's jolting over the rough country ways, and their trials would be over.

On the night that followed this announcement they set forth upon their journey with lighter hearts than usual. The guide pressed their pace. For two days past storms had been threatening, and he was anxious to get in before the breaking of the monsoon season. He was not, however, very uneasy, for there were now no formidable streams between them and their goal, and the stout covering of the cart would protect the ladies from the worst of the rain.

The awful blackness which precedes a storm in India fell upon the little party two or three hours after they had started. There were then in the ekka four ladies and two children. The guide, who was walking at the bullocks' heads, stopped them for a moment to draw down the curtains of the cart, when one of the ladies said she would faint if she were kept so close, and another begged to be allowed to get down and walk beside the bullocks. The guide demurred ; but the darkness was so great, and the place seemed so solitary, that he was easily persuaded to give way to her wish. She alighted, and the elder of the two children, in spite of the earnest entreaties of his mother, not, however, reinforced by the other ladies, who were rather glad to be rid of him for a few moments, followed her.

This change gave a little comfort in the cart, which went on quietly for some time, the lady outside holding the guide's

girdle to help herself along, and the little boy clinging to her skirts.

The road along which they were moving was bounded by woods that made walls of blackness on the right hand and on the left. The sky was entirely covered. There was not a ray of light anywhere; but the guide, who knew the road well, had not the least fear. He was, in fact, congratulating himself on the darkness, which made a refuge for them, when suddenly his heart was paralysed by a sound of terrible significance. Even the poor beasts shivered as it rang through the woods. 'Deen! Deen!' It came from the right hand and from the left, filling the black spaces with its echoes. 'Deen! Deen!' It was the Mussulman battle-cry, and it was coming nearer—nearer, enveloping them, floating towards them on the wind.

A stifled scream came from those within the ekka. 'Silence, in Heaven's name!' hissed the guide. 'The darkness is our only hope.'

Then to the lady who stood erect by his side: 'Missy Grace, it is all over with them. The sepoys have lights. They will see the cart. But for you and the child there is yet a chance. Stand where you are!'

She obeyed him without a sound. He felt about on hands and knees and then came back to her. 'There is a nullah close by,' he whispered; 'hide!'

Scarcely knowing what she did, but hoping against hope that she might save her darling Kit, Grace, following the directions of the guide, leapt into a shallow ditch, and drew the long grass over herself and the child. 'If they let me live, I will come back to you,' he whispered; 'if not, go on straight to the next village and say that Hoosanee, the servant of the Rajah of Gumilcund, has sent you to his father. He will guard you till you reach the city. Farewell, noble lady!' And he returned to the cart. In the next moment Grace saw the flashing of torches and heard the trampling of armed men in the woods. Kit began to whimper. She breathed in his ear that, if he wished to see his mother again, he must be brave and good, and pressed him close against her breast to stifle his sobs. Then, with a strange composure at her heart, a feeling that the worst—the awful thing to which they had been looking forward so long—had come, she lifted herself up on hands and knees and looked out over the edge of the nullah.

Armed to the teeth, some of them riding, and others on foot carrying torches, the sepoys came pouring out of the wood. The light fell on the cart, and, with cries like those of wild creatures scenting their prey, they gathered round it. A man taller and better dressed than the others imposed silence by an authoritative word, and with a sweep of his naked tulwar thrust them back, so that they made a wide circle, having the cart in the midst of them.

The curtains were down, not a sound proceeded from within them, and the gallant guide kept his place at the bullocks' heads.

Her heart throbbing with admiration and terror, Grace watched him from her hiding-place. She heard his voice, clear and strong, as he addressed the leader: 'We are peaceful travellers. What do you want with us?'

'Draw open the curtains of that cart,' was the brutal answer. 'You have Feringhees there.'

'*You* may sin, for you have the power,' said the guide boldly. '*I* dare not.'

'Do you deny that they are Feringhees?'

'They are holy women, bound under a vow to travel by night to the sacred river. Touch them and you incur the guilt of sacrilege!'

The leader laughed out loudly. 'Tell a better tale next time, son of an ass,' he said scornfully. 'We will run the risk and see the colour of their faces for ourselves.'

Upon this the unhappy guide began to dance wildly round the cart. 'Let my lord have pity!' he cried out. 'Feringhees or not, they are women and children who have done no wrong——'

He was not allowed to finish. The leader pushed him aside, and, amid the jeers of his men, began to feel along the sides of the cart. At his touch the ladies screamed, sprang out, and fell on their knees.

How the poor girl in the nullah preserved her senses, how she kept back the scream that was clutching at her throat, she never knew. Grace, palpitating with horror, grasping with her one hand at the sides of the nullah, and with the other pressing Kit's face to her bosom, so that he could neither cry out nor see, she stood, yet never for one moment did she lose her presence of mind.

Her friends rose, ran a few paces, saw by the flare of the torches that they were surrounded, and then knelt again, and

implored piteously for mercy. For a few moments no one stirred. Then the voice of the leader broke the silence. 'I want one of you. The rest may go on their way in peace.'

Here the guide interposed with a shrill cry: 'What my lord wishes is impossible. We go on together or not at all.'

'Be silent! Who spoke to you?' said the leader.

'Excellency, for the love of the Prophet—by your hopes of Paradise, listen to me!'

'Do you hear?' roared the leader, making a dash at the poor man with his sword. 'Silence! I have to put a question to these mem-sahibs. If they answer it truly they are free. The daughter of that son of Satan, who calls himself the General Elton, is here. I am sent to take her prisoner. Let her give herself up and the rest are free!'

In the little group of trembling women there was neither sound nor stir; but their guide sprang forward.

'She is not here,' he cried.

'You lie, infidel!'

'Nay, by the Prophet's beard, I speak the truth! To satisfy you, I will give you the names of those here. Let them go on in peace, and——'

The leader broke in with an awful imprecation.

That is enough,' he cried. 'If she has escaped me, all these shall die.'

He advanced threateningly. Even as he did so there came from close at hand a voice, so clear and still that it seemed to be ringing down from the upper air. 'They shall not die,' it said, 'I am here.'

It was like a vision. Hoosanee told his master so, when, sobbing like a child, he gave him an account of his stewardship. Pale as death, but moving proudly like a queen, her head thrown back, her eyes burning under their lids, she stood suddenly amongst them—the young English girl who knew how to die.

'I am here,' she said firmly. 'Let me speak a word to the kind friend who has helped me so far, and then, if you have really any pity, kill me.'

A moment of silence followed her bold words. No one cried out. No hand was raised to touch her. Her heroism, it would almost seem, had touched some chord of gentleness even in these wild hearts.

She moved forward quietly towards her terror-stricken

countrywomen, and whispered in English that they should get into the cart again. 'Kit is close by,' she said. 'You will find him when these men have gone. I have persuaded him to keep quiet.' Then, in a lower tone, 'I will tell you for your comfort what I was afraid to tell you before. You are going to an Englishman—a dear friend of mine. Give him my love, and tell him that I thank him for what he has done, and that I thought of him even to the last. Get in, dears. Cover yourselves up. Now kiss me, and good-bye.'

'Oh, Grace! Grace! Why did you do it?' sobbed one. 'We can't go on without you, and we could all have died.'

'Yes,' said the girl, with strange solemnity, 'we can all die. Thank God for that! Lucy, you know what I have here—something swift and sudden. Tell them at home and give them my dear love.'

'But we can't leave you so,' sobbed Lucy.

'You must! Get in, Lucy. Yes, if you love me. Would you kill all of them?'

In the meantime the unhappy Hoosanee had prostrated himself at the feet of the leader, and was pouring out entreaties and denials. 'She lies, Excellency. Do not listen to her. It is to save the others that she has spoken. She is not the child of the General. She is the sister of my master, the Rajah of Gumilcund, whose servant I am. Let her go on with us, and we will bless you all the days of our life.'

So and with many more words he pleaded, but they took no more notice of his entreaties than of the blowing of the wind among the trees.

Then Grace, who had bade good-bye to her people, came forward again, and touched him on the arm.

'It is useless, my poor Hoosanee,' she said. 'They are stronger than we are. I must go with them, and you will, for my sake, take my poor friends on. Remember Kit.'

At this moment there was a wild shriek, which made Grace wring her hands and weep. 'Oh, God! have pity!' she moaned. 'Is it not enough? That is his voice; I left him insensible.'

Maddened with terror at finding himself alone, the poor child had sprung out of the nullah, and made blindly for where the torches were shining. A sepoy seized him. Grace cried out frantically and covered her face with her hands. The poor women in the cart, who thought that it was her death-cry, gave a piteous wail. Hoosanee dashed forward and seized the

barbarian's arm. 'Shame! shame!' he cried, 'it is a girl-child; give it to me!'

The light of the torches flashed on poor little Kit's long golden curls and delicate face, and there was a murmur of pity. The child was released, and he dashed headlong into Grace's arms. 'Go to Hoosanee, darling!' she whispered. 'He will take you to your mother.'

'No, no, no. I'll go with you. Take me! take me!' sobbed poor little Kit, the strain of his arms tightening.

'No, Kit, no; I can't. Oh God! It will kill me! Hoosanee, take him. Take him by force if you must. There! there!'

'Enough! Take them both,' cried the leader. A litter had been brought out. It was put down, and Grace was ordered to get into it. She made one last effort to send away Kit; but he clung to her more convulsively than ever. They got in together; the curtains were lowered; four stout coolies lifted the pole to their shoulders; a body of torch-bearers ranged themselves on either side; the horsemen and foot soldiers made a compact mass round them; and, in a few moments, they were being swung along at a swift pace—going they knew not whither.

Then Grace burst into tears, and Kit loosened his frantic grasp of her neck. 'Why did you come, child?' she said. 'You would have been safe with them. To-morrow they will be in Gumilcund.'

'But I'd much rather be with you,' said Kit, 'and it would be beastly cowardly to let you go alone. Don't cry, Grace. I'll take care of you now.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WELCOME OF A SORROWFUL SPIRIT

THE rajah had returned from seeing off his troops, and he and Chunder Singh were shut up together in close conclave. For the first time since fate had so strangely thrown them together they had been having a serious difference of opinion. The subject that divided them was the written message which the rajah had received from Dost Ali Khan, and which ran as follows:

'To-morrow the Englishwoman you seek will be in my hands. Come to me for her. Ganesh will show you the way.'

After serious thought, Tom had come to the conclusion that it would be wise at once to obey this summons—a conclusion justified no doubt by the knowledge that rest and peace of mind would be perfectly impossible to him until he had tested its truth. Chunder Singh, on the other hand, who suspected a trap—he knew that Dost Ali Khan was anxious to separate Gumilcund from the English alliance—wished him not to act precipitately, but to endeavour, before putting himself in the power of so desperate a rebel, to find out what had actually been done by Hoosanee for the Nowgong fugitives.

The discussion waxed warm, and both men grew irritated. Tom insisted on starting at once. Chunder Singh used the most cogent arguments to stop him. Tom tore the arguments to shreds and tatters. Chunder Singh produced others, of an even more telling character, which, in their turn, were demolished by the ardent youth. At last Chunder Singh showed mutinous symptoms. He couched his resistance, indeed, in the most decorous language, being as prodigal as usual of submissive words and high-sounding titles, but beneath the velvet glove the iron hand was hidden. The rajah was made to understand that, having accepted the raj, he belonged to the people over whom he ruled, and that they would protect him, even against himself, if such a step was necessary. His late expedition had caused much murmuring. Having received him back in safety from the very jaws of death, the people did not feel disposed to allow him to risk his life again. He, Chunder Singh, would, in such case, be called to account. He besought his master, for all these reasons, to be patient, hinting pretty broadly that impatience would serve no good purpose, since he would not be allowed to thrust his head into any robber's den, even for the sake of a charming young lady.

This was expressed with so much deference, and brought out in such a roundabout manner, that it was some time before its actual significance dawned upon Tom. When he did understand his wrath was extreme. Forgetting, for a moment, the Oriental manners, in which he had taken such pains to perfect himself, he stormed at his Indian counsellor in the good old English fashion. What did the fellow take him for —a fool, or an idiot? Did he really suppose that he would allow himself to be dictated to? He strongly advised him to keep for the future to his own department, and to understand

that, as far as his personal action was concerned, he intended to keep a free hand. He would exercise his own judgment with regard to his movements, and come and go at his own pleasure, without deigning to consult any of them. To all this Chunder Singh listened with an unmoved countenance. His face was a mask, behind which his irritated young master tried in vain to look. If he was surprised, if he was angry, if he was determined, it was not possible to say. They had reached this point—an uncomfortable sort of deadlock—when Tom heard light flying footsteps in the corridor, and, looking out, saw his little friend, Aglaia, running breathless towards his room.

'What is it, darling?' he said. Do you want me?'

She ran into his arms. 'Ganesh says they are coming,' she cried, 'and ayah wants me to go to bed. Mayn't I stay up to see them?'

'Who are coming, dear? What does Ganesh say?'

Ganesh was close behind her. 'Excellency,' he said, bowing low, 'a runner has come in with news from Hoosanee, his Honour's servant.'

'Well! well! go on, for Heaven's sake!'

'He has already entered the city. He brings with him some of the English sahib-log from Nowgong.'

'From Nowgong! Thank God! Chunder Singh, do you hear? They have come in. Now we can lie down in peace and sleep. Ganesh—why do you look at me so? Hoosanee, you said, from Nowgong?'

'Hoosanee, Excellency. He has come back safely.'

'And where are they?'

'The mem-sahibs are in a cart which travels slowly. The runner left them within the gate of the Princes. He came at his full speed.'

'Have Snow-queen saddled at once, and I will ride out to meet them. No, my little Aglaia, I cannot take you. It is too late, and the air is heavy after yesterday's storm. They must have been out in it, Chunder. Help him to have everything ready, Aglaia. Supper and sleeping rooms and fresh garments. Thank Heaven that I took your advice, my good friend! You always advise me well. Is Snow-queen ready, Ganesh?'

'The syces are bringing her round, Excellency. But——'

'Then don't stop me. I will listen to what you have to say presently.'

With a light and swinging step, as of one from whose mind a heavy burden has been taken, the young rajah walked along the corridor, and ran down the marble steps that led to the inner court of the palace. The night was as dark as pitch; but torch-bearers were running by the side of the horse, which had been saddled and was now being brought at a quick trot across the paved court.

In a moment Tom was in his saddle.

Chunder Singh, who had been speaking to Ganesh, sprang forward. 'Excellency,' he said in English. 'Listen to one word before you go.'

'Let it be short, then, Chunder. Snow-queen is as impatient as I am. See how she is trembling;' and he added under his breath, '*She* shall ride you to-morrow, little beauty!'

Chunder Singh, meantime, was faltering out his dreary warning, begging him not to set his hopes too high, but to prepare for disappointment.

'Disappointment! He laughed out merrily. He would not even answer the well-meant, but foolish, words. He shook his bridle-rein, and touched Snow-queen with his heel, and in a moment she was carrying him at a quick trot through the arched gateway and out into the beautiful market-place, which to-night was empty of people. The runners, carrying torches, ran before them. The night air, heavily scented with the breath of moist foliage and faded blossoms, swept by. He was madly, fiercely happy. This dark night-world was as a Paradise, in which his trembling heart was uplifted till it moved in a heaven of bliss for which words have no name. All his fine schemes, all his lofty aspirations, with the curious mysticism which had become almost a part of his being—where were they? Gone, as the vapours of morning go when the full radiance of the day has come.

Disappointment! What fool's tongue spoke that word of ill-omen? Hoosanee had come back. Hoosanee, who knew, who had read the secret of his heart—and Hoosanee had brought back fugitives. That she was not amongst them would be impossible.

So terrible, so overpowering was his joy, that there were moments of that frantic ride when he felt as if he could not bear it—as if it would kill him. Once, to the great solace of his light-carriers, who, stalwart and swift as they were, could scarcely keep up with him, he drew rein for a moment, and pressed his hand to his heart, whose wild, passionate throbs

seemed to be choking out his life. A few moments—a few moments—and then—ah! there they are—a little covered cart, stealing slowly down the road—men carrying lanterns beside it—the guide, his noble Hoosanee, walking at the bullocks' heads. Now, what an idiot he has been not to order out carriages! She—they—should not thus make their entry into his palace. But it is dark now, thank Heaven! and storms are threatening, and no one is abroad. To-morrow, when they are rested and refreshed, and clothed in fine raiment—to-morrow they will drive in state through his city.

But surely Hoosanee has seen him—why does he not hasten forward? And he is hanging his head, like one ashamed—he who has done this great and noble deed. What does it mean?

He spurs on. The cart stops, and Hoosanee approaches him, bowing low.

'Is all well—is all well, Hoosanee?' cries the poor fellow.

'Excellency, your servant has done what he could.'

'I know it; but—my good fellow, don't torture me. She is safe?'

'Sahib, she is in the hands of the All-Merciful.'

'Dead?'

'Excellency, in a few moments I will tell you all. There are three English ladies and a little child in the cart. They are fainting with hunger and weariness. Will not your Honour speak to them?'

For a moment Tom's head sank upon his breast. He could not. Then, making a fierce effort to recover himself, he dismounted, threw his reins to one of the syces and went up to the cart.

A wild white face, set round with an aureole of yellow hair, looked out at him. It was Lucy's.

'Oh!' she wailed. 'Where are we, and why are we stopping? Is this the end?'

'It will be the end of your troubles, I hope, dearest lady,' said Tom very gently.

'An English voice,' cried another lady hysterically. 'Thank God!'

'An English voice, and an English heart,' said the young rajah. 'I am taking you to my house, dear ladies. Command me as if I were your brother.'

He tried to go on, but he could not. The words choked him, and his heart was like to burst. Motioning to Hoosanee

to take the cart on, he fell back behind it. As he went he heard the ladies' voices. They were speaking joyfully one to the other, congratulating themselves on their escape. Hungrily he listened, hoping still against hope that he might have misinterpreted Hoosanee. He heard two voices—then a third, much weaker than the other two, and now and again, piercing his heart to a pity that almost slew him, the feeble wailing of a little child ; but that voice, for the least of whose vibrations he would have given his life, he heard not. And so, with a dull heart that had yet to realise the fulness of its woe, he plodded on.

The syce brought up Snow-queen, but he refused to mount her. The mechanical movement, the contact with the dull earth, seemed fittest for him ; now and then it would be to him even as if he were walking in a funeral procession—as if his youth, and all the hope and gladness of his life, were being carried out to be buried under fathoms of earth.

In the palace Chunder Singh and Aglaia had been busy, and everything was ready for the reception of the ladies. Ah! how delightful it was to the tired wanderers—all the little luxuries to which they were accustomed, the deep baths filled with warm scented waters, and the daintily spread meal, and the soft couches on which presently they would rest their weary limbs, above all, the tender, the reverential welcome. There was a solemnity—a sadness—about it that touched them curiously. But none of them knew what it had cost their entertainer to step forward as he did, and to hand them out of the cart, and to speak those kind words of sympathy and welcome.

'I am thankful to God,' he said earnestly, 'that you have found your way to me. You are safe here, for we are prepared for any number of enemies. Do me the favour of treating my house as if it was your own.'

'Oh, thank you ! thank you !' they cried in one breath. But poor little Lucy, when the hand of the rajah touched hers, broke into a torrent of tears. 'Can nothing be done for Grace ?' she wailed.

'Is she alive ?' said the rajah.

'Yes ! Yes ! Oh ! she was carried away, and we let her go—she, who had done so much for us ! I shall never forgive myself that I did not go with her. Couldn't I go now—couldn't some one ?'

'I will see Hoosanee. I will try,' said Tom chokingly.

'I think—but forgive me, I can't talk now, and you must rest. My people——'

From the corridor above, a child's laugh rang out. Kit's mother, who was one of the little company so reduced in strength now that she could scarcely speak, gave a little stifled cry, staggered forward, and would have fallen had not Tom caught her in time. 'How foolish I am!' she murmured. 'I thought it was Kit.'

'Your child,' said Tom tenderly, as, thinking of his own mother, he took her up in his strong young arms.

'Yes, my little Kit,' she moaned. 'They took him away. They were going to kill him; but they saw his beautiful curls, and they thought he was a girl. I beg your pardon for being so foolish. I think I can walk.'

But he saw that she was weaker than she thought, and he would not put her down until she was in the hands of Aglaia and her ayah.

Then he left them all to rest, sent a message to the Resident to let him know that they had arrived safely, and, at last, when he was sure that everything which hospitality demanded had been done, he sent for Hoosanee.

CHAPTER XXX

CHUNDER SINGH'S PRECAUTIONS

'TELL me everything,' said the rajah.

'I will try,' replied the poor fellow; 'but my master must not blame me more than he can help. I acted for the best.'

'Yes, yes; but—oh! Hoosanee, my servant, my friend,' cried Tom, breaking down now at last, and for a few moments giving way to his passionate grief. 'It is too terrible,' he went on, when the strangled sobs and shivering of his limbs would let him speak. 'God knows I am glad to have rescued them; but I never thought—I never imagined—that you, knowing my heart as you do, would bring back the others and not her. How could it have been?'

Then Hoosanee told rapidly the story that we know.

'It was herself, master,' he cried. 'As your Honour lives, she was safe. They would not have found her, for the night

was as dark as the jaws of hell, and to save the others I could have made a story, and the ladies would have helped me. We would have said that she was dead. I would have taken them on to my father's village and returned, when all was still, for her and the child. We should all—all have come in ; but she is a daughter of Allah—too fine—too noble even to be paralysed by fear. When she heard the Soubahdar use threatening words she came out and they carried her away. I ask my master what could I do ?'

'Nothing. You have done your best, my poor Hoosanee. And now it rests with me.'

'Not so, master. You cannot go out as I have done. You know neither the people nor their ways. If you can think who has taken her, tell me, and I will at least find out if she is alive and what treatment she is receiving Master,' —piteously—'do not deny me ! It is not for your Excellency's sake alone, although to serve you is dear to me. It is for her. Ah ! master, if you had seen her through all those nights. *They* were impatient ; they would blame me sometimes, and say that I had not done my best ; and sometimes, master, knowing a little English as I do, I could hear that they were angry with one another and the child. But *she* was always the same—always a kind look and a gentle word. "My good Hoosanee, my kind Hoosanee"—master, I hear her voice in my sleep, and I spring up and say to myself that if I do not go to her, if I do not try to save her, I am black of heart and degraded. Let me go then, I beseech you !'

'Hoosanee, it is neither fair nor right. Twice—three times —you have been in peril for me. You will become known. They will call you a spy—a spy of the Feringhees—and then what treatment can you hope for ?'

'I can die, master,' said Hoosanee nobly. 'That has been the fate of better men than I am in these last few days. But I do not think I shall die. I have that within me which says that I shall live to see these cruel days at an end. And does my master think that I will show the same face as I have done to these men ? He must know little of the resources of the Indian. I will change myself so that my own father would not know me. Did my master know Subdul Khan when he went into the midst of the enemy's camp ?'

'So you have heard of our adventure ?' said Tom. Full of anguish as he was, he smiled faintly at the memory of that strange evening. 'Subdul was certainly sublime,' he went.

on. 'But you have only just come in, and he has left. How did you hear?'

'My master's friends are everywhere,' replied Hoosanee tranquilly. 'In all this region there is scarcely a village where they are not to be found. Byrajee Pirtha Raj, our revered ruler, was well known and warmly loved. Is not my master his true son?'

'If this is so,' said Tom, his voice trembling, 'if I have many friends amongst this people, is not that the more reason that I should go forth? I must, Hoosanee, I will. I tell you that if I stay I shall go mad.'

For a few moments Hoosanee paused. Then he went nearer to his master and threw himself at his feet. 'Will my lord pardon me?' he said in a low and humble voice, 'if I speak the thing that is in my heart.'

'Say what you will, Hoosanee. After what you have done for me it would be strange if I could be angry with you. But get up and speak quickly,' said Tom. 'Before the night is over I must be gone.'

'Master, that is just it!' cried Hoosanee. 'Should my master go? Listen! My lord who has gone—the mighty and excellent Byrajee Pirtha Raj—was once in such a difficulty as this of my lord's. Duty to his State and the good of his people drew him one way. On the other side——'

'Hush, Hoosanee! I will not listen to you. I know what you would say. Chunder Singh has said it before you; but it is useless. Nay, if the voice——! Ah! Why did you recall it? I will be myself to-night. I will not be another.' He had been talking in Hindostanee. Suddenly he paused. The words of the language which in these last few weeks had become to him almost as familiar as his own fled from his lips. It was in English—the dear language that had been his from his infancy, the language in which he had learned, and dreamed, and loved, and suffered, in which he had fought his childish battles and won the praise of those who were dearer to him than his life—that the thoughts welling up hotly from his passionate heart found utterance.

'Is it not enough?' he cried—not to his servant, for he had forgotten his presence—'is it not enough? Am I to be tortured for ever? I have tried this double life, and I cannot live it; I must choose to be one, and I choose to be myself. I am Tom Gregory. I am Grace's lover.'

There was a pause, during which he seemed to be listening to voices in the air. Hoosanee threw himself on his face

and lay like one dead. Darkness gathered about them, and the silence in the great room was as the silence of the grave. And then the rajah's voice, deep and passionate, broke forth again.

'What are all these to me, cruel voice? Stay! Stay! For God's sake do not answer me yet, for I must fight this thing out with myself! She is one—an English girl, forsaken and distressed, and in danger of her life—a life that has little value for anyone but me. And they are many—thousands upon thousands. And, through them, I may influence countless myriads more. Do I not know it well? On the one side all these holding out their hands to me. On the other the little soft trembling hand of my love.' His voice broke. There followed another few moments of silence, and then he cried out again: 'Great heavens! why do I stop? Grace in danger! Is this paralysis that is stealing over me? I will shake it off. I will show them all, visible and invisible, that I have a will, that I can choose and act. Hoosanee!'

The piercing voice acted like an electric shock. Hoosanee sprang to his feet.

'I thought you were asleep,' said Tom in Hindostanee; 'as you are awake I want you to answer me two or three questions. Answer directly, for my stock of patience is nearly at an end.'

'Let my master speak,' said Hoosanee.

'If I confide in you,' said Tom, 'will you obey me blindly? Come, yes or no? I have had enough of arguments.'

'I am, as I have always been, his Honour's servant,' said Hoosanee with dignity.

'I suppose I must be contented with that,' said Tom, smiling grimly. 'Will you be silent?'

'As silent as the grave, my master.'

'Come, that at least has the merit of directness. You know Ganesh? Do you consider that you know him well?'

'I have known him for many years, Excellency.'

'You have reason to believe that he is a faithful servant?'

'Why does my lord——?'

'We may come to that presently. Answer my question before you put questions of your own.'

'Master, I have no wish and no reason to blacken the face of my fellow-servant before your Highness, but if my lord looks for a companion in this adventure it is not Ganesh that he should choose.'

'Why, Hoosanee?'

'He is a proud man, and a man of high caste. He could not change his countenance or serve my lord with subtlety, as Hoosanee or Subdul Khan could do.'

'Is this your only reason for thinking that he is not the man to go with me?'

'What other reason——?'

'For Heaven's sake answer me directly. Have I not told you that my stock of patience is nearly at an end?'

'I have no other reason,' said Hoosanee with dignity.

'Then go, my good Hoosanee, go at once, without asking me a single question, and tell Ganesh that I want him.'

Casting a look of wonder, not unmixed with reproach, on his master, Hoosanee obeyed. He was away some two or three minutes, for Ganesh, who had been sleeping in one of the corridors, would not appear before his master without carefully adjusting his turban and girdle. These minutes were spent by Tom in pacing his room rapidly, trying by the strong physical exercise to stifle thoughts.

'What a time you have been!' he said, when Ganesh, who looked as dignified, watchful, and correct, as if sleep were an impossible weakness, stood before him.

'And yet I have made haste,' he said humbly. 'His Excellency is surely more impatient than usual?'

'You are right, Ganesh, I am impatient. But what is that to you? I sent for you because I wish you to guide me at once to Dost Ali Khan's camp.'

'Dost Ali Khan, your Highness?' Ganesh's eyes were fixed on Hoosanee.

'Are you afraid that Hoosanee should hear the name of your friend?' said Tom.

'Why should I fear?' answered Ganesh boldly. 'My heart is white. Does his Highness wish that Hoosanee shall accompany us?'

'If it is his desire.'

'My lord knows,' said Hoosanee, 'what my desire is.'

'You would go without me, but that is impossible. And now, without any more loss of time, to our arrangements. Ganesh, how far is the camp from this?'

'It is not to a camp; it is to a fort that I am desired to take your Highness.'

'Where is it situated?'

'My lord will forgive me. I am forbidden to say. This I

may tell him, that it is only one day's journey from the boundaries of Gumilcund.'

'So near? If we press our pace we may go and return before they miss us here,' said Tom. 'But why not tell me where the fort is? If I go with you I must certainly find out.'

'Will my lord pardon me? I am taking my instructions from others, and it is only in this way that I can help him. When he leaves Gumilcund he must go in a closed litter as a high-caste woman. If Hoosanee will go with us, his eyes must be covered till he reaches the boundaries of the forest.'

'But it is impossible! You are dreaming, Ganesh!'

'I wish I were dreaming, my lord. I wish I could take you to the dwelling of Dost Ali Khan by a bolder and surer way. But I have sworn by my God to show to no one the road thither. If my lord cannot give himself blindly into my hands he must think of it no more.'

For a second or two Tom paused. His eyes, piercing as stars, were fixed upon the face of Ganesh, who stood before him erect and proud, not so much as an eyelid trembling. At last he held out his hand.

'I believe you,' he said; 'make your own arrangements. If you are false to me——'

'If I am false, my lord, let death come upon me swiftly, and let my soul go down into hell,' said Ganesh fervently. 'Will my lord pardon me if I leave him for an hour? When I return I shall hope to tell him that everything is ready for a start.'

There was a knock at the door of the room.

'One moment,' whispered Ganesh, as Hoosanee went towards it, 'I must not be seen here.'

'True; Chunder Singh wants to stop me from leaving,' said Tom. 'Hide!'

Ganesh withdrew into the shadows—seemed literally to vanish into them, for Tom, who thought that he had his eyes upon him, could not tell the exact moment or the manner of his disappearing. There had been three in the room. There were now only two. The knocking was repeated. 'Go and see who it is,' said Tom to Hoosanee; 'whoever it may be, I must not allow him to stay with me long.'

Hoosanee drew aside the purdah before the doors and threw them open, and in the next moment Chunder Singh, followed by the English Resident, entered the room.

The minister cast a rapid and searching glance round the apartment, saw no one but Hoosanee and the young rajah, and, having made his salutation, drew back.

The Resident came forward with outstretched hand. 'You will forgive my intrusion, I am sure,' he said; 'but, when I heard that the poor ladies from Nowgong had arrived safely, I felt that I must thank and congratulate you.'

'Their safety is as dear to me as it is to you, sir,' answered Tom with some reserve. He was meditating how, without giving offence, he could get rid of his visitor.

The visitor, meanwhile, did not seem to be in any hurry. He was an expansive person, and he had a fine flow of language at his command, and having come across an Indian rajah who seemed to be as familiar with English as he was himself, he rather enjoyed the prospect of letting out some of his imprisoned ideas, the more so that Chunder Singh, prime minister to this mysterious young prince, and evidently a person of some insight, had begged him to impress certain views upon him.

'It is very kind of you to feel so,' he said, in answer to Tom's last remark. We should observe, in passing, that he had, as yet, only seen the rajah in such a subdued light as the present, and that he knew nothing of him, excepting that he was the adopted son of Byrajee Pirtha Raj, and that Lord Dalhousie, in consideration of the long and close alliance between the rulers of Gumilcund and the English, had pledged himself to sanction his succession.

'May I stay with you for a short time?' he went on; 'you smoke? I smoke too. If that would help talk——'

'I have made a vow not to smoke until an object very near my heart is fulfilled,' said Tom gravely. 'But that need not debar you from smoking if you will.'

He had neither sat down himself nor asked his visitor to take a seat. This was so unusual a circumstance that Chunder Singh, who, in the belief that his young master would speak more confidentially to his countryman if he were absent, was retreating towards the door, could not help pausing for a moment, and looking at him inquiringly.

'Join us if you will, Chunder Singh,' said Tom. 'I have nothing secret to say to Mr. Montgomery. In fact,' passing his hand over his eyes, 'I am afraid I should not be able either to talk or to listen very well to-night. It has been an exciting

season, sir,' to the Resident—'anxiety, labour, early and late hours, and I, you see, am new to this sort of thing.'

'Ah! yes, yes. So I believe. The late rajah might have done more wisely, perhaps, if he had accustomed you a little to the position. I said so to him more than once. "Your heir," I said, "ought to be with you. An English education is all very well in its way, and, up to a certain point, nothing could be more advantageous. But there is a limit." Well, that is all over. No doubt he expected to live much longer. Ah! his death was a sad blow to us all. I look upon it now as the beginning of all this misery. What do you think?'

'I am afraid I am not capable of any serious thoughts to-night,' said Tom; 'my eyes are nearly closed.'

'Dear, dear! I am very sorry, and I had so much to say to you; however, it will keep, no doubt. I will come to-morrow, with your kind permission, and pay my respects to the ladies, who may be glad to see the face of a fellow-countryman, and you will allow me then, perhaps, to express my deep sense——'

'Thank you,' interrupted the rajah, 'there is no need. As I have before had the honour of telling you, I look upon these English ladies as my sisters and personal friends.'

It was a little, just a little, audacious, the Resident thought. His sisters, indeed! Englishwomen! But those were not days when one could afford to slight friends, and he made the ordinary polite acknowledgments.

'As for to-morrow,' went on the young rajah, 'I am afraid that I shall be engaged all day. I am under a vow, as I have told you. No business connected with the State will require my presence, and I very much doubt whether I shall leave these rooms. In a few days, however, I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you.'

It was a dismissal. The Resident bowed and withdrew, wondering over the dignity and reasonableness of the young rajah. 'Only shows what English education can do,' he said to himself.

Chunder Singh, in the meantime, lingered for a few moments. 'Your Excellency will really try to rest?' he said anxiously.

'Of course I will, Chunder. Don't you see that my eyes are half shut already?' answered Tom. 'Now pray leave me.'

'Will you promise me——'

'How dare you speak to me so?' cried the young fellow, lashing himself into a rage which he was far from feeling. 'Promise you, indeed! I will promise you nothing. Do you suppose that because I have accepted you as my counsellor, and listened to your advice, I intend to give myself up to you entirely? If you do, let me tell you that you are extraordinarily mistaken. I will do what I think right.'

'Yes, yes; so long as my lord does not run into danger!' cried Chunder Singh piteously.

'My dear friend,' said Tom, in his most English fashion, 'let me entreat you not to be a fool. When I say that I decline to be dictated to, that does not mean that I intend to assert myself by deliberately thrusting my head into a lion's mouth, or doing anything else of the same ridiculous nature. And now, for Heaven's sake, go away! I like you too well, and I respect you too much, to wish to quarrel with you; but I tell you plainly that I am not quite answerable to myself to-night. If you continue to stand there looking at me in that absurdly piteous way I shall say or do something foolish.' Sighing deeply and making a respectful salutation, Chunder Singh, to whom this new attitude of his young master was deeply bewildering, not to say alarming, took his leave.

In the corridor he paused. Hoosanee was still with the rajah. There was no one else. The rest of the servants were scattered. Several of them had been told off to attend upon the new inmates of the palace. The corridor was empty and very silent. Between the entrance to the rajah's apartment and the staircase lay the mattress which Hoosanee had been formerly in the habit of using at night, and which on his return had been spread for him again. Chunder Singh sat down upon it, determining to remain where he was until the exit of Hoosanee, when he would confer with him on the new danger that seemed to threaten the State. He sat where he was for a long time, and at last, vigilant as he had determined to be, his eyes grew dim. Again and again he tried to arouse himself, and again and again he dropped off into a doze. He felt persuaded, however, as he asserted later, that, if the door of the rajah's apartment had opened once, he must have heard it. So in ineffectual attempts to keep on the alert the hours of the night passed by.

Towards morning, being now fully persuaded that, contrary to his usual custom, the rajah had kept his servant in his room, he fell into a deep sleep, from which he was aroused

finally by sounds of movement in the palace. Then, a little ashamed of his want of dignity, sleeping at his master's door —he, an old minister of the State like a personal servant—he crept off to his own house.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ENGLISH LADIES IN THE RAJAH'S PALACE

CHUNDER SINGH had been about an hour in his house, which was situated only a few yards distant from the palace, whither, not feeling perfectly easy about his master, he was thinking of returning, when he heard a murmur as of many people running together in the market-square. He went out and saw a large crowd round his house. As soon as he appeared, its foremost members called out to him. 'Chunder Singh will tell us the truth,' they said. 'Yes, yes,' cried others ; 'Chunder Singh has never deceived us.'

Wondering what this might mean, the minister closed the door of his house and set his back against it. He saw now that the throng of people were being reinforced every moment by streams from the avenues that converged towards the market-place, which was already one unbroken sea of turbaned heads and fluttering garments. 'Why is this?' he said. 'What has made you come together?'

There stepped out of the crowd one well known in the palace. He was the chief of the merchant-caste—a man of large wealth and larger patriotism, who had given with a free hand towards the defence of the city and the equipment of the force that had just started for Delhi.

'Give them a word of comfort and assurance, Chunder Singh,' he said. 'Some foolish person has spread about the rumour that our young rajah has left the city and joined Dost Ali Khan, who, they say, will win him to his side by giving up into his hands an English captive. I have told them that the rumour is false ; but they will not believe me, and it is true that I have spent the night in my own house. You, as they have heard, were in the palace. You will know if anyone left it.'

'This is a strange story,' said Chunder Singh gravely.

'Is it true?' asked the merchant.

'No, no. It is false. It is impossible.'

Chunder Singh drew back, and, mounting the little platform before his house, looked the crowd proudly in the face. 'I wonder,' he said, 'that the citizens of Gumilcund should allow themselves to be moved by so foolish a rumour. I spent the night in the rajah's palace. Being too weary to move, I rested on a bed outside the door of his room. If anyone had passed out, I should certainly have known it. Go to your homes in peace. I will ask the rajah to ride through his city to-day.'

With loyal shouts, the easily satisfied crowd dispersed, and in a few minutes the market-square resumed its ordinary aspect. Then Chunder Singh, whose face was curiously contracted, turned to the merchant. 'There is a grain of truth in this, Lutfullah,' he said in a subdued voice. 'Dost Ali Khan has sent a tempting message to our rajah. He would not betray us—I am too sure of him to fear that. But my dread is that he will perversely run into danger, and that we shall lose the succession promised to us.'

'You are certain that he did not leave last night,' said Lutfullah, who looked sericus.

'To that I would pledge my life,' answered the minister. 'And he cannot have gone this morning. There were too many people about him.'

'We must set a watch on the palace,' said Lutfullah.

'Yes; we must set a watch. You will help me. We must save him, even from himself if it must be,' said Chunder Singh.

They went to the palace together. Everything seemed as usual in the outer and inner courts. Passing through an arched passage, they went into the garden at the back of the palace. Since Aglaia had come, the rajah was often to be found there in the early morning, either pacing one of the shaded alleys, with the child beside him, or sharing a breakfast of fruit and milk with her in the darkened and artificially cooled summer-house. And, indeed, they had scarcely entered the rajah's favourite walk before they saw the little figure of Aglaia, quaint and lovely in a gauzy Indian dress. She was walking more sedately than usual, for a creature still smaller than herself—a wizened, white faced baby, dressed in strange nondescript garments—was toddling by her side.

'Isn't he a darling?' she said to Chunder Singh, whom she always addressed in English. 'He's just had his breakfast, and I've brought him out to see Daddy Tom.'

'And have you seen him yet, Missy?' said Chunder Singh gravely.

'Why,' said Aglaia, looking up at her Indian friend, 'what a funny face you have this morning, Mr. Chunder! Aren't you glad to see little Dick? That's his name. He mustn't walk far, for his mother says his legs have got cramped. Just think! He was ten days in a cart. Is 'oo tired, little pet?' she said lispingly to the baby. 'Shall Aglaia——'

'No, no, Missy-sahib,' cried the ayah, running up. 'Too small, you! Ayah, give poor baba.'

But the poor baba, who was a person, in an ordinary way, of irrepressible activity, refused to be taken up. He seated himself on the grass, struck out with his little fists, and looked up at them with a delicious smile of baby contentment. Then Aglaia assailed him with kisses, and Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, who, for all their grave looks, were men of most tender disposition, smiled at one another and passed on. It was quite evident that Aglaia had no thoughts even for Daddy Tom that morning. She was wholly absorbed in little Dick.

The rajah was not in his summer-house, and the attendant in that charming retreat, who was the daily purveyor of his Highness's little breakfast, had not as yet received any orders from him.

Retracing their steps to the palace, which the rajah did not seem to have quitted that morning, the two elderly men looked a little blue.

They made their way straight to Tom's sleeping apartment. Chunder Singh knocked, but he received no answer. He knocked again, and, after waiting for about a quarter of an hour, tried the handle cautiously. He found that it was bolted on the inside, and turned a relieved face to Lutfullah.

'He must be within,' he said. 'No one else would presume to draw the bolt. No doubt he was awake all night, and fell asleep towards the morning. We must have patience.'

They left Hussein Buksh, the second bearer, one of Chunder Singh's own nominees, at the door, desiring him to let them know the moment the rajah stirred, and went down themselves into the garden. There they found the three English ladies who had arrived the night before gathered together in a little group round the children. They wore, with a curious awkward

ness, lovely Indian dresses, some of which, as being the best he could procure, Tom had laid in store to meet such an emergency as this. Their faces were very pale, and the haggard anxiety, the horror, remembered or expected, which gave so piteous an expression to our countrywomen in these dreadful days, had not left their faces; but the quiet night and the peaceful awakening had refreshed them, and they were already very different from the wretched, bedraggled-looking creatures who had driven through Gumilcund on the previous evening.

Chunder Singh and Lutfullah saluted the ladies reverently. Lucy, who was talking to Aglaia, a little apart from the others, eyed them with some curiosity. 'The major-domo of the palace,' she whispered, 'and one of the chief citizens. How funny it all is! Something like the middle ages.' The mother of the white-faced baby was, in the meantime, answering Chunder Singh's inquiries, and expressing her satisfaction in having reached so pleasant a haven of rest.

'Does the major-domo understand English?' asked Lucy.

Aglaia nodded. 'Oh yes. He's a nice man. I like him,' said the child.

'Then I must speak to him,' said Lucy. With her white face and golden hair, and large, childish-looking eyes, Lucy looked quaint and very pretty that morning. She had been given her choice amongst a number of dresses, and she had picked out a tunic of cherry-coloured silk and a snow-white saree of the finest muslin, deeply trimmed with gold embroideries. To put on these pretty fresh garments after her copious bath of warm scented water had given poor Lucy a sense of satisfaction, which, when she came to think of it seriously, seemed curiously inappropriate, if not wicked. But she could not help herself; she was happier than she had been, and the pretty dress, which suited her to perfection, had something to say to her happiness. Pressing forward she addressed Chunder Singh:

'Oh!' she cried, 'where is the rajah, the person, I mean, who received us last night? He is the rajah, isn't he?'

'Yes, madam. It was our rajah—the ruler of Gumilcund—who had the honour of welcoming you to his palace last night,' said Chunder Singh, nearly paralysing the childish little creature with his dignity. She fixed her limpid eyes upon him doubtingly; then recovering herself with an effort:

'Oh yes,' she said, 'I was told so. Could you tell him,

please—the rajah, I mean—his Excellency—is that the way to speak to the great people here, Aglaia?'

Chunder Singh was waiting respectfully for the conclusion of her sentence.

'I want particularly to speak to him,' went on Lucy more fluently. 'Perhaps you wouldn't mind saying that I have a message for him—I suppose,' looking round at the other ladies with some bewilderment, 'that it is for him. You know he told us he was an Englishman; but this isn't much like an English house. And how does he come to be a rajah? Oh dear! if Grace could only have come herself!'

'His Excellency was educated in England,' broke in the mellifluous voice of Chunder Singh.

'And some of us think him more English than Indian,' added Lutfullah pleasantly.

'You can speak English too, chief citizen!' cried Lucy. 'This is most extraordinary. Really I begin to think that we must have died last night, and that we are in a sort of half-English, half-Indian paradise. But,' with a deep sigh, 'that can't be, for Grace would certainly have been here before us. Oh, my poor Grace! my dear Grace! Can't anyone tell me where you are?'

'Hush! Lucy. Hush! We shall never know how they went. She and my lovely Kit,' cried Mrs. Durant, weeping bitterly. 'Little could I have thought to what his love for her would have brought him——'

'Do you give them up?' cried Lucy, flashing round upon her friend fiercely. '*I* don't, and just because they are together! Oh, Mr. Major-domo, if you have a heart—and you look as if you had—find this mysterious prince, who is an Englishman and not an Englishman, and ask him, for pity's sake, to speak to us!'

'No doubt his Highness will request the honour of speech with you later,' said Chunder Singh. 'At present he must not be disturbed.'

'Did he say so? Oh! where is he?' sobbed Lucy. 'He can't know how dreadful the danger is! I was ashamed of myself for being able to sleep last night. If Grace dies'—clutching at her muslin robe after a fashion that, to the grave Indian, was scarcely decorous. 'If Grace dies, I shall never forgive myself.'

'I will see if his Highness is awake,' said Chunder Singh

retreating, while Lucy, now in a perfect paroxysm of grief, was led to the summer-house by her companions.

There they waited for a long time. The sun rose high in the heavens, and, outside the summer-house, the air was like that of a heated oven; but here there were punkahs swinging slowly, and darkened windows, and splashing water, so that they scarcely felt the heat. Meantime attendants came and went, bringing them books and music and food and drink, and toys and pictures for the children; but, ask as they would, there came no message from the rajah.

'I cannot stand it,' cried Lucy at last. 'I had rather not be so comfortable. I will go out and see what it all means.'

'Go out into that sun! Don't behave like a mad girl! Do you wish to bring more trouble upon us? You think only of yourself,' said Kit's mother reproachfully.

And so, being, as I have said, a childish little creature, and accustomed to rebuke, Lucy sat on with red eyes and trembling fingers, trying to amuse herself and feel comfortable, but possessed, all the time, with a sense of sorrow and remorse that nearly crushed her.

At last, when the heat of the day was over, and the sky behind the trees that sheltered their retreat was all ablaze with gold and crimson, she saw Chunder Singh coming slowly towards them. His face was covered, and his head had dropped upon his breast, and in the dark eyes that looked out from the folds of his chuddah there was a strange glitter. Lucy had been running out to meet him; but when she saw those blazing eyes she withdrew.

'Something has happened,' she whispered to Aglaia. 'You know him better than we do, child. Ask him what it is!'

Then Aglaia ran out, and Lucy, who was trembling from head to foot, heard her little baby voice.

'Do bring Daddy-Tom,' she said. 'He hasn't been to see us all the day.'

'Missy,' said Chunder Singh, in grave, sad tones, 'ask Miss Sahib and the Mem-Sahibs where his Excellency is.'

He was at the door of the summer-house, and as he spoke these ominous words, he looked round upon them searchingly.

'Ask *us*!' cried Lucy hysterically. 'What does the strange man mean?'

'Madam,' said Chunder Singh, bowing low, 'you must have the goodness to come with me.'

'I?' shrieked Lucy. 'Why? What do you want with

me? Oh!' falling on her knees, 'have pity! If he has gone, I know nothing about it. I may have meant to ask him; but I hadn't the chance. Ask the others. We saw him for a few little moments last evening, and to-day we have been alone. Indeed! indeed! no one has come to us. Oh! don't you believe me?'

'Let me assure you, before those here, who will remember my words,' said Chunder Singh, 'that we mean you no harm. If you fear, let Missy Sahib and her ayah come with you. Our rajah has gone. How he has gone, or why, we cannot as yet find out; and as Hoosanee, the servant who brought you to Gumilcund, has gone also, we would ask you the questions which we would have asked him had he been here. Miss Sahib I ask to come because she is most interested in what has happened. But if one of the Mem-Sahibs——'

'No, no, no. Take me! I will tell you all I can,' sobbed Lucy.

Terribly solemn and staggering beyond the power of language to express were Lucy's next experiences. There was first a brief journey in a litter, with Aglaia, to whom she had clung as her only hope and consolation, for a companion. The litter was put down, and, upon drawing its curtains aside, they found themselves in a small, dimly-lighted hall, in the presence of four men, all of them as grave and mysterious of aspect as Chunder Singh. They were seated on cushions at the upper end of the hall; but when Lucy drew the curtains of her litter aside, one of them rose to his feet and greeted her reverently. There followed a few moments of silence, during which the poor little creature, who could not imagine what all this solemnity meant, felt her heart beating as if it would burst.

Aglaia had made the acquaintance of all these grave persons, and she was not in the least awed. Yet they constituted the inner council of the Gumilcund State. One was Chunder Singh, the prime minister, and another—he who had risen—was Lutfullah, the representative of the merchant class, and the third was Vishnugupta the priest, and the fourth was the exalted citizen who headed the warrior caste and directed the organisation of the rajah's little army.

These good persons wore their dresses of state, and the dignity of their manners was fully equal to the grandeur of their appearance. When Aglaia, who, as I have said, had no fear, ran up to the magnificent Lutfullah, and began chatter-

ing to him in her baby Hindoostanee, nodding gravely meanwhile to her other friends, Lucy felt half afraid that the roof of the hall would drop down upon them.

But nothing happened, and she began presently to feel a little more composed. Then Lutfullah, who, having a bland manner and reassuring aspect, and being, moreover, well versed in the English tongue, had been commissioned to ask the questions which the council had decided to be necessary, said, in a soft voice, that he trusted she would not feel the least alarm. It was true that a calamity had fallen upon the State, and it was true also that they, into whose hands the direction of its fortunes had come, were for the moment embarrassed and disheartened; but that was no reason why the guests of the State should suffer. As far as she was concerned, all they wished was an account of the events that had intervened between the moment of their leaving the station of Nowgong and the present, with special reference to the unfortunate occurrence that, as he understood, had preceded their arrival.

It was a most stately preamble. Lucy, who was not without a sense of the fitness of things, tried to still her beating heart and to answer it with becoming dignity. And, in fact, she made a pretty fair start. But, as she went on, as she tried to draw a picture of what Grace was to her and to them all, as she entered upon a narration of the events that led to their separation, her dignity evaporated in gasping spasmodic phrases, and tears, that not even the august presence of these stately citizens could repress, poured from her eyes.

They listened in perfect silence. Aglaia, who did not fully understand what was happening, crept up close to her, and whispered to her not to cry. The poor little ayah sat in the background sobbing like a child. Lucy felt as if she could not go through with it. But at last it was over. Now they would let her go, and she could cry her heart out. Not yet, poor little Lucy! It is Chunder Singh who stands up, and he has thrown back the chuddah from his face, which looks curiously determined.

'We thank you, Miss Sahib,' he says in his grave and sonorous English. 'But there is yet one thing more that we would know. You spoke to me this morning of a message.'

'Oh yes. I had a message; but it was not for any of you,' cries Lucy, starting up. 'It was for him.'

'If he is not here——'

'Then I must keep it for him until he comes back.'

'Will Miss Sahib pardon her servant——?'

'No, no, no. Oh! I cannot tell you. How can I? They were her last words. I should be a traitor.'

'We thought that if we heard the message sent to his Excellency it would help us to find him. That is all,' says Lutfullah gently. 'Chunder Singh, my good friend, it is enough,' he adds in a lower voice. 'Let her go!'

'Yes, yes; let her go!' say the others. And Lucy—oh! so thankful to be released—draws round her the silken curtains of the litter, and Aglaia gives her hand to the ayah, and, while they go back to the palace, the four ancients of Gumilcund hold a council as to what is to be done for the State.

CHAPTER XXXII

NO NEWS

THAT was Lucy's last piece of excitement for some considerable time. When, having been carried back to the palace, she fell weeping into the arms of her friends, there began for her and the others a life of the most bewildering monotony. A part of the palace, consisting of a small pillared hall, and two or three sleeping apartments, with the shaded alley in which Chunder Singh and Lutfullah had met them first, and the rajah's summer-house were allotted to them. Day after day, with clock-like regularity, a liberal provision of meats and drinks, water to their hearts' desire, fresh garments, sweetmeats, and books were brought to them. They had everything, in fact, but that for which they craved the most—news.

Chunder Singh and Lutfullah went to see them occasionally, and sent morning and night to inquire after their health. Mr. Montgomery, the Resident, paid them periodical visits, but there was no word of the rajah.

Mysterious to the ladies, to Aglaia, to whom her deliverer was everything, this sudden disappearance was a shock as cruel as it was inexplicable. Where had her Daddy-Tom gone? she would ask piteously. Why hadn't he said good-bye to her? Couldn't he send her a letter if he liked? Questions which no

one, not even the wise Chunder Singh, could answer. Had it not been for baby Dick, who was one of the most restless of little persons, she would have suffered even more severely. In the new healthy atmosphere that surrounded him, Dick had recovered his vigour. The wizened little face was filling up. Roses and dimples were asserting their rights. The long pent-up limbs were expanding luxuriously in all sorts of joyous activities, which Aglaia, who had begun by being his slave, was bound to share. Never was a merrier or a more irrepressible little man than Dick.

