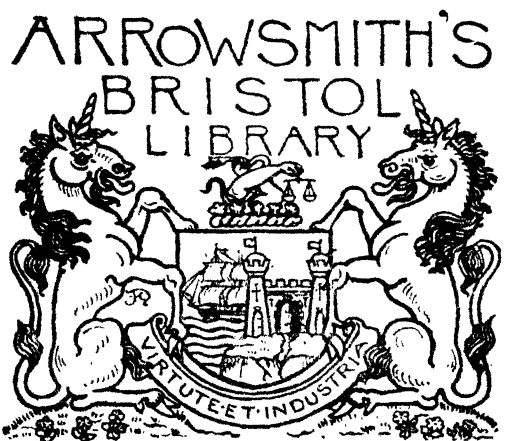
ONE SHILLING

The Rajah
AND
The Rosebud

BY WILLIAM SIME



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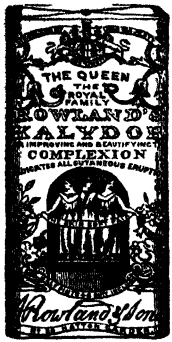

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THE RAJAH

AND

THE ROSEBUD

BY

WILLIAM SIME

AUTHOR OF

'KING CAPITAL," "BOULDERSTONE," "THE RED ROUTE"

ETC.

BRISTOL

J. W. ARROWSMITH, 11 QUAY STREET

LONDON

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LIMITED

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The Rajah and the Rosebud.

CHAPTER I.

Bordington Square.

THE gardens of Bordington Square were very pleasant and attractive on an early summer evening. The square itself had some pretension to historical dignity, its entrances being guarded by a pair of gatemen in uniform, who superintended the locomotion which passed over its stones. This was a remnant of a time when greater personages occupied the tall, solid houses of the square; but it gave an air of exclusiveness much appreciated by the inhabitants. For rank and fashion had gone West long ago to other squares, though the Bordington people were reasonably proud of their *locale* as it stood. It was architecturally a success, any one who glanced from end to end of it having the sort of feeling that he was standing on the floor of an unroofed cathedral, out of which grew poplars and elms, copper-beeches and hanging willows. As for flowers, they bloomed in brilliant, blazing plots from end to end of the gardens, not to speak of the windows, which in their season

were full of them. It was a quiet square too, the most notable sound which reached it being like the monotone of the sea. The subdued roll which so much resembled the breaking of waves was the crush of omnibuses in Oxford Street and the rumbling of drays in Tottenham Court Road; yet was Bordington Square secluded, sequestered, quiet. Its situation was much appreciated by foreign-looking gentlemen with pronounced noses, impecunious natives of England who became directors of small companies or occupied desks in the City, a few doctors, and what not. There was not a titled personage at any of the numbers, and the gardens gave a democratic tone to the neighbourhood, as it was impossible to saunter in them of an evening without a general recognition of equality and *bonhomie*. Indeed, everybody knew every other body beneath the elms and the poplars, and more than one unconnected youth had his introductions furnished him and his fate settled through evening perambulations in the gardens. By everybody, of course, is meant the inhabitants of Bordington Square. It really seemed to be very pleasant to a few old gentlemen, smoking cigars under a poplar, to watch the coming and going of the young crowd which had got into the gardens this early summer evening.

Old Dr. Brookes, with the largest house all along—who held committee-meetings about the gardens' key and felt like a Lord Chancellor on the occasion—he, of course, was smoking; so was Van Shift, who, from behind, looked like a Dutchman, and in front was unmistakably a Jew; so was the great house-agent, who owned as many as he "agented," or never "agented" long without

owning—all smoking. There was something in the air of the gardens pleasant for men over the mid-period of life. Think of it! Within earshot of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, yet the May sky overhead was nearly as blue as if the consumption of coal was unknown, the leaves on the trees as green as if they had only country-air to feed them, and the flowers not a whit less blue and golden and red than if they had been coloured up in a rural garden of the Midlands. The triplet of ancient residenters seemed to feel that they got the value of their money inside their gardens; that they had London to live in with all the privileges of open air and greenery, a quiet time for naps, and dignity at the gates. They smoked accordingly.

"A foolish thing it's always seemed to me," remarked the doctor, "that a fine, handsome square like this should be given up by the *crême de la crême*. There is nothing like it in Mayfair, De Shift, for solidity, appearance, seclusion. Think of this now, this poplar, this seat, these nice young men and nice young ladies, the happy, innocent children, and two minutes' walk away we have—ah! what haven't we?"

De Shift was perfectly contented with the populace: he sighed not after *crême de la crême*, being a money-making man, near his seat of receipts, and he told the doctor as much. But the agent was more interested: it was his opinion that if there was only milk in the Bloomsbury dairy at that precise moment, they would have cream by-and-by.

"Lor' bless you, sir, look at the changes in fashion, and look at the tendencies of the hage!"

"I do look at 'em," said the doctor, burning his

shirt-front with a refractory vesta, and unbuttoning himself to get rid of the cause of fire. "I do look at 'em, and I don't find as many carriage people inside the square as I 'd like—d' ye see? H'm, now, too many houses sublet, for you know what."

"Wh you mean?" asked De Shift with some emotion.

"Houses—d' ye see?—which aren't houses, but rooms and flats. Over there now—no tickets out, of course: no, much too genteel for that, d' ye see? Over there, an Oxford tutor with nothing a year to live on, and sensitive into the bargain. A little further off, a Cambridge tutor's widow, not sensitive, but owning no establishment; and a little further, one of my own profession, letting rooms by the week, d' ye see?"

"Yes; but they take good ones. I know now a lady up in the Cambridge tutor's top-flat who works hand-in-glove with a cousin of Lord Salisbury's mother-in-law. Fact, sir; as near the Premier as that. No mistake about it. *That's* all right."

"The circular lady. Yes, I know her; always deliverin' circulars about societies. She's in all the societies, and wonderful how close-fisted it makes 'em too, d' ye see?"

"*That's* all right," pursued the agent, glancing at three young fellows who came down the gravel walk together towards the poplar shade, "but you take a look at No. 1, doctor."

"I have been takin' several looks. What's going on there?"

The agent smiled in a superior sort of way.

"Talk of 'cream delly cream,'" he pursued,

"I 'm puttin' into that 'ouse the biggest swell as ever carted furniture into Bordington Square! You know my 'ouse—it 's the prettiest furnished establishment in Bloomsbury. I wouldn't valuate the mantelpiece ornaments of my servant's bedroom under fifty pounds—I wouldn't indeed. I wouldn't valuate No. 1 under a hundred thousand pounds, now! There 's an Indian prince in it, and his revenues, they tell me, ain't less than quarter a million a year; and he 's up there now!"

The doctor, who had long ago abandoned the philanthropic part of his profession, and who worked for fees pure and simple, watered within his large mouth, turned in his garden-seat, and scrutinized No. 1 for a full minute at a time.

"It 's the tendencies o' the hage," pursued the agent. "I believe lots o' the toffs 'll come back. They 're 'on' for the British Museum, and knowin' about heverything queer. That 's why the Hindian prince has set up his establishment in Bordington Square. That 's why lots more of 'em 'll do the same."

The three youths came to a full stop at the poplar, waiting for acknowledgments of their presence from doctor, Dutchman, and agent. They were very unlike each other, but seemed to be on common terms of acquaintanceship. The doctor grunted at them, the Jew nodded politely, the agent said:

"You think I don't know your little game. You 're a smooth-faced one, Mr. John Jones of Wales, but I see you makin' signs from your window; you 're a rough-faced one, Mr. Mark Inskip, but I see you answer him; and you 're a little of

the one and a little of the other, Mr. Teddington Smith, but I 'll bet you made a sign too. Only I don't see her. She ain't comin' out to-night just to spite ye."

Mr. John Jones, an undersized man, who lisped as he spoke, and whose words came from him in a ludicrously measured and important set of tones, denied that he had made any signs at his window. The other two laughed, and admitted that they had been on the look-out.

"Ah! it 's 'the Rosebud,' is it?" inquired the doctor. "Now, you better take care, you fellows, or you 'll get your fingers pricked with that girl, d' ye see?"

"It is Miss Rhoda Courtenay you mean?" inquired the Jew, rising from his seat, fingering his studs, and looking towards a window.

"Yes, that 's the name."

"She is coming," said Mr. Mark Inskip, indicating a figure on a door-step which looked from right to left, and then crossed the road to the gardens.

At first sight there was nothing in the figure which should have set hearts palpitating. It was a slim, lithe form, arrayed in some plain dark stuff, which accentuated limbs and bosom, but called no attention by reason of colour. The girl got across the road awkwardly; a hansom came down on her, and she did cross precipitately and slipped, the horse being pulled up in time to allow her to retreat. She came into the gardens flushed, and justified the doctor's name of "Rosebud" for the moment, though colour in her cheeks was rather latent than real. Her face was one to look at because of a swift incisiveness in the eyes, which

were neither blue, nor dark, nor black, nor grey; because of the Venetian ruddiness of the hair, which had the same character as the eyes; because of the sweetness of the mouth, which corrected the slightest severity in the formation of the nose, which might have been meant to be Grecian, but really became "tip-tilted." All her points had been discussed in the gardens many times. They called her "the Rosebud" because she looked well and said sharp things; but they all agreed that, putting aside eyes, nose, mouth, hair, figure, colour, and that kind of thing, it was "character" that attracted them to the girl. What the "character" was none of them could define: she was not, for example, conventional; she lived by herself in No. 19, she made her own living, she made her own friends, she came in and went out just as she pleased; yet they all (*i.e.* all the males) agreed she was the finest flower in Bordington Square, which was saying a good deal, considering the number of them which showed their faces from No. 1 to No. 101, where the square broke into a street of opulent, first-class purveyors of everything.

"Take a seat, Miss Rhoda," said the doctor, who disliked women who made their own living; "take a seat."

"Yes, Miss Courtenay, three of 'em," said the house-agent, collaring the Jew.

And Rhoda sat down. She breathed rather hard after her escape from the hansom, and tried to conceal it by opening a book and appearing to read. Inskip looked at Teddington Smith, who followed the disappearing figure of John Jones of Wales with his eye.

"Yes," quoth the doctor in an aside, "Mr. Jones will get 'the Rosebud.' He has a fine tact; he knows how not to do it. These fools are in love. He! he!"

"He sha'n't get her," replied the house-agent to the Jew; all elderly men, smoking and lazily seeing things.

It was John Jones's intention, however, to get her, even if he offended his father and mother and influential circle of friends.

Miss Rhoda Courtenay kept her eyes on her book, in apparent unconsciousness that she was being discussed in asides. Her heart kept beating after the episode of the hansom, and she compressed her lips as she tried to recover perfect equanimity. Meanwhile the gardens filled up with children who came out to have their last game for the day. The tutor strolled vaguely on the side-walks, and little boys in the street hung on the palings to give vent to certain personalities upon the "swells" who had admission to the summer paradise of Bordington Square.

Presently the house-agent became the centre of a group of figures, and Rhoda raised her head as she heard him, in an eager undertone, exclaim:

"That's 'im! that's 'im! that's the Hindian prince!"

They were peering through the branches at No. 1, and the girl between the boughs from behind her seat observed a slight, slender figure standing on a balcony. He seemed very boyish, but he had an expression on his dark face which attracted her. His balcony faced the east, and he was earnestly gazing towards that quarter, his

lustrous eyes distended as if in a trance. He was dressed unlike an Englishman, but what most struck the girl was the single jewel which gleamed in his turban. He stood rapt for a few seconds, and in another moment was gone; but their eyes had met.

CHAPTER II.

The Rajah.

THE advent of Rajah Mahommed Ali to Bordington Square made a fuss for several streets round about. The men of the neighbouring mews promised themselves unconscionable quantities of beer-money from a man who stabled five horses and two carriages among them. A wine merchant round the corner, who did not understand the restrictions of the Koran, contemplated his vats and wondered how many of them his Highness would empty. The fashionable cook, who supplied all the routs of the district, looked out an old-fashioned cookery-book for Indian dishes, and speculated how she could reach him with curries and mulligatawnies. Milkmen foraged about his areas asking questions, and were intercepted by laundrymen and coal merchants, who wanted to know what the prospects of trade were. A live prince had not strayed into that region since the Russian who had turned out a disappointment, holding low views about his own order, and being so poor that he had been seen frequently entering the British Museum with an evident intent to work. He had no horses and carriages, was mean enough to drive in omnibuses, and having disappeared, was rapidly forgotten.

Here, however, was the real article; and the

retinue of trade gathered, from near and afar, at the area gates, and began to do a roaring business outside them within a few days of the prince's arrival. The first time he had been seen, however, was on the summer evening described, looking towards the east from his balcony. Rhoda's three lovers saw him at the same time, and one of them watched Rhoda peer at him through the boughs. He was the only one who observed the glance of the eyes between them, yet it made him feel uncomfortable. A good deal depends upon that glance, which for the present may be left to itself.

As has been said, the Rajah's arrival awoke curiosity among the tradesmen, it roused envy and heart-burning among the residenters. They wondered whether No. 1 would touch any other number of the square at some obvious social point. They knew in a few days that he was no pretender; for, though a busy place, Bordington daily sent a few old maids or idle young men to survey the spectacle of rolling carriages in the Row, and it was duly reported in the gardens that the dusky Rajah had been seen to bow to the highest people of the land. There was no doubt about him, therefore.

"Who shall it be?" was the query of the party-giving persons, who had houses on their own account, and admitted no boarders into them. "He could not," it was argued, "come into the square without cultivating friendly relations with the better class of his neighbours. Practically he is one of us. We must get the Rajah out. There is no other householder in Bordington Square who has a nod from royalty—from all the

royalties; for they have been severally seen to respond to his inclinations from his carriage."

Such was the argument; but whether it was to be the doctor, the house-agent, or the Dutch Jew, could not with safety be hazarded in the gardens. It was a common subject of speculation, however, as were the Rajah's habits and customs in general. which report reproduced in a disappointing way. He rose early; he breakfasted frugally, though on magnificent dishes; he read books; he went early to the West End before lunch, and after it left cards at the doors of great personages, taking his drive among them in the early evening. He had been seen in the peers' gallery of the House of Commons, listening to a debate upon India, during which the Speaker slept, and there were only three of an auditory; and it was told that he had visited the House of Lords, and been spoken to by half a dozen ex-viceroys and the Secretary for his native land. There was nothing, however, about him or his habits which greatly separated him from thousands of people in the West End.

In Bordington Square, of course, they were very exceptional, as there nearly everybody had to work; but, considering that he was a real Rajah, no rumours of an alarming sort got out about him. The thick umbrage of summer hid his windows from the gardens before he actually declared himself, and it was in the ordinary way of the Square. He came out of his door and opened the gate with his own key, and walked among the residents as one of themselves. He was, indeed, a slight figure, clad in as close a resemblance to English dress as his limbs and trunk could apparently stand. His head-dress still carried the jewel, and

as he strolled among the householders, it was a little while before he became observed. His first movement was to pull a flower, at which a small child was gazing enviously, and to give it to her. This was so monstrously against the rules of the gardens, that a young lady who approached him stopped and remarked:

"You don't know, perhaps, that we are not allowed to do that?"

His Highness turned his large, sombre eyes upwards, and met the quiet smile of Rhoda Courtenay. She was a head and shoulders taller than the Rajah. He showed his ignorance of her remark and his desire to disembarrass himself of his Eastern manners by holding out his hand to her, which she took, with an increasing smile, and returned the shake of fingers which seemed to her strangely cold.

"The Rajah may give me a flower," said the child, moving away as Rhoda repeated:

"We are not allowed to pull them. We have a law that they must be permitted to grow."

"Ah! I am the Rajah Mahommed Ali," said the prince helplessly.

That might have been a reason for his doing what he liked in India, but in Bordington Square it was different. Rhoda, remembering what she had heard the house-agent say of his position, replied:

"A Rajah—that is somebody high up in India. But everybody here, however high, must obey something. You are, in No. 1, a stranger; but you must not pull flowers in the gardens."

"Must not," he murmured, "must not;" and stooping, he pulled a handful and, with the same sombre look in his eyes, offered them to her.

Rhoda smiled, took them from him, and they parted, the Rajah making the circuit of the gardens by himself. His slender figure and sad-dish countenance, and the jewel in the turban, soon attracted attention, and he was watched as if he were some strange being from a different planet—as indeed he was. Perhaps it may be as well to say how he got there.

The Rajah Mahommed Ali was tributary prince of a State which had been friendly to England through thick and thin. That is, when England was making "little wars" on other Rajahs and Maharajahs, the Mahommed Alis offered money and troops to help the Supreme Government against the offenders. His father had done so, as also his grandfather; and it was considered likely that he, too, would do likewise, if the necessity for giving a dole and a sword ever occurred. He was officially a Mahommedan, as his name indicates; but that does not explain the character of his kingdom, which included Hindoos, Buddhists, and other religious bodies. His was the freest kingdom in India—that is, from English supervision, which, as every reader knows, supervises every kingdom in some way, but, owing to their loyalty, the Mahommed Alis' hardly at all. The kingdom of Masalihon was as independent of India as England is of Turkey, who is suzerain of some English property. Masalihon was *terra incognita* to tourists and travellers, yet were its princes known; and the present Mahommed Ali had gone so far beyond his predecessors that he had abandoned his kingdom for the sake of knowledge, and come to England to learn what she was. He was but a lad in years, judged by the English standard, but

to be twenty-one and born of Indian parents is to be in the thirties for a European. Mahommed Ali was no more than in his majority; yet he had the age of his race and climate, which is ever beyond its years.

There could be no denying the impression he made upon the gardens. When he returned to No. 1, Rhoda was surrounded by maids and matrons who, as a rule, had little to say to her, and was overwhelmed with questions about him, she being the privileged one who had spoken to him. And what was his jewel? Was it a diamond, or a sapphire, or a ruby, or a what? And could he speak English? And all of which questions Rhoda was unable to answer because of her surprise that there should be such a fuss about a dusky boy wearing a jewel. She was glad to get away from her persecutors to the seat at the foot of the poplar, where she could read at her leisure.

And now, who is Rhoda Courtenay? For here come the three lovers from the three points of the compass, swooping down upon her. It may be best, however, first of all to say who *they* are; for Rhoda deserves a chapter to herself.

Enter Mr. John Jones of Wales, first of all, in correct jacket and breeches. He is thirty years of age, a Master of Arts at Cambridge, a mathematician on a mild scale, and a clerk to his father, who runs a dry-goods shop in the City. Mr. Jones looks like twenty, having carefully stripped himself of ten years for business purposes. He plants his foot on the rock of his M.A., despising the City, or pretending to. He inhabits Bordington Square because it is within walking distance

of his office. "My office" he calls the dingy little apartment next to his father's sumptuous hall over the dry-goods shop. He is five feet four in height, keeps his head in the air, and has a thin fringe of moustache, which he carefully cultivates, being of the hairless type of humanity which regrets its own smoothness.

Mr. Teddington Smith is walking the hospitals round the corner and up Gower Street. He is a lank lad of five-and-twenty who cultivates a resemblance to a great living actor, wearing his hair like him, and striding as if in tragedy, and talking with a certain hollowness of tone which is occasionally belied by a cheery boyishness which seems to break out in spite of himself. He will be a doctor shortly, and already feels the importance of his position. He inhabits Bordington Square because it is near his college.

Mr. Mark Inskip is neither tall nor short. He has a thickish nose, and hands which are inclined to seem large when they are not gloved. He has a bright pair of honest eyes, a brown moustache and beard, and an odd, short, sharp laugh. He is a civil engineer somewhere, and inhabits Bordington Square because it is neither in nor out of the East End where his business is.

They have all met Rhoda in the gardens; they are all prepared to lay down their lives for her. They each profess to care nothing about her.

"But," says Mr. Jones to Mr. Inskip on this particular evening, "Miss Courtenay spoke to the Rajah."

"Confound the little nigger!" replied the other.

"And took flowers from him," said Mr. Teddington Smith.

"She wouldn't take them from me," replied Mr. Inskip.

"Nor from me," replied Mr. Jones.

"How did you happen to offer her flowers?" inquired the former.

"I see no harm in it," said Mr. Jones.

"But I do," said Mr. Teddington Smith.

"And I won't say I don't," interpolated Mr. Inskip.

But for all that the trio joined each other and walked to Rhoda's seat, and began engaging her in conversation.

"Confound the little nigger!" were words which seemed to reach her ear as they approached; and she raised her head to look sternly at them, knowing it was the Rajah they meant.

CHAPTER III.

The Rosebud.

IT *was* the Rajah they meant; for Rhoda, standing up, her finger and thumb holding her closed volume, to ask who "the nigger" was, nobody replied. It was evident that "the nigger" interested her. It disgusted the young men to find that he should.

"Yes, he attracts me greatly," said Rhoda, smiling on them in turn and reading their thoughts. "I have never been so near a prince in my life, and to have the privilege of being impertinent to one is something to be grateful to chance for. I rebuked him for taking flowers, and he accepted it so sweetly. Only he repeated the offence."

"The beggar doesn't know a word of English, I'll bet," said Inskip.

"His Highness is a scholar," said Jones, who knew better than contradict Rhoda.

"He's a howling swell, anyhow," said Smith, as the Indian's carriage passed up the square and through the gates.

"I wonder if he will come again?" ejaculated the girl; and, to the disappointment of the three, she bowed and crossed the way to her rooms.

Rhoda lived by herself in the centre of the square; and if the reader goes upstairs with her, he will find her accommodated with a small study

in which a number of books, in different languages, look out of a bookcase in a recess. The pictures on the wall are homely sketches of her own, taken on the Devonshire coast: here, a boat on the beach, with its collection of pilchards being carried away; there, a group of boulders with the purple seaweed clinging to them; on another wall, a peep of high hedges with a wild confusion of various flowers and weeds thrown in. Rhoda likes to look at her own handiwork, as it reminds her of home, of the town of Cleaver, and the little inn, and the church-tower, and the rocks, and orchards, and hedges, where she spent her childhood. Cleaver was very dear to her; for when her father was alive—he was the vicar—she knew no care which other well-fed children are not acquainted with. But Mr. Courtenay had fallen ill and died a couple of years before, and Rhoda was thrown upon her own resources. The vicar had not been worldly-wise, or even commonly provident; so his wife moved away to Bournemouth to eke out a livelihood by opening her house to invalids, and her three younger girls joined her.

Rhoda, being seventeen and versed in languages, was allowed to go to London, where she proposed to qualify herself for some high post by teaching and attending University classes. It was a great ordeal for her to pass from Cleaver to London—Cleaver with its simple, old-fashioned ways, and its numerous friends, to London with its dreadful chilliness and paucity of friends. She had, however, got used to her life of independence, and in Bordington Square found a good many acquaintances, who

tried to make up to her for the solitude of her life. But it was solitary, even though she had the excitement of 'bussing it to the West End each day for her hours of teaching, by which she earned her bread. She was busy, however, with her languages, and had long discovered the secret that work is the only solvent of *ennui*. Besides, another element had entered into her life of late, though she did not confess it to herself. She knew that she had the power of attracting the admiration of men; and, though she never wilfully set herself out to extort any tributes from them, the tributes came. What this admiration exactly meant, she had never attempted to explain to herself; for she had her career before her, and proposed to run it to its end. That excluded love, or at least lessened its significance for her. She was, however, but nineteen, and it was impossible that the attentions of the three young men in the square should not affect her imagination. It did; but no further than to induce her to ask herself what preference she had among the three, and how far it went. As yet, she thought the gentleman with the M.A. was the most worthy of encouragement; but she liked the civil engineer, and did not wholly despise Teddington Smith. None of them, however, had been allowed an opportunity of proposing: she kept them at arm's length, and, as yet, had not admitted to herself that they were ever likely to seek a closer acquaintance than they had.

Rhoda in her own room was a pathetic figure to her landlady, who did not see any improvement in a condition of this world's affairs which compelled a young lady to work as she did, when she had so

many graces of person. She would have had her go to balls and parties, and other scenes of enjoyment, more often than she did, knowing how popular she was in the square, and what opportunities she had, if she liked to use them. Yet she used them but little, London for her having contracted itself to the square, the college, and the two houses in the West End where she drew her fees. This evening, however, she had a little excitement—her first dress for an important party, and her landlady stood by her criticizing. It was the costliest garment in her almira, and had given her many pangs of conscience in the purchase; but she had been invited to a great function, and felt obliged to be extravagant.

"Well, then," said the landlady admiringly, "but you look lovely in it. It's your first appearance too, and I'll wager you'll bring a lot of them to your feet."

"Don't be foolish, please, dear Mrs. Pierce. I don't want to bring anybody to my feet; and I'm not so pleased with it, somehow, as I expected."

Mrs. Pierce arranged some mirrors for her, pulled at the fringes of her dress, tightened, buttoned, and unbuttoned; and Rhoda, gasping for breath, admitted emphatically that she was really well-dressed.

"And who's your matron, Miss Courtenay?"

"I am matron myself, for I am taking charge of one of my promising pupils of seventeen. *She* makes her *début*, I don't."

"Well, they are determined to make you old before your time."

"But I was born old, Mrs. Pierce."

The great function was at Lancaster Gate; but the most important fact for Rhoda was, that among the gentlemen who took note of her was the Rajah Mahommed Ali. He attracted a mighty deal of attention, blazing with diamonds and resplendent with orders, and his partiality for Rhoda was the cause of a quantity of cold glances from ladies who wished to monopolise the prince for their own purposes.

"Who is *she?*" was asked with a severity which did not escape Rhoda herself, after the Rajah, unintroduced, had approached and spoken to her. He did not say much.

"You rebuked me in the gardens for the flowers," he remarked. "I observe with pleasure you wear them. I regret I cannot dance, or I should offer to inscribe my name on your card."

It was true some of the flowers were there, though the Rajah did not understand that it was because Rhoda found it inconvenient to spend small change on more expensive ones.

"I am not dancing, either," replied Rhoda, indicating a timid girl at her side, whose card was slowly filling up; on the principle that if she wasn't the rose, she was very near it.

"I find great pleasure in seeing the dance. They take great trouble to amuse and divert us," said the Rajah.

"I'm afraid they don't think of it from that point of view. They are diverting themselves."

"In Masalihon the high-born do not dance."

