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HIS MAJESTY'S GREATEST SUBJECT

BY

S. S. THORBURN

BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE

AUTHOR OF "ASIATIC NEIGHBOURS"

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His Majesty's Greatest Subject

Chapter I

INTRODUCING THE STORY

DEATH is upon me; I am passing away full of years and full of honours, 'His Majesty's greatest subject,' and the people's most trusted friend.

A few days hence, amidst the nation's mourning, my body will be laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, and the immortal part of me will await judgment behind the veil. Will the decision consign me to an eternity of bliss or to a purgatory of torment? Will the Almighty Judge of all the earth forgive me for the transgression—I can hardly call it crime—which I committed just forty-five years ago? I was greatly tempted, and I greatly fell, perhaps; but through my fall—if it was a fall—I saved the Empire. That will be my justification before a Just God, and that plea will surely prevail. But will my countrymen accept

it? I think so; though some narrow-minds will doubtless condemn me for having kept silence all these years, after the occasion for concealment had passed.

On my return to England, my beloved wife, my Melissa, she who saved me from the flood, and from the wrestler's fate, and whom I served with love and reverence until the great opportunity came, implored me to proclaim the truth, and trust to the magnanimity of all imperial-souled Englishmen and English-women. She urged that the deception which I had practised was the highest form of State-craft, and that the grandeur of its success was a full vindication. Perhaps;—but Melissa does not always see things from the English point of view. I combatted her arguments; I resisted her entreaties; I pleaded for time: let me first establish myself in the affections of the people, and then, possibly, confession might safely be made, the favour of my Sovereign would not be withdrawn,—my services were too distinguished for that ingratitude,—but the vain and vulgar many might be misled by their straight-laced teachers, and turn from me as from an impostor. That risk I could not face. It would be death in life without that "resurrection in the minds of men" which deprives physical extinction of half its horror.

Thus I, who in the crisis of my life, of Imperial England's life, I might say, had courted every danger, had quailed before no risk, shrank from making an avowal which, when made, may after

all, rather enhance than diminish my reputation as a statesman and man of action.

The avowal once put off became more difficult, for the cares of statesmanship again laid hold of me, and during a quarter of a century left me little time to think of myself and my past. Moreover, the good fortune which attended my labours seemed to absolve me. Why should the man to whom England ascribes her social peace, the Empire its present unity, and the Governments of Europe their modern harmony, proclaim that he began life with a fraud?

Thus as the years passed I still kept silence. With old age came sickness, and with sickness the determination to die, as I had lived, 'His Majesty's greatest subject.'

Reluctantly Melissa acquiesced in my decision. 'At least write down the truth,' she entreated, 'and let it be published—afterwards.'

I consented.

She put writing materials before me, and sometimes writing, sometimes dictating, I have slowly recorded the story of my great temptation, and how I used it.

The just completed manuscript is here by my bedside, within reach of my hand. My darling sits beside me, smiling sadly through her tears as she thanks me for having carried out her wishes. While we talk, or in loving, yearning silence await the final wrench, we hear the carriages roll up. The great ones of the earth — sovereign, princes,

ministers and ambassadors—are calling to show their sympathy for us. Melissa looks out of the window, and tells me of the silent crowd down there in the street, patiently waiting to hear the latest bulletin. That moves me. I always loved the people. We hold each other's hand, she and I: we look into each other's eyes. She reads in mine that I have realized at last that all is vanity and vexation, all but the love that we have for each other. We think of it, and of its impending severance, and the weary, weary waiting until our reunion hereafter. I am glad that I yielded at last to my darling, and wrote that confession. It removes the only cloud which had ever come between us. I have extenuated nothing. I can now die in peace.

Now what remains but that I should say good-bye to light, to love, to all things? A month or two hence the world will know my secret, and I humbly hope that as God will forgive me so will man.

* * * * *

Chapter II

THE DROWNING OF JACK RAVENHILL

I WAS one of twins—a younger son by a few minutes. That chance seniority gave my brother Cecil precedence over me in the external sweeteners of life, but still I was I, and in all things personal his superior almost from babyhood. He was the heir, the certain head of the family, a lord by courtesy already, the future Earl of Severn, with estates and coal-mines in several counties. I was merely the Honourable Jack Ravenhill, with a beggarly £1000 a year. In the nursery I was the favourite. When not sleeping or eating, I was either laughing or chattering, "amakin' of his little jokes," as dear old Emma, our nurse, called it. But Cecil was quiet, reserved and exacting, the sense of his position weighing on him already, I suppose.

It was the same at school. I was "Jack" to every one—good all-round in the playfields, but neither student nor scholar in class. However I picked up a smattering of knowledge easily enough, and was no dullard. With Cecil it was different. He took life seriously from the first, and was the hope and pride of the masters; but as for the boys,

they first dubbed him "Dignity," and latterly, when he rose to be head of the school, "Brains."

In repose we were hardly distinguishable. We were both tall, handsome lads; but as with my brother all life was propriety and preparation, whereas with me it was amusement and a good time, he and I were never mistaken for each other. His face was always set and serious, mine bright and genial. At Oxford the divergence in our characteristics continued. He was a sage, a favourite with the dons and reading-men, and a fair oar, whilst I developed an aptitude for languages and became famous as a cricketer and even as a polo-player.

We were always good friends, he and I, until, when twenty-three, we foolishly fell in love with the same girl, one Jean Vincent, then about eighteen, the daughter of a neighbour of ours. In her heart she naturally preferred me, and often told me so,—indeed, we had a boy-and-girl engagement,—but her mother and ambition decided her to throw me over and wait for the heir, an unwise resolve, for she had to wait a long time. Cecil was too cautious to commit himself to more than an indefinite and conditional engagement.

I left home in disgust, sowed my wild oats all over the world, shot big game in Africa, spent a summer whaling in the Arctic seas, wandered through Canada and the States, and after a short visit home started for a prolonged tour in the East, taking India first. My free, open-air life, general

insouciance, exuberant health and spirits, and a habit I had of clean-shaving my face, kept me boyish in appearance, and even in manners, at an age when some men are already fathers and dreading a quiverful. My brother at the time of my last visit home was M.P. for Se ern, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and said to be on the road to the highest political distinction, unfortunately, on the Radical side. I had never studied politics, but my extensive acquaintance with democracy, white and black, had given me a Conservative bias, even though I was a poor devil of a younger son, with little but my family name and a handsome face and figure wherewith to make my way in life.

Well, here I was in April, 1903, a boy, I might say, though twenty-eight, travelling in leisurely fashion down to Bombay, rather disillusioned about our great dependency and the wisdom and unselfishness of our rule over it. I was getting tired of shooting, and was thinking of making tracks for Australia or South Africa, and trying gold-digging, when it occurred to me that I might just as well round off my shikaring experiences by bagging a crocodile or two in the Trimali, before I turned my back for good on the so-called gorgeous, but really squalid, sordid and evil-smelling East.

I was always a man of action. The project was no sooner conceived than put into execution. I picked up some tents at Delhi, went on by train to Dowlatnagar, marched thence to Gurisna, on

the Trimali, and pitched my camp on its right bank.

The weather was intensely hot and oppressive; the preceding monsoon had been late and feeble; the winter rains had also failed; man and beast were drooping and depressed. Shifts of meagre, underfed cattle wearily drove the water-wheels of the wells all night long, and for half the day as well, filling the air with the mournful creaking peculiar to Persian wells. During the hottest hours there was stillness; the animals rested. Half the cattle of the country were already dead from starvation, over work, or murrain; men moved about like shadows, languidly and silently, weary of existence; their usually voluble, shrill-tongued women even, when they met at the well, or in the village lanes, passed each other without remark. Their naked brats were alone happy and unimpressed, wallowing like the spare buffaloes in the sluggish back-waters or stagnating pools of the river, or playing in the mud on its bank.

All things wore a sombre grey colour: the melancholy mud hovels of the village, the very foliage of the trees. So thick was the dust that the sun at mid-day was veiled, ashamed to look down on the mockery of spring. Day followed day in prolonged twilight, as if the sun were under permanent eclipse.

The river, too, the great Trimali, five miles wide in the rains, accustomed at this season to saunter slowly southwards towards the sea in several chan-

nels, was shrunken to a single peddling stream, fordable on foot in many places. Nature seemed brooding over her wrongs, and sulkily showing her power, and man was helpless to propitiate her. He had thrown weirs across her rivers, and diverted their waters into irrigation canals; he had changed sandy wastes into vast wheat-plains; he had peopled those quondam deserts with ever-multiplying millions, and had stopped the most deadly of the ordinary correctives to over-population—war, pestilence, and famine — by reducing the vagaries of natural reproduction and extinction to one dull routine of forcing-house rules and regulations. Man, proud man, or, rather, the world-compelling English, had done all this, had even attempted to scale the heavens and subject the powers of the air to law, but nature had resented the insult and would not be trammelled. Nature had this year asserted her wild freedom, and had refused to refresh the earth with showers, or replenish the failing rivers in due season.

Such were the conditions when I, Jack Ravenhill, pitched my camp outside the village of Gurisna, near a groaning well, in the shade of a solitary *pîpal*, almost in the dry bed of the Trimali.

The tent being intolerably stuffy, I had passed the greater part of the day reading and sleeping in my big cane deck-chair, which my bearer had placed in the shadiest spot he could find. I awoke from a troubled siesta about sunset. The still silence of the long, long afternoon was now

broken by the slow revival of active life about me. Droning beetles were humming through the air in aimless search for food or for each other, their buzz-zz-ing stopping abruptly as their heavy bodies struck with a thud on my tent or even on myself. A *kel* in the tree above me was signalling to his mate, crying, 'Who-are-you?' 'Who-are-you?' with the melancholy iteration which so irritates the nerves that he is vulgarly called 'the brain-fever bird.' Anon a procession of scantily draped women, each with pitcher balanced on her head, moved silently from village to well, whilst ahead of them came running their little naked irrepressibles, laughing, squabbling, and chattering as if food were plentiful, and the all-pervading, all-penetrating dust were life's elixir. Down-stream across the sluggish remnant of the river stretched a long spit of white sand—a basking elysium for crocodiles, I thought. I searched that sand-spit with my field-glasses; yes, there they were, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen black specs, stacked regularly like logs of seasoned timber fringing the farther edge of the river, where the water was still deep. As the village awoke, these logs moved, and, singly or in groups, slid smoothly into the water, until only one huge old patriarch remained, too lazy to flick his tail and propel his bulk riverwards, or too accustomed to brown humanity to fear it.

'I'll have you, my friend, to-morrow,' I said to myself; 'and a few months hence your stuffed car-

case will be gazed at by gaping Londoners in the Natural History Museum, Kensington, and I'll put a life-sized image of an Indian baby between the saw-like teeth of your long, ugly jaws, though they say you are rarely a man-eater.'

'Sahib, sahib, *bakshtsh*!' uttered by a dozen small voices interrupted the formulation of further intentions. I looked down and found myself surrounded by a throng of little gaping brownies, each one gazing up at me, and exhibiting teeth and eyes which my lost love, Jean Vincent, would have envied. They saw the direction of my looks, and, guessing my thought, chorussed in Hindustani:

'Yes, sahib; to-morrow you'll shoot him; we cannot bathe there, as he eats children.'

I scattered a handful of small coin amongst them, and in an instant they were struggling on all-fours for the money, rolling over each other, and even in their eagerness pulling at my trousers with their dirty hands. Some of the younger women stood looking on, boldly shooting soft approval from their great dark eyes. Evidently but for propriety and reverential awe of the handsome sahib, they would have liked to investigate me closer.

Ladies in every clime had always been gracious to me, but brownies?—I had never yet taken the *trouble to look at them particularly. But these* brownies—well, for some reason their admiration flattered me. I was alone in that jungly solitude,

oppressed by the heat and brooding silence of the day, and the kindly glances of these village belles was pleasing. I waved my hand, and smilingly told them in my best Hindustani that they must go away, as I wished to be alone, it was too hot for talking. They giggled and quietly withdrew, driving the noisy little ones before them.

I, too, withdrew inside my tent, and after a gritty dinner, threw myself on my camp-bed, and was soon asleep, and dreaming of rescuing a village maiden from the snapping jaws of a huge saurian. I fired. There was a babel of shrieks, followed by a crash, and in an instant the slimy brute was somehow enveloping and suffocating me.

Nightmare, I thought. I must wake; I must shout or move suddenly and break this awful oppression; but I could not. I was helpless; the soft belly of the great brute was on top of me, his hard, thin jaw was crushing in my chest; cries of "Storm!" "Storm!" and "A flood has come!" penetrated my brain. I struggled now for breath and freedom, and realized that I was awake. The tent had collapsed; its pole had fallen across me, and its cloth-roofing, wet and heavy, was clinging to my limbs.

By degrees I wriggled myself free, and, worming myself outside all encumbrances, stood up. All was black darkness; rain was falling in torrents; servants were screeching and moving about somewhere near me. There was no wind as yet. I stumbled against my cane-chair, and touched

something in it that was cold, soft, and yielding, some one's face, it seemed. A moment or two and then suddenly forked flashes zigzagged through the blackness, immediately followed by a succession of crashes, which made the very earth tremble. The weird illumination showed water glistening everywhere, and the river, already much swollen, rushing down in yellow flood.

The thunder ceased, and rain and blackness visible again encompassed me, and then from upstream there fell on my awed senses a dull, approaching rumble, growing momentarily louder, until it became a continuous roar. Another succession of flashes now re-lit my surroundings. I saw a great wall of mad, tumultuous water rushing down on my camp. I realized that death was at hand, and instinctively threw myself into the cane chair, and in doing so had a sense of relief that the cold soft thing in it was a large air-cushion, which was sewn into it. As I clung to my frail protection some freak of the mind made me think of Noah in the Ark, and wonder whether my chair would prove an ark for me. What an adventure to tell my friends, to have been swept down for perhaps hundreds of miles in one of those cataclysms, which occur on the great Indian rivers perhaps once in a century. My thinking was cut short by chair and self being caught in the turmoil of water and hurled along like a cork in a mill-race. I spluttered and gulped and fought for dear life, now in the chair, now under it, but always

holding on to it, sometimes amidst darkness and sometimes amidst the vivid brightness of continuous lightning.

How long this went on I know not, but when my strength was nearly gone I noted, in one of the now less frequent flashes, that the flood was no longer raging through a flat country. I saw trees and hills quite near me, but I was too much exhausted for exertion. Half-drowned, numb, and bruised as I was, I could make no effort to save myself. Helpless I lay back in the chair, which my weight kept partially under water. I saw rifts in the clouds and the stars shining above me; I heard the rumble of distant thunder far behind me. I noticed that the river was no longer turbulent, but smooth and deep and red. We, my chair and I, were still being carried down at a great pace. Once or twice our speed slackened, or we bumped against something. It was a backwater we had entered, or a carcase we had struck against. By-and-by I saw lights ashore and the outlines of houses, and my dulled senses realized that I was passing a town or a village. I distinctly heard four struck on a gong, and connected the sound with the approach of dawn. After that I must have dozed or fainted, I do not know which.

My next consciousness was a sensation of returning warmth and of restfulness from cessation of motion. The long terror of the night was over; I was saved, and would live to encounter new adventures. I slept.

Through my closed eyelids I saw the darkness gradually change into a vivid red, across which brown shadows kept moving fitfully. They perplexed me; but soon a rustling above and about me explained the whole puzzle. Night was yielding to dawn, and dawn intensifying into sunlight; and the early morning breeze, common on Indian rivers, was stirring the reeds or foliage which fringed the spot at which the chair had grounded. My red silk *pahjāmās* and sleeping jacket were dry now, and were loose, gently fluttering against my bleached skin. My sensations were pleasant—of warmth, indolence, and bodily ease. Why should I move? I would rest and sleep, and regain strength.

I dozed on in a semi-conscious state, when suddenly I heard the tinkling of gold or silver anklets as little feet pattered lightly on stones; low laughter too—girls' happy laughter—penetrated my ears. Then voices — girls' voices — interrupted by the stronger tones of some fussy woman.

My heavy eyelids lifted slightly. I saw, just beyond my encircling shelter of reeds and trees, a little bay, with white steps leading down to it. The water was clear and shallow, mirroring on its glassy surface the spreading *banyan* tree which gave the spot shade and privacy. I looked on idly, enjoying the beauty of the scene and its enchanting quiet.

Presently the water was disturbed by the splashing in it of three bathers. I resented their intrusion. The peaceful calm of that little bay was spoilt for me. It was always so in India, I thought: nature

charms, but man pushes in and breaks the charm. I turned my eyes in vexation on these intruders. Why, one is fair, and one is brown. Boys? No, girls surely, and the third is a stout woman, in a garment of some sort—a bathing costume in India, I thought, wâh! wâh! advance, India—but the lady is plain and fat—ugh! I turned for relief from her to the father of her two companions. As I did so that young person rose from a sitting posture and faced me—a slim child of light and beauty. I ought, perhaps, to have coughed, or shut my eyes; but, no, I could only look. Grace, innocence, modesty, the straight lines of girlhood merging into the soft curves of womanhood, were all there, and the face had a sweet imperiousness about it which I had never before seen in my wanderings. As I gazed the stout bather moved between me and my charmer, like a cloud across the chaste moon. Espying me, she screeched, 'A man! a man!' and in her confusion flopped down into the water up to her neck, as if her ugly person could be an object of attraction or curiosity to any man.

Instead of following suit, the two girls, with calm dignity, waded out of the water to the steps, and quietly wrapped up their dainty little persons in what appeared to be folds of white muslin. They then seemed to consult together, pointed in my direction and at their cowering duenna, and began to clap their hands and laugh.

To my amazement, the fair girl called out to her said duenna in broken English,—

'You old goosey, Miss H., I mean, it's not a man, but some white and red rags caught in the reeds.'

'No, no, Princess; it's a man—a white man in red *pahjamas*. I know them.' (Oh, fibbing Miss H.! I thought.) 'Run, Princess; call the bearers or throw me my clothes. Oh dear! oh dear! what will his Highness say?—a sahib bathing in the harem *ghāt*!'

Whilst she was speaking, the two girls—the Princess and her attendant, I ought now to say—were cautiously advancing in my direction, each holding the other by the hand, now taking a few uncertain steps forwards along the bank, at the end of which my chair had grounded, now pausing, and seeming half inclined to run away. Like two timid gazelles, they suspected danger, but stayed, curious to view it nearer.

The Princess led. The companion alternately hung back or pushed her mistress forward. I now thought it prudent to close my eyes. Presently I heard whispering over me.

'It's a man—a beautiful young man—fast asleep,' said one.

'He is very pale, and I see a bruise on his arm, perhaps he's dead,' was the comment of the other, followed after a pause by the remark 'I'll go closer, and see.'

'Oh, don't, Princess! Let us run. I am so frightened!'

'Let go my hand, Lulu; I am not afraid. À

Princess should have no fear,' was the audacious rejoinder.

I now felt a small hand touch my face, and then pass slowly down, until it stopped over my heart. The soft, warm pressure animated me like a draught of the elixir of life. My heart bounded; the hand trembled in response, and was hurriedly withdrawn. I felt breath—her breath—upon my face. I opened my eyes. Into their blue depths was reflected a kindly, compassionate look from the large dark eyes of the Princess. She smiled with a sort of shy sympathy. It was evidently a tremendous adventure for that plucky little lady. Then, to my astonishment, she whispered in English,—

'Who are you?'

'Drowned Jack Ravenhill,' I answered. 'You will save me, won't you. But who are you?'

'I am the Princess Melissa of Sultànabad,' she replied with dignity; and then she stooped her pretty head quite close to mine and added, 'Yes, I'll save you; you look nice, and so clean.'

I almost laughed, and whispered, half in joke, 'I ought to be. I tub daily, and last night was being washed and bleached in your river for twelve hours.'

That was my introduction to her—the little accident which decided the rest of our lives, and was instrumental in preserving India to the Empire.

She stepped back, as if nothing extraordinary had happened to either of us, and said calmly to her handmaiden Lulu,—

'It's a half-drowned sahib—a real sahib; and he'll die if I don't take care of him.'

'He's dangerous, Princess,' interposed the duenna, who had meanwhile come up, having recovered her courage with her clothes. 'Do come away and leave him. His Highness will be so angry when he hears of this.'

'Miss H,' said the Princess decisively, 'his Highness shall know nothing about this. I shall not leave a sahib here to die. Please order up your litter, and I'll take him home. You can sit with me in my *pālki*.'

'His Highness will kill us!' protested Miss H. with conviction.

'He won't hurt me,' the Princess remarked, with point on the 'me.'

After that all three talked at once, and I caught the words "*khāna zādahs* to be trusted"; by which I understood that the bearers were home-bred servants, almost domestic slaves. Miss H. was finally sent off for her litter, and whilst she was away Lulu fetched their bathing towels. The Princess concealed me under them, and thus I was laid out like a corpse prepared for the coffin. I was then clumsily lifted and laid full length in it—the litter, I mean, not the coffin. The bearers shuffled off. Their jerking was intolerable. Evidently I was going to faint. Oh! oh! where was I? Being buried in a harem. Yes! that was it. So good-bye, Jack Ravenhill; and—then my senses left me.

Chapter III

THE TROUBLES OF A PRINCESS

WHEN I next opened my eyes I found myself in bed, in a small, poorly-furnished room. I was disappointed. The harem of a palace should be all cushions, Persian rugs and silken draperies, but this was little better than a room in a staging bungalow. It was cleaner, no doubt, and had only one entrance and one window, and that twelve feet from the flooring. It was no staging bungalow, that was certain. Perhaps it was a room in the State prison? No, it could not be that, for books were lying about, also various articles which men do not affect—a work-basket, for instance; and surely those draperies hanging on the wall were articles of female attire? I was fairly puzzled. Any way, there must be people within reach of my voice; so I ventured to call, with a half-apology in the tone, '*Qui hai?*' Almost immediately the door was opened, and in walked the stout lady known to me already as Miss H. She advanced towards my bed with caution and some hesitancy. She had evidently taken pains with her toilet, and certainly looked more presentable in clothes than without them.

'Good-morning, madam,' I said, to reassure her.

'Hush!' was her response. 'You are ill; you are not to talk.' When close to me, she first turned away her head with a delicious prudery, which tickled me to inward laughter, and then actually placed her hand upon my forehead.

'You have no fever, I think?' she remarked interrogatively.

'Only a gnawing pain here,' I said, indicating the empty part of me.

She understood, and nodding pleasantly said, 'If that's all, I'll fetch you some breakfast at once.'

Miss H. then went away, and soon after returned with a tray well supplied with good things. The way I disposed of them pleased her, for when I had finished she actually thanked me.

'It's I who thank you, madam; I shan't want a doctor now,' I protested, feeling very grateful.

She was delighted to find me so cheerful. Evidently Miss H. regarded a healthy appetite with favour. When she removed the tray, she left the room, and did not return for a long hour—reporting my condition to the Princess and discussing my disposal, no doubt. On her return I felt sure she had a mission to perform which perplexed her. What a dear, sympathetic old thing she now appeared to me! I quite hated myself for having at first classed her as an old hen clucking over her too venturesome chicks. As she took down her belongings from the wall, and kept glancing

at me, to see if I was watching her, Miss H. reminded me of my nurse Emma; only Emma was white, and maltreated the Queen's English, whereas this lady was what Indian descriptive rolls call 'of a wheaten complexion,' and pronounced her words like an educated woman.

To give her confidence, I thought it best to volunteer information about myself; so I told her my whole story. We were soon good friends. By degrees I induced her to tell me about herself and the Princess. Miss H. was a Musalmani, daughter of a deceased teacher in the Mission School at Delhi. When a child she had been adopted by a philanthropist—a Mrs. Holmes—and educated in Calcutta. At sixteen she had gone to England with her benefactress, whose name she now bore, and had studied in London. Her English friends had intended her for *Zanâna* Mission work; but when the time for decision came she had refused to renounce Islam, and had ten years before accepted the post of governess and companion to the Princess Melissa, then a child of five. The Nawâb of Sultânabad was now an old man, in declining health, and as the Princess, his only child, was his sole heiress and successor-designate to his throne, and fully aware of her position, she was at times just a little difficult to manage.

'This morning, for instance, Miss Holmes,' I remarked slyly, remembering the difference of opinion between them.

Miss H.—by which letter her imperious little pupil always designated her—looked unhappy, and protested that she would have sent the Nawâb's men to take care of me. Presently she went on with her story:—The Princess had hardly a drop of Indian blood in her veins. Her ancestors in the line of the succession, under a rule enjoined by the founder of the family, had always, with one exception, obtained their brides from Circassia or Turkey. The exception was the case of the Princess herself, who was partly English. The story was romantic, and only known to a few persons in the palace. Her father, the Nawâb, had once been fond of racing, and had put his stable in charge of a trainer, who was known to the people as 'the Englishman.' This man had a little daughter, a beautiful girl, who on her father's death had been taken into the royal harem. When she was sixteen the Nawâb had secretly married her, and she had died in giving birth to the Princess. It was the only *mésalliance*, according to Miss Holmes, in twenty generations,—otherwise every Nawâb's mother had been noble. The Princess was betrothed to her cousin, the Sardar Abdul Hakk,—a bigoted, narrow-minded man, of dissolute habits and personally odious to his *fiancée*. As that young person was now fifteen, the Nawâb was in a hurry to have the marriage celebrated without more delay, but, so far, the Princess had flatly declined to consider a date for the ceremony. Her Highness insisted, and in this Miss H.

privately supported her, that the Sardar must first divorce his two existing wives, one of whom was a common dancing-girl; and further, that he should prove his intention to amend his life by performing the pilgrimage to Mecca—a duty meritorious for a good Musalman, but indispensable for a bad one seeking to retrieve a damaged character.

Miss H. admitted that these preliminary conditions had been very astutely devised with a view to gain time. The city, and, indeed, the State, was divided into two parties—progressists and conservatives. The former were opposed to the marriage, because the Sardar, as Prince Consort, would be as retrogressive and tyrannical as a Turkish Pasha. They, therefore, applauded the determination of the Princess, whilst the men of the old school, though anxious to see the marriage carried out, were afraid to pronounce that either condition was incompatible with Musalman law or the dignity of the reigning House. The position was, therefore, altogether strained, and her Highness' present indiscretion, if discovered, would turn the whole kingdom against her, and certainly imperil her succession to the throne, as the Government of India might refuse to ratify it, on the ground that her conduct in concealing a young Englishman in her house was *ipso facto* proof that she was unfit to govern a Musalman State.

Having exchanged confidences, Miss H. and I concluded a treaty of peace and amity: she was to keep my secret and give me shelter so long as the

propriety of my conduct and my devotion to the interests of the Princess made my presence in the harem desirable. I, of course, assured Miss H. that I would gladly risk my life for her young mistress, and that, as for the obnoxious cousin, I should have the greatest pleasure, not only in thwarting his schemes, but in thrashing him. Miss H. arranged that I was for the present to continue to occupy her sitting-room, and that I should be waited upon by herself and her servant—a little mute. Her suite of apartments was immediately under those occupied by the Princess, which were only approachable by one narrow stair. Like the *concierge* in a Paris mansion, Miss H. commanded the only access to the upper storeys of the building, which was known as the garden-house, and connected with the palace by a long, sunken passage or tunnel.

As the Princess was such a pretty girl, and had risked her reputation to befriend me when in dire extremity, I was naturally impatient to express my gratitude to her. The idea of being knight-errant for a time to a distressed Indian Princess was fascinating. For the present I had to possess my soul in patience, for even had the summons come, how could I appear before the royal lady unshaven and in a torn sleeping suit? To show to advantage before a beautiful and perhaps impressionable girl I must be presentable, and if possible preserve the environment of romance in which her Highness had found me. In my dilem-

ma I consulted Miss H., who was good enough to assure me that within twenty-four hours I should have the means of making my bow to the Princess in the character of a youthful Saladin.

When I woke next morning I felt fit for any adventure. I gently called '*Qui hai?*' whereupon the little mute appeared, carrying a collection of silken garments. Having deposited them on the table, he pointed to the bath-room, and by signs made me understand that the indispensable tub was ready. I went in, and there found all the requisites for a complete toilet.

Half an hour afterwards, on surveying myself before the glass, it reflected as handsome a young Musalman as my eyes had ever beheld. I was robed in loose white garments, the closely-drawn *cummer-bund* throwing into relief my broad shoulders and slim waist. On my head I wore a green turban, as if I were a *Hâji*, and had indeed made pilgrimage to Mecca.

When Miss H. came in with breakfast she nearly dropped the tray on beholding the strange youth who gaily wished her good-morning. I rescued the tray, and she sat down to recover her equanimity. Her eyes dwelt on me with such eloquent admiration that I was satisfied I should not disappoint the Princess. Amongst other items of news, Miss H. informed me that the Princess would see me that evening.

How slowly the hours dragged to sunset, and then how long it seemed before the mute appeared

to conduct me to the presence! At last he came and beckoned me to follow him. After groping my way up the dark, narrow stair, I suddenly found myself standing inside a small, softly-lighted divan, in which the Princess, with her handmaiden Lulu in attendance, was reclining on cushions. I confess that at the moment I felt as nervous as a girl left alone for the first time with her lover.

The Princess looked up, let her eyes travel over me for an instant, and then graciously motioned me to a chair—the only one in the room.

I was young, conceited, and self-confident. I foolishly believed that I was irresistible; hence there was adoration in my gaze, and I thought she knew it. I was the first to speak

'Princess,' I said, 'you have saved my life, which is now yours till death. Command me.'

I bent towards her, took her hand and raised it to my lips. She drew it hastily away with a slight blush, and told me to drop the courtier, and tell her about myself. I obeyed, and ended my narration by declaring that I would not leave Sultànabad until I had repaid the debt which I owed to her. Should she turn me out of her house, I would take up my residence in the city, and live there until I had an opportunity of rendering her some great service.

At first she listened doubtingly, but by degrees the persuasive earnestness of my professions, perhaps, too, the pleasing influence of my personality, inclined her to believe in me.

'But what,' she asked, 'of your father and people in London? They will not consent to your burying yourself here.'

'I require no burial,' I said, wilfully misunderstanding her.

'What can you mean?'

'I am drowned, Princess,' I answered, shaking my head mournfully. 'Jack Ravenhill's death will appear under domestic occurrences in to-morrow's *Times*.'

'What? you are blotting yourself out, and all for me?' she inquired half-incredulously.

'Yes; why not?'

'I wonder if I can trust you,' she mused. 'I am in great straits, and want a faithful friend.' Then, turning her great eyes on mine, she continued with animation, 'You are an English sahib, and you look good and honest. I think you can help me.'

'Trust me, Princess,' I urged.

'I will! I will!' she exclaimed impulsively; and then she told me of her difficulties, ending by asseverating that she would sooner take poison than become the wife of a low creature like Sardar Abdul Hakk. What should she do? Could I help her?

'Escape with me to Bombay,' I suggested audaciously, without really meaning it.

'What! live with you, an infidel! No, thank you,' she cried scornfully.

'Forgive me, Princess,' was all I could say, and I bent my head, self-humbled.

'Go! go!' she ordered imperiously.

I was snubbed, that was certain. But she was kind, and had already pardoned my impertinence. Observing my chagrin, and wishing to dismiss me graciously, she gave me her hand, expecting me, I suppose, to bow over it and withdraw. Instead, I held it, and pressed it more warmly than mere homage justified. She snatched it away, and after looking curiously at it, said to me coldly, 'Now go. That is enough for one day.'

Other interviews followed, at some of which she thawed a little, at others was frosty throughout. At all of them either Miss H. or Lulu was present. A fortnight slipped by, and the hot weather came on with a rush, as it often does. I was now taken up to the flat roof of the quarters inhabited by the Princess.

The place was cool and airy. It overlooked the town and part of the straggling palace, but for greater privacy was surrounded by a wall of open brick-work.

In that secure eyrie I was sometimes allowed to spend whole evenings with the Princess. She was now my instructress in Hindustani; I hers in English. Sometimes we read to each other; sometimes we talked; but oftener as the evening wore on we lapsed into silence, and—if the attendant were Lulu, and not Miss H.—I would quietly turn down the lamp. In semi-darkness a Princess is like any other girl. On such occasions my hand would seek hers, and hers would sometimes return the pressure of mine. We would whisper soft nothings

to each other, and she would not chide me if I called her Melissa.

On such occasions Lulu, like a sensible maid, showed her discretion by proclaiming to us that sleep had overcome her vigilance. She would snore, and we would press each other's hands at each sound and laugh. Once, when our heads were touching, I suddenly threw my arms round the lissom, yielding waist of my goddess, and touched her lips with mine. I told her that I loved her, and implored her to fly with me. She started as if awakening from a delicious dream, and thrusting me from her side, told me to go away, I had forgotten my duty. For days after that I received no summons. I was miserable. For weeks I had only lived for those meetings, and now I was like a caged beast in my confinement down below, or like a fallen angel shut out from paradise. Miss Holmes was very sympathetic, and though she scolded me for forgetting my position and my promises, she also consoled me by saying that her mistress liked me, and often talked about me; her heart was all kindness, she would soon relent.

At last the longed-for summons came again, and I sprang up the winding stairs like a young man hastening to his bride. Alas! when I saw the Princess, she appeared nervous and almost afraid of me. She motioned me to be seated, and then told me that a crisis in her affairs was approaching, and that, unless our united wits could save her, there would be no alternative for her but death or

flight. 'And, Jack,' she whispered, clasping her hands together, and trying to smile, 'I should prefer you to poison.'

'My darling!' I replied, with mock seriousness, 'how sweet of you! I am certainly nicer than poison; but you will not have to take it, or me even, for I have thought of a plan. Miss H. has procured a long white beard for me, and I am going to dye my hair white too, and assume the garb and style of a holy *mullah* from Samarkand. I have the dress and beads ready. As an aged priest I shall visit you openly, and be admitted behind the *purdah*, to confirm your wavering faith. The Nawâb and the Sardar Sahib—as the objectionable cousin was called—will be told that you are studying the Koran, and will encourage my visits, thinking that my ministrations will induce you to yield to their wishes.'

She silently placed my hand on her head, in token of submission. Tears formed in her dear eyes. Then suddenly she threw her arms round my neck and cried as if her heart would break. 'I can't lose you, Jack. I do like you so. They will find you out, and kill you when you leave me and go amongst them. They are going to have a great meeting of *kâzis* and *mullahs* to discuss the question as to whether the conditions on which I am committed to marry the Sardar Sahib are obligatory on him or not. He has already bribed some of the leaders of the reform party, and it will end by their forcing me to marry him.'

My sweet Princess was quite unnerved. She clung to me, sobbing, 'Save me, Jack! I'll fly with you rather than lose you or endure life with that beast.'

I did my best to soothe her, and when the paroxysm had subsided, gently laid her down on her cushions, and told her that I should attend the meeting and win her cause for her. I was a more learned priest than any of them, as they only knew the Koran and its commentaries, like parrots, by rote, whereas I should confound them with quotations from archaic Arabic, as used by the Koreshes of Medina when the Prophet fled there.

'Some of them know a little English, Jack, if you intend to call that archaic Arabic,' she said doubtingly, half-guessing my meaning.

'I shall spout to them in guttural German, and that for such ignoramuses will be an unknown tongue and carry conviction,' I declared, with an air of confidence which I was far from feeling in reality.

'It will puzzle them, at least, and gain us time,' was her conclusion.

And so our plan of action was arranged. Next evening I appeared before the little lady got up as an infirm and aged *mullah*. I had always been fond of theatricals, and was a good actor for an amateur; I had, therefore, no difficulty, with the help of the properties which Miss H. had secretly procured from Calcutta, in disguising myself beyond recognition. Emerging on the roof, I

leant on my staff and advanced with uncertain steps towards the Princess. Though prepared for strangeness in my appearance, she was frightened, and with a cry of alarm ran over to Miss H. for protection. I raised my arms and blessed her in sonorous German.

'Go away! you're not Jack, my Jack!' she exclaimed in terror, hiding behind Miss H.'s amplitude.

'Melissa, don't you know me?' I asked, in my natural voice.

That convinced her. Indeed, so rapid was her transition from fright to over-confidence that when I withdrew she was in high spirits, and full of regrets that she could not be present at the convocation of the holy and learned men of her father's kingdom, who were to decide whether or no she was to be forthwith forced to marry her cousin.

That evening I slipped quietly out and boldly entered the guest-house attached to the great mosque of the city.

I announced that, hearing rumours of the coming disputation, and being anxious to visit the city of Sultànabad, which was renowned throughout Central Asia as a seat of Musalman learning, and a place of pilgrimage second only to Mecca in sanctity, I, aged and worn though I was, had undertaken the journey, and hoped soon to be strong enough to go on to Mecca, there to die, if God so willed, after drinking once more from the Holy Well.

Next day being Friday, the Musalman Sunday, I conducted morning prayers at the great mosque, it being the custom that at that service the oldest *mullah* present should head the faithful at their prayers.

I was soon a celebrity. The fairness of my complexion was explained by my being a Samarkandi from the cold north, and my imperfect pronunciation and knowledge of Hindustani to the fact that Turki—a language which, of course, no one knew—was my mother tongue. The old Nawáb, hearing of my learning, sent for me, and told me of the dilemma in which his daughter's religious scruples had placed him. He hinted that he had no love for his nephew, the Sardar Sahib, as he was called, who had a 'black heart,' and was known to drink and beat his wives when in a passion; though he personally had no objection to the latter form of correction; still, in these levelling days, it was regarded as reprehensible. He ended by appealing to me for advice. What was he to do in the difficulty? The Sardar was rich and powerful; hence, for the good of his kingdom and the security of his daughter's succession, her Highness should fulfil her engagement at once, in which case no political troubles could arise, and he would be allowed to die in peace. 'Once married,' he continued, chuckling, 'if she does not like him, she can, *inshallah!* soon become a widow. She has brains.'

I was horrified at the callous way the old sinner

suggested that my Melissa could easily poison an objectionable husband. When, however, he suggested that I should visit that contumacious lady, and lecture her on her duty to her father, I feigned reluctance, unless I should be permitted to hear her views, and be guided to a right conclusion according to my interpretation of the Koran and its commentaries.

'By all means,' he said eagerly; 'and give her a hint that husbands often pre-decease their wives.'

Next morning, and daily for the following week, I was closeted with the Princess, engaged, as all Sultànabad believed, in convincing her that a daughter's happiness lay in implicit obedience to her father's wishes. In reality, I was drinking deeper and deeper of the cup of love, and fretting much that my disguises kept the cup from my lips. The last words my darling whispered to me as I left her one evening to attend the convocation were,—

'And, Jack, remember he must be sent off to Mecca.'

The conference took place in the great hall of audience in the Nawâb's palace.

The time of meeting was 10 p.m., as the heat was trying during the day, and the Nawâb's physicians prescribed rest for their august patient from sunrise to the time of evening prayer, after which his Highness had supper. It was a quarter-past ten when I entered the hall. The estates of

the kingdom were already assembled, impatiently awaiting my arrival. If I should have succeeded in gaining the consent of the Princess, the only matter for discussion would be the choice of an auspicious date for her Highness' marriage.

Chapter IV

IMPOSTORS IN ARGUMENT

AS I passed from the darkness of night into the hall, I was glad to notice that its lighting was indifferent. The place had not been used at night for some months, and the lamps had been carelessly cleaned. I walked boldly up between the rows of men, all seated cross-legged in Eastern fashion on the ground. Behind them were a motley collection of privileged persons and attendants. The disputants faced each other concentrically. At the far end of the room was a daïs. In its centre the old Nawâb reclined on a couch smoking a hookah, and looking intensely bored. That he had supped well, though not wisely, was evident from his flushed face. Fronting him, but below the daïs, sat the Sardar Sahib, Abdul Hakk, on a State chair.

I made a profound obeisance to the Nawâb, and bowed formally to his nephew. The latter ignored my salutation, but fidgeted in his seat. Our eyes met, and I think he then and there instinctively realized that I was his enemy. He scowled at me, strummed with one of his unslippered feet on the floor, and yawned exasperatingly. He appeared to

be about five-and-twenty, of middle height, well built, but flabby, and inclined already to corpulence. His eyes were small and sunken, restless, and set too close together—their closeness giving him a furtive, sinister look. His mouth was large and sensual, and he had a heavy under-jaw. Altogether he gave me the impression of a cruel and vindictive, but nerveless man. His puffy cheeks were indicative of the life of self-indulgence which he was known to lead.

The learned men on the right of the Nawâb were almost all elderly, and dressed in loose white robes—some not very clean. They all wore large turbans, mostly white; a few green, like my own, to show they were *Hâjis*—that is, had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. They were evidently the old school *Mullahs* and *Kâzis*, whilst those on the Nawâb's left were progressists. These latter were of all ages, from twenty to seventy, many smartly dressed in semi-English costumes. Quite half of them had keen, intellectual faces, which contrasted strikingly with the apathetic set of the features of the conservatives confronting them.

When the buzz of talk occasioned by my entrance and slow but deliberate approach to the dais had subsided, I raised my aged arms and said, in a loud, sonorous voice, in Arabic, 'Peace be on you'; and all replied according to formula. I then withdrew some dozen paces, stepping haltingly backwards, but keeping my face towards his Highness, and sat down cross-legged in the open

space between the rival rows. By so doing I showed them all that I was accustomed to courts, and had attached myself to neither party. This apparent impartiality evidently pleased the men of the new school.

Formal proceedings were then opened, and I, being called on to state the result of my exhortations to the Princess, explained that her Highness, whilst bowing to her august father's wishes in all things, declined to believe that, as a good Moslem, his Highness could wish her to marry a man whose mode of life was in direct defiance of the precepts of the Prophet, in that he drank intoxicating liquors, and never attended public prayers. It was necessary, therefore, that, before the preliminaries of marriage could be discussed, the Sardar should forswear wine, and live cleanly; and, in token of his intention to amend his ways, the Princess demanded that he should perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. Her Highness had other objections. For instance, she contended that it was beneath her dignity as heir-apparent to the throne to be the Sardar's third wife. But as regards this objection, as it was, perhaps, a matter of sentiment, which only concerned her and her father personally, and not her official status as the future ruler of a Musalman State, she waived her former demand. Further, as an obedient daughter, she had consented to leave the decision to his Highness, who, she was convinced, would consent to nothing derogatory to the honour of his family.

Most of the gentlemen on the Nawâb's left received this declaration with satisfaction. They nodded, they smiled, they whispered together, and those of them who had beards caressed them. Had etiquette permitted, I have no doubt they would have cheered.

Those on the Nawâb's right were dissatisfied. Their brows contracted, their mouths gaped, their heads bent forward, and every one of them dug his fingers into his beard, and looked dejected. The Nawâb showed his perturbation by taking short, rapid pulls at his hookah, and for some seconds the loudest sound in that vast hall was the hubble-bubble from the smoke being drawn through the water of the hookah's bowl.

I kept my eyes fixed on the Sardar. Our battle had begun, and I had drawn first blood. He twisted about in his chair; his face twitched; he clasped and unclasped his hands, and his small sunken eyes glared at me venomously, like those of a poisonous snake roused to show fight. After muttering to himself in incoherent fashion, he jumped up and spluttered forth, 'Let the Chief *Kâzi* and Chief *Mullah* meet these calumnies. I am a true Musalman'—and here he repeated the creed. 'I pray in private, and I fast in private; and if I drink spirituous liquor, it is for my health's sake, with the sanction of my physician.'

