HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

ON THE IRRAWADDY: A STORY OF THE FIRST BURMESE WAR

George Henty

On the Irrawaddy: A Story of the First Burmese War

Henty G.

On the Irrawaddy: A Story of the First Burmese War / G. Henty — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

G. A. Henty
On the Irrawaddy: A Story of the First Burmese War

Preface

With the exception of the terrible retreat from Afghanistan, none of England's many little wars have been so fatal–in proportion to the number of those engaged–as our first expedition to Burma. It was undertaken without any due comprehension of the difficulties to be encountered, from the effects of climate and the deficiency of transport; the power, and still more the obstinacy and arrogance of the court of Ava were altogether underrated; and it was considered that our possession of her ports would assuredly bring the enemy, who had wantonly forced the struggle upon us, to submission. Events, however, proved the completeness of the error. The Burman policy of carrying off every boat on the river, laying waste the whole country, and driving away the inhabitants and the herds, maintained our army as prisoners in Rangoon through the first wet season; and caused the loss of half the white officers and men first sent there. The subsequent campaign was no less fatal and, although large reinforcements had been sent, fifty percent of the whole died; so that less than two thousand fighting men remained in the ranks, when the expedition arrived within a short distance of Ava. Not until the last Burmese army had been scattered did the court of Ava submit to the by no means onerous terms we imposed.

Great, indeed, was the contrast presented by this first invasion of the country with the last war in 1885, which brought about the final annexation of Burma. Then a fleet of steamers conveyed the troops up the noble river; while in 1824 a solitary steamer was all that India could furnish, to aid the flotilla of rowboats. No worse government has ever existed than that of Burma when, with the boast that she intended to drive the British out of India, she began the war. No people were ever kept down by a more grinding tyranny, and the occupation of the country by the British has been an even greater blessing to the population than has that of India.

Several works, some by eyewitnesses, others compiled from official documents, appeared after the war. They differ remarkably in the relation of details, and still more in the spelling of the names both of persons and places. I have chiefly followed those given in the narratives of Mr. H. H. Wilson, and of Major Snodgrass, the military secretary to the commander of the expedition.

Chapter 1: A New Career

A party was assembled in a room of an hotel in Calcutta, at the end of the year 1822. It consisted of a gentleman, a lady in deep mourning, a boy of between fourteen and fifteen, and two girls of thirteen and twelve.

"I think you had better accept my offer, Nellie," the gentleman was saying. "You will find it hard work enough to make both ends meet, with these two girls; and Stanley would be a heavy drain on you. The girls cost nothing but their clothes; but he must go to a decent school, and then there would be the trouble of thinking what to do with him, afterwards. If I could have allowed you a couple of hundred a year, it would have been altogether different; but you see I am fighting an uphill fight, myself, and need every penny that I can scrape together. I am getting on; and I can see well enough that, unless something occurs to upset the whole thing, I shall be doing a big trade, one of these days; but every half penny of profit has to go into the business. So, as you know, I cannot help you at present though, by the time the girls grow up, I hope I shall be able to do so, and that to a good extent.

"I feel sure that it would not be a bad thing for Stanley. He will soon get to be useful to me, and in three or four years will be a valuable assistant. Speaking Hindustani as well as he does, he won't be very long in picking up enough of the various dialects in Kathee and Chittagong for our purpose and, by twenty, he will have a share of the business, and be on the highway towards making his fortune. It will be infinitely better than anything he is likely to find in England, and he will be doing a man's work at the age when he would still be a schoolboy in England.

"I have spoken to him about it. Of course, he does not like leaving you, but he says that he should like it a thousand times better than, perhaps, having to go into some humdrum office in England."

"Thank you, Tom," Mrs. Brooke said with a sigh. "It will be very hard to part with him–terribly hard–but I see that it is by far the best thing for him and, as you say, in a monetary way it will be a relief to me. I think I can manage very comfortably on the pension, in some quiet place at home, with the two girls; but Stanley's schooling would be a heavy drain. I might even manage that, for I might earn a little money by painting; but there would be the question of what to do with him when he left school and, without friends or influence, it will be hopeless to get him into any good situation.

"You see, Herbert's parents have both died since he came out here and, though he was distantly related to the Earl of Netherly, he was only a second cousin, or something of that kind, and knew nothing about the family; and of course I could not apply to them."

"Certainly not, Nellie," her brother agreed. "There is nothing so hateful as posing as a poor relation–and that is a connection rather than a relationship. Then you will leave the boy in my hands?"

"I am sure that it will be best," she said, with a tremor in her voice, "and at any rate, I shall have the comfort of knowing that he will be well looked after."

Mrs. Brooke was the widow of a captain in one of the native regiments of the East India Company. He had, six weeks before this, been carried off suddenly by an outbreak of cholera; and she had been waiting at Calcutta, in order to see her brother, before sailing for England. She was the daughter of an English clergyman, who had died some seventeen years before. Nellie, who was then eighteen, being motherless as well as fatherless, had determined to sail for India. A great friend of hers had married and gone out, a year before. Nellie's father was at that time in bad health; and her friend had said to her, at parting:

"Now mind, Nellie, I have your promise that, if you should find yourself alone here, you will come out to me in India. I shall be very glad to have you with me, and I don't suppose you will be on my hands very long; pretty girls don't remain single many months, in India."

So, seeing nothing better to do, Nellie had, shortly after her father's death, sailed for Calcutta.

Lieutenant Brooke was also a passenger on board the Ava, and during the long voyage he and Nellie Pearson became engaged; and were married, from her friend's house, a fortnight after their

arrival. Nellie was told that she was a foolish girl, for that she ought to have done better; but she was perfectly happy. The pay and allowances of her husband were sufficient for them to live upon in comfort; and though, when the children came, there was little to spare, the addition of pay when he gained the rank of captain was ample for their wants. They had been, in fact, a perfectly happy couple–both had bright and sunny dispositions, and made the best of everything; and she had never had a serious care, until he was suddenly taken away from her.

Stanley had inherited his parents' disposition and, as his sisters, coming so soon after him, occupied the greater portion of his mother's care, he was left a good deal to his own devices; and became a general pet in the regiment, and was equally at home in the men's lines and in the officers' bungalows. The native language came as readily to him as English and, by the time he was ten, he could talk in their own tongue with the men from the three or four different districts from which the regiment had been recruited. His father devoted a couple of hours a day to his studies. He did not attempt to teach him Latin–which would, he thought, be altogether useless to him–but gave him a thorough grounding in English and Indian history, and arithmetic, and insisted upon his spending a certain time each day in reading standard English authors.

Tom Pearson, who was five years younger than his sister, had come out to India four years after her. He was a lad full of life and energy. As soon as he left school, finding himself the master of a hundred pounds–the last remains of the small sum that his father had left behind him–he took a second-class passage to Calcutta. As soon as he had landed, he went round to the various merchants and offices and, finding that he could not, owing to a want of references, obtain a clerkship, he took a place in the store of a Parsee merchant who dealt in English goods. Here he remained for five years, by which time he had mastered two or three native languages, and had obtained a good knowledge of business.

He now determined to start on his own account. He had lived hardly, saving up every rupee not needed for actual necessaries and, at the end of the five years he had, in all, a hundred and fifty pounds. He had, long before this, determined that the best opening for trade was among the tribes on the eastern borders of the British territory; and had specially devoted himself to the study of the languages of Kathee and Chittagong.

Investing the greater portion of his money in goods suitable for the trade, he embarked at Calcutta in a vessel bound for Chittagong. There he took passage in a native craft going up the great river to Sylhet, where he established his headquarters; and thence–leaving the greater portion of his goods in the care of a native merchant, with whom his late employer had had dealings–started with a native, and four donkeys on which his goods were packed, to trade among the wild tribes.

His success fully equalled his anticipations and, gradually, he extended his operations; going as far east as Manipur, and south almost as far as Chittagong. The firm in Calcutta from whom he had, in the first place, purchased his goods, sent him up fresh stores as he required them; and soon, seeing the energy with which he was pushing his business, gave him considerable credit, and he was able to carry on his operations on an increasingly larger scale. Sylhet remained his headquarters; but he had a branch at Chittagong, whither goods could be sent direct from Calcutta, and from this he drew his supplies for his trade in that province.

Much of his business was carried on by means of the waterways, and the very numerous streams that covered the whole country, and enabled him to carry his goods at a far cheaper rate than he could transport them by land; and for this purpose he had a boat specially fitted up with a comfortable cabin. He determined, from the first, to sell none but the best goods in the market; and thus he speedily gained the confidence of the natives, and the arrival of his boats was eagerly hailed by the villagers on the banks of the rivers.

He soon found that money was scarce; and that, to do a good business, he must take native products in barter for his goods; and that in this way he not only did a much larger trade, but obtained a very much better price for his wares than if he had sold only for money; and he soon consigned

considerable quantities to the firm in Calcutta and, by so doing, obtained a profit both ways. He himself paid a visit to Calcutta, every six months or so, to choose fresh fashions of goods; and to visit the firm, with whom his dealings, every year, became more extensive. But, though laying the foundations for an extensive business, he was not, as he told his sister, at present in a position to help her; for his increasing trade continually demanded more and more capital, and the whole of his profits were swallowed up by the larger stocks that had to be held at his depots at Sylhet, Chittagong, and at the mouths of the larger rivers.

Twice since he had been out he had met his sister at Calcutta, and when she came down after her husband's death, and heard from Tom's agents that he would probably arrive there in the course of a fortnight, she decided to wait there and meet him. He was greatly grieved at her loss, and especially so as he was unable to offer her a home; for as his whole time was spent in travelling, it was impossible for him to do so; nor indeed, would she have accepted it. Now that her husband was gone, she yearned to be back in England again. It was, too, far better for the girls that she should take them home. But when he now offered to take the boy she felt that, hard as it would be to leave Stanley behind, the offer was a most advantageous one for him.

The boy's knowledge of Indian languages, which would be of immense advantage to him in such a life, would be absolutely useless in England and, from what Tom told her of his business, there could be little doubt that the prospects were excellent. Stanley himself, who now saw his uncle for the first time, was attracted to him by the energy and cheeriness of manner that had rendered him so successful in business; and he was stirred by the enterprise and adventure of the life he proposed for him. More than once, in the little-frequented rivers that stretched into Kathee, his boats had been attacked by wild tribesmen; and he had to fight hard to keep them off. Petty chiefs had, at times, endeavoured to obstruct his trading and, when at Manipur, he had twice been witness of desperate fights between rival claimants for the throne. All this was, to a boy brought up among soldiers, irresistibly fascinating; especially as the alternative seemed to be a seat in a dull counting house in England.

He was, then, delighted when his mother gave her consent to his remaining with his uncle; grieved as he was at being parted from her and his sisters. The thought that he should, in time, be able to be of assistance to her was a pleasant one; and aided him to support the pain of parting when, a week later, she sailed with the girls for England.

"I suppose you have not done any shooting, Stanley?" his uncle asked.