"Where is Masalihon? I am dreadfully ignorant of geography."

"It is my kingdom."

"Are you, then, a king?"

"I am a Rajah. But tell me who some of them are. I am yet ignorant of the names of the high-born in these halls."

"I'm afraid I'm very badly versed, your Majesty, in social nomenclature."

"My title is 'Your Highness.' I receive it most frequently."

"But your Highness must know the little bald man in the corner. He is——"

"Ah! yes, yes, a group of them; I have had the pleasure of knowing them in India."

"Masalihon is in India?"

"Why, yes. I had thought my kingdom was more widely known. Masalihon is as large as England—yes, once, twice over. And it is not in subjection. No; I rule Masalihon."

"From Bordington Square?"

"Yes, even from thence. To-day I have signed death-warrants to the number of twelve. My Prime Minister has been much troubled of late, and I am removing the causes of it."

Rhoda looked at the gentle face of the Rajah to reassure herself.

"Then you may order executions at your will?"

"When I wish it."

"It must give you great pain to order the death of your subjects?"

She said it with so much emotion that the Rajah acquiesced. He did not seem to understand why it should give him pain—that was a question for the subjects; but he wished to agree with the girl.

"Are you a princess?" he added, while Rhoda was considering how she might stop the conversation, so many were watching them.

"No, indeed, your Highness."

"But you are high-born. You are a premier's daughter, perhaps?"

"No; my father was a clergyman in the south of England."

"He was a—the word I do not know."

"Clergyman, your Highness. But I am monopolising too much of your time; and as I am a matron to-night, I must rescue my young ward from the arm of that terrible dancer."

"Stay!" said the Rajah. "I wish to speak with you. You are the daughter of a——"

"A minister," said Rhoda.

"Oh, in the Councils of the Empress! Politics—the Cabinet."

"The Church," said Rhoda, feeling profoundly uncomfortable, as she saw the effect of the prolonged conversation on the hostess, who wished the Rajah near her. "And now, your Highness, I know your society is wanted higher up the rooms. I see Lady Charing is watching for you."

"She wearies me," said the Rajah simply. "I am not tired to talk with you. Tell me, do you live in Bordington Square?"

"Yes."

"And may I see you when I wish?"

"No, your Highness, not when you wish. I have work to do."

"Work?"

"Yes. I have my bread to make."

"I do not understand."

"How should you?"

"Tell me what it is to make your bread."

"My father is dead, your Highness. I am young and strong, and——"

Lady Charing at this point sent a messenger, in the shape of the bald colonel, to forcibly remove the Rajah. He came down slowly on them, evading the outside edge of the dancers; and though he had his orders to look severe at Rhoda, he did nothing of the sort. His eyes twinkled beneath his grey brows, as he softly asked his Highness if he might interfere so offensively with his argument as to invite him to Lady Charing's side. Her ladyship was dying to ask him about the troubles in Masalihon, and to consult the Rajah about something of the utmost importance. He rose reluctantly from Rhoda's side, and his eyes filled with a look of inexpressible longing as he turned from her to follow the colonel. A smile seemed to ripple over the room. He did not notice it, but turned again and, to Rhoda's confusion, said:

"I should prefer to speak with you. Her ladyship is great, and bountiful, and powerful, but she wearies me. You will promise to me that I may have the honour to see you again?"

Rhoda bowed placidly, glad to see his strange figure losing itself among the crowd. Her pupil joined her, flushed with the excitement of her waltz.

"Miss Courtenay," she asked, "what did the Rajah say to you? Everybody wishes to know. You were the envy of the room, for they wish to hear him converse. He is so artless, they say, and fresh."

Rhoda carried away her pupil early, and left the ball-room after taking one dance with Sir Francis Charing. Next morning, however, she had an opportunity of noting that she had not

been a success. A frigid little note, in Lady Charing's hand, conveyed to her the intimation that it would not be necessary to come as usual between ten and twelve o'clock. A cheque was enclosed, which brought the connection to a summary conclusion.

"My dear Francis, I was obliged to do it. The girl attracted an amount of attention which, for one who teaches your children, is quite too intolerable. Then, I did not like her demeanour with the Rajah. She encouraged him to conversation, and held him to it, when she knew it was distasteful to me. She will not come again."

So said Lady Charing the same evening to her husband. He thought his wife was a fool, but he acquiesced in the arrangement.

CHAPTER IV.

Advice.

MR. MARK INSKIP began to find his seat by his window overlooking the square less exciting than it used to be. He had come to the conclusion that Rhoda had given her heart to John Jones, and it sickened him to see that rival escorting her. For a week he did not enter the gardens at all, but when he returned in the evening from his work sat disconsolately smoking, with an idea that the world had come to an end. It was with some sense of surprise, therefore, that Teddington Smith burst in upon him one night as he sat planning a retreat to Australia, or anywhere far enough away from Rhoda and Jones.

"Inskip, my boy, what's the matter?" called out Smith, in a vein of high tragedy.

"Everything's the matter."

"Down on your luck—eh?"

"Never had any luck."

"Never said you had; but I've been sent for you. The orders are peremptory; they've got to be obeyed right away."

"I sha'n't take any orders you bring, Ted. Let me alone, will you? I'm not fit company for man or beast, and I can only sit still and smoke."

"You're taking it like that, are you?"

"Taking what like that?"

"You know," said Smith, balancing himself on one leg and wheeling round till Inskip felt giddy. "My orders are from the Rosebud, sir, who waits for you in the gardens, and who has sent for you expressly. In the meantime, Mr. John Jones is having all the advantage of my absence and your dilatoriness in monopolising her person and conversation. Hurry up, grumps, or it will be dark!"

Inskip rose and looked from the window. Sure enough, Rhoda was standing with Jones, and had, apparently, been looking up: her attitude seemed to indicate that. Inskip's heart went to his mouth.

"You 're not joking, Ted?"

"No, I 'm not. She wants the benefit of your great sagacity. Come along!"

The pair entered the gardens, and Inskip was charmed to hear Rhoda say:

"I was afraid you were ill. I believe you *are* a little ill?"

"No, I 'm not. I 'm all right. Did you send for me?"

Mr. John Jones put as much contempt into his features as they could carry, as he noted the absurd affectionateness of Inskip's face when he was addressing the girl.

"I wished to see you—all three of you. There is wisdom in the multitude of councillors, says the proverb. I want to be wise; though really Mr. Smith is not perhaps ready to advise. He is so flippant."

"Flippant! My dear Miss Courtenay, plumbago is a feather to the weight my advice will have, if you do me the honour to include me in the council."

"Come, then, let us walk about."

They strolled away, nowhere in particular, led by Rhoda, who commenced again:

"But I hardly know where or how to begin. Mr. Inskip, you are sympathetic; help me."

"Only tell me how, and you shall have the help right off."

"That is not true insight and sympathy. It is brutal frankness."

"Mr. Jones, cannot you come to my aid?"

"I 'm considering how," said Jones.

"Let 's have a game at lawn-tennis!" called out Smith, thinking he had fathomed the difficulty.

"Not now," replied Rhoda; "I am serious. My difficulty is this. You are aware, my councillors, that I am an independent worker, that I live by my own earnings, that I teach to live."

The councillors hung their heads as if they were being rebuked.

"I do not," pursued the Rosebud, "say so out of boastfulness, but because I have been deprived of some of my work, and——"

She faltered, and Inskip, thinking he understood, burst out:

"By Jove! I've got twenty pounds upstairs. They are yours now, if you 'll have them."

"Mr. Inskip!" said Rhoda, drawing away from him, "how *could* such a thought enter your head? I think, after all, I was wrong in consulting you."

Mr. Jones felt his spirits mount as he murmured:

"Most insulting!"

"It wasn't meant in that sense at all," said

Rhoda; "I am sure it was kindness of heart, but it was a misunderstanding."

"I'm a blamed fool," said Inskip humbly. "I didn't mean it a bit; but sometimes I'll say anything that comes up my back."

"You're a pretty councillor!" said Smith.

"Now there's an end to it!" exclaimed the Rosebud, lifting a forefinger. "Hear me out. For no reason that I can think of, I've been ordered by Lady Charing not to read with her children any more. I lose, therefore, the most remunerative part of my day. Mrs. Pierce says, 'Never mind. It'll all come right,' which is very good of her indeed; but in the meantime I shall get into debt—debt, which is the horror of my soul——"

Inskip very nearly made his offer over again, but repressed himself in time.

"Yes, my peculiar dread. Now, I have a way out of it. Can you guess what it is? and will you say, please, frankly, whether it is a way which commends itself to your judgment?"

"She has a proposal of marriage," thought Jones, as he leant on a tree to support himself.

"The Rajah Mahommed Ali has asked me to read European literature with him at No. 1, and his remuneration will be princely."

The announcement came like a thunderbolt.

"Confound the blackamoor—I mean, bless him," said Inskip, who felt that he was in imminent danger of putting his foot in it.

"The prince has not got his answer yet. I thought I should take some impartial advice first of all. Mr. Inskip blesses him, so I presume that he views the offer favourably."

"I don't, indeed! Why can't you come and read European literature with me instead? I'll take four hours a night of it. I'm as ignorant as a hedgehog about European literature."

"I know you are; and care for it as little. I accept your blessing for the Rajah. Say, Mr. Jones, what you think."

"It requires deep consideration," said Jones gloomily.

"But I have no time. I must decide at once."

Jones thought if he had known sooner he would have proposed. Smith considered that there would be no great harm in reading literature with an insignificant fellow like the Rajah.

"I agree," at last said Jones, "with Inskip, that you had better not. Upon my word I rather think it would make a scandal in the square. It would make a grave scandal. They would say all sorts of ill-natured things about you, and you would be made very uncomfortable. I wouldn't read with him. I really wouldn't. No, I don't think it will do at all. I've heard strange things about that Rajah. We have an agent, home from Mudderpore, who tried to get our soap into Masalihon—he knows a lot about him and doesn't like him. In fact, he tells dreadful stories of him; I couldn't repeat to a lady what he says."

"Perhaps your agent didn't sell any soap to him," interpolated Inskip, who did not relish Jones agreeing with him.

"That doesn't matter a bit, and has no bearing on the question. No, Miss Rhoda, as an old friend, I would sincerely advise you *not* to read literature with the Rajah."

"If your agent's soap stories are all you have

to go on, then I wouldn't give a brass farthing for your advice. The fact is, Miss Rhoda, you should decide for yourself. Only, all I can say is, I wish I were the blackamoor."

"Please not to call him that. He is really a prince of India, and that is much to a person like me. I cannot afford to despise him, and would not if I could. In fact, he interests me greatly."

The three men sighed and hid their disconsolate looks by various shifts of person.

Rhoda continued:

"I may take it, then, that two approve and one dissents. Very good, I shall read with the Rajah."

And, forthwith, she left the gardens and penned the note:

"Miss Rhoda Courtenay begs to thank H. H. Rajah Mahommed Ali for the suggestion that she should read European literature for two hours with him, thrice a week. She will, at his convenience, commence reading from books in the English, French, German or Italian languages. She awaits his pleasure for the appointment of hours suitable, and hopes that under her tuition H. H. may make satisfactory progress."

CHAPTER V.

Employment.

RHODA COURTENAY did not understand what forebodings mean. They are very real to some people, who profess to have lived in advance every misfortune in life which has overtaken them or theirs. Still, having written to the Rajah to say that she would read European literature with him, she felt profoundly uneasy all the evening; and on Sunday not even a visit to the Foundling Hospital, and the use of an open ear to the sweet singing of the gentle castaways of old Captain Coram, brought her mind back to its usual equilibrium.

Rhoda was not a modern politician of the democratic type, though she led a life of compulsory independence, and the master of a kingdom, though he was but a dusky boy, rather impressed her imagination. It was something, too, to be the only one in the square who should be asked to approach him in his stronghold of No. 1. Then there was another reason even more potent with her. Her mother was in deep distress for want of money. Her invalids had all turned out failures on her hands, two of them carrying things to such lengths that they died on her premises, owing her large sums, which there seemed no prospect

of recovering without still larger sums being expended in legal expenses. She asked Rhoda to do what she could to help her, just at the crisis when she was out of her best engagement. The Rajah's tuition would enable her to part with a small surplus. That, of course, was a very delightful idea; yet there was a certain anxiety about it which the girl could not explain to herself. She was as fond of adventure, however, as a boy, and she succeeded in putting away sad thoughts before the hour of her first reading came round. Not without a preliminary incident, which struck her as being grotesque from the way in which it occurred. The incident was the delivery of three letters at the same time, in the handwriting of Smith, Jones, and Inskip. It was not a set of letters written in common. Far from it. They were composed without reference to each other, and they ran in the following style:

"60 BORDINGTON SQUARE,

"*Saturday Night.*

"Dearest Rhoda Courtenay,—I have sat for eight hours not knowing what to do or say after the meeting of councillors you held in the gardens. I wish very much you had consulted me, and me alone, about your new move about the Rajah of Masalihon. Inskip is a fool, and Jones is a little bit of a knave, and neither of them are entitled to say to you what you ought to do at a serious crisis like the present. My dearest Rhoda, in one short year I shall be a practising physician—independent of all the world. I think, therefore, I am in a better position to advise than either Inskip or Jones. I ask you now, therefore, if you will accept me for better or worse as your lover, and if you will permit me to consider that we are engaged from this day following.

If you will put a geranium in your window, I will understand that, as I have long suspected and indeed known, you love nobody but me.

"Yours for ever and for ever,

"TEDDINGTON SMITH."

Rhoda gave a little gasp as she came to the end of the letter. After all, it was a proposal, the first she had ever had, and it fluttered her somewhat. She went on, however, to the next. It was Mr. John Jones's:

"65 BORDINGTON SQUARE,

"*May 15th*, 188-.

"My dear Miss Courtenay,—I cannot tell with what anxiety I regard your decision with regard to the Rajah of Masalihon. I cannot explain the disgust with which the advice of Inskip and Smith inspires me. They are not only a pair of fools; they are a couple of knaves as well. I will explain their motives. You will remember that I have told you they are not friends of mine; they are simply two lodgers in the gardens I have met by accident, and had some games of tennis with and some conversation. I am an M.A. of Cambridge, well known in circles which would decline to receive them; yet they have been very familiar, or, perhaps I should rather say impertinent, to me in these evening talks. Fools, of course, you know they are. But they are knaves as well, because it was simply to 'put my nose out of joint'—pardon the vulgarity—that they opposed my serious and well-considered advice. My dear Rhoda—why should I any longer conceal my true feelings?—let us come to a proper understanding with each other. I love you. You love me. I will shortly be in a position to maintain you as my wife. But do not go to the Rajah's, and for the future ignore Smith and Inskip. Consider them as persons you have never seen or known.

Do not trouble to write back at once, but let me have one little sign of your intention to become my very own. Tie a knot upon the muslin curtains, and I shall know.

"Your ever devoted slave,

"JOHN JONES."

Rhoda gave another little gasp, and proceeded to open Mr. Inskip's letter. It was brief:

"75 BORDINGTON SQUARE,

"*May 15th*, 188–.

"My dear Miss Courtenay,—I don't care whether it's rude or not. I've thought over it, and here are the four five-pound notes I asked you to take. Lots of people have to take as much help as that when they are pushed. And believe me,

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARK INSKIP."

It was well for Rhoda that she read Inskip's note last. Two proposals of marriage had the effect of confusing her; Inskip's rude gift gave her thoughts free scope for indignation. She would not, she could not, pardon him for repeating what he had admitted to be a folly. Rhoda paced the room with a flushed face, and attributed all her own perturbations to foolish Mark Inskip's impertinent kindness. For an hour she could find no relief to her feelings; she could not even smile at the geranium and the knot on the curtains—foolish fellows that they were, to suggest to a serious woman of nineteen such childish trivialities! Then Mark's letter caught her eye, and she thought of her mother's difficulties and her peevishness in distress. She did not call it peevishness,

but that was the impression. What could not four five-pound notes do for her, with her frugal way of laying money out? Why, it would keep her mind easy for months.

Then a housemaid came in with a scuttle, and Rhoda leant at the window, thinking of neither Jones nor Smith, nor their irrational code of signals.

"Sarah," she said, "could you take a letter for me to No. 75?"

"Yes, Miss," said Sarah, who was a "rosebud" on her own account to a large circle of devout admirers.

"Stay; I haven't written it yet. It is very short, and you needn't go till I have finished it."

Sarah, who had not been taught to write in her comely youth, admired the facility with which Rhoda penned her epistle. She did not understand writing, but she knew bank-notes when she saw them, and she saw four of them roughly thrust into an envelope, which she was told to deliver to Mr. Inskip.

"Well! if he ain't a mean cad," said Sarah confidentially to a door colleague at No. 75; "he's taking money from young Miss Courtenay. I never *did* like Mark Inskip; he ain't a gentleman, like Mr. Jones!"

Having returned the notes and re-read the proposals, Rhoda locked up the letters in her desk. She could not explain yet to herself, but she felt that she was of more importance in the world than she had ever been before. Two men to ask her to become their companions for life, to promise to marry them—it was something certainly; but she retired early to bed, not being able to set a pro-

gramme for herself of continental literature for the Rajah's benefit on the morrow. She could not tell what would suit him. She felt her judgment was not cool enough to find the literary material. So she went early to bed, and slept rather sound than otherwise.

The readings were to come off in the forenoon, and Rhoda was at the Rajah's door in good time. She had heard much of the portentous luxuriance of No. 1, of the number of strange Indian servants, and the superlative wonderfulness of the furniture of the rooms. But the door was opened by an English man-servant, and she was passed on to the Rajah's study by another of the same nationality. It certainly was an impressive room; a tall fellow, in old-fashioned uniform of '55, with his hand on a curved sheath, standing in front of a curtained recess, saluting her as she entered. He was of some Indian race, it was obvious at a glance, and he murmured a few words to her in a language which she guessed was Hindustani, though she could not tell. The room was well-lined with volumes, apparently of all the European races, and with strange, unbound tomes, obviously from the East. The Rajah was evidently doing his best to become as Western as possible.

As he came through the curtained recess the tall sentinel salaamed profoundly at him. Rhoda advanced to take his proffered hand. He seemed wearied by vigils. At any rate, there was something preternaturally solemn in his dark eyes; his face looked as if it had never been lightened by a smile. The sentinel brought Rhoda a sumptuous, high-backed chair, at a side-table; the Rajah sat down opposite her, and folded his arms.

"Your Highness, I am not sure where I should begin with you. Let me know how much you understand of European languages."

"One only—English—and perhaps a little French and German, but so very, very little, that it will take you a long time to teach me."

"Give me an idea, your Highness, what you have read?"

"These," he answered, waving his arm in the direction of his bookcases. "Everything, everything, and my soul is weary of them; and I wish to know what your European heroes have done, and to hear the strains in which their deeds have been sung. I have been so entranced with Don Quixote, the Spaniard. Perhaps you will read with me first the Spanish and the great knight's glorious deeds?"

"But I do not know Spanish."

The Rajah looked disappointed. He had expected her to know everything. He said he had come to England through Spain, and much of it was like his own Masalihon.

"If you like we can read Don Quixote in English. I haven't read him since I was a child. He used to make me laugh so, years ago."

"I did not laugh," said the Rajah, solemnly.

"Then, if you will pardon me, I think you ought to read what will make you laugh. Your Highness seems depressed, and in need of something to turn your mind from brooding."

"Is there anything in English literature which makes you laugh?"

"Anything? Why, it is full of laughter!"

The Rajah looked a shade more solemn, and answered:

"But if I do not wish to be amused—if I wish to pour into my soul the wise thoughts of wise men, if I wish to feed on the tree of knowledge, if I wish to saturate my nature with the oozing from that tree—what then?"

"Then," said Rhoda, disconcerted, "you should engage Mr. John Jones, M.A., to read Newton's *Principia* with you. In teaching languages, I like to choose what will amuse. It carries you on, don't you know, more easily."

"I do not wish Mr. John Jones. I am content," said the Rajah, placidly. "But tell me who is your Buddha, your Confucius, your Mahommed—give me some knowledge of England's prophet."

"England never had one of her own, your Highness. Englishmen have never been good prophets. They had to go to Syria for a religion; they never founded one on their own account. But you do not wish me to read theology with you?"

"Who, then, was Mammon?" asked the Rajah. "Some *savant* has told me that Mammon was your god, and that you worshipped him and him only. I had hoped to hear something of the English Mammon, and proposed to visit some of his temples while I remained here."

"I do not know about Mammon," said Rhoda; and again the Rajah saw that her knowledge had limits.

"To be truthful to you," he said, "I have made much inquiry about the gods, for it is difficult to rule Masalihon, and I have turned from side to side, from the one God of Mahommed to the five hundred gods from Brahma. I have felt inclined to do what our great Indian Buddha did—lay down

kingdom and power, and become a teacher of my humblest subjects. But I have nothing to teach; I am as ignorant as the unlettered peasant who brings the water to his rice-fields. I may learn something in England, however; you will teach me it."

He looked ardently into her listening face across the table.

Rhoda was confused. She knew nothing of the East. She did not know what she could teach him which would satisfy his craving.

"Your Highness," she answered, uneasily, "I will teach you all I know."

When she rose to go, he called his attendant, who brought a jewel-case.

"You will take what is a poor recompense for your wisdom," he said, offering the gift to the girl.

"Your Highness, I must teach you on this subject too. You must never offer me gifts for work I am doing—and a great, blazing diamond, least of all!"

CHAPTER VI.

How they Took It.

RHODA'S answer to Mark Inskip made that young man increasingly miserable. There was nothing he would not do to lighten the burden for her; and if he had not been afflicted by a certain shyness of disposition, he would have done what Jones and Smith did—ask her to engage herself to him. He was afraid, however, that such a proposal would be premature; besides, he did not just then see his way to housekeeping. He thought seriously, indeed, of taking his civil engineering talents to a more remunerative market at another portion of the English world. Rhoda's letter determined him; he could stand it no longer. He *would* go away and forget his disappointment in new scenes and new work.

She had written him:

"Take back your gift. It has seriously offended me. You already knew that I would not accept it. Such bad taste I cannot forgive."

A few evenings afterwards he was sitting with a cousin of the name of Tryman in the office of a large printing house, off Fleet Street.

"I couldn't get in to-night without a tremendous fuss," said Mark; "your doors were all locked."

"Yes; we've got a big job on. The governor has got a lieutenant-governor or some such Indian nob with him in his room. He is printing a telegraphic code, and insists on having it done with the door locked. The governor told him if he wanted to keep it a secret he should have the door open, and make no mystery about it. He wouldn't though. And as he's paying for his secrecy we don't mind."

"What's the secret, Frank?"

"Only what I've told you—a Government telegraphic code, and we're turning out the only three copies there will be in India. We've got to do it in four days."

The governor and lieutenant-governor came out of the room, the former with a bundle of proofs in his hand. The latter looked suspiciously at Mark and sharply at the printer.

"Only my nephew, Sir Leo. He tells no secrets. In fact, I'm going to make him a Freemason. Sir Leo Pollard—Mr. Mark Inskip."

Mark bowed to the Indian notable, and his uncle remarked:

"By the way, Mark, would you mind going to India?"

Sir Leo looked keenly at him, and asked what he was.

"H'm, a civil engineer. Do you understand electricity?"

"Yes, sir; but I've never worked at it."

"Why do you want to go out?"

Mark looked confused. His uncle said he wanted to go out for the same reason which took other young men there. He wanted to better his position, to make a little money, and see the world.

Sir Leo, who had designed the code, and was proud of it as a little masterpiece of enigmatic telegraphing, said:

"Well, look here, Mr. Inskip, I 'll take your uncle's word for you. Tryman, I suppose I may do that?"

"You may, upon my word. Mark is the finest draughtsman in his office, and he 'll work the code from top to bottom in a week. What 'll you give him, sir?"

"A thousand rupees a month."

"I 'll take it, sir," said Mark.

"Good. Then you 'll get some jumpers and things ready, and I 'll find a couple of comrades for you. You 'll be stationed at Calcutta—they 'll go to Madras or Bombay. It 's secret service, and mum 's the word—you understand?"

"I 'll back Mark for holding his tongue," said Tryman senior, and the engagement was made.

Mark resigned his appointment at his office next day, and set himself to learning the telegraphic code.

"Dear Mr. Jones" (ran Rhoda's letter to the Welshman),—"You surprise and confuse me. I have never thought of such a thing as marriage. If I ever looked into the future at all, I always imagined myself going on alone, and into old-maidenhood. It is, indeed, very kind of you to think of me as you do, but I could not engage myself to anybody. I must be free. That is my nature; and if you have the regard for me you say, you will not seek to interfere with my freedom. Put such an idea away from you. There are so many others worthy of your affection and scholarship, and in Bordington Square too."

Mr. Jones called at Teddington Smith's rooms that evening. He was not too downhearted with the contents of his epistle. He thought he saw in it hope for the future. It would not have suited him to have married Rhoda right off. His father would resent the connection. His friends, outside the square, would not look at a penniless, dowerless girl like Rhoda. John Jones was the only M.A. of his circle, and to the non-academical minds of his friends he was an individuality not much inferior to Drs. Goschen or Tyndall. Anything might come of him, they thought, with his mastery and control of figures. He knew their ideas about him, and he did not resent the delay (that 's what he called it) implied in Rhoda's letter. He did, however, resent Mr. Teddington Smith, who, with dishevelled hair and tragic countenance, was smoking a huge pipe, with his carpet covered with human bones and skulls.

"How d'ye do, Smith? You look pretty well cut up! What fellow's remains have you got there?"

"Cut up!" said Smith, rising and shaking Rhoda's letter in Jones's face. "Cut up! You may say so! If you knew all! Sit down, Jones —sit down. It will do me good to unburden this broken heart. It will relieve me to open the sluices of my emotion. No, it will not relieve me. Nothing but the grave can ever do that. For me there is no relief beneath the sun. Jones, sit down and listen to this:

"'Dear Mr. Teddington Smith,—How absurd of you to suggest that we should become engaged. You know that nothing has ever occurred between us which could lead you to such a supposition. Do not think of such a thing.'

Jones, she writes me in these terms!"

"Who does?"

"Rhoda Courtenay, my friend—Rhoda, for whom I have been dying by inches; Rhoda, the light of my life. Ah! Jones, little did you fellows in the square know, when you were flirting round her, what I was feeling! Little did you know that where you admired, I loved—loved, Jones! But rest, beating heart! I am too prostrate to explain what is passing within."

