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Or the Tiger of Cawnpore A Story of Indian Mutiny

Author: James Edward Muddock

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HAND ***

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corrected.

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GREAT WHITE HAND
OR
THE TIGER OF CAWNPORE

A Story of the Indian Mutiny

دو سفید ہاتھ

By

J. E. MUDDOCK

Author of

"Maid Marian and Robin Hood;" "The Dead Man's Secret;" "Stories Weird and Wonderful;" "Stormlight;" "For God and the Czar;" "Only a Woman's Heart;" "From the Bosom of the Deep;" "Basil the Jester;" "Stripped of the Tinsel;" "The Star of Fortune;" &c.

LONDON
Hutchinson & Co.

34 Paternoster Row, E.C.

1896

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To the Memory of

MY FATHER

A true gentleman, brave, upright, faithful; who after many long years of devotion to duty in India—and when on the eve of returning to his native land—sank very suddenly to his eternal rest in March, 1861, and sleeps “Till the day break,” in The Circular Road Cemetery, Calcutta, I dedicate this book.

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PREFACE

In the year 1894, I published in two volumes a romance of the Indian Mutiny, under the title of "The Star of Fortune." A short prefatory note intimated that it was my lot to be in India during the terrible time of the Sepoy Rebellion. From this it may be inferred that I not only wrote with feeling, but with some personal knowledge of my subject. "The Star of Fortune" was exceedingly well received by the public, and last year a cheaper edition was called for. That edition has been extensively circulated throughout India and the Colonies. The book on the whole was well reviewed, while my critics were good enough to accord me praise, by no means stinted, for the portions which dealt with the Mutiny proper. One London paper said it was "a very fine picture narrative," another spoke of it as "a spirited piece of writing," a third declared it was "written with spirit and vivacity," a fourth as being "really breathless in interest." I could go on multiplying quotations similar to the foregoing, but those I have given will serve the purpose I have in view.

On the other hand I was taken somewhat severely to task because the opening portions of the tale dealt with Edinburgh, and about one-third of the book was exhausted before India was reached. Whether or not that was really a fault is not for me to say; it was certainly part of my original plan, but I cannot be indifferent to the fact that a consensus of opinion condemned it, and declared that the Mutiny was far too interesting a subject to be mixed up with any love-making scenes in Edinburgh or elsewhere other than in India. I was very bluntly told that I ought to have plunged at once into *medias res*, and that a story purporting to be a story of the Mutiny should deal with the Mutiny only. The advice has not been lost upon me. I have steadily kept it in view while writing the "Great White Hand," and I venture to express a hope that whatever shortcomings may be found in the work, whatever sins of omission and commission I am guilty of, I shall at least be credited with keeping strictly to the *locale* and incidents of the Great Rebellion, which, in my opinion, affords, and will continue to afford for generations to come, a fund of the most romantic material all ready to the novelist's hand. If it should be urged against me that the dramatic situations in which my characters become involved are overstrained or

improbable, I shall claim on the authority of history that the thrilling times of the Revolt were rich in situations so sensational, so dramatic, so tragic and pathetic, that they put fiction into the shade. The bare ungarnished story of the Rising is in itself one of the most sensational records the world has ever known. Not even the Crusades, not even the wonderful defence of Malta by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, against the infidel Turk, present us with a more thrilling, romantic, and stirring panorama of battle scenes and incidents than the Indian Mutiny. It was not a struggle of the Cross against the Crescent, but of the Cross against Vishnu, against Shiva, against Brahma. The “Phantom” King of Delhi, and the “Tiger of Cawnpore,” both believed that the doom of Christianity in India had knelled. But they were undeceived, and all that was best, bravest, and noble in British men and women was brought to the surface. Of course, in a work of this kind, history must necessarily be used simply as a means to an end; therefore, while it is not claimed for the story that it is a piece of reliable history in the guise of fiction, it may truthfully be said it records certain stirring events and incidents which are known to have taken place. These incidents and events have been coloured and set with a due regard for the brilliant and picturesque Orient, which forms the stage on which the dramatic action is worked out. Those who knew India as I knew it in those lurid and exciting days, will probably admit that there is scarcely an incident introduced into my book but what *might* have happened during the enactment of the great tragedy. An air of *vraisemblance* represents true art in fiction, and when it becomes difficult for the reader to tell where fiction begins and truth ends, it may be said that the story-teller can go no further. If I should be fortunate in establishing a claim to this praise, I shall be proud indeed; but though I fail in that respect, I humbly venture to believe that “The Great White Hand” will be found neither dull nor uninteresting.

THE AUTHOR.

LONDON, 1896.

THE GREAT WHITE HAND,[\[1\]](#)

OR,

THE TIGER OF CAWNPORE.

A STORY OF THE INDIAN MUTINY.



CHAPTER I. THE RISING OF THE STORM.

It is the ninth of May, in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-seven. The morning breaks lowering and stormy, a fitting prelude to the great and tragic drama that is about to startle the world. It is not yet four o'clock, and the sun is hardly above the horizon, but in the fair Indian city of Meerut there is an unusual stir. The slanting rays of the rising sun, as they fall through the rifts of hurrying storm-clouds, gild the minarets and domes of the numerous mosques for which the city is famed. The tall and graceful palms stand out in bold relief against the sky, and from the cool greenery of their fan-like leaves there issue the soft, peaceful notes of the ring-doves. Meerut, at this time, is one of the most extensive military stations in our Indian empire, and covers an area nearly five miles in circumference. In the centre of the city is a great wall and esplanade, and along this runs a deep nullah, which cuts the station into two separate parallelograms; the one contains the European, and the other the Native force. The European lines are in the northern quarter, the Artillery barracks to the right, the Dragoons to the left, and the Rifles are in the centre. Between the barracks of the two last rises, tall and straight, the spire of the station church. It contrasts strangely with the Oriental architecture which surrounds it. Farther northward again stretches an extensive plain, which is used as a parade-ground. Towards this plain, on the fateful ninth of May, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, streams of human beings are flowing. Crowds of natives, from the low-caste Coolie to the pompous Baboo, hurry along, either on foot or horseback.

Presently, far and near, the *reveille* is heard, and, in a little while, long lines of troops, mounted and on foot, march towards the plain. Then the clattering of horses' hoofs, and the rumbling of guns, add to the general commotion, and soon the plain is swarming with armed men. Heavily-shotted field-guns are placed in position, and the drawn sabres of the Dragoons flash in the sun's rays, while on three sides of the plain are bodies of troops armed with the new Enfield rifles, that are ready, on the word being given, to belch forth fire, and send their rotary messengers of death into the crowds of natives if the necessity should arise.

The cause of this great gathering is to see eighty-five native soldiers converted into felons. On the 24th of April the 3rd Native Cavalry had been drawn up for

parade, and, when the order to load had been given, these eighty-five had resolutely refused to bite their cartridges. For this mutinous act they had been tried by a court-martial, composed of English and native officers, and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment with hard labour; and on this Saturday morning, the 9th of May, the first part of the sentence—that of stripping them of their uniform in the presence of all the regiments—is to take place.

At a given signal the doomed eighty-five are brought forward under a strong guard of Rifles and Carabineers. They still wear their uniform and have their accoutrements. Colonel Carmichael Smyth, the Colonel of their Brigade, steps forth, and, in a loud, clear voice, reads the sentence. That over, their accoutrements are taken from them, and their uniforms are stripped from their backs. Then the armourers and smiths step forth with their shackles and their tools, and, in the presence of a great concourse of their old comrades, the “eighty-five” stand with the outward symbols of their black disgrace fastened upon them.

With loud cries they lift up their arms, and implore the General to have mercy upon them, and save them from ignominious doom. But the fiat has gone forth, and they stand there manacled felons. Then, in the agony of despair, they turn to their comrades and hurl reproaches at them for quietly permitting such dire disgrace to fall upon them. There is not a Sepoy or native civilian present but who gasps for breath as he feels the rising indignation in his throat. But, in the presence of the stern white soldiers, of the loaded guns, of the grooved rifles, and the glittering sabres, they dare not strike. As the prisoners make their appeal, there moves, swiftly, silently amongst the crowds of natives, a tall, slim man—a Hindoo. His movements are snake-like; his eyes glisten with a deadly fire. As he goes, he whispers—

“Courage, and wait!”

The crowds commence to disperse. The felon “eighty-five” are marched to the gaol, two miles from the cantonment, with only a native guard over them.

As the day wears on the storm passes away, and when the shades of evening fall upon Meerut, all is quiet and peaceful. It is one of those nights that may be described, but which few persons, who have never been in hot countries, can realise. The air is stagnant. The stars seem to quiver in a haze. Not a branch stirs, not a leaf rustles. Myriads of fire-flies—Nature's living jewels—dance about in bewildering confusion. Occasionally the melancholy sounds of a tom-tom,

varied by the screech of a jackal, is heard. But with this exception, a death-like silence seems to reign in the city.

Seated on the verandah of a pretty bungalow in the European quarter, is a young man—a civilian. His physique is that of a trained athlete. He is handsome, too, with a mass of black hair falling over a prominent forehead. His name is Walter Gordon; he is the son of a wealthy merchant of Meerut, who had died very suddenly, and Walter had but recently come out from England to take charge of his father's business. He is not alone now. His companion is a lady slightly his junior. She is very pretty. A pure English face, with tender brown eyes, and soft, moist lips. A wealth of rich brown hair is negligently held together by two large gold pins of native workmanship. This young lady is the betrothed of Walter Gordon. Her father (Mr. Meredith) had held a Civil Service appointment in Meerut, but had died some two years before the opening events of this story, leaving a widow and two daughters, Flora and Emily. Emily had been recently married to an officer of one of the regiments stationed in the city. Lieutenant Harper and Walter Gordon were very old friends. They had been school-mates together, and they both laid siege at one time to the hearts of the Misses Meredith. Harper had been successful, and carried his prize off to his quarters, but Walter had delayed his marriage, pending the settlement of some legal difficulty in connection with property to which he was entitled. That difficulty was now removed, and Walter had gone on this evening to Mrs. Meredith's bungalow to arrange for his marriage with Flora.

"Flo, are you not glad that we are soon to be united?" he asks, as he observes that she is silent, and makes no remark on the news he has brought her.

"Yes, love. You say that you wish our marriage to take place in a month's time. Would that it were to-morrow; ay, even to-night!"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Flo, what do you mean?"

"I mean that in a month's time you and I may be separated."

"Separated?" he repeated.

"Yes. Perhaps dead."

"Dead!" he echoed—his astonishment increasing at the strangeness of her manner.

“Ah, love,” she murmured, as she placed her arms around his neck, and her head drooped upon his breast,—“strange as you are yet to the ways of the country, you surely cannot be blind to signs which rise on every side, that a storm is approaching.”

“A storm. To what do you allude?”

“To the discontented state of the natives, who are ripe for revolt. We tremble upon the brink of a mine that may at any moment be sprung; and what the consequences will be I shudder to think.”

“These are but morbid fears, Flo,” he answered, as he caressed her. “Believe me that our power is too strong, and too much dreaded by the natives to allow any serious outbreak. The example we made of the ‘ighty-five’ on the parade this morning will strike terror to the hearts of those who might have contemplated any rashness.”

“There you are in error, Walter; what our troops did this morning has only increased our danger manifold. There is not a Sepoy in all Meerut to-night, but who is nursing in his breast feelings of the most deadly hatred towards the English. The fire smoulders, and a breath will fan it into flame. If the natives should rise, may God in His mercy pity us.”

“Tut, tut, my girl; you are alarming yourself with foolish fears, and there is nothing at all to justify your apprehensions. The soldiers dare not revolt, and if they did, we have such an overwhelming force of British in the cantonment, that all the native regiments would be speedily cut to pieces.”

“The belief in our security is our danger,” she answered. “Remember I know the country and the natives well. I have been in India from the time I was a little child. Those who are in authority seem to me to be wilfully blind to the signs which indicate coming mischief. For some days past, a man, ostensibly a Fakeer, has been riding about the city on an elephant, and visiting all the native quarters. I do not believe that man to be what he professes to be. He is an agent moving about from place to place, and stirring up the rankling hatred for the British which is in the hearts of all his countrymen.”

“This is a strange statement; and you speak as though you had authority for what you say.”

“I have authority.”

“Ah! what do you mean?” he cried in an excited tone.

“Oh, Walter, what I have to tell you I know will give you pain, but it must be told. I have held it back until I feel that to keep it from you longer would be unfair. You have in your service a sicar, a young man who was brought up in an English school.”

“You refer to Jewan Bukht. Well, what of him?”

“He has confessed love for me!”

“Confessed love for you!” Walter cried angrily, as he ground his teeth, and tightened his arm around the waist of his beloved. “By Heaven, I will horsewhip the scoundrel. But come, Flo, you are joking, and do not wish me to seriously believe anything so absurd.”

“Would that it were a joke! Jewan has been your trusted and confidential clerk, and whenever you have had a message to send to me, he has always brought it. Latterly he has grown unpleasantly familiar, and on one occasion asked me to kiss him. On my showing anger at the insult, he apologised, and promised not to offend again. A few days ago he called, and appeared to me to be under the influence of *bang*. He seized my hand, and fell upon his knees at my feet. He said that in a little while the natives intended to rise in the name of the Prophet; that every white person in Meerut would be massacred; but, if I would consent to become his wife, he would save me and those belonging to me. In disgust with the fellow for his impertinence, I called him a dog, and threatened to inform you of his conduct. He became greatly enraged, and said that I should be his by fair or foul means, and that you should die by his hand.”

“Why did you not tell me this before, Flo?”

“Because I looked upon it at the time as the freak of a drunken man, and I had no wish to give you unnecessary pain. But it was foolish of me. I ought to have told you.”

“When did this scene take place?” Walter asked, thoughtfully.

“Three days ago. That is, last Wednesday.”

“This is very strange, Flora. On that day the rascal asked me for leave of absence till Monday, as he wished to visit a sick relation.”

“Depend upon it, Walter, he will never return to you.”

“Never return! You are really talking in riddles. What do you mean?”

“I feel sure that there was truth in what the man told me, and his leaving you on that day was part of the scheme. You may say I am nervous, foolish, stupid, what you will, but I understand the natives well. I know how treacherous they can be; and it is useless our trying to cheat ourselves into a belief that they love us, because they don’t do anything of the sort.”

Walter laughed, as he pressed a kiss on the lips of his companion.

“Look here, Flora, you are certainly low-spirited to-night, and have got some strange fancies in your head. If you have any more of these morbid imaginings, I shall have to place you under the care of Dr. Macdonald. I have been very stupid to lend a serious hearing to your fears for a single moment. I am sure you are wrong. Our power is too great to be broken. The natives fear that power too much to do anything rash. Ah! good-evening, Harper, old boy,” he exclaimed, springing from his seat, as Lieutenant Harper and his wife entered the verandah. “I am very glad you have come. Flo is suffering from a fit of nervousness, and wants cheering up. Look here, Emily,” with a laugh, and turning to Mrs. Harper, “just give your sister a shaking, and shake her into a better frame of mind.”

“Surely you young people have not been quarrelling,” Harper remarked, as he threw himself into a seat, and offered his friend a cigar.

“Oh dear no; but Flo has got an idea into her little head that the natives are going to rise *en masse*, and massacre us all.”

“By Jove, they will have tough work, then,” laughs the lieutenant. “They had an example this morning of what we can do. If there had been the slightest sign of insubordination on the parade, we should have mowed them down with grape and canister.”

“Don’t talk quite so loud, Master Charlie,” his wife remarked. “There are two of the bearers at the end of the verandah, and they seem to be listening.”

“All the better, my dear. Nothing like impressing these black wretches with a sense of our superiority. What say you, Walter?”

“Well it depends a great deal upon what we consider ourselves superior in.”

“Superior in!” exclaimed his friend. “Surely you are not going to estimate your countrymen so low as to suppose for a moment that we could be inferior to the natives in any one respect.”

“I am not quite clear on that point,” answered Gordon, thoughtfully. “I think that the great error of the English has been in treating the natives as if they were not possessed of common intelligence. Depend upon it, it is a mistaken policy, which we shall some day rue.”

“Nonsense, old fellow. You are a greenhorn yet in the country, and in a very short time these sentimental ideas will be knocked out of you. There is no doubt that the *canaille* of India is bitter against us, but the upper classes are loyal to the backbone—take Dhoondu Pdnt as an example.”

“You mean the man who is known as Nana Sahib of Bhitoor?”

“Yes; he is the adopted son of the Peishwah Bajee Rao. Now, if any man has cause to be dissatisfied with our rule it is the Nana, inasmuch as we have resolutely refused to recognise his right to succession. Moreover, he is a Mahratta by race, and a Brahmin by caste. Now, it is well-known that in the heart of every Mahratta there is an innate and hereditary hatred for the English, while the Brahmin religion teaches its votaries to look upon the Feringhees as dogs and infidels that, in the name of the Prophet, should be exterminated. And yet his highness—by courtesy—is as loyal to us as a man can possibly be. His balls and dinners given to his friends, the English, in and about Cawnpore, are things to be remembered.”

“But what proof have you that the Nana is not playing a well-studied game; only biding his time to execute a well-planned *coup-d'état*, and strike for his home and liberty?”

Harper laughed loudly as he looked at his friend's serious face; and as he offered him a cheroot, exclaimed—

“Bosh! Look here, old fellow, don't get such ideas as those into your head, or you will never succeed in India. Here, Khitmudgar, brandy pawnee lao.” Turning to the ladies, he said, “Flo, I think you have been putting some strange ideas into Walter's head, and I shall have to take you to task. Why, my dear fellow, there is no more chance of the natives rising here, than there is of Her Majesty's Life Guards revolting in London at the present moment. Come, what do you say to a hand at whist? Em and I have two hours on our hands before we

return to quarters.”

“Whist, by all means,” Walter answered. “Flo, will you order one of the bearers to get the card-table ready in the drawing-room?”

In a few minutes the four Europeans were apparently so absorbed in the game, that all thought of danger was banished. A sleepy Coolie sat on one side of the room, and with monotonous regularity pulled the cord of the punkah, that, moving gracefully backwards and forwards, made a cool and refreshing draught. Without all was silent. Only the drowsy whir of the insects, and the sweetly mellow notes of the bul-bul rose on the stagnant air.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] The Great White Hand (*Baṛā Safed Hāth*), a saying current in India to describe the power of the English.

CHAPTER II. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHUPATTIES.

As sleep fell upon the northern quarter of Meerut on that Saturday night, there was an unusual stir in the native part. In the lines of the native soldiery, in the populous bazaars, and in the surrounding villages, a fatal signal was passing. Five fleet-footed Indians were speeding from place to place; and as they went, they put into the hands of the principal men a small cake. It was a chupatty; and, like the fiery cross, it was the signal of a general rising.

On the banks of the Goomtee there rose the lichen-covered wall of a half-ruined temple. Hitherto, silence had reigned in its deserted halls, and the lizard and the serpent had hunted undisturbed for prey amongst the fallen shafts and broken capitals. But the grey ruin was witness of a strange scene to-night. Hundreds of natives were pouring in from all parts. At every entrance to the temple a guard was posted, and admission could only be gained by giving a password. That was "Chupatty." But all comers knew the pass; none were turned away. Rapidly the crowd swelled with soldiers and civilians, until every available space was occupied. They perched on the broken walls, on the fallen columns, on the moss-covered arches. Wherever a foot-hold could be gained, there was a native. Here and there was suspended a native lamp—a cotton-wick placed in cocoa-nut oil, contained in a cocoa-nut shell. Seen in this dim light, the scene was striking and picturesque. The dusky forms of the natives seemed to be everywhere—above, below, around. The dark wall of the ruin appeared to be actually jewelled with gleaming eyes, which, as they caught the fitful flare of the lamp, flashed with hatred and revenge. A dull, confused sound only was heard as the swarming natives conversed one with another in subdued tones. Presently six distinct beats were given on a tom-tom. Then there was a death-like silence, as there entered, by the main entrance, a tall man, whose face was muffled with a puggeree. He was followed by several other natives; and as they entered and took up their position at one end of the ruins, salaams rose from a hundred throats. Then the tall man threw back his puggeree, and exposed his features. They were massive, firm, and of the true Mahratta cast. His skin was light brown; his lips full and sensual, and his eyes small, restless, and cunning. He was a powerfully-built man, with a full, flowing beard, his age about thirty years. His bearing was proud and haughty; his dress handsome, being that of a Mahratta prince. Round his

neck was a massive gold chain, and on his fingers sparkled numerous and costly jewels. His head was encircled with a rich turban, ornamented in front with a single large diamond. From a jewelled belt round his waist protruded the inlaid handles of native pistols; and at his side was suspended a tulwar. This was Dhoondu Pdnt, the Nana Sahib of Bhittoor. He was attended by his war minister, Teeka Singh, and his confidential friend and adviser, Azimoolah. The latter a short, slim man; but supple and panther-like in his movements; his face had but one expression—that of pitiless ferocity. In a few moments the Nana addressed the assembly.

“Countrymen, I have ventured here to-night that I may, by my presence, inspire you with courage and hope. We stand on the eve of great events, and no man has the cause more at heart than I. We wait but for one signal now to decide us in the course of action we are to take. That signal is to come from Delhi. Our agents have been hard at work for some days, and if the regiments there will join us, and give us shelter if needed, all will be well. Though I must hurry back to Bhittoor to-night, that it may not be known, until the proper hour arrives, that I have shaken off allegiance to the hated Feringhees, I shall be with you in spirit; and, in the name of the Prophet, I invoke success on your arms. When you strike, remember that you strike for your freedom, for your religion. Let the House of Timour be restored, and the Imperial Dynasty of Delhi be revived in all its ancient glory and splendour. Let our race of mighty kings be perpetuated, and the great white hand of the hateful British be crushed and trampled into the dust. We are a great people. We have been enchained, enslaved, and robbed of our birthrights. Let us rise now as one man, and strike for those sacred rights of which we have been deprived. Steel your hearts against every feeling of pity. Let not the pale faces of either their women or children raise one sympathetic feeling in your breasts. When the opportunity arrives I will perform deeds that shall not only be an example to you, but that shall make my name known throughout the world, and the name of Nana Sahib shall be in every man’s mouth. Let Hindoos and Mahomedans alike be stirred but by one impulse to slaughter the Feringhees, man, woman, and child. The English are *luchar* (helpless). They sleep in fancied security, and dream not that their doom is sealed. We have past injuries to avenge; we have future dangers to guard against. Let our feelings declare themselves in characters of fire. Let the firebrand tell these invaders of our soil that, from end to end of India, we have common cause, and that we strike for liberty!”

The Nana ceased speaking, and a murmur of applause ran through the assembled

multitude.

“Jewan Bukht comes not, sahib,” said Azimoolah, after a pause. “I hope his mission has not failed.”

“The Prophet forbid,” answered the Nana. “His mission was fraught with danger, and he may have been unexpectedly detained. When he departed on Wednesday he said he should be back to-night, to bring to this meeting the answer of Delhi.”

“I hope he has not proved false?” Azimoolah remarked, his cold eyes glittering like a snake’s.

“False! No,” exclaimed the Nana. “I’ll answer for him with my life. He is a useful man; he knows the ways of the English well, having been brought up in one of their schools. No, no; Jewan is not false. He has personal motives for being true to us, and he has much to gain. Ah! I hear the sounds of horse’s hoofs in the distance. Let the word be passed to the guard to be on the alert.”

The ring of horse’s shoes could now be distinctly heard, as it galloped furiously along the hard road. Nearer and nearer the sounds came, and in a few minutes the tom-tom was beaten again as a signal that someone of importance had arrived. Then in a little time a man, hot and breathless, rushed into the presence of the Nana, and, prostrating himself at his feet with a profound salaam, took from his turban a small chupatty, and handed it to the Prince. On it was inscribed, in Hindostanee characters, painted red, the following:—

“We fight for the King.

“We fight for the restoration of the Mogul throne.

“We fight for the Prophet.”

“Allah be praised!” exclaimed Dhoondu, as he took the cake, and a smile of triumph lighted up his cruel face. “Success attends us,” he continued, addressing the multitude; “and the Imperial City is true to herself. We will plant the rebel standard on the Palace of the Mogul, and the House of Timour shall flourish once more. Jewan Bukht, thou art faithful, and hast performed a brave deed; the Prophet will look favourably upon thee.”

Jewan was a young man with a singularly intelligent, and, for a native, handsome face. He was a native of Meerut, and at an early age had been left an orphan. An European lady had taken him under her care, and sent him to an

English school near Calcutta to be educated. When he had reached the age of twenty his protectress died, and he returned to Meerut a professing Christian, and speaking the English language fluently. Since his return he had occupied the position of a head sicar or clerk in Walter Gordon's establishment. He had gained the esteem and confidence of his master, and had, up to a quite recent period, been in the habit of attending regularly the station church. But of late his movements had become mysterious, and he had passed much of his time in the native lines.

"I thank you, great Prince," said Jewan, in answer to Dhoondu. "I have had a perilous journey, but I left no quarter in Delhi unvisited. Young and old there are panting for the hour to arrive when they can arise from their bondage. There is but a very small European force in the city. Delhi once secured, we can hold it against all comers."

"And we will secure it," added the Nana, significantly. "But come, the night wears, and we must disperse; Teeka, and you, my faithful Azimoolah, let us return with all speed to Bhittoor, and there await for the signal. Cawnpore shall be ours, and we will there wipe out our wrongs in English blood!"

He wrapped his scarf around him so as to hide his pistols and tulwar, and drawing his puggeree over his face, he passed out, attended by his followers. At a little distance a native carriage was waiting, and into this they sprang, and Meerut was speedily far behind. Then the crowd of natives quietly left the ruined temple, and soon the roofless halls were silent and deserted, and the slimy things that had sought shelter from the trampling feet, in the nooks and crannies, timidly came forth now, in search of prey, upon which they might feed so that they might live in accordance with the instinct planted by a Divine hand. But the hundreds of human beings who a little while before had held possession of the temple had also gone forth in search of prey, thirsting for blood—blood of the innocent and guilty alike—not that they might live thereby, but to gratify a burning feeling of hatred and revenge.

On the verandah of Mrs. Meredith's bungalow stood Flora Meredith alone. It was late, or rather early, for two o'clock had just sounded from the neighbouring barracks. Flora had been vainly endeavouring to sleep, but an undefined sense of dread had kept her awake, so that at last she had risen from her couch and gone out on the verandah, glad to breathe the cool morning air. Pensively she was gazing up to the stars, which still shone clear and bright, although the first streaks of dawn were struggling to the eastern sky.

She was dreaming of the man she loved, of the man who had her heart in his keeping, whose wife she was to be. She had an intuitive perception that there was danger coming—that, to use an expressive Hindostanee phrase, “there was something in the air.” But what did that something portend, and where did the danger menace? were questions she asked herself as she stood there—a picture of loveliness—in her loose robe, and her beautiful hair flowing freely about her white shoulders.

Unperceived by her, the figure of a dusky native was stealthily stealing across the compound, keeping in the shadows of the trees and shrubs, until he stood beneath the verandah. Then, with a noiseless spring, he vaulted lightly over the railings, and stood beside the dreaming girl.

With a cry of alarm, Flora started from her reverie, and, turning quickly round, beheld Jewan Bukht.

“What do you do here?” she asked quickly, when she had recovered from her surprise.

“Hush!” he said, putting his finger to his lips. “Your life depends upon silence. I have something to say to you.”

She was a brave girl; but her heart sank now, for she knew that his boldness arose from some terrible cause. Her presence of mind, however, did not forsake her. To set this man at defiance would be to gain nothing. She would endeavour to learn his motive for coming.

“What is the meaning of this unceremonious intrusion at such an hour?” she asked, when her first feeling of alarm had passed.

“I came in the hope of seeing you as the day dawned,” he answered; “but Fortune has favoured me, and, as if it were so decreed, you are unexpectedly here alone, even while the night is young.”

“Well, and what of that?” she asked hastily, as the man paused.

“It is good,” he replied, “for I have much to say.”

“But this is neither the time nor the place to say it,” she answered, making a movement as if she were about to turn into the bungalow.

Jewan caught her hand, and, with his glittering eyes fixed upon her fair face, said

“Miss Meredith, listen to me. But one thing could have induced me to visit you, for if my countrymen knew it they might suspect me of treachery, and slay me. But what will a man not do for love? Ah! do not start; do not try to draw your hand away, as if I were something loathsome. If my skin is dark, do not the same emotions and passions stir my breast as those of the white man’s? Can my heart not throb with feelings as tender as his who is your accepted husband? Miss Meredith, I love you! In the name of all that is good, I ask you to become my wife, according to the rights of your own Church. I will give you devotion, I will be faithful to you, I will love you unto death. Could a white man do more?”

“Jewan Bukht, are you mad? Do you know what it is you ask? Am I to give you all that is dear to me—to sever every tie that binds me to my kith and kin, in order to become your wife? Never!”

“Think well before you give a decisive answer,” he replied, still retaining his hold of her hand.

“I have already thought. You have my answer. Nothing can alter my decision. Go away for a little while, and, believe me, this silly infatuation of yours will speedily wear off.”

“How little you know of the heart, to talk like that. Mine is no infatuation, but a genuine love. Why should you despise it?”

“I do not despise it. But I tell you I cannot, nor will not be your wife.”

“Again I ask you not to be rash in your answer. A great danger is hovering over the station. In a little while a fire will be lighted here that will extend throughout India. Your countrymen and women will cry for pity to ears that will be deaf, and they will appeal to hearts that will be as stone. I tell you, Miss Meredith, that ere the sun has risen and set again, there shall be bloody deeds done in Meerut. Every white person in this and in every city of India stands in deadly peril. And when once the revolt has broken out, even the ‘Great White Hand,’ all-powerful as it is, will not be able to stop it. Ere it be too late, say that you will be mine, and I will save you—more, I will save those belonging to you!”

She looked at the kneeling man at her feet; her heart beat wildly, and her breath came thick and fast. She knew that there was truth in what he said, but how should she act?

She could not give this man her love—she shuddered, indeed, with a feeling of loathing, as she contemplated him. She released her hand from his, and drew herself up proudly, scornfully. And as the first flush of dawn, which was spreading over the heavens, caught her face, she looked inexpressibly beautiful.

“What you ask is impossible,” she said. “Love I could never give you, and better to die than sacrifice myself. Your master, Mr. Walter Gordon, is to be my husband. I will either be wedded to him or death. This is my answer. It is unalterable. For the rest, I trust in that God which you yourself have professed to worship.”

The man rose to his feet now—proud, defiant. His lips wreathed with scorn—his eyes glistened with a strange light.

“I own no master,” he answered, “but the great Nana Sahib. I came here as your friend; I leave as your enemy; you have treated me as you would have done a dog; but let that pass. I offered you life, liberty, security. You have scorned my offer. Let it be so. We shall meet again, and, when next we meet, you will answer me differently. You shall entreat where now you scorn. Farewell.”

She would have stopped him, for she regretted that she had spoken as she had, and wounded the man’s feelings. But it was too late; he had leaped over the railings into the compound, and was quickly out of sight.

With a sigh, poor Flora turned from the verandah to seek her couch, for she was weary and faint and sick with an instinctive feeling of some coming calamity.

CHAPTER III. THE STORM BREAKS.

The 10th of May was Sunday. It came in with fiery heat and glare, and arid, dust-charged winds. The bells of the church pealed forth, as they called the Christians to worship.

“You do not seem well this morning, Flo,” said Walter Gordon, as he assisted Miss Meredith into his buggy, with the intention of driving her to the station church.

“I am not at all well, Walter,” was her answer. “I have been restless all night, and have slept but little.”

“That is bad news, Flo. Suppose we have a drive out of Meerut, instead of going to church?”

“No, no. I prefer to attend the service this morning. I shall be better by-and-bye.”

As they drove along he noticed that she was nervous and agitated, and he questioned her as to the cause; but, though she longed to tell him all, her courage failed her, as she did not wish to give him unnecessary alarm. Besides, after all, what Jewan had said might have been but the boastful threat of a disappointed man—perhaps all would be well. She consoled herself with this thought, and determined to tell her lover at a later period.

In the European barracks and in the various bungalows there was on this particular morning a general desertion of native servants; but this circumstance, strange to say, excited no suspicions, and so the day was got through as usual.

The afternoon drew to a close. The sun declined on the opposite bank of the Goomtee, burnishing the stream with gold, and throwing into dark relief the heavy masses of native boats. The great Mall was a scene of gaiety, for the white glare of the day had departed, and the dust-laden atmosphere was tempered with a refreshing breeze. The whole European population seemed to be taking an airing. Strings of vehicles, crowds of horsemen, gaily-dressed ladies, numberless natives, together with the glowing river, the waving palms, the tall cocoa trees, and the gilded domes of the numerous mosques, which rose grandly in the

background, made up a scene which for picturesqueness and beauty could scarcely have been surpassed. It was a fair and smiling scene; “white-robed peace seemed to have settled there, and spread her downy wings.”

Backwards and forwards went the natives. Hindoos and Brahmins, high-caste and low-caste, mingling now indiscriminately. Could each of the hearts that beat beneath those dusky skins have been read, could it have been known how they were burning with hatred and loathing for the Feringhees, many a white man would have shuddered, and, as he tightened his grip on revolver or sword, he would have drawn the loved ones to his breast, there to shield them with his life.

Walter Gordon and Miss Meredith sat alone in the verandah, for Flora had complained of feeling very unwell, and Walter decided that, instead of going for the usual afternoon drive, it would be better to remain quietly at home.

They were suddenly surprised by observing a horseman come galloping down the road. He drew rein opposite the compound, and, springing from his saddle, hurried to the verandah. It was Lieutenant Harper.

“Walter, a word with you,” he cried. “Do not be alarmed, Flo,” he added, quickly, as he observed her cheeks blanch.

She sprang to her feet quickly, and grasped his arm.

“Tell me,” she cried, “what is the matter. I see by your manner that there is danger. Where does it threaten?”

“Do not be alarmed,” he repeated; “there is danger, but we may avert it. I must not stay, though. I am bound on secret service to Delhi, and I must reach that city before the day breaks. I am guilty of a great dereliction of duty in calling here; but I could not leave without seeing you. Walter, order your horse to be saddled, and accompany me as far as the Delhi road. I want to talk to you.”

“But Flora—how can I leave her?” Walter asked, in agitation.

“Never mind me,” she answered. “Go; it may be to our benefit.”

“Yes; it will be. I have some plans to arrange,” said Harper.

In a few minutes Walter’s horse stood in the compound.

“You have a case of revolvers?” Walter said to Flora.

“Yes.”

“Let me have one—quick.” He hurried in, and speedily loaded the chambers of a Colt’s. Then thrusting the weapon into his belt, and buttoning over his coat, he kissed Flora, and pressing her to his heart, said—“Good-bye, darling, I shall not be long away. I know that Harper has something of the utmost importance to say, or he would not ask me to go.”

“God protect you!” she murmured. “Until you return, my heart will be full of fear.”

In another moment the two men were galloping down the Mall, towards the great road which led to Delhi, that city being forty miles from Meerut.

“Walter,” said Harper, when they had got some distance away, “I did not wish to alarm Flo, but there is an awful time coming for us. It is not clear, yet, from what quarter the danger will arise. The Commandant has, this afternoon, received some information, whether trustworthy or not is not very clear. At anyrate, he attaches more than ordinary importance to it, and I am the bearer of dispatches to Delhi. My mission is one fraught with the greatest amount of personal danger, and I may never return alive. But I am a soldier, and must do my duty. To your care I consign my wife. When you get back, take Flo and her mother up to my bungalow. You will be company for Emily, and be under the protection of the troops in the barracks. If nothing serious occurs to-night, the danger may be averted. I regret now that we treated Flora’s fears with so much disregard. With a woman’s keener sense of penetration, she saw farther ahead than we did.”

“What, then, is the nature of the danger anticipated?” Walter asked.

“A general revolt of the native soldiery, and a wholesale massacre,” was the answer.

“Great Heavens! Is that so?” exclaimed the other, as his heart almost stood still at the bare thought of the horrors the words suggested.

Then for some little time the horsemen galloped along without exchanging a word. Each was busy with his own thoughts, which possibly flew far away to peaceful England, whose Queen little dreamed that her great Indian possessions were about to be all but wrested from her. The great Delhi road was reached at last, and along this Walter accompanied his friend for some miles. The slant shadows thrown by the evening sun were slowly fading, and darkness was

creeping up. The men drew rein at last.

“I will return now,” said Walter.

“Do,” was the other’s answer. “Walter, give me your hand, old fellow. Perhaps in this world we may never meet again. If I fall, be a brother to my poor wife. If I should return, and you fall, Flo shall find a brother in me. We all carry our lives in our hands. Let us sell them as dearly as possible; and for every white man that falls let twenty black ones bite the dust.”

A sharp report rang out on the still air, and a bullet whizzed between the men.

“Great God!” cried Harper; “the storm has burst at last. Farewell.”

He grasped his friend’s hand, and in another moment was speeding away in the darkness.

Walter glanced about to see from which point the danger threatened him. Then he drew his revolver, and grasping it with the determination of an Englishman who would only sell his life at a great cost, he set his horse’s head back to Meerut.

To return to Miss Meredith. Scarcely had Walter and her brother-in-law gone than she threw herself into a chair and burst into tears.

“What for missy weeping?” said a voice behind her.

On looking up, she beheld an old and faithful ayah, named Zeemit Mehal, who had been in her mother’s service for some time.

“Ah, Zeemit,” she murmured, “I am so glad you are here. Mr. Gordon has gone out with Lieutenant Harper, and I am very lonely and nervous. I think I shall go up and see my sister; she will be dull now her husband is away.”

“No, missy, you must not go,” answered Zeemit firmly.

“And why must I not, Zeemit?”

“Because there is great danger coming to your countrymen and women; and my love for you prompts me to save you.”

She caught the old ayah by her skinny arm, and, in a voice choked with emotion, said—

“What do you mean, Mehal? If there is danger, does it not threaten my mamma and sister as well as me?”

“Yes, but there is greater safety indoors; for every white man who shows himself, there are a hundred bullets waiting to pierce his heart.”

Flora uttered a scream, and she clutched the skinny arm tighter, as if in that weak old woman she saw her only refuge.

“Oh, Zeemit,” she cried, “if this is true, what will become of Walter?”

“He is a brave man, miss, and may be able to get back here in safety. At any rate, do not alarm yourself unnecessarily. I will not desert you, and while I have life I will defend you. But in all things, miss, be guided by me.”

The alarm that an outbreak was expected had spread now throughout the station, and it was determined not to hold service in the church, although the congregation had gathered. And so the clergyman, commending them to the care of Heaven, dismissed them with a blessing.

As the people returned to their homes, there was a look of unwonted anxiety on the pale, scared faces. Sounds and sights greeted them on their way back that could not be misinterpreted. The unwonted rattling of musketry on the Sabbath evening; the sound of the bugles from all quarters, as they called to assembly; the hurrying to and fro of men armed to the teeth, and the panic-struck looks of the unarmed, all told of coming disaster. Presently columns of smoke rose up against the fast darkening sky, then blood-red flames leapt into the air, and the lurid glare soon spread the awful news, far and wide, that the native troops in Meerut had revolted.

The Third Bengal Artillery, whose comrades were languishing in gaol, rushed from their lines towards the hospital, which had been turned into a temporary prison for the “eighty-five,” whose only guard was a small body of natives. This was one of the most inconceivable acts of stupidity that occurred during the whole of the frightful mutiny. And when it was too late, it became painfully evident that someone had blundered. Who was responsible for the error? men asked of one another as they hurried about in the first panic of alarm. But no one answered the question, and through the weakness of the administration at that critical period, hundreds of innocent lives paid the penalty.

On went the half-maddened men of the Third, their cry now being “To the

rescue!” Some were in uniform, man and horse fully accoutred, some in their stable dress, with only watering rein and horse cloth on their chargers, but all armed to the teeth, and on the faces of all a grim, resolute expression of ferocity. They reached the walls of the gaol; not the slightest opposition was offered; the rescue began. Down they tore the masonry around the cells; iron bars were wrenched away, and used to batter in the gates. Then forth came the “eighty-five”; their manacles were struck off, and the erst-while felons stood free men, with the light of the incendiary fires beating upon their dusky faces. Up behind their deliverers they mounted, and rode back to the lines, their hearts thirsting for revenge.

When they got to their quarters they were joined by the Eleventh Native Regiment. Colonel Finnis, who commanded the Eleventh, strong in his belief of the loyalty of his regiment, rode in amongst them.

“Men of the Eleventh!” he cried, “be true to your Queen, and do not disgrace your profession of arms by acts of violence and mutiny. Whatever wrongs you have I pledge you, in the name of the Queen, that they shall be redressed. Remember that we have helpless women and children amongst us who look to you for protection. You are human, and in your human hearts let the voice of pity obliterate your feelings of bitterness. I, your colonel, command you to return peaceably to your barracks, and I will protect you from all consequences of this act.”

The answer was a report, and the colonel’s horse staggered and fell beneath its rider. Another shot was fired; it went clean through the colonel’s body. A volley followed—and Colonel Finnis fell dead, completely riddled with bullets.

Then, from every quarter of Meerut, rose heavy columns of smoke, that were illuminated with many coloured flames. The sight was awful; the rolling of the musketry, the crackling of the fires, the crashing of falling timbers, the shrieks of the dying and the wounded, the cry of defenceless women, the piteous neighing of the horses as they were scorched to death in their stables, the yells, and shouts of the rabble, made up a night of horrors, such as, in the history of the world, has rarely been recorded.

From every street, and corner, and hole, and alley—from the bazaars and villages—poured forth streams of maddened natives, bent upon murder and plunder. And “death to the Feringhees!” was the one cry heard above all others. Like wild beasts from their lairs, seeking whom they might devour, came the

hordes; and as the European officers rushed from their bungalows, they were shot down, and fell riddled with bullets.

Flora Meredith stood in the verandah of her bungalow like one turned to stone. She was horror-stricken, and could not move. At the first alarm her mother, maddened with despair, had rushed out into the compound, and was shot through the heart; and there she lay now, her dead eyes staring blankly up to the red sky.

A man hurriedly crossed the compound. He sprang into the verandah, he stood beside Flora, he passed his arm around her waist. It aroused her to a sense of her awful position. She turned and confronted the intruder. Her eyes fell upon Jewan Bukht.

“You brute!” she cried, “how dare you take such a liberty?”

He laughed, and tightened his hold, as she struggled to free herself.

“I told you we should meet again,” he said, with withering irony. “It is not yet too late; I can yet save you. Say you will marry me.”

By a desperate effort she freed herself from his grasp, and, recoiling away, exclaimed:

“Never! I would rather die a hundred deaths.”

He laughed again—a bitter, cunning laugh—and made a movement as if to seize her.

“Then you shall die,” he exclaimed, unsheathing a long, glittering native dagger.

He was intercepted by a woman—a native. It was Zeemit Mehal.

“Stay, Jewan!” said Zeemit. “If you are rough with this pretty prize, she may injure herself. She is a bonny bird, and should not ruffle her plumage. She shall be yours. I give her to you.”

“May God in heaven protect me!” murmured Flora, as, sinking on her knees, she buried her face in her hands.

“Hush!” whispered Zeemit, as she bent down, unperceived by Jewan, “obey me in all things, and I will save you.”

“Come, my pretty dove,” said Zeemit, aloud, as she took the hands of Flora, and raised her to her feet, “life is sweet, and Jewan will be good to you. Besides, our

time has come. The Feringhees have ruled us long enough. We triumph now, and resistance on your part will be useless. You must go with Jewan.”

“That is well said, Zeemit,” cried the man; “and I will give you jewels enough to make you as rich as a Ranee for your service. I shall take this white-faced woman to the Palace of the Mogul in Delhi.”

“But you must not leave me behind!” exclaimed Zeemit in well-feigned alarm.

“Leave you behind—certainly not!” answered Jewan, with a laugh. “You shall go and be keeper to my bird, and clip her wings if she wants to fly. I have a buggy close at hand; we will go together. Stay here until I bring it up.”

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He went out into the compound, and when he had gone Flora flung herself at the feet of Zeemit.

“Oh, Zeemit!” she cried, “by all that you hold dear—if you have sister, mother, father, brother, nay, more, if you have a child—I appeal to you, in their names, to save me!”

“I will,” was the answer. “But you must go with this man; for to remain here is certain death. If your lover has escaped, and he may have done so, he will assuredly return. I will remain behind and wait, so that if he comes I can warn him and apprise him of your whereabouts. Hush! Jewan returns.”

Flora was utterly bewildered. She could neither think nor act, only yield herself blindly to the counselling of this old woman.

The man had driven into the compound in a buggy. He sprang to the ground.

“Quick,” he cried, “there is no time to be lost.”

“I have an old father, who lives on the other side of the nullah,” said Zeemit; “I must visit him before I go.”

“But I cannot wait for you; even our own lives are in danger by remaining here,” observed Jewan angrily.

“There is no occasion to wait,” was the answer. “When I have seen my father I will hurry after you. I am an old woman, and no one will molest me; I shall find means to reach Delhi almost as soon as you. Come, my baby, put on your things,” she added, addressing Flora, who followed the old woman into the bungalow.

When Flora had secured a few relics and articles of value, and had arrayed herself in a shawl and hat, she returned to the verandah.

“You will come,” she whispered to the old woman; “and save him if possible. Should I not see you in three days, and if this man insults me, I will die by my own hand.”

“I will save him and you if he lives,” was the answer. “Go.”

Then the poor girl, bewildered by the rapid course of events, and half-dazed by the danger that surrounded her, and scarcely able to realise the fact that a few

yards off her mother was lying stark and white, mounted to the buggy, and sank down overpowered upon the cushions.

Jewan sprang up beside her, and, covering her up with a dark horse-cloth, he lashed his horse into a gallop, and was soon speeding out of Meerut. As the buggy reached the great Mall, it was passed by a horse that was tearing along at a great pace. It carried a rider, an Englishman. His head was bare, his hair was streaming in the wind, his teeth were set, and in his hand he firmly held a revolver. He bent low, until his face almost touched the neck of his horse, for now and again shots were sent after him; but he seemed to bear a charmed life, and never slackened pace for an instant, and soon he and the buggy were far apart.

The flying horseman was Walter Gordon. Breathless and begrimed, he rushed into the compound of the Meredith bungalow, just in time to see flames issuing from the windows. It had been fired by the incendiaries. He would have entered the burning building, but a hand firmly grasped his arm, and a voice whispered in his ear—

“Be silent as you value your life.”

It was Zeemit Mehal.

“Where is Miss Meredith?” he cried, in spite of the old woman’s warning.

“She lives,” was the answer. “On your prudence depends her safety and your own. Be guided by me, and wait. Tether your horse to yonder tree, and follow me.”

He did as she desired, for there was something in the woman’s tone that gave him hope and confidence. Then at her bidding he crouched down beneath a clump of bushes, and waited.

CHAPTER IV. THE PALACE OF THE MOGUL.

As that awful night of the 11th of May wore on, a drama was enacted in the fair city of Meerut, that the most graphic pen would fail to do justice to. For a time the mutineers held their own. They burned and pillaged, they massacred and drank. In their mad fury nothing was held sacred. Even their own temples and mosques fell a prey to the incendiary firebrands. Innocent children were ruthlessly slaughtered; helpless women were dismembered, and many a gallant officer rolled in the dust without being able to fire a shot at his unseen and cowardly foe.

But soon the tide turned. The panic, which for a short time seemed to have paralysed those in command, gave place to reaction. The Rifles and the Dragoons were let loose. Desperate and terrible was the conflict, but the “Great White Hand” was too powerful to be crushed by a howling rabble. The gallant English soldiers warmed to their work. Their blood fired as they thought of their cruelly-murdered wives and daughters, and country-women. And so, with carbines and sabres they cut lines for themselves through the crowded streets, until from thousands of throats went up the warning cry—

“Gora-logue, aya” (the Europeans have come). Then out of the city of Meerut, and on to the great high road that led to Delhi, went the cowardly mutineers—a disorderly, beggarly, undisciplined rabble now. The Dragoons followed some little distance, and made terrible havoc among the flying crowds. But suddenly, and for some inexplicable reason, the English soldiers were ordered to return. They did reluctantly—sorrowfully. Nay, they were half-inclined to disobey that order, for their blood was up, and they knew that they could have cut that flying horde to pieces. Somebody had blundered again! But who? And to the present day echo answers, Who?

The men returned to their lines, and the rebels straggled on. Before them was the Imperial City, with its gorgeous Palace, its stupendous magazine and arsenal, its countless treasures, its almost impregnable defences. It was a goal worth pressing forward to. Behind them was a town of smouldering and blackened ruins, of slaughtered women and children, and dauntless British soldiers burning to revenge the foul murders, but who were held in check by the marvellous

stupidity of those in office.

The Palace of the Mogul, in Delhi, was one that might have vied with any similar building in the whole of India; it was a majestic pile, worthy of the traditions that surrounded it, and the noble line of kings who had dwelt beneath its roof, but who were now but a name, for their ancient splendour had set never to rise again.

In one of the stateliest rooms in the stately Palace sat the aged King—a man upon whose brow the years had gathered thickly and set their stamp. A long beard, white as the driven snow, reached to his waist; his face was wrinkled and puckered, and his eyes dull and bleared, but they were restless, and plainly told that within the spirit was chafing. Around him was a brilliant retinue, and on each side of the marble hall stood an armed guard.

The King was seated on a raised dais, and was holding counsel with some of his ministers.

“Things work well,” he replied, in a low voice, to some remark that had just been made by one of his courtiers. “Our sun is rising, and power is coming back to us; we shall yet live to enjoy some of the glory which made the reign of our predecessors so conspicuous before these cursed Feringhees came and trampled on our power. Death to them!”

He ground his teeth and clenched his emaciated hand, and his eyes sparkled for a moment with a burning feeling of hatred.

“Do not distress yourself, great lord,” said a tall and handsome woman, whose massive bangles, flashing diamonds, and gold chain, bespoke her one of the King’s favourites. “The power of these foreigners is great, and better to submit to it than to rise only to fall again and be crushed.”

The King turned upon her, his whole frame quivering with wrath.

“Peace, fool—beast!” he cried; “thy sympathies have ever been with the hated race. Beneath thy breast there beats a traitorous heart. Have a care. Bridle thy tongue, or thy head may pay the forfeit.”

“I own no traitor’s heart, my lord and king,” the woman answered, as she drew herself up proudly.

“Peace, Haidee, I tell thee!” cried the monarch, in a voice husky with passion;

“we brook no insolence, and no answer. Thou art a slave. Know thy place.”

The eyes of Haidee burned and her lips quivered, while her bosom heaved with suppressed emotion.

“Take my life if it so pleases you, my lord, but to your face I say I am no slave,” she answered.

Haidee was as yet but in the first flush of womanhood; she had not numbered more than two-and-twenty years. She was a native of Cashmere, and of the true Cashmere type of beauty. Her form was perfect in symmetry; her face a study. Her eyes were large and liquid, and fringed with long silken lashes; her skin a delicate brown, almost cream colour, and the cheeks tinged with pink, while down her back, reaching below the knees, fell a wealth of the dark auburn hair peculiar to her countrywomen; it was kept from her face by a small tiara studded with diamonds, the points being many butterflies, composed of rubies and pearls; her arms, beautifully proportioned and rounded, were bare to the shoulders; and on the right arm up to the elbow were massive gold jewelled bands. She was arrayed in all the gorgeousness of Eastern costume—flowing silk studded with pearls, and looped up with massive gold knots, was suspended from her shoulders; trousers of light blue silk, and slippers of the same material, ornamented with small gold fire-flies, completed a costume that was at once picturesque and beautiful. Nature and art had combined to make Haidee a picture of perfect beauty.

Angered almost beyond control by her last remark, the King raised his hand as a sign to one of the guards, to whom he was going to issue orders to have her taken away; but, before he could speak, a messenger entered hurriedly, and prostrating himself before the dais, waited for the King’s pleasure.

“What hast thou to communicate?” asked the monarch, as he resumed his seat with difficulty.

“An English officer, the bearer of despatches from Meerut, seeks audience with your Majesty,” was the answer.

“Ah!” exclaimed the King, as he nervously clutched the arms of the chair with his withered hands. “An English officer, eh?—an English dog, thou shouldst have said. Let him wait our pleasure then,” he added angrily.

“He is importunate, your Majesty, and says his business permits of no delay.”

“A palsy seize him, and the whole of his race!” answered the King. “But we must not be premature. It were better, perhaps, to admit him.”

With a low bow the man withdrew, returning in a short time in company with Lieutenant Harper, whose ride from Meerut had been performed in an incredibly short space of time, and on whose face the perspiration was still wet, while his uniform was white with dust.

“Your Majesty will pardon me for dispensing with all ceremony,” he said, as he made a respectful salute to the King. “I have the honour to be the bearer of most important despatches from the Commandant of Meerut. Their contents are private, and intended for no other eyes but yours.”