"Not with a gun, but I have practised sometimes with pistols. Father thought that it would be useful."

"Very useful; and you must learn to shoot well with them, and with fowling-piece and rifle. What with river thieves, and dacoits, and wild tribes–to say nothing of wild beasts–a man who travels about, as I do, wants to be able to shoot straight. The straighter you shoot, the less likely you are to have to do so. I have come to be a good shot myself and, whenever we row up a river, I constantly practise–either at floating objects in the water, or at birds or other marks in the trees. I have the best weapons that money can buy. It is my one extravagance, and the result is that, to my boatmen and the men about me, my shooting seems to be marvellous; they tell others of it, and the result is that I am regarded with great respect. I have no doubt, whatever, that it has saved me from much trouble; for the natives have almost got to believe that I only have to point my gun, and the man I wish to kill falls dead, however far distant."

Two days after the departure of Mrs. Brooke, her brother and Stanley started down the Hoogly in a native trader.

"She is a curious-looking craft, uncle."

"Yes; she would not be called handsome in home waters, but she is uncommonly fast; and I find her much more convenient, in many ways, than a British merchantman."

"Is she yours, uncle?"

"No, she is not mine, and I do not exactly charter her; but she works principally for me. You see, the wages are so low that they can work a craft like this for next to nothing. Why, the captain and his eight men, together, don't get higher pay than the boatswain of an English trader.

"The captain owns the vessel. He is quite content if he gets a few rupees a month, in addition to what he considers his own rate of pay. His wife and his two children live on board. If the craft can earn twenty rupees a week, he considers that he is doing splendidly. At the outside, he would not pay his men more than four rupees a month, each, and I suppose that he would put down his services at eight; so that would leave him forty rupees a month as the profit earned by the ship.

"In point of fact, I keep him going pretty steadily. He makes trips backwards and forwards between the different depots; carries me up the rivers for a considerable distance; does a little trade on his own account–not in goods such as I sell, you know, but purely native stores–takes a little freight when he can get it, and generally a few native passengers. I pay him fifteen rupees a week, and I suppose he earns from five to ten in addition; so that the arrangement suits us both, admirably.

"I keep the stern cabin for myself. As you see, she has four little brass guns, which I picked up for a song at Calcutta; and there are twenty-four muskets aft. It is an arrangement that the crew are to practise shooting once a week, so they have all come to be pretty fair shots; and the captain, himself, can send a two-pound shot from those little guns uncommonly straight.

"You will be amused when you see us practising for action. The captain's wife and the two boys load the guns, and do it very quickly, too. He runs round from gun to gun, takes aim, and fires. The crew shout, and yell, and bang away with their muskets. I take the command, and give a few pice among them, if the firing has been accurate.

"We have been attacked, once or twice, in the upper waters; but have always managed to beat the robbers off, without much difficulty. The captain fires away, till they get pretty close; and I pepper them with my rifles–I have three of them. When they get within fifty yards, the crew open fire and, as they have three muskets each, they can make it very hot for the pirates. I have a store of hand grenades and, if they push on, I throw two or three on board when they get within ten yards; and that has always finished the matter. They don't understand the things bursting in the middle of them. I don't mean to say that my armament would be of much use, if we were trading along the coast of the Malay Peninsula or among the Islands, but it is quite enough to deal with the petty robbers of these rivers."

"But I thought that you had a boat that you went up the rivers in, uncle?"

"Yes; we tow a rowboat and a store boat up, behind this craft, as far as she can go; that is, as long as she has wind enough to make against the sluggish stream. When she can go no further, I take to the rowboat. It has eight rowers, carries a gun–it is a twelve-pounder howitzer–that I have had cut short, so that it is only about a foot long. Of course it won't carry far, but that is not necessary. Its charge is a pound of powder and a ten-pound bag of bullets and, at a couple of hundred yards, the balls scatter enough to sweep two or three canoes coming abreast and, as we can charge and fire the little thing three times in a minute, it is all that we require, for practical purposes.

"It is only on a few of the rivers we go up that there is any fear of trouble. On the river from Sylhet to the east and its branches in Kathee or, as it is sometimes called, Kasi, the country is comparatively settled. The Goomtee beyond Oudypore is well enough, until it gets into Kaayn, which is what they call independent. That is to say, it owns no authority; and some villages are peaceable and well disposed, while others are savage. The same may be said of the Munnoo and Fenny rivers.

"For the last two years I have done a good deal of trade in Assam, up the Brahmaputra river. As far as Rungpoor there are a great many villages on the banks, and the people are quiet and peaceable."

"Then you don't go further south than Chittagong, uncle?"

"No. The Burmese hold Aracan on the south and, indeed, for some distance north of it there is no very clearly-defined border. You see, the great river runs from Rangoon very nearly due north, though with a little east in it; and extends along at the back of the districts I trade with; so that the

Burmese are not very far from Manipur which, indeed, stands on a branch of the Irrawaddy, of which another branch runs nearly up to Rungpoor.

"We shall have big trouble with them, one of these days; indeed, we have had troubles already. You see, the Burmese are a great and increasing power, and have so easily conquered all their neighbours that they regard themselves as invincible. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Burmese were masters of Pegu; then the people of that country, with the help of the Dutch and Portuguese, threw off their yoke. But the Burmese were not long kept down for, in 1753, Alompra– a hunter–gathered a force round him and, after keeping up an irregular warfare for some time, was joined by so many of his countrymen that he attacked and captured Ava, conquered the whole of Pegu and, in 1759, the English trading colony at Negrais were massacred.

"This, however, was not the act of Alompra, but of the treachery of a Frenchman named Levine, and of an Armenian; who incited the Burmese of the district to exterminate the English– hoping, no doubt, thus to retrieve, in a new quarter, the fortunes of France, which in India were being extinguished by the genius of Clive. The English were, at the time, far too occupied with the desperate struggle they were having, in India, to attempt to revenge the massacre of their countrymen at Negrais.

"Very rapidly the Burman power spread. They captured the valuable Tenasserim coast, from Siam; repulsed a formidable invasion from China; annexed Aracan, and dominated Manipur, and thus became masters of the whole tract of country lying between China and Hindustan. As they now bordered upon our territory, a mission was sent in 1794 to them from India, with a proposal for the settlement of boundaries, and for the arrangement of trade between the two countries. Nothing came of it, for the Burmese had already proposed, to themselves, the conquest of India; and considered the mission as a proof of the terror that their advance had inspired among us.

"After the conquest by them of Aracan, in 1784, there had been a constant irritation felt against us by the Burmese; owing to the fact that a great number of fugitives from that country had taken refuge in the swamps and islands of Chittagong; from which they, from time to time, issued and made raids against the Burmese. In 1811 these fugitives, in alliance with some predatory chiefs, invaded Aracan in force and, being joined by the subject population there, expelled the Burmese. These, however, soon reconquered the province. The affair was, nevertheless, unfortunate, since the Burmese naturally considered that, as the insurrection had begun with an invasion by the fugitives in Chittagong, it had been fomented by us.

"This was in no way the fact. We had no force there capable of keeping the masses of fugitives in order; but we did our best, and arrested many of the leaders, when they returned after their defeat. This, however, was far from satisfying the Burmese. A mission was sent, to Ava, to assure them of our friendly intentions; and that we had had nothing whatever to do with the invasion, and would do all we could to prevent its recurrence. The Burmese government declined to receive the mission.

"We, ourselves, had much trouble with the insurgents for, fearful of re-entering Burma after their defeat, they now carried on a series of raids in our territory; and it was not until 1816 that these were finally suppressed. Nevertheless, the court of Ava remained dissatisfied; and a fresh demand was raised for the surrender of the chiefs who had been captured, and of the whole of the fugitives living in the government of Chittagong. The Marquis of Hastings replied that the British government could not, without a violation of the principles of justice, deliver up those who had sought its protection; that tranquillity now existed, and there was no probability of a renewal of the disturbances; but that the greatest vigilance should be used, to prevent and punish the authors of any raid that might be attempted against Aracan.

"A year later a second letter was received, demanding on the part of the king the cession of Ramoo, Chittagong, Moorshedabad, and Dacca; that is to say, of the whole British possessions east of the Ganges. Lord Hastings simply replied that if it was possible to suppose that the demand had been dictated by the King of Ava, the British government would be justified in regarding it as a declaration

of war. To this the Burmese made no reply. Doubtless they had heard of the successes we had gained in Central India, and had learned that our whole force was disposable against them.

"Three years ago the old king died, and a more warlike monarch succeeded him. Since 1810 they have been mixed up in the troubles that have been going on in Assam, where a civil war had been raging. One party or other has sought their assistance, and fighting has been going on there nearly incessantly and, two months ago, the Burmese settled the question by themselves taking possession of the whole country.

"This has, of course, been a serious blow to me. Although disorder has reigned, it has not interfered with my trading along the banks of the river; but now that the Burmese have set up their authority, I shall, for a time anyhow, be obliged to give up my operations there; for they have evinced considerable hostility to us–have made raids near Rungpoor, on our side of the river, and have pulled down a British flag on an island in the Brahmaputra. We have taken, in consequence, the principality of Cachar under our protection–indeed its two princes, seeing that the Burmese were beginning to invade their country, invited us to take this step–and we thus occupy the passes from Manipur into the low country of Sylhet."

"I wonder that you have been able to trade in Manipur, uncle, as the Burmese have been masters there."

"I am not trading with the capital itself, and the Burmese have been too occupied with their affairs in Assam to exercise much authority in the country. Besides, you see, there has not been war between the two countries. Our merchants at Rangoon still carry on their trade up the Irrawaddy; and in Assam, this spring, the only trouble I had was that I had to pay somewhat higher tolls than I had done before. However, now that Cachar is under our protection, I hope that I shall make up for my loss of trade, in Assam, by doing better than before in that province."

"I thought you called it Kathee, uncle?"

"So it is generally named but, as it is spoken of as Cachar in the proclamation assuming the protectorate, I suppose it will be called so in future; but all these names, out here, are spelt pretty much according to fancy."

While this conversation had been going on, the boat had been running fast down the river, passing several European vessels almost as if they had been standing still.

"I should not have thought that a boat like this would pass these large ships," Stanley said.

"We have a good deal to learn in the art of sailing, yet," his uncle replied. "A great many of these Indian dhows can run away from a square-rigged ship, in light weather. I don't know whether it is the lines of their hulls or the cut of the sails, but there is no doubt about their speed. They seem to skim over the water, while our bluff-bowed craft shove their way through it. I suppose, some day, we shall adopt these long sharp bows; when we do, it will make a wonderful difference in our rate of sailing. Then, too, these craft have a very light draft of water but, on the other hand, they have a deep keel, which helps them to lie close to the wind; and that long, overhanging bow renders them capital craft in heavy weather for, as they meet the sea, they rise over it gradually; instead of its hitting them full on the bow, as it does our ships. We have much to learn, yet, in the way of ship building."