Sometimes, worn out by games and laughter, he would fall asleep, and then Aglaia would steal quietly to the lattice, and, the tears dropping from her eyes, would watch and watch. 'Oh! if he would only come—if he would only come!'

'Everyone goes away,' she said to Lucy one day. 'I wonder why?'

'I don't know, dear,' said Lucy, who was becoming more and more melancholy. 'I suppose they must.'

'He needn't,' said Aglaia proudly. 'He is the master of everyone here.'

'Your Daddy-Tom, as you call him, is like the Good Shepherd in the parable,' said Lucy. 'Do you remember?'

'Yes,' said Aglaia, in a low voice, her little face becoming strangely set. 'He left all the others.'

'And he went after the one that was lost,' filled in Lucy with a sigh. 'I always thought it was uninteresting to be one of the ninety-and-nine. I am sure of it now.'

'I don't understand,' said Aglaia wearily.

'Of course you don't, and I am a goose—an ungrateful goose, too,' said Lucy, her eyes filling with tears. 'If he only brings back Grace——'

'Is that her name?' said Aglaia.

'Yes; isn't it pretty? And it's just like herself. Dearest Grace! We should never be dull or miserable if she were here.'

'Tell me what she is like,' said Aglaia.

'What Grace is like? Ah! that's not so easy,' said Lucy enthusiastically. 'She is perfectly lovely to begin with, tall and very slender—oh! my darling'—breaking into tears and sobs—'if you are alive, you must be more than slender now. All these days and nights! I can't bear to think of it. She was so gentle, too. I never heard her complain once. And her temper was that of an angel. Everyone—even the ser-

vants—adored her. It was through Tikaram's love for her that we got away at all. As for the man who brought us here, he simply worshipped her. Don't you hope she may come back safely, Aglaia?'

'Yes,' answered the child, briefly and sadly.

'But you don't seem a bit sorry for her, you funny little thing.'

Aglaia lifted her limpid eyes and fixed them on Lucy's face. 'I'm not,' she said.

'Now why, you little barbarian?'

'Because——' began Aglaia, and then she turned away. 'I don't like to talk of it,' she said, and went off to Dick, leaving Lucy to wonder over her curious precocity.

But although the ladies heard nothing of what went on in the city, there was considerable uneasiness and excitement abroad. When the elders in the State found out as a certain fact that their young rajah had given them the slip they tried to keep the uncomfortable knowledge to themselves. In his room they found a slip of paper, written in his hand, and addressed to Chunder Singh. It was his hope, he said, that his friends would not discover his absence until his return, when he would give them every explanation; but, in case of delay or obstruction, he begged that the elders of Gumilcund would carry on the business of the State as they had been accustomed to do. He did not himself anticipate any inconvenience from his own enforced absence. When he had accomplished the purpose upon which, as Chunder Singh knew, his heart was set, he would return, and then it would rest with them whether they would again accept him as their rajah, or choose rather to be governed by one of themselves. In the meantime he begged to assure them of his faithfulness to the principles which had been laid down by his predecessors for his guidance.

This, to the elders of Gumilcund, while reassuring from one point of view, was disappointing in another. Most, if not all, had given full credence to the assurance of their late rajah that, in the person of the successor he had chosen, he would himself return to them. To us of the West such a belief may appear childish. But we must remember the difference between our standpoint and that of the Asiatic. The doctrine of the transmigration of souls from body to body, which to us seems unreal and fantastic, has, from the earliest ages, formed a part of the Eastern creeds. And, this

granted, there could not surely be anything extraordinarily unlikely in one of high spiritual rank being permitted, if not to choose, at least to foresee, his next incarnation. In any case this was their belief, a belief which the singular likeness between their late rajah and his successor, with rumours which had come to one and another of mysterious voices holding communion with him, had served to confirm. But his departure at this critical moment, an action at variance with what they knew would have been the will of their late ruler, and his apparent readiness to sacrifice his State so long as he could save a single English captive, somewhat shook them in this view. Nevertheless, they tried their hardest to hide the rajah's flight from the people. Do what they would, however, it leaked out, and with it came other distressing and alarming news. The surrender of the Cawnpore entrenchments, and the awful massacres that followed : the general rebellion in Oude, followed swiftly by the siege of the Lucknow Residency, and the death of Sir Henry Lawrence : uneasy rumours from the Punjaub, where the disaffected Poorbeahs were being held at bay like savage animals, and the delay at Delhi—these and many other rumours came pouring in as the month of July ran its course. It says much for the loyalty and strength of Chunder Singh, who was now the ruling spirit in the councils of the Gumilcund elders, that the terror and despair which were beginning to be felt amongst the populace never once touched them.

And yet there was much cause for uneasiness. Chunder Singh, indeed, who had visited England twice, the first time with Byrajee Pirtha Raj, his late master, and the second in obedience to his dying wish to further the interests of his successor, believed profoundly in the power of England ; but he knew also how apt she is to try the effect of small measures, little outbursts which, to the uninitiated, seem nothing more than ebullitions of temper, before, armed with her full strength, she stands out wrathfully to assert her will. Such delay practised now would mean, if not the total subversion of the English power in India, at least the temporary ruin of those who had accepted her as the Paramount Power. It did not need the threatening letters which, in spite of all their efforts, were continually poured into Gumilcund to advertise them of what their fate would be if the English forces—coming down from the Punjaub and up from Calcutta and Bombay—met with any serious defeat. Chunder Singh and his friends knew very well what assault

and sack meant when a baffled Asiatic army were inside the gates of a wealthy city. But with all this no thought of compromise ever entered their minds. To the terror-stricken people, merchants and handicraftsmen, who came flocking to them for advice they had always the same answer: 'We have gone too far to retreat now. If the worst comes to the worst we must defend our city to the last.'

The inquiries about the rajah were more difficult to answer. His absence had considerably increased the alarm of the people. For the belief held by the men of education and culture in Gumilcund, as it filtered down to the lower strata of the populace, had lost its vagueness, and had gained in strength. The curiously dramatic entry of the young rajah into his city, and the effectiveness of his various appearances, gave colour to the general superstition. He seemed to many of them not a man at all, but a divine being whose presence was a guarantee of the city's continuance in safety and prosperity. That this God-given ruler should leave them at such a crisis as the present was inexplicable save in one way—that the spiritual beings, who were said to direct him, had warned him of the coming evil and helped him to escape—a theory confirmed by the circumstance that no one could tell them how their prince went. In spite of all Chunder Singh and Lutfullah and Vishnugupta could say, the hearts of the people were heavy within them, and their minds presaged evil.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONTAINING EXTRACTS FROM THE RAJAH'S DIARY, WITH HOOSANEE'S RECOLLECTIONS

THE rajah, as it will have already been guessed, had discovered a secret way of leaving his palace. Starting from a well, or small chamber underneath his sleeping room, it led out through a long subterranean gallery to another well, most secretly contrived beyond the principal gate of the city. Ganesh, who had discovered it by accident, had made use of it to open communications with Dost Ali Khan. Believing that the rajah would accept the rebel chief's invitation to a

conference, he had set everything in readiness for a departure this way. With regard to Tom's adventures on the perilous journey thus initiated I have been fortunate in securing narratives both by himself and his attendants. I have said that, in Gumilcund, he had given up recording the events of his daily life in his diary. No sooner had he left the State, regaining, as it seemed to him then, his old identity, than the necessity, which in some natures is so strong, of completing his life by throwing its incidents into a mental picture, reasserted itself. He wrote hurriedly day after day, on the tablets he carried with him, and as they, with the rest of his diary, have been confided to my keeping, I am able to give some extracts from them here.

'*July* 1857.—The die is cast. For better or for worse, and I cannot now decide which it is. I have cast off the shackles which, for these many days, have bound me. I am thinking, acting, living, in my own person. And the strange part of it is that, with everything to make me uneasy and miserable, I am happier far and more tranquil than I have been for weeks. That is why I am writing now.

'It is deep night, and we are halting—Hoosanee and I—in the midst of a forest, while Ganesh, our guide, goes on to make arrangements for our admission into the fort, which is held, as I hear, by Dost Ali Khan. I have his safe-conduct, presented to me at Delhi, on my person. Ganesh tells me that it has already saved me from death once, that had I not had it about me, the soldier Abdul—my gaoler on the White Ranee's march—would certainly have killed me. Possibly it may save me again. In any case I can do no other than I have done. Whatever the issue may be, I must await it with fortitude. Grace, I believe, is in that fort. I will leave it with her, or I vow before God that I will not leave it at all. If she is dead, which I cannot and will not believe, then I will return to Gumilcund, and give myself up to my people, letting them do what they will with me.

'The night passes slowly. Ganesh is long away. I wonder if he really means well by us, or if this is merely a trap laid out for our destruction. It may be. Chunder Singh was sure of it. And he knows the native character much better than I do; but as I cannot draw back now, and would not if I could, I must not dream of failure. There are other things to think of. In these quiet moments, solitary except for

Hoosanee, who crouches at my feet—the litter in which I have been travelling at rest, and my little reading-lamp making a tent of light in the dark forest—I have time and opportunity for thought. In Gumilcund I could not think. That sense, half oppressive, half exultant—ah! has it not been a great illusion? I feel so free, so natural now: my life has become so simple—one thought in my mind—one will animating me—one object at my heart—that I cannot but believe I have been tormenting myself in vain. And, indeed, can it not be easily explained? This idea of a double personality was the clever stroke of policy of a clever and subtle brain that sought to project itself into the future. And no doubt, having allowed myself to fall into it, I have been able to do more for the people of Gumilcund and for my own people also than would otherwise have been possible. So far it has been well. But it cannot surely last for ever. It began—stay—did it begin here? Did it even begin on board the "Patagonia?" Before ever I met Chunder Singh—the very night after I received news of my inheritance, I had my first vision. The next was when I opened the papers that were so mysteriously lost. If then the others resulted from my intercourse with Chunder Singh, what was the origin of them? Some solution of the mystery may come to me by-and-by; it seems to me now as if there was only one way in which that question could be answered.

'But I hear footsteps in the wood; I must put my pen down.'

The following entries are undated; but I know that they belong to this period:—

'What a terrible—what a bewildering day this has been! I have been thinking—I have been talking—I have been pleading—I have been protesting—till I scarcely know where I am or what I am doing, and—I tremble as I write the words—I am no nearer the accomplishment of my object than I was when I arrived.

'One thing, however, seems certain. Dost Ali Khan, though he would give worlds to detach me and my State from the English alliance, has no wish or intention of injuring me personally. I confess, after all I have heard of the perfidy of Asiatics, I am a little astonished at the gratitude I have met with for very small favours.

'But I must try to put it all down in detail. It may be useful for future reference.

'Early this morning I was carried into the fort. Refreshments were placed before me; I was allowed to adjust my dress, and then I was led by Ganesh into the presence of the chief, in whom, although his appearance was much changed, I at once recognised the high-caste youth I had fed and sheltered in my tent at Delhi.

'He was alone, having dismissed his captains. The place in which he received me was a court, open to the sky and surrounded by galleries, in one of which I distinctly saw a veiled lady sitting. My heart leapt into my mouth, for I thought it might be Grace; but I came to the conclusion presently that it was not Grace but Vivien, who had, as I knew, completely thrown in her lot with the rebels.

'The chief greeted me with perfect courtesy, saying that this was an honour to which he had long been looking forward. I, feeling myself in his power, answered after the same courteous fashion, and after this little preliminary fencing he began to speak about the curious and critical state of affairs in the country. I would not interrupt him, being anxious to know precisely what his views were, and I confess it was a little strange to me to hear views, set forth ably, and urged with no little eloquence, diametrically opposed to those I have been accustomed to hear and to support since I came to India. For, according to him, the English overlordship has been a mistake from beginning to end. It has failed in strength, in sympathy, in suitability to the people of the land. That, sooner or later, it would be swept away, to be replaced by a more congenial rule, he did not for one single moment doubt; and he strongly advised me either to go back quietly to my own country, or if, being an Englishman, I desired still to rule Asiatics, to make up my mind frankly to throw in my lot with them. A countrywoman of mine, and he smiled in a very strange way, had come prudently to this latter determination; and he did not think she repented what she had done.

'To all this I listened as quietly as I could, not attempting a word of contradiction.

'He asked me straightly if I would join them. I answered that I could do nothing without the consent of the elders of my people. Did I wish them well? he went on to say. I said that I was not sufficiently acquainted with their principles and aims to be able to answer such a question. I was, as he

very well knew, the faithful servant of the Government to which I owed my advancement. Dost Ali Khan smiled at this, and said my boldness pleased him. He said, further, contradicting some of his previous assertions, that if the English had behaved to him as they had behaved to me, he would never have taken part against them. He then asked me if I had heard that the British army, on their way to relieve Lucknow, had met with a serious defeat, and been forced to fall back upon Cawnpore. I said boldly that no such rumour had come to me, and that even if it had I should not have believed it. I knew indeed that General Havelock was retreating; but his reason was insufficiency of troops, and not defeat in battle.

'So, for a full hour, we fenced with one another, for I knew the Oriental character, and while burning to speak of my beloved Grace, I would not court defeat by rushing upon her name.

'Dost Ali Khan spoke of her first. As this is important, I am trying to put down in my own language a perfect transcript of his words, and of my own answers.

'"I am to understand, then," he said suddenly, "that my brother has come hither in obedience to my message?"

'I answered briefly in the affirmative.

'He looked at me searchingly. "I gave you to understand," he went on, "that the Englishwoman of whom you are in search was in my hands."

'I answered quietly, fighting down, as best I could, my fiery impatience, "I trusted in Dost Ali Khan's honour. Have I done wrongly?"

'"Let us wait a moment," said the wily fellow, laughing after a fashion that made my blood run cold. "I do not say that she is in my hands, and into such a war as ours honour does not enter. Have your friends and allies acted honourably with me?"

'"I have sought to do so," I said.

'"You? That is true, and, if you stood alone, I would do what I could to gratify your desires. But you belong to the cause for which you are fighting. I must therefore use you as I would this weapon if I had it in my hand and saw a deadly foe in front of me. Enough of preamble! Say this fair Englishwoman is in my hands, what price would you give me for her?"

'"My life," I cried passionately.

'He smiled grimly. "Well spoken!" he said; "but wide of the mark. My brother's life is of no value to me. I prefer his friendship."

'I paused for a moment. It was difficult to think—difficult to speak—with this terrible excitement at my heart. At last I said slowly:

'"My personal friendship is yours. Give her up—let us go away together safely, or, if you prefer it, send her to Gumilcund under a fitting escort, and I give you my word that so long as I live I will be grateful to you."

'"Those are fine words," said Dost Ali Khan, and the eyes that he fixed upon my face seemed to glitter strangely. "But I care little for words. How will my brother show his gratitude? Will he be on my side?"

'"You know I cannot," I answered. "But this I will promise. When this mad attempt of yours ends, as end it must, in ruin to yourself, and the dispersion of those who now call themselves your friends, I will stand by you as a friend may, and plead your cause with our Government."

'Scarcely suffering me to finish, he sprang to his feet. "You are bold," he said with a harsh laugh. "Failure? Ruin? Who dares to speak of them here? Remember that you are not in your own encampment at Delhi, sheltered by the English power. You are in my dominions."

'I looked him full in the face. "That," I said, "gives me courage to speak what I believe to be the truth. Would my brother have me lie to him because he is strong and I am weak?"

'The dull red which had overspread Dost Ali Khan's dark face died down, and his fierce eyes fell. "My brother has spoken well," he said, "and I apologise to him for my heat. But it is dangerous, let me tell him, to browbeat a man in his own house."

'"I should prefer it," I answered, "to browbeating him in mine."

'"Come," he said, with a smile, "that is a good reproof. I have not forgotten Delhi. Give me your hand and say what you will."

'Thus encouraged, I thanked him for his goodwill and kindly remembrance, set forth my errand in a few simple words, and besought him not to delay me any longer. By obeying his summons, I said, I had risked everything with my friends at Gumilcund. Nothing but a swift return would save

my credit. If he had really any regard for me, let him accept my assurances of personal friendship, bring me to where my countrywoman was, and permit us to go.

'But it was not to be so easily done, for though courteous, even to deference, in his manner, Dost Ali Khan had no intention of foregoing the purpose with which he had brought me to this place. Instead of answering my question, he begged my permission to relate a little incident. I agreed, of course, though my heart was like to burst with impatience, and he proceeded to tell me the following story.

'"A man came to me the other day, asking to join my force. He was dressed as a peasant, but I knew at once that he was a soldier. He was enrolled with two or three others whom he had brought, all stalwart men. I found soon that he had been Soubahdar in one of the finest of the Company's regiments, and that he had a private vengeance to serve. His colonel—one Sahib Elton—had insulted and wounded him, and he wished to deal him a blow that he would feel. I do not encourage private spites; but I am obliged to make the most of the only material that comes to me, and before I heard this Soubahdar's story, I had judged that he was a clever soldier, and that I would do well to keep him. Let my brother listen well," said the rebel chieftain impressively, "for the strange part of my story comes in here. The Soubahdar knew that his enemy had a daughter in the European station of Nowgong. I had heard, no matter how"—I thought that here he glanced up towards the gallery, and my heart beat angrily—"that you had sent in search of her. So I allowed my Soubahdar to take out a few horsemen and waylay the Nowgong fugitives."

'He paused. It was with difficulty that I repressed a movement of indignation; but remembering that I was entirely in his hands, I was able to muster sufficient self-control to beg him to go on with his story. "Did the Soubahdar succeed in his base attempt?" I asked.

'He would not answer me directly. Here, indeed, our conversation became so swift and complicated that I cannot undertake to write it down accurately. I remember that he pressed his alliance upon me, and I know that I strenuously refused to pledge myself to anything more than the personal friendship and exercise of influence in case of disaster which I had already promised him.

'Again and again I tried to surprise him into making some

admission as to the safety of Grace and Kit, and again and again he evaded me. At last, having travelled all night, and lived for some days previously in a state of nerve-tension, which made rest impossible, I became so much exhausted that I could scarcely raise my voice above a whisper.

'By this time the full day had come. It was a day of storms. As I was led across the court to the mud-paved room on the ground-storey, which I am to occupy, the rain beat upon us pitilessly and the wind howled and tore about the corners of the fort, till one might have thought it in danger of destruction.

'I felt that I must sleep if I was to preserve my senses: there seemed, moreover, to be no imminent danger to anyone, so I flung myself on the charpoy which was the only piece of furniture in the room and closed my eyes.

'The next thing I knew—and it seemed to me as if only a moment had gone by since I lay down—I was starting up, wide awake and full of energy, and Hoosanee was standing beside me with a cup of strong coffee in one hand and a dish of chupatties in the other. I took the little meal gladly. He watched me, looking sad and reproachful; but when I begged him to give his opinion of the state of affairs, he put his finger on his lip and shook his head. It was then late in the afternoon. I sought and obtained another interview with Dost Ali Khan; but with no better result, and now, night having come, I have returned to my room, and, with Hoosanee watching beside me, am waiting for those in the fort to go to rest, as we intend then to look round us cautiously.

'Ganesh has kept away all day. This, I am afraid, augurs ill for his faithfulness.'

A few words must be added here. I have them from Hoosanee, who was faithful to his master throughout this adventure.

Everything was still that night, he said. He was dozing. His master was keeping himself awake by writing in his book. They had determined, towards the small hours of the morning, to go round the fort themselves. He had made friends with one of the watchmen, whose faithfulness had been corrupted by the present of a valuable trinket, and the promise of still richer gifts, if he helped them to their will. What they wished to do was to find out for certain if Grace and Kit were in the fort, and, if so, putting off their deliverance until some

good plan could be devised, to encourage them by letting them know that friends were at hand.

He, as I have said, had been dozing. Feeling sure that they ought to be on the move, he aroused himself. His master put down his book, and asked him in a whisper to go out and see if his friend was ready. He crept to the door, which was ajar, and opened it. In the next moment he had fallen back upon his master, dazed and trembling.

The doorway was blocked up by a slender figure in shining raiment with the face covered, and naturally his first thought was that Dost Ali Khan, repenting of his treachery, had sent them his captive. But Tom knew better. The moment he saw the figure he sprang to his feet with a wrathful expression. Hoosanee, thinking from the emotion in his voice and manner that some new danger assailed them, looked to him for directions; but Tom motioned him away. 'This is an Englishwoman, but not the one we seek,' he said in Marathi. 'Remain in the room, but keep at a little distance from us.'

Of the interview that followed no record remains. Tom could not be prevailed upon to speak of it. It is not so much as mentioned in his diary. Hoosanee, whose confidence in his master was perfect, neither understood nor sought to understand what was going on. Fearing treachery, however, he held himself on the alert, and when, after having poured herself out in a torrent of impassioned words, Vivien, for the figure could have been none other, rushed out into the darkness, he was by his master's side in a moment. To his dismay he found him weak and trembling. Twice, it seemed to him, that he was trying to speak, but he said nothing.

Then Hoosanee told him that the night was passing, and urged him to lose no time in setting forth upon their task. The friendly watchman was outside. He had won over all those who were watching with him. If they did not at once seize their opportunity, it would pass out of their hands for ever.

But if his master's manner had dismayed him, he was still more alarmed by the way in which his advice was taken. For an instant Tom made as if he would follow him, and then he sat down and burst into a passion of tears.

Hoosanee was in an agony. What had happened? 'Is Missy Grace dead?' he whispered, going quite close to his master.

'No, no; I hope to God she is alive still,' said Tom. 'And if I knew that the Jezebel who has just gone was speaking the truth, I should not be like this. I should know, at least, what to attempt. But how am I to tell? She may be lying to me as she lied to her husband, as she is lying every day to Dost Ali Khan.'

'What has she told my master?' asked Hoosanee.

'She says that they were here, and that they have gone. She heard I was coming and she put them out. She had made up her mind that we should not meet. Curses—a thousand curses—on her head!'

'Why did she tell my master this?' said Hoosanee.

'She did not tell me at first. It came out. That is why I think it may be true. She was enraged that I would not do what she wished, and then she threw it in my teeth. If I believed her, and escaped as I might do, and if I found out afterwards that she had lied to me—or if, on the other hand, I remained here while they were going through danger and hardship outside—oh! Hoosanee—my brother, advise me! What shall I do?'

'Listen, my master,' said the good fellow, who, while his master had been speaking, had taken his own measure of the situation. 'You will stay here for an hour. Yes. I beseech you, do as I say! It will be best. Alone no one will suspect me. I will join my friend, the chowkedar, and go with him on his rounds. I will hear the last news of the place. If the prisoners are still here, or if they have been put out, as the White Ranee says, will soon be known to me. When I know, I will return to my master, and he will decide what we had best do.'

It seemed the most feasible plan. In any case, so Hoosanee has told me, it was adopted. He left his master, hoping that he would compose himself in his absence, and went out into the court. The first person he met was Ganesh. Ganesh looked wild and unnatural. Hoosanee stopped for a moment to tax him with treachery. The Brahmin threw back the word in his teeth, and they parted. Ganesh went to the door of their master's room. Hoosanee joined the friendly chowkedar. They were smoking a pipe together, and the bearer was gradually drawing out the information he required, when in the courtyard there was a sudden clamour. One of the sentinels, posted outside, came rushing in breathless with the news that the Gora-log or European folk were upon them. The

chowkedar sprang up and ran headlong to the quarter of the fort where Dost Ali Khan and his captains were sleeping, and Hoosanee made at full speed for his master's room. Ganesh was there before him, so the young rajah had already heard of the panic. He was standing up fully dressed, with a revolver in one hand and a sword in the other, and Ganesh was beseeching him to remain where he was. 'We may escape,' he said, 'if we remain where we are. If we go out amongst them we are doomed.'

'But the prisoners?' cried Tom, who must have been nearly beside himself.

'If they are in the fort——' began Ganesh.

'They are not—they are not,' shrieked Hoosanee.

'The chief thinks so, but he is mistaken. The Soubahdar Sufder Jung was ordered yesterday by the White Ranee to take them away.'

'The Soubahdar Sufder Jung!' echoed Tom, and his arms dropped from his hands, and his limbs seemed to fail under him. 'The Soubahdar Sufder Jung!'

'Courage, Excellency!' said Ganesh. 'He has done it in the hope of reward.'

'Reward? Vengeance!' cried the unfortunate young fellow. 'Here! For God's sake let me out! I will kill that fiend with my own hands; I will force her to tell me the truth. Ganesh—Hoosanee, wretches! what do you mean? Have you turned against me too? Loose me, or I will slay you both!'

'Let my lord have patience!' murmured Hoosanee.

'Patience?' echoed Tom, with a hoarse laugh. 'There! This is my patience!'

With one mighty effort he had thrown them off. They lay on the ground—stunned by the force with which they had fallen. Tom picked up his weapons and bounded, like a wild creature escaped from captivity, across the room. For a few moments they lost him.

When Hoosanee came to himself, the room was empty. He had fallen with more force than Ganesh, who had already followed his master, and he had not the least idea how long he had been insensible. It would have been natural for the good fellow, who was conscious of nothing but devotion and rectitude, to be indignant at the treatment he had received; but it was not so. Sorrow and compassion for his master,

with shame that he could not hold him back from what, enlightened by a few awful words from Ganesh, would, he believed, be his destruction, made up the whole of his feeling. His head had struck violently against a corner of the charpoy as he fell, and with recovered consciousness came violent pain. He raised himself with difficulty to a sitting posture, crept to the door and looked out.

The confusion had not ceased. From every hole and corner armed men were hurrying out to man the walls, and there came, from a little distance, the rattle of musketry. There was another sound—more awful in its significance—the dull boom of cannon, and the crash of falling masonry. But it was not for this that the unarmed, terror-stricken man was listening. It was not to hear this that he laid his ear upon the ground. Ha! what is that? He springs to his feet, gazes into the lurid, torch-lit enclosure, and then, putting his hands to his mouth, trumpet-wise, shrieks out, 'Fly! fly! The magazine is undermined.' The words act like magic. In less than a moment the court is full of flying figures. There is a subterranean exit. The Europeans will not discover it in the darkness. Hundreds fling themselves into it, casting away their weapons, and hundreds are crushed out of all similitude of men. But, amongst the flying figures, Hoosanee does not see those whom he seeks. There comes to his ear a low rumble, and he flings himself down with his face to the ground. In the next instant the earth seems to rock like a drunken man, and there is a sound mightier far than the roll of artillery or the thunder of a storm. Crash! crash! A wild shriek! a low, piteous wailing! Another crash as the masonry gives way, hurling down those who had been defending it into the trenches, men no longer now. A splinter strikes Hoosanee as he lies, and his lips part in a groan. If he is not in safety here, what must *their* fate be? And is this—is this—to be the end of all his hopes? Has he been deceived all along? Was the master he served as the true representative of him who had gone but a simulacrum and no true man? Surely, if what he had so fondly believed was true, *they* would not have suffered him to perish thus! Such were the ideas that were thronging his troubled brain in those dreadful moments. How many they were he could never tell. He plucked up courage to look up presently. The court was deserted. Where the rebel chief's vast magazine and treasure-house of arms and gold had been, a column of flame and smoke was rising

into the air. The buildings adjacent to it—one of which, as he knew, was Dost Ali Khan's house—were beginning to burn. The boom of artillery had ceased—there was no need for it now ; but from outside he could hear the clatter of arms, and he knew that, in a short time, the fort would be taken by assault. In such case what would their fate be—his own—Ganesh's—his master's—if he was still alive ? Might they not be killed by the angry English soldiers before they could make themselves known ?

Deeper and deeper grew the silence about him. Those who were not dead or wounded had crowded into the subterranean exit. It would be strange, thought Hoosanee, if the English soldiers were to come in presently and find only him.

The torches that had lit the courtyard had died down. There was nothing now to illuminate it but the fiery column. By its light he saw dimly three figures, that seemed to come out miraculously from the very heart of the burning mass. He ran forward with a cry. If this was his master, then everything was true, for not Rama himself could boast such an adventure ! The Divine Ones had cared for their own.

'Hoosanee !' That was the rajah's voice.

'Master,' he cried piteously. 'Are you safe ?'

'I am safe. Take this burden from me !'

It was the form, to all appearance lifeless, of a woman. Hoosanee received it into his arms and, followed by Tom and Ganesh, who were nearly exhausted, carried it into the hut and laid it down on the charpoy.

'Light my lamp !' said Tom. 'Now,' he went on, 'go out, both of you, and wait for me.'

They obeyed, and he was left alone with the lifeless form. The face was covered with a veil. He lifted it and gazed down. Yes, it was Vivien Doncaster. Vivien herself—the soft brow—the smiling lips—the merry dimples ! The horror of death, which had been swift and sudden, had changed her no more than the horror of guilt in which she had steeped herself. Fair, sweet, innocent, like a sleeping child, she lay before him on the pillow.

With a shudder he dropped the veil. 'Farewell, beautiful witch,' he murmured ; 'we meet for the last time. That it was not left to me to kill you, I thank God ; but I would not, if I could, bring you back to the life which you have so miserably abused. Farewell ! As you lived, so you die—a torment and a mystery.'

As he spoke, he took a letter from his pocket, twisted it into a match, and, having kindled it at the lamp, deliberately set fire to the charpoy in two or three places.

Looking up then, he saw Hoosanee beside him. 'What is it?' he said angrily. 'I thought I told you to remain outside.'

'Master,' answered Hoosanee, 'the English soldiers are coming in through the breach. If we do not wish to die, we must stand aside until you can see the General.'

'You are right, as usual, my good Hoosanee,' said Tom, with his usual mildness. 'Ganesh knows the place, he will hide us.'

As they left the hut the flames ran up, consuming the charpoy and the dead body, and no one knew till much later that a human body had been within the charred and ruined hut.

To the servants, who had been witnesses of the deed, it was a deed of charity. Whatever the dead woman had been, the flames that made her sepulchre were less cruel far than the hands of men would be.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GOING THROUGH THE LAND—FROM NORTH TO SOUTH, FROM EAST TO WEST

MORNING dawned upon the ruin of the fort. Where Dost Ali Khan's magazine, the storehouse from which he drew his supplies, had been, there was a wide breach. Outside, English and Sikh soldiers—a detachment from the main army, which was on its way to Cawnpore—were under arms, waiting to rush in with the first rays of daylight. They were exultant, for this stronghold of the rebel chieftain, which was so cleverly hidden away that they had only discovered it by accident, was a refuge and a tower of strength to the mutineers, and without it the cleverest and most influential of their opponents, if he had escaped, would be completely paralysed. It was more than probable, however, that he would himself share in the destruction of the fort, in which case a blow would have been struck whose effects were incalculable.

In the night, and before they were discovered, they had thrown a cordon round the building, to cut off the escape of the garrison, which they had reason to believe was numerous. Hundreds fell with the magazine, while the guns, plied as they had been in the dark, had doubtless done some execution; but they could not suppose that every one within the walls had been slain, and the complete silence puzzled them.

Fearing an ambush, they set to work cautiously. The officers were to the front as usual, and Bertie Liston was one of the first to leap over the mounds of rubbish that blocked up the breach and to alight within the boundaries of the fort.

His presence at this critical moment must be explained.

When we saw him last he was leaving Gumilcund under the convoy of Subdul Khan, to make the best of his way to Meerut, which, however, he did not reach, having been met at a few leagues distance from the station by a runner in disguise, carrying despatches from the General at Meerut to the General of the army of relief, with a peremptory order to himself to use his utmost diligence to find the army, and to offer his services to the chiefs who, it was rumoured, had lost some of their officers by fever and other casualties.

Nothing, as we shall imagine, could have been more congenial to Bertie, who, ever since he heard the terrible news from Jhansi, had been longing ardently for a brush with the rebels. Helped by Subdul Khan, whose ability and devotion were beyond praise, he succeeded in finding the head-quarters of the army. On his way, through a series of accidents, which there is not space to record here, he discovered the whereabouts of Dost Ali Khan's fort, and when a body of troops of all arms were detached to capture it, he was given the command of the cavalry. And so it came about strangely that the first face Tom saw that day was the face of a friend.

All need for disguise being, for the moment, over, he had thrown aside the turban which he habitually wore, and washed the dye from his face, which was fearfully haggard and as pale as death.

With his two servants behind him, he was standing in one of the covered enclosures that still remained intact, when Bertie, walking in advance of his soldiers, with his drawn sword in his right hand, and his left grasping his revolver, marched by. He saw him, recognised him in an instant, and, breaking into an exclamation of surprise, called upon his men to halt.

Tom joined him, smiling sadly. 'I am afraid you will find nothing but ruins here,' he said. 'The few who were left of the garrison escaped.' Then he pointed to his two men. 'They are my servants. They will be safe?'

'Perfectly. I will leave two or three men to guard them in case of mistakes. We are fearfully savage.'

'God knows I can understand that. Come on! I will lead you,' said Tom.

'But how do you come to be here?'

'I came to find Miss Elton. She was taken prisoner.'

'Good God!' cried Bertie. 'You don't mean to tell me—Heavens, man!—what a fright you gave me! A prisoner? Not here, surely?'

'I hope not. I hope not. And yet—good Heavens! what am I saying? I know for certain that she came here. I was told, only just before the alarm, that she was sent away—sent away with a soubahdar, who had a grudge against her father. It may be false—God in heaven grant that it is.'

'His name?' said Bertie, his brow darkening.

'Sufder Jung. Do you know anything about him?'

'Only that he was one of General Elton's pets.'

'The General wounded him,' said Tom, 'and he came here, vowing vengeance. I have it from Dost Ali Khan, who allowed him to seize Miss Elton and bring her here. She was one of my Nowgong fugitives—my servant had rescued them. They were within a day's march of Gumilcund. The others came in——' His voice broke.

'Hold up, old man!' said Bertie huskily. 'Do you mean to tell me that Dost Ali Khan gave her up?'

'No; I believe he meant well. He had sent for me. He was making her a bait for my alliance. I could not have given in to that, of course; but I don't think for a moment that he would have hurt her. I can't tell you everything now. It was one of their fiendish intrigues.' As they talked they were going round the fort, where not a soul was to be found but these three men—the Rajah of Gumilcund and his two servants.

'Can the brutes have got away?' said Bertie.

Tom sent for Ganesh, who, he said, knew more of the events of the night than either he or Hoosanee, and, after a little delay, the Brahmin led them to a small inner courtyard, in the centre of which was a dry well. Several of the men who were following them leapt down. They found nothing but dead bodies. The entrance to the subterranean passage, which made

a secret exit from the fort, was here, and hundreds had been smothered in their efforts to reach it. That some had escaped was most probable ; but whether the chief was amongst them or not could not be determined. Search was made for his body, but it was not found. This was the only damper on an enterprise which had been perfectly successful, and accomplished without the loss of a single life.

The soldiers were now allowed to rest, cook their morning meal, and ransack the ruins for such treasures as might have escaped the destruction that had fallen upon the fort, and Tom, whose story had run through the camp, was invited to the officers' mess. Ganesh and Hoosanee, meanwhile, were taking what rest and refreshment they could, and making arrangements for another start. It was well that they had their wits about them, for Tom, for the moment, was like one dazed. The colonel of the detachment, when he had benevolently tried to enter into conversation with him, congratulating him on his escape, and asking what measures he meant to take to ensure his safe return to Gumilcund, and had received nothing but vague replies, took Bertie aside, and said that something ought to be done for the poor fellow. His mind was evidently a little astray. Bertie had the same fear ; had his duty permitted—I have this part of the story from him—he would willingly have joined his unfortunate friend, giving him the benefit of what he considered his own clearer judgment. But this he knew was impossible.

He led him away from the mess table. 'My dear fellow,' he said as firmly as he could, 'you must really tell me what your plans are. Where do you mean to go when you leave this place ? To Gumilcund ?'

'To Gumilcund ! When Grace is wandering Heaven alone knows where !'

'Do you love her ?' asked Bertie, hoping to rouse him.

'Love !' burst out the poor fellow, 'that is too poor a word ! I—O God ! there is no word—no word I have ever heard that can tell what I feel. She is everything to me—life, love, hope. I would give myself—I would die in slow tortures in the presence of my enemies, to save her—my darling—one moment's uneasiness. And to think—but I can't think. Thinking kills. I must act, or I must die !'

'But have you any clue ?' said Bertie. He was full of the most passionate sympathy, and he dared not give it vent. His unhappy friend must be brought to take a practical view

of his position if he was to be saved. 'Couldn't you tell me how you mean to set about the search?' he went on.

'I don't know. Don't ask me. Light will come. My servants are looking for horses. Give me money, like a good fellow—all the money you have. I will return it to you when we meet in Gumilcund. We shall meet'—with a strange smile. 'Yes; don't look at me in that incredulous way. And she will be there, too; and, look here, Captain Liston: if you see the others—the General, and Lady Elton, and Trixy—tell them that I am going through the land—from east to west, from north to south—deserts, jungles, forests. I will leave no stone of it all untrodden, and, sooner or later, with God's good help, I will come upon her—or'—in a terrible whisper—'her murderers!'

'Yes, yes,' said Bertie chokingly. 'But, my dear boy, you mustn't be so vague—you mustn't, really. You won't find her by riding over the country, and most likely you will get killed yourself, which wouldn't suit the book of any of us just now. I have been putting your scheme before the General, you know, and he quite falls in with it—says you are a military genius. We shall want you to help us to work it. Take my advice, and——' He paused. 'The poor fellow doesn't so much as hear me,' he said to himself. 'I wonder——'

But at this moment Hoosanee interrupted them. 'May I have a word with my master?' he said.

At the sound of his voice Tom started up, all his lethargy gone. 'Yes, Hoosanee, I have done with the Sahib,' he said. 'Captain Liston, good-bye. I trust we may meet in Gumilcund.'

And before Bertie could speak another word he had gone.

CHAPTER XXXV

A BRUSH WITH MUTINEERS AND A CLUE TO THE FUGITIVES

AGAIN we must let the rajah's heir tell his story in his own words. The exact date of the following extracts is not given; but, from internal evidence, I judge that they were written in the month of August.

It was a critical time for the country, for rebellion was still at large, and no decisive step had been taken to check it; but the gathering of enormous masses of rebels in and about the great centres of mutiny, such as Delhi, which was still in the hands of the disloyal troops, and Lucknow, where the gallant little band of Europeans were holding at bay untold hosts of enemies, and the marching down into Central India of a Ghoorka army from Nepaul, kept the country districts, over most of which the wave of insurrection had swept, comparatively free from disorder. In many places English magistrates had actually resumed their ordinary jurisdiction, and, although the mails were subject to interruptions, and had to travel by a more circuitous route than formerly, while the robber tribes and vagrants were more troublesome and insolent to travellers, it was still possible, even for a European, with pluck and readiness of wit, to pass safely through the land. The villagers, moreover, and scattered peasantry, having seen what the rule of a disorderly army meant, showed less animosity against the English. In some few cases they were actually friendly, while there can be no doubt that in others they magnified the difficulties of the road to fugitives to magnify the reward which they hoped to earn by hiding them.

Tom travelled, as he had done before, in an Eastern disguise, and he did not, therefore, undergo the same perils as his compatriots. But that his journey was not without its perils this record will show.

'How many days and nights have gone by since I left the fort? I cannot tell, and, in fact, it seems to me sometimes that I have lost the power of recording time. One day is much the same as another. But this morning something happened, and we have decided, in the little council which we hold daily—Ganesh and Hoosanee and I—that it will be wise to halt in this village for a few hours. So, to still my impatience, and to regain, if I can, the balance of mind which deserted me so strangely after my awful experiences at the fort, I am trying to put down upon paper the things that have happened to us, and the things that we expect. I do not despair yet. That seems strange, even to my two devoted servants, who, I can see, though they do all they can to help me, have themselves given up hope of anything but disaster. Ganesh desires me to return to Gumilcund. The days at the fort have caused him to change his politics, and he is very

sorry now that he carried Dost Ali Khan's message to me at all. If he only knew how fervently I thank him in my heart! for, sad and dispiriting as this life is, I know very well that at Gumilcund it would have been worse. Now I have hope, at least. Every night, as we start on our journeys, I say to myself, to-morrow morning we shall hear of them! And I feel that I am doing something.

'It has come to our ears, through one of Hoosanee's many spies, that a party of rebels, carrying with them English prisoners, will pass through this village to-day, and we have reasons for thinking that Grace and Kit may be amongst them. If they are—but I dare scarcely think of it. The thought unnerves me.

'It has gone round that I am a great man—not a rajah—I dare not give myself that title lest I should be detained—but an Ameer of great wealth. How Hoosanee manages, Heaven only knows: his resource and readiness are marvellous: but he always keeps me provided with good mounts, fine trappings for the horses, and fresh garments. I second his efforts as well as I can by preserving, in my face and manner, the dignity of a king's envoy, and we meet with respect everywhere. In this large and populous village, I have been given the whole of the serai to myself, and the chief men amongst the villagers have brought beds and padded quilts, and water and food for my entertainment. We arrived between night and morning. It is full noon now—the awful, burning noon of this terrible season. I occupy a pavilion lifted high above the court of the serai. Ever since early morning the people of the village have been crowding in to see me; but, thank Heaven, the heat has driven them away at last. While my good Hoosanee prowls about, picking up what information he can, and Ganesh is making arrangements for our further supplies, I can draw down my blinds and rest.

'I have slept—actually slept. I dreamt that we were together again in England, Grace and I. Is this a good omen? God grant it. Hoosanee, who has just been in, tells me that he has gained over the villagers. They will not attempt to fight the rebel escort, but if the sepoys halt here for a few hours, as it is supposed they will do, it is proposed to take the prisoners from them by subtlety. He asked what I would promise them, and I left him free to make any conditions he pleased. I think he has been obliged to tell more than he in-

tended, for I hear a great buzz as of many voices in the serai, and I can see through my blinds that the people are gathering together in their multitudes. If they will have me as a leader I am ready to put myself at their head. Ah! how my heart bounds as I think of it! Once—once to see myself face to face with these villains! But we must be prudent. We must remember Cawnpore. Subtlety first, till the captives are in our hands, and then force!

'It is all over! Not for me, for my task is not done; yet, sad and hopeless as I feel, there is in my soul a certain wild springing up of exultation which prevents me from being utterly cast down. It is for them—for the torturers of women and the slaughterers of unarmed men and helpless children—that the end has come. Fifty rebel sepoys with their leader lie slain in the narrow streets of this quiet village. Their prisoners—two young English officers, fearfully attenuated, who had been walking under the sun of this August day with chains on their limbs, and a lady in a cart whose face I have not seen, though I know to my sorrow that she is not Grace—are under the care of my excellent Hoosanee in the house of the headman of the village.

'How did it all come about? This I must try to remember and put down. That we—the assailants of this valiant fifty—were only about twelve men all told I know, for Hoosanee counted them out before me. It was a fortunate circumstance for us that we had anyone at all to help us, for the villagers, though sympathetic and willing to earn the large reward I offered, had no wish to put their skins in jeopardy by trying conclusions with armed and disciplined soldiers. But, as it happened, a little band of Bheels, on their way to fill up the gaps made daily by sword and pestilence in one of the newly formed native regiments, were halting in the village, and some of these were ready to flesh their swords on the persons of the hated Poorbeahs, to whom, as Hoosanee had represented, the English prisoners' escort belonged.

'They marched in early in the evening. The village was complaisant, and an enormous quantity of food, with good liquor to wash it down, was brought to them, while the serai which I had vacated was allotted to them for the long rest that would be sure to follow their heavy meal. They entered and disposed themselves for sleep, sentinels being posted at every entrance to give notice of danger. Night fell. My few

men and I were close by, watching. The sentinels, who had feasted as luxuriously as their comrades, kept on the alert for a short time, and then, seeing that everything was quiet, addressed themselves to sleep. Some of our friends amongst the villagers slipped in softly, set the prisoners free and brought them out, whereupon our little body of sturdy hill-men ran into the serai with shouts and the fierce clattering of arms. From outside these shouts were echoed by the villagers, and the unhappy wretches in the serai, thinking, no doubt, that an army was upon them, were completely paralysed. Numbers were slain. The remainder rushed out. It was deep night now, and they could not see the number of their assailants. I stood at the entrance alone, and I cut them down one after the other. God forgive me if I sinned, not in killing, but in the awful spirit of exultation which possessed me as I plied my fearful task Ten men must have fallen to my sword. Some who had caught up their weapons in their abject flight tried to resist me, but I was too swift for them. I was not a man, I was an avenging fate. Those who escaped me fell into the hands of the villagers, and they, with yells of derision, drove them back into the serai, so that in a brief hour it was all over. Every one of the rebel escort was slain, and their prisoners—who, we hear, were to have been taken to Lucknow and there most foully put to death—are safe in our hands.

'The exultation which followed my easy victory did not last long. What does the slaughter of one or two matter in this great saturnalia of blood and wretchedness? Grace has not been found, and till my hair turns grey, and my limbs wither from age and disappointment, I will search for her. So we—Hoosanee, Ganesh, and I—are on the march again. The little party of prisoners is left in the village. I was surprised and deeply touched to find that the lady in the cart was Mrs. Lyster, my travelling friend of the "Patagonia." She and her companions, supposing me to be a native potentate who had interfered in their behalf, sent as soon as the struggle was over to thank me for their rescue, and to beg for the favour of an interview. I sent back word by Hoosanee, who was their messenger, that I would wait upon them, and, dressed as usual in my Indian disguise, I entered the inner court of the headman's house where they were resting.

'I had resolved not to make myself known as an Eng-

lishman, but the sight of Mrs. Lyster's sorrowful face and neglected dress—she who had always been so gay and trim! —was almost too much for my resolution. It gave me a little pang to find that she had not the least suspicion of my being anything but what I gave myself out to be; and how strange it was to me to receive her humble thanks! Evidently she had been chosen to speak, for the young fellows with her were too much exhausted to be capable of carrying on a conversation. Sad as it all was, I could have smiled at her careful speech. She had never been very strong in Hindoostani, and she was fearful of not speaking to the great Indian lord in a sufficiently respectful manner. Over and over again I longed to turn everyone out, and to speak to her in our own English tongue. But this I knew would have been the height of imprudence.

'I hope I replied becomingly to her thanks.

'And now came the question of what they were to do next. They wished to reach, as soon as possible, a place where they could feel themselves secure, and I was anxious to have them in Gumilcund with my other fugitives; but I could not, even for their sakes, give up my search, and I was afraid of allowing them to travel alone. The two young men, moreover, who as I presently found out were subalterns in the army, and mere boys, were so much prostrated by the hardships they had undergone that to take them on at once might have endangered their lives. Mrs. Lyster told with tears that one of them had been tied to a tree in a village through which they had passed, and flogged in the presence of a hooting crowd of villagers, and that both of them had been put in irons and forced to walk for miles under the burning sun. Taking all these things into consideration, we thought it best that they should run the risk of staying where they were for a few days. I, in the meantime, would send messengers to Gumilcund, which was within three days' march of the village, and an escort strong enough to take them there safely would be sent out.

'Mrs. Lyster showed some animation when Gumilcund was mentioned.

'"I have heard of the little state as one of the happiest and quite the most wisely governed in India. Are you,' looking at me doubtfully, "the rajah?"

'I drew back from the light and put on all my dignity. "Madam," I said, bowing low, "I have at least great influ-

ence in Gumilcund, and that, with everything else I possess, is at your service."

'"Everything, except your Excellency's time," said Mrs. Lyster, with a touch of her old spirit which enchanted me.

'Keeping myself well in hand, I made another ceremonious reverence. "My gracious lady must know," I said, "that my time is not my own. If it were, she would be welcome to it."

'"To whom does your Highness's time belong?" she asked.

'"To the God whom I have worshipped from my birth," I answered. "I will speak to you frankly, for you are of those who can understand. I have bound myself under a solemn vow to find and rescue an English lady from whom I have received many kindnesses."

'"Is she in danger?" asked Mrs. Lyster.

'"I have reason to believe so," I answered.

'"A prisoner? English?" she asked eagerly.

'For an instant I forgot everything, and if Hoosanee, who was always on the watch for these mistakes, had not interposed, I should certainly have betrayed myself by dashing into English. Bowing himself almost to the ground, he stepped forward.

'"Will my master pardon me?" he said. "I have a question to ask the Mem Sahib."

'"Say on, Hoosanee," I said, withdrawing into the shadow, and letting him continue the conversation. I did not, in fact, speak again—a circumstance which annoyed Mrs. Lyster, for when, Hoosanee having obtained all the information she could give us, we retreated to the courtyard, I heard her say, in English, "He is the nicest native I ever met. But what a pity to see him so completely in the power of that deceitful-looking servant!" I thought, as I crossed the court, how, if God spares us to see some of this dreadful tangle straight, Mrs. Lyster and I will laugh over it by-and-by.

'We saw our host, who was perfectly agreeable, vowing, by all he held sacred, that the fugitives whom the courage of his lords had rescued should be well treated while they were in the village.

'Ganesh now came in, and informed us before him that my letters had been sent to Gumilcund. These were to Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, requesting that men and money should be sent to the village at once. The money was to reward those who had stood by us. The men were to escort Mrs.

Lyster and her companions to Gumilcund. When he heard of soldiers and treasure, the headman became more and more abject. I believe he will be loyal. Fortunately, no one of the prisoner's escort is left to tell the tale of their destruction to the rebel army.

'This over, we retired to the hut that had been allotted to me, and discussed our further proceedings, which were to be moulded on the information given to Hoosanee by Mrs. Lyster, and which, with the object of seeing things more clearly, for I am still like one wandering in a maze, I shall write down here.

'It was by the merest chance that it all happened. For the latter part of their miserable journey—it had lasted a week when we rescued them—she had been given a small covered bullock-cart, such as native women travel in. At the last stage, when a halt was called, the cart was drawn into what seemed to her to be a large market-place. It was mid-day, she said, and their escort and the people of the village where they were halting appeared to be asleep, for there was no noise. She tried to sleep too. She thinks she did drop into a doze; but she always slept with one ear open, and the sound of low whispering close under the cart aroused her. One of the side curtains was lifted, and a face peered in. It was not an angry face. It was an inquisitive face. The face with-drew, and another took its place. This one gazed at her with considerably more attention. But it, too, withdrew. She was now thoroughly awake, and a little startled. She crept to the side of the cart where she had seen the faces, and laid her ear against the curtain. An altercation was going on. Words that might be rendered in English as "She is!" "She is not!" "I'm certain," "So am I;" "You are a fool!" "I'm not: you are!" were being bandied from mouth to mouth. All she could gather at first was that both of the men had thought they recognised her, and that they did not take her to be the same person. But why this interest? She continued to listen, and it seemed to her presently that the man who spoke in negatives had convinced his companion. His name was Tika-ram. When they settled down to confidential talk, she heard him say distinctly that he was in search of an English girl and a fair-haired boy, who, he was led to believe, had been taken prisoners by Dost Ali Khan. A third man joined the conference, who, from the way in which he spoke, she judged to be a disarmed and fugitive sepoy. He was working his way

into Nepaul, and appeared to be in great dread of the swamps that have to be crossed before the mountain kingdom is reached. In the course of conversation he mentioned having heard of English fugitives going that way.

'I can write of it calmly now—too calmly—for I am becoming accustomed to cruel shocks, and my heart, I think, is growing callous; but, when I heard it first, when I tried to realise that my tender and delicate Grace might be entangled in the meshes of the pestilential, tiger-haunted district which I had crossed in the winter, my heart, I confess, nearly failed me.

'But to return. On hearing of fugitives, Tikaram roused himself and asked for particulars. The conversation became very swift now, so that Mrs. Lyster could not quite follow it; but she is certain that the sepoy convinced Tikaram of the identity of the fugitives of whom he had heard with those he was seeking. He went off presently in search of an ekka with a swift pony, and returned to bid his friends good-bye. Mrs. Lyster thinks that the sepoy joined him, but of this she cannot be quite sure. She believes, however, that their designs were friendly.

'Now this, it will be said, was not much to go upon, but we have to make the best we can of it, for we have no other clue. Hoosanee builds much, I find, on Tikaram's name. This Tikaram, if he is the same man, was a servant in the house where Grace was staying at Nowgong, and seems to have been deeply attached to her. There was besides some whisper of a reward if he could bring her safely out of Nowgong. The mystery lies in his knowing that she is not with the other fugitives at Gumilcund. Hoosanee says that he advised him not to follow them out of Nowgong, but it is quite possible that he may have been upon their heels and have witnessed the capture of Grace and Kit. Conjecture, however, is of little use. We have determined in any case to follow Tikaram, and early in the morning of the day after the rescue we made a forced march to the village where Mrs. Lyster and her friends halted last. There, Hoosanee being as clever as usual in picking up news, we heard that Tikaram had been heard of at Ghazeapore. That district is comparatively quiet, as my good friends the Ghoorkas, under their gallant captain, Gambier Singh, are holding Azimgurh in force. It would be curious if Grace could have wandered so far, but Hoosanee says it is not at all impossible. Since the day when she was said to have

been put out of the fort held by Dost Ali Khan more than three weeks have gone by. I tremble as I write the words. I scarcely dare to credit them. Three weeks! She may have died long since. If she is alive still—Ah! I cannot write. I cannot think! God help me! Let me preserve my reason, at least until I know! Then do with me as Thou wilt. I will be dumb!

'Three more days of rapid travelling have gone by. We are going night and day. When our horses are knocked up Hoosanee, by some miraculous means only known to himself, gets us fresh ones. He tells me that he is drawing largely upon the future. Let him! So long as we are moving—so long as I have still this little ray of hope to carry me on—I care for nothing else.