So adjured, first one old gentleman and then the other addressed the assembly, and poured forth many sentences in Arabic, which they asserted

were quotations from the sayings of the Prophet and his successors, all tending to prove that even if the Sardar Sahib were a backslider—a point on which they submitted there was no evidence except as regards his predilection for alcoholic liquors—his peccadilloes could be condoned by a distribution of alms, and a dispensation, which they, as Chief *Kâzi* and Chief *Mullah*, were prepared to give.

'Agreed! agreed!' cried the delighted Sardar. 'I'll pray five times a day in public for one year, and become a *Hâji* as soon as a boy heir to the throne is born Has the priest from—Samarkand, I believe—any objection to urge?'

I saw by his pause before pronouncing 'Samarkand,' and by his sneering manner, that he doubted me.

I rose slowly, as an old man might, stiff from sitting for a long time, and, being directly under a chandelier, advanced several paces. I now stood where there was little light on my face, and I commanded my audience better from immediately in front of the dais than from lower down in the hall. Besides, my deliberate movements gave me time to think. I was cornered, and I knew it, for I saw that the men of the reform party looked anxious. I had been unaware that Islam, like Rome, admitted indulgences and dispensations. Having chosen my position, I banged the point of my iron-shod staff, as if in anger, on the ground, and called loudly, 'Listen to me!'

The Nawâb started, and dropped the mouthpiece of his hookah; the Sardar tucked his feet under him on the chair, and, sitting like a croakless frog, looked both nervous and sulky. The old school men were all attention, stroking their beards reflectively in evident perplexity. The progressists were eager and watchful, wondering by what subtle argument it would be possible for me to change a seeming defeat into victory. Silence being obtained, I deliberately and calmly declared that the references and quotations made, though genuine, were all from writings in comparatively modern Arabic, drawn up three or four hundred years after the Prophet had expired. I went on to say that at Samarkand and Ranenabad (a name I invented as I spoke) I had been privileged to see the original Koran and the Prophet's sayings as attested by his four Apostles, and recorded during his life. The language was archaic Arabic, which was totally different from that quoted by the learned Chief *Kâzi* and Chief *Mullah*—both of whom, I may say, I knew to be impostors so far as Arabic scholarship went. I then proceeded to repeat long passages from these same original sources of Moslem law and tradition in their relation to social life, and for fifteen minutes or more I rolled forth a torrent of guttural German, occasionally bringing in the Prophet's or Allah's name, 'accompanied with a resounding '*Amīn*' (Amen). I wound up by asserting that any man who contended that the religious scruples

of the Princess could be lawfully nullified by indulgences or almsgiving was a Kâfir, and had he lived in the days of the Prophet or early Caliphs would have been stoned as an infidel.

My extraordinary speech was listened to in profound silence. It exposed the ignorance of these pretending scholars and students of divinity. They felt that a master had lectured them; they recognised in their hearts that they were impostors.

The men of the reform party, forgetting the etiquette of the court in their excitement, shouted, '*Shâbāsh!* Oh, learned Samarkandi! thou hast quoted truly: thou art right.'

The beaten party, with more dignity, bowed their diminished heads, and after consulting together, indicated to the Nawâb that they accepted my reading of the law and the traditions, as my authorities were older than theirs and unimpeachable.

When they announced their surrender, the Sardar Sahib, whom I was watching warily, expecting some outburst, started from his chair and rushed at me with a dagger in his hand, crying, 'False priest! die with lies in your mouth!'

As he struck at me I planted one, two, left and right, on his nose and mouth, and he fell stunned to the ground, bleeding freely. It all happened in an instant. The rival parties were still seated gesticulating and talking. I alone was standing.

'See!' I shouted to them all, 'Allah himself has

smitten this would-be assassin of a feeble old man. Allah has pronounced sentence. This proves that the Sardar is a Kâfir, and unfit to marry your Princess.'

By this time they had all risen, and some were crying out, 'A miracle! a miracle! great is Allah!'

'Let us forgive him, my friends,' I said, with feigned magnanimity. 'Perhaps the Sardar was drunk or drugged.'

So saying, I gathered my robes about me, picked up my staff, and with slow dignity withdrew from the hall.

In the tumult no one had remembered the feeble old Nawâb. He had slid off his couch, and was kneeling behind it, repeating his beads.

It was a relief to find myself in the open air undiscovered, triumphant. The Princess was, for a time, at least, safe from further persecution; her odious cousin had disgraced himself, and I, why, by to-morrow I should be reverenced as the holiest and most learned priest in Sultànabad.

As I hurried through the deserted streets I almost forgot that I was still the aged Samarkandi, playing a *rôle* in a comedy which would end in a tragedy were my disguise detected. I changed my pace, and walked feebly, as an old man does. I longed to go straight to Miss Holmes and tell her what had happened; but as the city gongs had struck twelve—midnight—I had to restrain my impatience. When I got to my lodging, which

consisted of the two best guest-rooms attached to the great mosque, I bolted my doors securely, and was soon asleep. The crowning tension of the last two hours, superadded to that of the preceding week, had exhausted me.

Chapter V

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

NEXT morning I had to receive a succession of visitors, all eager to congratulate me, and ingratiate themselves with the man whom it was evident both the Nawâb and the Princess would now delight to honour. That afternoon the Nawâb, as my admirers had anticipated, sent for me and assigned me quarters in the palace. His Highness warned me to be wary, my life being now in danger at the hands of any of the ruffians in the pay of his disappointed nephew. In the evening I paid a visit to the Princess. When a man is a hundred years of age, even Musalmans think that he may safely visit their women folk; and was I not more than that age, and a priest and ascetic to boot?

Miss H. beamed on me when I passed through her apartments and said that the Princess had heard the news, and was radiant with joy and gratitude. I hurried up the narrow stairs, and at its head was received by the dear little lady herself, literally with open arms. When calmness returned to us, I resumed my disguises and became

once more her grave and thoughtful adviser. I told her that I believed the Sardar had suspected me from the moment our eyes had met at the convocation, and that I feared he must be convinced—though no one else had doubts—that his broken head was caused by a right and left from the fists of a young man, and not by the miraculous interposition of an offended deity. She timidly spanned my biceps with her small hands, and then remarked,—

'Yes, it's iron. I should almost like to see you use your strength.'

My arm was still round her slender waist, and as I squeezed it incontinently I said,—

'Would you, Melissa? You shall some day.'

'Don't! don't! Jack; you hurt me,' she protested, trying to release herself from the pressure of my arm.

I gave her freedom, and became the priest again. Just then I heard a sound like a woman's scream, faint and indistinct, proceeding apparently from the ground floor. It died off into a wail, and then ceased. There was no repetition.

'Ah! do you hear that? What can it be? Miss H. is in her room,' whispered Melissa nervously.

'It's a cat, I expect, in the passage,' was my ready solution.

'It's human, I think,' she surmised.

'But,' I persisted, 'cats cry like women.'

'Hush!' she interrupted, listening intently.

A shuffling was now heard, as of some one mounting the stair clumsily.

'Perhaps it's Lulu or Miss H. coming up in the dark. You brought the candle with you,' Melissa suggested; adding immediately, 'Go away into that corner, and keep quiet; you are too near me still.'

I obeyed, as always.

Presently I heard heavy, stealthy steps coming up and up that narrow, winding stair. Whose could they be? Melissa had heard them too. She glanced hastily in my direction, and was reassured at seeing the surrounding darkness broken by the shadowy outline of my white robes. She knew I was there, though she could not see me. She put her forefinger to her lips, and smiled towards where I stood, then calmly took up some embroidery, and began mechanically to ply her needle.

A solitary but powerful lamp, which stood on a tripod beside her, threw its strong light over her graceful head and figure. All beyond its circle was blackness. The curtained doorway opening on to the roof was invisible to both of us. The steps came nearer, nearer, now pausing, now advancing, and now the sound of laboured breathing was audible. Evidently the approaching visitor was unaccustomed to climbing. Melissa's fingers still plied the needle, though her eyes were directed towards the *portière*. Her coolness was admirable. What a perfect actress the plucky girl is, I thought. Presently the curtain was pulled aside, and three

figures emerged from the doorway. They stood just within the circlet of light thrown out by the lamp. Two remained in the background, whilst one stepped forward right in front of the Princess. It was her cousin, the Sardar Abdúl Hakk. I noticed with satisfaction that the impress of my handiwork was writ large on his face; for his nose and upper lip were much swollen. The Princess shook with nervous disgust at his appearance, and let her needle drop, but almost immediately recovered her composure, and asked with a steady, scornful voice what he meant by his impertinent intrusion.

'I mean to persuade you to come with me, cousin. You are almost my wife, you know. To-night you will sleep in my house,' he answered, leering at her, as if she were his bride and in his power already. At the same time he came close to her, and stooping suddenly, attempted to seize her hand.

She jumped up, tore her hand away from the pollution of his fingers, and said angrily, 'Begone, you brute! I order you and your creatures to go at once.'

The latter turned, inclined to obey, so great was the authority in her command. For the instant their master, too, seemed almost ashamed of his conduct, and stood still from irresolution. The Princess pressed her advantage, and repeated her order, promising to forgive the men if they went at once. They began to slink away, and had lifted

the *portière*, when the Sardar interposed and ordered them to return. They did so, and he turned to the Princess, who was now standing before him flushed and excited.

As she raised her arm and pointed to the exit, crying, 'Go, cousin, go; you've played the fool long enough,' her beautiful pose and animated face seemed suddenly to rouse the brute's passions.

With an oath he sprang forward, shouting, 'I'll go, but with you, my beautiful bride!' and he called to his men to help him to carry her downstairs by force. They wavered still. He clutched at her, but she eluded him, and he fell heavily forwards, taking hold of her skirt as he was falling. She screamed to me for help, and struggled to free herself. I ran forward. He saw me, and yelled frantically, 'The priest! the priest! Seize him, you pigs!'

They rushed at me. For the instant I was occupied in wrenching his unclean hands from contact with Melissa. Having freed her, I gave the Sardar a violent push with all my force, which sent him sprawling on his back. My momentary distraction gave his men their opportunity. They sprang on me, still supposing they had only an old man to deal with. I easily shook the lighter and smaller man off—he seemed faint-hearted—getting home a blow as he fell. But the other was a heavy, determined fellow, whom I now recognised as the champion professional wrestler of the city. Dissolute Musalman gentlemen of means often kept such

men as retainers. They were useful as bullies, and for any dirty work required by their masters. The big man closed with me and tried to overpower me. I had the advantage of him in height, and perhaps in length of reach, he of me in weight and skill in close wrestling, in which I had no practice. My aim was to free my arms and use my fists, his, I think, to double me over him, and by some professional twist either throw me violently or perhaps break my back. His arms encircled mine, pinning them to my side, and his hands were interknit behind me. I felt his knuckles pressing on the small of my back. We staggered about upon the roof, neither of us uttering a word. I felt myself giving, giving. In a moment I should be at his mercy. His head was butting at me below mine, close against my breast. Suddenly he unclasped his hands, and relaxing his grip yelled from pain. I wrenched my right arm free, knocked up his head with a blow from my knee on his jaw, and sent my fist like a sledge-hammer full into his face. He reeled and fell back heavily.

There was a crash of falling brickwork, through which his huge bulk had disappeared. For an instant silence followed, and then a shriek of terror rang through the air, succeeded by a dull thud on the pavement of the courtyard beneath. Part of the slight lattice-work which surrounded the roof—meant only to afford privacy, and enable the harem ladies to see outside—had given way, and he had fallen over and been smashed.

Hardly taking note of his awful fate, I turned sharply to defend myself against the two others, but saw Melissa only in front of me.

'I dug my scissors into his fists and made him let go. See, the points are bloody!' she gasped in breathless agitation, holding up the scissors.

'You have saved my life,' was all I said, as I hurried across to the *portière*, just too late to catch the other ruffian. Realizing the death of his companion, he was plunging haphazard down the stair, which was in darkness. In his haste he fell, and from his groaning it was evident that he was badly hurt.

Satisfied, I turned to look after the Sardar Sahib. There he was where my push had sent him, seated froglike on the ground, swaying his body to and fro and muttering to himself in a dazed sort of way that the priest had killed him. I took him roughly by a wrist, twisted it behind his back, and forced him to rise. In that position he was helpless.

'I am going to tie your hands together,' I told him. 'Don't move, or I'll break your arm.'

We were near the lamp. He looked at me almost vacuously—muzzy, perhaps, from drink or opium—and asked,—

'You are the priest, are you?'

'Yes; don't you see I am?'

'Where's your beard, then?' he inquired, with a sickly grin.

I put my hand up. The beard was gone—had come off during the scrimmage, I suppose.

Involuntarily I gave his arm a savage twist, and brought him on his knees. I had no time for deliberation, I had to act. I tied his wrists together with a strip torn from his own turban, forced his knees up between his arms, shoved my own staff between his elbows and knees, and turned him over as young fellows do when cock-fighting together after mess. Then I gagged him, seated him again, span him round, and left him facing the broken part of the wall through which his bully had disappeared. I next went to the stair, and there found the brave Princess, candle in hand, standing sentry over the moaning wretch who had stumbled and fallen when attempting flight. He had sprained his ankle, or possibly broken his leg. I seized him, dragged him on to the roof, and secured him, tying his arms behind his back. Like the Sardar, he resigned himself to the inevitable. It is a wise way natives have. They know when they are beaten.

But all this time where were Miss H. and Lulu? I was on the point of going down to the former's suite of rooms, when clever little Melissa, who throughout had never lost her head for a moment, said, 'No, Jack; it will be safer if you get your beard on first. Remember you are still the Samarkandi priest, and at least one hundred years old.' She picked up that property, and helped me to adjust it, and restore my disguise. Then we went downstairs together. We pushed open the door of Miss H.'s bedroom, and there,

with the help of the flickering light, saw the poor governess and pretty Lulu lying bound, gagged, and helpless on the floor. We speedily released them, and amidst kissing and embracing—manifestations in which I had no share—heard how they had been surprised by the Sardar and his two retainers.

When calmness returned, I told Miss H. of the fate of the big wrestler, and of my predicament with the Sardar. She grasped the situation at once, and without hesitation decided how to meet it.

'He has drugged himself, or is half intoxicated, you say. I know he is superstitious, and I believe him to be a coward. You must play upon his fears, and terrify him, if necessary, into leaving Sultànabad at once.'

She then explained her plan of action. It seemed blood-curdling and almost absurd to me, but she understood natives and I did not. Whilst she was rapidly making her preparations, I persuaded Melissa and Lulu to lie down where they were. They were both pale and exhausted after the awful scenes in which they had taken part. We told them that we were going to get rid of our prisoners, and that when they were being removed there might be some little disturbance, which they were not to mind. Melissa turned her drawn little face up to me and said, 'Oh, Jack! I've seen what a man's strength is now. It frightens me.'

'It would have been nothing without a girl's wit,' I replied gravely.

'The scissors, you mean. What a tigress I was!' she exclaimed with a shudder; and then added softly, 'Do you hate me, Jack, now for using them so? And yet I could not help it. I only thought of your danger.'

'You saved my life, dear,' was all I could reply.

She was shivering like one in ague. Lulu now sensibly put her arm round her, and drew the over-strained girl away. Miss Holmes and I then went up to the roof, and found the prisoners still passive and seemingly indifferent. I lifted the Sardar's man—he did not weigh over eight stone—and, carrying him downstairs, locked him into a small room used for storing charcoal. When I returned I saw that the Sardar had roused himself. His small, malignant eyes followed me everywhere. As pre-arranged with Miss H., I began to impress upon him how his attempted villainy had caused the death of one of his retainers.

'I know,' he interrupted; 'you killed him.'

'No,' I said solemnly, carrying out my *rôle*. Allah gave the old man strength to protect his life from your assassin.'

My manner scared or confused him. He blinked his eyes, muttered unintelligibly to himself, and then asked, 'Who, then, was the smooth-faced man?'

'There was none,' I replied, fibbing. 'It was I, the Samarkandi Mullah;' and after some words in

German, meant to imply thanks to Allah for my deliverance, I repeated the creed with sonorous unctuousness.

He seemed utterly puzzled now, doubtful of his first impression; or perhaps he was only cunning, and dissembled his feelings.

I then told him curtly that the Princess had commissioned me to say that his crime would not be reported and punished provided that he signed a full confession, and agreed to self-exile from Sultânabad territory for five years. In that case, he and his surviving follower would be released, and they could remove the body of the wrestler, and account for the man's death by any plausible lie they chose to invent. He listened attentively, but it was clear that he thought we were bluffing, so he tried bluster, and flatly refused the offer. He had come, he said, as the *fiancé* of his cousin, to pay her a friendly visit; he had defied convention, it was true, and committed an indiscretion, but what was an indiscretion to a murder, and who was I? He courted an inquiry, whilst I was, he asserted, afraid of one.

'Well, then,' I said, 'I must act. You will never leave this roof alive unless you do as her Highness in her clemency demands.'

So saying, I with difficulty rolled him on to a low, country-made bedstead, and tied his legs by the ankles to two of its posts. I then drew out my staff from below his knees, and after a little trouble, I had him beautifully laid out on the bed, and so

astened down that literally he could not move arms, legs, body, or even head. In fact, his head was so drawn out and fixed that his bare neck lay temptingly open, almost inviting th/ use of the penknife which Miss H. had brought up with her, in case it should be necessary to go to extremes. Even now his eyes showed a sort of sullen, nervous defiance, rather than terror.

'Well,' I asked sharply, 'do you agree at last?'

'No.'

'In that case the consequences are due to your own obstinacy. I am about to open a vein in your neck, and you will slowly bleed to death. Do you understand? It is a common mode of suicide in Russian Turkistan. When you are dead, the ligatures which now bind you will all be removed, and people will suppose that you died by your own hand.'

As I spoke with slow emphasis I let him see the penknife and a basin ready prepared to catch his blood. Though frightened, he still clung to the idea that I was only bluffing him. Miss H. had provided me with a sponge and water dyed red with cochineal, an article in kitchen use in many wealthy households.

'Hold the basin ready close under here,' I said to Miss H., and so saying I pricked the victim's neck a little with the point of the knife.

'There,' that will do; now I make a small incision in your vein, which I have exposed (I scratched his skin), and the blood at once begins

to flow. It oozes out slowly, drop by drop, at first, but it will come freer soon. Ah, there it begins;' and I squeezed the sponge, letting the coloured water in it fall into the basin. He heard the trickling and dropping. He bore up with surprising determination for some little time—perhaps two minutes. Then his face became gradually ashen. His lips were now blanched into a dirty yellow, his eyes staring from terror, and his breathing hard and stertorous; sweat-drops formed on his head, his body became by degrees cold and clammy. The pangs of conscious death were upon him.

'We are killing him in earnest; we have gone too far, I fear,' I said to Miss H., in an aside.

'See if he will promise now,' she whispered.

'Will you accept her Highness' proposal?' I asked. 'I can still save your life.'

He tried to speak, but his mouth was too dry. He could not articulate. His tongue clicked metallically on his palate, like that of a thirsty Indian crow in hot weather.

'Quick! quick!' I urged. 'Blink your eyes three times if you agree.'

He did so. I at once pretended to pinch together the place in his neck which I had pricked, and kept a finger on it for some minutes, making remarks the while that the blood had ceased flowing, that I might have to stitch the vein, that he had lost more than two quarts of blood, and so forth. Then I undid his bonds. To my horror the poor wretch had fainted.

'It is better so,' was Miss H.'s composed remark; 'you will find him quite amenable when he comes to his senses.'

In a few minutes his eyes opened and after a shuddering stare round, fixed themselves longingly on a water-jug on the table. I gave him a drink. It seemed to revive him. He feebly took hold of my arms, and tried to stand upright, but could not. He looked almost old, and it is God's truth that I now saw white hairs in his beard and above his ears.

'Write, write, and I'll sign,' he hoarsely whispered to me. 'The devil tempted me, and Allah has punished me, for you are an old man; but—but there was a smooth-faced priest, was there not? But where? Oh! my memory has gone. Yes, I'll leave Sultànabad; my cousin would kill me if I remained. She has the new learning and knows all devilish arts.'

He maundered on for a long time, whilst Miss H. drew up to my dictation a concise statement of the events of the night. It was read over to him and he seemed to understand it, for he kept on repeating at each incident, 'It's true, it's true'; and finally he said, 'Yes, I promise.' Miss H. helped him as he, with trembling fingers, subjoined a declaration in his own handwriting that the narrative was a true statement, and that, in return for her Highness' pardon, he engaged to leave Sultànabad territory within a week's time, and remain away for five years, or until permitted to return.

As I helped him down the stair, my arm supporting him, he curiously made the very same remark which the brave Princess had made some hours before: 'It's iron,' he said; and then, after a pause, he asked with timid doubt, 'It's Allah gives you strength, is it not?'

By three in the morning I had got rid of them both, but the big ruffian's body was not removed and the court-pavement cleared until long after daylight. As the broken wall was visible from outside the garden, and the body was conveyed by bullock-cart through the suburbs and several streets in the city, the case caused a good deal of gossip.

The accepted story was that the wrestler—who was a Don Juan in his way, and hated accordingly by citizens with pretty wives—had encountered me in the Princess' quarters whilst he was abducting Lulu, her handmaiden; a fight had ensued, and once again Allah had given strength to the arm of his instrument, the old Samarkandi priest.

Chapter VI

LOVE AND POLITICS

WHILST conducting prayers next evening at the Great Mosque, my thoughts were a little mixed. Here was I, a young Englishman, a waif, a rolling stone, accepted by the good people of Sultànabad as a holy Mullah, second only to Allah himself. Through me, a feeble centenarian, twice during the preceding forty-eight hours had Allah punished the wickedness of that very common-place rascal the Sardar Sahib.

Poor creature, he had no party now, for his own God himself had decided against him. Terror had so overpowered him that his one idea was to escape beyond the reach of the mysterious priest, who had killed his bully, cut his throat, and then restored him to life again. He had that morning been carried home in a litter, and put to bed. He had since sent word to the Princess that he would leave Sultànabad territory with his family for his estates in Oudh as soon as he had recovered sufficient strength to be safely moved; he was still prostrate in mind and body from loss of blood, and was being attended by the leading physicians of the city, some of whom, fearing fever, were bleeding

him, not knowing the truth; others were blistering him, whilst his wives were feeding him up with *ghi* (clarified butter), sugar-plums, and other blood-making niceties: he hoped that one or other treatment would restore him sufficiently to enable him to start on his long journey within the stipulated week; meanwhile he was preserving his secret, and would continue to do so. On hearing this piteous tale, I was inclined to pity the wretched Sardar, now so fallen from his high estate. When I walked to my lodging after prayers that evening, some of the citizens prostrated themselves at my feet, as if I were a Moslem pope: others ran before me, calling out, 'Make way, make way for the Samarkandi Mullah Yadullah, the arm of God.'

I avoided publicity as much as possible, but my fame was now so great that I had daily to attend the old Nawâb, and advise him on public affairs. His Highness was almost in his dotage now, but still signed State papers, and went through the form of sitting in the Hall of Audience, and hearing complaints, deciding cases, and receiving petitions. Within a month's time I was practically Prime Minister of the State, and as I made no attempt to cut down any Court official's salary or perquisites, neither took bribes, presents, or salary myself, and only interfered when any gross injustice was being perpetrated, no jealousy was roused by my sudden rise to power.

Things went on in this way until the autumn, when the Nawâb, weakened by a long bout of fever,

and mentally obfuscated from persistent over-indulgence in opium and alcohol, announced his intention of abdicating in favour of his daughter the Princess. The Government of India raised no objection, provided that I was accepted as responsible Minister. Thus in due course it came to pass that the Princess Melissa reigned instead of her father, and I, Jack Ravenhill, her faithful servant and lover, became under a high-sounding title her Prime Minister and senior member of her Council.

Up to the night of that murderous struggle on the roof, the Princess had appeared to me an impulsive, imperious, intensely lovable but unawakened girl. My kisses had passion in them—sometimes—but hers, when she returned mine, which was seldom, had none. She tolerated my love-making because she saw I liked it, and because she enjoyed the exercise of her sweet despotism over me. She was no doubt very fond of me, but rather as a favourite brother or privileged cousin, perhaps, than as an actual lover. After that night I noticed the beginnings of a change in her. She was less confiding, less talkative, at times pensive, almost grave; her hand never sought mine, and as for kisses, she only permitted them occasionally as a special reward for days of discretion on my part, or as a means of restoring me to good temper, when she thought me vexed at her persistent coldness. She was now insatiable in acquiring knowledge, and showed an aptitude in language which surprised both Miss Holmes and myself.

She had accepted her new responsibilities as a ruling princess with a dignity and decorum which endeared her more than ever to all who knew her. Though only fifteen, and veiled, when sitting in Council with her grey-beard ministers, it was not long before they all adored her. The deliciously dainty little figure, the low, sympathetic voice, and the firm, quiet manner, superadded to the wisdom of her utterances, made all of them loyally submissive to their young Princess. None of them suspected that before each meeting of Council she always discussed the agenda with me, and invariably adopted my opinion as her own. She saw instinctively that amongst all her Councillors I alone was disinterestedly devoted to her, and that the less I was in evidence, the stronger would be my indirect influence. Mine was a service of love, hers I believed a highly conceived devotion to duty. Between us we improved the administration of the State, increased its revenues, and kept all classes loyal and contented, without committing the mistake of trying to modernize on rigid, twentieth-century English lines the ancient institutions of a conservative Eastern people.

The Sultánabad State was surrounded by several districts of British India. They were materially even more prosperous than those under the rule of the Princess Melissa, but in the British districts all classes were discontented. It was the same throughout all British India. The peasantry were everywhere growing sullen and suspicious. They were

gradually being reduced to serfdom under the money-lenders, their former servants, because the rigid revenue system in force exacted payment of land-revenue twice a year by fixed dates, crop or no crop, and because the complicated elaboration of the laws, manipulated by swarms of hungry legal practitioners, created constant disputes, which forced poor men into never-ending litigation. Those classes, too, whom British rule had most enriched—money-lenders, bankers, merchants, shopkeepers, and lawyers—were also dissatisfied, because, having wealth and high education, each wanted a larger share in the administration than the supreme Government saw fit to concede. These evils had been long existent, but had of late years been intensified by the advent to power in Great Britain of a strong Radical Government.

Each cold season, from October to the end of the year, political doctrinaires and faddists came out by the dozen in every mail-steamer, founded associations, attended congresses, and set themselves to enlighten the Indian nation on their right to self-government and how to work it. The columns of the disloyal journals in India—and their number was legion, though their circulation was small—were filled with these teachers' nostrums for the regeneration of India. As a consequence, the educated classes began to clamour for the franchise, for quinquennial parliaments, for the abolition of all class distinctions and privileges, the reduction of the expensive white army, and the government

of India generally in exact conformity to the English model. The result was an extensive loosening of the bonds of authority, the depreciation of the Sahibs, and the apotheosis of verbose Bengalis and others from the position of loquacious sedition-mongers to that of statesmanlike representatives of the Indian nation.

Her Highness and I noted the growth of the canker in the British districts all around us, but, being old-fashioned, we adhered to old ways, maintained a strict censorship of the press, and refused to permit political meetings in any part of the Sultànabad State. As a consequence, her people remained in happy ignorance of the doubtful blessings offered to them, and each peasant continued to drive his plough, and live in lotus-eating contentment on his own little farm, undisturbed by the seething of the multitudes in the great Continent beyond her borders.

Things were ripening for a tremendous upheaval, when, early in March, 1906—nearly three years after my arrival in Sultànabad—I was astonished to read in the *Gazette of India* that Cecil, my twin brother, now the Earl of Severn, had been installed as Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

Though a Radical, he was, I knew, neither fool nor faddist, and, though young for his high office, would, in quiet times, have made a model Viceroy. But the present were unquiet times. A convulsion was impending. Four years of Radical domination at home and in India had had their influence on

the minds of men, had changed simple people into politicians and embryo revolutionaries. A prolonged drought or the preaching of a few inspired fanatics might excite the justly exasperated masses of expropriated peasantry into insurrection, and once the cry went forth of the land for the agriculturists, all India would respond, money-lenders and bankers would be plundered, their books would be burnt, and in a month's time the boasted law and order of the British Râj would disappear.

The contagion of Radicalism had infected some of the native States, but not deeply. Their rulers had generally acted on the principle of *quieta non movere*, and had, like the Sultànabad Government, given political agitators and incendiaries a short shrift. Still, all our great feudatories were disturbed. They used to believe, and to some extent still did believe, in the prudent wisdom of their *Sahib log* in India. But when they witnessed the irruption of the inspired politicians from London, read the unrepressed treason of their utterances, and time after time saw that the opinion or action of the Viceroy in Council was over-ridden by orders emanating from the London Cabinet, they could not resist the conclusion that national insanity possessed their white masters. Self-preservation being the first principle in nature, each feudatory prepared to meet the crisis as seemed best in his own eyes.

Now, Cecil, though a sensible fellow, was not the Viceroy to inspire confidence amongst vassal Princes or the masses of British India. His cold, reserved

manner, his studious habits, his logical mind, his reverence for law, and his cautious sparingness of speech, would all tell against him. He would not, I was sure, act until full evidence was before him, and had been exhaustively examined, and by the time his case would be complete, the fatal words, "too late," would stultify any action but the application of force. And whence was the necessary force to be found? Part of our native army was itself disaffected, and could not be trusted. Our Sepoys in the Punjab and Bengal commands were largely recruited from the hardy Northern tribes, and many of their families had been ruined by the law, lawyers, and money-lenders. Thus the Government of India had only some 70,000 British troops to rely upon, and a fifth of that number were unfit for campaigning, owing to the abolition of a certain protective Act, and of the rules under it, and to other causes.

With the *Gazette of India* in my hand, I sought an interview with the Princess, who was surprised to see her Prime Minister so agitated, and conducting himself as if he were seventy years younger than his official age.

'My twin brother,' I explained, 'is the new Viceroy. Here is the announcement.'

She read it, bantered me on my seriousness, and laughingly said, 'Well, Jack, is that alarming? If he is like you, he will do well, and I dare say a year hence we shall all be puzzled to account for our present fears.'

But when I had described his character to her, and answered her many questions, her mood changed. She became thoughtful, and after a long silence remarked, with an unwonted tenderness in her voice and manner, 'After all, there could not be two Jacks in the world! I forgot that. What a pity you are not the Viceroy! You would soon put all things straight.'

'Do you believe in me as much as that?'

'You know I do—more, far more,' she answered impulsively, adding, by way of correction, 'Ah, I did not mean all I said; but at any rate, Jack, had you been Viceroy, I should not have known you.'

As she spoke, she sighed, and taking my hand in hers, said, 'Jack, poor Jack, why do you remain here?'

'To serve you, Melissa,' I replied.

'And I, what right have I to your service? I give you nothing in return—not even hope,' she cried with self-reproach, and, giving way to her feelings, she carried my hand, which she was still holding, to her lips, and kissed it with reverence as if I were a God and she a worshipper.

'Princess,' I said, retaining my self-control, 'I am repaid, more than repaid. I have often of late doubted if you cared for me. You have been so cold, so reserved, so self-watchful. Why, you have not called me Jack, or let me—let me—touch your hand even for six weeks now! Just now you are like the wayward Melissa of old, only you

were a girl then, and now you are the Princess Melissa.'

'And a woman as well,' she said to herself slowly, with a curious choking in her voice. Then suddenly, in a quick outburst of nature, her already fluttered consciousness taking wing boldly, she cried, 'Did you think me a child still? No, no—my childhood ended that night on the roof, and after that girlhood changed gradually under the influence of your kisses, and now I am what you have made me.'

As she spoke, she rose from her seat, and stretching out her arms, stood before me—a woman, the light in the passion-lit eyes subdued by the virginal majesty still enthroned in her.

Beholding her, every sense in my body tingled with strange ecstasy—she was awakened—I was loved at last.

My arms twined round her. I felt her sweet breath, short, quick and warm on my face. I held her closer—closer. I kissed her hair, face, eyes, mouth, with short mad kisses, and she—for an instant she let her arms rest on my neck, and her lips returned my kisses.

A moment later she withdrew her arms, held back her dainty head, and, struggling for freedom, panted forth, 'Let me go. I forgot myself.'

When free, she remarked demurely, half in seriousness, half in fun, 'It was my fault. Your touch is fire, and I seem to be like gunpowder for you, sir.'

Her recovery was immediate—mine slow. I stood before her trembling, gasping, my heart beating wildly, half ashamed, yet filled with an intoxication of joy. She was mine at last. Like Jacob, I would serve years more for such a Rachel, only—only—I must have hope. I adjusted my disguises with shaking hands, and having done so, stood respectfully before her once more her aged Councillor.

She laughed gladly at the change, and even chaffed me for my solemn demeanour. 'And if any one had seen you a few minutes ago, would he believe,' she asked, 'you are more than a hundred years old, and the chief pillar of the State of Sultànabad?'

'I am your humble servant, madam,' I said, bowing gravely.

'You understand me now, Jack, do you?' she asked, adding sadly, 'I shall never give way again. The Princess must be stronger than the woman.'

'Yes,' I said, 'we love each other; but have to love honour more. I am content—for a time, at least.'

'Have patience. You taught me your proverb that all things come to him who knows how to wait, and in this coming hurly-burly changes and chances must occur. Your next *avatâr* (incarnation) may be in the form of a young Prince restoring peace and good government to India. Think of that.'

And so our brief madness ended like a short, sharp thunder-storm in the dog-days, which clears and cools the over-heated atmosphere.

* * * * *

We waited. Something was sure to happen, and that soon.

* * * *

The days lengthened to weeks, the weeks to months, and the echoes from the outside continent came noiselessly to us in letters and newspaper paragraphs. Now and again we caught a preacher of sedition, *flagrante delicto*, and hanged him quietly without fuss; otherwise, life rolled on as usual. Public opinion was entirely with the Princess. Her people demanded peace, and she gave them peace. The cold weather was now once more upon us, and still the storm had not burst. I was delighted. My brother was surely proving more successful than I had anticipated. I had underrated his powers, his adaptability to his new environment. He had not recessed at Simla that year, but had, from a high but mistaken sense of duty, remained in Calcutta till the middle of May, and then had spent a month at each of the important centres: Agra, Delhi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. From that latter station—the Aldershot of India—came news that he had been down with fever, and was now suffering from insomnia, due to over-work and anxiety. In October he commenced a tour through some of the larger native States. His

programme included Sultànabad, which he was timed to reach early in November.

With a fine courtesy he sent the Princess an autograph letter announcing his intention, but explaining that were his visit inconvenient to her he would postpone it till the spring, or indefinitely. He complimented her on the wisdom of her rule, and the happy quietude of her subjects, and added, that his chief object in visiting her Capital was to learn from her the secret of successful administration. 'Your Highness,' he continued, 'is still very young, hardly, indeed, beyond the age when English ladies are still in the schoolroom, and yet your State is perhaps the best governed in India. There is much, therefore, which your Highness can teach me. Your Prime Minister is, I am informed, one Yadullah, a learned centenarian. Though etiquette will only permit your Highness to receive me from behind the *purdah*, I hope soon to have the pleasure of grasping Mullah Yadullah by the hand, and adding him to the list of my truest friends.'

When Melissa passed me my brother's letter, she watched my face as I read it, and easily interpreted my thoughts. It was a kind, considerate, natural letter, and satisfactory, were I any one else than the writer's long-deceased brother, but it presaged trouble for us both. The Viceroy must be received, and I must meet him. Voice, some boyish tricks of manner, some half-forgotten birth-mark, might awaken memory, and easily enable Cecil to pene-

trate my thin disguise. In the first surprise of the discovery how would he act? Supposing he controlled himself, and thus got time to consider the situation, would not his idea of honour require me at least to leave Sultànabad? That would be intolerable without Melissa.

We considered the case in all its bearings, and finally decided to anticipate no evil. At the worst, I might have to reveal myself and face the inevitable; and if that happened, Melissa would perhaps marry me, after which, it would matter little to us whether we should become the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Ravenhill and live where we liked, or should remain in Sultànabad, she as at present the Ruling Princess, and I as Prince Consort and Minister. The charm of the extraordinary romance would placate Mrs. Grundy, and possibly the success of the administration, the personal popularity of the Princess, and the knowledge that no scandalous intrigue had existed between us, would cause the people to insist on retaining her as their ruler. As for myself, I was quite ready to nominally accept Islam and declare myself a follower of the prophet. 'For forms let fools contend.' I was as good a Musalman or Christian for that matter, already, as nine-tenths of the educated men who had been born in either faith.

However, there was no object in courting discovery, so the Princess replied in English that she would be highly honoured in receiving His Excellency, and that her Chief Councillor Yàdullah

would only be able to discuss affairs occasionally in the Palace, as the state of his health, not to mention his age (the wily Melissa did not state what it was), would confine him to the house until the weather improved.

Thus everything was duly arranged, and two days after the date originally fixed—a delay due to a relapse which nearly carried off Cecil—His Excellency's camp was pitched on the parade-ground overlooked from the Palace. The booming of guns next morning announced the Viceroy's arrival. Instead of riding, as he usually did, he drove in, being still in feeble health. There was nothing radically wrong, I was told, but the unceasing worry and anxiety of the last six months, superadded to the mistake of his having passed the whole hot weather in the plains, had caused some functional derangement of his heart's action, for which riding or any considerable physical exertion was injurious.

Chapter VII

THE GREAT TEMPTATION

IMMEDIATELY after His Excellency's arrival, Mr. Dingwell, the Foreign Secretary, came over to the Palace to have a private interview with me.

I received him purposely in an indifferently lighted room, and was relieved when I found that our advices about him from Calcutta were accurate. He was very short-sighted, and consequently always wore glasses, and his pronunciation of both Hindustani and Persian was villainous. It was presumable that his knowledge of natives was chiefly a paper knowledge, and that he would not suspect me of being an impostor. When, however, he informed me that His Excellency was about to marry—a rumour already reported by our Calcutta newswriter—and went on to explain—in confidence, he said—that His Excellency had been engaged to the lady for some years, I forgot myself and excitedly said in English, 'To Jean Vincent, is it not?'

As the words formed on my lips, I realized my mistake; but it was too late.

'How do you know?' he almost shouted in his astonishment.

'Her Highness has a news-writer at Government headquarters, and he informed her,' I replied with unblushing effrontery.

'But how could he know the name?' he asked in perplexity.

'Ladies are interested in these things all the world over, and enjoy details,' I replied drily; 'and these,' I added, showing him a handful of gold mohars, 'disclose all secrets.'

'Does Her Highness resort to bribery, then, to get information?' he queried suspiciously, only half-convinced.

'Certainly not,' I answered sharply. 'Her Highness expects to get information on all subjects that interest her, and pays her confidential agents accordingly. In this we follow the example set by the Government of India itself.'

It was the exact truth, and he knew it. He next asked me where I had learnt English, and complimented me on the purity of my accent. 'You speak it like a Russian, however,' he added, hoping, I suppose, to entrap me into an acknowledgment of my nationality, and no doubt thinking I might be a Russian. In India, I may observe, every polyglot nondescript is suspected of being a Russian spy.

'Wide-awake ministers have to know English,' I replied evasively.

He had to be satisfied, and though I had blundered, and in a sense spoken diplomatically rather than frankly, I felt that his opinion of both the Princess and of myself was now very much higher

than it had been a few minutes before. We arranged that next day or the day after, as soon as His Excellency was sufficiently recovered from his fatiguing journey, the Princess would receive him alone, and unattended, in her private audience chamber.

'How condescending!' he said, sarcastically, as I thought; 'but even then, though behind the veil, like a spirit after death, may His Excellency hope to see Isis unveiled?'

'I cannot guess riddles, sir,' I replied shortly.

'What I mean is, do you think Her Highness will show His Excellency the light of her unveiled countenance?'

'Possibly, if His Excellency has a persuasive tongue. The Princess is young,' was my answer.

'Yes, so I believe, and very beautiful, I hear, and beauty likes admiration.'

'You are hardly respectful about Her Highness, sir,' I said severely; 'and you will be good enough to remember that I too am a Musalman.'

'Indeed!' was his cool rejoinder. 'I should have thought you far too able a man to be anything but an agnostic.'

I rang my call-bell, and bowed him out of the room. He seemed to me a shrewd cynic, without reverence for woman or religion, but all the same I liked him.

Next morning I was notified that His Excellency hoped to be well enough to pay Her Highness a long private visit that afternoon. Our preparations

were simple. The Viceroy was to be received with full ceremonial, and conducted into the grand Hall of Audience, whence he was to proceed unattended except by a Court Chamberlain, through some passages and up a private stair to Her Highness' ante-room. There I, being indisposed, was to wait on him, and introduce him into Her Highness' presence. This procedure was carefully observed.

Waiting at the head of the narrow stair, and thinking that I should soon hear my brother's well-remembered deliberate step upon it, and introduce myself to him as the aged Prime Minister of the State, I felt like some trembling criminal about to face his judge. I had thought out everything beforehand, and pre-arranged my part in the interview with Melissa. I had rehearsed the bow, the hand-shake, the halting pronunciation of my mother English, the old man's quaver; nothing had been omitted. By this time I was an accomplished actor, yet naturally on this occasion I was very nervous. It is easy to play before an audience in the provinces, but a very different ordeal is the first appearance before a critical London house.

Presently I heard the words, 'This way, your Excellency. There are only thirty steps in all.'

The stair was of wood, and resonant. The foot-fall of the Chamberlain was inaudible, for he was a Courtier, and moved noiselessly with naked feet. The sound of Cecil's slow measured steps was startlingly clear—two — five — fifteen — I counted them one by one. Then there was a pause, and I

heard him panting. Dear old Cecil, it was hard to make him mount these creaking steps, and he so weak from recent illness. Then the ascent was continued, and I saw his head appear. I started and gasped. He was still my double, but paler and decidedly thinner in face. Another second, and he stood before me in a black frock-coat with the Order of the Star of India blazing on its left breast. I bowed, and managed to stumble through my prepared self-introduction.

'I am glad to meet you, Mr. Yadullah,' he said, scrutinizing my face and holding out his hand.

With Oriental gravity I raised it slowly to my lips, bending low, and said, 'Your Excellency is welcome. Her Highness is quite ready.'

He was pallid, and I noticed that he kept putting his left hand up over his heart, as if he were in pain.

I conducted him into the inner room, and presented him to Her Highness, who was seated veiled. She rose gracefully and giving Cecil her hand, over which he bowed with courtier-like *empressement*, caused him to sit on a state-chair on the right of her own. For some seconds there was silence. My brother seemed out of breath and a little agitated. Presently he began speaking, and in well-chosen language thanked Her Highness for receiving him, and paid her some stately compliments. She had hesitated a little on his appearance, and glanced towards me as if to assure herself that he and I were different men. But when he began speaking her composure almost forsook her.

It was my own voice, but slower, lower, and perhaps more sympathetic.

When she delivered her set reply, it was clear that she was quite at her ease again, and liked her visitor. There was a friendly warmth in her voice, and her pronunciation of English was so good that my poor brother's drawn, anxious face relaxed into a smile, and he exclaimed:—

'Ah, Princess, I know your secret already. You have a kind heart, and have been educated by an English lady; but for that veil I might think you a compatriot of my own.'

Melissa, I am sure, must have blushed behind her veil as she thought how nearly my brother had hit off the truth. As it was, she quietly told him that she had been brought up by a Musalmani lady, who had studied in England, and had for the last four years enjoyed the advantage of being taught history and French by her Minister—indicating myself, who was standing in the background. (What a little traitress she is, I thought; getting out of her own difficulty by thrusting me into one.) I bowed. Then turning to me my brother began to ply me with questions—the countries I had travelled in, the languages I had studied, what fortunate chance had brought me to Sultànabad, did my memory go back to Warren Hastings, or Lord William Bentinck (he accepted my century then), where had I been in the great Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, and so forth.