"Confound his heart!" murmured Mr. Jones. "And what are you going to do, Smith?"

"Do? Do what every pilgrim of love must—win my love or die!"

"You aren't thinking of putting an end to yourself?"

"I am too prostrate to think. Oh, what have I not lavished on that girl of my precious soul's affection, and to get this return! Jones, old fellow, you sympathise with me. I see sympathy in your face. It isn't contempt—no, I'm sure of that: it's fellow-feeling. Jones, you have a finer nature than Inskip. I took him into my confidence, and he told me to go to a place where coals are cheap. He did, indeed—yes, he swore at me, and left the room! And I trusted him. Jones, you've never had the same experience as me. May you never, is my best wish for you. Oh, cruel, cruel girl, when she knows what I am suffering!"

Mr. Jones said he sympathised heartily with his friend. He agreed with him that Inskip was a brute; and, in fact, a fellow they should for the future have nothing to do with.

"If you take my advice, Smith, you'll leave Miss Courtenay alone for some months. Don't

make any more proposals to her. She may come round, you know. A little judicious neglect, they say, on these delicate occasions, is worth a world of attention."

"Jones," said the unfledged physician, "you were always my friend. Give me your hand; let me wring it. My sorrow is too deep for tears. It's an awful and unexpected ending to all my fondest hopes. But you'll stand by me in this crisis. You'll see me through. You won't desert me. You understand my nature so well."

"Yes, of course I do, old fellow. I know what you must be feeling. It's an awful damper. Let's go and see something. It'll take your mind off misfortune."

They went to the "Oxford," and saw a variety of things; and Mr. John Jones sympathised so effectually with his friend that late at night he left him beside the garden railings, singing "Gaily the Troubadour," &c., &c., beneath Rhoda's window, in a number of husky and falsetto keys.

"Well, if it ain't that fool, Teddington Smith!" said Sarah, on her area-stairs, to one of her five-and-twenty sweethearts. "He's a-singin' to Miss Rhoda upstairs, I know. But, lor, if 'ere ain't the policeman on the beat! He'll make short work of him and his Palestines. Now, you get away and keep out of it. There's going to be a row!"

Sarah locked her area-gate. Rhoda looked out of window, and saw Smith embracing a policeman, and heard him assuring him that "she had broken this faithful heart. She had fooled his affections away, but 'Gaily the Troubadour,'" &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

A Way Out of Difficulties.

FROM Bournemouth Rhoda got more harrowing news. Her mother was at her wits' end for means. She was threatened with eviction, and looking forward to ruin; and she wrote her daughter a heart-rending account of her prospects. Her furniture was to be seized, her poor girls would have to go to the workhouse, and she to the grave: could Rhoda think of nothing to arrest such misery? Rhoda thought of many things—of Inskip's twenty pounds and the Rajah's diamond, and for a good half-hour she wished she had accepted them both. They would have carried her mother over her difficulties, and what the worse would she have been? But she did not think so long. Rather, she began to cast up how she might increase her modest income, so as to relieve her mother's pressure; and she decided to devote herself entirely to teaching, and forego lectures in the meantime.

The same day, when she was reading with the Rajah, he stopped her and said:

"I am afflicted to see you to-day."

"And why?"

"I do not know, but have you not lost some of your cheerfulness?"

"No; I think not."

"Then I am mistaken. Pardon me for the interruption. I thought you looked sad."

"Your Highness, I am a little sad; but then I have no right to show it to you."

"Do not say so. To be sad and to keep it to oneself is to increase the evil. One of our wise men has told me that."

"It is curious, but I have thought sometimes you do not appear to be happy. You do not like England, I fear?"

"Yes, I recognise her power. It is not that which makes me sad. Oh, no! But I have a kingdom to govern. I am many, many thousands of miles away from it, and I am not easy in my mind. It is difficult to throw the burden off."

"Your Highness should have brought your wife with you."

"My wife?"

"I take for granted you—you are married."

"I have two wives, but I did not think of them accompanying me."

"*Two* wives!"

"I am a Mahommedan, you will remember—yes, two wives; but I do not miss them—no, not much at all. In Masalihon they are happy. Here they would die."

Rhoda drew back from the table, and laid down her *Don Quixote*. She was teaching a bigamist, then! The hot blood rushed to her face, and her swarthy pupil, calmly contemplating her, said:

"Here, your princes do not take more than one wife."

"No, indeed," said Rhoda, abashed. "I am so ignorant of the East; but I thought where England ruled, the English laws——"

"No, no, Masalihon obeys my laws and the laws of my ancestors. But I do not care about my wives much. They do not understand me. They have given me trouble."

"I am sure, your Highness, I would not have introduced the subject had I realised how painful it is."

"I should like to marry an English lady. I think it would do my kingdom good. It would strengthen my alliances with the Government of England, and—and I should be happier."

He spoke quite simply and in evident sincerity. Rhoda sat in utter confusion to think of the barbarian ease with which he talked of having three wives. She devoutly wished she had not mentioned the subject.

"I should find it difficult to make an alliance with a lady, I presume, being a Mahommedan?"

"I presume your Highness would. Let us, however, get back to *Don Quixote*."

The Rajah rose, and fetched some photographs.

"These are my palace and grounds at Masalihon. My wives are living here," pointing to a spacious building, with marble steps ascending to it, and a marble dome surmounting it.

Rhoda could not suppress the suffusion of blood which reddened her face. She hardly dared to look.

"Your customs are so different from ours," she had at length the courage to say, and the reading recommenced.

But the Rajah did not seem to listen. His eyes wandered from his page, and Rhoda had an uneasy feeling that he was looking at her.

"Your Highness must really give more attention

to the text," she said, in a moment of nervousness, in which she had nearly left the room.

She could not stand being scrutinised by a boy-bigamist, even if he were a king in his own country, and his laws allowed him a couple of wives.

"I attend; yes, I attend diligently: but, pardon me again, is there no sorrow or trouble in your mind? You have not the gaiety of your first days."

"I could not tell you my troubles. They are for my own private ear."

"But I am learned in other people's troubles. It is my duty in Masalihon to listen to what affects my people. I am father of the races, as well as ruler, and encourage them to come to me with their griefs. Tell me, now, what there is in your mind which was not present at Lady Charing's, or in those days we have read together?"

"Your Highness, it is only this. My father left my mother poor. She has grown poorer since his death, and I am anxious to find some position which will keep her independent and help to educate my sisters."

"The lady is poor and has other daughters. Yes, I understand a little. She need not be poor. You wish 'some position'? I offer it to you. I have said that Masalihon would prosper better, had I an alliance with England. I offer you a share of my throne. You will——"

"Your Highness," said Rhoda, starting to her feet, "you have only now told me that you are married—why, twice married! You cannot know what it is you are proposing. It is so impossible that I can smile"—she laughed hysterically—"smile at it."

The Rajah folded his arms and looked at her, and in a still voice replied:

"You see what it is to be still ignorant of the suzerain power. I offered for kindness. I did not mean to insult. But you need not be poor, and your people need not suffer. Whom I befriend I help. I offer you what you wish—position—but you do not take it."

"No, sir; I do not take it, and if you understood you would not offer. It is so impossible that, if I am to remain reading with you, it must not so much as be hinted at. You understand me?"

"I understand," he said gravely; "but I could find you in Masalihon a position."

"In Masalihon?"

"We have two English ladies there—two of them—who have gone out and in freely, and have earned much means for themselves. They were in the Zenana Mission. I procured for them all the liberty they desired. I could procure it for you. My Premier demands an interpreter of European languages. Who could interpret better than Miss Courtenay? You have but to ask what you wish for your services, and you will receive it."

Rhoda could with difficulty suppress a little excitement. Her way seemed clear to her all at once. She could support her mother and sisters, and occupy an honourable post.

"I will not give your Highness an answer at once. Give me time to tell Sir Francis Charing and my friends."

The Rajah contracted his brows, and remained silent for a little.

"I would not make the appointment public in

England. No. It would have its inconveniences. You would not be without friends at Masalihon. There is the English Residency, and people of your own blood. Say that you will accept the appointment, and everything will become smooth for you."

"Your Highness, I will take some time to think over it; and what shall I ask for my services?"

"What you ask shall be given you."

She arose, confused and uneasy, and returned to her rooms, hardly knowing whether she walked or was on wings.

Then she went out again to visit at the South Kensington collections. She had only once been to the Indian section; and she thought she could go with more interest. It would assist her mind to realise what Masalihon was like. Another day she would run out to Kew and breathe the air of the hot-houses to feel what the Indian atmosphere was. On this occasion she went down among the curiosities and pondered.

CHAPTER VIII.

Among the Trophies.

RHODA had never given much attention to India. Her studies did not include the history of the East, so the Rajah's hints with regard to its pantheon and mythology awoke in her mind a great curiosity. She passed through the Sanchi Tope Gate, gazed at the carved pillars and elephant-heads, at the lion and the wheel, with an awe begotten of her knowledge that the real gate, away in the East, was eighteen hundred years old! She turned to the Buddhist and Moslem photographs of palaces and temples, and keenly scrutinised their wonderful tracery of gods and goddesses. She stood at the foot of Akbar's throne, and smiled as she remembered the offer she had received from Mahommed Ali to share his royal seat.

Was it a dream, she asked herself, that she, an English school-girl, should be asked by a great potentate to rule with him a territory about the size of England?

"Queen of Masalihon," she murmured, as she passed to a miniature of one of the wives of Akbar.

It was his Sultana Mehal, and very simple and unostentatious she looked among the gorgeous surroundings. She wondered if Mehal resembled the Rajah's Hindoo consort? Then there was

Roumi, the Moslem wife, and Miriam, the Christian, and what were they like? Rhoda looked about the section for them, but it was Mehal only who had been immortalised; the Christian wife was not there, nor the Moslem. As she thought of what she had read about Akbar, her resentment at the beginning gave way to a certain feeling of pity for the poor prince, who did what his predecessors were used to do, nothing worse than that.

As her eyes got more used to the chased brasses which had swung with incense, to the wonderful pottery and jade; to the tiger-heads in gold, and the cannon and arquebuses, a great longing came over her to see these things as they were in India. Yes, she decided, she would go to Masalihon as interpreter. The offer had come to her at a moment when it would save her family from misfortune; she would spend some years at the Rajah's Court, and—precious idea!—she would perhaps realise a fortune, and come back a great rich Nabob of twenty-four.

The section was thinly attended that day, and, as Rhoda returned to the figure of Mehal and her transparent draperies, she did not know that she was being carefully watched from the region of Akbar's throne by an anxious young man, with a brown moustache, who grew pale at the sight of her. It was Mark Inskip, who had been advised by Sir Leo Pollard to take a run round the section before he went out. It would help him to understand India, he was told; but here was a much more interesting object than any the museum presented.

Mark did not know whether he might speak to

Rhoda or not. He feared a rebuff, or he would have approached her at once; so he stood aside and hated himself for the blunder he had made, and hated "the whole show," as he called it, because it was part of the India to which he must go, leaving behind him this precious Devonshire girl to the attentions of a fellow like Jones, or even of Smith—who could tell? And still Rhoda stared at Mehal, and smiled to herself, and her lips seemed to move; and Mark, remembering her readings with the Rajah, turned, with a feeling that his heart was broken, to another room. He could not rest there, however; he was obliged to come back in a few minutes, when he found Rhoda had not left that hideous idol, as he called the gentle Mehal, but stood in rapt attention, as if she would have liked to change individualities with it.

"It 's something that confounded nigger has been saying to her that has sent her here—that I know. What did she care about Indian things till that fellow turned up in the square?"

Mark had an angry expression on his face at that moment, and just then Rhoda turned towards him, with a sigh. At first she hardly seemed to note his presence, but the blood forsook her face as she advanced to him. Mark did not think she would speak. He very much wished himself at Jericho—the girl's calm, unimpassioned way terrified him, though he knew from her expression that she was profoundly moved. Mark raised his hat; Rhoda bowed, and passed on.

He thought if he were going to India he would never see her again, and something like a sob came up his throat: she considered that if she were to

go to India, it would be wrong to part with poor Mark, who meant nothing but kindness, as if he had mortally offended her; so she turned and held her hand out to him.

"It seems strange that you should be here to-day. You couldn't—no, it isn't possible."

"What isn't possible, Miss Courtenay?"

"That——" She paused and added: "I hardly dare say what I am thinking; but you couldn't have followed me to South Kensington?"

"You are willing to think very badly of me. I didn't follow. I was here before you came in to look at these trumpery trinkets and broken gods."

"No, I do not wish to think badly of you, but I know that you are careless about such things, and—well, after all, it is only vanity and suspicion: you have as much right to be here as I. Trumpery trinkets and broken gods! Why, to me they are full of interest."

"I ought to be interested in them too. Sir Leo Pollard sent me on here to look them over, and gave me one of Bird's books to read them up. I don't care a fig about them, however. A lot of ugly monsters, with neither shape nor form in them!"

"You do not know what you are saying. Come with me and look at Mehal."

"That thing!" said Mark, contemptuously.

"It is Mehal, the wife of the great Indian Emperor, Akbar."

"I never heard of her before," said Mark, "nor of him either, for that matter of it. I don't admire his taste, but I daresay he had plenty more wives. These niggers have no sense of decency."

"The great Akbar had three wives—this was

the Hindoo wife; but there was a Moslem wife, and—and Miriam, but I have searched for Miriam without finding her."

"The old rip! He ought to have been hanged from one of the pillars of his own throne! Who was Miriam?"

"Miriam was a Christian," said Rhoda, with so faltering a voice that Mark looked at her.

"I daresay it was all about the time of Noah, and didn't much matter," said Mark, whose notions of history were confined to the date of Magna Charta and the passing of the first Reform Bill.

"No, it was no later than the time of Queen Elizabeth."

"Well, that wasn't yesterday," said Mark.

"No, not yesterday; but how interesting it is! For the Rajah Mahommed Ali tells me—or, rather, I infer from what he tells me—that Masalihon is now not so very different from the kingdom of Akbar in Akbar's own time."

"Ah!" said Mark vaguely, feeling grateful to be permitted to hear Rhoda's voice so near him.

"Yes; and he, too, has a Hindoo wife and a Moslem wife."

"I should have thought that very likely. I have no patience with these fellows. And hasn't he got a Miriam, too?"

A pang of pain shot through Rhoda's heart as the question, idly put, was asked her. She turned her eyes away from the engineer's face, which was beginning to wear a look of peaceful content.

"No, he—has—not—got—a—Miriam."

There was a moment of silence, and Mark dismissed the Rajah out of his mind. He was going away in a day or two because this girl had

given him no hope of a chance of loving her. Yet she was almost cordial to him now. Could he dare to suggest to her that she was all in all to him?

"I should so like, I think, to see their palaces and temples," said Rhoda, leaning her head towards a photograph.

Mark's heart palpitated.

"Would you really like to see them?"

"Yes, of course I should. Then my poor little readings in history would become living images of great beautiful facts, in architecture and landscape, and manners and customs."

"That's only a wish, though?"

Rhoda did not say that she had an opportunity presented her of realising the wish.

"Only a wish," she repeated mechanically.

Mark's heart nearly stopped beating altogether.

"Rhoda!" he said thickly; "Rhoda!——"

He had never addressed her so familiarly before. She shrank from him, and a flash of anger lightened in her eyes.

"Not 'Rhoda,' if you please, Mr. Inskip. I am not your sister!"

"No, thank goodness, you are not. You are far more to me than fifty sisters. Rhoda, I can take you to India. I am going there. You may see as many palaces and temples as you have a mind to. In a few days I am starting for Calcutta on secret service business, and I will—I am—in fact, I can afford to keep a wife."

"And what interest has such a communication to me?" asked Rhoda, turning to Mehal automatically.

Mark sighed, and his face fell, and he mumbled, his voice rather broken:

"Forgive me, but I was fool enough to think that it might have some interest for you. I was wrong, but don't let us part with hard words. It 's a long journey I am taking, and we may never see each other again. I would like to bid you good-bye without a shade coming between us. You will shake hands with me, Miss Courtenay?"

"Why, of course; here is my hand—both of them, if you are so inclined."

Mark took them both, and held them in one of his; but he could not speak a word. She had refused him. She had declined his help. He left her precipitately, and fled down the corridors, ashamed of the weakness which moistened his eyes.

Rhoda stood watching his retreating figure, and asked herself:

"What is it they see in me? Four of them pressing me to become their betrothed, and one of them with a kingdom!" She went back to Mehal, and added: "A kingdom and two wives. How much odder is life to me than I thought it would become! Poor Mark! he is very sincere; but I must be free, and in my freedom I shall accept the Rajah's offer, and take the interpretership. Mother shall have no more anxieties, and my sisters shall be provided for, and I shall make ever so much of a fortune. I wonder if I shall meet the Roumi and Mehal, who have given the Rajah so much trouble? Perhaps I may, and he may bring Miriam to Masalihon too. Well, I shall not mind. In the first place I shall go down to dear old Cleaver and refresh my memory, and on to mother, and let her know the good news in Bournemouth. After that——"

CHAPTER IX.

A Bordington Scare.

THE doctor, the Dutch Jew, and the agent were smoking as usual their evening cigars in the Bloomsbury Gardens, when they were approached by Teddington Smith. Smith had become a little disreputable of late: it was rumoured of him that he behaved in a silly maner at public bars, and brought his silliness into the region of respectable householders. He would have been snubbed by the three oracles had his appearance not been as strange as a man in a tragedy. His jaws were cadaverous and his cheeks livid.

"I say, young man," said the doctor, "you 're playing ducks and drakes with your liver. You 'd better go home to your bed."

"That 's where you 'd like me to be, isn't it?"

"You 're goin' it too hard, young 'un," said the agent. "Suppers all over the shop—home at any time o' the morning. D' ye think now, with the noises you make, that you 're worthy of Bordington Square—the most respectablest square in Bloomsbury: for I ought to know; for I let 'em, hevery one of 'em."

"With sixty house exceptions," said the Dutch Jew.

"Hexceptions proves the rule," replied the agent. "The rule is I let; that 's all I want to prove."

Smith began plucking leaves and breaking twigs.

"Well! you are like a feller in a play, pluckin' the precious leaves as we 'ave to pay so 'an'somely for. What 's the matter, Mr. Smith?"

It was not clear whether he was quite sober; but sorrow and illness are so much akin to inebriety that the fee-gatherer again advised him that his liver was disordered, and he had better get inside his bed, as he respected his chances of life.

"You 're all older men than me," said Teddington Smith, "but you 'll tell me, you who know how to put two and two together — the Rosebud 's gone!"

"Dead, d' ye mean?" interrogated the doctor.

"How should I know! But she 's out o' the square, and Mrs. Pierce's servant says she believes she 's been done away with."

"That ain't evidence," said the agent. "Mrs. Pierce's Sarah ain't evidence. She 's got a brigade o' young men, has that girl. Mrs. Pierce had better hand her round to a window and door looking down a quiet place—a mews or something o' that sort. She attracts too much attention, she do."

"Miss and maid, they 're both alike," remarked the Jew.

Mr. John Jones came circling round the gardens, with a distressed face.

"Have you heard anything of Miss Courtenay?" he asked of nobody in particular.

"Yes, rather. Mysterious disappearance. Sarah says she 's been done away with. What more do you want?"

"You think it 's a joke, Mr. Pinewood; but it isn't. I can't find any trace of her anywhere, and

Sarah said to me that Mrs. Pierce had a letter from Bournemouth, asking whatever she had left to be sent on there. And she didn't write the letter—it was her mother, and the edges of the envelope were black."

"Well, her 'usband's dead," said Pinewood, "and they like to keep the black flag up. It's interestin', an' calls attention to their lone condition, an' as good as says 'You see I ain't a old maid, I'm one as 'ad a 'usband.'"

"Yes, that's about it. I daresay Miss Courtenay's with her mother," replied the doctor.

"But, sir, she isn't. I have made inquiries in Bournemouth, and find she isn't; and her own mother don't know where to find her."

"Ask the Rajah," hazarded the Dutch Jew.

"That's just it again," pursued Mr. John Jones. "I have made inquiries, too, at No. 1. They know nothing, except that she don't read there, and the Rajah's health has suffered, and he is in Italy or going to it. It cost me five shillings to get that information!"

"More than it's worth," said the Jew.

"I thought so! I thought so!" exclaimed Teddington Smith. "I put two and two together. The Rosebud's eloped with the Rajah. Foul fiend that he is! Sooty emanation of the infra—the infernal regions! Black-hearted, base ruffian! He has plucked the Rosebud—he is wearing it now!"

"And, ah! he's left its thorn with thee," murmured Mr. Pinewood, who knew a good deal of verse in an uneducated way.

"Yes, Mr. Pinewood, he has; I admit it. But, oh! it's all nothing to me. I was engaged to her—

she would have married me. Is it any wonder that I should b-b-break down?"

He broke down accordingly, and retired looking very disreputable, and the agent made sure he would one day make a fool of himself on the stage.

"He ain't got no self-control, like Mr. Jones, d' ye see," explained the doctor, as that crestfallen young man disappeared round a tree.

The same evening Bordington Square was full of the story that Miss Rhoda Courtenay had been the victim of a foul plot; that she had been murdered, abducted, married out of hand against her will, and what not. The areas inclined to a theory of murder, the drawing-rooms to abduction, the parlours to a marriage against her will.

In the meantime Rhoda had travelled back to Cleaver. She had not been to the little place since her father died. How silent and sleepy the river looked as it passed, without ripple or current, into the deep sea beneath the rocky headland! How much smaller the vicarage looked among the dwarfed trees! And the Norman tower of her father's church seemed to have lost something in dignity and greatness. To her recollection it had always seemed on the scale of St. Paul's; but now she found that St. Paul's had the advantage of it in size.

Then, what a number of people she knew who were now in their graves! The Bartons, the Cowards, the Dilkes, the Knights, the Maples—one or two or three out of each family, and their names inscribed on their graves. She saw the vicar

between a couple of hedgerows—he was tasting cider from a boy's barrel,—and though she rather liked him, she did not pluck up courage to call and say she was the daughter of his predecessor. Rather, she preferred to go along the pathway to the western headland, inside a cove, where the little fishing-village of Porter lay embosomed among roses, well out of reach of the sea, and, indeed, of all the elements except rain. Many a time she had sketched Porter and its gateways and old pumps and hedgerows.

She went back to Cleaver by a circuitous route, and filled her hand with the blue and purple and crimson and gold of a hedgerow for her mother's vases at Bournemouth. And next morning, without looking up any of her old friends, she went on by train to the watering-place her mother had made her home. She found things there a little desolate.

Her mother, who was not made for adversity, but who would have flowered into fruit in prosperity, met her with tearful eyes, and had a sad story to tell.

"Rhoda, I must give up the fight. It is killing me!"

"Indeed, mother dear, I think it is. You look so worn and wearied. How are Josephine and Georgie and Mary?"

"They are killing me, too, with their rude health and high spirits. And Georgie has increased my troubles by getting engaged to an idle young fellow, whose father says it is impossible he will ever be able to keep a wife."

"What! Georgie engaged? why; she is two years younger than I am!"

"Ah! yes, Rhoda, but you are the eldest; you always had a staid disposition. But her engagement is the smallest of my troubles. Dear Rhoda, you have not met Mr. Stirk—he is senior curate, and knew—and knew your—your father. He is my own age, and he wishes to assist me. He knows how hard-pressed I have been. Mr. Stirk has not the opportunity to make money, but he offers to do all a good man can do. If I give up this great house and go to a cottage, close by the Tichborne estate, he will come there."

"How good of him!" said Rhoda sceptically.

"Yes, Rhoda dear, he will come there, and—really, dearest one, I do not know how to express it all to you, but——"

And Mrs. Courtenay drew her daughter towards her, kissing her on the brow, without further words.

"Oh, horrible, mother! He will ask you to become Mrs. Stirk. Indeed, mother, I will not allow it. I will not have that great hulking fellow for my step-father. He is wall-eyed. He smells of spirits in the forenoon. He always stumbles on the doorstep and trips on the mats, and puts the table-napkins in his coat-pocket at luncheon. You will not marry him, mother? I cannot allow you to think of such a thing!"

Mrs. Courtenay was in low spirits, and could not resist her daughter.

"I do not," she said, recovering herself with sal-volatile, "profess to like him, Rhoda; it is for your sake and the girls' that I should—should marry Mr. Stirk. He has a hundred and eighty a-year, and *might* get a vicarage."

"He may get ten vicarages, but he shall never

get my mother," said Rhoda, putting her arm round her waist, and leading her into the garden, where she was shown the splendid water-melons under the fir, and a host of other succulent things which come up nowhere out of Bournemouth.

"But this life is very tiresome to me, and now it has become impossible; for I have notice to quit, and I have wearied out the patience of all my friends by asking their assistance. They see no end to it, Rhoda. I am truly at my wits' end!"

"Mother, you need not be. What do you think I have come for? Only to let you know, of course, of a way out of all your troubles. But, first of all, you must not treat me as I treat you about foolish Mr. Stirk. I am to have your consent before I begin telling you what it is."

"Why, Rhoda love, you are to be married yourself, and you do not as much as ask my leave!"

"No, I am not to be married, mother: but I am to leave England for a time, and I am to take a high post in India, where my knowledge of European languages will let me make money; and I shall make enough for myself, and you, and Mary, and Josephine, and Georgie—what do you think of that?"

"India, Rhoda, is a great way off. We have a number of Indian people here: they are all very bilious, and spent, and disappointed, I think; but they do not want money. No; certainly they have as much of that as they seem to require."

"Exactly, my dear mother. Now, this is what I say. You are to be the best and dearest of all mothers; to stay where you are, and let me go from Plymouth without so much as a word to any

one, except the solicitor, who will make payments as regularly as I receive them. You cannot think what sums I shall make—thousands and thousands of rupees!"

"Is a rupee a penny or a shilling, dear? I am so ignorant."

"It is two shillings, you stupid mother; and I am not sure that it isn't half-a-crown sometimes. I don't know how it is, but it goes up and down, like old Weller's omnibuses in the city."