'We are resting in a small dâk bungalow on the banks of a canal, which was occupied I suppose formerly by an English engineer, and which is within a few hours' ride of Azimgurh. I wished to ride on without drawing rein, but our horses gave in altogether, and we find that we must let them rest for a few hours. I write because I dare not think. Every day my love and agony seem to increase, and I feel sometimes as if I could not bear it much longer. In spite of the fatigue we are undergoing, I am afraid to sleep, for the dreams that haunt me are worse than my waking thoughts. Oh, what horror! What misery! Talk of the hideous visions of a maniac! They can be nothing to mine. Time after time my good Hoosanee has come with tears and cried out to me to awake, for he could not bear to hear my sobs.

'We have heard of Tikaram again. I trust indeed that we are almost on his heels. He seems to have visited Azimgurh. Some one heard that he was given a little band of Ghoorka soldiers to help him in his search. If that is so, he must have made Gambier Singh very sure of his goodwill. I shall hear all about it presently from himself.

'I feel as if I ought to have been far from this hours ago. It is Gambier Singh's fault that I am not. He has beguiled me to remain by the promise of such help as it would not be prudent of me to refuse. I have slept for two good hours: such a sleep as I have not known since I left Gumilcund: and now, while the last preparations for our march are being made I will write down in my book the strange events of yesterday.

'I had no difficulty in finding the head-quarters of the fine little Ghoorka army; my difficulty was in having speech with their captain. Fortunately, however, while I was standing at one of the outposts begging that a note from me might be taken in to him, there passed by a man who had often seen me during my visit to Jung Bahadoor at Katmandu. He ran in with my note, and in ten minutes' time Gambier Singh himself appeared upon the scene. I shall never forget the warmth of his welcome, or the passionate sympathy and interest with which he threw himself into the history of my misfortunes. I really think he almost regretted for a moment the responsible position he occupied, which prevented him from joining me in my search.

'We held a long and earnest consultation. I find that the rumour concerning Tikaram is true. He came to the camp with his story, which was that he was in search of a young Englishwoman and a child with long fair hair, travelling as it was supposed alone, who had been heard of last in these districts, and were said to be making for Nepaul. He wished to follow and help her; but his resources were completely exhausted, he had no arms, and he feared to penetrate the jungle alone. So Gambier Singh gave him a body of trusty men to accompany him. This happened yesterday only, so we shall soon be on their track.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN THE DEADLY TERAI

THIS part of my friend's diary ends abruptly. During the next few days it was impossible for him to write a line, and afterwards he only mentioned briefly the incidents of his further adventures. But Hoosanee, Gambier Singh and others, with whom I have spoken since, have given me the details so fully that I can almost see the story passing before my eyes.

I take it up from the point where the diary breaks off. The writing was interrupted by Gambier Singh, who came in to tell him that everything was ready for a start. The Ghoorka captain had not much hope himself of a happy issue to the enterprise. He had lost too many men in the deadly Terai not

to know its perils, and he did not for one moment imagine that a tender woman and delicate child would have been able to cross it safely. But he was too chivalrous and kind of nature to be able to quench his friend's hopes by expressing his own conviction. He expended his sympathy in taking care that nothing which he could supply should be wanting to the success of the enterprise.

Tom was attended now as befitted a person of rank. He rode in front on a splendid little Arab horse—the gift of Gambier Singh—a small body of Ghoorka soldiers, armed to the teeth, followed him, and close in the rear came camels and bullock-carts, laden with camp equipage.

For two days and nights they plodded on. As the jungle closed round them, and the air grew dark and pestilential, the despondency of the young rajah increased. Day after day, to the imminent peril of his life, he left the beaten tracks and made great circuits in the bush. Now and then, at such times, he came upon sights that would make his blood run cold—human bones bleaching in the sun, the bodies of men, who seemed to be sepoys, half gnawed away by wild beasts, and arms and utensils flung down in the bush. Once, emerging from a close thicket, he came upon a huge tiger, mumbling over its horrid feast. His blood was up, and, while the restless fire of the brute's fierce eyes was upon him, it fell, mortally wounded, over the corpse it had been devouring. His men, several of whom were close by, were triumphant, and the beautiful monster was carried off to camp. As for the conquerer, he turned away groaning—penetrated to the heart by a sickness for which earth holds no remedy.

It was a sickness of the soul, for his bodily health did not suffer. While one after another of his attendants sickened, and had to be sent back, he held on. Even Ganesh, desperately anxious as he was to keep up, was compelled to give in at last. Hoosanee, although his superb devotion prevented him from acknowledging it, showed, by the wild look in his eyes, that he was suffering from fever. Tom saw it all; but he would not give in. 'Let us at least find Tikaram!' he said to Hoosanee. 'We know that he has gone into this place. Sooner or later we must come upon his track. He is not alone as they are.'

One day, as they were plodding slowly on, a little cavalcade of men and camels and Ghoorka soldiers, coming from the opposite direction, met them. On both sides a halt was imme-

diately called. Tom, who was in front, saw, as the party opened out, that a litter was being carried between them. His pulses had begun to beat so furiously that he could scarcely breathe or speak, and he motioned that Hoosanee should speak for him. A few words were exchanged. He could not hear them for the tumult of his senses. Then Hoosanee came up. 'Well!' he said fiercely.

'My master, it is Tikaram. He is dying.'

'If he is *dead*, he must speak to me,' cried Tom.

In the next instant he had sprung from his horse, and was standing beside the litter. He set aside the curtains and looked in. At the sight of him, the fever-stricken wretch within, who had been lying in a kind of trance, seemed to be galvanised into new life.

'Are you the rajah?' he said feebly. 'You—promised—a lakh of rupees.'

'A lakh!' echoed Tom. 'I tell you that if you have found them—if you can guide us to where they are—I will make you rich beyond the dreams of avarice.'

The man gave a deep sigh. 'A lakh!' he said slowly.

'But tell me! tell me!' said Tom.

'A lakh!' he repeated. 'I could win it yet. But I am dying.'

'You shall not die. I have medicines with me and nourishing food. Good God!' He broke into English in his agitation. 'The man is going, and he knows something. I read it in his eyes. Hoosanee, bring me wine or spirits.'

A strong restorative was brought in a cup, which Hoosanee put to the lips of the stricken man. He swallowed a few drops, and his eyes, which had been closing, opened once more. Tom was going to speak again; but Hoosanee stopped him.

'Let me speak, my master,' he said. 'The life is nearly gone, and flutters like a spent flame. A breath may put it out.'

'Right!' said Tom. 'Take my place!'

Then, in the silence of both cavalcades, Hoosanee stooped over the litter. 'Do you know me, O brother?' he whispered.

'You are the seller of garnets,' answered Tikaram. 'You came to Nowgong, and the lotus-eyed trusted you, and you carried her away.'

'She was taken from me, Tikaram.'

'She was taken from you. I saw it all. I followed her to

the fort, and when the evil-hearted Soubahdar took her out of the gates——'

He paused. 'Let my brother go on,' said Hoosanee gently. 'There is no enemy here. Why did the Soubahdar take the lotus-eyed forth?'

'The White Ranee commanded him. She was black of heart and evil. I saw her at the gate, and she saw me, and her servants, whom she commanded, caught me by the girdle and would have slain me, only that the god whom I serve was my friend. For a night and a day I lay like one dead, suffering grievously. My strength came back and I set out in search of her.'

Again his breath failed him; but a few drops of Hoosanee's potion made him strong enough to go on with his tale.

'There were two—the Miss Sahib and the child. What the Soubahdar would have with them I know not. He was known in the villages about, and I tracked him from place to place; but was never swift enough to come up with him. Then I lost him. He had gone out of a village in the morning, and his prisoners, who where still alive, were with him. It was thought that he was taking them to the hill-countries of the north. But of this I know nothing, save that they were going north, and that they travelled by unfrequented ways. After that village, O brother, I lost him. Some said he was dead; but his body was not found. Miss Sahib and the butcha I lost too: but I went on, seeking everywhere.'

'Courage!' whispered Hoosanee. 'My master will make your family rich.'

'I thought I heard of them at last,' he went on. 'But they were alone, and how could that be? Where was the Soubahdar who had taken them from the fort?'

'Could he have deserted them?' said Hoosanee—'left them in some jungly place to be fallen upon by the wild beasts.'

'Why should he do so, O brother, when he could take them out himself and kill them with the sword? He is not of my religion. He is a Moslem. This I said to myself, and my trouble was great. But the lakh of rupees and the eyes of the Miss Sahib, who, as my brother knows, will sometimes smile graciously on her servants, kept me from going back. I travelled on till I reached the camp of the Ghoorkas, where I told my story, and where I was given men and food to take me on.'

'Is that all?' said Hoosanee, very sadly. 'Has my brother come back unsuccessful?'

'Am I going back?' cried the poor creature, starting up and looking round with a fierce glitter in his bloodshot eyes. Pain conquered him and he lay back groaning. 'I could stand and walk no longer,' he moaned, 'and they put me in this. But they said, "We are going on, we camp in new ground every day," and I believed them—I believed them.'

'Perhaps you *are* going on,' said Hoosanee soothingly. 'This country is strange to me. But tell me, if you can, why you think that Missy Grace is here.'

'Have you ever seen Miss Sahib's writing?' said Tikaram.

'My master knows it well. If you have found anything, show it to me,' cried Hoosanee eagerly.

Tikaram was too weak to move. 'My right hand,' he murmured. 'Open it!'

Pulling aside the light covering that was over him, Hoosanee saw one of his hands rigid, as it seemed, and firmly closed. He forced it open as gently as he could, the man's eager eyes following him wistfully. Tom was close by. He had heard the last words, and he was trembling from head to foot with impatience. But he had to wait while the fingers, cramped with the awful sickness of the jungle, were slowly and painfully unclenched. The hand was nearly open at last. They saw a scrap of paper, and Tom made a dash to seize it; but, with the onslaught, the hand, as if moved by a will of its own, closed again. Then a convulsive shudder ran through the man's wasted frame, and a long, long sigh broke from his heart.

'He dies,' said one of the Ghoorka soldiers, falling back. 'Give room for his spirit to pass out of him!'

Space was made round the litter; but Tom stood there still, with blazing eyes looking down upon the clenched hand, which might, for all he knew, hold a message for him.

'A moment, master—a little moment,' whispered Hoosanee.

'Try him with your drink!' said Tom.

It was put to his lips; but he could not swallow. Stooping over him, Hoosanee heard him murmuring the name of his god. 'It is very near,' he said.

In the next instant the poor creature started up. 'Missy Grace!' he cried out. 'Missy Grace!'

Tom groaned. 'He knows something. Make him speak. The secret will die with him!' he sobbed.

'Master,' said Hoosanee solemnly, 'the secret is at your feet.'

For, with the sudden movement, the clenched hand had relaxed, the fingers had fallen open, and the paper they contained had rolled out upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ADVICE OF BÂL NARÎN

TIKARAM was dead. His was an instance, and not a solitary one, of the devotion of which the sons of the soil were capable, both to the children under their charge, and to the men and women who in the days of their power had treated them with consistent kindness. While his co-religionists covered his face and built hastily a pyre of dead wood to consume his body, Tom went apart and, with a beating heart, undid the many foldings of the paper.

The writing within was in Grace's hand. He saw this at a glance, but the words were so faintly traced that he had great difficulty in deciphering them. He did not, in fact, make it all out at once. But for us it has been transcribed, and we are able to give it as it was written down.

'This is for Tom. I know he is looking for me. When I have an opportunity I shall throw it down addressed to him in his Indian name, and some one, perhaps hoping for reward, will take it to him——' A break, and then, 'I cannot write. I am watched day and night. What will the end be? I dare not even imagine. But I must not die while Kit is living.' Another short break, and then in tremulous, very minute characters, 'I am afraid of this man. There is a wicked look in his face. I think he is vindictive; but what can I have done to offend him? To-day he threatened to separate me from Kit. If he does I know what I will do. Don't fear for me, my beloved ones. My peace-bringer is still at my heart. When the occasion comes I know how to use it——' After this last entry a considerable interval must have elapsed. To those who read it afterwards it seemed as if some mental shock had passed over the poor girl, shattering her nerves. When she wrote again it was with a sort of

surprise. 'I forgot about my plan—' so the next entry runs —'but did I have a plan? My mind goes from me. Everything is confused. I feel as if I had been dead, and had come to life again. Perhaps I have. But here is my darling Kit sleeping sweetly beside me in the hut where we have been resting all day. Is he dead too? Or who is dead? Everything is confused, and I cannot understand. But I think he and I are alive. What we are doing here I don't know in the least. Some one somewhere, who seemed kind, dressed us in native dresses and stained our faces, and some one else gave us a cart and a bullock, and so we go on day after day. Kit says we are going into Nepaul, for the people there are kind to the English. The poor English! I wonder how many of them have been killed! Kit says we are English too. I wonder if that is true. I thought I was English once. I thought I was a woman and a lady, but that must have been in another life——' Ah! how strange and pitiful it was! Spelling it out with pain and difficulty, Tom felt now and then as if his heart would break! If he could only weep as Bertie Liston had done! But he could not. His eyes were dry and hot, and a fire seemed to be burning within him, and his breath came and went in panting sobs like one in the agonies of death.

The last words were more clearly written, and the collected way in which they were put together, contrasting vividly with the incoherence of what went before, gave him a little glimmer of hope.

'I have slept, and I am better, and I remember now what I intended to do when I first began to write this. There is a good man here—a hermit or holy man, who has penetrated our disguise, and who pities us. He has heard from those who have heard it from others that fugitives have been inquired for in the villages hereabouts. He advises us, however, not to linger here. The Ghoorka army are on their march southwards, and the people are excited. But he will try that my scroll may reach those who are trying to find me. I think Tom is one. If he finds me—but I remember that he may see this. I thank him with all my heart for what he has done, for what, as I believe, he is still doing for us. To-morrow we go into the jungle. The good hermit will guide us. We go towards the mountains, and we hope to succeed in crossing them. If this is found let those who find it look for us in the jungle or on the hills. There may yet be time to save

Kit. He is the noblest and bravest little fellow that ever lived.'

That was all. The suspicion which had led Tikaram first, and later the young rajah, to search for them in the jungle was confirmed, but there was no further clue. These might be the last words of the heroic girl before darkness swallowed her up. And yet it was with a strange rapture—a sense of exultation such as he had not known since he fleshed his maiden sword on the slaughterers of women and children—that Tom pressed the dear missive to his heart. She was hoping for his help, counting on him as her defender. And since she had lived through so much, was it not possible that still, even at this eleventh hour, he might find her? He dared not think of it. It was too good, too joyful. Yet for a few instants the warm blood welled to his heart, and his pulses beat a triumphant measure, and it seemed as if all—all he had suffered, his toil, his depression, his despair, his horror was as nothing. Found! Brought back in safety; cared for with so deep a tenderness that the terrors of the way she had gone, and the misery and humiliation of her capture, would be forgotten. His heart swelled. The love it contained made it fit to break. 'It is too much, too much,' he said to himself. 'I cannot bear it.'

And then he remembered suddenly that his task was not done, nay, that the hardest part of it was to come, and he tried to be stern, and to brace up his energies to do what lay before him.

They had halted in a small open glade. The pyre on which the body of Tikaram had been placed was already kindled, and the smoke was rising into the still air and floating away in tremulous waves, like heat made visible. The birds of prey that had been hovering over the litter were sailing away suddenly, uttering harsh cries. The men of both cavalcades, taking advantage of the rest, had tethered their horses and, gathered together in little groups, were lighting small fires to cook their evening meal. On all sides they were hemmed in by the jungle, and, as the shades of evening gathered, strange noises as of shrieks and sobbings echoed and re-echoed through the dense and matted underwood.

Tom had gone apart to read the paper. When the strong determination to act at once came upon him, he called up the chief of his little escort and Hoosanee. The latter, at his request, fetched two or three of those who had been with

Tikaram. When they were all together Tom addressed them in Hindoostani. He told them as much as he could of the paper that had fallen into his hands, expressed it as his conviction that those he sought were still wandering in the jungle, and asked their advice.

Not one of them, not even Hoosanee, but gave it as his opinion that the fugitives were long since dead. If they had crossed the Terai, which was unlikely, they could never have crossed the mountains. The Ghoorkas were for giving up the search in despair. Hoosanee said nothing; his eyes followed those of his master. Tom asked temperately if, in their opinion, there was any fear to be entertained of their encountering detachments of the rebels here. They believed not. Later there would, no doubt, be many fugitives from the revolted troops, but there had not as yet been any English victory of sufficient importance to cause the rebels to despair. If they fled from one place they would join their comrades in another. But jungle-fever was a worse enemy than revolted sepoys.

Tom said he knew this, and he therefore proposed that the greater number of those who had come with him and Tikaram as escorts should return to their respective regiments. Two or three of the strongest he would like to retain in case of accident. But even as regarded this he would wish them to judge for themselves. The coolies must go with him to take on the carts with provision for the way and camp equipage, and if his Ghoorka friends would do him a kindness they would take back with them his friend and servant Hoosanee, recommending him to the kindness of the Captain Sahib, Gambier Singh, until such time as he could himself return.

He was interrupted by the sound of sobbing, and, looking down, saw Hoosanee at his feet. 'Have I offended my master?' said the poor fellow. 'Have I been indifferent in this search, or does he reproach me with failing in my service to him? If I have, let him speak to me! Nay, let him strike me! I will take punishment from his hands. But let him not send me away from him!'

'My good Hoosanee,' said Tom very gently, 'do you not see that it is of you I am thinking? You are ill. You cannot deny it.'

'If that is all,' said Hoosanee rising, 'I will venture to disobey your Excellency's command.'

'How? You will be rebellious,' said Tom smiling.

'I will do what I know is for the best. Does my master think that he could go on without me?'

'But consider, Hoosanee—if you were really ill——'

'Master, if I die, I die. I will never be burdensome to you. Let me go on?'

'If you must, there is no more to be said. But the responsibility is your own,' said Tom gravely.

The Ghoorkas meanwhile had been discussing their plans. When, looking radiant, Hoosanee stood aside, one of them stepped forward and spoke. The rajah, he said, had spoken well. If some of them must die, there was no reason why all should meet with the same fate, and, in the province whence they had come, good men were wanted. They proposed that six of the strongest from the two escorts should be chosen to attend the rajah on his farther journey, and that the rest should return to their captain.

Tom thanked them, and gave orders that all arrangements should be made for the breaking up of the party.

When they had withdrawn he held a further consultation with Hoosanee and the cleverest of his Ghoorka guides. This man had felt the curious magnetic power which Tom generally exercised over Orientals, and had become almost as much devoted to him as his own servants. Uninvited, he had joined the conference, and he now threw himself at his feet, and, having begged that he might be one of those whose services he would retain, answered with readiness and perfect knowledge his questions about the country. No one, as it happened, could have been better acquainted with the low country that lies at the foot of the hills which separate the Nepaul valley from the plains of North-West India. The jungle-fever had no power over him. He breathed more freely on this pestilential plain than in the high mountain valleys. Moreover, the wild tribes, or Aswalias, as they are generally called, who inhabited the jungle of the Terai, knew and respected him. Had he not again and again brought down great Shikaris, or hunters, from the hills, who slew the tigers that devastated their fields and carried off their little ones? The great reptiles themselves that, like malignant spirits, shuddered through the long grass of the jungle, had no terror for Bâl Narîn, and he carried with him potions and unguents that could steal the poison from the deadliest snake-bites. Though a Ghoorka, therefore, and, as such, a natural enemy of the wild Aswalia, he had long been counted their friend.

Bâl Narîn shared his countrymen's admiration for Europeans, of whom he had been frequently the companion and guide. It was to fit himself for their service that he had practised Hindoostani, which he spoke with quite sufficient ease to carry on a conversation, and, as this was a rare art amongst the Ghoorkas, it made him all the more valuable. His European friends called him Billy—a trick into which Tom fell with a readiness that betrayed him at once to the keen perception of Bâl Narîn, who had made up his mind long since that he was far more English than Indian. The discovery, however, had rather increased than diminished his reverence for his new lord, to whom he was now almost as much devoted as Hoosanee himself.

These three then set themselves to discuss their plans.

Bâl Narîn stated that they were one day's direct march from the foot of the hills. The road was not, at that time, nearly so good as it has since become; but he was able to speak of it as comparatively safe and easy. With the ascent of the hills, the difficulties would begin. Exceedingly precipitous, choked with low underwood and haunted with wild beasts, the belt of country which lay between the pestilential swamp they were now crossing and the middle slopes of Sisagarhi was almost as dangerous as the Terai, and far more exhausting to the traveller. The question was, Could a woman and child have crossed it alone? Bâl Narîn thought not. He inclined to the opinion that if they were living—a point concerning which Tom would admit no doubt—they were still on the plain. Hoosanee, on the other hand, who had witnessed the heroism of which Grace was capable when she had others than herself to defend, was loud in his belief that she had set herself to face the perils of Sisagarhi, and that she had succeeded in her attempt.

Above the lower belt of which I have spoken, and on the middle slopes of the first range of mountains, there are glorious forests and delicious pastures. In this favoured region, where the temperature is that of Southern Europe at its best, the oak and the chestnut, the ash and the elm, the laurel and the magnolia, are to be found in company with the pipul, the banyan, and the acacia. In the midst of this wealth of vegetation there are pretty little villages inhabited by quiet cultivators of the Magar and Newar tribes – Buddhist for the most part, and people of gentle life, over whom the Ghoorka warriors exercise lordship, in return for a protectorate that is gratefully wel-

comed. There are posts here and there, along the road over the pass, in which soldiers are stationed, to drive back the savage and predatory tribes from the south, who, since the settlement of the country early in the century, have been able to do little mischief besides such as might arise from an occasional cattle raid. It was the fear that these wild tribes, held in check on one side by the British and on the other by his own stout little soldiers, might become powerful and overrun the country that had induced Jung Bahadoor to originate the policy which he carried through with such consistency and success throughout the year of the rebellion. Hoosanee, then, gave it as his opinion that the fugitives had reached this middle region, and found a temporary resting-place in one of the villages. He proposed that they should press forward without an hour's delay, make for the foot of the hills, and set themselves to climb them. As for Tom, he wished to go both ways. If they had reached the further side of the jungle, he could not bear that they should remain without help one moment longer than was absolutely necessary, while, on the other hand, if they were here on the plain hiding, it might be, in some miserable hut, how terrible it would be to leave them to their fate!

'Hoosanee,' he said at last, 'do you really wish to please me?'

'Do I wish to please my master?' cried Hoosanee. 'How can he ask me?'

'I ask you, Hoosanee, because I must put your affection to the severest test. It has come to this. We must divide our party. You must go one way and I another. Listen, and do not speak until I tell you! I would divide myself if I could. I would climb Sisagarhi to search for Miss Grace there, and I would hunt this jungle through and through, in case she should be hiding here still. How can I do it? In one way only. You are my second self, my good friend, and you must take part of my duty from me.'

'I will stay then. My master shall climb Sisagarhi.'

'No, Hoosanee. It is you who shall go on. Be silent! I cannot allow you to decide this. I have my reasons for what I am doing, Listen again! You shall take three of the Ghoorkas, and a runner to send back with intelligence as soon as you have gained it. I will take the others, and Billy, who knows the people, shall go with me. Come at once! I will divide provisions and send you on.'

And so it was settled to Hoosanee's distress, for, although

he saw at once that it was necessary to the success of his enterprise that he and his master should separate, he would have preferred to reserve to himself the more dangerous part. As for Tom, while he felt that the arrangement he had proposed was the only one which offered any hope of a good issue to their task, he was thankful to have succeeded in sending off Hoosanee to the higher latitudes. In the meantime, Bâl Narîn was far more useful to himself than even his own servant could have been.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SHIKARI'S DISCOVERIES

VERY early the next morning the cavalcade divided. The released Ghoorka escorts returned to their regiments. Hoosanee, with good store of provisions and three mounted soldiers, went off in the direction of the pass, and Tom, accompanied by Bâl Narîn, turned off the main road to seek a byway through the jungle, which was known to his guide as having been used by criminals and fugitives, but which was little frequented by travellers

It is the fortunes of this last detachment that I propose to follow, my chief authority being Bâl Narîn, whom I met a few years ago—an old man then, but wonderfully clear as to intellect and memory—in his native city, Katmandoo.

That it was a forlorn hope he had felt from the beginning, and nothing but his extraordinary regard for the young rajah, who, as he expressed it, 'held him by his eye,' would have induced him to go on with it.

I find that he and others looked upon Tom as perfectly mad at the time. Many Orientals, however, and Bâl Narîn was fortunately amongst their number, look upon madness as men of a later time have looked upon inspiration. The man himself, they think, is helpless, and the Divine speaks and acts through him. This, no doubt, in addition to his peculiar fascinating power, was the cause of the faithfulness with which Tom was followed more than once in his desperate enterprises. Having been prevailed upon to go forward, Bâl Narîn acted as

Subdul Khan, and Hoosanee and Ganesh, and even Gambier Singh, so far as possible had done. He gave himself heart and soul to the task before him.

He spent the night before they started, not in resting, but in drawing out a plan of the Terai, as it was known to him, and making various imaginary routes to and fro, so that, in the future, he might be able to say that every spot within a certain area—the limits of which he did not think any fugitives from the Doab could have crossed—had been thoroughly explored. These he proposed to traverse, penetrating by the way into the solitary haunts of the half-savage Aswalias, whose language he knew, and of whose friendship he was sure. For if such travellers as the English girl and boy had passed through the more unfrequented ways, they would most certainly have been heard of. Even in the jungle and amongst half-naked savages, extraordinary pieces of news, as Bâl Narîn knew from experience, are apt to spread.

The following morning he detailed his plan to Tom, who listened with hope, and said that he would be guided by him entirely. That was a terrible day's march. To cross from the main road to the bypath that Bâl Narîn knew, it was necessary to plunge into the jungle, and the coolies had here and there literally to hack a way through it for the horses and camels. Comparatively open spaces, which Tom would have set himself to canter over gaily, were carefully avoided by the Ghoorkas, and Bâl Narîn told him that they were dangerous morasses, into which he might have disappeared without hope of rescue. It was still worse when they reached tracts where the vegetation was larger, for now giant creepers flung down from the trees sinuous arms, with thorny leaves that cut into the flesh of the coolies who hacked them away, and that, when they touched the flanks of the horses, made the poor creatures plunge and snort with pain. The closeness of the atmosphere, the dank vegetable smells, and the effluvium from decaying growths, were almost unendurable. There was danger, too, from the dwellers in the jungle. A man-eating tiger, had one been abroad that evening, would have made short work of these weary men. So, when the darkness began to gather, they set torches flaring to frighten all evil things away, and far off in the cavernous recesses of the jungle kingdom they could hear the dull roaring of the disappointed beasts of prey. That night they rested as best they could, for Bâl Narîn refused to accept the responsibility of going on. With the first break of

day, Tom, who was quivering through every nerve with fierce impatience, stirred them up. He found the Ghoorka soldiers, who believed themselves lost beyond hope of redemption, deeply depressed; but Bâl Narîn was in excellent spirits. He informed Tom that he had discovered some of his own traces—the marks he had set upon certain trees in one of his latest hunting-frays; and he knew that his instinct, by which alone he had been moving on the previous day, had not deceived him. He was making straight for the point he wished to reach. This was encouraging, even to the soldiers.

They set forward again, and went on for many hours at a rate of progress terribly slow to the young rajah's excited nerves. He was on the strain of expectation. Over and over again he would pull Bâl Narîn up short and make him listen to the mysterious whisperings and flutterings that he had heard himself. But the experienced guide could explain them all. He said, moreover, that it was impossible they could be found here. Not even an Aswalia could have his dwelling in the midst of such a region. And Tom tried to control himself. It was immeasurably hard. All day long—and never so much as now—he was haunted by a sick dread of that failure at the very moment of what might, with a little foresight, have been transcendent success which makes uncertain enterprises so nerve-harrowing. If she were near him and he passed her by—if, from her hiding-place, she could hear the very tramp of their horses, and, thinking they were enemies, plunge more deeply into the jungle!

For so it might be. There was no argument of Bâl Narîn, to whom he poured out his fears, which could persuade him that he was cherishing a phantom fear. Then sometimes, as I have heard, it would come over him with sharp throbbing of pain that he was wrong, and that these were right. It was madness—nay, it was the very insanity of folly—to imagine that, wandering in this haphazard way without chart or compass, he would ever succeed in finding her. She was dead! dead! dead! And if he were near her, or if he were far away, what could it matter? The dead hold no commune with the living. By day and by night the awful word rang in his ears. Bâl Narîn heard him repeating it. Dead! Grace was dead—all her loveliness and sweetness—all her heroism and patience—with the love and passion and tenderness unutterable that she had inspired in the hearts of others—gone! —lost to the earth for ever and ever and ever! There were

moments in those awful days when his soul went out beyond the limits of its own despair, and when abysses of sorrow—fathomless as the graves in which our beloved lie buried—would seem to open out before his feet. Mad! Was he mad? No, he would say to himself: it was the world—dull of eye and ear—insensible—suffering itself to be shrouded with the veil of spiritual blindness which Nature throws round her human children, as she woos them softly to fulfil her behests—the world was mad—he was sane. To him, in his anguish, the anguish of the universe had been revealed—a pandemonium of woe that made him sicken and tremble and cry out for Death, even the Death of eternity, to release him from the torturing memory.

But, miserable as his thoughts were, they did not delay his steps. Guided by Bâl Narîn, he plodded on quietly hour after hour.

On the evening of the second day, they emerged from the jungle, and, to the great contentment of the whole party, came to opener ground. On the banks of a sluggish stream, whose course they had been following for some time, the weeds and shrub had been cleared away to give place to scanty herbage and lush-green paddy-fields. An Aswalia village—a melancholy little group of tiny bark huts—had been planted in the clearing. It was a landmark for which Bâl Narîn had been looking. As soon as he caught sight of it, he made his party halt, and cantered on to make inquiries, and to prepare the villagers, who were exceedingly jealous of their rights, for the passage of strangers.

He was away long enough to make Tom impatient; but when he returned, his radiant face showed that he brought good news with him.

'Are they in the village?' cried Tom, leaping at once to the conclusion which, a moment before, had seemed too rapturous, even for a vision.

'No,' said Bâl Narîn, drawing rein. 'But they have been heard of.'

'Where? where? Let us set off at once! You are our saviour, our good genius,' cried Tom.

'The Sahib must be pleased to have patience still,' said Bâl Narîn, with dignity. 'I will tell him what I have heard, and then he shall decide what we are to do. Two days ago——'

'Two days—only two days—you are sure——'

'I am telling my tale to the Sahib as it was told to me. Two days ago a woman and a little girl, who said that they were servants of the English, came into the village. A holy man was with them. He was from the Doab, he said. He had met the woman flying from murderers, and he had vowed to carry her safely across the mountains with her child. They were afraid to go by the main road, and they were seeking the pass known as the "robbers' road." The headman is quiet and good when he sees no chance of plunder. I know him well. There was nothing about the travellers to tempt him, and perhaps he would have been afraid to hurt the holy man. They were given shelter and provisions, for which the woman and child gave the bangles of silver that they still wore. The headman pitied them, and he would not take all. He directed them to the next village, let them rest for a night, and sent them on. I asked how they were travelling, and he said they had a bullock-cart.'

'But how do you know——' began Tom.

'Patience, Sahib! I am coming to that. The child, they tell me, wore a little embroidered cap under her muslin veil. The cap was of a pretty red colour, and one of the women in the village took a fancy to it. She came behind the child and lifted it off. Then, Sahib, all who stood round were speechless with surprise, for the child gave a cry, and the woman caught it to her arms, and long yellow curls fell down about its shoulders. What does the Sahib say to that?'

'It was Kit,' said Tom. 'But go on, for Heaven's sake. Did the villagers show them any unkindness?'

'No, Sahib, none. I think, from what I hear, that they were more friendly than before. Perhaps they thought they would gain a reward by-and-by. The headman begged them to remain, offering to keep them till the war was over. But the woman would not hear of it. She said, for the child's sake, she must go on to the mountains. But, Sahib, they could not travel fast, and I know the way they have gone——'

'You think it a miracle that they should have lived so long, Bâl Narîn?'

'Sahib, it is the strangest thing I have ever heard. The gods have cared for their own.'

'And since they have got so far, am I mad in thinking they may go farther?'

'Who said that his Excellency was mad?'

'No one said so. I have read it in your eyes, Billy. But

we are both sane now. Yet—it is no question of madness. Two days. What could they have done in that time? They could not travel day and night as we will.'

'If we travel at night we may miss them, Sahib.'

'True; I had not thought of that. But, come on now. There are two good hours of light before us. Then you shall rest, and I will watch. Have you been able to get any fresh provisions?'

'They are bringing in bags of dâl and rice, which will last us for six more days. By that time we shall have reached the further boundaries of the Terai.'

And so they went on once more.

I try to imagine it all sometimes, but I confess I find it hard, although Bâl Narin and the rajah himself, in the moments of confidence that come to him on rare occasions, have again and again given me narratives of their experiences.

They went on for two more days. This part of the jungle was haunted by tigers. At night, when they made up their camp-fires, they could hear them howling about the sluggish streams that crept through the jungle. There were serpents, too. Tom slew one monster that reared itself up in his path by striking its head with the butt-end of his musket. But to him the most appalling feature of all this march was the swooping down of the foul birds of prey that came from their eyrie in the hills in search of such meat as the jungle would always yield. The creatures had not the least fear; they came so near, sometimes, that he could have struck at them with his cane. It seemed as if they were waiting for the death that might presently fall upon their victims.

He shot down two of these mighty birds in one day, glorying over them as he had gloried over the sepoys whom he had destroyed.

His mind, in the meantime, was oscillating between hope and despair. Every hour increased his impatience, and added to his horror and uncertainty. It was true that, only a few days before, they had been seen living, and still, so far as he could gather, in good health; but would not the difficulties and dangers of this further journey, which taxed their own resources to the utmost, break these tender wanderers down? And to fail at the last moment, when help was actually within reach—how infinitely pitiful it would be! He had one comfort, meanwhile—Bâl Narîn was with him. The news heard at the Aswalia village had completely won over the wily

Ghoorka guide. Hitherto he had gone on with the enterprise to indulge his employer, and humour the mad caprice of an Englishman who had cast his spell over him. While the European rajah 'held him with his eye,' he could not refuse to follow him. Now, first, he began to believe in a happy issue. He would not say much about it, for he was fearful, if he gave an encouragement which turned out to be unfounded, the young rajah would sicken and die of despair; but Tom, who could read the minds of his people, knew that he was going forward with renewed energy.

It was on the second day after they left the village behind them that Bâl Narîn's experienced eye began to detect marks which led him to believe that they were actually, at last, on the fugitives' track.

They were in the path known in this region as the robbers' road—a path which, though distinct enough to the experienced, was difficult to pass over, being much choked with vegetation. Kutcha-grass, growing to an immense height, made dense walls on either side of the road. They were in their usual marching order—the coolies in front beating down obstructions, Tom riding behind them, and peering anxiously into the recesses of the jungle, behind him the Ghoorka soldiers mounted on camels, and Bâl Narîn bringing up the rear.

The guide was on foot, and studying the ground. He saw something shining, and, stooping to pick it up, found that it was a silver bead such as the women of these parts often wear in their bangles. He has told me that the excitement caused by this apparently simple discovery was so great that he could scarcely refrain from shouting it aloud. But, in the next moment, he realised that it might not mean anything—that, in any case, it would be unwise to place too much reliance upon it. This was the robbers' road, and it was more than possible that the bit of silver might have dropped from one of their bags of spoil. He went on examining the ground, and carefully scrutinising the walls of kutcha-grass. Presently he made another discovery; but it was so small a thing that no eyes save those of an experienced hunter of beasts and men, like Bâl Narîn, could have discerned it. Low down, where a weed, whose fleshy leaves are armed with spiked thorns, grew among the grass, he thought he saw a single white thread. Eagerly he swooped upon it, and picked it up, and now he could scarcely restrain his excitement, for the thread told the same tale as the bead. A muslin saree, such as those worn by

women of the plains, had certainly swept those thorny weeds. It was probable that the bead had been dropped by the woman who wore the muslin veil. Taking them together, there could be little doubt that women dressed in the Indian fashion had passed this way. But, if so, there would be other signs that he could read—signs that might, perhaps, lead him straight to their hiding-place.

So, with bent head and beating heart, he proceeded on his search.

About a hundred yards further on he picked up another bead, which matched the first. He judged from its position—it was poised, as it were, on a little blade of grass, and the least agitation of the air would have dislodged it—that it had been only recently dropped.

Meanwhile, these narrow investigations had seriously delayed his progress. When he made this last discovery, he looked up and found himself alone. Those he was leading had gone on in front of him. The sound of the whistle, with which the rajah was accustomed to keep his little party together, came ringing down the lane at this moment. Bâl Narîn answered it with a peculiar call of his own, and a few instants later he heard the hoofs of his chief's horse, as Tom cantered back to find him.

'Rajah Sahib!' he cried out, waving him back, 'I cannot come on yet. You must have patience with me, and I may bring you news.'

'News here! You are dreaming, Billy,' answered Tom very sadly. 'Who could bring us news in this wilderness?'

'That is my concern, master. Leave me, I entreat of you; and, as you cannot go forward alone, let the men rest and eat! I will join you by-and-by.'

Mournfully the rajah turned his horse's head. This, of course, was one of Bâl Narîn's whims; but it would have to be indulged, for he was completely in his hands.

It was now late in the afternoon, and the men, who had been riding hard all day, were glad of rest and food. Languidly, for the air of these pestilential regions has a numbing effect upon the energies of men, the soldiers unsaddled, and lighted a fire, round which they crouched, while one of their number cooked the dâl and chupatties that served them for their meal. Tom dismounted, tethered his horse to a stake which his men had driven into the ground, and, feeling it unwise to join Bâl Narîn, who never liked to be disturbed

when he was working out a fresh idea, strolled about aimlessly. The camels and bullock-carts, carrying their larger supplies, were coming up behind them, so he could not take his own meal; but, in fact, he did not want to eat. The excitement that had been working within him since Bâl Narîn sent him away made him feel that food would choke him.

His restlessness, meanwhile, was terrible. He was possessed with those miserable, impossible longings which come to most of us at the great crises of our lives—when our senses and the faculties bestowed upon us by Heaven seem too little for our need; when we crave madly for some indefinite power—some loosening of the bonds of our humanity—some supersensuous divine knowledge and strength to carry us, at one leap, to the bourne where our restless hearts would be. Secrets, deep as the grave and high as the infinite azure, are weighing down upon our little lives. In the level light of every-day life we forget them. They circle about us, and we see them not. It is when the light departs—when the little life with its little interests becomes tragic, that they come—this grey host of shadows—and mock us with our impotence. Sometimes we strike out blindly, as children strike at tables. We must know; we will know. It cannot be that we have reached thus far, and that never, through all the infinite ages that must be, we can reach any farther. That would be hideous—revolting to our moral sense. 'Give us light, give us light!' we cry out to the Power which, as God, or Nature, or blind Force, holds our destinies in its hand. 'Give us light, or kill us!' And only the awful silence answers us, 'Neither light nor death, poor soul; only a blind going forward to an unknown goal!'

Such was Tom's condition that evening. As he looked round on this desolate land, given up to monstrous growths and fierce animals, with his hopes dwindling every moment, he felt a terror of his own littleness that almost maddened him. Devoured by impatience, he could do nothing. If he moved a few yards from his party he would be lost, and without Bâl Narîn he would be more helpless and hopeless than ever. The necessities of his humanity; the grossness and opacity of his senses; his weakness and his ignorance, were such that, if the dear prize for which he would willingly have laid down his life were in his grasp, he might not be able to seize it. Many men in his position would have cried out to their God. He could not. What he did actually believe was not very clear,

even to himself, at that time. The strange mysticism, so fascinating to a high intelligence, that animates some of the older Oriental philosophies had become curiously blended in his mind with the cut-and-dried orthodoxy in which he had been brought up. But he knew what he did not believe, and special providences, miracles worked benevolently for favoured mortals, were amongst the things that he had renounced long ago.

So, with neither hope nor help, only a vague determination to go on until he died, he went to and fro, like a restless wild creature. When he was out of his men's sight he would clench his fists and strike out at an imaginary foe, and mutter fiercely; when he returned to them he would be as they had always seen him—quiet and stern.

An hour passed by. A sickly evening dimness was creeping over the desolate land; he fancied he could hear the animal-world of the jungle rising up to meet the night, and his impatience grew to such a pitch that he could scarcely restrain himself. Presently the camels and bullock-carts came up. He asked the coolies if they had met Bâl Narîn. They shook their heads. He had not certainly been seen on the road. This made the young rajah exceedingly uneasy; but the Goorkhas, whom he consulted, did not share in his fear. Bâl Narîn, they said, knew what he was about. Most likely he did not care to go any farther that night, and he had laid down where he was, so as not to be ordered on. If he did not join them in the evening, they would certainly see him at daybreak. With this Tom tried to be satisfied, for it was quite evident that he could do nothing. The men would not stir without Bâl Narîn, and for him to do so alone would be as useless as it was dangerous.

They made him up his usual evening meal, a mess of rice and fried vegetables; but he could not eat a morsel. Mounting his horse, he rode slowly back to the point where he had seen Bâl Narîn last. Here he whistled, cried out, tried to ride through the kutcha-grass; but was driven back by the venomous tribes of insects that had come out with the dying down of the day; then, realising that these spasmodic efforts were perfectly useless, he returned to the road, and paced back sadly and slowly, seeing no signs of Bâl Narîn anywhere.

The camp was illuminated by gleaming brands set high on poles, and the little cooking-fires were smouldering in its midst. It made a spot of glowing red in the spectral darkness;

where everything but it was being slowly obliterated. Tom would have preferred the darkness; but he knew very well that in the jungle he was surrounded with nameless dangers. If he did not wish to give his body for a meal to the beasts of prey that were ranging it, he must keep in the neighbourhood of his companions. So, trying to still his fiery impatience, he lay down where they had spread his canvas sheets, drew a gauze net over his face, and lighted a pastile to keep the cloud of insects at a distance.

I have spoken of Tom's gift of sleeping at will. Even in this terrible emergency it did not desert him. He had learned a few lessons, however, in his life of adventure, and it would not have been so easy now as on his first expedition to steal a march upon him.

The sleep, light and brief as it was, refreshed and invigorated him. When, having indulged in it for about two hours, he sprang up and looked round, he found that the feverish madness of excitement which, if given place to, would have unfitted him for work that needed decision and readiness, had gone. His brain was clear, and his limbs had lost their languor.

In the encampment everything was as it had been. The fires were smouldering and the torches flamed. Two Ghoorkas were on guard. The rest slept, while the camel-drivers, syces, and coolies sat doubled up together, their knees touching their noses, near the beasts of burden which were tethered in the centre of the encampment.

It was dead night; but the darkness was not such as it had been earlier, for a three-quarter moon had come up from her bed of snows behind awful Himâla and was shedding over the desolate land a pale light, which, defective as it was, Tom hailed with pleasure.

'You have often been my friend, Lady Moon,' he said, as he gazed up into the vapour-veiled sky, 'and though you don't shine as you do in the plains, I think you will give me light enough to see what I am doing.'

One of the Ghoorka sentinels, in the meantime, seeing him on his feet, had approached him. 'Does the Rajah Sahib require anything?' he asked.

'I want to know if Bâl Narîn has been seen,' said Tom.

'Bâl Narîn has not come back to camp,' answered the man.

'Then, of course, he has not been seen,' said Tom impatiently. 'Have you heard anything?'

'We have heard nothing but the beasts of the jungle. Purtab killed a serpent. It would have stung him. The gods grant that it may not bring misfortune!'

'The gods have brought Purtab good fortune, my friend. His life is better than a snake's—to himself at least.'

'That is as it may be, Sahib,' said the man enigmatically.

'Settle it your own way, but, in the meantime, listen to me! I don't like this lengthened absence of Bâl Narîn's, and I fear some evil has come to him. I will go and look round.'

'If you go far, Sahib, you will never return. This is the devil's hunting-ground. Men in company they spare. Solitary men they destroy.'

'Then how about Bâl Narîn?'

'Even the devil will not slay his own offspring,' said the man with a chuckle. 'Bâl Narîn is safe, wherever he goes.'

'Is he?' said Tom laughing. 'I wish I had such distinguished ancestry; however, I am not afraid. I have my revolver and my sword. If I whistle, try and find me.'

'Right, Sahib!' said the man, falling back.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHAT BÂL NARÎN HAD BEEN DOING

We return to Bâl Narîn, whom we left pondering deeply on the significance that might belong to a muslin thread and two little silver beads.

To make this part of my narrative clear, I must explain, having received the information from this cleverest of Ghoorka guides, that besides the robbers' path, as it was called, there were other narrow tracks running in every direction through the jungle. These were due to the animals that at this season make the kutcha-grass their haunt. Wild beasts, like civilised men, are the creatures of habit. They love their old lairs and their daily walks, and are given to ranging certain circumscribed areas, which, no doubt, are to them what our village, city, or club is to us. These animal highways, then, had, through repeated use, become widened and trodden down, so that it would have been easy for the inexperienced to mistake

them for paths frequented by men. When Bâl Narîn so impetuously waved Tom away, the notion that thus it might have happened to the fugitives of whom he was in search had suddenly come to him. It was a terrible thought, for in such case they would probably have walked right into a wild beast's lair, and nothing could save them from destruction. The idea, however, having occurred to Bâl Narîn, he could not cast it off.

His mind was of that dogged type which often distinguishes men of his profession. From his boyhood it had been his meat and drink to struggle with difficulties and overcome them. The more arduous the task the better it pleased him, and the mere fact of his having entertained the possibility of undertaking it was stimulus sufficient to make him carry it through. By sympathy in the first place and severe personal effort crowned by partial success in the second, he had worked himself up to strong interest in this work of rescue, and passionate determination that nothing should be wanting on his part to bring it to a successful issue. All the force, all the dogged resolution of his nature was aroused. Working for the master whose kindliness and grace had won his attachment, he was also working for himself, that no man in the future might relate how Bâl Narîn had failed in the task he took in hand.

It was in this mood that the new idea met him, and he set himself immediately to work it out. On the robbers' road, where he had been told he might find the fugitives, he had seen indications which led him to believe that he was on their track. If these indications continued he would know, as far as it was possible to know anything, that the fugitives were on ahead of him. If, on the other hand, they stopped at any particular point, there would be every reason to suppose that the road had been abandoned, in which case he saw that there would be nothing for him to do but to try the likeliest of the jungle paths.

Quietly he stole on. A few yards ahead of the spot where he had paused to take his bearings the road was crossed by a path wider than itself, and of such character and appearance as to be almost certain to mislead any but the dwellers in the jungle, or those who, like Bâl Narîn, had traversed it so often as to be fully acquainted with all its peculiarities.

He happened to know it, for it led to a little marsh-surrounded lake where the tigers went down at night to quench

their thirst, and near which he had waited for them more than once with European sportsmen.

He had lighted his lamp meanwhile, for he always carried one in his belt, and with its help he was examining the ground. Close to the opening of this jungle-road, where it turned off the road to the right, he found a third bead. He went on for some distance and saw nothing, then he retraced his steps. A conviction amounting almost to certainty had come to him that it was down this pathway those poor souls had gone. If so he must follow them. Having looked well to the priming of his revolver, and taken from its sheath the short, murderous-looking knife, which he had used several times with effect in close encounters with his fierce jungle-foes, Bâl Narîn adventured himself into the wild beasts' highway.

At first he found nothing to confirm his conjecture. The character of his surroundings had changed. Instead of the tall kutcha-grass there were about him low, thorny bushes, with here and there a ghostly-looking tree, and nullahs in which hideous forms of vegetable life were growing, stretched along the sides of the beast-trodden path. A strange way it was, and devious, going straight for a few yards, and then shooting from right to left, as, like the fire-flash from lightning-charged clouds, it followed the track of least resistance. A dangerous region, and Bâl Narîn, being too old a hunter to be caught napping, trod warily. Once, however, he almost lost his caution. It was when the light of his lamp fell on a shred of coloured stuff that clung to one of the spiked leaves of a sickly, stunted aloe. That moment, he has told me, was one of the strangest, the most triumphant of his whole life. He knew now that the sagacity upon which he prided himself had not failed him in his need. Whether the fugitives were found or not, he had positive proof that they had passed this way.

Meanwhile the darkness that had made Tom curse his helplessness began to assail Bâl Narîn's more subtly tempered senses. He did not mind it. All his greatest enterprises had been carried out in the night time, for it was then that the foes with whom he waged war were at large, and the blackness of the heavens rather quickened than deadened his energies. He drew aside quietly from the beasts' highway, let his lamp, which was burning steadily, shine in front of him, and having twisted some of the gigantic stems of the kutcha-grass into a torch as he came along, he set light to it, and held it flaming over his shoulder. Thus equipped he was far too terrible an

object for even the man-eating tiger to tackle. So he went on towards the marsh-surrounded lake.

But what was his distinct object? He could not, I think, have explained it to himself. I found, in fact, when I tried to pin him to this point of his narrative, that a peculiar confusion reigned in his mind. Up to it and beyond it he was perfectly clear. He could tell about everything, even the working of his own mind. Here he faltered and stumbled in his speech. 'Why did I go on?' he exclaimed to me one day. 'Sahib, I must confess to you that I cannot tell. I should have been mad to think that they were alive. I should have been mad to suppose that, if they were alive, I should find them in that darkness. I knew I was going into danger. Think, Sahib, of where I should have been if my lamp had gone out. I thought of that myself. "Billy," I said, "you are a fool. You are running into danger like an ass that has no wit to keep out of it. Go back! Tell them at the camp what you have found, and bring the rajah and his men with you to search this place in the daylight." That would have been the wisest plan, Sahib. Why did I not take it? As I live I cannot tell you. Sometimes,' his voice dropped mysteriously, 'I have thought that it was not of my own will I went forward. The Sahib, being a wise man, will understand. There are things of which it is not well to speak too plainly. The jealousy of the gods is easy to rouse, and difficult to stay.'

I knew what Bâl Narîn meant, and I nodded my approval, whereupon he proceeded with his story. Though, as he had confessed, he was going forward without any distinct aim, his vigilance did not sleep for a moment. His ear, trained to a subtlety of perception such as we, dwellers in towns, and inheritors of the grossness born of luxurious living, can scarcely imagine, was alive to every sound. His eyes searched the darkness. His sense of touch, which was not, as with us, confined to the effects that arise from actual contact, sent out feelers in every direction. Through his delicate nostrils—the subtlest of the nine gates of the body—he interrogated the humid atmosphere, finding separate odours where we should have distinguished nothing but the vaporous distilments of the jungle.

Presently he came to a full stop, lowered his torch, and drew a long breath. Something strange, subtle, impalpable, was floating towards him. He could not for a moment determine what it was or even through which of the sense-avenues

it had come ; but he knew, he was penetrated with a conviction as strong as death, that presences, either spiritual or corporeal, but other than the beasts of the jungle, were near him.

He paused for fully five seconds, making an effort to define his sensations, and in the meantime he made another observation.

Overhead the darkness grew darker, there was a curious agitation of the air, and he knew that the vast birds of the mountains—the eagle and the vulture—were flying round him in ever narrowing circles. The dead or the dying, then, were near, and they had scented them from their eyrie in the hills. At this moment, when he had recognised the birds as blots on the blackness, and was straining his eyes to follow their flight, there was a faint glimmer of light in the east from the rising moon. Faint as it was it gave the shikari all the light he needed to enable him to see plainly. He looked up and saw a gigantic bird sailing slowly down the wind. His heart beat, and his blood seemed to bound in his veins as he watched it, for it was taking the direction whence his own sense-perception had come. A second followed, and then a third. By the help of the silver light in the east he was able to keep them in sight. Leaping nullahs, tearing through thick jungle, uttering fierce cries to frighten away the wild creatures that might be crouching in cover, he followed in their track. If he had stopped to think, as he has told me, he could not have done it. Nor would it ever have occurred to him to follow the birds, had it not been for that impression, inexplicable even to this day to himself, that unseen presences were near him. But once started he staggered on. Insects stung him, thorns cut into his flesh, his torch was extinguished, his lamp burned dim. Through all his excitement he realised that if he was left in darkness he was lost beyond hope of redemption. His life-foes would have him as their prey. No one would ever hear of Bâl Narîn again. Once he fell, but he sprang to his feet again and flourished his lamp, and a tiger, disturbed in his lair, rushed by with angry growling that would have chilled the blood of a man of ordinary courage.

But still he held on. The vulture sailed on, swooped down, rose into the air with a harsh cry—was it of disappointment? —swooped down again, and was lost in the jungle. But Bâl Narîn was triumphant, for he had marked the very spot of his disappearance. The second bird and the third sailed up.

They helped him to mark the spot. He could not mistake it now, for a tall cotton-tree, whose candelabra-like branches stood out boldly from the silver grey of the eastern sky, was in its immediate neighbourhood. There were few of these trees in the Terai, and they indicated places where the soil was comparatively wholesome. So far as he could judge he was not now very far from the tree which made his landing mark, but there was still a wide nullah to be crossed. Torn and exhausted as he was, he experienced some difficulty in getting to the other side, and he considered himself happy in meeting no tiger. He had scarcely force left to grapple with one.