As we spoke together, I became interested, and

my English got purer, and my voice more natural. Cecil listened and talked, but after my last answer his smile faded, his brow contracted, his expression became that of a man pained and puzzled by some awakening memory, which recalled a sorrow. Lying back in his chair he gasped for breath, and when his struggles permitted speech, said: 'You confuse me. It is strange, but yours is like a voice from the grave.'

Realizing my mistake, Melissa hurriedly interposed: 'Your Excellency is ill—in pain? Oh, what can I do for you?'

This diversion partially recalled his wandering senses; his sad but attractive smile returned. With an effort he sat upright, and with painful exertion repeated the words, 'Do for me?' and then collecting his thoughts said gallantly, with something of my own boldness, 'Madam, your face must be as beautiful as your mind or your voice. A sight of that face might soothe me.'

She hesitated, and then, perhaps remembering that he was my brother and ill, graciously complied with the sick man's request. The suffering Viceroy raised his head, beheld, wondered, and was charmed. Speaking softly, as if communing with himself, he exclaimed: 'It's the face of an angel! I am—unworthy—of this—privilege.'

The last words were stuttered with difficulty. As he spoke his lips grew ashen, his head drooped, and he sank forward, and slid, rather than fell, on to the floor.

'Jack, Jack! what have I done?' Melissa cried in terror.

'Hush! he has fainted, unconscious from pain, I fear,' I replied, bending over him and opening his coat and waistcoat. I threw myself down beside him, and cradled his head in my lap. 'Cecil, Cecil!' I called; 'don't you know me? I am Jack, your brother.' I tore off my beard.

He opened his eyes, looked up in my face and murmured faintly, 'Jack? Yes, it must be so; the voice was familiar. This is death. I have known for some time it would come suddenly—like this.'

Whilst he was speaking, I put my hand over his heart, and could only feel a weak, irregular fluttering. I begged Melissa to summon his people, but he interposed: 'No, no, too late. Let me die in your arms, brother!' His head fell back, but his staring eyes were fixed on mine. Presently he continued hoarsely in a broken whisper, 'It's my heart . . . I guess your story, Jack. . . . You love her, don't you?'

I nodded. Melissa was on the floor chafing his poor lifeless hands, her tears dropping on them.

'Don't cry, dear,' he gasped, and then, after a long pause, his face brightened, and his dying eyes dwelt affectionately on me. 'Jack, Jack,' he whispered eagerly, and I put my face close to his, 'why not take my place? You will do it better, and then you can marry. . . .' The rest was inaudible, but his lips still moved, and I caught the words 'war . . . France . . . mutiny . . . save

India.' Then there was a catching of the breath, a sharp cry, and silence.

He was dead!

We looked at each other. Melissa's face expressed abject terror mingled with a curious alertness, an awakening of some train of hopeful thought. Where was there room for hope when he was dead, my brother, the Viceroy of India? My left arm was still under his head. What would I not give to recall Cecil to life again, if only to explain to him how accidentally I had drifted into my present false position: he said he had guessed my story, yes, but how much of it? What gaps could have been filled up in half an hour's talk! Had my voice, and the memories caused by it, brought on the spasm which had killed him? If so, I was in a sense his murderer. How little I had appreciated his great qualities, his self-abnegation, his struggles to do his duty at the grave risk of his life; and I, what had I done with my life? I had loafed through my thirty-two years, during the past four of which I had been a living lie, an impostor, and all because I had been fascinated by a girl—'a little Indian girl,' as my former friends would have called my Melissa, had they heard of my 'infatuation,' as they would style it.

Well, what should I do now? Should I call his people, avow myself, and take the consequences? But what consequences? I was now the rightful Earl of Severn, and, after all, I had done no man an injury; on the contrary, I had for nearly four

years been a successful administrator of a great native state, and had gained the respect and affection of five millions of poor Indians.

'Jack, what are you thinking of? what are you going to do?' was Melissa's whispered interruption to my further reflections.

'Do?' I queried; 'why, call his people and bury him, I suppose. Poor Cecil, he is happy now!'

'Yes, we must bury him,' echoed Melissa, putting her shaking hands on my free hand. I caught her to me. She was cold and trembling, yet her face was flushed, her eyes aglow from some mental agitation.

'Why, Melissa,' I said, 'what a coward you are! Remember, his troubles are over; see how tranquil the poor drawn face is now.'

'I am afraid of my thoughts,' she explained hurriedly.

'What thoughts?'

'Those that Cecil put into my head about your taking his place. Oh, Jack, Jack!—is it wicked?—but I wish you to do so. It is the only way to—to—save India, and—marry me,' and she hid her face against my shoulder, afraid even to look at me.

The idea startled me, excited me, awoke ambitious longings. The prizes of life—love and a great position—were within my grasp; why not grasp them? Why should I not play the part of Viceroy? No man could be better equipped for

that great office, and I was now the Earl of Severn. As Viceroy I should be able to do my country a lasting service, and secure my own happiness.

The temptation was great; my brother himself was the tempter, and that was a sanction—and Melissa? She was the incentive, the prize of success far more than India. I wavered. Her cheek was now against mine, though her eyes were still hidden, and her two hands were still clasping my free hand I felt that in some subtle way she was suggesting to me my line of action. She said nothing, yet her will was influencing mine. I yielded for her sake and my own far more than for India's.

'Yes, I'll do it,' I said simply.

At the words she raised her head, drew it back a little, looked into my eyes with an intensity of love and gratitude, and then gently putting her lips to mine, said, 'Thank you, Jack. I'll go now for a little.' Then she left the room, and I was alone with Cecil's corpse.

I moved as one hypnotised, and began to carry out Melissa's suggestion, for her influence still governed me, though she herself had gone. I tore off my outer garments, replaced them with those of my dead brother, and then kneeling down by the body, adjusted my disguises on it. As I smoothed my false beard over Cecil's neck and chest, I touched his face. It was almost cold already, yet I thought an approving smile hovered about the still mobile lips.

'Cecil! Cecil!' I called in response; but the dead gave no reply. There he lay, his anxieties ended, his upturned face placid as a sleeping child's, his premature wrinkles all smoothed out, the ideal of a dead centenarian priest.

Hearing the cry, Melissa returned. She was self-possessed and observant. 'You have forgotten your white hair. It is fortunate you wear it so short. Go in there,' she said, pointing to her room, 'and wash the dye out.'

I did so. She looked at me critically on my return, and said, 'You are perfect. I think you ought to go now. Remember, it's for my sake and—India's.' And then she kissed me, as a loving sister might her favourite brother when he was starting on a dangerous journey.

I was excited, but my nerves were now strung. It was time for me to face the throng downstairs. An hour or more had passed since the interview had begun, and they would soon be wondering at the length of His Excellency's visit.

Before going, I stood over my brother's body, and silently thought my long good-bye. There he lay, my dead self. I was Viceroy now; still an impostor, but less so than during the last four years. After all, his death had made me the rightful Earl of Severn, and the difference between Jack and Cecil was trifling. 'What's in a name?'

'You'll do all honour to him, and let me know when the funeral is,' I said to her.

She nodded, tried to reply, but could not articu-

late. She was sobbing hysterically. It was my turn now to show decision.

'Good-bye, Melissa—darling,' I said, taking her in my arms. 'Never fear; it will all come right.'

'Go! go, Jack!' she said excitedly, 'or I shall break down. I can't stand this much longer.'

I obeyed

I went down the stair with a slow, heavy tread like my brother's, and before reaching the ground-floor turned up the collar of my coat, and finding a large silk handkerchief in a pocket, I tied it loosely round my neck. I entered the grand Hall of Audience quietly. The aide-de-camp on duty, Captain the Honourable A. Forbes, sprang to my side, and said in alarm at my appearance, 'You are ill, sir, again, I fear. It has been too much for you.'

'Yes,' I said, 'those stairs were trying.'

He gave me his arm, and we passed out through a bowing crowd. The carriage was waiting. We drove off, and in a few minutes I was alone in my luxuriously-appointed tent.

I dined by myself, and retired to bed immediately afterwards, to think, to dream, to wake to the strange new *rôle* which was before me.

Chapter VIII

'MENS ÆQUA IN ARDUIS'

WHEN, early next morning, I was informed that Mullah Yadullah, the Prime Minister, had died suddenly soon after the conclusion of my interview with the Princess, I instructed the Foreign Secretary and two of my aide-de-camps to attend the funeral, and I also gave orders that my body-guard should be present.

As for myself, I decided that it was to the interest of the Empire that I should remain on the sick-list for some time. By this means I should secure privacy, and gain time to acquire information before making my appearance in public. After breakfasting in bed, I sent for Surgeon-Colonel Willoughby, the Viceregal physician. He came at once, and, the tent being rather dark, ordered my bearer to light a lamp and place it near me.

'No—no—doctor,' I said hurriedly, 'for God's sake don't; I can't stand light.'

'Doctor!—I—I only wish to stethoscope your heart, sir, as usual.'

'I will have no more examinations,' I replied, in

a decided tone; 'they only worry me. I've fever, I tell you, and it's gone to my head. The palpitations are from weakness.'

'Let me at least feel your pulse, sir, and take your temperature.'

'Certainly not,' I said to him testily; 'I will be my own physician for once, and prescribe for myself some cooling medicine—tonics, quinine, and iron, say.'

'Your Excellency has hitherto trusted your case entirely to me,' was his offended rejoinder.

'But you are doing me no good, my friend,' I remonstrated. 'Just do as I wish, and I'll be fit in a fortnight. Try my treatment at least. If it succeeds, the credit will be yours, not mine.'

'Very well, sir, for a fortnight only; good morning.' And he left me, convinced that brain symptoms had set in, and that a soothing treatment was necessary.

Being respited for fourteen days, I made the most of my time. I became a cormorant at work, though I was careful to conceal the fact from my staff. I read through all my poor brother's papers, including his voluminous diaries, for he was, fortunately for me, a very methodical recorder of events. I interviewed my secretaries in turn, puzzling them by the mixture of ignorance, forgetfulness, and astuteness, which I displayed in my questions and remarks. I insisted on reading and talking daily with one of the Foreign Office translators, and the extraordinary progress I was

making in the vernacular was soon the talk of the camp. I drove out nearly every afternoon, wrapped up in furs, and before a week was over, had made such progress towards a good recovery, that 'Colonel' Willoughby, as I afterwards learnt my doctor liked to be called, reluctantly accepted faith as useful amongst the remedies required to cure nervous diseases. By faith he meant humouring and deceiving, if expedient, the patient. Of course I threw away all his medicines, whilst pretending to swallow them, and equally of course he did not change his treatment, though he labelled his prescriptions in terms consonant with my diagnosis of my case.

On the tenth day I let it be understood that I was much better, and drove over to the Palace to see the Princess. The ceremonial was the same as that observed on the last occasion, except that a successor to the late Prime Minister not yet having been appointed, no third person was present at our interview.

Melissa was, of course, delighted to see me again, but professed to prefer as a lover Jack the loafer, or Yadullah the priest—without his beard—to his Excellency the Viceroy. I had changed, no doubt. The cares of Empire were upon me, the idler was now the assiduous worker. Though embracing a pretty girl, when got up as for a garden party in the height of the season, may be a more formal proceeding than when the only clothing is soft silk or muslin, I managed to satisfy Melissa. Indeed,

she soon admitted that, making allowances for a stiff collar, His Excellency's kisses were as warm as those of the defunct Jack. On her side, Melissa was all a loving little girl should be with her lover. It is true that for some minutes a cloud did obscure our sunshine, but when we had talked over the little difficulty and arranged the course of events to our mutual advantage, the sun came out with a new splendour, and we laughed together that such a small matter should have caused us both a minute's disquietude

It was this:—when for the twentieth time Melissa, holding me delicately in her arms to avoid crumpling my coat or shirt, had asked me to repeat that I loved her, and would never care for any other woman, I suddenly remembered that that morning I had received a telegram from Miss Vincent —the Jean Vincent who had thrown me over for Cecil—announcing that she would reach Bombay on or about New Year's Day. So this time I varied my answer to Melissa's inquiries, and said with mock seriousness, 'Yes, sweetheart, but I forgot to tell you I have to marry Miss Vincent next month.'

'Jack,' she cried, disentangling her arms from my neck, 'what can you mean?'

'What I say.'

'*Oh, you are cruel to tease me so: you told me* Miss Vincent preferred your brother.'

'Yes, but I am my brother now, and have assumed all his engagements.' As I said this, I

could not help laughing—the little woman had taken it all in earnest.

'Oh! Jack, Jack. I see you have already thought of a plan. What is it?' she cried gladly, clapping her hands and flying to me again.

'Yes, I'll marry her—but to some one else.'

'But she will prefer you, I know,' she said with melancholy conviction.

'I'll make myself very objectionable.'

'You can't, Jack.'

'Oh yes, I can. I'll taunt her with really loving Jack, not me.'

'But she will see that you are very like Jack, and besides, if she is ambitious and mercenary, she will want to marry the Viceroy,' objected Melissa.

'Well,' I said conclusively, preparing to go, 'failing other devices, I'll tell her I love you, and that will finish her.'

Even this did not quite convince Melissa, as she could not conceive any woman renouncing her Jack. The thought that if I could not escape from this disagreeable marriage, I might turn Musalman and marry her as well, was, she afterwards told me, some small consolation to her troubled mind. Though I made light of the complication, it was a horribly awkward predicament.

The fact is, when first going through my brother's papers, I had been preoccupied by affairs of State and the difficulties of my position, and I had not realized that the crisis was so near. The morning's telegram had shown that I was living in a

fool's paradise. On return to camp, I critically glanced through the correspondence and diary for a second time. It was clear that my poor brother had not loved Miss Vincent—I doubt if he could have wholly loved any woman; he was fulfilling his engagement from a sense of honour, that was all. In Miss Vincent's letters to him were upbraidings for his coldness, and the repeated mention of Captain the Honourable Charles Byng—my brother's permanent private secretary, then at home on six months' leave—showed either that she was fond of this Captain Byng, or that she had been trying to excite Cecil's jealousy, and so induce him to fix a date for their marriage. Whatever the explanation, the entry in the diary was conclusive: 'Wrote offering to marry Jean in January if the state of public affairs would permit.' A fortnight later I found the entry, 'Wire from J——, coming about Christmas,' that was all.

As I thought over the situation, I caught myself almost longing that the threatened rupture between France and Great Britain had taken place. It would have closed the canal route any way, and even if Russia remained neutral—which was unlikely—the existing confusion in Afghanistan and Persia would render the overland journey by the recently opened but misnamed Kandahar-Herat Railway so unsafe, that lady travellers at least would not attempt it. That route was, in fact, unsatisfactory at any time, as the 250 miles of desert between the two terminal towns of the Indian and

Russian systems had not then been linked up, and were traversed by tarantass or on horseback.

Happily I was of a buoyant disposition, and trusting to the good luck which had hitherto attended me, I put the papers by, resolved not to anticipate trouble. I built my hopes on Captain Byng. He was said to be a handsome, pleasant fellow, a great lady's man. He had been at Homburg with Miss Vincent all the season, and was now escorting her to Bombay; so I hoped that they would arrive sighing for each other.

I lingered on another week at Sultànabad, and managed to have so many unceremonial interviews with Melissa, that Mr. Dingwell, the Foreign Secretary, when complimenting me on my improved health, dared to insinuate that my treatment by the 'Virgin Queen' as he called Melissa—thereby mockingly likening her to our Queen Elizabeth—had more to do with the cure of my heart-complaint than all Colonel Willoughby's drugs. I looked inscrutable, and told him if he had been blessed, as I had been, with a sight of the beautiful Princess, he would never leave Sultànabad, whereas I was starting for Calcutta next morning.

This time I rode my marches. The change wrought on His Excellency physically and mentally by his three weeks' rest at Sultànabad was little short of miraculous—so said all who knew me. I shot, I hawked, I even ventured to try pig-sticking, and astonished the sporting chief of the Konds by challenging him to a tent-pegging match

with me. He was a past master of the art, I—as Viceroy, at least—a novice. He beat me, it is true. In three courses of three pegs each, he took seven and I five, but even so I beat the best man in my escort. Then on the march one morning, when attended by some sporting Rajput chiefs, we saw a black bear scuttling away from us in the low scrub jungle through which we were passing. One of the rajahs borrowed a spear and dashed after him. I followed in pursuit, and by hard riding and great luck struck Bruin dead as he was reaching the fringe of safety—a teak forest.

By the time I got to Agra, whence I was to journey by train to Calcutta, I was convinced that many feudatories, who had recently been wavering in their allegiance to the Empire, would risk a great deal for a Viceroy, who, whilst on occasion haughty and exacting as Jove himself, was yet out of Darbar their good comrade and friend, and a match for the best of them in any of their sports or exercises.

So far I had not yet ventured upon introducing any changes in the system of administration. I had yet to meet the members of my Executive Council at Calcutta, and to face weary sittings of the Legislative Council, in which the elected members had now organized themselves into a sort of standing opposition, always playing to their gallery 'the Indian nation,' so called, and the extreme members of the Radical party and press at home.

There were, however, a few little orders which, in consultation with the Foreign and Home Secre-

taries, I ventured to give of my own authority. 'The Viceroy in Council' is legally empowered without trial to deport or imprison any political offender. The Viceregal warrant is a sort of *lettre de cachet*. No *habeas corpus* can run against such a warrant. Both courts and lawyers are powerless before it. Hitherto these warrants had only been issued against offenders from outside India, frontier freebooters, rebellious vassals, and the like. I now decided to treat as political offenders the sedition-mongers, both white and brown, who were swarming throughout the peninsula, preaching treason and stirring up disaffection against the British dominion. The sayings, doings, and movements of each of the more important of these pests of society were always duly reported and noted. Hitherto my brother had been content to observe them only by a sort of shadowing He had not resorted to strong measures, as their wire-pullers had a powerful money-backing, and a trial before a regular tribunal was what each courted, for it meant publicity and a further dissemination of political poison. He had feared, in fact, to take any notice of them, freedom of speech being as sacred to the democracy of Great Britain as freedom of the Press.

What I caused to be done was to have several hundreds of these gentry suddenly arrested, and confined in different jails as political offenders. Some half a dozen of them, who wrote M.P. after their names, and a few home newspaper men were quietly put on board steamers returning to Great

Britain by the Cape. The long sea voyage was preferred, because the lives and liberties of such valuable representatives of the British nation would not have been safe had they been sent to their duties at Westminster and elsewhere by the Canal route. The outbreak of war between France and Great Britain appeared imminent, and if war came, the Canal would be immediately closed.

This little *coup d'état*, though an act of ordinary self-preservation for a Government encompassed by perils as mine was, created a wordy storm throughout India and even Great Britain. The blow was admirably timed and delivered. One morning India awoke to find that three hundred leading busybodies had disappeared. Next day the reasons for the action taken were shortly stated in a Gazette of India Extraordinary, and it was added that similar offences would be even more severely treated. A meeting of the London Cabinet was hastily convened to consider my action, and explanations were demanded. I replied that my law advisers were unanimous that the action taken was legal, and that when the Secretary of State for India should receive the papers, I was confident that my proceedings would be approved; the papers in each case were being completed as rapidly as possible, and would be sent home as soon as ready. I was careful not to add that they would not be ready for some months to come. The Cabinet, though pressed to recall me, prudently decided to await full information,

and in the course of the next fortnight the storm somewhat subsided.

In India my action was hailed as a deliverance, and open treason-mongering soon ceased to be an attractive occupation for any man. The effect of the measure was excellent. It gained me the respect and even admiration of the great feudatories, and naturally district officers approved. Being small autocrats themselves, they favoured any sign of reversion to patriarchal rule. As for the public generally—my own council, I might add—they were fairly bewildered. Until a few weeks before, they had known or heard of me as a cold, cautious, retiring man of few words, very dependent on his council, and particularly so on its law member; whereas now, after a severe illness and three weeks of mysterious seclusion in the capital of a remote native state, I had suddenly, by all accounts, risen, like the phœnix, from my own ashes, and was ruling India as if I were the great Moghal *redivivus* and anglicised. Not only so, but I was cured of all my physical ailments, I was now an athlete and sportsman, instead of a valetudinarian and student.

All Calcutta was agog to see the renovated and rejuvenated Viceroy. Whether it was the heat below Allahabad, or the thirty-six hours' confinement in the train, or a sort of unconscious self-adaptation to the fitness of things, I know not; but when my train drew up at Howrah, and I stepped out on to the platform, I felt weak and nervous. I

hastily seized Captain Forbes' arm (he was the aide-de-camp I liked best). 'I feel giddy, and can't see distinctly,' I said in his ear. 'Just quietly introduce me to those with whom I must shake hands.'

He was quick and intelligent, and I got through the ordeal excellently, though I heard afterwards I had disappointed the Chief Justice by not asking after his wife and daughter, and had astonished several members of my Council by confusing their names. The fact is that Captain Forbes, after the manner of aide-de-camps, did not know all their names and persons, and had guessed at them occasionally.

An hour after I was tubbing in my own room in Government House. During the afternoon I made so many small slips of the tongue, that I decided to revert to my Sultànabad device, and go again on the sick list for a few days. A fall I had had when pig-sticking at Delhi was an explanation readily accepted by every one, an explanation which was confirmed by my receiving the members of the Executive and Legislative Councils with a wet bandage round my head.

In a week's time I was once more ready to confront destiny with a smiling face, and to say the right things to councillors, generals, secretaries, and their wives and daughters. It was not difficult to take the measure of each of my English colleagues in council and chief secretaries. They were all clever men in their several ways, each an expert in the technique of his own department, but

as most of them had risen to their present positions through services rendered in the different secretariats of the Local Governments, or Government of India, they were one and all deficient in practical district experience. Some owed their advancement up the rungs of their departmental ladders to the courtier-like habit of always subordinating their own views—when they had any—to those of their immediate official superiors. Such men, when heads of departments themselves, were not very reliable 'pillars of the State.'

To oscillate between an office stool in Calcutta and Simla, occasionally see villages from a first-class compartment in a mail or special train, and frequently accord interviews to polished native gentlemen, one and all vencered imitations of Englishmen, is not the way to learn India, and qualify for the position of membership of the Viceregal Council, or the Governorship of a Province; yet this had usually been all the previous experience of India undergone by the men selected to fill these high offices.

Under such conditions, it was not surprising that our system of administration had long been a complicated rigid bureaucracy, and that our legislation was an ill-digested adaptation from the laws obtaining in England and America. It was a system excellently suited for a commercial nation with a preponderance of sharp practitioners, but utterly unsuited for the good governance of ignorant peasants, whose average arithmetical capacity was

limited to counting up to twenty, and whose highest aspirations were contained in the prayer, 'Give us each day our daily bread,' coupled with the rider, 'and help us somehow to cheat or defeat our creditors.'

In discussions with my colleagues I soon found that I was, in practical knowledge, a head and shoulders taller than most of them. The year I had spent shikaring in the jungles, and then my four years as Prime Minister of the Sultánabad State, had given me an insight into native character, into the effect of acts of Government on the average native mind, which was not possessed by any of my colleagues. Then my knowledge of colloquial vernacular—a knowledge which, so far, I was specially careful to conceal—gave me an immense advantage both over colleagues and secretaries. It also gave me great influence over those of our feudatories and nobility to whom I accorded private interviews. Each man went away wondering what manner of man was this, who, not a year in the country, conversed with him correctly in his own tongue. On such occasions I spoke Urdu or Persian freely. As no Englishman was present, I was aware that stories told of my linguistic attainments would be taken as the mere complimentary exaggeration usual amongst native gentlemen when speaking of dignities to dignities.

It was now the middle of the Christmas week, and a crisis in my fortunes was at hand. A wire from Aden informed me that Miss Vincent's

steamer had reached that port, and that she was well, notwithstanding unseasonable heat in the Red Sea. 'How very interesting,' I thought, in my bitterness about her. Another wire in cipher warned me that as war with France might break out at any hour, India was to expect no reliefs or reinforcements of British troops that season, and that on the declaration of war, according to the plan of operations already decided on, all French possessions, both in India and Indo-China (Siam and Tonquin), were, as soon as expeditions could be despatched, to be seized, and when ships were available, Tamatave was to be occupied, the Hovas armed, and Madagascar wrenched from the enemy.

I grinned sardonically when I read this cablegram. The Home Ministry, in their usual ignorance of, or indifference to, Indian affairs, had overlooked the fact that, through our long perverse misgovernment, the chances were that as soon as our Aryan brethren realized that England was about to be engaged in a death struggle with one or more of her European rivals, we should have to fight for our own lives, honour, and Empire, inside India itself. Well, I should do my best according to my ability, and if only Miss Vincent would fall overboard, or marry Captain Byng at Bombay, I should face the crisis with a light heart. That such an ignoble wish had occupied my mind was a shock to my finer feelings. To think that I, who ought to have been wholly absorbed in my public duties, was worrying myself to desire evil to an

innocent girl, because, with excusable if not laudable ambition, she wished to marry me, showed what a poor creature I was, in the green-room of my own conscience. I drove self-introspection away by remembering that it is human nature to put self before duty at least in the mind's eye, though in action the sense of duty often happily overcomes the sense of self.

Chapter IX

A STUDY IN PRACTICAL POLITICS

WELL, to-day I was to address in Darbar the princes, chiefs, and leading notables of Bengal, and my speech would be wired to every town in the Empire. It was expected to be what newspaper correspondents call an 'epoch-making' speech, and half my Council had been good enough to give me suggestions for it, whilst Mr. Dingwell, the Foreign Secretary, had supplied me with several closely-written foolscap pages of suitable platitudes. I thanked colleagues and Secretary for their several contributions, but said that on the whole, as I was Viceroy, and on my shoulders lay all the responsibility, I should take my own line.

'And what is that, sir?' asked Mr. Dingwell, nonplussed.

'Simply to speak the truth, in the fewest possible words, and appeal to their self-interest,' I replied.

'There is no precedent for such a course, sir,' he protested in dignified distress.

'There is no precedent for the present situation,' I replied. 'If there is to be an upheaval or civil war, call it what you will, the sooner we know who are our friends, who are trimmers, and who will be our enemies, the better; and as for the unfortunate masses, the sooner they know that there is to be an end to the preposterous system of over-government on Western lines, which has nearly ruined them, the better our chances of keeping them from rising, or pacifying them if they do rise.'

'Will you dictate your speech beforehand to our shorthand writer, and circulate it to the members of your Council for their suggestions? That is the usual course.'

'I think not. There is hardly time,' was my diplomatic reply.

'But, sir,' he urged, 'the speech must be written out before delivery, as it has to be repeated in the vernacular after you have made it in English.'

'I think I shall address the assemblage in Urdu myself in the first instance,' I replied. 'I suppose few of the Darbaris know English well, but all speak Urdu fluently. It is the mother tongue of most of them.'

'True, sir,' he protested, almost rude from astonishment at what he thought was my egregious conceit and self-confidence, 'but a knowledge of Urdu, adequate for the exchange of formal civilities, will hardly suffice for speech-making.'

'Well, I dare say you are right, Dingwell,' I said with a yawn. 'If you will send me your best

translator and my private munshi half an hour before the Darbar begins, I'll see what can be done.'

Mr. Dingwell bowed and departed, annoyed at my obstinacy and self-assurance, and doubtless fully expecting a breakdown. As a matter of fact, I had already carefully prepared what I should say, and had worked out the vernacular rendering of some of the terms and sentences with my munshi. It was unnecessary to tell Dingwell this; moreover, it was part of my deliberate policy to be always a *poseur*. To create a great and striking effect, surprise and mystery are valuable assistants.

Whilst the presentations were taking place, the Darbaris themselves maintained a grave and dignified impassivity. But many of the British officers, who were present in crowds, in full-dress uniform, treated the occasion as if it were a play or spectacle. As each Darbari, with his offering in his hands, was escorted in order of precedence to the foot of the throne, and bowed low whilst being introduced, the ribald youngsters on my left behaved very much like undergraduates at commemoration. They remarked freely on the styles of salâming, the costumes and the barbaric profusion of the ill-set gems which flashed from the turbans and necks of the Darbaris. In point of fact, the display of personal taste in colours amongst those presented was of infinite variety; but the general effect, whether viewed individually or collectively, was strikingly rich and harmonious. In dress and deportment these native gentlemen

were dignified representatives of the aristocracy of India, and would have created a favourable impression at a *levée* in St. James's Palace.

With the ending of the moving part of the ceremony the hum of criticism subsided, and every person in that large assembly sat silent and motionless with eyes turned towards myself. For a minute or so I remained still as a statue, and then when the hush of expectancy was deepest, I rose slowly and deliberately.

My action astonished the whole audience: all looked uneasy; many hastily stood up. That a Viceroy should stand, whilst his inferiors sat, was, as Dingwell would say, 'without precedent.' I knew it. I smiled to myself, seeing his evident consternation, and reading his thoughts: the breakdown of his self-willed master was coming, a precursor surely of the breakdown of the British dominion in India.

The fact is, I stood to increase the effect of my speech. I had height and a commanding presence, and by standing I best dominated my audience. To deliver an oration from a chair is to lose power and speak with half-inflated lungs. I raised my right arm, and proclaimed loudly, 'Let all sit; I speak standing.'

All resumed their seats, and amidst the hush which followed I delivered my address in Urdu, articulating slowly and clearly, so that not a syllable should be lost.

'Ruling chiefs and gentlemen,' I said, 'your

obeisances and offerings doubtless symbolise the devotion and loyalty which you owe to our common Lord the King-Emperor, whose representative I am. We are all fellow-citizens of the Anglo-Indian Empire, the justest, greatest, and most beneficent which human wisdom and organization have yet produced. You are aware that a storm is threatening that Empire both from without and from within. From without, France seems intent on making war upon the Empire, and in such a war Russia would probably be the ally of France. From within an agrarian insurrection appears to be imminent, because, through mistakes in legislation and a too-centralized system of bureaucratic administration, hundreds of thousands of the ancient proprietary of the village communities of India have been expropriated, and their lands transferred to the effeminate, money-lending classes of the towns.

'In the troubles that may be before us, you will all find that the line of self-interest coincides with that of duty.

'For you, ruling Chiefs, that duty is to maintain tranquillity within your several States, and to aid our common King-Emperor, mine as well as yours, in repelling invasion from beyond the frontiers of the Empire.

'For you, great landlords of Bengal, that duty is to keep your tenants contented, and to contribute as may be required of you to the defence of the Empire. You know that the continuance of

the extraordinary immunity from reasonable taxation conferred on you by the foolish Cornwallis-settlement depends on the preservation intact of the British dominion. Knowing this, you will be required to pay for the maintenance of an army corps in the field so long as this war, if it come, may last.

'As for the masses, the hereditary peasants and yeomen of British India, whom the British system has reduced to serfdom, I pledge my honour as Viceroy that their proprietary rights will be restored to them, and that hereafter it will be illegal for persons other than true agriculturists to acquire rights in arable land.

'Let all clearly understand that, be this war short or prolonged, be the internal troubles of India general or confined to a few localities only, the British Empire will eventually emerge triumphant over all enemies, whether foreign European powers, misguided feudatories, or exasperated peasantry.

'Finally, when accounts come to be settled, justice according to merit will be done to each class and individual; the chiefs who will have freely helped their King-Emperor with blood and treasure will be rewarded; but those who were hostile, or stood lukewarm, will be punished. As for the peasantry, much will be forgiven them, because we have sinned much against them.'

Every word of this short speech was listened to with close attention. During its delivery no cough,

no sound, no movement detracted from the effect of my words. As I resumed my seat the hitherto pent-up feelings of the audience found vent in an outburst of ejaculations of approval, and a buzz of complimentary remarks, as man discussed with man his wonderful, his masterful Viceroy, whose command of correct Hindustani was extraordinary. Suddenly a curious thing happened. Two of the highest Darbaris, both ruling chiefs and rival claimants for additional guns to their respective salutes, impulsively hurried forward towards my throne, threw down their jewelled turbans, and bowed their bared heads to the ground. From that prostrate position one called out, 'Not only my army but myself and my children are yours, Lord Sahib—I vow them all in the service of the Kaisar-i-Hind'; but the other, being less ready with his tongue, could only find words to say, 'Of course (*be shakk*), and I too.'

Whilst this quaint comedy was enacting before me, the group of young British officers, whom I have referred to as 'ribald youngsters,' shouted 'Three cheers for old England and the Viceroy—hip-hip-hurrah!' At the same moment a madness of vociferous loyalty spread to the whole assembly, and each man shouted at the top of his voice; but of the many sounds which I was able to discriminate, the loudest, clearest, and most soul-inspiring were the hurrahs of those British youngsters. The enthusiasm was still at its height when, owing to some mistake, the band of the military guard of

honour, stationed just outside the entrance, began playing 'God save the King!' In an instant the hubbub was hushed, and several hundred British throats rhythmically rolled forth the first verse of our grand but rather blood-and-thundery national hymn.

That evening I held a special meeting of the Executive Council. A telegram had been received from the Secretary of State for India announcing that the Canal was closed, a large French steamer filled with stone ballast having been mysteriously, though probably by design, blown up in a narrow part between two of the stations. Great Britain had consequently seized Port Said, and announced that as her interests in the Canal transcended ten times over those of all other nations put together, she now temporarily assumed its sole management, so that the trade of east and west should not be at the mercy of any blunderer or miscreant. The French Government had replied that in so doing Great Britain had committed an aggression against all the neutralising powers, and that grave consequences would ensue unless the cabinet of St. James' at once withdrew from their untenable position, and referred the 'unfortunate incident' to arbitration.

Then came the most important part of the telegram, 'as His Majesty's ministers have certain information that the French Government are only delaying their declaration of war against Great Britain, because of a hitch in the terms of their

alliance with that of Russia, you are authorized to proceed as if war had been already declared.'

When the discussions in Council had been concluded, I withdrew to my sanctum or private office-room, and received several of my colleagues separately. The first was Mr. Albert Jones, the legal member, a recent arrival from home, appointed not on account of his legal knowledge, but in payment for political services rendered to the Radical party at the last elections.

'How, sir,' he asked, 'do you propose to rehabilitate expropriated peasant and yeoman owners? Their ascertained numbers approximate to twenty millions of families; hence to buy out the interests of the money-lenders, who, as mortgagees or purchasers, are now their landlords, is impossible. The amount of compensation alone would bankrupt India.'

'Not at all,' I said; 'a maximum of twenty years' usufruct will be held to legally extinguish any non-agriculturist's claim as mortgagee, the terms of the so-called mortgage contract notwithstanding, and as to titles by purchase, some other equitable arrangement will be devised. The State, too, will make advances to facilitate repurchase, as was done in Ireland.'

'Then, sir, you intend that the new law should have retrospective effect. In that case you will go back on completed contracts!' he exclaimed in astonishment.

'Well,' I replied, 'you must remember that it

is the Contract Act and the Civil Procedure Code and the strict way our technical courts have interpreted their provisions and played the game of the money-lenders, which have contributed largely to the undoing of the old proprietary classes. Probably not more than ten per cent. of the paper aggregate of agricultural debts is principal, all the rest being interest and compound interest. If we have now to be what you legal gentlemen think a little hard on usurers, remember that they have had it all their own way for the last fifty years. It is surely an act of justice to give the ignorant masses a little fair play now. Besides, we must do so, or a year or two hence not a usurer will be left alive in the country. As it is, our late Radical visitors, some of whom I so recently deported or locked up, have in places already taught the cultivators how to conduct no-rent operations. What would you do? We cannot imprison thousands of rent-defaulters, can we?'

'I must study the question,' was the perplexed legal member's reply.

'Yes, do, Sir Albert,' I said absently; 'I mean Mr. Jones. I beg your pardon for giving you brevet promotion before you have earned your spurs by drafting and passing a comprehensive agricultural relief measure.'

I saw him smirk with pleasure at my mistake. He had a fat cockney wife, who longed to be a 'lady,' though nature had denied her a title which man might confer in name at least. When

I saw his satisfied smile, I was sure he would soon be a convert to equity *versus* law.

The next colleague who conferred with me that evening was Sir Trevor Tyler, the financial member, a man of trained capacity and quick adaptability for whom I had already a sincere regard. 'My business,' he said, 'won't take up more than a few minutes. There are two points to be cleared up before I can prepare a scheme for further consideration. The one is how to squeeze a war contribution out of these Bengali drones, the Cornwallis-created landlords, and the other concerns the elasticisation of the Land Revenue System.'

'Well,' I replied, 'taking the drones first, this is the argument. They pay, as land-revenue, three and a half millions conventional sterling a year, whereas under any other government they would have to pay about thirteen and a half millions. We forego these ten millions because Lord Cornwallis' short-sighted promise is held to bind his successors, to quote the terms of his engagement, 'for ever.' They do not contribute a recruit to the army, they and their rack-rented tenants not being fighting men. Their taxation is thus practically nominal. They contribute next to nothing for the security they enjoy. We squeeze out of the Punjabi peasantry as much as Russia does out of her *muzhiks*; yet it is that Punjabi peasantry—which our system has ruined—who fight our battles in India and Burmah, and

supply recruits for war service in Africa and China. To safeguard the immunities of our Bengali friends, you have to devise a tax, call it their Property Protection or War Insurance Tax, or what you will, which will give us about half a million sterling a month so long as this war may last. Being of a personal and temporary nature, and having for its high object saving the pockets of the Bengal landlords 'for ever' to the tune of ten millions a year or so, they will be stopped from making any valid objection against the measure.'

'Except this,' remarked Sir Trevor drily, 'their purses command the whole Calcutta Bar and a hundred votes in Parliament at least.'

'Both immaterial at this crisis,' I interrupted; 'you have only to draft the bill and assess the demand by an acreage rate on cultivation or otherwise.'

'But consider the outcry in England. These landlords will use money freely amongst our immaculate Members of Parliament and the London Press.'

'Don't be alarmed on that score, Sir Trevor; I'll arrange all that,' I said with confidence.

'How?'

'The Bill will be law before people at home hear of it,' I replied.

'How? the telegraph wires will——'

'Not be in working order a week hence,' I said, finishing the sentence in my own way.

'My Lord? Ah, I think I see your meaning.'

'I was sure you would.'

'Then as to the substitution of elasticity for a fixed demand,' Sir Trevor continued. 'I suppose you mean to roughly adjust each season's demand to that season's yield, commuting the Government share of each crop into cash according to the price of certain staples such as wheat.'

'Exactly so, Sir Trevor,' I said. 'The budget will not be upset, because if crops fail in one locality they will be abundant in another, so equilibrium will be maintained. The way those poor devils of peasants and yeomen in the Punjab have for the last forty years had to pay a fixed assessment twice a year, crop or no crop, is one of the reasons for their present enslavement to the usurers. When there is no crop, the landowner pays his revenue by borrowing from his money-lender. Thus if a peasant's revenue quota is twenty rupees, he borrows that sum, and by the next harvest, what with interest and compound interest, owes fifty shillings. Our Land Revenue system is nearly as unsuitable for the people as is our Civil Justice system. Between the two we have ruined the fighting races of the North-west, and now it is a question whether or no we can prevent them from rising in their desperation and cutting the throats of all usurers, burning their creditors' ledgers and the accumulated rubbish of our Civil Court Record rooms. You have heard, of course, of the no-rent league in the Western Punjab?'

'Yes, but what can you do?'

'Nothing, but promise reforms, as I told the Darbaris to-day. I can do no more. No Government can take proceedings against a whole people. I wonder, Sir Trevor, how they have stood us as long as they have.'

'Well, sir, we understand each other; you are a brave man. May Providence see you safely through all these troubles——' and shaking me warmly by the hand, Sir Trevor left.

The only other officer of my Government who wanted to see me that evening was Mr. Dingwell, the Foreign Secretary. He came in looking crest-fallen and anxious, evidently doubtful about his reception.

'Well, Dingwell,' I remarked, 'I see my speech surprised you. I contravened every precedent, even to standing up and speaking my mind bluntly and truthfully.'

'Sir,' he said, with a mixture of bitterness and contrition in his tone, 'I was wrong to doubt you, but I confess I cannot understand you. Since your illness at Sultànabad, you are a new man, strong, resourceful, and imperious; whereas your old self was the reverse. Then as for your Hindustani, your memory must be prodigious. You cannot know the language. Mezzofanti himself could not have acquired it in a few months. Yet your diction was that of an educated native.'

'You forget my munshi, my friend, and how I burned the midnight oil with him,' I suggested gently.

'I forget nothing, sir,' he said slowly; 'you are not the man I knew. It often seems to me that in one of your mysterious interviews with that beautiful princess a transmigration of souls must have taken place between you and that old Mullah Yadullah. He died immediately after your first interview, and his soul must have passed into you.'

'And my own?' I asked.

'Was buried with him, perhaps. The whole case is an inscrutable mystery to me. All I can say now is that I trust you are rightly inspired—for inspired you surely are—and that this incomprehensible force which leads you may guide you to a successful issue. I almost fear you, sir, because I cannot comprehend you. Would it not be better to change your Foreign Secretary or do without one?'

I felt greatly moved by the humility of his appeal, so near the truth and yet so far from it. I gave him my hand, and after some consideration said, 'How would you like to go on a special mission to the North-west Frontier? You would have large powers, and if Russia attempts an invasion in earnest, you would be the chief political officer with our army. You would, of course, take your orders from me, and I am sure I can rely upon you implicitly to carry out my policy. The mission might last only a few months or till the war ended. If you did well, you would, of course, be sure of my substantial gratitude.'

'Thank you, sir,' he replied, with evident relief;

'I think I shall be able to serve you better at a distance than in daily intercourse with you. I know not how it is, but I constantly find myself wondering who you are, and connecting you in some way with that strange old *mullah*, with whom you may not know I had a lengthy interview.'

'Yes, yes, I know,' I interposed unguardedly.

'But I never told you before, sir,' he exclaimed in surprise.

'I know everything, my friend,' I replied calmly, looking him full in the face.

'It is strange,' he said, almost trembling; 'these are the very words the *mullah* used to me, and you have almost his look.'

'Your nervous system is out of order, and wants bracing, I see,' I said with easy assurance. 'You must get away from this enervating Calcutta climate, and have an outing in the cold north. You have been poring for too many hours over office papers, and want new scenes and a new occupation. Now good-night, and be prepared to start the day after to-morrow, or as soon as your instructions are ready.'

He left, and I confess I felt relieved when he had gone. He had got on the scent, and might have become troublesome, and yet I am certain that had I trusted him then and there with my secret, he would not have betrayed me, but would have served me faithfully to the end.

Chapter X

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

ON the following evening the Commander-in-Chief dined with me alone. He was Sir Power Oliphant, afterwards better known as Lord Oliphant of Kabul. I had a great admiration for him, and entire confidence in the soundness and moderation of his judgment.

The military authorities of India had hitherto acted as if they believed that the principal function of the civil administration was to collect revenue for them to spend. The army was the great spending department, always wanting money, and always getting it. Being then generally in a state of complete preparation for war, it is not surprising that successive Chiefs used all their influence to promote war. This syllogism is obviously sound: the Indian and Russian armies being fighting machines ought to fight; therefore the nearer the respective Asian outposts of the two Empires approach each other, the sooner will a war between them be precipitated.