As Harper spoke he handed a package of official documents to the King, who in turn was about to hand them to his secretary, as he remarked—

“We will have them read to us at our leisure.”

“Pardon me, but they must not leave your Majesty’s hands,” Harper said, hurriedly.

“Must not!” the King echoed, sternly. Then checking himself, he said—“Well, well, you English are an impetuous race! We will comply with your request. My spectacles, Zula. Let us see what these important documents contain.”

A native boy stepped forward, and presented to the King his spectacles on a gold plate.

Then, with nervous, trembling hands, he broke the seals of the packet, and unfolding the long blue sheets of paper, he slowly perused them. As he did so, there flitted across his face an almost perceptible smile of triumph, and over the gold rims of his spectacles he darted a look full of meaning to a powerful Sepoy who stood near.

This man was an orderly of the guard, and his name Moghul Singh. He was evidently in the King’s secret, for he seemed to understand the look, and made a sign, with his right hand, to his comrades.

Quickly as this was done, it did not escape the notice of Haidee, who shifted her position, ostensibly to converse with a group of ladies, but in reality to place herself nearer Harper.

During the time that the King had spent in reading the documents, Harper's gaze had frequently wandered to the lovely form of Haidee, and their eyes met, until every nerve in his body thrilled with the electrical fire of her wondrous eyes.

When the King had finished reading, he removed his spectacles and handed them back to the bearer. And as he slowly folded up the paper he remarked with an ill-concealed look of scorn—

“Your commandant fears that there is a conspiracy between the Meerut troops and those of Delhi. It may be so, but we know nothing of it. We have ever been faithful in our allegiance to your sovereign, and these suspicions are unjust. But our agents shall lose no time in ascertaining to what extent dissatisfaction exists in this our Imperial City, and steps shall be taken to give the mutineers of Meerut, should they come here, a warm reception. Moghul Singh,” he added, turning to the orderly, “see this officer comfortably quartered until to-morrow, when we will receive him again, and give him safe escort back, should he desire it.”

Harper made a salute, and prepared to go. The orderly also, in acknowledgment of his commands, saluted, but in obedience to a sign from the King he approached the dais, and the King, bending slightly forward, whispered—

“The stone room, Singh.”

Harper's movement had brought him close to Haidee—so close that the skirts of her garments touched him.

He looked up. His eyes met hers; and in accents that were scarcely audible, but which reached his ears, as they were intended to do, she whispered—

“On your guard! Danger!”

For a moment he was startled, but only for a moment. He comprehended in an instant that he was in peril, and that this beautiful woman, for some unknown reason, had given him friendly warning.

As Harper followed his guide from the audience chamber he began to suspect treachery; and knowing that the Commandant of the Palace Guard was a Scotchman, by name Douglas, and also that there were an English chaplain and several ladies in the Palace, he made a request to the orderly that he might be conducted to the presence of his countrymen and women.

“The sahib’s wishes shall be obeyed,” the orderly answered, with a military salute. But there was something in the man’s tone and manner which caused Harper to mistrust him, and the young officer instinctively moved his hand to the sword which hung at his side, and which was clanking ominously on the marble pavement.

Down long corridors, along numerous passages, through stately apartments, Harper went, led by his guide. At length an open court-yard was reached. On one side was a guard-room, at the door of which several Sepoys were lounging. The orderly led the Englishman close to the door, and as he did so he raised his hand and muttered something in Hindoostanee. Then, quick as thought, two tall, powerful Sepoys sprang upon Harper, and seized him in a grip of iron.

“Scum, cowards,” he cried, as he realised in an instant that he was the victim of a plot, and making a desperate struggle to free his hand and draw his sword. But other Sepoys came to the assistance of their comrades; the sword was taken away, his accoutrements and jacket were torn from him; then he was raised up, carried for some little distance, and forcibly thrown into a large apartment. Bewildered by the suddenness of the movement, and half-stunned by the fall—for his head had come in violent contact with the floor—Harper lay for some time unable to move.

When his senses fully returned, he stood up to examine the place in which he had been suddenly imprisoned. It was a large, square apartment, with walls of solid masonry, and a massive iron door, that seemed to render all chance of escape hopeless. The only light came from a narrow slit on one side of the room, near the roof. When his eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, he made a more minute inspection of the place. It was evidently a dungeon, for the walls were damp and slimy, and the most repulsive reptiles were crawling about the floor; while in the corners, and on every projecting angle, huge tarantula spiders sat waiting for prey.

In one corner of the room Harper noticed that there was a recess, and in this recess was a small arched doorway. He tried the door. It was made of iron, and as firm as the solid masonry in which it seemed to be built.

He was a brave man. He could have faced death unflinchingly in open fight, but he sank into the apathy of despair as he realised that he had been trapped into this place, from which escape seemed impossible, to be murdered in cold blood when the rising took place; for he had no doubt now that the appearance of the

Meerut mutineers would be the signal for a revolt in Delhi, and that when the time arrived every European would be ruthlessly butchered. As he remembered the words Haidee had uttered as he left the audience chamber, he reproached himself for not having been more on the alert.

“Fool that I was,” he cried, “to be thus taken off my guard! That woman gave me warning, and yet I have failed to profit by it.”

There was a small stone bench near where he was standing, and on to this he sank, and pressing his hands to his head, he murmured—

“My poor wife, God bless her; we shall never meet again.”

In a little time he grew calmer, and, rising from his seat, he once more made an inspection of his prison. But the slimy stone walls and the solid iron door seemed to mock all thought of escape, as they certainly shut out every sound—at least no sound reached his ear. The silence of death was around him. The awful suspense was almost unendurable. He felt as if he should go mad, and he was half-tempted, in those first moments of despair and chagrin, to dash his brains out against the dripping wall. He paced the chamber in the agony of despair. He threw himself on the stone seat again. And as the thought of those he loved, and that he might never see them any more, flashed through his brain, he felt as if he were really going mad.

Suddenly, out of his confused ideas, out of the mental chaos to which he had been well-nigh reduced, a question suggested itself to him, and an image rose up before his view.

It was the image of Haidee. The light of her eyes seemed to shine upon him from out of the thick darkness. He saw the beauty of her form, veiled in her costly, jewelled drapery, and her magnificent hair floating around her.

“Who is that strange beautiful woman?” was the question he asked, as in his imagination he saw her stand before him.

Then he followed it by another.

“Why did she interest herself in me? I must surely be totally unknown to her?”

But the questions were more easily asked than answered. It was a mystery of which he could scarcely hope at that moment to find the solution.

Exhausted with his long ride, and the great excitement under which he had laboured, he sank into an uneasy doze. How long he had remained thus he had no means of knowing; but he was suddenly startled by the boom of a heavy gun, that seemed to shake his dungeon, solid as it was.

He sprang to his feet. He thought he would hear wild shouts and the clashing of arms.

Boom!

Again a gun gave tongue. It appeared to be directly overhead.

Another and another quickly followed. His heart beat violently; a clammy perspiration stood upon his brow; not from any craven fear, but from the awful thought that murder and rapine were broken loose, and he, young and active, with an arm powerful to wield a sword, was imprisoned there, and utterly helpless as if he had been bound in iron gyves.

“Heaven above,” he cried, “is there no hope for me?”

Scarcely had the words left his lips than he was made aware that a key was being inserted in the lock of the small iron door in the recess. He would have given much at that moment for a weapon. Even a stick he would have been grateful for. But his arms were yet free. He had the power of youth in them, and he was determined to make a bold effort, to let at least one life go out with his own, and he resolved that the first man who entered he would endeavour to strangle.

He stood up in the recess, ready to spring forward. The key grated harshly; the lock had evidently not been used for some time. Then there was the sound of bolts being worked in their sockets. It was a moment of awful suspense. Nay, it seemed an age to him, as he stood there panting and waiting, with rapidly beating heart, for what might be revealed.

Presently the bolts yielded. The key was turned, and a long strip of light illuminated the recess.

“Hush, silence, for your life!” a soft voice whispered; and to his astonished gaze there appeared the form of Haidee, who bore in her hand a small lamp, and whose figure was clothed in the ordinary muslin garments worn by the native peasant women.



CHAPTER V. THE TREACHERY OF THE KING.

When the mutineers had got clear of Meerut, they straggled along the great highway towards the Imperial City. They were a broken horde now; some of them were mounted, some on foot, while the scum and villainy of the bazaars followed in their wake. A mile or two in advance of them was Jewan Bukht, with the captive Flora Meredith, who had remained in a state of insensibility in the bottom of the buggy from the time of leaving the bungalow. As his horse tore along, he occasionally glanced backward, and smiled with satisfaction as he saw the flames of the burning city leaping high in the air. The rays of the rising sun were burnishing the domes and minarets of the Imperial City as he arrived on the banks of the Jumna, which looked like liquid gold in the morning light.

He hurried across the bridge of boats to the Calcutta Gate, where a few hours before Lieutenant Harper had entered. He was well known to the guard at the gate, who greeted him with laughter and cheers. Flora had recovered her senses, but was weary and ill; but as the horse's hoofs clattered on the stone pavement, she raised her head, and looked out. When the Sepoys at the gate saw her, they set up a loud laugh, and exclaimed, "Oh, oh, Jewan, thou hast done well!"

Jewan did not answer, but drove straight on, until, crossing a broad courtyard, he alighted at the door of a pile of buildings in the rear of the Palace. He lifted Flora out, for she was too weak to rise. He carried her into a luxurious apartment, and placed her upon a couch. Scarcely had he done so than Moghul Singh, the orderly of the guard, entered hurriedly.

"Good greetings, Jewan," he exclaimed. Then, noticing the pale form of Miss Meredith, he laughed slyly, and added, "So, so; you have caught a bird! By the Prophet, but she is a bonny one too!"

Flora seemed to be quite unconscious of what was passing around her. She had let her head fall upon the arms of the couch, and had buried her face in her hands.

"But what do you want here?" the orderly continued. "Know you not that your presence is urgently required in Cawnpore?"

“No, I did not know that,” Jewan answered, as a look of annoyance crossed his face. “But whence got you this information?”

“From Teeka Singh. He was here yesterday, and said you were to lose no time in hurrying to the Nana. Nay, he expects you this very day.”

“That is unfortunate,” Jewan remarked, biting his lips with vexation.

Moghul laughed, and, pointing to Flora, said—

“You must choose between pleasure and duty.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Jewan, angrily.

“Mean,” retorted the other; “why, I mean that you must give up your mistress to serve your master.”

“No; I can retain the one and do the other. From the Nana I shall derive wealth, greatness, position. It is worth some sacrifice to gain them. But I have risked too much for this white-faced woman to let her go now. I will take her to Cawnpore.”

With a scream, Flora—who, though apparently unconscious, had heard the conversation between the two men—flung herself at the feet of Jewan, and, catching his hand between her own, cried—

“Oh, man, if you are not something less than human, do not take me away. Do not take me to Cawnpore. Let me remain here. Nay, kill me, rather than separate me for ever from those who are dear to me.”

She crouched at his feet; she held his hand tightly, and looked up into his face with such a look of sorrow, that it should have moved even a savage animal. But the man only laughed coarsely, and, with a sneer on his lips, said—

“Our power is returning. The white woman crouches at the feet of the despised Indian.”

“No, no; do not say despised,” she answered, her voice broken with sobs. “You have ever experienced the greatest kindness from my countrymen. Has not Mr. Gordon been a friend to you? Were you not nursed and tended with love and gentleness by white friends? Let some remembrance of all that has been done for you move your heart to pity me; and, rather than take me away, strike me dead now at your feet, and with my last breath I will bless you.”

“Why do you remind me that I have been a slave?” he answered, his eyes glowing with hatred. “Why do you utter a name in my ear that only serves to turn my heart to stone. Walter Gordon is your lover. I offer all that he can—love and faithfulness. You spurn me, and choose him. I hate him. Do you hear? And do you think that, after having risked so much to secure you, I shall let you escape? No; I’m for Cawnpore, and you go with me.”

She threw up her arms, and, with a pitiful cry, fell upon her face on the floor.

“The right stuff is in your nature, Jewan,” remarked the orderly, as he assisted his comrade to lift the insensible Flora to the couch.

“I am steel and iron,” was the answer; “that is, so far as these Feringhees are concerned.”

“That is good,” the other replied. “We must not know pity—we must be deaf to all supplications. I have a prisoner. The King gave him into my charge, and he shall die by my hand the moment the first batch of our comrades enters Delhi from Meerut.”

“Ah! is he an important one?”

“He is an English officer!”

“An English officer?”

“Yes; from Meerut.”

“Indeed. What is his name?”

“Harper; and he wears the uniform of a lieutenant.”

“Fate assists us,” Jewan answered. “I know the man. He is a friend of Walter Gordon’s, and once counselled him to discharge me. Kill him, kill him, Moghul! Or let me do it for you,” and, as the man spoke, a demoniacal expression passed over his face.

The devil, that had so long been kept down by the bonds of civilisation, was rising now, and the ferocity of his nature was asserting itself. All the examples that had been set him, all the kindness that had been shown to him, and all the prayers of Christianity that had been breathed into his ear, were blown to the winds, and he was simply the Hindoo, burning with hatred for the white man, and thirsting for his blood.

“I can do all the killing that is to be done, myself,” Moghul answered. “I am no chicken-heart. Besides, the King offers fifty rupees to every one who shall slay a British officer. Hark!” he suddenly cried, as the beat of a drum and the blast of a bugle were heard; “that is the signal that our comrades have come.”

He was about to hurry away, when Jewan stopped him.

“Stay a minute,” he said, “I must leave for Cawnpore immediately, or the road may be stopped by the English. Where shall I get a good horse and conveyance?”

“Go round to the Palace stables, and take your pick. But you must away at once, or every gate will be closed, and you will be unable to pass out. Farewell, the Prophet smile on you!”

Moghul Singh hurried away, and Jewan was alone with the still insensible girl. He looked at her with admiration, as she lay there, ghastly pale and ill, but still beautiful.

He bent over her, and, pressing his hot lips on her cold forehead, he murmured—

“You are mine; and I thank the fate that placed you in my power! This is a moment to have lived for.”

He hurried away, having first taken the precaution to lock the door and take the key with him. And, as he crossed the courtyard to the stables, the boom of a heavy gun sounded, dull and ominous, on the morning air.

The Meerut mutineers had reached the Jumna. They were swarming over the bridge of boats, and clamouring beneath the windows of the Palace.

Captain Douglas, who was then the Commandant of the Palace Guard, instantly ordered the Calcutta Gate to be closed.

This was done, and he sought the presence of the King, who, supporting his tottering limbs with a staff, met him in the Hall of Audience.

“Your Majesty,” cried Douglas, in an excited tone, “the Sepoys have revolted!”

“Have they so?” the King answered, with a cunning leer, his palsied limbs shaking with joy that caused his heart to quicken its pulsations.

“Have they so!” Douglas echoed, in astonishment. “Is that the only answer your

Majesty has to make?”

“The only answer, Douglas. What can we do?”

“Do!—blow them to pieces with our guns!” was the reply of the brave Englishman.

Through the open windows of the Palace came the cry of the insurgents—

“We have killed the English in Meerut. Long live the King of Delhi. We have come to restore the Dynasty, to raise the House of Timour, to fight for the Faith!”

The King smiled with satisfaction, and Douglas, seeing the treachery of the King, hurried away to join the other Europeans of the guard.

The mutineers, finding the Calcutta Gate closed, rushed along the road that runs between the Palace walls and the river, until they reached the Ragghat Gate, which was instantly opened to them by the Mohammedans, and the murderous crew clattered into the town, shouting as they went—

“Glory to the Padishah, and death to the Feringhees!”

Then ensued a scene that can scarcely be described. They murdered every European they met; they set fire to every house, and then doubled back to the Calcutta Gate. Here Captain Douglas, Commissioner Fraser, and several other Englishmen, had stationed themselves. And, as the troopers galloped up, Fraser seized a musket, and shot the foremost one dead.

A buggy, with a horse attached, was standing by, for Commissioner Fraser had just driven up. He sprang into the vehicle, and, lashing the horse into a gallop, made for the Lahore Gate, whilst Douglas jumped into the ditch of the fort.

He was severely injured by the fall, but he was sheltered from the enemy’s fire. In a little while he was discovered by a soldier of his guard, whom he had once befriended. This man lifted him on his back, and carried him into the Palace, to a room where the English chaplain and his two daughters were listening to the horrible tumult below.

But soon it became known that the Europeans were there. Then a demoniacal crew rushed up the stairs, and, breaking into the room, massacred the little party with exultant ferocity.

It was a brief and bloody murder, as horrible as any that stained the walls of the Delhi Palace.

Next the courtyards were turned into stables, the Hall of Audience into a barrack-room; and the human fiends, tired with their long ride and their murderous work, strewed straw on the marble floors, and lay down to rest.

When the first excitement had passed, Jewan Bukht prepared to take his departure. He had secured one of the best horses and a light vehicle.

When he returned to the room where he had left Flora, he found that she had partly recovered, but was still dazed and bewildered.

He had procured some food and wine, and these he offered to her. The poor girl, faint from long fasting, ate a mouthful of the food. Then Jewan poured out some wine, which she took almost mechanically. She drained the glass.

Jewan watched her eagerly, as she laid her head wearily back on the couch. The wine was drugged. It soon took effect; and, in a few moments, poor Flora was once more insensible. Then the wretch wrapped her in a large cloak, and, lifting her in his arms, carried her to the buggy.

Just as he was about to apply the whip to the horse, Moghul Singh rushed up, and, in an excited tone, cried—

“There is treachery somewhere. My bird has flown!”

“What!—Harper?” Jewan asked.

“Yes. He has escaped from the stone room, the strongest in the Palace. But how he has got away is a mystery. Both doors were locked and bolted. He has been liberated by some of our own people. But he shall not escape me, for he cannot get outside of the Palace. Farewell; glory to the Prophet!” the man cried, as he rushed away again.

Jewan whipped his horse, and, waving his hand to several Sepoys who were standing about, he quitted the Palace by the Calcutta Gate, and, crossing the Jumna, reached the road that led to Lucknow, and giving his horse the reins, Delhi was soon left far behind.

CHAPTER VI.

HEROIC DEFENCE OF THE MAGAZINE.

The great magazine of Delhi, with all its vast supplies of munitions of war, was in the city, not far distant from the Palace. It was one of the most important stores in Upper India.

It was in charge of Lieutenant George Willoughby, of the Ordnance Commissariat Department—a man whose dauntless bravery it would almost be impossible to surpass. He had with him as comrades, Lieutenants Forrest and Raynor, officers of the Bengal Artillery, and six other Europeans.

When the warning went forth that the mutineers were swarming into the town, this little band of resolute Englishmen braced themselves to face the tremendous odds which threatened them.

“Comrades,” said Willoughby, as, mounting a gun, he addressed his force, “this is an awful time, and an awful responsibility rests upon our shoulders, for this great arsenal, with its enormous stores, will be the first point made for by the mutineers. Shall we yield it to them without a struggle?”

“No, no!” was the united cry.

“Good. Shall we defend it with our lives?”

“Yes, yes!”

“Good again. The odds pitted against us are incalculable. But we are Englishmen. Duty and honour demand that these villains shall only reach the stores over our dead bodies.”

“Bravo! We will fight to the death!”

“Nobly said. Not only will we fight to the death, but nothing that this store-house contains shall fall into the hands of the cowardly assassins.”

“Hurrah!” was the answer.

“From the magazine,” Willoughby continued, “we will lay a train of powder, to

that tree there in the compound. You, Scully, my brave fellow, shall stand at the tree with a lighted port-fire in your hand, and, when further defence is useless, you shall receive a signal from me to fire the train, and then, ho! for death and glory. Let all the outer gates be closed and barricaded. Load the six-pounder guns with double charges of grape, and while we can move an arm let the cowardly enemy be met with a reception that shall at least cause them to have some respect for British pluck.”

The answer from his comrades was a wild, ringing cheer, and each man hurried to his task. The gates were closed and hasty barricades improvised. The guns were dragged out and placed in position, and into them grape and canister was crammed to the very muzzles. Then the door of the powder-room was opened and the heads were knocked out of several barrels, and the powder scattered about. From this a thick train was laid to the withered trunk of an old mango-tree. Here Conductor Scully, a young man, little more than a youth, but dauntless as a lion, was stationed, port-fire in hand. And the brave Willoughby placed himself in a conspicuous position, to issue orders, and assist in serving the guns. It was a heroic deed—history has scarcely a parallel. Those nine men, all in the flush of youth, setting themselves to oppose the advance of a countless multitude, and vowing that sooner than yield one grain of powder, or one pound of shot, they would bury themselves in the ruins.

When the preparations were complete, the brave band sat down to wait. But they had not to wait long. The shrill sound of a bugle was heard, together with a hammering at the principal gate. Willoughby sprang on the wall. Below was Moghul Singh, accompanied by a number of troopers.

“It is the King’s commands,” cried Moghul, when he saw the Englishman, “that you surrender this magazine and all its stores into his keeping. And, on condition of your so doing, he promises that your lives shall be spared, and that you shall have safe escort out of the city.”

“This is our answer,” exclaimed the noble Willoughby, his face beaming with indignation. “If your vile and treacherous King desires this arsenal he shall have it, but we will surrender it to him a heap of smouldering ruins, together with our blackened bodies.”

“That is an insolent reply,” Moghul remarked; “and I should advise you to reconsider it.”

“There can be no reconsideration. Our decision is unalterable. We can die, but

never surrender.”

“But the King commands you.”

“If the King were here in person to make the command, we would answer him with a round of grape. But you are only a myrmidon of his, and so we treat you with contempt.”

“By the Prophet’s beard,” cried Moghul, shaking with rage, “if I were near you I would make you eat your words, dog of an Englishman! But since you do not recognise the authority of his Majesty, whose power is now supreme, we will teach you a lesson. The reign of the cursed Feringhees is at an end, and the Mussulman’s time has come!”

The man turned his horse’s head and rode away, and Willoughby descended from the wall.

“Comrades!” he cried, “we have not a moment to lose. These black devils will be down upon us directly in countless thousands. But they shall only reach the top of our wall over the heaps of their own slain. We are but nine, but for each one of our lives there shall fall hundreds of these wretches, who are little less than demons.”

Then, with an energy begotten by the nature of the situation, they dragged out a number of guns, and placed them in a line so as to command the gateway and the front wall. Scarcely was this arrangement completed than the air was rent with the yells of the mutineers and the rabble, as they swarmed down to the arsenal. They were met with a terrific fire from the walls, delivered with all the coolness and steadiness of a practice parade. And as the guns belched forth their awful grape, scores of the on-coming horde bit the dust.

This unexpected reception caused a momentary check to the advance of the rabble. But it was but momentary, for the gaps were instantly filled, and on the infuriated mob rushed again. Once more they reeled and staggered, as from the walls came the messengers of death. Quickly recovering, and infuriated beyond control with their unseen foe, they raised a rallying cry—

“For the Prophet and the Faith! For the King and Liberty!”

And then they came down like an impetuous torrent, leaving in their wake a track of dead and dying, for round after round was delivered from the arsenal with terrible effect. But the enemy was legion. As thousands fell, there were

thousands instantly to take their place, and thousands more again to fill up every gap.

Onward they pressed, yelling with fury, maddened with rage. Inside the walls, the noble and devoted band stood unflinchingly at their post. Grimed and blackened with smoke and powder, the brave Willoughby worked with almost superhuman strength, carrying heavy cases of grape and bags of powder; now serving this gun, now that; encouraging his comrades with cheery words, and hurraing as he saw how their well-directed fire told upon the swarming enemy.

At the foot of the blasted mango-tree stood the heroic Scully. His arms were bare to the shoulders; his keen eyes were fixed upon his chief, from whom they never shifted; his teeth were set, his lips compressed. In his hand was a blazing port-fire, at his feet a heap of powder. But for the flush upon his face, and the heaving of his massive chest, he might have been taken for a stone statue representing the God of Vengeance about to inflict a terrible retribution.

It was an awful moment. It is hard to die at any time, but harder still when in the full vigour of health and strength. A slight movement of Scully's arm, and the fire and powder would come in contact, and in an instant there would be an awful ruin. But not a muscle of the man's frame quivered. He stood as firm and motionless as a rock.

The sun was shining brilliantly on the gorgeous domes and minarets of the great city. The great marble temple, the Jumna Musjid, which was devoted to Mohammedan worship, and was one of the wonders of India, gleamed grandly white in the shimmering light. But it was deserted now. Not a soul trod its sacred precincts. The followers of Mahomet had forgotten their religion, and, like starving tigers, were panting for blood.

Hour after hour passed, and still the noble "nine" kept the horde in check, nerved by the hope that succour would come from Meerut.

"Half the large number of troops in Meerut will be despatched after the mutineers," said Willoughby; "and they must be very near now."

Many an anxious glance did he cast towards the great high road, but no troops gladdened his sight. The expected succour did not come. Five hundred British soldiers at that moment could have cut the howling rabble to pieces, and in all human probability have prevented the further spread of the mutiny. And that number could easily have been spared from Meerut; but they were not sent out.

Why, has never been known; but it was a fatal and cruel mistake; it is recorded in characters of fire on the pages of history, to the eternal disgrace of those who were responsible for the blunder.

The defence of the magazine was stubborn. The mutineers were mad with rage. They rallied to their war-cry of “Deen! Deen!” They pressed forward like a resistless tide. They rent the air with their howling. They discharged showers of musket-balls at the walls, which every moment gave tongue, and sent forth volumes of death-dealing grape and canister. But presently the fire began to slacken. The ammunition of the besieged was getting short, and none of them could leave their posts to descend into the magazine to get up fresh supplies. The sea of human beings without poured on. They gained courage as the discharge of the guns from the arsenal became less frequent. They pressed forward yard by yard. They gained the walls, against which scores of scaling-ladders were placed. Then the enemy streamed over, but the brave defenders had backed to their line of guns, and for a time kept the foe at bay, until even, as Willoughby had said it should be, the mutineers were almost able to mount to the parapets by the piled-up bodies of their slain.

Still they poured on, in their mad confusion, shooting down their comrades. The ammunition of the defenders was all expended now. The lion-hearted Willoughby rushed to the bastion on the river face. One more look—a long, anxious look—towards Meerut, but not a sign of coming succour. Meerut had failed them!

Willoughby returned to his guns. Half-a-dozen of them were still loaded; but he saw that all hope had passed. Further defence was useless.

“Comrades,” he said, “you have fought nobly, and England shall ring with your praises. We have defended our charge until defence is no longer possible. We are beaten by multitudes, but we are not conquered, and we do not know the meaning of the word surrender. When in happier days peace shall once more dawn over this fair land of India, when men shall recount the deeds done during this cruel day, may it be said that we did our duty as soldiers, and that we died like brave men.”

The natives were swarming down the walls now. They were inside the arsenal.

Willoughby and his friends discharged their last round, and dozens of the enemy fell. Then the noble Commandant held up both his hands. It was the signal agreed upon. Scully shifted his eyes from his leader; then he cast one look

around at the living mass that covered the walls and bastions. He bent his arm; the port-fire and the powder came together. Up leapt a great white flame. With a terrible hiss it rushed along the ground, through a dark archway, where it was lost sight of until it reached the open powder. Then there was a terrific shock. The whole building seemed to be blown into the air. The very earth shook with the awful convulsion. The air was filled with bright, lurid flame. Dense volumes of smoke obscured the sun, and for miles around the report was heard.

The destruction was almost beyond comprehension, for there were thousands of tons of powder stored in the magazine. Huge masses of masonry were hurled high into the air. Ponderous guns were tossed away as if they had been toys caught by a strong wind. The massive walls rocked, tottered, and fell, burying hundreds of natives, while hundreds more were blown through the air like wisps of straw. Death was scattered through the ranks of the mutineers until they fell back appalled. It was such a daring deed, so unexpected, so fearful in its effects, so incalculably destructive, that it struck a nameless terror to their recreant hearts; and, with the bodies of their comrades falling in showers around them, they stood spellbound.

Four of the little band of defenders escaped alive. One of these four was a man named James Martin—a determined, fearless fellow, who, during the five long hours of the defence, had worked like one endowed with superhuman strength. When he saw Scully apply the torch to the train, he sprang on to one of the bastions, and, dropping a distance of nearly twenty feet, lay still until the awful blast of fire had passed over. Then he crept along until he reached a heap of masonry that had been blown down, and had fallen in such a way as to leave a large hollow, a kind of cavern. Into this Martin crept, and worn out with fatigue and excitement, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII. HAIDEE AND HER WRONGS.

It is necessary here to go back to the moment when, to the astonished gaze of Harper, the beautiful Haidee appeared in the cell in which the lieutenant had been incarcerated.

It seemed to him as if his senses were playing him false, and instead of a living, breathing woman, he was looking at a vision—at an angel of goodness—who had come to give him hope. But suddenly his thoughts changed, as he beheld, by the light of her lamp, that in her girdle she carried a long gleaming dagger, and her white fingers firmly grasped the handle. Assassination, then, was her object? So he thought, but dismissed the idea as soon as formed; for the face was too beautiful, too soft, too womanly for a nature that could do murder.

She stood for some moments in the doorway, in an attitude of listening, as if she feared that she had been followed; and Harper noticed that a small flight of stone steps led upward until they were lost in darkness.

Presently she stepped into the cell, and gently closed the door. Then, holding the light above her head, she surveyed the young officer.

“I will not ask if you come here as a friend,” said Harper; “your movements proclaim that, but I may, at least, ask why you come, and why I, a stranger, should have aroused an interest in you?”

“I come to save you,” she answered, in a voice that was clear and soft, but bore traces of inward emotion. “In the Hall of Audience I tried to warn you that you were in danger. I would have told you that they intended to kill you if I had had the chance. They would have slain you then, but they had been waiting for the appearance of the soldiers from Meerut, for, until they came, it was not known whether the rising there had succeeded or not. You were to fall with the rest of your countrymen; but, at the risk of my own life, I come to save you.”

“And why?” he asked, drawing nearer to her.

“I am a woman,” she answered, while a deep flush spread over her face, and her bosom heaved as if with some suppressed passion.

He waited for her to continue, but she remained silent.

“You are a woman, fair and beautiful,” he said; “and I am sure your heart is kind and good.”

“Heart!” she cried. “Ah! would that it had turned to stone. But it throbs with passionate delight, and your words reach it until its pulsations quicken, and I know, alas, that I am a woman!”

She drooped her head, and Harper fancied that the long lashes of her eyes were moist with tears.

“You speak in sorrow as you speak in riddles,” he said. “If I can soothe away the one, how gladly will I do so; but I must also ask you to explain the other. You are an utter stranger to me, and I do not even know your name.”

“I have but one name; it is Haidee. Sorrow I have known; it has crushed me. Why should my words be riddles to you? You are a man; I am a woman. I have looked into your eyes, and I become your slave.”

As she spoke she knelt at his feet, and bowed her head upon his hand. He raised her gently. Her hair had fallen over her face; he brushed it back. He took her hand—soft and warm—in his own, and said, gently—

“Haidee, you speak strangely, and I do not understand you.”

“You do not understand!” she repeated. “Ah, your race is cold-blooded, and stand on ceremony. In my country we are quick, impulsive, warm. It is customary there for a maiden to go forth, when she has seen the man she would love, and, laying her hand in his, say—‘Thou hast taken captive my heart; at thy feet I lay it. Like the timid dove to its mate, I come to thee. On thy breast I lay my head; thou shalt shield me from the storm—thou shalt guard me from danger. Thy life shall be my life—thy death my death; and for all time I will be thy faithful and willing slave.’ Then will the man reply—‘If thou art true, I will love thee; if thou art honest, I will keep thee; if thou hast wrongs, I will redress them.’ And if she has wrongs, she will make answer and say—‘I am true as thou art true; I am honest as thou art honest; and thy slave’s wrongs need redressing.’”

Harper was astonished, though he knew that she spoke in the innocence of her heart and in all sincerity; and, however strange her confession might seem to English ears, she was an Oriental, and but following a custom of her country.

As she stood before him with flashing eyes and heaving breast, he could not help feeling impressed with her beauty and grace.

“Grieved indeed should I be if I have inspired you with aught but friendship,” he answered. “I dare not give you love; though I would, if it were possible, redress your wrongs; but, alas, I am a prisoner!”

“Dare not!” she echoed, turning her flashing eyes full upon him. “What do I give you in return? Life. If I save you from death, have I not a right to claim you? If you are a prisoner, I shall make you free; so that you can avenge my wrongs.”

“Haidee,” he cried, “you know not what you ask. Your beauty thrills me, but I dare not own its sway. I burn to be your champion, but that must not be at the expense of my honour.”

“It is you who speak in riddles now,” she retorted, her voice quivering with emotion. “If you remain here, in a very short time they will kill you, for your enemies are thirsting for your blood. I save you and you become mine, and have I not a right to claim your love?”

“If the only conditions upon which you will set me free are that I should give you my love, it were better that you left me here to die.”

“No; it is not so. If you die, I will die with you. But why do you spurn me? It is said that I am beautiful. Poets have sung of my beauty, and kings have acknowledged it.”

“I do not spurn you, Haidee. I feel the power of your beauty; the light of your eyes thrills me, but my love is already given. I have a wife; by all that is honourable and true I am bound to her, and therefore could not love another.”

Haidee uttered a cry of pain, and pressed her hand to her heart.

“Alas! how my dreams fade,” she murmured, “and how wretched is my life.”

“Say not so,” he answered, as he once more took her hand, and looked into the beautiful eyes that were now flooded with tears. “Say not so. You have youth, and happiness may yet come. Let me be your friend—you shall be my sister. I will shield your life with mine, protect and respect your honour, and endeavour to right you if you have been wronged.”

Again she fell at his feet, and, seizing his hand, smothered it with kisses.

“Light of my soul,” she murmured; “even as you say, so shall it be; and though I may not own your love, I will be your willing and faithful slave.”

He raised her up, and said—

“Not slave, Haidee. In my country we have no slaves. But you shall be my sister.”

“Sister, then,” she answered sorrowfully. “I will lead you forth from this prison that would have been your tomb. The stairs by which I descended lead to a secret passage in connection with the upper apartments of the Palace. I will guide you to a place of safety in an outer building near the magazine, where you can remain for a time. And I will inveigle one there whom you shall slay in the name of your sister Haidee. Then we will escape from the city together, and I will follow you until you are safe from all harm, and that being so, I will die. I would slay this man myself, but if the hand of a Cashmere woman spills blood, all her hopes of Paradise have gone, and the Houris would curse her.”

“But who is this man, and what wrong has he done you, Haidee?”

“He is a creature of the King. His name is Moghul Singh, the man who brought you here, who was to have accomplished your death; and the wrong he has done me is irreparable. Four years ago I was the happiest maiden in all Cashmere. In my father’s home peace reigned. He was but a peasant, but was happy and contented. A brother and two daughters, myself included, were his family. Proud and brave was my brother; and, though but a peasant’s son, he was noble and free, scorning all that was base, and loving honour better than his life. My sister had nothing to recommend her beyond gentleness of manners. She had no beauty—I had; that was my misfortune. But I knew it not then. I had given my love to a youth whose race was noble. Others had sought me, princes had knelt at my feet, but I rejected them all. Then this Moghul Singh came to our valley. He was an agent of the King of Delhi, and his mission was to take back the most beautiful maidens, that they might become the King’s mistresses. He heard of me. The fame of my face had reached him. Alas, that it should have been so! He sought me out; he tried to dazzle me with tempting offers of gold and jewels. But these things possessed no charms for me. He said that I should rank as a princess in the King’s harem. But I turned a deaf ear. Then he tried to win me for himself. I spurned him, spat at him, and called him dog. He swore by his faith he would carry me away. I told my brother and my lover, and they vowed to defend me. But Moghul Singh had powerful retainers. They came in the dead of night,

armed to the teeth, to my father's house. With the courage of lions did my brother and my lover fight. But, overpowered by numbers, I saw them both go down, weltering in their blood. At the feet of this Moghul Singh my sister then threw herself. She prayed for pity. She implored him not to take me, the light of the house, away. But the demon was pitiless. He drove a dagger into her heart because she clung to him and impeded his way, and, with a laugh of triumph, he bore me off, while my wretched father, overcome by the terrible misfortune, sank down in raving madness. Into my heart there came but one wish, one hope, one prayer. It was for vengeance. My own hand could not strike the blow, for if it did, my hopes of Paradise would for ever have gone. But I schooled myself to patience; to wait until chance raised up a deliverer. I hate Moghul Singh with a hatred that has no words. I loathe the King as a foul and loathsome thing. But I showed nothing of this outwardly. I knew that there was more to be gained by patience. I have been a witness to the plans that have been in preparation for months for this mutiny. The Nana Sahib of Cawnpore and the King of Delhi have frequently met in secret, and their agents have been sent to every town and village in India. And on the Koran they have sworn that the blood of the Feringhees should flow like water. I have waited patiently through all this plotting, for I said to myself, 'Out of this a deliverer and avenger will come for me.' My prayer was heard at last, and you came. Just before your arrival the King had been holding a counsel, in which the 'rising' was the chief topic. It was my good fortune to be present. When I looked upon you I said, in my heart, this shall be the righter of my wrongs. I knew that the moment you entered your fate was sealed, unless you were saved by a miracle. But I determined that I would save you. I heard the King give an order to Moghul Singh to consign you to the 'stone room.' It is the private prison of the Palace, and only those are brought here who are cast for immediate death. But I knew the secret passage leading to it. By the gift of a large amount of jewels to one of Moghul's men, I procured a key of the door, and I am here to open it to you and set you free. In the garb of a peasant I am safe from molestation. I know the Palace and the city well, and I will save you. But in return, I must exact a promise that you will avenge me. And though you may not love poor Haidee, she will command your respect and friendship by her patience and fidelity."

She ceased speaking, and waited in breathless anxiety for his answer. More than once during her recital had her eyes been suffused with tears, her lip had quivered with emotion; and he had caught the spirit which had moved her, until he felt her wrongs to be his wrongs, and that it was his duty to avenge them. He laid both his hands upon her shoulders and looked full into her beautiful face—

his own aglow, his eyes flashing, his nerves thrilling.

“Haidee, you have made me your slave. I will avenge you.”

Boom!

The report of a heavy gun seemed to shake the building.

“Come,” she said, taking his hand, “we have no time to lose. The gun announces that the mutineers are in sight. When the hoofs of the foremost trooper’s horse ring upon the bridge across the Jumna, the death-knell of the British in Delhi will be sounded.” She drew the dagger from her girdle and handed it to him. “Take this weapon. It will do until you get a better. The blade is poisoned, and if you but scratch the skin with it, death will speedily ensue. Come, quick; a key grates in the other door.”

He seized the dagger and thrust it into his belt, for the sounds of a key being inserted in the lock told that the enemy was at hand. Haidee blew out the light and seized his hand, leading him through the doorway. Scarcely had they got on to the steps, and closed and locked the door, than the other one was opened. Then they heard the voice of Moghul Singh cry, “Death to the Feringhee, in the name of the Prophet!” In a moment his voice changed, and he uttered an imprecation as he discovered that the man he had come to slay was no longer there, but had escaped.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PERILOUS MISSION.

For many hours did Walter Gordon remain in his hiding-place behind the clump of trees, in company with the faithful ayah, Zeemit Mehal. He watched with sickened heart the flames wreath themselves around the pretty bungalow, where he had known so many happy hours, until, in a little while, a heap of smouldering and blackened ruins was all that marked the spot where had once stood the peaceful home of his beloved. Many times did he narrowly escape being discovered by the howling demons, as they rushed about in frenzied excitement. His horse, used to scenes of commotion, remained quietly grazing where it had been tethered. Out on the compound, with the red flames flushing the white face, as if in mockery, was the dead body of Mrs. Meredith. It was an awful sight, and Walter would have jeopardised his life to have gone out and placed the body in some spot where it might remain until a chance of burial presented itself. But Mehal restrained him.

“To expose yourself is to court instant death,” she said. “Be quiet.”

Presently a gang of ruffians entered the compound, led by a well-known butcher of the town, named Mezza Korash. The man had long been notorious for his undisguised hatred for the British, and had on several occasions been imprisoned for robbery, and for offering insult to Her Majesty’s subjects. Their object was plunder, and some of the gang entered the smoking ruins of the bungalow in search of any valuables that might have escaped the flames.

As Mezza reached the spot where poor Mrs. Meredith was lying he suddenly stopped, and, spurning the corpse with his foot, burst into a coarse laugh.

“Ah, ah, comrades! look at this dog’s flesh,” he cried. “It was my hand that slew her. I was the first to fire a shot, and that shot was into the heart of this Feringhee woman. Glory to the Prophet, and death to the British!”

He hurried away, followed by his brutal companions, whose laughter made the night hideous.

As Gordon heard the words of the self-confessed murderer, his blood boiled; and if Zeemit had not forcibly held him back, he would have rushed out. But when

the cowardly crew had gone away, he said—

“Zeemit, summary retribution must be meted out to that villain, and mine shall be the hand to strike him down. If he escapes me, I shall never be able to look Miss Meredith in the face again.”

“But what would you do?” asked the woman, in alarm.

“Drag him from his den, and shoot him like a dog.”

“But surely you will not throw your life away for a worthless purpose?”

“To bring down just punishment on the head of a double-dyed murderer is not a worthless purpose. I know the man well. His shop is in the bazaar, near the Nullah. At all hazards I go. If I return alive, I shall come back to Lieutenant Harper’s bungalow, in the lines. You hurry there without delay.”

As Mehal saw that further opposition to the will of the “fiery Englishman” would be useless, she allowed him to go forth. He loosed his horse from the tree, and sprang into the saddle; and, drawing his revolver, gripped it firmly in his hand. The city was comparatively quiet as he rode out of the compound. The lurid flames from the burning bungalows were paling before the dawning light of day. Dead bodies of natives were lying about the streets, where they had fallen before the resistless charge of the British soldiers, who, in obedience to the bugle-call, were straggling back to their barracks.

Gordon rode hurriedly forward, never drawing rein until he reached the bazaar. The ruffians of the gaols and the Goojur villages were slinking back to their homes with the coming of the morning light. The sudden presence of this dauntless white man appalled them; their cowardly natures caused them to crouch away like whipped curs, for it was only when banded together in large numbers that anything like courage animated their craven hearts.

With lips compressed, brows knit, and chest thrown back, Walter threaded his way through the tortuous streets of the bazaar until he reached the shop of the butcher, Mezza Korash, who, wearied with the night’s work, had thrown himself down on a matting before his door.

Without a moment’s hesitation Gordon jumped from his horse, and, seizing the murderer—who was a little thin man—in his powerful grip, he threw him, almost before he could realise his position, across his horse’s neck, and, springing up behind, galloped away amidst the shouts of the astonished natives,

a few of whom sent random shots after the flying horseman, but without effect.

Mezza struggled frantically to free himself from his captor; but he was like a pigmy in the hands of a Goliath. Gordon had twisted his hand in the man's body-cloth, and held him in a vice-like grasp. When he reached the Mall he met a body of artillerymen, who were returning from the Delhi road, after having chased the mutineers for some miles.

"I have captured a murderer," cried Gordon, as he hurried up. "His hands are yet red with the blood of his victim. Shooting were too good for such a cur. A rope, men—a rope!"

When the cowardly Mezza heard this he whined for mercy, begging that he might be shot instead of hanged; for death by the rope precludes a Mohammedan from all hope of heaven. But his prayer was unheeded. A rope was speedily produced, and thrown over the limb of a banyan tree; a running noose was placed round the neck of the villain Mezza, who rent the air with his howls. A dozen hands grasped the slack of the rope, and instantly the coward's body was dangling in the morning breeze. It was a summary act of vengeance, as daring as it was just.[\[2\]](#)

Walter rode back to the barracks in company with the men, who were enthusiastic in their praise of Gordon's bold deed. When he reached Harper's bungalow, he was shocked to hear that Mrs. Harper was very ill.

"If I fall, you will be a brother to my wife?" were the last words of his friend, as he parted from him the previous night on the Delhi road.

And, with these words ringing in his ears, he sought the presence of Mrs. Harper. She was deathly pale, and terribly ill, but she sprang towards him, and clutched his hand.

"God be praised, Walter, that you have come!" she cried. "But my husband, my sister, my mother—where are they?"

"You must not distress yourself like this," he answered evasively, and trying to lead her back to the couch.

"Do not keep the news, however bad it is, from me. Better to know the worst at once, than suffer the nameless agony of suspense, when the fate of one's dearest relatives is in question. My husband—what of him?"

“When I parted from him last night, I left him in perfect health. I have no doubt he would reach Delhi in safety.”

“Bless you for that news! And my sister—what of her?”

Gordon grew pale; strong man as he was, the tears gathered in his eyes, into his throat came a sensation as if a ball had suddenly been placed there, and was choking him; for his love for Flora Meredith was as strong as it was honourable.

And as he thought of what her fate might be, his emotion overpowered him.

“You do not answer,” cried Mrs. Harper, excitedly, as she noticed the red fade from his face, and a pallor spread over it. “Does she live? Speak, I conjure you.”

“She lives,” he answered, sorrowfully.

“Lives! and yet she is not with you!” Mrs. Harper almost shrieked, as a terrible thought flitted through her brain.

“Do not excite yourself, Emily, I beg, for you are endangering your life. Your sister lives, but has been abducted by Jewan Bukht.”

With a cry of despair, Mrs. Harper fell upon her knees on the floor. Gordon raised her gently, and carried her to the couch. He then procured smelling-salts and water.

“You are better now,” he remarked, as he saw the ashen paleness give place to a faint flush.

“Yes, yes. I can bear the worst. Go on; my, my poor mother—does she live?”

“Alas, no! A quick and merciful death has spared her all misery.”

Mrs. Harper bowed her head upon her hands and wept.

The weight of sorrow that had so suddenly fallen upon her young head was almost unbearable, and the frail thread of life threatened to snap.

She grew calmer presently. She brushed away her tears and stood up before him.

“At such an awful time as this,” she said, “the dead are to be envied. I cannot hope that my poor husband and I will ever meet again. He went to Delhi. He is a soldier—a brave one—and will do his duty. But behind him are the mutineers. When they reach the Imperial City, few, if any, white men will escape the

carnage that will ensue after their arrival. But even if he should be fortunate enough to come safely through the chances of war, my end is near. I have not been well for a long time. The terribly hot season of this awful climate has fearfully enervated me; and it had been arranged between my husband and me that I was to return to Europe. But it is all over now. This shock is too much for an already shattered constitution to bear, and in a very short time my sorrows will end, and I shall join my mother. Give me your hands, Walter; the other one as well. Look into my eyes, brother—for so I may call you—and listen to my words, as the words of a dying woman. My sister is in robust health; she is young and beautiful. She is your betrothed. She would, in a short time, have been your wife. Her honour, which is dearer to her than life, is imperilled. Let your mission be to save her—if that is possible. With your eyes looking into mine—with both your hands placed in mine—promise me, I, who stand on the very verge of the grave, that you will rescue my sister, or perish in the attempt. Remember she is your affianced wife, and her honour is yours.”

“I need no such reminder,” he answered with closed teeth; “my course is clear—my mind made up. In a few hours, whatever the hazards—whatever the peril—I shall be on the road to Delhi, and I will save your sister, or perish in the attempt!”

“Some good angel will surely hear your words,” Emily replied, “and will write them in the book where the deeds of brave men are recorded, and a just Heaven will reward your efforts.”

She had spoken as if she had been inspired, but the great effort had exhausted her, and she sank back upon the couch, pallid and trembling.

And Gordon knew too well that in the Indian climate such extreme prostration was an almost certain sign of coming death.

A few hours had served to bring about terrible changes in each of their lives; and what the end might be, no man could tell. But he braced himself up to do his duty, and mentally vowed never to cease his search for the lost Flora while he had reason to believe that she lived, and while health and strength were his.

“You must remain very quiet now, and get rest,” he said, as he placed a pillow under the head of Mrs. Harper. “Your sister’s ayah, Zeemit Mehal, promised to meet me here; I must go and seek her, and arrange my plans with her; for she has promised to go with me.”

“That is good,” Emily murmured; “if this woman remains faithful, her services will be invaluable.”

“I will answer for her fidelity. She might have betrayed me into the hands of her savage countrymen, but she has been true.”

Walter soon found Zeemit. She was waiting for him in the verandah of the bungalow. She had brought with her some powder for staining the skin, and a native dress—that of a religious mendicant.

“With this disguise,” she said, “you may penetrate into any part of India, free from molestation. This staff, carried by none but religious pilgrims, will be a passport of safety.”

“This idea is excellent,” he answered; “but there is one great difficulty which seems to me to be insurmountable. I have but a very slight knowledge of the language of the country, and this will betray me.”

“Yes, it would, if you let it be known.”

“But how am I to avoid letting it be known?”

“You must be dumb.”

“Dumb?”

“Yes, loss of speech and hearing must be the afflictions under which you suffer. This will ensure you sympathy. I shall be your aged mother conducting you to our sacred shrines. So long as your disguise is not penetrated, no one will dare to offer us harm.”

“This arrangement is capital, Zeemit, and no reward will be too great for you to demand if my mission is successful.”

The powder was made into a paste, and with the assistance of Mehal, Gordon proceeded to stain the skin until it appeared of the dark copper colour peculiar to the Bengalees. His black hair and eyes were favourable to the disguise, and when he had donned the native cloth, and fastened on a pair of sandals, it would have been a keen penetration indeed that would have recognised the Englishman in the garb of the Hindoo pilgrim. To test the completeness of his disguise, he presented himself before Mrs. Harper, who immediately asked him in Hindoostanee what he meant by intruding on her privacy. And not until he spoke

did she recognise him.

“This is a splendid device,” she said, when Walter had made known the old woman’s plan; “and if you are discreet you may yet save poor Flora. Let me see Zeemit and personally thank her.”

When the old ayah entered, Mrs. Harper took her hand and kissed her.

“You are a faithful creature, Zeemit, and my brave countryman shall reward you amply.”

“I need no reward, mem-sahib; I wish only to rescue missy, whom I love. For has she not always been good and kind to poor old Zeemit? And Zeemit is grateful, and will save her if she can.”

Mrs. Harper shook the woman’s hands heartily.

“There is no time to lose,” she said, addressing Gordon. “May Heaven watch over you. We shall never meet again. I feel sure of that, for I am so very, very ill. But if you see my husband, tell him that the last words the lips of his poor wife uttered were his name, and a prayer for his safety and happiness.”

As Gordon looked into the speaker’s face, he felt the full force of what she said, for death seemed to have already settled upon her; and the enervating nature of the climate precluded all hope when once the fearful prostration had seized one. He knew that, and yet it was very awful to think that he must speak the last words that ever he would have a chance of speaking to her in this world. But it was a time for action, not useless regret. However poignant the grief for the dying or the dead might be, the safety of the healthful and the living was a matter calling for the first consideration.

His parting with Mrs. Harper was affecting in the extreme, and he was glad to hurry away. When he had secured a pair of loaded revolvers beneath his clothes, he took his staff, and uttering a final adieu, left the apartment in company with Zeemit.

As the two walked through the city, and gained the great high-road, none of the many hundred natives they passed suspected they were anything but what they seemed to be—a decrepid old woman, and an afflicted, half-witted beggar son, hurrying away to pursue their calling in some more peaceful district. And not a few pice were tossed to them by those who had pity for the beggars, but none for the Christians.

The sun was pouring down his fiery beams; the Goomtee was rippling on like a stream of living fire; the air was heavy with dust, and all things were hushed to silence by the great heat, as Walter Gordon started upon his perilous mission, acting his part as if to the manner born, for a great purpose nerved him, and there is not much a true and brave man will not do for the woman he loves.

FOOTNOTE:

[\[2\]](#) The incident here related actually occurred.

CHAPTER IX. HOPES AND FEARS.

Haidee led Lieutenant Harper up the flight of stone steps, and then along a dimly lighted passage that appeared to be built between the walls. On reaching the end of this passage another door presented itself, but his beautiful guide took a key from her girdle and unlocked it. Another flight of steps were descended, and then not a single gleam of light could be seen. Haidee caught his hand and led him along. It was a tortuous way, but she was well acquainted with it. Presently a faint glimmering light was discernible, and, as they drew nearer, Harper perceived that it came from a small window let in a door. More steps had to be ascended to reach this door, which opened to Haidee's key, and in an instant the lieutenant's eyes were dazzled with a bright burst of sunshine.

A broad walk, running between an avenue of noble banyan trees, was before them. Except the noise of the moving branches, as they swayed in a light breeze, not a sound broke the stillness.

"This is the King's private ground," said Haidee, in a whisper. "It is here he walks with his agents, and his favourite wives, free from all intrusion. Once across this ground, and we are safe. But caution is necessary."

She closed the door behind her, and, motioning Harper to follow, cautiously led the way, keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the banyans. The avenue was passed through without adventure, and a large iron gate, let into a stone wall, reached. Haidee produced the key, and inserting it in the lock, gave access to a sort of plantation. She peered cautiously out to see that the way was clear, and, motioning Harper to follow, closed the gate again.