"It is a serious step, Rhoda; but here are your sisters back from their forenoon bathe. We will talk it all out in the afternoon and evening. Perhaps I had better say 'not at home' to Mr. Stirk."

Georgie, Josephine, and Mary rushed into Rhoda's arms, and hugged her.

CHAPTER X.

Off.

RHODA had taken a great resolution, and notwithstanding that her sisters clung to her, and her mother accepted her advice, it was necessary for her to join the steamboat, and proceed to India. Her salary commenced from the day of going on board, and her mother's chance of holding her own in Bournemouth depended upon advances made from her interpretership. Everything was arranged for her by agents of the Rajah, and she went round to Plymouth with a light heart, feeling a tremendous sense of responsibility and importance.

No wonder! She did not so much as know where Masalihon was. Latitude and longitude were very unfamiliar to her. She only knew that it was in India, and that India was governed by England, and that arrangements had been made at a lawyer's office, and that she was to interpret languages—which, or for what purpose, she had no idea of,—and that out of the proceeds of the pay was to come her mother's deliverance. Rhoda had never travelled much before—out of England. She had never travelled by sea at all, and that was wonderland to her.

There were not many passengers: the ship was a British India liner, warranted to run to India some weeks slower than a P. and O.; and the pas-

sengers were a major, a superintendent of police, a clergyman, and some engineers from Dundee. Most of them had their wives with them, and they were going back to India with the utmost reluctance—not so much the wives as the husbands, because the former knew that in extraordinarily hot weather they might go to hill regions with as superior a coolness as the summit of the Mendips. Yet, the voyage to India was charming in its way.

Poor Captain Hays, with a wife and family away somewhere in hyperborean regions, seeing a young lady going alone to India, and not finding her questioning or communicative, took the liberty of being a little in love with her, so that she should be made as comfortable as possible. He protected her from the unmarried ones, though she was very well able to protect herself, and from the married ladies, who wished to know who her father was, where she came from, whom she was going to, and what not.

England is a pretty big place, and there are plenty of people in it, as Rhoda found on her voyage; because none of them knew her people, and she knew none of theirs. It was easier, therefore, for her to keep her secret. It was not much of a secret, after all: but her agents had told her that Masalihon was not an open province for the Irish, Scotch, and English of India; that, in fact, it was a principality by itself, on friendly terms with England; and that, if she didn't meet any of the Residency people, she need say nothing to any one about where she was going.

The British Indians make a long voyage of it, sometimes; no matter what observations, or how skilful, they are condemned to great periods. So

it comes about that, *en route*, people talk to each other and get to know each other.

It is always so interesting for oldsters to see how youngsters take their maiden voyage. After that first brief experience of illness is over, there are at least four points: the sky, the sea, the birds and fishes, and the drama on board. Rhoda was not long in her cabin; indeed, they had not sailed out of English seas before she was herself again, and the clergyman and the major were competing against each other for the honour of giving her a deck-chair. She would much rather they didn't, as it increased the enmity of the wives; but they were men who had arrived at years of discretion, and she must needs let them do what they would in the matter of small courtesies. Once she was really alive to the fact of being at sea, she did not find it so easy a matter parting with her native land. Not every girl had three lovers willing to accept her return of friendship and affection. Many a time she thought tenderly of Bordington Square as she reclined in her deck-chair; and on being offered a penny for her thoughts, prevaricated mildly and said she wondered what her mother was doing.

Still there were the four points about the voyage —the sky in the early morning and at sundown. Rhoda would punctually turn towards the east, when in warmth, fire, flame, and colour the sun shot his rays across the sea. In the evening she would view his descent in the west, mellowing all the clouds with saffron and ruby and gold. Such risings and settings she had seen before in her own England; but the artist in the clouds dipped his brush in richer hues as the *Nancy* passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, richer still as she slowly

worked her way out of the sandy banks of the Canal and anchored at Suez, and the flame of fire became almost too terrible on the African and Indian coasts. As for the sea, its "multitudinous laughter"—Rhoda knew her *Sophocles*, and quoted that phrase to the parson once—assumed different forms all along the route. Now it was a laughter of foam and spray, as in the Bay of Biscay; again of blue, unbroken wavelets, as in the Mediterranean; or of stillness and sleep, as in the Red Sea; but always various and new. As for the fish that showed their heads—great blowing whales from the Atlantic, who seemed to regard the ship as a harmless comrade of the ocean; dolphins, full of trickery and sportiveness, who outran the steamer's speed, and returned on her to dive and gambol for twenty miles or so, and then leave; flying-fish, in their silvery thousands, hovering, like linnets, in the hollow of the water, and tumbling with an ineffective splash when their power forsook them.

All day long these things were new and strange to Rhoda, and she enjoyed them, though her heart was a little sore. But what struck her most was, perhaps, the presence of England—England everywhere. The flags on the ships were English flags; and they had not been long on the glorious Spanish coast before they came to Trafalgar Bay, where the captain sang "Tom Bowling" in the evening to Rhoda's accompaniment, and the major remembered Nelson in a bumper much deeper than his wife liked. Then they shortly had the great Gibraltar Rock lifting its leonine head on the left of them, and a day or two afterwards entered the strong gates of Valetta, and a week or two later saw Perim, and heard the guns booming out of volcanic Aden—

England everywhere, showing strong teeth and asserting protection. So that, though sailing for the first time, there was not wanting a feeling of home in the indications of the various seas.

Getting into the hot weather, of course, was a subject for long spells of conversation, because boxes had to be opened and ladies blossomed into white garments, and punkahs had to be pulled by the hour in the saloon—all of them new experiences.

Perhaps it is not necessary to indicate the events of the voyage further. They were not of a too tragic or too comic nature—the tragedy consisting chiefly in "growls" at the cook, and dark assertions that the propeller would probably break; the comedy being the light and easy banter of the deck, morning, noon, and night.

The clergyman and the major vied with each other in instructing Rhoda. The latter knew all about Gibraltar, for example, and held her for hours giving her an account of the sieges it had stood. Then, finding that she understood poetry, he made bold to point out the very spot where the ship went down about which Byron wrote his "Roll on, thou deep and dark-blue ocean, roll," or about which he thought it was written. He knew something about Spain, too, and on the south coast pointed out a headland with a bell-tower and a bell, which used to be rung when the Algerian pirates came over the Mediterranean from Africa.

"Fine fellows, my dear," said the major; "they knew what loot was, where it was, and how to get it!"

"Loot, Major Wroughton; what is that, precisely?"

"Loot, my dear, is the earnings of the just, if I may put it neatly."

"Still, I don't understand what loot is."

"What you can pick up out of blood and thunder. You've heard of Hodson, of Hodson's Horse, of course?"

"No."

"Hodson was a fine looter. He looted on scientific principles. He never missed a chance. He was devilish poorly paid for his services in money and reputation, so he helped himself; and lots of other fellows did the same, though they never came to grief for it. But these Algerines never did anything else *but* loot—took whole cathedralfuls with 'em, my dear, and left the priests blubbering on the altar-steps. Those were times of it, to be sure!"

Thus it was that Rhoda was instructed as she went along. But the major was not the only one to talk. At the Isthmus of Suez—it was a Sunday—the parson had his turn. It is a dull time going through the Canal, with its interminable lagoons and sandy wastes, and the parson was dallying on deck with a prayer-book. The captain had asked him to read a service if he felt so disposed, and, though everybody looked more inclined to recline on a coach or tumble into bed, he had consented. But first of all he talked with Rhoda beneath a canvas-shade on deck.

They were well on the way to Ismailia, and the banks of the Canal were abundantly enlivened with camels, ridden by Arabs dressed in picturesque old-world costumes, and armed with flintlocks. In the lagoon itself were innumerable birds—pelicans and flamingoes—fishing in waters where the fish have hardly room to move for each other.

"I am going to preach to-day," said the parson.

"I am so—so sorry, I had almost said," replied Rhoda.

"And why, pray?" inquired the injured clergyman.

"Because it is so much more romantic—well, no, not romantic, but—sacred to look out on this Egyptian route to Jerusalem."

"Ah! the captain has been posting you up."

"Yes. He tells me that just here Joseph and Mary, with their child, must have escaped from Herod into Egypt."

The parson had never been confronted with the facts before; he was thinking of a notorious incident in a history much more recent.

"I declare I believe you are right," he replied, removing his hat: "I shall take my text from it, and, while we are steaming through, explain the mystery of the Trinity. Ah! here comes my wife. Wife! let me point out to you the ever-memorable scene (Gospel of Matthew, cap. ii. verses 13, 14) in which Joseph, son of David, conveyed his wife and child into Egypt."

His wife looked surprised; she had never heard of the legend; she thought it was a little profane to localise Scriptural events; she asked her husband how he knew. And at that point Rhoda very nearly betrayed her secret; for she began talking about the Rajah of Masalihon, and asked whether he might ever be allowed to become a Christian.

"He daren't, my dear," said the major, from behind. "No, no, no! He's a clever fellow, Mahommed Ali, but he can't become a Christian; though they say he's tried all the faiths in his

kingdom—one down, t'other come on, don't you know? Have you had the pleasure of meeting the Rajah? I know he's in England just now, much to the disgust, no doubt, of all the good Brahmins he rules. But a very fine young fellow. I knew him when he was a boy, and dandled him on my knee—well, I meant to do it, but was warned off, as my touch would have polluted his royal breeches. I beg your pardon, ladies—his garments. They are precious particular, Miss Courtenay, these black chaps."

The bell rang for service, and the parson preached an eloquent sermon upon the fugitives of the New Testament.

"Well, well, well—it *is* very sacred land, after all," said the major, disappearing to the steward's room to quench a desert thirst with a large tumbler of shandy-gaff.

The same evening the steamer threw out an anchor in the shadow of the ruddy hills of Suez, while not far off a P. & O. lifted hers and went down the Red Sea. The Rajah of Masalihon was one of the passengers.

CHAPTER XI.

The Rajah's Struggle.

WHO can profess to get into the mind and heart of an Eastern potentate who has fallen in love? Particularly, who may understand a youth who was neither Buddhist, Brahmin, Mahommedan, nor Christian, but a little, perhaps, of each? The Rajah had suddenly flown to India to anticipate the arrival of Rhoda Courtenay. He meant to be in Masalihon before her. He would do her all the honour which the resources of his State would permit on her arrival, but in the meantime he consulted the Pantheon in vain. He kept very much to his cabin, feeling the sea to be a hostile element; but he consulted the gods in vain for one favourable sign that his love would be reciprocated. His Brahminism, on the whole, predominated at the period he was descending the Red Sea, in front of Rhoda. This particular evening he sat in rapt meditation within his spacious cabin, in front of a golden image of Vishnu, in the representation of Krishna.

"Krishna," he murmured, "Krishna, give me a sign. I have ever seen to it that your shrines were treated with respect. I have ever commanded the priests to be vigilant with their offerings of food and raiment, for thou art the god of all the gods most loved by me. Give me, then, a

sign that this marvel in human form, who comes to Masalihon at my request, will abide with me throughout the remainder of my days. Krishna! have I not religiously and for weeks at a time conned the story of thy doings—conned them in the Mahabharata, and learnt them by heart in the Puranas? Have I not seen that thine August Festival was observed with a glory unapproachable? Son of Vasu-deva and Devaki, child of the new moon—yes, better than Indra or Vadreya,—I have loved thee from thy boyhood and admired thee, O, dark-skinned, in thy rejoicings and sportings among the daughters of the cow-herds. Eight tookest thou from the Gopis, and on thy finger poised the mountain when Indra pursued. Give me a sign that I shall be as successful in love as thou!"

The steamer turned into the Isthmus; a ray of the setting sun lit up the jewelled eyes of the idol, which for a moment seemed to blaze benignantly, as the Rajah watched them. He rose from his kneeling posture and accepted it as a sign that his favourite Hindu god was, at least, propitious.

Whether the Prophet and the God of the Christian would regard his love with the same approval he did not know; but he went on deck, and felt so happy that, for the first time since leaving the south of Italy, he joined a group of English passengers. It was the evening of a new moon, and they were turning pennies in their pockets. The Rajah stood shyly outside the group, which consisted of a priest, a civilian, a soldier, and three ladies. He looked up at the new moon, and again he returned thanks to Krishna for his sign, and for a moment lost all

consciousness of the presence of English people on deck.

They stopped turning coins and looked at him, the civilian bending his head towards his companion and whispering:

"The Rajah is afraid of the sea. He is praying. Your Highness has not come much among us," he continued, as the momentary trance seemed to disappear.

"We are not skilful voyagers," replied the Rajah; "and I had reasons for remaining much in my cabin. The air here is hotter than Masalihon."

"But what a moon!" said the priest.

The Rajah turned towards it with an obeisance, and wondered if it were shining on the face of her he had elected to make his bride. The *mem-sahibs* coughed, and suppressed titters at his movement. The Rajah looked at them affectionately, remembering that she whom he loved was white-skinned like them, and a Christian.

"Your Highness is returning to Masalihon," remarked the priest. "What were your impressions of England?"

"I did not stay so long as I intended. There are difficulties at Masalihon. My Premier finds the burden too heavy for his shoulders. My people desire my return. What were my impressions? Oh! that she is beautiful with the beauty of the heavens——"

He looked towards the moon, and again he thought of Krishna, and his face was illuminated with a smile.

"Your Highness is speaking of England, is he not?" inquired one of the *mem-sahibs*.

"I spoke—yes, of England, of my impressions."

It was evident he spoke of something else, though who or what *she* was did not become apparent.

"Your Highness," continued the priest, "from what I have read of Masalihon, I should greatly like to pay it a visit."

"You flatter us, reverend sir. We have few visitors, and no priests of Christianity. I should wish a priest to come. If I were to form an alliance with a Christian, I should probably require his aid."

"But your Highness is already married. There might be difficulties."

"But I wish to bring my kingdom into closer relations with England, and——"

The moon shone full on the *mem-sahibs'* faces, and the Rajah saw they were laughing. He ceased talking, and a pain shot through his heart. What if the lady-interpreter were to smile at him as they did—to deride him, in fact, and see something amusing in the lové he proposed to translate into marriage?

The priest resumed:

"By Christianity only can you do so. Would your Highness give facilities at Masalihon to a clergyman of our faith—I mean the faith of the Holy Catholic Church? All other forms of it are erroneous and——"

"Come, Father Burke, you're in a minority of one on this deck; don't be so dogmatic!" replied the civilian.

"*She* is Christian," mused the Rajah, aloud.

"You mean England?" inquired a *mem-sahib*, satirically.

"Yes; I should encourage Christians to come to Masalihon. I am as tolerant as Akbar, who encouraged all religions within his dominions. I think all faiths have a similar meaning, and that the errors of the one are corrected by the accuracies of the other."

"What is your faith, Rajah?"

"I am a Mahommedan by birth, but she is Christian."

"Again!" said the satirical *mem-sahib*. "Your Highness does *not* mean England this time."

"I hardly know what I said; but, priest, I repeat, that if you should ever come to Masalihon, I shall grant you every facility for the practice of Christianity."

"Your Highness has learnt something in England, then," said the soldier.

"Yes; I learnt that the English of England do not think so much of the difference in complexion as the English in India. I have found, in visiting Calcutta, that to be white is to be distinguished, and to be dark is to be despicable. It is good to see the great London, for such a reason alone. It takes a larger view than Calcutta; it is more generous, more sympathetic."

"London is sympathetic to any one with large revenues," said the soldier.

"Did your Highness travel much in England?" asked a *mem-sahib*.

"But little; I found London enough."

"Of course you went out a great deal?"

"Yes."

"Did you see the Charings at all?"

"Yes."

"You would be sure. There was such an odd

little rumour about Sir Francis having fallen in love with his children's governess. Of course there was no truth in it. The minx got short shrift from Lady Charing, however."

The Rajah moved uneasily away, and returned again with a sigh.

"But Sir Francis would not—he has Lady Charing. He would not fall in love with a governess."

"Not at all—not at all," said the priest, with so sinister an intonation that the *mem-sahibs* went again into fits of laughter.

"Ah! Rajah, you never saw her; I did. She was sitting with two of his children reading, and it was wonderful what an interest Sir Francis seemed to develop in their lessons. 'I can hardly keep him out of their room now, he is so bent upon directing their studies,' poor Lady Charing said to me; and, sure enough, when we went into the room there was Sir Francis sitting on the corner of the table smoking a cigar, and chatting with Miss Courtenay. I really couldn't help saying to Lady Charing, 'If Sir Francis were my husband, my dear, he shouldn't direct the children's studies any more.' That word, I believe, was enough; for, after closely watching her behaviour at one of her parties, she made up her mind that the attractive minx should come no more to her house."

The Rajah eyed the garrulous *mem-sahib* for a little, and a feeling of hate came over him.

"I, too, watched her behaviour," he said, with a strange gentleness in his voice, in which a listener could hardly detect a suppression of anger. "It was such behaviour as the princesses of your land might have envied."

"Well, upon my word, so you were smitten like Sir Francis! But I am only alluding to the rumour—the girl was nothing to me. Men take curious fancies sometimes, and I know that Sir Francis was uncommonly susceptible."

"Susceptible," said the Rajah slowly, "and what is that?"

"Oh, it 's a sort of a queerish feeling all over, don't you know. Is Sam there? Is my husband there? No? Well, I don't mind admitting I 've had it myself."

The civilian put himself into as charming an attitude as he could command, the soldier boldly ogled the speaker, and even the priest simpered a little. But the Rajah moved away slowly from the group, and did not join the party again all the way to Bombay.

Before he left, however, the priest approached him, and said he was in earnest in wishing to know whether Masalihon was open for operations to such a Christian as himself.

"Come, and welcome," said the Rajah. "I wish to see your marriage ceremony."

CHAPTER XII.

Mark Inskip's Surprise.

INSKIP had reached Calcutta with his code, and had got installed in his office overlooking the Hooghly. He had an immense apartment to himself, through the breadth of which a punkah swung, steadily diffusing a mild breeze, which only served to stir the stifling warmth of the air and emphasise the hot sickliness of the atmosphere.

He was as nearly naked as the respectabilities of his office would permit; and as he sat with his code in front of him, and a box of Trichinopolies at his elbow, he wondered whether he had done well, for the sake of double income, to give up the cool den in the East-end of London, and the comfortable rooms of Bordington Square, where he had worked and lived. Presently, however, a clerk brought him a cipher taken off the end of his wire.

Slowly Inskip spelt it out. It ran thus:

"His Highness the Rajah of Masalihon has arrived at Bombay, and proceeds direct to his own capital. His stay in England has been shortened by the want of success of Narendra Mokerji in administering during his absence. He is in excellent health, and speaks in favourable terms of his reception in all quarters at home."

Inskip wrote off his telegram, and had it despatched to its proper office. It set him musing more than ever. So the Rajah had given up his readings in literature, and Rhoda was quit of his attentions. He drew a breath of relief, and lighting a Trichinopoly, smoked reflectively over his code.

He sighed to think that that insidious dwarf, Jones, might now have the field free to himself, and that even Teddington Smith might at least have the happiness of seeing her. He looked at the swinging punkah, and loathed the sight of it. He hated the timorous Bengali who came salaaming to him with a light. He nearly sickened as he inhaled the heavy scent of aromatic flowers which poured into his window. Then the noon-day gun from Fort William made a noise, and his *gharry* was brought him, and he set off to the Great Eastern for tiffin.

Some days later he sat at his code interpreting, in a languor of warmth, when he was wakened up by a message of information to a department of Government, which came from Chakravarti, the nearest station to Masalihon. The telegraph, in fact, stopped on the borders of the Rajah's dominions. As Inskip read, his heart gave a great leap within him.

"A great *fête* was held," the telegram ran, "at Masalihon, on the occasion of the arrival in the capital of a young English lady. She is to be attached to the Rajah's Court, but in what capacity has not yet appeared. An escort of household troops accompanied her from the borders, and she rode into the palace-grounds on an elephant richly caparisoned. The Rajah's subjects are said to regard her appearance with indignation, and he is likely to suffer much in popularity."

Something seemed to make it certain to Inskip that the young English lady could be none other than Rhoda Courtenay. He despatched his telegram, however, to its department, and presently put on the wire to England a message addressed to the house-agent in Bordington Square.

"Is Rhoda Courtenay in India?" he inquired.

About the same time came an inquiry from a Government office in reply to the cipher from Chakravarti.

"What name does the English lady attached to Rajah's Court bear?" it ran.

The answer came back the same evening—

"Rhoda Courtenay."

Next day, from Bordington Square, came the reply—

"Yes."

Inskip sat down and resigned his post. Then he tore up the letter.

"I shall apply for service on the Masalihon survey," he concluded: "Rhoda may want me yet."

CHAPTER XIII.

A Prophecy.

TWO days after landing in India, Rhoda Courtenay came to the end of her railway journey, and, being ushered into a palanquin, was carried off to a landing-stage on the great river which flowed through Masalihon. She gave a little sigh of regret as she parted with the last white face at the station —it was the engine-driver's,—and, surrounded by a troop of Hindoos, drew the shutters of her palanquin, and heard the chanting of the men who bore the poles on their shoulders. It was not a musical chant at all, being a rapid intonation through the nose; but there was novelty in it, and it amused her. Presently she put aside one of the casements and looked out, and found to her surprise that she was escorted by a number of horsemen; putting aside the other, she found that on either hand the brown highway was lined with them. Ferocious-looking fellows they seemed, as they rode beneath the overhanging branches of the trees; nor did they cast an eye on her when she peered from her snuggery on the men's shoulders. Stern and lowering, they gave her an uneasy impression that her presence in Masalihon was not as agreeable to them as it might be. Her journey in the palanquin did not last long; but she had leisure to note some villages on her way to the

river, villages so frail and slender of build that the first wind might blow them into space. Grass and bamboo seemed to be the principal constituents; yet were they picturesque enough, with their brazen pots shining in the open doorways, and crowds of brown babies tumbling naked in the sunlight. The natives gazed at her curiously as she was carried by them; but not a friendly glance could she detect. Then the horses reining up at the river, Rhoda had an opportunity of testing the difficulty of descending from a palanquin. By the pier a launch was moored, with the steam up, and a tall Eurasian approached her, with an obeisance which seemed to her unnecessarily humble.

"His Highness the Rajah Mohammed Ali greets the Lady Courtenay. We shall ascend the river to Masalihon when she thinks fit to give orders. Her rooms on board are ready for her service. The great Prince of Masalihon has, himself, seen to the comfort of her ladyship. Is it her pleasure to be assisted aboard?"

Rhoda stood on the wharf for a moment, bewildered. The horsemen, dressed in uniform which she had seen in pictures of the pre-Crimean era, presented arms at her in silence.

She turned to the wide chocolate-coloured stream, on which the sun was beating fiercely, and as she drew her breath she seemed to inhale a thousand odours of flowers known to her only in hothouses. There were tawny fishermen at work on the water, their limbs shining like copper as they dipped their nets from their double-prowed boats. On the farther bank, a thick fringe of jungle closed upon the water, and she half expected to see a tiger go down to drink.

"Yes," she said, addressing the Eurasian, "I think I had better go on board at once," when a movement among the detachment of soldiers arrested her attention. They simultaneously wheeled about and made as if to charge, without, however, moving from their position; and at once a parley began in Hindustani, in which everyone present seemed to take part. Above all the voices, however, was one more shrill, sustained, and earnest than the rest, and Rhoda appealing to the Eurasian, he replied:

"It is a fakir, lady. He wishes to speak. He has seen you on the route, and he would tell you what the future has in reserve for you."

"He is not dangerous, is he?"

"He is harmless, lady; but if you do not wish to hear him, he shall go away."

"But I have not seen a fakir, and am a little superstitious, and should not mind learning the future. Let him come forward."

At a word from the Eurasian the horsemen made a lane, and a strange figure covered with dust and ashes passed through, touching his forehead with his palm, and chanting low to himself. His eyes flashed like jewels, and his long, matted, black hair hung far over his shoulders. He looked at her as a wild animal might, and began in a lugubrious voice to address her.

"But I shall not know the meaning of a word," she said to the Eurasian.

"I shall give you meanings," he replied.

And the fakir proceeded:

"You have come from far away over the sea. From England you have come to the Prince of Masalihon—greatest of all princes who rule on the

face of the earth. You have been pure and noble and upright in the island over the sea, and the lord of Masalihon has heard the fame of your name, and he desires your companionship. Great and gentle and tolerant is the lord of Masalihon. All men may worship the gods of their fathers within his lands. Brahma they may worship, and Vishnu they may worship, and Siva; the prophets of other gods may they consult, and other gods may they worship—the God of England, and the god of Turkey, and the god of Persia. With all of them has the illustrious Mahommed Ali made himself acquainted, to each of them does he do the homage of worship. Thus is there peace in the land. But you who have earned the great lord's love, you know but the God of your island and his Prophet, and you come into our Masalihon to thrust from our shrines and temples our offerings to those who create and maintain and destroy, and to fit up temples to your God of England. Beware, lady from beyond the seas; for calamity lies in your path! But pour into the ear of the renowned Rajah of Masalihon the secrets of your God and your Prophet, and take from him the desire to be just and to be true to the gods of his ancestors, and to us who worship them, and

At this point the fakir turned his eyes upwards, the torrent of his words increased, and the Eurasian ceased translating.

"Why do you stop?" asked Rhoda. "He seems more in earnest than ever."

The Eurasian gave a look of discomfort, and made a movement as of stopping his ears.

"You should not hear it, lady," he replied.

"He prophesies fatal things, and he tells in detail what may happen."

"I insist upon knowing!" said Rhoda, as the fakir, exhausted with his long outpouring, laid himself on the ground and bowed his head in the dust.

"He tells what the people of Masalihon will do if the great Rajah forswears his gods."

"But I am not here to ask him to forswear them. Why should he curse me? I presume he was cursing—in ignorance of my mission."

"Yes, lady, he cursed you and your father and your father's father, and all the line in which blood flowed before it came into your veins. He cursed the ground you stood upon. He cursed the pathway of the water on which you shall go to Masalihon. He cursed the nation from which you came, and the West which gave them birth. He cursed your rising in the morning and your going to rest in the evening. He cursed you at your meals and in your intercourse with the glorious Prince. He cursed you in sickness and in health, and hoped that your death might be made terrible, and your grave an abomination, the common defilement of all unclean and unholy things."

"Do his prophecies ever come true?"