Chauvinism is the same all the world over, and

being stronger in Russia, and far cheaper and less risky there than in India, the Russian forward school met each advance on our side by a counter-move on theirs, only for each mile of progress by us they pushed on ten. Thus by 1907 Russia held part of the Hari Rūd valley, including the town of Herat, and a large slice out of Afghan Turkestan, extending almost up to the western skirts of the great Hindu-Kush ranges, whilst Anglo-Indian garrisons were, by arrangement with the Amir, established in Kandahar and Jalalabad, with outposts at Girishk and Gandamak. What remained of the kingdom of Kabul was thus reduced to the strips of deserts, valleys, and mountains inhabited by the pure-blood Afghan tribes. Intrinsically their territories were not worth holding, being, in the language of 'the Great Amir,' Dost Muhammad Khan, 'a country of rocks, stones, and sand, which produced nothing but hardy, fanatical men.'

So far, the present Amir was our friend—nominally at least, because without our subsidies he could not have held his government together for six months. In heart he and his tribes classed both English and Russians as 'infidels,' and hated both accordingly.

The two rival powers, who had thus between them annexed all that was worth having of the countries between the Indus and the Oxus, had with each advance *pari passu* pushed on their respective railway systems. In Central Asia our

termini were Kandahar and Jalalabad, whilst those of Russia in the direction of India were Herat and Mazàr-i-Sharif. On the Pamir side neither power had advanced from the line taken up in 1894, both, after wasting millions, having come to the sensible conclusion that nature there was ar insuperable bar to warlike enterprises. In difficult countries the line of least physical resistance is the line on which the battles of contending nations must be fought.

Such, then, was the military position on the evening in December, 1906, when the Chief dined with me *tête-à-tête* at Government House, Calcutta.

We discussed affairs till late into the night, and were in complete accord as to the line of action to be taken. Sir Power agreed with me that in all eventualities military expenditure must be kept down as low as possible: taxation—except indirect—could not safely be increased; Government paper was then at ten per cent. discount and likely to fall much lower, hence loans would be disastrous, and must only be resorted to as a last resource: in way of extra war taxation we should receive £500,000 a month from the Cornwallis Bengali landlords, and might, by extra duties on salt and over-sea imports, scrape together as much more: a *regie* on tobacco was out of the question, at all events until peace returned and agrarian grievances had been redressed: the recently imposed export duty on jute would probably soon have to be repealed, because the Indian monopoly of production

was at an end, as the plant was now successfully grown in Central Africa: the contingents of Imperial service troops from the great feudatory States would supplement our forces by about 40,000 thoroughly trained and equipped soldiers, all maintained by their own rulers: on the whole the prospect was less gloomy than was generally believed, always provided that neither widespread mutiny nor peasant insurrection should occur.

As to operations on the Afghan Frontier against Russia, we agreed to confine our positions to the Kandahar and Jalalabad lines, putting and maintaining in each of those districts a mobile force of about 30,000 men; the regular troops in all the numerous isolated posts in the vast barren mountainous tracts between the above districts were to be withdrawn, and replaced by tribal levies, whose loyalty or disloyalty, whilst the war lasted, could not influence results.

We further agreed that after the outbreak of war our best policy was not to seek the Russians in advance of our chosen positions, but to induce them to seek us, and so involve them in a heavy continuous expenditure and entangle them in poor and difficult regions, with the certainty that the Afghans would maintain a guerilla warfare against them. As to the fear that Russia would arm the Afghans and push them forward with the loot of India dangled before their greedy eyes as their prospective reward, we disregarded it: all precedent showed that swarms of undisciplined hill-

men were contemptible in the open, and the armed Afghans would rather plunder Russian convoys near their own homes, than be shot down away from home by regulars, operating from the secure basis supplied by their forts.

Finally, as regarded the instructions from home to seize, when opportunity offered, all French possessions east of Suez, we decided, for the present, not to dissipate our forces or resources, because it was certain that as soon as the French navy should be destroyed or driven off the seas, all such possessions would consequently fall to us after little or no fighting or expenditure. It would be better for us eventually, that the French should, in the early stages of the war at least, waste men in reinforcing their Asian garrisons, than that we should at once capture the points then weakly held by their troops. Did we do so, we should be scattering our strength and increasing our outlay, whereas the French would reduce their expenditure, contract their war responsibilities, and be enabled to concentrate their forces on enterprises nearer home, which would have a powerful and direct bearing on results. Thus, beyond seizing Chandernagore and Pondicherry in India, and supplying our political officers in Burmah and Siam with funds and means wherewith to foment native rebellions against their French masters, we decided for the present, pending developments, on a policy of masterly inactivity in Farther India.

Chapter XI

LOVE'S CONFLICTS

FOR several days after the Darbar I was so absorbed in public business, that, beyond a passing thought or two about Melissa or Miss Vincent, my private affairs never obtruded themselves on my mind. I was fagged out by each day's work. As soon as my head was on the pillow I went to sleep. I generally woke between six and seven in the morning, and whilst taking tea and toast—*chota hāziri*, as it is called in India—looked through the telegrams and letters which had come during the night.

It was New Year's Day, 1907. I had already glanced through the contents of several covers, when my bearer brought me in an "urgent" telegram, which had arrived the previous evening, but by some mistake had not been handed to me. It was from Miss Vincent from Bombay, and ran: "Arrived: resting with friends: disappointed at no letter from you: Captain Byng very attentive."

On the spur of the moment I wired in reply, "Welcome to India: sorry I neglected writing, but all my time occupied. Do rest till quite recovered.

Captain Byng can have a week's extension of leave."

As soon as it had been despatched, I regretted its coldness, and the manner of the reference to Captain Byng. Miss Vincent's mention of him either meant nothing, or was more likely a shallow little female device to excite my jealousy and quicken a slack lover. What I meant was prompted by the selfish devil who sits enthroned in most of us, though we seldom exhibit him to our friends, and only examine him in private when the light is out. I wanted Miss Vincent to remain in Bombay, and fall seriously in love with Captain Byng. I was sinking in my own estimation, though after all it was human nature for a man in love with one woman to descend to shifts to get out of an involuntary engagement with another. In contrition, I wrote Miss Vincent a long letter; but from my ignorance of what she had been doing for the last seven or eight years, and of what had passed between her and Cecil—the real Cecil—and probably, too, because I had no feeling for her, the letter must have been even colder than the telegram. It was necessarily chiefly descriptive. On the other hand, I sent Melissa a few burning lines, enclosed as usual in a cover addressed to Miss Holmes, in which I wrote as I felt, and told her how empty, how intolerable, my life was without her.

The conduct of a secret correspondence between a Viceroy and an Indian Princess has fortunately

been of rare occurrence in history, because sooner or later some Paul Pry must have discovered it, and discovery would have been followed by complications, and the publication of scandalous tales in Anglo-Indian papers.

In our case we secured concealment by using Miss Holmes as our medium. She had a large correspondence with missionaries and others, and no one would ever dream of opening letters addressed to her in a mean hand scratched on an embossed half-anna envelope such as pice-saving natives use. As to letters addressed to myself, Miss Holmes sent me the outpourings of her Princess through her brother, who had succeeded their deceased father as a teacher in the Mission school at Delhi. By this device suspicion was avoided, which would, sooner or later, have otherwise arisen had any one of my *entourage* noticed the frequent recurrence of the Sultànabad postmark in my correspondence.

Melissa and I had first tried carrier pigeons, but as one of the birds had never reached his destination, had early come to the conclusion that cipher telegrams and the Indian Post Office were the safest and surest available means for exchanging thoughts.

Melissa was, of course, kept informed of the movements of Miss Vincent, and had insisted on being sent a photograph of that lady. Now Miss Vincent was tall, fair, and beautiful, and her London artist had enhanced her physical attractions by a

few judicious touches and tonings; hence it was natural that sweet innocent Melissa should have felt a little uneasy on seeing her possible rival's portrait. I did my best to satisfy her misgivings in the only way open to separated lovers by the increased fervour of my protestations. More successful were my references to her having twice saved my life, owing to which that life was doubly hers. When she heard that Miss Vincent had reached Bombay, I received a message by wire: 'I shan't eat or sleep until you marry her off.'

After resting a few days at Bombay, Miss Vincent, escorted by Captain Byng, came on to Calcutta. They were duly met at the station, like any other distinguished guests, and received into Government House. Though I suspected that gossip averred that the lady was my *fiancée*, still the engagement had not been given out, and whatever talk there may have been about our relationship to each other did not reach my ears. I sent her a note to the station, saying that as she would be tired, I was sure that she would prefer on arrival going straight to her room with her maid, but that I should be ready to pay my respects to her whenever she should send for me after five o'clock that afternoon. I knew of old that Miss Vincent, even in her teens, had disliked surprises, and would prefer to be looking her best when first meeting me; hence my conscience was clear in deferring our first meeting as long as possible.

Soon after their arrival, Captain Byng came to

my sanctum. He had been for some years, I believed, intimate with my brother, and had probably been always welcome in that cosy little room. There were three rooms on the first floor *en suite*; the innermost was my bedroom, then came my sanctum, whilst the outside room, opening on the great staircase, was the private secretary's office and viceregal anteroom. My bedroom again opened on to a back or private stair, which it was sometimes convenient to use. Thus no one could approach me except through the private secretary's office, whilst I had access to my two rooms without going through his.

I was writing to Melissa at my table, as I believed in my usual privacy, when I was startled by hearing a softly modulated voice say, 'How do you do, sir?'

I looked up, and saw a handsome man, of about my own age, standing in front of me. My first impulse was to push the half-filled sheet under my blotting pad. This I did. My next was to ask the intruder who he was, and why he had entered without knocking. This, fortunately, I did not do. A moment's reflection told me who he must be, and on looking at him carefully, I easily recognised him. My visitor was very like his photograph. I rose from my chair, and tried to throw some heartiness into my handshake. As we exchanged greetings, I saw a momentary hesitation overcloud his face, whether due to compunction or surprise I was not sure, but it sufficed to put me somewhat on guard.

Presently, when we were seated, I said, 'Your noiseless entry startled me a little. I like to be warned, you know.'

'That is a new departure, surely? Formerly I had the *entrée* at all hours.'

'What, without knocking?' I asked thoughtlessly.

'Sir,' he replied with reproachful astonishment, 'you must remember the arrangement. I was your *alter ego*, privileged to make use of this room, and have access to you at all hours of the day and night.'

'Indeed? Yes,' I said absently, 'including the privilege of being my proxy with Miss Vincent, I suppose,'—and the consequent idea so took hold of me that I laughed, a little sarcastically perhaps.

'Hardly as far as that, sir,' he said, with an uneasy scrutiny of my face, whilst a tinge of red overspread his.

'She wired me you were very attentive, Byng, and you are a *persona grata* to ladies, more than I am, eh?' I remarked, with a sardonic laugh.

He evidently thought I was showing jealousy, and said with his persuasive voice, 'I was Miss Vincent's escort, sir, under your own instructions.'

'Of course, of course, my dear fellow; what with overwork and anxiety, I forget little things now.'

'Miss Vincent does not think anything affecting herself a little thing,' he remarked, with an ill-suppressed sigh, intending reproach, probably.

'No, she's a big thing herself, quite nine stone, I should say, and five feet seven inches,' I said, with a disparaging shrug.

'Sir,' he replied, severely hurt at the inexcusable disrespect of my remark, 'she is nine stone eight pounds, and she stands, without shoes on, five feet eight inches.'

'Ha! you weighed her?'

'Yes.'

'And took her height?'

'Yes, in Bombay.'

'Without shoes on, eh?'

He did not reply, but appeared confused, and pulling his moustache ends, stared at me.

'Well, Byng,' I continued, 'she has pretty feet, I own, and I dare say did not mind your noticing the fact. What woman would? I suppose you like her?'

'What a curious question, sir! I not only like her, but,'—and here he paused, and his voice shook,—'I consider her a queen amongst women.'

'I am delighted to hear you say so,' I said heartily, getting up and walking about the room. In truth, I could have leapt and shouted for joy, so relieved did I feel.

Byng sat on watching me in perplexity, with not an inkling of the key to my strange self-contradictory moods. I saw that he thought I had first shown jealousy of him, then bitterness against her, a consequence of my jealousy; and, finally, when he had almost admitted that he worshipped her, I had frankly told him I was delighted to hear it.

Whilst I was tramping the room, almost forget-

ting his presence, he said to me, 'Now that I have returned, I suppose you will do no more personal writing, sir.'

'Why?' I inquired.

'I thought you would prefer to dictate your correspondence to me,' he explained.

'Oh, thank you; but I write faster than you, I expect, so that would not save time.'

'But, sir, don't you remember I write shorthand? Shall I finish that letter you were writing when I interrupted you?'

'What letter?' I asked forgetfully, annoyed at myself for unwarily displaying my ignorance about his shorthand powers.

'The one you put under the pad, sir, when I came in,' he replied simply.

It was my turn to blush now, and I did; and I lamely explained to him it was a private letter which I preferred to finish myself, as I had begun it. I then looked at my watch, and told him I was going over to see the Chief, but would try to be back by five, by which time I hoped Miss Vincent would be able to receive me, or if she preferred, she would perhaps honour me by taking afternoon tea with me in my den: we should be safe from interruption there, and Mrs. Grundy would not object, as I was known to be above fleshly weaknesses, and claimed to be a law unto myself: *convenances* did not apply to me at least in my own house.

I returned from the Chief's sooner than I had ex-

pected, and, not wishing to disturb Byng, slipped into my room by the back approach. As I entered it I caught the words, 'You know how I love you,' followed by the retort, 'Then why won't you marry me, Jean?'

The speakers were Byng and Miss Vincent, and the devil prompted me to play eavesdropper. I stood and listened.

'I wish I could,' was Miss Vincent's reply; 'but I am bound to Lord Severn.'

'To Lord Ambition you mean, Milady,' was Byng's scornful correction.

'I must fulfil my destiny,' pleaded Miss Vincent, in weak self-defence.

'Destiny! Nonsense! You loved Jack Ravenhill first, and threw him over for his brother with the title and the estates,' said Byng with brutal bluntness.

'It is true,' she echoed, sighing.

'Yes, you have often told me so, and excused your heartlessness by saying it was your mother's doing,' continued Byng, with increasing bitterness. 'If you all along intended to marry Lord Severn, why did you encourage me and make me mad for you? Where is my honour, now, after Bombay? I hardly dared to look him in the face this morning, lest he should read my treachery in it. He is changed much since six months ago. He was first jealous, then cynical about you, and the upshot is I don't believe he really cares for you at all.'

'He must, he shall,' she cried, stung by his words.

'Go to him, then; he will be back in a few minutes. A kiss from your lips will melt him, and then you can deceive him as you have me. I have done with you, and yet I love you still. What weak fools we men are!'

'Oh, Peter, Peter, how cruel you are!' she whimpered; 'what a miserable wretch I am, and you have been good and patient with me, and after all, it is you I care for.'

'Come to me, Jean,' he commanded.

There was movement, silence, and then with suppressed triumph there burst forth from him, 'Yes, yes, you do love me! I know it, I feel it. My God, what treachery! and yet I would not alter things if I could.'

I could stand it no longer. I stepped hurriedly back into my bedroom, and quietly closed the door, feeling ashamed to have listened as I had done. I could not but be glad at the fulfilment of my hope that Jean should give her affections to another than the man to whom her faith had been plighted. Yet both she and Byng were conscience-stricken, and I was for the moment entangled in their self-reproach. I was relieved, however, by the reflection that I should soon be able to set their consciences at rest, and at the same time to make clear the way for Melissa and me.

I touched the button, and heard the summons ring sharply on the landing beyond Captain Byng's room. How the guilty pair must have started at it, I thought. The door from my sanctum was

opened, and Captain Byng, looking heated and perturbed, put his head in

'Ah, Byng,' I said cheerily, 'I did not want to trouble you The orderly on duty would have done.'

'I was in my room, sir,' he replied, his face clearing.

'Well,' I asked, 'what are Miss Vincent's commands, sanctum or blue drawing-room, which and when?'

'Now, here in your study,' he answered abruptly; 'Miss Vincent is just coming Tea is ready.'

He left me I went into my den, wheeled round a second easy-chair beside the tea-poy, and waited. Presently Miss Vincent entered from Byng's room. I—Jack Ravenhill—had not seen her for about eight years. She had last seen Cecil at Charing Cross station, when starting for India, nearly a year before. As the door was closed behind her,—by Byng, I suppose,—I gazed at the beautiful presence before me with involuntary admiration. He had not exaggerated the truth. She was a queen amongst women, tall, fair, ripe, gracious in repose, with a perfect harmony of proportion, more gracious still in movement—this I noticed as she advanced toward me—and the face, it was the face of an angel that had eaten of the tree of knowledge. It was capable of every emotion, had experienced every emotion, no doubt, and yet it showed that the spirit beneath that delicately-tinted mask was not at peace.

'Miss Vincent—Jean,' I said, ignoring her half-offered cheek, but taking her hand instead, and raising it to my lips, 'you are welcome. How good of you to come out!'

'*Cecil, won't you kiss me?*' were her first words, spoken with gentle offence. The voice was low and sympathetic.

'No, dear, I hardly know how to. My present love is my work, and it absorbs me,' I said a little drearily.

'You were always studious, and avoided women, even me, Cecil, latterly,' she remarked pensively. Then looking at me with her soft, searching, grey eyes, she added quickly, 'But you must give up reading these stupid papers (glancing away to the littered table), and learn to read me. I am worth studying, I assure you, sir.'

'And by reading you, what shall I learn?' I asked.

'Learn? Learn?' she echoed. 'Why, look at me, Cecil,' and she held out her beautiful arms, suggesting an embrace.

'Yes,' I said, kindling a little, but still on guard, 'you are the most beautiful woman whom this old anchorite has ever seen.'

'Old anchorite, indeed!' she cried, with a touch of gladness in her voice. 'Now that I look at you again, you are not a bit like your old self.'

'Why?' I queried, startled.

'Why? you are broader, stronger, healthier, and, yes, you look more masterful.'

'The results of India, and the office I hold,' I

explained. 'But if I am not like myself, whom am I like, then?'

'You remind me more of Jack, dear old Jack, my first love, whom I jilted for you, Cecil,' she replied almost in a whisper.

'You loved Jack, then?'

'I think so—I don't know—why do you ask? He is dead. How can a girl know anything without experience? and how is she to have experience until after marriage, when it is too late to change?' she answered wildly, with a haunting fear in her beautiful eyes.

'Surely, Miss Vincent—Jean, I should say—you would not marry a man without caring for him?' I inquired gently.

'Yes, I would,' she answered quickly; and then, correcting herself, added, 'No, I don't mean that exactly. Oh, how can I ever care for you, as you call it, when you have no warmth, no love in you—oh, what have I said?'

'The truth—that is all. I lack what you possess,' I said gravely.

'*And yet you are going to marry me? If you* don't give me love, how can you expect me to give it? It comes afterwards to most girls, my mother *used to preach.*'

'Tell me,' I asked, ignoring her speech, 'have you ever really cared for any man?'

'Yes, for Jack, I have just told you,' she answered

'Disappeared? Why, he was drowned. What can you mean?' she inquired, looking at me curiously, her voice *crescendo*, her manner excited. She rose, her fingers twitched, her eyes shone. She seemed hysterical. A rapturous flush overspread her features. 'Ah!' she cried, 'you know something? I see it, I see it, you are Jack, dear, dear Jack,' and she threw herself upon my breast, and flung her arms round my neck.

I gently forced her back into the chair, and said quietly, 'Jean, you are unstrung, hysterical. What is the cause? These references to poor Jack were a mistake. You know, as well as I, we twins were each other's doubles.'

She was trembling and sobbing now. I laid my cheek on hers, and tried to soothe her. When she was quieter I whispered, 'Jean, dear Jean, do let me help you. Tell me your trouble for Jack's sake; let me be a friend, a—brother to you.'

She started up, throwing me away from her.

'I hate you and your ways. I know you are Cecil. Jack was a sunny, bright, dear boy—Jack had a warm nature; but you—you were always cold and cautious. I don't believe you ever committed a sin in your life. Men worth loving are *not nice and calculating as you are. I detest your* goody people; I am not goody, and I thank God for it. I may be worldly, but I have a heart. I want love, *love—blind, unfaltering love.*'

'You are talking nonsense,' I interposed with asperity. 'I am ten times the sinner that you may

be. Why don't you tell the truth, and say you don't care for me—and no wonder. I don't deserve a sweet thought from you—but you have learnt to be fond of some one else. That is your secret.'

She looked up at me frightened, and buried her face between her hands. I saw the tears stealing down between the fingers. Then, with her face still hidden from me, she moaned, 'It's true, it's true. I do care for some one, but he was and is good to me. I believe I could care for any one—any woman could—who was loving, and patient, and gentle, and, yes, sometimes angry too.'

It was pitiful to hear her. I drew her hands into mine, and the tear-stained face and the soft grey eyes made my heart beat fast. I almost envied Byng his good fortune. What glorious womanhood as here! And now, after years of storm and stress, the struggle between love and ambition was ending, and love was winning, and the result would be a full, happy life for her.

Even now I felt I had only to say in her ear, 'I am Jack, not Cecil,' and she would have returned true and staunch to her first love; but I did not. I, too, was true to my little Asiatic flower, with nobler blood in her veins than any girl in England. What a contrast there was between the two, this glorious emotional Venus, and that chaste little lily away in far Sultànabad!

My dreaming was cut short by Jean's low, caressing voice: 'Cecil, you, too, are now kind to me. We understand each other a little better now, dear,

I think. I like you now since you have told me you are not the saint I had always thought you. Have you a secret, too?'

'Poor little Jean,' I said, taking her hand. 'Do you remember how I used to call you so, long, long ago?'

'You, Cecil? It was Jack who did so. How very mixed you are!'

'You would make any man mixed,' was my excuse, muttered hastily in some confusion, as I dropped her hand.

I felt that I must end the interview. The intoxication of her touch and personality were overpowering my self-control. I forced myself to say, 'I think, dear, you had better leave me now. I want you to be happy, but I cannot give you happiness though you might make me miserable—forgetful, at least.'

'Well, Cecil, just kiss me once, and I'll go,' she said meekly, almost gladly, pleased that I had at last acknowledged she had some power over me.

I put my lips to her forehead, whereupon she asked,—

'And what does that mean?'

'That I wish to love you as—brother does sister,' I managed to say—brave words, though my heart was beating wildly, had she but known it.

She seemed disappointed, fixed her grey searchlights on me, and would have remained longer to further discuss the question had I not hastily and desperately opened the door leading into Byng's

room, and, almost pushing her, quickly escorted her through it to the landing outside.

Byng was not in his room—a truer man than I was, I thought, remembering my eavesdropping, and the struggle I had had to resist his beautiful Circe.

Chapter XII

SETTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER

FOR some days after that interview I saw little of Miss Vincent; in fact, I purposely avoided her, except at dinner or when I took an early ride, and she happened to be one of the party. The critical state of public affairs confined me to my office chair for quite nine hours daily, and when not poring over papers or dictating to Byng, I was presiding over meetings of the Executive Council, being interviewed by departmental chief secretaries, or receiving and returning calls from gun-entitled potentates.

Throughout the whole of January and February Calcutta was visited by a succession of Ruling Chiefs and their ministers from all parts of India, each anxious for personal assurances, the redress of some real or imagined grievance, or the extension of his rights and privileges—as, for instance, the adjustment in his favour of an old and practically decided boundary dispute, or an increase to the number of his guns.

A good deal of the unusual personal activity amongst these 'Lights of Asia,' as Byng called

them, was due to the troubled times in which we were living. Each was jealously watching his neighbour or rival. Each was desirous of gaining information first hand as to how this European war would probably affect the paramount power in India; what was the nature of the reforms that were in the air, whether they had been initiated from a real wish to improve the condition of the agricultural masses, or from a sense of weakness in order to propitiate them, and so forth. Then, too, they had all heard or read strange stories of their extraordinary Viceroy: that he had been a recluse and student until his visit to Sultànabad; that he had there been permitted to behold the unveiled beauty of the renowned Princess of that model State, and that her influence had metamorphosed the retiring silent ascetic into a Nowsherwân-ul-zamân and mighty Nimrod, had replaced the sad, anxious smile, which had sometimes illumined his careworn face, by a frank, hearty demeanour which inspired all beholders with gladness and confidence; and finally that, notwithstanding all these changes, he was so devoted to his duties as Viceroy and Governor-General that he remained a celibate, though evidently nature had made him neither misogamist nor misogynist. Curiosity to see me and judge for themselves was thus one of the causes which brought so many of the Empire's feudatories to Calcutta that season. I did my best to impress and please them. On ceremonial occasions I was the great Viceroy, imperious yet conciliatory, dis-

tant yet urbane. In private interviews I was very plain-spoken with one and all of them. I assured them that the Empire would, a year or two hence, when peace and goodwill had returned, issue from its present troubles stronger and greater than ever before, and that, whether swayed by selfish or loyal motives, their only security lay in their exactly following the line of conduct prescribed for them in my Darbar speech. That speech, largely amplified, had by now been published in every language spoken throughout India, and was believed to be producing a good effect upon the native mind; but to what extent it had really percolated into the intelligences of the peasantry there was as yet no evidence.

Just a week after the Darbar the long-expected news was received that France and Russia had declared war against Great Britain, and that consequently India must depend on her own resources for both offence and defence, until at least the combined fleets of the hostile powers could be crushed or otherwise rendered innocuous. It was time, then, for me to be up and doing. To give the Government of India complete liberty of action, it was necessary that the power of mischievous interference from the distracted and ignorant ministry as well as from wire-pulling busybodies in England should be ended.

Having decided on the step necessary for freedom, I called Byng into my sanctum. Though I think he had not yet come to any clear under-

standing with Miss Vincent, he knew that at the present juncture marriage would never enter my thoughts. He saw that the relationship between her and myself, though pleasant and friendly, was not that of lovers, and was satisfied. He may have distrusted her, but he had no reason to distrust me. He was doing his best to 'improve the shining hour,' and made no attempt to conceal his devotion to her. She on her side was very circumspect, and did not appear to have yet made up her mind to the fact that gratified love is more satisfying for a passionate woman than gratified ambition.

When Byng came in, I told him at once that I was about to send him on a confidential mission of extreme urgency and delicacy, which might involve his absence from Calcutta for ten days or more. At the news his face fell, but he only replied, 'Yes, sir, you can rely on me to carry out your instructions with secrecy and despatch.'

'It is essential for my plans,' I explained, 'that telegraphic communication between India and Europe should be suspended until the time becomes ripe for the restoration of the connection. I leave the mode of executing this duty entirely to yourself; but secrecy is a *sine quâ non*. The world, including both India and England, must suppose that the French have succeeded in cutting the wires. That it will have been your doing must remain a confidence between you and me.'

After putting a few questions and receiving answers, he said, 'I shall do all that is possible, and

shall leave for Bombay by to-night's mail. Good-bye, sir.'

His voice was steady, though his hand shook, and his face was white and distressed.

'Do you feel going so much, Byng?' I asked, wishing to induce him to speak his mind.

'No, no—I'm a weak fool. I'm out of sorts a little, I suspect.'

'Keep a brave heart,' I said. 'Remember all things come to him who knows how to wait.'

'What things?' he asked, his eyes swimming.

'Success,' I replied enigmatically.

'Tush!' he exclaimed, tossing back his head impatiently, and turning to go.

'Wait a minute, Byng,' I called after him. 'Let us understand each other. I know what you want. Believe me, none of your friends will congratulate you more heartily than I shall when you succeed.'

'Do you mean it, sir?' he asked, brightening.

'Of course I do. You have no rival in me.'

'Thank you, sir; but won't you tell her yourself?'

'No,' I said with decision; 'let the true womanhood which is in her come out: let heart conquer head. When love has won, your jewel will have a double lustre and a double value in your eyes.'

He started that evening. During dinner I kept my eyes on Miss Vincent. She was unusually silent, and seemed depressed. Others noticed the change as well as myself, and some probably guessed the cause. After we had rejoined the ladies, she came to me, when I was standing apart

from the rest of the company, and said upbraidingly, 'So you've sent Peter away. He would not tell me why or for how long.'

'Yes, I was sorry to lose him, but I could trust no one else.'

'Do you value him so much, then?' she asked.

'Yes; don't you? Don't you know he is true gold?'

'I have not tried him yet as you have, perhaps, but I daresay if I do, he will stand assay,' she replied with a smile.

'Well, he will be back, I hope, in a week or ten days at most. I can manage without him for so long,' I remarked, with pretended indifference.

'You! You can manage!—but I cannot,' she said with hurried vehemence.

'Jean?'

'Well, he is my special aide-de-camp, you know, rides with me, talks to me, and now I shall have no one.'

'If that is all, I'll be his substitute when I have time,' I responded, to decoy her further.

'But you are not Peter, Cecil,' she said gently.

'I am Peter's best friend, anyway, you goose; so you had better be nice to me.'

A few days passed, during which lengthy telegrams, interrogatory, advisory, prohibitory, poured in from the Secretary of State for India. I was to send troops here, there, everywhere; to promise inquiries, but effect no reforms without sanction from him, after Parliament and public opinion

should have had time to consider them. In particular, I was on no account to rouse the suspicions or susceptibilities of the great landlords of Bengal by attempting to break through the spirit of the Permanent Settlement. In short, I was to change nothing and do nothing without referring each matter in detail home first.

The Government of India was too busy to attempt to answer any of the references or make any promises; so the file accumulated on Byng's table. On the fifth day after his departure all India was electrified, astounded, perplexed. The newspapers announced that telegraphic communication with the outside world had been cut. It was generally accepted that the French must have done the work; but that conclusion was hardly compatible with the fact—except on the coincidence of a second break in the Arabian Sea—that connection between India and Aden had also simultaneously ceased. As for the Persian and Siberian lines, the former was not working, and the latter was no longer available.

On Byng's return, he told me how he had carried out his difficult mission. Connection, he assured me, could be quickly restored when wanted; a wire to a certain electrical engineer in the Telegraph Department, Bombay, would at any time bring that about. It had been necessary to take the said electrical engineer into the secret; but as the man was near his retirement, was what Byng called a 'decided Christian,' and had been promised

a lakh of rupees as a gratuity should the *coup* succeed, and he keep his own counsel, Byng was convinced that the third partner would divulge nothing; he would do more, Byng expected—he would defeat the attempts of the zealous officials, who were already trying to discover where the supposed second break had occurred between Bombay and Aden.

The relief felt was great, not only by me personally, but in every department of Government. Now at last, for the first time since the mutiny—or at least, since the extension of the submarine cable system to India—the Viceroy was free from leading-strings, free to work in an emergency for the good of India without constant obstruction from the party in power in England—for both Conservatives and Radicals had a habit of subordinating Indian interests to their home party interests in Parliament.

Being free, I proceeded forthwith to put the plans and measures sketched in my Darbar speech into execution. A Bill 'for the better protection of the rights and immunities of the great landlords of Bengal in time of war with an European power,' under the short title of 'Bengal Landlords' War-insurance Bill,' admirably drafted by my friend Mr. Albert Jones, was quickly passed through Council, and became law. The landlords themselves professed to acquiesce in its provisions, knowing that resistance would be useless, and fearing lest in this *crisis obstruction might be called treason by*

Government or a hostile press. The effect of the Act on the other taxpayers of India—that is, practically on the leaders amongst 300 millions of people—was most gratifying. The measure was hailed—provided that it were made permanent—as a tardy act of justice to the masses throughout our great dependency. Indeed, one ardently loyal and patriotic up-country editor prayed, in large type, that the war might continue 'until the coffins (coffers?) of Government groaned to bursting from repletion with the unearned increments of these 5,000 fattened calves of the short-sighted Cornwallis.'

The prospect of a good spring crop in the Punjab afforded hope that the hardy peasantry of that province, happy in a bumper harvest—to be secured to them by special ordinance—would for the present remain quiescent, watching developments, and prefer not to commit themselves to an insurrection which would certainly ruin them and might not even benefit their children.

Then as to the measures to elasticise the Land Revenue collections, disable money-lenders from holding agricultural land, and substitute village courts of equity for the detested technical law-courts and system of the Government, it was early recognised that such measures would require careful consideration, and could only be introduced gradually. It was therefore resolved, by order in Council, pending the final settlement of the series of issues involved, to temporarily close the civil

courts for cases between money-lender creditors and agricultural debtors, and to prohibit the acquisition of more arable land by the former class. During this period, plaints were to be registered as heretofore, though no action was to be taken on them. The Revenue Courts were alone to continue open to hear rent and tenant cases between agriculturists only; but, on executions, land, crops, and all necessaries were to be exempted from attachment and sale, and the imprisonment of debtors under any pretence was absolutely prohibited.

These *ad interim* ordinances practically amounted to a tacit acquiescence in the proceedings of the recently formed no-rent leagues, as the payment of a debt or rent to a money-lender, not being enforceable by the Courts, became *de facto* a mere moral obligation. As, however, trading and restricted money-lending had flourished throughout India in all settled times for 3,000 years or so preceding the introduction of our technical Western system of civil law, it was expected that the units constituting a village community would by degrees re-establish a *modus vivendi* on the models existing before our unfortunate innovations upset the old relationships between man and man, and set a premium on chicanery, lying and unscrupulous sharp practices.

Whilst, under the inspiration of the Supreme Government, the provincial civil administrations were beginning to set their houses in order, and

remodel their institutions down to the needs and capacities of the betrayed and exploited agricultural masses, the military authorities were actively carrying out preparations for a defensive campaign on India's North-West Frontier, on the lines prearranged between the chief and myself. The concentration of regular and Imperial service troops, and the collection of animal-transport, and of vast quantities of ordnance and commissariat stores in the Trans-Indus cantonments of the Punjab, were being vigorously pushed forward. Everything so far was working smoothly, because, for the preceding thirty years, since Lord Roberts as Commander-in-Chief had initiated his far-reaching though costly reorganization schemes and defence works, the whole army had been re-constituted, and, with a view to meet an invasion by Russia through Afghanistan, each step repeatedly tested by means of camps of exercise and 'little wars' against hill tribes.

Chapter XIII

AGRARIAN DISTURBANCES

SUCH was the situation in the last week of February, 1907, when an unfortunate explosion occurred in the Punjab, which set Hindus and Musalmans by the ears from end to end of India.

About twelve years previously class regiments had been substituted for class companies throughout the Punjab and Bengal commands. It so happened that two infantry regiments, entirely composed of Punjabi Musalmans, were stationed at Jhelam in the above-named month. Now Jhelam is one of the strong Musalman districts of the Punjab, and having been recently what is called resettled, the peasantry, already in debt to their Hindu money-lenders, were suddenly required to pay, crop or no crop, a greatly enhanced land-revenue demand. The district had lately suffered from a succession of bad harvests. Thus between the demands of the State for land revenue and of the law-courts, which were the debt-collecting agency of the money-lending classes, the agriculturists of the district were terribly harassed,

and, in fact, little better than serfs on the fields they had until recently owned for generations. A no-rent league was formed, of which the leaders respectfully informed the collector of the district that they would pay the new revenue demand whenever they had crops wherefrom to pay it, but that to their money-lending creditors and mortgagees they could not and would not pay a rupee until the accounts had been examined, principal separated from interest, compound interest cut out, and all payments already made duly credited; they believed that most of them had already liquidated their true debts, including reasonable interest on them.

The collector was a Hindu—one Mattra Dās by name—a cadet of a well-known banking firm in Lahore, a competition-walah and a good lawyer to boot, and most of the subordinate civil courts of his district were presided over by Hindus of commercial origin or connections—in short, the official staff of the district was almost entirely of the same class as that which practises money-lending.

When the Jack Cades of the league made their representation, the ordinances or orders in Council, to which I have already referred, had not yet filtered down through the many circumlocution-offices between the Government of India and a collector to the chief civil authority of the Jhelam district. Mr. Mattra Dās received the peasant deputation very civilly, and suavely pointed out

that law was law and must be obeyed to the letter, that under the Contract Act and Civil Procedure Code they would have to pay their legal debts, and so forth.

The deputation withdrew in deep dudgeon against their lawyer collector, and informed their brothers, cousins, and uncles in the two native regiments stationed at Jhelam of the result of the interview. Various confabulations followed, which resulted in the men of a dozen of the most impoverished villages in the vicinity of Cantonments binding themselves to ignore all Civil Court processes, and forcibly to resist bailiffs and other minions of the law who should attempt to enter their villages and execute processes there.

A few of these myrmidons of the Courts—all of whom, in addition to their pittance of salary, received retaining fees from the leading money-lenders at headquarters—were, a day or two later, when serving notices or attaching household goods of judgment-debtors, assaulted and ignominiously hooted out of the villages concerned. The Hindu newspaper of the town, edited by a member of the local bar, at once clamoured for the punishment of the offenders. Mr. Mattra Dās forthwith sent his assistant to one of the implicated villages in company with some of the complainants, the party being escorted by four constables, who as local Musalmans sympathised with the villagers. Naturally enough a riot ensued, in which the assistant got his head broken, and the constables

contented themselves by flourishing their batons, and shouting, 'Oh, brothers, don't beat him!'

The ringleaders in the riot, believing themselves now fully committed to resisting authority, sent the fiery cross round to the other villages of the league, and during the night about one hundred Hindu shops were looted and all bonds, mortgage-deeds, and account books found in the shops collected and burnt. The contagion spread, and within the next forty-eight hours the lenders in several hundred villages were served in the same way. Mr. Mattra Dās, though at his wits' end, as the codes and chief court circulars and rulings gave him no real help, remained calm amidst the storm, and wrote officially to the officer commanding the station, requesting him to put down the rioting with his Sepoys. That officer being warned that the Sepoys would not act against their relations and co-religionists, and in his heart sympathising with the peasants, declined to take action, on the ground that it was a matter for the Civil police and not the military to settle.

Mr. Mattra Dās then sent up an elaborate report on the case to the Punjab Government, taking several days to prepare his statistics and compose his narrative, and in due course the Commissioner of the division arrived at Jhelam, with instructions to make a local inquiry, but with no powers. Within a week of the first outbreak, the Jhelam garrison was reinforced by the arrival of a battalion of British troops and a Sikh regiment. But within

that week, upwards of a thousand other village communities of the district had followed the example of their brethren in the neighbourhood of the headquarters station, and then had desisted from all further violence.

Thus, within the week, the insurrection had begun and subsided, the fire had blazed up, spread, consumed all that was easily combustible within its area, and had then burnt itself out.

What was now to be done? The Punjab Government had referred the case to the Government of India. My executive council met, deliberated, and decided to do nothing more than direct the appointment of a Commission of inquiry, and advise the substitution for Mr. Mattra Dās as Civil head of the district of an active common-sense Englishman. Further, my ordinances were to be proclaimed in every village throughout both the Jhelam district and all the surrounding tracts. At the same time the people were warned that though all real grievances would be speedily redressed, any renewal of rioting or lawlessness would be sternly put down. A few of the known ringleaders in the Jhelam disturbances were arrested and deported, and the two tainted regiments were railed down to Benares, where, as foreigners amidst a Hindu population, they would have no sympathisers, but be a strength to Government in the event of a Hindu rising.

For the next ten days or so there was quiet, the clouds seemed rolling by; but, alas! it was only the

lull before the storm. The blaze up in Jhelam had been like a fire in a reserved forest in the lower Himalayas, short, rapid, very restricted in area, and destructive only to the most inflammable substances—in a reserve, pine needles and dry wood—which were equivalent to the bonds and ledgers made into a bonfire by the exasperated peasantry.

The new fire, which was to sweep over India, more resembled a prairie conflagration in America, a great roaring omnivorous monster, which spares nothing, and carries devastation and desolation over vast areas.

The first signs of the coming storm were visible in a few violent articles and letters in the most scurrilous of the vernacular Hindu newspapers. But when the facts of the Jhelam outbreak, of its lenient treatment by Government, and of the ordinances or orders in Council, became generally known, the whole Hindu press of India—with some honourable exceptions—shrieked with indignation, the boon of civilized institutions had been withdrawn, the Government had connived at the plunder of the Hindus, and was about to authorize the Musalmans forcibly to repossess themselves of the lands which, by process of law, had passed from idle drones to thrifty, hardworking Hindus.

All this was legitimate enough; but now the recently half-suppressed agitators and fanatical busybodies of both peoples saw their opportunity and used it. The Hindu press was filled with

stories, some doubtless with a foundation of truth in them, of the slaughter of sacred kine by Moslem butchers in unauthorized places, even in Dharmsals or Temples, of calves' heads and cows' blood being found in wells, of the kidnapping of Hindu girls, and of the forcible conversion of Hindus, both boys and girls, to Islam.

The Moslem press retaliated with alleged authenticated accounts of the pollution of mosques by pigs' blood being smeared on the inner walls, and of wells by pigs' bones being thrown into them, of the slaughter of the unclean animal in public places, and so forth.

The press of both parties equally demanded protection against insult from the Government, and then vituperated that Government for not wreaking vengeance on its opponents. Finally, the Hindu press significantly pointed out that Hindus outnumbered Musalmans by five to one, including 'their supporters the white-faced and white-livered English,' and called on the 'nation' to rise and cut the throats of the former, and drive the latter into the sea, whence they had come.

Not contented with whipping up their respective co-religionists to action by publishing lies and treason in the newspapers, each party verbally abused the other through its authorized mouthpieces. The Hindus, whose so-called 'cow-protection' and other associations had branches in every town and large village, employed itinerating lecturers and treason-mongers to stump the

country, and also set loose the tongues of hundreds of thousands of wandering fakeers. The Musalmans, whose numbers, wealth, and organization were all very inferior to those of their opponents, made up for these deficiencies by the fervour with which their priests preached a holy war against the idolatrous Hindus.

When the cry of *din din* (religion) was raised by the rival races, the poorest and most ignorant of both went literally mad wholesale. Everything that was destructible in mosques and temples was destroyed by the contending mobs by hand, crowbar, or fire. When mob met mob, the fighting, though severe, did not cause much loss of life. The people of India are fortunately disarmed, hence the weapons used were stones, bricks, sticks, and clubs. The rioting was mostly confined to towns.

In the western half of the Punjab, in which the Musalmans outnumber the Hindus by ten to one, the former showed great power of self-control, and little or no renewed rioting occurred. They still had faith in the British Government, and were still generally amenable to the advice and orders of their English district officers. They openly explained the reason for their aloofness by pointing out that the action of the Jhelam rioters was of the nature of an appeal to the sense of justice, which they believed still dwelt in the hearts of the *Sahib log*, and until they had reason to know that the appeal had failed, they intended to abide by the

law as modified by the new ordinances, of which they had just been apprised, and watch events.

The fact is that the Musalman religion, being a dignified fatalistic faith, tends, where still undegenerate, to induce a habit of mind akin to resignation. Thus it was that the men of the strong tribes of the Punjab conducted themselves in the present crisis with a self-restraint and deliberation which was admirable, whereas their weaker, more downtrodden, and altogether inferior co-religionists about Delhi and in the North-West Provinces lost their heads and ran *amok*. As for the many millions in Lower Bengal and the other millions scattered about the rest of India, all—a few influential tribes excepted — proved themselves poor, impulsive creatures, easy to excite, but easy to quell.

Owing to the concentration of troops in progress on the North-West Frontier, the interior garrisons of British India stood everywhere at the obligatory minimum strength; hence the rioting frenzy could only be suppressed gradually wherever military aid was necessary. The contending mobs no doubt mutually inflicted enormous losses in property, and caused some thousands of deaths, and many thousands of broken heads, limbs, and contusions; but fortunately these mobs exhausted themselves upon each other, and in very few cases were Government servants deliberately attacked or Government property deliberately destroyed. By degrees, too, the mobs, as mobs, began to see that prolonged rioting was a losing game for both sides, and their

passions cooled down as the wiser heads reckoned up their losses.