The trader had his own servant with him, and the man now came up and said that a meal was ready, and they at once entered the cabin. It was roomy and comfortable, and was, like the rest of the boat, of varnished teak. There were large windows in the stern; it had a table, with two fixed benches; and there were broad, low sofas on each side. Above these the muskets were disposed, in racks; while at the end by the door were Tom Pearson's own rifles, four brace of pistols, and a couple of swords. Ten long spears were suspended from the roof of the cabin, in leather slings. The floor, like the rest of the cabin, was varnished.

"It looks very comfortable, uncle."

"Yes; you see, I live quite half my time on board, the rest being spent in the boat. My man is a capital cook. He comes from Chittagong, and is a Mug."

"What are Mugs, uncle?"

"They are the original inhabitants of Aracan. He was one of those who remained there, after the Burmese had conquered it, and speaks their language as well as his own. I recommend you to begin it with him, at once. If things settle down in Assam, it will be very useful for you in arranging with the Burmese officials. You won't find it very easy, though of course your knowledge of three or four Indian tongues will help you. It is said to be a mixture of the old Tali, Sanscrit, Tartar, and Chinese. The Tartar and Chinese words will, of course, be quite new to you; the other two elements will resemble those that you are familiar with.

"I talk to the man in Hindustani. He picked up a little of it at Chittagong, and has learned a good deal more, during the two years that he has been with me; and through that you will be able to learn Burmese."

A week later the dhow entered the harbour. Stanley had passed most of his time in conversation with Khyen, Tom's servant. The facility his tongue had acquired in the Indian languages was of great benefit to him, and he speedily picked up a good many Burmese sentences.

For the next six months he continued, with his uncle, the work the latter had carried on; and enjoyed it much. They sailed up the sluggish rivers, with their low, flat shores, in the dhow; towing the rowboat and the store boat behind them. The crews of these boats lived on board the dhow until their services were required, helping in its navigation and aiding the crew when the wind dropped and sweeps were got out.

The villages along the banks were for the most part small, but were very numerous. At each of these the dhow brought up. There was, in almost all cases, sufficient water to allow of her being moored alongside the banks and, as soon as she did so, the natives came on board to make their purchases and dispose of their produce. In addition to the European and Indian goods carried, the dhow was laden with rice, for which there was a considerable demand at most of the villages.

As soon as he had learned the price of the various goods, and their equivalent in the products of the country, Stanley did much of the bartering; while his uncle went ashore and talked with the head men of the village, with all of whom he made a point of keeping on good terms, and so securing a great portion of the trade that might, otherwise, have been carried by native craft.

Three times during the six months the dhow had gone back to Calcutta, to fetch fresh supplies of goods and to take in another cargo of rice; while the trader proceeded higher up the river, in his own boats. While on the voyage, Stanley always had the rifle and fowling piece that his uncle had handed over, for his special use, leaning against the bulwark, close at hand; and frequently shot waterfowl, which were so abundant that he was able to keep not only their own table supplied, but to furnish the crew and boatmen with a considerable quantity of food. They had had no trouble with river pirates, for these had suffered so heavily, in previous attacks upon the dhow, that they shunned any repetition of their loss. At the same time every precaution was taken, for, owing to the intestine troubles in Cachar and Assam, fugitives belonging to the party that happened, for the time, to be worsted, were driven to take refuge in the jungles near the rivers; and to subsist largely on plunder, the local authorities being too feeble to root them out. The boats, therefore, were always anchored in the middle of the stream at night and two men were kept on watch.

To the south as well as in the north, the trading operations were more restricted; for the Burmese became more and more aggressive. Elephant hunters, in the hills that formed the boundary of the British territory to the east, were seized and carried off; twenty-three in one place being captured, and six in another–all being ill treated and imprisoned, and the remonstrances of the Indian government treated with contempt by the Rajah of Aracan. It was evident that the object of the Burmese was to possess themselves of this hill country in order that they might, if they chose, pour down at any time into the cultivated country round the town of Ramoo.

"There is no doubt, Stanley," said his uncle one day, "we shall very shortly have a big war with the Burmese. The fact that these constant acts of aggression are met only by remonstrances, on our

part, increases their arrogance; and they are convinced that we are in mortal terror of them. They say that in Assam their leaders are openly boasting that, ere long, they will drive us completely from India; and one of their generals has confidently declared that, after taking India, they intend to conquer England. With such ignorant people, there is but one argument understood–namely, force; and sooner or later we shall have to give them such a hearty thrashing that they will be quiet for some time.

"Still, I grant that the difficulties are great. Their country is a tremendous size, the beggars are brave, and the climate, at any rate near the sea coast, is horribly unhealthy. Altogether it will be a big job; but it will have to be done, or in a very short time we shall see them marching against Calcutta."

Chapter 2: The Outbreak of War

On the last day of September, 1823–just a year after Stanley had joined his uncle–the dhow sailed into Chittagong; which had now taken the place of Sylhet as the traders' chief depot, the latter place being too near the Burmese, in Assam, for him to care about keeping a large stock of his goods there. He went ashore as soon as the dhow cast anchor, Stanley remaining on board.

"The fat is all in the fire, Stanley," Tom Pearson said, when he returned. "The Burmese have attacked and killed some of our troops, and it is certain that the government cannot put up with that."

"Where was it, uncle?"

"Down at the mouth of the Naaf. As you know, that is the southern boundary of the province, and there was a row there in January. One of our native boats laden with rice was coming up the river, on our side of the channel, when an armed Burmese boat came across and demanded duty. Of course, our fellows said they were in their own waters, whereupon the Burmese fired upon them and killed the steersman. There were reports, then, that bodies of Burmese troops were moving about on their side of the river, and that it was feared they would cross over and burn some of our villages. Accordingly, our guard at the mouth of the river was increased to fifty men, and a few of these were posted on the island of Shapuree.

"This island lies close to our shore and, indeed, the channel between can be forded at low water. It has always formed part of the province of Chittagong, and there has never been any question raised by the Burmese as to this. However, the Viceroy of Aracan called upon our resident here to withdraw the guard, asserting the right of the King of Ava to the island.

"Since then letters have passed to and fro, but I hear that the Burmese have settled the question by landing on Shapuree. One night last week they attacked our post there, killed and wounded four of the sepoys, and drove the rest off the island. The Indian government have put up with a great deal, rather than engage in so costly and difficult an operation as a war with Burma, but it is impossible that we can stand this."

The Indian government, however, used every endeavour to avert the necessity for war; although the Rajah of Aracan lost no time in writing a letter to the government of Calcutta, stating that he had occupied the island of Shapuree, and that unless they submitted quietly to this act of justice, the cities of Dacca and Moorshedabad would be forcibly seized. In order, however, to postpone, at any rate, the outbreak of war, the government of Bengal resolved to give the court of Ava an opportunity to withdraw from the position taken up. They therefore acted as if the attack on the guard at Shapuree had been the action of the Viceroy of Aracan alone, and addressed a declaration to the Burmese government, recapitulating the facts of the case, pointing out that Shapuree had always been acknowledged by Burma as forming part of the province of Chittagong, and calling upon the government to disavow the action of the local authorities. The Burmese considered this, as it was in fact, a proof that the government of India was reluctant to enter upon a contest with them; and confirmed Burma in its confident expectation of annexing the eastern portions of Bengal, if not of expelling the English altogether.

In the meantime, Shapuree had been reoccupied by us. The Burmese–after driving out the little garrison–had retired and, two months after the attack, two companies of the 20th Native Infantry arrived by sea, from Calcutta, and landed there. A stockade was built, and two six-pounders placed in position. Another company was stationed on the mainland, and the Planet and three gunboats, each carrying a twelve-pounder, were stationed in the river.

The Burmese at once collected large bodies of troops, both in Aracan and Assam. The government of Bengal made preparations to defend our frontier, and especially the position in the north, as an advance of the Burmese in this direction would not only threaten the important towns of Dacca and Moorshedabad, but would place the invaders in dangerous proximity to Calcutta.

Accordingly, a portion of the 10th and 23rd Native Infantry, and four companies of the Rungpoor local force, were marched to Sylhet; and outposts thrown forward to the frontier.

Seeing that the Burmese operations would probably commence in the north, Tom Pearson had, after completing his arrangements at Chittagong, sailed north to remove his depots from Sylhet, and other places that would be exposed to an attack from that direction. They reached Sylhet the first week in January. By this time Stanley, from his constant conversation with his uncle's servant, had come to speak Burmese as fluently as the Indian languages. He was now nearly sixteen, tall for his age, and active but, owing to the hot climate and the absence of vigorous exercise, he was less broad and muscular than most English lads of his age.

They found on landing that news had arrived, two days before, that a powerful army of Burmese had entered Cachar, from Manipur, and had defeated the troops of Jambhir Sing; that 4000 Burmese and Assamese had advanced from Assam into Cachar, and had begun to stockade themselves at Bickrampore, at the foot of the Bhortoka Pass; and that the third division was crossing into the district of Jyntea, immediately to the north of Sylhet. There was a complete panic in the town, and the ryots were flocking in from all the surrounding country, with their families and belongings; and were making their way down the country, in boats, to Dacca.

"I am afraid, Stanley, there is an end of trade, for the present. What we see here is, doubtless, taking place all over Cachar; and it would be just as bad down at Chittagong. It is a heavy blow, for I have done remarkably well this year, and was building up the foundations for a good business. No doubt, when this trouble is over. I shall be able to take it up again; and it may be, if we thrash the Burmese heartily, which we are sure to do in the long run, it may even prove a benefit. Still, there is no doubt that it is a very bad business for me. However as, just at present, there is nothing whatever to be done, I propose, as soon as the goods are all on board, to take a holiday, and go out and have a look at the fighting."

"You will take me with you, uncle?" Stanley asked eagerly.

"Certainly, lad. We don't mean to do any fighting ourselves, but only to look on; and it may be that, after it is over, you may be able to make yourself useful, if they want to ask questions of any Burmese prisoners."

"You think that there is no chance of their beating us?"

"I should think not, though of course there is no saying; still, I don't think these fellows will be able to stand against our troops. Of course, they have no idea, whatever, of our style of fighting, and have never met any really formidable foes; so that I imagine we shall make pretty short work of them. However, as we shall be mounted–for I will hire a couple of horses, there have been plenty of them driven into the town–we shall be able to make a bolt of it, if necessary. Of course, we will take our rifles and pistols with us."

The goods were not placed on board the dhow, but in what was called the store boat; as the trader had determined to take up his abode in his rowboat, which could move about much faster than the dhow; and to allow the captain of that craft to make a good thing of it, by taking down to Dacca as many of the fugitives as she would hold.

Finding that the Burmese division that had entered Jyntea was intrenching itself, at a few miles' distance, Major Newton, the officer commanding on the Sylhet frontier, concentrated his force at Jatrapur, a village five miles beyond the Sylhet boundary. Tom Pearson had introduced himself to Major Newton, and asked permission to accompany his force; saying that his nephew would be able, if necessary, to communicate with the Burmese either before or after the action, and that both would willingly act as aides-de-camp. The offer was accepted with thanks, and they rode out with him, on the evening of the 16th of January, 1824, to Jatrapur.