"They are reported to have some truth in them, lady. I should not like to have my future told in the same language."

"Rise, old man," said Rhoda, advancing and stooping towards the fakir, and putting her hand on his arm.

The fakir shivered, leapt from the ground, flung his single garment from him, and rushed stark, and apparently terrified, through the lane

of the Rajah's troopers into a neighbouring wood.

"What did he call out?" she asked.

"Defilement! defilement!"

"Shall I be treated like that in Masalihon" she murmured aloud.

"Lady," said the Eurasian, "in two hours the train which brought you returns on its journey."

"Yes?"

"If the curse has terrified you——"

"Well? Do not stop; let me hear all you have to say."

"Then there is yet time to rejoin your people."

"To go back, you mean, without having seen Masalihon, without having fulfilled my engagement with the Rajah: how strangely stupid you must be, to think that an old man's curse could have that effect on me! I shall go on board, if you please."

The launch was superbly equipped in the cabin to which Rhoda was ushered. A curtain of rich amber silk separated an outer room from an inner, in which she found a couch prepared for her, from which she could look on either side to the banks of the river as they ascended. They soon cast off ropes and got into mid-stream, and she had time to reflect on her situation. In spite of herself the fakir's curse rested in her mind and made her uneasy. Alone she was coming into this Rajah's dominions, without English friends to encourage her; for, except the Resident and his assistant, she had heard of no white men and their wives who lived in or near the city—none save ladies of the missions. She lay and watched the flow of the

river, and wondered whether she had done well in leaving England. A great longing seemed to pervade her entire being—a longing in which she seemed to see in a vision all the beloved places at home with which she was acquainted. What she would have given to press her sisters to her heart! What, to be wandering on the banks of the Cleaver, a little tidal stream with none of the majestic flow of this mighty river on which she found herself—but oh! with how many bosky vales, smelling of apple-blossom or cider a-brewing! with how many cheery walks to the cool air of the sea! Here it was all languor of heavy-scented flowers and alligators, like dead logs, floating on the surface, and Hindoos washing themselves on the margins.

She sighed on her couch, and only woke from her reverie when the amber curtain was drawn by a female attendant, with earrings and rings in her nose, with gold armlets, and on her uncovered ankles hoops of gold. She looked at Rhoda attentively and, being observed, broke into a flow of Hindustani.

"It is not that hateful curse again, I hope!" said Rhoda, devoutly wishing she knew more than the few phrases her voyage had taught her.

"Girl!" she said, sitting up, "you are not cursing, are you?"

The girl knelt by her and motioned her back to the couch, and removed her shoes and stockings, and began kneading her feet, until she felt luxurious and drowsy, and, at last, forgot everything in sleep. It was the first touch of human kindness which she had received since she set foot in India.

CHAPTER XIV.

Masalibon.

WHEN Rhoda woke up, the launch was nearing the city of the Rajah. She went out and found the Eurasian alert for her appearance. She looked ahead, and in the distance saw a pencilling of blue and white mountains on the horizon. She breathed freely at sight of them, and asked if the Rajah went there sometimes with his Court.

"Not often, lady."

"Is it easy to get there?"

"Without much difficulty."

"I see snow on the mountain-tops—how delightful!"

"We do not value it so highly. We like to remain warm. But in half-an-hour we shall have arrived at the palace grounds. His Highness will await your ladyship's landing."

"I think that is hardly likely."

She went back to her cabin and dressed carefully in her summer white, and when she had done she became aware that the little steamer had slowed beneath the walls of a magnificent mansion. As she set foot on the lowest step, the Rajah Mahommed Ali descended to meet her. She had not anticipated such an honour, and her face flushed as he held out his hand to her and escorted her to the lower windows of the house,

past the salaaming chiefs who had been standing around him.

"Your Highness," she said, regaining her breath as they paused on the balcony, "this is indeed thoughtful and kind of you. I had not expected to see you so soon."

"To-day I have had these with me"—indicating the chiefs—"or I should have been with you on the river. You must, after so great a travel, be in need of repose. Everything, I trust, you will find agreeable here. I have assigned you this establishment."

"What! This immense place all to myself? Your Highness is liberal in his accommodation!"

"It is, I think, the most desirable residence within the walls. There are others beyond the mosque, but this is my best, and I trust you will make it a home of happiness for yourself."

"I heard guns, your Highness?" said Rhoda, with some solicitude.

"They were the salute for the launch, and for —Miss Courtenay. And now, let me hand you over to your household; in the evening I shall come again, if you are not too fatigued to receive me, and we shall discourse of the future."

"In the evening I shall be glad to take your Highness's instructions."

The Rajah joined his chiefs, whom Rhoda seemed to detect in the act of lowering at her. Then she turned to follow a tall steward, who conducted her to a curtain on a landing of black marble. He drew the curtain aside, and Rhoda stood at the entrance to a suite of lofty rooms, splendidly furnished in English style, commanding from the window a wide view of an extensive

park. At the further side of the park was a palace; a mosque lay to the right of her; among the trees a herd of deer browsed peacefully. She was led by two female attendants to a bath-room, chilled by incomparable slabs of marble and a fountain perpetually playing. What a luxury it was to get among the spray! Her bath finished, she went out into a hall commanding the river, where a magnificent dinner was spread. The number of attendants was a little bewildering; she had never had so many hands and eyes directed to her plates and glasses before. In an hour she learnt a great deal of Hindustani.

Then she returned to a room where all the books which had ever been printed in Europe seemed to be gathered together. She might, indeed, read literature here, and teach the Rajah to his heart's content. But European literature interested her less than the language of Masalihon, which she hardly knew at all. She took with her to the river-balcony an armful of native volumes, ignoring the service of attendants, who despised her for doing their work.

A curious hour—the sounds from the city were so strange, the voices so numerous, the rattle and "gabble" of the tongues so unbroken. Then a noise of roaring came from the park, and she wondered if beasts of prey came within earshot. Worse, however, than that was the flutter of a great winged creature—a cockroach a dozen times larger than she had ever seen—which hit the wall behind her. Though her emotions were well under control, she rose, startled, and uttered a brief exclamation of horror.

"I should not have come upon you unan-

nounced," said the Rajah's voice from a doorway.

"It was nothing," replied Rhoda, glancing from him to the cockroach; "only it is the first I have seen."

An attendant entered and, clutching the intruder with his fingers, removed him from view.

"And now you have come to my kingdom, what do you think of it?" he asked, turning his eyes to her.

"Everything is so strange just at first. I am bewildered. But this, at least, is very lovely. Your Highness may have been to Hampton Court when you were in London. This view on the river reminds me of it."

"The same thought occurred to me at Richmond."

"And now, I am anxious to know what my duties are to be."

"So soon! You must not think of duties yet. Time for duties to-morrow, and the next week, or the next year, and again the next year."

Rhoda walked away a pace or two on the balcony, and the Rajah hurriedly followed in her footsteps.

"I have been freely cursed since I came. Your Highness, I doubt if I shall be popular."

"You have been cursed! Who has cursed?" he asked, with suppressed agitation.

"The fakir cursed me."

"The fakir shall die!" said the Rajah.

"Indeed, I should not wish you to punish him with death, or in any way. It was I who invited him to speak."

"He shall die the death of a dog!"

"Then I shall not report my grievance to your Highness. The fakir must not die. You must promise me that no harm shall come to him on my account. I think lightly of his maledictions."

"You command me," he said, with an obeisance.

"But to return to the subject of my duties—what am I to do?"

"What you choose, when you choose—something, anything, nothing. I am content that you are here, within my walls."

Rhoda looked at him, and saw that the illusion of marriage had not been removed from his mind. It made her uneasy. She asked:

"Where does the English Residency lie?"

He pointed up the river, towards the mountains.

"Your Sir Francis Charing did say to me it was called the Residency because nobody resided in it. He loves sport and making tours. He is little at home."

Again Rhoda returned to the subject of her duties; and as they slowly paced the balcony, he explained:

"Masalihon is changing," he said. "Some of my chiefs have been to a Congress, and they ask me to give them a Parliament. My Premier does not like the idea. I have been the Parliament until now—I and my ancestors; but they have heard of Westminster, and are beginning to think that what is good for England cannot be bad for Masalihon."

"Yes."

"I am in love with England," he said softly. "Why should they not have what is good for

England? I was told in London that it is the subject of the future among politicians."

"Your Highness, I do not understand politics, but I suppose you are talking about Home Rule."

"You are right; what Parnell Charles Stewart, of the royal family of Scotland, is asking for Ireland my chiefs are asking for Masalihon. This bears upon your duties. My Premier has placed in your library volumes concerning the Parliaments of all European countries; and he wishes you to translate from them, so that we may understand what Parliaments are. I shall have them bound in morocco and gold, and placed in the archives of Masalihon, when you have finished your labour; but there is time for that years afterwards. Do not hasten!"

"That is work which I can readily do, and shall enjoy. I shall begin to-morrow."

"You will be of much help to me," replied the Rajah, imitating Rhoda, who sat down upon a lounge. "It gives me," he continued, "deep pleasure to be permitted to come to your balcony without ceremony, as I might do in England. I am grateful for the privilege. I should not, however, desire you to show yourself too freely in Masalihon—I——"

But Rhoda was not listening. She was looking over the broad breast of the river, and at the dreadful panorama of unaccustomed clouds from which the sun was dropping out of sight. A silence ensued. As she leant and looked, her figure seemed to define itself in every line and curve to the Rajah's eye. He admired her inch by inch, as she gazed away from him. Her exquisite

left arm, on which she leant her noble head, the undulation of her gently-moving bosom, the rotundity of her lower limbs—he dwelt upon them, and forgot that it was the hour of religious service. Religion, indeed! What were the gods or the prophets to this revelation of loveliness?

"It has quite suddenly become quiet," said Rhoda, withdrawing her head from her hand, and confronting the Rajah.

"Your Highness!" she added uneasily.

His face wore the same expression as she first saw upon it in the square. He seemed absorbed with the absorbtion of one to whom the universe had become immaterialized, and nothing existed but spirit; he chanted in a low voice in Hindustuni. Love was the refrain of it, as she could make out. He rose slowly from his lounge, still chanting, and approached her. He put out his hand, and touched her uncovered arm. She shivered from head to foot, and drew away from him.

"Peerless!" he called, in a voice of agony; "beautiful! given me by England, do not look at me with anger! Again I offer——"

Rhoda, rose and he grovelled at her feet, and the sound of the chant died away in a whine of pain.

"Rise, your Highness!" She put a satirical flavour into the pronunciation of the last word. "To-morrow I shall seek protection of the Residency, and ask to be sent home again. You forget yourself. You have brought me here to interpret, and you abuse the confidence I have reposed in you by making love. And such love!

Literally at my feet. Rise, Mahommed Ali. I shall return. Already you have your wives, and you dare, knowing me to be of English birth, to presume to suppose that I could become a third! Go, leave me, you miserable boy."

He rose, and cast a look at her as of a wounded deer.

"I have not loved woman before. I have not — no, I have not — demeaned myself to woman before. Whom I chose to love, accepted. To-night I shall not pursue the subject; but——"

"Neither to-night, nor to-morrow night, nor any other night, Rajah Mahommed Ali. To-morrow I shall seek our Resident, and I shall leave Masalihon, thinking but little of the prince and his kingdom."

She swept out of the balcony, and sought the privacy of her bedroom. Her female attendants waited obediently to assist her to undress.

"Leave me!" she exclaimed; "go! I cannot take service from one of your colour!" and she urged them to the door. Then she threw herself on her bed, and broke into a passionate storm of tears.

* * * * * *

The Rajah left the balcony, and entered the palanquin which had carried Rhoda from the station to the river. He was borne to the palace, and, standing in a room of state by himself, he gave vent to his rage and indignation. The climax of his love-making be-

came a harsh guttural of sinister sounds. For an hour he was beside himself, unable to think, only conscious of the fact that the woman he worshipped turned on him with contempt when he renewed his professions of love. When he came to himself he called his groom of the chamber:

"Feringh Singh is with you?"

The functionary salaamed.

"Bring him to me."

The Eurasian who had met Rhoda in the morning was presently conducted to his presence.

"You have forgotten to tell me that Lady Courtenay was cursed by a fakir."

Feringh Singh gave a glance of discomfort.

"I communicated, your Majesty, to his Excellency the Nawab."

"Call his Excellency the Nawab."

The Premier was brought from his own palace without the walls, after some little delay.

"The Lady Courtenay has been cursed by a fakir. The fakir must be found," said the Rajah.

"He shall be found, your Highness," said the Premier, an astute person in middle life, who, to judge from his girth, seemed to feed well.

"Do not find me *a* fakir, but *the* fakir who cursed the lady. I should have known of this calamity before I went to her. The fakir shall die by the wild-cat. His bowels shall pour upon the earth. He has come between me and the love of the peerless."

"Your Highness is in anger," said the Premier: "the fakir shall die, as you wish, but death by

the wild-cat is—it is forbidden by the paramount Power."

"Nevertheless, so shall he die."

"I cannot, your Highness, hinder the Residency from knowing everything. It might reach their ears, and we should have——"

"An expostulation. The fakir shall die as I have decreed!"

CHAPTER XV.

The Faithful Heart.

THE house-agent soon spread the intelligence about Inskip's telegram of inquiry.

"Jones," he said to that young gentleman, as the evenings were drawing in, "you 're not in it now. She 's in Hindia, and 'e 's in Hindia. We 're betting ten to one in the gardens that Mark gets the Rosebud now."

"He's in Calcutta," said Jones, "and she 's in Masalihon, which is very much as if she were in Exeter and I was at St. Petersburg. The probability is he will never come across her at all, Mr. Pinewood."

"Anyhow, I 've had a telegram from him asking if she 's in Hindia. That looks like business, don't it? There ain't much goin' on in the square now; they 're mostly away to the seaside. It 's gettin' too chilly for a seat under that old poplar. De Shift he 's off to Dieppe, and Brooks he 's gone to Bath, the tutor 's at his mother-in-law's, and all the old ladies are 'avin a 'oliday at some other body's expense, and Bordington's quiet. I must make a tenner and go down to Brighton. Brighton's good enough for me. Good-bye, dear boy; don't take it too much to heart!"

"Insolent fool!" murmured Jones, going into his rooms and taking his tea in a state of violent dejection. He, too, was about to have his

holidays at the seaside, and he was suffering from the agonies of being only two days off them. The state of delicious suspense which should precede a few weeks' leisure, and fill the interval with pleasant schemes, was not a happy one for Jones. Absence only made the person of Rhoda Courtenay more desirable for him. He began to think that he must take up his father's soap and push it himself in the East. It was so difficult, however, to convince the Indians that English-made soap was not an abomination like greased cartridges. But he would not let Rhoda think he had given up hope. After tea he would write her a long letter. He would begin it that night and write away at it during his leisure hours the next two days. After all, India was only three weeks off. Mileage didn't count now—it was time; and, counting by time, Masalihon was as near London as Edinburgh used to be not so very long ago.

He rose from his table, and looking out of the window saw Mrs. Pierce's Sarah walking slowly past the gardens, beneath the branches which overhung the street.

Sarah had a Gainsborough hat on her head, and a tight jacket with gigantic buttons, which became her very nicely, and a dress of some dark blue stuff. Her pink-and-white countenance betrayed an emotion of discontent, however. She seemed to have had a disappointment which grew on her as she looked from end to end of the Square, and no one came.

"Sarah will tell me a good deal," reflected Jones, as he looked at her disappearing and reappearing figure. "I wish I could get a few hours' talk with her."

Bordington Square was out of town; Sarah was still beneath the branches a quarter of an hour later; Jones put on his hat and crossed the road.

"Good-evening, Sarah," he said, in a voice of soft blandishment.

"Good evening, Mr. Jones, sir," replied Sarah, who brightened up as he spoke.

"He has broken his engagement, Sarah."

"Yes, sir, he has. It's the last time he'll get the chance of being my young man."

"I thought so, Sarah. But don't be done out of your walk because he hasn't come. How many hours has Mrs. Pierce given you?"

"Till ten o'clock, sir: but she won't be in till twelve herself, and I could have stopped out till eleven."

"You can't take your walk all by yourself," said Jones.

"No, sir; I ain't in the humour for it now."

"And I daresay he pretended to be in love with you, Sarah?"

"I didn't mind so much about that, sir, as long as he took care of me."

Sarah did not return on her footsteps this time; she walked all the length of the square and into another, while Jones conversed; and on to Euston Road and up Hampstead Road, while he still conversed; and into Regent's Park, where, as the shadows fell, hundreds of couples promenaded on a side-walk.

"They're mostly grooms and second-coachmen, sir," said Sarah, as Jones crossed and joined the amorous procession.

"Don't 'sir' me, Sarah, or some of these fellows

will spot me for a gentleman. I am your young man to-night."

He gave her his arm, and she took it quite simply. Jones wondered what his father would say if he saw him promenading Regent's Park with a parlour-maid.

"Oh lor!" exclaimed Sarah suddenly, as a well-dressed youth with a stupid-looking girl on his arm came towards them.

"What is it, Sarah?"

"Oh, it's that mean fellow! That's his way of keeping his engagement with me. It's my young man, and he's coming down there with that dowdy on his arm."

Sarah gave the youth a look of withering contempt, which was returned with compound interest by the stupid-looking girl.

"So that's your young man, Sarah. What is he?"

"A perrooker. But barbers is always false."

"Never mind, Sarah, you've got another young man now. You won't find him false."

"I know my place, sir. I ain't expectin' you to take more than a walk with me."

Jones scouted the idea; and as her hand tightened upon his arm he allowed himself to say:

"You are the prettiest girl I know, Sarah."

"I ain't such a fright as the one my young man had on his arm."

"A fright, Sarah! But let that faithless fool slide. I like walking with you. We shall go up Primrose Hill and have a seat."

"That's where you used to go with Miss Rhoda, ain't it?"

"What put that in your head, I don't know. I never had a walk with her in my life."

"It 's because she used to speak sometimes about you. She made a friend o' me. D' ye see my hat? I got that hat from her before she went away. Didn't I get a fright when I first heerd of it? I made sure she was murdered. She gave me good advice, too. She told me not to have too many sweethearts, or I wouldn't get a 'usband; but she had a power o' sweethearts herself!"

"It 's easy giving advice, Sarah; it doesn't cost much. But what did Miss Rhoda say about me?"

They were nearing Primrose Hill; the light was getting dim, but they turned into it and began the ascent.

"She asked me what kind o' men I liked best, tall ones or short ones; and I said I could like him best as liked me best. I didn't mind if he was big or little. And she said, 'Sarah, you're a' —I forget what she called me now—'a fly officer,' I believe it was."

"A philosopher, wasn't it?"

"Something of that sort. But don't this hill catch your breath going up?"

"Here we are at last, Sarah; and a seat all to ourselves. And did Miss Rhoda say"—putting his arm round her waist—"whether she liked tall ones or short ones best?"

"Lor! Mr. Jones, you 're squeezin' o' me!"

Jones put his head boldly beneath the Gainsborough hat, and seemed to find Sarah's lips agreeable, for their heads remained together some considerable time. Then they sat quite silent, looking over the lights of the town, and hear-

ing the wild beasts of the Zoo roaring at their feet.

"No; she never said which, but I could make out as you were her favourite. I used to tell her I thought you was the best in the square."

Jones put his head under the Gainsborough hat again; and a sound, as of sparrows chirruping, issued from beneath it.

"Well, if you ain't fond o' sweetheartin'! She'll hear all them animals where she's gone to, won't she?"

"Never mind her, Sarah. I'm not thinking about her," said Jones, relapsing into osculation; "it's you I'm thinking about."

"I like 'aving a gentleman for a young man," said Sarah artlessly. "But I'm feared you won't keep it up. Will you, now, keep it up?"

"Yes, of course I shall. I'm going away on my holidays this week; but when I come back I'll put myself at your disposal. What's your full name, Sarah?"

"Sarah Ryder."

"You don't belong to London?"

"No, to Yarmouth. My dad, he has a smack; but there's so many of us, that I left to do for myself. And I have done pretty well," she added, as Jones got again beneath the hat. "I believe you like me!"

"Indeed I do, Sarah; but you mustn't tell Mrs. Pierce."

"Oh lor, no; but my people in Yarmouth 'll be glad to hear I've got a real young man at last. But it's getting time I was goin' back."

"I won't give another thought to Rhoda Courtenay, Sarah."

"Ah; that 's the way with you all. You can't keep constant to one for long."

"Never mind; we 'll get down the hill, and I know where we can have some supper before you go back. You have plenty of time. And don't you have any other sweetheart but me. You can call me Jack, if you like."

"I won't never call you nothing else," she said, as he put his head beneath the hat for the last time.

And thus, instead of absence making the heart grow fonder, it parted Jones and Rhoda.

The same evening Jones came across Teddington Smith. He was still harping of the vicar's daughter, but he had another grief on hand. He had been up at an examination for his doctorship, and he had been "spun," as he termed it.

"How was that, Smith?" asked Jones.

"It was all that ruffian Doncaster, in zoology. D' ye know this, I bought fifteen shillings' worth of his beetles, to study their nervous system, last session. One of his beetles costs threepence—he drives a fine wholesale trade in 'em,—so you may know how often I picked 'em to pieces. But it was no use, Jones. My own system was so nervous when he came to put his test questions, that I forgot everything I knew. And he 'spun' me on the spot."

"That 'll keep you hanging on a little longer—a year, perhaps."

"You might think so; but it won't."

"How 's that?"

"Jones, I don't think you ever appreciated me at my proper worth; although you were more discerning than that fool Inskip."

"Yes I did, Smith."

"You didn't see my versatility, I mean."

"Your versatility?"

"Yes, I'm versatile; and you'll think so when I tell how things have fallen out. What, Jones, are the entrails of a beetle to me, when I have Shakespeare by heart?"

"Do you know so much of him as that?"

They were standing in the square, and Jones, striking an attitude, turned on his rhetorical tap at "Seems, madam," and his voice resounded afar, until windows opened and heads appeared, under the impression that some leading tragedian had got adrift.

"You do it better than I thought, Smith; but 'I know not seems' won't take you through Doncaster's pass."

"No; but it'll take me into the mouth of Fame; and I shall be known all over England and the world, and knock audiences about, and make a mint."

"You're sanguine, anyhow, Smith."

"Not without a reason, old friend. I went through this at the 'Hare and Tailors'—you know my club,—and a provincial manager choked on his chop, remarking 'That's good enough for me;' and engaged me on the spot for the Theatre Royal. I am to come out leading star there. The 'Hare and Tailors' never heard of such a rapid success. They don't like it, I can tell you; for they know that my Hamlet's the most original one conceived. My secret is this, Jones: to put myself into my Hamlet. When they hear me shuffling off this mortal coil and that sort of thing, they hear the man Teddington Smith;

that's why the Royal manager sprang at it the moment he heard it."

"I wish you joy of the stage, I'm sure, Smith; and that your Hamlet will be a novelty is certain. I hope you mayn't regret it."

"I've only one misgiving about it."

"What's that?"

"I should think you could guess it, if you tried."

"I'm not good at conundrums."

"What'll she think, Jones? What'll she think? I know she prided herself on her friendship with a man who was going into the profession. I know that she looked forward to a conjunction of her star with mine at Wimpole Street. But blow Wimpole Street! When I am traversing the boards, and the audiences can't keep their palms asunder, and hundreds go away disappointed from the door—she'll think nothing of Wimpole Street. Did you think I was so versatile, Jones?"

"No; upon my word, I didn't. I suppose you are talking about 'the Rosebud' when you allude to 'she'?"

"I am; and that reminds me," he continued, drawing his walking-stick across some area railings, "I want to see that little girl of Mrs. Pierce's."

"Smith, don't!"

"Yes, I will!" and he drew the stick again.

Jones walked rapidly away, but stopped to see what turn events should take. Sarah went up the area-steps.

"What is it you want? If I'd a-thought it was you, Mr. Smith, I wouldn't ha' come out,"

"Don't be cruel, Sarah."

"You can't be makin' love to me, sir."

"One moment, beauty; have you got anything of Miss Courtenay's—an old glove, an empty pin-box, an old playbill, a reel of cotton—anything to remind me of her? Sarah, I will look round to-morrow, and give you five shillings for the smallest memento of her."

Sarah went down the steps, and stayed away for five minutes.

"I can't find nothing but a old bookey of flowers. She wore them one night at Sir Francis Charing's."

"Sarah, you are a priceless jewel. If I weren't sure of the mistress, I should take the maid."

"There ain't nobody axin' ye, sir," said the girl, descending abruptly as the tragedian joined the uncomfortable and irritated Jones.

CHAPTER XVI.

Imprisoned.

"THE Nawab Narendra Mokerji desires an interview with the Lady Courtenay at any hour of the day which may be convenient for her."

Such was the note which was carried to Rhoda's mosquito-curtain the morning after her talk on the balcony.

"I shall see the Premier in the library after breakfast," she replied; and when she went into that spacious room, a stout man, with a very round head and large eyes in it, took his arms out of fold, and, standing up, revealed the full expanse of the black-and-yellow silk drapery with which he was clad from shoulder to heels.

"Sir, I wished to see you this morning. Yesterday I informed the Rajah that I should seek the protection of the Residency to-day."

"His Highness has talked to me," replied the Premier in fluent English. "He had hoped that the repose of your first evening in Masalihon would have changed your decision. He is certain that you can make allowances for his manner under provocation of passion. He bids me assure you that, for the future, your privacy will be respected, and that he himself will not come near these rooms unless he is invited. It was to

his Highness a delight to be permitted to visit without ceremony."

"It is not the visiting without ceremony I complain of; it is the evident intention which the Rajah—a married man—has of making love, I complain of. I have come here for the single purpose of the interpretership; and he dares, knowing well the impossibility of it, to ask me to become his wife!"

"His wife? What is it but a word? You need not become his wife. There shall be no harsh contract to bind you! He loves! Is not that enough?"

Rhoda looked at the little statesman in silence, and a sensation of feebleness came over her. She dropped into a chair, and leaning her arms on the back of it, asked:

"Why, what is it you take me to be?"

"You had made your arrangements with the Rajah Mahommed Ali in England. You knew that he had for you the regard of love; you were aware that he returned months before his original plans of travel were completed, because you had given him a promise to come to Masalihon."