Thus rioting began to fizzle out, but in its stead a contagion of general lawlessness sprang up. Desperate, poverty-stricken men, both from amongst the lowest classes and from out of the vast aggregate of wholly expropriated peasant farmers, formed themselves into bands, and began to commit what are called 'dacoities,' or gang robberies. At first only the houses of rich, obnoxious traders or bankers were broken into and plundered. Next larger operations were undertaken. A small but wealthy village would be surrounded, its inhabitants terrorized, and all portable property carried off. The general paralysis of the authorities, due to the paucity of troops and constabulary, by degrees emboldened these robber-bands to attempt extended enterprises. All persons resisting these bands were now ruthlessly murdered, and sometimes small bodies of the police were encountered, routed, and their arms seized. The next step was the wrecking of trains, and on one occasion the gates of a district jail were forced open and the convicts released. In some localities complete anarchy prevailed.

With the scanty forces available to restore public order, it looked as if Government were face to face with troubles resembling those of the so-called Pindari war early in the nineteenth century. It took some little time to organize the forces of order, but the Government of India was equal to

its responsibilities. Local Governments were empowered to proclaim a state of siege wherever necessary, to call out all pensioners for service, to enrol special constables, to suppress offending newspapers, and generally to act with any severity necessary to restore order and confidence.

So supported, and knowing that their proceedings would be afterwards condoned by an Act of Indemnity, district officers used their powers with a vigour and discretion that soon rallied all the well-disposed to their side. When a few summary executions had been made of men caught with loot in their possession, or carrying arms without a license, the effect on the populations of the neighbourhood was immediately tranquillizing.

Chapter XIV

MARRIAGE BELLS

WHILST up-country all energies were concentrated on the work of scotching and killing the hydra-headed monster of disorder, in Calcutta itself life went on much as usual. I gave dinners and dances, welcomed the coming and regretted the departing guests, and talked and smiled as if 'black care' were not ever seated behind me.

So far, few of our feudatories or their people were giving trouble. The presence of their best troops on our North-West Frontier, many hundred miles from their homes, amidst alien populations, talking tongues strange to them, was a pledge for the good conduct of their rulers. The want of telegraphic news from the European theatres of war was a source of regret to many of us, but so far as India was concerned, made distinctly for tranquillity. It caused the millions to forget that their white masters were engaged in a life-and-death struggle six thousand miles away. Had the wires been working, the report that a British cruiser had

been sunk or a P. and O. steamer captured, would have given the ignorant and unreasoning an idea that we had suffered a heavy defeat. On the whole we in Calcutta, with our fingers on the pulses of the huge Imperial patient, were thankful that the illness, though serious, promised not to become dangerous.

I was personally uneasy about Sultànabad, for Melissa was there, and the senior member of her council, who was now acting as her chief minister, was no match for the officially defunct and actually absent Yadullah. No letter had come from her for a week past, and in her last she had mentioned a rumour that the old-school bigoted party amongst her subjects were intriguing against her, and that her cousin, the Sardar Sahib, was said to have secretly returned. I was thinking of sending a confidential agent to Sultànabad, when, to my joy, I received a cover in the now familiar hand of Miss Holmes' brother. Inside was the dear writing itself. It confirmed the rumour, and added that the writer (Melissa) had evidence that her cousin was trying to stir up the city *badmâshes* (bad characters) and the fanatical element in the population generally, to seize the palace, depose her, and proclaim himself Nawâb, on the ground that Islam was in danger, and that he as a Mecca Hâji (which he in reality was not), and devout follower of the Prophet, was better fitted to guide a Musalman State through the present troubles than a half-Anglicised girl, whose face few had

ever seen, and about whose fidelity to Islam there were the gravest doubts.

The personal news in the letter was confined to a piteous little postscript, or rather two, which ran as follows:—

'I am miserable. You have been gone nearly three months now. I trust you, Cecil, but am always praying for two things: to see you again, and to hear of the beautiful English lady's marriage to your secretary.

'P.S.—I am not really jealous, only my heart aches.

'Your loving MELISSA.'

In the first postscript the pen had been run through 'Jack,' and 'Cecil' written above it.

The appeal went home to me. I could surely relieve her mind about 'the beautiful English lady,' and I must send her help; that rascally Sardar Sahib was now playing the devout Moslem, and hinting that Melissa was a Christian—was he? Well, I was a better Musalman than the Sardar, as I believed in Allah, and she was a better Christian than I, as she had charity and purity.

As once before in a difficulty, I, on this occasion also, sent for Byng. I told him the nature of the news, and that I had decided to send, if the Chief could find the force, a battalion of British troops, or a Hindu regiment, Sikhs, Rajputs, or Dogras, whichever could be best spared, to help to preserve order.

'Yes, but I don't see how that concerns me, sir,' he commented with a twinkle in his eye, for he too had heard stories about my Sultànabad interviews.

'I was coming to that,' I explained a little awkwardly. 'I propose to send you there as Resident and Political Agent. It is of the highest importance to keep the premier Musalman State undisturbed by revolution.'

'And preserve its throne to the Princess Melissa, sir?' he inquired most unnecessarily.

Before I could think of a suitable answer, he continued,—

'There was no letter with the Sultànabad postmark in your bag, sir, this morning. I suppose your information is indirect?'

'It is direct from the Princess herself.'

'Indeed!' he said with a touch of sarcasm. Her Highness evidently distrusts the local post-office, then. May I see the letter?'

'Certainly,' I replied, laughing, and handing it to him; but before doing so I cut off the postscripts.

'Your relations with the young Princess are very confidential, I see, sir,' he said with stress on the *young* as he returned the letter.

'Well,' I asked, 'what do you think?'

'That the situation is really serious,' he replied with a gloomy expression, adding the query, 'When am I to start?'

'On your wedding day, I hope,' I answered cheerfully.

That may not be till the Ides of March, for nothing is settled yet,' was his lugubrious comment.

'Nonsense, Byng. Tell Miss Vincent from me that Sultànabad is the place for a honeymoon. That the Princess is young, lovely, accomplished, longing to know her, and the possessor of a State secret.'

'Anything more, sir?' asked Byng, enjoying my enthusiasm.

'Yes, and that you go as a First Class Resident, with a Civil K.C.B. or K.C.S.I. in your pocket as soon as this war is over, and India settles down again.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Byng, delighted. 'But of all the inducements offered to Jean, I think the strongest, after securing me for herself, to have and to hold, will be her curiosity to see the lady whose influence over you is little short of an inspiration.'

After dinner Jean came to me, beaming with happiness, and asked me to congratulate her, as she had promised to marry Peter next week. She had, in fact, she asserted, all along intended to have him, provided she could honourably break with me. What a story-teller, I thought to myself. She next qualified her statement by saying that she had only consented to an immediate marriage on one condition.

'And what is that?' I asked, my prophetic mind roused.

'That you show me that postscript, sir,' she replied coaxingly.

'No, dear, I cannot. A lady's communications are sacred, you know. Would you like your love-letters read by any one—by me, for instance?'

'N—o, not some of them,' she answered after reflection, and then suddenly she clapped her hands and cried gleefully to Byng, who was standing near: 'I have it. Peter, Peter, come here, and I'll whisper it to you. That—postscript—was—a—love-letter.'

Then she turned to me with real commiseration in her grey eyes, and said,—

'Poor dear, silly, romantic Cecil in love with an Indian Princess—at first sight, too. I am sorry for you.'

'Don't jump to conclusions, Miss Positive,' I said gently. 'Poor, dear, silly, romantic Cecil will never marry.'

A few days later they were married by special licence, and started next day for Sultànabad. The Resident's escort, as his little force of regulars was called, had been pushed on ahead, and it was expected would reach its destination about the same date as the Honourable Captain and Mrs. Byng. The escort, to my regret, consisted of only one hundred rifles, all Sikhs, commanded by a grand old-school native officer, Subadar Major Wazir Singh. It had been found impossible to spare more men, and, on consideration, I had accepted the Chief's view that in the distribution of the

meagre forces available for garrisoning stations outside the Punjab, the duty of protecting our own people was more urgent than that of helping a feudatory to keep down his subjects.

I had to yield the point, for in proposing a larger orce I felt that heart had governed head. Well, the future was in God's hands—and in Byng's, I mentally added—for all would depend on his discretion, powers of conciliation, and firmness.

The next letter I received from Melissa told me that the approaching arrival of a British Resident with an escort of regular troops had put heart into all her friends, and had correspondingly depressed the city rabble and fanatics. As for the Sardar Sahib, it turned out that there was no certainty yet that he was in Sultànabad. What was certain was that he had left Oudh, and so was presumably bent on mischief.

As usual her letter ended with a P.S., in which she promised 'the beautiful English lady' a warm welcome and her love and friendship, if she would accept them.

Chapter XV

HOME AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

WITH the Byngs' departure, Calcutta became a gloomy prison-house to me. Their presence had lent charm and piquancy to the otherwise dull monotony of my daily life. I liked them both. I liked, too, to feel that the happiness of both had been in my hands. Both had been interesting studies. Jean, in fact, rather a dangerous one, for she had beguiling ways, her grey eyes were magnetic, and the varying cloud and sunshine of her moods aroused emotions which dimmed for the time the pale, constant light of the twinkling little star shedding radiance from distant Sultànabad.

To see Jean by day had been refreshing; to see her at night in a low-cut dinner dress, intoxicating. In repose or in motion, a Venus must always fascinate a healthy young man. Though now thirty-two, the wine of life often flowed wildly in my veins. Then the knowledge that had I declared myself, Jean might have loved me for myself, gave me satisfaction. The consciousness, too, that I puzzled and perplexed them both, and had

still with them to play a part, whilst with others I was now always myself, added zest to the morning ride, the afternoon talk at five o'clock tea, and the forced gaiety and persiflage of the daily dinner party.

Well, they were gone out of my life, and what could I do better than move nearer the lode-star, which Byng had shrewdly guessed had transmuted and inspired me. It was getting very hot, too, in Calcutta. It was the third week in March, the usual time for the Government of India to be moving up to Simla. But to Simla I would not and could not go. Why, residence there in cloud-land, amidst the pines, the cedars, and the rhodo-dendrons, is residence out of India. One cannot feel London in Switzerland, nor can Viceroy, Governors, and Secretaries realize life in the plains in the hot weather when disporting in Simla.

On the whole I decided that duty and inclination would both be served by a move to Delhi. Ludlow Castle was there available for myself, and the hotels were now empty, and would house colleagues, secretaries and clerks. So the fiat went forth. The headquarters of the Government of India would be Delhi until further orders.

Before going, I wired in cipher to the Electrical Engineer in Bombay, whom Byng had admitted into the secret of his mission there, to bring about a natural reopening of telegraphic communication with London for a period of forty-eight hours, at the end of which time our enemies were once more to have the credit of severing it.

Since the beginning of the war, the regular mail-service between Bombay and London had been by the Cape, but the Red Sea route had also been fitfully used. The news to hand by letters and newspaper was meagre and unsatisfactory—at least, from an ardent patriot's point of view. It appeared that no general, or even partial, naval engagement had yet been fought. On both sides isolated merchant and passenger steamers had been chased, and had escaped, or been captured; food-prices in Great Britain had only gone up about fifteen per cent., and the French and Russian fleets, though united at Toulon, preferred harbour to open sea.

When telegraphic communication was restored, our information was at once brought up to date—end of March. We learnt that the French had massed 300,000 men at different points between Cherbourg and Calais, but that no one believed that they had any serious intention of attempting to transport their forces across the Channel, except in the very improbable event of a disaster to our Channel or Mediterranean fleet; in the Mediterranean we had closed the straits at Gibraltar, and were practically, though not admittedly, mistress of the whole sea, as the united fleets of our enemies could not be induced to leave the shelter of the Toulon and Villa Franca harbours. French and Russian cruisers were very active, and had greatly interfered with our commerce. Russia was slowly massing troops in the Herat Valley, in Afghan Turkestan, and even on the Roumanian frontier,

to be ready for a rush on Constantinople should circumstances permit it. The fact that both France and Russia had neglected to strengthen their garrisons on their respective German frontiers, indicated that both nations had an understanding with Germany, and it was expected that in the event of any British disaster, France would occupy Belgium, and Germany Holland, after which the latter would perhaps join the allies against us, did she see any way of injuring her great trade-rival without losing her African dependencies. Germany was so far officially neutral, officially the 'honest broker,' anxious to restore peace—for a commission,—but in reality we knew that her neutrality was malevolent towards us, and that as it was to her interest that all three powers should exhaust themselves, she would not let the war end speedily, if she could help it.

As for the French colonies, or rather dependencies, they were falling one after another to us, but so far we had made no attempt to disturb the French in Algeria or Tunis: we were, in fact, slowly increasing and organizing our very incoherent land-forces, and putting every battleship and possible cruiser into commission as fast as we could get qualified crews to man them; the country was becoming impatient with the Radical Ministry and clamouring for decisive results, though they were unattainable unless we could first bring on a big naval action, and achieve a great victory without crippling ourselves. It was, in fact, as a correspon-

dent put it, a case of a school of whales fighting conger-eels and elephants.

The official cablegrams to myself were more interesting. In one of them the Ministry complained of the supineness of my Government in not having already seized all French dependencies east of Suez: they were convinced that 'the serious rioting which had taken place between Hindus and Mohamedans in different parts of India would eventually conduce to strengthen, not weaken, British rule, as each party began to realize that its safety lay in the maintenance of that rule' And then, as regarded the concentration of troops about Kandahar and Jalalabad, they were of opinion that 'Russia was not in a position to attempt the invasion of India, and that a large portion of the forces collected Trans-Indus, would be better employed in restoring internal order throughout British India, and in driving the French out of their possessions in Indo-China.' Finally, as to the levy of the war-tax on the landlords of Lower Bengal, and the 'oppressive' increase of the Salt Tax—a step necessitated by the financial situation—I was warned that both of these measures were 'disapproved,' and a threat was conveyed that I might be 'recalled and impeached'!

The Chief, Sir Power Oliphant, and Sir Trevor Tyler, the Financial Member, were sitting with me in my sanctum, when the above cablegram was received. I read it through, and after handing it

to Sir Power, wired to the Secretary of State for India: 'Your cablegram despatch, dated yesterday, received. Position in India misunderstood by you; situation very grave; insurrections general; some sepoy regiments mutinous. I must have support, and be given plenary powers in this crisis. Otherwise, I tender my resignation as soon as successor can take over.'

'A snubbing, and no mistake. These Radicals are getting shaky,' said Sir Power, as he returned the London cablegram to me. 'They think they may save their own skins by sacrificing you. They put you in here as one of their own kidney; but, by Jove, though you may be a Radical, you run the show your own way, which is not the way of King Demos, who does not like a master. What shall you do?'

'That,' I replied, showing him my ultimatum.

'You are right,' he said, returning it to me. 'It's a strong move, but a wise one and a safe one, because they dare not swap horses crossing the stream, and you force them to back you up.'

The Chief was buoyant, fearless of responsibility, always straight, and a consistent Conservative—hence he was delighted that I had taken the bull by the horns. He discounted victory before it was gained.

But the Financial Member was an old official, and as such regarded authority with an unbounded reverence; besides which he was very ambitious, and hoped to mount to higher honours than a mere

K.C.S.I. He felt that as the Financial Member, who had concurred in and carried through both the condemned measures, his personal prospects might suffer, and was correspondingly depressed. He suggested that as both measures were temporary, and had only begun to operate on the first day of the new financial year (April 1st), were it announced that they would expire on some given date, say three or four months after introduction, even though the war should continue longer, the irritation of the Home Ministry might be allayed: after all, I had exceeded my powers by imposing new taxation without the sanction of the Secretary of State for India, that was, practically, of the Home Government of the day.

He ended as the Chief had begun by asking me what I should answer. I pointed to my reply cablegram.

On reading it he shook off some of his apprehensions, and said with deliberation: 'You are a strong man, my lord, and I think they will recede from their position; but all the same, it will be safer to meet their wishes on the lines which I have suggested.'

'And how are we to pay our way?' I asked. 'A loan would be ruinous at present.'

'By increasing the Note issue,' he suggested, faltering.

'And further depreciating the already depreciated currency,' I commented. 'No, no, as soon as they commit themselves by giving me the powers which

I demand, I shall further enhance the Salt Tax. In a war we must have the sinews of war.'

'And if the reply is as you expect,' interposed the Chief with a laugh, winking to me, 'the best thing that can happen after that is, for these obliging Frenchmen to immediately cut the wire.'

The Financial Member echoed that pious wish, but did not wink, and neither laughed nor smiled.

'Well, gentlemen,' I said as they were leaving, the French have agents everywhere, even in Bombay. I have an apprehension amounting to a conviction that the cable will be again cut in a day or two, but I hope the answer will get through first.'

Next day I received the following reply: 'I laid your telegram before the Cabinet. They desire me to inform you that you possess their entire confidence, and that in the event of telegraphic connection being again interrupted, measures declared urgent and passed by your Government will have the support of His Majesty's Government. This exception to standing rules will cease on restoration of telegraphic communication.'

I at once sent the Chief and the Financial Member of Council a copy of the cablegram. It was the last received in India for many months. The press was unanimous in announcing that our enterprising enemies were evidently on the alert, and had again circumvented us.

* * * * *

Established in Delhi, we all felt the better for the

move up-country. Calcutta, with its conventions, its officialdom, its mixed and jostling society, its heat, smells, and mosquitos, is at best tolerable for a month or two till the end of January, but after that month one sighs for freedom and coolness. The spring in Delhi is delightful, the mornings cool and enjoyable till the middle of May. Indeed, in a good house the Briton has little to complain about for another month.

To me personally life was fuller, more rational, and far more real during our stay at Delhi than it had been in Calcutta or could be in Simla. My colleagues and secretaries thought otherwise. Their wives and families were already in Simla, and they longed to follow them to that official paradise. They, however, were mere officials, scribes noting, criticising, referring, suggesting, making work, in short, much of it useless, whereas I was making history in the heart of historical India. Agra, Lucknow, Sultànabad, and Lahore were all conveniently near, and in each one of these centres political forces were actively working for and against revolution. I was watching and being watched. Having laid down the broad lines of policy which were to be pursued, I personally could do little but encourage in every way the splendid body of district and divisional officers, who were devoting their experienced energies to pacifying the country and restoring the loosened bonds of loyalty and confidence which should bind government and people together.

What little I could do I did. Princes and members of the native aristocracy of Upper India, very few of whom had paid me a visit in Calcutta, flocked to Delhi, and were there welcomed and hospitality entertained. Many were true sportsmen, and enjoyed the day with the Delhi Tent Club as much as I did myself. Some had palaces, some studs, some menageries, some shootings of which they were proud. A few had collections of priceless Sanskrit manuscripts. Whatever it was, I accepted an invitation, if heartily given, and if the information available showed that a visit was desirable. These occasional holidays were more than pleasant breaks in the monotony of desk-work, as they helped to convert possible waverers or lukewarm vassals into devoted supporters of the Empire.

By the end of May it had become too hot to be out of doors with comfort or safety after 8 a.m., so excursions to distant or even neighbouring places gave way to a ride or game at golf in the early morning or evening. The increasing heat had no effect upon me, but some of the older men about me felt it: for many years past they had annually gone to Simla in March, and come down in November, and the present change from that pleasant routine disagreed with their constitutions and tempers as much as a course of hot Bengal curries would with Londoners. Their complexions became yellow, their spirits depressed, their minds inactive, their pens unready, and generally their output of work deteriorated. June came, and I

still showed no signs of moving. One after another my colleagues found a change of air necessary, and I raised no objection to their going up to Simla.

With the secretaries to the Government of India it was different. Were they, too, allowed to migrate heavenwards, the quill-driving exhilaration induced by climate and surroundings might result in such a crop of demands for statistics and reports, all to be ultimately prepared by the district officers in the plains, that the supremely important work of regaining the confidence of the agricultural masses would suffer.

In desperation the Home Secretary interviewed me, and represented that he was so prostrate from the heat, that in the interests of the public service it was advisable that he should be allowed to move with his office up to Simla.

'In what way,' I asked, 'will the public service benefit by your going there?'

'Well, sir,' he said, 'you must have noticed that for a month past or more my notes on cases have been very brief. Then my office receipts and issues are declining about twenty a day. That of itself is serious.'

'The less scribbling,' I remarked drily, 'the happier for India. At this rate you will shortly be able to reduce establishment, and effect an economy in expenditure.'

'But,' he said gloomily, 'in that case my control over details will be less searching.'

'So much the better, I should say. The Government, both supreme and provincial, is too centralized. Excessive bureaucracy is a sort of creeping paralysis. It first destroys activity in the limbs, and finally attacks the brain. District officers have until lately had no initiative; they have been mere voting and reporting machines, hence their authority has waned. An officer's worth now is gauged by his scribbling ability. Since I have been in Delhi I have had the advantage of discussing many matters of administration with the men who are the real administrators of India, the district officers, and I have not been surprised to find that they unanimously attribute our present troubles to what may shortly be called over-centralization, over-government on theoretical lines. It is unfortunate, too, that district officers are most harassed for reports and replies to references on every conceivable subject in the hot weather. It is always easy to question and destructively criticise, and call for figures and opinions seated in a pleasant office-palace at Simla, with the thermometer at 65°, and a good dinner or a play in prospect as a relaxation in the evening; but it is a cruel thing for the local administrator to have to supply what is wanted with the thermometer at from 93° to 103°, and half a dozen criminal and revenue original cases or appeals to dispose of as well.'

'Really, sir, your views surprise me. I have always supposed that the district officer's work is

very light, and that he requires constant supervision.'

'Most secretariat men have the same idea, because their knowledge of practical executive work is *nil*. Half of my secretaries would be just as efficient on office-stools in London as in secretariat-palaces in Calcutta and Simla.'

He looked distressed at this assertion of mine. I had forgotten that he had begun bread-winning on a stool in a solicitor's office in London, had thence passed a brilliant competitive examination for the India Civil Service, and being posted to Bengal had, after a year's service under the collector of Calcutta, got a secretariat appointment, and had risen step by step in the secretariat until he had reached his present high position. He hoped some day to govern a province, and probably would do so in ordinary routine, though he would then have less real experience than a young civilian two years out, provided that the said civilian had passed these two years in a jungle station learning his work.

I sighed remembering all this, and felt pity for the precisionist of the desk with the critical and logical faculties so developed that he had never been known to prepare his final note on a case, until it had been returned at least a dozen times for the correction of omissions. Finally, I let him take his office up to Simla, on the condition that he would pigeon-hole all but really urgent cases until the return of more settled times.

Chapter XVI

DANGER SIGNALS

MY chief reason for clinging to Delhi throughout June was to be nearer Melissa and the Byngs. The news to hand, though hardly alarming, was still unsatisfactory. Since the glory had departed from Delhi, Sultànabad had gradually risen in the estimation of the faithful, and was now recognised as the premier Musalman city in India. Thither for months past the Islamic scum of the peninsula had been drifting, and it was now believed that its ordinary population had been increased by the influx of some 20,000 needy foreigners, of whom a large portion were presumably potential fanatics. The great mass of the peasantry of the State, though good Moslems, pursued the even tenor of their simple lives, unmoved by the political agitation of the time. They were attached to their Princess as they had been to the old Nawàb her father—who had lately died, by the way—and in the event of a rising in the city, if they moved at all, would be more inclined to support the Government as representing the old

order of things than the party of revolution. On the whole, their neutrality was more probable than their participation did fighting occur. Their minds assimilated new ideas slowly, and by the time they had realized that a bloody revolution was in progress, that revolution would be an accomplished fact, and their action or continued inaction of no consequence.

The Princess had sent all her few regular troops to the front, and had replaced them by what were termed levies, who could be relied upon to bolt *en masse*—there were only 1,200 of them—were a shot fired in earnest.

The presence of Sardar Abdul Hakk in the city was undoubted, though he was careful as yet not to show himself anywhere in public. He was spending money freely, fanning the fanaticism latent in every destitute and ignorant Musalman, and filling the minds of men with evil tales about the Princess, and with reports of British defeats at the hands of the Russians and Afghans.

Did an *émeute* occur, the danger peculiar to Sultànabad was that the Princess, the Resident and his escort would be overpowered before assistance could reach them. There were no Government troops nearer than Delhi, from which Sultànabad was 300 miles distant, being about 100 miles by road from the nearest railway station.

In all his letters Byng had hitherto spoken with confidence of the power of the Princess and her ministers to maintain order, extolling her tact and

popularity, and dwelling with satisfaction on the close friendship which had sprung up between her and his wife. But early in June his political diary began to contain entries which showed that the inflammable materials present in the city were causing him anxiety. Preaching in the great mosque was incessant. Arms, particularly swords, were being secretly manufactured in quantities; a contraband consignment of rifles and cartridges, believed to have been procured from a German firm in Bombay, had been seized; men openly went about armed in the peaceful streets of the city; one of the oldest and most trusted advisers of the Princess had asked for six months' leave of absence, and when pressed to give a reason for his application, had admitted that he was afraid trouble was impending; two sepoys of the Sikh escort had been waylaid and brutally assaulted by city roughs; some of the wealthiest and most respected citizens were quietly removing their families and portable possessions from the town; anonymous letters containing threats or warnings were being daily received in the Palace.

Then came a remarkable entry, showing wise precaution, but clear apprehension that the detached house in the Palace grounds occupied by the Princess might be suddenly attacked. It ran thus: 'Have collected, without rousing suspicions, fifteen days' supplies for 200 men in the underground rooms of the *Zenana* quarters or garden-house, and have arranged to move into these

quarters at a few minutes' notice in case of an alarm: am having large gaps made in the wall surrounding the garden in which the house stands, and will have it all levelled if there is time.'

Knowing the place well, I was pleased with Byng's resourcefulness. He had evidently a good eye for a defensive position, and would not be taken by surprise. The house in which Melissa had spent her girlhood stood in what was known as the Nawâb's garden, an orange grove, occupying about ten acres, and situated between the rambling old Palace and the river. Between Palace and city was a strip of open ground, used indifferently for fairs, parades, and as an Idgāh or place of public prayer on the Id festival. The harem quarters stood alone in the middle of the garden, a solidly constructed, three-storeyed building, surrounded by a raised and flagged courtyard. Round the garden, except on the river side, which was open, ran a high brick wall, pierced only by one gate. Thus protected from prying eyes, the royal ladies enjoyed freedom inside their enclosure, and in the hot weather could disport themselves in the river at the bathing *ghāt* beside which the great flood, nearly five years before, had deposited Jack Ravenhill and his deck-chair.

Melissa's home had several peculiarities: no timber had been used in its construction, except for the flat roofing of the third storey. Brick domes took the place of timber for the first and second floors. These domes were a feature

common to Sultànabad architecture, necessitated because of the destructive pertinacity with which white ants attacked all wood-work. Then, when the house was built, means for passing from floor to floor had been forgotten, hence make-shift wooden stairs had been run up afterwards. Finally, to connect the ladies' quarters with the Nawâb's palace, a sunken covered way had been made from Palace to house. Since her father's abdication, Melissa, as the ruling Princess, had apartments in the Palace; but, as she still loved her old house, she spent much of her time in it.

By the same post I had a letter from both the ladies. Melissa was confident that her subjects would not dare to lift a hand against her or her guests, as she termed the Byngs, 'and if they do,' she added, 'I shall be sorry to have to punish them, because they will be doing me a personal service. It would force you, Viceroy though you are, to come to my rescue, and then I should see my darling Jack again—Cecil, I mean—and we should, I suppose, hang the Sardar Sahib.'

Mrs. Byng's letter showed neither buoyancy nor vindictiveness. She took a gloomy view of the situation, and declared that but for her anxiety for her husband's safety, and her admiration for the plucky and fascinating little Princess, she would desert and find her way to Delhi somehow. As it was, she would willingly exchange the present uncertainty and waiting on events for the excitement of being besieged, with the prospect of being either

killed, or more probably rescued and restored to civilization.

To send troops to Sultànabad was out of the question. The news of their despatch would precipitate the outbreak which otherwise might never take place, and, besides, there were no troops available for the service. If the mob rose and laid siege to the garden-house, it would be necessary to send a force, rescue the defenders, and chastise all rebels. I represented the whole case to the Chief, who was at Peshawar, and urged him to send back any troops he could safely spare: should an *émeute* occur, and not be immediately repressed and exemplary punishment inflicted, others would follow, and 20,000 men might be unable to do in six months what a brigade of all arms, if moved quick enough, might accomplish in a week. The Chief replied that he would rail back 5,000 men to be distributed between Lahore and Delhi as rapidly as possible, but that owing to the heat and other causes it would be ten days or more before the Delhi garrison could be properly reinforced and a small field force mobilized. In case of emergency, he thought the best way to succour the Resident at Sultànabad would be to send all the cavalry and mounted infantry that could be collected to the nearest point on the railway line to that city, and deliver an attack before even their approach was suspected.

The suggestion was excellent. Arrangements were at once begun to carry it into effect. One

hundred lances of my Body-Guard and 150 mounted infantry of the Rifle Brigade were a few days later ready to start at an hour's notice for Sultànabad or elsewhere. The infantry mounts were nondescript animals, a few of them trained troop-horses, but most bazār ponies of all ages from thirteen to fourteen hands. They were big enough for the small, wiry Londoners who bestrode them, as many of the men had never even ridden donkeys before. The men were young and keen. With constant practice they had by the end of a week learnt to keep their balance fairly well. Many a rider still hung on by the bridle when trotting or cantering, but a bazār pony has a mouth of iron, and is accustomed to bad riders, so the harder Thomas Atkins pulled, the higher went the pony's head and the quicker his legs. Then daily a process of weeding of men and beasts went on. Men who were soft and blistered too easily, or could not sit on except at a walk, had to give place to other aspirants. Ponies that proved weaklings, or screws, or incorrigibles, were replaced by others—farriers' ponies, grass-cutters' ponies, and fat grocers' ambling nags. Once town and country understood that the *Sarkar* was buying ponies, and readily paying fancy prices for them, ten were offered for one purchased. After a week of constant drilling, Thomas Atkins and ponies did credit to their instructors. To see them on parade was a comedy, they looked so weedy and unserviceable, and executed evolutions so grotesquely; but to time them

covering somehow ten miles across country was a revelation. They did the distance in an hour, at the end of which, whilst fifteen men held the ponies in bunches of ten, the remaining 135 men were lying down, each putting a dozen shots a minute into a large butt 500 yards off.

Horses, ponies, and men were also practised at entraining, and it was found that the whole number could be easily crowded into two trains. The animals had to be packed as close together as are Arab ponies on the deck of a British-India steamer on the voyage from the Persian Gulf to Bombay.

Chapter XVII

ABORTIVE NEGOTIATIONS

THE week of hasty preparation at Delhi passed, and still the news from Sultânabad showed that the situation remained almost unchanged. The exodus of the timid from the city continued; the whole town and its suburbs had been declared out of bounds for the Resident's escort; the telegraph wire had some weeks back been cut, and partly carried away, but the post-office continued open and worked with fair regularity; the ladies slept in the garden-house, in which part of the escort were already accommodated; the Sardar Sahib was now openly showing himself, praying publicly in the great mosque and riding about on a white mare, surrounded by a small bodyguard of footmen in white and green uniforms, who called themselves *ghāzīs*.

He had written a speciously obsequious but covertly insolent letter to the Princess, in which he stated that he had returned to his home because it was his duty as a true patriot to serve his country at the present crisis: he was doing his best to preserve order and promote the glory of

Islam, but could not answer for the consequences, did his cousin persist in shutting herself up amongst unbelievers, who were the enemies of God and His Holy Prophet: he further urged the Princess to induce the Resident Sahib with his escort to withdraw to Delhi, in which case he would garrison the Palace with his own trustworthy levies, and protect her life and honour from the violence of the mob. He swore by the beard of the Prophet that if she would follow his advice she would regain her waning popularity, and be recognised throughout Islam as the Defender of the Faith.

The Princess read and explained the letter to Mrs. Byng and the faithful Miss H——, and asked them what they thought of the offer.

'It is plausible enough; I'd send for him and negotiate,' said Mrs. Byng, thinking herself a diplomatist already and longing for the lively civilization of Simla or even Delhi.

'He's afraid to attack us,' observed Miss H——, 'so wants to get you into his power without risking a fight.'

Whilst they were giving their opinions, the Princess was pacing her boudoir with short, rapid steps, shaking her small fists in the air, knitting her usually calm brow, and screwing up her pretty eyes, by all of which signs her old governess knew that her mistress was very angry and very excited. Presently the Princess paused in her walk, and facing them, let loose the scorn of her pent-up indignation,

'Hound that he is!' she exclaimed; 'he tried force once, and was met with force, and beaten. This time he is trying artifice. I'll meet tricks with tricks, and beat him at his own game.'

'What can you do?' asked Mrs. Byng, frightened at the explosion.

'Do? I shall pretend to agree and invite him to come to-night to arrange details after you and Byng Sahib have gone to bed, and then I'll seize him, and treat him as he would me.'

'That would be treachery,' was the horrified comment.

'No, dear,' was the vehement rejoinder; 'when you circumvent wild beasts, it is called sport. If I trap this human beast, why not call it diplomacy?'

Miss H—— was inclined to agree with her mistress, but prudently suggested that it would be better to ascertain the Resident Sahib's views before sending an answer.

On his appearance, Captain Byng admitted that the plan of action which had suggested itself to the Princess, whether regarded as treachery and therefore morally wrong, or as a stroke of high policy and under the circumstances justifiable, had this clear merit that, if successful, it would checkmate the rebels and end an almost intolerable situation; but did the Princess really think the Sardar was such a simpleton as to fall into so palpable a trap?

'He is a suspicious man, and probably has

advisers' she admitted; 'but why not lay the trap for him?'

'That might precipitate a catastrophe,' suggested Captain Byng.

'Possibly,' admitted the Princess.

'Don't you think he would probably accept your invitation, come with a number of armed followers, and rush the door when it was opened to admit him?' was Captain Byng's next suggestion.

'He might and he might not,' was the cautious answer.

'Well, Princess, supposing he acted in good faith and trusted to your honour, would you then be inclined to seize him?'

'N—o,' she replied with hesitation, and then, entirely surrendering her first position, she added: 'I think in that case we might really negotiate, and whether we come to terms or not, let him go.'

'I agree with you, Princess; your judgment is never at fault. Let us send him an invitation to a conference, as you first proposed, and act honourably by him as you say. At the same time, in case he attempts any foul play, we must be prepared to meet it.'

'He will attempt it,' said the Princess with conviction.

She liked Captain Byng, and loved 'the beautiful English lady,' his bride. She enjoyed her daily business discussions with her Resident, his soft, insinuating voice, his courtly, deferential manner. He never opposed her will in anything, yet she

always surrendered hers to his. Invariably, his suggestions were adopted by her, but accepted by him as emanating from herself.

The Sardar's proposal was talked over in the Palace, in which all business was transacted. The Byngs had quarters in it, and the Sardar and his people believed that the Princess herself now resided there also, only visiting the garden-house occasionally. This impression was carefully encouraged, to divert attention from the preparations to stand a siege going on in that building. A Sikh sentry was always ostentatiously in evidence at the gates of the Palace; all supplies were taken in by that entrance—most of them being subsequently conveyed by the sunken covered-way to the vaults of the garden-house. Then at night lamps were kept burning in what had been the Nawâb's bedroom, and throughout the long corridor leading to it.

As the Sardar's visit was to be at night, and secret, it was hoped that he would suspect nothing if the Princess' old house were named as the place for the meeting between them. The reply sent to him was the joint production of Miss H—— and the Princess; and having been passed, with some amendments, by Captain Byng, was fair-copied by the confidential clerk in the Resident's office.

In the letter, the Princess stated that she would be glad to have a discussion with her cousin between ten and eleven that evening in her garden-house, which she still occasionally used when

wishing to be private; but she insisted that her visitor should come either alone, or accompanied by only one attendant—'not a wrestler,' she added, to show him that she remembered his former knavery.

The Sardar accepted the terms offered, stated that he was pleased to find that his fair cousin trusted him, and hoped that she would be still more satisfied with his honourable conduct before the interview between them should be over. He ended his letter by assuring her of his devotion to her interests, and anxiety to serve her, although the doubts shown by the reference to the unfortunate wrestler incident in Her Highness' otherwise gracious letter, had distressed him greatly: to remove these doubts he would bring a Koran with him that evening, and swear on it to observe good faith with her.

'Methinks he doth protest too much; he means some devilry,' was Captain Byng's comment—an opinion shared by the Princess.

It was then an hour before sunset, so there was ample time to complete preparations. The whole escort, with the exception of the corporal and four sepoys on duty at the entrance of the Palace, were withdrawn to the garden-house. What remained of papers and portable valuables were also conveyed there. At nightfall the Palace gates were shut, as usual, after which the guard was also withdrawn. Lamps were lit, and from outside the Palace appeared occupied, whereas, in fact, it had

been abandoned. Clerks and workmen had, of course, left some time before sunset.

In the garden-house, the few windows in the basement storey had all been loosely bricked up from inside, the bricks being taken from the demolished parts of the *Zenana* wall. Some openings were left to admit light, and as loop-holes for the men to fire through. As the ground on which the house stood was only a few feet above river flood-level, a small well had been sunk without much difficulty in one of the vaults; hence all anxiety about water was removed.

For that night's interview with the Sardar the dispositions were simple. Some sacks of wheat were placed behind the entrance door, which was of clumsy construction, but very strong, a thing of thick wooden boards studded with large-headed iron bolts. If a rush were made, so long as the door held it would be impossible for more than two men to squeeze through at a time. The sacks would prevent the door being forced wide open. Most of the men of the escort were distributed up-stairs in such a way that their rifle-fire enfiladed the approaches to the entrance of the house. Ten sepoys were placed in concealment in a room adjoining the door, ready to shut it, should the Sardar try to force an entrance.

The delicate and risky duty of parleying with, and admitting, the Sardar had to be entrusted to Miss Holmes, because if a man spoke or showed himself, the visitor would take alarm and beat a

retreat. The interview was to take place in the ground-floor sitting-room—once, I may note, Jack Ravenhill's place of lodging—and during the discussion Captain Byng was to be within hearing in the inmost room, which was still Miss Holmes' bedroom.

When everything had been arranged, Captain Byng and the ladies sat down to a hasty meal upstairs. All were excited and animated. The wearing suspense of the last fortnight would be ended, one way or another, within the next few hours. If the Sardar should prove honourable and reasonable, a *modus vivendi* would be possible; but if, as was more probable, he should turn out to be a lying, treacherous villain, his seizure and retention as a valuable prisoner of war would be justified. The Princess would then begin negotiations with the revolutionary party, or fight them with their leader in her hands.

The only portion of the little garrison thoroughly in their element, to whom a peaceful solution would have been a lifelong grievance, was the escort. The Sikhs were gleeful at the prospect of a fight with 'those Musalman pigs,' who had turned against their Princess and wanted to kill their pretty 'lady sahib,' as they called Mrs. Byng. Their broad, honest faces were aglow with the anticipation of the coming strife. To them the position appeared impregnable, as they believed they had ammunition, food, and water in plenty, the walls were thick, and there was nothing in-

flammable about the place. Outside, the ground was fairly open and level for a radius of over 300 yards, beyond which, to the north and east, were hills covered with thick jungle growth.

When the city gongs struck ten, the men were sent to their posts, and ordered to keep silence, whilst the Princess and Captain Byng sat whispering and listening in the outer room by the entrance door. Upstairs on the roof were Mrs. Byng and Lulu on the look-out, straining eyes and ears, city-wards and palace-wards. The moon was in its first quarter and sinking fast; hence the light was bad, and obscured, rather than illuminated, distant objects.

They listened and waited, and in their impatience doubted whether the Sardar would come. Presently a dog-barking broke the stillness, then several others gave tongue, and a domestic goose or two—the *canibusve sagacior anser* which saved Rome and makes the most wakeful night-watcher in India—sent out his loud cry of alarm. These sounds came from the direction of the suburbs on the city side of the Palace, and were soon audible also behind the partially razed garden wall.

'Don't you think that a body of men must be advancing under the shelter of the wall to the point nearest this door?' whispered Captain Byng to the Princess.

'The lady sahib or Lulu,' she answered, 'would surely have seen them passing the gaps. Don't you think so, Miss H——?'

That wise person shook her head, and finger on lip, answered softly, 'No, the men would be almost naked, and indistinguishable amidst objects as dark as themselves. The Resident Sahib is right.'

Whilst she was speaking Lulu appeared, and said that she and the lady sahib thought they had heard the sound of many feet passing near the wall, and some one had distinctly called out *chup chup* (silence) from that direction. They had not been able to see anything moving, but the darkness had been blacker for some seconds about the nearest gap.

'Go back,' said Captain Byng, 'and watch again, until the lady sahib and you see figures steal forward towards this door. Let them come quite near, then try and count them, and tell us how many there are, and if they appear armed.'

When Lulu had gone, Captain Byng said to the Princess that he must make sure that the Bengal light in the loophole on the first floor above the doorway was properly placed. He left, but returned almost immediately, and whispered to the watchers at the door, 'I made out six men not ten yards from here, reconnoitring from behind the nearest orange trees. The Sardar must be one of them. He ought to be here by now.'

Still there was no sign from without. They had perhaps seen some clumsy Sikh's head and taken alarm, or—no, it was all right, for Lulu's step on the creaking stair was heard again, and on her appearance she said that, as far as they could judge,

there were now in hiding near the entrance about fifty men with nothing on but loin-cloths; all appeared to be armed. Two wore clothes, and one of the two was of the size and build of the Sardar, the other was a huge fellow.

Captain Byng now motioned to the Princess to retire to her reception-room, and when she had gone he placed five of the sepoys behind the door, and five facing it. The Sardar and one man were to be allowed to come in, and were then to be immediately seized and the door shut, and if no attempt were made to force it, the men in hiding amongst the trees were to be allowed to withdraw or remain without molestation. As to the Bengal light, Lulu was sent with a message to Mrs. Byng about it.

These dispositions had hardly been made when some one from outside scratched on the door, and inquired softly, 'Is any one there?'

'Yes,' replied Miss H—— promptly; 'who are you?'

'Sardar Abdul Hakk; open quickly,' was the answer in a muffled tone.

'I know the Sardar's voice,' objected the door-keeper suspiciously, 'and yours is strange to me. Speak naturally, if you are the Sardar.'

'I would, but have a cold, and am hoarse. Be quick, and open to me.'

'Are you alone?' was the next question. 'Remember your agreement.'

'Yes, yes; I mean I have only one old man

with me—a priest with the Koran,' was the reply, delivered impatiently in a rasping whisper.

'Only you two will come in,' said Miss H——, pretending to fumble at the door-chain.

'Of course. Look sharp, you suspicious old lady,' said the voice from outside. At the same moment its owner rapped at the panel with his knuckles.

Miss H—— removed the chain, and then, her nerve giving way, ran back into the room where the Princess was. At the same moment the door was pushed back violently from outside as wide as the sacks behind would let it go. Two men burst through the opening, and others were following, when the five Sikhs stationed behind the door with a simultaneous shove bore it back, but failed to shut it entirely as the body of a man nearly through got jammed between its two halves. He was pulled in, and, showing fight, bayonetted.

The first two men through had rushed straight on the sepoys, who had been placed facing the door. Taken by surprise, both were overpowered, thrown down, disarmed, and pinioned almost without a struggle. Meanwhile, the pressure on the door from outside was forcing it gradually back, though the Sikhs behind it disputed every inch.

'Light up now,' shouted Captain Byng to his wife and Lulu.