At one o'clock in the morning the troops were roused, and marched an hour later. At daybreak they came in sight of the stockade, and a few shots were at once fired upon the advanced guard by the Burmese. A portion of their force was lying in a village hard by.

Major Newton at once divided his command into two bodies. One of these was led by Captain Johnston against the front of the stockade. The other, under Captain Rowe, attacked the village adjoining. The Burmese stationed there gave way, after a very faint resistance. They were accustomed to rely always on stockades; and this attack upon them, when not so protected, shook them at once. Those in the stockade, however, made a resolute resistance.

Captain Rowe, after gaining possession of the village, and seeing the occupants in full flight, moved his force to aid the other division; and the Burmese, dispirited by the defeat of their countrymen, and finding themselves attacked on two sides, gave way and fled, leaving a hundred dead behind them; while on the British side but six sepoys were killed.

The Burmese fled to the hills, at a speed that rendered pursuit hopeless by the more heavily-armed troops; and the fugitives soon rallied, and effected their junction with the division advancing from Manipur. After the action Major Newton returned to Sylhet, and a few days later Mr. Scott, who had been appointed commissioner, arrived there and, advancing to Bhadrapur, opened communications with the Burmese. As, however, it became evident that the latter were only negotiating in order to gain time to intrench themselves near Jatrapur, to which they had returned, he again placed the matter in the hands of the military commanders.

The Burmese force amounted to about six thousand men. They had erected strong stockades on each bank of the river Surma, and had thrown a bridge across to connect them. Captain Johnston advanced with a wing of the 10th Native Infantry, a company of the 23rd Native Infantry, and a small party of men of a local corps. Small as was this force, he divided it into two parties. One of these, under Captain Rowe, crossed the river; and then both moved against the enemy. The Burmese opened fire as they advanced, but the sepoys marched gallantly forward, and drove the enemy out of their unfinished intrenchments at the point of the bayonet. The Assam division retreated hastily to the Bhortoka Pass, while the Manipur force stockaded itself at Doodpatnee.

The Assam division was first attacked, and the stockade carried at the point of the bayonet. Lieutenant Colonel Bowen, who now commanded, then moved against the position at Doodpatnee. This was very strong. Steep hills covered the rear; while the other faces of the intrenchments were defended by a deep ditch, fourteen feet wide, with a chevaux de frise of pointed bamboos on its outer edge. Although the position was attacked with great gallantry, it was too strong to be captured by so small a force; and they were obliged to withdraw to Jatrapur, with the loss of one officer killed and four wounded, and about one hundred and fifty sepoys killed and wounded.

However, their bravery had not been without effect, for the Burmese evacuated their stockade and retreated to Manipur, leaving Cachar free from its invaders. Thus, in less than three weeks, the Burmese invasion of the northern provinces had been hurled back by a British force of less than a tenth of that of the invaders.

Stanley and his uncle had been present at all these engagements and, in the absence of any cavalry, had done good service in conveying messages and despatches; and the lad had several times acted as interpreter between the officers and Burmese prisoners. Both received letters from the commissioner, thanking them for the assistance that they had rendered.

"That last affair was unfortunate, Stanley; and it is evident that these stockades of theirs are nasty places to attack, and that they ought to be breached by guns before the men are sent forward to storm them. However, as the Burmese have gone, our repulse does not matter much.

"Well, I felt sure that we should thrash them, but I certainly gave them credit for having a great deal more pluck than they have shown. As it is, if there is nothing fresh takes place here, the natives and little traders will soon be coming back from Dacca, and business will be better than before; for the Burmese have been talking so big, for the last three years, that no one has bought more than would just carry him on; while now they will be more inclined to lay in good stocks of goods.

"Tomorrow we will start for Chittagong. You see, I have a considerable store there; and there is a chance of much more serious fighting, in that quarter, than this little affair we have seen. The

Governor of Aracan has, all along, been the source of troubles; and we may expect that he will cross into the province at the head of a large force, and may do an immense deal of damage, before we can get enough troops there to oppose him."

Descending the river they coasted along until they arrived, early in March, at Chittagong. They found that great alarm reigned there. In January, Bandoola, the greatest military leader of the Burmese, who was known to have been one of the most strenuous supporters of the war policy at the court of Ava, had arrived at Aracan and taken the command of the troops collected there, and had brought with him considerable reinforcements.

A wanton outrage that had been committed by the Burmese showed how intent they were upon hostilities. Owing to the unhealthiness of the islet of Shapuree, the sepoys stationed there had been withdrawn; and the Company's pilot vessel, Sophia, was ordered to join the gunboats off that island. Four deputies from the Burmese court arrived at Mungdoo, on the opposite shore; and these invited the commander of the Sophia to come on shore, in order that they might talk over with him, in a friendly way, the situation of affairs. He unsuspectingly accepted their invitation and landed, accompanied by an officer and some native seamen. The party were at once seized and sent prisoners to Aracan, where they were detained for a month, and then sent back to Mungdoo.

This wanton insult was followed by a formal declaration of war, by the government of India; and a similar document was issued by the court of Ava. The force at Sylhet was reinforced, and that in Chittagong increased. It consisted of a wing of the 13th and of the 20th Native Regiments, and a battalion of the 23rd, with a local levy, amounting in all to some 3000 men. Of these a wing of the 23rd, with two guns, and a portion of the native levies were posted at Ramoo, which was the point most threatened by an invasion from Aracan.

It was in the north that hostilities first commenced, a force moving into Assam and driving the Burmese before them. Several sharp blows were dealt the enemy and, had it not been for the setting in of the wet season, they would have been driven entirely out of Assam.

"I think, Stanley," his uncle said, after he had been a short time at Chittagong, "you had better go up to Ramoo, and see about matters there. Of course, until the Burmese move we cannot say what their game is likely to be; but it will be as well to get the stores ready for embarkation, in case they should advance in that direction. If they do so, get everything on board at once; and you can then be guided by circumstances. As the dhow came in yesterday, I can spare both our boats; and shall, of course, ship the goods here on board the big craft. Even if the Burmese come this way, I have no fear of their taking the town; and shall, of course, lend a hand in the defence, if they attempt it. You can do the same at Ramoo, if you like.

"I was chatting with Colonel Shatland yesterday. He tells me that a large fleet has been collected, and that an expedition will be sent to capture Rangoon so, in that case, it is likely that Bandoola and his force will march off in that direction.

"I think government are wrong. It will be impossible for the troops to move, when the wet season once sets in; and they will lose a tremendous lot of men from sickness, if they are cooped up in Rangoon. They had very much better have sent a few thousand men down here, to act on the defensive and repel any attempted invasion, until the rains are over; when they could have been shipped again, and join the expedition against Rangoon. It seems to me a mad-headed thing, to begin at the present time of the year. We have put up with the insults of the Burmese for so long that we might just as well have waited for the favourable season, before we began our operations in earnest."

Accordingly, on the following day Stanley started south for Ramoo and, on arriving there, took charge of the trading operations. Shortly after, meeting Captain Noton–who commanded there–in the street, he recognized him as an officer who had been stationed at the same cantonment as his father; and whom he had, four years previously, known well.

"You don't recognize me, Captain Noton," he said. "I am the son of Captain Brooke, of the 33rd."

"I certainly did not recognize you," the officer said, "but I am glad to meet you again. Let me think; yes, your name is Stanley, and a regular young pickle you used to be. What on earth are you doing here? Of course, I heard of your poor father's death, and was grieved, indeed, at his loss. Where is your mother? She is well, I hope."

"She went back to England with my sisters, two months after my father's death. I joined my uncle, her brother. He is a trader, and carries on business in the district between here and Sylhet, trading principally on the rivers; but of course the war has put a stop to that, for the present. We saw the fighting up in the north, and then came down to this district. He has remained at Chittagong, and I am in charge of goods here. I speak Burmese fairly now and, if I can be of any use to you, I shall be very glad to be so. There is not much business here; and the Parsee clerk, who is generally in charge, can look after it very well. I acted as interpreter with the troops in the north, and have a letter from Mr. Scott, the commissioner, thanking me for my services."

"I remember you used to be able to talk four or five of the native languages, but how did you come to pick up Burmese?"

"From a servant of my uncle's. We thought that there would be sure to be war, sooner or later; and that, after it was over, there would be a good chance of profitable trade on the Burmese rivers. I had no great difficulty in learning it from my uncle's man, who was a native of Aracan."

"I have no doubt you will find it very useful. What a big fellow you have grown, Stanley; at least, as far as height is concerned. Let me see. How old are you, now?"

"I am past sixteen," Stanley replied. "I have had several touches of fever–caught, I suppose, from the damp on the rivers–but I think that I am pretty well acclimatized, now. I know I don't look very strong, but I have not had much active exercise and, of course, the climate is against me."

"Very much so. I wonder that you have kept your health as well as you have, in this steamy climate.

"I am going to the mess room, now. You had better come and lunch with me, and I will introduce you to the other officers. We are very strong in comparison to the force for, counting the assistant surgeon, there are ten of us."

"I shall be very glad, sir," Stanley said. "I have certainly been feeling rather lonely here; for I know no one, and there is very little to do. During the last year, I have often gone up one of the rivers by myself; but there has always been occupation while, at present, things are at a standstill."

"I tell you what, Brooke, if you would like it, I can appoint you interpreter. There is not one of us who speaks this Mug language–which is, you know, almost the same as Burmese–and the officers in charge of the native levy would be delighted to have some one with them who could make the fellows understand. I can appoint you a first-class interpreter. The pay is not very high, you know; but you might just as well be earning it as doing nothing, and it would give you a sort of official position and, as the son of a British officer, and my friend, you would be one of us."

"Thank you very much, Captain Noton. I should like it immensely. Should I have to get a uniform?"

"There will be no absolute necessity for it; but if you get a white patrol jacket, like this, and a white cap cover, it will establish you in the eyes of the natives as an officer, and give you more authority. Oh, by the way, you need not get them, for one of our lieutenants died, the other day, of fever. His effects have not been sold, yet; but you may as well have his patrol jackets and belts. We can settle what you are to pay for them, afterwards. It will only be a matter of a few rupees, anyhow."

They now arrived at the house that had been taken for the use of the officers. On entering, Captain Noton introduced him to the others and, as several of these had at various times met his father, in cantonments or on service, he was heartily welcomed by them and, at luncheon, they listened with great interest to his accounts of the fighting, in Cachar, with the Burmese.

"I fancy we shall find them more formidable, here, if they come," Captain Noton said. "Bandoola has a great reputation, and is immensely popular with them. From what you say, a

considerable proportion of the fellows you met up there were Assamese levies, raised by the Burmese. I grant that the Burmese, themselves, do not seem to have done much better; but they would never have conquered all the peoples they have come across, and built up a great empire, if there had not been good fighting stuff in them. I have no doubt that we shall thrash them, but I don't think we shall do it as easily as our troops did in the north."