After a short walk, they arrived at a small ruined building. It stood on an eminence, and commanded a view of the surrounding country. It had formerly been used as a temple, but was now fallen into decay, and was overrun with luxuriant vegetation. A small flight of slippery, moss-covered steps led to the doorway.

"This will be a place of safety," said Haidee, as she pushed open the door, that creaked on its rusty hinges as if uttering a complaint.

It was a circular building, and contained one room below that was in a tolerable state of preservation. A broken idol lay upon the floor, where it had tumbled from a niche in the wall, and some stone benches still remained. Above this was another room, reached by a stairway built in the thickness of the wall. From this room a look-out was obtained, and Harper saw that the building was within half-a-mile of the magazine, of which it commanded an uninterrupted view. The roof was entirely gone, but the broad leaves of some palms which grew on the hill had spread themselves over the walls in such a manner as to form a screen from the scorching rays of the sun.

“You are safe for a time,” said Haidee, as she stood facing the man she had delivered from death, and presented to his gaze a combination of beauty, grace, and resolution, until his heart beat quicker, and he felt as if he could fall upon his knees at her feet and pour out his thanks in passionate language. “This was formerly a private temple, and here Moghul Singh has often come to pray to the god of his faith. One night the diamond eyes of the idol which lies on the floor below, were stolen, and the King ordered the temple to be closed, and never more used. It is shunned now—nobody ever comes here. It is to this place that I would draw Moghul Singh, that you may slay him—slay him like a dog in the place that is cursed, and leave his carrion as food for the foul things that creep and crawl.”

She spoke passionately. The fire in her eyes burnt brilliantly, and she drew her breath quickly. She was no longer the mild, gentle woman, but looked like a fury panting for revenge. Harper noticed this, and said, soothingly:

“Don’t agitate yourself, Haidee. Have patience, and your day will dawn.”

In an instant she had changed. The love-light came into her eyes again, and the stern expression of her face softened.

“Ah, forgive me,” she murmured, taking his hand and drooping her head; “my wrongs are great, my desire for vengeance uncontrollable. But to you, my lord, my master, I would be gentle as the dove. Could I but see this villain writhing in the throes of death, I should watch him with joy in my heart, and when he was dead, I should feel that my mission was ended, and henceforth it was poor Haidee’s duty to be only your loving slave.”

“Not slave, Haidee, but sister; though you should remember that you are a woman, and this terrible feeling which you are nursing is not good—it is unwomanly. Leave this wretch to the retribution that is sure, sooner or later, to

overtake him.”

She let his hand fall, and recoiled with a cry of mingled pain and rage, and was the fury again.

“Would you play me false, now that I have saved you? Is it not out of my very womanhood that my desire for vengeance comes? Does not the mad cry of my father still ring in my ears? Does not the blood of my murdered sister, and brother, and lover, cry aloud for vengeance? Let my heart turn to steel, let my own blood become a burning poison that shall gall and canker me night and day if I allow my slaughtered kin to go unavenged. You have promised to right my wrongs—you dare not break that promise. Your life is mine, since I gave it back to you. I snatch you from the jaws of death—have I not a right to demand something in return? Remember that in my veins runs the hot blood of an Eastern woman; my country people are not as yours are. We can melt with love, or rise to a passion of wrath which you English people know nothing of.”

Her stern energy startled Harper. It was like the sudden bursting of a thundercloud, where, a moment before, all was serenity. Yet even in her passion she looked beautiful, if dangerous; and her nature, strange as it was, aroused in the young officer a feeling of enthusiastic admiration.

“You mistake me, Haidee,” he said, softly. “I acknowledge freely that to you I owe my escape from a cruel end, and therefore you have a right to demand any service from me that is not absolutely dishonourable; and such service I will freely render. You said, a little while ago, when you first entered my prison, that you were a woman. I may answer you now in similar language, and say I am a man. And in my heart lives all that feeling which it would be impossible not to feel for a lovely and much-wronged lady.”

His words touched the springs of her nature, and her long lashes dripped with tears. In an instant she was on her knees at his feet, and her soft and burning cheek was laid against his hand.

“Oh, forgive me, if I have hurt you; but Haidee’s sorrows are great. I know now that your heart is true, and your hand strong to strike in cause of sullied honour. You thrill me with your words, and my pulse throbs for you alone.”

They were suddenly startled by the cry of a multitude, and the sullen boom of the guns. Harper rushed to the window, and exclaimed—

“The insurgents have attacked the magazine.”

“There is no time to lose,” she answered, rising quickly to her feet; “I must away, and return to you as soon as possible with weapons and food. You must not stir from here unless you wish to sacrifice your life. I shall seek out Moghul Singh. I shall tell him that I have you here, where I have enticed you on the pretext of saving your life, having discovered you affecting your escape through the King’s grounds. He will come. As soon as he enters, you will strike him down; but leave enough life in him that he may hear from my lips that Haidee avenges the cruel death of her kindred. Farewell until we meet again.”

“Stay a moment, Haidee. How many Europeans are in charge of that magazine?”

“I know not; but they are few in number.”

“Heaven protect them. Would that I could render them my poor assistance. That, however, is impossible. But promise me one thing, Haidee. Let it be a promise as sacred as that I have given to you. Wherever and whenever you can render succour to my countrymen or women, you will do so; and you will, if you have it in your power, rescue any of them from death?”

“I promise you by my hopes of paradise.”

She pressed her moist lips to his hand, and with a light step, hurried away.

It was a strange position for Harper to be placed in, but he was as powerless as a reed that is swayed in the storm-wind. His breath came thick and fast, and his heart beat violently as he watched the heaving sea of black humanity surge against the walls of the magazine, only to be driven back again by the storm of fire. He knew that the defenders were few, for it had long been a standing complaint that the great and valuable arsenal of Delhi had such a weak European guard. But he little dreamt that the number was as low as nine. He panted to be behind those walls, to exert the strength of his youth and the energy of his nature in helping to defend the treasures of his country and the lives of his countrymen who were battling so heroically against such tremendous odds. But he could only wait and watch. To have gone forth into that savage crowd would have been like casting a boat into a maelström; he would have been torn to pieces.

The roar of the guns, as they belched forth their iron hail, was deafening, while the disappointed cry of the insurgents rose like the howling of a hurricane. Hour after hour he watched there, but the time seemed short, for he was fascinated.

Now his hopes rose high, and he felt as if it was almost impossible to suppress a cheer as he saw the craven multitude beaten back before the fire of the defenders. Then his hopes would sink again as the walls were reached by the raging sea. Presently his heart almost stood still, as the guns of the magazine were silenced, and he saw the natives swarm over the walls.

“They have conquered,” he thought.

But the thought was scarcely formed, when the air became darkened. Even at the distance he was, it seemed as if a mighty whirlwind was sweeping over. He saw the stupendous sheet of fire leap into the air, and he knew that the arsenal had been blown up. The terrific shock shook the ground, and some of the crumbling masonry of his retreat tottered and fell with a crash. He buried his face in his hands to hide the awfulness of the scene, and an unutterable sorrow took possession of him, for he could not hope that any one of the noble defenders could escape from that fiery storm.

Slowly the time passed now, as he sat on a fallen stone and thought over the fortunes of war, and of the strange chance that had placed him in the position to be a witness of that terrible drama. Soldier he was, it was true, and though he yearned to be up and doing, how could he hope to prevail against a multitude? He felt that he was a victim to circumstances which it would be as useless for him to try and control as it would be to attempt to stay the wind. If he wished to live he must yield himself unconditionally to his fate. Those were the only terms, for what others could he make?

Two faces came before him.

They were those of Haidee and his wife. He could not serve them both. He must be false to one and true to the other. Haidee meant life; his wife—death. For without Haidee’s assistance he felt convinced that there was not the remotest possibility of escape. But would it not be better to die, conscious of having done his duty, rather than live to dishonour?

He grew bewildered with the conflicting emotions that tortured him, and, overcome with weariness, slept. When he awoke the day was declining. Down sank the sun, and night closed in quickly on the short Indian twilight. Alas! he thought how many a blackened corpse, a few hours before full of hope and energy—how many an agonised heart, that had beaten that morning with happiness and joy, did the curtain of the night cover?

Slowly and wearily the time passed, and Haidee came not. From all parts of the city lurid flames from incendiary fires were reddening the sky, and sounds of musketry and drums reached him. The unequal fight was still being carried on somewhere. Could he, bird-like, have hovered o'er the city, he would have seen sights that would have appalled the stoutest heart. In one of the strongest houses the Europeans and Eurasians from the Daraogung, or English quarter, had barricaded themselves—a little band selling their lives as dearly as possible. But all was fruitless. The barricades were carried and the people slaughtered. In the Flag-Staff Tower, on the Delhi Ridge, the women and children were gathered for protection, while a few officers and men, from the cantonment, were trying to keep off the black demons, in the hope that succour would come from Meerut, but it never came. Later on these helpless women and children were to escape, but only to meet with subsequent massacre at the hands of the brutal mutineers. Again a little body of white people, women and children, a few soldiers, officers and men, were gathered at the main guard of the Palace, holding their ground for a little while, with the fierceness of lions at bay. The European troops stationed in the cantonment when the mutiny broke out in Delhi, could have been counted by dozens, and these few dozens were scattered on this awful night. There was an embrasure in the bastion that skirted the court-yard of the main guard. Through the embrasure egress was obtained. Beneath, at a distance of thirty feet, was a dry ditch. By dropping into this ditch, crossing over, and descending the opposite scarp, the slope and the glacis could be mounted. Beyond was some jungle that offered cover to the fugitives. When defence was no longer possible, these brave officers and men made ropes of their clothing and lowered the women and children into the ditch, dropping themselves afterwards—many falling never to rise again, killed and maimed by the tremendous drop. And those who did escape dragged the weak ones up the slopes, and into the jungle. But it was only a prolongation of the agony, for the murderers reached them ultimately. All these things, and others that pen can never write, nor tongue tell, would Harper have seen, had he been, as I say, suspended, bird-like, in the air.

But though he could not see, every shot, every cry, told him, in language not to be misinterpreted, that an awful carnage was going on. And the nameless horror of such knowledge, such suspense, made him wish that he were dead.

Slowly the weary night passed on,—still Haidee came not. Had she deserted him, or had she fallen? were questions he asked.

To the first he soon framed an answer. He would not believe she had proved false.

As the night grew old, the guns ceased, the fires died out, the cries were hushed, and stillness fell upon all things. There was no light, neither moon nor stars. He could see nothing. But occasionally he heard a lizard dart out to seize its prey, or the squeal of a rat as it was caught in the jaws of a snake, and he thought that—mystery of mysteries—even amongst the lowest order of created things, there was endless war, there was bitter pain, there was cruel death. Why should such things be?

Amongst the overhanging palms and the surrounding foliage, the flying foxes, huge bats, and grey-owls flapped their wings and gibbered and hooted, like evil spirits gloating over the harvest of blood and the awful work of the reaper Death.

The man's soul was heavy, his breast was tortured with pain. The darkness, and solitude, and suspense, were all but unendurable. He felt as if he was going mad. Why did not Haidee come? Over and over again he was strongly tempted to trust himself to the darkness of the night and endeavour to find his way out of the city. But, alas! he was soon convinced of the utter hopelessness of such a course. Besides, he could not desert this woman, until he was sure she would not return. His manhood rebelled against that.

He strained his eyes in all directions, but nothing met his gaze. The darkness was impenetrable. Worn out with his long watching, and fasting, and excitement, nature once more asserted her supremacy, and he fell asleep.

How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly startled by the sound of footsteps. She comes at last, he thought. The first faint streaks of dawn were in the sky, and they enabled him to make out closely surrounding objects. His heart palpitated, and his face burned. The sounds had died away again, and there was silence unbroken. He listened, and listened, and listened until the strain became painful. It was but a few minutes' pause, but it seemed almost like hours. Then footsteps again, and whispering voices beneath. One was a woman's, Haidee's, he believed. But whose was the other? Had the time come for him to do the deed he had promised her to do? Had she brought Moghul Singh? He held his breath. He could hear the hard beating of his own heart. However brave a man may be, a sense of unknown and undefinable danger produces a feeling akin to fear. And this is increased when he is situated as Harper was. He drew the dagger from his belt, and held it firmly. It was a formidable weapon, and, in the hands of a determined man, at close quarters, there would have been little chance for an antagonist escaping its poisoned point.

The footsteps drew nearer. Two people were ascending the stairs—a woman and a man; the difference in the tread betrayed that. They reached the top. Two persons stood in the room—one was a woman and one a man. The woman was Haidee; but, in the dim light, Harper saw that the man was not Moghul Singh.

CHAPTER X. A NARROW ESCAPE.

When Walter Gordon and Zeemit Mehal had got clear of Meerut, and fairly on the great highway, they turned into a paddy (rice) field, where there was a small bamboo hut. Into this they crept, for the heat of the sun was so terrific, and walking was almost impossible. Suffering from extreme fatigue, Walter threw himself into a heap of straw, and thought over the terrible events of the last two hours, and as he remembered that Flora Meredith was in the hands of the enemy, he felt distracted, and inclined to continue his journey without a moment's delay. But, however strong his energy, his physical powers were not equal to it, for even the natives themselves felt prostrated by the intense heat of the Indian summer. And yet it was awful to have to remain there while she who was dearer to him than life itself was surrounded with deadly peril.

He wondered what had become of his friend Harper. Had he escaped death? and if so, would he be able to return to Meerut to comfort his dying wife? for Walter had no doubt in his own mind that Mrs. Harper was stricken down never more to rise. Even if he were fortunate enough to discover his friend and his affianced, he would have sorry news to convey to them. But it was the time of sorry news. Nay, it was but the very commencement of a long period, during which there would be no other news but that of suffering, of sorrow, and death. The storm had indeed burst, with a fury undreamt of—unparalleled; and through the darkness scarcely one gleam of hope shone. From mouth to mouth, amongst the natives, the terrible words had passed—"Death to the beef-devouring, swine-eating Feringhees!" They were truly awful words, well calculated to inflame the minds of the black races, who had for years been taught by their leaders and their priests to cherish in their hearts an undying hatred for the British; to look upon the Great White Hand as a hard and grinding one, that should be crushed into the dust, and its power for ever destroyed. The dogs of war had been slipped, and Havoc and Destruction stalked hand in hand through the land. And though the "lightning posts" might flash the news to the great towns, it was doubtful if succour could be sent in time to prevent the spread of the awful desolation.

As these and similar thoughts flitted through the restless brain of Walter Gordon, he realised that the position of himself and his friends called for the most

decisive action. In a few brief hours his own little circle had been broken. His friend Harper had gone, and, in all probability, would be one of the early victims. That friend's wife was drawing near the end of her earthly troubles. Mrs. Meredith was already dead, and what the fate of Flora might be he shuddered to contemplate. This latter thought distracted him, and he seemed to be suddenly endowed with superhuman strength.

"I must go!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Zeemit, Zeemit, do you hear?" for the old woman had fallen asleep. "Zeemit, I say, let us continue our journey. This inaction is maddening, and it were better to dare the sun's rays than fall a victim to one's own thoughts."

Zeemit started from her slumber. His excited looks and tone for a moment bewildered her. But she speedily grasped the purport of his words.

"Sahib, sahib!" she cried, "you will betray yourself if you have not more discretion. Remember you are supposed to be dumb, and the moment you use your voice the very walls may have ears to catch your words."

"But, Zeemit, I cannot endure to remain here, knowing the awful peril in which Miss Flora stands; and that the slightest delay on my part may be fatal to her."

"If you would be of service, sahib, you must reserve your strength. To attempt to continue the journey under this noon-day heat, would be to court your own destruction. Rest and have patience."

"You reason well, Zeemit, but how can I have patience under such circumstances? Succour must reach Miss Meredith immediately if she is to be saved."

"But you cannot quicken the wind or chain the lightning, sahib, nor can you cool the sun's rays. These things must be endured. When night closes in, and the fresh breezes blow, then is your time for action. But you must have caution. If you speak, let your words be uttered in whispers, for there is danger in the very air."

Suddenly she uttered a suppressed cry of alarm. Her eyes had been fixed on a small window at the end of the hut, which was covered with a bamboo flap; but this flap had been broken away on one side, and through the opening a face was grinning. It was withdrawn the moment its owner was aware that it had been discovered.

“Sahib, we are betrayed!” she exclaimed, as she hurried to the door in time to see a Coolie moving quickly away.

Gordon followed her, and, drawing one of his revolvers, levelled it at the retreating figure of the native, and fired. But the shot missed its mark, and, with the fleetness of a deer, the man sped away, and was soon beyond range.

“This is unfortunate, Zeemit,” said Walter, as he restored the revolver to his belt.

“It is even as I say,” answered Mehal; “there is danger in the very air. That Coolie, no doubt, lives in this hut. He was returning here, when he heard your voice. He will quickly spread the news, and we shall be followed. There is no time to be lost. We stand in imminent danger; and, at all hazards now, must quit the place. Remember, from this moment, you are dumb.”

Gordon felt the full force of the old woman’s words, but he made no answer, though he mentally blamed himself for his indiscretion. But the mischief was done, and there was no helping it now.

He silently followed his companion, and they went out into the glare of the sun. The heat was still terrific, for it was only a little past mid-day. For a time, Walter kept bravely on, but his strength soon began to fail him.

Even old Indians never thought of walking at such times, and he, a new-comer, was not yet inured to the climate. A feeling of oppression seized him, and he could scarcely resist the desire to lie down by the road-side. But, encouraged by Mehal, and buoyed up with the thought that every mile brought him nearer to Delhi, where he hoped to meet the object of his search, he struggled bravely on. The dusty road, treeless and shelterless, seemed to quiver in the heat. His mouth was parched with thirst, and his limbs tottered beneath him. But, with the resolution of despair, he kept up for yet a little while longer.

“Zeemit,” he said at last, “I can go no farther; I am sinking.”

“No, no; you must not stop here, or you will die. See; look ahead! To the left there, there is a clump of jungle. In that jungle is a dawk-house, where the palanquin bearers rest when travelling backwards and forwards. It is but half-a-mile, and you will there find shelter, for it is almost sure to be deserted now. Come, sahib. Courage!”

Thus cheered by his faithful companion, he struggled on, his eyes almost blinded with the glare, his brain in a whirl, his limbs trembling as if he had been stricken

with an ague. Had he not been a strong man, he would have fallen by the wayside, and then death must have speedily ensued. But he held up. The welcome goal was reached at last, and he tottered in.

The place was one of the small, square, flat-roofed, stuccoed bungalows to be found on the high roads in all parts of India at that period. They were generally erected at the Government expense, and were used as shelters for travellers, and as places where change of horses could be had for the mail-dawks. It was two storeys high, and contained four rooms, with a circular stairway at one corner leading to the upper storey and the roof. At the back of the bungalow was a compound and a stable, and beyond a patch of jungle. Round the building ran the indispensable verandah; and a small doorway, screened by a portico, gave entrance to the house.

Utterly exhausted, Gordon struggled into one of the lower rooms. It contained a cane-bottom lounge fixed to the wall; on to this he threw himself; and in a very few minutes nature succumbed, and he was asleep.

Zeemit did not follow him, for two Coolies were lying on a bamboo-matting in the verandah, and they rose up as the travellers reached the house.

“Peace be with you, countrymen,” said the old woman, addressing them. “Sorrow is mine, for my poor son is stricken with illness, and we have far to go.”

“Where are you journeying to, mother?” asked one of the men, when he had returned Zeemit’s greeting.

“Alas, my son, where should we journey to but to that great city where the King dwells, and where we hope to find rest and plenty.”

“Allah guide you!” the man answered. “The Moghul will be restored, the Feringhees will be exterminated, and our race will be raised to power again. But come you from Meerut?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know the latest news. Are the Europeans going to follow our friends to Delhi?”

“No. They have, to a man, returned to Meerut.”

“Allah be praised!” cried the Coolie, springing to his feet. “That is news indeed.

I and my companion then will accompany you to Delhi, and we will serve these foreigners no more. Fearing that the Europeans would follow our friends out of Meerut, we have remained at our posts here, dreading to be overtaken. But the news you bring is good, and we will seek better fortune than is to be gained by attending to the Feringhee travellers who stop here.”

“When my son is refreshed, we will continue our journey in company,” answered Zeemit, as she passed into the house; and the two Coolies coiled themselves upon their matting again.

The unexpected meeting with these two men was a source of trouble to her; for if their suspicions should be aroused, the object of the journey might be frustrated. Moreover, she feared that the man she had seen at the hut in the paddy field would give pursuit as soon as he had armed himself, and got some of his comrades to join him; for he would know that the Englishman could not go very far, and could soon be overtaken. She looked at Gordon; he was steeped in a death-like sleep, and even if she had been inclined, she could not have aroused him until rest had somewhat restored him.

She made a survey of the house. The windows were only guarded with jalousies, which offered no protection; so that, if the place should be attacked, escape would be almost impossible.

Some hours passed, and nothing occurred to justify her suspicions. Many an anxious glance did she cast back to the white road along which they had travelled.

The cool breeze was commencing to blow, the sun was declining, and she began to hope that the danger she feared would be averted. With the departing heat of day the Coolies aroused themselves from their lethargy, and commenced to cook their evening meal of curry and rice. Zeemit also lit a fire of charcoal, and taking some rice from her waist-cloth, and begging a small fish from the Coolies, she made some supper in a lotah, or brass dish, and commenced to eat, having set aside a portion for Gordon, who still slept. As the shadows lengthened and the twilight came on, she was startled by seeing, far away down the road, in the direction from whence they had come, a cloud of dust arise. She knew in a moment that it was a signal of danger; that it was caused by a body of natives. In a few minutes this was confirmed. About two dozen men, as near as she could judge, were coming up, three or four of them being on horseback. They could have but one object, she thought, and that was pursuit of the Englishman, unless

they were a band of fugitives flying to Delhi; but that did not seem probable, since, if it had been so, they would have been accompanied by women.

She hurried into the house. Gordon was still sleeping. She shook him; he turned over, and groaned. She shook him again, but he did not wake. There was not a moment to lose, for she could now hear faintly the ring of the advancing horses' hoofs, as they rattled along the road. She grasped Gordon tightly in her arms, and, by a great effort of strength, dragged him off the lounge on to the floor. It had the desired effect, and he awoke. At this moment one of the Coolies entered. He had observed the advancing body, and exclaimed—

“We shall have goodly company on our way to Delhi.”

Gordon had raised himself on his elbow, and being dazed with the heavy sleep, and not realising his position, cried out in English—

“What does this mean? Who has thrown me down?”

The Coolie stood like one who had been suddenly transformed to stone. Then, with a cry, he bounded out of the room exclaiming—

“A Feringhee in disguise, and a treacherous country-woman. Death to them.”

“We are lost,” Zeemit murmured, still shaking Gordon.

But he needed no further shaking; that warning cry had aroused him into full activity again, and he sprang to his feet. And though he did not comprehend the full extent of the danger, he realised that his disguise had been penetrated.

The body of natives were quite close now. The Coolies were flying down the road to meet them; and Zeemit heard the foremost horseman ask if they had seen a Feringhee in disguise. Then the answer was given—“Yes, yes; he is here.”

She seized Gordon by the arm, and fairly dragged him towards the door.

“Come,” she said; “the roof is our only place of safety.”

They hurried out of the door and gained the small round tower, common to Indian bungalows, and which contained the winding flight of steps used by the Bheestee Wallas, or water-carriers. By these steps the roof was gained. The entrance from this tower on to the roof was by a very narrow doorway. The door was of stout teak. On the roof were some bamboo poles. He seized one of these, and used it as a lever to dislodge a portion of the brick parapet. The *débris* he

piled up against the small door, thus forming a most effectual barricade. He had two breech-loading revolvers and ample ammunition, and he did not doubt he would be able to hold his own for a considerable time.

“Do you know how to load these pistols, Zeemit?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered, with sadness in her tone, for she knew that they must be levelled at her own countrymen. But love for her English mistress was strong in her heart, and it overcame all scruples.

Gordon glanced over the parapet. The crowd, numbering eighteen or nineteen, and several of them armed with guns, were close now. He was determined not to be the first to fire.

“What do you seek?” he cried, as the natives swarmed into the verandah.

“Death to the Feringhee,” was the only answer; and with a wild cry they sought the tower and rushed up the stairs, but they were unable to force the door. Down they went again, yelling and howling like infuriated demons, and they fired a volley at the roof—the bullets sending the cement flying in all directions, but otherwise doing no harm. Gordon no longer hesitated in the course to pursue, but levelling his revolver, fired the six shots in rapid succession, and with such good aim that five men rolled over. It was an unexpected reception, and the survivors were furious—some firing wildly at the roof, and others rushing off in search of combustibles wherewith to burn down the house. Gordon had little chance of picking any of them off now, for, taking warning by the fate of their comrades, they sheltered under the portico and behind trees.

It was almost too dark to see; night was closing in fast. Gordon recognised that his position was critical in the extreme, and, unless he could escape, death was certain. He peered over the parapet on all sides. At the back were the stables, and the roof was about ten feet from the parapet. It was the only chance. A yell of delight at this moment greeted him, and he could discern some of the natives rushing towards the house with a long ladder, which they had discovered in the compound.

He hesitated for a moment. If he remained on the roof he could keep his assailants at bay as long as the ammunition held out; but if he should be discovered when on the ground, all hope would be gone. His mind, however, was soon made up, as he saw other natives bearing heaps of wood and undergrowth, with the intention of burning him out. There was no time to be

lost. If once they lighted that fire, its glare would discover to them his whereabouts. He must take advantage of the darkness. He speedily made known his plan to Zeemit. She acquiesced immediately, and, getting over the parapet, dropped lightly on to the roof. Gordon followed, just as the ladder was reared against the other side of the house.

From the roof of the stable to the ground the descent was easy, and in a few minutes Gordon and his faithful companion had gained the jungle. As they did so, they heard the cry of rage which their foes gave vent to as they reached the roof and found that those whom they sought had flown.

CHAPTER XI. STARTLING NEWS.

The man who appeared in the ruined temple, in company with Haidee, and to the astonishment of Lieutenant Harper, was no other than James Martin, who had escaped the terrific explosion of the magazine. But for his dress he might have been taken for a native, as his face was black with smoke and powder.

“I am fulfilling my promise,” said Haidee, “and I have rescued this man, your countryman. You may be of service to each other.”

“We meet under strange circumstances,” Harper said, as he held out his hand to Martin, “but I am none the less thankful. We both stand in imminent peril, and our lives may not be worth many hours’ purchase; but two determined Britishers are a match for an army of these cowardly wretches.”

“That is so,” answered Martin. “But I do not think my time has come yet, seeing that I have escaped from twenty deaths already. I was one of the defenders of the magazine until our lion-hearted commander ordered it to be blown up. I managed to escape the fiery storm, and crept into a cavernous hollow formed by a mass of fallen masonry. I must have been there some hours, for, when I awoke from a sound sleep, I was ravenously hungry, and, at all hazards, determined to creep out of my hole and seek for food. It was quite dark, and I groped about amongst the ruins until I reached the road leading to the Palace. I walked for some distance, until a voice asked where I was going to. The voice belonged to this woman, who had just emerged from one of the private gates leading to the Palace grounds. At first I thought she was an enemy, and I drew my revolver, which I had been fortunate enough to retain, although it was unloaded. Still, an unloaded weapon, I thought, was quite enough for a woman. ‘Who are you?’ I asked, ‘and why do you stop my way?’ ‘I am a friend, and I wish to save you,’ she answered. I could not be mistaken in those tones, I thought. They were too gentle, too kind, to belong to an enemy. And so, returning my weapon to my belt, I extended my hand to her, and said, ‘I trust myself entirely to you; lead me where you like.’ ‘I will lead you to safety, and to a countryman of yours, who is dear to me,’ she answered. And here I am.”

Haidee had remained silent during Martin’s speech. Her head was bent and her

arms folded. Harper crossed to where she stood, and took her hands. The scarlet flush of morn was in the sky, and as it tinged her beautiful face, he saw that her brows were knit, and her teeth set, as if in anger.

“Haidee,” he said gently, “words cannot thank you for what you have done; I am already heavily indebted to you. How can I discharge that debt?”

“I need no thanks,” she answered. “Haidee is true to her promise; but my heart is heavy, for he who should have come with me now is gone.”

“Do you refer to Moghul Singh?” asked Harper, in some astonishment, and not without a slight feeling of pleasure. For, though Singh was a double-dyed traitor, Harper did not like the thought of having to act the part of a private assassin.

“To whom else should I refer?”

“How comes it then that he has gone?”

“He has gone by order of the King.”

“Ah! is that so? Where has he gone to?” Harper queried in alarm, for the thought occurred to him that the man had departed to convey the signal for a rising in some other place.

“He has gone to Cawnpore.”

“To Cawnpore!”

“Yes, and for Haidee’s sake you must follow him.”

“Nay, that cannot be,” Harper answered, with ill-concealed alarm.

“Cannot be—cannot be!” she repeated, in astonishment, and drawing herself up until their eyes met. “Are my wrongs, then, so soon forgotten?”

“Not so, Haidee; but you forget that I am a soldier. My first duty is to my Queen and country, and that duty must not be neglected in my desire to redress private wrongs. I bear for you all the feeling a man of honour should have for an injured woman; but I cannot—dare not—go to Cawnpore.”

“Cannot—dare not!” she echoed, in astonishment, letting his hands fall; “and is ‘dare not’ part of a soldier’s creed? Sits there a craven fear in your heart?”

“No,” he cried, his face burning at the suggestion. “For I have none; but I hold

that my honour should be the paramount consideration. I can die, but I cannot sacrifice that which is dearer than life to a true soldier—honour.”

“You wrong me,” she answered passionately. “I have made no such request; but I have saved your life—I have given you liberty. You have my heart; I ask but one service in return.”

“And that service I would have rendered if Moghul Singh had been here, for he is a traitor, and an enemy to my race and country. Moreover, I have a personal wrong to settle, because he betrayed me, subjected me to gross indignity, and would have slain me. But for a time he escapes retribution. I cannot follow him. The moment I stand outside of these city walls a free man again, I must hurry back to my regiment. Failing to do that, I should be branded as a deserter.”

“I comprehend now,” she cried, throwing herself at his feet. “I had forgotten that, and you must forgive me. Never more can happiness be mine. Into the dust I bow my head, for the light of my eyes will go with you. Poor Haidee will set you free. When night closes in again she will lead you and your countryman clear of the city; then we must part—never, never to meet again.”

He raised her up gently, and passed his arm soothingly around her waist, for she was terribly agitated, and shook like a wind-tossed reed.

“Do not say that we shall never meet again, Haidee. Chance may bring me back here, and if I escape the many deaths which encompass a soldier at a time like this, we shall meet. But even though I may not come to you, you can at least come to me.”

“Haidee would gladly live in the light of your eyes; but if I can hold no place in your heart, we must part for ever.”

Harper struggled with his feelings. He was on the horns of a dilemma, and the way out of the difficulty did not seem straight. His arm was still around Haidee. He felt her warm breath on his cheek, and heard the throbbing of her heart. Her upturned eyes were full of an ineffable expression of love, of trust, of hope—hope in him. How could he wither that hope—misplace that trust? How could he leave her in the city at the mercy of the treacherous King? As he thought of these things, he wished that she had never opened his prison door, but had left him to meet death alone. For cold, indeed, would have been his nature, and stony his heart, if he had not felt the influence of her great beauty. To look into her face was to feel sorely tempted to cast his fortunes on the hazard of the die, and

sacrifice all for this woman's sake. But the inward voice of conscience kept him back. Wife, country, honour, were in the scale, and they must have weight against all other considerations. "No," he thought, "rather than I would be branded with the name of traitor, I will walk boldly forth into the heart of the city, and bare my breast to the insurgents' bullets."

A deep sigh from Haidee called him back to a sense of his position.

He led her to the stone seat, and said kindly—

"Why do you sigh? I know it is the language of the heart, when the heart is sad; but, have hope; brighter days may be dawning, and in your own lovely valleys you may yet know happiness and peace."

She turned upon him almost fiercely, and her eyes flashed with passion.

"Do you mock me? Why do you speak to me of peace and happiness? Would you tear the panther from its young, and tell it to pine not? Would you torture the sightless by stories of the beautiful flowers, of the glittering stars, of the bright sun? Would you bid the dove be gay when its mate was killed? If you would not do these things, why bid my heart rejoice when it is sad? why talk to me of peace, when peace is for ever flown? But why should I speak of my wrongs? Even now, Moghul Singh is on his way to Cawnpore, to bring back one of your own countrywomen."

"To bring back one of my countrywomen!" cried Harper in astonishment. "What do you mean?"

"Yesterday, there came from Meerut, a man by the name of Jewan Bukht. He brought with him, as captive, an Englishwoman—young and beautiful."

Harper's nerves thrilled as the thought flashed through his brain that this Englishwoman could be no other than Miss Meredith; for Walter Gordon had told him what he had learnt from Flora with reference to Jewan Bukht. He almost feared to ask the question that rose to his lips, and not without a struggle did he do so.

"Her name—did you learn her name—Haidee?"

"No."

"What was Bukht's object in bringing her here?"

“He is in the pay of Nana Sahib, but is also an agent for the King. He thought to remain here, in the Palace, where he has relations; but, on arrival, an imperative order was waiting him, that he was instantly to depart for Cawnpore: and he lost no time in hurrying away. When he had gone, the King heard of Jewan’s captive, and of her beauty, and he commanded Singh to follow, with a band of retainers, and bring the woman back. Long before Singh can overtake him, Bukht will have arrived in Cawnpore; and when Singh gets there, it is doubtful if he can return, owing to the vigilance of the English.”

When Haidee had finished her revelations, Harper entertained no doubt that Jewan Bukht’s unfortunate captive was Flora Meredith, and that being so, the first question that suggested itself to him was, whether he was not justified in attempting her rescue.

“Haidee!” he said, “from what you state, I have every reason to believe that the lady carried off by Jewan is a relation of mine, and that it is my duty to follow her.”

“Your duty to follow her?” Haidee repeated mournfully. “When I spoke of your following the craven-hearted Moghul Singh, you replied that it could not be, and yet this man is an enemy to your race, and has slaughtered with exultant ferocity many of your countrymen! But now you proclaim your readiness to throw to the wind all those scruples which applied to him in favour of the woman! You speak in parables, and poor Haidee in her ignorance understands you not. Only her heart tells her this: she holds but little place in your thoughts.”

“Ah, Haidee, how you wrong me! Your reproaches are undeserved. However great the number of my faults, ingratitude is certainly not one of them. How can I forget the services you have rendered to me? how forget the great wrongs that you yourself have suffered? But the laws of our two nations are different. Society in my country is governed by a code of rules, that no man must depart from who would not have his reputation blasted. I hold a commission in the service of my Queen. Would you have me sully my name by an act that I could never justify to my superiors?”

“To what do you refer?” she asked with startling energy. “Sooner than I would counsel you to dishonour, sooner than I would bring shame upon you, this little weapon should be stained with my own heart’s blood!”

As she spoke she drew quickly, from the folds of her dress, a small, glittering stiletto, and held it aloft, so that the glow of the now rising sun made red its

gleaming blade. Fearing that she meant mischief, Martin, who had been a silent witness of the scene, darted forward and caught her hand. She turned upon him with a look of sorrow, and said—

“Do not fear. The women of my country hold honour as dear as those of your own. I said the weapon should find my heart sooner than I would bring shame on the head of your countryman, and that I will never do.”

Martin released his hold and drew back respectfully, for there was something so touchingly sorrowful in her tone, and yet so majestic, that both her listeners were deeply impressed.

“Yours is a noble nature,” said Harper. “It is that of a true woman’s, and it is the differences in our nationalities only that cause us to misunderstand each other.”

“Why should there be any misunderstanding? A Cashmere woman never forgets a kindness, she never forgives an injury; and there is one wrong, which, when once inflicted upon her, only the death of the wronger can atone for. Were I back amongst my own people, those of them in whose veins runs my family’s blood would band themselves together to avenge me, and they would never rest until they had tracked down and smitten the foul reptile who found me as a lily, fair and bright, who plucked me with a ruthless hand, who befouled me, and robbed me of treasures that have no price, and then flung me away, a broken, friendless woman.”

“You can never say with truth,” answered Harper, “that you are friendless while the life-blood warms my veins. By everything that I hold dear, I pledge myself to use every endeavour to protect you, and set you right again.”

His words were like magic to her. They touched her and sank to those hidden springs whence flowed gentleness, love, and truth. As she stood there before him, the very embodiment of womanly grace and beauty, it would have been hard indeed for a stranger to have imagined that in her breast rankled one feeling of hatred. How could he stay the invisible electric fire which passed from him to her, and from her to him, and drew both together, even as the needle is drawn to the magnet? Human nature is the same now as it was when time began, as it will be until time ends. Each of these two beings felt the influence of the other. She was taken captive, bound with chains that galled not, and filled with the ineffable sense of adoration for one who had suddenly risen before her as a worldly god, from whom she would draw hope, peace, happiness, and life, and that being so, she was willing to bow down and yield herself as his slave. And

he, deeply sensible to her great beauty, and pitying her for her sorrows, felt like a knight of old would have done, whose watchword was "Chivalry,"—that he must champion her for the all-sufficient reason that she was a woman, defenceless and alone.

Whatever scruples he might have entertained at first, he felt now that he was justified in using every endeavour to rescue Flora Meredith, and that he would be serving his country loyally in following Moghul Singh with a view of bringing him to justice.

"Haidee," he said, after a pause, "I will go to Cawnpore."

"That is bravely spoken," she answered, her face beaming with a look of joy; "and you may be able to render good service there by putting your countrymen on their guard? for I know that the Nana Sahib but waits a fitting opportunity to give the signal for a rising."

"But are you not wrong in supposing that the Nana Sahib is false? He has ever proved himself a courteous and kindly gentleman to the English, and I am impressed with the idea that at the present moment Cawnpore is a safe refuge."

"Dismiss all such ideas," she answered, with energy. "Do you judge the nature of a leopard by the beauty of his spots? I tell you, that in all the Indian jungles there stalks not a tiger whose instincts are more savage, or whose thirst for blood is more intense, than this smooth-faced, smiling Nana Sahib. Ever since the return of his agent, Azimoolah, from England, whose mission to your Queen failed, the Nana has cherished in his heart an undying hatred for your race. Often has he visited this city in disguise to confer with the King, and for years they have been organising this revolt. I tell you that Nana Sahib is a demon, capable of performing deeds that the world would shudder at."

"This is strange and startling news, Haidee," cried Harper, in astonishment, "and doubly justifies my journey to Cawnpore. The division is commanded by one of the Company's Generals, Sir Hugh Wheeler, and I shall consider it my duty to apprise him of the treacherous nature of the Nana. I appeal to you, comrade," he said, turning to Martin, "and shall be glad of your advice."

Martin was a man of few words. He had proved his reticence by refraining from taking any part in the conversation between Haidee and Harper.

"Go," was the monosyllabic answer.

“Good. And you?”

“I will, when once outside of these walls, make my way to Meerut.”

“Excellent idea,” cried Harper, as a new thought struck him. “You can not only report me, but render me a personal service. My wife is stationed there; visit her, and inform her of my safety.”

“I will make that a duty. But what is your name?”

“Charles Harper, lieutenant in the Queen’s —— regiment. And yours?”

“James Martin, late engineer in the Delhi Arsenal, now a homeless, penniless waif, saved from an appalling storm of fire, but everything I possessed in the world lost through the destruction of the magazine.”

“But you yourself saved for some good end, Mr. Martin,” Harper replied, as he took his hand and shook it warmly.

“Saved so far,” joined in Haidee; “but there are terrible risks yet to run before you are safe. When darkness has fallen I will endeavour to guide you clear of the city—till then, farewell. I must hurry away now, or I may be missed.”

She caught the hand of Harper and pressed it to her lips, and, bidding Martin adieu, was soon speeding through the avenue of banyan trees towards the Palace, and the two men were left to discuss the situation alone.



CHAPTER XII. WAKING DREAMS.

To Harper and Martin it was weary waiting through that long day. They dozed occasionally, but suspense and anxiety kept them from enjoying any lengthened or sound sleep.

Occasionally sounds of firing, and yells of riotous mobs reached them, but nothing to indicate that an action was being sustained in the city.

In fact, with the massacre of the Europeans, and the destruction of the magazine, there was nothing for the mutineers to do but to quarrel amongst themselves and to bury their dead.

The city was in their hands. Its almost exhaustless treasures, its priceless works of art, its fabulous wealth, were all at the disposal of the murderous mob.

And never, in the annals of history, was city sacked with such ruthless vandalism, or such ferocious barbarity. Some of the most beautiful buildings were levelled to the ground from sheer wantonness. Costly fabrics were brought out and trampled in the dust, and the streets ran red with wine.

All the gates were closed, the guards were set. And for a time the hypocritical and treacherous old King believed that his power was supreme, and that the English were verily driven out of India.

But he did not look beyond the walls of his city. Had he and his hordes of murderers cared to have turned their eyes towards the horizon of the future, they might have seen the mailed hand of the English conqueror, which, although it could be warded off for a little while, would ultimately come down with crushing effect on the black races.

Perhaps they did see this, and, knowing that their power was short-lived, they made the most of it.

As the day waned, Harper and his companion began to gaze anxiously in the direction of the avenue, along which they expected Haidee to come.

The narrow limits of their hiding-place, and the enforced confinement, were

irksome in the extreme, and they were both willing to run many risks for the sake of gaining their liberty.

“That is a strange woman,” said Martin, as he sat on a stone, and gazed thoughtfully up to the waving palm boughs.

“Who?” asked Harper abruptly, for he had been engaged in cogitations, but Haidee had formed no part of them.

“Who? why, Haidee,” was the equally abrupt answer.

“In what way do you consider she is strange?” Harper queried, somewhat pointedly.

“Well, it is not often an Oriental woman will risk her life for a foreigner, as she is doing for you.”

“But she has personal interests to serve in so doing.”

“Possibly; but they are of secondary consideration.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes. There is a feeling in her breast stronger and more powerful than her hatred for the King or Moghul Singh.”

“What feeling is that?”

“Love.”

“Love! For whom?”

“For you.”

“Well, I must confess that she plainly told me so,” laughed Harper; “but I thought very little about the matter, although at the time I was rather astonished.”

“I can understand that. But, however lightly you may treat the matter, it is a very serious affair with her.”

“But what authority, my friend, have you for speaking so definitely?”

“The authority of personal experience. I spent some years in Cashmere, attached to the corps of a surveying expedition. The women there are full of romantic

notions. They live in a land that is poetry itself. They talk in poetry. They draw it in with every breath they take. Their idiosyncrasies are peculiar to themselves, for I never found the same characteristics in any other nation's women. They are strangely impetuous, strong in their attachments, true to their promises. And the one theme which seems to be the burden of their lives is love."

"And a very pretty theme too," Harper remarked.

"When once they have placed their affections," Martin went on, without seeming to notice the interruption, "they are true to the death. And if the object dies, it is seldom a Cashmere woman loves again. But when they do, the passion springs up, or rather, is instantly re-awakened. There are some people who affect to sneer at what is called 'love at first sight.' Well, I don't pretend to understand much about the mysterious laws of affinity, but the women of Cashmere are highly-charged electrical machines. The latent power may lie dormant for a long time, until the proper contact is made—then there is a flash immediately; and, from that moment, their hearts thrill, and throb, and yearn for the being who has set the power in motion."

"But you don't mean to say that I have aroused such a feeling in Haidee's breast?"

"I do mean to say so."

"Poor girl!" sighed Harper, "that is most unfortunate for her."

"She is worthy of your sympathy, as she is of your love."

"But you forget that I have a wife."

"No, I do not forget that. I mean, that if you were free, she is a worthy object."

"But even if I were single, I could not marry this woman."

"Could not; why not?"

"What! marry a Cashmere woman?"

"Yes; is there anything so *outré* in that? You would not be the first Englishman who has done such a thing. Why, I have known Britishers mate with North American Indian women before now."

"True; but still the idea of Haidee being my wife is such a novel one that I

cannot realise it.”

“The heart is a riddle; and human affections are governed by no fixed laws.”

“But really, Martin, we are discussing this matter to no purpose. If Haidee entertains any such passion as that you speak of, it is unfortunate.”

“It is, indeed, unfortunate for her, because if her love is unreciprocated she will languish and die.”

“What do you mean?” asked Harper sharply, and with a touch of indignation. “Surely you would not counsel me to be dishonourable to my wife?”

“God forbid. You misjudge me if you think so. I speak pityingly of Haidee. It is no fault of yours if she has made you the star that must henceforth be her only light. What I have told you are facts, and you may live to prove them so!”

Harper did not reply. His companion’s words had set him pondering. There was silence between the two men, as if they had exhausted the subject, and none other suggested itself to them. The short twilight had faded over the land, the dark robe of night had fallen. It was moonless, even the stars were few, for the queen of night appeared in sullen humour. There were heavy masses of clouds drifting through the heavens, and fitful gusts of wind seemed to presage a storm. The boughs of the overhanging palms rustled savagely, and the child-like cry of the flying foxes sounded weirdly. There was that in the air which told that nature meant war. And sitting there with the many strange sounds around them, and only the glimmer of the stars to relieve the otherwise perfect darkness, what wonder that these two men should dream even as they watched and waited.

Martin had bowed his head in his hands again. Possibly his nerves had not recovered from the shock of the awful fiery storm that had swept over his head but a short time before; and he felt, even as he had said, that he was a waif. Like unto the lonely mariner who rises to the surface after his ship has gone down into the depths beneath him, and as he gazes mournfully around, he sees nothing but the wild waters, which in their savage cruelty had beaten the lives out of friends and companions, but left him, his destiny not being yet completed—left him for some strange purpose.

Harper was gazing upward—upward to where those jewels of the night glittered. He had fixed his eye upon one brighter than the rest. Martin’s words seemed to ring in his ears—“It is no fault of yours if she has made you the star that must

henceforth be her only light.” And that star appeared to him, not as a star, but as Haidee’s face, with its many changing expressions. Her eyes, wonderful in their shifting lights, seemed to burn into his very soul. And a deep and true pity for this beautiful woman took possession of him; poets have said that “pity is akin to love.” If no barrier had stood between him and her, what course would he have pursued? was a question that suggested itself to him. Martin had spoken of the mysterious laws of affinity; they were problems too abstruse to be dwelt upon then. But Harper knew that they existed; he felt that they did. How could he alter them? Could he stay the motes from dancing in the sunbeam? He might shut out the beam, but the motes would still be there. So with this woman; though he might fly from her to the farthest ends of the earth, her haunting presence would still be with him. He *knew* that; but why should it be so? He dare not answer the question; for when an answer would have shaped itself in his brain, there came up another face and stood between him and Haidee’s. It was his wife’s face. He saw it as it appeared on the night when he left Meerut on his journey to Delhi—full of sorrow, anxiety, and terror on his account; and he remembered how she clung to him, hung around his neck, and would not let him go until—remembering she was a soldier’s wife—she released him with a blessing, and bade him go where duty called. And as he remembered this he put up a silent prayer to the Great Reader of the secrets of all hearts that he might be strengthened in his purpose, and never swerve from the narrow way of duty and honour.

The dreams of the dreamers were broken. The visionary was displaced by the reality, and Haidee stood before them. She had come up so stealthily that they had not heard her approach. Nor would they have been conscious that she was there if she had not spoken, for the darkness revealed nothing, and even the stars were getting fewer as the clouds gathered.

“Are you ready?” she asked, in a low tone.

“Yes, yes,” they both answered, springing from their seats, and waking once more to a sense of their true position.

“Take this,” she said, as she handed Harper a large cloak to hide his white shirt, for it will be remembered that his uniform had been stripped from him. “And here is a weapon—the best I could procure.” She placed in his hand a horse-pistol and some cartridges. “Let us go; but remember that the keenest vigilance is needed. The enemy is legion, and death threatens us at every step.”

Harper wrapped the cloak round him, and, loading the pistol, thrust it into his belt.

“I am ready,” he said.

She drew close to him. She took his hand, and bringing her face near to his, murmured—

“Haidee lives or dies for you.”

The silent trio went out into the darkness of the night. Heavy rain-drops were beginning to patter down. The wind was gaining the strength of a hurricane. Then the curtain of the sky seemed to be suddenly rent by a jagged streak of blue flame, that leapt from horizon to horizon, and was followed by a crashing peal of thunder that reverberated with startling distinctness.

“Fortune is kind,” whispered Haidee; “and the storm will favour our escape.”

Scarcely had the words left her lips than a shrill cry of alarm sounded close to their ears, and Harper suddenly found himself held in a vice-like grip.

CHAPTER XIII. FOR LIBERTY AND LIFE.

The cry of alarm that startled the fugitives came from a powerful Sepoy, and it was his arms that encircled Harper.

“Traitorous wretch!” said the man, addressing Haidee; “you shall die for this. I saw you leave the Palace, and, suspecting treachery, followed you.” And again the man gave tongue, with a view of calling up his comrades.

He had evidently miscalculated the odds arrayed against him. Martin was a few yards in front, but realising the position in an instant, sprang back to the assistance of his companion. Then ensued a fierce struggle. The man was a herculean fellow, and retained his hold of Harper. Martin was also powerful, but he could not get a grip of the Sepoy, who rolled over and over with the officer, all the while giving vent to loud cries.

“We are lost, we are lost, unless that man’s cry is stopped!” Haidee moaned, wringing her hands distractedly; then getting near to Martin, she whispered—

“In your comrade’s belt is a dagger; get it—quick.”

The Sepoy heard these words, and tightened his grasp, if that were possible, on Harper’s arms, and rolled over and over with him, crying the while with a stentorian voice.

Not a moment was to be lost. There was no time for false sentiment or considerations of mercy. Martin, urged to desperation, flung himself on the struggling men, and getting his hand on the throat of the Sepoy, pressed his fingers into the windpipe, while with the other hand he sought for Harper’s belt. He felt the dagger. He drew it out with some difficulty. He got on his knees, his left hand on the fellow’s throat. As the three struggled, the Sepoy’s back came uppermost.

It was Martin’s chance. He raised his hand, the next moment the dagger was buried between the shoulders of the native, who, with a gurgling cry, released his grip, and Harper was free.

As he rose to his feet, breathless with the struggle, Haidee seized his hand, and kissing it with frantic delight, whispered—"The Houris are good. The light of my eyes is not darkened. You live. Life of my life. Come, we may yet escape." She made known her thanks to Martin by a pressure of the hand.

Another brilliant flash of lightning showed them the stilled form of the Sepoy. A deafening crash of thunder followed, and the rain came down in a perfect deluge.

The storm was a friend indeed, and a friend in need. It no doubt prevented the cry of the now dead man from reaching those for whom it was intended, as, in such a downpour, no one would be from under a shelter who could avoid it.

The howling of the wind, and the heavy rattle of the rain, drowned the noise of their footsteps.

Drenched with the rain, her long hair streaming in the wind, Haidee sped along, followed by the two men. She led them down the avenue of banyans, and then turning off into a patch of jungle, struck into a narrow path. The lightning played about the trees—the rain rattled with a metallic sound on the foliage—heaven's artillery thundered with deafening peals.

Presently she came to a small gateway. She had the key; the lock yielded.

"There is a guard stationed close to here," she whispered: "we must be wary."

They passed through the gateway. The gate was closed. They were in a large, open, treeless space. Across this they sped. The lightning was against them here, for it rendered them visible to any eyes that might be watching.

But the beating rain and the drifting wind befriended them. The open space was crossed in safety.

"We are clear of the Palace grounds," Haidee said, as she led the way down a narrow passage; and in a few minutes they had gained the walls of the city.

"We must stop here," whispered the guide, as she drew Harper and Martin into the shadow of a buttress. "A few yards farther on is a gate, but we can only hope to get through it by stratagem. I am unknown to the guard. This dress will not betray me. I will tell them that I live on the other side of the river, and that I have been detained in the city. I will beg of them to let me out. You must creep up in the shadow of this wall, ready to rush out in case I succeed. The signal for you to do so shall be a whistle." She displayed a small silver whistle as she spoke,

which hung around her neck by a gold chain.

She walked out boldly now, and was followed by the two men, who, however, crept along stealthily in the shadow of the wall. They stopped as they saw that she had reached the gate. They heard the challenge given, and answered by Haidee. In a few minutes a flash of lightning revealed the presence of two Sepoys only. Haidee was parleying with them. At first they did not seem inclined to let her go. They bandied coarse jokes with her, and one of them tried to kiss her. There was an inner and an outer gate. In the former was a door that was already opened. Through this the two soldiers and Haidee passed, and were lost sight of by the watchers, who waited in anxious suspense. Then they commenced to creep nearer to the gateway, until they stood in the very shadow of the arch; but they could hear nothing but the wind and rain, and the occasional thunder. The moments hung heavily now. Could Haidee have failed? they asked themselves. Scarcely so, for she would have re-appeared by this time. As the two men stood close together, each might have heard the beating of the other's heart. It was a terrible moment. They knew that their lives hung upon a thread, and that if this devoted woman failed, nothing could save them. Still they did not lose hope, though the suspense was almost unendurable. Each grasped his pistol firmly, to be used as a club if occasion required. The termination of what had verily seemed an hour to them, but in reality only five minutes, brought the welcome signal—the whistle was blown.