And now, to his measureless surprise, he saw the jungle open out before him. A small clearing, such as those in which the Aswalia villages are planted, only of much more limited extent, lay under his eyes. A low fig-tree, a stunted bamboo, and the cotton-tree which he had already seen, could be dimly discerned through the darkness. Nothing else at first except the three vast birds. They sat side by side under the cotton-tree, as if in hideous expectation of a feast. Bâl Narîn stamped his foot and cried out, and they rose slowly, but they did not go far. They hovered overhead, and it seemed to him that they were watching his movements.

And now, pausing, he could hear distinctly sounds as of fluttered stirring to and fro, and breath drawn labouringly. He trimmed his lamp and went on cautiously, carrying it before him. In a few instants its light fell on a rude shed, made of branches of trees and dried leaves. On the side by which he had approached it there was no opening; but he could see, through the interstices between the branches, that figures were moving about within. Giving it rather a wide berth so as to see before he was seen, he came round to the front, and called up for a few moments to observe what was going on.

Within the small enclosure, which was such a hut as hermits dwell in, he saw three figures. Two were on the ground, whether dead or asleep he could not tell, and the third—a slender figure in woman's garments—was going from one to the other, stooping over them, and, as it seemed to Bâl Narîn, weeping bitterly. While he was considering how he should reveal himself without increasing her distress and alarm, she came out to the front of the hut, and, his lamp being turned that way, he saw her plainly. That was a moment which Bâl Narîn will never forget. For an instant he shut his eyes.

He was seized with a tremor that seemed to be drawing away his power, and the presence of mind on which he prided himself. Wild as she was, with that haunting terror in her sweet eyes that was never, so long as she lived, to leave them again, there was a beauty and majesty in this face that awed him, he could not have told why. It was like the face of a spirit, he said—of one who had done with the earth for ever. Thus for a moment he saw it; in the next it was suffused with a horror and anguish, such as he had never beheld before. Looking up, he saw the heavens darkened with the wings of the birds of prey that were swooping nearer and nearer to the entrance of the hut, as if they would defy this weak living woman to keep them any longer from the dead.

A cry of unspeakable despair broke from the woman's lips, and she agitated her arms wildly above her head. They retired, settled, approached again, the girl still gesticulating wildly. Then the ping of the shikari's revolver rang through the jungle. Again it sounded, and again, the girl retreated trembling, and two of the birds fell to the ground mortally wounded, while their mate sailed away sullenly to his eyrie in the hills.

Before the echo of his last shot had died away, Bâl Narîn was standing with bowed head before the girl in the hut, and addressing her in his choicest Hindoostani. 'Let me entreat my gracious lady not to fear me,' he said. 'I am a poor hunter from the hills—a man of the Goorkha nation, to whom the white races are honourable. I saw my gracious lady's distress, and I slew the birds that caused her fear. Can I help her further?'

'Could you help me—would you?' said the poor girl.

'Let my gracious lady try me?' said Bâl Narîn.

At this moment there rang another sound through the jungle—a low whistle, prolonged and flute-like, but curiously tremulous, that seemed to be floating down from above them. The girl pressed her finger to her lips, and a colour, soft as the crimson of the morning, flooded her pale face.

The tremulous, sweet sounds go on—they form themselves into a melody. Ah! What is this? What is this? In a moment—in less than a moment—the poor girl is back again in the past. Under her feet is a carpet of soft, green grass; above, swayed gently to and fro by the breath of a June morning in England, wave the light branches of a weeping willow-tree—the waters of a river lie before her—a boat is cutting

through them—it has one rower. Oh! the fair boyish face—the dreamy eyes—the rapture of adoring love!

'Come where my love lies dreaming,' he sings.

'Yes; I am dreaming. I must awake,' sobs poor Grace.

The sounds go on—distant but clear. 'Dreaming the happy hours away—Come—Come—Come where my love——' Groaning, she covers her face with her hands.

Bâl Narîn, in the meantime, is showing the most extraordinary excitement—shouting, dancing, tossing his hands about in exultation. Returning from her dream, the girl gazes at him in speechless surprise.

'Pardon your servant, gracious lady,' he says, 'if his pleasure lifts him off his feet! My master and I have waited for this moment. As the sick unto death long for the morning, so have we longed for it, and how can I help being triumphant?'

'Your—master?' says the girl, fixing her large, fever-bright eyes upon his face.

'My master—the Rajah of Gumilcund. He is on his way. He will be here soon, if—now the demons of the jungle guide him! Here! here!' he cries, lapsing into his native Ghoorka in his overpowering excitement. 'Look for the cotton-tree! Ah! what a fool I am! He does not know my tongue. Lady, you have a light within?'

Trembling with excitement, Grace ran inside and caught up a little rush-candle—their last!

'One moment, dearest Kit!' she cried, for a little moan had come up from the ground. 'They have found us. Tom—our Tom—will soon be here. He will frighten the dreadful birds away.'

She ran out to Bâl Narîn, who had torn off a dried stick from the cotton-tree and twisted a bunch of withered grass to its extremity. Anointed with the drop of oil left in his lamp and lighted from the rush-candle, it flamed out brilliantly in a moment. He waved it over his head and rushed forward with shouts into the jungle, 'This way, master; this way!'

But in a few instants he returned to the space before the hut, fed his torch with wisps of straw, and caught up the rush-candle. The whistling had ceased, and there was no answer to his frenzied cries. Grace looked up into his face and saw its haggard look.

'Is he not there?' she moaned.

'It is a dangerous road,' he answered, 'and my master is

not a shikari like Bâl Narîn. Listen, Miss Sahib! Do you hear that?'

'Thunder. I have heard it several times to-night.'

'Not thunder—the tramp of a herd of wild elephants, Miss Sahib. I must go——'

But Grace did not hear. She had rushed back into the hut. With hands cramped together and beating heart she was crouched on the ground, near the couch of dried grass where she had laid her little Kit, praying that the Father in heaven, in Whom through all these dreadful days she had trusted, would, at this last moment, be gracious to them.

'Save him, O Father,' she sobbed. 'Let him take my darling Kit from this awful place, and then my work will be done, and I will go to Thee.'

Over and over again, while Kit's little arms were about her neck and his burning cheek rested on her shoulder, she whispered the same words, 'Save him! Save him!'

Moments passed into minutes. The hold of Kit's arms relaxed, as, lulled by the sound of her voice, he fell back upon the pillow. Her own head drooped. The long and awful watch by the dead that lay in the hut with them—the sudden shock of terror and joy—the suspense—the strain of expectation seemed to be more than her enfeebled frame could bear. Her mind wandered. 'Kit! keep me awake,' she whispered. 'Those awful birds will come again.' But Kit did not hear her. He was dropping off into a doze. Her eyelids fell. Oh! if she could only sleep! If somebody was here—a friend—some one who would watch for her, and keep the birds and beasts away! Ah!—she started up suddenly, wide awake and trembling in every limb. The light that was diffused through the tent—that shone on the rigid form of the old man who had protected them so far, giving at the last his life for theirs, and on the yellow matted curls of poor little Kit—was the light of the moon. There was nothing to keep the wild things out. A convulsive shudder agitated her frame, and she tried to rise but could not. Then she put her face down near Kit's. 'My poor darling,' she whispered. 'It is all over. I had a dream. It has gone—and I have no more strength to fight.'

CHAPTER XL

THE ELEPHANTS' CHACE

THIS, in the meantime, was what had been happening to Tom. When, having provided himself with tinned meats and a bottle of the powerful restorative which he had always on hand, he left the camp, he had turned by what he spoke of afterwards as a happy instinct into the track which Bâl Narîn had been following before the strong impression of human neighbourhood and the eccentric movements of the three birds of prey had started him on his perilous journey across the belt of jungle that lay between the wild beasts' track and the hermit's hut.

He, too, was well armed with light and weapons, and he went cautiously lest he should be taken by surprise. Suddenly the ping of Bâl Narîn's bullet aroused him. He waited until the echoes died away to make sure of the direction whence the sound had come, and then dashed into another track. He was in great doubt as to whether he was right, for there is nothing more confusing than the sound of firing in a wood. The detonations repeated again and again, and dashed, as it were, from one opposing substance to another, seem to come from a hundred points at once. Instead of approaching Bâl Narîn he might be putting immeasurable distance between them, while, on the other hand, it was quite possible that one of a company of robbers or fugitive sepoys had fired, in which case a deadly conflict would be before him.

The prudent course would have been to retreat while he could, to rouse his little camp, and to take the advice of those who knew more than he did about this dangerous region. Tom, however, never once thought of retreating, for he was launched—launched, as he felt even at that moment of doubt and difficulty—on the last stage of his enterprise; and, if hell and all its legions had yawned at his feet, he was bound to go on.

The path into which he had struck, as being that which seemed to lead in the direction where he had heard the firing, was comparatively easy. As he went on cautiously, throwing the light of his lamp in front of him, he felt surprised that he met with so few difficulties. For a space several yards in

width the tall kutcha-grass was so completely trodden down, and the low trees and bushes, with their rank wealth of undergrowth were so uniformly levelled to the ground, that he could have imagined an army with artillery and baggage-waggons had passed this way. That such a thing was impossible he knew very well, for he had studied the map of Terai again and again with Bâl Narîn. The maharajah's road, which was the only one used for military purposes, was many miles distant from the point they had reached. But what he did not know was that he was in the very track of the monarch of the jungle. Eight months before, when the plains of the north-west were at peace, and the Terai was unhaunted by the deadly fever that, for three-quarters of the year, makes it uninhabitable to all but the savage Aswalias, Jung Bahadoor, who was at that time one of the keenest sportsmen of his generation, brought down from the high Nepaul valley a gallant company of hunters, mounted on tame elephants of proved skill and sagacity, to chase and capture some of the wild elephants that have their dwelling in the morass and jungle, and it was along this road that the hunters had come. A terrible chase it was to any but men mounted and caparisoned as they were, for the wild herd had made it their drive. Hither they came, from the mud in which they had been wallowing—night after night in awful phalanx serried—to drink from a pool in the morass, and to tear down the tall grasses and trees on their passage, for the succulent young shoots that made their food. Had Tom met the dark army, he was lost. Not even the flaming torch, which was a protection from serpents and tigers, would have saved him. They would have rushed over him—crushed him into a grave, where even the birds of prey would scarcely have found him.

Of this danger—the worst that had ever threatened him yet—Tom had no more idea than a child. He trusted for his protection to his torch, his lamp, and his weapons, and all the energies he had to spare from picking out his way were bent on watching for anything that might indicate human neighbourhood. That, at a moment so critical, his mind should have strayed even for an instant from the scenes in which he found himself, seems so strange as to be almost incredible. He was alone; he was surrounded with unknown perils; an object dearer far to him than the preservation of his own life was—or seemed to be—within his grasp; everything might depend upon the way in which he met the next few moments;

and yet—I have it on an authority which there is no disputing —at this point his mind began to wander.

He could not help it, any more than he could have helped the curious transfusion of his own thoughts and ideas with those of another, which had come to him now and then since the night when he wandered unbidden into Grace's rose-garden, and dreamed his dream of fear. It came suddenly too, and without, as it seemed, anything to lead up to it. When, thinking to make a signal to Bâl Narîn, he lifted to his lips the flute-like reed which he always carried, and felt his breath quiver through it, he stepped all at once into another world. Instead of the long shrill whistle he had intended to send forth, it was the notes of a melody, which he had sung a year ago, floating with oars suspended, on the reach of the silver Thames by the lawn of the General's little garden, that stole out on the pestilential air of the wild beasts' haunt—'Come where my love lies dreaming—dreaming the happy hours away.' Was it his own voice—or was it the voice of another? He paused and looked round him, trying to collect his thoughts. Ah! to him too the scene is changed. What are these—what are these—that come towards him out of the darkness? Old hopes—old memories, old dreams. He is the Indian rajah no longer—he is the English boy, into whose heart the honeyed sweetness of a new land of promise is stealing. 'My love! my love!' under his breath he whispers the magic words. And then again he lifts the reed to his lips, and again the melody that he dared to sing long ago, close—close to his darling's rose-bower—floats out upon the air 'Come! Come! Come where my love lies dreaming!'

Unconsciously—blindly—he was rushing on. He did not hear the thunder behind him, and the mad cries of Bâl Narîn made no impression whatever upon his senses. Why he swerved aside—how it came about that he should have dashed into the jungle and precipitated himself into the deep nullah that yawned close by, he never knew. He thought he saw the flashing of silver water through trees—this is the only explanation he could ever give. But, meanwhile, as, bruised and shaken, he lay in the slime, wondering what had come to him, and bitterly cursing himself for his folly in not being able, at a crisis so momentous, to keep his wits about him, the black army that had been marching in his rear dashed over the spot where, but a few moments before, he had been tranquilly walking.

It took Tom some little time to recover his breath, climb to the edge of the nullah, and shake off the mud from his clothes. That time, as we know, had been spent by Grace in frenzied prayers to Heaven, and by Bâl Narîn in no less frenzied ejaculations and gestures. When silence fell upon the hut and silence upon the jungle—a silence fearfully broken by the earth-shaking tread of the herd of elephants—when he whistled and shouted, and fired wildly over his head, and no one answered, he made up his mind that all was lost. .The young lord whom he had accompanied for gain, and clung to in despite of his own better judgment for love, had met with a sudden and fearful death at the very moment when his end was won.

Overcome for a few instants by pity and sorrow, Bâl Narîn covered his face and wept.

A desire came over him then to see what was left of his unfortunate young master, and leaving the little clearing he plunged into the jungle. His senses being far better trained than Tom's, he had no doubt whatever about the direction he should take. The last articulate sound the rajah had made, before darkness and silence swallowed him up, came from a point known to Bâl Narîn, who had been one of the mahouts in Jung Bahadoor's famous hunt, as a sharp curve in the elephants' drive. For this point he was making as speedily and cautiously as he could, when a tall figure—bareheaded, and covered from head to foot in a coating of mud—stood suddenly before him.

Grasping his weapon, Bâl Narîn challenged the man. He was answered by a voice that made his heart leap into his mouth. 'Don't you know me in this disguise, Billy?' it asked.

'Rajah Sahib,' cried the poor fellow passionately, 'forgive me. I would have searched for you amongst the dead. Now thank the gods and the demons of the jungle, who have been favourable to his Excellency!'

And he fell down before him and held him by the feet.

'Get up, you foolish fellow!' said Tom, who was touched, although he would not show it, by his devotion. 'I have fallen into a mud-bath, and got myself into a pretty mess; but why you should have thought me dead, I confess I don't see. You must have come this way yourself, since I find you here.'

'This way, that is true, Rajah Sahib, and why I came

only the gods know. But I kept clear of the Elephants' Chace. I would no more have adventured myself there than I would have slipped my neck into an enemy's noose.'

'The Elephants' Chace,' stammered Tom, 'was that road——'

'It is the deadliest road in all this region for a man not furnished as a hunter,' said Bâl Narîn. 'And the herd has just gone by. How his Excellency escaped is a mystery.'

'The herd—of what, Billy?'

'Does not my lord know——?'

'I understand,' said Tom, a shiver, which he could not control, running through him. 'Wild elephants! My life must be valuable to some one, Billy. Yes; I heard them. I thought it was thunder. I must have only jumped into the nullah in time. And I wasn't trying to escape. Well! it is over now, so there's no use thinking about it. I will stick to you for the future, my good friend! Why did you separate yourself from us last evening?'

'If I tell my master, he will scarcely believe me,' said Bâl Narîn.

'Billy! Billy!' Tom was trembling from head to foot. 'You have found something.'

'I have found those his Excellency is seeking,'

'What? The English lady and the child. And in life? Billy, you are torturing me. Speak plainly. No, no; I cannot bear it. Don't speak at all. I shall see. And yet—where has my manhood gone? If they are dead——'

'Master, they are not dead.'

'Not? Now Heaven be praised!'

'Yes; but my master must be careful. See! there are pits here! If his Excellency goes in so headlong a fashion, he will break his limbs, and how will that profit his friends? Let him follow me, and I will take him where they are.'

'Yes, yes; I will follow you—my good guide—my noble guide! If all I have can recompense you, it is yours. But it cannot.'

'That my master gives me his confidence still is all I ask,' said Bâl Narîn.

'My confidence! I am bound to you for ever and ever. From this day I look upon you as the nearest and dearest of my friends. But how, in the name of Heaven, could you have found them in this thicket?'

'That is a long story. Some day I will tell my master.

But truly those he loves are favoured by the gods, for the birds and the beasts that are their children have helped me in my search——'

And there he broke off, for they had leapt over the last nullah that separated them from the clearing and the hermit's hut; and the moon having risen and floating freely overhead, Tom saw, as Bâl Narîn had seen before him, the little enclosure of dried twigs and leaves; but within there was darkness, and no one was moving to and fro.

CHAPTER XLI

WHAT THE MORNING BROUGHT

How Tom lived through the next few moments he never knew. The next thing of which he was distinctly conscious was standing in front of the hut and looking within and seeing nothing but blackness. As he groped forward with arms extended blindly, Bâl Narîn, who had been busy kindling another torch, came up behind him, and the flashing light flamed suddenly upon a spectacle that made Tom's heart stand still, and brought a wild cry to his lips.

There were three figures in the small enclosure. On one side, rigid in death, lay the fearfully emaciated body of an old man. A couch of dried grass was his bier, and his limbs were covered with the long robe that he had worn in his lifetime. On the other side the little heap of grass on which he lay, pressed close against the opposite side of the hut, and as far as possible from that sight of fear, was a child with golden hair, whose tiny face, thin and pinched with suffering, bore upon its lips the tranquil smile of sleep, or her twin-sister death. This in the flashing of an instant Tom saw. But it was not this, for all its pitifulness, that brought the sick chill to his heart, and that wrung from his lips that tortured cry. For he saw something else. *She* was lying there—his love—his darling! On the damp floor, but close beside the couch, and with arms outspread, as if her last conscious effort had been spent in defending the child, she lay before him motionless. She did not stir when Bâl Narîn's light fell upon her The cry of irrepressible anguish that had broken from Tom

brought from her pale lips no answering note of recognition. It was as he had so often dreamed it would be. He had found her, indeed ; but she was dead—dead—dead !

For the space of an instant he paused. Love and a reverence that almost slew him were waging war in his heart. He was sick with the longing to raise her in his arms, and press her against his breast, and breathe into her lips of his own life and energy, and he dared not.

In that instant Bâl Narîn looked over his shoulder. 'Quick, master, quick !' he cried. 'They are not dead. This is the shock of a great joy. A few moments ago the gracious lady was speaking to me. Bring her out under the moonlight. And here are my chuddah and girdle to make her a bed. You have the cordial ?'

'Yes, Billy ; I have the cordial. Thank God that I remembered it. So !' as he lifted up the light form in his arms ; 'gently ! gently ! Take away the torch, Billy. Let there be nothing to frighten her when she awakes ! And the child, poor little Kit ! bring him out—let him be near her ! God ! how light she is ! My sweet one ! my love ! how you must have suffered ! But it is all over now !' He laid her down reverently on the couch that Bâl Narîn had prepared, and wetted her lips with the cordial. Then her eyelids fluttered, and a tremor ran through her limbs, and her lips parted in a long, shuddering sigh that went straight to Tom's heart. He was chafing one of her hands softly. 'My poor love !' he whispered. 'Is it cruel to bring you back ? Have you suffered enough ? But you shall never suffer again—never, so long as I have life and strength to protect you. Will you not open your eyes and look at me ?'

Her lips parted, though her eyes were still sealed. He stooped over her and caught one word—'Kit.'

'Kit is safe, darling. My good friend Billy is with him. Ah ! I hear his voice.'

Not his voice only. It was a little feeble laugh that came at that moment from the door of the hut; for Kit, who was a proficient in children's and bearers' Hindoostani, and Bâl Narîn were already on the best of terms.

'Do you hear ?' said Tom. 'Do you hear him, Grace ?'

'Thank you,' she whispered.

Then her eyelids lifted, and her sweet eyes, deep with the passion of pain and horror that, so long as she lived, would haunt her, rested upon his. 'You are our Tom,' she said.

'I am Tom. Your Tom——'

'I have something to tell you. It is very strange—very horrible. I don't quite understand it myself. Sometimes I think it is a dream; but, if it were——'

'Dearest, you must tell me nothing now. See! You are exhausted. You have suffered so much. And we are here now, Billy and I, to look after your little Kit and you. Let me give you some of this cordial—it is better than food; and then go to sleep and I will watch over you, and in the morning, which is very near, dearest Grace, Billy and I will carry you through the jungle to our camp.'

She did as he begged her. She was as weak as a little child, and the feeling of security, absent from her for so many long days and nights, was of itself enough to make her drowsy. But before she settled herself to sleep, she opened her eyes once more.

'Rungya is in there,' she whispered. 'He died for Kit and me. You won't let the wild birds have him?'

'No; Bâl Narîn shall watch.'

'He killed two of the birds,' said Grace. 'They were watching for us. I could not keep them away.'

And then her eyelids fell, and she slept peacefully until the morning.

Kit slept, too. He was in Bâl Narîn's arms, just as he had thrown himself when he had eaten biscuit and tinned meat and drunk a glass of cordial. The guide had, in the meantime, lighted a large fire, which blazed and crackled, keeping effectually all the wild things away. As he held the little one, and fed the fire with dried grass and sticks, he and Tom were holding a council of war. Which would be the best plan—to carry Grace and Kit between them to the spot where they had left the men and waggons, or for Bâl Narîn to rush thither at once and bring assistance?

Billy was for the latter alternative. He would take an hour to go, and an hour to come back. By the time the sun was well up they could start together.

But Tom, who, since the adventure of the previous evening, which might have had so terrible a termination for himself, clung to his Ghoorka guide as to a sheet-anchor of strength and hope, was of a contrary opinion. 'Let us keep together, Billy,' he said. 'To-night we have both escaped from almost

certain death, and how can we expect to escape a third time?'

'But, Sahib, consider——'

'I have considered. If there were ten bearers I should carry her myself. And you, if you will, shall help me. How if we contrived a litter——?'

'Out of our garments and those of the holy man,' said Bâl Narîn.

'He will not want them any more——'

'We must burn him, Sahib. That is the burial for the Hindu-Saint. Before we leave this place we will fire the hut.'

'Could we do it now, while they are sleeping?'

'I am afraid of the flame spreading, Sahib. With the first break of day, I will set my torch to it, and we shall be far on our road before it blazes high.'

Giving Kit over into Tom's arms, Bâl Narîn proceeded to make his arrangements. Out of the hermit's robe and the rajah's upper garment, and a long, straight branch from the cotton-tree, he devised such a litter as could be carried on the shoulders of two men: then he took a parcel of dried twigs and grass into the hut, scattered them over the old hermit's body, and anointed them with oil. This done, he went outside again, cleared from the neighbourhood of the hut everything of an inflammable nature, cut two or three stout stakes from the cotton-tree, and hammered them into the ground at a sufficient distance from the hut to allow of their escaping from the fire that was presently to consume it.

'Rungya was a holy man,' he said, in explanation, 'and the time may come when his friends and disciples will wish to do honour to his ashes. We leave these stakes as a signal.' By the time all this was done the light of the morning was beginning to peep in the east, and the wild world of the jungle was sinking to rest.

'It is time for us to move,' said Bâl Narîn.

Tom looked down regretfully at Grace's sleeping face. 'Couldn't we wait a little?' he said. 'It seems such a pity to disturb her.'

'We will not awake her,' said Bâl Narîn. 'Will his Excellency allow me——?'

Tom moved aside while, with a dexterous gentleness which he envied but could not emulate, the clever Ghoorka, who in his youth had served an enforced apprenticeship to a robber

tribe in the plains, transferred the sleeping girl from her bed on the ground to her bed on the litter.

Kit, in the meantime, had awoke. He was much stronger, he said, though to Tom his poor little legs looked piteously weak and slender. It was possible for him, however, to walk, and when he was tired Bâl Narîn said he would carry him on his shoulder. Then a match was applied to the touchwood under the hut ; Grace, who had only stirred once, was lifted slowly and carefully to the shoulders of her bearers, and, with light hearts, they set out to rejoin the rest of their party on the robbers' road.

The sleep which had fallen upon Grace when she knew that her task was done, lasted for many hours. Passing through the air, resting for brief spells when the shoulder of the rajah, which was unaccustomed to weight-carrying, threatened to give way, taken up again with reverent care, and lifted skilfully over the various obstructions of the way, she neither moved nor spoke. Tom would, now and then, look at her with alarm ; but Bâl Narîn smiled.

'The gracious lady is a child of the Supreme Spirit,' he said, 'and this is His sleep which has fallen upon her. When she awakes, Sahib, her trouble will be gone.'

'Grace never slept,' said Kit, who was perched now on Bâl Narîn's unoccupied shoulder, and holding on by his head, 'after Rungya died.'

'How long was that, my little Sahib ?' said Bâl Narîn.

'I don't remember,' said Kit wearily. 'A long time, I think. The big birds came and frightened us. Grace had some candles and she lit them. I tried to keep awake, but I couldn't. She kept awake always.'

'She is making up for it now,' said Tom, from the other side of the litter.

'Yes, she is sleeping beautifully,' said Kit. 'She'll be all right when she awakes, won't she ?'

'All right ? What do you mean, Kit ?'

'She used to look so funny—just as if she were somewhere else. She didn't look so at first, when that dreadful man was with us ; but'—pulling himself up—'I musn't say anything about that. I promised.'

'No,' said Tom. 'Grace will tell us everything herself when she awakes.'

What the sleep was to her—how delicious it had been to

close her eyes, and to let herself drift away on the sea of unconsciousness that, for these many days, had been wooing her; to half open her eyelids just to be sure that she had not dreamed this strange and sudden bliss, and then to close them again; to hear, without understanding, Kit's bird like voice throbbing through the air, and Tom's grave, kind answers; to know that there was no need for her to rouse herself, that she might sleep—sleep till the death-like languor had gone from her limbs and the pain about her heart was stilled—of the rapture of all this what tongue can tell? Only those who have passed suddenly, as I did once, from peril and anguish, and the mad terror of the hunted, to perfect rest and security, can have the faintest idea of what it means.

It was impossible, meanwhile, that their progress could be swift, for they could not tear straight through the jungle as they had done the night before; and Bâl Narîn had to make many a detour to avoid the wild beasts' haunts.

When the sun rose, he rigged up a leafy umbrella, which he fixed at the head of the litter, and under it Grace lay like a sylvan queen being borne in a trance to her woodland home. At last, after three hours' steady tramp, they came out into the robbers' road, and sighted their waggons and horses in the distance.

There had been much excitement in the camp. When they arose in the morning, and Abiman, one of the Ghoorka soldiers, reported that the rajah had left them shortly after moonrise in search of Bâl Narîn, and that neither of them had returned, it was felt that some calamity must have happened.

'This is what comes of killing a serpent,' said Abiman to Purtab; and, indeed, Purtab's conscience had already been reproaching him.

But when a swift-footed coolie, who had run back to see if anyone was coming, rushed into camp with the joyful news that the rajah and Bâl Narîn were on the road, and that they carried a litter between them—then Purtab and Abiman changed places.

'The gods have won the day,' said Purtab, seriously, 'and the demons of the jungle may mourn.'

Everyone knew what to do, for the rajah had often prepared his followers for this moment. In a trice the coolies dragged out and rigged up the tent which was held in readiness, and the water-carriers brought water from a neighbouring stream and heated it in jars over the camp fires, and the

bearers unpacked the soft cushions and fresh garments with which Gambier Singh had supplied Tom, and laid them out temptingly, and toilet-appliances were hunted out from their cases and set in order, so that before Grace, who had been brought in and set down amongst them, had found strength to open her eyes, her tent in the jungle was as well served with all that was needful for her refreshment and comfort as the room from which she had fled when insurrection broke out in Nowgong. So wonderful are Indian servants.

As for Tom, when he came in and looked round, he was so glad and thankful that he would fain have scattered, then and there, rich largesse amongst his people; and it was fortunate, perhaps, both for himself and his guests, that he had nothing at that moment to dispense but promises.

It was Kit who took Grace by the hand and led her into the tent, and it was Kit who served her with the tea and biscuits which had been prepared for her. They were together for a few minutes, and then he came out, and dropped the curtain, and they saw that there was an awed look on his little face.

'She is somewhere else still,' he said to Tom; 'but I think if we don't make any noise she will come back to us.'

'You are sure, Kit?' said Tom, in a broken voice.

'She always came back when she could sleep a little,' said Kit. 'Poor old Rungya used to watch sometimes. Then he died. I will look in and see how she is presently,' he added, with an encouraging nod, and then he went on to play the hero, and to be petted and tenderly cared for by the Indian servants.

They happened to be in a comparatively wholesome region when they halted, and it was decided, in the brief consultation which Tom held with his followers, that they should remain where they were for that day and part of the next night, starting for the Maharajah's Road with the rising of the moon. Grace and Kit would have a cart to travel in, so, although their progress would be slow, the fatigue would not be great; and as there would be no need now for any of those tentative flights into the open spots amongst the jungle that made their former journey tedious, they would get over the ground more quickly. Bâl Narîn calculated that in two or three days, at the outside, they would reach the Maharajah's Road, at the point where they left it. Here Tom hoped to pick up Hoosanee. It had been arranged that if he found no trace of the fugitives on the lower slopes of Sisagarhi, he should return to the

point where the cavalcade had divided, and wait there a certain specified time for his master, after which time, should no news come, he would hasten back to Gambier Singh, acquaint him with what had happened, and ask his advice. It was almost certain now that the rajah and his party would reach the meeting-point before the time agreed upon, and Tom's only fear was that Hoosanee, who was so much of his friend that he longed to let him know speedily his success and happiness, would not be there so soon. But, in such case, a plan for communicating with him could soon be devised.

After all this, having heard through Kit that Grace wanted nothing, the rajah and Bâl Narîn gave themselves up to the rest which they needed so sorely. The hours of the day rolled on. The sun rose high in the heavens, and a deep noontide silence, unbroken by the noises that at dead of night and early morning make the jungle terrible, brooded over the camp. Everyone slept but the two or three who remained on watch to keep the camp-fires burning.

It was in the midst of this silence that the English girl came slowly to herself. Up to this she had been in a dream. All she had distinctly realised was that she might rest—that the strain, which had tried her to the utmost limit of endurance, was over. Now, as she opened her eyes and, by the light that stole in through the canvas walls and closed chicks, saw the curtains of rose and amber, and the pretty camp-furniture, and the fresh garments, and the bowls of clear water, she began dimly to understand that this was not a dream, such as those that had visited her in her wanderings, but a reality. The gates of the dear old life—the life of safety, and love, and reverence—were opening to her once more. It was the horror she and Kit had lived through that was the dream. This was true.

For the first few moments her mind was too weak to be able to take in anything more than this: she was with her own people: she was travelling back into the past: some day, if God was gracious to her, she might see her mother and her sisters again: she might give up her darling Kit to his friends. Then, gradually, as her mind grew stronger, the events of the night, and of the days that had preceded it, shaped themselves before her.

They had been on their way to Nepaul. The good Rungya, who had rescued them one night from a horde of brutal villagers, had promised to take them thither, and place them under the

protection of the minister, Jung Bahadoor. They had crossed the plains, and entered one of the great sâal-forests of the Terai together. Then their cart broke down, and the animals sickened, and word came to them that a party of fugitive sepoys, who had taken up robbery as a profession, were haunting the great highway. So they turned aside, walking painfully on foot through the jungle, till they reached the Aswalia village. They had scarcely left it before Kit sickened with the fever. They carried him on between them, hoping to reach opener ground, where they might rest, when Rungya bethought him of the clearing into which they turned. A holy man, a Brahmin, who had passed through his life's different stages, and who was preparing himself in solitude and meditation for his eternal rest, lived there once. Rungya had visited him when his own life was lusty within him, and had kissed his feet reverently as a spiritual teacher. It could not be that the holy man was alive still; but his hut, which even the savage tribes of the jungle would respect, might be standing, and it, for a few days, would afford them shelter. Before they reached it Kit began to mend; but Rungya was stricken down. For two days Grace tended him as if she had been his daughter. On the third day he died; and then began that awful struggle between the heroic girl and the wild things of the wilderness, which had nearly reached its limit when Bâl Narîn found her. How long it lasted she could not tell—neither could Kit. When it began they had water and rice, and faggots for firing; when it ended their little stock was exhausted. She dared not leave the hut so much as to cut a stick of wood or fill her brass lota with water at the pool. It was like a horrible siege. The wild things without; she and her dead and dying within.

Slowly and painfully her mind travelled on. She remembered the determined attitude of the three great birds, and her own wild tempest of passion. She remembered vividly the ping of the shikari's bullet, and the fall of her enemies, and his friendly address. After that came a terror which she only dimly recalled, and which was followed by a blank—a peaceful falling-away into forgetfulness.

That she had been taken from her dangerous position, and that she had heard Kit laughing and talking beside her was all she knew for certain.

The effort of thinking was great, and she fell into another brief sleep. When she awoke the day had begun to decline,

and the camp was astir. Grace was stronger. Her mind worked fitfully. She was like one who is in search of something, and who has a clue which makes him believe that he will not be long in ignorance.

Suddenly, like a flash of light in midwinter darkness, there rose before her a scene out of the past—a little room, with bare mud walls and costly furniture: in its midst an Englishwoman, dressed in Oriental robes, and lovely as a vision, with soft eyes and dimpled cheeks, and a little voice like rippling waves on a pebbly shore. She—Grace—is standing before her. Her hands are bound; her face is stained; her garments are dirty and ragged. How vividly she feels the contrast between them! The lady in Oriental robes feels it too. She laughs—not brutally, as one who exults over a fallen enemy; but with gushing gladness like a child. 'Dearest Grace!' she says, 'this is shocking! What has come to you; and where, in the name of Heaven, is your rajah?' There is no answer. Grace cannot speak. The little rippling voice goes on: 'I think he is here, dear; but we cannot let him see you. You are so beautiful. You would turn his brain.' Silence again, and then: '*Won't* you speak to me, you serious young person? Am I too frivolous for your taste? Well! but never mind. I mean to give you your liberty, now at once! Such fun! While Tom is in the fort expecting to see you! A friend of your father's, one of his favourite Soubahdars, will take care of you, and no doubt you will reach the English lines in safety'—and then there rises before her suddenly the wicked face with its sinister smile——

In a moment—in less than a moment—it sprang before her. She had no force to go further. There was something to be remembered still; something horrible; something that she would have to think out and tell before she had peace. But this for the moment was enough. It was the cry of her heart, the strong rapture of conviction, which, through all the shame and agony of those awful moments, had been present with her, that she remembered now

'Tom is looking for us! Tom will find us!'

Tom, then, had traced them into the jungle. Tom had sent the shikari to slay the birds. Tom had taken them into his keeping, and was transporting them to a place of safety. There had been war between him and the White Ranee, and he had conquered.

Weary and spent with this strange flight of memory, she

sank back and closed her eyes. But she could not rest any longer. An impulse, dead for all these terrible days, but so much a part of herself that even now she could not imagine how it had ever slept, was rising up within her.

Once more she opened her eyes, and this time they fell on a mirror which an officious servant had placed near her. She propped it up in front of her, and gazed at herself, and a blush of maidenly shame tinged her pale face. Was she Grace—Grace who had been so proud and dainty? Ah! but she had forgotten Grace. Grace must have lived long ago in some other world. Grace was a memory—a dream—it was this haggard woman, with the ragged robe and tangled hair, who was the reality. But could not Grace come back again?

With a swelling heart she looked round her. Some one had thought of this too. Everything that she could want, clear water and English soap, and fresh and lovely garments, were in the tent. If only she had the strength, she could, in a few minutes, make herself fit to be seen. Slowly and painfully she rose from her couch. How weak she was! Could it be she, her very self, who only yesterday had withstood the wild beasts and birds of the jungle? When she was on her feet she staggered and nearly fell; but she would not give up till she had washed the stains of travel away, and put on the robe of pale blue and snowy white which was lying ready for her. Then, once more, she looked into the mirror. Very white and haggard was the face that gazed upon her, and the eyes—oh! what was it? What was it? She dared not look into them. There was some awful tale; some picture of horror that would not fade, behind their half-dropped lids; something that was not Grace—that never would be. And yet she was happier, more tranquil, than she had been. The fresh water and the fair garments had helped her to dream that she was herself once more. She was ready to meet her deliverer.

CHAPTER XLII

'DOES PEACE RETURN?'

SHE saw Kit's face first. He had been sleeping too—close to Bâl Narîn, whose large, kind presence had, from the first, inspired him with confidence; and now he had awoke, and his

new friend, who was one of the most versatile of men, being as well able to nurse a child as to snare an elephant or to kill a tiger, had taken pleasure in washing from his face and hands the stains of travel, and combing out his long golden curls, and dressing him in smart new garments. So when Kit stole in softly to see if his dearest Grace was awake, he almost startled her by his beauty. It was the little fine gentleman of Nowgong, before the revolt, the adored of English *burra sahib-log* and native servants—who had come back. Kit was surprised too. He stopped short just inside the tent and broke into a little laugh. 'Who made you so pretty, dearest Grace?' he said. 'Was it Tom? Billy dressed me.'

'And who is Billy?' asked Grace.

'Oh! don't you know Billy. He's the shikari that killed the birds. He's told me all about it, and how he found us. But I must go and find Tom.'

'No, no—come here first!' said Grace, softly. 'Is it quite—quite—true, Kit? Isn't it a dream?'

'You can pinch me if you like,' said the little fellow. 'I don't mind. Do you think I look nice?'

'You look lovely, darling. I never saw anything so strange. Somebody we know has thought of everything, Kit. To think that we should find new dresses in the jungle!'

'It's Tom, I know,' said Kit, with conviction. 'He's a big man here, like Dost Ali Khan, only bigger. The fellows call him the rajah. But, I say, you mustn't keep me, dearest Grace. I promised to let him know the very minute you were awake. I looked in twice, and you were asleep.'

He gave her a hug, and ran out; but looked back to say, with a little nod, 'They're getting dinner ready, *such* a jolly one! Can't you smell the cooking! Tom knows how to do it, I can tell you.'

Yes: Tom certainly knew how to do it; this Grace said to herself with a smile. But there was a tremor at her heart all the same. What was she to say to him? How could she make him understand her passionate gratitude? While she was thinking he stood at the door, for Kit had found him close by. 'May I come in?' he said, raising the chick.

'Oh yes—yes; come in,' said Grace, half rising from her couch. 'I wanted to see you; I wanted to thank you.'

'And that is just what I can't let you do,' said Tom, as quietly as he could for the furious beating of his heart. 'Are you comfortable?' he went on, looking round. 'Have my

people done all they can for you? If you will deign to come with me to Gumilcund, we can do much better; but here——'

'Oh,' cried Grace, with a little agitated laugh; 'but it is just this that is the wonder. It is like a miracle. How *did* you—how *could* you have done it?'

'It is my best—I think it is my best,' stammered Tom. 'I wish I could have brought some one who knew you better—your mother, or one of your sisters; but the way was so rough. I was afraid of their breaking down. Is there anything else? Am I tiring you? Had you rather not see me until you are stronger? I would—would *die* to give you comfort or relief.'

'I know you would,' said Grace, simply.

'Oh! thank you,' said the poor fellow in a broken voice. 'It is infinitely good of you to say so; and, indeed—indeed, it is the simple truth. But'—trying to smile—'dying isn't of much use, is it? If you had died, you couldn't have saved Kit, and if I had died, I should never have found you. You are sure you have everything you want?' he added, looking round with a sort of piteousness in his face. 'I know very little, you know, about what ladies want; but if there is anything—these Indians are wonderful people——'

'No, no; there is nothing,' said Grace. 'Wonderful! They are *marvellous*; they can almost create. I shall never forget what Hoosanee was to us—' she was speaking rapidly and in little broken sentences: she wanted to put him at his ease; but she felt so strange herself. 'Where is he?' she went on. 'In Gumilcund, I suppose?'

'Ah! poor Hoosanee!' said Tom, smiling freely now. 'He wouldn't be left, Grace. He fell in love with you, like every one else; wanted to start off at once and find you alone; but of course, I couldn't allow that, so he came with me. I owe it to his love and devotion that I am here now.'

'Then he is in the camp. Poor, brave Hoosanee! I should like to see him.'

'But I am sorry to say he is not in the camp. I sent him off to the mountains three days ago, to search for you there. I hope he will join us presently.'

'And have you been looking for me ever since I was taken away?' said Grace.

'I should have looked for you till my hair was grey and my limbs were withered, Grace. I have found you much sooner than I thought.'

'It may not be so long as I think,' she murmured. 'To-day it seems to me that ages—eternities—have gone over my head since the night I was carried away. This morning I was trying to think back and—I could not——'

There came a pitiful, agonized consciousness into her face that frightened Tom. 'Don't,' he said, beseechingly. 'There is no need. Put all those dreadful memories away! Let us go back, both of us, to the dear old days. Do you remember, Grace, our gardens that nearly touched, and the little wicket-gate, and the river? What a plague I must have been to you sometimes!'

'I think you were pretty tiresome,' said Grace, smiling.

'Ah! but the girls were tiresome too. Trixy and Maud—how they used to tease me! And the General was just as bad. I can feel the grip of his hand on my shoulder now—that night he found me, what he would have called philandering in his compound.'

'Father was very downright,' said Grace. 'But he liked you, Tom. I don't think there was anyone he liked better. Dearest father! I am afraid he must have been dreadfully miserable about me. Ah! how often—how often—I have wished for him—his stern look and his strong voice—I believe he could have frightened away any number of them.'

'He fought fifty—single handed,' said Tom. 'Bertie Liston came to Gumilcund and told me about it. They had laid an ambush for him—his own regiment—they nearly had him; but his audacity and resource carried the day. Some came over to his side——'

'He came out of it safely?' cried Grace.

'With only a slight wound, and he is better. When Bertie came to me he was nearly well. I sent word that I hoped to find you. They are all safe at Meerut. Our little Trixy is quite a heroine, at least Bertie thinks so. She got hold of a revolver and fired at one of the wretches who were trying to get in——'

'And mother?' broke in Grace. 'Is she well? Ah! what would I not give just to see her for a moment! Mother's dear, kind face! It is the sweetest face in all the world.' She broke down, and covered her face with her hands, and tears, that seemed to heal her pain, came stealing down her pale cheeks.

Then Tom stole away, for he felt that she would prefer to be alone.

In a few moments he sent in Kit and Bâl Narîn. Billy was radiant in fresh white linen, and Kit had so happy a face that Grace could not help smiling at him.

'Billy won't let anyone wait upon you but himself, dearest Grace,' he said, 'and Tom says dinner is ready, and the sun's gone down, and it's very nice by the camp fire. Will you come out, or shall they bring yours here?'

'I will come out, Kit,' said Grace.

And then came the joyful buzz of the camp, and the glowing evening light on the jungle, and the spread table, to which the rajah led her, his servants and camp followers bending down humbly, with their faces to the ground; and again she felt as if she were moving in a dream. Though she was only able to take a very little of what had been provided for her, Grace felt stronger when she had eaten. Leaning on Tom's arm, and with Kit clinging to her hand, she was able to move about the camp. She made the acquaintance of Purtab, who had slain the serpent, and, using Bâl Narîn as an interpreter, he and Abiman congratulated her upon her escape, and expressed their conviction that she was favoured of the gods. So long as she was talking and moving she was at peace. But when she was alone the horror came again. They were not to start until moonrise. Tom left her in her tent to rest. Kit went to sleep on a cushion by her side. Silence fell upon the camp, and in the darkness and solitude her nameless dread took form. There she lay, with hands cramped together and staring eyeballs, while vision after vision, full of horror, swept by. Was it she, her very self—this Grace who was not of heroic mould, to whom all these things had happened? Was she dreaming hideously, or were they true? Oh! God, were they true? She had suffered, but it was not that alone. She had heard what curdled her blood in her veins, and made her feel that the gentle, innocent gaiety of the past was a sin. Women and little children tortured to death, men blown away from guns, inhuman crimes, inhuman vengeance, hell gaping its mouth to devour, and heaven, the dear heaven, of which, in the days of her childhood, she had dreamed, passing away as visions pass in the lurid light of a world in flames.

She shuddered as she lay. This was terrible. She ought to be so thankful. Ah! and she was thankful; but it was to man, not God. Once she opened her lips, and the cry, old as humanity, the 'Our Father,' that will instinctively break from the heart of Earth's children when they realise their weakness

and the strength of the forces set in array against them, rose on a wave of anguish from her soul. But in the next instant the cry was withdrawn. Father! There was no Father, only a blind power that hurled the world-atoms, which for once in the measureless ages have shaped themselves into sentient lives, from steep to steep of a dead eternity. Awful, unutterable sorrow piercing her heart, like barbed arrows, each of which leaves its sting in the wound, looking out pitifully from a myriad of eyes, making life impossible and death the only refuge to be hoped for!

In the darkness Kit awoke and heard her laboured breathing. He groped for her hand, and, finding it cold, was frightened and stole out to awake Tom.

He came in, lighted the lamps, and knelt down beside her. 'You are with friends,' he whispered, when he had made her drink a few drops of Bâl Narîn's cordial. 'You must have courage for a little while.'

'I will try,' she said, plaintively. 'I should like to see them once more.'

'You will see them once more and many times. When all this tangle is over, we must go back to England.'

'England!' murmured Grace. 'Ah! they are good there. One can believe, but,' shuddering, 'one cannot forget. I suppose we have to go out of life for that.'

'Grace, if you love us, if you love them, do not, for heaven's sake, speak so!'

She raised her heavy eyes, and looked at him.

'Poor boy!' she said softly. 'I am troubling him. And when he has done so much for me—all that way through the thicket! But the others—ah! Tom, the others!—there was no God to save them.'

'My dearest, in heaven's name, I beseech you, put these thoughts away! There was a God. There *is* a God. Death opens the way into His kingdom.'

'I used to think so,' said Grace, dreamily. 'That was long ago, before I knew, when I thought the world was good.'

'And so it is, Grace; so it is! Give yourself time, dearest, and you will come back to the old thoughts. You will know that the horror which it has pleased God to let you look upon is the exception, not the rule. It is like the tempest which comes and goes, and does its awful work. Peace returns afterwards.'

'Does peace return?' cried the girl, fixing her agonised

eyes upon her companion's face; 'and if it does, is it a true peace? This is no dead storm, like a storm of winds and waves. It is a storm of human souls. The passion, the cruelty, the restlessness, the awful, awful, unquenchable thirst, are alive. Oh! I have seen them again and again. It is like the look in the eyes of the wild creatures, *misery and pain—misery and pain.*' Her voice dropped. Into her face came a look of horror, as if some vision long driven back were forcing itself upon her. 'How did it come?' she whispered. 'Where does it go? It must be somewhere, even when there is peace. Is it below us, ready, like the wild beasts, to spring at our throats; or does it go away? When we open our eyes *there*, shall we see it, *misery and pain—misery and pain?*'

'Grace, for pity's sake, for *my* sake,' said Tom, hoarsely, 'try to forget. For you the horror is over.'

'For me, but for the others, for the world! Did He make it? Did He give it gentle and good things to triumph over? And what will He do with it by-and-by? Is it to go on for ever and ever and ever?'

'Don't think of it; don't think of it, Grace.'

'I can't help myself,' she sobbed. 'It *is*—now, at this very moment, while we are speaking—the misery, and the cruelty, and the restlessness, and the despair. Hark!' starting up. 'Do you hear?'

'I hear the wild beasts howling, nothing else. Abiman and Purtab are keeping the camp-fires alight. Everything is safe. Oh, my dear! don't look so! you frighten me!'

She tried to smile! 'I am so sorry,' she said, gently. I *will* try—yes—I *will* try to put it all away. But I think you must let me go, Tom. You are looking for the Grace you once knew. You will not find her; she has gone. The horror has touched her, and she can never—never—be the same again.'

'Grace, you will break my heart. As you are, love, as you are, with the sorrow in your eyes, and the anguish in your soul, you are more, ten thousand times more, to me than even then in all your dainty pride and sweetness. I loved you, God knows I loved you—now—' he threw himself down on his knees by her side—'now I adore you.'

'My poor boy! My poor boy!' she murmured, touching his face tenderly with her long, white fingers.

'Grace,' he whispered, 'do you care for me a little?'

'I care for you more than a little, Tom. I love you. I have loved you from the first day we met.'

'Loved me! Oh! Grace; oh! my darling! is it true?'

'Hush, dear!' she said, softly. 'You must keep quiet. If we speak too loud we shall awake Kit. Poor little Kit! He has suffered so much. And this sleep is restoring him.' Her voice was so quiet that it sent a chill to his heart. There was no passion in it, no trouble, not even the agitation, the sweet tremulous consciousness of a woman happy in loving.

There surged up in his throat a sob of uncontrollable anguish. 'I can't even think of Kit,' he said. 'I can only think of you—you. Say it again, Grace—it is the dearest, sweetest sound in all the world. Whisper it as low as you like and I shall hear it. If I were on earth and you were in heaven, above the stars, myriads and myriads of miles away, still I should hear it. Are you smiling, darling? I can smile too now. But even you don't know everything. I will tell you some day. Say, I love you.'

'I love you, Tom; I love you.' She was still touching his face and hair, still gazing into his face with a tenderness that almost slew him, it was so strangely quiet. 'I did not mean to tell you,' she went on, 'but the time is so short. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be somewhere else.'

'Grace,' he cried, passionately. 'Do you wish to kill me?'

'No, dear, I wish to live, and I think I shall live a little while longer. I have seen you; I must see mother and father and the girls, and poor little Lucy, and Kit's mother, and the others. I didn't mean that I should die, but I may not be here. Didn't Kit tell you? I wander away sometimes. He used to tell me about it when I came back. "You have been somewhere else, dearest Grace." I can hear his little voice now. That was before Rungya left us. Afterwards, I remembered everything till I fell asleep and you found me.'

'Ah! but it was natural then. You were in such trouble. It is a wonder to me that you lived through it at all. But that is over.'

'Yes,' said Grace, closing her eyes, 'all over! all over!'

He watched her, his heart beating painfully. She lay quite still, and, hoping she was asleep, he stole to the door and lifted the chick, for in another hour they would have to start. He looked out, with a dazed feeling in his mind, at the sleeping camp and the fires that were burning brightly. He

listened to the monotonous jabber of the watchmen, and saw how the solemn, silvery light, that would presently change the dark jungle world into an enchanted region, was beginning to dawn in the sky. Then he returned to Grace, whom he found with wide-open eyes and smiling lips. 'Is that you, Dad?' she said.

'Yes, dear,' he answered.

'Call the girls,' she cried, 'They said they would start early. The river is so lovely in the morning. Is the boat ready, Dad?'

'Yes, dear. It is moored under the willows. I will come for you directly.'

He took up Kit in his arms, and carried him out to Bâl Narîn. Tears were in his eyes, and the beating of his heart nearly choked him. Grace did not know him. She was 'somewhere else.'

CHAPTER XLIII

A STRANGE JOURNEY

AFTERWARDS Tom Gregory looked back upon this journey as one of the strangest experiences of his strange and chequered life. As regards outward events there is little to record. Bâl Narîn knew every step of the way. The soldiers, servants, camp-followers, and coolies, of whom the cavalcade consisted, were so well up in their duties, and so hopeful of large reward from the rajah, that they worked with all the regularity and much more than the intelligence of machines. Even the heavens seemed to smile upon the intrepid travellers, for there could be no doubt that the air was less pestilential than is usual at this season, while there were none of those sweeping storms of rain that, in late summer and early autumn, will sometimes make the roads of the Terai impassable.

They travelled quietly, so as not to fatigue Grace and Kit, and it took them three days to work across the jungle from the robbers' path, where Bâl Narîn had found the first traces of the fugitives, to the Maharajah's Road.

This, of course, was the most difficult and dangerous part of the journey, but they accomplished it safely. There was

no talk of fever now, no grumbling about the denseness of the jungle and the fatigue of the way. Bâl Narîn issued the orders for each day, and they were obeyed with joyful alacrity. It would almost seem as if the gladness that had taken possession of the camp since Grace and Kit were found had given it strength and tone. But for all this, and in spite of the kind and gracious face he showed to his followers, the young rajah carried about with him an aching heart. His hope and dream had not been fulfilled. He had saved his love from the last extremity; but for what had he saved her? Sometimes when he saw the wandering horror in her eyes, when he listened to the broken words of pain, which for his sake she tried to repress, when, with a trouble which almost unmanned him, he realised that so it must be as long as she lived, he would say to himself ruefully, that for her it would have been better if in the trance in which he found her in the hut, her gentle spirit had winged its flight from earth.

But these were his worst moments. The best times were when, as Kit expressed it, Grace was 'somewhere else.' Then, but for the curious expression of her eyes, the haunting pain that seemed always to be lying in wait for her, she was so quiet and peaceful, so much the Grace of the dear old days, that he could venture to hope for her restoration to health of body and peace of mind.