'Kick the sacks away, my men, then let them open the door as wide as they like and fire into them,' he said to the sepoys in a low, clear voice.

Chapter XVIII

A GALLANT DEFENCE

THE Bengal light burnt brightly, and disclosed a mob of men pushing and struggling wildly against the door, which now suddenly banged wide open. The foremost assailants, precipitated forwards by the pressure from behind, were thrust into the broad portal. At the same instant the sharp, smokeless concussion of rifle-fire flashed from inside on the seething crowd, and the pellets struck down many of the foremost, but still the confused pressure of the mass beyond continued. Then from the roof and every loop-hole on that side of the house, the crackle of rapid firing was heard pouring a concentrated hail of lead into the now fleeing, leaderless mob below. In a minute or so the Sardar's men had dispersed, running for dear life, to get behind the safety of the still standing parts of the garden wall.

Then the Bengal light burnt out, or was knocked over, and night resumed her silent sway. From outside the only sounds were the groans and cries of the wounded, but inside all was movement, talk, and excitement.

Lamps were lit, torches prepared, fifty men were sent out to collect the arms of the dead and wounded, to identify individuals, or the classes to which they belonged, to collect and remove bodies —including even the wounded—to an open space near the garden wall. As the work of identification was impossible without the aid of the Princess or Miss Holmes, the latter had to go out with the Subadar—Major Wazir Singh by name, who commanded the escort—to perform that duty.

Meanwhile the two prisoners were brought before the Resident to be interrogated. The Princess acted as interpreter. As soon as she saw the men, she said, with vexation in her tone, that neither of them was the Sardar Sahib. The smaller prisoner, though cut and bruised, was cool and collected.

'The Sardar was not fool enough to come,' he said, looking insolently from Princess to Resident, and enjoying their disappointment.

Explaining why he had personated the Sardar, he told them that his master's life was too valuable to be risked. Though that master had not believed that Her Highness, notwithstanding her English education, would act treacherously as she had done, still, as she had an English adviser at her ear, and was only a woman, the Sardar decided to send him as his representative: the other prisoner was a mere hireling brute, selected because of his strength, to force the door open, and would now for payment be as ready to join the defence as the attack.

'The foul play was the Sardar's, not ours,' inter-

posed Captain Byng, with a quiet voice. 'Her Highness would have observed the conditions had the Sardar carried out his engagement.'

'Ours was a permissible stratagem for the Faith, yours a butchery,' shouted the prisoner—and possibly he believed it.

'Who are you?' asked Captain Byng, perceiving the futility of discussing the point further.

'I am a Sayad of Bareilly, at present the Sardar's secretary and manager of his Oudh estates.'

'Why did you join him in a rebellion here if you are of Bareilly?' was the next question.

'For the Faith, I suppose. I hate you English ever since the Collector Sahib of Bareilly last year unjustly put me in jail and dismissed me from my post of "Local Fund Secretary."'

'You are frank, anyway, and a brave man.'

The compliment pleased the scoundrel, and he had the coolness to ask,—

'Well, sahib, what are you going to do with me?'

'Hang you, perhaps, or use you,' replied the Resident grimly.

The two were then removed, and placed in one of the empty vaults.

When the Subadar and Miss Holmes returned, the former reported briefly 22 killed, 17 wounded, and some 50 to 60 swords, knives, and pistols collected. Miss Holmes said that she recognised none of the Sardar's men individually, but from their faces and the way they wore their hair, they appeared to be a mixture of peasants and town-

nondescripts of all sorts from various parts of India; there was not one Sultànabad farmer amongst them: they were mostly young or middle-aged men, evidently chosen on account of their physical fitness.

The rest of the night was spent in strengthening the defences, and particularly in blowing up a part of the covered connection between the house and the Palace. The operation was only partially successful, not more than a length of a few yards of the sunken way having fallen in. As much of the smoke from the explosion escaped back through the passage or tunnel into the vault in which the two prisoners were confined, their yells of terror penetrated to the rooms upstairs.

Captain Byng was at the time holding a council of war with Subadar Wazir Singh.

'What's that?' the former inquired apprehensively.

The old soldier threw his nose up, and after sniffing the air, replied with a broad grin,—

'Don't be alarmed, sahib, it's only these two pigs of prisoners being suffocated. They will be quiet soon.'

'How? Suffocated?'

'Yes, sahib; the grated door of the tunnel opens into their vault, and the smoke has filled it. I can smell it here.'

'Poor wretches!' said Captain Byng. 'Get them up here at once. I think we can use them. They will both, I expect, do anything for money.'

When the two were brought before the Resident, they presented a woful appearance. Both were coughing and spluttering. Their eyes were blood-shot and watering, and in their fright they must have rolled together, and bitten and torn each other, for the marks of scratches and bites were visible on their arms and faces. Possibly their jailers had some knowledge of the facts, as, under the circumstances, Sikhs would not have scrupled to torture the prisoners. The Resident thought it best to ask no awkward questions, but to come to business at once.

'If you are released,' he asked the Sayad, through Miss Holmes, 'will you go straight to Delhi and deliver a letter to the Viceroy there? If you do so within five days, he will give you a thousand rupees in cash.'

The man's eyes glistened, yet he answered with a scowl,—

'Add the ten acres of my father's well-land, grabbed by a rascally usurer, and I'll do it in a shorter time. I'll steal one of the Sardar's mares, and be twenty miles on my way before he knows of his loss.'

'Very well, I'll trust you; but tell me why you change sides so rapidly? You dislike us English, you know.'

'True, sahib, but a man must live,' he answered with a shrug and a sinister blinking of his eyes. 'Though I hate you all, I can trust you. As for the Sardar and his *canaille*, I despise them, and

then I know now that he is playing a losing game.'

Half an hour later he left on his mission, with a letter in Foreign Office cipher to the Viceroy, and a written guarantee about his reward in plain English—as he would be sure to have it read to him. He was certain to be faithful. The bribe promised was big enough to have induced him to murder the Sardar Sahib, or his own father for that matter. He was one of those clever Musalman adventurers who abound throughout the cities of India, capable under excitement of risking life and limb for the Faith, but readier upon reflection to commit any baseness for a sufficient pecuniary inducement.

When business with the Sayad had been concluded, the Resident turned to his companion, the big 'hireling brute,' as his fellow-prisoner had called him. The creature was asleep. Like a beast of the field he only felt the sensations of the moment. When in a tight place, he fought; when his eyes and flesh-wounds smarted, he bellowed; when suffocating with the terror of smoke and darkness on him, he yelled and bit and scratched; terror and acute pain ceasing, he slept.

'Wake, wake, you unclean beast,' called the Subadar, touching the sleeper with his foot.

'Rouse up sharp,' cried the sepoy in charge of him, covertly prodding his back with the bayonet.

The fellow started and rubbed his eyes. After many questions and repetitions his dull brain comprehended that he was to be set free, and carry a

letter to the Sardar Sahib, notifying that, if a white flag were shown, the killed and wounded could be removed, and further reproaching him for his treachery, yet offering to reopen negotiations.

The wily coward, after first having all the victims of his tortuous policy removed under flag of truce, replied that he himself was now a mere puppet and prisoner in the hands of men, whom the cruel butchery of the night had changed from unoffending citizens into *ghāzīs*.

During the day the enemy discovered that the Palace had been evacuated. The Sardar being informed of the fact, hurried with his *ghāzīs* from the city to take possession of their prize. When they arrived, they found that the gates had already been forced open, and that hundreds of the scum of the town were inside the place, plundering and wrecking it.

Throughout the afternoon and evening the sounds which reached the little garrison of the garden-house indicated either that fighting or wild carousing—or more likely both—was going on inside the Palace enclosure. Shouting, tom-toming, and the occasional discharge of firearms continued all that night and well into the following morning. Then hundreds of men and boys, many carrying headloads, were seen to string away from the gates across the strip of open ground to the city.

The following night a few shots were fired quite close to the garden-house, otherwise the garrison was still unmolested.

The men of the escort were disappointed, even contemptuous. Their Subadar proposed to raise their spirits, and complete the discomfiture of the enemy, by seizing the Sardar in the Palace.

'But we don't know in what room he sleeps,' objected Captain Byng. 'Besides, there must be over a thousand men there.'

'The more to kill, sahib.'

'It won't do, Wazir Singh. We must run no risks. We have to husband our strength. They would fight, like baited rats, in rooms and passages, because they would have to kill or be killed.'

The Subadar saluted and retired, gloom visible in every wrinkle of his usually cheery face.

When he made his report next morning he was beaming with satisfaction; the enemy meant fighting; the only apprehension was that the garrison might be relieved too soon. The keenest fire-eater in the escort was happy now. Some master-spirit had asserted himself amongst the ranks of the enemy. The signs of an organizing head and hand were even visible all round the house; the city swarms had been divided into commands, each under its own flag, and to each had been assigned some particular locality immediately behind an undemolished portion of the garden wall; during the night at several points inside that wall small earthworks had been thrown up; if a man showed above the parapet of the roof defences, bullets whizzed near him; as yet the shooting was wild, but it was bound to improve with practice.

Then in the darkness a number of the carts employed in the evening for removing the killed and wounded had, after being filled with earth, been driven back into the garden, the bullocks unyoked, and the carts left standing. They were now utilized as pellet-proof screens for the enemy's sharp-shooters and trenching coolies. By the fourth day of the siege, round two sides of the house was a laager of these carts, from behind which zigzag trenches, most of them on the Palace side, were being pushed forwards. The nearest was now within a hundred yards of the house, and its earthwork completely hid from view the gap in the sunken passage which had been blown in some days before.

The boldness and rapidity with which the approaches were being advanced puzzled the garrison, until one night a sortie resulted in the capture of two of the enemy's workmen. They turned out to be coal-miners impressed from a State colliery recently opened at a place called Dandat, about thirty miles from the city. Both the miners said they were glad to escape from the Sardar's clutches, as they were being starved, ill-treated, and overworked, and had no wish to be shot in a quarrel, in which all their sympathies were with their Princess. They conjectured that the firing and tom-toming, which was now going on day and night, was meant to distract the attention of the garrison from a tunnel which was being bored towards the house.

If correct, the information was serious. The Sikhs had no objection to fighting above ground; but to be undermined, and perhaps blown up, was a fate the possibility of which might unnerve them. Captain Byng decided, in the first instance, to explore the passage himself. If tunnelling were going on in its vicinity, he would surely hear sounds. He consulted Wazir Singh, who insisted that the Resident Sahib should not go alone, but take with him one of the miners in charge of a couple of sepoys. The little party at once started, a candle-lantern being carried by the leader, as the passage was dark. When they had penetrated some fifty yards, the miner's practised ear detected the dull scratching of a pick somewhere near where they were standing. All strained their powers of hearing to localize the tapping. The miner put his ear here and there against the walls of the tunnel, and after trying several places, motioned to the Resident Sahib to listen at a particular spot.

The miner whispered to him, 'They are not more than six feet off, and should connect in a few hours. You can guess by the irregularity and feebleness of the blows that they are working against their will. There—did you hear that? There must be a flaw in the stratum here, or we could not have distinguished voices.'

What the Resident clearly heard was an angry order to the miners to work harder, an indistinct reply, and then a blow and a yell.

How many hours have we before they will join on here?' he inquired in a low voice.

'Till midnight, probably; they could cut through sooner if they liked. We do not work by shifts. They will rest soon for cooking, eating, and sleeping, and begin again an hour or two after sunset.'

'When they connect, what will happen?' was the next question.

'The miners will leave a thin partition standing. They will then be withdrawn. Afterwards the fighting men will either steal up this passage in force to surprise you, or lay a mine under the wall of the house,' was the confident reply.

'Two can play at that game,' was the Resident's grim comment.

The man nodded, and the party returned quietly to the house.

In consultation with the Subadar it was decided to place a heavy charge of powder close to the spot at which the passage would be pierced, and to explode it the moment the enemy should break down the partition. At the same time the Subadar was to head a strong sortie party, who would rush on the besiegers in their works immediately after the explosion took place. The captured miners were promised a large reward if the plan proved successful, but threatened with instant death should they attempt treachery or even do their work clumsily. When all arrangements had been made, a watch was set in the passage and the situation

explained to the garrison. That their fighting was to be above ground, and begin as soon as their Sahib had exploded his mine, was good news for them.

About eleven that night word was brought that men were heard collecting beyond the partition. The sacks and rubbish piled behind the door to strengthen it had already been cleared away, so that it could be thrown open on the signal. The moon was now ten days old, and threw its silvery light over the orange grove and the strange mounds encircling the house, from one or other of which occasional shots were being fired. Vigorous tom-toming was going on from behind the shelter of the garden-wall, and even from that of the nearer-lying carts, which formed a perfect cover for the men sitting under them.

Suddenly a dull subterraneous rumbling, breaking into a thunderous roar, was heard. The ground about the passage, not more than sixty yards from the house, vomited forth earth, stones, and bricks, with a weak but ripping upheaval. A second or two later a louder, sharper reverberation, accompanied by an outburst of flames, overpowered the earlier explosion, and the air up to a height of fifty feet or more was thick with flying *débris*, and even the bodies and limbs of scattered men. A shower of bricks and stones was also cast about in all directions, some striking the sides, and thudding heavily on the roof even of the house. Silence ensued, in the midst of which the gallant Subadar,

followed by half the garrison, rushed from the opened door of the house and pursued the panic-stricken groups of the fleeing enemy towards the two nearest gaps in the wall, upon one or other of which parties of fugitives were converging.

Seeing that the tunnel had been ripped open for a long distance, the Subadar collected and halted those of his men who were near him, and poured their fire into the crowded gaps. The slaughter continued for several minutes, until a handful of the enemy's bravest marksmen, recovering from their panic, began to return the fire from the shelter of the carts and mounds just outside the scene of the two explosions. Seeing his men beginning to fall, Wazir Singh, after sweeping round and clearing some of the earthworks, had the recall sounded, and withdrew his party to the house. His loss was seven killed and wounded, some probably having been hit by ill-directed shots fired from the defences during the first confusion of the sortie.

Not a shot was fired during the rest of the night. From the roof, the place had the appearance of a mining camp in sleep. The line of the tunnel was clearly traceable as a deep, irregular trench between house and palace. Dotted about the trench singly or in groups were the motionless forms of the miners seemingly at rest. The light of the waning moon was insufficient to reveal the ghastly reality, but the ear caught sounds—groans, curses, and feeble invocations of Allah—which showed that

to many there death would be a merciful release from suffering.

The chief slaughter had been wrought by the second explosion, which had been caused through the ignition by the first of the enemy's powder-bags, intended to be used to blow down a part of the house. The Sardar or his lieutenant had packed his part of the connecting passage with *ghāzīs*, who were to rush forward the instant that a breach had been effected in a wall of the house.

As the night wore on towards dawn, the painful silence, latterly only broken by the cry of some passing soul, was startled by the hideous yelling and shrieking of packs of jackals and occasional hyenas sweeping through the garden. There was flesh there in plenty for them. From the discovery of the feast till daylight the little garrison heard these beasts of ill-omen snarling and fighting over the bodies outside. The thought that some would be rent and bitten before life was extinct made sleep impossible for the two ladies.

At dawn, no besieger being visible, a fatigue party was sent out to destroy all that was easily destructible in the enemy's works, to collect bodies and throw them into the far end of what had been the tunnel, or into any distant trench. The certainty was that should corpses not be removed the air would soon become tainted under the fierce heat of the June sun. In that case the position of the garrison would be almost unendurable. As it was, the stench and myriads of flies

in the ground floor and even in the first storey, both of which had been given up to the men of the escort, were causing sickness. The ladies and Captain Byng occupied the second storey, and slept on the roof when possible. Even there the air was only sweet when the night breeze was blowing from the river.

Chapter XIX

A VICEROY TO THE RESCUE

WHILST the inmates of the garden-house at Sultànabad were standing at bay against the fanatical swarms surrounding them, my anxiety at the sudden cessation of news was giving me miserable days and sleepless nights. I dared not reveal my feelings to any of my staff. Reports came in daily, and sometimes oftener, from scores of stations, and if none came from the capital of a Native State, why, no news was good news, and busy officials had less reading and writing to do. That was the way in which they regarded the absence of information from Sultànabad, if they thought about the place at all.

When the third day of silence had passed, the suspense overpowered me. I could restrain my nervous apprehensions no longer. I started at every footfall—I could attend to no business. Captain Forbes, who had to some extent taken the place of Byng in my confidence, and was acting Private Secretary, in addition to his duties as aide-de-camp, suggested that a run up to Simla for ten days or so would brace me up.

'To Simla?' I repeated irritably. 'That would not be my direction. I have a foreboding that something terrible is happening at Sultànabad.'

'Why, sir?' he inquired. 'No trouble has been reported from that quarter.'

'That is just it. Why hasn't she—I mean Byng—written for the last three days?'

He noticed my excited manner, assuming, no doubt, that by 'she' I had meant to refer to Mrs. Byng, and tried to cheer me by saying, 'Oh! Byng, you may be sure he is all right, sir. They won't catch him napping.'

'You don't understand!' I roared at him, ignoring his words. 'Can't you send some one quietly to the *bazār* to pick up any rumours that may be about. The *bazār* always hears bad news sooner than we do, you know.'

'All right, sir,' he responded quite unperturbed. 'If any *gup* (talk) is going, you shall have it in an hour, but native stories are usually worthless.'

'Not in this case. No one would care to invent tales from a native State just now. Interest centres in British stations.'

He left me, and returned inside the hour. He said some bankers had heard that the city rabble in Sultànabad, augmented by ruffians and fanatics from outside, including Delhi, had risen, sacked the Palace, and proclaimed as Nawâb one Abdul Hakk, a formerly disgraced relative of the late Nawâb.

'It is the truth,' I groaned, beside myself with

misery. 'I was sure something of the sort had happened.'

'Don't give way, sir; Captain and Mrs. Byng must be safe, as no mention was made of them; besides, the mob would not dare to touch the British Resident or his wife.'

'But Melissa, the Princess,' I almost shouted in my anguish. 'That vindictive cur, her cousin, will have killed, or—or forced her into marriage with him.'

My emotion and knowledge astonished him. What was she to me or I to her? Shrugging his shoulders, he said quietly, 'Oh! the Princess Melissa?—yes, I remember about her. Well, sir, in any case, one prince or princess the less in India won't matter much. It is of our own people we must first think.'

This callous speech angered me. I seized him by the arm, and almost shook him. 'You don't know, you can't know,' I cried; 'but I love her, I'd die for her, and here have I been fooling in Delhi, when I ought to have gone to her rescue ten days ago.'

Whether he thought my brain was affected, or that I had told him a secret, I know not, but he calmed me by insisting that if the Byngs were alive and safe, as they were sure to be, the Princess would be with them, and that in any case, there being no positive news of a catastrophe, none could yet have occurred.

Whilst he was still speaking, some one tapped at

the door, and being told to enter, the orderly on duty came in, and reported that there was a Hindustani, with his head bound up, in the hands of the sentry. The man said he had a letter for me to be personally delivered.

'Have him brought up at once,' I ordered.

'I'll go and fetch him, sir,' interposed Forbes. 'It won't do to admit a stranger without precautions.'

He went, and in a few minutes returned with a seedy, dirty, but intelligent-looking Hindustani, who, after satisfying himself that I was the Viceroy, had the coolness to inquire whether a promise made by the Resident Sahib of Sultànabad would be fulfilled by me. I gave him the required assurance, whereupon he opened a knot in his cummerbund and handed me a letter. I recognised Byng's writing, and tearing off the cover, hurriedly gleaned the contents. I had been so accustomed to reading cipher despatches of late, that I read the Foreign Office cipher in which Byng had written pretty easily, without having to use the key.

'Good, my friend, you shall have the promised reward; but as I wish to speak with you shortly'—an intention carried out that evening—'this gentleman will make you over to one of the Government Native Secretaries, who will look after you.'

Forbes took him off, and in his absence I again read the letter. It gave me all the news up to the departure of this Bareilly Sayad. To-day was the fourth day of the siege. All going well, we ought

to reach Sultànabad early on the sixth day, and Byng was satisfied that he could hold out for ten days certain, unless the Sardar could procure and use serviceable cannon, wherewith to bombard them, or unless the frenzy of the last days of the Moharram should excite the besiegers to carry the house regardless of loss The two mountain batteries, belonging to the State, had both been sent to the front, with the Sultànabad Imperial Service troops; hence unless the Sardar could find and bring into the field a *sherbachcha* ('tiger-cub') or two, there were no other big guns in the State, and as for the said *sherbachchas*, if loaded they would probably burst, and in any case might be as dangerous to their gunners as to the door of the garden-house.

Confident that all would go well, the prospect of an exciting adventure, and a meeting with my darling Melissa, put me into the best of spirits.

When Forbes returned, he found that I was as calm, collected, and determined as the most devoted aide-de-camp could wish his chief to be.

By ten that evening the 100 troopers of my body-guard, and the 150 mounted infantry from the Rifle Brigade, with their horses and ponies, already told off for emergent field service, should occasion arise, had all been packed into the railway trucks and cars prepared for their reception some days previously. To that force a Maxim gun, with mule transport, and the necessary complement of men, had since been added.

My friend, Colonel Hay-Salter, of the battalion of the Rifle Brigade stationed at Delhi, was in command of the relief force. As he wanted gallopers, he allowed half a dozen members of the Delhi Tent Club to join the expedition. They were all good horsemen, experts with the spear, mounted on Arabs in as hard condition as their riders. I went as a sort of volunteer, with Forbes as my aide-de-camp and commandant of the Tent Club contingent. When Thomas Atkins, Esquire, saw that his Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General was coming with him, his regrets at not having been sent to the front to fight the Russians changed to delight at having been left behind. He was sure that real business was expected, and, if so, he had a better chance of a medal than his comrades on the North-West Frontier, from whom the Russians were still keeping respectfully some 200 miles away. We decided to pass the Sultànabad Road station, and to detrain at a flag-station eighty miles farther on, but only thirty-five from our objective. The country between was hilly, much of it forest-covered, roadless, and sparsely inhabited, but it was all practicable for horsemen. By running beyond the station for Sultànabad, we lost the use of the metalled road to that capital, but reduced the distance to be ridden by sixty-five miles; we also expected to mislead the enemy—if they kept any look-out, which was doubtful. The one risk in our plan was that, should heavy rain fall, we might find some of the otherwise petty streams

which we had to cross unfordable for hours or even days. That risk was, however, infinitesimal, because the telegraphic meteorological report of that morning showed that settled conditions prevailed all over India. Fine weather was therefore pretty certain for some days to come, at all events. Rain had, in fact, just fallen, and we were now in the beginning of the ten or twelve days' break of dry weather between the 'little rains' and the regular monsoon. Luck was with us at the start, for if those 'little rains' had not fallen so opportunely, the terrific heat would have knocked over many of the men and some of the animals. These latter stood ten in each truck, packed so tightly that, had any vicious brute wished to object to his neighbour, biting or kicking was impossible. As for the men, they were in third-class and 'intermediate' compartments with sitting room only.

The leading train left the Delhi terminus about 10 p.m., and was followed by the other half an hour later. The Sultànabad Road station was passed between 7 and 8 a.m. Except a solitary constable of the railway police, no one was visible on the platform. About three hours later the two trains successively discharged their freights on the farther side of the long Kandesh tunnel at the 243rd mile from Delhi, and a few miles outside Sultànabad territory. Both trains were then sent back to Delhi to convey a small force of infantry and artillery to the Road station, in case more

troops should be wanted to quell the disturbances at Sultànabad.

It was noon before men and animals obtained shelter from the pitiless sun amongst the trees surrounding the flag station. Two-thirds of the mounted infantry were soon after allowed to rest inside the tunnel, through which a pleasant current of air was perceptible all day long.

The start for the long night ride to the rebellious city was made soon after sunset. For the first three hours the route followed what is technically called a fire-line through a forest-reserve; that is, the troops marched down a broad cutting in the forest, which was intended to stop or check the advance of a conflagration, but as a matter of fact never did so. To the British soldier, accustomed only to the bald scenery of lines of ugly barracks, stunted trees, and white dusty roads, with the occasional break in the monotony of cantonment life afforded by a camp of exercise in some bare plain in the cold weather, or a standing camp on some Himalayan spur in the hot weather, that march through the great silent forest was a new and strange experience—a peep into a mysterious world of giant vegetation, great shadows, weird shapes and sounds, and gloomy darkness made conspicuous by innumerable moving and flashing Lilliputian lanterns, each a mere point in the air, whilst over all things there brooded a deep, creeping stillness.

Overhead shone the three-quarter moon, throw-

ing into fantastic relief the trunks and limbs of the kings of forest-land on either side of the cutting. But for the fire-flies scintillating in millions about its edges, and wherever the recent rain had left water standing, that forest-land was sombre and awesome to the soldiers. Its stillness depressed the senses. Seemingly it was devoid of animal life, except when a startled pack of hunting-dogs or a solitary deer dashed out into the moonlight, stared for an instant in dumb suspense at the intruders, and then with cries of alarm plunged back into the depths of their asylum. Now and again a family of inquisitive monkeys swung themselves from bough to bough amongst the trees, and accompanied our march grinning, chattering, and criticising the laborious slowness of our movements. Once the roar of a tiger was heard. That dread wailing cat-cry made the sleepy horses and ponies start and shiver, and awoke their riders from dreamland in an enchanted forest to the advisability of keeping together, and to the reality of the adventure on which they were engaged.

It was a relief to all of us to emerge from the dark stifling forest into a bare and open country, overspread though it was with boulders and flints. The going was slow and difficult, as each animal had to pick his way warily; but in compensation the air was dry, and stirring as much as it would under a lazily-pulled punkah. This plain was intersected by *nullahs*—most of them just then either dry or mere brooks. Beyond rose a moun-

tain-range which had to be crossed. A fire had swept over it just before the 'little rains' had fallen, so there was neither long grass nor jungle under-growth to weary or impede our animals. The descent led down into a cultivated valley, but as the spring crops had been cut, and many of the peasantry had taken their cattle to the uplands for coolness and pasturage, until the bursting of the monsoon should recall them to plough and sow for the autumn crop, we saw few people in the villages and hamlets through which we passed.

On being questioned, these simple folk declared that they had heard no news from Sultànabad. They had paid their land-revenue to the local tax-collector a month before, and it did not concern them whether Princess or Nawâb were their ruler. All they wanted was to be left alone and not over-taxed. It appeared that very few of them had ever been to the Capital; their valley was their home and all the world to them, as it had been to their forefathers.

At the last village, which occupied the lowest point in the valley, a halt was called, the animals fed and watered, and the men advised to eat part of the ration each carried with him.

It was now about 3 a.m. The Trimali, broad and swift in summer flood, was only half an hour's ride ahead of us. Once reached, the route lay along its bank until near the Palace, when it struck off to the right and crossed a low wooded range. The river here narrowed, and swept with swift and

quiet Majesty through a gorge impracticable to men or animals except at the low season.

After a short halt we moved on, and soon reached the Trimali. As we marched slowly southwards along its left bank, we were suddenly conscious of a great luminosity behind us, which projected the shadows of men and horses upon the water; then a great ball of light passed smoothly and noiselessly over our heads, and disappeared somewhere in front of us into the ground or water apparently, but again without sound.

The phenomenon, though nearly as instantaneous as a flash of lightning, impressed us all as an omen, but particularly the men.

'That 'ere's a tailless blazer,' and it means—blazes,' remarked the philosophic astronomer of the mounted infantry.

'Yes, that we're going to blazes before our next square meal,' was the lugubrious explanation of a hungry comrade.

The same idea possessed the men of the body-guard—all picked soldiers from the native army. A creepy feeling seemed to steal over the whole force, and white and brown soldiers alike began to discuss the prospects of the expedition amongst themselves with gloomy forebodings about its success.

The fact was reported to Colonel Hay-Salter, who ordered Forbes to tell the men that it was merely a brilliant meteor which they had seen, and meant nothing; but that if they insisted in regard-

ing it as an omen, it indicated the speedy extinction of the rocketty or rather ricketty Sardar and his fire-eating *ghāzīs*.

That interpretation was readily and cheerily accepted as the only possible one; perhaps more because dawn was now destroying the fancies of the night, than from belief in their Colonel as a reader of heavenly signs and wonders.

By 7 a.m. we were amongst the trees on the hills just north of the Palace—not two miles from the Princess and her sorely pressed garrison; and none of them knew of our approach. Before the final pull up and action which would follow, the Colonel halted his men for breakfast. The Rifles were to advance on foot from this point, whilst the men of the Body-guard and the Tent Club contingent were to stick to their horses as long as possible. The mules carrying the Maxim gun would, of course, scramble over any ground.

The dispositions being made, and each rifle-man's magazine-attachment filled and adjusted, Colonel Hay-Salter, Forbes and I started up the hill ahead of the others to reconnoitre. We walked and took a small escort with us, though from my previous knowledge of the locality I knew that the precaution was needless; we should not meet a soul, and as for the enemy, they would all be clustered round the garden-house, like jackals about a soldier derelict, waiting for death to make the onslaught quite safe.

The curtain of mountain between us and the

scene of strife prevented us from hearing firing, if any were going on. We threaded our way single-file up the hill, and when near the top we collected together. We were all in *khāki* very much of a colour with our rocky surroundings. As the Colonel and I were cresting the ridge, sounds of occasional firing were clearly audible, but suddenly a dull, fuller booming noise struck our ears.

'A big gun, by God!' I exclaimed as I pushed on in front of my companion.

'Easy, sir, easy,' he called, coming up to me, and seizing my arm. 'We can do nothing alone, and must not be seen. We have to surprise the scoundrels, you know.'

We now advanced cautiously, and when on the ridge ensconced ourselves amongst the rocks, keeping well within their shadow. The whole scene below lay like a panorama before us. Not more than 600 or 700 yards in front of us stood the well-remembered house, white and glistening under the morning sun. All around it, except to the north on the side of the hill, where we were, was a confusion of mounds and trenches, every bit of cover from the house-side filled with men. Behind the dismantled wall which used to run round the garden were more men, some standing about, some prostrate in prayer, others sitting, a few lying down. All seemed intent, waiting for something to happen. We could see the sole entrance to the house on the Palace side, and to our horror the door was gone, and some of the

assailants appeared to be inside it. The defences of the roof were in ruins and deserted, except for two figures, who appeared to be watching.

With my glasses I made out that one was Jean —Mrs. Byng—and the other a sepoy. Occasionally from the interior of the house came a muffled report—a rifle shot, probably. Now and again a handful of brave men would rush forwards from some cover and disappear in the entrance, and as they ran one or more would drop, hit by a pellet from some loopholed window in the house.

As we looked, we saw a flash followed by a booming sound from an embrasure on a large mound between the Palace and the house. Then a projectile of some sort struck a part of the parapet on the roof, and another portion of that frail defence fell down.

The Colonel and I turned to each other. We had each of us realized what had happened. He looked almost despondent.

'I fear we may be too late!' he said to me with wonderful coolness. 'They are inside, and forcing the stairs, I suppose. Were they wiser, they would set fire to the place and burn or smoke the garrison on to the roof, and then pick them off.'

'No, no,' I whispered eagerly to him; 'we are just in time. The house can't be burnt—it's all bricks, there is no wood-work; between each storey is only one narrow stair. Don't you see our men still hold the first floor. Some of the shots which

dropped a few of these devils running in were fired from that floor.'

'You are right, I think; but how you got the information I don't know.'

'Never mind how—it's accurate,' I answered. 'Had you not better hurry up the men?'

He crept back to where Forbes and the others were standing, and after giving his orders, returned to me. I told him that we could get nearer, unobserved, if our men stole up a *nullah* on our left farther from the river. We should be on much lower ground, but every shot would tell.

'Well!' he said, 'we enfilade some of them from here, and command the line of escape by the river. The Body-guard can work round in that direction and charge across that open space as they string away to the city. I shall put half our riflemen here, and the others with the Maxim in that depression, towards which you assure me a *nullah* bed runs.'

'Excellent!' I agreed, but added, 'Won't it lose a little time and divide our small force into three parties?'

'True,' he replied; 'but I want to achieve both a rescue and a complete victory.'

'Quite so; but the garrison is in extremity,' I protested.

'The defence is good for an hour yet. Our people will fight it out inch by inch. Remember it is an Englishman and Sikhs against undisciplined men.'

'Many being *ghāzīs*,' I added, thinking of Melissa, and praying for her safety as I had never prayed in my life before.

There was nothing for me to do but to obey orders, and use my local knowledge. I was a civilian volunteer, and the fighting Colonel beside me knew his business.

We withdrew from the ridge, and going back, met the men panting up the hill. The new dispositions were quickly made, as Colonel Hay-Salter had determined. The officer in command of the Body-guard troop was ordered to dismount his men, and then leaving their horses under cover as near the low ground by the river as possible, to use his troopers as infantry until the moment came for them to mount and charge. Neither troopers on our extreme right nor the riflemen to whom the crest or central position had been assigned, were to pull a trigger until they heard firing begin from the left attack; in other words, from the dip, in the ridge nearest the Palace. If, as was probable, when that attack opened, the enemy fled *en masse* across the front of the central and right attacks, the officers commanding were to use their discretion whether or not to retain their fire until the fleeing crowds got hopelessly committed to that line of retreat.

Chapter XX

THE RELIEF OF THE GARDEN-HOUSE

ALL arrangements being made, the Colonel and I led the way to the left position. We walked together, but in point of fact I acted as guide. Whether it occurred to any one or not that it was curious that the Viceroy appeared to know the ground, never entered my head. The tension and nervous exaltation of the time probably overpowered thought in most of us. Anxiety to quickly rescue Melissa—or avenge her—was my only feeling. The prayer, 'Lord, save my sweet girl, save her, save her,' whether formulated into words or not, filled my heart and brain. The Colonel kept behind me, Forbes close to my side. At times I felt his eyes fixed speculatively on me. We none of us spoke. We dropped or stumbled into the *nullah*, and then picked our way up its stony bed until close to the gully or dip, which we had seen from the higher ground on our right.

The Maxim and its carriage were now unloaded from the mules, the parts put together, and the gun run forward into position; the men of the Rifle Brigade were meanwhile stringing out in line,

after which each advanced cautiously amongst the stones, and when in a spot which commanded the enemy's works, lay down ready to open fire when the order should be given.

'I'll give the Body-guard five minutes more. They have farthest to go,' said Colonel Hay-Salter to me, watch in hand.

'For God's sake, don't!' I protested.

He looked at me, and saw the agony on my face, and was about to say something, when at the instant his tongue was arrested by a hubbub of cries of 'Allah!' 'Allah!' and the sight of men in hundreds, leaping out from their cover, and converging at a frantic run towards the garden-house. At the same moment from every loophole on roof and second storey—the first was silent now—the crackle of rifle fire was heard, pouring pellets upon the surging masses below.

'Are you all ready?' shouted the Colonel calmly.

'Yes, sir,' was the simultaneous reply from his captain and the lieutenant in charge of the Maxim.

'Begin firing.'

Responsively the death-dealing hail began immediately to fall on the mad multitude about the entrance of the house. Almost immediately the shouts of 'Allah, Allah,' ceased, and the rush towards the house was arrested. The mass became motionless, impotent, benumbed from terror. They were falling in heaps and heaps, and none had yet seen whence destruction came. For the moment,

too, the garrison on the housetop ceased firing; then realizing that deliverance had come, a shout of joy was borne to us. We saw arms raised, and men dancing and embracing, as if gladness could madden as readily as terror could paralyze. Presently the defenders resumed their firing from the roof and second storey. Our fire had never ceased from the first discharge. The enemy by degrees comprehended that death sped wholesale on them from our direction, and, moved by a common impulse, began running frantically to our right in the direction of the river.

When well under our central attack, they were mowed down in scores from it. Helpless and leaderless they continued their blind rush towards the river, and presently came under the fire of the Body-guard.

As soon as the first movement for safety showed the Colonel that the stampede would be riverwards and he saw that his centre were biding their time, Forbes had been sent off to order the Body-guard to mount and charge the enemy as they streamed across the open. With him had gone, by permission, the Tent Club men, each keen to blood his trusty hog-spear in a *ghāṣī*.

'Keep the house and its surroundings clear,' was the Colonel's order to his riflemen. 'Watch the entrance; there must be a hundred or more inside still. The garrison will force them out; then shoot them down as they dribble away.'

The men did as they were ordered, and shot

down the *ghāzīs* as singly or in groups they rushed or stole away from the shambles inside.

'Keep the Maxim playing on the crowd as it moves; never mind scattered men,' was the next admonition.

In ten minutes from the first shot all was over. The ground about the house, and in the trail of the stampede, was a slaughter-yard filled with carcases. The garden was thickly sprinkled with dark, almost naked bodies.

'If you had ever seen,' said Colonel Hay-Salter to me, 'an army of young locusts in the creeping and hopping stage, after a train of kerosine oil has been flashed under them, that's what the place there reminds me of.'

'It's a ghastly sight,' I said; 'but can't we go to the house now?'

'Not yet. I don't want to lose a man if I can avoid it,' was the answer.

'But,' I urged, 'there are only the dead and wounded now between us and the house.'

'Yes, and shammers,' said he; 'and as long as a *ghāzī* can pull a trigger or strike with a *talwār*, or knife, he kills. The Sikhs will be out on them presently.'

He was right, for we saw thirty or more of the garrison with their long woman's hair streaming behind or about their heads, come out from the entrance, and begin clearing the ground in a deliberate and business-like way. They evidently acted under command. In parties of five or six

they moved about bayoneting or shooting every man they found with life enough left in him to be dangerous. This sickening but necessary work went on for some time.

The Maxim was meanwhile packed on to the backs of the mules, and our men were formed up, waiting impatiently to advance, when the Colonel touched me and said,—

'Look there by the river; our troopers are well in amongst them.'

I put my glasses up, and saw the troop going through and through the fleeing crowds.

'Good practice for the lance,' he observed at my ear.

'They are not keeping together enough, and I see two, three horses on the ground, hamstrung, I expect,' I said, still watching the scene.

'Yes,' said Colonel Hay-Salter, also sweeping the ground with his glasses. 'The troopers seem a little out of hand, but I can't see Forbes and his pig-stickers anywhere.'

'Nor I. He has six good men behind him,' I said, trying to persuade myself that he must be all right.

'Seven Englishmen on tired horses, if caught in a ruck of *ghāzīs*, will have a bad time of it,' was his comment as he shut his glasses.

He then told the lieutenant in charge of the Maxim to leave his gun to the sergeant, and hurry up to the central attack, and order the officer in command there to go with his Rifles to the succour

of Forbes, wherever he might be. Having done so, the Colonel began to move his men cautiously down the hillside towards the house. He showed wisdom, for as we neared the garden wall, a small band of the enemy sprang out from a water-course, and, *talwârs* in hand, charged up at us.

Looking back at his men, the Colonel sang out,—

'Steady! bayonets only, or you may hit the Sikhs in front of us.'

The leading *ghāzīs* were now upon us, two abreast only, as the pathway was narrow. The Colonel and I emptied our revolvers into them, and one man dropped, whilst two others staggered aside. This caused the six or seven others to waver. Whilst they hesitated, our men closed on them. Bayonets and *talwârs* met. The fanatics fought like wild cats, but were all killed, whilst several riflemen received sword-cuts, and one who was slow in withdrawing his bayonet from a fallen *ghāzī* was killed, his head being nearly severed from his trunk.

As we entered the garden enclosure, we were seen by the Sikh soldiers, who had been giving a quietus to the wounded and other *ghāzīs* lying about. Naked to the waist, with bayonets bloody and wind-swept hair loose, these splendid soldiers came rushing toward us, shouting, cheering, and capering with joy.

Their brothers-in-arms clustered on the roof caught the infection, and sent forth a succession of

hearty hurrahs. Presently the crowd up there fell apart, and ceased cheering, whilst the ladies came forward, and waved their handkerchiefs to us, and then the shouting began anew. I recognised Melissa and Jean, but they did not see me. They had as yet no knowledge that I was with their rescuers.

After allowing time for the glad excitement to subside, the Colonel ordered the Sikh Jemadar to form his men behind the Rifles, and pushing on, halted all just outside the house. He and I then clambered in, literally over heaps of bodies.

Inside, the place was a shambles, especially about the foot of the broken staircase, where hand-to-hand fighting had been severe. The atmosphere was fœtid and stifling, as the windows had been built up.

The first thing to be done was to admit light and air, and then have the dead removed. Whilst Colonel Hay-Salter was organizing fatigue parties and setting Sikhs and Britishers to work, I wandered round the house, hoping to discover some means of getting up to the first storey, or failing, to pick up information. I found a young Sikh who, having an arm disabled, had been excused from fatigue duty, though he had been fit enough to help in the gruesome work of giving the wounded besiegers their 'happy despatch' to paradise.

'How did we let the hogs in, sahib?' he said, repeating my question. 'Why, they were quite quiet for a night and a day after we had blown up the

tunnel, and last night also we heard no noise. We thought they were beaten, I suppose, and got careless, but suddenly, soon after the moon had set, there was a roar and a crash. There were only ten of us on duty in the ground floor, and by the time our eyes were open, and our senses collected, we were struggling in the dark with crowds of *ghāzīs*, who had forced themselves in through the broken door. We gradually drove them out, when our Subadar headed a sortie in force, and spiked three of the four "tiger-cubs," with which the door had been destroyed. They had silently in the darkness carried the cannons to a position facing the door. In the sortie our Subadar Sahib was wounded, and then there was confusion, and we all ran back to the house. These *ghāzīs* came in with us, and the Resident Sahib and every one fought on the stair.'

'Was the Resident Sahib wounded?' I asked.

'He was hurt, but he's not dead, I think, as the orders came from him to the last.'

'How did they seize the first floor as you succeeded in breaking down the stair?' was my next question.

'Well, sahib, we kept firing into the crowd below, but for one we killed five rushed in from outside, and suddenly we found we had no more cartridges left. When that happened, they swarmed up somehow, one mounting on another's shoulders. We were still fighting with the bayonet on the first floor when we heard the shouts of "Allah!" "Allah!"

outside, and then just as some of us began to feel that we were really in a tight place, the *ghāzīs* stopped fighting and began scrambling and dropping down the broken stair. Then we listened and heard cheering on the roof, and the harsh, rasping, continuous ba-r-r-r of the Maxim and the crackle of the new *gora-log* rifles, and that was all. When you stopped firing, the Jemadar Sahib took all who were fit to jump down outside with him, and—well, we cleared the ground of *badmāshes*.'

It was a plain, succinct account. I thanked the modest young sepoy, and asked him if he thought there was any way for me to get into the first floor, as the stair would not be passable for another hour.

'Yes, sahib, I'll manage it,' he replied, after a little consideration.

He then drew back some paces, and began shouting up to Sher Singh, Boata Singh and other singhs. When he had succeeded in attracting attention, he called out that the 'Doctor Sahib'—whom he assumed me to be—was in a hurry to attend to the wounded, and that if several of them tied their puggeries together, they could haul me up. I was soon safely drawn up, and standing in the little room in which I had first learnt to love Melissa. I asked where the Princess was, and they said upstairs. I ran up, and passing through an outer room, which seemed full of men lying on the floor, some asleep, some awake, but most of them ill or wounded, I lifted a *purdāh* and saw the loved one before me.

She was kneeling, attending to a handsome grey-bearded Sikh, about whose pallid and corpse-like face life seemed present only in the brown sympathetic eyes. They shone with an intensity of gratitude upon the beautiful girl bending over him. Beyond, and nearer the window upon a *charpoi*, or native bedstead, lay Byng, with his right arm and head bandaged. He too was pale, but his face was animated and its expression happy. His wife was sitting beside him talking eagerly, her manner that of one conveying glad news to a sufferer whom she loved.