“You first, Harper,” said Martin.

They darted from their hiding-place and rushed through the door; a Sepoy tried to bar the passage, but was felled by a blow from Harper's pistol; in another moment they were outside the walls—Haidee was waiting for them.

“Speed!” she cried, leading the way.

The alarm was already being spread. A deep-toned gong, that could be heard even above the howling wind, was warning the sentries that something had happened.

From gate to gate, from guard to guard, the signal passed, and soon a hundred torches were flaring in the wind; there were confusion and commotion, and much rushing to and fro, but nobody exactly seemed to know what it was all about, only that someone had escaped. A few shots were fired—why, was a mystery—and even a big gun vomited forth a volume of flame and sent a round shot whizzing through space, only to fall harmlessly in a far-off paddy-field. In

the meantime the fugitives, favoured by the darkness and the wind, sped along, keeping under the shadow of the wall, until the bridge of boats was passed.

“We cannot cross the bridge,” said Haidee, “for on the other side there is a piquet stationed.”

“How, then, shall we gain the opposite bank?” asked Harper.

“By swimming,” she answered.

When they had proceeded about a quarter of a mile farther, Haidee stopped.

“This is a good part; the river is narrow here, but the current is strong.”

“But will it not be dangerous for you to trust yourself to the stream?” Martin remarked, as he divested himself of his jacket.

“Dangerous? No,” she answered; “I am an excellent swimmer.”

She unwound a long silken sash from her waist, and, tying one end round her body and the other round Harper, she said—

“I am ready. Swim against the current as much as possible, and you will gain a bend almost opposite to us.”

Martin walked to the water’s edge, and, quietly slipping in, struck out boldly. Haidee and Harper followed, and as they floated out into the stream she whispered—

“We are bound together. Where you go I go; we cannot separate.”

It was hard work breasting that rapid current, but the swimmers swam well, and the bank was gained. Emerging, somewhat exhausted, and with the muddy waters of the Jumna dripping from them, they stood for some minutes to recover their breath.

Haidee was the first to speak.

“We are safe so far,” she said. “Before us lies the Meerut road. The way to Cawnpore is to the left.”

“Then I suppose we must part,” Martin observed.

“Yes,” she answered. “You have but thirty miles to go; travel as far as possible

during the night, and in the morning you will be safe.”

Martin took her hand.

“You are as brave as beautiful, and I am too poor in words to thank you. But in my heart I have a silent gratitude that time can never wear away.”

“God speed you,” joined in Harper. “Tell my wife that you left me well and hopeful. Bid her wait patiently for my coming.”

“You may depend upon me.”

Martin shook the hands of his friends, and, turning away, was soon lost in the darkness.

When his retreating footsteps had died out, Haidee grasped Harper’s hand, for he stood musingly, his thoughts preceding his friend to Meerut; he felt not a little sad as he pictured his wife waiting and weeping for him, and he wondered if he would ever see her again.

“Come,” said Haidee softly. “Come,” she repeated, as he did not seem to notice her at first, “time flies, and we are surrounded with danger.”

He turned towards her with a sigh.

“Why do you sigh?” she asked.

“I scarcely know.”

“Is it for one who is absent?”

“Perhaps so.”

She sighed now, inaudibly, and she pressed her hand on her heart; but he did not notice the movement.

“Cawnpore is distant,” she said, in a low tone, “and the night is already far spent. Let us go.”

And so they went on, side by side, into the darkness, on to the unknown future. And the wind moaned around them like a warning voice, and beat in their faces as if it would drive them back.

CHAPTER XIV. THE TIGER OF CAWNPORE.[\[3\]](#)

For many years, up to eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, Cawnpore had been one of the greatest Indian military stations. In the palmy days of the Honourable East India Company all the officers invariably spent some period of their service there. As a consequence, there were wealth and beauty and fashion to be found in the British quarters; there were luxury and ease, and their concomitants, profligacy and vice—and yet withal it was perhaps neither better nor worse than all great military centres—while for rollicking gaiety and “life” it stood at the head, even Calcutta being behind it in this respect. But when the mutiny broke out, Cawnpore’s sun was declining,—not but what it was still a station of importance, but the coming end of the “Company’s” power had brought about many changes in this as well as in most other Indian cities.

It was an irregularly built place, some eight miles in extent. Squalor and wealth seemed to fraternise; for in many parts the lordly mansion raised its head beside some tumble-down, reeking native den. There was no pretension to anything like mathematical precision in the streets. They had been laid out in the most promiscuous manner. In fact, it might not inaptly be said that if you wanted to construct a Cawnpore such as it was at the time of our story, you must take a big plain with lots of cocoa-palms about, and a broad river running through it. Then get many hundreds of bamboo and mud huts; a few marble palaces, some temples with gilded minarets, a few big public buildings, a hospital or two, a gaol, and a quantity of miscellaneous structures, such as an arsenal, barracks, etc., shake them all up together, and toss them out on the plain, and there you have your Cawnpore.

To be accurate in the description, which is necessary to the better understanding and interest of this history, the city is built on the banks of the Ganges. The British lines were on the southern bank, and in the centre of the cantonment, and leading from a point opposite the city, was a bridge of boats to the Lucknow road on the other bank. Lying between the roads to Bhittoor and Delhi were many of the principal civilians’ houses. Beyond the lines were the gaol, the treasury, and churches; while squeezed up in the north-west corner was the magazine. In the centre, between the city and the river, were the assembly-rooms

—made notorious by subsequent events—a theatre, a church, and the telegraph office. The place was well provided with entertainments. There were splendid shops, and they were well stocked with goods of every description, from almost every country in the world. Western civilisation and Indian primitiveness were linked.

In this terrible “57” Cawnpore was commanded by a General of Division, Sir Hugh Wheeler, who resided there with the Division staff. But although there was an immense strength of native soldiery, not a single European regiment was garrisoned in the place, the only white troops being about fifty men of her Majesty’s Eighty-fourth and a few Madras Fusiliers. Sir Hugh was a gallant officer, who had served the “Company” long and honourably, and was covered with scars and glory. But the sands of life were running low, for upwards of seventy summers and winters had passed over his head. A short time before, the only regiment that had been stationed in Cawnpore for a long time had been sent to Lucknow. This was the Thirty-second Queen’s. But they left behind them all the *impedimenta*, in the shape of wives, children, and invalids; and the awful responsibility of protecting these helpless beings devolved upon the time-worn veteran. Some little distance out on the Bhittoor road, there stood a magnificent dwelling, a veritable palace, with numberless outbuildings, courtyards, and retainers’ quarters. It was the home of the Rajah of Bhittoor, Dundoo Pant, otherwise Nana Sahib. His wealth at this time was almost boundless. He had troops of horses, and elephants, and quite a regiment of private soldiers. Many a time had his roof rang with the hearty laughter of English ladies and gentlemen. He was the trusted friend of the Feringhees, was this Mahratta prince. They loaded him with wealth, with favours, with honour, did all but one thing—recognise his right to succession. And their refusal to do this transformed the man, who, although a courteous gentleman outwardly, was a tyrant in his home life, and this failure to gratify his ambition turned his heart to flint, and developed in him the sanguinary nature of the tiger, without the tiger’s honesty. Well indeed had he concealed his disappointment since “52,” when Azimoolah, who had gone to England to plead the prince’s cause, returned to report his failure. To speak of Azimoolah as a tiger would be a libel on the so-called royal brute. He might fittingly be described as representing in disposition the fiends of the nether world, whose mission is to destroy all good, to develop all evil, to drag down the souls of human beings to perdition. He was the bad tool of a bad master, if he did not absolutely lead that master to some extent. Allied to the twain was Teeka Singh, soubahdar of the Second Cavalry. The trio were as cowardly a set of villains as ever made common cause in a bad case.

Between the King of Delhi and the Nana there had been numberless communications and frequent interviews, spreading over a period of some years. The imbecile puppet of Delhi fondly imagined that he could be a king in power as well as name, and he looked to Nana of Bhittoor as a man who could help him to gain this end. Actuated by similar motives, Nana Sahib fraternised with the King for the sake of the influence he would command. But between the two men there was an intense hatred and jealousy. Each hoped to make the other a tool. It was the old fable of the monkey and the cat realised over again. Both wanted the nuts, but each feared to burn his fingers. In one thing they were unanimous—they hated the English. They writhed under the power of the Great White Hand, and wished to subdue it. But although the King betrayed this so that he incurred the mistrust of the English, the Nana was a perfect master in the art of dissembling, and all that was passing in his mind was a sealed book to his white friends.

When the revolt broke out in Meerut, old Sir Hugh Wheeler fondly believed that the storm could not possibly spread to Cawnpore. But as the days wore on, signs were manifested that caused the General considerable uneasiness. Some of the native soldiers became insubordinate and insolent. Still he felt no great alarm, for in an emergency he had his trusted and respected friend the Rajah to fly to for assistance. The General, iron-willed and dauntless himself, showed no outward signs of mistrust. He had passed his life amongst the natives. He loved them with a love equalling a father's. He respected their traditions, honoured their institutions, venerated their antiquity; and while the storm, distant as yet, was desolating other parts of the fair land, he betrayed no doubts about the fidelity of his troops. Morning after morning he rode fearlessly amongst them, his genial face and cheery voice being seen and heard in all quarters. But as the mutterings of the storm grew louder and more threatening, anxiety for the hundreds of helpless people on his hands filled him. He could no longer shut his eyes to the fact that there was danger—a terrible danger—in the air. It was his duty to use every endeavour to guard against it, and he felt that the time had come to appeal to his friend the Rajah.

He rode over to the Bhittoor Palace, and was received by the Nana with studied courtesy and respect.

“I have come to solicit aid from your Highness,” the old General began, as he seated himself on a luxurious lounge in what was known as the “Room of Light,” so called from its princely magnificence. The roof was vaulted, and, in a cerulean ground, jewels, to represent stars, were inserted, and, by a peculiar

arrangement, a soft, violet light was thrown over them, so that they scintillated with dazzling brightness. The walls were hung with the most gorgeous coloured and richest silks from Indian looms. The senses were gratified with mingled perfumes, which arose from dozens of hidden censers. The most exquisite marble statues were arranged about with the utmost taste. Mechanical birds poured forth melodious floods of song. The sound of splashing water, as it fell gently into basins of purest Carrara marble, rose dreamily on the air. Soft and plaintive music, from unseen sources, floated and flowed around. The floor was covered with cloth of spotless silver; a profusion of most costly and rare furs were scattered about. Articles of vertu, priceless china, gilded time-pieces, gorgeous flowers, and magnificent fruits were there to add to the bewilderment of richness and beauty. While over all, through delicately-tinted violet and crimson glass, there streamed a mellow light, the effect of which was the very *acmé* of perfection. It was verily a bower of dreams, a fairy boudoir. A confused medley of colour, of beauty, and sweet sounds, that was absolutely intoxicating and bewildering.[\[4\]](#)

It was here that the Rajah, attired in all the gorgeousness of a wealthy Mahratta prince, and attended by a brilliant suite, received Sir Hugh Wheeler.

“My services are at your command, General,” was the Nana’s soft answer. But his dusky cheeks burned with the joy that animated his cruel heart as he thought that his day-star was rising; that the stream of time was bringing him his revenge; that the great nation which had been the arbiter of others’ fate, had become a suppliant for its own. “In what way can I render you assistance?” he asked after a pause.

“Your Highness is aware,” the General answered, “that there rests upon my shoulders a very grave responsibility, and I may be pardoned if I confess to some anxiety for the safety of the large number of women and children who are under my care.”

“But what is the danger you apprehend, General?” and the Nana laughed loudly, coarsely, and it might have been gloatingly; for he stood there, in that paradise of beauty, a spirit of evil, and in his soul there was but one feeling—it was the feeling of revenge. His heart throbbed revenge; in his ears a voice cried revenge. It was his only music, night and day it went on ceaselessly; he listened to it; he bowed down and worshipped before the god of destruction and cruelty. For years he had prayed for the gratification of but one desire—the desire to have these Feringhees in his power; and the answer to that prayer was coming now.

Neither wealth nor the luxury that wealth could purchase could give him one jot of the pleasure that he would experience in seeing the streets of Cawnpore knee-deep in English blood. He felt himself capable of performing deeds that a Robespierre, a Danton, a Marat, ay, even a Nero himself, would have shuddered at, for the barbarities of the Roman tyrant were the inventions of a brain that beyond doubt was deeply tainted with insanity. But no such excuse as this could ever be pleaded for the Rajah of Bhittoor. It would be impossible for the pen of fiction to make this man's nature blacker than it was; he was a human problem, beyond the hope of human solution; one of those monstrosities that occasionally start up in the world of men to appal us with their awfulness, and seemingly to substantiate the old belief that in the garb of humanity fiends of darkness dwell upon the earth. And yet, with a wonderful power of self-control, he betrayed nothing of what he felt.

“Objectionable as it is for me to have to think so,” answered the General to the Nana's question, “there is a fire smouldering in the breasts of the native regiments here stationed; they have caught the taint which is in the air, and a passing breath may fan the fire into a blaze, or the most trivial circumstance develop the disease. After what has been done at Meerut and Delhi, we know to what length the Demon of Discord can go when once it breaks loose!”

“I think you are alarming yourself unnecessarily, General; but, since you desire it, pray tell me in what way my services can be utilised?”

“Firstly, then, I must ask you to post a strong body of your retainers, with a couple of guns, at the Newab-gung. This place commands the treasury and the magazine, both exposed places, and the first places that will be attacked in case of a revolt.”

“You English look well after your money stores, Sir Hugh,” jocularly remarked Azimoolah, who had been examining a large portfolio of water-colour drawings of English “beauty spots.” And as he stepped forward a few paces, he rubbed his hands, and his face was contorted with a sardonic smile. I say contorted, for it was a singular characteristic of this man that he could not laugh; the hearty cachinnation of honest men became in this one a mere contortion of the facial muscles; and his eyes, cold and snake-like, glittered with a deadly light. “I noted, as the result of close observation when in England,” he continued, “that this same money was a very much worshipped god; and those who had it were flattered and fawned upon, and those who had it not were the despised and rejected.”

“But is that not a principle unfortunately common to every people?” Sir Hugh remarked.

“Possibly; but I think nowhere is it so conspicuous as in England. And, after all, I think that there is a good deal of emptiness in the boasted freedom of the English; for the poor are slaves in all but name, and the task-masters of Southern America are not more grinding or exacting than are your English lords and capitalists. The dogs and horses of your wealthy squires are housed and fed infinitely better than are your poor.”

“I think you are prejudiced against my nation,” said the General.

“Possibly so,” was the pointed answer, “and, perhaps, not without cause; for I found that the English are much given to preaching what they never think of practising; and the boasted liberality of John Bull is a pleasant fiction, like many more of the virtues of that much vaunted personage.”

“But to return to the subject of our conversation,” joined in the Nana, as if fearing that Azimoolah’s feelings would betray him into some indiscretion; and so he was anxious to put an end to the discussion. “You wish me to place a guard over your arsenal and treasury?”

“That is my desire,” said Wheeler.

“Good; orders shall at once be given for two hundred of my retainers to march to the Newab-gung. That point being settled satisfactorily, what is your next request, General?”

“That you will hold your troops in instant readiness to join my little body of men, and suppress the insurrection, should it unfortunately break out.”

“That also shall be complied with,” smiled the Nana. “Anything further to request?”

“I think not; but I cannot allow the opportunity to pass without thanking your Highness for your ready acquiescence to my wishes, and in the name of my country I further tender you thanks for your devotion and loyalty.”

The Nana smiled again and bowed, and Azimoolah adjusted his gold eye-glasses, and pretended to be busy in his examination of the portfolio; but into his face came back the expression of ferocious joy, and it was with difficulty he suppressed an audible chuckle.

The business upon which he had come being ended, the General took his departure.

“Inflated fool!” muttered the Rajah, when his guest had gone. “Loyalty and devotion forsooth! Umph! bitterness and hatred methinks.”

“The brow of your Highness is clouded,” said Azimoolah fawningly, as he closed the portfolio and came forward.

“Clouded?” laughed the Nana; “no, no, Azi, clouds sit not there. It is joy. Joy, my faithful. Ah, ah, ah, ah! Clouds, indeed! By our sacred writings, I should be unworthy of my sire if I allowed a cloud to darken the joy I feel. Ah, ah, ah! the confidence of these English is amazing. They think they can put their heads into the lion’s jaw with impunity. Well, well, let them do it. The lion knows when to close his jaws at the right moment.”

“Say rather, your Highness, that the tiger, having scented quarry, knows how to track it to the death with downy tread, and spring as light as air.”

“Aptly said, Azi, and so it shall be. They shall say I *am* the tiger before I’ve done. Come,” linking his arm in Azimoolah’s, “let us walk in the grounds. Order the dance for to-night, and let there be a display of fireworks. By the beard of Mahomet, we will make merry. ‘With downy tread, and spring as light as air.’ Ah, ah, ah! So it shall be.”

The mechanical birds were warbling sweetly, and unseen censers were making the air balmy with delicious perfume, the silken curtains rustled pleasantly, the falling water plashed musically. There was peace and beauty around, above, below; but in the hearts of these two men, as they went out, laughing sardonically, there was the deadly poison of human hatred, and no shadow of the Great White Hand disturbed them in the hour of their supposed triumph. Indeed the Nana believed that the power of the British in India was fast waning, never to be restored.

FOOTNOTES:

[3] Nana Sahib was first referred to as “The Tiger of Cawnpore” by the *Times*.

[4] This is no exaggerated description. The room was exactly as described.

CHAPTER XV. AS ARMOUR IMPENETRABLE.

At the end of a block of buildings attached to the Rajah of Bhitoor's Palace was a lofty, square tower, rising to the height of sixty feet, and crowned with a gilded cupola. It was a massive stone structure, and contained many apartments, used as the lodgings of the Nana's retainers. From the basement to the roof there straggled, in wild profusion, a tough rope-like Indian parasite, a species of ivy, with reddish leaves. The beauty of the whole building was materially enhanced by this plat, that insinuated itself into every crevice, and twined gracefully round every angle. It was a conspicuous mark in the landscape, was this ivy-covered tower. It asserted its presence over all other erections; it rose up with a sort of braggadocio air, like unto a tall bully, and as if it said, "I am here. Who is as great as I?"

It had been witness to many a strange scene. If its time-stained stones could have spoken, many and curious would have been the tales they would have had to tell.

Quarrels deadly and bloody had taken place beneath its roof. There, too, had the Indian maid listened to the voice of the charmer. English officers had made it their quarters in the balmy days of the H.E.I.C., and its walls had given back the echo of the shouts of many a Bacchanalian revel. Life and death, laughter and tears, storm and calm, had it seen. But it was doomed to witness one scene yet such as it had never witnessed before.

In the topmost room of all, up next to the stars, and from the windows of which one looked from a dizzy height on to the roofs of many buildings that rose on all sides, and away over the city to the plains and the broken jungles, and followed the course of the "sacred Gunga," that, like a silver thread, ran tortuously through the landscape, sat a maid, an English lady. It was Flora Meredith. It was the night of the day upon which Sir Hugh Wheeler had had an interview with Nana Sahib, and she was watching the fireworks that were being let off in the Palace grounds. That is, if one might be said to be watching who looked but saw not; whose eyes, while fixed *there*, were looking beyond, from the past—the happy, bright, and sunny past—to the future, the unknown, the dark, the awful future.

Her face was pale, and it seemed as if years had passed over her head since we last saw her, instead of brief, but terrible, days.

The rush of events, the sudden changes, the magical transformations, as it were, of those days, had literally bewildered her, and what she did see she saw through a kind of mental haze. Her mother dead, her lover gone, her home destroyed, and she herself forcibly kept away from kith and kin! Surely these things were enough to make sick the boldest heart, and to daze the strongest brain. The journey from Delhi had been a hurried one. The drug administered to her by Jewan Bukht had been merciful in its effects, since it had deprived her of the power of thought for a long time; and since Jewan had conveyed her to this place she had only seen him once. Her wants had been attended to by an old woman—a hag in appearance, a thing of evil in disposition. Her name was Wanna Ranu. She was little, and ancient, and bent; her skin was shrivelled, like unto old parchment; her nose was hooked, her chin beaked. She had long, bony arms, that were encircled with many brass rings; brass bands were fastened round her ankles, and large brass rings were pendant from her ears. She was one of the strange characters to be found in almost every Indian city. Her hatred for the Feringhee was undying. She had drawn it in with her mother's milk. A hanger-on at the Palace, an unrecognised waif, a casteless outcast, living literally, it might be said, on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, if grains of rice could be so designated.

When Jewan Bukht had arrived at the Bhitoor Palace, he was at first at a loss where to convey Flora to, and into whose charge to give her. He could not let it be known that he had brought an Englishwoman with him, and he dare not neglect the business of his master, the Nana Sahib, by whom he was employed as the bearer of secret messages, and to stir up the smouldering fires of insubordination in the native regiments. When, in his mad infatuation for the white girl, he had decided to carry her away, he had not counted upon the costs of so doing, nor the difficulties that would beset him. But, being so far advanced, he could not turn back; he must make the best of circumstances. It was night when he reached the Palace. Flora was ill and semi-unconscious, and as he stood deliberating what course to pursue with reference to her, Wanna Ranu crossed his path. He knew the woman from previous visits to Cawnpore, and he immediately secured her as a custodian for his captive. For although she hated the white people she loved pice more; and pice would enable her to obtain ghee, a luxury to such as she that was worth doing much for.

She knew the Palace well, particularly the tower. She was aware that the upper

part of this Palace was untenanted; that the doors were strong, the locks good. And when Jewan had queried the possibility of Flora escaping, the hag had grinned maliciously, and exclaimed—

“Escape? No, no, my son; unless she has wings and can fly.”

And so to this room Flora was taken, and the witch-like janitor was bound in promises such as the most depraved Indian will respect, to guard her well and secretly.

Flora sat alone, gazing, as has been said, vacantly out into the night. Wanna had left her for a little while to cook her evening meal.

The poor girl’s heart was heavy. It was as if a hand, cold and hard, was gripping it and squeezing out its life. She had been plunged with cruel suddenness into moral gloom; but the last thing in life to leave a person is hope; and although the brightness of this star had diminished to a feeble ray, it yet shone in her darkness and gave her courage. She trusted in the Giver of Life for a way out of her tribulation. She prayed, silently, fervently, to Him to shield her with His mighty arm; to beat down her enemies, to raise up a deliverer, to break the bonds that ensnared her. And yet withal it was weary waiting, and what wonder that her soul was heavily charged.

She remembered the promise of Zeemit Mehal, and she knew that if Walter Gordon lived, he would follow her. If they went to Delhi, she thought, Zeemit would soon learn of Jewan’s departure, and Walter would still follow, if that was possible, even as the faithful Evangeline followed Gabriel.

There was comfort in that thought, at least. It might be but a sorry reed to lean upon, but will not a man in his extremest need clutch even at a straw? And so this poor, suffering woman took hope of heart even at this, remote though the probabilities were of its fulfilment.

The only light in her apartment was a small, swinging cocoa-nut lamp. It was like her hope, faint, and barely did it make the darkness more than visible. But its melancholy and flickering rays served, at least, to reveal to her the cheerlessness of her apartment. The only furniture was a native wooden bedstead, covered with matting; a bench fixed to the wall to serve as a table, and two massive, wooden chairs. The walls themselves were plasterless, for the plaster had fallen away with damp and age; and the only decoration, if worthy of the name, was a large native drawing of a hideous idol. It had a dozen arms on

each side, and in each hand it held a sort of club. Flora's eyes had wandered to this picture: she had gazed at it, until somehow it took shape in her thoughts as the "Retributive God" that would arise with its piercing eyes to discover, and its many hands to smite down the cruel and relentless enemy of her country, and the slayer of her kindred. She felt sure that the horrid mutiny could not go on for long. The Great White Hand was mighty in its strength. There were British soldiers who had never yet been conquered; would they not speedily come and destroy the foe, whose triumph could be but short-lived?

Her meditations were suddenly interrupted by the opening of the door, and turning her eyes in that direction, she uttered an involuntary cry of alarm, as they fell upon the dusky form of Jewan Bukht.

"Why do you cry as if a cobra had stung you?" he asked, angrily.

"A cobra would be more welcome than you!" she answered with a shudder; "for it kills only through an instinct of self-preservation, and does not wilfully torture its victims."

"Umph, you are complimentary," as he locked the door, and moved near to the shrinking girl. "I have not tortured you."

"Your very presence is torture to me."

"Indeed! If your heart and mine were taken from our bodies, and laid side by side, would there be any perceptible difference in their construction? Why, then, should my presence torture you, since my heart is similar to your own? It is because my skin is dark. Were it of the same sickly hue as your own, you would have no scruples."

"Your words are false," she answered, quivering with indignation. "An honourable woman, when once she has given her love, is true to death."

The man sneered scornfully, as he seated himself in one of the chairs.

"Why should I not gain your love? I made an honourable proposal to you. I offered to marry you. You rejected that offer. Why?"

"How can you ask such a question? You are well aware that I was the affianced wife of Mr. Gordon."

Jewan's brows contracted, and he ground his teeth, and clutched at the air with

his hands, by reason of the passion which moved him.

“If I had a cobra’s poison,” he answered, after a pause, “I would spit it at you every time you mention that name. Between you and him lies a gulf that can never be bridged. You looked your last upon him the evening he left you in Meerut. Even supposing that he still lives, which is doubtful, seeing that a hundred bullets waited for him alone by my orders, he could never rescue you, because I have everywhere spies and tools who would hack him to pieces on a look from me.”

Flora staggered a little, and her face grew pallid; she grasped at the chair with her right hand, and the left she pressed hard against her breast, as if trying to still the throbbing of her wildly beating heart.

The man jumped up and caught her in his arms, for she seemed as if about to fall. His face came close to hers, his hot breath was on her cheek, his glittering eyes looked into hers, and seemed to chill her. She struggled and writhed, but was powerless to free herself from his strong grasp.

“You are mine!” he almost hissed. “You are mine,” he repeated with ferocious glee. “You are mine!” he reiterated for the third time, as he tightened his arm around her waist. “There are moments in our lives when we feel that we have attained something that were worth whatever years in the future may be reserved for us. Such a moment do I experience now; and, for the sake of a victory like this, I could almost die.”

It was an unequal strife. It was muscle, as opposed to virtue and womanly indignation. He might still further tighten his arm until he had squeezed the breath from her body. He might torture her with his words until her heart cracked, and she became a stiffened corpse in his arms; but where would be the triumph? He might as well have tried to grasp a soap bubble and retain its prismatic glory, as to penetrate the invulnerable armour of virtue and honesty in which this woman was shielded.

She drew herself back from him as far as she could. She kept him off with her outstretched arms, and, with an energy that positively startled him for the time, she exclaimed—

“Jewan Bukht, life is a precious thing; we cling to it while there is the faintest glimmer of hope. But sooner than be yours—sooner than be false to the vows made to Walter Gordon—my finger nails shall tear open the veins and let my life

flow away. If I had twenty lives, I would yield every one, sooner than be yours even in thought.”

Her determined air made him wince—her words stung him; and coward and craven that he was, he felt strongly tempted to put forth his man’s strength and dash her to the earth. He felt that he was beaten, and though he might kill the body he could not bend her will. He still retained his hold of her. Her hands were still on his shoulders, and she was keeping him off; but by a sudden twist he freed himself, and suddenly pressed her close to his breast.

“You see how thoroughly you are mine,” he said, exultantly.

Her answer was a piercing scream, again and again renewed, as she struggled to free herself.

He had not counted upon this. It was a woman’s weapon, and served her in this case. He was fearful that her cries might be heard, and draw attention to his prisoner. He was puzzled for a moment how to act. She still screamed, and he dragged her towards the bed with the intention of trying to smother her cries. He was frustrated, however, by a knocking at the door. A pause. Flora heard the knock, and uttered a piercing shriek. The rapping was repeated. He literally threw her from him, so that she reeled and fell to the floor.

“You infernal fool!” he hissed, “I will take your life inch by inch sooner than you shall escape me.”

He inserted the key in the lock, and threw open the door.

Wanna Ranu entered. She grinned unpleasantly and twisted her scraggy hands one about the other.

“The white-faced cat yells,” she said; “why do you not gag her?”

Wanna was not alone; there entered with her another woman—a native. It was Zeemit Mehal.

With a cry of joy, Flora sprang to her feet, and, darting forward, threw her arms round Zeemit’s neck, exclaiming—

“Oh, Zeemit, save me! save me!”

But Zeemit shook her off, as it seemed, savagely; and with an Indian grunt of contempt, said—

“As well might you appeal to the stones. Zeemit knows no pity for the Feringhee woman.”

With a wail of pain, wrung from a heart filled almost to bursting, Flora sank to the floor; and Jewan’s joy found vent in loud laughter.

CHAPTER XVI. A DEADLY STRIFE.

“Your arrival is well-timed,” said Jewan, turning to Zeemit.

“I see that it is so,” she answered. “I soon discovered in Delhi that you had left, and I determined to follow you, for poor old Zeemit is alone in the world now. I was lucky in meeting with Wanna. Some years ago I was in Cawnpore, and I knew her then. When she learnt that I had followed you, she lost no time in conducting me here.”

“I am glad of it,” said Jewan. “My prize will be safely kept now. Guard her well, Zeemit; and you, Wanna, if you value your life, look to her! You understand? She has dared to defy me, and I swear to subdue her!”

He crossed the room to where Flora still trembled, and crouched upon the floor. He stooped over, and said, with bitterness—

“I leave you now. Business calls me hence, but I shall return to-night, and then we will see who conquers.”

He passed out of the room, and Wanna locked the door after him. It was an inexpressible relief to Flora when he had gone. But when she raised her head, and her eyes fell upon Wanna’s face, she shuddered. It was a face scarcely human in its expression of hate. She turned to Zeemit—she had given her hope in Meerut—why had she failed her now? She could read little or nothing in the dusky features. Her heart sank, for the glimmering ray that had supported her hitherto seemed to fade entirely.

“Come,” said Wanna, spurning the trembling girl with her foot, “here is food for you; I suppose I must keep life in you until Jewan has sucked your sweetness. What he can see in you I know not. It is a mad infatuation, and he will get the better of it; but if I had my way I would torture you. I would spoil your beauty—I would pluck your eyes out—I would lop off a limb from your body every day—I would burn you with hot irons. Ah, ah, ah! it would be sport! Eh, Zeemit, what say you? We have been ground as corn in a mill by these accursed Feringhees; and now that our day has come, have we not a right to be glad?”

She hummed the air of an Indian ditty, and fairly danced about the room with fiendish glee.

“Oh, woman!” moaned the unhappy Flora, “if you are not altogether inhuman, have pity, and kill me.”

“Ugh, bah, pish! pity indeed,” cried Wanna, moving about backwards and forwards in that restless and strange manner peculiar to caged, wild animals. “Have we ever had pity from your countrymen? Have you not crushed us into the earth?—subdued us with fire and sword? And now that our power is coming back we know well how to retaliate.”

As she spoke she spat upon the floor twice, and made a sort of hissing sound with her lips.[\[5\]](#)

“Why do you not get up?” asked Zeemit, in a tone that contrasted strangely with the savageness and cruelty of Wanna.

The ray brightened again for Flora. She caught comfort from that voice; but when she looked into the face she saw nothing to justify the inference she had drawn. The kindness displayed in Zeemit’s voice did not escape Wanna, who turned sharply upon her country-woman and cried—

“How is this? You speak to the white-faced cat as if she were your pet dove, instead of an enemy.”

“Scarcely an enemy, Wanna. Her only crime seems to be that she is a Feringhee.”

“She is a beast.”

“She is a woman, and I feel as a woman should do for her.”

Zeemit’s words were to Flora like water to the parched earth. They gave her hope, they gave her joy; she drank them in with avidity, and gained strength. She rose up and would have clung around the neck of her ayah, had not the attitude of Wanna appalled her.

The hag stood facing Zeemit. The bangles on her legs and arms chinked as she shook with passion. She was clawing the air, and almost foaming at the mouth. She struggled to speak, but her passion well-nigh choked her. Words came at last.

“You sympathise with this Feringhee woman. I see through you—you are an enemy to us, a friend to her. But, if you thought to liberate her, you have set up a trap into which you yourself have blindly walked. I go for Jewan.”

She made a movement towards the door. To let her go would frustrate every plan. Zeemit knew that it was no time for reflection. It was woman to woman—age to age; for on both the years pressed heavily. With a lithe and agile spring she fastened upon Wanna, who, with the sudden instinct of self-preservation and the ferocity of the jungle cat, twisted her bony fingers round and dug her nails deep into the flesh of the other’s arms.

It was a strange scene. From the wall the picture of the idol seemed to grin hideously. Speechless with terror, poor Flora stood wringing her hands. The two women, panting with the first shock of attack, glared at each other, and over all there fell the weird, flickering light of the swinging cocoa-lamp.

As in all Indian buildings of this kind, there was a long window in the room opening on to a verandah. The jalousies were thrown back. The stars in the heavens were shining, and from below came up the sounds of the voices of the natives, who were beating their tom-toms and making merry.

Miss Meredith moved to this verandah. She peered over. She could see groups of people below. Her first impulse was to call for assistance, but in an instant she was convinced of the madness of such a proceeding. On the issue of the struggle her life depended. She might go free if Zeemit conquered—die if the triumph was Wanna’s.

“Give me the key of that door,” demanded Zeemit, when she had recovered breath enough for speech.

“Never while my heart beats,” answered the other.

“Then I will take it from you when your heart has done beating,” said Zeemit.

Mehal was slightly the taller of the two women, and her arms were longer. In this respect she, perhaps, had an advantage.

The women struggled furiously. Now they were locked in a deadly embrace, now parted, only to spring together again with increased ferocity. Never did wild animals grip and tear, and hiss, and struggle more savagely than did these two women. But the springs which moved them both to action were of a totally different nature. A kindly desire to render assistance to one in distress was

Mehal's motive—a deadly hatred for the Englishwoman was the other's.

They dragged each other round the room; they panted with the extraordinary exertion which each made to gain the victory; their muslin garments were encrimsoned with blood and rent to shreds. Now they dashed against the stone walls, then reeled and tottered to the floor, writhing in the agony of the terrible grip which each had of the other. Rising again, covered with dust and blood, and their limbs locked together like snakes—their faces contorted with pain and passion, and their breath coming thick and fast.

It was an awful moment for Flora. She would have rendered assistance to Mehal, but that was impracticable, as she found, for Wanna twisted herself about so rapidly as to frustrate the attempts which Flora made to grasp her.

It was truly a struggle for life; for, ere it ceased, one of the strugglers must die. They knew that, and so they fought with the desperate energy which nerves a human being when dear life is at stake.

The efforts of Wanna were growing gradually weaker. Mehal had worked one of her hands up to the other's throat, and she was pressing her thumb and fingers together, until Wanna's eyes started.

The hag knew now that only by a desperate effort could she free herself, and save her life. But even if that were impossible, she was determined that her antagonist should not live to enjoy her triumph.

She put forth what little strength remained in her withered frame. It was an upleaping of the dying fire again, and for a moment the battle raged fiercer than ever. They spun round, and reeled, and staggered.

The end was coming. Wanna felt that. With an almost superhuman effort, she managed to drag her foe to the verandah, and, with a quick and sudden movement, drew the key from her girdle, and, uttering a cry of ferocious joy, was about to hurl it over the railings. But a counter-movement of Mehal's broke the force of the jerk, and the key fell on the extreme edge.

Flora darted forward, but she could not pass the combatants.

Wanna saw that her chance had gone. But nerving herself for one final struggle, she dragged Mehal round. They lost their balance—they fell to the floor—they rolled against the wooden railings, which, old and rotten with age, broke down with a crash. Away went the key into space. The two women were on the

extreme edge of the verandah!

Flora rushed forward once more. She made a frantic clutch at their garments, with a view of dragging them back.

It was too late!

Death let fall his spear, and took the stakes. The fighters rolled over, and Flora stood petrified with horror, still holding in her hands some remnants of blood-stained garments.

The wind moaned amongst the ivy on the walls. In its wailing she seemed to hear a prophetic voice that told her the struggle she had been an unwilling witness to between the two women, but represented the greater struggle between two races that had just commenced; and, before it could end, the soil of India should be drenched with blood.

The night wind moaned. It sounded in her ears like a requiem for her slaughtered friends. It seemed like an agonised cry of pain, wrung from hearts suffering almost more than mortal sorrow.

The night wind moaned—a dirge-like moan, that told that the Angel of Peace had been beaten, broken-winged, into the dust; and through the Orient land were stalking the grim demons, War and Woe.

The night wind spoke. It told her that the catastrophe she had just witnessed destroyed every hope of escape she might have had, for with Zeemit her best friend had gone.

She heard Jewan Bukht's voice in the wind—a voice malignant and cruel.

“I will return to-night, and then we will see who conquers!”

Those were his parting words. As the wind repeated them to her, it called her back to a sense of her awful danger. Her almost stilled heart sprang into life again. It throbbed with the wildness of fear and horror at what the consequences might be if he returned.

She could foil him yet; in her hands she held her own life. An effort of will, and she could snap the “silver thread” and break the “golden bowl.” Three paces forward, and a plunge down into the dark depth, whence had rolled the bodies of Zeemit and Wanna.

Were it not better to die than to live to shame and misery?

When all hope has fled, when everything that can make life endurable has gone, has not the time come to die? She thought this. And the moaning wind answered her, and said “Yes.”

A plunge, a rapid descent, a terrific shock, and then the end.

She looked up to the silent stars. They seemed to look down pityingly on her. Mentally her gaze wandered beyond the stars, to the plains of peace, to the White Throne of Mercy and Justice, and she put up a prayer for forgiveness.

Be still, wild heart! cease, oh, throbbing brain! death is merciful.

She took a step forward—she closed her eyes—she threw up her arms; and, bending her body, she was about to take the fatal leap, when a voice reached her.

Not of the wind this time, but a human voice, that cried for help, that told of pain.

She went down on her knees. She peered over the broken verandah into the darkness. She could see nothing. The voice had ceased, and there was silence again, save that the “ivy rustled and the wind moaned.”

FOOTNOTE:

[5] When the Hindoos wish to express a thorough loathing and contempt for anything, they spit upon the ground, and make a peculiar movement with the lips. During the mutiny, and for long afterwards, it was common for the native servants in the European houses, when ordered to do anything, to spit upon the ground when they thought their masters were not looking. The language put into the mouth of Wana, and the ferocity depicted, are by no means an exaggeration. In fact, words would almost fail to accurately express the inhuman hatred for the English, which the natives—men and women—took every opportunity of displaying during the revolt.

CHAPTER XVII. FOR LIFE AND LOVE.

The cry that came up out of the darkness, and stayed Flora Meredith in the very act of self murder, was uttered by one who had been miraculously saved from an awful death.

For some minutes Flora continued to strain her eyes before she could make anything out. Then she became conscious that the figure of a woman was lying on a verandah about fifteen feet below, and which projected considerably beyond the lines of the upper one on which Flora stood. That it was one of the women who had rolled over, Miss Meredith had no doubt; but which one was a question difficult to answer. But presently the cry was repeated. Flora fancied she detected Mehal's voice, but could not be certain. Everything was quiet below in the grounds, for the hour was late, and nobody was about. She bent over the verandah as far as possible, and, in a low tone, called—

“Mehal—Zeemit—Zeemit.”

She waited with palpitating heart for any reply, for on that reply it might truly be said her life hung. But the reply did not come—only a half-stifled moan telling of acute suffering.

Again she called—a little louder, this time; again she waited in expectancy, to be disappointed once more. She rose to her feet, and considered what was best to be done. There was little time to lose, little time for thought.

Hope rose again. If she could manage to reach the lower balcony, she might be saved. But how was that to be accomplished? Even if she had been in possession of a rope, she doubted her ability either to make it fast, or, having succeeded in that, to lower herself down; for easy as such a thing seems to the uninitiated, it is practically a task fraught with the utmost danger, and requiring an exertion of physical strength severe for a man, and ten times more so for a woman. But though she had possessed the acrobatic skill to have performed the feat, the rope was not there, nor was there anything in the room that would have answered as a substitute. What, then, was to be done?

She stood irresolute, almost distracted by the painful tensity to which her mental

powers were stretched. But as she stood, hovering, as it were, between life and death, the rustling creepers whispered to her—

“Here is a way down.”

As the idea flashed upon her, she could have cried out with joy.

She moved to the end of the verandah. The great rope-like stems were twined and twisted together, and spread out in all directions. She looked at her hands, delicate and soft, and mentally asked herself if she had strength of arm and wrist sufficient for the task.

Fear lends strength, as it gives wings, and even a woman, situated as Flora was, will perform deeds that, under ordinary circumstances, would seem impossible.

It was the sole chance, and she must avail herself of it. She hesitated no longer; but mounting the railing of the verandah, grasped firmly a thick stem of the ivy, and swung herself over.

It was an awful moment. The failure of the power of the arms, the slightest giddiness, and a fall of fifty feet would close the book of life for ever. But after the first nervous dread had passed, she found that the descent was far easier than she had imagined.

The rough angles of the walls, and the thick ivy, gave her tolerable foothold. But now and again her weight dragged the stems from their hold of the wall, and she would slip down a little way with a jerk that sent the blood back upon her heart with a rush.

It was hard work; it was a struggle for life—a life that, a few minutes ago, she would have sacrificed, for then all hope seemed to have gone. But since then the star had risen a little once more, by reason of the pain-wrung cry of a human sufferer.

She struggled with desperate energy to save that life. Lower and lower she went. It seemed as if she would never reach the goal.

The ivy ripped and gave way, painfully straining and jerking her arms, and the rough stones lacerated and tore her hands. But there was no giving up until she reached the wished-for point.

She clung desperately—she struggled bravely, and the reward came at last—she

was abreast of the lower verandah! She got a foothold, then clutched the railing, and, in a few moments, stood on the floor, breathless and exhausted, but safe so far.

The figure of the prostrate woman was a few feet off. She moved to her, bent down, turned her over, and then uttered a silent prayer of thankfulness, as she recognised the well-known features of her faithful ayah.

But it was evident that Zeemit was wounded grievously. She was unconscious, and lay in a pool of blood, which flowed from a deep wound in the forehead. In her descent she had struck her head on the railing of the verandah; but this probably saved her life, as it caused her to roll inward, instead of outward.

Flora endeavoured to staunch the blood. She chafed the hands, and raised the body to a sitting posture. Her efforts were at length rewarded, for consciousness slowly returned to the old woman. It was some time before she could realise her exact position. But, as the truth dawned upon her, she grasped the hand of Flora, and cried—

“Allah be praised, missy, you are still safe!”

“We both live,” answered Flora; “but we both stand in deadly peril. How are we to save ourselves?”

“You must not think of me. You must endeavour to get free of this place, and save your own life.”

“And leave you here!” cried Flora; “never!”

“You are a brave girl, and Zeemit thanks you; but you must go. Wanna is, no doubt, dead. If she fell to the ground, which seems probable, it would have been impossible to have survived such a fall. Dead people tell no tales; therefore we have nothing to fear from her. I feel that I cannot rise. For me to go with you would but impede your flight. Leave me. I shall be discovered. I shall tell Jewan that Wanna intended to set you free, tempted by a heavy bribe you offered. I endeavoured to prevent her—we struggled, and fell over the verandah—and then all is blank to me. This will give me an opportunity of rendering you still further assistance, because, however angry Jewan may be, he would scarcely dare to offer me violence.”

“It is much against my will to have to leave you here, Zeemit, and I can scarcely reconcile myself to such a course.”

“But it is the only chance there is for me to render you aid. Besides, there is one below who waits anxiously for you.”

“Ah! tell me, tell me, where he is?” cried Flora, the opportunity occurring for the first time to speak of him since Zeemit’s appearance.

“He was safe when I left him,” answered the old woman. “Soon after leaving Meerut we were attacked in a bungalow, where we had sought shelter; but we managed to escape, and continue our journey to Delhi. We gained entrance to the city, and I soon learned from some of the Palace servants that Jewan had gone to Cawnpore. We lost no time in following him, and we arrived here last night. In yonder clump of trees,”—as the old woman spoke, she slightly raised her head, and pointed with her finger across the compound—“is a disused bullock-shed. There, on a heap of straw, you will find Mr. Gordon. He was to remain secreted until I had learned tidings of you. He was weary and footsore, and sleeping soundly when I came away.”

“But how am I to reach there unobserved?” asked Flora, scarcely able to restrain her impatience.

“I think that will be comparatively easy. Go through the room here till you gain the landing, then down the stairs until you come to the entrance-hall. The night is dark, and you may easily make your way to the bullock-shed. Once there, you and Mr. Gordon must lose no time in hurrying to the protection of the English quarters; but, if possible, fly from Cawnpore without delay, for there is an awful time coming for the place. The native troops are pledged to rise, and the Nana Sahib is thirsting for revenge.”

“God help us all out of our tribulation,” murmured Flora. “I will endeavour to carry out your directions, Zeemit, but be sure that you join us. It is against my will to leave you here, but we must bow to the circumstances that we cannot alter.”

“Go—go,” murmured Mehal; “I am old, and you are young. Join your lover, and seek safety in flight. I have no doubt we shall meet again; but be discreet. Jewan is wary, and the moment he discovers your escape, he will use every endeavour to recapture you.”

“Farewell, Zeemit,” said Flora, as she stooped and kissed the old woman, “we part in sorrow, but I trust when next we meet, it will be under happier circumstances. You have been miraculously preserved from death, and no doubt

it is for some wise purpose. When we reach our English friends, I shall lose no time in sending for you.”

A hurried shake of the hands, a few final whispered words of parting, and Zeemit Mehal was left wounded and sick, lying alone under the stars; and Flora Meredith, like a timid hare, was descending the stairs.

On the various landings the natives were lying about asleep, a custom common to the servants in India, who coil themselves up anywhere. With noiseless tread, and rapidly beating heart, the fugitive picked her way amongst the sleepers, turning pale with alarm, as one moved here, and another groaned there, almost entirely holding her breath, lest even the act of breathing should awaken those whom she had such cause to dread. But after nearly half-an-hour of the most painful and intense anxiety, she stood at the main entrance of the building.

Day was commencing to break; there was sufficient light in the sky to enable her to see across the compound. Not a soul was in sight. Without a moment's delay, she sped towards the clump of trees. The bullock-shed indicated by Zeemit was soon reached. It was a very dilapidated structure, built of bamboo and mud. She entered through the doorway, and advanced cautiously for some paces; then listened, for there was scarcely sufficient light in the hut to distinguish anything plainly. The sound of heavy breathing fell upon her ears. It came from the extreme end, where she could make out a heap of straw. She went a little farther, and stood again.

“Walter!” she called softly; “Walter!” she repeated, a little louder.

But there was no reply. The sleeper slept, and the heavy breathing was her only answer. She went nearer. The rustling of her own dress alarmed her, for her nerves were unstrung.

“Walter!” she whispered again, as she reached the straw. Still no reply. “He is worn and weary, and he sleeps heavily,” she murmured to herself.

The light had considerably increased, for the day breaks in India as suddenly as the night closes in. She was close to the sleeping form. She stooped down until she knelt on the straw. She stretched forward to waken the sleeper, but instinctively drew back as she noticed the muslin garments of a native. She rose to her feet again, advanced a little, bent down and peered into the face, the dusky face of, as she thought, a Hindoo. She had come expecting to find her lover—in his place was a native. She uttered an involuntary cry of alarm, and, turning

round, sped quickly away.

The cry penetrated to the sleeper's brain. He turned uneasily, then assumed a sitting posture, and, as Walter Gordon rubbed his eyes, he muttered—

“Bless my life, how soundly I have been sleeping. I could have sworn, though, I heard a woman's cry. It must have been fancy.”

He stretched himself out once more on the straw; for many weary miles had he travelled, without being able to obtain a moment's rest, and nature was thoroughly exhausted.

“Poor Flo,” he thought, as sleep commenced to steal over him again, “I hope she will come soon. Zeemit is a faithful creature, and I have no doubt will succeed. God grant it.”

Walter Gordon slept once more, and she for whom he sighed was speeding from him on the wings of terror, into the very jaws of death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH A LOVE THAT PASSETH UNDERSTANDING.

The signs of dissatisfaction which had alarmed General Wheeler for the safety of his community gradually increased. The smothered fire was gaining strength. It muttered and rumbled, and gave evidence that a tremendous outbreak was imminent.

Sir Hugh was loath to believe in the infidelity of his troops, and hesitated about taking steps for self-protection. But there were those about him who had less of the optimist in their natures than he, and who were loud in their condemnation of his supineness. They urged him in every possible manner to take instant steps to place the cantonments in a state of defence, until he could no longer turn a deaf ear to their entreaties.

But though he had been slow to take this step, it must not be assumed that Sir Hugh Wheeler was unmindful of the awful responsibility that rested upon his shoulders. His was as brave a heart as ever beat in human breast, but out of his very bravery arose the danger to those under his charge.

He knew the character of the natives well. He knew that they writhed under a sense of supposed wrong, and that the slightest touch will cause an open wound to smart. He was, therefore, fearful of letting them see that the English mistrusted them. He acted upon the old principle that confidence begets confidence. Moreover, he had firm faith in Nana Sahib. He knew that as a native the Rajah had infinitely greater power over the native mind than an European could possibly have had.

Sir Hugh's confidence, too, seemed fully justified, for the Nana had readily complied with the request made to him, and had posted two hundred of his troops at the Newab-gung. This was a slightly elevated position, and fully commanded the arsenal and treasury.

A couple of guns on the spot, served by determined and faithful soldiers, could have kept a regiment at bay; but the fact of the Nana's assassins—for no other term is applicable to them—being placed there was the very irony of fate. Into

their hands had been given a wealthy treasury, and a well-stocked arsenal. All they had to do when the right moment came was to walk into these places, and slay the English with their own weapons.

Listening at last—though reluctantly—to the entreaties of his people General Wheeler looked about for the best means of securing his position; and it occurred to him, in the emergency, that the only way of defending the precious lives of the Christians was by throwing up some defensive works, within which he might gather his people, so that with their guns they could keep the enemy at bay.

He selected a spot for this purpose about six miles down the river to the south-east, not far from the Sepoys' huts, and about a mile from the banks of the river. He was guided in this choice, to a great extent, by the fact that on the spot were two long hospital barracks that would make good quarters for the people. One of the buildings was a substantial structure built wholly of masonry; but the other had a heavy thatched roof.

Here, again, the cruel hand of Fate seemed to be, for a time, against the English, for to the circumstance of the thatched roof some of the most awful suffering endured by the besieged was due, as will be hereafter shown. Both buildings were single-storied, and verandahs ran all round them; they stood in an open and perfectly flat compound. In the centre of the compound was a well, the only place from which supplies of water could be drawn; and as will be disclosed in the subsequent unfoldings of the story, this well was the scene of almost unparalleled heroic deeds.

Having selected his place, Sir Hugh began to entrench it, and supply it with a stock of provisions capable of feeding his people for several weeks.

The so-called fortifications were paltry in the extreme, for the means were not at hand to render them worthy the name. The earth-works were only four feet high, and were not even proof against bullets at the crest. The apertures for the artillery exposed both guns and gunners; whilst, on all sides, adjacent buildings offered splendid cover for the enemy. The excessive heat and dryness of the weather had rendered the ground so hard that it could only be turned with the greatest amount of difficulty, and by patient labour; and when it was dug it was so friable that the cohesion necessary for solidity could not be attained.

The month of May wore on; the expected mutiny did not occur. June came in, and Sir Hugh then felt confident that all danger had passed; and Lucknow being

threatened, the General sent to the relief of the neighbouring station a portion of his own little company of soldiers.

As these white troops crossed the bridge of boats, and set their faces towards Lucknow, the natives fairly shook with suppressed laughter as they thought what fools the English were. And at this very time, Jewan Bukht and other agents of the Nana were visiting the bazaars and the native lines, and fanning the smouldering fire to flame.

Towards the latter end of May, there entered Cawnpore by the pontoon bridge, two strangers. It was the close of a more than usually sultry day, and the travellers, who were on foot, were dust-stained and worn.

These travellers were Lieutenant Harper and Haidee. They had come from Delhi—a long weary march; and along their line of route they had experienced the greatest difficulty in procuring necessary food and rest.

Nerved by the one all-powerful motive, Haidee had kept up, and exhibited extraordinary powers of endurance. When her companion sank exhausted from heat and thirst, this brave and beautiful woman watched over him, encouraged him, and gave him hope. Her gentle hand wiped his brow, her soft bosom pillowed his head. Her love for him grew stronger each day. To lie at his feet, to pillow his head, to watch him when he slept, was joy inexpressible to her. And yet during this journey she never by a single word betrayed aught of the strong passion which filled her heart; but every action, every deed proclaimed it.