"He returned because there were troubles in his kingdom—troubles about the gathering of tribute, he told me, which his Premier could not allay."

The Nawab nearly prostrated himself before her. But the expression of his eyes was malignant, and Rhoda saw that he regarded her with hate.

"I repeat, sir, that I shall go to-day to the English Residency. I am here upon a misunderstanding. I am here——"

She made a convulsive effort to save herself

rom breaking down. A smile came to the lips of the Premier as he noted her woman's weakness. He thought she might be of use to him. His voice softened, and he almost cooed as he said:

"The Lady Courtenay has travelled far, and requires rest. Rest will change her point of view. Let me explain. Everything that your heart can desire will be done for you in Masalihon. Already I have seen to the furnishing of a bungalow for you in the mountains, to which, whenever you find the heat of this place too great, you may go. It is your own. Much else will become your own—jewels, silver and gold. Do not despair on the threshold. You will find his Highness will appreciate your presence. He has freely invited Christians to come; he fears no religion. Be of good cheer. Do not decide so hastily. I have good news for you also. The foolish fakir I have sent for; he shall be punished with death. The captain of the guard who allowed him to pass into your presence—his place is taken by a more judicious officer. Feringh Singh, who translated the curse, receives no remuneration for three months. No one shall go unpunished whom it may be your pleasure to indicate."

"It is my pleasure to indicate no punishments. I wish no man's death, no man's disgrace. And as for your bungalow and jewels—tell me, sir, when and how I may go to the Residency."

Rhoda was on her feet; on each cheek appeared a faint flush of indignation. It was an unaccustomed colour to the Nawab's eye. He liked the look of it, as did his master the Rajah when he had seen it in England. No such colour came to the cheeks of the Nawab's wives. He began to understand

hy it was that his master had schemed to bring er to Masalihon.

"The Lady Courtenay shall be obeyed in all that he asks. If she desires to seek refuge in the Resiency,—but do not call it by a phrase so harsh; not efuge, for here you have nothing which should make ou flee,—I shall bring the Resident to her. He is at resent shooting, two hundred miles away. It is is delight to kill animals. You have in another oom the skin of a 'man-eater,' which fell to his un. He was kind enough to present it to me. It as a tiger of extraordinary power and cunning; ut the Resident's rifle was more powerful and nore cunning. Among the pleasures you might ave would be the spectacle of a tiger-hunt. Masalihon is not without its pleasures. You will ecover your fatigue, and forget that you have ished so soon to leave the Court. I have ordered lays and dances for your benefit. It is not to be ll interpreting. Whom the Rajah Mahommed li loves, he finds the delights of life for. The ady Courtenay will take my advice?"

"I do not ask to be loved. If I have honourble protection, it is enough; and I wish no more f that than is required to conduct me to the Residency. Please be so good as not to resume ne argument. When may I go?"

The Nawab looked curiously at the flush in her heeks.

"I am commanded by you. His Highness has aid that what you ask shall be given. I shall not renew the argument."

"Then I shall expect to be driven to the Resiency in the afternoon. Good-morning!"

The Nawab slowly retreated to the doorway,

paused, and slowly descended to the park. Each one of fifteen gateways to the city was commanded by soldiers. To each gateway he sent the order that the English lady and her carriage were not to be allowed to pass out.

Reluctantly he drove to the palace, and was ushered into the presence of Mahommed Ali, who sat upon a cushion, with his chin resting upon his breast. He looked the picture of misery. His Premier did not dare to assert his presence until, after a long interval, he made a movement of looking up.

"Your Highness, I have seen the English lady, and have spoken with her."

"And she has answered?"

"That to-day she must be taken to the Residency."

"She shall not go! She shall not go!" screamed the Rajah, as he leapt from the cushion. "Narendra Mokerji, she shall not go. She is mine. You have not done your duty. You wished her to leave, and you have not spoken well. I shall find another Minister for Masalihon. You have lost your powers!"

"Your Highness, she is a difficulty greater than the difficulty of the tribute. I have done what I could by ordering that she shall not be permitted to leave the palace grounds."

"It is well. Narendra, my wives must die; they are in the way. They must receive attendance from Hakim Krish—one this week, another the next. The path must be cleared. All is nothing to me—kingdom, power, life itself—without the Lady Courtenay!"

The Premier increased the stolidity of his

emeanour. Hakim Krish was a very skilful hysician. His poisons were infallible; they ad never been known to fail of their intention.

"Your Highness may have some intention of abracing Christianity. It will increase the diffiulty of government."

"I shall call in the English, if my marriage th the lady is misunderstood, and I shall fill y public offices with Englishmen, and I shall ve them the mines to work, and the silk and otton to spin, and the railway shall run. You re certainly losing your power of forethought nd statesmanship; but you have done well to rbid her exit. I stake all; but she must—she all—become mine!"

"Your Highness, the feminine heart is full of uile, as you are aware. Be of good cheer. May not be that the lady who has crossed the seas to asalihon is really in love, but conceals it?"

"I cannot tell. I have not been compelled to udy the female heart. Narendra, when I touched er she shivered and cast a glance at me as of the ghtning from the gods!"

"Do their books not teach your Highness how convince her?"

"I have been reading their Bible. Their New estament I do not find of service; but their Old estament—yes, I am a Christian when I read its oah and David and Solomon. Go, however; I ust renew myself by thoughts of her incomarable personality."

He sat in motionless meditation for some time, nd, rising to his windows, he looked out and saw carriage slowly driving by. He saw a gloved and at the window; it was Rhoda's. She was

driving, as she thought, to the Residency. He watched the carriage disappear among the trees, and heaved a sigh of mingled satisfaction and despair.

"Let the Hakim Krish attend," he presently said, turning to an attendant.

They had not far to go for him. He came in at once—a venerable figure, with a white beard flowing over the breast.

"Hakim Krish, how is my Hindoo wife, Bâee?"

"My lord, she awaits your attention. She has strange dreams, all of which concern your appearance. 'Is my lord coming? Is my lord coming?' —these are the words on her lips day and night."

"Hakim Krish, Bâee is ill——"

"No, my lord; not ill, only sick with the desire that your Highness shall come to her, as of old."

"She is ill, I say!"

"My lord, the Lady Bâee *is* ill."

"Bâee has never been strong; but now she is weak and dangerously ill."

"The Lady Bâee is dangerously ill, your Highness."

The Rajah sat on his cushion, and a long interval followed without words. The physician was standing. He could not follow his master's train of thought: he did not divine that the Rajah meant to get rid of his Hindoo wife; he rather suspected that the Rajah believed in her serious illness, and that he himself might snatch some considerable advantages from curing an entirely healthy young lady.

At length the Rajah broke the silence:

"Bâee is dying, Hakim Krish!"

They are costlier than all the gems of the ace. I reserve them until I know that you are faithful, obedient Hakim Krish you were to father."

The Hakim became a worm of allegiance.

When will Bâee die, Hakim Krish?"

She cannot live beyond the sixth day from ; she may die on the third. I think it bable, your Highness, that her last breath l be drawn on the morning of the third ."

'To-day I am too weary to offer you the gifts I e brought from Europe. On the evening of third day, Hakim Krish, you shall claim half hem."

The physician again became a worm, and grov- ed his way to the door.

'Hakim Krish!" called out the Rajah.

'My lord," said the physician, returning to 1.

'The Kateeyanee, my Mahommedan wife, is o not in good health?"

'The Kateeyanee, my lord, is seriously ill."

'She will die soon?"

'She cannot, your Highness, survive long."

'She may go to the funeral pyre in two eks?"

'Or less, my lord."

'On the fourteenth day her funeral obsequies l take place. On that night, Hakim Krish, ll you receive the gifts I have brought from

Europe. You are as faithful in your duty and allegiance to me as you were to the illustrious Mahommed Ali, my father."

In the meantime, Rhoda's carriage drove to the gates. At each gate came a long parley, and by the time the fifteenth had been reached the sun was sinking in the heavens. Slowly it dawned upon her that she was not to be allowed to go to the Residency; that she was to be kept within the walls, in spite of herself. Then a sense of her weakness came over her, and she sat in dumb despair, unable to think.

It suddenly became dark, and she saw nothing beneath the trees but the dance of the fireflies, and here and there a pale glimmer of light upon the face of a pond.

Yes, truly it was as she suspected. She was being driven back to the residence which had been assigned to her. As she came down, no one waited for her; she went into a house apparently deserted except by servants. She tottered as she entered her bedroom, and had to take the assistance of a female attendant.

"Imprisoned!" she murmured; "kept in restraint!" and bracing herself up, she went to the river-balcony to breathe the air of the river.

She paced the balcony for a time, and tried to collect her thoughts so as to see her way to an immediate escape. But no way presented itself. She leant upon the balcony and looked into the flowing stream, and wondered how she might float, undetected, away from Masalihon. Then an uneasy feeling took hold of her. She did not hear footsteps, but she became conscience of a

presence. Not a sound, and yet some living being within reach of her!

She turned abruptly, and by the light of a firefly she saw the gleam of an uplifted knife. She stretched her arm towards it, and in another moment went down upon the slabs as unconscious as if she were lying in her grave.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A Dilemma.

RHODA went down on the slabs of her balcony; she parted with her consciousness for some seconds; but presently she awoke to her position by a sound as of some evil creature being worried by a dog. She leant on an elbow, and saw the Eurasian, Feringh Singh, with a Hindoo in his grasp, whom he was urging out of the darkness into the light of one of her own rooms. She rose, feebly enough, and followed. Feringh Singh was holding an almost nude figure by the throat; blood trickled from the fingers of his right hand; in his left he grasped a knife with an immense blade. The sight of the men stirred her to recovery.

"You are not going to do a deed of blood within my rooms?" she called out, advancing upon the Eurasian.

"I have, lady, prevented a deed of blood from being done. He would have murdered you, had I not suspected your danger. It is the fakir!"

"Why should he wish to take my life? I have never done him an injury. But, yes, I remember his prophecy; I remember his threat. You weak, foolish fakir, I have not interfered with your gods. I ask nothing of your glorious prince save the freedom to depart from his dominions."

The fakir shot a glance of hatred at her; but made no movement of escape.

"He would do the same again, lady, if I allowed him. It is decreed that the fakir shall die."

A crowd of attendants gathered in the rooms. Feringh Singh handed the fakir over to their care, and staunched his own hand with a handkerchief. The great blade had been drawn down the flat of the palm. It made Rhoda a little sick to look at it; she retired, therefore, to her innermost room, and again sent away her female attendants. She wanted nothing but solitude on this eventful night, when she found herself deprived of liberty and threatened of life. But solitude was not to be granted to her. In an hour's time Hakim Krish came to her door, and, much against her wish, she opened it to him. Behind him stood Narendra Mokerji.

"I shall come to you in the library," she said; and Narendra noticed the colour in her cheeks which he had previously admired.

She followed them into the great book-room, and, with a weary expression, asked what business they proposed to discuss with her. It seemed to be a business of salaams; the Premier's gold belt, studded with diamonds, sent strange flashes of light from floor to ceiling.

"His Highness has only now heard of the dreadful danger to which your life has been exposed. He would, by your permission, come and offer you congratulations on your escape."

"His Highness may do what he chooses with one whom he thinks fit to treat as a captive. He may come with an offer of congratulations, but

not with my permission. I do not wish to see him."

The Premier folded his arms; the doctor looked at the floor; there was a long silence, broken by Rhoda, who asked:

"Why do you come to me now? Say what you have to say, and let me retire. I have had enough in this day's experience to make me wish to rest."

"Lady," said the Premier, "again I ask you to think over the Rajah's proposal. His love is not lightly to be thrown away; for it is a love which he will sacrifice kingdom and power to attain. To-night he has suspended the service of the gods in his palace. Neither the god of Mahommed nor of the Hindoo Pantheon are any more to receive worship until you have answered him favourably."

"Then Mahommed Ali shall remain an atheist to the end of time. I have given him his answer. I shall go to my grave rather than receive the attentions of love from him. Shame to him, with his wives beyond the Mosque, to mock an English woman with his proposals!"

"Lady, we see the difficulty. The illustrious prince sees the difficulty. They shall presently cease to be his wives."

Rhoda looked from the Premier to the doctor; they waited her answer expectantly.

"You think you may reach me in my hour of weakness. You think I can be easily fooled, because I have trusted and been deceived. I do not ask that Mahommed Ali should divorce his wives for my sake."

"The Lady Courtenay must know that they are—they are dying."

"His wives are dying—both of them? Surely—but no, no! you cannot come to me with the insinuation that these poor ladies are to be done to death, that the Rajah may have the opportunity of making a shameful marriage! The fakir, who has attempted to take my life, is less guilty than he, a prince of education, would be. But I misunderstand you?"

"You misunderstand. Hakim Krish, tell the lady how it is. Let not our glorious lord and master, Mahommed Ali, be suspected of the crime of murder."

"The lady must know," said the doctor, "that the prince's long absence from Masalihon has made sorrow to his wives, the sorrow has sickened them unto death; and my experience tells me that within a few days one must die, and that within a few other days another will die; and the Rajah may order his marriage customs as he chooses. Will the Lady Courtenay not listen to the voice of his love?"

"It is your duty, sir, to see that his wives recover, and that they do not die. I repeat that I shall not listen to a word of affection. There will be a terrible day of retribution to him and you when my fate is learnt. Do you think I have no friends? Do you suppose I am forgotten? Go and tell your lord and master that if my freedom be not given me, English soldiers will soon be at his gates, and English bayonets, demanding their apology of blood for the insult which has been offered to one of their race!"

The Premier and the doctor went sadly and silently away. Rhoda sought her own innermost room again; but rest was denied her. She could

think of nothing but her terrible position, and the hours sped on to midnight, without any thought suggesting itself for her comfort. By-and-by she took up a blank sheet of paper and mechanically wrote in bold characters across the centre of it:

"Help!—R. C."

It was done with no definite purpose in view; the paper lay before her untouched for a time, and just as mechanically as she wrote the words, she twisted the sheet into the shape of a boat—such a boat as in early childhood she had often enough pushed into the Cleaver. That, too, lay by her until it flashed on her that a message might be made of it, if only she could send it afloat on the stream beneath her window. It might fall into English hands, and a rescue might be made.

She snatched it from the table, and passed out of her rooms to the staircase. There were attendants everywhere. They did not interfere with her. She went down between the darkness and dawn, and pushed it into the river. The service of the gods had been suspended, and it seemed to the overawed servants that the lady was propitiating something heavenly, and they took comfort from it. She took some herself, as it went out of sight on the water, and she returned to her innermost apartment a little relieved.

By her bedside stood a slight girlish figure, wearing a rich bodice and a yellow-silk petticoat, partly overhung by a scarf bordered with red, which tied up her waist and enveloped her shoulders and head, on which she carried a triangular headdress, with some resemblance to a crown. On her wrists were bracelets of red ivory. She

stood pensively regarding Rhoda as she approached, and, to her look of surprised inquiry, answered:

"I am Bâee."

"You are Bâee? And why have you come to me at such a time? Are you, like Narendra Mokerji and Hakim Krish, the messenger of Mahommed Ali?"

"If my lord knew, I should die to-night!"

Rhoda looked into her olive-tinted face, and in the melancholy of her appealing eyes she read as deep a distress as her own.

"I have dressed myself as I would for the funeral pyre, if my lord had died. I come to you to beg my life."

"They told me you were ill, sick even to death. I cannot see that you are dying. But, alas! why come to me, who am powerless to control my own fate?"

"You may do with my lord what you choose. He has brought you to Masalihon. Why do you not marry him?"

"And you are Bâee, you are his Hindoo wife, and you ask me to take your place while you are still alive?"

"It would save me from Hakim Krish. If you would marry Mahommed Ali, I should still live; I should still be Bâee, his wife. You he would love more than me; but he might grow weary of you too in a time, and I should again be his favourite, and return to my own house, which he has given to you."

Rhoda took the girl's hands in hers and led her to a couch, and they sat down together.

"And I could save your life, Bâee, if I were to

become his third wife? But are you very certain that he means to deprive you of it?"

"I am certain. To-day my faithful Seeta took the confection meant for me, and she is now lying at the gates."

"Who is Seeta?"

"My nurse, my friend, my servant, who feared Hakim Krish, and tasted the confection."

"You mean that your servant has been poisoned?"

"Not to death, not the first time she eats of it; but more eating would kill Seeta: and it is Bâee they wish to die, because she is in the way."

"But, Bâee, you would not surely wish me to marry a murderer?"

"I should not die if you married. If you were to say to my lord: 'I do not mind Bâee being your wife; I like Bâee; Bâee has never done me a wrong,'—then he would not wish me to die, and the service of the gods would begin again. All is dark in Masalihon until you appease the prince."

"If I said 'I like Bâee,' I should say what was true. But the Rajah—I hate him! He ought to be torn limb from limb, and thrown to the jackals. He is detestable to me, with his enchanting simplicity of demeanour and infernal nature. Yes, I hate him!"

And Rhoda rose and paced the apartment, with proud anger kindling in her face; and the Hindoo went on her knees to her, and clasped her hands in anguish.

"My poor Bâee, do not look at me so. I would do anything for you I could—anything to save you from the slightest pain, much less the death they

have decreed for you. Indeed, you shall not die. They shall bake no poisonous stuff for you."

"You will marry my lord then?" exclaimed Bâee, rising and permitting Rhoda to clasp her in her arms. "You are shedding tears," she said, looking up into her face, but remaining in the strange embrace, which seemed to soothe her.

"I cannot help myself. But it is for you I am shedding them, not for myself. To save you I would do anything—anything, except one thing; and that is, to marry the Rajah. And I thought him so simple, so gentle, so guileless, so wise with the wisdom of his ancestors! Bâee, poor child, rest yourself. Sit there on my couch until I can begin to think. Oh! why did I put myself within his power? Why should I have been chosen as the cause of such crimes? Bâee, I cannot marry him!"

"Seeta, who hears all, told me that great English ladies would not marry a husband who had other wives. I should not trouble you at all. You would not know that Bâee was in Masalihon —only that you had saved her life. And my lord would not give way to the temptation of murder. It is because you will not have him with more wives than one that his heart is turned from Krishna to Siva, and where he once loved he would now destroy. If you would say to yourself: 'What does Bâee matter? What does the Kateeyanee matter?' and marry the prince, then all would be well."

"Child, how can I explain it to you? I have not come here on an errand of marriage. Had I thought of such a state of life, there were in England men from whom I might have chosen a

husband—not men with kingdom, and power, and glory, like the Rajah Mahommed Ali; but men, I hope, who would not marry three wives, or who, to marry one, would not poison two."

Bâee sat in silence; and Rhoda leant her brow upon the panes of a window.

"Bâee," she presently said, "you have been able to come to me to-night at the risk, you say, of your life. Why may not I get beyond the walls, with the same chance? I only ask to reach the Residency. Can you not help me to escape?"

"I have been able because the service of the gods is suspended, and no one took note of me. Even now, I should have brought death on myself if I were known to have left my apartments. But of what use has it been? You will not save me from death. And it is so easy, so easy—you have only to marry the Rajah!"

"So easy? Alas! it is anything but easy. Has he not touched me with his hand, and did I not feel, as if by revelation, that he was not the man I had taken him for; that, on the contrary, he was as cold as ice and as immovable as steel when his purpose was set? Bâee, neither can I let you die nor can I marry your husband."

The Hindoo girl started to her feet.

"This very week I shall be no more. But, see! the dawn is coming. I must go back, or my hour will be hastened. Think of me, dying. Think of me kindly in your time of power. I thought I would hate you; but I do not—I do not. I find you warm and gentle. Bid me good-bye, and be kind to my lord, who once loved me. Tell him, when I am dead, that Bâee did not think evil of him, and it was not Bâee who stirred up strife in

the palace between the worshippers of one god and the worshippers of many — not Bâee, but the priests. Tell him that Bâee counted the hours and the days when he had travelled afar, and fasted and feasted and prayed for his safety. Tell him that when Hakim Krish came with his poisoned cakes she took them and lay down in peace, thinking only of my lord Mahommed Ali, and that she died wishing well to the English lady and to her reign on the throne of Masalihon. Now embrace me as you did before, and let me seek my own rooms."

"Bâee, dear," said Rhoda, gathering her in her arms, "I declare to you that if there is no other way of saving you from death, I shall—I shall marry the Rajah."

And like a ghost the Hindoo girl slipped away into the half-light, while the English girl sought sleepless rest on her couch, and heard, with weariness, the first signals of dawn from the throats of the cocks and the kites.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

An Appeal.

THE young Englishman who settles in Calcutta, with his thousand rupees a month, realises at once many of the things he dreams of enjoying in his rich old age. If he invests ninety of them judiciously, he is master of a carriage and horse; forty more give him four dutiful attendants to look after his goods and person; the quantity of native consideration he receives for a small outlay makes him remember his island as a place of rough civilities which fails to appreciate true worth.

Mark Inskip, after the first languors of the climate had subsided, took to the unwonted amount of service with relish, and found his carriage exercises on the banks of the Hooghly rather a distinguished way of finishing his day's work. After all, on the banks of the Serpentine there was not nearly so much colour as showed in the carriages of the Indian princes whose horses pranced round Fort William. To be sure, there was something bilious about the appearance of the Englishwomen who looked out of window on the carriage-roads about the Maidan, as of transplantations drooping in uncongenial soil; yet, taken as a whole, for variety and plumage, Mark decided that Hyde Park was "not in it" with the Calcutta course.

On one of his excursions in his *gharry*, with a civil servant of some position, he passed the Viceroy's carriage. His lordship had recently come down from Simla, and there was a visible increase of the crowds on the path, to see how he looked after his sojourn among the hills.

"By Jove, Charing's with him!" exclaimed the civilian. "I wonder what's brought him out again?"

"Is that Sir Francis Charing?" asked Mark.

"Yes; he's been home three years—we thought he wasn't coming back."

"Well, I know more than you. He's taking Colonel Hume's place at the Masalihon Residency."

"Ah, it's time old Hume was out of it. He does nothing but shoot and write 'snorters.' We want a stronger hand on Masalihon; and Charing has it, under his velvet glove. Masalihon will pay hand over fist, when you've got your old wire operating all over it. Go up Chowringhee and round to the Great Eastern, and have dinner with me. Stanley has got a new *prima donna* at his theatre; we can get tickets *en route*."

"All right," said Mark, and the drive continued.

They got their tickets, and in the evening went back to hear an operetta with an Australian *prima donna* in it. The Viceroy was in his box, with the new Resident at his side. Mark saw nothing else in the theatre than the iron-grey beard and Roman nose of Sir Francis Charing. During an *entr'acte* he saw him recognise two ladies in front of him, and was the involuntary listener at a little conversation which disturbed him much.

"My dear, I saw a good deal of him at Lancaster Gate."

"Did you, indeed?"

"Yes, but the secret of his coming here has been so well kept that no one in London, when I was there, knew of it."

"Who goes to Masalihon with him?"

"I haven't heard, but there's ever such a strange romantic thing has occurred. Sir Francis had a rather pretty governess for his children—you know how susceptible he is."

"Don't tell me any more; his eyes are fixed on us, and I believe he knows every word you are saying, even at that distance, I am bound to say that he looks in splendid condition."

"He is an uncanny man. But no, that's impossible; he can't hear what I'm saying."

"He can divine it, then."

"Then he may, if he likes. What I was saying was, that he had a rather pretty governess, and that he threw himself in her way as much as he could, and that Lady Charing—you knew poor Mary, didn't you?—took fright, and ordered her about her business."

"Is that all?"

"No; there's more to follow."

"Really? I hope Sir Francis didn't compromise himself."

"Not in the least. But what do you think? This strange girl, who is of perfectly good family, from Cornwall or Devonshire, or somewhere in the south of England—this girl has gone out to Masalihon, and is there now, at the Rajah's Court! They tried to keep it a secret, but it has leaked out."

"You see, Sir Francis hasn't forgotten our faces."

"At the Rajah's Court? What an abominable scandal!"

"If you put two and two together, what do you think that boy Mahommed Ali has to do with it?"

"He is looking at you so strangely, I am sure he hears what you are saying."

"I don't in the least mind. Put two and two together, and it is Sir Francis who has sent her out—the bold, bad man!"

"Upon my word! And where is Lady Charing?"

"She cannot come for at least six months yet; she expects a new baby."

"The horrid wretch! I shan't look at him the whole evening again."

Husbands and brothers, who had been having cigars and "pegs," began to troop into their places. Mark rose, and excused himself to his friend the civilian, and went down to his office. He had received no answer to his letter, requesting to be allowed to join a surveying party told off for duty in Masalihon. But he did not regret that, as he had established a sort of friendship with the telegraphist on the borders of Masalihon, and kept himself informed of all he knew. Mark and his distant friend beguiled many hours by playing games of chess, but this evening he did not resume his exercise pawns and knights, for a little message came:

"To-day my servant brought in a small boat, made of paper, found floating on river. Written in lady's hand is 'Help!—R. C.'"

She was in danger then. Mark looked at his clock. It was getting on to midnight, but he rushed into the street, sprang into a *gharry*, and drove straight to Government House. He did not give two thoughts to the ceremonial of entrance, but demanded admittance to Sir Francis Charing's apartments.

"And don't keep me waiting, you yellow idiots!" cried Mark, as the appalled attendants denied him. "I have a telegram which I must deliver into his own hands."

Notwithstanding the desperation of his haste, it was fully half an hour before he was conducted to the Resident's room.

Sir Francis was in bed, beneath his mosquito-curtain, and laid aside a yellow-backed novel as Mark approached.

"You 're working the Pollard code—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What have you got for me that mightn't lie over till to-morrow morning?"

"I must explain, Sir Francis. A young lady of the name of Courtenay ——"

Sir Francis sat up in bed, as if he had been stung, and impatiently thrust the mosquito-curtain aside. Mark saw at a glance that there was at least some truth in the gossip of the stalls. He had not heard the name Courtenay for the first time.

"Well, what of *her?*" he asked sharply.

"She has come out, sir, to Masalihon, and for a little time has been living at the Rajah's Court in the capacity of interpreter."

"Yes, yes; I know all about that. Let me see your telegram. 'To-day, servant, small boat,

paper, lady's hand, "Help!—R. C." What the devil do you take this to mean?"