The time now passed pleasantly with Stanley. He had, after thinking it over, declined to accept payment for his services; for this would have hindered his freedom of action, and prevented his obeying any instructions that his uncle might send him. He therefore joined as a volunteer interpreter, and was made a member of the officers' mess. He was specially attached to the native levy and, soon acquiring their words of command, assisted its officers in drilling it into something like order.

Early in May a Burmese division, 8000 strong, crossed the Naaf and established itself at Rutnapullung, fourteen miles south of Ramoo. As soon as Captain Noton learned that the Burmese had crossed the river, he sent news of the fact to Chittagong, with a request that reinforcements should be at once sent to him; and then moved out with his force from Ramoo, to ascertain the strength of the enemy. The Burmese were seen upon some hills, where they were constructing stockades. The small British force advanced against them, drove them off the hills and, following them, prepared to attack them in the plain beyond. The guns, however, had not come up; partly owing to the cowardice of the elephant drivers, and partly to the fact that it was found that several of the essential parts of the guns had been left behind.

Without their assistance to clear the way, Captain Noton felt that it would be imprudent to attack so great a force; and therefore fell back to Ramoo. Here he was joined by three companies of the 20th Native Infantry, bringing up his force to close upon a thousand; of whom about half were sepoys, and the rest native levies. Had any energy, whatever, been shown by the officer in command of Chittagong, in sending up reinforcements–which he could well have spared, now that the point of attack by the Burmese had been made clear–Captain Noton might have taken the offensive, in which case serious disaster would have been avoided, and the Burmese would have been driven back across the Naaf. None, however, came and, on the morning of the 13th of May, the enemy appeared on the hill east of Ramoo, being separated from the British force by the river of the same name.

There was some difference of opinion, among the officers, as to whether it would be better to maintain a position outside the town, or to retreat at once; but the belief that reinforcements might arrive, at any hour, caused Captain Noton to determine to keep in the open, and so to cover the town as long as possible.

On the evening of the 14th, the Burmese came down to the river as if to cross it; but retired when the two six-pounder guns opened fire upon them. That two small guns should produce such an effect confirmed the British officers in their opinion that the Burmese, although they might defend stockades well, were of little use in the open. The next morning, however, the enemy effected the passage of the river farther away and then, advancing, took possession of a large tank surrounded by a high embankment.

Captain Noton placed his force in an enclosure, with a bank three feet high. His right flank was protected by the river; and a small tank, some sixty paces in front, was occupied by a strong picket. On his left, somewhat to the rear, was another tank, and at this the native levies were placed. The main position was held by the sepoys, with the two six-pounders. As the Burmese advanced, a sharp fire was opened upon them; but they availed themselves of every irregularity of the ground, and of cover of all kinds, and threw up shelter banks with such rapidity that the fire was, by no means, so effective as had been expected.

During the day news came that the left wing of the 23rd Native Infantry had left Chittagong on the 13th and, as it should arrive the next day, Captain Noton determined to hold his ground; though the Burmese continued to press forward, and a good many men, as well as two or three officers, had been wounded by their fire. At nightfall, a consultation was held. The reinforcements were expected

in the morning and, although the native levies had shown signs of insubordination, and evidently could not be relied upon to make a stand, if the Burmese attacked in earnest, it was resolved to retain the position.

During the night, the Burmese pushed forward their trenches. A heavy fire was maintained on both sides during the day, but it was with considerable difficulty that the officers in command of the levies kept the men from bolting.

"Things look very black," Captain Pringle said to Stanley, when the firing died away, at nightfall. "Reinforcements should have been here, today. It is scandalous that they should not have been pushed forward, at once, when we asked for them. Still more so that, when they once started, they should not have come on with the greatest possible speed. I doubt whether we shall be able to hold these cowardly curs together till tomorrow. If they bolt, the sepoys will be sure to do so, too; in fact, their position would be altogether untenable, for the Burmese could march round this flank and take them in rear.

"I wish to Heaven we had two or three companies of white troops, to cover a retreat. There would be no fear of the sepoys yielding to a panic, if they had British troops with them; but when they are outnumbered, as they are now, one can hardly blame them if they lose heart, when the enemy are ten times their strength, and will be twenty to one against them, if our fellows here bolt."

The next morning, the Burmese had pushed up their trenches to within twelve paces of the British lines, and a tremendous fire was opened. At nine o' clock, in spite of the efforts of their officers to keep them steady, the native levies bolted; and the officers with them dashed across the intervening ground towards the main body. One of them fell dead, and two others were wounded. Stanley was running, when he fell headlong, without a moment's thought or consciousness.

The Burmese occupied the tank as soon as the levies had abandoned it, and their fire at once took the defenders of the main position in flank. A retreat was now necessary, and the sepoys drew off in good order but, as the exulting Burmans pressed hotly upon them, and their cavalry cut off and killed every man who fell wounded from their ranks, they became seized with a panic. In vain their officers exhorted them to keep steady. Reaching a rivulet, the men threw down their rifles and accoutrements as they crossed it, and took to headlong flight.

The little group of officers gathered together, and fought to the end. Captains Noton, Truman, and Pringle; Lieutenant Grigg, Ensign Bennet, and Maismore the doctor were killed. Three officers, only, made their escape; of these, two were wounded.

The fugitives, both natives and sepoys, continued their flight; and when, two or three days later, they straggled into Chittagong, it was found that the total loss in killed and missing amounted to about two hundred and fifty. Those taken prisoners numbered only about twenty. All these were more or less severely wounded, for no quarter had been given. They had, in the pursuit, been passed over as dead; and when, after this was over, they were found to be alive, they were spared from no feeling of humanity, but that they might be sent to Ava, as proofs of the victory obtained over the British. The number actually found alive was greater, but only those were spared that were capable of travelling.

Among these was Stanley Brooke. He had remained insensible, until the pursuit had been discontinued. A violent kick roused him to consciousness and, sitting up, he found that half a dozen Burmese were standing round him. His first action, on recovering his senses, was to discover where he was wounded. Seeing no signs of blood on his white clothes, he took off his cap and passed his hand over his head; and found that the blood was flowing from a wound just on the top, where a bullet had cut away the hair and scalp, and made a wound nearly three inches long, at the bottom of which he could feel the bone.

Looking up at the Burmese, he said, in their own language:

"That was a pretty close shave, wasn't it?"

Two or three of them laughed, and all looked amused. Two of them then helped him to his feet; and the group, among whom there were some officers, then took him some distance to the rear, where he was ordered to sit down with three wounded sepoys who had been brought in.

Chapter 3: A Prisoner

The little group of prisoners received several additions, until the number mounted up to twenty. The spot where they were placed was close to the bank of the river and, as all were suffering severely from thirst, Stanley asked and obtained permission from the guard to fetch some water. He first knelt down and took a long drink; then he bathed his head and, soaking his handkerchief with water, made it into a pad, placed it on the wound, and put his cap on over it. Then he filled a flask that he carried, and joined his companions. These were permitted to go down, one by one, to the river to drink and bathe their wounds.

Stanley had already learned, from them, all they knew of what had happened after he had been stunned by the bullet. Two of them had crossed the rivulet, before being wounded; and these said that they believed all the white officers had been killed, but that they thought most of the troops had got away.

"It is more than they deserved," Stanley said indignantly. "I don't say much about the Mugs. They had very little drill or discipline and, naturally, were afraid of the Burmese, who had long been their masters; but if the sepoys had kept together under their officers, they might all have escaped, for the Burmese would never have been able to break their ranks."

"Some of the officers had been killed, and most of them wounded, before the retreat began, sahib," one of the sepoys said apologetically, "and they were ten to one against us."

"Yes, I know that; but you who had fought before should have known well enough that, as long as you kept together, you could have beaten them off; and they would have been glad enough to have given up the pursuit, at last. No doubt they all wanted to have a share in the plunder of Ramoo."

"What do you think that they are going to do with us, sahib?"

"From what they said as they brought me here, I think that we shall be sent to Ava, or Amarapura. They lie close together, and the court is sometimes at one place and sometimes at the other. What they will do with us when we get there, I don't know. They may cut off our heads, they may put us in prison; anyhow, you may be sure that we shall not have a pleasant time of it.

"All we have to hope for is that the capture of Rangoon, by our fleet, may lower their pride and bring them to treat for terms. It sailed nearly six weeks ago from Calcutta, and was to have been joined by one from Madras and, allowing for delays, it ought to have been at Rangoon a fortnight since, and would certainly capture the place without any difficulty. So possibly by the time we reach Ava we shall find that peace has been made.

"Still, the Burmese may not consider the loss of Rangoon to be important, and may even try to recapture it–which you may be sure they won't do, for I heard at Chittagong that there were some twenty thousand troops coming; which would be quite enough, if there were but good roads and plenty of transport for them, to march through Burma from end to end."

In the evening food was brought to the prisoners and, talking with some of the Burmese who came up to look at them, Stanley learned that Bandoola himself had not accompanied the force across the Naaf, and that it was commanded by the rajahs who ruled the four provinces of Aracan. Upon the following morning the prisoners were marched away, under a strong guard. Six days later they reached the camp of Bandoola. They were drawn up at a distance from the great man's tent. He came down, accompanied by a party of officers, to look at them. He beckoned to Stanley.

"Ask him if he is an officer," he said to an interpreter, standing by his side.

The man put the question in Hindustani. Stanley replied, in Burmese:

"I am an officer, your lordship, but a temporary one, only. I served in the Mug levy, and was appointed for my knowledge of their tongue."

"How is it that you come to speak our language?" Bandoola asked, in surprise.

"I am a trader, your lordship, but when our trade was put an end to, by the outbreak of the war, I entered the army to serve until peace was made. I learned the language from a servant in the service of my uncle, whose assistant I was."

The Burmese general was capable of acts of great cruelty, when he considered it necessary; but at other times was kindly and good natured.

"He is but a lad," he said to one of his officers, "and he seems a bold young fellow. He would be useful as an interpreter to me, for we shall want to question his countrymen when we make them all prisoners. However, we must send him with the others to Ava, as he is the only officer that we have taken; but I will send a message to some of my friends, at the court, asking them to represent

that I consider he will be useful to me; and praying that he may be kept for a time and treated well, and may be forwarded to me, again, when I make my next move against the English."

The following day the prisoners started under the escort of twenty soldiers, commanded by an officer of some rank, who was specially charged to take them safely to Ava. It was a fortnight's march to the Irrawaddy. Until they neared the river the country was very thinly populated but, when they approached its banks, the villages were comparatively thick, standing for the most part in clearings in a great forest. On the march the Burmese officer frequently talked with Stanley, asked many questions about England and India; and was evidently surprised, and somewhat sceptical, as to the account the lad gave him of the fighting strength of the country. He treated him with considerable indulgence, and sent him dishes from his own table.