On his part he tried to think of her only as one who had befriended him, and to whom it was his duty to offer such protection as lay in his power. But on the road from Delhi he proved the weaker vessel of the two, for the awful heat, aided by the want of proper rest and sustenance, sorely tired him. She, on the other hand, inured from birth to the heat, and strengthened by her great love for him, kept up when he faltered, and exhibited, comparatively speaking, but little weariness.

Hers was the devotion of a true woman; it was self-sacrificing, all-absorbing, undying. Truly she had made him her star that gave her only light. She had no selfish thought, except such selfishness as is begotten by true love—for all love is selfish; it is its very nature to be so. And yet this faithfulness made the man sad. He felt that he could not return her love, however much he might admire her. However much he might feel grateful, however great his worship for her nobleness of nature might be, he must shut his eyes to her charms, close his

senses to her silent outpourings of love, for he was another's, and to that one he must be true, or feel that for evermore the honour which was so very dear to him was sullied, and time could never wipe out the stain again.

Often as he dragged his weary steps along, with the loving Haidee by his side, he mentally asked himself if he was not pursuing a phantom that was luring him to unknown danger. Had he done right in setting his face towards Cawnpore, and could he justify the course he had taken by any amount of logical reasoning? He was striving to do his duty. If he failed, it would be through error of judgment, and not through want of heart.

As the two travellers stood upon the Cawnpore bank of the river Ganges, Harper gave vent to a sigh of relief. But Haidee seemed to be pressed with a weight of sorrow.

“You do not seem well, Haidee,” Harper remarked casually, as he observed the depressed look of his companion. “Your eyes are dull, and your cheek is pale. What is the cause?”

She looked at him almost reproachfully, and her only answer was a long-drawn sigh.

“What is the matter with you?” he asked again, with a good deal of indifference in his tone; for, to confess the truth, his thoughts were far away. He was racked with doubts and fears, and half-regretted that he had yielded consent to come to Cawnpore, instead of returning to his quarters at Meerut.

Her eyes glowed, and her face and neck crimsoned, as she struggled to conceal the emotion which almost choked her, and which his words had caused. Her sensitive nature was wounded by his indifference, and she shrank away, as it were, like a startled fawn.

“Why do you sting me?” she exclaimed, when she could speak.

“Sting you, Haidee! What do you mean?” as he turned upon her quickly, and coming back again to a sense of his true position.

“Why do you ask me what is the matter, in a tone that betrays too plainly that you take no interest in the question?”

“Nay, Haidee, there you wrong me.”

“Sooner would I wrong myself than you; but your words remain with Haidee while your heart is far away.”

“My heart is divided, Haidee, and I give you all of it that I dare. You are my friend. Every sacrifice I can make I will make for you, if it is necessary. I will protect you with my life. I cannot do more.”

“Ah!” she sighed; “and yet you can ask me what it is that makes me sad? There is sorrow at my heart; sorrow at the thought our journey is ended, and you and I must probably part never to meet again. That is what is the matter with me.”

“Forgive me, Haidee, if I have hurt you by my seeming thoughtlessness. I assure you I had no intention of doing so. And though our journey is for the present ended, do not say we shall part for ever. You have grown precious to me as a noble, generous, devoted woman; and I vow, by all that I hold sacred, that I will endeavour never to lose sight of you as long as I live.”

She trembled with a nameless, pleasurable emotion; her nerves vibrated like unto the strings of a harp that are swept with a strong wind; for this man’s words were music to her. “I will endeavour not to lose sight of you as long as I live.” Had he not spoken them? And they sank to the deeper depths of her nature. They were like an elixir of life, given to one whose strength was ebbing away. She yearned for sympathy, and this man gave it to her. Her soul cried out for kindredship, and it found it in him. What wonder then that she should be taken captive?—that beat for beat her heart should answer his? It is given to human beings to feel the burning rapture of love, but not to solve its mystery; for it is a mystery as strange as the Sphinx of old; as unsolvable as the cosmical problems which have puzzled philosophers of all ages.

She loved him. Every look, every action, every tone betrayed that she loved him with a true woman’s pure love. If it had sprung up suddenly, it was none the less genuine or strong. She would have been content to follow him, even if he, like the fabled “Wandering Jew,” had been doomed to go on and on, restlessly and for evermore. Still would she have followed, living in his shadow, drawing her very life from his look and voice, sorrowing when he sorrowed, laughing when he laughed. Nay, more; she would have taken upon herself all the pains, however fearful, he might have had to endure. She would have rendered that last and greatest sacrifice that one human being can make for another—she would have laid down her life to save his.

It was a grand love, this love of hers—not the sickly sentiment of a wayward

girl, but the strong, powerful, absorbing passion of a woman; a love as heroic as any that Homer ever sang of, or that moved the Roman women of old to follow the youths to the battle-fields, and die when they died.

Harper was a stranger in Cawnpore, but he knew that the numerical strength of the garrison was ridiculously low, and, knowing this, his heart sank as he observed unmistakable signs of coming mischief. During the journey he had been astonished at the large number of mounted natives he had met speeding along to and from Delhi, and he had no doubt that these men were spies and agents, passing backwards and forwards with news; so that he was not surprised when he found that information of his coming had preceded him to Cawnpore; and as he passed through the streets he was frequently met with the ironical question, put by some insolent native, "Holloa! how fares it with the English in Delhi?"

His companion, too, was also subjected to considerable attention. Her appearance belied the idea that she belonged to the lower order, although she was dressed in the commonest of native dresses; but there was an air of refinement and bearing about her totally out of keeping with her costume. This did not escape the keen scrutiny of hundreds of eyes, and many were the ominous whispers that fell upon the ears of Harper, and he frequently detected the words—"She is from the Palace. She is one of the King's slaves."

He lost no time in proceeding to the English quarters; he found them deserted; and he soon ascertained that the Europeans were congregated with General Wheeler behind the earth-works. This place was some distance from where he then was, and both he and Haidee were greatly exhausted. But food and shelter were not to be had, so he set his face boldly towards the fortifications.

It was quite dark now; even the stars were obscured. The travellers held on their way; no words passed between them, for each was occupied with his and her thoughts. They drew near to their destination; they could see the lights in the barrack windows, but they had yet about a quarter of a mile to go. The road was through some clustering trees, and past a number of straggling native huts; these places all seemed deserted—at least, none of the natives showed themselves. In a little while Harper stopped suddenly, and drawing Haidee to him, whispered—"I believe that we are being followed. I am certain that I have discerned figures moving quickly about, as if dodging us. Do not be alarmed," as he passed his arm round her and drew his pistol. "We have not far to go, and if we can reach the barracks we shall be safe. See," he exclaimed, in a low tone, and pointing to

a small mound upon which grew two or three palms, "I am convinced that there are some men there moving about suspiciously. Do you not see them?"

"Yes, yes," she murmured, clinging to him—not from fear for herself, but rather as a mother would cling to her child when she knows that danger threatened it. "Let us proceed cautiously."

They went on for a few yards, until they were nearly abreast of the mound; then Harper stopped again, and he placed himself before Haidee, for a sound had come to him that was terribly ominous. He had heard the sharp "click, click," of a rifle. His soldier's ear detected it in a moment.

"Crouch down, Haidee. Crouch down. They are going to fire," he said, quickly.

But the words had scarcely left his lips when there rang out on the still night air a startling report, and a tongue of fire darted from the clump of trees. Then instantly another report, and another tongue. It was certain that two rifles had been fired, and one of the bullets had found its billet. Harper tossed up his arms, and, with a gurgling gasp, sank to the ground. With a shrill scream Haidee threw herself beside him. She passed her arm round his neck; she bent over and kissed him frantically.

"Oh, my beloved!" she moaned, "speak to me. Do not die! Do not leave Haidee alone in the world! Oh, ye Houris of goodness!" she prayed, as she turned her eyes up to heaven, "ye who observe human sorrow from the gates of Paradise, pity me, and spare this mortal."

Perhaps her prayer was heard—perhaps some pitying angel did carry it up, and lay it before the throne of mercy.

The wounded man heard it, and he managed to clutch her hand, and press it to the left side of his breast. The blood was gushing out—his warm blood—and it flowed over her hand and arm. In an instant she had bared his breast; and, tearing off her muslin skirt, she stanching the wound. He could not speak, but a faint pressure of the hand gave her hope.

"My beloved, live—live!" she murmured. "Oh, for some assistance! But you must not lie here; it were death to do so. Oh, that I had a man's strength but for a brief half-hour."

She had passed her arm still further under his neck, and, getting a firm hold with her other hand round the lower part of his body, she raised him up. She

staggered beneath the load for a moment, but planting her feet firmly, and drawing a deep breath, she started forward, bearing the almost lifeless body of the man for whom she had risked so much. Her burden called for the utmost physical strength to support; but what will love not do? She struggled along, resting now and again, but never putting down her precious load, never for a moment shifting his position, and trying to avoid the slightest jerk, for she was fearful of the wound bursting out afresh, and she knew that to let that precious life-current flow was to let the life, so dear to her, drift away.

Harper was quite unconscious now. His arms hung down powerless. It almost seemed to her that he was already dead; and she grew cold with fear as she thought every moment she would find the beloved form stiffening in her arms.

Word-painting would fail to adequately depict the woman's feelings as she staggered along in the darkness. The welcome lights were before her eyes—would she reach them? Even if the life was not already gone out of the body she bore so tenderly in her arms, a few minutes' delay might prove fatal. Never did shipwrecked mariner, floating on a solitary plank in the midst of a wild ocean, turn his eyes more eagerly, imploringly, prayerfully, to the distant sail, as she turned hers towards those lights. Her heart throbbed wildly, her brain burned, her muscles quivered with the great exertion; but she would not be conquered. Love was her motive-power; it kept her up, it lent her strength, it braced her nerves. And she would have defended the helpless being in her arms, even as a tigress would defend its wounded young.

On—step after step—yard after yard—nearer and nearer the goal.

“Who goes there? Stand and answer.”

It was the challenge of an outlying English sentry.

She uttered a cry of joy, for the man was within a few paces of her.

Never did words sound more welcome in human ear than did that challenge to the devoted Haidee.

“A friend,” she answered quickly, in English. “Help me!—quick—I bear a wounded officer in my arms.”

The man gave vent to an expression of profound surprise as he hurried forward to meet her. In a moment he had raised the alarm. The signal flew from post to post. A few minutes only passed, but it seemed an age. Then she saw a body of

men advancing with lanterns. Gently and tenderly they took the insensible form of Harper from Haidee. She walked beside him, or rather staggered, for nature was thoroughly exhausted, and only strength of will kept her up.

The guard was passed, and the barrack was reached. Harper was laid upon a mattress on the floor, and two doctors were speedily bending over him; and while one administered a powerful stimulant, the other made a critical examination of the wound.

Haidee's eyes wandered from the one face to the other. She noted every expression, she tried to read the thoughts of the doctors, but she did not worry them with useless questioning. But when the examination was completed and lint had been applied to the wound, she grasped the arm of the nearest medical man, and whispered—

“Tell me truly—will he live?”

“It is possible,” the doctor answered tenderly.

Hope shone again, and, with the words still ringing in her ears, she sank down beside the wounded man, and in an instant was steeped in a death-like sleep.

Then loving hands—women's hands—raised her tenderly and bore her to a couch, and the doctors proceeded to make a more minute examination of their patient's condition.

CHAPTER XIX. FROM CAPTIVITY TO CAPTIVITY.

In one of the outbuildings attached to the Rajah of Bhitoor's dwelling, four natives are seated. It is night. From a smoke-blackened beam, a long, rusty chain swings. Attached to this is one of the primitive cocoa-nut lamps, the sickly light from which scarcely does more than make the darkness visible. At one end of the apartment is a charcoal fire, on which a brass lotah, filled with boiling rice, hisses. The men are sitting, Indian fashion, upon their haunches; they smoke in turns a hubble-bubble, which they pass from one to another.

It is a weirdly picturesque scene. The blackened mud walls of the building have a funereal aspect, heightened by the swinging lamp as at the door of a tomb.

But the four dusky figures seated round the fire, and reddened by the glow from the charcoal, slightly relieve the sombreness. They would not inaptly represent spirits of evil, holding counsel at the entrance to Tartarus. Their eyes are bleared by the opium they smoke, and, as they converse, the shifting expression of their faces betrays that there is joy at their hearts. But it is not a good joy. It is rather a gloating as they think of the sorrow and suffering of those whom they are pleased to consider their enemies. They are—or so they like to believe—self-constituted avengers of their country's wrongs, and they would, if it were in their power, write "Death" across the "Book of Life" of every one indiscriminately, whose misfortune it was to have a white skin.

To destroy the power of the Great White Hand—in other words, to exterminate the British—is the souls' desire of these men, as it is possibly of every, or nearly every, native in India on this eventful night.

As it is given to man to love, so it is given to man to hate, and the hate of the human heart is beyond human understanding; it has no parallel in anything that draws the breath of life. The savage animals of the forest may rend and tear, but in their nature there can be none of the deadly poison of resentment and hatred which a man can cherish.

But in the hearts of these four men there is that which predominates even over the hatred. There is lust, there is the greed of gain, and the cringing, fawning

servility which ignoble natures ever display towards those higher in the social scale than themselves, and upon whom the goddess of wealth has showered her favours lavishly. Two of the men we have seen before—they are Moghul Singh and Jewan Bukht. The other two are retainers of the King of Delhi. An hour ago, when Jewan had come down from Miss Meredith's chamber up in the tower, he was surprised, not to say annoyed, to find Moghul Singh waiting for him.

When the first greetings were passed, Jewan invited his visitor to this place, although he did not know the errand upon which he had come. But there was that in Singh's manner and laugh which told Jewan that Flora Meredith was in some way, if not the sole cause of Moghul's visit to Cawnpore. And this idea was very soon to be confirmed; for as the men gathered round the fire, and the hubble-bubble had been filled and passed, Jewan ventured to inquire the nature of his visitor's business.

Singh laughed, or rather grinned, and his eyes sparkled maliciously as the question was put.

"To take back the Feringhee woman of yours, Jewan," was the answer, an unpleasant one enough to Jewan; for, apart from the risks he had run on her account, he bore some sort of feeling for her; certainly not love, because that is a holy passion, and so, for the want of a better word, it must be called an infatuation. Well, bearing this feeling, being dazed by her beauty, and above all, having a strong desire to subdue her will, he could not reconcile himself to the thought of parting with her, nor was he altogether prepared to do so.

"If that is the only object that has brought you here, methinks you will go back again empty handed," he replied.

Moghul grinned again—grinned with the self-assurance of a man who knows that he holds the winning trump card, that he can play at any moment to the discomfiture of his opponent.

"I think not so, Jewan, my faithful one. Come, fill the pipe again; it need not be put out, even if you do not like my errand. Ah, ah, ah! By my faith, one would think by the look on your face that you had been called upon to disgorge a lac of rupees, instead of to give up possession of a woman that can only cause you a world of trouble."

"I am not so sure of that. At any rate, having caged the bird, I mean to keep her. She shall pipe for me alone."

“Oh, oh!—ah, ah! Pass the pipe; this smoke is comforting. You mean to keep her, eh? By the Prophet’s beard, Master Jewan, they are big words. Blow the charcoal, Hadjee,” turning to one of his companions, “that rice does not boil fast enough, and it is not good to laugh much on an empty stomach. You mean to keep her? Ah, ah! That is a good joke. Methinks you will need a strong cage then, and a good keeper.”

“I have both.”

“Have you so? But you forget, my friend, that bars may be broken and keepers bribed.”

“Neither of which you will dare to do.”

“And why, my faithful Jewan?”

“For two reasons.”

“And they are—”

“That I would denounce you sooner than you should have her, and kill you if you attempted to take her.”

“Oh, oh! Jewan Bukht, the good days that are coming for us are making you bold indeed. Have a care, my youth. I have performed some deeds of daring in my time, and brook not insolence from one who has passed his days in scribbling for the English dogs.”

“You will find that I can wield something more formidable than a pen if you taunt me,” returned Jewan, the passion glow rising in his dusky face.

“May be so,” answered Moghul sarcastically; “but in spite of your threats I tell you I shall take this woman back.”

“You speak authoritatively. By what right will you take her back?”

“By the King’s command. Ah, ah, ah!—oh, oh! There I have you, Jewan.”

Jewan’s brows contracted, for he felt that he was beaten, and dare not disobey that command.

“Come, come,” continued the other; “don’t look as if a jungle cat had bitten you. After all, you are not called upon to give up much, and you cannot afford to quarrel with the King. He heard of this woman almost directly after you left, and

he despatched me instantly to bring her back. So give me the key of your cage, and let me get the work done, for I don't like these jobs. Besides, I am anxious to get back to Delhi, for there are rare times there now, and rupees are plentiful."

"Well, as there is no help for it," said Jewan, "I suppose I must. But I should like to have broken this woman's spirit, for she has defied me."

"Pshaw! there is higher game to fly at than that. Besides, there are good times dawning for Cawnpore, and you will come in for a share of the spoil. But let us have our supper, for I am hungered."

Hadjee had already turned the rice on to a large brass dish, and added to it the indispensable mess of curry, and having procured some water from a neighbouring well, the four men seated themselves round the rice, and commenced to eat.

When the meal was ended, Moghul rose.

At the same moment, a tall, powerful, and savage-looking man entered; his name was Haffe Beg, and he was employed by Jewan Bukht, on behalf of Nana Sahib, as a spy.

Jewan rose as the man entered.

"Ah, Haffe! what news? You have been absent for some days."

"Yes," answered the man gruffly; "I have had business."

"Important, I suppose, since it has detained you?" said Jewan.

"Yes; word was brought to me a few days ago that a woman and an Englishman were travelling from Delhi towards Cawnpore."

"Indeed!" cried Moghul Singh; "who were they?"

"I don't know; but evidently fugitives, and of importance. The woman came from the Palace; she was a Cashmere woman, I believe. The man was an English officer."

Moghul Singh's brow contracted, and he bit his lip. "My prisoner Harper, by the beard of Allah!" he exclaimed, wrathfully, "and the woman Haidee, or may my eyes never see daylight again. I have long suspected her of treachery. But they do not live *now!*" he added, significantly.

The man grinned as he replied—

“I am not certain.”

“Not certain!” repeated Bukht, angrily. “By the Prophet! rupee of thy master’s shall never again find its way to thy pouch if you failed.”

“You do not mean to say they escaped?” added Moghul menacingly.

“Keep your threats for your slaves,” answered Beg, with a defiant air. “As soon as I heard that these people were on the road, I set out to meet them; but they evidently did not follow the main road. I learned that they had entered the city. I returned. They made for the English quarters, and from there to the defences at the barracks. No opportunity presented itself until they were near the English guard; for the night was dark. But, as soon as I could, I sent two bullets after them, with as true an aim as was possible under the circumstances.”

“And you hit your mark, of course?” chimed in Moghul and Bukht together.

“One, at least, fell,” answered Beg; “but afraid that the report of the gun had alarmed the sentries, I retired. Later on I sought the spot; the bodies were not there, but there was a pool of blood. Whether the English, guided by the report, had come out and carried the bodies away, or whether only one of the two fell and the survivor carried the other off, I don’t know; but I believe one of my bullets for certain found the woman’s heart.”

“If that is so, I can forgive you for your bungling,” Moghul remarked between his set teeth. “I would not let her escape for a lac of rupees.”

“I think you may console yourself, then,” said Beg. “I was guided by her white dress, and I feel sure she fell.”

“So far that is satisfactory, but take further steps to learn,” replied Moghul. Then, turning to Bukht, he said—

“I cannot waste more time—I must go.”

“How do you travel?” asked Bukht, moving towards the door.

“By gharry. It stands there in the compound, and I have a pair of splendid horses, provided for the return journey by the Nana’s head syce (groom).”

Bukht led the way, followed by Moghul and the other men. The building in

which they had been sitting was about a hundred yards from the tower. As Jewan reached the foot of the tower he stumbled over something. It was a woman. He stooped down and looked in her face, then uttered a cry of surprise. The face was Wanna Ranu's. But the woman was stone dead, and there was scarcely a whole bone in her emaciated body.

"This smacks of treason!" Jewan exclaimed, as he hurried to the door of the tower.

He had soon gained the top storey. He had a key of the door of the room in which he had imprisoned Flora. As he entered he gave vent to an imprecation, for she whom he sought was not there. He hurried to the balcony. The broken railings told the tale.

"There has been foul play!" he said, as he turned hurriedly to Moghul, who stood with a look of consternation on his face; for he could not hope to make the King believe that the girl had escaped, and, if he returned without her, he knew he would fall into disgrace.

At this moment there came up a cry from Zeemit Mehal—purposely uttered, for she had heard Jewan's voice.

"That cry comes from Mehal," he said, "or I am much mistaken. We shall soon know how the girl has escaped."

He hurried down, followed by the others.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, as he bent over the wounded Zeemit.

"Alas! it means that I have well-nigh lost my life in your cause. But Wanna, where is she?" she suddenly exclaimed, for she was anxious to know whether her foe lived, and had told Jewan anything.

"The hag is dead," he answered; "she lies almost pounded to a jelly at the foot of the tower."

"That is good," Zeemit cried, with unfeigned joy. "She deserved it—she deserved it. Tempted by a heavy bribe offered by the girl, she was going to set her free; but I interfered to prevent it. We struggled, and both fell over."

"But the girl—where is she?"

"Alas, she must have escaped! but I have no recollection of anything after I fell."

Jewan bit his lip. He felt that he was foiled, and it galled him almost beyond endurance.

“How long is it since you saw her?” asked Moghul of Jewan.

“Scarcely two hours.”

“Then she cannot be far off; and we will find her if she has not got to the English quarters.”

“Thou art a faithful servant,” said Jewan to Zeemit; “and shall have attention and ample reward. But you must wait until I return, for we shall have to recapture this woman.”

As they went away Mehal smiled with satisfaction, in spite of the pain she was enduring; for she scarcely doubted that Flora had by this time discovered Walter Gordon, and the two were safe within the British lines. But fate had willed it otherwise. The men scarcely reached the compound, when the first thing that met their gaze was the bewildered Flora, flying unconsciously from the devoted lover who had perilled his life to save her.

A stranger to the place, and almost blinded with terror, she was rushing frantically about to endeavour to find a way out of the grounds into the city. But her chance had passed. With a diabolical cry of glee, Jewan rushed forward, followed by Singh.

Miss Meredith knew that she was pursued, though she was too confused to tell by whom. She darted away in the direction of some buildings that seemed to offer her a chance of hiding; but she was deceived. On she sped again, followed closely by the cowardly ruffians. She knew not where she was going to, she scarcely cared, so long as she could escape them. She would have thrown herself into a well, or dashed her brains out against a wall, if either had been at hand.

The grounds were extensive, and, to an uninitiated person, little better than a maze. The farther she went, the more hopelessly confused she became. Now darting here, now there, until with a wail of pain she fell upon the grass in a swoon. Nature was merciful, and came to her relief.

It might have seemed better had she fallen dead. But, in the mysterious workings of Providence, it was not so ordained. Her destiny was not fulfilled—her book of life not yet completed, so that the Angel of Death could write “Finis” on the last page. She must live to the end, whatever of sorrow, whatever of agony was in

reserve for her.

“We’ve run the cat down,” said Moghul, as, breathless, he stooped over the prostrate girl, and lifted her in his strong arms.

Jewan laughed—laughed joyously, ferociously; he would gladly yield her up to the King twenty times over, rather than she should escape. In a few minutes they had placed her in the gharry, which was driven through a private entrance, and was soon on the other side of the Ganges, and speeding along the road to Delhi.

Within a hundred yards of where the unfortunate Flora had fallen, Walter Gordon slept soundly, and when the sound of the wheels of the departing vehicle had died out, the silence of the night remained unbroken.



CHAPTER XX. AS A BIRD IS ENSNARED.

As the sounds of the wheels died away, Jewan Bukht half-regretted that he had given his consent for Flora to go with Moghul Singh. He blamed himself now for being so indiscreet as to take her to Delhi in the first instance; but there was no help for it. He had lost her, he believed, beyond all hope of recovery; and if he wished to retain his position, he was bound to acknowledge the supremacy of the King. He knew that. And so, consoling himself as best he could, he turned towards the tower, with the intention of rendering some aid to Zeemit Mehal.

He found that the old woman had managed to drag herself into the room. She was terribly shaken, and weakened from loss of blood, but it was evident that she yet had a good deal of vitality left in her frame.

“How fares it now?” he asked, as he entered.

“Better,” she answered. “Strength is returning to me. But what of the Englishwoman?” she added eagerly.

Jewan laughed.

“She is safe. The bird thought to escape me, but her wings were not strong enough. We brought her down again; and I warrant she will be caged securely enough now.”

Mehal groaned with sorrow.

“What is the matter?” asked Bukht, quickly taking the exclamation as an expression of sympathy.

“My wound pains me,” she answered.

“Or have you sympathy with the Feringhee woman?” asked Bukht, eyeing the other suspiciously.

“Sympathy forsooth!—no. Have I not risked my life in your service? Why then suspect me of sympathy? But after what I have suffered, I regret that you have lost possession of her.”

“You do not regret it more than I; but it was the King’s command, and I could not disobey.”

“But how did the King know that she was here?”

“Some meddling fool, I suppose, in Delhi, informed him.”

“That is bad. You cannot hope to regain her?”

“No.”

“Without she was to escape.”

“Escape! What do you mean?”

“You are dull. Supposing she were to escape, and you to re-capture her.”

“But how should she escape.”

“If bars and bolts were withdrawn, and doors and gates thrown open, why could she not walk out?”

“I do not understand you.”

“Supposing somebody was near her, who would offer her liberty.”

“But who dare do this in defiance of the King?”

“I.”

“You!”

“Yes.”

“So, so,” Jewan muttered musingly. “I think I gather your meaning now. And yet I am not quite clear what you would propose to do, after she had escaped.”

“The plan is simple. I go to Delhi. I seek out this woman. I pretend to be touched with some feeling of pity. I offer to aid her in escaping. She accepts that offer. She walks out of one trap into another. Once free from Delhi, she can be re-captured by you, and secretly conveyed away, so that the King shall no more find her.”

“I like your plan,” Jewan added, after a pause; “but there is danger in it.”

“Danger! How so?”

“If the King were to get to know that I had had a hand in this, it would be my ruin.”

“But how would he get to know? I should not tell him, and the Feringhee woman could not.”

“True. If I can depend upon you, the plan might work.”

“If you can! Why can you not? Have I not proved myself faithful?”

“Yes.”

“Then why these suspicions? They are unjust.”

“Because there is so much danger in the plan that extreme caution is needed.”

“I do not blame you for being cautious; but since you have been to so much trouble, and risked so much to gain this prize, it is worth some effort to try and retain her.”

“That is so,” said Jewan, for he saw that the plan was quite possible, and the chances of once more getting Flora into his power was too strong a temptation to be resisted. “I think you reason well,” he continued; “and if you are cautious, we may succeed. At any rate, let us make the attempt. If you are true to me, I will pay you five hundred rupees the moment this woman is once more mine; but if you play me false, your life shall be forfeited.”

“You need not threaten. I have served you well; I will serve you better. Get me assistance, so that my hurt may be attended to; and, when I have regained a little strength, I start for Delhi. Time shall prove how well I will serve you.”

This was said significantly, but Jewan failed to catch its meaning.

The old woman felt that she was leading him into a pitfall, and she could scarcely restrain the pleasure she experienced. Her love for Flora was unmistakable, and it was a fact strangely at variance with the demoniacal-like hatred exhibited by the majority of the natives, that, during the mutiny, the truest friends to the whites were the ayahs or nurses. It is certain that many of these women—and there was one in every house in India, where there were children or ladies—paid for their fidelity with their lives.

“You know the reward and the penalty which attaches to your errand,” Jewan remarked. “Death or riches. I depend upon you, and you shall go. To-morrow we will confer further on the subject. For the present, good-night.”

When he had gone, Mehal gave utterance to a sigh of relief. She had made up her mind either to save Flora, or die in the attempt. She had no doubt that if she could but get near Miss Meredith—and this she knew would not be difficult—some plan of escape might be easily arranged, and the young Englishwoman could be restored to the arms of Walter Gordon. As Mehal thought of him, she felt inclined to seek him at once, and make known her plans. But she must wait until somebody had attended to her. She had not to wait long.

Jewan’s first act was to have the mangled corpse of Wanna Ranu conveyed away, and it was soon floating towards the sea on the bosom of the Ganges. Then he sought out a native doctor, and despatched him to render aid to the wounded Mehal. Her wound was dressed, and a restorative administered; and in a little while she sank into a deep sleep.

In the meantime, Walter Gordon, refreshed and strengthened by his long rest, had awoke, and ventured to look out from his hiding-place. He knew that many hours had passed since he had entered, and he began to grow exceedingly anxious about the success of Mehal’s plans. She had promised, if possible, to bring Flora to him.

The reader is already aware how that plan had failed; but little did Walter dream that the woman for whom he would willingly have died to serve had been near him, and fled away in alarm, as she observed his disguise.

It will be remembered that on leaving Meerut he had adopted the garb of a religious mendicant, and so complete was this disguise that no wonder Miss Meredith had been deceived. And it had not occurred to Mehal to tell Flora that her lover would be found dressed as a native. Thus by an omission, apparently trifling in itself, the troubles of the lovers had been complicated, and the two were separated probably never to meet again.

As morning commenced to break, Zeemit Mehal awoke, considerably strengthened by the medicine she had taken, and the sleep she had secured. Her first thoughts were of Walter. She must endeavour to see him and to arrange some plans for their future guidance.

With difficulty she arose, for she was very ill, and the loss of blood had been

great. Having assured herself that all was quiet, and that there was no one stirring, she commenced to descend, and soon gained the compound. This she quickly crossed, and stood in the shed where Walter waited, burning with anxiety and suspense almost unbearable. In the uncertain light, he did not recognise for some moments who his visitor was; but as soon as he discovered it was Mehal, he sprang towards her, and in a voice, rendered tremulous by his excessive anxiety, cried—

“What of Miss Meredith—where is she?”

“Hush!” Mehal answered, clutching his arm and leaning upon him, for she was terribly weak.

Then for the first time, Walter noticed the bandage round the old woman’s head, and that something was the matter. His heart sank within him, for Mehal’s appearance in such a plight augured a disaster—so he thought—that might annihilate his hopes.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked eagerly, as he led the woman to the heap of straw.

“Our plans have miscarried,” she said, as she seated herself with difficulty, and the pain from her wound caused her to utter an involuntary groan.

The strong man staggered as the words were uttered, for it sounded like the death-knell of Flora. In an instant he remembered the promise he had made to Mrs. Harper the night before he had left Meerut. “I will either save Flora, or perish in the attempt.” That promise should be fulfilled one way or the other. He mentally pledged himself again to that.

When he had recovered from the first effects of the startling news, he said—

“But how is it the plans have miscarried? and where is Miss Meredith?”

“I liberated her. She must have been near you.”

Gordon uttered a cry of agony, and pressed his hand to his head, as there flashed through his brain the remembrance of the cry which had startled him in his sleep, and which he believed to be a delusion, but he now knew was a reality. He moaned, fairly moaned, with the unutterable sense of sickness which was at his heart, as he realised that, by some accident, Flora had been near, without discovering him.

“Tell me all,” he said, when he was able to speak.

Mehal related the circumstances of her struggle with Wanna, of Flora’s descent to the balcony, of her starting off for the shed, and the other particulars which have already been chronicled.

“Answer me one question,” Walter gasped, for his breath came so thick and fast that he could scarcely speak. “Did you tell Miss Meredith of my disguise?”

“No; it did not occur to me to do so.”

“I see it now clear enough,” he continued. “She has been here. The voice I heard was hers. She did not recognise me in this disguise, and fled.”

“I think there can be no doubt that these are the true facts,” Mehal remarked. “And it must have been on leaving the shed that she was recaptured.”

Walter was bowed with grief. He felt that incalculable misery had been brought upon all by one of the merest chances imaginable.

Flora might have been saved; but in the very moment of her extremest peril he had been sleeping; and to that circumstance was due the fact that she was again lost to him. It was a terrible reflection. But useless wailings could avail nothing; action—prompt action—was required.

“Zeemit,” he cried, “at all hazards I will follow Miss Meredith. To rescue her is the mission of my life. I must accomplish it or perish!”

“Were you to follow her, you would most certainly perish. It would be a useless sacrifice of your life, and you would not be able to render her the slightest aid. At a time like this, when the power of your countrymen is set at defiance, and anarchy prevails, stratagem only can succeed. To that we must resort!”

“But what do you propose?” he exclaimed, interrupting her in his eagerness.

“I propose to follow her myself. I, and I alone, can save her now.”

“But what shall I do?” he asked, scarcely able to restrain his impatience.

“You must remain quiet. I go to Delhi ostensibly on Jewan Bukht’s behalf. I have told him that I shall endeavour to liberate Miss Meredith, so that she may again fall into his hands. Your presence would endanger my plans, and you would run the risk of being detected. Make your way to the English defences in

this town. I will find means of communicating with you in a few days; and, should I succeed in setting the lady free, we will instantly proceed to Meerut, where you can rejoin us, or we will come on here.”

“I am in your hands, Mehal; I will be guided by you. But remember, if I do not hear from you in about a week I shall endeavour to make my way to Delhi, whatever the consequences may be. To remain inactive when her honour and safety are imperilled, would be a living death. Therefore I will face any danger, so that I can feel that I am doing something in her behalf.”

“You can best aid her by doing what I suggest. On reaching Delhi, if I find it practicable to set her free, I will return here immediately to let you know; the rest must depend upon circumstances. Jewan will be able to get me a conveyance back to Delhi, so that I will soon be with Miss Meredith once again. I cannot remain longer with you, for if Jewan should miss me all our plans would be frustrated, and he would kill me.”

Walter saw the necessity of strictly complying with the old woman’s wishes. He recognised that in her rested every hope of future happiness. It was a slender reed, but the only one upon which he could lean.

Mehal gave him some hurried directions as to the road to take to reach the English quarters, and then hastened away; and he was left standing alone, as the rising sun was commencing to throw down his fiery beams.



CHAPTER XXI. THE VOICE OF THE CHARMER.

As Walter Gordon and Zeemit Mehal arranged their plans, and then separated in the hope of speedily meeting again, they little dreamt of the mine upon which they stood. The woman was as ignorant of the true state of Cawnpore as Walter himself. She had no idea that all was ready for the revolt, and that in a few hours all the horrors of the mutiny would be visited upon the devoted heads of the little handful of English in the city. But the ways of Providence are mysterious. From a human point of view, all things might have been ordered differently; but it was ordained otherwise—ordained for some special purpose that the cups of sorrow of some of the people in the city was to be filled to overflowing ere relief came; and to this Walter Gordon was to be no exception. When Zeemit had disappeared, he left the shed which had for the time given him shelter and security, and with heavy heart he set his face towards the British quarters. He had little difficulty in finding his way on to the high road. And though he was frequently accosted by the passing natives, he made motions to all that he was dumb; he was thus enabled to pass on unmolested; but as he went, he gathered scraps of information, which left him no doubt that the troops were on the eve of rising.

When he reached the outlying sentries of the British defences, he was stopped; but he speedily made known his nationality to the man who challenged him, and was allowed to pass on.

He lost no time in seeking out Sir Hugh Wheeler, and soon related his story to the General, who was no less pained than he was astonished.

“I think the old woman has counselled you well,” Sir Hugh remarked as Walter finished. “You could not hope to bring this English lady out of Delhi yourself, and Mehal may succeed. At any rate, it is your only chance. Last night a wounded officer and a native woman, who have escaped from the Imperial City, were brought in here. The officer, who is from Meerut, had been shot within a mile or two of this place.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Gordon, in astonishment, as the idea occurred to him that the English officer from Meerut could be no other than his friend Harper. “Do

you know the officer's name?"

"Harper, I believe; a lieutenant in the Queen's —— regiment."

"This is strange, indeed. The lieutenant is an old friend of mine, and with your permission I will see him immediately."

"Do so by all means. I had an interview with him this morning, and though he is very ill, he was enabled to inform me that he had been sent to Delhi on special service, that he had there been made a prisoner, but effected his escape through the assistance rendered him by a Cashmere lady, who is here with him. I am anxious that he should be forwarded on to his regiment at Meerut without loss of time; but the doctor says it would be dangerous to move him for some days."

In a few minutes Walter Gordon stood by the bedside of his friend Harper, who had fallen into a troubled sleep. At the head was seated the faithful Haidee, and she was applying iced water to the forehead of the patient.

Gordon soon made himself known to her, and she briefly told him the history of his friend since they had parted—a space of time brief enough in itself, but filled with suffering and sorrow for them all.

Harper was deathly pale, his eyes were sunken; he had been severely wounded. The ball had entered the left breast, glanced along one of the ribs, narrowly escaping the heart, and ultimately lodged beneath the shoulder-blade. No vital organ had been touched; but there was considerable inflammation, and the doctors were not without anxiety for the condition of their patient. They had not yet extracted the ball, owing to his weakened state.

Haidee watched every change of countenance, noted every beat of his pulse, for she scarcely ever moved her fingers from his wrist. It was certain that, if loving care could save him, his life would not be sacrificed.

Gordon was anxious to know who Haidee was; but he did not like to question her, and she did not volunteer the information. He was afraid to think evil of his friend, and yet he was at a loss to account for Haidee's presence.

Presently Harper turned uneasily on the bed, then he opened his eyes and stared at Gordon, who put out his hand to shake that of his friend. But Harper only stared—there was no recognition—the light of reason was for a time out of his eyes, and he was delirious.

The little band of defenders were now thrown into commotion by the arrival of a messenger who brought word that the rising had commenced, that the gaol had been thrown open, and the treasury was being sacked.

The news was too true. The hour of the Nana's triumph had arrived. He had given the word, and his followers at the Newab-gung had broken open the gaol and set the prisoners free. Then they cleared out the magazine, and a wealth of heavy artillery and ammunition fell into their hands.

The spoil from the treasury was heaped upon elephants and carts, and the infuriated soldiery, feeling themselves unfettered at last, cried—

“Forward to the Imperial City!”

They, like the Meerut mutineers, expected great things from the restored sovereignty; upon the restoration of the Mogul throne they placed all their hopes.

But this was not the case with Nana Sahib, nor the wily Azimoolah. The centralisation of the rebellion was to place the power in one pair of hands. The Nana craved for power, and he had no intention of recognising the authority of the King, to whom he would have to be subordinate. That, however, formed no part of his programme. But, for a time, the Sepoy leaders declared their intention of going to Delhi, and they made one short march on the road as far as a place called Kullianpore. Here, with all their elephants laden with the English treasure, their artillery, and heaps of ammunition, they halted. The Nana had accompanied them thus far. He knew that by humouring their first impulse he might bend them to his will. His craft and cunning were truly remarkable.

“Comrades,” he cried, as he commenced to harangue them, “we make common cause. And I ask you, would you be slaves? If you go to Delhi your necks must bear the King's yoke. Remember all that I have done—all that I have sacrificed to give you liberty. From these English I drew wealth, but I have forfeited all in order that you may be free. Why should you go to the Imperial City? If you concentrate yourselves at any given point, it is certain that the Feringhees will mass their forces against that point and crush you. It is by spreading ourselves over a large area that our hopes of success lie. The British have not troops enough to attack all our strongholds. Again I say, what can Delhi offer you more than I can? Have we not a fair city here?”

“The power of the English in Europe is declining; they are weak in India; the vast breadth of country over which the faithful followers of the Prophet are

asserting their independence is stripped of troops. What then have we to fear? Remain here and recognise my rule. Restore the Peishwahship, and I promise you wealth, freedom, honour and glory.”

The voice of the charmer prevailed. The leaders wavered in their determination. They conferred one with another, then up they spoke, almost as one man, and answered the Nana Sahib—

“We go back—we devote our lives to your service—we will do your bidding.”

The Mahratta smiled. He saw that the game was in his own hands, and that his ambition and malice might be gratified at one blow. Here were four disciplined native regiments—together with his Bhitoor retainers, who numbered alone nearly one thousand, and were all trained soldiers, some hundreds of guns, heaps of ammunition, and abundance of treasure. With such a force, what might he not do?

His familiar demon, Azimoolah, rubbed his hands with ferocious joy as he heard the answer of the men. Formerly a common servant in the house of an Englishman, Azimoolah had been raised to position by the Nana, to whom he had ever been a ready tool and a cringing slave. He had gone to England to plead his worthless master’s cause; he had made love to English ladies; he had been *fêted* and lionised by the hospitable English, who loaded him with favours and presents. But he returned to his country with a deadly hatred in his heart for those who had befriended him.

In addition to this astute Mahomedan and cunning devil, the Nana had in his company Tantia Topee, who had been his playfellow in former days, and was now his counsellor and guide.

There were also Bala Rao and Baba Bhut, his brothers; the Rao Sahib, his nephew, and Teeka Singh—a combination of cowardly and pitiless villains.

And so the elephants’ and horses’ heads were turned round again, the artillery trains were got in motion, and at the head of his powerful army the Nana Sahib—the ruthless Tiger of Cawnpore—marched back to the city. He felt that he was supreme master of the situation. He knew that opposed to him were a little handful of English only, that he could crush—or, at least, he believed so; but he did not consider the hearts of steel that beat in the breasts of those few British, who would have conquered even his legions of black demons if they had not been made the victims of a cruel plot.

With swelling pride the Nana rode into the town, his long lines of troops in the rear, his guns lumbering over the dusty roads, and singing a “song of death” with their trundling wheels. He dubbed his army at once the “Army of the Peishwah,” and commenced to make promotions, Teeka Singh being placed in command of the cavalry, with the rank of general. Azimoolah was war secretary and counsellor, and Tantia Topee became keeper of the treasure.

When this first business had been arranged to their own satisfaction, the army sat down close to the British defences. Long a subject of the English, Nana Sahib now felt that he was their master; and a pitiless, grinding, exacting, awful master he was to prove.

As he viewed the paltry fortifications which had been thrown up by General Wheeler, and then let his eyes wander to his own heavy guns, he smiled a grim smile of satisfaction.

“What think you of our chances of success, Azimoolah?”

“I have been examining the place through my telescope for the last half-hour,” answered Azimoolah. “I have some difficulty in discovering their works, even now. But I think that after two hours’ battering with our guns, I shall need a microscope to find them.”

“Sarcastic, as usual, Azi. But don’t you think that we had better let these miserable people go?”

“Go—go where?” cried the crafty knave, turning upon his master suddenly.

“Escape,” the Nana answered pointedly.

“Escape?” echoed the other, in astonishment. “Surely your Highness will not signal the commencement of your reign by an act of namby-pamby weakness. Escape, forsooth! Turn every gun you’ve got upon them, and blow them to that hell they are so fond of preaching about!”

“You do not gather my meaning, Azi,” the Nana replied, as he viewed the defences through a jewelled opera-glass. “I meant, let them escape from one trap, to fall into another. We could have them cut to pieces when they had got some miles from Cawnpore, and we should escape blame.”

“Oh, oh, your Highness—pardon my hastiness. You are an able prince. I could not imagine that you were going to spoil your nature by any stupid, sentimental

notions; still, I do not approve of your Highness's scheme. We should miss too much sport. And why need we concern ourselves about the blame? Let us commence the fun without further delay."

The Nana laughed heartily, as he replied—

"You are somewhat hasty, my friend. Impetuosity is not good. There is refinement in killing, as in all other things. The *acmé* of torture is suspense. We will torture these British people, Azi. I shall send, however, a message to Wheeler, that I am going to attack his entrenchments."

"But why should your Highness even take this trouble?"

"Because we will so far recognise the usages of war as to announce our intention to commence the siege."

In accordance with this determination, a messenger was despatched to the aged General, who did everything that man could do to make the best of his position. Darkness had fallen. It gave the brave hearts behind those mud walls a short respite, but with the return of light the booming of a gun told that the enemy had commenced operations.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LION HEARTS.

With the booming of that gun, as the terrible day dawned on Cawnpore, there commenced a siege that, for horror and misery, has never been exceeded in the history of the world.

It was the month of June. The heat was terrific. The cloudless sky was like a canopy of fire. What little wind there was came like the blast from a glowing furnace. The tubes of the guns grew so hot in the sun's rays that it was impossible to touch them with the hand. Behind the entrenchments were a heroic band of men—a mere handful—and with them nearly two hundred women and children.

It was for the sake of these dear ones that every man braced himself up to fight against those fearful odds, until he fell dead at his post. Not a craven heart beat in any breast there. Every person knew that the case was hopeless—that to hold out was but to prolong the agony. But “surrender” was a word no one would breathe.

For days and days went on the awful siege. The defenders, weary, overworked and starving, laboured, with the might of giants, in the trenches. The clothes rotted from their backs, and the grime from the guns caked hard and black upon their faces and hands. But, with dauntless courage, they served the guns, and this always under a tremendous fire, from which they were barely screened.

Where all were heroes, comparisons would be invidious indeed, and yet there were some whose names are indelibly written upon the scroll of fame, for the conspicuous manner in which they displayed their heroism.

Captain Moore was one of these. He was wounded at the very commencement of the siege—his arm was broken. But it could not break his spirit! He went about with the fractured limb in a sling. No toil seemed to weary him—no danger could daunt him. Day and night he laboured; encouraging the women, cheering the children. Now serving a gun—now heading a desperate sortie against the enemy. As a companion with him was Captain Jenkins of the 2nd Cavalry. He held the outposts beyond the trenches. Over and over again did the enemy try to

dislodge him, but failed each time. At length a treacherous Sepoy, who had been feigning death, raised his gun and fired. The jawbone of the brave Jenkins was smashed, and he died an agonising death.

One day a red-hot shot from the enemy's battery blew up a tumbrel and set fire to the woodwork of the carriage. A large quantity of ammunition was stored close by. If this caught fire the whole place, and every soul in it, would meet with instant destruction. It seemed as if nothing but a miracle could save them, for there was no water—nothing to extinguish the flames. But the miracle suddenly appeared in the person of a young hero; his name was Delafosse. A deadly stream of eighteen-pound shot was poured upon the spot by the besiegers, but, unmoved by this, Delafosse flung himself upon the ground beneath the blazing wood, which he tore off with his hands, and then stifled out the fire with dry earth. Such a cheer rose from the throats of the British at this heroic deed, that it must have sent terror to the hearts of the cruel and cowardly enemy.

Then upon a projection of the barrack wall there was perched young Stirling, known as the "dead-shot," from his unerring aim. Day after day he sat on his perch and picked off single Sepoys. And the list would be incomplete without mention of the brave Scotchman, Jervis; he was an engineer. He was out in the open compound one day, and with the indomitable pride of race, refused to run from a black fellow, so he fell shot through the heart.

If midst our tears we sing a pæan in honour of these hero-martyrs, the wives and daughters of the fighting men of Cawnpore must go down to posterity as an example of all that women should be—noble, patient, uncomplaining.

Poets have sung how the women of old turned their hair into bow-strings, that their men might fight the enemy. Those Cawnpore women would have done the same, if it had been needed. And they did do an equivalent. When the canister could not be rammed home, owing to the damage done to the guns by the enemy's fire, these noble women took off their stockings. These were filled with the contents of the shot-cases, and it is probably the only time that such cartridges were used.

The days lengthened into weeks, but still these lion hearts could not be quelled. Sadly reduced were their ranks by death; for what the enemy's fire failed to do, privations and sickness completed.

One of the greatest wants felt was that of water. The small quantity in store when the siege began was soon exhausted, and the only supply to be obtained was

from a small well that stood in the open compound. The cruel enemy knew this, and they kept guns pointed, and special marksmen for that particular spot. To go for water was to go to almost certain death. And yet every morning men were found who volunteered for the awful work, until around the well there grew up a pile of dead, where they were obliged to be left, for there was nowhere to bury them.

At last came one of the heaviest blows that had fallen upon the garrison. The barrack with the thatched roof was burnt down; it had enjoyed an immunity from this long-expected disaster, but the fatal shot came one day that set it on fire. How the fiendish hearts of the coward mutineers beat with joy as they saw the flames leap into the air! It was a terrible disaster for the noble defenders, as many of the women and children had to lie upon the bare ground without any shelter from the dews by night or the sun by day.

Matters had grown desperate enough now. The food was all but done; the well was all but dry. The air was poisoned by the unburied dead. Sickness and disease were hourly thinning the number of the wretched people; and yet there was not a man there, not a woman, nay, not even a child, who would have consented to dishonourable surrender.

During the progress of the siege, there was one who was not able to render much, if any, assistance. This was Lieutenant Harper, who recovered but slowly from the effects of his wound; the want of proper nourishment and other necessaries retarded his progress to convalescence. Haidee watched over him, nursed him with untiring care, and gradually brought him from the very brink of the grave. When he gained strength, he felt that the time had come to render what poor assistance he could. How best could that be done? was a question he put to Haidee and Gordon, who had been amongst the most prominent defenders. After some reflection Haidee answered—

“If you could reach the outside world, and procure succour, we might all be saved.”

It was an unselfish suggestion. She knew that it was a forlorn hope; but it held out a faint hope for the little garrison. Harper jumped at it. It was desperate service indeed. To safely get beyond the lines of the investing army seemed almost out of the region of possibility; but there was yet a chance, however small, and if he could but reach Meerut, help might be procured, and the little remnant of the brave defenders saved.

It was agreed unanimously that he should go, and a dark night favoured his departure. Walter Gordon would readily have gone, but he felt that his strength could be utilised to better advantage in helping the besieged. He had suffered agonies of mind as he thought of what the fate of Flora Meredith might be. He hoped and prayed in his own mind that a merciful death had long since ended her sufferings.

The hour came for Harper to depart; it was a solemn moment. Each felt that as they grasped hands.

“Walter,” said Harper, “the last time we parted was at the very commencement of this horrible mutiny. I little thought then that we should meet again; but we part now, and the chances of our seeing each other any more on this earth are remote indeed. Though, if I should survive, and can render aid to Flora Meredith, if she lives, it shall be done. But before I go, I exact a solemn promise from you, that while life is in your body you will protect Haidee, and if you should both manage to escape, you will never lose sight of her.”

“I give the promise, old fellow. God bless you,” was Walter’s answer, in a voice that was choked with emotion.

Harper turned from his friend to bid farewell to Haidee. How can that parting be described? There was no passionate wailing—no useless tears. She was a true woman, and however powerful her love might be, she knew that it was a duty to sacrifice all personal feelings where so many lives were at stake. She hung around his neck for a few brief moments; she pressed a kiss of pure love upon his lips, and then released him. In both their hearts there was that nameless feeling of ineffable sorrow that has no interpretation.

“Light of my eyes, joy of my soul, go,” she said. “Into the dust Haidee will bow her head, for happiness can never more be hers.” One more pressure of the hand, one more meeting of the lips, and Harper crouched down, and was making his way across the compound.

It was midnight, and the night was dark. The enemy’s fire had almost ceased; and as the crouching form disappeared, many were the fervent prayers uttered on Harper’s behalf, that he would succeed in his mission.

The morning came, and then the night again, and the next morning, and so on for several mornings, the defenders holding out bravely. Meanwhile the Nana Sahib was chafing with rage. He had not counted upon such a stubborn resistance. The

indomitable pluck of these English was something that passed his comprehension. It irritated him beyond measure. The city over which he wished to rule was in a state of turmoil through it. His army was being shattered. Some of his best Sepoy officers had been killed by the fire from the defences; and, to make matters worse, cholera had broken out amongst the troops, and raged violently. Driven to desperation, he held counsel with his staff.

“What can we do to subdue this people?” he asked of Azimoolah.

“Nothing to subdue them,” was the answer. And for the first time in his life, perhaps, Azimoolah spoke the truth.

“What shall we do to crush them, then?” the Nana went on; “I would hack them to mince-meat, if I could get near enough, but that seems impossible.”

“Scarcely so impossible as your Highness seems to imagine,” made answer Azimoolah, as his face glowed with the inhuman cruelty that stirred his heart.

“How shall we reach them?” was the angry question of his master.

“By stratagem.”

“Ah, that is good! But how?”

“These people are reduced to extremity. They have many women and children with them; for their sakes they will be glad to accept terms. Let us proclaim a truce, and offer, as a condition of their laying down their arms, to convey them by water to Allahabad.”

The Nana laughed as he observed—

“You are an excellent counsellor, Azi, and I like your scheme; but having got them out, what then?”

He asked this question with a great deal of significance; for although a diabolical thought was shaping itself in his brain, his recreant heart dare not give it words. And so he waited for his tool to make the suggestion.

“Having got them out, I think the rest is easy, your Highness.”

“Well, well,” the other cried, impatiently, as Azimoolah seemed to dwell too long upon his words.

“We will provide them with carriage down to the river. There we will have a

fleet of large, thatched-roof boats. On board of these boats the English people, who have given you so much trouble, shall embark.”

“Well, go on—I follow,” said the Nana, as Azimoolah paused again. “Having got them on board, what then?”