"I take it to mean, sir, that she has been induced to go to Masalihon on false pretences; that finding that out, she is fighting to be free; and that they are keeping her in restraint against her will, and that she is, as she says she is, in need of help."

"R. C. may stand for anybody. I don't take your view of it, young man. Miss Courtenay is at the Court of the Rajah, no doubt; but then the Rajah is, or was when I last knew him, a gentleman. She should be as safe under his protection as under my own. Next time, be good enough to exercise more judgment before you rush into a Resident's bedroom in the small hours."

Mark bowed and retired, reached the door, and was caught up by a—

"Hullo, I say!" He returned to the bedside. "You're a griffin, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, a griffin to Anglo-Indians."

"How long have you been out?"

"A few weeks."

"Had you any special interest in Miss Courtenay?"

"I was acquainted with her in England."

Sir Francis sat up in bed again.

"Intimately?"

"She allowed no intimacies, but I have spoken to her."

"Perhaps you had a great regard for her?"

"I had."

"Perhaps you have still?"

"I have."

"So have I. Leave your card as you go out. I don't think there 's any cause for anxiety."

Sir Francis sprang out of bed as soon as Mark retired, and re-examined the telegram.

"The Rajah," he reflected, "was desperately hard hit, there can be no doubt. But he wouldn't dare to make a dishonourable—— Surely Hume is wideawake enough to know that, under the circumstances, there should be a little supervision. I shall leave Calcutta a week sooner than I intended."

Then he turned down his light and covered himself in again from the insects, and presently went fast asleep.

Mark spent a miserable enough night. He could not accept Sir Francis Charing's comfortable theory of there being no danger. It was evident to him that there was very great danger; and that if Rhoda Courtenay were not forthwith assisted, anything might happen. What might not have happened already? He could not sleep, and as he sat smoking at his open window a sense of his helplessness came over him.

By the time he had got through half-a-dozen cigars he had come to the conclusion that, somehow or other, he must make his way to Masalihon, and let the Pollard code take its chance in somebody else's hands.

He was sitting next day in his office, looking sufficiently haggard and disreputable after his vigils, when he became aware that Sir Francis had entered his room.

"You have no more news from Masalihon?"

"No, sir."

"You see, it's just as I thought. If anything had occurred, it would have leaked out. I want you to tell me, however, what you know about this extraordinary mission of Miss Courtenay's."

"I know very little about it."

"You told me last night, I think, that you had a very great regard for the young lady?"

"Yes, sir; I 'm not ashamed of owning to it."

"You mean, I presume, that you are desperately in love with her?"

"I don't know any reason for denying it."

"Then, I suppose, she knows the state of your feelings?"

"I tried to explain to her before I left England."

"You proposed to her, in fact?"

"I did."

"And she—what did she say to it?"

"She bade me good-bye, but gave me no definite answer."

"You still hope that she may be induced to come round?"

"I do; but there are others—I know there are others—who had the same kind of intentions about her as myself."

"Faint heart, my good fellow, never won fair lady! I approve and applaud your excellent choice. You came out here with a good record, and I 'm not sure that Rhoda Courtenay could do much better than make up her mind to have you. But can you tell me nothing of her business in Masalihon?"

"Nothing, except that she is interpreting."

"Interpreting European languages at a Court

which does not receive fifty letters in the year in any other European tongue than English?"

"That is exactly what I feel, sir. The Rajah has taken her out on false pretences."

"I don't follow you there. The Rajah has got wives of his own. Besides, he is a young gentleman. Then you don't know more than I do myself about the girl's mission?"

"She wished to be independent and help her mother. That much, I know."

"Quite so; there's the true reason of it."

"But something has happened, Sir Francis Charing. She is not the kind of girl to call 'help' when help wasn't needed, and I feel that help ought to go to her at once."

"Ah! that's your lover's jealousy, Mr. Inskip. I have been thirty years in India. You will trust me to be able to judge of probabilities better than you."

"Nevertheless, sir, I shall resign my post and go to her assistance."

"That might be foolish."

"No; I am convinced it is the right thing to do."

"I think no great harm would come if you did resign. Pollard's code is a fad, and nothing else. Your office is a fad. Still, you must stick to it till the amended code comes out—it comes, I believe, by the next mail,—when you will have an assistant to help you to work it."

"Sir Francis, I *must* go to Masalihon! No considerations of duty can hinder me!"

"Then I think less of you than I should be inclined to do. Besides, you don't understand the

difficulties. You cannot, for example, enter Masalihon without permission of Government; and that, I may say, will not be given you if you take any precipitate course like that you think of."

Mark drew a long, despairing breath; the Resident helped himself to one of his cigars.

"Now, it may not occur to you that I am as deeply interested in Miss Courtenay as you are yourself. I have known her probably as long as you. She taught my children, and taught them well. They loved her: she deserved it, and I encouraged it; and what I can do for her now, I shall."

"Then help me to get to Masalihon as quickly as I can."

"As I say, the amended code comes by the first mail. There is your chance. You are a civil engineer: we shall want a good many of them in Masalihon for some time to come. But by that time I shall, myself, be at the Residency; and Miss Courtenay's difficulty, if there be one, will be at an end. In the meantime, I suggest you to do this. Telegraph to your friend to send on the paper boat; you know her handwriting, I presume?"

"I do," said Mark, feeling in his pocket for a letter-book, from which he took her note declining the twenty pounds' assistance. "I don't know why I shouldn't show you this."

"Yes, that's Rhoda's handwriting. You will have no difficulty in judging whether R. C. who asks help by the river is the R. C. who declined it in Bordington Square."

"I suppose I must wait."

"I see nothing else for it."

"If R. C. is Rhoda Courtenay, you will help me to get to her?"

"I promise you all the assistance I can give. And now it's time for tiffin. Keep cool, and everything will come right."

CHAPTER XIX.

A Promise.

WHEN Bâee had glided away in the dawn, Rhoda undressed and rested for a few hours. She saw now the meaning of the situation. Undoubtedly the Rajah loved her, and was willing to make immense sacrifices for her sake, and among them the lives of his wives. His gentle nature, as it had seemed to her, was a gentleness which held in the bud terrible possibilities of cruelty. It was a cruelty of almost unlimited power, which used every means to a desired end. He knew that he might not have her, an Englishwoman, for his wife, so long as other wives were wedded to him; so he proposed that the obstacles should be removed.

"Poor little Bâee," said Rhoda, as she drew her curtain, "she *shall* not die;" and with that thought she fell asleep, and was visited by peaceful visions from beyond the seas, in which Masalihon and its horrors were blotted out. But with the morning came a renewal of her anxieties. By decree the service of the gods had been suspended within the palace-walls, and she saw in the stricken looks of her attendants that they regarded her with a kind of fascinated awe. Suspending the service of the gods might not mean very much over the face of

Europe, where they are not much in people's thoughts, and where the best of Christians find an hour or two a week a liberal quantity of time to bestow upon them; but it was different in Masalihon, where almost every action has some reference to supernal or infernal authority, and from dawn to sundown Hindoos are consciously or unconsciously engaged in offices of homage to the unseen powers.

"Girl, do not approach me with that stricken look!" said Rhoda to her attendant, who had swiftly come to the conclusion that Rhoda herself must be greater than the gods, since the prince had ordered all worship of them to cease. Her servants were Hindoos to a man; and as she passed to her breakfast-room, their prostrations were too painful to behold. She instinctively felt that these were not the customary ceremonial forms in the presence of a stranger, and that they were the promptings of fear, and an hour later she found the Mahommedans at the gates in the same case.

She went back to the gates again, to make sure that her imprisonment was as rigid as she suspected. The soldiers were all Mahommedans, and, though their symptoms of fear took a milder form, there was no doubt about the awe with which they regarded her. If they had allowed, she would have passed out and sought a way to the Residency, but from gate to gate it was the same reception of terrified obedience, which stopped short of obeying just at the point of giving permission to pass into the city. Rhoda returned, a little ashamed of the weakness which would have impelled her to leave, when she had engaged with

herself to stop the plot which was to kill the Rajah's wives. The fact that she had such a mission gave her courage to return to her rooms without the despair of her first evening upon her. Narendra Mokerji waited for her in the library. He, too, showed some of the craven terror of the people.

"Lady," he said, "you have everything in your power."

"So much have I, that I may not even go beyond the walls."

"It is to protect you from harm that you may not go—as yet. I am here to tell you that the prince does not insist upon his proposals. He is content for the present that you should undertake the duties for which you have engaged yourself. You shall not be persecuted."

"The Rajah was too hasty. Perhaps, indeed, he meant nothing. But I, too, was hasty. You may tell him that if he be willing to forget, I shall do so also."

"Lady, you will tell him this yourself. You will see him, and offer him a generous forgiveness. So much depends upon it; for Rajah Mahommed Ali has taken to heart so much your treatment, that he has forsworn the gods. Not a muezzin chanted a call overnight from the mosques; not a priest in the temples has made an offering to the gods. All is suspense, and the people are in terror. They know not what may happen. Lightning may be decreed us, or the river may rise and swell its banks, or Masalihon be swept away—anything is possible, unless the prince see again with the eyes of his ancestors. A kingdom without gods—it is a kingdom in deep, immediate danger. Say to

him that you were in haste—that you recall the words which have transformed him from princely gentleness to—to something not himself. Say to him that you will remain in Masalihon; for he has fallen upon a troubled time. His wives are leaving him. Death is making them his own. Bâee is dying, and the Kateeyanee is dangerously ill. He will lose them both. You must make allowances for him, and the distress—the great distress of his mind."

"Bâee is dying?"

"Yes; she may not survive many days. Be gentle, lady, with the Rajah, who loves you. Be considerate with him in his sorrow."

"And his sorrow is great?"

"Beyond expression."

"I shall see the Rajah and speak with him. I shall ask him to restore the worship of the gods. I shall not be the means of bringing trouble on the people. And now explain to me the nature of my work."

The Premier went over the ground with Rhoda, telling her that, first and foremost, they wished to understand in Masalihon what Parliaments were in Europe. The Congress was teaching them that, after the Mutiny, the Empress-Queen had promised the Indian races representative institutions. In Masalihon the chiefs were all anxious for this. They would like a House of Lords, he said—*i.e.*, representation of the chiefs by the chiefs for the chiefs,—and would the lady translate from the various volumes on Parliaments, so that they might learn the wisdom of the West? But there was no hurry. She need not hasten to her work. First of all, see the Rajah and let him understand

that he need not rage at the universe and the gods, for she was not going to leave him. After that, all would be well.

They saw him in durbar among his chiefs, the Premier bringing Rhoda straight into his throne-room, where he sat listlessly beneath a variegated canopy, looking as torpid as a county-court judge. The torpor soon disappeared at sight of her, and a comprehensive glance of Mokerji speedily vacated the chamber. Rhoda would have liked to look cordial, and to conceal the aversion which his love-making and his fatal intentions towards his wives roused within her. As he stepped from his throne and advanced to meet her, it was hard to restrain some vehement exclamation, so simple, so gentle, so earnest he looked. Was it possible that he could harbour beneath such a mask of innocence an intention so diabolical? For a moment she felt that it must be impossible; that even Bâee must be wrong, and that she must be wrong. He held out his hand to her as he had done in England, and she touched it lightly with her fingers.

"The Lady Courtenay," said the Premier, "has repented her of her decision. She would not now return to the Residency. She has the desire to begin her duties of interpretership at once."

The Rajah looked weariedly at his Minister, and stood in silence.

"I have been telling your Minister that you and I were equally hasty—you, to make proposals which you were aware I, as an Englishwoman, could not accept; I, to reject them

with so much scorn, when they were offered in sincerity."

"Narendra, you may finish the causes I had before me. To-day, I shall not listen to the representations of the chiefs again. I had no right to expect that you would be so generous," he continued as Mokerji disappeared. "I was grievously in the wrong. You have forgiven and forgotten already?"

"I am prepared to do so. You have enough to trouble you, without unnecessary petulance of mine. Your Minister has told me that—that your wives are ill?"

"My wives are dying," he replied; and search his face as she liked, Rhoda could read no expression but simplicity, gentleness, and earnestness. "Soon I shall be wifeless in Masalihon—they are even now leaving me."

"But you have doctors, have you not?"

"There comes a time when doctors are of no avail. Such a time has now arrived to my wives. Why, however, should you be pained by thoughts of their death? Narendra did wrong to tell you."

"Your Highness, I have done nothing as yet to earn a favour at your hands. But a favour you would confer on me, if you would allow me to see your wives. I have a great deal of skill. Something may have escaped the doctor which I would see—something which might still save their lives."

"I have promised myself to grant you every favour it is in my power to give. I shall send for Hakim Krish, and we shall find whether you may enter their residence or not. For

myself, I have not seen them since I was in England."

Rhoda looked curiously round his throne-room, at the gorgeous patterns on the canopy, and replied:

"You would miss them dreadfully!"

"Had I never gone to England, I should have missed them. I shall not, now, miss them at all."

"How dreadful!" said Rhoda.

"How is the Lady Bâee?" he asked suddenly of the physician, who was in prompt attendance.

"There is no improvement, your Highness."

"Is she so ill that she may not see this lady?"

"She ought to see no one, your Highness; for her hours are numbered. She may die to-morrow, or the day after."

"Do grant me this favour, your Highness. Let me see the Lady Bâee. I may be the means of prolonging a life which — which you once valued."

"But I value it no more. Bâee has made me a polygamist. I desire now to live the life of a European."

"But you may not, in order that you may lead that life, part with your wives — I mean your Highness would not gladly see them die, that you might become a monogamist!"

"Anything, that I might again offer this throne to Miss Courtenay in all good faith and honour."

"Ah! the forbidden theme! What if I tell you that the throne might become a temptation if Bâee recovered? What if I were to say that, living in Masalihon, I might adopt some of your manners

and customs, provided only Bâee lived? What if I were to forget my English birth and life, given Bâee were my companion?"

"To tell—to say—to forget!" said the Rajah, his eyes dilating, and a look of joy taking the place of his set mournfulness.

"Is Bâee, then, so ill, Hakim Krish, that all hope is gone?"

"My lord, the lamp is ready, and the sacred water from the Ganges; the leaf of the purple basil is plucked. The Lady Bâee sets out upon her journey soon—I cannot say how soon."

Rhoda looked from Rajah to physician—the one who had ordered the girl's death, and the other who was doing his best to execute it. She was not much of an actress, yet her power of dissimulation was badly wanted for the occasion: how to convince the Rajah that she would admit his attentions, if only the girl-wife were snatched from the hands of the quack?

"Why do you grieve so much for Bâee?" said the Rajah. "Death is not so terrible. Bâee knows the journey she is to take, and the gods who summon her. Bâee is not afraid to die. She no longer has my esteem; she prefers to go. You do not know Bâee, or you would not take to heart so deeply her departure."

Rhoda strove to suppress an outburst of indignant loathing. In her brief life she had heard of dreadful things being done; she had never come face to face with the instigator and perpetrator of crime. But she succeeded in quietly saying:

"I may go to the patient, and see her—if only to see her die?"

"Whatever you desire," said the Rajah; and

the doctor conducted her across the park to the lesser palace, with the gilded dome, where the royal ladies had their apartments. Again, at sight of her, the affrighted servants threw themselves on the ground, feeling that she for whom the service of the gods had been suspended was herself a celestial being. Hakim Krish led the way to the girl's apartment, an exquisite room, commanding a pond where coveys of ducks swam among the water-lilies, and strange flights of pigeons darkened the air.

Bâee was reclining in a low bedstead, as still and monumental as alabaster.

"Leave me!" said Rhoda peremptorily; and the physician retired. Rhoda followed him. "Another room along, if you please," she added, showing him through a curtained doorway, and making sure, before she returned, that he could neither hear nor see what occurred within. She returned to the side of the bedstead, and knelt beside the girl. There seemed no movement of her bosom to betoken the presence of life. She put her lips to her brow—it was as cold as marble.

"Bâee!" she called into her ear; and, without movement of limb or feature, the girl unclosed her eyes, and whispered,

"I am cheating Hakim Krish. I have not taken the poisoned cake."

"Bâee, you may say that you are a little better, then. Mahommed Ali is anxious that you should recover."

"My lord does not wish me die!" said the girl, rising on one elbow and scrutinizing Rhoda. "Then you are becoming his third wife?"

"As you like, Bâee; but you shall not die."

"Will my lord tell me himself that he would have me to live?"

"Not yet, Bâee, perhaps; but I shall hope to convince him. Go on refusing to take the physician's drug, and I think I can do the rest."

In the ante-chamber she met the Hakim, and accompanied him to the Rajah's presence.

"Rajah Mahommed Ali, it is as I thought; Bâee will not die. The purple basil-leaf has been plucked too soon. She is ill, certainly; but if I were allowed to see her from time to time, she would recover."

"And you will adopt some of our manners and customs, and you will forget your English birth and life, if you are allowed to see Bâee?"

"Your Highness is again approaching a dangerous subject."

"I cannot, I find, speak of anything else. Why do you not see? Do you not understand that a precious day wasted is an eternity of suspense to me? I place everything at your disposal. Masalihon is yours; Bâee's life, the murderous fakir's—all, if you but promise me now what I have already asked."

"I promise you, Rajah," said Rhoda, bitterly; "but, first of all, you shall promise me that the Hakim shall not again visit Bâee."

"He shall not. But after that? I have invited a priest to come to Masalihon. He is even now on his way from Bombay. You shall have the service of the Christians, and I shall erect a Christian mosque within the walls. You shall lead what life you like. Tell me that before your month is dead I may claim you as my consort!"

His words made Rhoda realise the full extent of

the meaning of her answer. But she was dealing with a potentate who hesitated at no method which secured him his object, and she herself was at his mercy.

"I promise," she said, almost inaudibly.

The Rajah approached her, and would have taken her hand.

"Not now; another time, then," said Rhoda, in a dry, hard voice.

"On the last day of your month?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XX.

Points of Civilisation.

A WEEK went by, and Rhoda had no sign that in the great world beyond the walls anybody was thinking of her. She had promised the Rajah that at the end of the month she would accept the position he had offered her. It was a ghastly subterfuge devised for the protection of his wife. So far it had succeeded. Bâee was now pronounced to be out of danger, the dreadful Krish being only too pleased to affirm that the English lady possessed secret powers, unknown to himself or his art, which made for healing.

Every day Rhoda was allowed to see the girl; and she would have visited the Kateeyanee too, but was assured that the Mahommedan wife would allow no intrusion from a barbarian stranger. It was pleasant for her to think that the little midnight visitor, who was so near her end, had a prospect of life and happiness. She pardoned herself her own Jesuistry as she thought of the risk the little princess had run; but her anxiety, as the days went by, did not abate. Marry the Rajah she would not; but if she did not escape, what could she do? Not choose a voluntary death; that was a crime as bad as a marriage. Hourly she turned the matter over in her mind, listening

as the woman of Lucknow may have done for the distant sound of bagpipes; but listening, too often, only to hear the beating of her own heart.

She turned to her duties in the library, however, with as stout a will as she could command, and transcribed quantities of material bearing upon parliamentary institutions in Europe. Mokerji visited her each day, and showed undisguised admiration at her swift power of work, and scrutinised affectionately the occasional scarlet tint of her cheeks, and insinuated diplomatic remarks about his master and his intentions.

As for the Rajah, he did not press his visits; at the end of the Christian month was the Peerless not his own? It occurred to him, however, to suggest to his Premier that seven days having elapsed between his visits, he ought to see the lady. He had plans to explain to her, as the Premier knew. He wished her to see the mosque and the Hindoo temple, and he had a wish to surprise her with an account of the Christian mosque he meant to rear within the walls. It should be built forthwith, and any revenue she named should be expended upon it.

"I shall approach her, your Highness, on the subject," said Mokerji.

And thus it came about that on the seventh day Rhoda found herself in an open carriage, seated side by side with the Rajah, for an inspection of the grounds.

Rhoda saw in the faces of the retainers that the hate had died out. The suspension of the religious services had been withdrawn, but the awe which

succeeded the edict changed to respect for the godlike personage, the English lady, who had been the occasion of it. The changed air of cordiality was very grateful to her. It seemed to open out possible vistas of escape, through the assistance of a friendly people. It helped her to sit beside the Rajah without revealing in her face or demeanour the inward chafing which kept her from replying for a time to his soft words of surrender and adoration. They had not far to go to the mosque.

"It is my grandfather's work," said the Rajah; "he was a Sunni."

"A Sunni; and what is that, your Highness?"

"He was a Mahommedan of the Mahommedans. He did not tolerate. The gods of the Hindoos were hateful to him. Into the merits of Christianity he never went: 'Allah is Allah, and Mahomet is his Prophet,' was enough for my father's father."

"Are you not a Sunni, then?"

"The difference does not trouble me much, but I am a Shiah. I hold that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and Hasan and Husain, his grandsons, are of divine origin. To them I trace my own ancestry. The origin of our house is divine, through Ali, who had Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, to wife. I have, however, put down the quarrelling of Sunni and Shiah in Masalihon. You have differences as various in Christianity: they are tiresome. Would you care to look in? I cannot conveniently ask you to enter."

"Thanks. I shall have seen enough from the outside," said Rhoda faintly, having a

vivid feeling of the reality of her nearness to the polygamist who had her promise of marriage.

"My Premier tells me that your work among the Parliaments is illustrious and amazing. You will yet take an interest in Ali and Fatima, and I shall be able to exchange knowledges with you. You will find it delightful beyond compare."

"I shall be so pleased to hear of it all."

They drove easily from the mosque towards the edge of the river. It was a lovely day, not much hotter than she had felt it in England sometimes, and she could not refrain from admiration of the exquisitely-kept ponds, and the gazelles on the lawns, and the squirrels among the trees.

"It is all very beautiful," she said sadly, and the Rajah, turning towards her, replied:

"And it is all yours! But here," he continued, as she did not respond,—"here I propose to place the Christian mosque. It is an open space looking upon the river. I shall send for an illustrious English architect. You shall send for him, and he shall build a mosque, as old in design as any in England."

"Had you not better call it a church?" said Rhoda, smiling in spite of herself.

"A church I, of course, should have called it; and you shall have it from the Greeks or the Goths; and it shall be of the Holy Catholic Church, or of the English. I have studied the differences, and you may choose."

"I know only the church in which I was brought up. It had a little Norman tower,

where the choughs hovered all day, and great tendrils of ivy clasped the walls."

"I shall send for it," said the Rajah.

"I doubt if they would export it."

"The tower at least, or the ivy and the choughs they might sell. I find everything for sale in England."

"But I doubt if the choughs would hover after they arrived."

"A really great architect would arrange it all."

"It is to be an English Church, then."

"English!" said the Rajah, with a look of delight in his eyes; "and you will teach me the prayers, and the fasts, and the festival. I shall soon make a number of Christians for it. Ah, you will help me to rule Masalihon as it has never been ruled before. We shall touch all civilisation at all important points, and you shall become famous throughout the world."

"And the temple—is it far off?" asked Rhoda.

"It is on the island at the entrance end of the palace grounds. We are going there now."

Between the island and the grounds was a bridge, which led into a grove of palms, and among the trees the temple reared its walls. They left their carriage and passed into it, Rhoda seeing many of the strange figures she had admired in South Kensington—though they looked a little forbidding and hideous to her now. They made straight for the innermost sanctum, where the priests received them in front of the idols. A great casket of jewels was laid before the Rajah,

and Rhoda looked into their gleaming surfaces with eyes which sparkled only less brilliantly than the gems.

"They are the jewels of the gods," said the Rajah. "You have seen all when you have seen these."

And they withdrew.

Again they went into the carriage, and Rhoda felt that the building of the church might afford her an excellent opportunity for procrastination. She would insist that before they could get married the church must be built. It was one of the customs of her country for marriages to be celebrated within a church. She took her place with something like an approach to gaiety, therefore, seeing the increasing friendliness of the people around her, and hopefully speculating that she might postpone the dreadful day on which she had offered to become the Rajah's.

"After we have been married we shall see other temples and mosques—not so great, not so famous as these—within Masalihon city. I perceive that my people already love you. It is as I anticipated. They should have been compelled to love you, but it is better that they do so of their own accord."

Rhoda was thinking how she should approach the subject of postponement, when they drove into a darkened thicket of trees.

"How dark it becomes!"

"I did not ask them to pass here. Fools! Why did you enter!"

But it was too late. Rhoda uttered a piercing exclamation, and leapt from the carriage.

On the upright stump of a tree was a human body, clad in one cotton garment saturated with blood. Blood covered the ground; and the feet of the standing corpse were enveloped in a knotted mass of entrails. Rhoda fled from the spectacle and from the Rajah's presence. He sat for one long minute and contemplated the abominable scene in silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

Another Appeal.

RHODA fled from the thicket, and, with unresting feet, ran till she reached the riverside. She ran hopelessly, without aim or object, in sheer desperation of fright at the hideous appearance on the tree. A score of feet followed her, noiseless among the undergrowth, while the Rajah sat and contemplated the disembowelled object who had earned his displeasure. He did not attempt to overtake Rhoda again; it was enough for him that she should be followed and watched by servants who were beginning to understand the situation within the walls. When she came to the riverside she stopped, and turned towards the house.

How she hungered and thirsted for the sight of one white face—if it were only a vulgar little street Arab! These myriads of dark eyes and tawny skins, they oppressed her with a sense of loneliness which was as distracting as it was new.

She returned to the house, and the Rajah went to his palace, wondering why this strange being out of the West should frustrate him as she did, when he was trying his best to arrange everything for her highest convenience. No matter, however, how strangely she behaved to him, he felt himself loving her all the more, and he regarded all the obstacles as mere temporary impediments, which

at the end of the Christian month would cease to exist.

Rhoda resumed her duties automatically, and Narendra Mokerji carried daily to the palace some fresh token of her diligence in the shape of manuscript, over which the Rajah gloated as if they were the precious jewels of the gods.

"Narendra," he said on one occasion, "I shall mark my sense of my love for her, on the last day of the month, by founding a church and by giving the chiefs the Parliament they ask. It shall be a House of Lords for Masalihon; and all my Zemindars may sit in it, and deliberate. It will be her English gift to the community, which may gracefully be made as she ascends the throne at my side."