When not talking with him, Stanley marched at the head of the little party of prisoners–all of whom were sepoys, no quarter having been given to the native levies. Of an evening, Stanley endeavoured to keep up the sepoys' spirits by telling them that probably, by this time, the British expedition had arrived at Rangoon, and captured it; and that peace would most likely follow, and they might be exchanged for any Burmese who fell into the hands of the English.

When they reached a village on the banks of the river the population, on seeing them, came round and would have maltreated them; had not the officer interfered, and said he had Bandoola's orders to carry them safely to the court, and that anyone interfering with them would be severely punished. The head man of the village bent low, on hearing the general's name.

"I ask your pardon, my lord. The prisoners shall not be touched. But have you heard the news?"

"I have heard no news," the officer said.

"It arrived here yesterday, my lord. The barbarians have had the audacity to sail up, with a great fleet of ships, to Rangoon. They had vessels of war with them and, though our forts fired upon them, they had so many cannon that we could not resist them, and they have captured the town. This happened a fortnight since."

The officer stood thunderstruck at what appeared, to him, to be an act of audacious insolence. However, after a moment's pause, he said wrathfully:

"It is of little matter. The town was weak, and in no position for defence; but a force will soon go down to sweep these barbarians away. Now, get ready your war galley, as soon as possible."

Each village on the river was compelled, by law, to furnish a war galley for the king's service whenever it might be required. These carried from fifty to a hundred men, and some three hundred of these boats were always available for service, and constituted one of the strongest divisions of the fighting force of the Burman empire. The village was a large one, and in half an hour the crew of the galley were on board and, rowing forty oars, started up the river.

"What think you of this news?" the officer said, beckoning to Stanley to take his place in front of him. "These men must be mad, to tempt the anger of the Lord of the Golden Stool, the mighty Emperor. Had you heard aught of this?"

"I heard but a vague rumour that a fleet had been collected, but I heard nothing for certain as to its destination."

"It is madness," the officer repeated. "We shall sweep them into the sea. How many of them are there, do you think?"

"As to that I can say little, my lord. I only heard a report that some ships and troops were to sail–some from Madras and some from Calcutta–but of the number of the men and ships, I know nothing for certain."

"They have taken evil council," the officer said, gravely. "I have heard that they gained some slight advantage, in Cachar; but there they had but irregular troops to meet, largely Assamese, who are but poor cowards. This little success must have turned their heads. They will now have our regular forces to deal with, and these will number a hundred thousand–or twice as many, if necessary. Think you that the handful that would be transported in ships can stand against such a host?"

"There may be more than you think, my lord. Many of the ships will be very big, much bigger than those that trade with Rangoon; and some of them will carry as many as five hundred men."

"Even so," the officer said scornfully; "if there were twenty-five such ships, or even fifty, the force would be as nothing to us. They will have to take to their vessels, as soon as our army approaches."

"It may be so, sir; but I think that they will scarce go without fighting. I would represent to you that, although much fewer in numbers than your army which attacked us, at Ramoo, the troops made a stout fight of it; and that they fought steadily, until the Mugs ran away. After that, from what I hear, I admit that they fled shamefully. But the troops that come to Rangoon will be better than those were, for there will be white regiments among them; and though these may, as you say, be overpowered with numbers and destroyed, I do not think that you will see them running away."

"And you think that they will really venture to withstand us?

"I think that they will endeavour to do so."

"Why, there will scarce be an occasion for fighting," the officer said, disdainfully. "They were mad to come; they are madder, still, to come now. The rainy season is just at hand. In another week it will be upon us. The rivers will spread, the flat country will be a marsh. Even we, who are accustomed to it, suffer. In places like Rangoon fever and disease will sweep them away and, when the dry season comes and our troops assemble to fight them, there will be none left. They will die off like flies. We shall scarce capture enough to send as prisoners to the emperor."

Stanley felt that, in this respect, the Burman's prophecies were but too likely to be fulfilled. He knew how deadly were the swamp fevers to white men; and that in spite of his comfortable home on board the dhow and boat, he had himself suffered although, during the wet season, his uncle made a point of sailing along the coast, and of ascending only rivers that flowed between high banks and through a country free from swamps. He remembered that his uncle had spoken, very strongly, of the folly of the expedition being timed to arrive on the coast of Burma at the beginning of the wet season; and had said that they would suffer terribly from fever before they could advance up the country, unless it was intended to confine the operations to the coast towns, until the dry season set in.

It would indeed have been impossible to have chosen a worse time for the expedition but, doubtless, the government of India thought chiefly of the necessity for forcing the Burmese to stand on the defensive, and of so preventing the invasion of India by a vast army. Unquestionably, too, they believed that the occupation of Rangoon, and the stoppage of all trade, would show the court of Ava that they had embarked in a struggle with no contemptible foe; and would be glad to abate their pretensions, and to agree to fair terms of peace.

The Bengal force that had been embarked consisted of two British regiments–the 13th and 38th–a battalion of native infantry, and two batteries of European artillery, amounting in all to 2175 men. The Madras force–of which one division was sent on at once, the other was to follow shortly–consisted of the 41st and 89th Regiments, the Madras European regiment, seven battalions of native infantry, and four batteries of artillery, amounting to 9300 men; making a total of 11475 fighting men, of whom nearly five thousand were Europeans. In addition to the transports, the Bengal force was accompanied by a flotilla of twenty gun-brigs and as many row-boats, each armed with an eighteen-pounder; the Larne and Sophia sloop, belonging to the Royal Navy; several of the Company's cruisers; and the steamboat Diana. General Sir A. Campbell was appointed to the chief command, and Colonel M'Bean, with the rank of Brigadier General, commanded the Madras force.

The Bengal squadron sailed from Saugur in the middle of April; and reached the rendezvous, Port Cornwallis, in the Andaman Islands, at the end of the month. The Madras first division sailed at the same time, and joined them a few days later; and the whole force, under the escort of H. M. frigate Liffey and the Slaney, sloop of war, left Port Cornwallis on the 5th of May, and arrived on the 9th at the mouth of the Irrawaddy.

Forces were detached for the capture of the islands of Chuduba and Negrais. On the 10th the fleet entered the river and anchored within the bar and, on the following morning, proceeded with the flood tide up to Rangoon, the Liffey and the Larne leading the way. A few shots were fired as they went up the river; but the Burmese were taken wholly by surprise, the idea that the English would venture to invade them never having entered their minds.

There was considerable disappointment on board the fleet, when Rangoon came into sight. It was situated on the north bank of the main branch of the river, thirty miles from the sea. It extended about nine hundred yards along the bank, and was six or seven hundred yards wide, at its broadest part. Beyond the town were some suburbs, outside the palisade that inclosed it. The palisades were ten or twelve feet high, strengthened by embankments of earth thrown up against them, on the inner side. One face of the defences ran along the river bank, while the others were protected by a shallow creek communicating with the river. The town itself consisted, for the most part, of miserable and dirty hovels; and of a few official buildings of larger size.

At twelve o'clock the Liffey anchored abreast of the principal battery, close to the water gate; the transports being ranged in a line in rear of her. A proclamation had been sent on shore, on the previous day, giving assurances of protection to the people at large, and to all who should offer no resistance.

When the guns of the fleet were loaded, a pause ensued. The town was evidently incapable of offering resistance, and it was hoped that it would capitulate. The Burmese were seen standing at their guns, but they also remained inactive, apparently paralysed at the appearance of this great fleet of vessels–of a size hitherto undreamt of by them–and the threatening guns pointed towards them. However, they were at last goaded, by the orders and threats of their officers, to open fire upon the ships.

The frigate at once replied with a broadside. In a very few minutes, every gun on shore was silenced, and the Burmese fled in confusion from their works. As soon as they did so, the signal for disembarkation was made. The troops crowded into the boats, which rowed for the shore; and the soldiers entered the town without resistance, and found it completely deserted.

The whole of the population had been driven out by the governor on the previous day and, according to Burmese custom, the men had all been formed into a levy, while the women and children were held under guard, as hostages for their husbands and fathers–their lives being forfeited in case of desertion, or cowardice, by their male relations.

The foreigners in the town had all been seized. They were few in number, consisting of some eight or ten British traders and American missionaries. These, after being fettered, were taken to the Custom House prison. They were brought up and tried, early on the morning of the attack, and were accused of having arranged the assault on the town. They naturally urged that, if they had had the least knowledge that it was going to be made, they would have left the place in time. But the Burmese at once condemned them to death, and they were taken back to the prison to be executed.

The sentence was not carried out. The Burmese had intended to execute them on the walls, in sight of their countrymen; and the authorities had all assembled at the prison for the purpose when, fortunately, a shot from the first broadside fired passed through the building, causing an instant stampede. The chiefs at once left the city; and the prisoners, heavily chained, were marched some distance into the country. A party of British troops were, however, pushed forward in advance of the town, as soon as it was occupied; and the guard, in alarm for their own safety, placed the prisoners in a house and made off; and a patrol found them there, on the following morning, and brought them into the town.

The great pagoda, standing two miles and a half from the town, was at once occupied as an advanced position by the British. It stood upon a conical hill, rising seventy-five feet above the plain. The area on the top was somewhat over two acres; and in the centre rose the pagoda, three hundred and thirty-eight feet high.

Every boat on the river was found to have been removed. In spite of proclamations promising good treatment, none of the inhabitants returned to the town, being prevented from doing so by the Burmese authorities and troops. No stores whatever had been found and, till the end of the wet season, the army had to depend entirely upon the fleet for provisions; and remained cooped up in the wretched and unhealthy town, suffering severely from fever and malaria.

The boat in which Stanley and the other prisoners were conveyed was changed at every village going up the river, as the officer was carrying the despatches from Bandoola to the court. A flag was hoisted as the boat came in sight of a village. This was the signal that another was required and, within two or three minutes of their arrival, the prisoners, their guard and officer were on their way again.

Thus they proceeded, night and day and, in four days, arrived at Ava. Leaving the prisoners in charge of the guard, the officer at once proceeded to the palace. In an hour guns were fired, drums beat, and the bells of the pagodas rung, to give notice to the population that a great victory had been won over the English, and their army annihilated, by Bandoola and his valiant troops. This obliterated the impression produced by the news that had arrived, a few days previously, of the landing at Rangoon; and there were great rejoicings among the population.

An officer from the palace presently came down to the boat, and the prisoners were marched through the streets to a jail, amid the jeers of the mob. Stanley was surprised at the meanness of the town; the great majority of the houses being built of bamboo, and thatched with grass, and having a very poor appearance. The public buildings and the houses of the great officers were constructed of planks, and tiled; but were heavy and tasteless, and it was only upon the innumerable pagodas, in and around the town, that any care seemed to have been bestowed.

He had wondered much at the numerous pagodas that they had seen, near every town and village, as they passed up; but the officer had informed him that these were all private property, and that it was considered the most meritorious of actions to erect one; consequently every man who had means to do so built a pagoda, large or small in proportion to the sum that he could bestow upon it. On Stanley's remarking upon the great number that were in ruins, the officer replied that it was considered so much more meritorious an action to build a pagoda than to repair one that, after the death of the founder, they were generally suffered to fall into decay.