All this I perceived at a glance. I advanced a few steps and said one word, 'Melissa.' She turned, rose, tottered forward, crying, 'Jack! Jack!' and in an instant the dear one was in my arms. For a moment or two we were all the world to each other; then we remembered the others. I looked round and saw Jean standing beside me, Byng sitting up in bed, and the grand old Subadar—who already knew me by sight—upright on his feet, saluting.

Blushing self-consciously, Melissa hurriedly disengaged herself, and retired to a window in shy yet happy distress. I now shook hands with Jean, and then noticing that the Subadar was ricketty on his legs, put an arm round him, and helped him to lie down again, praising his splendid gallantry, and saying that the Doctor Sahib would be upstairs as soon as he had attended to some of our own poor fellows.

I next went over to Byng's bedside, but whilst

trying to answer his shower of questions, had eyes only for Melissa. Jean was foolishly smiling and nodding to her, and thereby increasing her embarrassment. I felt at the moment angry with her, the woman of the world, for showing such a want of feeling towards my little flower of the jungle. I forgave her when presently she went to the window and whispered something to Melissa, which caused her to look up, and, though mantling crimson, show a glad, laughing face. The next moment Jean was kissing that glad little face, and the two, with arms intertwined, were seen crying from happiness and reaction.

An involuntary groan from the Subadar recalled us all to the realities of active duty. Melissa returned to her patient's side, whilst I, at Byng's suggestion, went off to bring the doctor. When he came, the old hero's wounds, which were serious, were carefully dressed, a bed was formed for him, and he was made comfortable.

Byng's hurts were next examined. He had been shot through the forearm, and had what was believed to be only a scalp wound from a sword cut. The Hospital Assistant with the escort, *vice* the Residency Assistant Surgeon (an Indian) disabled, had stopped the bleeding; and Byng declared that all he wanted to be fit again was a little more blood in his veins, and a plug in his head to make the constant buzzing cease.

When I went down to the ground floor, which was now presentable to the eye, though still often-

sive to the nose, I found Colonel Hay-Salter standing outside on the shady side of the house. Three litters were there, just brought in. He pointed to one of them, the curtains of which were open. A man's body lay in it, covered with gashes and blood. A glance told me it was Forbes, and that he was dead.

The poor boy's story was soon told. He had taken the Colonel's order to the Body-guard, and whilst impatiently waiting for them to mount and rejoin him, had noticed a small body of fugitives detach themselves from the crowd and make for a ravine. In their midst was a man on a white pony. Forbes, suspecting who he was, called out to the six Englishmen with him, 'That's the Sardar Sahib, you bet; are you game to capture him?'

'Yes,' was the unanimous answer.

'Come on, then,' he shouted, whirling his spear round his head, and away they dashed, Forbes leading.

They caught up their quarry, and the quarry fought desperately. They were real *ghāzīs*, these footmen, resolved to defend their master till death, and glorying in dying for the Faith, if only they could send some *kāfir* souls to hell before theirs went to paradise.

Forbes was first amongst them. He transfixed one, was surrounded, pulled off his horse, and struggling on foot was soon down, hacked by many swords. His avengers were a second or two behind him, and three of their spears went home. Then

ensued thrusting and slashing by horsemen and footmen for a little. Finally two or three of the latter ran, and when the *melée* was over, two Englishmen and eight *ghāsīs*, including their master, lay dead or dying on the ground. Meanwhile, the Body-guard had mounted and charged through the thickest of the crowd in the open ground, and not one of our troopers had seen the fight in which two gallant English boys had lost their lives.

When I had heard the story and gazed with good-bye sadness on all that remained of young Forbes, I turned to the third litter in which the supposed Sardar Sahib was lying bleeding to death, it was said, from a spear-wound. I lifted the curtain, and saw the face of the banished Abdul Hakk drawn and terror-stricken as I had seen it nearly five years before, when he thought that I had cut his throat.

'Yes, it is the man,' I said to Colonel Hay-Salter.

'Are you sure, sir, as you have never seen him before?' he inquired, surprised at my confidence.

'Yes,' I replied, 'I am sure.'

Then I stooped over the dying man and said softly, 'Sardar Sahib.'

He opened his eyes, stared, glared, shivered, half rose from his recumbent position, muttered in fright, 'The beardless *mullah* again!' and fell back dead.

'He died opportunely and cheated the gallows,' I remarked to Colonel Hay-Salter as we re-entered the house.

By this time news of the destruction of the

rebels and of the death of their nominal leader had spread far and wide, and citizens and villagers were eager to convince us that their paralysis was due to fear, not indifference. The town guilds sent us provisions in abundance, fuel for the burning of the dead Sikh soldiers, and large gangs of coolies for the burying of the Musalman dead. The villagers were equally active outside, hunting down, disarming, and killing or capturing the hundreds of foreigners, who, in small bodies and singly, were trying to escape from Sultànabad territory.

Whilst the dead were being turned over for identification or classification before burial, the body of a well-dressed high-caste Hindu was found lying beside the *sherbachcha*, which had not been spiked in the last sortie. Inquiry proved him to be a Mahratta Brahmin—a class amongst whom are to be found the ablest natives in India. He had taken service with the Sardar, just before India's agrarian troubles came to a head, and had easily gained a complete ascendancy over his master. The Brahmin was ambitious, too ambitious. His design was to excite the agriculturists into a general rising, and so bring about the overthrow of the British dominion in India. He found the weak, discontented Sardar a tool fitted to his purpose. He it was who had impressed the miners and discovered and used the *sherbachchas*. In fact, he was the master-spirit amongst the rebels. His hostility against the British Government dated from fifteen years back, when the Bombay Government

had declined to continue for another generation a life-*jāgīr* held by his late father. Since then he had been an active conspirator against the British dominion, and after joining the Sardar had planned the insurrection at Sultànabad, in the expectation that success there would be followed by insurrection elsewhere. It was a curious case, and when known, afforded a theme for political moralising in Indian and home journals.

During the afternoon the garden-house was evacuated, and the survivors of the garrison and the whole relief force comfortably settled in the Palace. In a day or two things in city and environs had returned to the old routine of quiet times, just as if the terrorism and topsy-turvydom of the late Sardar's brief lease of power had been a nightmare, forgotten as soon as daylight reappeared. The rapidity with which order displaced disorder was a gratifying proof that the administration of the Princess had been mild and popular.

Within a fortnight Sultànabad saw many changes. I was back at Delhi, and the Deputy Commissioner of that district was officiating as Resident, *vice* Byng, on sick leave at Simla. The Princess too was there, having accompanied the Byngs, as after the strain of that terrible week it was thought that Her Highness required rest from the cares of Government, and a complete change of scene. There were other reasons also of a private and confidential nature between Melissa and myself.

In that fortnight, too both the relieving force and the remnant of 'the illustrious one hundred'—as the *Pioneer* called them—had been replaced by a wing of the latter's regiment from Delhi, and suitable rewards had been recommended or sanctioned for both defenders and rescuers. Every survivor of the garrison was to be decorated and pecuniarily benefited by the grant of the order of merit; in addition their Subadar Wazir Singh was appointed Aide-de-camp to the Commander-in-Chief, and promised the title of 'Sardar Bahadar.' As to the troops engaged, a special medal was to be struck, inscribed 'Relief of Sultánabad, June, 1907,' for the relieving force. On that for the defenders the word 'defence' was to be substituted for 'relief.' A V.C. was recommended for the slain Forbes—a new departure, but he had earned it before his death, and his family would be pleased to see the coveted letters after his name on his tombstone and on the brass, which his friends would put up to his memory in his father's church in Aberdeen. As for Byng, he nobly deserved a K.C.B., and was recommended for it.

Chapter XXI

A LITTLE MIXED

THERE was hardly a district in Bengal, Upper or Central India, which had not contributed recruits to the Holy war in Sultànabad. It was a Holy war, because the wily Brahmin who had planned it had persuaded his dupes that they were fighting to wrest the leading Musalman State in India from the hands of a pervert Princess, the creature of the rapacious English Government. That infidel power had despoiled the Hindu and Musalman peasant-farmers of India of their ancestral lands, and was now about to destroy the last vestiges of independence left to the native states. The appeal to fanaticism had been strengthened by the promise of reward and well-paid employment as soon as Sultànabad was again a self-governing and practically independent State.

Misled by such inducements, needy adventurers, fanatics, and malcontents had for months preceding the outbreak been concentrating from all parts of the peninsula on Sultànabad. Then came the

seizure of the sham Sardar, the siege, and the rescue, with the bloody collapse of the rebellion.

That a handful of English and Sikh infidels should have surprised, crushed, and almost annihilated many thousands of self-styled *ghāzīs* was a revelation of impotence terrifying to traitorous schemers throughout India. That the Musalman peasants of a Musalman State should have not only refused asylum to their beaten co-religionists, but even massacred them, brought home to all intelligent men that incitement to rebellion, even though the appeal be to the fanatical element latent in every uneducated Moslem, will not rouse contented village communities against an existing order of things. Most of the grievances of agriculturists throughout British India against the preposterous system, which had nearly enslaved them, had either been temporarily redressed by the orders in Council already referred to, or by the promise of relief-measures which had been made. As the people believed in me and my Government, it now seemed that the lesson to rebels inflicted at Sultānabad would require no repetition. Thus before a month had passed since the rebel gathering had been so signally crushed, district reports showed a great improvement in the general situation. The working classes—the masses—were distinctly less discontented and more hopeful than they had been for many years, and well they might be, as their debts to money-lenders and other middle-men were for the present irrecoverable by legal process; but

the creditor classes were incensed and plotting against my Government. Now these latter classes were chiefly Hindu usurers, the majority of whom had acquired land as mortgagees or purchasers, and were dependent on the law alone for the realization of their rents.

These men, and the great army of pleaders, touts, and scribes of all sorts, whose incomes were derived from litigation between lenders and agricultural debtors, represented what 'young India' was pleased to term 'the wealth and intelligence of the nation.' They had long purses and excellent organizations, and had at once begun to use both, with the object of putting pressure on the Government to rescind the obnoxious ordinances, and restore the *status quo*. They soon perceived that their machinations would be fruitless unless they could succeed in inducing the agricultural masses to join them. They therefore concentrated all their energies upon trying to bring about a great pan-Hindu combination—a combination which appeared to myself and my advisers unlikely, if not impracticable, because the immediate interests of rural debtors and urban creditors were diametrically opposed to each other, and because to-morrow is the limit of mental vision for all Indian rustics, Hindu as well as Musalman.

The monsoon had now burst, and harvest prospects were favourable; so after carefully considering the political outlook for the rest of the hot weather, I came to the conclusion that my presence in the

plains was no longer required. Having, I considered, earned a holiday, I naturally decided to go up to Simla.

There officials and others turned out *en masse* to welcome the Viceroy, whom flatterers had already begun to hail as 'the Saviour of India.' I was gratified by the enthusiasm of my friends and admirers. Hitherto I had puzzled people, dazzled them even by performances really due to my experiences as Jack Ravenhill—performances which scores of young English officers, with like opportunities, would have done equally well, or perhaps better. But though knowledge of my past as Cecil Ravenhill, Earl of Severn, had caused men to wonder at my all-round skill in sport, my facile command of Persian and Hindustani, and my masterful ways, judgment had been hitherto generally suspended on my political sagacity and prudence as Viceroy. Now, however, the verdict promised to be wholly in my favour. Success was compelling all men to believe in me. My enemies even, if I had any, could not deny that my bold and extraordinary measures were pacifying British India, and that feudal India had already accepted me as a Viceroy to be both loved and feared.

But, gratifying though it was to have gained the confidence of British officials, great feudatories, and in some sense of the dull-witted agriculturists, my heart was sad within me when I entered India's summer capital that August morning. I should be alone and lonely in that lordly residence, misnamed,

with 'the pride that apes humility,' Vicercgal Lodge. To be near my love, yet separated from her, was maddening. I was like a parched traveller in a desert, within sight of water, yet held back from reaching it. To work all day in conjunction with comparatively elderly men. whom I respected or tolerated, but could not care for as companions, would have been endurable if with night came the reward of my long penance—the tender exchange between loving eyes, the sound of a sweet, soothing voice, the touch of a soft, responsive hand. But all that was denied me. An impassable barrier, in the form of a time-honoured code of strict conventions —to say nothing of the long gauntlet of a watchful, censorious mall—lay between me and Melissa.

As I paced my room that first night at Simla, and thought of the emptiness of my great position, unless warmed and relieved in private by the presence of her I loved, I envied Jack Ravenhill his happy days at Sultànabad. I envied him as Viceroy during those anxious weeks at Calcutta, when his cares were made easier by the part he had played in the love-story of Jean and Peter, to both of whom he was sincerely attached. I envied him the excitement of his recent Sultànabad adventure, culminating in that one short foretaste of bliss when his arms were round his Melissa. And so thinking of the past, my mind reverted, as it often did, to the image of my slaughtered friend, the gallant young Forbes, as he lay hacked and blood-stained in that litter outside the garden-house.

Poor boy, he had nearly read my secret before he died. He was gone, and of those remaining who were dear to me, none would now live with me, none would warm or brighten for me the vast rooms of the great Government pile of building in which I dwelt. Byng was still bed-ridden from his wounds, Jean Vincent was his wife and nurse, and Melissa—my Lis—was their guest, whom convention would not permit me to visit or receive in my house except perhaps as one of a crowd.

I had lived, it is true, but now I was as one dead. I was glued to the top of a ridge for the next three months—alone—alone—unable to eat, sleep, ride, or walk without my every word and deed being commented on and criticised by an army of well-disciplined officials and their wives and daughters. How much more scandalised they would all be, I thought, in my bitterness, were I, the King-Emperor's representative and chief official in the Empire, to occasionally drop in as an ordinary visitor at Northwood, where the Byngs lived, than if I were to give a fat appointment to every ne'er-do-well youngster in their families. Such a bestowal of patronage would be the vicarious reward of conspicuous merit—conspicuous for the most part in Calcutta and Simla on paper only—whilst the former would be so derogatory, so discreditable, so liable to immoral construction, 'quite too-too-naughty, you know,' and so forth. I argued the case out with myself, and naturally decided to have my own way. And why not? After all, I

was Vicéroy. I had already disregarded precedent in affairs of State, and why should I not do so in an affair of the heart? When not on an office chair or at a State dinner or reception, I had always prided myself on being an ordinary Englishman. So inclination weighed down the scale, and, scandal or no scandal, I decided to be the friend of my friends, and marry Melissa.

Next morning I told the aide-de-camp on duty that I was going for a stroll by myself, and would probably breakfast with the Byngs at Northwood.

The day was Tuesday, August 3rd, and the custom, since Lord Canning, the first Viceroy, had started the practice, was that on the first Tuesday of each month the Viceroy granted interviews from 10 a.m. to noon to certain high officers of Government and others. My going out alone, and for the purpose stated, was unprecedented, but my absence from home on that particular morning was an outrage on custom. However, the well-disciplined aide-de-camp, to whom I had made my announcement, suppressed his surprise, and said, 'Very well, sir. Shall callers be asked to wait?'

'By no means. Simply tell them where I have gone,' I replied, hurrying out.

Once through the gates I felt free and elated, like a schoolboy larking out of bounds, inclined rather to run than walk, to sing than keep silent. I noticed nobody and nothing until I found myself at the door of Northwood. As I passed the bow-window of the dining-room, I saw that Jean and

another lady, whose back was towards me, were seated at breakfast. Byng was not in the room with them. At the door the orderly—who knew me by sight—salamed low, and then rushed off to the dining-room, and excitedly informed his Lady Sahib that 'the Calcuttawâla Barā Lord Sahib' was outside.

Hearing the news, Jean ran—I might almost have written danced—to the door, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, and her hand welcoming me to the house.

'Don't tell me you have come to see us,' she said, chaffing already. 'It's Melissa you want. You'll find her changed, and she won't call you Jack this time—at least, not before us.'

'If she does I shan't object,' I said, calmly indifferent to the innuendo. 'She is Queen, and likes me as Jack better than Cecil. Jack has been her ideal name for a hero since babyhood, ever since she heard of "Jack the Giant-Killer."'

Jean threw a puzzled, curious look at me, and led the way into the breakfast-room, which was also the dining-room. As I entered, she said to the lady with her back to the window, 'I think you two have met before, so no introduction is required.'

The lady rose, glowing like a blush-rose, and turned nervously towards me. It was Melissa, but transformed, anglicised, and almost unrecognisable. I had ever known her as the Princess Melissa, a fair-complexioned but dark-haired Eastern girl, draped in lightest silk or finest muslin, unshackled, uncorsetted, with the divinity of grace-

ful figuré which God, the first Artist, bestows on His greatest work, a beautiful woman—a divinity conspicuous in every pose and movement of her lithe and sinuous form. Instead of the Melissa I knew and loved, there stood before me a Miss Melissa, a perfectly frocked and lovely *à la mode* young lady, disfigured by corset, puffed sleeves, square-cut shoulders, and all the angles, compressions, and excrescences which concealed nature's curves and went to make up the conventional lines of fashion of 1908. She read surprise, mixed with irrepressible disappointment, on my face, and said timidly, as we shook hands, 'I dislike it all, Cecil, but Jean made me do it.'

'Cecil, is it?' laughed Jean. 'Well, Cecil will advance with you. At Sultànabad he was a prostrate idolater; here he will be an aggressive flesh-and-blood lover.'

We both laughed a little awkwardly, uncomfortable from a fluttering consciousness of the situation, and then sedately sat down to breakfast. We were in the conventional world, and must, in public at least, try to conform to most of its canons. I was speedily consoled, for a sly study of Melissa's face showed that it was unchanged, and soon her tender eyes began to exchange secret signals with mine, which none but we two could read—at least, we thought so.

We chatted through the meal. Yes, Peter was getting better—Sir Peter, was it now? Of course it was. He had got his K.C.B. He was still weak,

and his head could not stand much work yet. He would see me after breakfast? No, not before 10.30, as his wife had business with him till then. She hoped I should not be bored by waiting, but possibly Melissa could entertain me for half an hour; that young lady had a charming little boudoir of her own. I should there see some drawings and paintings of hers; they were very promising; in fact, since Melissa had consented to anglicise herself, she had developed so many talents that in a year or two she would be quite an accomplished woman, but of course if she returned to her Indian jungle she would degenerate, and might there develop into a typical Eastern queen, instead of shining in Simla, and later in town, as the bright particular star of the East that had travelled out of its orbit and had subdued by superior effulgence all the lesser stars of the West.

Breakfast over, Jean—now Lady Byng—rose, and, making me a sweeping curtsy, said that whilst she was away preparing Sir Peter for the honour of a visit from His Excellency, she left my entertainment to Miss Melissa.

When she had gone, Melissa turned to me shyly, almost helplessly. I said softly, 'Little Lis.' She answered with 'Jack.' Then we both laughed, and were soon exchanging confidences. We mutually agreed that we hated society, and getting old, and English clothes and all that, and wished we could put back the clock, and be boy and girl again in her 'little room upstairs' at Sultànabad.

After that we bridged time in earnest, and 'pretending,' as children say, we went off, hand in hand, to her 'little room downstairs.' As she moved away, I was half-reconciled to her adoption of English costume. After all, art could make a charming woman more fascinating to the eye, though straight shoulders were an offence.

Chatting in her own room, Melissa was soon her old buoyant, loving self again. My half-hour there was sacred. In those thirty minutes we no doubt talked a great deal of nonsense, and sealed our vows as lovers do, only no pair ever did love so quite, quite intensely as we did; of that we were certain. Before I left she promised to be my wife, provided that her people and the Islamic world generally would consent to her marrying out of the Faith. She confessed she was at heart more Christian than Moslem, but she could not forget her duty as hereditary ruler of a great Moslem State. Her scruples did her honour, but I was consoled by the knowledge that when a woman loves, scruples sooner or later vanish, if a choice between love and duty become imperative.

Whilst we were still talking, Jean came back, and found us both seated yards apart. We said nothing, but she must have perceived a lustre in our eyes, a flush on our cheeks, and an elation in my voice at least which satisfied her that the Simla dressmakers would soon have a trousseau to prepare.

'And what do you think of the new style now,

after half an hour's study of it?' Jean asked me, pretty confident beforehand of an appreciative answer.

'Art,' I admitted, with sententious generosity, 'may have added distinction to Melissa's beauty, but could not have enhanced it.'

They then took me into Byng's room. He was lying on a couch, looking thin and languid, but he brightened on seeing us, and said he would be fit enough but for his head, which was still dazed and confused. After a short chat I returned to Viceregal Lodge in time to receive all but the earliest callers.

Next day I repeated my visit to Northwood, and soon fell into the habit of making a daily call there. Simla noticed, and Simla talked. The matrons shook their heads, and pitied that 'poor, dear, invalid husband of Lady Byng,' whilst the less suspicious and more romantic maidens knew better: they said it was the 'pretty little Indian girl who had captured the heart of the great Viceroy.' Neither Melissa nor I cared. We were considering our own plans. Following Miss H——'s sage advice, we had determined to refer the question on which our happiness depended to the Musalmans of India themselves. It was a bold and novel project, but, if well engineered, was certain to succeed.

Chapter XXII

'OMNIA VINCIT AMOR'

HAVING matured my plans, I thought it prudent to sound my Executive Council on the subject. Accordingly, I one day told them at an informal meeting, at which, by the way, neither the Chief nor the Financial Member was present, that I was contemplating matrimony.

'A most holy and blessed state,' said Mr. Albert Jones, the little legal member, solemnly thinking of his own domestic felicity.

'I congratulate you, sir,' said another. 'Her Excellency will add an *éclat*, and—and—finish to the Viceregal entertainments which—which——'

'They have hitherto lacked, perhaps,' I remarked, frowning at him as I finished the blunderer's sentence.

'As you have admitted us so far into your confidence, sir,' interposed Mr. Jones, 'is it permissible to ask who the lady is?'

'Certainly,' I replied promptly; 'the lady is the Princess Melissa of Sultànabad.'

This simple announcement seemed to hypnotise my honourable colleagues. Animation was suspended. Not one of the members had the wit or

readiness to make a remark, however banal. I knew what was passing in their minds. Had the lady been some unknown Miss Arabella Smith, of Cardiff, their tongues would have been active with compliments and good wishes; but as she was a so-called Indian, and a Musalmani to boot, their vulgar prejudices about race and religion were shocked. And who were they? Why, some were *parvenus*, self-made men, and few of them could trace descent from a gentleman for four generations, but my blue-blooded Melissa carried hers back in unspotted succession for 400 years to the great Baber himself. Then as to religion, Melissa believed in God, as a good Musalmani does, and was, so believing, nearer God than most of the tepid Christians or cynical agnostics who make up the *sahib log* in India.

I lit a cigarette, and lay back in my chair in scornful enjoyment of the silent helplessness of these worthy colleagues of mine.

At this juncture my friend, Sir Power Oliphant, the Commander-in-Chief, came in, and I turned with relief to him, and told him of my intention. The old man's face lit up with genuine pleasure; he shook hands with me warmly, and said that he congratulated me from the bottom of his heart. Had I ransacked all Europe and Asia, I could not have found a nobler, more refined, or more beautiful woman. The others listened, and having now received their cue, offered me their tardy and clumsy felicitations.

I then explained that the reason why I had informed them of the fact of my engagement to the Princess was, that there were difficulties which must be removed before a marriage between Her Highness and myself could take place, and I hoped that the step I was about to take in order to overcome these obstacles would meet with their concurrence

'You all know,' I continued, 'the critical state of this Empire, and that although for the present agricultural India is quiet—thanks to a good monsoon, a late incident at Sultànabad, and our recent ordinances—a pan-Hindu agitation is making headway. To permanently pacify this continent, the handful of English sojourners who rule it must regain the confidence of all classes in India, both Hindu and Musalman, peasant-farmers, and that influential body of citizens who call themselves "the representatives of the wealth and intelligence" of the country. By the measures which I am about to announce to you, I hope—in addition to securing my own happiness—to divert public attention from seditious plottings, and concentrate it on questions the solution of which will add solidity to the Empire.

'These measures are two. I propose first to summon the wisest and most influential Moslems in India to a conference at Delhi, and to submit for their consideration the question of my marriage with the Princess of Sultànabad. They will, I have reason to know, after long discussion, unani-

mously decide that such an union will consolidate the two "peoples of the book," tend to the glory of God, and to the material benefit of the faithful of India, provided that two ceremonies are performed, one in accordance with their own, and the other in accordance with our rites. Their finding will impress the organisers of the pan-Hindu agitation with the hopelessness of their movement; hence they will be ready to seek a reconciliation both with Government and their Musalman fellow-subjects.

'Seizing the opportunity, I propose, as soon as my marriage has been celebrated, to assemble the men of light and leading of the Empire—Hindus at Benares, and Musalmans at Delhi—to consider and advise us on the Agricultural Relief and Land Revenue Bills, which are being drafted. And here, too, I have reason to expect that both parties will in principle, though perhaps suggesting useful amendments in details, readily accept our proposals. I am sanguine that by the simplification and adjustment of our civil justice and revenue systems to the necessities and comprehensions of the masses harmony and confidence will be restored. When the issues are fairly examined and hastily formed opinions subjected to the light of deliberate reason, the creditor classes, who are now futilely conspiring and agitating, will realize that our projected reforms will benefit them as well as agriculturists. They will recognise that security of life and property cannot rest as at present on

coercion through police and law-courts, but must depend on the restoration of mutual good-will and honest dealing between lenders and borrowers—a relationship which our complicated technical English system has destroyed.'

This speech was received with marks of general approval, and was followed by a whispered confabulation between several of my councillors, who were now anxious to atone for their late coldness. Mr. Albert Jones, speaking for himself and his colleagues, remarked that he thought that the proposed marriage concerned the two high contracting parties alone, and that, in consulting the Moslem community, an unnecessary compliment was being paid to them.

'The object is twofold,' I explained: 'to overcome Her Highness' personal scruples, and to conciliate Musalman opinion generally.'

'Quite so, sir. I express, I am sure, the mind of my colleagues,' said Mr. Jones, looking round the table, 'when I say that your intention is laudable and statesmanlike. There is, however, a point of law to which I would draw attention. By the *nikáh*, or Musalman rite, you will be entitled to marry two more wives, whereas by the Christian rite monogamy is the law. Which system will be legally binding on you?'

'Why,' I said, laughing, 'the strictest rules under both will bind me concurrently. Most Musalmans, I may observe, find, as we do, one wife at a time sufficient.'

Thereupon the legal member subsided, but was understood to say that the point of law involved would remain doubtful until a test case should be heard and fought up to the judicial committee of the Privy Council.

Upon the wisdom of consulting the people themselves on the provisions of the relief measures then in preparation, the Council was unanimous. It was recognised that, as drastic and revolutionary changes in law and system had become necessary, the nearer such changes should approximate to popular ideas of equity, the more satisfactory would be the results. The principle hitherto governing economic legislation in India, that whatever laws were good for Englishmen were, *ipso facto*, equally good for Asiatics, was now, after a century of blundering, to be reversed. We were about to legislate on Indian lines for the Indian peoples, and the way to avoid a further series of mistakes was to frame laws for their governance on lines approved by their best selves, as most suitable for their requirements, capacities, and present and future interests.

The proclamation announcing the summoning of all the wisest and most learned Musalmans in India to a council to be held in Delhi was brief but clear. It stated that his Excellency the Viceroy sought in marriage the hand of the Princess Melissa of Sultànabad, and that Her Highness had declined the proposed honour unless first assured that the marriage would be not only lawful

by *Shariat*, but approved by her co-religionists. His Excellency had therefore resolved to refer the question to the decision of the Kâzis, Akhunds, and Uluma, of British India.

Though the proclamation was short and business-like, the subject afforded the whole vernacular press of India, Hindu as well as Musalman, an inexhaustible mine for leading articles and descriptive incidents.

The romance of the love-story of Viceroy and Princess, as they called it, embellished as it was by imaginary episodes and thrilling accounts of the rescue of Her Highness by His Excellency, appealed to the popular mind. Musalman journals reviewed my doings as Viceroy, and flatteringly summed me up as a Rustum for bravery, a Nowsherwan for justice, a Nimrod for sport, and a Solomon for wisdom and love, the latter quality being concentrated on one instead of 900 fair ladies. On the other hand, Hindu writers likened 'His Excellency' to their god Krishna, and the rescue of the Princess from the Sardar Sahib, to Rámá's deliverance of Sîta from the clutches of the monkey-god Ravaná.

The way the subject 'caught on' was evidenced by the enormous increase in the circulation of all vernacular newspapers, and in the relegation of discussions on grievances, acts of 'white man's' injustice, and war news to corners or quarter-columns in their interior pages.

The theme, too, excited the imagination of scores

of native poets, and we sometimes laughed, but more often blushed, over the warmth of the outpourings, which reached us in every tongue spoken in India as well as in classic Sanskrit and Arabic. The productions adjudged by us the most superior were naturally some of those in Persian, which mellifluous and liquid language lends itself to erotic versification; but it must be owned that both Melissa and I had already read very much the same rhapsodies and similes in the poems of the divine love-dreamer Hafiz and the moralizing Shekh Sâdi.

So far as popular opinion went, the cause was won before it came on for hearing at Delhi. There was some delay in the opening of the session there. The selection of judges was a matter of difficulty, so keen was the competition. If London contains not fewer than two thousand remarkable persons, each worthy of a notice in 'Men of the Time,' India was found to possess at least 20,000 men of light and leading, each of whom considered himself, and was, in the judgment of his friends and followers, fit to be one of the illustrious 670—the number fixed upon, because that is the number of members in the House of Commons. These Indian M.P.'s were to be empowered to condemn Viceroy and Princess to the misery of perpetual celibacy, or to raise them to the ninth heaven by sanctioning their union. The authority conferred upon them was therefore a most honourable and onerous responsibility. Preliminary difficulties were over-

come by a judicious resort to a mixture of contrivances, all designed to impress fatalists with the belief that fate (*kismat*) had decided the choice. No Moslem can object to a decision arrived at by drawing lots, therefore so soon as, for any given election-circle, a number of pretty evenly-balanced candidates had been obtained, lots decided the question of selection amongst them.

Amongst the 670 members of this Moslem Parliament, the inclusion of a certain number of able and eloquent men devoted to our cause had been arranged. Thus, no time was wasted in discussing preliminary points, as, for instance, procedure, length of individual speeches, reporting, and the like. Serious discussion began within a week of the first sitting, and never since the days of the early Caliphs have been heard from the lips of human beings greater erudition, legal acumen and subtlety in differentiating shades of meaning to be drawn from text and traditions. The speeches delivered, the fencing over points, and the extraordinary power of research displayed, proved to listening India that Islam was not effete, but, on the contrary, that the Musalmans of our great dependency possessed powers of debating, of exciting themselves over issues of no importance, of sitting up all night, and generally of exuberant verbosity, far superior to those of British Members of Parliaments in the days when Irish questions obstructed all useful legislation for England, Scotland, and Wales.

The quarrel which distracted Christendom for two centuries as to how many angels could stand at one time on the point of a needle, was a squabble amongst children compared with the voluble acerbity with which these Moslem gentlemen fought over the knotty question as to whether, when my marriage ceremony was being performed, according to their rites, I should utter the responses personally, or through a sponsor.

The argument which convinced these learned men that I was a minor was that, as at my wedding I should only be a presumptive Musalman of a few hours' standing, I should therefore in the eye of the law be an infant, and as such incompetent to personally take vows on myself. Eventually, the great disputation ended as had been planned and expected. These accomplished doctors of the law and divinity unanimously recorded a finding that a marriage between myself and the Princess was lawful by *Shariat*, provided that it was first conducted according to the prescribed Musalman ritual, after which Christian rites were immaterial. A rider was attached to the effect that the marriage would be 'a meritorious action' (*sawâl*) if the Princess commemorated it by erecting and endowing in Delhi a small white-marble mosque, to be known to future ages as 'the chapel of the Union.'

It was October before the Delhi proceedings terminated, and a copy of the *fatwa* or *Shariat* decision was delivered to each of us.

In recognition of the eminent services rendered

to the Empire on that occasion by the Moslem delegates, I ordered a gold medal to be struck with a fitting inscription thereon in Arabic and Persian. Each one of the gentlemen who took part in the conference was subsequently presented with the medal and a *savad* or diploma, which conferred on him the life-title of 'Imperial Councillor,' carrying with it the personal privileges of travelling on all State railways by 'Intermediate' class at third-class fare, and elevating those who were not already Darbaris to the dignity of being chair-sitters instead of carpet-sitters.

The success of that Delhi session was undoubted. Personally, it gave me happiness, for it sealed Melissa to me, and caused her to look upon herself as my affianced bride. Politically, it diverted for some months, at a critical time, all minds in India from dangerous subjects, and concentrated attention on a little romance in the private lives of two public characters. Then, by its 'touch of nature' it drew together in a common kinship Englishmen and Musalmans—the two masterful races of India—and helped to consolidate, as the delegates had put it, 'the two peoples of the book.' Further, it brought home to all wealthy and educated Hindu malcontents, throughout the length and breadth of the peninsula, their own impotence in the face of such a combination.

With educated India either enthusiastically loyal or anxious for reconciliation, and the masses quiet,

if not actually contented, owing to a good harvest and freedom from legal processes, the time was opportune for consulting the people on the relief measures which my Government had been preparing during the preceding six months.

In order to ascertain the trend of agricultural opinion on the Government proposals before their submission to the great assemblies of representatives, which would sit at Delhi and Benares, extensive preliminary inquiries had been made by the different local Governments. With a view to elicit expressions of opinion, draft bills with clear explanations of objects and reasons had been prepared, and copies sent by the hundred to all district officers, local boards, municipal committees, newspaper editors, and even the head-men of every village. The freest and fullest discussion and criticisms were invited, and every possible means taken to discover the views of all classes of men, from illiterate self-cultivating peasants to great hereditary landlords and city-bankers.

One fact elicited by these inquiries was a serious blow to the legal member of Council, and might have caused him to resign his high office, but that his ambitious wife would not let him retire until he had been knighted and she consequently made a lady. That fact was that a large minority of debtors and creditors, relieved from all incentives to chicanery and dishonesty by the closure of the Civil Courts, were everywhere reverting to the old sanctions, under which their forefathers had thriven

—when times were settled—for ages stretching back into a pre-historic period. Many agricultural debtors were already voluntarily paying reasonable interest on their just debts: usufructuary money-lending mortgagees were putting in the mortgagor owners, either as occupancy tenants or as long-term lessees, with prospective redemption after so many years of servitude. Many non-agriculturist purchasers even, unable to obtain paying tenants owing to a boycott system learnt from English agitators, had been coming to terms with the late owners or some of their moneyed relations.

Of course the return to honest dealing and mutual accommodation between the above classes was only beginning. Our well-intentioned but unsuitable laws had changed the human units which formerly composed the village communities into individual antagonists ruled by the law-courts alone. The suspension of the sittings of these law-courts, and the consequent conversion of the legal compulsion to perform the letter of the written contract into a mere moral obligation to do what public opinion regarded as equitable, had already induced about ten per cent. of the village debtors and creditors to come to reasonable terms with each other. It was a fair presumption that, in time, all but irreconcilables would follow suit, once both sides were convinced that the old governmental pernicious system would not be revived.

The establishment of these facts, the discovery that rural India would have been happier and

honester, and the fruits of the earth more equally distributed, but for the misguided activity of the Indian legislature, was a painful revelation to all bureaucratic minds. And the pity of it was that by no special pleading or refinement of subtle argument could the fundamental error of the law system be controverted. That error was that the system was built up on the wholly absurd assumption, that stupid, bestial ploughmen, shepherds, and village-menials were all educated members of a purely commercial community.

Well, the time was ripe for an expiatory act of governmental renunciation, the throwing over of a great part of the existing laws and institutions, and the substitution for them of simple protective and restrictive laws adapted to the mental darkness of the needy peasant millions, whose business intelligences and notions of thrift were not much higher than those of their plough-oxen.

All arrangements being well in train for the meeting of the agricultural-relief assemblies at the two appointed centres early in December—the beginning of the idlest season for Indian farmers—Melissa and I had leisure to come to a decision about our own affairs. The time, place, and manner of our marriage had to be settled.

Naturally I was all impatience, and she procrastination. Our present relationship was delightful; she was studying hard to fit herself for her new duties. Then why not be happy as we were? I saw her daily, in her little boudoir too. I kissed her as

often as was good for me, and in my calmer intervals we talked over our secrets of the past and our plans for the future. Then why not leave well alone. What more could I want?

'You, Lis, you, all to myself,' I answered, with a lover's selfish intensity.

'But you have me, sir, already, far more to yourself than were I Her Excellency, and a prominent piece of State furniture,' she protested, pushing me from her, and pouting provokingly. I caught her hands in mine, and faced her, but she went on: 'You have your work to attend to, and for play I let you make love to me. Surely that is enough?'

'But I don't want to make love now. I want to have love itself—there—there—there,' I cried, throwing my arms about her and reddening her lips with the pressure of mine.

She disengaged herself gently, and said with a sigh: 'I don't understand your vehemence, Cecil. Why, you are panting and flushing as if you had been running up Jacko.'

'Naturally, when trying to make fire out of ice,' I said, looking as she thought dangerous again.

'Don't, Cecil, please,' she pleaded, 'and, for the sake of peace, I'll let you marry me as soon as you like, if you promise that ever afterwards you will restrain your emotions.'

'Of course, darling,' I promised gladly, ready to forswear my own soul had she demanded it.

We then sealed the compact by a draught of long-drawn sweetness, and when we had both be-

come quite rational, we settled place and manner in a business-like way. We decided that, being conspicuous public characters, and what little was known of our love-story having appealed so powerfully to the romanticism of the people of India, we must be married at Delhi, and have the event celebrated by a general holiday and public rejoicings.

Of the two ceremonies the Moslem rite was simpler, quieter, and more delicately considerate to the bride's feelings than the coarseness and pageantry of the observances considered necessary by Christians. During the former, Melissa remained in the seclusion of her own room, being represented by proxy, whilst I, having been declared to be a legal infant, stood as a lay-figure, my *vakîl*, or sponsor, answering for me. The *nikâh* over, we were subjected to a brilliant but painful ordeal in church, which concluded with an unnecessary exhortation from the good Bishop of Calcutta. We then had to face the forced hilarity of the wedding feast, and the roughness of the rice-and-slipper bombardment.

At last we two, man and wife now, were alone, speeding towards Kalka, *en route* for Simla, where we had arranged to spend a brief honeymoon.

When the last hand-grip had been exchanged —it was only with Byng—the last good wishes spoken, and the last cheer, as the train moved out of the station, had made its glass roof ring, I pulled up the windows and turned to Lis—my

wife. She was in tears, sitting in a corner of the carriage. I flew to her, and whilst we held each other close, said, 'At last, at last, my love.'

'Oh, Cecil, how I hated it all!' she sobbed as her sweet body shook hysterically in my arms, her dark tear-bedewed eyes fixed on me almost reproachfully.

'I know it was hateful,' I said, soothing her; 'but it's over now. Why, to-morrow we shall be in Simla, and have it all to ourselves.'

'No more love-making now?' she asked gently, with the shy curiosity of the two hours bride.

'No, sweetheart, it's loving now,' was my answer.

It was the end of the first week in November, and Simla was deserted, clear, cold, and glorious. Officials had returned to the plains, and the nearest of the few winter-residents lived quite two miles away from that Indian Windsor Castle yclept Viceregal Lodge.

These few days of careless happiness were one daily, hourly bewilderment of love for me—a life's ecstasy compressed into a brief week. At first I marvelled at the absoluteness of my wife's sweet self-surrender, but as the days sped, I marvelled more and more at her ever-deepening tenderness. That foretaste of heaven upon earth was all too short, for our honeymoon was soon ended. The morning on which we left, just before starting, Lis clung to me long and fondly, oh so fondly, and in the low dear tones which always thrilled me,

said: 'I know what love is now. I have lived on love for seven days.'

I was standing beside her at the time. The sorrow in her heart was reflected in the tearful regret of her eyes. I guessed what was passing in the little woman's mind—our holiday was over· return to the business of life below meant separation, pre-occupation, the starvation of love.

I stooped and said softly to her, 'Sweetheart, our "earthly Paradise" is only beginning.'

> 'Look up, love,—ah, cling close and never move!
> How can I have enough of life and love?'

'Thank you, Cecil,' she whispered, holding her lips to mine, 'but all the same, I shall begin my duties as your real helpmate to-morrow.'

Chapter XXIII

THE GREAT WAR OF 1907–8

TO-MORROW? Yes, next day we were back in the work-a-day world, items in the middle of a great camp at Umballa, shortly to move slowly North-west to Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar. Yesterday we were young lovers, crowding into our last hours, amidst the silence of our beautiful mountain resting-place, all the joys which God can confer on man and woman. To-day we were busy functionaries, mere State property. Whilst Melissa was receiving and modestly replying to the congratulations showering upon her, I was reading despatches, reports and home-papers, and discussing affairs with colleagues and secretaries.

During the last two months the situation in both the European and Afghan theatres of war had developed considerably, and by the time we reached Lahore early in January, 1908, decisive events in Kabul appeared imminent.

In Europe the Franco-Russian fleet had suffered severely in an engagement begun off Biserta and ended under the guns of the forts protecting the entrance of the Toulon harbour. The allied fleet

had been closely blockaded by us for some months in Biserta, owing to which the enemy's coal supplies had fallen low. Inaction, too, had preyed upon the mercurial temperaments of the French sailors Some cases of insubordination had been punished with death, and the sentences, instead of improving discipline, had almost led to a mutiny. Close association with many thousands of Frenchmen, all suffering from *ennui*, all sighing for their cafés and sweethearts in 'la belle France,' and every one of them an ardent politician and potential President of the Republic, had infected the usually obedient, uncomplaining Russians with a desire for some of the 'liberty, fraternity and equality' enjoyed by their allies.

To improve the temper of the men, and replenish supplies, the blockaded admirals decided to make a dash for Toulon. Our information was good, but the night selected for running the gauntlet of our fleet was dark and rainy. Luck was with the Russians, whose squadron reached Toulon in safety. But the French fared badly. Their fleet was intercepted. Throughout the night our numerous 'racing bull-dogs'—as the improvement on the old torpedo-boat destroyers were vulgarly called—badgered and impeded the slower-steaming French battleships. At dawn a running desultory fight began, lasting all that day and into the next night. The French lost half their fleet, against two of our battleships sunk and several crippled.

Considering our losses, and the few captures

made, the results were not wholly satisfactory, being inconclusive. Our command of the sea was now demonstrated, it is true, to all the world, but we had acted on the fact all along. Our previous preponderance over the allies had been increased, but what was the use of it? The enemy would never stand up to us or even run away from us again. They would now remain in harbour. It was clear that a decisive engagement was impossible,—in a confined sea, at least,—unless both sides equally wanted to fight *à l'outrance*, or the attacking fleet could catch the enemy at sea and easily outsteam his ships. English public opinion was inclined to regard that long fight in the Mediterranean, miscalled the battle of Biserta, as a barren victory, but for once the popular verdict was all wrong.

The escape of the Russian squadron, unscathed, coupled with the destruction of half the French fleet, was bitterly resented by all Frenchmen. The Russian admiral was a coward, had deserted his ally, the Czar had a private understanding with his uncle by marriage the King of England, and was spending neither blood nor treasure in the war—that was what the press proclaimed and patriots shouted in the wine-shops. Several duels took place between officers in the two navies. A French admiral, who drew blood from a Russian commander, became in consequence so popular that he was seriously considered as a possible candidate for the approaching presidential vacancy.