“We will slaughter them, your Highness—man, woman, and child. Not one shall live to tell the tale. On each side of the river we will have heavy guns posted, and our troops shall line the banks. A mouse would not be able to escape.”

“Good! I leave all to you,” was the Nana’s only answer. But his tone of voice betrayed the joy he felt.

Azimoolah retired to his tent, and, calling for writing materials and pen, with his own hand he wrote the following missive in English:—

“To the subjects of Her Majesty Queen Victoria: All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie, and are willing to lay down their arms, shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad.”

The next morning an armistice was proclaimed, and Azimoolah, accompanied by two Sepoys, presented himself before the entrenchments.

This temporary cessation of hostilities was a great relief to the starving and worn-out garrison. They were prepared to listen to any terms that did not propose dishonourable surrender. General Wheeler called up two captains and the postmaster, and gave them full powers to go out and treat with the emissaries of the Nana.

Azimoolah proposed surrender, without the customary honours of war. But this the officers would not entertain for a single instant, and demanded that the British should march out with their arms and sixty rounds of ammunition in the pouch of every man. The Nana was to afford them safe escort to the river, provide carriages for the women and children, and provisions of flour, sheep, and goats for the voyage to Allahabad.

These proposals were written on a sheet of paper and given to Azimoolah, who returned to his lines; while the officers went back to their entrenchments.

As they made known the terms they had submitted, there was rejoicing in the little garrison. The women cheered up as they thought that an end was coming to their sufferings and sorrow.

So it was; but a different end to what they contemplated. It had been an awful time during the siege. Human comprehension can scarcely realise the full measure of the suffering endured by the devoted band. It possibly stands without a parallel in the world's horrors begotten by war.

For some hours the people waited in anxious suspense; their hearts beat high, and the wan cheeks flushed as the sounds of a bugle fell upon their ears.

A horseman had arrived from the rebel camp, and brought word that the terms had been agreed to, and the garrison was to remove that night. But General Wheeler flatly refused to do this, saying that he could not get his people ready until morning.

“Let it be so,” said the Nana, when the message was brought; “we can afford to give them a few hours.”

In the rebel camp there was great rejoicing; quantities of drink were consumed; and there was gambling and singing throughout the long dark hours.

In the entrenchments there was peace; silence reigned, broken occasionally by the audible prayer from some grateful heart as it uttered its thanks to the Christian's God for the relief He had brought them.

CHAPTER XXIII. AS WITH AN ENCHANTER'S WAND.

During the terrible night—a night full of hope for the starving, miserable people in the Cawnpore entrenchments—the little garrison were busy making preparation for their departure on the morrow. That is, such preparations as they could make, which, for the most part, consisted of gathering together the trifling remnants of their treasures. Here, a treasured portrait was carefully stowed away; there, a lock of hair cut by loving hands from the head of some dear one, whose earthly troubles were ended, was wrapped up and placed between the leaves of a well-worn Bible, so that it might serve in future time as a sorrowful memento of that awful siege.

Through those dreary hours of darkness there was one who sat apart from his companions; he was weary and jaded, but sleep refused to visit him. This was Walter Gordon. As he sat there, with his head bowed on his hands, it would have been almost impossible to have detected the European in the guise of the native, for he still wore the costume in which he had left Meerut. And the disguise was rendered more perfect by long exposure of the sun, and by smoke and grime from the powder which seemed to have literally been burnt into the skin.

An unutterable grief appeared to be pressing him down; for his thoughts wandered to one whom he dare not hope could be alive and well. The plan arranged by Zeemit Mehal for Miss Meredith's rescue had, so far as he was able to judge, resulted in nothing, because however successful she might have been, the investing enemy had prevented any news reaching him from the outside world; and even if Zeemit had been able to get Flora free from Delhi, he knew that, without assistance, speedy recapture must result.

During the long weeks that he had been shut up in the entrenchments, the excitement of the siege had prevented his thoughts from dwelling too closely upon his troubles. But now that that excitement was over, and the reaction set in, he felt an anguish of mind and body that almost threatened to upset his reason. The promise of the coming release gave him no pleasurable feeling. His business was ruined; the fate of the woman who was to have been his wife unknown; nearly all his friends killed; and he, lonely and broken-hearted, a wreck compared to what he was a few bright happy weeks ago. As the memory of that

night in Meerut, when Flora Meredith had warned him of the coming danger, rose up before him, he felt that it would be a relief if any one of the enemy's shot would but come and cut his thread of life. He had allowed her warning to pass unheeded; nay, had absolutely laughed it to scorn, as the emanation of one who was morbid and out of sorts. He might have saved her then, have saved his possessions, and all belonging to him and her. But he remained inactive. He allowed the precious moments to glide by, until the storm burst in all its fury, and escape from its consequences was impossible.

He gave up all thoughts of ever seeing his friend Harper again. It was true that sufficient time had not elapsed for the succour to arrive, even if he had managed to live through the thousand dangers he would have to face. But it was such a forlorn hope, that Gordon felt it was a fallacy to cherish any expectation of again seeing him. Life, as viewed through the medium which then presented itself, seemed to have practically ended for him. If he reached Allahabad, it would be but as a storm-tossed waif, thrown up, as it were, by a raging sea that had washed away all that was dear and precious, leaving him lonely and broken-hearted, to curse the unlucky chance that had saved him.

These were his melancholy reflections. After all he had endured, it was scarcely matter for wonder that they should be gloomy and tinged with morbidness.

There are moments sometimes in a person's existence when life seems full of nameless horrors—when death is viewed in the light of a loving friend who brings peace and rest.

Such a moment as this was Walter's experience. His cup of sorrow was full; it was overflowing, but then, when the tide has reached its highest flood, it commences to recede. Night was nearly passed. The fairy-like glamour which precedes the coming dawn, especially in India, was over the land. It was like a flush on the face of nature—surrounding objects were commencing to assert their presence. The outlines of trees and buildings could be faintly discerned, standing out against the roseate-flushed sky.

With the departing darkness and coming light, a faint glimmer of hope appeared upon the path of Walter Gordon; he began to think that things might not be so bad after all; and then his senses were suddenly and unexpectedly soothed by the melody of a bird. For weeks the roar of the guns had scared all the feathered songsters away; but the cessation of the din for the last twenty-four hours had induced a stray bul-bul—that gem of the Indian feather tribe—to alight on the

branches of a blackened and shot-shattered tree which stood some little distance away.

Perhaps the tiny singer had wandered from its tribe, and, missing the rich foliage which the storm of fire had destroyed over an extensive area, it was uttering a lament; for there was ruin, desolation, and decaying mortality around—the work of man's hand; and the song of the bird might have been a song of sorrow. Who can tell? But as it sat there a mere speck on the leafless and blackened tree, and trilled its beautiful and mellow notes that sounded clear and soft on the still morning air, the soul of Walter Gordon was touched.

The wand of the enchanter, in the shape of the piping bul-bul, had changed the scene. From the fierce glare and the strife-torn land of India, he was suddenly transported to his native shores. He saw the peaceful valleys of smiling England—he heard the clanking of the wheels of industry as they brought bread to toiling millions, and sent forth their produce to all the corners of the earth. He saw the happy homes where the laughter of merry children made light the hearts of their parents. He saw that land with all its beauty—a land free from the deadly strife of contending armies; and, as the vision passed before him, hope sprang up again strong and bright with the dawning day. The little bul-bul's notes had been to him like a draught of an elixir that can banish the sickness of the heart, and lift up the human soul from darkness into light.

The bird's notes ceased, but another sound fell upon his ear. It was a long-drawn sigh of a woman. It was Haidee. She had been sleeping on a sheepskin some few yards away from where Gordon was sitting. As he turned his eyes to where her form reposed, he remembered the promise he had made to Harper with reference to this woman. During the few days that had elapsed since his friend's departure, he had tended to Haidee with the loving solicitude of a brother. He had told her of all his troubles, and how by a most singular chance Flora had been separated from him again, and conveyed back to Delhi.

And he felt now, as he turned to Haidee, that for his friend's sake—a friend he looked upon as dead—it was his sacred duty to protect her until he could place her out of the reach of danger.

He knew but little about her, for Harper had volunteered no information beyond the fact that she was from the King's Palace, and to her he owed his life. It was sufficient for him to know that this was the case—to feel for her in Harper's behalf all the anxiety and tenderness which was due to her sex.

He had speedily discovered that she was possessed of a true woman's nature, and that she entertained a strong love for his friend. But he looked upon it purely as a Platonic feeling, for he had too much faith in Harper's integrity to think that he would have encouraged any other.

"You have slept soundly, Haidee," he remarked, as he observed that she opened her eyes.

"I have had a dreamful sleep," she made answer, as she sat up, and pushed back her beautiful hair, tarnished somewhat, and tangled with smoke and dust, but beautiful still. Her face, too, was a little worn, and a look of anxious care sat upon it; but the shocks and jars of the last few weeks had affected her much less than it had her companions in sorrow.

"I trust that at least they have been pleasant dreams," Gordon answered, as he shook Haidee's hand; for she had risen and moved to where he was sitting.

"Alas, no! I dreamt that your friend Harper was lying cold and dead—that he had died for the want of help and care, and I was not there to administer comfort to him."

"But you know, Haidee, we say that dreams always go by the contrary," Gordon answered, trying to force a smile; but it was but a melancholy attempt, for he knew that his words belied the thoughts of his heart.

"Perhaps so," she said, sighing heavily. "Fortune has favoured him so far that she might still continue to smile upon him. But then he was weak from his illness, and the risks he would have to run before he could get clear of this city were numerous and great."

"True; but we will not despair. We have all stood in deadly peril, and yet we live; and this dawning day brings us relief from our tribulation."

"I am not so sure of that," she answered, hurriedly.

"What do you mean, Haidee? Has not the Nana promised us safe escort to Allahabad?"

"He has promised—yes."

"Your words have a ring of doubt in them, as though you had no faith in the Nana's promise."

“I have no faith. I fear treachery.”

“Your fear is surely a groundless one, then. The capitulation has been put into black and white; and however bad the Nana Sahib may be, he is bound to recognise those usages of war common to every civilisation.”

“I tell you I have strange forebodings of evil. I believe the man’s nature to be cruel enough for anything.”

“Hush! Haidee! Do not let your words reach the ears of our fellow-sufferers, or they will only cause unnecessary alarm.”

“I have no desire to be a prophet of evil, but I believe it would have been better to have held out until every ounce of powder had gone rather than have trusted to the mercy of the Nana Sahib. However, your people shall go, and as they depart I will waft my good wishes after them.”

“Waft your good wishes after them! Really, Haidee, you are talking strangely, and as if you did not intend to go.”

“I do not intend to go.”

“Why?” he asked, quite unable to conceal his astonishment.

“Because for me to go would be to go to certain death. Even if I escaped recognition by the Nana—which would be almost impossible, for he knows me well, having often seen me at the Palace—my nationality would condemn me; there would scarcely be a native whose arm would not be raised to strike me down.”

“But the protection which Nana Sahib is bound to afford to us, in accordance with the terms of treaty, must likewise be extended to you.”

“I tell you, you do not know these men. In my case they would be bound by no terms. They would say that I had been treacherous to the King, and, not being a British subject, my life was forfeited. Not that I fear death. But for the sake of him who is dearer far to me than life, I must try and live, that I may serve his friends—if that is possible.”

“But do you know, Haidee, that he placed you in my care; and if I allow you to remain behind, I shall be guilty of breaking the promise I made to him, that I would never lose sight of you as long as I lived.”

“My mind is made up, Mr. Gordon; I shall remain behind.”

“Then, at all hazards, I remain too.”

“I am glad of that.”

“But what do you propose doing?”

“Returning to Delhi.”

“Returning to Delhi?”

“Yes. You told me that the lady who was to be your wife had been conveyed back to that city.”

“I did.”

“Then what I have done once I may be able to do again.”

Gordon’s heart quickened its beating. Haidee’s word opened out new prospects that he had not before thought of. At any rate, however slender might be the reed, he clutched at it with desperate energy. What might not a determined woman and a man actuated by love accomplish? Still, whatever her scheme might be, it was as yet to him misty and undefined.

“My plan is this,” she continued, after a pause. “We must conceal ourselves somewhere about the entrenchments until night falls again. The disguise which has served you in such good stead so far will serve you still further, if you are discreet, and do not use your voice. Under cover of the darkness we can escape from this place, and retrace our steps to Delhi. I do not think we shall experience any difficulty in gaining entrance to the city. Once there, I have plenty of friends who will give us aid and shelter so long as they do not penetrate your disguise. We shall soon be able to learn news of Miss Meredith and Zeemit Mehal, and if we cannot render them assistance at once, we can wait near them, until an opportunity occurs.”

“I like your plan,” Gordon answered, thoughtfully. “It seems to me to be full of promise. At any rate, if the scheme appeared more chimerical than it really does, I should be inclined to follow it out, so long as there was even a shadowy chance of succeeding in my mission. I owe my presence here to a strange chance. Once released, and I am free to follow her who has been so cruelly separated from me. In your hands, then, I place myself, Haidee. And I am sure, for the sake of our

mutual friend, whether he be living or dead, that you will do all that a brave and noble woman can do.”

“Living or dead,” she sighed, as if his words had sunk deep into her soul. “Yes, living or dead, I devote my life to serving him, or those belonging to him.”

“Our faiths may differ, Haidee,” Gordon answered; “but rest assured there is an Almighty Power that will bless your efforts and reward your devotion.”

She turned her large, truthful eyes full upon the speaker, and replied in a low tone—

“Yes, the Christian’s God is good, and some day I will seek to know more about Him.”

It soon spread through the little garrison that Gordon and Haidee had determined to remain behind. No opposition was offered to this determination. They both were free agents, and at liberty to act upon their own responsibility; but not a few of the people looked upon it as a foolhardy step, and thought that they were running unnecessary risk.

As the sun sprang up in the heavens—for in the Indian climate it may truly be said to spring up—the sounds of a bugle broke upon the morning air; it was the signal for the sentries to come in, and for the garrison to arouse. The sounds of that bugle revived the hopes that had all but died in the poor crushed hearts. As the weary people gathered themselves together, those notes were like the kindly voice of a friend calling them to rest, and telling them that their trials were over. Alas! they little dreamt that it sounded their death-knell. If some pitying angel had but whispered to them never to stir beyond the mud walls of their defences, what soul-wrung anguish they might have been spared; but it is written that man shall suffer. The doom of those poor creatures was not yet fulfilled, and they must go forth. Again the bugle sounded; this time for the march. Then the barriers were withdrawn, and forth from the defences they had so heroically held went the people. A tattered and torn British ensign, nailed to a bamboo staff, was carried at the head of the procession. The black demons, who swarmed around in thousands, might insult that flag, they might spit upon it, trample it into the dust, but they could never quell the dauntless courage of the lion hearts who owned its sway. The ragged flag flaunted proudly in the breeze, and the ragged crew, each of their pouches filled with sixty rounds of ammunition, and bearing on their shoulders their guns with fixed bayonets that flashed in the sunlight, straggled on. Haidee and Gordon had concealed

themselves in an outbuilding—it was simply a heap of ruined brickwork, for it had been battered to pieces with the enemy's grape; but the fact of its being in ruins was in their favour, as they were less likely to be discovered by intruders. In about half an hour the last of the garrison had departed, and the entrenchments were left to silence and the dead.

CHAPTER XXIV. “SHIVA THE DESTROYER.”

Close to the Suttee Choura Ghaut, the place at which the garrison were to embark, there rose a Hindoo temple; it was known as the Hurdes, or the Fisherman's Temple. It stood upon the banks of the Ganges, and its shadows darkened the water. Many a religious festival had been held within its walls, and many a pious Hindoo fisherman had come from afar, that he might fall down before the god it enshrined, and invoke a blessing upon himself and his calling. But on the morning that the English people went forth from their defences, it was devoted to a far different purpose.

Enthroned on a “chaboutree,” or platform, of the temple, sat Tantia Topee. He had been commissioned by Nana Sahib to carry out the hellish work. Near him were Azimoolah, and Teeka Singh, and they were surrounded with numerous dependants. From their position, they were enabled to command an uninterrupted view of the river, through the open doors and windows. At the proper time the fatal signal was to be given in that temple by Tantia Topee. The signal was to be the blast of a bugle.

But all unmindful of the awful danger, the garrison went on—women, and children, and men, who had survived the horrors of those awful weeks—gaunt, and ghastly, their garments hanging in shreds, and scarcely covering their emaciated bodies, enfeebled by want, their bones almost protruding through their skins, some wounded, and bearing upon them the indelible marks of the battle.

In the hearts of most was a glimmering of a peaceful future.

Here a little child carried in its arms a broken and smoke-blackened doll; there a woman huddled to her breast some household treasure that had been saved from the great wreck; but they were a pitiable crowd. The beautiful had left their beauty; the young had left their youth in the battered barracks; and even the faces of the children were pinched and wizened, showing how fearful had been the suffering during those dark weeks.

The wounded were carried mostly in palkees (palanquins); the women and children were in rough native carts, a few rode on elephants; and the able-bodied

men marched. But the attempt at martial array was but a mockery—they were soldiers only in spirit. Outwardly they were starving tatterdemalions.

The grim old warrior, General Wheeler, was accompanied by his wife and daughters. He was worn and broken spirited—for the capitulation had crushed his heart. In spite of the starvation which stared him in the face, in spite of the hordes of rebels arrayed against them, and in spite of the sickness and misery which were upon them, the poor old man was reluctant to surrender, for he still hoped for succour from outside. But his officers had forced it upon him, for the sake of the unhappy women and children.

It was but a mile down to the Ghaut, but it was a long, long weary journey. The place of embarkation was reached at last, and the weary eyes of the people saw the fleet of boats that they hoped were to convey them to safety. They were common country eight-oared boats, known as “budgerows.” They were unwieldy things, with heavy thatched roofs, so that they resembled, from a distance, stacks of hay. It was the close of an unusually dry season, and the water was at its shallowest—the mud and sand-banks being far above the water in many places. The banks of the river were lined with natives, who had turned out in thousands to see the humiliated English. There were thousands of soldiers there too—horse, foot, and artillery. The troopers sat with their horses’ heads turned towards the river, and seemed impatient for the sport to commence.

Such a deep-laid plot, such a diabolical act of treachery, the world had surely never known before. Not even the imagination of Danté could have conceived blacker-hearted demons to have peopled his “Inferno” with, than those surging crowds of natives. Those floating budgerows were not to be arks of safety, but human slaughter-houses.

Slowly the people embarked, and, as they did so, there floated out into the stream a small wooden idol: it represented the Hindoo god Shiva—Shiva the Destroyer. As it was pushed out into the stream, every native who saw it smiled, for he knew too well what it signified.

General Wheeler remained till the last. He had been riding in a palanquin, and as he put his head out, a scimitar flashed in the air, and the brave veteran rolled into the water a corpse. Almost at the same moment Tantia Topee raised his hand in the temple, and the notes of a bugle rose clear and distinct. Then the foul design became apparent, and the unhappy people knew that they had been lured into a death-trap. From every conceivable point on both sides of the river, there

belched forth fire, and grape and musket balls were poured into the doomed passengers; in a little while the thatch of the budgerows burst into flame, for in every roof hot cinders had been previously inserted. Men leapt overboard, and strove to push the vessels out into the stream, but the majority of the boats remained immovable. The conflagration spread; the sick and wounded were burnt to death. The stronger women took to the water with their children in their arms, but they were shot down or sabred by the troopers, who rode in after them.

In a large and elegant tent on the cantonment plain, the fiend and tiger, Nana Sahib, paced uneasily. He heard the booming of the guns, the rattle of the musketry, and occasionally the dying shriek of an unhappy woman was borne upon his ear. He knew that Shiva the Destroyer was doing his hellish work. Perhaps as he paced up and down, there came into his black heart a pang of remorse, or, more probably, a thrill of fear; for in his solitude he might have seen a vision of the Great White Hand that was to smite him into the dust. Or perhaps there stole over him a sense that there was a destroyer mightier even than Shiva—even the Supreme God of the Christians, who would exact a terrible retribution for his unutterable crimes.

It is certain that as Dundoo Pant paced his tent, he was ill at ease. He was haunted by the ghosts of his victims, even as was that bloody tyrant of infamous memory, Richard the Third, the night before Bosworth.

“Ah! What do you want?” cried the guilty Nana, as a messenger suddenly entered the tent—so suddenly that the conscience of Dundoo caused his heart to leap into his mouth.

“The work speeds well, your Highness,” said the man, kneeling before his master; “but these Feringhees are fighting to the death.”

“Go back with all haste to Tantia Topee, and say that, as he values his own life, not another woman or child is to be slaughtered; but let every man with a white face be hacked to pieces. Mark me well. *Not an Englishman is to be spared!* Tell Azimoolah to see to all this.”

The messenger withdrew, and the tiger ground his teeth and resumed his walk.

Down at the Ghaut the work was truly speeding well, but when the Nana’s message arrived it stopped as far as the women were concerned; and about one hundred and thirty women and children—some fearfully wounded, others half drowned and dripping with the slime of the Ganges—were carried back in

captivity to Cawnpore.

Thirty-nine boats had been destroyed; but there was one that got into the fairway of the stream, and down on the dark bosom of the waters it drifted, a lonely waif. There were no boatmen, there were no oars, there was no rudder, but there were hearts of steel on board; heroes who would die, ay, suffer death a hundred times before they would surrender. That solitary boat contained about eighty men—such men that, if they had had a fair chance, not all the legions of the accursed Nana could have conquered them. Slowly it drifted on between the banks. Hissing shot and burning arrows were discharged at it in showers, but it seemed almost as if it had been surrounded with a charm, for it drifted on unscathed. Next a blazing budgerow was sent after it, but that failed to harm it, and its occupants, slender as was the chance, began to think that they would escape. But as the sun commenced to decline, and burnish the river with his golden rays, a boat, filled with about sixty men, was sent in pursuit, with orders from Tantia Topee to slaughter every Englishman. The lonely boat grounded on a sand-bank. Hope sank again. On came the would-be destroyers, and their boat stuck on the same bank. Then occurred a last grand burst of courage—courage even in death, and which is always so conspicuous in British heroism. On the bows of the pursuer there stood up a tall, powerful Sepoy, and, in a loud voice, cried:

“In the name of the Nana Sahib, I call upon you to surrender.”

He might as well have called upon the winds to stay their course, or the tides to cease to flow. Surrender forsooth! And to the Nana Sahib, the insatiable Tiger of Cawnpore, whose name, and name of all his race, will descend to posterity covered with infamy, and who will be held up to execration and scorn until time shall be no more!

CHAPTER XXV. THE LAST GRAND STRUGGLE.

That call to surrender was answered in a manner that literally paralysed the pursuing sixty.

Forth from the Englishmen's boat a little party of officers and men went. They were exhausted, famishing, sick, and wounded, but they would not wait to be attacked by such a demoniacal crew. Wading up to their knees in the water that covered the sand-bank, and all armed to the teeth, they made for the other boat, and fell upon the natives with such fury that not half-a-dozen escaped to tell the tale; and even those few only saved their lives by plunging into the deep water, and swimming ashore.

It was a glorious victory, but the last for the hero-martyrs of Cawnpore.

They got on board the enemy's boat, and found it contained good stores of ammunition, which they conveyed to their own boat, but there was not a scrap of food. They lay down, utterly worn out; and, as darkness gathered, sleep fell upon them.

It was the last sleep for many. Some never woke again, but passed to eternity. Those who survived awoke with the first glimmer of morn. Then despair seized upon them. In the dark hours of night the rising waters had drifted their boat into a creek, where they were speedily discovered by the pitiless enemy.

It was a narrow creek running inland for about two hundred yards. On each side the natives gathered in hundreds, and they poured in a deadly shower of musket-balls.

Lying at the bottom of the boat was an officer who had hitherto been in command, but he was wounded unto death now. Both his arms were shattered; but, without betraying the slightest pain, he issued his orders.

“Comrades,” he cried, “we belong to a race that never waits to be smitten. Let these merciless bloodhounds see that even in death we know how to smite our enemies.”

No second bidding was needed. Fourteen men and officers—the only unwounded ones in the boat—sprang ashore, and, with a wild cheer, charged the surging multitude. The terrified crowd fell back. Such courage appalled them; they were unused to it; they could not comprehend it. The brave fourteen hacked out a path, then rushed back again. Alas! the boat had drifted out into the stream once more, and the fourteen were left upon the pitiless land, while their doomed comrades floated down the pitiless river.

At some little distance rose the towers of a Hindoo temple. The eyes of the leader of the fourteen saw this. He raised a cheer and rushed towards it, followed by his comrades. They gained the temple, pursued by a howling rabble; but with fixed bayonets they held the doorway. On poured the dusky wretches, but they could not break down that wall of steel. The black and bleeding corpses piled up and formed a rampart, and from behind this barricade of human flesh the little band delivered a galling fire. There was some putrid water in the temple, but this the people drank with avidity, for they were choking. It gave them new strength, and they loaded and fired without ceasing. Hundreds of the enemy fell, and back there sped a messenger to the Nana with word that the remnant of the broken army could not be conquered.

He raved when he heard the news. This defiance and gallantry galled him beyond measure; he felt that though he had “scotched the snake he had not killed it,” and he began to realise that, powerful as he was, he was still far from being powerful enough to crush his valiant foe.

“A thousand curses on them!” he cried, when his agent delivered the message. “Go back to your leader, and tell him to burn these Feringhees out, and for every white man that escapes I will have a hundred black ones executed.”

Back went the man, and soon around the walls of the temple there were piled heaps of dried leaves and faggots. The brand was applied. Up leapt the devouring flame; but there was a strong wind, and it blew the flames and smoke away. Then a new device was put in practice; the enemy filled bags with powder and threw them on the flames, until the building rocked and tottered. There was nothing left now for the brave fourteen but flight. Bracing themselves up, and shoulder to shoulder, they fired a volley into the astonished foe; then, with a cheer, they charged with the bayonet. It was a short, but awful struggle. One half their number went down, never to rise again; seven reached the river; there they plunged into the stream. As they came up after the dive, two of the number were shot through the head, and the water was dyed with their blood; a third made for

a spit of land, but, as soon as he landed, he was clubbed to death with the butt ends of muskets. But four still survived. They were sturdy swimmers; they seemed to bear charmed lives; the bullets fell in showers around; the rabble on the shores yelled with disappointed rage. But the swimmers swam on—The rapid current was friendly to them. They were saved! “Honour the brave!”

When the roll of heroes is called, surely amongst those who have died in England’s cause, and for England’s honour, the names of those valiant fourteen should stand at the head of the list. Never since the days of old Rome, when “the bridge was kept by the gallant three,” have there been heroes more worthy of a nation’s honour than that little band of fighting men who held the temple on the banks of the Ganges, and cut their way through a pitiless multitude who were thirsting for their blood. No Englishman will ever be able to read the record without the profoundest emotions of pity and pride.

When the Nana heard of the escape of the four, he tore his hair in rage; but he could still have his revenge. For news arrived immediately after, that the boat which had drifted away had been recaptured. Ordering a horse to be saddled, he galloped down to the Ghaut, to join Azimoolah and Tantia Topee. And the three waited to gloat their eyes upon the wretched victims in the boat. There were a few women and children, and about a score of men; they were all sick and wounded, but they were driven ashore. The men were butchered on the spot; but the women and children were reserved for a second death.

As Dundoo Pant viewed these helpless people he laughed loudly. It was some satisfaction to feel that they were in his power, and that a word or a look from him would bring about their instant destruction. What the real desire of his own heart was at that moment can only be known to the Great Reader of human secrets. But at his elbow, his evil genius, his familiar fiend, stalked, and, with the characteristic grin, murmured—

“We are in luck’s way, your Highness; and these prizes will afford us further amusement.”

“In what way, Azi?”

“We can torture them.”

“Ah, ah, ah! You are a grim joker, Azi. I would torture them—I would burn them with hot iron—I would flay them, but these cursed English seem almost indifferent to physical pain. We must torture their minds, Azimoolah—break

their hearts. We must invent some means of making them feel how thoroughly they are humbled.”

“The invention will not be difficult, your Highness. Set them to grind corn!”

“Ah! that is a good idea.”

“They will know well that it is a symbol of the uttermost degradation. In their own biblical records they will remember that it is stated that the sign of bondage in Eastern lands was for the women to be compelled to grind corn with the hand-mills.”

“It shall be as you suggest,” answered the Nana, thoughtfully.

“And when they have, through these means, been impressed with a sense of our power and their own thorough humiliation, then consummate your victory.”

“How, Azi?”

“By slaughtering them.”

“Hush, Azi—we will discuss that matter later on. For the present let them be conveyed to the Beebee-Ghur and carefully guarded.”

The Beebee-Ghur was a small house situated between the native city and the river. It had originally been built by a European for his native mistress, but for some years had been occupied by a humble native scrivener. It was a small, ill-ventilated place, with but wretched accommodation. The walls were blackened with smoke, and the furniture of the place consisted of a few rough deal chairs and tables. But into this place were crowded over two hundred women and children. Left there, without any certainty as to the fate for which they had been reserved, they felt all the agony of horrid suspense, and they shuddered as they thought what that fate might be. Madness seized some, and a merciful death speedily ended the sufferings of a few others.

When Nana Sahib and Azimoolah had seen their captives safely guarded, and some of the most delicate and refined ladies seated on the ground, grinding corn, they turned their horses' heads towards the Bhittoor Palace.

“This has been an exciting day, your Highness,” Azimoolah remarked.

“Yes,” was the monosyllabic, and somewhat sullen answer.

“Why does your face wear a frown?” asked Azimoolah. “Your star has risen, and in its resplendent light you should be all smiles and mirth.”

“So I will try to be, Azi—so I will try to be,” and, laughing with a low hollow laugh, Nana Sahib put spurs to his horse, and sped towards his Palace, as if already he saw the brilliancy of that star darkening by a rising shadow—the shadow of a grim, retributive Nemesis.

Perhaps his mental ears did catch the sounds of the coming conqueror’s drums, and the roar of his guns; and his mental eyes see regiments of unconquerable British soldiers, exacting a terrible vengeance, and he himself, forsaken by his people, driven forth, a beggar outcast, wandering on and on, through trackless jungles, without a pillow for his head or roof to shelter him, and on his forehead a brand more terrible than that which ever branded the brow of Cain—flying forever from his pursuers; a guilty, conscience-stricken, blackened and despised wretch—too abject a coward to die, and yet suffering the agonies of a living death.

Whatever of these things he might have dreamed, he gave no utterance to his thoughts, but galloped on to his Palace, and issued orders that that night should be a night of revel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES SWINGS.

The day following the slaughter at the Ghaut was a great day for Nana Sahib, for he was to be publicly proclaimed Peishwah, and his power in that part of the country was to be acknowledged supreme. The dream of years was fulfilled at last. He stood at the foot of the throne; he had but to mount the steps, and men would bow down before him as their ruler. Power, greatness, wealth—all were in his grasp. His foe lay crushed in the dust—his ambition and revenge were gratified; and in the pomp and glitter of the gorgeous pageant of that day, the voice of conscience was perhaps for a time stilled.

And truly the pageant was a gorgeous one—a spectacle that even, in their wildest imaginings, the authors of the “Arabian Nights” could not have dreamed of. Scarcely had the sun fully risen before the Palace at Bhittoor was in a state of commotion. All night long, thousands of hands had been at work preparing for the great show, and nothing was wanting to render it complete.

At a given signal the procession, which was to march through the town, and some of the outlying villages, commenced to form. First came five hundred stalwart natives, walking six abreast. On their heads were turbans of cloth of gold, and on their breasts were glittering vests of steel. Every man carried on his shoulder a drawn sabre, that flashed in the sun’s rays. The front row carried the Nana’s standard, which was trimmed with real and massive gold fringe. These men were followed by five hundred boys, dressed in white muslin. Each boy carried a pair of silver-plated cymbals, and the very air was rent with the clashing. Then came a body of singers, singing a song of triumph, each singer being dressed in a costly robe. They were followed by two hundred camels, their necks hung with silver bells, while their trappings were cloth of gold. On the back of each camel sat a boy dressed in raiment of pure white, and carrying in his hands a small disc of highly polished steel, which was turned so as to catch the sun’s rays and throw the light far ahead—on tree, and road, and building. This was to symbolise the Nana’s power.

Next in order was a body-guard of the Nana’s retainers, numbering altogether a thousand men, clad in burnished armour, and carrying in their hands long spears, decorated with golden tassels. Following this guard came a band of musicians

with brass instruments, and playing a martial air which they had learnt under English tutors. Then there were fifty elephants, three abreast. The forehead of each beast was decorated with a large jewelled star composed of pure silver: their bodies were covered with cloth of gold, fringed with massive bullion lace. On the head of each elephant sat a gaudily-dressed native driver: each man held a long polished brass trumpet, and every now and then, on a given signal, the trumpets were blown in unison.

After these men was another body of armour-clad men, who formed a hollow square, two deep. In the centre of the square walked, with majestic step, a huge, spotless white elephant: its breast was guarded with a massive shield of pure gold, and on its forehead was a large star of brilliants; on its back it bore a costly houdah, made of blue satin, supported by golden rods, the satin being trimmed with gold and jewels. Beneath this houdah was seated Dundoo Pant, the Nana Sahib. His head was bare, for the ceremony of marking him with the mark of sovereignty in accordance with Eastern custom, and known as the "sacrament of the forehead mark," had yet to be performed. He was clad in a robe of pure gold cloth, ornamented with rubies and sapphires. Round his neck he wore a massive collar composed of diamonds.

Over the elephant's back was thrown a rich scarlet cloak, with gold tassels; and on its tusks were many gold rings. The Nana was seated cross-legged. In front of him was a superb coronet of gold, studded with diamonds: this, with a jewelled sword, rested on a scarlet cushion.

Behind this elephant, and in the centre of another square of armour-clad men, were fifty high Brahmin priests, clad in white and with their faces painted, and between them was a small and beautiful Brahmin bull. Its hoofs were encased in gold, and its body was literally covered with jewels.

Next came two hundred Nautch girls, dressed in scarlet garments. Each girl bore a small palm leaf, and these leaves were waved backwards and forwards with rhythmical regularity. Next to these was another elephant, gaudily trapped and decorated; and beneath a magnificent houdah of silk were seated some of the principal females of Dundoo's household.

Following in order was another band of music. Then came Teeka Singh, Azimoolah, Tantia Topee, Bala Rao, and other members of the suite. They were all mounted on handsome charges, and bore at their sides jewelled swords, while fixed to their heels were golden spurs. They were escorted by a strong body-

guard of picked troops. These were succeeded by files of men carrying silken banners. Then a hundred boys, bearing long poles, attached to which were silver bells, and five hundred girls clad in garments of cloth of gold. Every girl carried before her a jewelled vase, that was filled with the most exquisite flowers. Behind the girls were two thousand troopers—the flower of Dundoo's army—and all mounted on superb horses; and last of all was a grand display of artillery. There were guns of every description, which had been plundered from the English arsenal.

It was, in truth, a gorgeous show, well calculated to daze the hordes of illiterate natives who crowded every thoroughfare, with its pomp and importance. Dundoo and his wily admirers had learnt the secret of the importance of outward show, if the masses are to be impressed, and they used their knowledge to advantage. The procession moved slowly forward—a long array of glitter and glare, of noise and bewildering richness.

Literally hundreds of thousands of natives had gathered; they swarmed on every conceivable spot from whence a view could be obtained. On the housetops, in the trees, on the walls, the huts—every place where a foothold offered itself were Nana's future subjects to be seen. They rent the air with their cries of welcome; they sang songs of victory, and howled out execrations against the Feringhees.

Through every street and road where it was possible for the procession to pass, it went. The white elephant, with its costly silken houdah, beneath which was the Tiger of Cawnpore, towered above all—a conspicuous and central figure.

Soon after mid-day the show returned to the Bhittoor Palace, where preparations had been made on a grand scale for the ceremony of the forehead mark, or the crowning of the Peishwah. In one of the largest halls a stately throne had been erected, and on this Nana Sahib took his seat.

Then there was borne into the hall, on men's shoulders, a platform covered with cloth of gold. The platform was railed round with golden railings, and in the centre stood a Brahmin bull, covered with jewels and held by gold chains. Following the bull came a large number of priests, carrying small brass idols, and chafing-dishes containing fire. The bull was placed in the centre of the hall, and the chafing-dishes and idols ranged round it. An aged priest stepped up to the head of the animal, and, after making many mystic symbols, he held up a gigantic sword, and cried out in a loud voice—

“The enemies of Brahma shall be smitten to the death.”

Then a gong was sounded, and the whole of the vast assemblage fell upon their knees, and bowing their heads to the ground, worshipped the bull. This ceremony being ended, the chief priest advanced to the Nana, bearing in his hand a dish of pure gold. From this dish he took a small wafer, and while his colleagues muttered a low, monotonous chant, and a hundred tom-toms were beaten, he pressed the wafer on the forehead of the Nana, reciting a Brahmin prayer the while. He next took a chaplet of gold, and placed it on Dundoo’s head.

Then the Palace seemed to be shaken to its foundation as the artillery thundered out its recognition of the new ruler.

The imposing ceremony being ended, and Dundoo having been duly proclaimed Peishwah, the courtiers and servile cringers crowded round the throne to congratulate their chief. Conspicuous amongst these were Azimoolah, Tantia Topee, Teeka Singh, and the brothers of the Nana.

It was a proud moment for Azimoolah. He had played a deep and skilful game, and won. The stakes were large, but not all the newly-acquired power of the Nana Sahib would be sufficient to keep them from the destroying Nemesis who was coming on with gigantic strides.

Until far into the morning the festivities were kept up. There were torch-light processions, there were grand illuminations, and tremendous bursts of fireworks, accompanied by the hoarse roar of artillery. But all things come to an end, and the enthusiasm of Dundoo Pant’s new subjects, like their fireworks, soon burnt itself out, and there was silence, save for the croaking frogs, the shrill piping cicala, and the under-hum of tens of thousands of insects.

In a small room of the Palace, Nana Sahib had sought his couch, after the exciting day’s work. He was weary and worn, and there was a troubled look in his face. His newly-acquired crown did not seem to sit easily. It was stained too indelibly with English blood. Long he tossed about before he sank into an uneasy doze; then in a little while great beads of perspiration stood upon his face. His chest heaved, he clawed the air with his hands, he bit his lip until the blood flowed. The Nana Sahib was dreaming a dream; and this was his dream.

He saw a hand—a white hand—small at first, but it gradually grew, and grew, and grew, until it assumed gigantic proportions. It stretched out its massive and

claw-like fingers towards Dundoo, who fled in terror away. But that awful hand followed. In every finger were set hundreds of glittering eyes; they glared at him until they burned into his very soul. He still fled, but the hand grew larger, until it gradually bent its fingers, and tore out his heart. And yet he lived, and the shadow of the phantom hand was over him. It tortured him with unutterable torture. It dragged him away from all kith and kin. Then it opened a massive curtain, and showed him far, far down the Stream of Time. On its ever-flowing tide he saw himself, a battered wreck, drifting to the regions of immortal torture; and millions of scraggy fingers pointed at him in derision, and millions of voices cursed his name.

He awoke from this horrid dream—awoke with his heart almost standing still, and a cold and clammy perspiration bedewing his body. He sprang up with a cry of alarm, for everything in the vision had seemed so real. But when he had gathered his scattered senses, he smiled sardonically and muttered—

“Pshaw! What a fool I am to let a dream so alarm me. Am I not rich, powerful, invincible? What, then, is there to fear? These Feringhees are crushed—crushed beyond all power to rise again. I am supreme; who is there dare dispute my will?”

A man suddenly entered the chamber. In the light of the breaking day, the Nana saw that it was Azimoolah.

“What is the meaning of this, Azi?” he asked hurriedly. “Has anything occurred to alarm you, for there is a look of fear upon your face?”

“I might make a similar remark with a good deal of truth, your Highness,” answered the other with a forced laugh.

“Do not waste time in foolish recrimination, Azimoolah. What brings you here?”

“Bad news.”

“Ah! Is that so?”

“Yes. Some of our spies have just come in, and brought word that General Havelock is marching on Cawnpore.”

“Is that all?” exclaimed the Nana, with a laugh. “Your news is not so gloomy as I anticipated. We are powerful in troops and guns; we will wipe these saucy foreigners off the face of the earth. Await my coming below, Azi.”

Azimoolah made a slight inclination of the head, and retired towards the door.

“Azi,” the Nana called, busying himself in adjusting some costly rings that sparkled on his fat fingers. His familiar turned back. “Azimoolah, are the—dear me! There is a diamond gone out of that ring. Where can I have lost it, I wonder? Let me see, what was I going to observe? Oh—*are the women and children at the Beebee-Ghur safely guarded?*”

“I selected the guard myself, your Highness! so that I will vouch for its efficiency.”

“That is good. I will join you shortly, Azi. You may retire.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

WITH SWIFT STRIDES NEMESIS MOVES ON.

In spite of the indifference which Nana Sahib assumed to the news brought him by Azimoolah, he felt considerable alarm. He had heard of the powers of General Havelock. He knew that he was a dauntless and war-worn soldier, who did not understand the meaning of the word "defeat!" But he derived some consolation from the knowledge he possessed that the numerical strength of the English could be but as one to twenty against his own troops.

As he descended to hold audience with his staff, he smiled bitterly, and muttered —

"I am immensely strong in troops, I have powerful artillery, and if these fail to check the advance of these cursed English, I have yet one more card to fall back upon. I can still have revenge upon their women and children; and if the white soldiers should reach Cawnpore, they shall find the city a ruin, and its streets running with English blood. Shiva the Destroyer guides me, and victory shall yet be mine."

On reaching his counsel-hall he found his officers were excited and alarmed. Fresh spies had come in with the confirmation of the first report: that Havelock was making desperate efforts by means of forced marches to reach Cawnpore. The Nana held hurried conversation with his advisers. His hopes of a few minutes before gave place to despair as he thought of the possibility of his newly-acquired power being wrested from him, and as the remembrance of the dream he had dreamed during the night flashed through his brain, he trembled, and his trepidation was noticed by his staff.

"Your Highness is not well this morning," observed Azimoolah; "yesterday's excitement has disturbed you?"

"I am well enough," the Nana answered sharply; "but it seems as if I was to have no freedom from the annoyance of these English. I was in hopes that we had set our foot firmly down upon them—that they were hopelessly crushed. But it seems now that, Hydra-like, no sooner is one head destroyed than another springs up."

“Then we must keep on destroying them until they are all exterminated. Even the heads of the fabled monster were limited; and by constantly destroying the English their power must come to an end.”

“You do not counsel well!” cried the Nana irritably. “The power of the English, it appears to me, is like the ocean, which you might go on draining, drop by drop, until the end of time, and then there would be no appreciable diminution.”

Azimoolah smiled scornfully, and in his secret heart he felt some contempt for his master.

“Your notions are exaggerated,” he answered coolly, “and your fears with respect to the unlimited power of these British groundless. They are headstrong—impetuous—rash. They are rushing blindly on to their fate. My spies inform me that they are weak both in guns and men. We can bring an overwhelming force against them, and literally annihilate them. Meanwhile, the revolt spreads well; every city in India is asserting its independence of these foreigners, and so mighty shall we become that if every man in England were sent against us, we could defy them. I tell you the power of England is waning, if not already destroyed. The White Hand stiffens in the coldness of death.”

A thoughtful expression spread itself over the Nana’s face. Azimoolah’s words sank deep. Whenever he faltered and doubted himself this familiar was at hand to give him new hope. Bloodthirsty and revengeful as he was, he was, after all, but a puppet, and would have been powerless to have moved if others had not pulled the strings.

“I think you are right—I think you are right,” he said, “and we will contest the advance of these Feringhees. Let no time be lost in getting our troops in motion; and let it be proclaimed far and near that a lac of rupees shall be the reward to him who first captures Havelock, and brings him in living or dead.”

“The rupees were better in our treasury, your Highness,” answered Azimoolah. “Havelock shall fall without any such rash expenditure. His miserable force will be cut to pieces in the first encounter with our troops!”

In a little while Cawnpore was once more in a wild state of commotion. Far and near was heard the sound of the bugle as it called to arms. The artillery rumbled along, and thousands of trained troops were sent out to oppose the advance of the English. Bala Rao, the Nana’s brother, was placed in command of one division, and he was the first to march.

As the afternoon wore on, a messenger, breathless and travel-stained, arrived at the Palace, and sought an interview with the Nana. This was no other than Jewan Bukht. He had been out for some days, by command of his master, visiting all the villages within twenty miles of Cawnpore, proclaiming the power of Dundoo, and inciting the natives to rise and massacre the Europeans. It was evident Jewan Bukht brought news of importance, for his face bore a look of anxiety, if not alarm.

Jewan had to wait some time before the Nana consented to see him; for the monster was passing his time with the females of his household, and trying to still the voice of conscience by draughts of strong drink. When he did present himself before his agent he was flushed and excited, and his eyes were bloodshot.

“How now, Jewan?” he cried. “Why do you come at such an inopportune moment to disturb my peace?”

“I bring bad news, your Highness.”

“Curses on the bad news!” Dundoo thundered, as he turned furiously and faced Bukht, who started away in alarm. “Twice to-day have those words sounded in my ears. Am I never to know security? am I never to have peace?”

He paced up and down, fretting with rage. His arms were behind his back, and he played nervously with the jewellery on his fat fingers.

Jewan waited for some minutes before he spoke. He knew it was better to let the Nana’s temper cool, for it was evident that he was excited with drink, and at such times his savage nature was capable of any atrocity.

“I regret, your Highness,” Jewan said at last, “that I, your servant, should be so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure for having faithfully performed my duty.”

“There, there, excuse me,” answered Dundoo, as he stopped in his walk. “I am irritable, and allowance must be made for me. Things do not work as smoothly as they ought, and it appears to me that every one who seeks me has bad news to tell.”

“That is rather their misfortune than their fault,” was the answer.

“Yes, yes; you are right. I will try in future to be less hasty. But now tell me

what is the news you bring.”

“General Havelock is making rapid marches upon Cawnpore.”

“Pshaw! That is old news. Have you none other but that?”

“Yes. A body of troops, under Major Renaud, is making desperate efforts to effect a junction with Havelock.”

“Ah! That is bad. What is Havelock’s strength?”

“I do not know exactly. His army is small, but is composed of some of the best of English troops; and he has a regiment of bare-legged soldiers.”

“You mean Highlanders!” exclaimed the Nana, as he ground his teeth. “May the Prophet confound them, for they are invincible. They seem to draw fresh life from every blast of their unearthly pipes, and they fight like devils.”

“Still they may be conquered by numbers; and we have numbers, your Highness.”

“True, true; and we will send legions against them to stop their advance. But how about Renaud? What is his strength?”

“He is at the head of the Madras Fusiliers, but their number is not great.”

“The Madras Fusiliers!” echoed the Nana, while a look of fear passed across his face, for he knew that this regiment was celebrated throughout India. It was evident that some of the best troops were coming against him. His own troops only mustered about ten thousand strong, horse and foot, and when he had spoken of hurling legions against the advancing foe his mind was running upon the hundreds of thousands of natives who peopled the city and the villages. But what could the untrained hordes do against the very flower of England’s Indian army? It seemed to him now as if the dream was to be realised, and that the meshes were tightening around him. He paced up and down again, his eyes bent upon the ground.

“Your Highness is troubled,” Jewan observed.

“I am troubled, for I see that unless the march of these British is checked they will very soon be in our city.”

“But we must check them.”

“Must, forsooth, is easily said. But how are we to check them?”

“We have troops and guns. Our troops can fight, and our guns can speak.”

“And yet I do not feel secure, Jewan. We are not strong enough. But go now; I will confer with my officers. See me again. In the meantime stir up the people; let them go out in their thousands and harass the English.”

Jewan bowed, and had retired to the door when the Nana called him back.

“Stay, Jewan; a thought strikes me. Delhi is full of Sepoys.”

“It is, your Highness,” was the answer, as a new hope sprang to life in Jewan’s breast.

“Do you think the King would lend me aid?”

“I think it is to his interest to do so.”

“You are right. You shall go to Delhi, Jewan.”

Jewan’s heart beat wildly. He had longed to return to Delhi in the hope that he might again be able to secure Flora Meredith. Delhi was suggestive to him of luxury, of wealth, of idleness. He, in common with all his countrymen, turned his eyes to the Imperial City as the central pivot of the rebellion. Its strength was so enormous that it might defy the united power of England’s army. The desire to once more have Flora in his possession was so strong that he had often been strongly tempted to renounce allegiance to the Nana and fly to Delhi, but he had resisted the temptation, for he dreaded the power of Dundoo, whose confidential agent he had been, and he knew that if he incurred the displeasure of the revengeful Mahratta his life would never be safe from the Nana’s spies, who were everywhere. But now the very thing he had yearned for was likely to come to pass. From his knowledge of the King, he did not believe in his heart that the required aid would be given; but it was no business of his—at least, so he thought—to tell Nana Sahib this. Moreover, there was another reason which made him anxious to get away, and if his feelings had been truly analysed it might have been found that this reason was the stronger of the two—it was one of personal safety. He believed—though he did not from motives of policy express the belief—that the advancing English would soon cut their way into Cawnpore, and if that should be the case, and Nana’s power overthrown, his subjects would have to take care of themselves. There was an uneasy feeling in Jewan’s throat as he pictured himself swinging at the end of a rope from a

banyan-tree.

“And what will be the purport of my errand, your Highness?” he asked, scarcely able to conceal his delight.

“You shall hasten to Delhi with all speed, and convey to his Majesty a true statement of the danger that threatens me. You can tell him—and you know what an admirable diplomatist you are—you can tell him that my strength does not exceed five thousand, and that the English are coming down with a force double that strength. Solicit, in my name, one or two regiments. Let every available vehicle and horse be pressed into service, and let these reinforcements be sent on with all possible speed, to join my troops, and beat back Havelock. If the King will do this, my position will be secured.”

“I think we need not have a doubt about it, your Highness. His Majesty will do it.”

“I hope so, Jewan—I hope so. Lose no time, but depart at once.”

Jewan did not require a second bidding. He could ill conceal the smile of joy that played around his lips, as he took his leave to make preparations for his journey.

Having provided himself with a horse and buggy, and armed himself with a revolver, he drove out of Cawnpore as the shades of night were gathering.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“THE BATTLE OF THE BRIDGE.”

While Nana Sahib was thus neglecting no plan that could, as he thought, add to his security, the Nemesis was coming on.

It was well known to the English that Lucknow and Cawnpore were in imminent peril; and knowing, further, that General Wheeler was hampered with a large number of women and children, it was determined to make the most strenuous efforts to relieve Cawnpore.

With this object in view, General Havelock placed himself at the head of a body of gallant troops, including a regiment of Highlanders. With his little army he marched out of Allahabad. He knew how desperate were the odds against him—he knew that every mile of ground would have to be contested; but the grand old soldier was also aware that, if his troops were few, their hearts were brave, and he had perfect faith in his own ability to lead them to victory.

At the same time, Major Renaud, in command of the Madras Fusiliers, who had performed prodigies of valour, was pushing up the river with the view of effecting a junction with Havelock. By forced marches the General made rapid progress, not a day passing but what he had a skirmish with the enemy. These skirmishes were not worthy the name of battle, since they were waged mostly by the native rabble; but they served to harass and annoy the British.

In a little while he fell in with Renaud, and the reinforcement was doubly welcome; for many of his own troops had fallen sick through the intense heat and the heavy marches, but there was no rest to be had. The brave old warrior knew that every hour delayed served but to increase the awful peril of those whom he was hastening to relieve.

Futtehpore was reached, and here a desperate battle was fought between Havelock and the Nana's troops, who had been sent out to meet him.

Confident of victory, the Sepoys had taken their stand at this place, and, with taunts and bragging, presented a most powerful front to the jaded and worn British soldiers. But Havelock knew his men; he knew his strength. He let loose his little army. The fight was long and bloody, but it ended in unmistakable

victory for the General. It was the first decisive blow that had been struck at the enemy in that part of the country. Little time could be devoted to rest after the battle. Every man burned to be on the road again. They were warming to their work. Long forced marches were made, until a small river, called the Pandoo-Muddee, was reached. This river was some little distance to the south of Cawnpore, and here Bala Rao was stationed with a number of Sepoys to oppose the English crossing the bridge.

Havelock's soldiers were worn out. The men were staggering beneath their load. Some of them slept as they stood, others dropped by the wayside. But if any incentive were wanted, it came now in the shape of the news that Cawnpore had capitulated, and the brave garrison had been foully slaughtered.

The news was brought by the General's spies; and as he made it known, in a few sorrowful words, to his troops, want of rest was no more thought of. The strong sprang to their feet, and breathed silent vows of vengeance, while the sick and the weak wept because they were not able to join their comrades in wreaking retribution on the cruel enemy.