He would lengthen out these times of mental aberration. When she called to him by some name out of the past, he would answer to it. Patiently he would work himself into the spirit of her dream, so that he might live and act in it. With an ingenuity born of love, he would keep out of her sight, as much as possible, everything that would remind her of the present. Kit was not allowed to come near her while the dream lasted. The servants were kept in the background. Of everything strange that she saw about her, there would be some ingenious explanation. Thus the meal under the shadow of a tree was a picnic; and the jungle was an English wood, and the tent was a cottage in which they had taken shelter from heat or storm, he and she together, and the others—Lady Elton and Mrs. Gregory, and Lady Winter and the fine Sir Reginald, and the girls—these were all behind them, and would presently come up. So in the hours of tranquillity, which his love made for her, she gained marvellously in health and strength; but Tom had an uneasy feeling that the spectre of pain and horror which she carried about with her was not

destroyed, and that some day it would assert its presence dangerously. The fact was, that Grace lacked the robust individualism which enables the majority of people, and especially of women, to exult over their own exceptional good fortune. She could not feel herself a favourite of heaven; she could not, as she would say pathetically, be grateful. That thought of the others, the ill-doers as well as those who had suffered wrong, haunted her perpetually. She saw them in her dreams. They seemed to be holding out their hands to her. Whenever she was not wandering in the past, her heart was full of a new and incomprehensible anguish.

A little diversion, which had a beneficial effect upon her mind, was created by their meeting with Hoosanee. It was in a great sâal-forest, when they were travelling pleasantly along an easy road, under a fine canopy made by over-arching trees, that the rajah's faithful servant, who had made up his mind that no such fugitives as those he was seeking could have crossed Sisagarhi, came up with them.

He came in late in the evening, when the cavalcade had halted as it did habitually between sunset and moonrise. The blow on the hill-side had done for him what his master had hoped from it. The fever that had begun to work in his blood had gone, and his power and energy had returned. The meeting between him and the rajah was rather that of intimate friends than of master and servant. When Hoosanee heard that the object of the expedition had been fulfilled, that the fair and gracious maiden whom they had travelled so far, and on his part so hopelessly, to seek was actually in camp, he cried like a child. 'Master! master!' he sobbed, the tears rolling down his face. 'Who will dare to tell me now that the gods do not fight on our side? Ah! if some miracle would take us straight to the gates of our own town! How proudly we shall enter! It will be better even than the night when first the Rajah Sahib passed through our streets and the people saluted him as Rama, their prince and hero——'

'That remains to be proved, Hoosanee,' said Tom, smiling. 'Remember that I have offended the people of Gumilcund grievously. I doubt whether they will accept me as their rajah now. But I am sure that, for the love of those who have gone, they will admit me for a time. And I have been mindful of their interests while I was away. Is it not strange, Hoosanee,' he went on, dreamily, 'now I have fulfilled my task the love of my people and my work has come back to me?

The voice that was silent so long spoke to me again last night. I am one of you, my friend, as I was before. You are so near to me that you will understand this. But we must not be surprised if the others do not.'

'They will: they will. Chunder Singh knows. Chunder Singh is the friend of his Excellency. There is no fear,' said Hoosanee, joyfully.

Then he left his master, and presented himself at the door of the tent, where Grace was resting. Kit was just outside. He saw him, and gave a joyful cry of recognition. Grace heard it, and started up. 'Who has come? What has happened?' she cried.

'Oh!' said Kit, rushing in, 'it's Tom's bearer. It's Hoosanee. They did not kill him, after all. Hooray! Hooray! Three cheers! Grace—Grace! mayn't he come in?'

'Yes, yes; bring him in,' said Grace, joyfully. So Kit set the curtain aside, and Hoosanee, whose dark face was glowing with happiness, came in, and stood with bowed head and hands crossed reverently before the lady of his dreams. As for Grace, she held out both her hands and burst into tears.

'My gracious lady should laugh: she should not weep,' he said, bending low over her hands.

'But it is for joy, not for sadness. My brave Hoosanee! I never thought to see you alive again. How splendidly you stood your ground that awful night, and how nobly you pleaded for me! And did you take care of the others? Did you carry them to Gumilcund safely?'

'Missy Sahib,' said Hoosanee, a smile breaking over his face, 'it was not so easy when you had gone. The ladies cried, and sometimes they were unreasonable and doubted me, thinking that, as I had given you up, so I would give them up; and the storm beat upon us angrily, and it was with difficulty we dragged ourselves along. But on the second night we entered the gates of our city, and one ran to tell our rajah, and he met us.'

'And they were safe and well—Lucy and Kit's mother, and the baby, and the other Mem Sahib?'

'They were safe. The rajah gave them lodging in his palace. But we did not see them again, for that very night we departed for the fort.'

'The fort? Dost Ali Khan's fort?' said Grace, shuddering. 'That was where the wicked Soubahdar took me. But how did you know, Hoosanee?'

'It had been told to one of my lord's servants that we should find Missy Sahib there. Dost Ali Khan thought to buy the favour of my master by giving her up.'

'But I was not there, Hoosanee.'

'Let us give thanks to the Supreme Spirit!' said the Indian, bowing low.

Grace gazed at him, speechless with wonder.

'The fort has gone,' he went on, solemnly. 'Like a wild beast in its lair, Dost Ali Khan was destroyed. The day after Missy Sahib was put out the English came up, and they made a mine secretly, and the fort was blown to pieces.'

'With everyone within?' said Grace, whose eyes were distended with horror.

'My master and my master's servants escaped. Some few of the defenders may have left by the secret passage. All the others perished.'

'There was an English woman there,' said Grace.

'The woman who called herself the White Ranee, and to whom Dost Ali Khan, the pretended ruler of the country, did homage, was within the fort. She was slain,' said Hoosanee, quietly.

'Slain!' echoed Grace.

'It is true, Missy Sahib. The rajah himself brought her dead out of the ruins. I saw her in his arms. He made a fire in the room where they had imprisoned him, and her body was consumed. Then he and I went out to meet the English.'

While Hoosanee was speaking, Grace had covered her face with her hands. When she looked up she was as pale as death. 'Dead!' she murmured, 'Vivien dead! Is it true? Then God have mercy upon her!'

She paused. Hoosanee did not speak, and after a few moments she went on, in a stifled voice, as if she were speaking to herself: 'I had been thinking of her, wondering how it would end. But it is best so—much best! Hoosanee,' suddenly, 'you must tell no one. Remember! It is a secret between you and me and the rajah.'

'I will remember, Missy Sahib.'

'Let them think that she was taken prisoner,' went on Grace. 'It may have been so. Yes: that is the true explanation. I wonder I did not think of it before—and the terror and horror shook her reason. Poor Vivien! I am sorry I had hard thoughts of her. She was much too beautiful to be wicked. It was madness, Hoosanee. If she had not been

mad she would never have treated me so. I might have known it at once. And you say she is dead?'

'She is dead, Missy Sahib.'

'It was best. To have come to herself here would have been terrible. But I cannot think of it any more. Thank you for telling me, my good Hoosanee. You have just come in?'

'I rode into camp an hour ago, Missy Sahib.'

'You must want rest. I am selfish to keep you up so long. Good-night! I will see you again to-morrow.'

'May the sleep of my gracious lady be sweet, and may the gods preserve her from evil!' said Hoosanee, fervently.

He went out, to find the rajah waiting for him with eager questions. Then Bâl Narîn joined them. A runner had come out in search of the rajah. He brought intelligence of a great and notable Ghoorka victory, which had resulted in the complete pacification of the district between the Nepaul frontier and the Kingdom of Oude. Gambier Singh was triumphant. He sent word that the rajah must join him in his camp near Janhpore, and that he would tell off a detachment to escort him to Gumilcund, as a part of the Doab, which he would have to cross on his journey, was said to be still in an unsettled condition.

When questioned about the state of the country generally, the runner reported that Delhi was supposed to have been taken by assault a few days since; but that Lucknow was still in the hands of the mutineers.

This was joyful news to the rajah. 'If Delhi is taken, the worst is over,' he said to his servants, 'and our Gumilcund men will be in it. If we reach our city safely, I will put myself at the head of another little army and join the forces that will be marching to Lucknow. What do you say, Billy? Will you join me?'

'I will go to the ends of the earth with his Excellency,' said Bâl Narîn. 'But let him have a care!'

'Of what, Billy?'

'Of the jealousy of the gods, Excellency.'

'You think I am too prosperous, Billy? Don't alarm yourself. I shall have my knock-down presently.'

'It is useless to speak of such things,' said Hoosanee. 'The Rajah Sahib, as we know, has risked his life in two dangerous enterprises. It is fitting now that he remains with his people in Gumilcund.'

'Time enough to discuss our further movements when we

have reached that haven of rest,' said Tom, dismissing them with a wave of his hand.

And so, when the moon rose that night, they went on together joyfully. One more halt in the Terai, and a short day's march through the forest brought them to the borders of the dominions of the Maharajah of Nepaul, when they entered upon the vast agricultural plains of Upper India, held then by the British and Ghoorka armies.

Concerning this part of the journey, which, under any other circumstances, would have been monotonous, there is very little to record. The rajah's diary, to which he returned about this time, deals more with feelings and states of mind than with events. I gather from it that, as the days went by, his deep interest in the social and political condition of the people amongst whom his lot had been cast revived. He was impatient, for his own sake as well as for that of his friends, to be in Gumilcund again. He took a more wholesome and a larger view of life. Away from the pestilential swamps of the fever-haunted jungle, and under the wide benignant sky, he could forget the wild agony of despair that for so many days had bound him in prison; he could believe that it was not madness, but a sound philosophy, which caused men everywhere to expect and to work for the redemption of humanity.

Here and there he speaks of Grace, but only briefly. 'My darling is better,' he writes on one occasion. 'I think Hoosanee is doing her good. He understands how to make her comfortable. I really think she is at home in her tent.' And again, 'There is something on her mind still. If she could tell it, the look of haunting terror, which goes to my very soul, might leave her eyes. But I dare not urge her.' And yet again, 'A woman should be with her; one she has known and loved. Thank God, she will find friends at Gumilcund! Perhaps her mother would come if I sent for her. She will not be happy until she has told what is on her mind. Will she then? God help my darling and send her rest and peace!' From Bâl Narîn, who would not go back to his native valley until he had seen his friends at the end of their journey, I learn that the young rajah, who travelled in semi-Oriental dress, but who did not now disguise from anyone that he was of European origin, won hearts wherever he went by his grace and dignity. To this day most of these people believe that there was something supernatural about him. At the

villages, when there was difficulty about the supplies of food and firing, he had only to come forward and speak, and his orders were obeyed without delay. To himself his power over the native mind, which he could not help seeing and acknowledging, was a mystery. I, who look at this part of his history in the light not only of what went before but of what followed, can find an explanation. In him the indomitable pluck, the perseverance, the rectitude, and stern sense of justice which have enabled a Western people to conquer and hold dominion in the East, were combined with the softer, more graceful and endearing qualities of the race with which he was allied, although at that time he did not know it, no less by birth than by circumstances. Gracious as well as great, sympathetic as well as strong, feeling at every point the people with whom he came in contact, tolerant in them of the weaknesses whose germs, covered but not destroyed by his Western training, he found in himself, yet rising above them by his proud indifference to selfish considerations, his quickness to execute what his brain had devised; and, more than all, by his keen spiritual insight, Thomas Gregory has always seemed to me to be in himself a living parable. So, in my fanciful moments, I have imagined may society be, when the two great branches of humanity's noblest family, which have been separated so long, will consent not only to meet, but to meet on the same ground; when they will take one from the other as brothers should; when they will sit down together at the rich feast of stored-up experience wrought out painfully on the opposite sides of dividing oceans; when they will realise that one requires the other, and that only from sympathy and mutual concession can spring the union, out of which, as some of us hope, a perfectness such as the world has never known will grow.

But this is in the future still; and our present business is with the rajah on his march to Gumilcund. They made a slight détour to visit Gambier Singh in his camp near Janhpore; and I am told that the greeting they received from that magnificent young officer was of the warmest. He was highly elated with his own success, concerning which he had much to say to his friend, while his delight and admiring sympathy over the happy accomplishment of the feat, which when they met before he had judged to be impossible, were inexhaustible. During the few hours they spent together in the young Captain's tent Tom had to give over and over again his

account of the various incidents of their journey. Then Bâl Narîn was called in to receive his meed of praise and substantial reward, which he did modestly, asserting that he was but an instrument in the hands of the gods and demons, who were bent upon honouring the Rajah Sahib. Finally, having hinted at his wish to be thus distinguished, Gambier Singh was introduced to Grace, who thanked him in graceful and touching words for the assistance he had rendered to her friends in their search. It happened to be one of her best days. She was conscious of everything that went on around her, and the hope of being in Gumilcund soon, of seeing her friends, and gladdening their hearts with the news of her deliverance, although it could not lift from her face the shadow that rested there continually, gave to her an expression of tremulous anticipation that was curiously pathetic. This, with her delicacy of form, her low voice and gentle manner, and the white purity of her perfect face, made an undying impression on the mind of the chivalrous young soldier. When, accompanied by his friend the rajah, he left the English girl's tent, his dark face was glowing with a new enthusiasm. 'A few days ago, my brother,' he said, grasping Tom's hand, 'I could not understand you. Now it is clear to me. She is a fair and noble woman—one for whom a true man would willingly lay down his life. That I have been able to help you to save her will be a joyful memory to me as long as I live.'

Later he said, meditatively, 'Is she a type? Are there many like her in England?'

'There are many as beautiful, and true, and courageous,' answered Tom. 'Although to me, naturally, she stands alone.'

'Then I can understand your greatness,' said Gambier Singh.

'You must visit us and see our women at home,' answered Tom, with a smile.

CHAPTER XLIV

MORE FUGITIVES IN GUMILCUND

THEY could not spend more than a day and a night in Gambier Singh's hospitable camp. Moreover, the gallant little Goorkha army had work to do. It had been reinforced by

English officers and troops, and it was bound on an expedition south to cut off the retreat of a body of rebels who, having escaped the swords and guns of Havelock's Highlanders, were rushing up to hide themselves in the mountains. But Gambier Singh, with the full consent of his fellow officers, both British and Nepaulese, would not let his friends depart unattended. An escort, sufficiently strong to make them respected both by insurgent villagers and fugitive sepoys, was told off to protect them on their further journey, and he added to their travelling stores such comforts as he could command.

Both parties, the English rajah, with his Nepaulese escort, and the Ghoorka army, started with light hearts, for there could be no doubt now that the tide of affairs in the peninsula had changed for the better. Delhi was taken by assault; the news was in every mouth. The King of Delhi was a captive; his army was scattered and destroyed; and although, while Oude was in insurrection, and Lucknow was in the hands of the rebels, and a vast army, reinforced by the mutinous contingent from Gwalior, still held the field, the mutiny could not be said to be crushed, there was good hope now of a successful issue to the efforts which had been made to extinguish it.

With the intelligence from Delhi, which was brought by swift runners to the Goorkha camp, Tom had the satisfaction of receiving a good account of his Gumilcund levies. They were specially mentioned as having distinguished themselves in the assault. What he did not know then, but what he heard later, was that these men of Gumilcund had earned the praise even of the heroic Nicholson. On the day after the assault, when the gallant English soldiers, who had fought like lions and shed their blood like heroes, fell prone to the temptation thrown in their way by their enemies, and lay about, stupid as sheep, in the streets and courts of the city they had so brilliantly won, it was a band of Gumilcund men, who, by their steadfastness and intrepidity, prevented the day of dishonour from being, to many of them, a day of disaster.

This the rajah heard at Gumilcund, whither, as there is nothing in his further journey to deserve a special record, we must now return.

The English ladies in the palace had settled down, as we shall remember, into a peaceful and well-cared-for, if somewhat monotonous, life. They never went out into the streets of the city. This was by the advice of Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, who feared that the people, looking upon them as, in some sort,

responsible for the loss of their rajah, might show signs of hostility if they appeared amongst them. As for those grave personages themselves, they had overcome their first feelings of doubt and suspicion.

By the time of which I am speaking the rajah's message from the village in the Doab, where he halted to rescue the English prisoners, and received the intelligence which sent him to Azimgurh and Nepaul, had arrived. It had been immediately obeyed. Before Grace and Kit were found Mrs. Lyster shared the hospitality of the English rajah's palace, and the two young officers who had so narrowly escaped an ignominious death were resting and recruiting their strength in the Resident's comfortable house.

This message had brought hope back to the city. Their rajah had not completely deserted them. He sent word that he would return, that wherever he went he was mindful chiefly of their interests, that he would die rather than betray them ; and they believed him. Over the common people, in fact, to whom the contents of this letter was made known, his influence was rather strengthened than weakened by what had taken place. His mysterious departure, his extraordinary escape out of the hands of Dost Ali Khan, the deadly enemy of Gumilcund, with the destruction of the fort, from which the city and State had so often been threatened, confirmed their belief that the gods were in league with their rajah, and that, while he continued to rule over them, peace and prosperity were assured to the State.

And in fact this small principality was, at the time of which I am writing, like one of those islands in the Southern Seas which awful coral reefs guard from the onslaught of stormy waves. To her very doors the tempest raged. From east and west, from north and south, the posts, which had again begun to run, brought news of mutinous armies in possession of the country, of burning villages and sacked cities, of robber-tribes pursuing unchecked their career of violence, and of peasants fleeing from their unreaped fields. She remained untouched—a fortress and a refuge.

In the palace things were not so dull as they had been. Chunder Singh and Lutfullah paid daily visits to the ladies, to assure themselves that they wanted for nothing. The message from the rajah and the arrival of Mrs. Lyster raised their drooping spirits. Mrs. Durant began to hope that she might one day see her darling Kit again, and Lucy was better

able to excuse herself for what she still looked upon as her own cowardly desertion of her cousin and friend.

As for Mrs. Lyster, I am afraid it would take more space than I have at my command to do anything like justice to her feelings. When, after her long and toilsome journey, she was carried within the precincts of the palace, and her litter being set down in the cool marble court of the quarter allotted to the European ladies, she found herself surrounded by gentle and sympathetic faces, she was as one in a dream. Long after, as she has told me since, it abode in her mind like a picture in a vision. There were little Lucy, with her pure white skin and golden hair and pathetic eyes, from which the dream of horror had not yet passed away, and the pale faced mother eager—so eager—for news, yet not venturing to ask a question until the haggard, wild-eyed visitor had been refreshed and comforted; and Aglaia, like a child-angel with love and wonder in her face, and close to her the dusky-faced Sumbaten, pouring out broken words of welcome and offers of assistance: and little Dick, rosy and sweet, at sight of whom the poor fugitive covered her face with her hands and wept. Her baby had been shot—her soft innocent little darling—shot, in the arms of its father, who had torn it from the ayah to protect it with his own body. And then he had fallen too; and when cold and still as lifeless stone, she leant over them to staunch their life-blood, he whispered to her, hoarsely, 'For the sake of our children in England, escape!'

She had escaped—oh, God! she had escaped! But was not life far bitterer than death?

They knew how it was with her. Every one of them had gone through her hour of worse than martyrdom, so they waited silently till she looked up again and made a pathetic effort to smile and thank them; and then Aglaia, who, having been the first comer, continued to do the honours of the palace, took her by the hand, and Aglaia's ayah followed, and she was given clear water and fresh garments, and when she was ready she was brought out again to the rajah's summer-house, where an English tea with tinned meats and wheaten bread, and luscious Eastern fruits, was spread out.

It was then, as she has told me, that her perplexity began. She was asked a number of questions which she could not answer. Aglaia stood up before her, and besought earnestly to be told where Daddy Tom was, and why he did not come back; and when, thinking naturally the poor child was asking

for one of the dead, she said that she had not seen him, Lucy interposed, quickly: 'Oh! she means the rajah; don't you know? He sent you here.'

'The rajah! Daddy Tom!' echoed Mrs. Lyster.

'Of course you know he is an Englishman,' said Lucy.

'It was no Englishman saved us,' said Mrs. Lyster, shaking her head. 'Ask the others!'

'Oh! but it was; it was Tom. I think his second English name is Gregory. It's a funny story. Grace told me part of it,' said Lucy, 'and I heard the rest here. Surely he told you about Grace——

'And about Kit, my sweet Kit, my little hero!' said Mrs. Durant, weeping.

'Grace! Kit! I don't understand. I think indeed we must be playing at cross-purposes. God knows it would give me the truest happiness to relieve your anxieties—you who have received me so kindly. But what can I tell you but the truth? We were saved by an Indian prince, a young man. He came to see us in the headman's hut, late at night, after he had killed twenty of our captors with his own hand. He told us he was the rajah of this place, and he would send us here with soldiers of his own. But, Tom—Thomas Gregory! what do you mean?' cried Mrs. Lyster, in great agitation. 'I knew an Englishman of that name once.'

'But you don't, you *can't*, mean to say that you know nothing more!' said Lucy. 'Think, for heaven's sake! Try your hardest to remember.'

'Try to remember? Do you think I could forget? In the depths of our despair, I and those two poor boys, who were dying under my eyes; not knowing what fresh horrors each fresh day might have in store for us; living on and praying to a God who we still believed was a God of Mercy to let us die swiftly, and our pains and troubles end; all at once, in a moment, at dead of night, dragged out to what we thought must be the swift and sudden death we had prayed for: and then to find ourselves safe, our bonds loosened, our enemies gone, kind and gracious friends about us, with words of hope, which have been fully, fully redeemed, upon their lips! Forget! we should be monsters of ingratitude if we forgot. If I could ever return it, ever show—but that would be impossible,' cried Mrs. Lyster, wildly.

'Yes, impossible,' said the ladies together. And Lucy added softly, 'Tom has been our good angel. But it was for

Grace's sake. We must not forget that. He sent for us because of her. Do you know, all of you, she might have escaped alone, long before, and we, God only knows where we should have been! He was searching for Grace when he rescued you, Mrs. Lyster; he is searching for her still. Most likely she is dead, and then he will die too!'

'Oh! Lucy! Lucy! Don't talk so wildly!' said Mrs. Durant. 'Look at Aglaia, and think of me! You are frightening Mrs. Lyster.'

'I am not frightened,' said the poor lady, 'only bewildered. My Thomas Gregory was such an interesting boy. At least, we thought him so at first. Then some one said he was more than half a native. There was a curious story about him,' she went on, gropingly. 'He was going out, they said, to inherit the wealth of an Indian rajah. Dear! how strangely things come round. If'—with a little laugh—'I had only known he was Thomas Gregory——'

'Was he going on with his search?' said Lucy.

'Yes; and now I think of it, I must have given him a clue. His servant questioned me!'

'Hoosanee, our good Hoosanee!' cried Lucy, clapping her hands.

'He struck me as being rather artful,' said Mrs. Lyster.

'So he is, but it is in his master's service,' said Lucy, joyously. 'Hoosanee is a man of resource. I am sure they are safe now.'

'God grant it!' said poor Mrs. Durant, breaking into tears and sobs. 'If he were not such a darling—much too good for this world—I might hope too! Oh! Kit, my poor Kit, my pretty Kit, I can see your brave little face now as you went away! How I kept still I don't know. I was paralysed.'

'If Grace had been paralysed, we should none of us have been here to tell the tale,' said Lucy, with a sort of disdain, which was as much for herself as for these others, on her pale face.

'How she found strength to do it I can't imagine,' said little Dick's mother. 'But for baby——'

'Oh!' interposed Lucy, 'we all had our own reasons, of course. As a fact, I believe we couldn't have done any differently!'

'It is all very mysterious,' said Dick's mother; 'but I don't see why you should be so sardonic about it, Lucy. We ought

to be thankful that our lives are spared. I am sure I am, both for myself and dear little baby.'

'Don't! Don't!' cried Lucy, passionately. 'You hurt me! Thankful! How can I be thankful? Till Grace and Kit are here beside me, I shall not be thankful. I know I am wicked; but I can't help myself. It's in me.' And then she turned away, and gripped Aglaia by the arm. 'Come!' she said, '*you* won't reason with me or try to make me good. Let us find Sumbaten, and see what she is doing for Mrs. Lyster!'

They looked after her, as with a defiant step she went away along the avenue, and Mrs. Durant sighed deeply, while Dick's mother shook her head, and said that Lucy's temper did not improve. It was a pity they could not see her more subdued and humbled. As for Mrs. Lyster, she sat very silent. She was gazing out into the soft rose lilac of the narrowing heavens, and thinking of the young fellow who had been her companion on that delightful voyage, that seemed now so long ago—the young fellow whom she had liked and admired until a certain strange day, when he mystified her and others by putting on an Oriental robe, and assuming, with such marvellous perfection, the speech and manners of an Oriental grandee.

CHAPTER XLV

NEWS OF MEERUT—GENERAL ELTON FINDS A NEW SPHERE

THE message from the rajah and Mrs. Lyster's arrival did, as I have said, revive the drooping spirits of the ladies in Gumilcund; but many weary days and nights were destined to go by before they could receive certain news of their friends. In the meantime the posts, which ran now with tolerable regularity, brought them a variety of intelligence—some of it depressing, but for the most part tending to hope. That, though the North-West had failed in preparedness for the crisis, the gallant rulers of the Punjaub had not only held their own, but were pouring down reinforcements to the army before Delhi, while from Bombay, Calcutta and Allahabad men and munitions of war were being marched up country, Chunder Singh told them with exultation. Delhi, he was sure, would

not long hold out, and then, as he too sanguinely believed, the insurrection would be at an end.

They received private intelligence too. Strange and pathetic, as some of us will remember very well, were the letters exchanged between friends and relatives in those strange days. You would mourn a dear friend as dead, and then, all of a sudden, one wonderful morning you would see a letter in his well-known handwriting; and when, with beating heart, feeling as if a missive had come to you from the grave, you would tear it open, you would find that your friend had given up you as lost, and was writing to you joyfully as one brought back from the jaws of death. These were the bright spots—the red-letter days—in that time of anguish. Of those other letters which brought no joy, only a fearful confirmation of our worst fears—the letters which told us of the tender hunted to death—of the fair and fragile giving way under the awful strain of horror, and sleeping, as we fondly believed, in the bosom of their God—of the beautiful, the strong, the noble, cut off in the flower of their youth and the plenitude of their service—yes, of these, too, we carry about with us memories, and the bitterness of those memories will never fade until we meet our beloved on the further shore. Of news such as these there is happily no question here. Mrs. Durant heard of her husband. He had escaped from Nowgong by the skin of his teeth, having been surrounded and actually imprisoned for a season by a body of his own men who, though pledged to the mutineers, were unwilling to injure him personally Mrs. Lyster knew of her own the very worst. Little Dick's father had been summoned to Allahabad shortly before the outbreak at Nowgong, and joyful news it was to him that his wife and son were safe at loyal Gumilcund. Lucy was encouraged by letters from Meerut, and she sent back such encouragement as she could. Tom—*they* would know who Tom was—had left everything and run the risk of rebellion in his wonderful little State, which Lucy remarked parenthetically was like the Garden of Eden before the Fall, just to search for Grace and Kit. He had not come back, but he had been heard of, and it was the belief of everyone that he would succeed; so she begged her uncle, and aunt, and cousins to keep up their spirits and to hope for the best.

They smiled when they read the fly-away letter. It was like herself; but it was not very satisfactory to them. And indeed the family were in miserable case just then. General

Elton, who had barely recovered from the effects of his wound, was about again; and it may be that the bolder counsels which began from this time to prevail in Meerut were due in large measure to his advice and assistance. But he himself was, if that were possible, a greater anxiety to his friends than when he had been lying at the point of death, for then they at least knew the worst. Now his restlessness and irritability were such that they could never for a single instant be sure of him.

Accustomed as he had been to take a large share in the conduct of affairs, his personal inactivity galled him. He had no civil authority, and the collapse of the magnificent army with which for so many years it had been his pride to be connected, had deprived him, at a stroke, of his military occupation. Meanwhile the state of anarchy into which the province was falling cut him to the soul, the more so that he felt convinced something might be done to check it.

With the Asiatic nothing goes so far as audacity, a quality which he cannot understand, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, does not believe in. Where he sees unflinching boldness, he suspects hidden strength, and as often as not he will throw down his arms rather than have them forced from him. So the General was never tired of preaching, but for some time no one would listen to him.

Then there came a change. From the hills, where, when the storm broke, he had been enjoying his well-earned holiday, the gallant collector, Dunlop, came down. He was armed with the authority of a magistrate over the districts surrounding Meerut, and, to the surprise of everyone, he asserted his determination of exercising it without delay. He would march out alone if no one cared to join him, and it was his belief that the terror of the English name, reinforced by the outcries of the unfortunate people whose lands had been ravaged by a brutal soldiery, would carry him along.

Dunlop was one of those Englishmen who believed in audacity.

But if a few volunteers amongst those whom the breaking up of the old order had deprived of occupation would put themselves under his orders, there could be no doubt that the pacification of the country would be more easily and swiftly accomplished.

We may imagine, but it would be very difficult to describe, the effect of this announcement on the fiery soul of the old

General. As a war-horse that scents the battle-field afar off; as a Moslem soldier, who sees the pearly gates of his Paradise slowly opening like a flower across the clouds and thunder of tumultuous war, so he felt when, to the deep dismay of his family, he went up to Dunlop and offered him his sword. Numbers followed his example, but of the brilliant and successful campaign in which they took part there is no need to write here. It has its place in history.

Twice the seasoned old soldier rode out with the gallant little corps, called the *Khakee Ressalah*, on account of its dust-coloured uniform, and twice he returned to his trembling wife and children, safe, but triumphant. As for Trixy, though no less anxious than her sisters, she did not once bid her father stay. I rather think she would have liked to march with them. 'One of us ought to have been a boy,' she said to her mother one day. 'Women have far the worst of it—sitting at home and watching and weeping—it is very hard work and rather humiliating.'

'Hush! Trixy; you don't know what you are saying,' said Lady Elton. And then the wild look that they all dreaded to see came over her face, and she cried out piteously, 'Yes, child, you are right. I have too many daughters, and the world is cruel to women. If a man dies, he dies fighting. If a woman dies——'

'Darling, you must not,' broke in Trixy, vehemently. 'I am a little idiot. Forgive me! And do you know—listen, dearest, and don't look so—do you know that I have been having the strangest dreams about our Grace? When she comes back——'

'When—oh! Trixy, when-

'Listen, dear, hear me to the end! When she comes back, I believe we shall find that she has the spirit of a heroine, if not of a hero.'

It was curious that this conversation, in which, for the first time for many days, Grace's name was mentioned before her mother, preceded by only a few hours the arrival of the letter from Lucy. It brought a slender ray of comfort to Lady Elton, and now her one idea was to reach Gumilcund herself. She dared not speak of it to anyone; but, all the more for her silence, it haunted her mind day and night. If she could only go! If she could only go! Now that her husband was well, and she could feel that Meerut was a safe refuge for the girls, the spirit of passionate restlessness, which

had once nearly shaken her reason, took possession of her with increased violence.

Sometimes it was like a madness. She would watch her girls and the servants furtively, and plan how she could evade them and slip away silently. One evening she got up in her sleep and reached as far as the door; but Yaseen Khan, the faithful bearer, was stretched across the threshold, and the noise he made, when she tried to step over him, awoke her and aroused the tent. After that they took fright and watched her more closely.

When her reason was nearly giving away under the strain, and she had begun to beg piteously, not knowing what she said, to be taken to Gumilcund, where it was now her possessing idea that Grace was kept in prison, a strange thing happened. A messenger from Gumilcund found his way into Meerut. Trixy saw him come in, and she recognised in him, as she believed, the faquir who had brought the first letter from Tom, and under whose convoy Bertie Liston had left the station. Supposing his message to be addressed to the General in command, she ran back to their tent with the information. She had scarcely time to give her news before Yaseen Khan rushed in, crying out, 'A letter! a letter! Missy Sahib is safe.'

The General was in his tent, furbishing up his arms, which had seen hard service lately. 'Silence, you foolish fellow!' he cried out. 'Do you wish to kill the Mem Sahib? Give the letter to me!'

'No, no; to me,' cried a piercing voice from the further side of the tent. 'Children, let me alone! I shall not faint. And, General, don't you call the poor fellow names! What did you say, Yaseen Khan? Safe? Say it again! Safe! Safe!' She had rushed forward to meet him. The letter was in her hand, but her fingers trembled so that she could not open it. 'I am afraid,' she said, looking round, with a pathetic smile, 'that I shall have to ask someone to help me after all. My hands have no power to-day. No, General, not you. Trixy, come here! Open it, but don't take it out of my hands!'

Trixy obeyed, the tears rolling down her face. 'Why, your fingers are trembling too,' said Lady Elton. 'Thank you, dear. Now read it for me. My eyes are dim.' Trixy passed her eyes over the paper and broke into a joyful cry. 'Well! well!' said her mother impatiently. 'Read it, every word!'

'My dear Lady Elton,' began the girl, her voice shaking, 'I am sending my faithful Subdul to tell you and the General that we have found your Grace. She has been ill, but she is better. I am taking her to Gumilcund, where her cousin and several other English ladies, whom I and my men have been so happy as to rescue from positions of peril, are living. We are accompanied by an escort of Ghoorka soldiers. The Captain, Gambier Singh, has most generously put them at my disposal. I would willingly come down to Meerut, but I fear to add to the fatigues and hardships which your heroic child has already undergone, and I may not keep the escort longer than is absolutely necessary. I detach Subdul, who is a skilful traveller, and I believe that he will reach Meerut before we reach Gumilcund. If it could possibly be arranged for Lady Elton to join us there, I think it would be well. Grace will be happier and more at rest when she has seen one of her own people. But, in a very short time, I hope and believe, the country will settle down again, and then we shall be able to meet. In the meantime, with love and best remembrances,

'I remain, my dear Lady Elton,
'Your attached and always devoted friend,
'THOMAS GREGORY.'

So Trixy read. When her voice dropped there was, for a few moments, silence in the tent. Then a great babble began, The girls clustered round their father. 'Oh! couldn't you take us to Gumilcund?' they cried. 'Do, Dad! Surely it could be managed.' Lady Elton's voice only was missing. When the General, setting his girls aside, looked round for her, he saw that she was busy, with the help of Yaseen Khan, putting a few necessaries together for her travelling bag. 'You see, Wilfrid,' she said, answering his look, 'I must go. My child wants me.'

'We all want you, Grace.'

'Ah! but she wants me most. You will arrange for me to go, will you not? Where is this good Subdul? I might put on some sort of disguise, as Bertie did.'

'Nonsense, my dear,' said the General, hoarsely. 'If anyone goes, I will.'

'No, Wilfrid. Your place is here. These other children want looking after. No, no, no,' as they crowded round her. 'I cannot take you. You are safe at Meerut. And Grace is safe! Oh! yes, Grace is safe; but she wants me. Tom would not have

written so if she did not. And I—oh! my dear,' turning to her husband, 'forgive me if I am adding to your trouble; but I cannot help it. I shall go mad if you do not let me go.'

'Gently, Grace, gently!' said the General, brokenly.

'Say yes, and I will be as gentle as you please,' she answered.

He stood for a few moments looking down at her earnestly. Then he said: 'Promise me to do nothing rash, and I will see what can be done.'

'Thank you, dear,' she said, humbly. 'Yes, I will promise. But you must make haste.'

CHAPTER XLVI

HOW GUMILCUND RECEIVED HER PRINCE

THE month of October was in, and the great heats of the plains were over. Events had been marching. At Agra, which was still in a state of siege, the large European population gathered together in the fort and palace of the magnificent Shah Jehan began to breathe more freely. In Lucknow, where Sir Colin Campbell and his veterans had not yet arrived, Havelock and the gallant Outram held their own, and the flagging spirits of the Europeans had been cheered by several brilliant successes. Cawnpore was in the hands of the English: but Tantia Topee, the last general of note amongst the mutineers, was gathering his forces together for a final effort; and Jhansi, the home and citadel of a woman scorned, bade proud defiance to the English conquerors. These were the news that met the Rajah of Gumilcund when, journeying wearily, he drew near to the gates of his own city.

Things had been going well with him since he parted from Gambier Singh. The country was much quieter than he had expected; the villages received them well; they had no difficulty about supplies; their force was large enough to frighten away the hordes of robbers that haunted the highways; and Hoosanee, who was their guide, took very good care that there should be no chance encounters with mutineers.

The rest and good food, with the comparative coolness of

the atmosphere, had completely restored little Kit. The colour came back into his cheeks, and the sparkle into his eyes. It was a delight to see him going about the camp, speaking in his little lordly way to the coolies and servants, and picking up phrases of Nepaulese with which to make friends with the Ghoorka soldiers. There was not a soul in the camp who did not adore him.

In one of the villages they had bought a little hill pony for the child, and day after day he trotted gravely by Tom's side, looking as picturesque as a prince of fairyland, with his brightly-coloured Indian garments, his blue-and-white muslin turban, and his flowing golden curls.

Grace, too, was better; but she did not speak much, and Tom would not urge her. He believed in the power of healing Nature. In the meantime he had despatched Subdul with the letter, of whose arrival we have heard.

So, as I have said, they came on to Gumilcund. The rajah had sent on swift runners to apprise the people of his coming, and all the city was in a ferment. It was afternoon when he crossed the boundaries of the State. Most of the peasantry had gone up to the town, so the country had a somewhat deserted appearance; but it gave him pleasure to see that the forts stationed here and there for their protection were occupied strongly, and that there had been no break in the agricultural operations. The people went about their usual work in the daytime, and took refuge in the city at night.

He halted, as he had done before, just as dusk began to fall, about a mile from the principal gate of the city. Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, with several other distinguished citizens, and a gorgeously-attired retinue of Indian cavalry, were drawn up here to do him honour, and escort him to the city in state.

Bidding his Ghoorkas halt, Tom rode in amongst them. He had scarcely done so before he caught sight of his beautiful little Arab mare, Snow queen. She had been ridden by no one since the night when he rode her out to meet the English fugitives, and, finding that two were missing, went to Dost Ali Khan's fort to find them. Now, hearing his voice, she whinnied, and pawed the ground impatiently. In a moment Tom had dismounted from the horse he was riding, and vaulted on to her back. He had much ado then to keep her quiet, but he succeeded at last, after which he turned to Chun-

der Singh. 'Thank you,' he said, holding out his hand. 'This is a pledge to me of your forgiveness.'

'There is no question of forgiveness, Rajah Sahib,' said the grave Indian. 'I could have wished, for the sake of the people, who were clamorous for tidings when they heard the rajah had gone, that his Excellency had treated me with more confidence. But is not that amongst the things that have passed? We have escaped from the fiery trial. The people of Gumilcund and his Excellency, their rajah——'

'The people will receive me, then?'

'The loyalty of the people of Gumilcund to Byrajee Pirtha Raj, their ruler, has never wavered.'

'That is well,' said Tom, gravely. 'But you must understand, Chunder Singh, and you, Lutfullah, on some points I have changed since last I dwelt amongst you. In the wilderness, where, for many days, I have been wandering seeking for my kindred, I have come to this determination chiefly,' he spoke in their own language, which all of them could understand. 'I will not,' he went on, 'go amongst you any more upon false pretences. I am an Englishman. How and to what degree I am related to your former rulers, or whether the mysterious tie which seems to unite us is merely spiritual, I do not know myself. I have written for information, and as soon as I receive it I will pass it on to you. In the meantime, I have determined to go amongst you without disguise. Such as I am, you and your people must receive me; and if the idea of serving a foreign ruler is repugnant to you, I will retire and allow you to choose your own ruler, on whose behalf I will promise to interest myself with the British Government. But, however this may be, I know'—he smiled, and Chunder Singh, who had been listening with a falling countenance, plucked up heart—'I know,' he repeated, laying his hand on the closed litter, which had been brought to the spot where he had reined up Snow-queen, 'that for the sake of those who have gone before me—aye, and because they love the English name, which has been a tower of strength to their city, the good and loyal citizens of Gumilcund will receive me with respect and affection, and will shelter and nourish the fugitives whom I have brought with me until they can return in peace to their own people.'

He paused, and a buzz of applause, not loud, for these were grave citizens and Asiatics, but deep and heartfelt, followed his words. 'Our rajah has spoken well. Hah! Hah!

He has spoken words of wisdom. He has proved himself the true son of Byrajee Pirtha Raj. Let him come amongst us freely. The people are waiting to receive him with honour.' So from mouth to mouth the joyful answers ran.

Up to this everything was quiet, decorous, and stately; Tom playing the part of an Oriental potentate to perfection; the citizens of Gumilcund reverential in manner and dignified in speech and bearing; the two guards—the Ghoorka escort on the one hand, and the gorgeously-caparisoned cavalry from Gumilcund on the other—sitting their horses like bronze images on either side of the space of ground where the rajah and the chief men of the city had met. And so it might have continued but for that upsetting element, subversive of all dignity, an English boy.

Kit had been riding in the rear of the cavalcade with Bâl Narîn. He had seen one or two things that interested him—a score or so of flying foxes, hanging like black bags from the trees, which he insisted upon disturbing, so that he might see them fly—a huge cobra, which they followed and killed, and a herd of screaming jackals that he galloped after until Bâl Narîn caught his pony by the rein and made him come back. They were thus considerably in the rear when the cavalcade halted.

Now, as soon as Kit saw that something was going on, he set spurs to his pony, gained upon the Ghoorka guard, passed it like a flash of lightning at imminent risk of setting the whole of it in motion, and drew rein by Tom's side just as the citizens of Gumilcund were assuring him of the continued homage of their city.

For a moment the child paused, looking out at them. It was light enough to see him well—the slender, shapely figure, the proud little head, the shower of golden curls. Every one of the grave men smiled. He answered their kind looks with a ringing laugh. 'Are you the people from Gumilcund?' he cried out, his childish treble ringing shrill and clear through the still air of the evening. 'And have you come to meet us?'

'Hah! Hah!' answered the grave elders. 'Gumilcund people, little Sahib.'

'Oh! I say,' whispered Kit, in his own tongue, to Tom. '*Don't* they look jolly?' Let's give them an English cheer. Where are Bâl Narîn and Hoosanee and the others? I've been teaching them. They can cheer pretty well. Come up,

you men! Now then,' lifting his small turban from his head, and holding it in one hand, while he shook his reins with the other. 'Hip! Hip! Don't be frightened, you men! Sing out! Hip! Hip! Hooray! That's better! Again! Hip, Hip, Hooray for Gumilcund! And for the rajah—a good one this time!'

The men had begun to cheer with might and main—the soldiers joined. It was a joyful tumult, the like of which had never been heard in Gumilcund before. The grave citizens were bewildered. The horses, unaccustomed to the noise, grew restive. It was all Tom could do to hold Snow-queen in. 'That's enough, Kit,' he cried. '*Bus! Bus*, we shall be at the gates in another moment, if you go on like this!'

'All right!' said Kit, 'I'll be as mum as a mouse directly. Just one more, Hip, Hip, Hooray for Grace Sahib! Three times three! and three times more for luck!' And thereupon the mischievous little urchin threw up his turban, caught it in his right hand, and rattled his reins over the pony's neck. Off it started at a hand-gallop; Snow-queen, who had been chafing under her master's detaining hand, went off in pursuit; the grave men of Gumilcund mounted their carriages as speedily as they could, and the two escorts found their horses unmanageable. For the level mile that lay between them and Gumilcund, it was a stampede, rather than a trot. But Kit, on his fiery mountain pony, headed them the whole way.

At the bridge which spans the ravine between the walls of the city and the open country, he drew the pony up and looked round. Tom and Snow-queen were close behind him. 'Isn't it a lark?' he cried out. 'Teazer would go, you know; I couldn't help him.'

'How much did you try, you young monkey?' said Tom. 'But since you are still, keep still for a few moments! We must let these good gentlemen come up. And Grace——'

'I say—what wonderful chaps those bearers are!' cried the irrepressible child. 'They've been running with her. She'll be inside almost as soon as we shall. Good-bye, Tom. I must trot back and get her to open the palki. She looks lovely, I know, and they'd all like to see her.'

Back he went, shouting out greetings to his Ghoorka friends. The two escorts, in the meantime, had fallen into double lines on the bridge. The elders of Gumilcund descended from their carriages and formed themselves into a

procession. Tom, on Snow-queen, stood in front of them. Their faces were turned away from Gumilcund and towards the road by which they had come in. The palki and its eight bearers came on at a rapid run. The curtains were open. Grace had given in to the request of Kit, which he had been artful enough to represent as coming from Tom. And truly she was glad to see the light of this wonderful evening; for her heart was beating with a host of new feelings, and she had much trouble to keep herself quiet. Nearer and nearer drew the open palki. The light of the heavens had departed; but, as if by magic, a host of fairy lamps had sprung into being. They ran along the parapets of the bridge, up and down, throwing a weird radiance on the dark faces and showy accoutrements of the Ghoorka and Gumilcund soldiers. From the causeway, which led from the bridge to the gates of the city, thrown hospitably open, they shone out in myriads. Held on long poles they came flashing along—a glittering line of light. At the bridge the line divides, and while some of the light-carriers group themselves round the procession of citizens and their rajah, others run on to meet the palki. They form round it, and the light of their flaming torches falls full on the pale face, the snowy raiment, the golden hair, and deep, steadfast eyes of the English girl.

Wonderingly the people gaze upon her, for they think that they see a vision. As for the rajah, his heart gives a great bound. Even he, who knows her so well, has never seen her look so lovely. But what is the meaning of that strangeness in her face; the fixed gaze; the aloofness? To him she is like one who is moving in two worlds, whose body is present, and whose spirit is far away.

The palki stops. It is uplifted still on the shoulders of the bearers, so that all who are within the radius of the torch-light can see it plainly. Tom had meant himself to step forward and bid her welcome, but he cannot speak for the rush of tears that are blinding and choking him. He bends himself low over his saddle-bow in the graceful Oriental fashion, and makes a signal to Chunder Singh, who steps forward.

'Madam,' he says, in excellent English, 'his Excellency permits me the honour of being the first to welcome you to Gumilcund. My friends and I have heard your story, and know what your sufferings and your heroism have been. Accept our assurances that your troubles are over. In the rajah's city the gracious lady will be as safe as in her own

country and amongst those who have served her from her childhood.

'I am sure of it, Chunder Sahib,' says Grace, bowing and smiling, 'and I thank you from my heart.'

That is all she can say, for the irrepressible little Kit has drowned her voice in another wild cheer, and from the bridge, and the causeway leading up to the gates, and from within the gates whence the light of a myriad lamps and the tumult of a great multitude gathered together is pouring, the shout comes back in deep waves of sound that rise and fall on the still air like joyful music.

Then the rajah gives the word, and the palki with its bearers, and the merry company of light-carriers advance, Snow-queen, who has been reduced to order, stepping proudly in front of them, while the elders of Gumilcund, some of whom are 'fat and scant of breath,' mount their carriages and bring up the rear.

Then what a joyful tumult of welcome! All through the great avenue, with its double rows of trees, it is one sea of turbaned heads and waving garments and banners carried proudly aloft. Here and there the procession has barely room to pass, but the good temper of everyone in the crowd is perfect, and whenever the rajah, who takes the lead, draws rein, the multitudes separate of their own accord, and leave them a living lane to pass through.

So, moving slowly, they come on to the market-place.

Vishnugupta, the priest, is waiting for them here. It is an encounter which Tom would fain have delayed until a quieter moment, for the Brahmin devotee, who had doubtless believed in his pure caste and high lineage, may not, he thinks, be so ready to receive him as the simple citizens. But he is mistaken. To Vishnugupta, in his sacerdotal capacity, Byrajee Pirtha Raj was no less of an alien than his successor. But, like many another priest both of the East and of the West, he was something more than a person of approved sanctity. He was a patriot and a citizen. He knew what the present regimen had done for Gumilcund, where he had lived before the days of Byrajee Pirtha Raj and his father, and he recognised the advantages the whole country derived from the overlordship of the British. It was in the speech that Tom had made to the people, when rumours of mutiny were first rife in the country, that he had conquered Vishnugupta, the Brahmin devotee and astute poli-

tician. That he was of a different country and religion went for nothing with the priest. Nor, strange as it may seem, and although he belonged professedly to one of the most mystical faiths the world has ever known, did the legend current amongst the people of their late so passionately loved ruler having returned to them in the form of this young and comely stranger, affect him in the least. It might be so, and it might not. Vishnugupta would not express an opinion. What he did feel and say was that the rule of the stranger was good for the city.

And so, to the surprise of Tom, and to the measureless delight of the people who thronged round him, Vishnugupta received him with honour such as he had not granted even to his predecessors. Standing head and shoulders above the crowd, his hands, in one of which he held a cage of living brands, uplifted, and his white hair streaming in the wind, he called upon the procession to halt while, in a flood of words, all the more impressive to those who stood by for its mystical strangeness, he called down blessings upon the chosen of the gods.

He ceased, and making a low obeisance, the rajah passed on silently. Behind him were the golden-haired child and the English girl in her open palki. Vishnugupta stood in front of it, and the bearers stopped. So piercing was his gaze that even Kit was silenced. But Grace looked back at him calmly.

For the space of an instant they looked at one another across the shadows, and then the girl's lips parted in a slow and sorrowful smile. 'We will speak together another time,' she said, quietly, in English. 'You are a good man. I could trust you.'

'So be it,' said Vishnugupta, bending his proud head. He stood aside, and the procession, which was on its way to the palace, swept by him.

He had meant to follow, but he stood like one abashed, and his hands dropped, and the cage of fire which he had been lifting over the heads of the people, swung idly by his side, and those who had flocked round him, fearing accident, fell away, so that in a few moments he stood alone. Plunged deeply in thought, he did not observe the absence of bystanders. One, however, fascinated by his strange appearance, lingered and heard him whisper: 'That look! And on the face of a woman! I would fain see it again. But I fear! I fear! Ram! Ram! My heart flows from me like rivers that seek the sea.'

For a few moments his head sank on his breast. Then he raised it, and the fascinated observer watched him move forward slowly, till he reached the palace gate, which had closed behind the rajah and his party, but which, as he knew, would have opened at a word from him. There, for an instant, he paused in indecision. His hand touched the bell, but he withdrew it. 'Though I am a Guru and twice-born,' he murmured, 'I am old, and my eyes have not the precision of youth. To-night I will not see her again.'

CHAPTER XLVII

IN THE PALACE

In the general excitement no one had remembered to tell the English ladies of the missive that had been received from the rajah. Through Sumbaten, however, who loved gossip as much as those of her order at home, some rumour of what was going on had filtered into their quarters of the palace. Lingering in one of the outer halls, and wondering at the stir in the house, she was told that the rajah's apartments were being made ready for him, and that he was coming home that night.

Armed with this joyful news she ran back to her ladies. This was early in the afternoon. They did not believe her in the least, so they said ; yet, as the time went on, they too became aware that something unusual was going forward. At the instance of Sumbaten, reinforced by Lucy, they put on gala attire. Then they wandered up and down the shaded alley that led from the inner marble court to the summer-house, longing for this day of many hours to come to an end.

When at last the dusk began to fall, Sumbaten, who had been sent into the outer court to watch, came running in to say that there was an extraordinary stir in the market-place ; but that she could get no one to tell her what it meant, for all the palace was empty.

Then they gathered together and looked into one another's faces with wonder and hope and terror. Mrs. Lyster was as pale as death. Mrs. Durant, who could not stand, clutched at her arm. Little Dick's mother seized her child, who was playing about on the grass, and clasped him in her arms,

whispering that perhaps it was a rising, and couldn't they get away or hide? Lucy was trembling too, but she would show no lack of courage. 'Nonsense,' she said, a little scornfully. She looked down and saw Aglaia standing close beside her, her clear eyes shining like globes of light and her cheeks as red as a newly-opened rose. 'What do you think, little Miss Wisdom?' she said.

'I'm not wise, I'm foolish,' said Aglaia, 'but I know he is coming, and the people are making a noise because they are glad. Hadn't we better go into the hall to meet them?'

'Yes; yes; come along! Aglaia has more sense than all of us put together,' said Lucy.

'Oh! but is all right? How shall I bear it? How shall I bear it?' cried Mrs. Durant.

'It will soon be over. Have courage for a few more moments! Ah! if I had only your hope!' said Mrs. Lyster.

'I beg your pardon, dear,' murmured Mrs. Durant. 'I had forgotten.'

They went together into the hall, where they found everything in readiness for them. Beautifully-shaded lamps, which diffused a warm glow over the apartment, were lighted; the water in the fountain in the midst of the hall, and in the channels that ran through it, was stirring briskly; and on the daïs at the upper end, which was decorated with Persian rugs and embroidered curtains from famous Indian looms, their usual evening meal was spread out. With its delicately-wrought pavement, its sculptured pillars, its flowers and ferns and gaily-plumaged birds, it was a room to make the mouth of the modern æsthete water. But the English ladies were accustomed to its beauty, and to-night they had no thoughts for it. They were given up to listening, to watching for that which was to come. Moments passed into minutes, and never surely were minutes so tardy in their flight. Louder, meanwhile, and louder grew the tumult below. Lucy threatened to veil herself and run outside, but the others held her back. Sumbaten would rush out, stay away a few moments, and come back with a sensational piece of news. They listened with white faces, all but Aglaia, whose eyes were dancing, and whose face was bright with colour.

At last, when their patience was nearly at an end, they heard the gates of the palace open. Then the sound of many voices came floating through the courts and passages and staircases that separated their apartments from the outer enclosure,

and Sumbaten came rushing in to cry out that the rajah had come in.

And now little Lucy set her teeth together, and Mrs. Durant gave a low moan. 'Look out,' she whispered to Mrs. Lyster. 'I dare not.' But in the next instant she was flying across the hall, with a wild cry of joy, 'Kit! Kit! I hear him!'

She had heard him—the little silver voice that she had thought never upon earth to hear again had rung out clearly above all those others. 'Kit! Kit!' It was all over then—the anguish, the suspense, the horror of great darkness. Kit, her own golden-haired Kit, was safe. But another cry, a cry shrill and joyous, echoes through the palace court. He is in front, of course—the enterprising little hero; all these people are so slow and so stately that he cannot wait for them. He has penetrated to the foot of the great staircase that leads up to the ladies' court and hall. There he catches a glimpse of his mother's pale face irradiated with joy. 'Mother!' he cries.