It was the third day after the scene in the thicket, and Mokerji, looking at the Rajah, remarked quietly:

"As your Highness wishes. The path is now clear. The Kateeyanee has gone back in the night to her father's people, who have received her with honour, and not with contumely. As for the Lady Bâee, she is dead. The English lady has not seen her for three days; her strange recuperative influence being withdrawn, Bâee has sickened again, and died."

"It is well!" said the Rajah simply. "Now, nothing remains between me and the desire of my heart. You will order suitable rites for Bâee, remembering the while that at the end of the Christian month my real life of sovereign marriage begins."

The Rajah lost no time in presenting himself before Rhoda at this crisis in his domestic affairs.

She should not know what had happened through an intermediary; she should hear it at first hand from himself, and all the misunderstandings which kept them asunder would now, he felt sure, be for ever at an end.

Rhoda, who had not recovered the scene in the woods, would gladly have temporised and put the Rajah off with excuses; but the Premier assured her that his Highness must have his interview, so there was nothing for it but receiving him. His appearance in the library startled her. He was robed in his richest garments of State, yet was his look more boyish and abstracted than at those moments when she had first seen him. She had hardened her heart against him; yet, as he stood before her preparing to urge over again that forlorn suit of his, she could not help a momentary sensation of pleasure in his company. At least, the poor boy-bigamist was very much in earnest.

"My arrangements go on prosperously, Miss Courtenay," he said, without an illusion to the incident of the other evening.

Rhoda bowed; and the Rajah felt that he might sit down.

"Your mind may now be perfectly at ease," he continued.

"Yes!"

"A priest of the Western Church has travelled to the borders of Masalihon—Father Burke, of Ireland—who will unite us as the month ends."

"But I am not a Catholic," said Rhoda, alarmed at the practical tone of the prince, and seeming to feel that in his determination to gain his end he must achieve it.

"No matter—he is a friendly christian—he will

adapt his service to our requirements. I have thought of a way of making you at once beloved among the chiefs. They are to have a House of Lords on the day of our marriage. Already they are reading your translations with eagerness and delight. You shall be an incomparable consort in Masalihon."

"Thanks, Mahommed Ali," said Rhoda faintly. "I am glad that I should have turned out so excellent an interpreter."

"And now our marriage has become easy for you, because every obstacle is removed. The Kateeyanee has returned to her people, and Bâee is dead."

The relentless sweetness of the Rajah was too much for the English girl. She sat, idly swaying a gold pencil-case between her teeth, and looked at him.

"Bâee is dead!" she repeated, without quite seeming to realise the complete significance of the fact.

"Yes; Hakim Krish was right. She has not recovered; yet the vital spark glowed within her at the sight of you. She lived in your presence. It was wonderful, amazing! But now she is dead, and it is better."

"You have no wife now, Mahommed Ali?"

"No; none till the end of the Christian month. I recognise in it the beneficence of the gods. I have not been impartial, and have not prayed in vain. They have all helped me—all—Mahommed's god, and the gods of the Hindoo too, and the Christian's god. There has been unanimity among them. But you are looking sad, and it seems to me that you are shedding tears."

"Bâee is dead!" said Rhoda, suppressing her emotion as she rose from her sitting posture.

"Yes; poor Bâee!" rejoined the Rajah.

"But Bâee was murdered!" Rhoda said, advancing towards him, and standing over him.

He raised his eyes towards her as innocently as a babe might towards a mother.

"Murdered by you, Mahommed Ali! Oh!" as he put out his hand to touch hers, and withdrawing as if a snake had darted a fang.

"You do not yet understand me," he said pitifully, standing up and turning imploring eyes upon her.

"Yes; I understand too well that, in the exercise of your unlimited power, you put no barrier to your desires. You have spared yourself none of the crimes which you intended—no, not though you promised me, as the price of our marriage, that you would not perpetrate them. The fakir has been given to the wild-cat, Bâee has been wilfully poisoned, the Kateeyanee has been chased away: everything has been done as you ordered it in passion—done cruelly, and in cold blood! Mahommed Ali, you have forfeited my esteem, you have lost my services; as for marriage—never! never!"

He moved as if in pain, and pointed vaguely away with his right forefinger.

"I wished to be what you call respectable—yes, respectable,—and to be like the nation of my adoption, with one wife, one God, and to give you no difficulty to love me. You amused yourself with Bâee."

"I did not amuse myself. I found Bâee charming, such a wife as any good man might have gone

through fire and water for; but you, besotted with a power which the English have not yet taken from you, have deprived her of life for the sake of a whim. I have done with you, sir! and I shall go the road Bâee has gone—yes, cheerfully,—rather than pretend to fulfil my engagement with you at the end of the month!"

"Then are there no gods, neither for the Hindoo, the Mahommedan, nor the English? Gods! They are the nightmare of cowardly minds. They do not exist! I forswear them! Again I shall suspend their service till you have seen, my beloved, that all is nought to me without you."

He left her, and she went out on her balcony, and from the river she seemed to hear voices talking English. A launch was steaming slowly by; and yes, undoubtedly they were English voices. Rhoda's opportunity had arrived!

In the meantime the Rajah had returned to his palace, and renewed his edict for suspension of the service of the gods within the walls, and despair reigned from gate to gate. A wife lay dead, yet were the gods once more denied. A great horror fell upon the people. In vain Narendra Mokerji implored and prayed his Highness not again to place himself in opposition to the Divine will, that evil and not good would come from it, and even the Lady Courtenay herself would be further alienated.

"Do not reason with me," said Mahommed Ali. "If the gods will not help me, I shall not assist them."

"We are weak and impotent, your Highness, in their hands," said the Premier, some hours after the edict had been announced.

"They do not exist," murmured Mahommed Ali; and to the Nawab at that moment was brought a letter, which he would fain have kept out of sight.

"Has she written?" asked the Rajah.

"No, your Highness. It is from—it—is—from—the—Residency."

"And the contents are?"

"Your Highness, something has happened. She has—they have taken her away."

"Impossible! I have seen her this evening!"

"Nevertheless, she has been taken away, and the Resident writes——"

"Read, Narendra Mokerji," said the Rajah feebly, as he turned himself on his elbow. "Read what the Resident says."

"'Sir Francis Charing presents his compliments'——"

"Ah! Sir Francis Charing! He has, then, arrived! You have not served me well, Narendra Mokerji. But read."

"'—presents his compliments to the Nawab, Narendra Mokerji,'——"

"He addresses you, my servant. Narendra, you are a traitor!"

"Your Highness does not listen:

"'—presents his compliments, and begs of him to send to the Residency, without delay, everything which belongs to Miss Courtenay, who elects to leave the shelter of the palace. Sir Francis expects to see the baggage within two hours.'"

"And that is all?"

"Your Highness, that is all."

"And you allowed her to join Sir Francis Charing?"

"No, your Highness."

"Then how? Let the steward of her house be brought."

"The steward has pistolled himself, your Highness."

"He did well; but does Feringh Singh know nothing?"

"He is a religious man, your Highness. He has escaped beyond the walls, as many others to-night have done."

"Cowards!" said the Rajah. "Leave me, Narendra Mokerji. I have lost all!"

The Nawab went out to see Rhoda's things packed and forwarded to the Residency without delay. The Rajah crossed to the house of mourning where Bâee lay dead, penetrated to the chamber where she was laid out, looked at her for one brief moment, and rigidly turned on his heel.

"Yes, Bâee has set out on her journey," he murmured to himself, as he entered his own spacious bedroom. "Could I after death," he asked himself, "touch her heart? Could I make her feel within her bosom of English marble that indeed I love her, and that I am worthy one pang of pain? I shall try!"

And the Rajah sat down and wrote on an emblazoned sheet of State paper:

"The Rajah Mahommed Ali loved Rhoda Courtenay of England; but she loved him not. To-night he goes from Masalihon, and sets out upon his last journey. He leaves to Rhoda Courtenay the treasure behind the throne-room, and his private estate of Saf-Chowra—these for her services to him and his kingdom. Adieu! Adieu!"

He sealed the missive, and enclosed it within an envelope to Sir Francis Charing, which he placed for delivery on the morrow. Then he called his servants, and ordered them to keep from his presence until the following day. From a drawer he took out a cake of confections from a silver box, and rolled a cigarette. His windows looked to the east, and great stars were palpitating in the heavens.

"Allah is Allah," he unconsciously murmured, looking up at them and lighting his cigarette. "Yes, I am tired of the earth."

He broke the confection, and laid himself supine upon an uncurtained bed and tasted. It was deliciously bitter with the poison of the poppy, and with other ingredients, known to the skill of Hakim Krish. Bâee had eaten it; it had been enough for Bâee: he finished the cake, and his cigarette dropped from his fingers on the carpet. The stars went out, and Mahommed Ali stretched his limbs.

"Is Allah"—were the last words of him who had denied the gods for a woman, and no one disturbed his sleep that night.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Escape.

IT was an anxious party, but a merry one withal, which sailed up the river to Masalihon in the Resident's launch. Sir Francis Charing was on board, and he had invited Mark Inskip to accompany him, as a pioneer member of the surveying party to which he had been attached. A tall police superintendent, with ginger whiskers and thick lips, who knew the river, was also one of the party, and a bewildered priest was picked up on the way without his baggage. Sir Francis sat a good deal by himself in his cabin, having plenty of work on hand, until they approached Masalihon proper, when he became very nervous and restless, and talked a great deal to everybody.

He was not more nervous than Inskip, who, however, showed no signs of restlessness; though he kept very silent, and did not even respond to the genialities of the priest and the superintendent.

"Inskip is of opinion that we should be marching on Masalihon, with shotted guns," said Sir Francis, as they neared the city.

"I *am* a little anxious, sir," he replied to the Resident.

"If you had lost all your baggage, like Father Burke, there might be some reason for anxiety.

As it is, you need only congratulate yourself, I fancy."

"Yes, everything," said the priest, "except my box of spices. I never let it out of my sight, for with it I can always make a meal out of the simplest materials. So much for a Roman education. It is not, however, a sufficient wardrobe to appear at Court in. I cannot approach his Highness Mahommed Ali with a spice-box, while my clean shirts are journeying on their own account through the lower wilds of India. Alas for them, with my own name written in full across the hem! Into whose hands may they not fall? What vicissitudes may they not see? What knavish backs may they not cover?"

"We shall find some things to make you presentable, Mr. Burke," said the Resident, smiling. "You join the Rajah as 'our own theologian,' I suppose? He will not be likely to exact too costly a wardrobe. But here we are in sight of the grounds."

The four men advanced to an open space near the bow of the boat.

"Confess now, Mr. Inskip," said Sir Francis, "that you are in a very martial condition of mind. You would like to pass into these grounds sword in hand, seek the dragon all by yourself, slay him without further consideration, and release the lady to the tuck of drum?"

Inskip tried to laugh, but could not.

"You will find how different the reality is from your imagining. You will see shortly that a lover's misgivings are little related to the facts of life. Miss Courtenay, I take it, is as safe within the shadow of these mosques as she would be

within earshot of the Westminster bells," continued Sir Francis, who looked forward to meeting Rhoda with at least as much anxiety as the engineer.

"They have omitted the salute, sir," said the superintendent, as the launch passed the island of the Hindoo temple, and emerged in sight of the park and the palace.

"They ought to recognise my flag," said Sir Francis, irritably; "but I daresay it's only a blunder. Tell them to steer closer in upon the left bank. I may pay my respects informally, as I go up, if circumstances require it."

"Miss Courtenay!" said Inskip, in a tone of suppressed excitement, pointing to a balcony where a lady waved a handkerchief to them.

"There *is* something strange about the grounds. That *is* Rhoda Courtenay," said Sir Francis, ordering the launch to steam up to the steps.

They could not tell on board what a moment that was to the girl, as she slowly descended towards the river's margin. For her they were rescuers. She did not know them, but she knew their voices were English, and the sound of the homely Western speech put gladness in her heart. A mist seemed to come into her eyes as the little steamer approached. The swallows, who were beginning to know her, skimmed the air around her, and twittered gladly. A crowd of attendants stood at a respectful distance, watching the launch's approach.

"I must ask your protection," said Rhoda; "and to be taken from this place without delay."

She had recognised no one.

Sir Francis sprang to the gangway.

"So, then, there *is* something wrong! Take my hand, Miss Courtenay. This way!"

And the Resident led her into his own room, she accompanying him as if she were in a dream. The mist in her eyes had darkened, and as she sat down she said:

"Your voice, sir, I seem to know, but I am suffering from—— If I might—how silly of me! I am better, thank you. A little iced water would—thanks so much, Sir—Francis—Charing!"

"Yes, Rhoda, it is I. How exceedingly strange that we should meet like this! I cannot tell you how glad I am to find that nothing has occurred."

"I am not so certain of that!"

"At least, that nothing has occurred to you."

"Oh, no; certainly not—nothing, except that I should have died if I had not been rescued before the end of the month!"

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Indeed it is. But tell me that I am really taken from the Rajah's minions, and that I am in English hands!"

"You will understand where you are exactly when I say that I am the new Resident at Masalihon, and that I am now proceeding to the Residency, which lies on the river-bank a few miles higher up."

"Thank God! then I am safe!"

"Well, but tell me your danger?"

"Personally I had none. I had every attention which a host could lavish upon a guest. The Rajah and his people were most kind; but—but, Sir Francis Charing, he insisted upon marrying me!"

"The stupid boy! Now, my dear Rhoda, I

should say as little about it as possible. He has done you no personal injury. You are making your escape from your engagement easily. After all, an interpretership is an impossible sort of post at our native Courts. I wish you had taken my advice in England before you accepted; but then, to be sure, there was that unfortunate rupture which Mary made. Everything, however, has come right, and in the simplest possible way. Here you are sound and among friends, and not so much as an uncivil word spoken to the enemy."

"The Rajah is dreadfully in earnest, Sir Francis. He is in such a state of mind that, really, I shall hardly feel safe even at the Residency. And do you know that he is so bent upon adopting Western civilisation, that he is getting rid of his wives?"

"Oh, yes; he is a most valuable man. He is full of loyalty to England. As to the state of his harem—we don't care a straw about it. But talking of your rescue, I have a young fellow on board who, I feel sure, is bitterly disappointed he had no opportunity of fighting for your release."

Rhoda did not look interested.

"Shall I bring him in?" asked the Resident.

"Any face which is not of this country I shall be delighted to see."

Sir Francis called, and the superintendent insinuated his ginger whiskers at the curtain.

"Ah! this is Mr. Guise, who has done India on a bicycle. Like yourself, from the West of England. Let me introduce him: Miss Courtenay—Mr. Guise."

"On the next *ghat*, sir, we shall be at the Residency grounds," said the superintendent; and Sir

Francis, hurrying out, found Inskip standing apart, gazing dismally at the native craft.

"Come along, young man! I am not going to make love for you. Let me introduce you to Miss Courtenay, or this provincial descendant of the royal family of France will play you a trick. Rhoda, this is Mr. Inskip, whom you've met before!"

"Am I, Sir Francis Charing, asleep or awake? Is this—no, really it is not! Mr. Inskip, I am delighted to see you! Indeed, I feel among friends now!"

"Do you know that?" asked Mark, showing her the paper-boat.

She read her own inscription in it, and looking at him asked:

"This has brought you here, then?"

The superintendent thought he would like to punch the head of the young man who played so effective a card. But at that moment he was called out, however; and Inskip and Rhoda were alone.

"It seems to me as if every man with a white face were a brother," said Rhoda.

"You don't like the natives?"

"My experience has been unfortunate. I do not like to be prejudiced; but I *do* thank God for the sight of white faces. I shall go straight back to England, and never leave it again!"

The Residency was a quiet two-story house, situated on an island, with a drawbridge off the river: the party were presently driving through the cropped park, which surrounded it, and in a short time had separated to their rooms before meeting again at dinner. It was a disappoint-

ment to the men that Rhoda did not join them. But her hour of reaction had come, and she broke down by herself, and throughout the night spent hours of bitter foreboding, which the dawn did not dissipate. She came down late to the Resident's breakfast, and found from the deadly silence of the men that something had happened. Sir Francis gravely helped her, and one by one the men were glad to leave the table and saunter into the park.

"I have very bad news this morning," said Sir Francis, when everybody had gone.

"News from home?"

"No; from the palace."

"What! Bâee has been made a victim? She is without doubt dead?"

"Worse than that! Mahommed Ali is dead! He was found at dawn this morning on his bed. And he leaves no heir to the principality. It is a terrible complication, Miss Courtenay; the poor fellow loved you sincerely."

"He—is—dead!" said Rhoda, vaguely realising that one who was willing to surrender all for her had actually done so. "But I saw him yesterday, and he looked in perfect health!"

"That may be; but he is gone, I regret to say. And what is more, there seems no doubt that he committed suicide. I think it desirable that you should get out of Masalihon as soon as possible, for there is no accounting for the whims of these people. You should go to Simla, where you will find plenty of friends. I shall give you letters. At Simla you can make up your mind about your next move."

"Sir Francis, I should like to look on his

face for the last time. He will haunt me all my life!"

"Well, you may come down to the palace with me. I daresay Mokerji will not object; but to-morrow I recommend you to go. I shall get a good man to take care of you from the first station."

They went into the palace, and Rhoda was allowed to see the dead potentate and his dead wife.

"I feel as if I had done it all!" she exclaimed tearfully to the Resident, as they drove back again.

"Don't say that," he answered. "It is destiny! You will be glad of a quiet time after all this excitement."

"I shall return as soon as I can."

"There may be reasons, however, why you should stop in India for a little bit yet. You go to Simla in the first place, and then you can fix a date, as events make it possible. Hume may thank his stars he has been recalled. The quantity of correspondence I shall have to take up is too terrible to contemplate. I have no reason to congratulate myself on the Rajah's demise."

After dinner the same evening Sir Francis Charing took Inskip aside, and talked with him.

"Well," he said, "what luck?"

"She will not listen to me," said the discomfited engineer.

"Perhaps it's as well. I shall want you and your code on the first river station, as there will be an accumulation of secret-service work in connection with these unfortunate events. Miss Courtenay goes to Simla. I confess I judged to-

day, when I saw her look at the Rajah's dead, peaceful countenance, that your suit was hopeless. The fact is, whether she knows it or not, she was desperately in love with the little Mahommedan prince. Dash it all, what a fool he was to lie down and die—a young fellow with such revenues, and such a future!"

"When shall I go, sir?" asked Mark, who was not anxious to prolong his stay in Masalihon.

He had sought the opportunity of being heroic in his attachment; but, alas! the dead Rajah was still his rival: he had no chance of being a hero. He was a miserable, commonplace civil engineer, and he bitterly felt that Rhoda Courtenay was not for him.

"You shall go to-night," said Sir Francis; "and to-morrow you may be on the look-out for Miss Courtenay. I am sending her up to Simla. You are a secret-service man, Mr. Inskip, and I need not hesitate to tell you something I haven't told herself. By the wish and will of the Rajah, she comes into property, in jewels and land, which I should say will yield her a yearly income of five thousand!"

"Rupees, sir?"

"No, not rupees—the rupee is a little beast—five thousand honest sovereigns of the Bank of England!"

"She doesn't know this, sir?"

"No, not yet; but you can see her—well, I don't need to say to you what you must perfectly understand."

"I understand: it is, that I have no right to aspire to her hand now she is enriched. I admit it, and I thank heaven for my opinion of her—that

when she made it impossible for me to make any more love to her, she did not know of this mighty windfall!"

"Well, you have got some good sense. After all, a young lady is not bound to get married. I did my best for you; but she elects for virginity. Virginity and five thousand a year! What a run there will be on her, to be sure, next London season! If I were only single—but then I'm not."

In a couple of hours Inskip had gone back to his code, without seeing Rhoda. The day after she went away to Simla, and in the spring of the year she went on board a P. & O. at Bombay, still single, but confirmed in a fortune which was quite as large as the Resident had called it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Fancy Free.

TALK of sleepy hollows in the rural districts of England! What hollow is half so sleepy as one of those Bloomsbury squares detached from the madding crowd, to which comes the distant moan of the sea of life, ebbing and flowing in the greater thoroughfares of London?

As Bordington Square was last year, so was it on a May evening of this. Rhoda Courtenay looked out of a window on the gardens and saw no difference. Her window was not the same she used to occupy: she had taken the rooms the Rajah had in No. 1, and she had taken Mrs. Pierce's Sarah to be her maid. There was the identical old poplar, and the doctor, the agent, and the Dutch Jew gossiping at the foot of it. There were the copper-beeches, and the short-skirted children playing hide-and-seek among the lower branches. There was the tutor on the side-walk, reading an ode of Horace to himself with as much gusto as if it had appeared in the same evening's *Pall Mall Gazette*. There were the butcher and the poulterer from round the corner, standing with Queen's writs all ready for the Irish landlord as he came reeling out of No. 350. There were the little street-boys exercising their mother-wit on the railings of the gardens at the expense of the

little boys who were not on the streets, and who were not, therefore, so witty. Everything seemed to be exactly as it was.

Dear sleepy hollow! How Rhoda loved it after her wanderings! Even the butcher and the poulterer looked so homely and picturesque in their benevolent aprons, as they thrust their writs into the landlord's hand; for sleepy-hollow was not without its incidents.

"I wish," said the doctor to the house-agent, "you 'd devise a method, d' ye see, for keeping *prima donnas* out of the square, d' ye see."

"What 's that for?" asked the Dutch Jew, who was very musical.

"Can't you hear for yourself? There 's four of 'em at four open windows; and if they haven't taken the leaves off that precious last rose of summer, I 'm a nigger from Timbuctoo, d' ye see!"

"I call it getting our music cheap," said De Shift. "I call it the unconscious education of the younger generation. There, hear to that street-boy singing 'The Last Rose,' bee-oo-tifully!"

The house-agent defended the *prima donnas* also. He was as jealous for the honour of the square as any of 'em; he protested that they had no cause to be afraid of these "primer donners." They were respectable if noisy, and brought money into the district.

"Ah! here comes that crack-pot, Teddington Smith," he added. "He 's gone from bad to worse, and his friend Mr. John Jones is following him. I wouldn't mind how soon they packed their portmanteaus and went to the suburbs. They 're simply becomin' unfit for select society!"

Rhoda looked down from her window and saw the gardens fill up. She saw the young men enter who had, last year, asked her in marriage. She wondered at herself as she regarded them.

"Sarah!" she called to her maid, "come and tell me——"

"Yes, Miss."

"Who are those men in the garden?"

"Them under the tree, Miss?"

"No, strolling about."

"Don't you 'ave nothing to do with 'em, Miss Courtenay. That little one, he'd ha' deceived me, he would. He's as false as a perrooker, he is!"

"What had he to do with you, Sarah?"

"He hadn't nothin' to do wi' me; only I give him one walk, that's all. He ain't no good, Miss; no, nor that tall Smith fellow neither, as both pretends to have such a love for you, and ain't as faithful as two bluebottles on a summer's afternoon. They comes courtin' the maid when they can't get the misses."

"Enough, Sarah; you need not tell me more. I shall not know them again."

Rhoda looked frequently at her watch. She expected her mother and her married sister, and her sister's husband, and her two other sisters. Mrs. Courtenay had never been in London, except in the month of May, and she was glad to renew her recollections of it at the season of the year at which she used to visit it, during a previous period of her existence. Rhoda had provided for her mother and unmarried sisters in No. 1, but her married sister had to go to a private hotel. All these arrangements made her nervous; and she

passed from the window to the room, arranging flowers and consulting her watch and her maid, until a great clattering of cabs at the door told her they had arrived.

The first person who came down from a "growler" was the Rev. Mr. Stirk, looking helpless and imbecile, but managing to successfully bring away Mrs. Courtenay from that portion of her family which wedged her in a corner. From another came down the new brother-in-law, a smart, alert young fellow, who managed, with a business-like air, to make an infinity of blunders within two minutes. But presently the family were all seated in Rhoda's room, a little overawed because their mother had a secret to tell her which she had not yet heard.

"Rhoda dear," said Mrs. Courtenay in a bedroom conversation with her daughter, "I know you have a prejudice against Mr. Stirk. You dislike him so much that I have dreaded any communication about him; but now I 've no use in concealing what is known to your sister. Mr. Stirk has got a vicarage, and I am going to marry Mr. Stirk."

"Mother dear, it sounds dreadfully like marrying the vicarage. I wish you hadn't made up your mind so quickly. Why, what is the use of my being hopelessly rich? If there is any pleasure in being a Nabob, it is surely to make one's mother happy and comfortable in her old age."

"Old age, Rhoda! I am thirty-nine! That certainly is not young; but I have known happy marriages to be made later than that. Then, as for your being so rich, Rhoda, the vicarage is only worth two hundred a year; so you may add to it what you like. Mr. Stirk, when you come to know

him, Rhoda, is worthy of all respect. And he is very shrewd, notwithstanding his unworldly appearance. You might not suppose it now, but out of his meagre income as a curate he has saved seven hundred pounds!"

"I know many clergymen are fond of money. I daresay he is as miserly as he looks. Mother dear, you cannot expect me to be *delighted* with my stepfather."

"At least, Rhoda, you will not be rude to him. You will not show by your manner that you dislike him. Remember that he is a gentleman!"

Rhoda returned to the room, and going straight up to her future stepfather, surprised him by remarking:

"So you are marrying mother, Mr. Stirk?"

"I trust, in the providential order of the universe, that our lives will soon be united. I shall be glad to know—I shall felicitate myself greatly if I am made aware that, as the eldest daughter, you give your approval. My vicarage is not fifty miles from Cleaver. She will be no stranger in a strange land."

"I do not—at least, I do not at present—like marriages, but I suppose I must congratulate mother. We seem to be a marrying family. It may be as well that I should remain unengaged and unmarried."

"You'll want somebody to keep your fortune together," said the new brother-in-law.

"A marriage might tend to dissipate it," said Mr. Stirk. "I do not know that Rhoda could take better counsel than remain single for the present. It is a great responsibility—a revenue of thousands; it ought to be fenced and guarded with sleepless

vigilance. You may be sure that many men of the world will be ready to prey upon it mercilessly."

"Well, I am glad you don't all insist upon hauling me away to church and making a bride of me at once, willy-nilly. Let us, however, get to the family feast. As for me, my troubles are about to begin. Responsibilities crowd upon me, attentions accumulate, friends multiply!"

"It is the way of the world," said her step-father.

"Then the world's ways are a little bewildering," said Rhoda.

THE END.

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