The immediate upshot of the soreness and recriminations between the allies was an order from the Czar to his generals in Afghan-Turkistan to take a vigorous offensive and advance to the Indus, if possible. The order may have been politically wise, but strategically such an attempt to invade India was a mistake. It was a false move, and exactly suited our game. However, it put the French in good humour with their allies; if these allies won a bloody victory, the enemy would be humbled; if they lost the battle, why, the balance would be adjusted between the allies. Thus, indirectly, that sea-action off Biserta made for peace. Indeed, could France have had 'peace with honour,' she would have opened negotiations at once. The French people were weary of a war in which all the punishment was falling on them. Many of their distant colonies, or rather dependencies, had been already lost, and Madagascar and Tonquin, both in a state of rebellion, were at our mercy. Their occupation was useless to us. We wanted neither. We already held too many rich possessions in every quarter of the globe to burden ourselves permanently with more. As it was, the acquisitions made by us during the war would probably be surrendered when peace was made. To retain them would be too costly, and increase the jealousy of the nations already bitter against us.

As for France, she felt that every battleship or cruiser she lost, every week of continued hostilities, only weakened her against her hereditary enemy

at the gates—Germany—the one onlooker whom the war benefited. Russia was the ally of France, true, but the allies had no common interest outside the necessity of combining against the great military Empire lying between them. Russia had used France for twenty years now, had borrowed billions of francs from her, had in matters of foreign policy reduced the Great Republic to a vassal State, and now in this war, beyond a beggarly contribution of battleships—which had done no fighting—of what use had the alliance been? So far Russia's attitude towards Great Britain had been rather that of a malevolent neutral and potential enemy, than an active belligerent putting forth all her strength.

She was now going to attack India through Kabul; well, France would suspend judgment and await the issue, but obviously, whether victorious or not in that quarter, Russia, not France, would be the ultimate gainer. When the war ended, Russia would have lost no territory, no ships, have spent little treasure, and would certainly retain the previously unabsorbed portions of Afghan-Turkistan, Badakhshan, and the Herat Valley.

Up to some weeks after the sea-fight in the Mediterranean, the situation in the Afghan theatre of war had changed little. Russia had already occupied the Bamian pass, and was even threatening a descent on Chitral through Kafiristan, the late Amir, Abdul Rahman, having run a good military road through the mountains of the In-

fidels. However, so far, Russia had made no actual move on Kabul or Girishk. The temper of the Afghan tribes throughout the hitherto unabsorbed territory was uncertain. They and their Amir accepted money and arms from us, but squabbled and recriminated amongst themselves. The opposition in each clan favoured the Russians, and was subsidised by them. On the whole the Afghans were reaping a good harvest from both belligerents, but could be regarded by neither as friends or neutrals. All that was certain was that collectively the Afghans hated and distrusted Russians more than English, would oppose whichever first occupied Kabul, and be always ready to loot either when they safely could. But for the Russian fleet getting into Toulon harbour without loss, the much-discussed collision between Sepoy and Cossack in Central Asia would probably not have taken place. But for the Czar's order to advance on Kabul, the Russian troops would have stood firm at Bamian, and we certainly had no intention of going there to seek them. Jack Sepoy had always hated service Trans-Indus, and was already sick of this war, though he had not yet seen the enemy. To him both Afghanistan and its people were detestable, God-forsaken. Recruiting in the Punjab was already suffering, the hungry peasants preferring dry bread at home to free rations and good pay at the front.

It was, then, with intense satisfaction that I had learnt early in November that the Russians

had occupied Kabul, and were arming and attempting to drill the greedy hordes of Kohistanis, who swaggered about the lines of their allies as if the loot of India was already theirs.

For a couple of months things went well enough —officially—and just as with us in 1838–39, so with Russia in 1907, reports from Kabul were roseate. But all the time the exasperation of the tribesmen against the intruders was mounting up. Requisitions on the villages for 'supplies' were large and constant, payments small and rare. Amongst 'supplies for troops' women were sometimes indented for as if they were cattle, and what is more, had to be found. Thus a heavy debit account was being run up for what the Afghans call 'insulted family honour,' and many a husband, father, or brother was impatient for the coming of the day of reckoning.

When winter set in, the situation in Kabul resembled what it had been with us in 1840–41 on the eve of our own disasters there, with this difference—the Russian generals had read history to good purpose, and had repeated few of our mistakes. They had early laid in ample supplies to last till spring, and had occupied and fortified Sherpur and the Bālā Hissar. When, soon after, the tribes began to show their teeth—the Russian General, Stoliotoff, had ruthlessly driven out of the city all the Afghans and other dangerous elements amongst the population, but had allowed shopkeepers, artificers and Parsibans to remain, as

inoffensive and actually or potentially useful. As for the Amir and his ministers, they were called 'the honourable guests of the Czar,' but were in reality his prisoners and hostages.

All this time General Sir Power Oliphant, who commanded our field army in person, ably assisted by my former Foreign Secretary, Mr. Dingwell, was, under instructions, playing a waiting game. Whilst materially helping the tribes with presents of old muzzle-loaders, powder and lead, Sir Power refused to listen to their solicitations to advance and attack the Russians, until they themselves should be well blooded, and with united counsels seek aid from us. In that case they were told that we should be prepared to take part in operations against the Russians. At the same time we astutely announced that once the common enemy were defeated, and driven back to Bamian or beyond, our troops would be withdrawn to their present permanent positions.

The tribal *jirgas* or councils of elders importuned, threatened, implored, and, failing to shake Sir Power in his resolution, were left to stroke their dirty beards with the fingers of disappointment, and after a time got rid of by the reduction of their daily allowances to what in India are called 'famine rations.' After each dismissal they would go back to their impatient countrymen and discuss the situation, but do nothing.

On Christmas Day a heavy fall of snow occurred in Kabul, and the weather-wise foretold an un-

usually severe winter. That expectation quickened the deliberations of the Afghan leaders. They secretly collected their forces, the lately armed Kohistanis joining in the general rising, and overpowered and massacred the Russian garrisons in several small road-posts between the city and Bamian, but when they advanced in elation on Sherpur were met and heavily defeated. Inflamed by the exhortations and promises of their Mullahs, they again and again threw themselves against the Russian defences, but on each occasion were easily repulsed. The net result of a fortnight's fighting was that the invader's forces occupying Kabul were entirely cut off from their supports in Bamian 100 miles away, and would probably have to remain isolated until spring, when the melting of the snow and returning warmth would enable troops to operate, in which case Afghan resistance would be brushed aside without difficulty.

After their fourth defeat the grey-beards of all the gatherings investing Kabul were despatched to Gandamak to appeal to us for help. They could not dislodge the Russians without big guns, they said: we had many, the Russians none. They had lost thousands of men, most of their winter stocks of provisions, and half their cattle. Their orchards had been cut down, hundreds of their women had been outraged, and many were still inside the Russian lines in Sherpur and the Bālā Hissar. If we advanced and drove the enemy out of these two strongholds, King Snow and Afghan knives,

guns and *jesails* (matchlocks) would do the rest, and not one of these sons of burnt fathers would live to reach Bamian. They were, they admitted, a lot of suspicious, treacherous, quarrelsome ruffians, and deserved no favours at our hands; but at present the Russians were the common foes of Afghans, English, and Indians, and they were suppliants for help.

'We shall require hostages from each clan,' said the Chief, 'if we consent to advance.'

'Why, Lord Sahib, as we shall be friends?'

'We must take precautions,' was the explanation. 'Your Amir is a prisoner, and each tribe is a law to itself: you have no real leaders.'

'But we don't demand hostages from you English that you will not remain,' shouted some one insolently.

'We are English. You are—well, Afghans,' was the contemptuous retort. 'Either take our terms or depart.'

'Agreed! agreed! we'll give the hostages!' vociferously consented the more responsible elders. 'We can trust you English. You pay the Afridis for the use of the Khyber, and the Mohmands or the Amir for the route followed by the iron-road above Landi-Kotal.'

'Good,' said the Chief, 'another word is this,—all Russians who may surrender will be our prisoners-of-war, not yours, and will be interned in India. Do you agree?'

This announcement created a burst of indignation, as every man there fully intended to cut the

throat of every Russian who should fall into his hands. When the excitement had abated, and comparative silence had been restored, the Chief said sternly: 'We English give quarter to all enemies who surrender, and we break off negotiations unless you swear to regard the lives of all who surrender to us as sacred.'

'Don't you think, sir, you are rather skinning your hare before you catch him?' here remarked Mr. Dingwell to the Chief.

'True, but the hare is already in the trap,' was the reply, 'and these cut-throats must enter that condition in the agreement, otherwise they will fall out with us.'

After long debate it was agreed that Russians surrendering to us would be our prisoners; we, with our usual indifference to money when political considerations are a factor, guaranteeing a payment as ransom according to the Afghan scale. We further promised that all munitions of war and other property captured would be handed over by us to the Afghans, provided that they fought to our satisfaction, and observed the terms of their engagements.

The agreement signed, the hostages taken over, Sir Power, who had already completed all his arrangements, advanced cautiously but rapidly to a position a few miles from Sherpur. The whole operation was conducted as if the march lay through the passes of hostile not friendly tribes. The line of communications with Jalalabad, distant eighty miles, was strongly held, making retreat secure in case of disaster at the front.

Chapter XXIV

THE BATTLE AND AFTERWARDS

DURING our advance General Stoliotoff occupied himself in strengthening his works, and in making occasional sorties, or rather expeditions, against the wasp-like swarms of Afghans, who filled the villages and hamlets in the vicinity of Kabul city. Having under his command a compact force of 30,000 men, all by courtesy Europeans, or at least white men, well-housed, well-victualled, and well-entrenched, General Stoliotoff regarded the enterprise on which we were engaged as foolhardy and doomed to failure. In his opinion our numerical superiority—we had 40,000 men in Jalalabad and west of it—was discounted by the facts that half our infantry and most of our cavalry were Indians, and that we should have to attack a fortified position in mid-winter from open ground, with the certainty that repulse would involve us in an overwhelming disaster. The Afghan hordes investing Kabul, at present our allies, would in that case, he was convinced, join his victorious troops in annihilating our beaten and retreating army.

In so forecasting the probable results of the impending collision between Cossack and Sepoy, the Russian General-in-Chief made two mistakes. He overlooked the fact that Indian troops, well led by English officers, fighting in line with British troops, are, battalion for battalion, equal to the steadiest infantry in the world, and he appears to have been unaware that our field artillery was not only more numerous and heavier than his, but that we were bringing on two elephant batteries of siege guns from Jalalabad. We had, in fact, done our best to deceive his rather inefficient intelligence department about the arrival of these guns, which did not reach our camp until the dispositions for the attack on Sherpur were nearly completed. Our Chief knew that a siege was out of the question, that to succeed he must strike rapidly, and deliver a victorious assault within a day or two of his opening fire. The 'Christmas rains' had fallen punctually and copiously, as refreshing showers in the Punjab, but as heavy snow about Kabul. The weather was now settled, clear and frosty, and the ground hard. These conditions would probably continue for at least another week or ten days, within which time our work ought to be accomplished.

Our batteries opened on the morning of January 22nd, 1908, and continued the bombardment all that day. The Afghans, as spectators, turned out in their thousands from the adjacent villages in which they were lying. At first they sat silent,

like expectant vultures, watching our proceedings. When the superior range and weight of our projectiles began to silence the Russian guns, and destroy the defences of Sherpur, our allies began to show excitement by shouting, gesticulating, and waving their flags and weapons. This restless exultation of theirs resembled that of hungry wolves prowling round a still dangerous but dying quarry.

Towards sunset the Afghan *jirgas* were notified that the bombardment would be continued all night, but be chiefly directed against three points named, two of which they were required to assault at dawn, whilst the third—the key of the position—was being rushed by our troops. Should they be late, or fail to behave as brave men, they were warned that they would receive neither booty nor ransom-money for Russians taken prisoners. The threat was unnecessary. They were even keener for the battle than were our troops. They were fighting not only for their hearths and homes, but also for vengeance on the abductors and seducers of their wives and daughters. Then, were they not all *ghāzīs* face to face with invading, God-forsaken unbelievers? Throughout the night, whilst they were taking up their positions, the tom-toming on their drums, the wild screeching of their bagpipes, and the frequent salvoes of 'Allah! Allah!' diverted the attention of the harassed Russians from our movements.

At dawn the three assaults were successfully de-

livered, and an hour later all resistance was practically over.

Looking back on the incidents of that short campaign, it must be admitted that even had General Stoliotoff's intelligence department served him better, once his communications with Bamian were cut, he could not have done more than he did. He had been ordered to occupy Kabul, and had done so. Had he attempted to withdraw, without fighting, his Czar, his countrymen, and, above all, their allies, the French, would have dubbed him poltroon and traitor, and he would have been tried by court-martial and sacrificed.

As it was, he did all that courage and good generalship could accomplish in defending an untenable position. When his works were carried, and further fighting would have involved useless slaughter, some 3,000 Cossacks, several mule-batteries, and 6,000 Russian infantry, rather than surrender, marched out of the city and took the Bamian road. Our troops did not attempt a pursuit. Their hands were full as it was, and pursuit would in any case have been the height of rashness. But the victorious Afghans hung round the exhausted and straggling Russians during the whole of their awful retreat of one hundred miles. Mercifully for them the hard frost continued, and fully half of those brave men reached Bamian in safety.

Of the Russian garrison a sixth had fallen during the fighting, and rather more than a third had fled towards Bamian. General Stoliotoff with the

remainder of his troops, over 15,000 men in all, surrendered. The work of taking over and protecting the prisoners from the hordes of raging Afghans, surging and howling round the various buildings, forts, and enclosures in which the Russians were cooped up, was one of great difficulty. Our troops had more than once to fire on the savage mobs, who surrounded bodies of prisoners, and on two occasions Russians and British fought in alliance to repel a determined rush made by hordes of Kohistani *ghāzīs*.

However, on the whole, the tribesmen adhered fairly to their engagements. They had fought splendidly during the assault, and both then and throughout the long pursuit to Bamian had lost heavily. Our superiority in artillery had given us comparative immunity from casualties during the bombardment, but could not protect us much during the assault. Line after line of men had to be launched over a rifle-swept glacis more than a quarter of a mile in breadth, had to scramble down trenches and up banks, and negotiate carefully-laid wire entanglements, all invisible until reached. Thus before the defences were pierced and the position practically won, many hundreds of our brave fellows were mowed down. We lost in all 4,000 men, about a tenth of our force.

I was at Lahore when the news of the great victory was wired to me from Jalalabad. Though fully expecting success, and unable to see how the Russian garrison could escape destruction, still

when the Chief's and my own calculations were proved to have been correct, the magnitude of the achievement astonished and humbled me.

After all, how little had been done by the individuals who would receive the applause of the nation, honours, substantial rewards, and be personally named when the thanks of the two Houses would be passed! Just as in facing and quelling the late agrarian troubles in India, the men who had deserved most of their country were the district officers and their subordinates, so here, the men who had done the work were our dead soldiers and the officers and privates who had struggled across that bullet-swept glacis. Yet do what I could to adjust honours equitably, the old result would in both cases be repeated. A few luckily conspicuous and luckily high-placed men would absorb most of the rewards and honours, whilst the more highly deserving many, beyond the distinction of a medal and six months' *batta*, would be ignored.

Throughout the whole of this war, as throughout our agrarian troubles in India, my good fortune had been continuous. In the present case, but for the escape of the Russian squadron into Toulon Harbour without loss—due to the blundering of one of our admirals—the Czar would not have ordered General Stoliotoff into the trap at Kabul; and his army would not have been partly destroyed and partly captured there, but for the persistence of my constant good luck, which caused

heavy snow to fall and a long hard frost to set in just when both were wanted. Verily I had reason to be thankful. Whilst humbly acknowledging to myself the fortunate chain of events which had produced such tremendous results, I remembered that I was Viceroy, a *poseur*, a Jove, directing and ruling the storm, and acted accordingly.

When the news of the great victory over the Russians at Kabul was flashed to every telegraph station in India and Burmah, the jubilation was universal and genuine. The inhabitants in each of India's thousand towns and five hundred thousand villages burst out into illuminations and rejoicings, more extravagant, more prolonged, and more enthusiastic than had ever been known at any local wedding in the preceding ten thousand years. If my friend, Sir Power Oliphant, was now celebrated as Siva, the war-god, I was adored as Indra, the storm-compeller and controller of the universe.

Few men, white, brown, or black, really think but of their own affairs; fewer still read with understanding the geography or history of strange lands. All that India and the rest of the world understood of the war in Afghanistan was that small Russian and Anglo-Indian armies had been for the last eight months facing each other, separated by two hundred miles of barren, mountainous country, and that in the unlikely event of a collision, the consequences would not much influence results. The opposing forces were so small, and so phenomenally cautious, if not positively afraid of each other,

that if they did fight, the weaker army would early retreat, and the stronger army would stand firm where it had fought. As war correspondents were not allowed with the Russian armies, and had long since been recalled by their employers from ours—there being nothing to report—the ten days' campaign culminating in the destruction of a Russian army, took not only India, but the world by surprise.

The news had been immediately cabled to London, the renewed working of the submarine telegraph wire being, from some inexplicable cause, coincident with that Anglo-Indian victory. Connection had been interrupted for nearly a year now, during which time the whole system of Indian administration had been revolutionised and a great battle won in Afghanistan, and all this without a reference to the Secretary of State for India, or the permission of the Home Government. The history of the erratic conduct of the Eastern Telegraph Company's deep-sea wire remained a mystery for many years.

When the Russian prisoners began to dribble into Peshawar, and trickle slowly down country to the various stations of internment, Indian princes, nobles, and common folk travelled hundreds and hundreds of miles to gaze at these long, long trains of big, fair, melancholy men. The march through India of these 15,000 captured soldiers—magnified in vernacular papers to 50,000—did more to re-establish and consolidate the British dominion in

India, and impress the peninsula with the power and deep inscrutable sagacity of its extraordinary Viceroy, than did his orders in council or the reports of the victory of Sherpur.

The latter, strange to say, restored the good humour of the French with their allies: both now had fought and suffered; both owed defeat to the vast numerical superiority of the common enemy, and both, though beaten, had struggled heroically against overwhelming odds, and inflicted heavy losses on their foe. Since that sea-fight in the Mediterranean, both had surrendered all attempts to dispute any naval supremacy, had practically put their battleships out of commission, and had transferred the sailors and gunners to their cruisers. All their efforts had since been devoted to commerce-destroying, and, in consequence, marine insurance rates had risen in Great Britain to double what they had been before our sea-victory, and the prices of butcher's meat and wheat had become so high that our working classes were crying out that they were starving.

Such was the situation in March, 1908, when the tottering Radical Cabinet took the bold and extraordinary step of making overtures for peace—a step which, in the sequel, gained for that Cabinet the gratitude of the nation, and gave the Radical party a further lease of power. The bases of our peace proposals were: no indemnity to be demanded by us *other than the surrender of all French and Russian* battleships in commission

on the date of our naval victory off Biserta; all our conquests and acquisitions during the war to be restored intact; and in Afghanistan all territory west of the water-shed of the Hindu Kush and its Paropamissian and Safaid Koh continuations, to be recognised as solely within the sphere of Russian influence, the actual delimitation to be carried out by a joint Anglo-Russian commission.

The fact that Great Britain had 'sued for peace,' as the opposition press in London and our foes called these overtures, gratified the *amour propre* of the susceptible French people, whilst the generosity and good sense of the proposals satisfied both French and Russian statesmen. These latter were shrewd enough to see that if they did not accept the terms offered, the Radical ministry would fall, and be succeeded by a Jingo Conservative Government, which would mean that all three belligerent powers would continue to weaken themselves by prolonging an inconclusive struggle, thus enabling Germany to become arbiter of Europe. As a consequence, after some haggling about the warships to be surrendered, a treaty of peace was concluded to the satisfaction of Great Britain, France and Russia, but to the intense chagrin of Germany.

By that time I was back in Simla, and the great assemblies at Delhi and Benares had concluded their sittings. They had in the main approved the lines on which the relief bills had been drawn. Nothing then remained but that the Legislative

Council should consider the amendments suggested, and legalise the reforms in our system, which experience of our own failures in legislation and the great common sense of the conservative peoples of India had shown to be necessary to restore 'peace on earth and good will' amongst agriculturists and non-agriculturists.

It was a happy summer, that of 1908, which my wife and I spent at Simla. My good luck continued through it, for the rains were again generally propitious, and India was quiet and contented. The peasantry were happy. They were no longer harassed and fleeced by usurers and usurers' allies, the law-courts and the pleaders. They were no longer required to pay land revenue when their crops had failed. If their plough-bullocks or well-buffaloes died of rinderpest or overwork in time of a fodder famine, they were now assured that they would be able to replace losses by borrowing from the Government through their district officers, paying 4 per cent. per annum interest, instead of 36 per cent. as formerly, when taking a loan from village lenders. Similar facilities were provided for them when a well fell in or an embankment gave way, and money was required for repairing the damage. And when the necessity arose for alienating ancestral acres, the State interposed, and compelled the alienor to sell or mortgage to a true agriculturist. The restriction, at first, slightly depreciated the market value of arable land, but it estopped the middle-

man, the usurer, from intercepting the profits of agriculture; and it appreciably contracted each peasant's credit. Formerly the temptation to borrow, and the ease with which he could incur debt and so ruin his children, had been a fatal boon, a *facilis descensus* for him; now the limitation of his powers in that respect was part of his salvation, though at first many failed to realize the fact.

* * * * *

During the succeeding years of my Viceroyalty, India continued fairly prosperous and profoundly peaceful, and my part was the easy *rôle* of a great constitutional ruler. I had never again occasion to act autocratically, or even to remonstrate with the Secretary of State for India for ignorant opposition to the orders or recommendations of 'the Viceroy in Council.' The hurly-burly of 1907-8, and the strong and successful measures by which tranquillity had been restored, taught home-staying Englishmen of all shades of opinion a much-needed lesson, which, like that of the Sepoy mutiny of 1857, they will perhaps never forget. It taught them that if our Eastern dependency is to be preserved for, and attached to, the Empire, India must be governed on Indian lines, the form of rule being a benevolent and conservative despotism.

Chapter XXV

'OUR BOYS'

THERE is little more to tell of my work in India, except that when my term as Viceroy expired in 1911 I consented to retain office for two years more. The reform measures of 1907–8 were being amended, experience having shown that they were susceptible of improvement. They had given satisfaction to the protected masses, and had consequently achieved their primary object, but being a little narrow, had failed to attract recruits to the business of farming, or to bring about the investment of private capital in big schemes of land improvement, such as canals, reclamation of waste land and water-storage projects. It was in order that I might personally put the coping stone on my system of administering India on Indian rather than on English lines, that the Home Ministry had pressed me to accept an extension of my term. As I am writing a confession, I may as well admit that my reason for acceding to their wish was rather domestic than public.

During my four years of married life, I had been

blessed with two sons. When my term expired, the younger was two years old. Cecil the elder was fair and blue-eyed like his father, and would succeed me in the earldom. I had refused a step in the peerage, but accepted the garter. Jack, my younger boy, though fair-skinned, had his mother's eyes and dark hair, and was an extraordinarily beautiful and beguiling child. Like his father—the original Jack Ravenhill—he would only succeed to 'a beggarly £1,000 a year,' and any savings which his parents might leave. These, however, would be small, as both my wife and I had large ideas on the duties of show and hospitality.

On our small Jack's second birthday, Lis and I had had an anxious discussion about his future. As usual, the faithful Miss Holmes was called in to give us her advice. She had already assumed the special charge of the infant, and loved and worshipped him as if he were a boy-god, to whom she, a virgin, had in some mysterious way given birth.

'Well! Miss H——,' I said, 'he will be a pauper, his parents are so extravagant.'

'The little Nawâb Sahib a pauper, my lord?' she cried, hugging Master Jack to her bosom; 'never; he shall be the richest and greatest Prince in the East.'

Melissa blanched and turned appealingly to me, for it was not the first time that her faithful old retainer had called our second-born 'the little Nawâb,' or hinted pretty plainly the ambitious

future which she had mapped out for him. So far her ideas had been treated by us as the fancy of a fond old woman. We ourselves had never seriously discussed the subject. Our departure from India was yet six months distant, and Jacky was only cutting his eye-teeth, so there was no urgent occasion to make plans about his future. But all the same I knew that Miss H——'s absorption in Master Jack, and that Eastern title by which she called him, troubled my little wife, and made her almost jealous of the woman who dared to come between a mother and her Benjamin.

In response to Melissa's silent appeal, I drew her on to my knee, and promised that she, and she alone, should have the ordering of her baby's future. That promise satisfied her. She put her arms round my neck and kissed me. For some minutes we 'pretended' we were careless boy and girl lovers again, as we had been long, long ago, young bride and bridegroom lovers, telling each other of our mutual trust and devotion, whilst beside us was Miss H——, crooning over her babe, and doubtless telling him that he was the sweetest, dearest, most beautiful Prince in all the world.

After a time we descended to realities, and I tried to frown at Miss H——, and said sternly, 'Why do you talk nonsense? Do you suppose we shall leave baby out here when we go to England for good?'

'Well,' she replied with gravity, 'the Princess will have to abdicate when she settles in London

(England is "London" to the native mind), and if so the throne will have to be filled.'

'I shall have to abdicate, I know,' whispered Melissa to me, 'but can't you arrange that Jack should live with us, and leave the Council to administer his kingdom?'

The little woman asked the question with such wistful earnestness, that it was easy to see that it was the outcome of long cogitations, and that she too, as well as Miss H——, was ambitious that her boy should not start in life as an adventurer, as his father had done—only—only she wanted to have her cake and eat it—to keep him in England, yet make him a reigning Prince in India.

'I am afraid not, dear,' I answered, after some consideration. 'It is such a personal matter, that I could not take it upon myself to offer the Council of administration and your subjects any advice. I think that they will insist that their Nawâb should, as usual, be educated in Sultânabad, and I am sure that the Secretary of State for India will not oppose their wishes.'

'How ungrateful, how unkind of them!' sobbed Melissa, 'after all we have done for them; and you, Cecil, to take their part also! I could not have believed it of you. Miss H——,' turning to her in vexation, and holding out her hands to Jack—'give me my boy and go, please.'

Then she took baby and loved him as only a mother can, and he looked up into her face and smiled, and said, 'Mummy,' and put a small fat

forefinger into her eye. I looked on. I was out of it for the time, that was clear.

'I think, dear,' I said, but she was not listening; baby-talk was far more interesting than mine just then. 'I think, dear,' I repeated louder.

'Yes, dear,' she echoed absently, in a far-away voice.

'I have been asked to remain on for two more years,' I said in a clear, steady tone, determined to plough through with it.

'Hush, Cecil!' she interrupted; 'how can you speak so loud when Jack is just going off to sleep.'

I quietly left the room *re infecta*. Certainly I was not in it. I was nothing, but baby was everything, and very much in it.

However, an hour or two later Melissa was more reasonable, Jack being then sound asleep in his bassinette. I explained to her that if I accepted the offer made—and there were reasons of State which made my acceptance advisable—she might put off her decision for a year or more, and so enjoy Benjamin without ruining his prospects in life.

The extension of term having been settled, Jack grew in grace and stature, and twined himself more and more about all our hearts for a whole year, and even when a baby-sister presented herself, and claimed and intercepted some of her mother's love —Jack was still the Benjamin. We sometimes talked of his future, but never arrived at any conclusion. It was a sore subject with Melissa, and I sometimes suspected that she in her heart would

have preferred that I should have decided the question. But no, I never offered to do so. The kingdom was hers, Jack was more hers than mine, and had I assumed the responsibility, I knew that in after years, whichever way I should have settled the matter, I should be blamed.

As boy Nawâb of Sultânabad, out in India, the mother's heart would have often hankered after her son, the indelible picture in her mind being the winning, loving infant, with his beguiling baby ways. The pattering of his little feet would have ever been in her ears, and his loving, trusting smile before her eyes. At such times, I should have been reproached for having been the cause of the separation. Then, had I renounced the throne for him, and caused Melissa to adopt, as her successor, some little Indian connection, or even one of the deceased Sardar Abdul Hakk's brats, as Jack grew to manhood, I was sure that both mother and son would have regretted that great renunciation, through which wealth and ambition would have been sacrificed to affection.

Time wore on, and still Melissa vacillated. I pitied her, and loved her all the more for her indecision. It was our last cold weather in India, and we had resolved to visit Sultânabad, and there be guided by events. Melissa was now more with Jack than with both her other children put together. She played with her second boy, talked to him, hung over his crib at night, and often shed tears over him. He fully returned his mother's love, lived for her,

adored her, treated the yearning, heart-broken Miss H—— as a spoilt school-boy might Betsy Ann, his late under-nurse. I often caught myself wondering how it would end.

To my wife the succession to the throne of Sultànabad was as important a matter as that of her eldest son to the Imperial Crown for Czarina or German Empress. The throne was hers in direct descent from the great Baber's celebrated Circassian slave-girl's son, the founder of the Sultànabad kingdom. For twenty generations each succeeding Nawâb had married, from outside India, some much-sought-for lady of noble Circassian or Turkish blood. Only once had the rule of the Royal House been departed from, when the late Nawâb made a *mes-alliance* in marrying 'the Englishman's' daughter, the lady who had died in giving birth to Melissa. From her mother, indeed, from her ancestors generally, Melissa had inherited the complexion of an English girl. Then, knowing her descent from Baber, she was filled with the pride of race which still survives in Spain and India. As the ruling Princess of Sultànabad, she could not see the sceptre pass from her son, and yet, as his mother, she could not part from him.

On the present occasion the Viceregal Camp was sent on to Sultànabad ahead of us. We followed by train, a branch line having been opened from the Road station to the Capital, and thence onwards to the now valuable Dandat coal-mines.

The Council of Administration, nobles of the State, and city fathers received their ruling Princess and her Consort, the Viceroy, with a respectful warmth and enthusiasm, which gratified us both. When Miss H——, leading Jack by the hand, alighted from her compartment, a rush was made towards him, and many salamed to him, presenting gold *ashrafis* as *nazzars*, or tribute. The child was laughing and talking, and on each occasion, after touching the coins, raised his tiny hand to his forehead and saluted, just as if he were the Nawâb already. Each time he did so, he sought approval from Miss H——, who was beaming with delight at her darling's reception, and had doubtless coached him in his *rôle*.

Had his mother seen these acts of homage, and the way in which they had been received, she would have been embittered against Miss H——. As it was, the little fellow was soon tired of the adulation his appearance had excited, and began to look about for his mother. 'Mummy, mummy,' he called, stretching out his hands towards her as he espied her seated in the State carriage, 'take oos ittle Jack too.' At the same moment he broke away from Miss H—— and ran towards us, the white-robed officials respectfully making way for him.

We soon drove off, Jack on his mother's knee in the leading carriage, my eldest—the heir of my house—baby, Miss H——, and the nurse coming on in the next. Melissa kissed him hungrily, and

complained to me that her people were taking him for the Nawâb already.

'Yes, me Nawâb Sahib,' echoed the sharp-eared child, smiling up at his mother, and expecting to be told how clever he was.

'No, no, Jack, you are mummy's darling, not the Nawâb Sahib,' remonstrated his mother with reproach in her tone.

Jack was sensitive, and chose to think he was being scolded, so he changed his quarters to my knee, and indulged in tears, until his attention was diverted by the boys and girls of the State school singing 'God save our gracious Princess' in Hindustani. They were drawn up outside their schoolhouse, and, of course, dressed in bright, clean clothes. Though sore at heart, and longing to make peace with her darling, Melissa remembered her position, and stopped the carriage till the children had finished the hymn, and then said some gracious words to them and their teachers.

Our camp was pitched by the river near the bathing *ghât*, at which I had first seen Melissa. The garden-house of many memories lay behind, half hidden amongst the orange trees, now laden with their golden fruit. After lunch, my wife suggested a stroll to her old home. Some of our friends would have liked to have joined us, but we naturally wished to be alone, during our first visit at all events, so I put them off with the promise that next day I should be glad to personally conduct the whole camp to the different points of interest.

We wandered off alone, she and I. By tacit consent we first went straight to her former boudoir-room upstairs. We were both pensively silent. Presently we turned to each other, and each said one word, I 'Lis,' she 'Jack.' It was enough. We understood. We pressed each other's hand, and ascended to the roof. We thought of the scenes which had occurred there: the struggle with the wrestler, his fall, my preservation, the frenzy of joy when the exhausted remnant of the garrison saw thence the approach of their rescuers. Then we went downstairs, and stood on the spot where I had thought my last farewell over the gashed corpse of the gallant Forbes.

The great trench was there, the mounds were there, and higher than all the others was the great mound, under which lay many hundreds of the slain *ghāzis*. But everything was changed. What had then been freshly excavated earth, or an ugly yawning gap covered with the remains of mangled humanity, was now a grassy undulation. And the cold-weather sun shone steadily down over the whole of that peaceful orchard, throwing out into contrast with the verdure of the grass and the deep green of the leaves of the grove, the rich yellow of the fruit, which weighed down the branches of the trees. From the garden we wandered to the Palace, and stood thoughtful in the room where poor Cecil had died.

'Let us visit his grave now when we are still alone,' I suggested. 'I ordered a carriage to be

ready at the Palace gates in case you should be tired.'

We drove to my brother's resting-place. It lay outside the city in an unoccupied corner of a large cypress grove, in which for generations Musalmans of note had been buried. A new and stately mausoleum of pure white marble had been built over the grave. Round it was a simple but handsome railing, and close by was a caretaker's hut.

I turned to Melissa and said, 'You never told me you had done this for him How good of you! The design is quaint, but in perfect keeping.'

'I was waiting,' she explained, 'for it to be finished to tell you. I was sure we should come here before leaving India.'

'Who,' I asked, 'designed the domes and surmounted the large centre one with a cross?'

'I did,' she answered, 'when stopping with Lady Byng at Simla. My determination to introduce a cross puzzled her, and afterwards I had difficulty with the Mullahs and Kàzis of the city about it, until I told them that it symbolised the Archangel Michael's sword.'

'Does it?' I inquired doubtingly.

'I am not sure,' was her hesitating reply, as she turned away her head with a slight blush.

'What a diplomatist you are, Lis!' I said cheerfully, though sorry for her pious fraud. 'Any way, Cecil could not rest in a sweeter, quieter spot, and his mausoleum is a gem. It will become a place of pilgrimage, I dare say.'

'It is so already,' she said; 'the whole country venerates the memory of the good old Mullah Yadullah, who, for nearly four years, gave the people justice and lived only to do good.'

'And do you agree with them, Lis?' I inquired softly.

'Yes, Cecil; the good you have done, not only in Sultànabad, but throughout all India, is great. It will live after you.'

'Thank you, dear,' I said, 'but all I did was to impress on the cold commercial West that the agricultural East will best progress by evolution, not revolution.'

'Don't make set speeches to me,' she objected. 'Whatever the verdict of your "cold commercial West" may be on you as Viceroy, I know mine on you as Cecil, *né* Jack.'

'What is it, Lis?'

'That you are a good husband, for you love me; that is enough for any woman,' was her reply.

Chapter XXVI

'LE ROI EST MORT—VIVE LE ROI'

NEXT morning the great Hall of Audience was filled with an assembly representing every section of the community in the Sultànabad State. Their Princess was about to leave them for good, to give up the warm, sunny land of her ancestors for the cold, foggy island, in which her husband was a great lord. Her Highness would that morning announce her abdication, and say good-bye to her faithful subjects, who had been true to her house for twenty generations and more. But who would succeed her? Her second son, 'the little Nawâb,' as they already loved to call our Jack, or some uninteresting child of a nobody?

By the unwritten law of the realm the heir-apparent must be educated within its limits, and before being eligible for investment with full powers, must every lustrum for three successive lustrums, in the presence of the representatives of his people, perform certain rites and answer certain questions. How could these conditions be fulfilled should 'the little Nawâb's' royal mother carry him off to England? Many a father in that hall, who loved and

understood his wife, watching the dewed eyes and hunted expression of the Princess, realized the struggle going on in her mind between maternal love and devotion to her high duty, or shall we say ambition?

Yes, there the Princess sat before them all on her chair of state, unveiled now since her marriage, pale, beautiful, and oh, so pitifully, tremblingly anxious, as she held her sturdy, handsome boy in her arms. No one in that assembly knew what her decision would be—not even I myself, her husband, who sat aside, but a few inches behind her. On this occasion I was not Viceroy, but merely Prince Consort. Of late, whenever I had asked her if she had made up her mind, her reply had been, 'There is no occasion yet. It is not time; I am waiting for an indication.' Well, the time had come, and as yet there had been no indication.

After the proceedings had been opened and the senior member of the Council of Administration had read Her Highness' formal declaration of abdication, a great hush fell upon all present. They were all observing my poor little Lis, whose eyes were now glued with sad searching on her son, as if she expected some manifestation to come from him.

In the midst of that great silence, the voice of the senior member rose once more clear, calm, and full, 'Whom does your Highness nominate as your successor?'

As the last words fell from his lips, Jack, who

had now been for some minutes phenomenally quiet, looked solemnly at the speaker, then laughing in his own adorable way, turned his face up to his mother and said audibly, 'Me, muddy; me, Nawâb.'

This open prompting—or was it a command?—was heard by us all, and evolved a smile of approval from some of the 'grave and reverend signiors' nearest the throne.

The child's mother threw her arms about him, kissed him passionately, and then, with queen-like dignity and self-command, rose from her chair, stood on one side, put her boy on the vacant throne, and said in a low, but heart-broken voice, 'Behold my successor, the Nawâb of the Sultânabad State.'

As she spoke these words, the whole assembly rose as one man, and with exclamations of approval made obeisance to Jack, who, being a well-taught and well-mannered boy, acknowledged these acts of homage by raising his right hand to his forehead. Having done so, he next occupied himself in trying to tear off one of the golden tassels which decorated his throne.

'Does your Highness agree to educate the young Nawâb within the limits of this State, and to present him each completed lustrum to his people, according to the ancient custom of this kingdom?' was the next question.

Melissa threw a gentle, imploring look at her persecutor, like some distressed gazelle hemmed in by hounds, appealing in her last terror to the

huntsman standing near. Her eyes next sought mine, but mine were fixed on the ground. I would have saved that dear gazelle had I dared, and cried, 'Let us keep our boy, and forego the kingdom,' but I did not dare. Finally her eyes returned to Jack, as they always did. He had by this time succeeded in pulling a tassel off the chair of State, and was now engaged in investigating its manufacture.

There was no inspiration, no manifestation in the child; the age of miracles had passed. Seconds, perhaps a minute went by, and still there was no sign, no reply.

Suddenly the mother threw herself down beside her boy, and pressing her face to his, drew determination from the touch. Turning round to her people, she sobbed, 'I can't, I can't. He shall perform his rites before you every lustrum, but I will take him with me to England. I shall return each time with him for the purpose until he is of age. If that will not content you, I renounce the throne for him.'

The piteous realism of the scene, the beautiful mother's anguish, the curious sympathy, the mesmerism of her appealing voice, the greatness of her sacrifice, all combined to move even the hardest face in that great assemblage to tenderness. Many sobbed audibly, more sat still with heads sunk on chests, concealing their emotions, yet weeping dry tears in their hearts.

Jack, the innocent cause of all this commotion, had thrown down his tassel at the sound of his mother's

voice, which always drew forth the baby-chivalry of his nature. He heard the tones he loved, he saw his mother in tears, and he stretched out his hands to her and said, 'Not cy, muddy, poor muddy, rest head here'; and the mother laid her head on her child's lap, and the child stroked his mother's fair face, repeating softly the refrain, 'Not cy, muddy, poor muddy.'

All this time the representatives of her people were discussing her offer, the majority being apparently inclined to accept it. Jack had, meanwhile, been considering in his own way the cause of his mother's grief, and had come to the wise conclusion of asking her; so varying his refrain, he inquired, 'Why cy, muddy? any one hurt my muddy?'

'They want to take you away from me, darling,' sobbed mummy, by way of explanation.

He was more puzzled than ever. No one—not even he, Jack himself—had ever disputed his mother's will; then how could these people dare to be so naughty to that adorable mother, and even to himself! Was not he 'the little Nawâb,' and had not Miss H—— often said that to be a Nawâb meant the right to sit up till nine at night, or do any other wicked and unusual act he chose?

Their confabulations being ended, the senior member approached the throne, and addressed the Nawâb himself in Hindustani, in a timid, vacillating sort of way.

Evidently, I said to myself, though I confess I

was bowing my head to conceal my tears, evidently they too are seeking for an indication; will any sign come now? I had unbounded faith in the potential capacity of my second son, but as he was not yet four years of age, I did not look upon him as an actual Solomon.

When the senior member had sufficiently fixed the child's attention, he said, 'Nawâb Sahib, will you remain here to be our Nawâb, or go to England and forsake us?'

His mother had now risen, and was standing beside the throne. She was imploring her boy with her eyes, trying perhaps to magnetise him by what is called suggestion.

With his mother's intent gaze still fixed on him, Jack looked straight at his interlocutor, and replied in Hindustani, 'I Nawâb, you servant; I go with muddy.'

'You leave us then, Nawâb Sahib?' inquired the aged courtier, with a sort of patient submission in his tone.

'Yes; I go with muddy,' our boy repeated louder than before, cross at the old man's persistence.

'Will you return and show yourself to us every five years?' continued the questioner.

'Go away, horrid man. I cut your head. I Nawâb, you servant,' ordered Jack, losing his temper, and already beginning to exercise his authority.

Every word of this extraordinary conversation

was heard by the high officials and nobles near the throne. They were all intent in wondering silence, until the petulant little man threatened to cut off his aged minister's head. That submissive old gentleman was so accustomed to obedience, that he meekly joined his palms in supplication, and bowing his abashed head, stepped backwards, whilst the comic element in the scene tickled the others. They laughed to each other, and whispered, 'That settles it. We had better agree, or he will be cutting off more heads.' So they all salamed to our boy, and said, 'Well done, Nawâb Sahib; we are all your servants.'

And then the proud, satisfied mother led her son down the length of the great hall, her beautiful face flushed, her head bowed. But Jack strutted by her side, and the line of leading men on his right and left made low obeisance as their Nawâb passed out. The little fellow bore himself bravely, and looked about him with a regal air of indifference as he walked on beside his mother, carrying his right hand at the salute until he had passed out into the open air.

So after all Melissa was right. She did receive a sign, but to what extent she suggested it I do not know, nor does she herself. She willed her boy to speak with authority, as a Nawâb should, and nothing more; that is her explanation. Naturally, Miss H—— took all the credit of his performance to herself, but Melissa and I have never admitted the fact. Jack was a wonderful child from babyhood

upwards—there could be no doubt of that—and at three years of age understood his position; that was the explanation which pleased us most.

Thus it was that our second son, little Jack Ravenhill, raised himself to a throne, whilst his mother, the Princess Melissa, renounced hers, and became the Countess of Severn, and nothing more.

The story of my great temptation, and how I used it, has now been told. The verdict of my country will not be known to me till my beloved wife rejoins me beyond the grave, for I shall be dead and buried before this confession is published.

In a few days, or at most, weeks, I shall stand before the Judge of all the Earth, my account made up. As God is merciful, surely He will forgive my transgression—if it was a transgression—and if so, I cannot believe that man will be behind God, and withhold his forgiveness.

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