'Kit, my little Kit, my darling!' She has him in her arms. She is kissing him, fondling him, breathing sweet nothings over him as if he were a baby. It is all very pleasant, of course, but to a hero of Kit's standing just a little humiliating.

'Thank you, mother dear,' he says. 'I'm awfully glad too! But look here!' drawing himself gently away. 'Couldn't you kiss me presently? I don't mind it, you know. I like it. But there are such a lot of people here just now, and we're blocking up the way.' Put down upon his feet, he smoothed his ruffled plumes, and looked round him with dignity. 'Ah!' seeing Lucy close by, 'here's someone else I know. How do you do, Lucy?'

'Very well, thank you, Kit,' said Lucy, with corresponding gravity.

'You look all right,' said Kit. 'I've brought back Grace, you know. But I say,' catching sight of Aglaia, 'who's this?'

'Do you want to be introduced to her formally, you ridiculous child?' said Lucy. 'Mrs. Durant, for heaven's sake take him away! He will make me laugh, and I feel more inclined to cry. Ah! Here they come! Grace! Grace!'

'Daddy Tom!' said Aglaia, pressing forward.

'Tom! Tom Gregory! How could I ever have mistaken him?' cried Mrs. Lyster; but she kept in the background, and her cheeks, which had been so pale, were flushed with colour. They were mounting the marble steps together, Grace

leaning on the rajah's arm, and he with no eyes for anyone but her. She was very pale, as if she were weary, and there was a curious, steadfast look in her eyes, which rested nowhere, but seemed always to be looking on to something beyond.

'Grace!' repeated Lucy, and could say no more, for the words seemed frozen on her lips. Then, in a rapid whisper to Tom, 'Does she know us? Why does she look so?'

'Yes, yes. She is tired. I am afraid the coming in and the welcome of the people have been too much for her,' said Tom, hoarsely. 'Let her rest, and she will be better to-morrow.'

He did not ask for Mrs. Lyster, who kept still in the background watching him with one of her old smiles upon her lips. To Mrs. Durant, who had caught his hands and was pouring out her gratitude, he could scarcely pay even the attention necessary for politeness. As for Aglaia, her whispered greeting had been quite unheeded. He had not so much as seen her. The child turned away, with a pale face and clouded eyes. 'He saved me too,' she whispered; 'but he has forgotten.'

They had reached the top of the stairs. Grace was smiling, but there was still that strange, fixed look in her eyes. Lucy, divided between tears and laughter, threw her arms about her cousin's neck, and covered her face with kisses. Then she led her in to the others, chattering wildly. 'I can scarcely believe you have really come back!' she cried. 'I think I shall awake to-morrow and find it a dream. If you only knew what I have gone through, darling. I felt myself such a dreadful coward. I should have gone away with you as Kit did, brave little Kit! And oh! aren't you glad to be amongst us again? To-morrow you must tell us your adventures. Grace! why do you look so? Laugh! cry! say you are happy or sorry! Do anything! Perhaps it would be a relief to your feelings to scream. I know it would be to mine,' said Lucy, gazing at her cousin earnestly. But Grace only smiled that placid smile, looking out still as if she saw something beyond them. They brought her to a softly-cushioned divan on the daïs. Tom had given her up to Lucy. He was stumbling back across the hall when his glance fell upon Aglaia, and he stopped. She was standing by herself, and her eyes were full of tears.

'Aglaia!' he said, stooping over her kindly. 'Are you crying because we have come back?'

The child did not speak. 'But what is it, then? I thought I should have seen you dancing with joy.'

'I was a few minutes ago,' said Aglaia, vaguely.

'And has something happened since then, little friend? Come! Tell me! They are all busy up there, so no one else will hear.'

'No, no, no; it's nothing,' said Aglaia, choking back her sobs. 'I *am* your little friend still?'

'Of course you are, dear. Did you think I was so fickle as to have forgotten you?'

The pink flush mounted to Aglaia's face. 'Please forgive me,' she said, softly. 'And'—hesitating.

'Yes, dear—go on!'

'She is lovely. I think I shall love her, even though you do like her best.'

'Best!' echoed Tom, smiling. 'Now you are a little goose! Don't you know, Aglaia, that there are different kinds of loving? I love you as my child—my little friend.'

'And Grace?' said Aglaia. 'Isn't she your friend too?'

'She is my friend, and something more. At least, I hope so. You know we may have more friends than one.'

'Yes,' said Aglaia, doubtfully. But she added under her breath, 'There is only one best.'

CHAPTER XLVIII

A LETTER FROM ENGLAND

LEAVING Grace to come to herself in the hands of her friends, we will follow the young rajah to his rooms, where several people were waiting to have audience of him. He despatched the business which they brought to him with his usual clear-sightedness and rapidity, received the congratulations of the Resident, who had come up to see him, and of the two young officers whom he had so happily rescued, appointed a session for the following day, in open court, to try the cases, and read the petitions which had been accumulating during his absence, promised to attend later a supper which the Resident had prepared in his honour, and then, being left at last to the ministrations of Hoosanee and Ganesh, he turned to the letters and papers heaped high upon his table. Before turning them over he stopped to think. Up to this he had been too busy to reflect. All day long, ever since he touched the boundaries

of the State, a vague sense of wonder had been present in his mind. He was trying now to puzzle it out. When, two months ago, he left Gumilcund secretly, when he camped out in the forest waiting for news from Dost Ali Khan, he had felt like an escaped prisoner. Now, having fulfilled his mission, and returned to the bondage which he had remembered as so galling, he found, to his surprise, that it was bondage no longer. He had left Gumilcund as a prison ; he returned to it as a home. And it was not that he had lost his love for England. On the contrary, he had never loved England more: he had never felt prouder of his connection with her. Some day, if his life was spared, he hoped to revisit his early home and to see his mother and the friends of his youth. But he belonged to India, not to England. A few weeks ago, it would have given him keen pain to say this even to himself. It would have been a renunciation such as he could scarcely have had strength to face. Now he did not find that any effort was needed. The wonder to him was that he had not recognised it before.

Hoosanee and Ganesh were chattering busily, as they made preparations for his toilet and his tea. Their voices came to him like the distant buzzing of bees ; but the sounds warned him that he must not give much more time to thought. He was turning over the papers mechanically. They were spread out on a beautiful table of marble inlaid with precious stones. Above it swung a gold lamp of delicate workmanship. He wondered a little at the familiarity of these things, at the sense of coming back to his own—he who had only enjoyed them for so short a time! The papers did not seem to be of the first importance. There were belated news-sheets—circulars—petitions ; answers sent to inquiries of his own by Indian civil and military officers, some of which he put by for more careful perusal on the following day; and two or three letters from private friends. He was about to turn away from his hasty inspection, and to give himself over into the hands of Hoosanee, when at the very bottom of the pile, a bulky letter, different in appearance from any of the others, drew his notice. As he took it up his heart began to beat strangely. He held it up to the light. It was addressed in his mother's handwriting—the delicate, flowing penmanship he knew so well ; what made it so peculiarly remarkable to him was not only its size and weight, but that, for the first time since he took up his position, his mother had addressed him by his Indian name and title.

He looked at the date, went through a brief calculation, and then sank down upon his seat, feeling, for the moment, sick and faint. The letter was an answer to that written at Lucknow, in which he had begged so earnestly to be told his true position. Trembling from head to foot, he put it within his vest. How he passed through that evening with all its formalities—how, carrying about with him the consciousness of this letter which he had not yet dared to open, he talked and laughed and jested, and told the tale of his adventures, and independently of *it*—*it*, that might change his whole life—entered into engagements and appointments, and made plans for the future—how, when the long evening of festivities was over, he found strength to go quietly to his room, and, dismissing Hoosanee, to sit down under the swinging lamp and open it, he never quite knew. But it was done at last, and that was his last moment of weakness. The four closely-written sheets, in which his poor mother told the secret that had made the joy and the torment of her life, he read to the end without wavering. When he got up from their perusal, his face was perfectly pale, but his eyes glistened strangely.

For a few moments he paced the room. He went to the marble lattice, and, leaning his head against it, let the soft and fragrant air blow in upon his closed eyelids and burning forehead. He looked back upon his room—the room where Byrajee Pirtha Raj had breathed his last - the sculptured pillars, the inlaid pavement, and the fretted roof. He turned to the window again, and looked out upon the solemn Indian night—the still earth—the dark trees, with their ink-black shadows—the piercing radiance of silver stars winning its way through the finely-wrought marble. His mind was strangely upset. It was as if a revolution, in the conduct of which his own will had neither place nor power, were being wrought within him. And for this moment, at least, emotion was as passive as will. If he had any feeling, it was a sense of satisfaction that the mystery of the past was solved. He knew now to whom he belonged—knew that it was through no caprice of an eccentric stranger, but by the will of the Divine, which, from the beginning, had shaped his course for this end, that he had been called to his present position. Whether he was sorry or glad, uplifted or humiliated, would be for to-morrow to determine. To-night he had no more force left, even to feel.

And so he threw off his festive garments, extinguished the

lamps, stretched himself out on the couch which for the first time since he had occupied it seemed to belong to him; and Sleep, the nursing-mother of wearied human souls, received him presently into her keeping.

While the rajah sleeps, I must tell very briefly the story that his letter contained. To do so, it will be necessary to go far back into the past. Not only those early years which were so much of a puzzle to Mrs. Gregory's friends, but the years that preceded them, must be touched upon if we wish to understand how she and her son stood, and of what nature was the confession which his passionate entreaties had drawn from her. I have already said that she belonged to an honourable and distinguished family, well-known in early Anglo-Indian records. General Sir Anthony Bracebridge, her grandfather, who began as a subaltern in one of the Company's regiments and worked his way up to a high command and the honour of knighthood, went to India in the days when home-leave was an almost unknown privilege, and when English ladies had not yet begun to make India a field for the display of their talents and accomplishments. Yet upon him, as upon others, came the season when a 'young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.' He was more fortunate than most of his comrades, in that, through a romantic adventure, he won the favour of an Indian family of power, wealth, and high lineage. It happened that the daughter of a rajah, concerning whose beauty and magnificence the wildest rumours were afloat, was on her way to the sacred bathing-ghât, where she was accustomed to offer up her morning prayers, when her escort was attacked by a body of men belonging to a neighbouring rajah. This person had asked her hand in marriage, and been refused. Burning with fury at the insult offered to him, he had determined to seize her by force. So he might have done, for, after a fierce conflict, the escort of the maiden was nearly overpowered; but, as fate would have it, Captain Bracebridge and a few English troopers were passing through the town. These, as was natural, threw themselves into the mêlée, the maiden was rescued, and the Englishmen, being full of chivalrous ardour, refused to leave her until they had seen her safely within the gates of her father's palace.

That Captain Bracebridge should have won for himself the everlasting gratitude of the maiden's father for this gallant deed of arms was not wonderful. But what did seem strange

to those who knew the manners of the times was that he was presently adopted by the whole household as a friend. After a decent interval, during which he gained an influence, so extraordinary as to be attributed by many of their own people to magic, over the minds of the rajah and his brothers, he married, with her father's consent, and according to English rites, the beautiful girl whom he had so gallantly defended from peril and outrage.

The marriage, so the story goes, proved perfectly happy; but the bliss was of brief duration. After little more than two years of wedlock, Captain Bracebridge's Indian wife died, leaving a son behind her. On this son the father poured out the most devoted affection. He is said to have been a rarely beautiful creature; but all his affinities were with his mother's race. Notwithstanding this, it was his father's wish to bring him up as an English gentleman. I think one of his favourite schemes was through this boy, on whom a large fortune had been settled by his Indian relatives, to re-establish the fortunes of the Bracebridge family, and restore the ancient glories of their ancestral seat. But it was not to be. For although the boy was intellectually gifted, drinking in learning and science with an eagerness that surprised his teachers, he was not the stuff of which the ordinary English gentleman is made. He was too dreamy, too sensitive, and far too strange a being to make any sort of a success in society. Recalled to India, where General Bracebridge had, by this time, made both money and renown, he found that in the proud little official world, of which he was expected to form a part, he was even more of an alien than in England, and at last, stung by slights, some of them fancied and some of them real, he announced his determination of giving up his English citizenship altogether, and knitting himself to his mother's race and family. It may almost be said that Gumilcund owed its birth to this determination. The estate on which that flourishing little city now stands was, about this time, bequeathed to him by one of his grand-uncles, and he was in the enjoyment of the vast fortune settled upon him by his grandfather. Part of this money he spent in building Gumilcund, while the energy and political talent that had found no scope amongst his father's people, were devoted to the task of organising it.

General Bracebridge, in the meantime, indemnified himself for his disappointment by entering into a second marriage, which, the world said, was far more satisfactory than the first.

In course of time a second son was born to him; but he never lost his deep love for the first, and as long as he lived, the Rajah of Gumilcund, who had, in course of time, married, and, in his turn, become a father, was a frequent and welcome visitor at his house.

There Mrs. Gregory, his grandchild, then a lovely little girl six or seven years old, met her Indian cousin, who was just verging upon manhood. He was handsome, gracious, and noble, and she loved him as little children love their first hero. She was sent to England to school, and returned, after ten long years of absence, with her cousin's image fresh in her mind. Her grandfather was dead then, and the intimacy between the English and Indian branches of the house of Bracebridge was not so close as it had been. Nevertheless, the cousins, who had thought of one another kindly all these years, met and loved.

Colonel Bracebridge was absent on a frontier war. His wife was dead. The simple, inexperienced English girl was left very much to her own devices. After a ball, at which the Indian rajah had been the stateliest figure, she was persuaded to enter into a clandestine marriage. But, though feeling had carried her away for a time, her instincts of prudence and propriety were too strong to be altogether fought down, even by love. She left her husband, who would fain have persuaded her to give up all for him, and travelled under the escort of faithful servants to the station where her father was in command. To him she confessed what she had done, entreating his consent to celebrate publicly the marriage into which she had entered in secret. A terrible scene followed, for Colonel Bracebridge was of those who considered the admixture of alien blood in a family a disgrace and a sin. He told his daughter harshly that her marriage was no marriage, and threatened her with the loss not only of his protection, but of the good word of every friend she possessed, if she would not promise him never to see her so-called husband again.

For many days she held out; but the strong will and passionate, overbearing temper of her father, reinforced by depressing tales from him and others of how, if she persisted in her folly, she would be shut up in a zenana, and as much cut off from the world as a nun in a convent, prevailed at last. She was only sixteen, too young to take a line of her own, or to do battle with those she was trained to obey; and,

doubtless, she was not capable then, nor ever would have been, of that strong and perfect love which holds firm and faithful through all the storms of destiny and shocks of change. Moved by her father, she wrote a letter to the rajah, reproaching him for the advantage he had taken of her inexperience, and a few weeks later she was prevailed upon to marry Captain Gregory, having first told him the whole story and assured him that she could never love him. As a fact she came to love him dearly, both on account of the sacrifices he had made for her, and for his own sake. As for her little son, whom in the vain hope that he would be a Bracebridge and nothing else, she called 'Tom,' he was born in wedlock, and only a very few knew that he was not the true son of Captain Gregory.

CHAPTER XLIX

SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF MORNING

WHEN the rajah awoke the following morning he was conscious of a curious novelty, not only in the world about him, but in his own relations towards it. Deep down in his heart was a tremulous feeling of anxiety and incertitude that might presently become pain; but, for the moment, and floating buoyantly on the surface of his being, there was a sense of completeness and satisfaction such as he had never known before.

The first thought—rapturous as the saint's vision of Paradise—which leapt to his heart was that Grace was under his roof. His roof—he repeated the words with a pleasant emphasis on the pronoun, for it had brought him back to the revelation of the previous night.

His—yes, his—in a new sense. The State—the city—the palace—the servants who had attended upon him with such marvellous fidelity—the councillors, by whom he had been inducted into the duties of his position, and to whose wisdom and disinterestedness he owed it that he had been able to leave the task of government, which had become irksome to him, and to rescue and bring back in triumph the English girl, so much dearer to him than life—all these were his! His father—how warmly his heart thrilled to the name!—the

great man who up to this had been an enigma to him—a mysterious and disturbing element in his life—had given them to him: had prepared many of them for him most likely, with a view to the difficulties and dangers that he foresaw would beset him. This was the entrancing thought which glorified that strange awakening. The sensation was as that of one who steps out of a wilderness into a well-ordered home.

True, the story was somewhat of a tangle to him still. There had been a moment—an awful moment—during its perusal when the blood had rushed like fire to his brain, and he had held back his breath in terror of what he might have to know. But it had passed. Byrajee Pirtha Raj was no stranger to him. Through his works; through the strange yet always noble inspirations that had surged to his soul when he was, as he still firmly believed, holding commune with him; through the impression of himself he had left upon his friends and contemporaries, all of whom looked upon him as something more than a man, the young rajah had learned to know his father; and his mother's story, which, through all its penitence and self-accusation, hinted dimly at a great wrong done to her, did not stagger him, as it might otherwise have done. Wrong there had been, and grievous mistake and misconception; but he was passionately convinced that his father had meant no evil. To him the marriage rite, whatever it had been, through which he had knit the fortunes of the woman he loved to his own, had been true and holy and perfect.

So Tom said to himself, and it may be as well to say here that his instincts were true. His mother had not told, and, indeed, being young then to the ways of the world, she did not herself understand, all the circumstances that had led up to the step which she afterwards so bitterly deplored. As a fact, partly through her own folly and inexperience, and partly through the mischievous devices of one of her friends, she had been thrown, after that memorable ball, into an extremely compromising situation, and it was no less to shield her honour than to gratify his own ardent love that her chivalrous cousin had proposed the hasty marriage and carried it through. He honestly believed then that her father, when he came to know everything, would give to their union joyfully the seal of his approval.

He was, as we know, undeceived; and it was to save her from the pain of a final breach with her race and nation that

he had bowed silently to her decision to leave him. It was for her sake that he had not disputed the validity of her marriage with Captain Gregory. For her sake—ah! was it for her sake, or was it for the sake of Gumilcund, of India, of the high policy which he so consistently and courageously pursued, that he had allowed his son and successor to grow up away from him and in a distant land? This, with many another secret which Tom would have given everything he possessed to know, had died with the dead rajah. But his son knew enough to give to his life a new spring of gladness—a new soul of order. For now the war of contending impulses that had bewildered him was over. His present grew naturally out of his past, and formed, in its turn, a fitting prelude to the deeper harmonies of the future.

It was very early. The dawn was just breaking in the eastern heavens. Through the pierced marble lattices came the golden light, tracing, with its airy pencil, soft patterns of light and shade on the roof and wall. The morning air, burdened with delicate odours of tropical lilies and Cape jessamine and heliotrope and late-flowering roses, stole in rejoicingly. Then came sounds of awakening in the palace. The chowkedars, or night-watchmen, cried out to one another, and gave up their posts to the bearers and chuprassies. The royal peacock, perched on the garden wall, shook out his jewelled fan to the sun and screamed in discordant tones his welcome to the morning. Innumerable doves, of old time pensioners of the palace, swept past the marble lattices, with a whirr and flutter of soft, grey wings, to take toll from the heaps of yellow grain piled up in the outer court. The stir of the city, the lowing of kine, the rumble of wheels, the cries of those who bought and sold, the ring of metal, wrought painfully into forms of use and beauty, the monotonous beat of hammers—these, with the thousand indistinguishable sounds of a multitude in busy movement, fell, softened by distance, on the young rajah's ears. His heart swelled as he listened, and his eyes were dim with a sudden rush of tears. All the strangeness, all the wonder, all the curious tangle of conflicting passions and fates had brought him hither—he, in his weakness and inexperience—to be the ruler of this people. Yes; and the strangest part of it was that he felt in himself a fitness for the work he was called upon to do.

He remembered his boyish choice of a profession. If he could not be amongst those who, by their thought and genius,

build up the destinies of men and nations, he would, he said, build houses for them to dwell in, and temples where they could worship. He had entered upon the lower task; suddenly and unexpectedly he had been called to the higher. What did it mean? Had he really the constructive power, of which, in his boyish ignorance, he had boasted? And if so—ah! if so—how was he to use it?

As these thoughts succeeded one another through his mind, they took gradually a wider range. Beyond his own narrow individuality, beyond the little city and the busy crowd, they wandered, till, as in a vision, he seemed to see the truth at which as yet he had but dimly guessed. He did not stand alone. He was one in a chain. Purposes, strongly linked together, had been passed on from hand to hand, each in turn strengthening them with its own formative will, till at last in their cumulative force they should be powerful enough to move the world. He saw now that it was not for her own sake, nor even for the sakes of those who dwelt within her walls, that Gumilcund had grown up from the desert and taken a place amongst the cities of the world. She was to be an example—a living type of what might be, on a large scale and everywhere, when wealth and science and the white heat of enthusiasm—that heat in which self perishes—are brought together and allowed unchecked to exercise their influence upon the life and destiny of nations. They—his predecessors—had been able to do no more than give the sign. The prejudices of their friends of the West, and the circumstances of their own lives, narrowed down to the small issues of an Asiatic society, had tied their hands. To him—a child of the West in a truer sense than they could ever have been—belonged the larger life. Had he the strength and wisdom to use it as he should? He would at least try. And then his thoughts flew to Grace—his white dove—his darling. She had the wisdom that he lacked. She had more than wisdom: she had heroism, and the passion of self-renunciation and deep spiritual insight, which, however we may imagine of ourselves, are better understood and more widely appreciated in the East than in the West. Grace! But would she—could she—help him? His mind strayed back over the past few days, blissful for all their suffering, and his lips parted in a smile of hope. She had said she loved him. The sweet confession, true, he knew, as she was true, was still ringing in his ears. Would she, then, do what his mother could not? Would

she give up country and race, and come to him? Would she live here in Gumilcund, letting the beautiful radiance of her woman's life shine through and overcome the mists of custom, and the harsh and cruel caste-prejudices, which have separated Hinduism from the rest of the world and made of its votaries a people apart? That was the question which the next few days must decide.

There rose a vision before him, as he thought. He seemed to see in imagination how his hand, in passing on the sacred trust, might impress a new form upon it. His predecessors had founded a State and built a city. He might mould a society. His thoughts, having reached this stage, were becoming incoherent and wild, when Hoosanee, who had heard him stirring, came in with his morning meal. Hoosanee looked superb. He was dressed in snowy white, while a turban of pale gold, in the front of which glittered a small diamond star, given to him long ago by Byrajee Pirtha Raj, surrounded his dusky brows and fell in voluminous folds to his waist.

'Why, Hoosanee,' said Tom, raising himself on his elbow, 'how gorgeous you are this morning! You look much more of a prince than I do.'

'My master must remember that he is not in the jungle,' said Hoosanee, his dark face flushing with pleasure.

'And the gay dress is the sign of the joyful heart,' said Tom. 'Well! I think you are right. Have you any news for me?'

'Yes, Excellency. I have seen my sister, Sumbaten, and the little baba, Aglaia. Grace Sahib slept well last night, and she is sleeping still.'

'Thank heaven!' said Tom, fervently. 'I hope they will not awake her. And the other ladies, Hoosanee——'

'There is one who would have speech of your Excellency. I met her in the house in the garden, where the mem sahibs take choto hasari. She asked me many questions. The last time we saw her, Sahib,' said Hoosanee, a smile overspreading his face, 'it was the work of the rajah's servant to put questions to her.'

'Ah! poor Mrs. Lyster! And admirably you did it!' said Tom, laughing. 'I wonder, by-the-by, if she thinks you artful still.'

'She spoke to me with kindness, Sahib.'

'They have told her what a hero you are, Hoosanee. Well! get my bath ready, and give me my things! No one from out-

side will come in yet. I will meet the ladies in the summer-house.'

All of them but Grace were there—Lucy, looking a little pale after the excitement of the night before, and Mrs. Durant, with Kit pressed close by her side, and Mrs. Lyster, who wore her Indian dress with a strange shyness, and Aglaia, all smiles and gladness, and little Dick and his mother.

When they saw the rajah, who was dressed as an Indian of rank, coming along the path that led to their retreat, they rose from the table and went out to meet him. Aglaia and little Dick were first. They ran into his arms, and he caught them both up joyfully, glad, perhaps, to hide his slight embarrassment in the warmth of the children's boisterous welcome. 'Oh! how lovely everything is!' said Aglaia, rapturously. 'You won't go away again, Daddy Tom?'

'Not till I take you back to England with me, Aglaia.' And then he turned to the other ladies, a boyish flush on his face, which exercise and exposure to the sun had bronzed almost to the native hue.

'It is too bad of you to disturb yourselves,' he said. 'I should not have come so early, only I thought that, as you were taking breakfast out-of-doors, you would give me a corner at the table.'

'Of course we will,' cried Lucy. 'It's such a rapture to see anyone. Mrs. Lyster was just wishing——'

'Never mind what I wished. Let me speak for myself, Lucy,' said Mrs. Lyster, advancing and looking at the rajah shyly. 'Mr. Gregory——'

Tom smiled. 'So you have found me out at last, my dear old friend,' he said, shaking her cordially by the hand. 'I am cleverer than you. Dark as it was the other night, I found you out at once——'

'And yet you said nothing?'

'Ah! I was burning to speak, but I dared not. Our safety and yours depended on the fidelity with which I was able to play my part. I had to be the Indian rajah, and nothing else. A word in English might have lost us. But my happiness in knowing that it was you whom we had helped was none the less, I can assure you. And your companions—how are they?'

'So well, poor boys, that they are burning to be on the move! The Resident can scarcely keep them quiet. It was a happy Providence that brought you our way.'

'Happy for me,' said Tom, feelingly. 'Do you know that you gave us the clue we wanted? My artful servant'—— he smiled.

'Now,' broke in Mrs. Lyster, with Irish impetuosity, 'that is really too bad of you. You heard what I said.'

'I said to myself then that I would make you laugh about it later,' said Tom. 'But come into the summer-house. Oh!' as she continued to look at him questioningly, 'I will tell you all about it presently. I am not so much of an imposition as you imagine.'

He turned to the others, and gave them a cheerful good-morning. It was such a meal as he had often shared in the verandahs of English bungalows. A silver urn, over which Mrs. Durant presided, steamed at one end of the table, where tea and coffee were being made in the most approved English fashion, and white bread, cakes hot from the oven, platters of snowy rice, scrambled eggs and curried fowl, were being laid out daintily by the well-trained attendants.

'How delightful this is!' said Tom. 'It seems like coming home. No, no, Mrs. Durant,' as she handed him a cup of tea. 'I am not so much of a prince as all that. Help the others first! It is too much happiness to have my friends here to wait upon. What!' looking back at the face of one of the attendants.

The man grinned from ear to ear, showing a row of perfect teeth. 'Excellency, the little Sahib would have it so!' he said, in broken Hindoostani.

'So you and Bâl Narîn are inseparables, are you?' said Tom to Kit. 'What will you do when he goes back to Nepaul?'

'He mustn't go,' said Kit, stoutly. 'You want a shikari here.'

'To hunt the jackal? We have no other wild animals in Gumilcund, Kit.'

'Then we must import some,' said the child, gravely. 'Two or three elephants, and a tiger or so, and a few head of sambre. That would be enough. In a few years there'd be a lot, and we'd have no end of fun.'

Tom laughed, and turned to Mrs. Durant. 'What do you say to your son?' he said. 'Haven't his travels made quite a man of him?'

'I don't know about that,' said Mrs. Durant, who was watching her little boy with fascinated eyes. 'But I know he is more of a darling than ever.'

Here Kit, not wishing to be seized and kissed in the

presence of Bâl Narîn, edged away from his mother and made a remark in a low voice to Aglaia about the general jolliness of things. He wanted to know, furthermore, what she generally did after breakfast, and proposed a little turn in the town, offering to take the greatest care of her.

Lucy overheard him, and burst into a fit of laughter. Then she sprang up and said she would see whether Grace was awake, and might she take any message from his Excellency the rajah?

His Excellency's colour rose after a very boyish fashion, which made the ladies feel friendly towards him, when Lucy asked him this question.

'No, no,' he blurted out—'that is, I dare say I shall see her myself presently. But if I may, I will wait to hear your report.'

Lucy went off, smiling to herself over the pretty little romance which gave life a fillip that had been sadly lacking to it of late.

After a few moments, during which Tom, who was extraordinarily agitated, had left the little company at the breakfast table and strolled to meet her, she came tripping back. He watched her face, which was a very mobile one. It was serious, not sad; and this, he thought, augured well.

'How is your cousin?' he said, as quietly as he could.

'I can't quite tell yet,' answered Lucy. 'But she knows where she is, and she knows me, which I don't think she did last night.'

'You will keep her quiet?' said Tom, wistfully. He was half regretting the days of travel, when she depended upon him for everything.

'Yes; I think so. Sumbaten will take in her breakfast. She asked if we had seen you,' said Lucy, with an enchanting smile.

'And you told her I was here?'

'Oh, yes! I told her, and she just smiled, as if she was glad to hear we were so much honoured, and said that she hoped she would see you a little later. She was very eager about news from Meerut.'

'You have heard lately?'

'Yes; I had a long letter from Trixy—do you know Trixy, by-the-by?'

'Do I know Trixy?' said Tom, his face lighting up. 'I should rather think so! She is one of my best friends and

dearest enemies, if you can understand the anomaly. Would it be indiscreet to ask what she wrote to you?'

'Not in the least, Sir Paladin,' said Lucy, laughing, while, for the third time that morning, Tom felt the dark flush mounting to his face. 'She writes that Meerut is waking up. But I dare say you will have heard that already. The private news is that General Elton—my uncle, you know—is in his element, helping to restore order in the district, and that my poor dear aunt is distracted with anxiety to come on here at once.'

'I wish she could come,' said Tom. 'I have written to ask if it could be managed.'

'Oh, have you?' cried Lucy, the slightly artificial tone that had been apparent in her manner giving place to the most genuine eagerness. 'And do you think she will be able to come?'

'It will depend very much upon herself and General Elton. Personally, I don't think there would be any risk if she was properly attended. You would be glad to see her?'

'Glad!' cried Lucy, clasping her hands. 'I should be simply wild! And Grace—dearest Grace!—I believe it would do her more good than anything else. I sat beside her bed half the night, poor darling! Not that I was afraid of anything, you know; but that it was so delightful—such a rest and happiness—just to feast my eyes upon her. She spoke in her sleep once, and I bent over her to catch her words. "Take it away, mother," she said, "take it away! I can't bear it!" I moved her pillow and she half-opened her eyes and smiled. But a little later she cried out again, and there was fear in her voice—fear and horror—"Mother is dead!" she said, "Mother is dead, or she would come." I whispered to her that she was not dead—that she was coming; and then my poor darling smiled again, and lay quite still, looking as beautiful as an angel.'

Lucy's eyes were full of tears, and her voice was husky long before she came to the end of her little story. As for Tom, he could not so much as answer her. And so they stood silent for a few moments, he looking down absently into the basin of water, by whose marble brim they had stopped to have their little talk.

It was embarrassing to Lucy, and she began again presently, moving as she spoke towards the door of the pavilion in the garden. 'We get such longings out here for the home faces,' she said, with a plaintive little smile. 'And in England

we don't care. Sometimes we are stupid enough to think we would as soon be without them. At Nowgong, you know, I was getting perfectly ill with my longing to see some of them. And mother and father, who are at Lucknow, heard of it, and Grace was staying with them, having a first-rate time of it too! and she left everything and came to me. She is an angel! an angel!' said little Lucy, tremulously. 'If anything happened to her it would break my heart. But it will be all right as soon as Aunt Grace comes.'

'Yes, yes, all right! Thank you for saying so,' said Tom, hoarsely. He held out his hand. 'You will take care of her meanwhile, Lucy?'

She pressed it warmly. 'Take care of her! Of course I will, as much as I can.'

'And if there is anything she wants—anything you think would be better changed, you will let me know. You see'—blushing and fidgeting—'I am a novice about all these things. I don't really know what ladies want.'

'Then your imagination is better than most people's knowledge,' said Lucy, laughing. 'I have never seen anything like the arrangements of this place——'

But here Tom was called away. It was the hour when he had arranged to meet the chief men of the city in his private hall of audience, and Hoosanee had come, at his request, to remind him of the promise.

The rajah went away with his heart vibrating sorrowfully; but in the business of the day, which claimed his full attention, he regained the serenity and even, in some degree, the exaltation of the morning.

There was much to be done. From the hour of the forenoon, when he left the ladies in the garden-pavilion, until the sun was sinking behind the low hills that shut in the city to the west, he had not an hour to spare.

He carried out literally the programme which he had laid down for himself when he received his mother's letter. In the inner council and in the open court he proclaimed to the people that his instincts and theirs had not deceived them. He was the true son of Byrajee Pirtha Raj, and their ruler by right of succession.

The elders received the intelligence quietly. They were glad to hear him acknowledge that he belonged to them, and his explanation of the reasons that had led him to leave the

city, with his well-balanced relation of the measures he had taken in his absence to strengthen the hands of the English and to secure peace to Gumilcund, gave them perfect satisfaction. But they showed no surprise and very little emotion.

Outside it was different. Here the people—the craftsmen and mechanics—the small merchants and aged householders—were gathered together; and it may be that an electric current of pent-up feeling streamed outward from them to the comely youth who stood above them with his nerves and brain on fire. Certain it is that he told his tale after a different fashion to them. In the pose of the fine figure, drawn to its full height—in the flashing eyes and dilated nostrils—above all, in the noble words, wherein he expressed his reverence for those who had gone before him, and his desire to follow in their footsteps—pride of his lineage could be plainly read. He was proud to be the son of Byrajee Pirtha Raj; he was glad at heart of the destiny that bound him, for his life, to this people. So at least they read him; and the Asiatic crowd, which is sensitive and subtle in its perception of feeling, and as responsive to sympathy as a woman or child, received his tale with demonstrations of a joy so deep and passionate that it thrilled him to the heart.

He would not allow too much time to the ebullition of feeling. His speech over, the court opened, and for more than two hours he sat patiently in his alcove above the pillared and porticoed court investigating the cases that were brought before him.

And next, after a hasty lunch, he ordered out Snow-queen and rode through the city, showing himself to those who had not been able to come up to the court, and inspecting the works that had been in progress since his departure.

In the course of his wanderings, he was amused to meet Aglaia and Kit walking together through the town, with Sumbaten, who looked much puzzled and a little distressed by the innovation, walking behind them.

Kit, of course, hailed him joyfully. 'We're having no end of fun,' he said. 'Isn't everything jolly?'

'Particularly jolly, I think,' answered Tom, laughing. 'But don't keep Aglaia out too late, Kit.'

Then a voice from the near distance hailed him reassuringly, and he saw that the devoted Bâl Narîn was not far from his little Sahib. Billy, in his shikari's dress, looked very much like a fish out of water. The streets of Gumilcund, which

to-day were freshly swept and garlanded, were not so congenial to him as the jungle and the mountains; and the bourgeois life of ease and comfort was already beginning to pall upon his fiery soul. But, for the moment, he had constituted himself Kit's guardian, and Tom was perfectly easy about the child.

CHAPTER L

VISHNUGUPTA, THE PRIEST

THE sun had set, and that lovely rose-lilac glow, which, for a few moments of the evening, makes the skies of the East so entrancingly beautiful, was wrapping heaven and earth in its mystical radiance, when Tom, having finished his day's work, returned to the palace. A syce took Snow-queen, and he went in thoughtfully to his own rooms, wondering if he ought to ask to see Grace, or if it would be better to wait until the following day.

It may be as well to say here that, in the intervals for quiet thought which the business of the day had permitted him, he had made up his mind fully as to his course of action. There should be no repetition of the mistakes of the past. That one outpouring of heart, drawn from him by Grace's anguish of spirit, he could forgive himself. Until he had heard from General or Lady Elton, there should be nothing more of the same kind. He owed it to her, and to their mutual relations—she, a fugitive in his city, a guest in his house: he, the one to whom the honour and happiness of saving her had been granted—to set a seal on the door of his lips, for the present. He owed it to the future—to the position which it was his dearest hope and desire she might one day occupy—to do nothing in a corner, or without the consent and approval of her friends.

But none the less for his prudent resolve to hold himself in check, was his desire to see her and hear her voice.

As he was thinking about these things, Hoosanee came to meet him with a message from the English ladies. They had sent to know if his Excellency the rajah would do them the honour of joining them at their evening meal. He smiled at the punctiliousness of the invitation, answered it with a ready

assent, and, about half an hour later, found himself on the marble staircase that led up to the pillared hall of the zenana.

A little to his surprise, he saw that the hall was empty, and he was about to throw himself down on one of the settees and wait, when a murmur of voices from the daïs, which was hidden by a screen of palms and lilies from the body of the hall, attracted his attention. He went on to the foot of the steps that led up to it, and there stopped for a moment, half paralysed with surprise. As a picture nothing could have been more beautiful and striking than the scene upon which his eyes rested. The ladies were to dine on the daïs, and the centre of its space was occupied by a table, where flowers and rich tropical fruits and sweetmeats, with sparkling glass and silver, were laid out on snowy linen. At the head of the table, on a low couch, draped with embroidered stuffs, a figure that seemed to concentrate upon itself all the light in the room was reclining. It was that of a woman, dressed in a loose robe of white and gold. Her head, from which the veil had fallen back, was propped up on a little hand, so delicate in its blue-veined transparency that the burden seemed to be too heavy for it ; her pale face, overspread at this moment by a faint tinge of colour, looked out from its halo of golden hair, with the purity and stillness of a saint in a mediæval altar-piece ; and her lips were moving in low, impassioned words that throbbed through the silence like a prayer. Meanwhile, at a little distance from the couch, his large hands with their curiously-knotted joints clasped round his knees, and his dark, strongly-marked face lighted by deep eyes which shone with a dreamy light turned meditatively towards hers, sat a figure so different that it might have been placed there for a foil.

But it was not this that made the half-unconscious watcher start and pause, and feel, for a moment, as if his senses had been playing him a trick. It was that in the difference there was a likeness. In the solemn fire that seemed to kindle these two faces, in their meditativeness, in their dreamy enthusiasm, there was something which brought them together. Vishnugupta, the proud Indian mystic, and the simple English girl who had looked the King of Terrors in the face, and, for the sake of another, had vanquished him, met that night on a common ground of sympathy.

> Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow
> Together, tempering the repugnant mass
> With liquid love——

The words sprang to his mind as he gazed. He went forward, and the spell was broken. Grace looked up, gave a little start, as if she had just awoke from a dream, and held out her hand with a radiant smile of welcome.

Vishnugupta rose, bent his head with the proud humility of the Brahmin, drew his robe about his head, and, making answer neither by word nor sign to the rajah's entreaty that he would stay for a little while, passed slowly out of the apartment.

The priest had scarcely gone before there came a flutter of garments and a gay noise of laughter and voices in eager conversation from behind the screen that separated the hall and the sleeping-rooms. Then Lucy's little saucy face appeared above the palisade that bordered the daïs.

'Has he gone?' she whispered.

'Do you mean Vishnugupta?' said Tom, laughing at her mysterious expression.

'Is that his name? What a name! And oh! what a person!' cried Lucy. She ran up the steps and brought her charming little person, bewitchingly dressed in a long Indian cashmere robe, drawn in at the waist with a golden girdle, into full view. 'I was with Grace when he came in,' she said. 'I have been arranging the table, and I was arranging her. He looked at me and I withered up to nothing. But as Grace seemed to take to him and his talk like a duck to water, I just ran away and left them alone. Darling,' turning to Grace, 'what, in the name of heaven, were you talking about? He has been with you more than half an hour.'

Then the others came in, all of them looking curious. But Grace lay back with a smile on her lips, and a strange, inscrutable expression in her eyes.

'It was very good of you,' said Tom, gently. 'But you must not let these people tire you. I wonder who admitted Vishnugupta.'

'Please let him come again if he likes,' said Grace. 'He does not tire me in the least. I think, do you know, he has done me good.' She smiled more naturally than Tom had seen her smile since the day when he found her in the jungle.

'Oh! if he does you good, he shall come every day, and I will thank and bless him to the end of my life,' said Tom, gaily. 'But now, may we draw you up to the table? We are to have a merry evening, you know, Grace.' His voice

shook a little, and, in spite of the brave effort to be cheerful, the muscles of his face contracted painfully. He could not help seeing how fragile she was.

But she took up his words at once. 'Yes, yes,' she said; 'a merry evening. Let us fancy ourselves in England, on the banks of the Thames. Thank you,' as they drew in her couch. 'I am sorry to be so troublesome. Kit, will you sit near me, and Aglaia next? No, no Rajah Sahib; you must take the place of honour. So! We can all see you now! Has he really changed so much, Mrs. Lyster?'

'Changed! He hasn't changed at all,' cried the enthusiastic little Irishwoman. 'It's I that was the idiot not to know him. But I'll never be so silly again. I promise you that.'

'I'm not quite so sure that it was your fault, Mrs. Lyster,' said Tom, aside. Mrs. Durant and Lucy were exchanging a little war of words about some disputed point of the arrangements of the evening, and Grace was talking merrily to Kit and Aglaia.

'Do you believe,' he asked abruptly, 'in the possibility of people living in two individualities?'

She paused for a moment, and then looked meditatively at Grace. 'Until just lately,' she said, 'I should have called the question an absurdity. But——'

'Please go on,' said Tom, breathlessly.

'I have watched her,' whispered Mrs. Lyster. 'She is leading two lives. The priest saw it. That is what brought him to-day. Don't look at her; don't let her think you are watching her. She is very sensitive. It would be the easiest thing in the world to frighten that pretty gaiety away. Yes: she is living two lives, and——'

'Well! Don't stop——'

'It should be encouraged. It is her only chance.'

'Of what, Mrs. Lyster?'

'Of sanity and life.'

'What do you mean?'—sharply.

'Don't ask me just now. I will tell you by-and-by. But watch her. Yes—and talk—be gay! I will help you as well as I can. She is a noble creature—a heroine all impact—' said the warm-hearted little Irishwoman, 'and you are *almost* worthy of her, although——' and here she pulled up and blushed violently.

'Although I'm not almost, but altogether a native,' filled

in the rajah, a humorous expression crossing his face. 'Thank you for the compliment. It is no small one, Mrs. Lyster.'

'Go along with you,' she said, trying to laugh, though her face and neck were one burning red. 'I shall be speaking to you presently in my native Celtic, and telling you that you are nothing better than a gossoon.'

'Which would enchant me,' said Tom, laughing. 'Anyway'—seriously—'we sign to-night a truce and an alliance.'

'To be sure! though I don't know that I was ever at war with you,' said Mrs. Lyster.

And thereupon they threw themselves into the conversation that was going on around them.

Forgetting her own sorrows, the vivacious little Irishwoman pulled herself together, brought out her best jokes and most amusing stories, and became the life of the party. Lucy followed her lead. Mrs. Durant, the desire of whose heart had been fulfilled, had no difficulty in being lively. They drew out Kit, who made them all laugh with his funny little sayings. Even the mother of little Dick condescended to forget her own dignity and the imminence of the crisis through which she had been brought, and to enjoy herself. But long before it was over, Tom saw, to his distress, that the sudden springing up of vitality which had enabled Grace to take part in the gaiety of the others was over. She lay back on her couch, white and still, turning her large blue-grey eyes from one to another as the sallies of wit and merry anecdotes flew by, and smiling now and then vaguely, as though she was making an effort to follow them, but could not quite succeed.

The poor fellow was watching her, as a mother watches a sick child. While he made a feint of listening to the talk at the table, laughing when the others laughed, to give himself countenance, and occasionally launching out feebly a witticism of his own, he never lost a single expression of the face that was so unutterably dear to him. Dinner over, he crossed to where she was lying. 'Grace,' he said, in a low voice, under cover of the talk, 'what is it? You are looking worse to-day. Is all this too much for you?'

'No, no,' she answered, with a smile so gentle and patient that it thrilled him to the heart. 'And do you know, I really feel better. You must forgive me for not talking. You know'—pressing her hand to her head—'there is something here still. It won't let me. I get confused.'

'My darling,' he began, passionately, and then checked

himself. 'I mustn't be too impulsive yet,' he said, under his breath. 'Afterwards, Grace, afterwards——'

'Ah!' she said, with a beautiful, indescribable expression. 'Lucy has written. They will know in a very short time that I am here. Perhaps some of them will come. In the meantime——' dreamily.

'In the meantime, talk or be silent, as you please. Do anything! Only get well and strong, Grace. Only get well and strong!'

'I will try,' she said, plaintively. 'Sometimes—still—life seems very sweet.'

'It will not be sometimes—it will be always, when you get better,' said Tom, earnestly.

But there was a pang at his heart, for all his cheerful words. For the first time since he saw her lying insensible in the hermit's hut in the jungle, a feeling of despair swept over his young soul.

He would not—he could not—give place to it. Turning away, lest she should read it in his eyes, he met a look of sympathy from Mrs. Lyster. She was far too wise to put it into words, and he found, somewhat to his relief, that he must arouse himself, for there was more to be done.

The Resident had sent word that, with his visitors, he would call upon the ladies that evening, and Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, and several other distinguished Indians, who in the rajah's absence had been diligent in inquiries and offers of assistance, had asked permission to wait upon them also.

It had been decided that the reception should be held in the little pillared hall, which had been hung with garlands and banners for the occasion. Lucy and Mrs. Durant thought it was about time to go down. Grace was asked what she would do. Seeing Tom's wistful eyes fixed upon her, she said that she would like to be present, if she might be quiet. She had a curious dread of being alone in those days. But when she tried to rise, she found that she was too weak. Tears of vexation filled her eyes, but before they had time to fall, the rajah and Bâl Narîn, and Hoosanee and Ganesh had sprung to her couch, and it was lifted up with all its flowing draperies, as if it had been a featherweight, and carried down the steps; Grace smiling through her tears and begging them not to hurt themselves—to be sure to put her down if she was too heavy—an entreaty that made the stout Indians laugh.

'Put me a little out of everyone's way,' she had said to Tom.

So he found an arbour-like corner for her, beautifully shaded with palms and tree-ferns, whence she could see everything that went on in the brilliantly-lighted hall, without being much seen herself. There he put the couch down. The Indians retired, and he stooped over her. 'Is that right, Grace?'

'Perfectly right. I shall enjoy myself looking and listening. And now, Tom, you must leave me. The Resident and the others will be here directly.'

'I suppose I must,' he said, regretfully. 'I will come back again in a few moments, to see how you are.'

And so Grace lay quietly in her corner, and the anguish in her heart—the phantom that was continually rising up to mock her—was at rest for a few moments, while, like images in a dream, the busy little crowd that soon filled the hall, came and went.

The Resident and the two English officers, and Chunder Singh and Lutfullah, were brought up to speak to her. They spoke feelingly, congratulating her on her escape. She found a few simple words with which to answer them; but she could not say much, and the rajah took care that she should not be made to talk more than she liked.

How deep her gratitude was for his watchful tenderness it would be impossible to express. Once or twice, when he passed, she looked up at him with a wistful smile, and once she touched his arm lightly with her thin fingers, whispering, 'You are so good to me!'

'Good!' he echoed. 'Oh! Grace, if you only knew!'

And then, for an instant, the warm colour flooded his face, and his eyes shone with a wonderful light; but, not daring to trust himself to speak, he turned away, leaving Mrs. Lyster on guard.

Meanwhile, in the hall, which had surely never seen so strange a gathering before, there was plenty of fun and good fellowship. The party at the Residency had just been reinforced by Mr. Montgomery's wife, a handsome and accomplished woman, her sister, a pretty, timid girl fresh from England, and several other ladies, who had come to Gumilcund on the Resident's invitation, leaving, in more cases than one, desolated homes behind them. There were, besides, the two young officers—Irish, by-the-by, both of them—who had come in with Mrs. Lyster, quite well now and up to all sorts of fun. And so the evening glided on merrily. To an onlooker there

might have seemed to be something pathetic about their mirth. Scarcely one of the Europeans but had some deep present anxiety to endure, or some recent loss to mourn; but they were English ladies and gentlemen, and they knew how to control themselves. For the sake of one another and their entertainer, they would not be gloomy or morose. The two young officers sang comic songs, and Mr. Montgomery, the Resident, brought out his violin and played dance-tunes which made the feet of the younger ladies twitch to be off, and brave Mrs. Lyster, who was fighting all night with a desperate longing to run away and have a good cry, talked and laughed and told travellers' tales, charming them all with her wit and vivacity. The grave Indians, who knew through what deep waters many of these poor women had passed, were surprised at their spirits. Happily for some of them, it was not kept up late. The Resident and his party, with hearty expressions of thanks and goodwill, took leave of them long before midnight, and the Indian visitors followed their example immediately. Then poor Mrs. Lyster sat down and covered her face with her hands. 'I couldn't have stood it another five minutes. Oh! do all of you think me a brute?' she cried, lifting up her haggard face.

'Don't! Don't!' cried Lucy piteously. 'You will make me cry.'

'I think you one of the bravest of women. I always did,' said Tom. 'Do you remember the storm? No one was so plucky as you.'

'Do I remember it?' said Mrs. Lyster, with a queer little smile. 'Why, it was nothing—child's play. But come, my son of Anak, pick up the couch and carry our invalid inside. Be quiet, my dear!' to Grace. 'You're not to be allowed to stir a step to-night. Carry her in, Mr. Rajah, and then take your retinue away, and say good-night. We will face the terrors of the silent hours together.'

After that the days glided quietly one into the other. Every morning the rajah met his family, as he used to call the ladies and children who had found a refuge in the palace, at breakfast, in the pretty garden-pavilion. And pleasant breakfasts they were, although Grace was never present: for some one—Kit, or Aglaia, or Mrs. Lyster, or Lucy—had always something encouraging to say about her. During the day he gave himself without reserve to business and study, and cultivating useful and kindly relations with the people

about him, making meanwhile such progress in the knowledge of Indian affairs, and gaining such insight into hidden depths of life and character, and into the scope and meaning of the philosophies and religions of the country, as would sometimes surprise even himself. After sunset, when the work of the day was over, he met his friends again, and they would all take their evening meal together, talking over past and present, discussing hopefully the state of affairs in the country, and exchanging the news which the mails of the day had brought in.

Sometimes Grace would join them at these dinners in the hall, and sometimes not; but she always sent him affectionate messages, of which Aglaia was generally the bearer, and he seldom spent a day without seeing her once. Later he looked back upon those early days at Gumilcund, full to the brim of joyful interests, and flooded with the light of hope, as some of the happiest in his life.

Gradually a dull pain—a terror to which he could not give a name—began to encroach upon their sweetness. Why did not Grace pick up her strength? At first her weakness was easily to be accounted for. But surely the time had come when they might look for improvement. The rest, the freedom from anxiety, and the daily companionship of her friends ought, by this time, to be taking some effect. Sometimes, when they met, he would try to cheat himself into the belief that she was better and brighter; but the absence of vital strength was a fact that, in spite of himself, pressed home to his heart. Day after day he saw the same white face, the same patient smile, the same sorrow-haunted eyes. Day after day he was the witness of efforts so pathetic that he would entreat her sometimes not to make them. 'Be patient, my beloved!' he would whisper; and all the time, in his own heart there would be a tumult of fierce impatience, a gnawing of angry pain that almost unnerved him.

But this was not all. He was conscious—they were all conscious—of a mental cloud—a veil that seemed at times to wrap her away from them.

'Grace is changed. I don't know what to make of her. But I wish—oh! I do wish—that her mother would come,' Lucy cried out one morning when Tom asked her the usual question. Mrs. Lyster gave her a warning look, but she went on: 'Yes; I can't help it. I must speak. Something ought to be done.'

'What can be done, Lucy?' said Tom, whose face had turned perfectly grey.

'Don't mind Lucy. She is speaking wildly,' said Mrs. Lyster. 'She forgets—we all forget—that there are experiences which nothing but the healing hand of time—the slow passage of the years——'

She broke down, for her voice was choked with sobs.

'I know,' said Lucy, penitently. 'But, dear Mrs. Lyster, you have suffered more than any of us, and you are not so strange, so reserved.'

'My dear child, I am much older than Grace, and I have the Irish elasticity of temper, I suppose. We can laugh with the tears on our faces; and I thank God for it. And now, like a darling, run off and look after the children, and leave the rajah to me.'

Lucy hesitated for a moment, looked at them with a curious, half-mutinous expression in her face, and then turned away.

The other ladies had already left the summer-house, so that Mrs. Lyster and Tom were alone.

'Thank you,' he said, looking at her with strained, eager eyes.

She shook her head sadly.

'Tell me what to do?' he cried out, passionately. 'I love her. You know this already, I would give my life—my blood drawn from me painfully drop by drop—to save her a single pang. The thought of her trouble is agony to me—torture. What are we to do? Shall I send to Agra for an English doctor? I might.'

'I am afraid, my poor friend, that no doctor would do her any good. The disease lies deeper than medicine can cure.'

'What would, then? Tell me, for heaven's sake!'

'She has something on her mind,' said Mrs. Lyster, doubtfully.

'I know it—I know it. A fancied trouble. If someone reasonable and wise, like you, were to talk it over with her, she might be persuaded to put it from her. Won't you try?'

'I dare not,' said Mrs. Lyster, in a broken voice.

Tom started. 'I don't understand,' he said, confusedly.