The bridge across the river was a small and narrow one. Bala Rao had arrived too late to destroy it, but he had got his guns into position to sweep it, so that it seemed impossible that a passage could be made across it. He stood, with his cowardly followers, taunting the fagged white men to cross. He dared them to come. He called them dogs.

"Soldiers and comrades," cried Havelock, "we *must* cross that bridge."

Shrill and clear rang out the bugle notes as they sounded the advance. They must have struck terror to the black foe. With lips compressed, with bayonets down at the charge, shoulder to shoulder, went the dauntless few under a merciless storm of iron hail. The passage was short, but many a brave fellow fell never to rise again. The Cawnpore side of the river was gained; and then with a ringing cheer the British "went at it." What could stand against such a charge? The enemy was scattered; he fled in wild disorder, leaving his guns behind him.

The fight over, men fell down on the spot where they stood, and went to sleep, too tired and jaded even to think of the evening meal.

A few hours afterwards, Nana Sahib, anxious and restless, was pacing his hall; he was waiting for news of "the battle of the bridge." Though Havelock had succeeded in reaching that point, he could not conceive it possible that he could

cross. He had ordered Bala to blow up the bridge, and to make a firm stand. He was waiting now to hear that this had been accomplished, when Bala Rao staggered in. He was covered with blood, which had flowed from a terrible wound in the shoulder.

“They have crossed the bridge, and we are defeated,” he gasped, as he fell fainting into a chair.

Nana Sahib literally foamed with rage when he heard these ominous words. The dream was being realised, and the mighty fingers of the White Hand were closing upon him.

“Ten thousand curses upon them!” he muttered. “But I yet hold a card, and will play it.”

He rang a bell violently; a servant appeared.

“Send Tantia Topee and Azimoolah here.”

In a few minutes these two persons stood in his presence.

“I want the Beebee-Ghur cleared of every woman and child. And stay—there is a well close by—it has long been useless—let it be filled up with rubbish. Do not mistake my orders. EVERY WOMAN AND EVERY CHILD must leave.”

“I understand, your Highness,” answered Azimoolah, with a hideous smile. “Your tenants are not profitable, and you have use for the house. The women and children shall *all* be sent home.”

* * * * *

In a few hours’ time the Beebee-Ghur was deserted and silent, and the useless well had indeed been filled up.

Then, placing himself at the head of five thousand troops, Nana Sahib marched forth to oppose the further advance of Havelock.

“We shall conquer yet,” he murmured, as, armed to the teeth, he rode side by side with his counsellors.

They succeeded in reaching a village close to where Havelock was resting; it was naturally a strong position. Here they posted a number of very heavy guns, and the most experienced and ablest gunners were selected to serve them.

They opened fire with deadly effect upon the worn British soldiers.

“Comrades, those guns must be charged,” were Havelock’s words. “Who will take the post of honour?”

In answer to the question, the Highlanders, under the command of Colonel Hamilton, rushed to the front. There was not a single man who was not eager to play his part in the deadly work; but the Highlanders were the first to answer, and they claimed precedent. They were to lead the charge. Setting aside for a moment all discipline, a stalwart fellow stepped from the ranks, and holding up a card on which a thistle was worked in a woman’s hair, while around it was a true lover’s knot, he shouted in a stentorian voice—

“For ‘Auld Reekie,’ boys, and the bonnie lasses we’ve left behind.”

He was answered with a wild cheer, and cries of “Well done, Sandy!”

Every heart of those kilted soldiers thrilled as the shrill sounds of the pibroch arose from the bagpipes in the rear. Each man felt that he had a personal wrong to wipe out, the death of a murdered friend to revenge.

Every man set his teeth, and clutched his rifle, as he held it at the charge, with a grip of nervous desperation.

The guns of the enemy were still roaring fierce defiance, and hurling death right and left.

Forward went the brave Highlanders with a ringing cheer, their bayonets flashing in the sunlight; and, though the enemy were strongly posted behind those awful guns, they were appalled as they beheld the bare-legged soldiers rushing on like an impetuous torrent. The bayonet charge of British troops was what no Sepoy had ever yet been able to stand. The rebels wavered, then gave way, and fled. The guns were in the hands of the Highlanders. “Auld Reekie” had been well remembered, but poor Sandy was lying with his dead eyes staring up to the quivering sky, and the little love-token lying over his stilled heart.

The troops fell back in orderly array. But at the same moment a howitzer, that had hitherto been masked, opened fire with fearful effect. This gun was posted in a hollow—a sort of natural trench—on some rising ground. Had it been served by any other than Sepoys, it might have kept half-a-dozen regiments at bay.

“Soldiers,” cried General Havelock again, “we must silence that noisy gun. Its

impudent tongue disturbs the neighbourhood!”

Forth bounded the Highlanders again. An inspiriting cheer, a resistless rush, the gun was captured; and, as the foe fled, the howitzer was turned upon them.

But the battle was not yet ended. The rebels, in great force still, held the village, and new batteries were brought into action, and poured a murderous fire upon the British lines. A little body of volunteer cavalry, that had been held in reserve, now came forward. It was composed entirely of British officers, and their number was only eighteen. Eighteen against thousands of the enemy, who were sheltered behind walls and trees!

As these heroes were preparing to go into action, there was one of their comrades who, stricken with deadly cholera, was lying in the ambulance. This was Captain Beatson. He cried out that he would not be left behind, but that he would go into the heat of the battle with his brothers. He could not sit his horse, for he was dying fast. But no persuasion could induce him to miss the chance of taking part in the act of retribution. Go he would; so a tumbrel was procured, and he was carried into action, clutching his sword with his enfeebled hands.

The signal was given. Away went the dauntless few. Shot and shell poured around them, but could not stay their impetuous rush. Right into the very midst of the enemy they rode. They did terrible execution; and in a very short time had cleared the village.

As the noble Beatson was brought in, he heard the cries of victory; and, as his life was passing away, he raised his sword, gave a faint cheer, and, with a smile upon his face, fell back dead.

Baffled and beaten, the Sepoys fled. They appeared to be in full retreat upon Cawnpore. To the Peishwah all seemed lost. It was the crisis of his fate, and he was determined to make one desperate effort more to turn the tide.

He was arrayed in the most costly and imposing garments. He wore a robe of cloth of gold, and his waist was encircled with a zone of pure gold, set with brilliants. Pendant from this was a massive tulwar, also jewelled, and round his head was an embroidered turban, that was literally ablaze with diamonds.

He knew the effect of gaud and glitter upon the native mind, and so, putting spurs to his charger, he got ahead of his troops, and then faced them, and bade them halt.

“Why do you fly?” he cried, flashing his tulwar in the sun. “Are you not men, and your pursuers dogs? Do men fly from dogs? Shame on you! Remember our cause, and for what we fight—Liberty! Will you throw this away, and become slaves again? Turn, and face the enemy, who is weak and worn. We can hold this road to the cantonment. Let a battery of guns be planted. The enemy must not, and shall not, enter Cawnpore. An hour ago, I despatched messengers back to the city, and reinforcements are already coming up.”

“We will stand!” was the answer from hundreds of throats.

The battery was planted right on the road that led into the cantonment, and in about half an hour fresh troops came pouring out. They came down with a terrible clatter, and amid the clashing of cymbals and the roll of drums. As they got into position, Nana Sahib rode along the lines.

“Taunt them, boys—taunt them! Dare them from their shelter, and then blow them to atoms!”

And, in response to this, the native band ironically struck up “Cheer, Boys, Cheer.”

It was a taunt of the right sort. It reached the ears of the English; and, tired and worn out as they were, it gave them fresh vigour.

The grey-haired veteran, Havelock, rode forth before his troops.

“Soldiers,” he cried, “the enemy is bearding us; let us teach them a lasting lesson!”

The infantry rushed into line; their impatience could scarcely be restrained. The noble Highlanders, looking fresh and inspirited, as if they had only just come into action, again struggled to take the lead.

It was an awful moment, for they must ride right upon the death-dealing battery, which was planted in the centre of the road, and was belching forth storms of grape and twenty-four pounders with astonishing rapidity. But not a man quailed.

“Cheer, Boys, Cheer,” still sounded in their ears, when the word of command was given to “charge.” Away they went with that mad rush which nothing could withstand. Right on to the muzzles of the guns they sped, the General’s aide-de-camp, his noble son, Harry, leading the way. The battery was carried; the enemy

was shattered, and fled in confusion; and as their own guns were turned upon them, and a terrific fire opened, the English band struck up “Cheer, Boys, Cheer.”

Night fell—the British bivouacked two miles from Cawnpore. They were too weary to need a pillow, and their throats were so parched that they were glad to drink some putrid water from a neighbouring ditch.

On the following morning, as they were getting under arms, some of the General’s spies came in. They brought an awful tale—it ran like a shudder along the lines. Strong men bowed their heads and wept. And they knew now that, in spite of their forced marches, in spite of the terrible battles they had fought, in spite of their grand heroism, they knew *they were too late to save—they could only avenge*. And there was not a man there who did not make a mental vow to have a terrible vengeance.

When the first burst of grief was over, the troops moved forward to occupy the cantonment. As they neared it they saw an immense, balloon-shaped cloud arise, and then the earth was shaken with a fearful explosion. The retreating enemy had blown up the magazine.

Soon the British flag was once more floating over the blood-stained city; the bagpipes and the bands filled the air with pæans of victory; the sword of Damocles had fallen. The Great White Hand had gripped the fiendish heart of the Nana, and his power was no more.

CHAPTER XXIX. RETRIBUTION.

After that great battle of Cawnpore, the baffled Nana fled. He understood that his dream had come true, and his very hair stood erect with fear. But he was a coward—a treacherous, sneaking cur, who feared to die; and he dare not seek the common native mode of avoiding disgrace, and kill himself. He fled towards Bhitoor, attended by half a dozen of his guards.

As he galloped through the streets of Cawnpore, his horse flecked with foam, and he himself stained with perspiration and dust, he was met by a band of criers, who were clashing cymbals, and proclaiming, by order of Azimoolah, that the Feringhees had been exterminated.

As Dundoo heard this, it sounded like a horrid mockery, for he knew how false it was. He knew now that if all the hosts of swarming India had been gathered in one mighty army, they would still have been powerless to exterminate the Feringhees.

He felt that his power was destroyed. Failure, defeat, ruin, had followed with rapid strides on the glittering pageant which had marked his restoration to the Peishwahship. Deserted by his followers, his wealth gone, he was but a flying outcast. His one thought was to get away from the pursuing Englishmen. His terror-stricken mind pictured a vast band of avengers on his track.

He reached his Palace. Its splendour had gone, his very menials reproached him for his failure. As he entered the magnificent “Room of Light,” he was met by Azimoolah.

The Sybaritic knave had been luxuriating amidst all the wealth and splendour of this gorgeous apartment, while the Nana’s army was being hacked to pieces by the avenging Feringhees.

As the fear-stricken fugitive entered, the mechanical birds were warbling their cheerful notes, and a large Swiss musical-box was playing, with the accompaniment of drums and bells, “See the Conquering Hero comes.” It was the very irony of fate. It seemed as if it had been done purposely to mock him.

He strode over to the magnificently carved table upon which the box stood, and, drawing his tulwar, dealt the instrument a terrific blow, that almost severed it in halves; then he sank on to a couch, and burying his face in his hands, rocked himself, and moaned.

“Your Highness is troubled,” Azimoolah remarked softly, his composure not in the least disturbed by the Nana’s display of fury. “Why should you give way like this?” he continued, as he received no reply to his first remark. “Despair is unworthy of a prince. All is not yet lost. Rouse yourself, show a dauntless mien, and we will yet beat these English back.”

The Nana started from the couch, his face livid with passion, so that Azimoolah shrank back in alarm, for cruel natures are always cowardly, and it was coward matched to coward.

“Curse you for mocking me!” the Nana cried, raising both his hands above his head. “Curse you for luring me to destruction! May you rot living! May you wander a nameless outcast—without shelter, without home, fearing every bush, trembling at every rustle of a leaf, and with every man’s hand against your life. If I had not listened to you I should not have fallen. Curse you again! May every hope of Paradise be shut out for you.”

He fell into his seat again, overpowered by the exertion this outburst had caused him.

Azimoolah was a little disconcerted, but he tried not to show it. With one hand on the handle of a jewelled dagger, that was hidden in the folds of his dress, and his other hand playing with a lace handkerchief, he crossed quietly to where the Nana was seated, and said with withering sarcasm—

“Your Highness is a little out of sorts, and my presence is not required; but I may be permitted to remind your Highness that ‘curses, like chickens, return to roost.’”

With a smile of scorn upon his lips he passed out of the room, and the fallen Mahratta was alone.

In a little time, instincts of self-preservation caused the Nana to start up, and resolve upon some plan of escape. He knew what would be expected from him by his people. Having been defeated, he must retrieve his honour by dying; but, as before stated, he was too great a coward for that. He was wily enough,

however, to see that it offered him means of escape. There were two or three of his followers that he could yet depend upon, and these he summoned to his presence, and made known a plan that suggested itself to him.

This plan was, that it was to be given out that he was preparing himself for self-immolation. He was to consign himself to the sacred waters of the Ganges. There was to be a signal displayed in the darkness of the night, at the precise moment when he took his suicidal immersion. This signal was to be a red light hoisted at a given spot.

Soon the news was spread far and wide, taken up by thousands of tongues, and carried through the bazaars and the city, for miles around, that Nana Sahib was going to kill himself; and some of the Brahmin priests, who were still true to his cause, went through religious ceremonies, in which they prayed for the immortal welfare of the erstwhile Prince.

But he had no thought of dying. As darkness closed in he gathered the women of his household together, and hurried to the Ganges. There a small boat was waiting him. In this he embarked, and ascended towards Futtehgurh, and at a favourable spot emerged on the Oude side of the river and fled; perhaps with the voice of the Furies—who are said to avenge foul crimes—ringing in his ears.

At the moment that he disembarked, the red light was hoisted. Thousands of eyes had been watching for it; but no prayer floated upward for the man who was supposed to have drowned himself. Those eyes had been watching for another purpose, and when the red light appeared, a howling crew rushed towards the Bhitoor Palace. In a little time its magnificent halls and rooms were swarming with the rabble, who fought and killed each other for possession of the valuables. Everything was plundered. Not a yard of carpet, not a single curtain was left; even the marble pavement was torn up. And when the morning came, the Bhitoor Palace was a wreck inside.

As the sun rose, a large number of English soldiers were sent down from the cantonment to Bhitoor to search for the Nana. But they were too late—the bird had fled. They found nothing but the bare building. Some guns were brought up, and the muzzles turned towards the walls. The building was battered down. The Palace was entirely destroyed, and ere the sun set again, the last home of the Peishwah was a ruin.[\[6\]](#)

FOOTNOTE:

[6] It is needless perhaps to remind the reader that Nana Sahib, the Tiger of Cawnpore, was never captured, nor is it known how he met his end. It is supposed that he fled into the vast and miasmatic jungle, known as the Terai, where, deserted by his followers, broken-hearted and despised, he died a miserable death.

CHAPTER XXX. NEW HOPES.

To follow the fortune of two of the characters who have played conspicuous parts in this history, it is necessary to go back to the night of the day upon which General Wheeler vacated the Cawnpore entrenchments.

Walter Gordon and Haidee, as previously stated, sought concealment in the ruins of an outbuilding that had been battered to pieces by the enemy's shot. Here they managed to escape the vigilance of the marauders who swarmed in the defences after the English had gone. It was true that there was nothing worth plundering, but all that was movable in the shape of old iron and ammunition was carried off.

Soon after the departure of the defenders, Haidee and Gordon were startled by the booming of a gun, and almost before the echo had died away, another followed, and another, until the firing became general. Walter's heart almost stood still, for the sound told but too plainly that Haidee's fears had been realised.

As she heard the guns, she looked at her companion, and as her eyes filled with tears, she murmured—

“Your poor country people are being slaughtered.”

“Alas! I am afraid it is so,” he answered; “may God pity them.”

After a time the firing grew desultory, but it continued for hours, until Gordon became sick, as in his mind's eye he pictured the awful work that was being carried on. And as he remembered by what a strange chance he had been prevented from accompanying the unfortunate people, he could not help thinking that a kind destiny had preserved him, and that happiness might come. And yet to think of happiness then seemed almost as great a mockery to him as the mirage of a beautiful lake does to the travellers dying of thirst in the arid desert.

How could he hope for happiness? Deadly peril yet surrounded him. If his hiding-place should be discovered he and his companion would immediately fall a sacrifice to the yelling demons who were prowling about thirsting for blood.

And even if he escaped from them, how could the hundred dangers that would encompass him be avoided? No wonder that as he reflected upon these things, he sank almost into the very apathy of despair. Haidee noticed the look of gloom that had settled on him.

“Why are you so downcast?” she asked in a whisper.

“I cannot help being so, Haidee. Our prospects seem so hopeless. And, after all, our preservation may only be a prolongation of our agony.”

“You should not speak like that. We live, and with life there is always hope.”

“True; but the hope cherished in extremity is more often than not a delusion.”

“It may be so, but it is better not to think so, for our prospects are gloomy enough, truly so for me, for I am but a wanderer, without either home or friends.”

“Not without friends, Haidee, while I and Lieutenant Harper live.”

At the name of Harper, she averted her face, that the speaker might not see the emotion his words caused her.

“But the fate of your friend is uncertain,” she said, after some little silence. “He may be dead, and if so, life has no charm for me.”

“He may be dead, as you say, and he may not. There were chances in his favour; but even supposing that he escaped, he would lose no time in making his way to Meerut, and there he would join his wife.”

Gordon hazarded this remark, and as he did so, he watched his companion’s face. He could scarcely help making it, for he longed to know if Haidee was aware that Harper was married. But he did not like to ask the question plainly. She hung her head and sighed, but made no answer.

Gordon was disappointed. He waited for some minutes, then felt that he was justified in putting an end to all doubt upon the subject. For while he would not believe that his friend had wilfully deceived Haidee, he thought it probable that Harper might have deemed it advisable to withhold the information, as his life had entirely depended on this woman. And yet he was reluctant to believe that, for it seemed to suggest that Harper in that case would have been guilty of deceiving her, and he was not sure that even in such extremity the end would

justify the means—where the means meant the breaking of a woman’s heart. And that woman, too, the very perfection of womanhood.

“Did you know that Lieutenant Harper was married?” he asked kindly, watching her closely as he spoke.

But the only indication she gave that she felt the force of his question was an almost imperceptible trembling of the lips. She turned her eyes upon him as she answered—

“I am aware of it. Your friend is too honourable to deceive me;”—Gordon breathed freely again;—“but though I knew this, and know that the laws of your country allow a man to have but one wife, there are no laws in any country which prevent a man having any number of friends. I would have been a friend to him, to his wife, to his friends, so that I might sometimes have looked upon his face, and have listened to his voice. Alas! if he is dead, will not my sun have gone down, and only the gloom of night will remain for me.”

“Let me cheer you now, Haidee, for it is you who are downcast and despairing. Take comfort. Harper may still be living, and the future may have boundless happiness in store for you.”

“Forgive me for this momentary weakness,” she replied. “I do not despair. While you live I have much to live for, for you are his friend, and if I can succeed in restoring to you your lost love, shall I not have much cause for rejoicing?”

“You are a noble, self-sacrificing woman, Haidee, and your reward will come.”

“I hope so; but let us turn our attention to effecting an escape from this place. Why did you not try to secure a weapon, for you may have to defend your life?”

“And yours,” he added quickly, for she never seemed to think of herself.

Her words reminded him for the first time that he was totally unarmed, and carrying their lives in their hands as they did he knew that a weapon was indispensable. He reproached himself for having been so forgetful as not to have secured one before the garrison had marched out; but reproaches were useless; that he knew, and he thought it possible the error might yet be repaired.

“Perhaps it is not yet too late to get one,” he said.

“We will try,” she answered. “I will go and search amongst the defences; we

may find something that will be of service.”

“No, you must not go. Let that job be mine.”

“We can both go,” she replied. “Four eyes are better than two, for one pair can watch for danger, while the other searches.”

“Thoughtful again, Haidee. We will both go; but first let me reconnoitre, to see if the coast is clear.”

Cramped and stiffened by the crouching posture he had been compelled to sustain, he crept from his hiding-place, so as to command a view of the ground. He could see nobody. He listened, but no sounds broke the stillness, excepting now and again the exultant yelling of the natives, as it was borne to his ears by a light breeze.

The firing had ceased, for the deadly work at the Ghaut was completed, and the day was declining.

“I think we may venture forth, Haidee,” he said, after having assured himself as far as possible that there was nobody in sight.

They both went out from the place of concealment, and, while Haidee took up a position behind a large gun from which she could command an extensive view, and give timely warning of the approach of any of the enemy, Gordon commenced to search amongst the heaps of old rubbish that were scattered around.

It was a melancholy task, for at every step there were ghastly evidences of the fearful nature of the struggle that had been carried on so heroically by the defenders. Here was a fragment of an exploded shell, there an officer’s epaulette; a portion of a sword blade red with blood, a baby’s shoe also ensanguined, a bent bayonet, a woman’s dress, colourless and ragged, and what was more ghastly and horrible still, there was the corpse of a little baby. It had died that morning; its mother had been dead some days. In its dead hands it still held a broken doll, and on its pretty dead face a smile still lingered. Gordon picked up the ragged dress, and reverently laid it over the little sleeper.

Continuing his search, he came upon a canvas bag. It contained some salt beef and some biscuits. They had evidently been put up by one of the garrison for the journey, but in the hurry of departure had been forgotten. It was a very welcome find to Gordon, for the pangs of hunger were making themselves painfully

unpleasant both in him and his companion. The bag had a string or lanyard attached to it, so that he was enabled to sling it round his shoulder.

He next entered the portion of the barrack that had been occupied by the men. Here there seemed to be nothing but ruin and rubbish. Worn-out blankets, a few old beds, some broken cups, and various other articles were strewn about. Amongst these he searched, and in one corner of the room, hidden beneath a straw mattress, he found a case containing an American revolver, and with it a leather bag filled with cartridges. He could scarcely repress a cry of joy as he made this discovery; it was the very weapon of all others likely to be most useful. The revolver was in good order, and he proceeded to load it, and, this completed, he hurried to Haidee. She was, of course, delighted with his good fortune. As it was yet too early to leave, they went back to their hiding-place and partook of some of the biscuits and beef.

About two hours afterwards they crept from the ruins. The night was quite dark. Tom-toms were being beaten in all directions, and fireworks were constantly ascending. The natives were making merry and holding high revel in honour of the victory—that is, massacre—for this was the only victory they had ever gained. Haidee and Gordon made their way stealthily along, avoiding the huts and houses, and keeping in the shadow of the trees. They reached the bridge without molestation, but as they crossed the river they were frequently eyed with suspicion by the natives who were lounging about, several of whom addressed Haidee, but she replying in their language, and saying that her companion was dumb, the Delhi road was reached, and so far they were safe.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

Behind them was Cawnpore, a city red with the blood of slaughtered innocence, a city filled with cowardly assassins, who, in their supposed triumph, made night hideous with their drunken shouts. Before them was Delhi and the unknown future. Walter Gordon and Haidee travelled along in silence; both were occupied with their own thoughts. He was racked with many conflicting emotions; hopes and fears struggled in his breast. One moment he was inclined to think that he was going upon a very wild goose chase, the next his steps could not move fast enough to satisfy his craving desire to be at the end of the journey. More than a month since Flora Meredith had been carried over that very road, a captive, to the city of the King. What had befallen her during that month? Was it possible for her sensitive nature to have borne up against the shocks and trials to which she had been exposed? Even if she lived and was still confined in Delhi, which was an immense place, how could he hope to find her? Would it not be very much like looking for the proverbial needle in the bottle of hay? But assuming that he should be fortunate enough to discover her whereabouts, would it be possible for him to rescue her? It was true that Zeemit Mehal had gone in search of her, and Zeemit was faithful, and a native; but she was also old and ill, and might have died long ago.

As he thus reasoned with himself, it seemed to him that his journey, after all, was a little Quixotic, and it might be better, now that he was free, to make his way to Meerut, and there endeavour to raise a little corps to proceed to the Imperial City, and attempt a rescue by force, should Flora still be living.

He suggested this to Haidee, and gave her his reasons for coming to that conclusion, but she only laughed, for to her the plan seemed so absurd.

“If I had no other thought but of myself,” she answered, “I should counsel you to speed at once to Meerut, for is it not to Meerut that Harper has gone? But even if you were to go there, what force that you could raise would be powerful enough to enter the walled city of the Mogul? Delhi is the great stronghold. It is to that place that the tide of revolution flows. And it will need all the power of your mighty nation to wrest it from the grasp of the insurgents. What we have to do, we must accomplish by stratagem and stealth. By these means we shall effect

more than if we hammered at the Imperial doors with half-a-dozen regiments behind us to enforce our demands. I do not doubt but what we shall be able to get entrance into the city, and that being so, we shall have gained a most important step. Though I know that, by going back, I am walking into the very jaws of the lion, I have no fear, so that I can serve you, who are the friend of the man who is my life. Once in Delhi, we shall be comparatively safe; I have some country people there who heartily hate the King, and who will gladly give us shelter and concealment. The fact of an English lady having been brought in will be too notorious not to be widely known, and we shall speedily gain some information. For the rest, we must trust to chance.”

Gordon felt the full force of this woman’s reasoning. He derived hope and strength from her words. She appeared to him in the light of a good spirit, who was all powerful to lead him to success, and to guard him from danger.

There was something in her very presence that inspired him. Endurance, trust, unselfishness, devotion to the cause of others—these were the qualities that made her mind as beautiful as her face. And Gordon no longer wondered why his friend Harper should have felt an all-absorbing interest in her.

Many a man had sacrificed home, friends, interests, and honour for the sake of something far less ennobling than was presented in the mental and physical beauty of this woman. And yet she had all the elements of human weakness, though they were softened by those higher qualities of the mind which were so conspicuous.

“You are a wise counsellor, as you are a true friend, Haidee,” was Gordon’s answer; “and I cheerfully acknowledge the superiority of your reasoning as well as the clearness of your judgment.”

“You rate poor Haidee too high,” she murmured softly; “she only tries to humbly do her duty.”

Gordon made no further remark; he knew that no other words were needed, and so they walked on.

It was weary travelling along that dark and silent road—silent save for the myriad insects which in the Indian climate make night musical. For many hours the travellers kept their way, until, as the morning light stole upon the heavens, they halted, weary and worn, before a traveller’s rest.

It was a small, thatched bungalow, with the usual verandah running round it.

“This place invites us to recruit our strength with sleep,” Gordon said. “Do you think it will be safe to remain here, Haidee?”

“I think so; certainly safer than seeking rest in a jungle. There are signs, too, of intense heat and a coming storm. We shall be secure from it in this place, and we can remain until darkness again favours us.”

They entered the building.

There were two tolerably large rooms, which were bisected by a passage that ran right through to a small compound. This compound was fenced round, poultry having evidently been kept in it. On one side of the compound was the indispensable adjunct to all Indian buildings—namely, a cook-house. In India the food is almost invariably cooked over charcoal. The charcoal is burnt in a hole in the ground; and as there are no chimneys, the place in time becomes black and grimed with the smoke. The outbuilding, in this instance, was a very small erection composed of mud plastered over bamboo sticks. There was a door, and a small square hole for a window. On the other side of the compound, and directly opposite the cooking-place, was a little tank, and on the very edge grew three or four cocoa-nut trees.

The place was distant from Cawnpore only about ten miles, for the travellers had made but slow progress during the night.

When they had partaken of a frugal meal, it was arranged that one should keep watch while the other slept, and Gordon insisted that Haidee should be the first to seek repose. She protested at first, but he pressed her; for it was evident that she was fagged and worn-out, and only kept up by strength of will. She yielded to his entreaties, and very soon was locked in sound sleep.

As she had predicted, the day came in with a sultriness that was almost unbearable. The sun was obscured by heavy banks of cloud, but the dust-laden wind blew like the fiery blast from a furnace.

It was weary work enough watching, and Gordon had the utmost difficulty in preventing himself from being overcome by sleep, for nature was thoroughly exhausted; but he knew that danger menaced, and if he yielded to the desire for rest, he and his companion might both be murdered before they were able to utter a cry.

The day was growing old when Haidee awoke, thoroughly recruited by many hours of most refreshing slumber. The clouds in the sky were increasing, and it was evident a storm was brewing.

“I have slept long,” she said; “you should have aroused me before.”

“No,” he answered; “that would have been cruelty. I have yet several hours to rest before we can start upon our journey; for we must not leave this shelter until the storm has passed.”

He laid himself down, and in a very few minutes was sound asleep.

Haidee kept a faithful watch. Hour after hour passed. Darkness came on—darkness unrelieved by the glimmer of a single star. Presently heavy drops of rain commenced to patter down; then a blinding and jagged streak of blue lightning leapt across the black sky, and a deafening crash of thunder followed. Gordon woke with a start, alarmed for a moment, not realising what the noise was.

“Haidee, Haidee—where are you?” he called.

“Here,” she answered, as she groped her way to where he stood, and laid her hand upon him. “I saw that this storm was coming,” she continued, “but it is rather in our favour, for it will lay the dust and cool the air. Ah! What is that?” she suddenly exclaimed, as she grasped his hand. “Do you not hear something?”

“No, nothing but the rain.”

“There is something more than that—the sound of horse’s hoofs. Do you not hear it?”

He listened for a minute, and then answered—

“Yes.”

“Come to the door,” she said, still holding his hand.

He did as she desired, and they both listened.

“I hear wheels, too,” she whispered. “Somebody is driving along the road. We must conceal ourselves.”

“Where?” he asked.

She considered for a moment, and then answered—

“In the cook-house. You will be able to defend us there, with your revolver, against great odds. But if I mistake not, this is a buggy that is advancing, and so cannot contain more than two or three people. They are evidently making for this place to seek shelter from the storm. Come, let us go.”

They hurried to the cook-house. The door closed with a wooden latch, and Gordon managed to secure this from being opened from the outside by means of a piece of stick.

The sound of the wheels drew nearer and nearer, and in a few minutes the vehicle drew up at the door, and a man sprang to the ground.

“There is only one person,” Gordon whispered.

“There may be more behind,” she answered.

“We must not stir.”

They heard the man unharness the horse and lead it to the shelter of a small shed used as stable, at one end of the house. The storm now broke furiously. The lightning and the thunder were terrific, and the rain came down—as it does come down in India—in a perfect deluge. The man went into the bungalow, and for four hours Gordon and Haidee waited in terrible suspense for the coming day. Several times Gordon wanted to go out and face the stranger, but Haidee restrained him.

“Wait,” she said, “until you can see with whom you have to deal. There may possibly be more than one person, and they are sure to be armed. Besides, they, or he, will depart when day breaks.”

Gradually the storm died away. The lightning flashed less frequently, the thunder growled at long intervals, the rain became a pattering shower, then a drizzle, and at last ceased. Darkness fled before the dawn, and the soft light of a new day spread over the land. The air was delightfully cool, and the birds sang merrily, as if thankful for the health-giving storm.

The stranger, who had been sleeping in the room previously occupied by Gordon and Haidee, awoke with the break of day, and going to his buggy, he procured a small brass lotah and some food; then he crossed the compound to the cook-house and tried the door, but found it fastened. He tried it again; put his shoulder to it; still it did not yield.

“That is strange,” he muttered, in Hindoostanee. “It seems to be fastened on the inside.”

“By heavens—I have heard that voice before?” Gordon whispered excitedly to

Haidee. "There is only one man, and, at all hazards, I will see who it is."

He undid the fastening carefully, and opened the door, having first drawn his revolver. The stranger had crossed over to the tank, and was stooping down, filling his brass vessel with water. The door made a slight noise on being opened. The stranger, whose senses were quickened by being constantly on the alert for danger, sprang up, dropping his dish, which sank in the water, and with a rapid movement of his arm, he drew a revolver.

As Gordon saw who the man was, his surprise overcame his caution, and he exclaimed—

"I thought I was not mistaken, Haidee—it is the villain, Jewan Bukht!"

It was Jewan; he was on his way to Delhi, to seek reinforcements in the name of Nana Sahib. Master and servant had met. Master and servant were face to face, and one of them must die. Jewan recognised his old master's voice in an instant, and, with the instinct of self-preservation, which is ever uppermost in the human mind, he sprang behind the cocoa-nut trees, and covered the door of the cook-house with his revolver.

In his uncontrollable excitement, consequent on this unexpected and strange meeting, Gordon exposed himself to the aim of his foe. Jewan fired, but his aim was high, and his bullet went crashing through the roof of the little building. Bukht was looking out to see if his shot had taken effect, when Gordon seized the opportunity, and fired; but the bullet only struck the tree.

It was certain that one of the men must fall, for neither could leave his shelter without exposing himself to the fire of the other.

"Walter Gordon, you shall not escape me!" Jewan cried tauntingly. "I have friends, who will be coming along the road soon, and they shall burn you out."

"Villain and traitor!" Gordon answered; "you have professed Christianity, and worshipped in the Christian faith; and I tell you that that God, whose name you have often invoked, will guide my bullet, and recognise the justice of my cause."

A part of Jewan's shoulder was exposed, and Gordon fired again—but again missed—the bullet passing a little too high, and grazing the bark of the tree. He was ordinarily a good shot, but his nerves were unsteady now with excitement, and he could not take proper aim.

“Ah, ah, ah!” laughed Jewan as he returned the fire. “Your bullets need guiding, I think.”

Gordon was inclined to go out and openly attack his enemy, but Haidee would not permit it.

“That would be madness,” she said in alarm, “and a needless sacrifice of your life.”

“What, then, is to be done?” he asked. “If the fellow should be reinforced, we shall be doomed. Is it not better to make a bold stroke for our lives?”

“If the bold stroke is to expose yourself, I say no. The moment you go out, the man’s bullet will end your career. We must resort to a ruse to try and draw him from his cover.”

“That is a good idea; but what do you propose?”

Some pieces of bamboo were lying in the corner; she secured one of these, and then said—

“Give me your turban.”

He having done as she desired, she wound the muslin round the stick, so as to, in some measure, resemble Gordon’s head.

“Go to the window,” she said, “and fire a shot. This will attract Jewan’s attention to that spot, and while you get back to the door again I will show the turban.”

Gordon saw the plan was a good one. He crept to the window, and fired at Jewan’s tree, then ran back to the door, as Haidee raised the stick.

Bukht peeped cautiously from behind his shelter. He saw what he supposed was Gordon’s head, and, taking deliberate aim, fired. There were two simultaneous reports—two bullets sped past each other. One crashed harmlessly through the mud wall of the cook-house, the other crashed fearfully through the brain of Jewan Bukht, who, without a cry, without a moan, threw up his arms, and fell forward into the tank a corpse. It was a just retribution, and his career of crime was ended.

Gordon could not help drawing a sigh of pity as he saw his old servant fall, and yet he felt that the man’s fate was merited.

“We had better not remain here,” Haidee said, “for the firing may have reached other ears, and we shall have our foes down upon us in numbers. Let us conceal ourselves in the jungle until darkness again sets in.”

Gordon went out, untethered the horse, and set it free, so that it might forage for itself. He would have utilised it and the buggy, but he knew that that would be running unnecessary risk. He searched the vehicle, and found a large bag filled with rupees. These he appropriated as spoils of war, thinking they might be useful as bribes. There was also a quantity of provisions, which were very welcome. Having secured these things, and made a hearty meal, he and his companion struck into the jungle, there to wait until darkness should again befriend them.



CHAPTER XXXII.

DELHI.

Delhi, where centred all the hopes of the mutineers, was one of the largest and most beautiful cities in Upper India. If its walls had been properly guarded it would have been almost impregnable. One side of the city rested upon the Jumna, and the other side formed a mighty mass of fortifications. Stately mosques and minarets were everywhere to be seen. The Jumna Musjid, a triumph of Oriental architecture, and the magnificent pile of the Royal Palace, imparted to the place an aspect of regal splendour. It was here that for centuries a long line of kings had held arbitrary sway. Here, before the advent of Clive, the great Mogul rulers had dazzled the country with their pomp and splendour, and with irresistible might and power had awed their subjects into slavish subjection.

The city lay in a vast hollow, that was interjected and cut up by ravines and patches of jungle; while here and there, outside of the walls, stately mansions had been erected by Europeans. These houses glimmering whitely in the sun, and fringed with graceful palms, lent a charm to the landscape that could scarcely have been surpassed. Entrance to the city was gained by various gates, that were formidable in their strength, as well as noble and beautiful in their architecture.

It was to Delhi that the stream of rebels flowed almost unceasingly, until behind its frowning walls there was gathered a mighty Sepoy army, as well as a countless multitude of rascals from all parts. On the ridges on two sides, a mere handful of British had sat down waiting for reinforcements and a siege train to begin operations and attack the dastardly enemy in his stronghold. England's security in India depended upon the fall of the Imperial City; and yet the available force arrayed against it was ridiculously small.

It was as if a pigmy had set itself up to conquer a stupendous giant; for truly Delhi was a giant at that time. From its walls countless heavy guns kept up an incessant fire of shot and shell on the besieging army, which could only feebly reply.

The saucy rebels laughed when they saw how feeble their enemy was. Sorties from the city were almost of hourly occurrence, and the English were harassed

and taunted almost beyond endurance. But they waited, assuming the defensive at first, for they knew that their time would come.

Inside of the city it was little better than a pandemonium. The worst passions of humanity were running riot; the most savage and horrible instincts of the natives had been aroused, and they gave unchecked vent to their feelings; the beautiful Palace had become a barrack; the courtyards were turned into stables, and some of the noble apartments were occupied by the Sepoys, who gambled and drank, fought, quarrelled, and killed each other, and made the place hideous with their demoniacal revelry. The imbecile King, the grey-haired puppet, was powerless to stay this. He was like one who had invoked to his aid a terrible agency, that having once been set free, was beyond his control. But he believed himself mighty, and that belief gave him pleasure. He chuckled and grinned whenever accounts were brought to him, that so many English had been killed in the sorties.

“Make our guns speak! make our guns speak!” was his favourite expression to his creatures. “Send showers of shot and shell into the English positions. Give them no rest. Do not stop until you have blown these hated Feringhees from the face of the earth.”

But though the guns did indeed speak, though they sent forth their missions of death in thousands, there were still no signs of the “hated Feringhees” being blown from the face of the earth—on the contrary, they held their ground. They did more, they descended into the hollow, and attacked the enemy at his own gates, and often against fearful odds beat back the forces that came out against them. But these little successes gave the King no alarm.

He believed it was impossible for the foreigners to get inside the city, and so he gave himself up to indolence and luxury. He had one little trouble though—a trifling one perhaps, but it caused him to chafe. This was the obstinacy of two women—Englishwomen. One of these was Flora Meredith.

When Flora arrived in the city after being brought from Cawnpore by Moghul Singh, she was at once conveyed to the Palace, and confined in a small room. At first she gave herself up to almost maddening despair, and if the means had been at hand she might have been strongly tempted to put an end to her existence. A few days after arrival she was conducted to the presence of the King. He was alone in a luxuriously furnished ante-room that led from the “Hall of Audience.” Moghul Singh, who had been her guard, retired, and the King and Flora were

face to face. She was the first to speak.

“Your Majesty has sent for me,” she said. “What are your wishes, and why am I detained here a prisoner?”

“I have sent for you that I may gaze upon your beauty,” he answered.

“Peace, old man!” she exclaimed with warmth. “With your grey hairs there should at least be wisdom. I am but a girl; and though you may hate my race, my youth and sex should protect me from insult, and insure me pity from you.”

“Tut, tut, child; you talk foolishly. It is your very youth that constitutes your charm. But it has ever been the fatal mistake of your countrywomen to despise us; because our skins are of a different colour. Times have changed. We are the conquerors now, and the erst-while slaves become the masters. Your proud race shall bend and bow to us now. We will set our feet upon your necks.”

“And is it to tell me this that you have sent for me?” asked Flora, in an impatient tone.

“No, no,” mumbled the King. “I said it was to gaze upon your beauty.”

“Shame upon you!” she cried. “If that is your only purpose, I command you to let me go.”

“Command, eh? Such a word becomes you not, my child. We do not allow ourselves to be commanded. Your life is in my power. If I but raise my finger, you would die. Have a care—have a care, girl.”

“If but the raising of your finger can do so much, I implore you, in the name of all you worship, to raise it and release me. Nay, doom me to the worst of deaths, so that you will only end my misery.”

“No; your time has not yet come. We will reserve you for another purpose.”

“Ah! what do you mean?” cried Flora, as she pressed her hand to her temples to still their throbbing.

The King smiled, and rubbed his palsied hands together.

“You may be useful,” he answered. “We will keep you as a hostage; and though our age precludes the likelihood of our gaining your favour, we have sons, and one of them shall try his hand at breaking your proud spirit. He has succeeded

before now with your countrywomen, and I tell thee, girl, he will succeed with you.”

Flora shuddered. She inwardly prayed that she might be stricken with a merciful death upon the spot on which she stood, for she knew that she could expect no pity from her foes; and yet she cried—

“Oh, man, let your heart thrill with one touch of sympathy for me. I am a woman, helpless and alone; let that fact appeal to your manhood. Spare me. Let me go free. Do one good act, and rest assured it will bring its own reward.”

“Bah!” exclaimed the King angrily, “you people are too much given to preaching. But I am deaf to your appeals; I am steeled against your entreaties. I tell you my son shall make you his slave.”

“Never!” cried Flora, drawing herself up, while her face was scarlet with indignation. “I defy you. You can but kill me, and it were better to suffer death twenty times than become the plaything for you or yours.”

“We shall see, we shall see,” chuckled the King. “We have already one of your countrywomen here; she was more fiery than you at first, but we tamed her, and now she is as obedient as a well-trained dog. She is our tool—we use her. She shall take you in hand. Ho, Moghul!”

Moghul Singh appeared in obedience to the King’s call.

“Moghul, this woman is defiant.”

“Is she so, your Majesty?”

“Yes; and we must humble her. Where is Zula? Let her be conducted into our presence.”

Moghul bowed and withdrew.

“Zula is a name we have given to an Englishwoman who is in our care,” the King continued. “She was like you at first, but we soon cured her. She is useful now. She whiles away our idle hours with her songs and music; she sits at our feet, and we fondle her as we should our pet dog; but, like the dog, we make her know her place.”

Moghul Singh returned, and led into the room a young English girl. She was scarcely more than two-and-twenty, but her face bore traces of awful sorrow. A

sweet face it was, but its beauty was marred with the expression of care and a look of premature age. She was attired in a long robe of light blue silk, embroidered with gold, and down her back fell a wealth of unfettered hair. She looked at Flora in astonishment as she entered, but turned instantly to the King, and making a low bow, said—

“What is your Majesty’s pleasure?”

“Here is a countrywoman of yours, Zula; she sets us at defiance. You must teach her to respect us, to yield to our will. She may listen to you, though she will not listen to us.”

“She is foolish, your Majesty, and her pride must be broken.”

“Well said, Zula. Her pride *shall* be broken,” remarked the King.

Flora turned with amazement to Zula. To hear one of her own race talk like that seemed almost too horrible to be real. She could scarcely believe the evidence of her own senses; but she managed to find tongue at last.

“Are you mad, woman?” she asked, “or have you forgotten that you represent a great and honourable nation?”

“Neither,” was the scornful answer. “But however great our nation, his Majesty here represents a greater and a mightier still. The weak should yield to the strong. I yield, as you must.”

“Never!” was the passionate exclamation of Flora. “Rather than yield to such an imbecile dotard as that, I would suffer any torture that the ingenuity of man could invent.”

“Pshaw!—your words are idle,” answered Zula. “I once thought as you do, but I think differently now. I sympathise with his Majesty and his cause. He has been graciously pleased to smile upon me, and I thank him. Take my advice. Kiss the King’s hand, as a sign of your submission, and give yourself up to a life of luxury and ease.”

“To a life of infamy, you should say,” replied Flora. “But if you are dead to every sense of honour and right—if you are so abandoned as to have forgotten your womanhood, do not counsel me to follow in your footsteps. I repeat that I will die first.”

“I repeat that you won’t,” said Zula, with sarcasm. “If I have not lost my powers of persuasion, I will undertake to change your views in less than an hour.”

“Well said, Zula—well said,” cried the King. “You shall test your powers. Take this woman to your own apartment, and report in an hour’s time what progress you have made. Moghul, Zula will retire.”

Moghul Singh, who had been waiting outside of the door, entered. He understood the King.

“Come,” he said to Flora. “It is the King’s command.”

Anxious to get away from the hateful presence of the King, Flora allowed herself to be led out by Moghul, who was followed by Zula. He conducted her through a long corridor, until a room was reached. Then he turned to Zula.

“I give her into your charge,” he said. “Remember, you are responsible for her.”

“Never fear but what I will render a good account of her,” Zula answered laughingly. “Come, madam,” turning to Flora, “and let me see if I cannot alter some of your exalted notions. What I am you must be, either by force or persuasion; and, believe me, it will be far better for you to yield to the latter.”

It was a luxurious apartment. Splendid mirrors adorned the walls, and costly silken curtains hung at the windows. Marble statuary peeped from clusters of magnificent flowers and ferns, and some choice water-colour drawings by English artists were suspended on the walls by gold cords. A harp stood at one end of the room. There was also a grand-piano, while a guitar was lying on an ottoman. Tastefully arranged in various corners of the room were gilded stands, and on these stands were cages of gorgeously-plumaged birds, that made the air melodious with their songs.

“This is my prison,” said Zula, as Flora threw herself on to a couch, and burst into tears. “Here his Majesty visits me, and I am happy—oh, so happy. Tral, lal, la, la, la.”

She sat down at the piano, and with light and rapid fingers ran over the keys; and then, in a sweet, well-modulated voice, sang—

“My heart was a garden
Where fresh leaves grew;
Flowers there were many,
And weeds a few;
Cold winds blew,
And the frosts came thither;
For flowers will wither,
And weeds renew!

“Whither, oh! whither
Have fled away
The dreams and hopes
Of my early day?
Ruined and grey
Are the towers I builded;
And the beams that gilded—
Ah! where are they?”

As she finished the last line, she jumped from her seat, and, throwing the music carelessly on one side, laughed loudly.

“Moghul, you need not remain,” she said, addressing Singh, who lingered in the doorway. “I have an hour in which to convert this weeping beauty—and I will convert her, never fear. Convey my respectful salaams to his Majesty, Moghul, and ask him if he will deign to honour me with his presence at the end of that time, to see what progress I have made.”

Moghul withdrew, and as he closed the door, he turned the key in the lock.

Flora was still sitting on the couch, with her face buried in her hands.

Zula sprang to the door, and listened for a minute; then she hurried across the room, and seized Flora’s wrist.

“Why do you weep, woman?” she asked, in a hurried and low tone.

Flora looked up in astonishment, struck with the sudden change in the manner of her companion.

“Who are you?” she asked, “and what are you doing here?”

“I am a wretched, miserable, broken-hearted woman,” answered Zula.

“Ah! is that so?” cried Flora; “then you do but act your part?”

“That is all. I arrived in Delhi but a few short months ago from Calcutta. I came with my husband, who was in business here. He had gone to Calcutta to make me his wife. We were married and happy, and came here. I saw that husband butchered before my eyes, when this awful mutiny broke out in Delhi. But I was spared and brought to the Palace. I made the King believe that he had won my love. It was in the hope that an opportunity would occur for me to avenge my husband’s cruel murder, and rid India of a monster. I have here a small stiletto, and I have made a vow to plunge it into the heart of the King. I have won his confidence; he believes me to be true to him. Hitherto, he has seldom been alone when he has visited me, but he is becoming less cautious, and I pray Heaven that I may have the strength and courage to execute my purpose.”

“Oh, my poor sister in misfortune!” cried Flora, as she threw her arms round Zula’s neck, “this is very, very terrible. No doubt this monster of iniquity is deserving of such a fate, but will it not be better to leave him to the retribution that will speedily overtake him, and let us try and effect our escape to the British lines?”

“Escape is impossible,” Zula answered; “our enemies have become too wary. I have given up every hope, except the one that I, a weak, dishonoured, miserable woman, may be able to strike the imbecile King down. If it had not been for this hope I would have ended my own life long ago. If the King were dead, his army would become demoralised, and Delhi would fall. But while he lives, I fear the city will never be reduced, and thousands of brave English soldiers must be sacrificed in the futile attempt to gain an entrance. Therefore, I feel that it is a duty I owe to my country!”

“Alas! Zula, you speak truly, however fearful it may be to have to cherish such a feeling; but the atrocities committed since the mutiny broke out have been enough to unsex us, and turn even our women’s hearts to steel.”

“You would say so, if you had seen the sights that I have seen. My blood curdles, and I shudder as I think of them!”

She paused, for the key was being turned in the lock.

Flora sank on to the couch again as the door opened. On the threshold appeared

the King, Moghul Singh, and several Sepoys.

“So, you she-dog,” the King hissed, addressing Zula, “you would have my life, would you? Thanks to the fidelity of Moghul, who has overheard your plot, that trouble will be saved you. The Prophet is good, and watches over the faithful. I shall live, and *you* shall die.”

He made a motion with his hand, and four Sepoys entered and seized the unfortunate Zula. Flora screamed and fainted, but, beyond a deadly paleness, the doomed woman betrayed no signs of emotion.

“Treacherous wretch,” continued the King, “I little believed that you were playing a double part. I have been blinded by your deceitful ways.”

“Miserable dotard!” answered Zula scornfully; “if I had but seen you dead at my feet, I could have died happily.”

“Take her away, Moghul—instant death!”

The unhappy Zula was dragged out of the room, and the King, having glanced at Flora, locked the door, and, putting the key in his girdle, walked away.

CHAPTER XXXIII. A TERRIBLE VOW.

When Flora found herself alone, she gave way to bitter despair. It seemed as if fate was mocking her. She was hopeless. No sooner had she found a friend in the unhappy Zula, than that friend was snatched away to suffer a cruel death.

“Why should she die, and I be spared?” the poor girl moaned, as she rocked herself backwards and forwards under the influence of the mental torture she was enduring. “Oh, that I could lie down here and end my wretched life! Why do I live? Why am I spared? It is not that I fear to meet death. Life has a thousand terrors for me, but death has none. Friends, home, happiness, all gone—all gone, and yet I am preserved, for what end, for what end? It is a mystery that I cannot hope to fathom. I will try to be patient—to have faith in the goodness of Heaven. But I am weak, and in my human blindness Heaven seems unjust, and the burden of my cross is more than I can bear.”

She sank down on her knees by the side of the couch, and, burying her face in her hands, wept and prayed. She was suffering the very extreme of mental torture. Not a ray of hope shone out of the gloom into which she was plunged.

“Oh, for a friendly hand and a soothing voice!” she murmured; but neither was there. She was alone, and however awful the sorrow might be, she must endure it.

There are times when it really seems as if Heaven was unmindful of our sufferings, and with only human hearts and brains to endure, we appear to have more than human sorrow thrust upon us. We cry aloud for help, but it comes not; we pray for death, but it is withheld; we totter beneath our burden, and yet it is not lightened.

Flora Meredith experienced something of this—whichever way she turned her eyes she saw no help, only darkness and sorrow, and she almost impiously believed that the Christian’s God had forsaken her. It was scarcely to be wondered at that she should feel like this; for she had been borne like a reed on the current of swift-flowing events, and though she had prayed for help, no help had come.

In a little while she rose from her kneeling position at the couch, and made an inspection of the apartment. She scarcely knew why, though perhaps in her breast was some half-formed hope that a way of escape might present itself. At one end of the room was a carved archway, and before this archway hung a massive velvet curtain. She drew this curtain on one side, and there was revealed a small and exquisitely furnished boudoir. A long window, before which was a half-drawn amber silk curtain, stood open, and a verandah was visible.

Flora could scarcely suppress a cry of joy as she noticed this, and, darting forward, she found that from the verandah a flight of steps led to a portion of the ramparts. It was a small, gravelled terrace, evidently used as a private walk. Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she hurried down the steps. There was a refreshing breeze stirring, and it seemed to her that she was once more breathing the air of liberty.

She gazed over the fortified wall. There was a perpendicular depth of at least sixty feet, so that all chance of escape that way was shut off. She hurried along the terrace to an angle in the building, and then her heart sank, for she was confronted with a Sepoy, who was on guard.

The man, however, took no notice of her. She turned back to the other end of the terrace, and again stood face to face with a Sepoy sentry. She once more turned in despair. Escape that way was impossible. As she reached the centre of the terrace, she was startled to see the old King standing on the verandah, gazing at her. Seeing that she observed him, he descended the steps and approached her.

“We are glad to see you here,” he said, as he twisted his withered hands one about the other. “Too close confinement might cause your health to suffer. We allowed Zula to walk here, and we shall accord you the same privilege. It will be your private ground, and you need not fear intrusion. Our sentries are keen-eyed and vigilant. No one could pass them, and no one could come up that wall without the certainty of being mangled into an unrecognisable mass.” As he said this, his weazened face was puckered with a smile, and he fixed his bleared eyes upon the pale face of the trembling girl. “We know how to reward fidelity, and how to punish treachery,” he went on. “See,” pointing below, “see that group of men. They carry a burden. It is the body of Zula. I have ordered them to cast her carrion out on the plain, as food for the vultures and jackals.”