For some days the prisoners were taken out, every day, and marched about the town for some time, so as to afford the population ocular proof of the victory gained by Bandoola. The place in which they were confined was small and filthy but, at the end of a week, Stanley was taken out and placed in a room by himself; and here the officer who had had charge of him paid him a visit, an hour or two later.

"I have expressed to the court," he said, "the wishes of the general, and have had permission accorded for you to receive different treatment from the others; partly because you are an officer, but principally because the general thinks that you may be made useful to him. I have informed the officer of the prison that you are to be at liberty to walk about in the city, when you please; but that to protect you from violence, an officer and two soldiers are to accompany you, so long as you may think such a precaution necessary. I have ordered a dress of our fashion to be brought to you as, otherwise, you could not go into the streets without being mobbed."

Stanley expressed his gratitude to the officer for obtaining these indulgences, and the latter replied:

"I acted upon the orders of the general, but it has been a pleasure to me; for I see that you are a young man of merit, and I have learned much from you about your people during the journey; and have seen that, foolish as they have been to undertake to match themselves against us, there are yet some things that might be learned from them; and that, if they had remained in their island, many months' journey away from here, they might have been worthy of our friendship."

A short time after the officer had left, a soldier brought up some food of a very much better nature than that with which Stanley had been hitherto supplied. Half an hour later, the dress arrived.

It was that of a Burmese officer of inferior grade; and consisted of a tunic of thick cloth, coming down to the knees; leathern sword belt; a sort of tippet resembling that of an English coachman, with three layers of cloth thickly quilted; and a leathern helmet going up to a point in the centre, with a flap to protect the neck and ears. With it were worn tight-fitting stockings of cloth, and low shoes.

Presently an officer came in.

"I am ordered to go out with you, once a day, at whatever hour you may desire. I am a relative of the officer who brought you here, and he has requested me to look after your safety."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," Stanley said, "and shall be glad, indeed, to go out to see the city. Your kinsman has kindly sent me a dress; but if I am not to be noticed, it will be necessary for me to stain my face and hands, somewhat."

"That I have thought of," the officer said, "and have brought with me some dye which will darken your skin. It would be worse than useless for you to dress as a Burman, unless you did so; for it would seem even more singular, to the people in the streets, that a white man should be seen walking about dressed as an officer, than that a white prisoner should be taken through the streets under a guard.

"I am ready to go out with you now, if you wish it."

"I shall be ready in a few minutes," Stanley replied and, on being left alone, at once changed his attire and stained his face and hands.

He had just finished when the officer returned. He smiled and said:

"There is no fear of your being suspected, now; and you might really go about safely without a guard, unless you were to enter into conversation with anyone. You speak the language very well, but your accent is not quite the same as ours, here, though in Aracan it would pass unremarked."

As they went out from the prison, the officer told two soldiers who were waiting there to follow, at a distance.

"Do not approach us," he said, "unless I call you up."

The houses were not constructed in continuous rows, but were very scattered, each house having its inclosure or garden. The population was very small, in comparison to the area occupied by the town. This was divided into two parts–the inner and outer town. The whole was surrounded by a brick wall, five miles and a half in circumference, some sixteen feet high and ten feet in thickness, strengthened on the inside by a great bank of earth. The inner town was inclosed by a separate wall, with a deep ditch on two sides, the river Irrawaddy on the third, and a tributary river on the fourth.

A considerable portion of the inclosed area was occupied by the royal quarter; containing the palace, the court of justice, the council chamber, arsenal, and the houses of the ministers and chief officials. This was cut off from the rest by a strong and well-built wall, twenty feet high, outside which was a stockade of the same height. The total population of Ava was but 25,000.

The officer did not take Stanley to the royal quarter, observing that it was better not to go there as, although he had leave to walk in the town, it might give offence were he to show himself near the palace; but after going through the wall, they visited two or three of the markets, of which there were eleven in the town.

The markets consisted of thatched huts and sheds, and were well supplied with the products of the country. Here were rice, maize, wheat, and various other grains; sticks of sugar cane, tobacco, cotton, and indigo; mangoes, oranges, pineapples, custard apples, and plantains were in abundance; also peacocks, jungle fowl, pigeons, partridges, geese, ducks, and snipes–but little meat was on sale, as the Burman religion forbids the killing of animals for food. Venison was the only meat allowed to be sold in the markets; but there were lizards, iguanas, and snakes, which were exposed freely for sale; and there were large quantities of turtle and tortoise eggs, which had been brought up from the delta.

Stanley saw that there had really been no great occasion for him to stain his skin, as the people were, for the most part, lighter in colour than the Hindoos. Many of the men had, however, stained their faces to a darker colour; and all were tattooed, more or less. Men, women, and children were

all smoking; and frequently, when both hands were required for any purpose, thrust their cigars into the large holes bored in the lobes of their ears. Both men and women were somewhat short in stature, but squarely built and muscular and, in the majority of cases, inclined to be fat.

The men wore a sort of kilt, consisting of a double piece of cloth, wrapped round the body and falling to the knee. Over this was a loose tunic, with sleeves open in front. The headdress was a scanty white turban.

The dress of the women was somewhat similar to that of the Hindoos, consisting of a single garment like a sheet wrapped round the body, fastening under the arms and falling to the ankles. Those of the upper classes were more elaborate. The rank among the women was distinguished, so Stanley's guide pointed out to him, by the manner in which the hair was plaited and twisted, and by the ornaments in it.

The men, like the women, wore their hair long but, while the men wore theirs in a knot at the top of the head, the women gathered it in at the back. Their faces were broad at the cheekbones, but narrowed in sharply, both at the forehead and chin. The narrow and oblique eyes showed the relationship between the Burmese and their Chinese neighbours. They seemed to Stanley a light-hearted, merry people, going about their business with much chatter and laughter; and the sound of musical instruments could often be heard, inside the houses. Several men, in bright yellow garments, mingled with the crowds in the market. These were priests, the officer told him; and it would be a mortal act of sacrilege, were anyone else to wear that colour.

Stanley remarked upon seeing so few soldiers, and the officer told him that there was no regular army in Burma. Every man capable of carrying arms was obliged to serve in case of war but, with the exception of the king's bodyguard, and a very small body of men who were police, rather than soldiers, there was no force permanently kept up. Every man was expected to know something of military duty, and all were able to build stockades. From the fact that the flesh of wild fowl formed one of the principal articles of food, the peasantry throughout the country were all accustomed to the use of the gun, and were fair marksmen.

"But you yourself are an officer," Stanley said.

"At present, yes; but tomorrow I may return to my land. It is the same with the highest minister. One day he may be a trader but, if recommended to the king as one possessing ability, straightway he is chosen to be a high official. If he does not please the king, or fails in his duties, then the next day he may be selling cloth in the bazaar again.

"Everything is at the will of the king. Nobody is born with fortune or rank, for everything belongs to the king and, at a man's death, all goes back to him. Thus everyone in the land has an equal chance. In war the bravest becomes a general, in peace the cleverest is chosen as a councillor."

Walking about, Stanley soon found that there were a great variety of dialects talked in the streets, and that the language of the Burmese of the coast, of the natives of Pegu and the central province, and of those from districts bordering on the Shan states or the frontiers of China, differed as widely as those of the most remote parts of Great Britain did from each other. This being so, he was convinced that there would be no difficulty, whatever, in passing as a native, without attracting any observation or inquiry, so far as the language went.

His features and, still more, the shape of his face might, however, be noticed by the first comer, in the daytime. He thought, indeed, that a little tinge of colour in the corner of the eyes, so as to lengthen their appearance and give an oblique cast to them, would make a difference. The general shape of the head was unalterable, but the Burmese nose and mouth did not differ very greatly from the European; except that the nostrils were smaller and, in shape, were round rather than oval.

For three weeks he continued the same life, and then the Burmese officer, with whom he had now become very friendly, said when he entered one morning:

"You must not go out today. There is news that your people have made two forward marches. The first was against a stockade, which they took, and killed many of our men; the other time they

marched out four or five miles, had a fight with our troops, and again killed many. These things have angered the king and the people. Of course it is nothing, for our troops are only beginning to assemble; but it is considered insolent in the extreme, and the king's face is darkened against your countrymen. Four of the prisoners have been taken out this morning and publicly executed and, if the news of another defeat comes, I fear that it will be very dangerous, even for you."

"What had I best do, my friend?"

"I would fain save you, for we have come to know each other; and I see that there is much good in your ways, though they differ greatly from ours. Were I to take you out, as usual, you might be killed in the streets; were you to slip away and escape, I should assuredly be put to death; but if in any way I can help you, I would fain do so. My relation who brought you up here left, a fortnight since, to rejoin Bandoola; so his influence cannot serve you.

"I do not say that you might not escape from this prison–since you are not, like the others, confined in a dungeon–but I see not what you could do, or where you could go. Were you to disappear, orders would be sent down the river to every village, and every passing craft would be examined, and you would be sure to be detected; while it would be well-nigh impossible to travel the country on foot, for it is but thinly inhabited. There are often very long distances between the villages, and much of the country is swamp and forest, without paths; for the village trade goes by the river, and they have little communication with each other.

"I know that, from what you say, you think that your troops will beat ours, even when we assemble in large numbers. Were this so, I fear that there would be little chance of your life being spared. Were it not for that, I should say that, Bandoola having recommended you, you would be in no danger here, and had better remain until peace is made.

"What think you, yourself?"

"It is very difficult to reply, at once," Stanley said, "but I thank you greatly for your offer to befriend me, in any way you can. I do not say that I had not thought of escape, for I have of course done so. But it seemed to me a thing in the distance; and that, at any rate until the rains were over and the rivers had sunk, it would be useless to attempt it. I see, now, that it will be safest for me to try without delay. If you will come in again, this afternoon, I will tell you what I have thought of."

"I will do so; and I, myself, will try to think how best the matter can be managed. We must remember that the great thing is for you to find concealment, for the present. After the search for you has been made for some time, it will die away; and it will then be the easiest plan for you to make your way down the river."

Chapter 4: A Ruined Temple

After the officer left him, Stanley sat thinking for a long time. He himself inclined strongly towards the river; but he saw that, at present, the difficulties would be very great. The war boats were passing up and down, and bodies of troops were being carried down in large craft. In every village the men, he knew, were assembling and drilling. Even in Ava he could see the difference in the population, the proportion of men to women having markedly decreased since his arrival.

As to the journey by land, it appeared to him impossible. He was, too, altogether without money and, whether by water or land, it would be necessary to go into the villages to buy provisions. Indeed, money would have been almost useless, for there was no coined money in Burma; payments being made in lead, for small amounts, or in silver for large ones–the quantity necessary being cut off from small sticks or bars, or paid in filings.