'And I am afraid I can't explain,' she said. 'There is something about her—a whiteness of soul, a majesty. There, I am stumbling about as usual. In plain English, I can't get near her, and I am afraid to attempt it.'

'And yet——' began Tom.

'And yet,' filled in his companion, 'she can be bright enough sometimes Yes, that is just what I told you before: she has her hours. And'—mysteriously—'I will tell you a curious thing. That Brahmin, with the wild face and unpronounceable name, does her more good than anyone else. He came in yesterday, just before dinner. I was in the hall with her, and I stayed because I was curious; but of course I was not quick enough at Hindoostani to pick up all they said. You remember how calm she looked in the evening. We all remarked it. But it was so before. She is easier, brighter altogether, when she has been having one of her long, wild talks with that wild man.'

'Why wild, Mrs. Lyster?'

'Why, because, so far as I can make out, they seem to be scaling heights and plunging into depths of which we poor mortals have no idea. But I will tell you one thing that struck me, his manner to her. We—well! he doesn't take any notice of us. I don't believe he sees us. He treats *her* with a reverence that, coming from a man like him, is one of the most touching things I have ever met with in all my experience. It is just as if'—in an awed tone—'he was talking to one *on the other side.*'

'Don't, don't!' cried Tom, piteously. He was trembling even to the lips, which were ashy pale; but he made a feeble effort to smile. 'You come of an imaginative race, Mrs. Lyster,' he said. 'I understand that, of course. But for heaven's sake, let us have prose, not poetry! It would be too dreadful to let her slip through our fingers now! Can *nothing* be done?'

'We shall know more when her mother comes,' said Mrs. Lyster. And that was all.

The young rajah went to his work that morning with a heart so full that it seemed to him as if bands of steel, growing harder and tighter every moment, were winding themselves about him, and pressing out his life. Like a mournful voice—an echo of something he had heard before, Mrs. Lyster's words repeated themselves in his brain. 'On the other side.' What if there were some strange, mystical truth in them? What if in that trance the pure, strong spirit had winged its flight to the heavenly sphere—had found its home there—and now was only kept to its earthly tabernacle by their love, and tears, and prayers? It was a terrible thought. Again and again he tried to put it away from him, but it returned unceasingly,

through that long and miserable day, taking the strangest forms, as it swept through his mind. In the evening, when he went up to the hall, he half expected to hear that Grace was worse. But she was in her place, and though she was as pale and fragile as usual, she greeted him with a smile of unusual brightness.

Dinner over, he sat down by her couch. 'Grace, dearest,' he said, 'I wish you would tell me what you and Vishnugupta talk about when you are together. I am, in some sort, a protégé of his, and yet, do you know, I have never been able to draw him out, as you do?'

Grace looked up at him, an expression of childlike wonder in her eyes. 'Draw him out!' she echoed. 'I don't think I quite understand.'

'Well, then, make him talk.'

'Ah!' she said, smiling. 'But, indeed, it is quite the contrary. He has made me talk.'

'How, Grace?'

'I don't know. I think there is a power about him—a fascination. Do you remember what I told you one day when we were travelling? How I looked round me—above—below—on every side, and saw nothing but misery and pain—how I could not believe in God—could not even thank Him for saving me?'

'Yes, I remember,' said Tom.

'And after that,' she went on, 'I felt, but I couldn't speak. It was all in here—burning—burning—but no words—an awful, indescribable loneliness. You were all about me, loving me, helping me, caring for me so kindly, and I was like one apart—a spirit in prison. Then I saw this Brahmin prophet. It was the evening we came in.' She spoke rapidly, and with a curious exultation, which had the strangest effect upon her listeners—for there were two now, Mrs. Lyster having joined them. 'I saw him standing in the road—such a strange figure! It frightened poor little Kit; but I—ah! I can't tell you what it was—he looked at me, and it seemed to me as if he were looking straight down into my soul, as if he knew how I felt. And yet I did not tremble. I asked him to come and see me, and he came. He sat down there. He said nothing, not a single word; but I spoke; it was as if an angel had come down and loosened my tongue, letting the burning thoughts free.'

'Did Vishnugupta understand you?' said Tom.

'He did more than understand. He explained me to

myself. Listen, my beloved, and see how overpowering—how beautiful it is. We are stretching out our hands in the darkness—looking for God—weeping because He does not answer our prayers, and He is here within us. We shall part, or we shall think that we part, but it is not so. We cannot part, we meet eternally in the bosom of the Divine. But before we can know this, and enter into His peace, the self must be slain—will, desire, love of the things that are not He. Listen again! I wondered, you know, where the evil came from—pain, misery, cruelty. I know now. These are the things to which the self will grow in its darkness. But there is hope, for in the sting is the cure. Through the evil—through the bitter pain and misery—the vision is born. The poison has a heart of healing. If there were none of this misery that revolts our ignorance, the self would go on, building its palaces about it till the Divine was shut out. As it is, we grow weary at last, and we lay ourselves down at His feet. I thought it was a dream at first; but he spoke to me again, and each time he spoke the vision became clearer. He says they have known it here for thousands of years. It has been growing and fading—growing and fading; but there were always some who held it fast, and when faith was weak, and many had gone astray, and the clue to the labyrinth was in danger of being lost, then a revealer—a God-sent teacher—came.'

There was a pause. Neither of her companions spoke. Mrs. Lyster was looking out before her with bewildered eyes. If this was love-making, it was the strangest she had ever heard of. Tom had covered his face with his hands. It seemed to him that she was moving further and further away from them, and he could not speak for the sorrowful aching at his heart. Then she put out her hand, and, with a smile of the most divine compassion and love, touched his arm. 'Dearest,' she said, 'I must tell you something more. They are expecting another revealer. He will be different from any who have gone before him, for the sphere will be larger. New lights have been dawning upon the nations, and new truths, forced painfully from the silence by the higher minds, are waiting to be shown to the people. He will know all these. He will be of the West by his training, of the East by his nature. He will have the science and learning of the New World, and the self-forgetting passion of the Old. For years he will be content to learn—watching and waiting for the happy moment. Then, when he

is sure of himself and sure of them, he will speak—here, in this wonderful country, which has given so many wonderful things to the world, and thousands upon thousands will follow him. This is what Vishnugupta told me, and do you know what I thought? "Our prophet is here," I thought to myself. Years upon years to come, when all this dreadful strife and sore is healed, and when I, with so many, many others, who had a part in it, are laid to rest and forgotten, he will speak the words of life, and then, perhaps'—her lips parted in a yearning smile—'he will remember his love of old time, and these few days of love and happiness that his love made for her before——'

'Hush, Grace! Hush!' cried the poor boy, passionately. 'It is you I want——' Mrs. Lyster turned away weeping, and he broke into a piteous entreaty that Grace would unsay her cruel words. But in a moment the words died away upon his lips, and he was gazing at her with ashy face and horror-stricken eyes. For the expression they so much dreaded—the look of fear and piteous distress—had come back into her face. In the next moment he had recovered his presence of mind, and was stooping over her to ask if she wanted anything. 'No,' she said, trying to smile. 'I am tired;' and then, with white lips, and eyes whose sorrowful yearning will haunt him to the end of his days, she besought him to leave her alone.

CHAPTER LI

THE RAJAH WELCOMES A GUEST AND HEARS A STRANGE STORY.

THE next day was full of business, and Tom gave himself to it with stern self-repression.

He had offered a body of guides and pioneers, picked men, as skilful with the shovel and the scaling-ladder as with the sword, to the British army, which was marching northwards to the relief of Lucknow. His offer had been accepted, and to-day they were to set off for Allahabad, where the troops were congregating. In the early morning he inspected them, and then, having given orders that they should be feasted royally at his expense in the market-place, he harangued them in the presence of a great concourse of people, and, mounted

on Snow-queen, marched with them as far as the boundaries of the State.

Following as it did on an exciting evening and a heavy, sleepless night, the day exhausted him, and on his return he would not press his pace. He rode back slowly, his mind, to his own comfort and relief, almost a blank, so that it was late in the evening before he reached the palace.

He had left word that he would probably be late, begging the ladies to dine without him; and as he passed into his own quarters he felt glad that he had done so, for he was able for little else but rest. Here, however, an exciting piece of news awaited him. Lady Elton had arrived. He asked how long she had been in the palace, and found that she must have entered the city by one gate as he and his men had left by another. Hoosanee, who was his informant, told him that she had arrived in a well-equipped travelling-carriage, and attended by an escort of European soldiers. These, however, had left her at the gate. A young lady—the sister, as Hoosanee had been told, of Grace Sahib—came in with her in the carriage, and an English officer whom Ganesh had recognised as the Captain Sahib Liston, had ridden into the city in their company. At the gate of the palace they had inquired for his Excellency the rajah. When Hoosanee informed them of the business on which he was bound, adding that he might not return till late, the ladies had left their names with him and gone on to the zenana, and the Captain Sahib had proceeded to the Residency, where he would probably spend the night.

While Hoosanee was giving his master this news a servant came in with a letter for the rajah. It was from Lady Elton—a rapturous, affectionate, incoherent little note, saying she had seen Grace, and thanking and blessing him for all he had done for them. 'My good Trixy is with me,' she wrote. 'The General would not let me come without one of the girls, and I think she will be a comfort to her sister. I will not see you to-night. When I feel my child's hand in mine my love and gratitude overcome me. I could only weep. I could not speak. But to-morrow morning, as early as you like, we must meet.' And she added, after a few more fervent, incoherent words, 'Both the General and I feel that you belong to us.'

Pressing the letter to his lips, Tom wrote an answer hastily.

'My dearest Lady Elton,—I thank God from a full heart

that you have come in safely. Command me as if I were your son. It will be my happiness to serve you. To-morrow, since it may not be to-night, I will bid you welcome in person. I am always in the garden early. You are an early riser, I know. If the journey has not tired you too much, perhaps you will meet me there. I must see you *alone*, if possible. Brotherly greetings and a warm welcome to Trixy. Yours always, 'THOMAS GREGORY.

A long night, haunted by the strangest dreams, passed over the young rajah's head. Now he would be chasing Lady Elton about the garden, trying to speak to her, and seeing her elude him, and waking up with a start just as his hand was on her arm. Then he would come suddenly face to face with her, and she would begin an incoherent story, which he could not understand. Again and again he leapt up thinking it was day, and again and again he composed himself to sleep; but, do what he would, he could not rest for the fever of his heart and brain, and before the sun was up he dressed and went out into the garden.

Ever afterwards he remembered vividly the impressions of that morning. He went out into a still and wonderful world. The green things of the earth, the flowering shrubs, the palms, the dark cypresses that lifted their column-like heads above the lower and lovelier foliage, the water that flowed in deep channels by the grass—all these seemed to be asleep. But a soft wind was stirring; far away there was a low, confused murmur as of dawning consciousness, and over all stretched a cloudless heaven, pale and mysterious, in the zenith, where the little stars that had shone all night were passing, one by one, tremulously behind the radiant veil of the morning, and, on the eastern horizon, tinged with a dull red, quickening gradually, as if a hand were fanning it, into flame-colour and saffron. The beauty and tranquillity seemed for a few moments to soothe the fever of his heart. He felt a Presence in the garden. The strange words of the night before came back to him. *We are stretching out our hands in the darkness—looking for God—and He is here within us.* For an instant—a wonderful instant, which he remembered years afterwards with a passionate thrill of gratitude, a wild throb of expectation—the Divine was as near to him as his own quivering flesh and blood.

It was far too early yet for him to expect to see anyone

out; but instinctively his feet turned in the direction they had so often taken lately, and, in a few moments, he found himself in the avenue that led from the English ladies' apartments to the pavilion where they were accustomed to meet in the morning.

He had scarcely entered it before he saw at its further end, walking away from him into the open, the figure of a woman in a long, grey cloak. He hastened to overtake it, then stopped, then went on again. Lady Elton? But could it be? The slow pace, the uncertain steps, the bent head, were strangely unlike her. The doubt was soon laid to rest. In the stillness she had heard his footsteps behind her, and she turned and came to meet him. That, too, was a moment which Tom will remember all his life. It was not only the pallor of the once comely face and the attenuation of the form that, when last he saw it, had been so pleasant to look upon in its full matronly beauty; it was the expression of the face, the looking out upon him suddenly like a spectre in the noontide, of that despair which, slowly, slowly, but, as he now knew, surely, had been stealing into his own heart and killing its joy. He sprang forward impulsively and threw his strong young arms about her. 'This is dreadful,' he said; 'I had no idea you were so weak. Why didn't you tell me in your letter?'

'I didn't feel quite so weak then,' she said, drawing herself away with a little smile that seemed to bring the Lady Elton of Surbiton and Meerut back again. 'No, no, you impulsive boy; I am not so feeble as all that. Give me your arm to steady me. There, I am better now.'

'Have they taken care of you? Did they bring you a cup of tea before you came out? Shall I have one made for you now?'

'No, thank you, dear. The little girl's ayah, Sumbaten, took every care of me. I don't think the poor little thing slept at all for fear Grace and I might want anything. Then, you know, I have Trixy to look after me. She is a very good child,' said Lady Elton. She was trying to speak lightly; but he knew very well that the effort was almost too great for her.

He followed her lead, saying he was so glad Trixy had come. They had a little English society in Gumilcund now, and he did not think she would find it dull; and was it true that Captain Liston had come in with them?

'Yes, by-the-by,' said Lady Elton. 'It happened rather

conveniently. He had been sent to Meerut from Delhi; did you hear how he distinguished himself there? No? Well, I must leave it to Trixy. The foolish children are engaged, you know. The General was obliged to give his consent, though we don't quite see how they are to live. In the meantime they are very proud of one another; and of course Bertie took an additional interest. So he came with us. I believe he is to join the army for Lucknow somewhere near this. But he was to see you and the Resident first.'

'I shall be glad of the opportunity of congratulating him,' said Tom; 'he is a first-rate young fellow, and Trixy was always a great friend of mine.'

As they talked they were walking on quickly, Lady Elton leaning on his arm. There was a secluded spot—a little ferny hollow—at no great distance from the pavilion. The blue waters of the miniature lake lay in front of it, and a little semicircle of rocks and boulders, down which mimic cascades rushed continually, filling the basins of water in the hollow and keeping moist and cool the delicate mosses and rare grasses and ferns that had made it their home, formed a complete barrier between it and the rest of the garden.

Hither Tom, who could not speak freely until he was sure of perfect seclusion, guided Lady Elton's steps. She broke into an exclamation of surprise and pleasure when he led her in. 'I've brought you here because it is quiet,' he said. 'We can talk.'

He placed her in a low chair, under a fairy-leaved mimosa, drew up a cushion to her feet, and flung himself down beside her. 'Now, dearest Lady Elton,' he said, 'have pity upon me! Tell me about her.'

She was silent for a few moments, looking down upon him, her pale lips parted in a quivering smile, and her eyes dim with tears. 'I was just thinking,' she said, 'that I have not thanked you yet.'

'Would you thank a man for saving himself?' he said, reproachfully.

'She stretched out her hands with a little plaintive cry. 'Oh, Tom!' she whispered, 'Tom, my son!'

The words were like a spell. All in a moment his simulated calmness fled. He sprang to his feet, and, throwing himself on his knees, seized the pale, worn hands held out to him, and pressed them to his lips. 'God bless you!' he murmured; 'God bless you!'

'But, my dear, you must be quiet,' said the poor lady. 'There, get up, and let me have my hands again. Poor boy! poor boy! Do you care so much?'

'I care more than I can express—more than even you can understand. I thought I loved her then, but now——' and then he pulled up and looked at her strangely. 'Do you know everything?' he said. 'Does the General know? I must explain'—hurriedly. 'I did not know myself until the other day. But circumstances have come to light——'

'Dear child,' she said, softly, 'we have always known——'

'My parentage?'

'We know more about you, I expect, than you know about yourself.'

'And still——'

'Sit down here beside me, Tom.' She pushed back the hair from his forehead and looked tenderly into his dark eyes. She was thinking of the past. For the moment the last few dreadful weeks—that chasm betweeen the old life and the new—were blotted out. He was the boy he had been then, and she was his mother, understanding him as no one else did, and thinking of his friendship with a little motherly glow of satisfaction and pride.

'I will tell you the whole truth,' she went on. 'We were on your side—Grace and I. We believed we understood you better than the others; and—it seems a strange thing to say, but it is really true—if you had spoken a little earlier, you might have won our dear girl then. The news of your wealth made the General afraid. You see it was a wonderful change, and these changes of condition will sometimes show the character in such different lights. That is what the General said, at least. Then our dear girl, who, you know, is sensitive, heard some unkind and stupid gossip. It was rather about us than her; but it annoyed her all the more. It is an old story now,' said Lady Elton, the pink colour mantling her face, 'and I only tell you because Grace wished you to know everything. The silly people said we had known all about it long ago—that you would be rich, I mean—and that was why we had taken the cottage, and brought the dear girls next door to you and your mother. It was absurd, of course; but Grace took fire, and the General, who, you know, was against it then, went with her. I argued that he should find out what our dear girl's own feeling was before he gave her his advice, for I had my suspicions, and God knows I would have

braved the backbiting of malicious tongues, if it would have secured her happiness and yours; but—well! you know the General. He would not be the man he is—one of the finest soldiers that ever lived—if he was not pretty firm in his own opinion. But what he has seen and heard of you in this dreadful year, what he knows of you, Tom, has changed all that. If our dear child——'

'Why do you hesitate?' said Tom, hoarsely.

She paused for a few seconds, as if a wave of feeling too strong to be controlled had swept over her, and then she laid her hand gently on his. 'Will you tell me how it all happened—exactly?' she said, pleadingly.

'How we found them, do you mean?'

'Yes.'

He gave the story clearly and rapidly, from the moment when he left Gumilcund for Dost Ali Khan's fort, to that when he saw Grace and Kit in the hermit's hut, and was assured by Bâl Narîn that they were alive. He said as little about himself as he could, and nothing whatever about his feelings. It was a plain record of facts. The story over, he stopped. 'Mother,' he said, earnestly, 'I have told you all I can. It is your turn now. You have seen my darling'—his voice broke—'you who know her so much better than any of us—tell me what you think.'

She turned a little away, and looked up into the quivering branches of mimosa. A little striped squirrel was leaping gaily from branch to branch. Above, in the blue sunlit air, black and white mynas were darting. Tiny feathered creatures, bright as living gems, were flashing hither and thither through the light foliage. Ah! how peaceful, how happy they all were! For a moment she could not speak. Nature, with her thousand joyous voices, seemed to be mocking at her pain. In the next moment she became conscious of those strained-looking, agonised eyes, and said, faintly, 'I hope.'

'Is that *all* you can say?' asked Tom.

'No!' she cried; 'I have more to tell you, but give me time!'

He got up, walked to the margin of the lake, looked down into its waters with eyes that saw nothing, and then came back and stood beside her. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'you had rather say no more just now.'

'No,' she said; 'I must. I promised her. Sit down again,

dear, close beside me, and give me your hand to hold. I am so foolish, do you know, that it seems to me sometimes as if all these dreadful things that have been happening were a dream, and then I must hold something not to drift away into confusion. But you are impatient. I will begin.

'She was not so much surprised to see me as they thought she would have been. They prepared her; then we went in together, Trixy and I, and there was such a beautiful colour in her face, such a lovely light in her eyes, that I could scarcely believe what they had told me about her weakness. All the evening they were busy looking after us and showing us the palace, and talking about Gumilcund and you. I thought my dear child was quieter than the others; but you know, she had never the same vivacity as her sisters, so this did not trouble me much. We all went to rest early. She had begged as a boon that she and I should be alone together. I thought she looked at me wistfully before she laid herself down to rest, but I would not let her talk, for I was afraid of exciting her. I was so tired myself and so happy that I fell into a deep sleep at once. What awoke me I can't tell. It was as if a spirit had taken me by the hand and told me to arise. There was a strange pain at my heart, just as if something was suffering near me, and I wondered what it meant. But I opened my eyes and looked round me, and saw the room flooded with moonlight, and smiled at myself for my foolish idea. Then I looked across to where my dear child was lying. She was awake, her eyes wide open, and—and—but I can't tell you. Oh, God! oh, God! I see it still—I shall see it to the end of my days—that look in my darling's innocent eyes!'

There was a pause. Tom, who was nearly beside himself with suspense, pressed her hand convulsively, tried to speak but could not, and sat staring out before him into vacancy.

Presently she went on:

'I was at her side in a moment, but at first she did not know me. I called her by her name, softly, for fear I should be heard, and began humming one of the little Indian songs that I used to lull her with when she was a baby. How I did it I can't tell, for my heart was like to break. Little Sumbaten heard us stirring and crept into the room, and I sent her away to make tea for us. Gradually the stony look left my darling's eyes; she recognised me, and we cried together, and I gave her the tea. Then, when we were alone again, she crept in beside me, and hiding her head in my arms, just as

she used to do when she was an infant, told me what I have promised to tell you.'

She stopped again. It was as if the task she had undertaken was too hard for her.

Tom looked up at her pitifully. 'You are torturing yourself without cause,' he said. 'Why should you tell me? All I wished was that the burden should be taken from *her*. She has spoken to you. It is enough.'

'But I promised; she will ask me,' said poor Lady Elton. 'Don't look at me so, dear. I must find a little more strength, and then—then—we shall rest, my dear child and I.

'You know how she left the fort; but you may not know that the wicked Soubahdar who took her away had a grudge against her father. I must try to tell you about him. He was a man I had always disliked, he was so smooth in his manners—not a common man at all. He had been educated well, and he had lived for many years with Englishmen, so that he knew what our ideas and feelings are. The General had treated him not only as a comrade but as a friend. They had shared the same tent; he knew that honour was dearer to him than life; and he meant—I can see it all now—to humiliate and punish him through her, our darling. When I think of it, Tom, when I think of it, I feel the blood curdling about my heart. But I must not—— They left the fort together, this man, Grace, and the child. Grace soon found out that he was her enemy. But for Kit I think she would have killed herself, for she carried poison about with her; but she dared not take him with her, and she could not leave him behind. Day after day they went on, travelling by unfrequented ways. In the villages through which they passed they were often subject to insult. He would bring crowds to stare at them, and they would tell her, exulting like fiends, about the massacres and outrages in the English stations. But here and there her gentleness won for them kind looks and words of pity. So they went on till a certain day when poor little Kit, who was nearly worn out, stumbled in the way and said he could go no further. The brute struck him with a whip; Grace caught him in her arms with indignant words. Then the Soubahdar looked at her; it was only a look, but she knew very well what it meant—for Kit murder, for herself worse. What power held his hand it is impossible to say. There was nothing to keep him from striking, but he did not. They went on until late, Grace half-leading, half-carrying Kit. She says

that with that look a new spirit and strength seemed to have entered into her. They came to a little village by a river. She and Kit were given a mud hut to spend the night in. She put the child to sleep, but she would not sleep herself. Towards nightfall the Soubahdar came in; he had been drinking heavily. She feigned to be asleep, and he leant over her, muttering awful words of what he would do the next day. She kept her presence of mind; she says she never felt in the least danger of losing it. Then he threw off his weapons, the long knife and revolver he always wore, fell down like a log, and was fast asleep in two instants. I tell you all as she told it to me,' said poor Lady Elton, 'and indeed, indeed, I seem to see it now. It is passing before me like a nightmare.'

'God help you to forget!' said Tom, fervently.

'Yes; but I must tell it first—all—all!

'My dear child made sure that he was asleep. Can't you see her—I can—listening, staring out into that dark place? If he had stirred she was lost. But he did not. She was not afraid, she says. All her womanly timidity had gone. Whatever was to be done—and I don't think even then she knew—she was ready. She got up and took careful note of everything. The hut had two doors: one looked towards the river, which was very deep and dark, and flowed close by. It was open, and partly blocked up by the Soubahdar, who had fallen half in and half out of the hut, with his feet towards the river. The other door looked out on the village. She opened it, and saw that the hut they occupied was at a little distance from the others, which were all perfectly still and dark. Then she closed it, fastening the latch with a piece of wire which she found on the floor. Kit was in his first sweet sleep. She crouched down beside him for a few moments to think. They might run away, but he would be sure to find them, and then their death—Kit's death—would be certain. There was only one way to be rid of him. As she was thinking, his wicked words came back to her, and she saw the awful look again. At the same moment Kit gave a little sobbing cry, and called out to her through his sleep. It was that, I verily believe, that gave my darling strength. Softly, as I can well imagine, she soothed him off to sleep again. Then she rose from her knees and went to where the Soubahdar lay, stupid and senseless in his drunken sleep. His long knife was beside him. She drew it out of its sheath, and—and——'

'She killed him!' hissed Tom from between his closed teeth. 'My brave little girl! My heroine!'

'She killed him!' echoed Lady Elton. 'Think of it, with those little slender hands! She did more; she dragged him across the little space of ground that divided them from the river. How she found strength for it God only knows. But before she knew, before she had recovered from the state of frenzy into which his threats had thrown her, she heard a heavy plunge, saw the dark waters part, and knew that her terror slept. All this time Kit was asleep. When it was over she awoke him, whispered that they had a chance of escape, tore him out of the hut so that he should see no traces of what had happened, and before the dawn of the next day had broken they two were far away from the village. You know the rest,' said Lady Elton, wearily.

'Yes,' said Tom, 'I know the rest. My poor darling! My poor darling! Is it this that has been troubling her?'

'I am afraid it will never cease to trouble her,' said Lady Elton, very sadly. 'If it had happened to anyone else! But Grace! Oh, can't you see—I can—how the gentleness, the tender womanhood, that are her very self, have been wounded—how everything in her, her whole nature, has suffered outrage?'

'Yes, yes! I see—I see too well! But, dearest Lady Elton, those are the wounds that time heals,' cried Tom. 'She has spoken: that is the great point. Don't ask me to despond; I can't. You will comfort her. Troubled! why she should rejoice—exult! The man she destroyed was a scourge to humanity. He was no man: he was a monster. Who knows how many murders he had committed, how many more were being planned by his evil mind? She was an instrument in the hands of God for dealing out to him the punishment he so richly deserved. My only sorrow is that no man was near to save her little hand——' For a moment his voice was choked with sobs; then he looked up, and there was a light, soft and wonderful, in his dark eyes. 'But you will tell her all this?' he said. 'You will tell her that there is no true man living who would not weep as I do that she should have had to deal the blow herself—who would not honour her from his inmost soul for her courage and devotion? Yes'—smiling—'I have no fear now. You will heal her; you will bring her back to us!'

'I will at least try,' said Lady Elton, sadly. 'Our darling is in the hands of God.'

There was a depression, a weariness, in her voice which could not be mistaken, and, in fact, the telling of the story had been almost more than she could bear. In a moment Tom was on his feet.

'What a selfish idiot I am!' he cried, 'allowing you to exhaust yourself after this fashion. Come; I can't let you speak another word. Trixy will be looking for you, too. She will think we have spirited you away.'

'Ah, poor Trixy!' said Lady Elton, smiling through her tears. 'She is a little bit of a heroine, too. But she is differently constituted from Grace. She exults over her share in our little skirmish.'

And so, speaking lightly to hide the deep feeling that had almost overpowered them, they left the ferny hollow where the strange story had been told, and made their way slowly through the beautiful garden, radiant now with morning sunlight, to the ladies' pavilion.

Touching and tender beyond expression was the first meeting between Grace and Tom after he had seen her mother and heard the wild tale she had to tell.

It did not come about until the evening of that day. 'We must let her rest,' Lady Elton had said, and he agreed. But, when the daylight had fallen, he found his way to the door of the pretty little room that had been allotted to them. Aglaia saw him, ran in to tell Lady Elton, and then ran away again.

Grace was lying on the sofa, her pale gold hair spread about her like a cloud, white and weak, but with a look of dawning hope on her face that made her poor mother's heart tremble with joy.

'Tom is here,' she whispered, bending over her. 'May he come in?'

Her eyes gave the consent that her voice had scarcely strength to frame. Lady Elton went out and told Tom that he might go in, warning him, at the same time, that she was weak and that he must not stay too long.

In the next instant these two were looking one at the other silently, a strange, new consciousness between them. It was only an instant; but in that instant he took in all the details of the scene: the long, slender figure, in its white draperies, brought out into almost startling relief by the gor-

geously embroidered cushions and shawls that lay about it: the pale, beautiful face, pure as an angel's, looking out wistfully from its shadowy cloud of hair: the sweet eyes, into which, for all these days, he had scarcely dared to look, for fear of seeing in them the horror, the spiritual fear, that, when he met it, almost maddened him—eyes, so gentle, now, with half-dropped lids that veiled their childlike joy and wonder.

While he paused, spellbound, she smiled and tried to rise, a movement that at once awoke him from his trance.

'Don't! don't!' he cried. 'You mustn't.'

He rushed forward, flung himself on his knees beside the couch, and, with a look of infinite yearning, held out his arms. For a moment she drew back; in the next his love had conquered. He held her in his arms, her head upon his breast, her heart beating against his. It is a moment that will live with him as long as his pulses beat, and his eyes behold the sun. He was so happy that he scarcely knew what he did. All his young love and pity and devotion, all the pent-up torrent of agonised tenderness that, for these many days, had been surging about his heart, seemed suddenly to leap to the surface. Murmuring passionate, indistinguishable words, he rained kisses on her cheeks and lips and brow. She was his—his; and he vowed, by all that was sacred, that neither men nor demons should part them again. He would hold her—he would hold her—against the world! So, for a few moments, he raved.

Suddenly he stopped. She had drawn herself gently away from him, and he saw that her face was pale, and that her lips were quivering like a tired child's. Then, with a swift remorse, he entreated her pardon for his impulsiveness, and laid her head back tenderly against the pillows.

'Forgive me, dearest,' he said. 'It was the first delight. I have been so patient all these days; and you know'—bending over her, with a radiant smile—'our feelings will not always keep within bounds. But I promise to be very quiet now, if I may stay a few moments. May I?'

'Yes; but you must sit down and be reasonable,' said Grace.

'Darling, I have never been anything but reasonable. And to-day above all days! Till I had seen your mother, till I knew what she and your father wished, I had made up my mind to say nothing. And you know, dearest, how well I have kept my resolution. Oh! don't you think it has been

torture to see you, day by day, as I have done, to know what I know, and not to throw myself before you, and tell you plainly of my love and reverence?'

'Hush, Tom, hush!' said Grace, tears filling her eyes. 'You make too much of me. I am only a poor, weak girl.'

'You are my queen, Grace, my angel, my wife!'

She opened her lips as if to answer; but he would not listen. 'No,' he said, 'not a word. A little "Yes," if you like. If you try to say anything else, Grace, I will seal your lips with kisses.'

He drew a chair beside her, and sat down. 'See how reasonable I am,' he said. 'Give me your hand to hold, so that I may know it is no dream, and we will talk about the future.'

'My beloved,' she said, softly, looking at him with wistful tenderness, 'let the future care for itself! We have the present—the moment that is passing now. God in His mercy has given us that.'

'Yes,' said Tom, 'the loveliest moment that earth will ever give us, Grace——'

At this moment Lady Elton, who had been feeling a little uneasy, looked in.

'Haven't you talked long enough, children?' she said.

'I don't know about Grace; but I don't think I could talk long enough,' said Tom. And then he jumped up, like the boy he was, and threw his arms round Lady Elton's neck.

'Wish us joy, little mother!' he whispered. 'I have proposed, and she hasn't said "No."'

'Oh, Tom,' she cried, divided between tears and laughter, 'what a boy you are!'

'Am I? Then I am afraid I shall be a baby to the end of the chapter. I have never been so happy in my life.'

'God send you happiness always, dear,' she whispered. 'But your mother, have you thought of her?'

'Mother! it was the dearest desire of her heart that Grace and I should come together,' cried Tom. 'This will be the most delightful news to her. We must all go home together when the troubles here are over, and I can leave my post. Then, perhaps, you and I will persuade mother to come out with us for a cold season.'

'Ah! you are running far ahead,' said Lady Elton, sighing. 'However——'

'There is no reason why I shouldn't—isn't that what you meant to say?' interrupted Tom.

'What I meant to say, and what I must say, is that they are waiting for you in the hall.'

'Very polite of them ; but quite useless,' said Tom with a little laugh. 'I'm not cowardly as a general rule ; but I really couldn't face them to-night. I shall have something to eat in my own quarters. Good-night, little mother.' Then to Grace : 'Darling, you will *promise* me to sleep well.'

'I will do my very best,' she answered, smiling.

He left the room by a door that opened on to one of the passages, for he did not wish to pass through the hall. Grace listened silently, until the echo of his footsteps had died away, and then, to her mother's distress, she turned her face to the wall and wept.

CHAPTER LII

GIFTS AND CONGRATULATIONS

WHEN it became known in the palace that Grace and the rajah were formally betrothed, there was a joyful little tumult of excitement and delight. Lady Elton, who gave her piece of news in the hall after dinner, was surrounded and congratulated, and laughed at, and cried over in turns ; and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she could prevent the little society from rushing in a body into Grace's room, and overwhelming her with the congratulations, which she was scarcely strong enough to receive.

The next morning all sorts of delightful rumours were afloat. Hoosanee had been met in one of the corridors carrying a basket of the loveliest white flowers that ever were seen, the rajah's morning greeting to his bride-that-was-to-be. Sumbaten, who was as much excited as anyone else, brought in word of having seen the rajah riding Snow-queen at break-neck speed—an outlet, the ladies said, to his excited feeling. They smiled one to another as they remarked that he was charmingly young, and would make a most amusing lover. But, in fact—it was Lucy, I think, who made this observation—they were all in love with him themselves, and if Grace hadn't been such a darling as well as a heroine, they could not have allowed her to appropriate him. It was true, indeed, that she

was the only unappropriated lady in the palace; but this was a minor detail, and not worthy of being mentioned.

Someone had heard, heaven alone knows how, that the ceremony was to be performed according to the rites of the Church of England, and that a clergyman had been already sent for from Agra or Meerut, upon whose arrival it would immediately take place. Mrs. Lyster suggested that they should find out how Grace was before they disposed of her so summarily; but she found everyone firmly convinced that, being engaged, she would very soon be quite well. In confirmation of this benignant prophecy, cases without number were quoted. 'Ah!' said Mrs. Durant, fervently, 'happiness is a great tonic! Think of how miserably ill *I* was before my darling Kit came.'

'We were all ill,' said Lucy. 'I was afraid to go to sleep at night for the dreadful dreams I had. Now I sleep like a top.'

There was another little person present who had pronounced views as to the tonic quality of happiness; but she was too much preoccupied at the moment to be able to enter into the discussion. Certain sounds, indistinguishable probably to the other members of the talkative little group, had fallen upon her ears. With a vague remark about seeing how Grace was, she left the summer-house. When in the avenue she stood, for a few moments, shading her eyes with her hand; then, smiling to herself, and looking very pretty in the process, she put on the broad-brimmed hat she was swinging in her hand, and turned down a narrow walk fringed with grassy borders and light-leaved acacias.

The sounds, which proceeded from a rich baritone voice singing in a subdued key one of the sentimental English love ditties that were in vogue at the time, drew nearer. The girl in the straw hat stopped to listen, and there was a mischievous expression in her brown eyes. Then, quick as thought, she darted behind one of the trees. Presently a form followed the voice. It was that of an English cavalry officer in full uniform, with clanking sword and spurs—a tall, spare young fellow, whose comely face, burnt brown and red by the sun, and lighted by a pair of merry blue eyes, was about as pleasant a sight as it would be possible to look upon. This girl at least found it so, for her face was as red as summer roses, and her eyes were dancing with laughter. He, meanwhile, was looking out before him doubtfully. Seeing no one, he drew out his watch.

'I am sure of the path,' he said, half-aloud, 'for I counted the turnings. Can I be early? No, I'm late.'

After another long and fruitless look, which penetrated to the very end of the path, he was turning away with a disappointed sigh, when the wild little creature behind the trees darted out upon him. 'Now, Trixy!' he said, reproachfully; but he caught both of her hands and held them fast.

She looked up at him audaciously, mimicking him. 'I counted the turnings. Can I be early?'

'Trixy, do you know that it is naughty to play the eavesdropper? And what if I told you that I knew you were there the whole time?'

'You didn't, Bertie,' she said, blushing. 'I certainly shouldn't believe you did if you assured me of it till to-morrow morning. But don't; it would be monotonous. Besides, I have something to tell you—a great piece of news, a delightful piece of news.' She had linked her arm in his, and he was looking down upon her with an expression of love and admiration that made his frank face and blue eyes beautiful. As for Trixy, she would not for worlds have given utterance to her thoughts, which were irresistibly detained now and then by the vision of her own extraordinary good fortune.

'Can you guess?' she said, looking down that he might not see how her eyes were dancing.

'More arrivals?' he hazarded.

'No, no; guess again.'

'Has the rajah had news from the front?' he cried, breathlessly.

'I haven't seen his Excellency yet,' said Trixy, drily; 'but I believe he is to honour us with his company at breakfast, which is served in a place like a Greek temple. No, Mr. Bertie, my news is much, much more exciting Do you give it up? Then I must tell you. Tom and our darling Grace are engaged.'

'Weren't they long ago?' said Bertie, looking puzzled.

'Weren't they long ago?' echoed Trixy. 'Do you know, Bertie, you can be a most uninteresting companion. I thought you would at least be pleased.'

'Why, so I am, Trixy. *If* they only made up their minds yesterday——'

'But don't you see? Can't you understand? They are formally engaged. Tom acted like a gallant gentleman. He wouldn't say a word till mother came.'

'Oh! that's it, is it?' said Bertie, smiling indulgently. 'And now I suppose you are all in a delightful ferment. Love and lovers, wedding frocks and wedding favours——'

'We are not cynics,' said Trixy, loftily. 'I know somebody who used to take a little interest in such things himself. Now, I suppose, when he has convoys, and important matters of that description to look after, he disdains frivolities.'

'If he could disdain them as delightfully as a little friend of his, Trixy, he might have some chance of earning a reputation for solidity.'

'Bravo, Bertie! I call that a well-balanced sentence. But, seriously, are you not glad?'

'I am very glad, Trixy, especially as his Excellency and I will be brothers. Perhaps he may show his fraternal feelings by giving us a lift up. I believe he could do anything he liked with our Government just now. Do you know, little Miss Mocker, that he is one of the most distinguished persons in India at the present moment?'

'I have heard other people say so,' said Trixy, with some dignity. 'However, that doesn't matter much. The interesting part of it is that he is engaged to Grace.'

'And Grace is better?' asked Bertie.

'Ah! that is just it,' said Trixy, her eyes filling with tears. 'I may be a little goose—they all tell me I am; but there is something in Grace's face that troubles me.'

'She has had some terrible experiences,' said Bertie, shuddering, as he remembered his day and night at Dost Ali Khan's fort.

'I think they must have been worse than any of us imagine,' whispered Trixy. 'She told mother something the night before last. I asked mother to tell me, but she wouldn't; and there has been a scared look in her face ever since.'

'The rajah has a wonderful story to tell,' said Bertie. 'I was with him yesterday evening, you know. I believe he couldn't face the ladies.'

'And he told you he was engaged?'

'No; he didn't—he left me to infer it. I suppose, from what you say, that it was too near a bliss to be talked about,' said Bertie, smiling. 'And I think he was anxious and troubled. But I drew him on to tell me of his adventures and your sister's, and I think it did him good. I met him, you know, when he was in the depths, clue lost, and almost in despair, but pushing on with a plucky disregard of consequences that made us put him down as mad.'

'God bless him! He is a noble fellow, though he *is* a rajah and an Excellency!' burst out Trixy. 'Grace ought to get better. She *must*.'

'If she can, Trixy.'

'Oh! she can! she can! I felt like that after my wound. I was so weak and miserable, and everything was so wretched, that I thought it would be better to die and be done with it all. Then you came in, my poor boy! and there was such a troubled look in your face. I couldn't bear it. You seemed to be asking me all the time not to give way. And so, one day I set my teeth together, and clenched my fists, and said to myself, "You are a selfish little fool! You shall get better, you *shall*." In two days I was on my feet, Bertie, and then'—in a lower voice, and looking up at him with dewy eyes—'happiness came and cured me!'

The next words, which were chiefly of protest, were inaudible. Bertie had caught her in his arms and was covering her face with kisses.

'If you behave like that,' she said, severely, when he had released her, 'I shall never tell you my experiences again. Look at my hair! And when I am just going to take breakfast with his Excellency! No, sir! keep your distance, if you please; I can set it right myself.'

'God grant,' said Bertie fervently, 'that your experience may be your sister's!'

'She will have a much better-behaved lover,' said Trixy; '*Tom* has some spirit of reverence and romance. He will fall on one knee and kiss the tips of her fingers.'

'Will he?' said Bertie, with fine scorn. 'I should just like to lay a wager with you——'

'So should I; but there would be certain difficulties,' said Trixy, demurely. 'Who would hold the stakes, and who would be umpire?'

This last mocking question brought them in full view of the garden pavilion.

The rajah, looking a little shame-faced, it must be confessed, but otherwise very much his ordinary self, had joined the party of ladies, who were all congratulating him, each in her own characteristic way. Lucy dropped a deep curtsey, and said that she had never supposed she would live to be a ranee's first cousin. She felt at least two inches taller. Mrs. Lyster, whose kind eyes shone brightly through quick tears, caught him by both hands, and wished him all the happiness that

even heaven itself could send. Kit came forward with a little manly stride that set them all laughing; said he was very glad; hoped they would make haste; but he and 'Billy' weren't at all surprised—they had known it all the time. Mrs. Durant shook her head, and begged the rajah to excuse him. The fact was everyone was spoiling Kit. Then the little Aglaia, her face flushed to a beautiful red, stood up before him, and kissed his hand. 'I love Grace almost as much as I love you now,' she said, in her sweet, girlish treble, 'and, oh! may I stay with her?'

'Of course you shall, darling,' said Tom, stooping to kiss the little shining face. Was it a dream—a strange illusion? He looked up, smiling at himself for his folly; but it was with him still. He had seen, or fancied he had seen, Grace's expression in the pretty child's eyes.

At this moment, to the surprise and delight of everyone, Grace herself came in. She was leaning on her mother's arm, and Bertie Liston, who, standing at the door of the pavilion, and debating with himself whether he should go in, had caught sight of them and rushed to their assistance, was helping to support her. Grace looked pale and weak; but they thought there was a new brightness in her eyes, a new vigour in her voice.

As for Tom, no human being could have been happier or more brilliantly triumphant than he was that morning. Bertie had, of course, at once given up to him his place by Grace's side, and he led her to the table with a gentleness and reverence that amused and touched them all. He was quite as enchanting a lover as they had expected to find him; while the beauty and dignity of his appearance had never been so marked as now.

After breakfast he insisted that Grace should rest, impressing upon Lady Elton that they must not let her do too much. Then he went to his own business, which consisted principally in letting his intentions be known in the city, and consulting Chunder Singh and others as to the arrangements he should make to celebrate his marriage, and assure his wife a fitting position. He wrote also to his mother, and Mr. Cherry, and General Elton. This over, there came the usual work in court, after which one or two of the principal citizens waited upon him and begged his permission to present themselves at the palace with their congratulations and offerings.

He thanked them heartily, assured them that the palace

would be open, and went off to consult Lady Elton about whether Grace could be present at a reception in the early evening.

Grace, who had been resting all the morning, sent back word that nothing would please her better than to see all who cared to come. So they carried her down into the hall, and while the daylight was fading, and the lovely golden hues of evening were winning their way through the marble lattices, she lay in the midst of her friends, receiving the visits of Indians of every degree, and thanking them, in gracious, gentle words, for the welcome they had given her.

None came without his gift—small gifts of fruit and flowers and sweatmeats, and larger gifts of jewels and rich caskets, and costly robes and embroidered stuffs and perfumes; and as she lay amongst them, her pale thin fingers straying from one to another, she looked, Trixy said, laughingly, like a fairy princess in a rainbow bower.

This day was a sample of several others. Those who could not be admitted the first day came the second and the third. Everyone was anxious to see for himself the gracious, beautiful lady, of whom such wonderful tales were told. Everyone desired to give some token, however small, of his reverence and affection for Byrajee Pirtha Raj, their ruler, who had returned to them in the person of his son. Grace received presents enough those three days to constitute in themselves a rich dower.

There was one, however, whom she expected daily, but who did not appear—Vishnugupta, the priest. At last she made inquiries about him. 'Is it because so many people are coming and going that Vishnugupta keeps away?' she said to Tom one day.

'I expect so; but I will ask about him,' he answered.

There were several Indians in the hall. He turned to one, who stood close by, and asked him if the priest had been seen lately about the city.

The man bowed his head low, and covered his face.

'The holy man has gone,' he said.

'To his hermitage in the hills, I suppose?' said the rajah.

'No, Excellency; beyond.'

'What! has Vishnugupta other haunts?'

But here Grace touched his arm; and, turning, he saw a strange, indescribable yearning in her face.

'He is dead,' she said. 'I thought so.'

The man of whom they had been inquiring bent his head silently. He had not wished that his should be the voice to speak the word of ill-omen; but it had been spoken, and he could not deny it.

Grace said nothing more about Vishnugupta that night, but the next day she asked Tom to find out for her how he had died. There was little or nothing to know. After his last conversation with Grace he had started, as it was supposed, for his hermitage in the hills. Some had seen, or imagined, a change in his face—a rapt expression that had awed and solemnised them; but no one had spoken to him. The morning after the day he left the city he was found in a mango-tope at a short distance from the gates, his back against a tree—dead! His face, which, those who found him said, was turned towards the sun rising, had lost the tense and feverish look which it had worn so often in his lifetime. It was irradiated with the morning light, and a stillness—an expression of satisfied longing—seemed to rest upon it. This was what Tom heard, and what he told Grace. She listened with a wistful smile. 'A beautiful death,' she said, softly; I am glad for him.'

'He was an aged man. His death was natural,' said Tom, with unusual eagerness.

'Death is always natural,' answered Grace, and she added after a moment's pause: 'What we call death. Isn't it wonderful, Tom, the power words have to mislead us? We think of death with horror; it is the word, the associations. If we were to look at it calmly, as it is——'

'Death means separation, Grace,' interrupted her lover, hoarsely. 'To those who go it may mean everything you imagine. To those who are left——'

He broke down, for his own words seemed to choke him. With a force that had in it indescribable pain, Mrs. Lyster's phrase, spoken after his darling's first talk with Vishnugupta, came back to him: 'On the other side.' He rose hastily, and looked down upon her with a piteous effort to smile. 'But why should we discuss these dismal topics, darling?' he said. 'Try to look a little less like an angel, and I will tell you what I have been doing about our marriage.'

Thereupon he plunged into a long and not altogether new recapitulation of the arrangements that were being made for that glorious event, of the congratulations that were pouring

in, and of his own plans, which grew more golden every day, for the wonderful life, radiating happiness upon all who came within the sphere of its influence, that they were to lead together. Generally these talks with Grace gave him fresh hope and courage, but to-day he left her, he knew not why, with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER LIII

NEWS FROM LUCKNOW: TRIXY'S DETERMINATION

For the next few weeks, however, there was little change. The household in the palace dropped once more into a regular mode of living. Lady Elton fell into her place at once. Anxious as she continued to be about Grace, her sympathy and gentleness made her the friend and adviser of everyone else. They called her smilingly 'the mother of the zenana.' From Trixy, who would persist in looking upon the bright side of everything, there emanated a spirit of courage and joyous animation that was as refreshing as the morning breeze in the desert. Captain Liston, who was presently to lead out a convoy of provisions and ammunition to meet Sir Colin Campbell on his march up country, became exceedingly popular both in the palace and in the city. Kit, whose smart figure in its semi-Oriental dress was, by this time, a familiar sight in the streets and market-places of Gumilcund, followed Bertie about like his shadow, and proved a most efficient guide. The readiness, aplomb, and curious air of distinction that characterised the child, made him particularly attractive to the Asiatic multitude, so that he knew every nook and corner of the city, and was on the best of terms with everyone. To display his knowledge before so fine and complaisant a person as Bertie Liston was thoroughly agreeable to Kit, while the defection of Aglaia, who could scarcely ever be persuaded now to leave Grace, made the new companionship all the more delightful to him.

Lucy's parents being shut up in the Lucknow Residency, with the heroic survivors of that unparalleled defence, while her husband and Colonel Durant were with Sir Colin Campbell, much anxiety was felt as to the progress of the army and their efficiency to carry to a successful issue the great work

committed to them. But though often troubled and depressed about their own individual friends, not one of this little company entertained any doubts as to the final result. England was bound to triumph. The slaughterers of women and children must bite the dust.

The first great event after Lady Elton's arrival was the departure of Bertie for the front. He went off in the highest spirits, promising all sorts of glorious performances, with letters and messages as often as he could find hands to carry them.

Trixy, of whom he used to say sometimes that she was game to the very finger-tips, saw him go away as if he were going to a party of pleasure. From the horse, on which she had ridden out, by the rajah's side, to see the convoy start, she waved her young hero a gallant farewell; and then, turning away, put her horse into a mad canter to deaden the pain at her heart. Yet the next day she seemed almost as joyous as ever. And indeed she was not unhappy. Awful qualms of heart would come over her at moments, and a spirit of mad rebellion against the world and things in general for such horrors as were being allowed in their economy, would seize and shake her. But actually her profound belief in her own and Bertie's good star prevented her from being orthodoxly miserable. Bertie gone, her attention was more fully concentrated upon Grace, with whom, as the days wore on, she began to feel a little impatient. When they were together she managed to control herself; but, now and then, she would let herself out to her mother. 'Grace ought to get better,' she would say. 'What is there to prevent her? It is too bad. That poor fellow looks gloomier and gloomier every day!'

It was useless for Lady Elton to argue that health and sickness are not in our own hands, or to point out that Grace was making every possible effort; Trixy would still insist: 'If there is nothing really wrong, she ought to begin to be more like other people. If there is, she should see a doctor. I could never give up without a fight,' said Trixy, setting her teeth together.

Then, with tears in her eyes, Lady Elton would turn away. It was true, too true! Grace was slipping away from them. It was not her own fault. Her mother knew this well. Honestly, loyally, she strove to shake off her invalid ways, to be amongst them, to belong to them. But, alas! with every day the failure became more apparent. She was like a broken flower that not even the sunshine can revive. Some-

thing within her had snapped. The spirit of vitality that conquers pain and weakness, that God-implanted love of the dear Earth and all her homely ways, which will so often bring a sick soul back from the brink of the grave, had gone never to return, even at the bidding of human love, with all its passionate sweetness.

Now and then, after a sleepless night, the strain which she put on herself would, for a moment, be relaxed, and then those who loved her best would see a strange hunger in her eyes. It was as if she was holding out her hands to them and imploring them to let her go.

One morning Tom saw, or fancied he saw, this in her eyes. They were alone, for Aglaia, Grace's constant companion, after looking up pleadingly into the rajah's face and receiving no responsive smile, had slipped away. He flung himself on his knees by the couch, and catching her hands, which were as soft as snow, and only a little warmer, gazed speechlessly into her eyes. 'What is it, dear?' she said, faintly.

'Grace,' he cried, 'what do you want? where are you going? what do you see—oh, God! what do you see—that you should wish to leave us?'

An expression of pain and perplexity crossed her face. 'Wish?' she echoed, as if she had not understood the word.

He laid his burning face on her hands. 'Darling,' he said, humbly, 'is there anything we can do—anything we can give you? I would give my life, Grace, all I have and am, for you.'

But still she looked at him dreamily; and then all at once the futility of his prayers came home to him, and with a sob, which he could not repress, he rose slowly to his feet. Fool! Will even a child be drawn from its home by bribes and kisses? It was her *home*, the vision sweet and awful of the Divine, that was beckoning to her, and he was trying, by his poor love, to hold her to the little joys and sorrows of life.

But reason as he would with himself, his heart was sore. Like Trixy, he could not give up without a fight, and, on the evening of that day, he sent for a doctor. His messengers travelled night and day. The doctor, a civilian of some experience, who had come out a year or two before to make his fortune, lost no time. A week after the message had been despatched he was lodged in the palace.

He saw Grace, and was puzzled, as men of his profession

generally are by what seem like abnormal ailments. Who has any right to be ill, except by rule of thumb? Pushed into a corner, he spoke vaguely of mental shock, recommended quiet—which she had been having, Tom said, despairingly, for weeks—and set himself to watch and take notes. Alas! the notes did not help him much. When he had been in close attendance upon her for a week he was further from that full understanding of her case, which, he had said, would enable him to deal with it satisfactorily, than he had been at the beginning.

And yet she was patient and perfectly submissive, taking everything he prescribed, and never refusing to answer his questions.

So the days wore on. October passed away, and November opened. It was such a November as has scarcely ever been seen even in Gumilcund. The burning heat of the summer and early autumn were over, and the glory and brightness of the Indian winter, the deep skies, the sunny days, the entrancing mornings and evenings, had begun to be felt. The garden, with its overspreading foliage, its wildernesses of flowers, crimson and purple and orange; its arbours, covered with azure-blue convolvulus and lilac bougainvillea, and its long avenues bordered with channels of flowing water, was in perfection. It was a happiness to explore it, a bliss to breathe its air. If anything could heal Grace, so they said to one another, it would surely be the beauty of this Indian winter. By the doctor's advice she spent her life in the open air. A wonderful couch and carriage in one had been designed for her by the rajah, and skilfully executed by some of the clever Gumilcund mechanics. In this she was wheeled from place to place, making new and delightful discoveries every day. To those who watched her it would seem that, for days, her life was nothing more than a dream. But there were moments still when she was stirred up to a strong interest in life.