Flora shuddered as she turned her eyes to the spot indicated, and saw some men carrying a body. In a few minutes they threw it on the ground, and Flora could

discern that one of the rascals caught hold of the long hair of the victim, and dragged the corpse by it for some distance. Then the body was left, and the men returned.

“This is a dastardly deed,” Flora exclaimed, as she turned fiercely upon the King, and feeling that, had she been possessed of a weapon, she could, without any compunction, have slain the grey-headed monster of iniquity, who stood before her smiling in triumph.

“Not a dastardly deed,” he answered, “but a summary act of justice. That woman confessed to you her intention to take my life, if opportunity presented itself; but, the Prophet be praised, we overheard the creature proclaim her purpose, and we were enabled to mete out a fitting punishment. Heaven is merciful. Glory be to the Prophet!”

Flora felt a thorough loathing for this imbecile hypocrite. But she realised that she was in his power, and that to set him at defiance could be productive of no good. Hard as it was to have to dissemble, it gave her the only hope of ultimate escape. And now that her first great outburst of grief had passed, there came back a desire for life.

“Your Majesty is severe,” she answered.

“It is necessary to be so when we are surrounded with enemies. It is hard to distinguish friends from foes now, and we must make our position secure. But say, are we to look upon you as an enemy or friend?”

“I am only a helpless, defenceless woman, and should make but a puny enemy, indeed, against your Majesty’s might and power.”

“That is true. You reason well. But you speak mere words. Your heart thinks otherwise. No matter. We confess our hatred for the whole Feringhee race, and yet we do not wish to war with women. You are a woman and a captive. Kings from time immemorial have turned their captive women to account; we will use you. You shall be numbered amongst our favourite slaves. You shall occasionally enliven our spare moments, and when you cease to charm me— Well, no matter; much depends upon yourself. If you are obedient, your life will be one of ease and luxury.”

“I understand your Majesty well,” Flora answered, her face reddening with indignation, and her heart almost bursting with grief, which she struggled to

conceal. "I will endeavour to be obedient. Slaves have no choice. But am I to enjoy no more liberty than is afforded by these confined limits?"

"No. You have luxurious apartments, and you are free to exercise upon the terrace whenever you wish. That is all the liberty we can allow you."

Flora sighed, but she saw that it was better to accept her fate with resignation, and wait patiently for what the future might bring.

"Your Majesty is in power," she answered, "and I acknowledge your power—more I cannot do."

The King smiled, and laid his emaciated hand on her head, but she instinctively shrank away.

"You are sensible," he said. "We came here to know your mind, and we are glad to find you so submissive. For the present farewell. We shall visit you again by and by."

He ascended the steps of the verandah, and as he did so, he mumbled—

"She-dog of a hated race, we have humbled you, and we will humble you still more, and then give your carrion to the birds of the air."

Flora felt relieved when the King had disappeared. His presence was hateful to her. She knew he was the very embodiment of deceit and treachery; and all the loathing and contempt that an honourable woman could feel for such a being she felt for him.

The hours passed wearily enough. It was true her apartments were well stocked with a miscellaneous collection of books and music, but she could not concentrate her thoughts upon these things. Her eyes wandered longingly to the English positions, where she could just discern the white tents of her country's soldiers; and she wondered whether the city would fall, and if it did, whether she would live to see it fall.

She was very lonely. She paced restlessly up and down the terrace, but when either end was reached, she was confronted with the grim sentry. She peered over the wall, and could see lying on the plain what appeared like a little mound, but which she knew was the dead body of the unfortunate Zula.

As she thought of the ghastly crime her blood almost curdled, and she prayed in

her heart that Heaven would bring speedy retribution on those who had been guilty of the foul murder.

Perhaps the prayer was heard, for, some hours later, in the quiet hours of night, there crept down from the ridge a little body of English troops. They were on a reconnoitring expedition, and their object was to examine some of the gates of the city, with a view of reporting upon the practicability of blowing them open.

As these soldiers made their way cautiously along, one of the number suddenly stumbled over something—the something was Zula's body. The poor face was horribly distorted, and round the neck, deeply imbedded in the flesh, was a portion of a silken cord, showing how her death had been accomplished.

“Comrades,” said the soldier, when he had recovered from his surprise, “here is the body of a murdered Englishwoman. The black demons have placed her outside here as if to mock us.”

As the men crowded round, they gave vent to muttered threats. The officer in charge of the company stepped forward, and said—

“Soldiers, ours is a war against men, not women. But these inhuman brutes slaughter our countrywomen in cold blood, and out of pure wantonness. Such deeds as these must be revenged.”

“Ay, and so they shall,” exclaimed a dozen voices.

“Vows are scarcely needed,” continued the officer, “and yet let us make a vow to avenge this poor woman's murder, stranger though she was to us.”

As he spoke, he drew his sword from its scabbard, and, stooping down, proceeded to sever the beautiful hair from the head of Zula. When he had finished his task, he held a heavy bunch of hair in his hand. This he separated into equal lots, and, giving a lot to each soldier, said—

“Men, take your caps off. Hold your portion of hair over the body, and say after me—‘By all that is sacred on earth, and by all that is holy in Heaven, I swear most solemnly, that if I live I will have as many lives for this woman's murder as I now hold hairs in my hand; and I further swear to count every hair, and to preserve the lot until I have fulfilled my vow.’”

Each man repeated the oath with his teeth set, and with an earnestness that was startling. Then the tresses of hair were stowed carefully away, to be counted at

leisure.

The body of Zula was lifted tenderly up and carried to a little clump of bushes, where a rough grave was hastily dug; and the murdered lady was laid to rest. Scarcely was the mournful duty completed, when the officer cried—

“On your guard, men—we are surprised!”

The movements of the Englishmen had been observed from the city, and a large number of Sepoys were instantly sent out to attack them. They came on at the “double quick.”

The Englishmen fixed their bayonets, and dropping on their knees behind the bushes, which afforded them excellent shelter, waited patiently.

When the enemy was within fifty yards, the British officer stood up, and, waving his sword, cried—

“Remember your oath, men—fire!”

For every bullet that went forth from the muzzles of those rifles a native tottered to the ground. The survivors staggered for a moment, but quickly recovering themselves, came on again. But the deadly Enfields were quickly loaded, as if they were all worked by one piece of intricate mechanism, and another volley strewed the ground with dead and dying Sepoys.

“Load quickly, men. Another volley, and then charge,” cried the officer.

The Sepoys, exasperated by the terrible effects of the fire from their hidden foe, were coming on with a rush, but again they reeled and staggered, as the rifles belched forth fire and lead from the bushes.

“Up and charge, men, and remember your oath,” cried the officer once more.

Each man sprang to his feet, and then, with a ringing cheer, the little body charged the enemy.

It was a short and desperate struggle. The Sepoys were completely surprised. They offered but a feeble resistance. The oath of the English soldiers was indeed remembered, and though the number of lives taken was not equal to the number of hairs, the retribution was terrible. The deadly bayonet did its work, until the few surviving Sepoys, stricken with fear, turned and fled back to the city. The English followed right up to the gate, bayoneting many of the cowards in the

back as they ran.

“We can return now,” said the officer, as he collected his men, not one of whom was missing; “we have had a good night’s work.”

Flora Meredith witnessed the fight from the terrace. She could not make out things very distinctly, but she gathered that the Sepoys had been beaten, and had she known that the very men who had murdered Zula, by order of the King, were amongst the number who were lying out on the plain, pierced by English bayonets, she might have felt that her prayer to Heaven for retribution had, indeed, been heard.

CHAPTER XXXIV. A SURPRISE.

For a few days Flora was kept in comparative solitude. She did not see the old King, and Moghul Singh only visited her once a day. She recognised that all chance of escape was hopeless, unless something little short of a miracle occurred to favour her. She could not lower herself over that perpendicular wall. She could not pass the vigilant sentries on the terrace, and the door of her chamber was kept constantly locked, so that she could not go out that way. But if either, or all of these impediments had not existed it would still have been next to impossible to have escaped from the city. As she thought of this she suffered agony of mind that cannot be described. To concentrate her thoughts upon any of the luxuries which surrounded her was out of the question. There was a rare and costly library of books in her room. There were a grand-piano, a harp, and other musical instruments. There were gorgeous birds, and beautiful flowers, but all these things palled upon her senses. How could she enjoy them? Shut off as she was from everything she held dear in the world, she pined until her cheeks grew pale and her eyes lost their brightness. This did not escape the notice of Singh, and he began to think that this Englishwoman, who had put him to so much trouble, was going to die.

“Why do you sit moping all day?” he said one morning, on taking her a basket of mangoes.

“Why, indeed!” she answered. “Could you expect me to be cheerful and gay when you have brought so much misery upon me? Besides, this captivity is unendurable.”

“I don’t know why it should be. But you belong to a dissatisfied race. Your people always want to be masters, and if they can’t get their wishes they commence to whine. The fact is, if you sit brooding in this way all day you will die.”

“I hope so,” she cried suddenly, and with an animation that slightly startled him. “I hope so,” she repeated. “I have prayed fervently to Heaven that I may die. If it will only quicken the coming of that event, I will bless you if you will curtail even the limits of the limited space I have. Confine me to the floor of my room.

Shut out the light and air. Do what you like, so that you will but end my sufferings. I can assure you I am not afraid to meet death.”

But though Miss Meredith spoke the sentiments of her mind, those sentiments were not to be gratified. The King did not intend that she should be sacrificed yet. He had another object in view. So Moghul Singh answered—

“These views are morbid ones. You are melancholy. I will try and obtain you a little more freedom.”

“You need not; that would be but mockery,” she cried.

But Moghul only laughed as he withdrew. He at once sought the King his master, and represented that he was likely to lose his captive if he kept her in too close confinement.

“Then let her out a bit—let her out a bit,” mumbled the puppet monarch. “Let her have the freedom of our private garden. Her walk there will be circumscribed, and escape will be impossible, as the grounds are well guarded by our sentries. And stay, Moghul”—as the man was about to depart—“let it be distinctly understood, however, that should this Feringhee woman escape by any means from the grounds, every sentry then on duty shall suffer instant death.”

“Your Majesty’s orders shall be obeyed,” Moghul answered, as he bowed and withdrew.

When this concession on the part of the King was made known to Flora, she refused to avail herself of it, saying it would be but the torture of Tantalus. And she preferred to die quickly, to lingering long in hopeless agony. Moghul Singh, however, managed to overrule her objections after some difficulty, and Flora consented to walk in the garden.

Though this garden was comparatively small, being only about two acres in extent, the first hour spent there revived the drooping spirits of the poor girl. The ground had been planned, and laid out under the superintendence of an English landscape gardener. And with the aid of the tropical trees and plants which he found ready to his hand, he had turned the place into a perfect paradise. Palms and cocoas threw a grateful shade over almost every part. Gorgeous flower-beds, arranged in a novel style, and beautiful sweeps of emerald green sward, presented a magnificent picture, while the other senses were lulled by the delicious fragrance of the orange and citron trees, and the gem-like birds that

flitted about in thousands and filled the air with melody. Flora very soon felt grateful for this increased freedom, and a desire for life came back. Day after day as she strolled about she endeavoured to find out if any means of escape presented themselves. But, alas! She was hemmed in on all sides. Steep banks, crowned with hedges, formed the boundary of the grounds, and at various points, on the summit of the banks, Sepoy sentries were stationed. These fellows often eyed the young Englishwoman with jealous and revengeful feelings, and they wondered amongst themselves why the King wished to keep such a “white-faced doll.” Not a few of them would have liked to turn their muskets on her and shoot her down.

But Flora knew nothing of the demoniacal feelings which stirred the breasts of these men. Her walks were always companionless, excepting when occasionally Moghul Singh forced his hateful presence upon her. This man grew more and more familiar in his conversation. And it was evident that it was not solely on the King’s account that he paid her so much attention, and guarded her so jealously. On the contrary, he looked with contemptuous pity on the imbecile representative of the House of Timour. But to him he owed his position, and to oppose his wishes was to court his own downfall. Yet, notwithstanding the risk, he daily allowed himself to be tempted from his allegiance by the pale, but beautiful, face of the Englishwoman. His passion got the better of his judgment, and he ventured at last to make advances to her on his own behalf.

“You look better since I obtained permission from his Majesty for you to use the garden,” he said one day as he conveyed some flowers to her room.

“I am better,” she answered. “Increased freedom has made my existence slightly less painful; but still life seems little better than a mockery.”

“That is because you are morbid. Life has plenty of enjoyment if you like to extract it.”

“How,” she cried, “how am I—a wretched prisoner in the hands of my country’s enemies, and separated from friends and relations—to extract enjoyment from such a miserable existence as mine?”

“Pshaw,” he answered. “You would sacrifice yourself to no purpose. Why not adapt yourself to circumstances? Your people are fond of talking about the ‘philosophy of resignation.’ Why don’t you act up to it now? You are a captive. You cannot alter that condition. You are reserved for the King’s plaything. That may not afford you much pleasure to contemplate. Moreover, I may tell you this

—his Majesty intends in a few days to hand you over to one of his sons, and you will be conveyed away from here.”

Flora started with alarm as she heard this, and her face blanched.

“Never,” she cried; “I will throw myself over that parapet before I will suffer such an indignity.”

Moghul smiled.

“That would be madness indeed,” he said. “If the idea of becoming the property of the King’s son is so distasteful to your feelings, you may avoid it in a more pleasant way than by mangling that beautiful figure of yours by such a nasty fall.”

“How?” she queried eagerly.

“By escaping.”

“Escaping!” she echoed as she stared at the man in astonishment.

“Yes.”

“Are you mocking me? Or has your heart been softened by some pity for my miserable condition?”

“I am not mocking you.”

“Then do you offer me escape?”

“Yes.”

“On what conditions?” she asked, agitated with hopes and fears.

He smiled again, and drew closer to her.

“You are eager,” he replied. “The conditions are simple.”

“Name them then, if they are not dishonourable.”

“Bah! such a term is inadmissible to one in your position.”

“I think I gather something of your meaning,” she exclaimed, in alarm.

“My meaning should not be hard to understand. I offer you freedom if you will

consent to go with me to my house, which is on the other side of the city.”

She recoiled from him with horror—with loathing. The blush of indignation dyed her face to the very roots of her hair.

“You are a villain,” she cried when she could speak, for the base proposal literally deprived her of breath. “A double-dyed, treacherous villain. I am an Englishwoman, and would suffer a thousand deaths sooner than yield to such an unmanly coward. Go away and leave me. Do not torture me with your loathsome presence any more. And I warn you that I will inform the King of your treachery.”

It was the man’s turn to be alarmed now. If she carried out her threat he knew what the consequences would be, for the King was merciless.

“You are a fool!” he said, with an attempt to seem indifferent; “I did but play with you. Were you to inform the King, your position would not improve. For if he believed you, which is doubtful, he would take you away instantly, and your next keeper might not be as lenient as I am.”

Flora saw the force of this argument, and thought it was better to endure what she was enduring than to take a leap in the dark and in all probability increase her woes.

“Although you deserve it, I have no desire to bring harm upon you,” she replied; “but relieve me of your presence. Go away, I beseech you.”

“I do as you request,” was his answer; “but the next time we meet you may be in a better frame of mind. Think over it. You would find me a better master than the King’s son.”

When Flora was alone she wept very bitterly. The trials she was going through almost threatened to affect her reason. Every channel of hope seemed shut against her. Day after day she heard with a sickening sensation at the heart the roar of the guns, as besieged and besiegers were struggling for the mastery. She knew that outside the English troops were making desperate efforts to reduce the city. But with such a full force it almost seemed like a waste of time. Her rooms and the terrace before them were situated in a part of the building not exposed to the besiegers’ fire, but she was often startled by the bursting of a shell in close proximity to her quarters, or the scream of a round shot as it hurtled through the air. She grew despondent when she saw how fruitless were the efforts of the

troops outside, and how those inside laughed them to scorn.

When she had relieved her overburdened soul with a passionate outburst of grief she grew calmer. It was drawing towards the close of day, when, availing herself of her privilege, she sought the garden. She was faint and weak, and was glad of the fragrance and the cool air.

At the further end of the garden, away from the Palace, was a small summer-house, a sort of bower embosomed amongst some mango and orange trees, and covered all over with roses. It was quite sheltered from the heat of the sun, and formed a cool and quiet retreat. And here Flora had spent many hours, grateful for the undisturbed solitude. It was furnished with a couch, a few chairs and a table, some pictures and books.

Feeling unequal to walking about, she entered this place, and taking up a book, reclined on the couch and tried to read. But her mind was too confused to allow her to concentrate her thoughts. A mass of things rushed through her brain, until she became bewildered with the conflicting emotions which agitated her.

In a little while she realised that something was moving under the couch. Her first thought was that it was a snake, and she held her breath in alarm, but in a few moments she uttered a half-suppressed cry, as a voice close to her whispered —

“Hush! Silence, for your life.”

CHAPTER XXXV. NEW HOPES OF LIBERTY.

The cry that Flora Meredith half gave vent to was not a cry of alarm, but joy; for a head had gradually protruded from under the couch, until the face was revealed—and the face was Zeemit Mehal's.

“Hush, for your life!” the old woman repeated, as she revealed her presence to the astonished girl.

But, in spite of the warning, Flora seized the hands of the faithful Zeemit, and, as her heart beat violently, she whispered—

“God bless you, Zeemit. Your presence is new life to me.”

The woman rose very cautiously, and peered through the jalousies. Then she listened intently for a few moments—they almost seemed like hours to Flora, for she was burning with impatience for an explanation.

“My presence here, should it be discovered, would be death to us both,” Zeemit whispered at last.

“But what is your object?” was Flora's anxious query.

“To try and save you.”

“God be thanked.”

“The difficulties are so great, though, that I am afraid to hold out much hope. I have been in the city for some days, and have made various attempts to get into the Palace, but failed. By mingling with the soldiers in the courtyards, however, I learnt that you were in the habit of walking here. I determined at all hazards to try and reach you. I succeeded last night in escaping the vigilance of the sentries and getting into the grounds. Here I have remained since, until my old bones are sore, and I faint for the want of food.”

“You are a faithful, noble, generous creature,” was Flora's answer. “The only reward I can give you now is my grateful thanks. But tell me, Zeemit, what are your plans?”

“Alas, I have none. I am like a fly that has got into a spider’s web. I don’t see how I am to get out. I was determined to come if that were possible, and here I am. But the way I came, you could never go back. I had to mount stone walls, and scramble over high hedges.”

“Oh, I would do all that,” said Flora anxiously. “Only lead the way, and I will follow.”

“That will never do, baba. You would be missed, and before we could get outside of the Palace grounds, re-captured, and then death would be certain.”

“Alas, what shall become of us, then?” moaned poor Flora. “I have suffered so terribly that I feel I cannot endure it much longer.”

She then recounted to Zeemit all that had passed since they parted, and concluded with informing her of Moghul Singh’s proposal.

“Ah! that is good,” answered Zeemit, as she heard this.

“How is it good?” asked the astonished Flora.

“Because it presents a way of escape. Once clear of the Palace, and there is hope. There is none while you remain here. At any moment the King, exasperated by the desperate fighting of the English outside, might take it into his head to order you instant death. You must go with Moghul Singh.”

“Go with Moghul Singh!”

“Yes.”

“You do not make yourself very clear, Zeemit. Where is the advantage to be gained by running from one danger into another?”

“You go from a greater to a lesser danger.”

“But you would not counsel me to sell myself to this man?”

“By the ‘Sacred River,’ no.”

“What is your scheme, then?”

Zeemit pondered for a little while before she answered.

“I know Moghul Singh’s house. He keeps three or four of his mistresses there.

Escape from the place would be comparatively easy.”

“Yes, yes; go on,” said Flora excitedly, as Zeemit paused again.

“If he conveyed you there these women would favour your escape, because they would be very jealous of you. And if they let you go, they would think that, as a Feringhee woman, you would soon be slaughtered in the city. I could take you from there, and conceal you somewhere until a chance presented itself to get outside.”

“Your plan seems a good one, Zeemit; and a new hope springs up. But tell me, before you left Cawnpore, did you see Mr. Gordon?”

“Yes.”

“And what became of him?”

“I advised him to go into the defences, and promised to communicate with him in the event of being able to set you free. But communication is impracticable now. We must wait.”

“And do you think he still lives, Zeemit?”

“At a time like this it is hard to answer such a question. A thousand dangers beset us all.”

“But he was alive and well when you left him?” Flora asked with a sigh.

“Yes, and hopeful.”

“Now tell me, Zeemit, what do you propose that I should do?”

“Tell Moghul Singh that you have reconsidered your decision, and that you will go with him.”

“Yes, yes, and what then?”

“I will be near Singh’s house. I do not anticipate any difficulty in your being able to escape from there, and we can fly together.”

“I will do it,” was Flora’s answer.

“And I give you this caution: you must do everything you possibly can to lead Moghul to believe that you are sincere, or he might suspect something.”

“It shall be as you suggest, Zeemit, however repulsive the task may be.”

“The only thing repulsive about it is that you will have to practise a little deception. That cannot be avoided if you wish to save your life. But it is time that you went away now, for it is growing dark. Farewell, missy baba. If our plans do not miscarry, we shall meet again soon.”

Flora pressed the hand of the faithful old ayah, and with hope once more strong in her breast, she hurried to the Palace, while Zeemit crept under the couch again to wait until darkness would enable her to retrace her steps.

The following day dawned; but Moghul Singh did not appear. Another day and another night passed, and yet Moghul did not come. Flora began to despair again. He had never kept away before. She had fears now that the man, dreading that she would carry out her threat of informing the King, had fled from the Palace. And if so, her very last hope would be gone. The suspense was awful. The only attendant she had had since she had been confined in the Palace was an old woman who was dumb, or professed to be. At any rate, no word ever escaped her lips in Flora’s presence. She performed her duty sullenly, and with manifest disdain for the Feringhee woman, so that no information could be expected from her.

Thus a week passed—a week of most awful, agonising suspense. The guns roared with increased vigour. In fact, they were scarcely ever silent now, for desultory firing was kept up during the night. The siege was being prosecuted with energy, as the English siege-train had arrived. Flora was enabled to see from her promenade on the terrace that the defenders were concentrating their guns at those points which commanded the English positions. She saw also that great damage had been done to various parts of the building, and one of the gates, of which she had a full view, was very much battered, and was being barricaded with massive beams of wood and heaps of gravel.

She feared from these signs that Zeemit’s fears might be realised with reference to the King, and she was in momentary dread of seeing him or some of his myrmidons enter her rooms to drag her out to the slaughter. However, for several days she enjoyed a total immunity from any intrusion, with the exception of her sullen attendant, from whom she could derive no spark of information.

At length one morning her suspense was ended, for Moghul Singh himself reappeared. She almost welcomed him with a cry of joy, for in him her hopes of ultimate escape now centred.

“You have been long absent,” she said, in a tone that surprised him.

“Yes, I have been upon a journey. But if that absence had been prolonged, it would have pleased you better, no doubt.”

“No, it would not,” she answered truthfully.

“Ah! What mean you?”

“I mean that I have missed you,” she replied, with equal truth.

“Missed me! Why so?” he cried, unable to conceal his astonishment.

“Because I have been very lonely without you. You were kind and thoughtful.”

“And yet the last time I was here you repulsed me.”

“I did.”

“And yet you seem to welcome me now.”

“I do.”

“Explain yourself, for this is a mystery.”

“I was hasty the last time you were here. I have regretted that hastiness since. I have been so lonely, so miserable.”

A smile of satisfaction stole over Moghul’s face as he replied,

“I thought you would come to your senses. You Englishwomen are as fickle-minded as the wind is restless. But why have you regretted it?”

“You made me an offer when you were here before.”

“I did.”

“Does that offer still hold good?”

“Oh, oh—there is something in the air. What does this mean?”

“It means that if you are still of the same mind, I will accept your offer and will go with you.”

“So you have thought better of your decision, then. But why this change?”

“That question is scarcely needed. I am very wretched. I prefer to place myself under your care than to remain longer a prisoner here; and if you will take me away I will go with you.”

The man smiled inwardly with satisfaction. It was a triumph he had not calculated upon, and he was surprised and gratified. No suspicion crossed his mind, because he considered it would be impossible for a white person to escape from the city. Whatever control was exercised over the troops and other people about the Palace, the mobs in the city were lawless and revengeful, and to be an European was, in their eyes, a crime punishable with instant and cruel death. He, therefore, felt that when once he had got her outside of the Palace she would be thoroughly in his power, and to return to the Palace would be a feat no less difficult of accomplishment than to get outside of the walls. He fairly chuckled as he thought of this, and his coarse features displayed the satisfaction he felt.

The loathing that Flora had for him was so great that it was only with great difficulty she could prevent herself from showing it. But she knew that in him lay her last hope, and if he failed, then all was lost indeed.

“You have more sense than I thought you had,” he answered. “Come, give me your hand;”—she did as he desired;—“it is a nice soft hand, and looks very white in my black one, doesn’t it? You have fully made up your mind to go with me, then?”

“Yes.”

“That is good. Your flight must be provided for. The King must think you have escaped by yourself.”

“How will you manage that?”

“That is easy. Let me see now, what is the best plan? I have it. I will procure a rope, and make one end fast to the verandah, and let the other fall over the parapet of the terrace.”

“That is a good idea,” she answered.

“Yes, it will avert all suspicion from me.”

“When will you take me?”

“To-night.”

“At what time?”

“Late. I hold the keys of certain doors and gates, and I shall have the passwords, so that we shall not have much difficulty in getting out. Once clear of the Palace, a buggy shall be in waiting, and all will be well.”

“I shall be ready for you,” she answered, as she withdrew her hand.

She felt thankful when she was alone again, for the part she had played had taxed all her faculties to keep up. But the hours passed wearily enough now. She alternated between hope and fear. Every sound startled her. She watched the hands of the clock with feverish eyes. The hours seemed to go by leaden-footed. Ten, eleven, twelve struck, still Moghul had not come. She almost despaired. But the hour of one had barely chimed when the key was turned in the lock of the door. The door opened, and Moghul Singh appeared. In his hand he carried a coil of rope and a large dark-coloured shawl.

“I am true to my promise, you see,” he said, as he handed her the shawl. “You must conceal yourself in this as much as possible.”

She took the shawl and enveloped herself in it, while Moghul went out on to the terrace, and having made one end of the rope fast to the railings of the verandah, he lowered the other over.

“The sentries will have to answer for that,” he remarked, with a grin, as he returned to the room. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Come then.”

With palpitating heart and trembling limbs she followed him. He led the way down silent corridors and dark passages, past sleeping Sepoys and drunken servants, he moving quickly and noiselessly, she following like a shadow, but feeling sick and ill, and with a terrible sense of fear pressing upon her.

The open air was reached at last; the night breeze blew refreshingly cool upon her fevered face.

“We must be cautious here,” he whispered.

It was a large courtyard they had to cross, but nothing seemed to be stirring but themselves. He opened a gate with a key which he took from his pocket, and then they stood in a private road. Down this road he led her for some distance till a small strip of jungle was reached. Here in the shadow of the trees a buggy and horse were standing. A native boy was holding the horse’s head. Moghul helped Flora into the vehicle; when she was seated he drew his tulwar, and approaching the boy, who still held the reins, he almost severed his head from his body; then, springing into the buggy, he cried—“Dead men tell no tales.”

The deed was so sudden, that there was scarcely time for reflection, but Flora almost fainted with horror as she witnessed it.

Moghul whipped the horse. It started off at a gallop, and very soon the Palace was left far in the rear.

CHAPTER XXXVI. MOGHUL SINGH IS OUTWITTED.

The house to which Moghul Singh took Flora Meredith was about four miles from the Palace, and on the opposite side of Delhi. It was simply an ordinary bungalow, built for the most part of bamboo. It was in a dilapidated condition, and situated in the native quarter. At this place Moghul had three or four of his native mistresses. It was quite a common thing in India for men in Singh's position to keep up such establishments. In fact it was looked upon rather as a social distinction.

The place wore a most melancholy aspect when Flora arrived. The indispensable cocoa-nut lamp gave forth a faint glimmer that enabled a person, when the eyes became accustomed to it, to distinguish the squalor and filth; for the native dwellings, as a rule, were but one remove from pig-sties. In this room were ranged wooden benches, and on the benches were stretched the forms of several Hindoo women.

The air was fœtid with the smell of chunam and the opium and common tobacco smoked by the natives of both sexes, in the hubble-bubble, or hookah, of the country.

Flora experienced an indescribable feeling of alarm, while despair seized her again. In the Palace she certainly had comfort. There was none here. Moreover, she saw that she was thoroughly in Singh's power. In her anxiety to escape she had not thought of that; but now that the danger stared her in the face, she shrank with horror. She yearned for Zeemit. Where was she now? If she failed, everything was lost. Not that Flora doubted her. The old woman had proved her devotion in a hundred ways. But then the difficulties and dangers were so numerous. Besides, many days had elapsed since Zeemit had parted from her in the Palace garden, and during that time she might have thought that the scheme had failed, and had given up watching at the bungalow. As Moghul Singh handed his captive down from the buggy, she cast anxious glances about. But there were only darkness and silence around; nothing could be heard, nothing seen, only the dark mass of building, and the melancholy light of the lamp.

As she mounted the two or three steps that led to the verandah, and stood upon

the threshold of the doorway, she tottered with the sense of horror with which she contemplated the consequences of remaining. She felt that she dare not enter, that she would sooner rush to certain death in the open city, than pass one hour beneath the roof of that tomb-like place.

“What is the matter?” the man asked sharply as he saw that she faltered.

“I am faint,” she answered. “The heat has overcome me.”

“Oh, nonsense,” was his surly reply. “Come, follow me.”

He tried to take her hand, but she held it back. She felt such an unutterable loathing for the villain that it was almost impossible to avoid showing it. The cold-blooded deed that he had been guilty of in decapitating the boy made her shudder.

It was true she had seen horrors enough during the mutiny to have hardened her senses to some extent. But this tragedy had been committed in such a diabolical manner, and before her eyes, that it sickened her; and yet she had ridden side by side with the guilty miscreant for some miles. She had had an impression, although it had not been so understood, that on the moment of her arrival she would find Zeemit Mehal waiting, and that the woman would have matured some plan that would have enabled them to effect an immediate escape. But Zeemit was not to be seen. It was an awful moment for Flora. Words would fail to depict the agony of mind and body she endured. She reproached herself for leaving the Palace. She felt that if she had been in possession of a weapon, she could without the slightest compunction have slain the villain who stood beside her. She was suffering the extreme of despair—passing through that stage when all faith even in Heaven is for the time lost. Misfortune had come upon her so suddenly, and pursued her so relentlessly since, that she mentally asked herself why she and her people should have been made the subjects of so much persecution.

Moghul Singh grew impatient when he saw that Flora did not comply with his demand and follow him.

“Why don’t you come?” he exclaimed angrily. “The time is passing quickly, and I must return to the Palace before daylight.”

“I cannot,” she answered. “The atmosphere is stifling, and I am ill.”

The man scowled. He felt that he was thwarted, and it irritated him. He seized

her hand roughly and would have dragged her in, but she remonstrated.

“Why are you so cruel?” she asked. “Did I not come with you of my own free will? Surely you are not so dead to every feeling of pity, but what you can have some consideration for me now that I am ill?”

Her argument was effective. He released her hand, and drew back apace.

“What do you wish me to do?” he demanded.

“Procure me a chair, and let me remain outside on the verandah a little while. The cool air will no doubt revive me.”

With a gruff assent to her request, he turned into the bungalow, to procure the seat, and Flora stood alone. In those few moments a dozen things suggested themselves to her. She would rush wildly away. By that course she would probably be shot down, or, escaping that risk, she might be able to reach the river, or canal, and there she would end her misery, for she seemed to be abandoned by all. But great as had been her experience of Zeemit’s fidelity, she did not know what a depth of devotion there was in the old woman’s nature. For days she had loitered about the bungalow, waiting patiently and anxiously for the Feringhee lady, to whose cause she had devoted herself, in spite of the many temptations that were offered to a native to fling off all restraint for a time, and live a brief, riotous, and idle life. She had watched the bungalow with ceaseless watching, creeping at night into the shadow of the verandah, where she would lie coiled up, snatching a few hours of rest, but always ready to start up on the alert at the sound of wheels. She herself had almost given up all hope of Flora’s escape. She had begun to think that the plan had miscarried, and was resolving upon a scheme to pay another visit to the imprisoned lady in the Palace. But her vigilance and patience were rewarded at last. She heard the approach of the buggy, she saw Flora arrive, she heard the conversation that passed, so that, when Miss Meredith had sunk to the lowest depth of despair, when all seemed dark and hopeless, and she felt inclined to doubt the goodness of Heaven, succour was at hand.

As she stood alone in the brief space that elapsed during Moghul’s absence, Zeemit was by her side. Flora was used to surprises now; but as she heard the familiar voice, although it was but the faintest whisper, of her faithful ayah, she could scarcely refrain from uttering a cry. But the feeling of thankfulness that filled her heart found expression in a silent “Thank God!” uttered under her breath.

There was no time for words. Action was needed. Zeemit was equal to the occasion. The buggy and horse still stood before the door. She seized Flora's hand, and rushed to the vehicle. Terror lent them both strength and quickness. In an instant they had sprung to the seat. Zeemit caught up the reins, and bringing the whip down upon the horse's neck, started the animal into a furious gallop, just as Moghul came from the house with a chair in his hand. The whole affair took place in absolutely less time than it has taken to pen these lines.

Moghul realised at once that his bird had flown, and as he dropped the chair with an imprecation, he hastily drew a revolver, and fired it after the retreating vehicle. But the bullet sped harmlessly away, though the report broke upon the stillness with startling distinctness, and in a few minutes, dozens of natives had rushed from their huts to discover the cause of alarm.

"A horse—a horse," cried Moghul. "A hundred rupees for a horse. There is a Feringhee woman escaping from the city in yonder buggy."

A horse was speedily produced. Moghul sprang on to its back, and, followed by a yelling pack of demons, set off in pursuit of the escaped prisoner. But a good start had been given to the fugitives. The sounds of the rattling wheels and the horse's hoofs did not reach the ears of the pursuers, who tore madly along, while Zeemit, who was well acquainted with the city and its suburbs, guided the animal down a by-road that led through a jungle. After travelling for some miles, she pulled up.

"We must alight here," she said, "and abandon the horse and buggy, or we shall be traced."

Flora sprang from the ground, and the two women hurried along on foot. Zeemit led the way. She knew every inch of the ground. She kept her companion up by holding out hopes of ultimate safety.

As daylight was struggling in, a muddy creek was reached. It was a lonely spot—overgrown with tall reeds and rank grass, and the haunt of numberless reptiles. Half-hidden amongst the rushes was a large, broken, and decaying budgerow, lying high and dry on a mud-bank.

"This place offers us safety and shelter for a time," Zeemit observed. "I discovered it after leaving the Palace grounds."

She assisted Flora to get into the old boat. She collected a quantity of rushes and

dried grass to form a bed. These she spread upon the floor of the budgerow, and then the two women, thoroughly exhausted, threw themselves down, and fell into a sound sleep. At the same moment Moghul Singh was returning to the Palace after his fruitless search, vowing vengeance against Flora, and determining to send out men to recapture her, on the pain of death if they failed.

CHAPTER XXXVII. HAIDEE Ò STAR.

We must for the time being leave the fortunes of Flora Meredith and Zeemit to follow those of some of the other characters who have figured prominently in this story.

When Haidee and Walter Gordon left the traveller's rest, where the duel had taken place, they pursued their journey without further adventure, until they reached the neighbourhood of Delhi. Here the greatest caution had to be exercised, for thousands of natives, flushed with success and maddened with drink, were prowling about, committing the most diabolical outrages on every one they met.

Three or four attempts were made by Haidee and her companion to gain entrance to the city, but each attempt failed. On the last occasion success was nearly achieved, when a Sepoy, who had been in the King's service for some years, recognised Haidee. An alarm was instantly raised, and Gordon had to defend himself and companion against fearful odds. He was fortunate enough to secure a sword from the body of a man whom he had shot, and with this weapon—in the use of which he was well skilled—he was enabled to cut his way out.

After this encounter it was evident that any further attempt to enter the city would only result in disaster; and so the travellers determined to make their way over to the British lines. Here they were well received, and the history of their adventures listened to with intense interest.

Gordon's failure to get into the city caused him much sorrow. He remembered the promise he had made to Mrs. Harper that he would either rescue her sister or perish in the attempt.

Although he had repeatedly been near doing the latter, the former seemed very far from being accomplished.

He made the most desperate efforts to obtain some information of her—he sought, but always without success; and at length he began to despair of ever meeting her again.

He grew desperate. He joined his countrymen in night attacks; he went down with little bands of men to examine the gates and walls of the city; and, although he saw hundreds of his comrades fall around him, he lived. He appeared almost to bear a charmed life—neither sword nor bullet reached him; and his splendid constitution enabled him to withstand the deadly heat—and the still more deadly malaria, which committed fearful havoc amongst the British.

The siege promised to be a protracted one. The English were few in number; their guns were small, their ammunition limited; and yet, with these drawbacks to contend against, there were some most brilliant passages of arms and deeds of daring performed before Delhi, deeds that, although they have never been chronicled, entitle the actors in them to be placed on England's grand list of heroes.

Weeks wore on. The force of the besiegers was getting weaker, and their ammunition was all but expended. Reinforcements and a powerful siege-train were daily expected, but still they came not. There was much sickness in the camp, and the whole energies of the healthy were taxed to the utmost to minister to the wants of and amuse the sick.

In this duty there was one who stood out with individual distinctness. This was Haidee, whose exertions on behalf of those who were not able to help themselves were extraordinary. She flitted through the hospital at all hours. She comforted the sick; she soothed the dying; she helped the strong. No wonder that she won the love and good wishes of everyone. The heart of many a man in the camp fluttered when in her presence; and officers and men vied with each other in paying her the greatest attention. Her beauty—her romantic history—her devotion, won upon all. More than one officer, whose heart and hand were free, ventured to woo her; but she turned a deaf ear to everybody.

There was one for whom she pined—where was he? Night and day she thought of him. He was, indeed, her star—her only light. She was silent and patient; she uttered no complaint. She was content to wait for what the future might bring. That future seemed at present dark and uncertain, but she did not mourn. She wasted no time in useless repining; she was hopeful. Her reward came at last.

One morning the camp heard with unspeakable joy notes of music. They were the welcome strains of a soul-inspiring march played by an English band. The reinforcements had arrived. Coming up from the Grand Trunk Road the long lines could be seen. The white helmets and flashing bayonets of British troops

marching to the assistance of their comrades, and pledged to reduce the stronghold of the saucy enemy.

As the fresh troops marched in, the reception accorded them was enthusiastic in the extreme. The excitement was immense. Such cheering, such shaking of hands, such greetings.

As the newly-arrived officers were moving towards the quarters assigned to them, a man suddenly rushed out of a tent, and seizing the hands of one of the officers, exclaimed, in an excited tone—

“God bless you, old fellow! This is an unexpected pleasure.”

The man was Walter Gordon, the officer was Lieutenant Harper. The friends had met once again—met upon the battlefield.

Their last meeting had been sad, their last parting still more sad. But, as they greeted each other now, each had an instinctive feeling that, after having escaped so many dangers, they met now only to part again when happier times had dawned.

When Gordon could drag his friend away, he commenced to ply him with questions; but Harper interrupted him with an impatient gesture, and unable longer to restrain his feeling, exclaimed—

“Before I answer a single question, tell me if Haidee lives?”

Walter smiled at his friend’s eagerness as he answered—

“Haidee lives.”

“And is she well?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“This is joyful news.”

“I am glad to hear you say so, Harper.”

“Why?”

“Because she is one of the most faithful and best of women. She has a small tent to herself, for she is the idol of the camp. Come, follow me.”

Gordon pointed out Haidee’s dwelling to his friend, and then he left him; for he did not consider that he had any right to intrude himself upon their meeting.

Harper advanced cautiously to the door of the tent. Haidee was reclining on an Indian mat; her eyes were closed, but she was not sleeping. She was dreaming a day-dream, in which Harper figured.

“Haidee,” he called softly. “Haidee,” he repeated.

She started to her feet like a startled fawn. She recognised the voice. With a cry of joy she sprang forward—her arms closed around his neck; and, as her head was pillowed on his breast, she murmured—

“Your slave is thankful and happy.”

“Not slave, Haidee,” he answered, as he pushed back the beautiful hair and kissed her forehead, “but wife.”

“Ah! what do you mean? Is this a dream—or am I awake?”

“You are awake, Haidee; and I repeat the words—you shall be my wife.”

“But where is she of whom you spoke before—your—your other wife?”

“She is dead, Haidee,” Harper answered sorrowfully.

“Poor thing,” Haidee murmured, in a tone of such genuine sympathy that Harper felt that she was one of the best and most perfect of women.

“Yes, she is dead,” Harper continued. “When I left Cawnpore, I managed to get clear of the place without any adventure. I made my way direct to Meerut. I found my poor wife at the very point of death. She was only just able to recognise me before she died. I was bowed down with sorrow then. I heard of the massacre of Cawnpore, and concluded that you would share the fate of the other unhappy ladies. When my regiment was ordered to join the reinforcements for Delhi I was delighted; for active service, with the risk of ending a life that had been darkened with sorrow, was what I craved for. Little did I dream of

meeting you. Fate has been kind to us. To you I owe my life; and, if I am still preserved till the end of this war, I may honourably ask you to be my wife—for I am yours.”

“Ah, what happiness,” she sighed, as she clung closer to him.

* * * * *

The siege was now prosecuted with increased vigour. The British became exasperated at the stubborn defence of the enemy, and the most desperate efforts were made to reduce the city. Day and night a ceaseless stream of shot and shell was poured in, until breaches in the walls gaped, and many of the gates were battered. But as fast as these breaches were made, they were repaired again by the defenders, and it became evident that the place could only be reduced by storming. Every one was anxious for this; the patience of the troops had been sorely tried, and men burned to wreak vengeance on the recreant cowards who had sought shelter behind the walls, and now held out with desperate energy, knowing it was the last frail chance they had to preserve their miserable lives. But though the order to storm was so ardently desired, it seemed to be unnecessarily delayed, and the patience of both men and officers was taxed to the utmost.

But the order came at last. It was issued at night. It was a bright starlight night, but moonless. The firing was kept up incessantly. The roar of the batteries, the clear abrupt reports of the shells, the flashes of the rockets and fireballs, made up a striking and impressive scene. But as ten o'clock was announced, every battery ceased by preconcerted signal, and the order flew through the camp that the assault was to take place at three in the morning. Then a solemn and ominous silence fell upon the camp. Worn and weary men threw themselves down to snatch a brief rest; but many were the anxious eyes that were turned to the doomed city with its white mosques and prominent buildings sharply defined against the purple night-sky. For months it had defied the power of the Great White Hand; but the hour had come, unless the Hand had lost its power and cunning, when the rebellious city was at last to be humbled and crushed into the dust.



CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE FALL OF DELHI.

As the batteries ceased, the stillness that fell upon the camp was startling by comparison. It made men's hearts beat faster, for they knew what it presaged; and though many would be cold in death before the sun rose again, everyone was cheerful and eager.

The whole force of the camp was divided into four assaulting columns and a reserve. The first was to storm a breach that had been made at the Cashmere bastion; the second, a breach in the water bastion; the third was to blow open the Cashmere Gate; and the fourth was to enter by the Lahore Gate, while the reserve was to follow up in the wake of the first three columns, and throw in supports when necessary.

As the hour of three approached, there was great activity in the camp. The men were overjoyed at the long-hoped-for chance of being able to smite the enemy behind his own walls.

There was one in the camp, however, whose heart was sad. This was Haidee. Harper had crept over to her tent, to say a few parting words, and the two stood together at the doorway, with the light of a watch-fire gleaming redly upon them. Each felt that the probabilities were they were parting for ever. Harper was bound upon "desperate service," and the dangers were so many and great that the chances of escape from them were remote. But in spite of this, he tried to be cheerful. Duty called him, and he obeyed the call as a soldier should. His regrets were for this woman, to whom he owed his life, who had "made him her star, which was her only light," and if the star should be extinguished in the "sea of blood" that was shortly to flow, her lifetime henceforth would be one long night. For she stood alone, as it were, in the world. Friends, kindred, home, all gone; and if he fell, who would protect her? As Harper thought of these things, he could not help a feeling of grief that for a time unmanned him. Haidee noticed this, and said—

"Why are you downcast this morning? It is sad to part, when that parting may be for ever; but go to your duty cheerfully, and have good hopes for the future."

“It is not of myself I think, Haidee, but of you. If I fall, what will become of you?”

“Ah! if you fall, poor Haidee will be bowed into the dust. I have been so happy since you have been here. To be near you, to see your face, compensates me for the many years of bitterness I have known.” Then, after a pause, “But come; these repinings are foolish. We are not going out to meet our troubles; let them come to us. It is a soldier’s duty to fight for his country when called upon, and he should not be unmanned by a woman’s useless wailing. Your heart is bold, and your arm is strong. Glory and victory will be yours.”

“God bless you, Haidee! You give me the inspiration of courage and hope. You are a noble woman, and your devotion is worthy of the highest honours that could be bestowed upon you. You liberated me from the city we are now going to attack; and when I was wounded and senseless outside Cawnpore, your arms, strengthened by love, bore me to a place of safety. Twice, then, have you saved my life; and, if it is preserved through the conflict that is now about to commence, I will henceforth devote it to you. But in the event of my falling, I have taken steps that will ensure your heroic deeds being known to my country, and you will meet with a well-merited reward.”

“Talk not of reward from your country. The only reward I ask for is yourself—if one so humble as I dare ask for so much; and if I get not that, I am content to sink into oblivion, and wait for the end.”

“You are not humble, Haidee. You are noble, generous, true, and devoted; and if I am spared, I shall feel proud of the honour of being able to call you wife.”

“Wife,” she murmured, “wife to you; ah! what happiness!”

Shrilly on the morning air rose the bugle call. Its warning notes told the lovers that they must speak their last words of farewell.

“That is the signal for me to go,” Harper said, as he drew the beautiful form of Haidee to his breast. “On your lips I seal my respect, my thanks, my love. In the struggle my arm will be strengthened as I think of you; my eye will be quickened as it remembers your beautiful face, and let us hope that our love will be a charm to shield me from the enemy’s bullets.”

“Take this,” she answered, as she handed him a little packet, which, on opening, he found contained a card, upon which was worked, in her own hair, a beautiful

device; it was a true lover's knot, surrounded with a laurel wreath, and underneath were the words, "Duty, Honour, Love." "Let that be your charm, my well beloved, for in those three words there is magic to a good soldier."

A warm embrace, a passionate kiss, a faltering adieu, and the lovers parted. In a few minutes Harper had placed himself at the head of his company, amongst whom was his friend Walter Gordon, who had volunteered for the day.

The watch-fires were burning low. It was the dark hour before the dawn, and the sky was inky black. Softly the bugles sounded. How many a soul did they call to death! But no one thought of that. There was the hurrying tread of thousands of feet. There was the rumbling of guns as they were moved down into position to cover the advance of the troops. There were the clanking of arms and the fervently uttered "God speeds!" by those who, through sickness or other cause, were unable to leave.

Again the bugles sounded the advance. Soon the camp was silent, and the little army was winding down the valley. And as daylight spread over the face of heaven, the storming commenced. Undeterred by the deadly streams of bullets and shot that were poured out, heroic bands of men advanced to the gates, each man carrying in his arms a bag of powder, which was laid down at the gates, with the coolness and intrepidity which so astonished the natives during the mutiny. From this duty few of the dauntless soldiers escaped alive. But nothing could deter the hearts of steel that, in the face of death and slaughter, piled the bags against the massive gates.

Presently, even above the roar of the artillery, was heard the sound of the awful explosions that announced the successful accomplishment of the hazardous task. Before the clouds had cleared away, the bugles sounded the advance, and through the shattered gateways the victorious army poured, and soon the tread of the English troops resounded in the deserted halls and corridors of the palace of the Mogul.

We must draw a veil over the awful carnage, fierce reprisals, and almost unparalleled slaughter that ensued. The British had to fight their way into the city inch by inch, and several days elapsed before they had entirely defeated the enemy. The grey-haired miscreant, who had thought himself a king, was made a prisoner. His infamous sons were shot like dogs, and their bodies cast into the river.[\[7\]](#)

The "Great White Hand" was triumphant; it had crushed the "House of Timour"

into the dust; it had broken and destroyed the power of England's enemies, and had vindicated the outraged honour of the British nation. *Animo non astutiâ.*

* * * * *

Amongst the English officers who were wounded during the assault was Lieutenant Harper. He received a terrible sword cut on his left arm from a Sepoy who was feigning death. He slew his enemy, and then binding up his gashed arm in his scarf, he continued to courageously lead his men, until, through loss of blood, he fainted. He was then placed in the ambulance and carried back to the English camp on the Ridge. When the wound had been dressed, and he recovered consciousness, almost the first face his eyes met was Haidee's. His life had been spared, and her thankfulness found vent in an eloquent silence, passing the eloquence of words.

* * * * *

When the heat of the struggle was over, and the British were complete masters of the city, Walter Gordon, who had fought with the courage of a lion, and escaped without a scratch, commenced his search for her for whom he had endured so much. His inquiries failed to elicit any further information than that an English lady had been held captive in the Palace, and that she had escaped. When he heard the news he despaired of ever seeing her again. But one night, while sitting sorrowfully in his quarters at the Palace, he was informed that a native woman wished to see him.

The woman was Zeemit Mehal.

"What of Miss Meredith?" he cried, as soon as he recognised his visitor.

"She is well, and waits for you," was the answer. "Follow me and you shall see her."

"Thank God!" Walter murmured, as he rose and followed his guide.

"You had better procure a conveyance," she said, when they reached the courtyard.

There was no difficulty in this. Buggies and horses were numerous, and in a few minutes Gordon was driving along rapidly under the guidance of the faithful Mehal, who directed him to the lonely creek where she and Miss Meredith had lived for weeks on board of the wrecked budgerow.

Why describe the meeting of Walter and Flora? It was of that kind that words would fail to do justice to it. Each felt that, in a large measure, the joy of those blissful moments compensated for all the months of toil, the agony of mind, bodily suffering, and the cruel separation that had been endured. The awful trials they had gone through had left their mark upon the faces of each. But they were fervently thankful for the mercy of Heaven which had spared their lives, and as Walter pressed Flora to his breast he felt that he had kept his vow to her sister, who had been spared all those months of agony and suffering during which so many bright hopes had been shattered for ever, and so many hearts broken.

* * * * *

About a week after the fall of Delhi, Lieutenant Harper was informed that he had been mentioned in despatches, and recommended for promotion. He had sufficiently recovered to be able to walk about. Haidee had been his untiring nurse. Her loving hands ministered to his every want. She had watched over him, and nursed him back to life. One morning, as day was breaking, he said—

“Haidee, I want you to come with me for a short drive; there is a tragedy to be enacted.”

She obeyed him without question, and he drove her to a plain about three miles off. There was a great gathering of English troops, who were drawn up in a square of three sides. In the centre of the square were ten guns, their muzzles pointing to the blank side. Lashed with their backs to the guns were ten men—rebels, traitors, murderers. Harper led Haidee along the square until they were almost before the guns.

“See,” he said, “do you know that man?”

The one he pointed to was the first in the row. He was a tall, powerful fellow. His teeth were set, and his face wore a defiant look.

“Yes,” she answered firmly.

As she spoke, the man’s eyes met hers. He recognised her, and an expression of ferocious hatred crossed his face. The man was Moghul Singh.

“Will you remain here and see justice done, and your vengeance satisfied?” Harper asked of her.

“No,” she replied.

He led her away, but they had not got very far before the earth trembled with a violent shock. They both turned. The drums were beating, the British flags were waving, the air was filled with smoke and riven limbs.

“You are revenged, Haidee,” Harper whispered.

“Yes,” she answered. “Let us go.”

* * * * *

In one of the most beautiful of Devonshire villages, Lieutenant-Colonel Harper, now retired from the service, dwells with his wife and family. The beautiful Haidee, thoroughly Anglicised, in the character of Mrs. Harper, is the pride of the county for miles around. She is loved, respected, and honoured.

Gordon and his wife still reside in India; he is one of the wealthiest merchants in Calcutta. Their faithful and honoured servant, Zeemit Mehal, after some years of ease and comfort in the service of the master and mistress she had served so well, passed away. She died in the Christian faith, and was buried at Chowringhee, where a handsome marble monument records her virtues and services.

FOOTNOTE:

[7] The story of how Hodson shot the King’s sons is too well known to need repetition here. The act has been condemned, but those who are acquainted with the facts know that if the sons had not been shot the mob would have rescued them.

THE END.



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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GREAT WHITE
HAND ***

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