Such a moment was that when news came to Gumilcund of the final relief of the Lucknow Residency.

It arrived late in the evening. None of the ladies in the palace will ever forget that day. They were together in a little grove by the lake. They had been having tea out of the jewelled cups, which, with other lovely things, Tom had hunted out of his father's treasury to tempt Grace to eat and drink. After tea, Trixy, who, expecting news, had been in a state of irrepressible excitement for several days, seized upon the tiny boat, rocking in front of them, spun it out into the lake, and

tried to quiet herself by pouring out some of her favourite songs. Those in the grove listened silently. They had been talking, trying to amuse one another and forget the intolerable ache of suspense. When Trixy's clear, young voice came thrilling out on the evening air they all felt thankful for an excuse to be quiet.

A pretty group they made under the quivering light and shade of the acacias; Grace, on her long couch, her hands and face almost transparent now, but beautiful still, with a seraphic, unearthly loveliness that can scarcely be put into words; and near her sweet Lady Elton, with Aglaia at her feet; then Kit, who had been a little sombre since Bertie left, leaning against his mother, half asleep, she with her arm round him, an expression of peace on her thin, worn face; in the centre of the group Lucy, robed in the white cashmere that was now her favourite wear, lying at full length on a tiger's skin, her pretty head supported on her folded arms, as she gazed with wide-open eyes into the waning glories of the evening sky; and at a little distance from Lucy, holding on her knee, in a state of complete eclipse, rosy baby Dick, whose mother had gone inside to prepare for the high ceremony of his evening toilet, the slight figure of Mrs. Lyster, her fingers playing absently with the baby's silken curls, as she looked out before her with gloomy eyes. It was Kit who brought life into the picture. He saw the rajah coming towards them, flourishing a letter in his hand. 'Post! Post!' he cried, rushing to meet him. 'Post!' echoed one and another; and in a moment all but Grace were on their feet.

Trixy heard the cry. For a second her brave heart almost failed her; then, calling all her resolution to her aid, she threw herself upon the oars, drew them through the water with the vigour of ten, and, in less time than it takes to tell, was on shore and racing Kit down the avenue. In the next instant she had seen Bertie's handwriting, had torn the letter open, had understood at a glance that the news was good, and was rushing back at full speed to the group by the lake.

When she reached them she was much too breathless to speak, but her face spoke for her. Lady Elton got up, and put her arms round her, for this brave, healthy young creature was swaying to and fro as if she would fall. That was enough for her. 'Don't, mother,' she whispered, hoarsely, 'you will make me cry; and there's nothing to cry about.' Then Grace, who had seemed to be asleep a moment before, held out her

arms, and Trixy fell into them with something like a sob. 'Let me go, my sweet little Grace,' she murmured. 'I don't even know what the silly boy has said yet.'

But by this time the rajah, who looked particularly young and handsome, was amongst them.

'I don't know what Captain Liston says, of course,' he said, looking round on them with a triumphant smile, 'but I have a message from Sir Colin himself. It was a hard fight; but they have done their work, and our Gumilcund guide-corps, as well as the men with the convoy, have done splendidly. It will be good news in the city. I expect we shall illuminate, and have all sorts of festivities to-morrow.'

'What fun!' said Lucy, faintly; but she was looking towards Trixy with anxious eyes. That young person, who was once more the mistress of herself and the situation, had taken a seat under the swinging lamp, which Hoosanee had been considerate enough to hang up among the trees, and was unfolding Bertie's letter, parts of which she read aloud for the benefit of everyone.

It had been begun on the evening of the day when Sir Henry Havelock and the gallant Outram had shaken hands with Sir Colin Campbell. He had not been able, however, to despatch it at once, and he added a few lines on the following day. Several more important points had been gained; the rebels were completely demoralised, and flying in every direction; the line of retreat for the besieged had been organised, and the women and children and invalids were then being carried out to the Dilkoosha, where they were to rest for a night. Cawnpore, he believed, was to be their next halt. Lucy's father and mother were safe. He had seen her husband meeting them; they looked haggard and wasted, but already they were on the fair way to revival. Colonel Durant had won honour in the assault. He had himself had one glorious moment, about which he would entertain Trixy later. Sir Colin Campbell was one of the best men and finest soldiers it had ever been his lot to serve under. He would willingly lay down his life for him. In the meantime, though smarting in every joint from the exertions of the preceding day, he was thankful to say that he was sound in wind and limb. The Gumilcund men were trumps, every one of them. But of their gallant conduct the rajah would no doubt hear from other sources. To him, and the rest of the English society in the palace and Residency, he sent warmest greetings. The

messages to herself, whose perusal occupied a few moments, Trixy did not think it necessary to give.

'That dear fellow gets more considerate every day,' she said, looking round her with a glowing face, as she folded up her letter. 'He doesn't forget anybody. I should like to answer his letter as soon as possible'—to the rajah. 'When are you sending?'

'I shall send off my congratulations to-night,' said Tom, smiling.

'Oh! then, excuse me everybody. I must write at once,' said Trixy.

To what vagaries she committed herself in the solitary recesses of her room, it would be unfair to relate here. All I can venture to say is that the letter which resulted, and which arrived in camp on the eve of the gallant fight that scattered Tantia Topee's army, broke the spirit of the rebels in the North-West, and gave back Cawnpore to the English, was received and read with a transport of admiring love and gratitude that its recipient would always maintain carried him scatheless and triumphant through the dangers of that tremendous day.

'I verily believe,' he said to Trixy later, when, after his own light fashion, he was narrating the exploit that had won for him the English soldier's dearest reward for gallantry—the Victoria Cross, 'I verily believe that I was too happy and proud a creature to die that day. There was no killing me.'

'The dark angel hovered over you, and had not the heart to strike,' said Trixy, whose bright eyes were dim with tears.

But this belongs to the future, for before she met Bertie again Trixy had some dark and bitter days to live through.

She was passionately attached to her mother, and while, without understanding Grace in the least, she had always had a sisterly regard for her, she had never loved her as she did now, when admiration, tenderness, pride in her as a heroine, and some little sense of exultation in the part she might play in the future, had reinforced her sisterly feeling. And now, since the brief revival which followed on the news from Lucknow, inspired partly, as Trixy felt with a curious throb of tenderness, by sympathy for herself and Bertie, there was added to her love a devotion strong enough, the poor child believed, to fight with and overcome the invisible forces that were preying upon her sister's life. 'Grace shall not die, she shall not!' Trixy would say. 'I will prevent her.' For two

or three days she would let no one but herself do anything for Grace, scarcely speak to her. With the energy and strong will that belonged to her, she would sweep them all away. 'She wants life—life, do you hear?' she would cry. 'You people are sad. You let her brood and dream.'

Even Tom was only allowed to see her at Trixy's time and in Trixy's presence. 'You will thank me some day,' she said to him one day, pressing his hand with sisterly cordiality, and for the moment he almost believed in her. 'If you bring her back to us, Trixy,' he said, with a sob in his throat, 'there is nothing I will not do for you.'

'Ah, I shall remember that,' she said, nodding to him gaily, and then she took her measures. Kit, the gayest and naturally the most effusive of the party, was taken into her counsels. He was told that it was his mission to be amusing, and he showed his sense of the honour conferred upon him by being so delightfully important that Trixy would almost forget her own mission in the amusement of watching him. Aglaia, on whose little life the shadow which was enfolding those dearest to her seemed to have fallen, was warned privately not to look solemn, and she, too, began to be amusing in pretty prim ways that were charming to behold. 'It is a perpetual little comedy with those children,' Trixy said to her mother one day.

She herself was perfectly radiant. For hours she sat beside Grace, chatting of the present and the future. She gave quiet, humorous little pictures of incidents at Meerut, Yaseen Khan's importance, and their father's youthful vigour. She would even relate stories of scenes between herself and Bertie, blushing in the prettiest way as she repeated some of his silly speeches. She went back over the far past when they were all children together, raking up funny old stories of their nursery and schoolgirl days. She organised excursions to the city, Grace in a palki, and she and Kit riding beside her. For more than a week she was her sister's only physician, and even the doctor, who had looked grave at first, began at last to think that the new treatment was more successful than the old.

All sorts of rumours were in the meantime pouring in, and mostly of the vengeance that was overtaking the rebels. From the neighbourhood of Gumilcund, from Cawnpore, and, above all, from Delhi, came tales of wholesale executions, of indiscriminate slaughter, of men blown from guns in battalions, of dispossessed peasants and citizens dying in their multitudes

from famine. The ladies heard all these things at the Residency, where there was stern exultation. The rajah—who was a little sombre in these days, fearing that the reconcilement to which he looked as a new and glorious era in the life of the nations might be indefinitely delayed if the conquerors could not see the wisdom of tempering justice with mercy—was urgent that from Grace all these dark tales should be kept; and her friends, knowing how sensitive she was, would not have been likely to disappoint his wish, even though Trixy, who kept a fierce and friendly watch, had been absent.

As it was, no change was made, and yet, with the onward sweep of the winter days, lovely beyond description, but burdened each one with its ghastly tale of horror, a cloud of depression, for which there was no accounting, dropped down upon her. Sleepless nights followed the sad days. The doctor, saying she was too weak to stand the continued strain, gave her anodynes that helped her through part of the night, but left her more exhausted than before. Then her mother, who had let herself be lulled by Trixy's determined hopefulness, grew alarmed. She could sleep but little herself, and one night she sat up and watched.

Grace had been given a strong opiate. Through the early part of the night she slept, with occasional starts. Then suddenly she opened her eyes, and cried out like one in deadly pain. Her mother stooped over her. 'It is a bad dream,' she said. 'Awake! I am here beside you.'

The girl looked at her. 'They are binding my eyes,' she cried, with a strange bitterness. 'They think I can't see, but I can—I can! Oh, will no one do anything? Look! Do you see, do you see the horror in those eyes?'

'Whose? Whose? What do you mean, darling? There is nothing here,' said poor Lady Elton, weeping.

'Nothing!' echoed the girl, 'nothing!' And she sank down on the bed sobbing. But the next instant she had sprung up again. 'They are going,' she cried—'a pillar of flame. It is killing the sweet blue of the sky—and the stars—the stars—are fading. Oh! Where do they go? What becomes of them! Someone told me once; but I have forgotten.' Then, after a pause, during which her eyes seemed to be searching: 'It is real,' she cried, 'the pain—the restlessness—the misery—it goes on. They cannot destroy it—for ever and ever and ever.' Her voice sank away to a sobbing sigh, and she sank back exhausted. Her mother took

advantage of her quietness to whisper words of Christian hope and comfort.

'You forget, my darling,' she murmured. 'There *is* a refuge—a refuge for us all. He took the misery—He bore the pain. Look to Him—the Crucified—our Saviour.'

The girl looked up. The familiar words had penetrated the cloud of her delirium; but they brought with them no peace, rather a strange, fierce anger of impatience that pierced her gentle mother to the heart.

'Our Saviour! but who is theirs?' she cried, piteously, and then again came that awful heart-rending cry—inarticulate—the wail of a hurt and bewildered child. Lady Elton was on her knees by the bedside, tears raining from her eyes. 'It is breaking my heart,' she sobbed. 'Oh! Grace, don't you know me?'

Slowly the girl seemed to come back to herself. 'Mother,' she said, 'is it you?' Then with a strange smile: 'I was foolish to wish to see. Bind my eyes! Hide me! I dare not look.'

'My child! there is nothing. But come to me. Hide your dear head. My little darling! My baby! Oh! if I might hide you so always,' said the poor woman, 'as I did when you were really a baby!'

Grace lay perfectly still, her head on her mother's arm.

'You are better, love?' she whispered, stroking her hair with trembling fingers.

'Yes,' answered the girl. 'But it will come back again. Dear, you must let me go.'

The next day she was too weak to rise. Everyone was distressed, and Trixy's anguish was terrible. But after the first shock she persisted that it was nothing.

'Sick people are subject to these fluctuations,' she said, fiercely; 'Grace will be better to-morrow.'

But Lady Elton knew that the summons had come. She told Tom of the scene of the night. As he listened a ghastly pallor overspread his face, and he staggered like one who has received a blow.

'Someone has told her these hideous stories,' he cried, with sudden anger. 'The horror of them is killing her.'

Lady Elton put her tender, motherly hand on his shoulder. 'No, dear,' she said, sadly; 'I have watched; and Trixy, and the child, Aglaia, have been with her from morning till night. *It is impossible!*'

For an instant he stood silent. Every particle of colour had fled from his face, and his eyes had a strained, unnatural expression that alarmed her.

'I will watch with you to-night,' he said.

'If she will let you.'

'She shall not see me. I will keep out of her way while she is awake. Mother, you must let me. It is my right, and,' he added in a choked voice, as he turned from her, 'perhaps I know more about these visions than you do.'

Lady Elton went back sadly to her children. She found Aglaia curled up on the cushions at Grace's feet, reading the New Testament to her, and Trixy sitting beside them with swollen eyes.

With an unuttered prayer Lady Elton sat down and listened. It was one of the beautiful, mystical chapters of St. John. The child read it through, in her sweet, tremulous voice, and then stopped.

'Grace is asleep,' she whispered.

They sat silent, watching her. Her face was almost transparent. The blue-veined eyelids, fringed with long, silken lashes, lay against her cheeks. The breathing was soft and regular, like a child's. But she was not asleep, and presently she opened her eyes, and looked round on them.

'How good everyone is to me!' she murmured. 'What have I done that you should love me so?' Then in a lower tone, 'Mother, love is real.'

Her mother trembled, for she knew that the vision of the night before was with her.

'Love is real; love will conquer,' said Trixy.

Grace turned to her, and for a moment there seemed to be on the dying face some faint reflection of the fire and enthusiasm that shone from that of the living. 'Thank you, Trixy,' she murmured. 'Say that again: it does me good.'

'But it is true—it is true—how could anything else be?' cried the young girl. 'Love is real—it is strong—it is the strongest—it conquers everything—we know it—we who have felt.' And then sudden tears dimmed the lustre of her eyes, and she bent her head. 'Grace, dearest,' she whispered. 'Our love is calling you. Won't you—won't you—stay?' For an instant the large, grey eyes that were fixed on Trixy's face seemed to lose their steadfastness.

'Life is very sweet,' murmured Grace, 'to go on—to know—to love—to see the world opening out——'

'Life is beautiful,' said Trixy. 'Life is divine. You shall not die. It would be cruel.'

'Hush—hush!' said Lady Elton. 'Do you see?'

A faint colour had tinged the white face on the pillow, and the large eyes had filled with tears. Trixy turned away with a sob in her throat.

A little later they brought her food. She tried her hardest to eat, but she could not. Presently her mother saw her lips moving, and bent over her. 'I have been thinking about it,' she said, faintly. 'I am afraid my heart and brain are weak. I can't bear things as others do. If I stayed I should be a trouble to you. Tell Trixy,' and then again, in a still lower voice, 'somewhere else I may understand better.'

They noticed that, throughout that day, she watched Aglaia with a curious, wistful expression in her eyes. Once when Tom, who was coming in and going out helplessly all day long, sat down beside her bed, she drew the child towards her, and put her little hand in his. But she said very little, and none of them spoke to her much. All but Trixy were abandoning hope; she hoped on still.

In the evening Grace seemed better and stronger; she asked for fruit, and they brought her the richest and rarest that could be procured. There were baskets of fragrant white flowers in the room. She asked for one to be placed on her bed, and, for a few minutes, her thin, pale fingers strayed lovingly over the cool petals. One little white rose she pressed to her lips. 'It is such a pleasant sensation to touch them,' she said; 'they are so pure, so sweet.'

Late in the evening the doctor paid her a visit, gave her an anodyne and spoke with doubtful cheerfulness. Kit, and Mrs. Lyster, and Mrs. Durant, and baby Dick and his mother, and poor little Lucy came in, one by one, to bid her good-night. They had been sternly drilled by Trixy, and none of them wept or sighed. Trixy herself and Aglaia, who had begged hard not to be sent away, sat with her until ten o'clock; then Lady Elton insisted that they should rest, and they went into the inner room where they slept together.

Tom had by this time crept in. By one of the marble lattices there was a deep recess, shut off from the rest of the room by a screen. In this recess he took up his station. The early hours of the night passed quietly by. Grace seemed to be asleep. There was no movement, not the least sound of

life, in all the palace. Even the chattering of the chowkedars was silent, in obedience to the orders he had sent out by Hoosanee. That faithful servant was keeping his watch in the hall of the zenana; but he did not so much as move. Outside Tom could hear a soft wind stirring in the heavy foliage of the trees, and silver arrows of light, shot earthwards from shining worlds myriads of miles away, stole in through the lattice. Years afterwards he remembered, with a throb of pain, how wide and how desolate the universe seemed to him that night. Tired as he was when he began his watch, he did not feel the least disposition to sleep; his mind was too busy, too poignantly alive, his heart was too full. As the night wore on, dark and terrible thoughts assailed him. Once he could have cried out like a hurt child. The cruelty of life smote him, the piteous waste of force—hearts large with love, souls aching with passionate pity, and able to do nothing!

Down the sheltered river the little boat might be brought, furthered tenderly by guardian hands. Upon the sea, wide, fathomless, undiscovered, the awful sea of eternity, it must launch out alone. This was the mystery that oppressed him. Later he might think of himself, his own sorrow and loss and disappointment: now all his heart and mind were with the sweet soul that was going out from them into the invisible.

A sense of defeat and powerlessness, almost intolerable in its anguish, came over him. He got up and struck his forehead against the marble lattice, and the sharp pain of the blow seemed to bring him back to himself.

Now and then he would rise from his seat behind the screen and look back into the room. By the light of the shaded lamp he could see the mother's bent form as she turned over the pages of her book, and the white, white face upon the pillow, as still now as if death had frozen it into the everlasting silence. Twice he saw Lady Elton rise swiftly and lean over her, and then his heart beat so tumultuously that he thought she must have heard it. But she returned to her seat, and he knew that there was still breath.

So on for hours that seemed like a lifetime. At last the darkness began to lift. Through the lattice by which he was standing he saw the stars grow high and pale, and the grey light of early morning stealing over the earth. The air came in with the chill of the morning in it, and he drew the screen further round the lattice lest it should touch the white face on the pillow.

Ah! what was that? A cry! In an instant he was by the bedside; Grace was sitting up. Her eyes were wide open, her arms were extended, her voice was clear and strong. 'Keep me awake, Kit,' she cried, 'keep me awake!' Then in a voice lower, but thrilled through and through with ecstacy, 'Tom! Tom!'

A mist was before his eyes. He did not see Lady Elton, who was chafing the poor little feet that were deadly cold. The room, the bed, the flowers, the rich and costly things that were scattered about her, had vanished away. He was in the hermit's hut once more, and his darling, torn from the jaws of death, was at his feet. With an inarticulate cry, he threw himself on his knees and held out his arms. She sank into them like a tired child, a smile of ineffable peace on her lips. But the touch of her cold cheek recalled him to the present. 'She is worse,' he said, looking at her with eyes full of anguish. 'Mother, for God's sake, can nothing be done?'

Sorrowfully the poor mother shook her head. She had looked on death too often not to know it.

At that moment there was another voice—a cry stifled but full of pain. It was Trixy. With white gown and bare feet, her hair flying wildly about her shoulders, she stood in the doorway between the two rooms. In an instant she had taken it all in, and was rushing madly across the room. 'You are dreaming, all of you,' she cried. 'She is in a swoon; I know it is nothing else. Where is that cordial? She was nearly off yesterday, and I brought her back with it. And the doctor. Agl ia, fly for him! Tell him Grace is in a faint. Tom, give her this; she must take it, she must. Heavens! how helpless men are! let me try! Grace, sweetest, it is Trixy, your sister. For her sake! see, love!'—her tears were raining over the white hands—'Grace, I shall never be happy again if you leave us! Try this once, and no one shall torture you again as long as you live. One little drop, if you love me!' The spoon was between her lips, but it was in vain—she could not swallow. Yet the sister's passionate agony had done what the lover's voice could not. For an instant the heavy eyelids were lifted. Ah! what a look! dumb pain! speechless entreaty! To the day of her death it will haunt the sister's heart; she will see it in her dreams. The rest was like a trance, a vision. She seemed to hear a voice whispering to her to be still, and then a great chill struck her, and she smiled to think that she was going away with Grace, and there

was a confusion of many hands and voices about her, and she thought with a vague pity of Bertie, and the next thing she knew she was starting out of what seemed like a deep sleep and seeing her mother sitting beside her; but when she tried to get up, and said that she would go to Grace, her mother laid her hand upon her. 'Grace died last night,' she said.

'Last night!' echoed Trixy, falling back.

'And you have slept all day, my poor little one,' said Lady Elton, stooping to kiss her.

Trixy lay like one bewildered.

'And Tom?' she said presently.

'I have not seen him since. I hope he has been sleeping too.'

'Poor Tom!' said Trixy, her eyes filling with tears. 'His trouble is greater than ours.'

'Yes; and think of all he has done for us. I shall thank God to the day of my death that we had this quiet happy time together,' said poor Lady Elton, with a little stifled sob.

'You are better than I am, mother. I can't feel anything but angry yet. But not with Tom. Oh! not with Tom! He is a hero,' cried poor little Trixy.

CHAPTER LIV

COMING BACK TO LIFE

Of the days that followed immediately I have neither space nor inclination to write many words. It was a time of deep anxiety in Gumilcund, where it soon became evident that the young rajah, who had battled so stoutly with hardship, difficulty, danger, and disappointment, was seriously ill. His spirit was high, but his bodily powers were not equal to the task of sustaining it. Though he kept about and did, to the best of his ability, the tasks that fell in his way, those in the palace, and indeed many beyond it, saw that his strength was failing daily. At last, and, as some of them said later, providentially, the crisis came. A chill caught in a night ride through the city brought on fever. For several days he lay hovering between life and death. Lady Elton used to say that this illness of Tom's saved both her and him from mad-

ness. He was compelled to obey the voice of Nature and keep quiet for a time. She, having to put her own poignant grief aside and to assume a cheerfulness which she was far from feeling, found life, with its homely joys and sorrows, take hold of her once more. Grace had gone away into the invisible, but these others remained; Tom, who had to be wooed back with the tenderest care to the paths of the living; Trixy, who had to be persuaded—poor, impulsive child!—that it was not wicked to be happy; Kit and Aglaia, who watched her to and fro with the most pitiful, beseeching eyes; Lucy, 'a very Niobe for tears'; and her dear old General, who sent urgent messages that she would take care of herself, and not add to his sorrow and remorse by leaving them when they wanted her the most.

Her first really joyful moment after Grace's death was when, with finger on lip but eyes dancing with pleasure, she looked in, after a long absence, on the little melancholy party in the pillared hall of the zenana and whispered, 'The rajah is better; he is sleeping naturally. The doctor gives hope.'

It was delightful to see the sad faces relax, and to hear the fervent congratulations. Up to this Lady Elton had allowed no one to take her place. She and Hoosanee, whose devotion was unlimited, took the severer part of the nursing between them. But now, when all crowded round her, entreating to be allowed to take their share, she chose out Mrs. Lyster to join her. She knew, by the instincts of her own sad heart, that the service would be a comfort and relief to her who had suffered more than any of them; and, indeed, the clever, resourceful little Irishwoman, with her bright ways, her ready smiles, and her unconquerable and delicious sense of humour, proved a most valuable assistant.

Never was man or woman more tenderly nursed than our young rajah. Later he used to tell his friends that they forced him back to life. It would have been the basest ingratitude on his part not to try to get better when they were all so anxious and careful for him. The vigorous constitution which he had inherited, and which no excess had ever spoiled, stood him in even better stead than the nursing. Life in him was far too strong to be fatally worsted in this first serious encounter with its foes. But it was a changed life. This, when he came amongst them again, they all recognised. It was a graver man—one not so prone to the exhibition of feeling—who rose from that bed of sickness. The boy, with his raptures, his

poetic transports, and his passionate enthusiasms, had gone. The man, quiet, reserved, courteous, but withal stern and decided, had taken his place. The people, to whom he presented himself as soon as his doctor would permit the exertion, said that his resemblance to his predecessor, Byrajee Pirtha Raj, was more striking than ever.

Grace died in December. Before January had run its course the little party of ladies in the zenana had begun to break up. Travelling being once more possible, their relatives felt that it was not fair to tax the hospitality of the Rajah of Gumilcund any further.

Little Dick and his mother were the first to go; a haven in the hills had been provided for them until the spring, when they were to return to England.

Then came the turn of Mrs. Durant and the gallant Kit. Colonel Durant had been able to provide an escort for his wife and son to Calcutta, whence he wished them to proceed directly to England. He wrote to Tom as to an Eastern prince, thanking him earnestly for his protection and help, and asking if he could be of any use to him with the Government. Tom wrote that the consciousness of having been of service to English people was a more than sufficient reward for all he had done. If, however, he might be allowed not to lose sight of Kit, who was a charming little fellow, and his particular friend, he would take it as a kindness.

Kit was exceedingly reluctant to go. He did not see, he said, why they could not stay with the rajah. Gumilcund, he was sure, was quite as good as London, and Bâl Narîn taught him all he wanted to know. But Kit had to leave, his protest notwithstanding.

The Nepaulese shikari, who had continued to be Kit's devoted attendant, left Gumilcund at the same time as his *chota Sahib*, with whom he meant to travel as far as Calcutta. Bâl Narîn, so far as means were concerned, was now a gentleman at large, Tom having settled upon him a sufficient income to enable him to live in comfort and without toil for the rest of his days. It was his intention now to see the world. Besides Lady Elton, whom the General was urging to return to Meerut, preparatorily to a start for England, which he meditated shortly, there were now in the palace only Lucy, Mrs. Lyster, and Aglaia.

Lucy's husband, who was on active service, could easily have made arrangements for her to go to the hills; but she

begged to remain at Gumilcund, and, as there was no particular reason why she should move, Captain Robertson accepted with gratitude the rajah's proposal that she should make her home in his city until his own active service was over. Being Bertie Liston's comrade, he knew more about the Rajah of Gumilcund than Colonel Durant.

Mrs. Lyster, whose husband and baby were gone, had no ties in India. The dear ones at home were drawing her; but they were provided for, and there was no need for hurry. When plans were talked over, she agreed gladly to remain in Gumilcund, looking after the little Aglaia until they could both be sent home. Of Aglaia's present departure there was no question. Her mother and father had gone. Her friends in England believed, doubtless, that she had died with them. In time to come, Tom promised himself to look them up; but, for the moment, she belonged to her deliverer.

As for Lady Elton, she simply declined to leave Gumilcund until Tom could be said to be in his usual health. She owed this, she wrote to his mother, to himself, to Grace. The General might come to her and Trixy. They could not go to him.

The wild work in the neighbourhood of Meerut, which had earned the *Khakee Ressalah* their laurels, was by this time over. The courts were open; the country was comparatively quiet; the robber-tribes, having taken warning by one or two notable executions, had taken what was left of them elsewhere; and the peasants were coming back slowly to rebuild their little villages of mud huts, and to cultivate their fields. The General, who had nothing to do in this work of organisation, finding for the second time his occupation gone, gathered a few volunteers round him and set off for Gumilcund, which he reached, without the least difficulty, one evening in February.

The young rajah was convalescent, but not off the invalid list. The visitor, recognised at once as an Englishman of distinction, was shown into the ante-room of Tom's sleeping apartment, where, having been left by his kind nurses for the night, he was reclining in a nest of cushions. He sprang up, and held out both his hands.

'General!' he cried. 'You!'

'Yes, my boy,' said the old man, brokenly. 'I have come to look you up, you see, as I couldn't persuade you to come to Meerut. Sit down! Sit down! You have been ill?'

'Nothing to speak of; though my dear nurse, Lady Elton, insists on coddling me still. Shall I send for her?'

'Presently. I should like to have a little talk with you first, if it won't be too much for you.'

'My dear sir, I am well—perfectly well.'

Very strange and sad was the conversation that followed. When Tom, who knew the high soul, the resolute nature, and the grand audacity of his old friend, found him stamering and faltering, pouring out thanks and blessings, and stopping in the midst of broken words to reproach himself bitterly for the blind and credulous folly which had precipitated them all into danger, he was too much moved to answer.

But, meanwhile, the rumour of the arrival had spread in the palace, and Lady Elton, yearning to see her dear old General, and fearful of the exciting effects of his conversation upon her patient, wrapped herself in her veil, and went hastily through the corridors that separated their apartments from those of the rajah.

When the emotion of the two men was at its highest point, she stood between them, a hand on both. 'It is enough, Wilfrid,' she said. 'He is our son; you must not thank him too much.'

'Thank you,' murmured Tom.

As for the General, he took up his gentle wife in his arms and asked her, with a plaintiveness that came strangely from him, if she meant to desert him and the girls for ever. Tom smiled, and left them together.

Of course the General was irresistible. When Lady Elton met Tom the following day, she told him that she must leave him. 'I really believe you have turned the corner, dear,' she said, 'and they are so devoted to you; besides, there is Mrs. Lyster. She promises faithfully not to go until you are quite well. My dear old General doesn't seem to be able to get on without me. It is very foolish——'

'Dearest Lady Elton, I would not keep you for the world. It has been too good and kind of you to stay so long,' said Tom.

'Hush—hush!' said Lady Elton reproachfully. 'Is that the way sons speak to their mothers? But, seriously, the General says that if things go on as they are doing now, he will take us home in April or May. You ought to come with us.'

'And leave Gumilcund?'

'Oh! not for always of course. Spend the summer at home, and go back in the winter. The change will do you good, both in your body and mind.'

'I don't think I care much to go to England now,' said Tom. He was gazing out at the garden, the azure-blue lake, and the purple outline of the hills behind them, and thinking sorrowfully of his old dreams.

'But that is just it,' pleaded Lady Elton. 'You should make yourself care. I know how people slip into not-caring, dear. It is the worst of complaints. It takes all the hope and heart out of you. Think of us—of your mother—of England——'

'Yes, I will think,' he answered gently, and that was all she could persuade him to say then.

General Elton spoke to him more strongly. He had not seen him since his visit to Meerut, in the bright and joyous days that preceded the mutiny, and he was shocked by the change in his appearance. 'My dear boy,' he said, 'if you value your health—if you value your reason—if you wish to continue the useful career which you have begun so nobly, you must give yourself rest and change. Tell me frankly, is there anything to prevent your taking a holiday?'

'I don't think so,' answered Tom. 'The crisis is over, and things have been set going. They will work very well without me. It is not a question of being spared.'

'No; it is want of will. Now, my dear fellow, in your mother's name, as well as in that of others, I must scold you.'

'Poor mother!' he murmured.

'She has been eating her heart out with anxiety this dreadful year; you may be sure of it. You owe her a little comfort—a little consideration.'

'I owe her everything,' said Tom, impulsively. 'Don't urge me too much, General. You would be the first to tell me to consider my duty.'

'Of course I should. But your duty, it seems to me, is as plain as a pikestaff. You have to look to the re-establishment of your health. If you think that is to come about in a summer in the plains—over a hundred in the shade, and other things to follow suit—why, all I can say is that you are hugely mistaken.'

Having delivered himself thus, the old General stalked off, for he believed that his words would take more effect if he did not bolster them up with too many arguments. Tom consulted Chunder Singh. He said plainly that he belonged to Gumilcund. Since the recent events which had endeared to him unspeakably both the city and those who dwelt in it, he had felt

that no other place in the world could ever be his home. It was not his intention, however, to give up his English citizenship altogether. Chunder Singh, who was a wise man, knew very well that the maintenance of those cordial relations—that sympathy—with the Paramount Power which had enabled them to steer, not only safely but triumphantly, through the late dangerous crisis, was a matter of importance to Gumilcund. These, he believed, would be strengthened by personal intercourse with England, which he had always proposed to visit from time to time. His friends wished him to go over that summer. The question was, would the people and the elders of the State consider the time suitable? Would there be any fear—any panic?

Taken by surprise, Chunder Singh asked for a few hours' delay to consider and consult his colleagues. The consideration proved favourable to General Elton's scheme. The people of Gumilcund thought that there could be no better time than the present for their rajah's visit to England. The country in the immediate neighbourhood of the city was quiet. The rebellion, though not completely quenched, had received its death-blow in the defeat of Tantia Topee outside Cawnpore. The mutineers still on foot had far too much to do battling with the strong forces set in array against them to think of attacking Gumilcund. The business of the State itself was moving with the regularity of clockwork. Moreover, it was well known that in the council chambers of the English Parliament momentous questions regarding the future government of India were being mooted. Under such circumstances, it would be advisable that their rajah, whose influence these good people naturally overrated, should be at hand. Let him, then, depart; let him think for them and scheme for them in England as he had done here; and when the fiery summer had run its course, let him return to the city, as to a home!

So said Chunder Singh, as the mouthpiece of Gumilcund.

When the General and his wife and brave little Trixy departed, they took with them a promise that, if nothing came about in the meantime to prevent him, Tom would start with them for England in the month of April.

CHAPTER LV

IN ENGLAND AGAIN : CONCLUSION

LET us take a leap in time and space ! Leaving behind us the crowded cities, the dusky tribes, the deep skies and burning plains of India, let us cross the Black Water, and return to the little island of the West, whence the hands that have subdued these strange regions, and the minds—many of the greatest of them, alas ! gone forth from earth and her concerns for ever —that have governed them, took their origin. We are in England once more, and the month is the sweetest month of all the year—leaf-clad, rose-embowered June.

Just two years have gone by since the day when Thomas Gregory, the widow's son, received the news which was destined to change the whole current of his life, and was visited by a dream stranger than any of those he had encountered in his nightly excursions through the many visions of his poet friends. Yes ; and we are in the very same spot where then we saw him receive the letter—the garden of the little cottage in which his early years were spent.

It has changed very little. The same green summer-house looks down upon the river, which murmurs eternally the same sweet song ; the same willows brush it with feathery, golden-green branches ; the same flowers, once so dear to Grace and Tom—azure-blue speedwell and dainty forget-me-not, and starry celandine—mantle now, as they did then, the low, sloping bank with beauty ; the same soft, mossy lawn sweeps down to the river bank ; the same weeping-ash lifts its green tent from the green carpet ; above the lawn are the same carefully-trimmed fruit and flower gardens. The cottage, which, from where we stand, we can see peeping through a delicious network of foliage and blossoming trees, looks newer than of old, and there are certainly more boats upon the river ; but these are the only changes.

No one lives in the cottage now. It is looked after by a gardener and his wife. Mrs. Gregory, who owns it still, has had it, at her son's request, rebuilt and kept in perfect order, but she lives herself in the fine house, built, as all the neighbourhood knows, after her son's design, on the high ground above the river. Folks say that she likes the cottage better

than the mansion. Often, in the evening, when the weather is soft and mild, she comes down to the little place to see if her orders are being carried out. Last summer, during the dreadful days of suspense and anguish when no one knew what a day might bring forth, she haunted the cottage and garden like an unquiet ghost. Mrs. Stevens, the good old wife of her faithful gardener, could, if she liked, tell sad tales of the frenzy which would now and then seize upon the unhappy lady, as she stole round the little garden, in which she had spent so many tranquil days, or sat wringing her hands and weeping in the room that had been her son's.

But Mrs. Gregory is happier and more hopeful now, for the peril is over, and her son has promised her a visit. She is in the garden this evening. Dressed richly, in costly black lace and silk, with a Spanish mantilla thrown over her head, she is walking backwards and forwards slowly on the lawn above the river. She has changed in these two years. Her hair is perfectly white now, her figure, not nearly so full as of old, has a tendency to droop, and her face, whose comely outlines and healthy colour made her once the admiration and envy of her middle-aged friends, has lost its roundness. Neither have her eyes the brightness which they possessed then. If we look at her closely, we shall remark a curious pallor and tremulousness about them; while in all her movements there is a restlessness—a nervous timidity, pitiful in one of her age and condition.

She is joined presently by a neat-looking, elderly woman, in black gown, white apron and mob cap.

'Tea is ready, ma'am,' she says. 'Shall I bring it out to the lawn, or will you take it in the parlour?'

'Tea!' echoes Mrs. Gregory. 'Why, to be sure! I told you to get tea for me, didn't I? I had forgotten.' And she turns with a sigh to walk up the garden.

'Mayn't I take your parcel, ma'am?' said the gardener's wife, pleasantly. 'It's too heavy for you.'

Mrs. Gregory looks down with a start. In her right hand is a bulky packet, which she is holding with a curious tension pressed tightly against her side.

'This!' she exclaims. 'Oh no, thank you! It is not in the least heavy. I have promised, besides, to give it into no hands but my son's.'

'Bless me, ma'am, do you really mean to say so?' cries Mrs. Stevens, who is astonished to find her offer treated so

seriously. 'But I only meant carrying it to the house. You look hard put to it to carry yourself to-night, if I may make so bold. My William and me was just saying this very evening as it might be, "If so be as Mr. Thomas don't come soon, there won't be much left of the missis for him to see." But it won't be long now, as the saying is.'

'No, it won't be long now. I was just trying, when you came out, to reckon the time by his last letter. It seems to me that he ought to have been here before this.'

At this very moment—they had reached the upper lawn and flower-garden—Mrs. Stevens, who was a little in front of her mistress, saw a hackney carriage pull up at the gate. She turned round. 'Ma'am! ma'am!' she cried, 'there's someone come. Don't faint, like a dear! William, I say, William, run to the gate! I'll go through the house and open the hall-door.'

There followed a few moments of agonising suspense, and then, how it came about Mrs. Gregory never knew, she found herself lying in her son's arms, helpless as a child, with his warm kisses raining upon her cheeks and lips and brow.

Her first thought, strange as it may seem, was not of him, but of the packet which she had been carrying, and which Mrs. Stevens had picked up from the ground when in that intoxicating moment her senses had deserted her. Drawing herself away from her son, she made a rapid sign that it should be given to her, and when Mrs. Stevens obeyed she hid it in her mantilla. This manœuvre was unnoticed by Tom, all whose thoughts were of her.

'So I have frightened you, little mother?' he said. 'And yet I sent a message. Didn't you receive it? I should have arrived early in the day.'

'I was out, very likely. I took lunch with Lady Winter, and then I came on here. But I am not sorry. I wanted to see you first here, dear; here, where we have been so happy. I thought you would be more likely to forgive me and think kindly of me.'

'Dearest mother, you are dreaming. Forgive! What have I to forgive? Are you tormenting yourself because you could not make up your mind to tell me by word of mouth what you told me by letter? But that is the most natural thing in the world to me. And as to the days that have gone, we are to have better ones, little mother—much, much better. Let me look at you. Do you know that you have changed?'

'Yes, dear, I have changed. I couldn't help it,' with a

plaintive little smile, and clinging to him like a child. 'If I could have been certain, quite certain, of this beautiful moment, I would have kept myself as I was. Do you remember how you used to call me your pretty, rosy, little mother?'

'You will be my pretty, rosy, little mother again,' said Tom. 'Ah, there is the colour coming! A good beginning!'

'And you, Tom, you! You have changed, too, my son. But I expected that. Your face is sterner; there are some sad lines. Your eyes—ah! how they carry me back to the past! How foolish, how foolish I have been!'

'In what way, mother?'

'In dreaming that I could keep you. You are his.'

'I am yours, too, little mother. It was his wish, his thought. But we shall have plenty of time to talk seriously. This evening I want to enjoy.' He looked round him. 'How good it is to find you here in this dear old garden!' he said. 'Give me your hand, and let us make one round as we used to, you know, and then you must come back with me to your fine house on the hill, where I have left our travellers. I suppose, by-the-by, that that stylish-looking housekeper of yours can be trusted to look after them for a few minutes?'

'Oh, yes. She is perfect. Lady Winter trained her. And everything has been ready for you for days. But I ought to be there myself to welcome them. Did the dear child bear the journey well?'

'I think it did her good. She has had a more natural life than at Gumilcund. Such a number of children, many of them orphans, came home with us, and Aglaia was like a little mother amongst them. Mrs. Lyster, I am afraid, will only stop with us to-night. She is impatient, naturally, to see her own little ones, who are at school in Ireland. If you don't mind, I want you to ask her to bring them all to us for the summer holidays.'

'Certainly, dear; it will be a pleasure to me. And the General, and my dear, dear Lady Elton, and the girls—what have they done?'

'I left them in London. A house has been taken for them there for a few months. I suppose you know that we left Trixy behind us?'

'Yes; Lady Elton wrote. Dear little Trixy! I hope she will be happy.'

'I think she has every chance of it,' said Tom, smiling. 'Bertie Liston is one of the best fellows I know.'

'And the others, when shall I see them?' said Mrs. Gregory.

'We must bring them down,' said Tom. 'What should you think of persuading them to make the cottage their country home during the summer? Lady Elton won't be able to bear much racketing about; the quiet of this place and your society would be the best medicine for her, and pottering about the garden would just suit the dear old General.'

'It would be delightful,' said Mrs. Gregory. 'We must see what we can do.'

They were close to the river bank. It was a serene and lovely evening, and the water was gay with boat-loads of holiday-makers. As the mother and son stood, for a moment, looking down the stream, a skiff full of young people floated past them. The girls wore light dresses; they were laughing and talking gaily. It went on, and another followed, then another. With wet eyes and a painful contraction of heart the young man turned away. 'Mother!' he said. 'Do you remember?'

'Two years ago,' she murmured. 'Yes; I remember very well; how beautiful they were!'

'*She* was beautiful to the last,' said Tom, in a whisper.

'You must tell me of her, dear. It will do you good, and I—yes, it will do me good too. I loved her so, I built so many hopes upon her.'

'So dreams pass!' said Tom.

'No, no,' said his mother, grasping at his arm; 'not pass—nothing that is good goes quite away. They come back again, brighter and purer and more beautiful. My son, believe me! I am simple, I know, far too simple to be the wife and mother of great men; but,' smiling sweetly through her tears, 'the simple sometimes see further than the wise. And now let us come back to the house and welcome my new daughter and your dear friend.'

The meeting between Mrs. Gregory and her guests was very pleasant and touching. The traces of sadness which gave a new dignity to her charming face, her gentle motherliness, and her ardent anxiety to be sure that they were comfortable and at their ease, won Mrs. Lyster's warm heart at once. Aglaia, in whom Mrs. Gregory at once recognised a sensitiveness like her own, did not respond to her advances so readily; but she was careful not to alarm the child by being too demonstrative

all at once, and in a very short time her gentle reverence told. Before that evening was over, Aglaia was talking in the little, quaint fashion which was so peculiarly her own, answering with pretty, childlike sedateness all the questions put to her, and looking up at Daddy Tom's mother with unmistakable admiration and confidence.

To Mrs. Gregory the evening that followed was almost dream-like in its charm. The delight of having her son with her, of waiting upon him, of seeing him take possession of the things which she had spent so many happy hours preparing for him, the pleasure of entertaining these dear guests, who had escaped, by her son's hand, from peril so awful that the memory of it made her shudder—the joy, after her long famine of home affections, in uniting them round her table ; in looking from face to face ; in listening to tales which were all of the valour of her boy, and the beauty and dignity of his city in the far East ; whose wonderful arrangements, Mrs. Lyster would insist, were due to no one but himself—all this it would take a more graphic pen than mine to describe. I doubt, in fact, if words could do justice to it. But for a little pricking sense of discomfort, an ever-recurrent consciousness of something painful to be done before she could rest, Mrs. Gregory would have been perfectly happy that evening.

It came to an end, as all happy times must and will. Sumbaten, who, at her earnest entreaty, had been allowed to cross the Black Water with her adored Missy Sahib, had long since taken Aglaia to the pretty nursery provided for them. Family prayers had been read. Mrs. Lyster, who, while Tom went off with Hoosanee to see his new quarters, had lingered to tell one or two stories, which she could not tell before him, had risen to say good-night. Mrs. Gregory accompanied her to her room, and left her there.

The house was very still ; she had a little silver lamp in her hand, with which it was her custom to go round every night and make sure that all the bolts and bars were fastened. Mrs. Lyster's room opened on to an upper gallery, which commanded the lower hall. She lingered for a moment, her heart beating, and her lips quivering nervously. The lights here were out ; but the large hanging lamp below was alight still. As she stood looking down, her son came out of one of the rooms on the ground-floor and stood under it. 'Do you want the hall lamp put out? ' he said. 'Hoosanee and I have been round.'

'Thank you, dear,' she answered, nervously. 'Yes, put it out. I will say good-night to you in your room.'

Then she turned, ran hastily to her own room, and, having seized a packet which lay on the table, went back with it to the upper gallery.

The door of Tom's apartments stood open.

There was a little study exquisitely fitted up with everything a writer or student could require, and within it a spacious and luxurious bed-room. When Tom dlannep the house he had designed these rooms for his mother, and already, that evening, there had been a little amiable contest about them, which, 'possession being nine points of the law,' had ended, as it was bound to do, in Mrs. Gregory's triumph.

She went in breathless, and sat down, for she could not stand. Hoosanee, who was standing, with arms crossed, as dignified and well-dressed as usual, awaiting his master's commands, made her a deep salaam. She pointed to the inner room, whereupon he retired, closing the door of communication.

By this time Tom was outside. 'My dear mother,' he said, noticing, with regret, her pallor and agitation, 'you mustn't really fatigue yourself in this way! Come!' kissing her. 'Don't you know that I want to have my rosy little mother back as soon as possible? Let me take you to your room!'

'Presently, dear, presently,' she murmured. 'But shut the door first; I have something to say to you.'

'Won't to-morrow do?'

'No, Tom. It must be now—to-night. While I can, while I dare——'

'Mother, what do you mean? You are dreaming.'

She pressed her hand to her brow. 'God knows I think so myself,' she said. 'Often, very often, I say, "You are dreaming; there never was anything so hideous done; and for you to do it—you! It is impossible!" and then,' throwing aside her lace shawl and showing the parcel on her lap, 'I look at this, and I know that it is true.'

She stopped. Tom had turned deadly pale. 'Give it to me!' he said. She placed it in his hands. He sat down and opened it slowly, his mother watching him with, oh! such

His silence and abstraction wounded his poor mother more than words, even stern words, could have done. Too pained to weep, she sat gazing out before her with stony eyes. He was noting meanwhile, with a curious pang, how the very arrangement of the papers had not changed. There were the manuscripts in Persian and Arabic and Hindi, as he had thrown them together in his boyish wrath and disappointment; and above them was the sealed roll, unopened still, that, if he had mustered courage to open it, would, as he believed, have given him a key to a hundred mysteries.

Unable to bear any longer the silence and suspense, Mrs. Gregory crept close to him. 'Tom!' she said.

He looked up. There was reproach in his eyes, but no anger, and she breathed more freely. 'Why did you do it, mother?' he said, sorrowfully. 'Could you not have trusted the dead?'

'Listen to me!' she said. 'Dear, I don't want to justify myself. I have sinned, and I must bear my punishment. I have borne it, God knows, through these two awful years. But I may not have been quite so guilty as you think. When I saw you go out that night, I had no thought of robbing you. You left me alone. Oh! Tom, you shouldn't have done it, you shouldn't! There was a presence in the house that night. I felt it as soon as you had gone, and I fought with it for you. You were mine; I had brought you up; I had cared for you all these years; you were everything I had; I couldn't bear that you should be taken from me even for a larger life. That was my sin, not the other. My son, I am telling you a strange thing, but I give you my word that it is true. When I left the candle burning in the passage and went to your room, I was in a trance—I must have been, for I have no remembrance of it, not the least. Often and often since, I have tried to think myself back into that few minutes, and I cannot. The first thing I remember is the cry of fire. I was not in your room then, I was on the stairs. The girls caught me and dragged me out. Then, while we stood on the lawn together, I felt that against my side.'

'*You should have given it to me then, mother.*'

'*Do I not know it, my son? Have I not said so to myself a thousand times? God knows I should have been saved a* host of troubles if I had. But I could not. Do you see how it was? I had not taken them. They had been given to me by a mysterious agency, and it seemed to me like a sign that

you were to be mine still. Then you went away, and I saw from your letter, that *his* life, *his* ideas, *his* people were taking possession of you. At last came the letter from Lucknow, which told me only too clearly what I had seemed to know already, that you belonged to me and to England no longer. Then I made up my mind to tell you the secret of your birth, and, if it should please a merciful God to bring you home safely, to give you up the papers. Are you satisfied?'

The question was in response to a softened look in his face.

'Yes, mother,' he said. 'I am satisfied. Love blinded you for a time; but justice and rectitude, which should be stronger even than love, have opened your eyes.'

'That is a man's view, not a woman's,' she said, looking up at him with dewy eyes. 'But good-night. I am tired. Take my advice, and keep the papers till to-morrow. There is no danger of your losing them again, and here, you see, is a fire-proof safe, where you can put them if you like.'

'Thank you, mother,' said Tom, smiling to see her look and speak like herself again. 'Good-night! You will sleep well, I am sure!'

'Well! With you in the house, and that gone! It will be like Paradise. If only you knew what I have gone through! But I mustn't talk of it, now. Good-night, my son.'

'To my son and successor a word of warning and counsel.'

So ran the opening words of the sealed-up paper; and those were about all Tom was able to read that night. After the many fatigues and excitements of the day his brain was too heavy to be taxed any further. When Hoosanee, who had been waiting patiently in the inner room until the hum of conversation should cease, receiving no summons from his master, ventured to open the door between the rooms, he found him seated before the table, his arms folded over the open paper, and his head resting on his arms, fast asleep.

He awoke him, protested with him for his love of study, and persuaded him to undress and lie down. So in dreamless sleep the night passed peacefully away. Of his coming to himself the next morning I have often heard the rajah speak. He was perfectly refreshed and strengthened; but for a few moments he could not stir. As he lay, the blue of the June sky flecked with soft shreds of snow-white vapour, peeped in through the open window. A tuneful chorus of English song-

birds, linnets and larks and thrushes, filled the air with throbbing gladness; the familiar sound of the gardener's scythe, sweeping through swathes of wet grass, fell dimly upon his ear; and sweet scents of eglantine and roses and newly-mown hay saluted his nostrils. Ah! how delicious they all were—dream-like sensations that seemed to be coming to him out of the tranquil past and making the fever of these last two years unsubstantial as a vision!

So, for a few minutes, he mused. Then Hoosanee looked in, and seeing him awake brought in tea and his bath, and, in a very short time he had cast his languor aside, and was giving himself to his papers.

Those in Persian and Hindi he laid aside for the present. They were closely written, and, with all the instruction he had given himself and the facility he had been able to acquire, they would, he knew, take him some time to decipher. The English paper he read at once. Its full text I am not at liberty to give. I know, however, that it did not contain the story, which Tom's mother had given to him, touching his birth. From first to last, there was nothing to make him believe that the tie, which, as the writer asserted, did actually bind him to the East, was anything but spiritual.

It was written for use in the event, which, as we know, came about, of the then rajah not being able personally to make the acquaintance of his son by adoption. For purposes of his own it appeared, and in order that his son's education and training should be entirely English, he had bound himself not to interfere with him in any way until he should have reached years of discretion. Then, if his life was spared, he would pay a visit to England, and instruct his adopted son with his own lips regarding the career that lay before him. For the rest, it contained instructions concerning Tom's conduct on his arrival in India, and upon taking up the government of Gumilcund, which, as the young rajah recognised with a thrill of pleasure, agreed in almost every particular with the course he had instinctively adopted. There were, besides, dim and uncertain foreshadowings of spiritual visitations, and dark forebodings of a time of trial and great terror for the country the writer loved; the country that, he hoped and believed, would be loved by his successor; with admonitions to him to be courageous, bracing his nerves to receive whatever might come to him in a manner becoming to a man into whose hands a sacred trust has been given.

An entreaty that he would be patient, and not allow himself to fall away into despair if the good to which they looked as the fruit of their labours did not come in his time; a recommendation to train up those who would come after him to regard themselves as the repositories of the great trust, any one of whom might be the Revealer predestined to give to the New World and the Old the light of the new revelation; a hope that he would gain sufficient knowledge of the Eastern languages to read the enclosed manuscripts, which contained the gist of their philosophy and the definition of their hope; with a pathetic farewell, couched in language which made Tom believe that Byrajee Pirtha Raj was a Christian at heart—brought the paper to a conclusion.

And here, on the threshold of his new life, I find, to my deep regret, that I must leave him. The life becomes too complicated; the interests too numerous; the hopes too lofty and large, to find room in what will generally be considered as a work of fiction. Besides, I am not allowed. All I may venture to say is that he is working still. A maharajah in India—he was given this title after the mutiny—and in England a private gentleman of fortune and distinction, he passes his life between the two worlds of East and West, trying to induce that sympathy, that mutual comprehension, upon which so many of his hopes for the future depend.

Married now, and with children of his own, he does not forget his lost love; and indeed, in the face of his gentle wife there is an expression that recalls Grace vividly. It is quite natural, Aglaia says with a smile, for Grace is often with her.

And so I bid them, and those who have followed with me the strange fortunes of the Rajah's Heir, an affectionate farewell. It is possible that we may meet again. When the clouds that still hide the elder continent lift—and some of us think that in their darkness we can discern fissures, through which the azure of the far-off heaven looks down—when the Revealer has spoken, when the long-hoped-for consummation, the meeting of the nations, has come; then, if I am still able to write, I will tell what part Gumilcund and her rulers have played in the great, ever-unfolding drama of the ages, and how the present has grown out of the past.

Spottiswoode & Co., Printers, New-street Square, London.

EXTRACTS FROM PRESS OPINIONS

OF

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