It seemed to him that the best thing would be to take to the forest, for a time; and endeavour to subsist upon wild fruits or, if these were not to be found there, to go out into the fields and orchards at night, and so manage to hold on for a few weeks. His friend told him that, in the forests along the principal lines of route to the capital, were many bad characters–persons who had committed crime and fled from justice. Some were cultivators who, having been unable to pay their taxes, had deserted their land and taken to the woods. All committed depredations, and traders coming into the town from the Shan states, or from the country where rubies and emeralds were found, always travelled in caravans for mutual protection. At times levies were called out, and many of these marauders were killed.

Stanley, then, had hit upon nothing definite when the officer returned in the afternoon and, in reply to the latter's question, he acknowledged at once that the only thing he could see was to take to the forest, until the active search for him had ceased.

"You would find it difficult to maintain yourself. I have thought of a better way than that. I am acquainted with a Phongee, who lives in a temple in a lonely spot, four miles away. He is a good man, though somewhat strange in his habits; and I feel sure that, on my recommendation, he would take you in. There would be little chance of your being discovered there. You could not go dressed as you are, but must disguise yourself as a peasant; though it might be well to retain your present attire, which may be useful to you, afterwards. I fear that you will fare badly with him, in the way of food; there will be enough to eat, but it will be of the simplest."

"So that there is enough to keep life together, it matters little what it is."

"Then that is settled.

"Now, about making your escape from here. Your door is closely barred, at night; and there is no window save those four little holes, high up in the wall, which scarce a bird could get through."

"I could cut through the thatch above," Stanley said, "if I had but something that I could stand upon to do so. There are some bamboos lying just at the bottom of the steps. With these and some cord I might make a sort of ladder, and should then be able to get at the thatch."

"I will bring you some cord, tomorrow, for that and to let yourself down to the ground. Then I will arrange where to meet you, and will guide you out of the town and take you to the priest. I will bring a disguise for you, and some stain for your body and arms for, as a peasant, you would be naked to the waist. I can think of nothing better."

"I thank you most heartily," Stanley said, "and trust that you may get into no trouble for the kindness that you have shown me."

"There is no fear of that, my friend. No one will know that I have been away from the town. I am greatly afraid that this will be all that I shall be able to do for you; for I am told that I am to go down the river with the next batch of troops, which will start in three days. I have only been informed

of it since I saw you this morning. Had it not been for you I should have been glad; for it is in war time, only, that one can obtain honour and promotion."

"I am sorry that you are going, sir. I shall miss your kindness, sorely; but I can understand your desire to go to the front. It is the same with us; when there is a war, every officer and soldier hopes that his regiment will be sent there. However, I shall see you again.

"Has Bandoola's army moved yet?"

"No; nor do I think that it will do so. It is a long march down to Rangoon from Ramoo; and I believe that he will remain where he is, until he sees how matters go at Rangoon. As soon as your people are driven out, he will be joined by a great army, and will march to Dacca. There our troops from the north will join him; and then he will go to India, we think."

"I fancy," Stanley said with a smile, "if he waits until we are turned out from Rangoon, his stay at Ramoo will be a long one."

The next day the officer brought several yards of strong cloth, such as was worn by the peasants; a piece of muslin to make the circular band that was worn by the lower class, instead of a complete turban; and a lot of horse hair to be worn on the top of the head.

"Now," he said, "strip to the waist, and I will dye your body. I have dyes of two colours here; one for the skin, and the other to draw lines on the face, so as to make you look older; and with this I can also imitate tattoo marks on your chest and shoulders. Here is a long knife, such as everyone wears, and here is the cord.

"As soon as it is getting dark you must carry up two of the bamboo poles, taking care that no one observes you do so. There is seldom anyone in the courtyard. I have had the knife sharpened, and it will cut through the thatch, easily enough. When you get away, walk straight to the market that lies nearest to us. I will be at its entrance. It will take you, I suppose, two hours to make your ladder and get out. You cannot begin until the guard closes your door. You tell me he never comes in."

"No, he brings the last meal an hour before sunset. I generally sit on the top of the steps, till he comes up to lock the door, which is about nine o'clock; and I do not see him again until he unbars the door in the morning. I should not think that it will take as long as two hours to make the ladder, and cut the thatch; at any rate, by eleven I ought to join you.

"I suppose the gates are open."

"Oh, yes! They are never closed, though of course they would be, if an enemy were near. There is no guard anywhere."

After staining Stanley's skin, the officer waited a quarter of an hour for it to dry thoroughly; and then proceeded to draw lines on his face, across the forehead, and from the corners of his eyes; and then spent nearly an hour in executing rough tattoo marks on his body and arms.

"This dye is very good, and will last for weeks before it begins to fade. I will bring with me another bottle, tonight, so that you can at least re-dye your skin.

"Here is some wax. You must turn your hair up from the neck, and plaster it in its place with it. The turban will prevent anyone seeing how short the hair is. Here is a little bottle of black dye, with which you had better colour it, before fixing it with the wax."

Stanley's hair had not been cut for some time before he had been captured by the Burmese and, in the two months that had since elapsed, it had grown very long; and could therefore be turned up as the officer suggested. Putting on his usual garments, he sat at his place, at the door of the cell, until the guard brought up his evening meal. Having eaten this, he dyed his hair and, half an hour later, turned it up, plastering it with wax, and tied a bit of fibre round where the turban would come.

By this time it was getting dusk. He sat at the door at the top of the steps, until he saw that the courtyard was deserted; the guard at the gate having gone outside, to enjoy the coolness of the air. Then he ran down the steps, took two bamboo poles about ten feet in length, and two short pieces of the same wood no thicker than his finger and, hurrying up the steps with them, laid them down against the side of the room. Then he went to the steps again, and sat there until he saw the guard

coming across to fasten his door; when he went in and, as soon as he heard the bars put up, began his preparations.

First he lashed the short pieces across the ends of the two bamboos, so as to keep them a foot apart; then he put ratlines across, and soon had the ladder completed. He made up his clothes into a bundle, wrapped the rough cloth round his waist, adjusted the knot of horse hair on the top of his head, and fastened it there with wax. He wound the turban round below, and his disguise was complete.

Fixing the ladder against the wall he climbed it, and it was not long before he cut a hole through the thatch of sufficient size to pass out. The work had taken him longer than he had expected, for it had to be done in absolute darkness; however, he was sure that he was well within his time. Fastening the end of the rope to one of the bamboo rafters, he descended the ladder and picked up his bundle; then climbed up again, got halfway out of the hole, and listened intently. Everything was quiet in the street and, in another minute, he stood on the ground.

When he turned into the principal street, there were still many people about. Sounds of music and singing came from the windows, for the Burmese are very fond of music, and often pass the whole night in playing and singing. There was no risk whatever of detection now, and he stepped briskly along until he came to the open space, with its rows of little thatched huts. Here he paused for a minute, and the officer stepped out from behind a house and joined him.

"I was not sure at first that it was you," he said. "Your disguise is excellent. You had better follow me, now, until we get beyond the busy streets."

Keeping some twenty yards behind his guide, Stanley went on until, after nearly half an hour's walking, they passed through a gate in the city walls. He now closed up to the officer and, after another half-hour's walk across a cultivated country, they entered a forest. The ground now rose steadily and, after keeping on for two miles, they emerged from the trees at the top of a hill. The space had been cleared of timber, but it was nearly covered with bushes and young trees. In the centre were the ruins of a temple, that had evidently existed long before the Burmese dynasty occupied the country, and had been erected by some older race. It was roofless; the walls had, in places, fallen; and the ruins were covered with vegetation.

The Burman ascended some broken steps, entered the temple, and crossed to one of the opposite corners. A dim light was burning in a small apartment, which had been roofed with thatch. A man was lying, dressed, on a heap of leaves at one side. He started up as the officer entered.

"Who is it who comes here at this hour?" he asked.

"Thekyn," the officer answered.

"I am glad to see you," the Phongee said, "whatever may bring you here. You have not fallen into trouble, I hope?"

"In no way, good priest. I am starting, in two days, down the river to fight the barbarians; but before I go, I want you to do me a favour."

The Phongee smiled.

"Beyond naming you in my prayers, Thekyn, there is but little that a hermit can do for any man."

"Not so, in this case," the officer said. "I have one here with me who needs rest, and concealment. I would rather that you did not ask who he is. He has done no crime, and yet he is in danger; and for a month, maybe, he needs a shelter. Will you give it him, for my sake?"

"Assuredly I will," the priest said. "Your father was one of my dearest friends, in the days when I dwelt in the city. I would gladly do all in my power for his son, and this is but a small thing that you ask. Let him enter."

Stanley went in. The priest took down the little lamp, from a shelf on which it stood, and held it near the lad's face. Then he turned, with a smile, to Thekyn:

"The painting is but clumsily done," he said, "though maybe it would pass without close examination. He is a stranger, and comes of a race unknown to me but, as you said, it matters not to me who he is; suffice that he is a friend of yours. He is welcome to a share of my shelter, and my

food; though the shelter is rough, and the food somewhat scanty. Of late few, indeed, have sought me for, as I hear, most of the men have gone down to the war."

"I have brought you some food," the officer said; for Stanley had observed that he also carried a bundle, a larger one than his own. "Here is a supply of rice, that will last for some time; and this, with your offerings, will suffice to keep things going. My friend is not, like you, bound by his religion not to take life; and I know that snakes are very plentiful round here."

Snakes had formed a frequent article of his diet, since he had been captured; and Stanley had lost the repugnance to them that he at first felt, so the prospect of their forming the staple of his food was not disagreeable to him. It would also afford him some employment to search for and kill them.

"I shall be well content," he said, "with anything that I can get, and trust that I shall be no burden upon you."

"You will assuredly be none," the priest replied. "Here must be at least thirty pounds of rice which, alone, would keep two men alive for a month. As regards the snakes, though I may not kill them, I may eat them when killed; and indeed, there are few things better. In truth, I should not be sorry to have some of the creatures out of the way; for they swarm round here so thickly that I have to pay great heed, when I walk, lest I step upon them."

"Have you been troubled with robbers, of late, father?" Thekyn asked.

"They trouble me not at all," the priest said. "Men come, sometimes. They may be robbers, or they may not. I ask no questions. They sometimes bring fruit and other offerings, and I know that I need not fear them. I have nought to lose, save my life; and he would be indeed an evil man who would dare to lift his finger against a priest–one who harms not anyone, and is ready to share what food he has with any man who comes to him hungry."

"Well, father, I will say goodbye. I must be back to the city before men are about, as I would not that my absence should be discovered."

"Peace be with you, my son. May you come back safe from the wars. My prayers will be said for you, night and morning.

"Be in no uneasiness as to your friend. If any should ask me about my companion, I shall reply that he is one who has undertaken to rid me of some of the snakes, who dispute the possession of this place with me."

Thekyn motioned to Stanley to come outside the hut with him and, when he did so, handed to him a small but heavy bag.

"This is lead," he said. "You will need it, when you start on your journey down the country. There are eight pounds of it and, from what you have seen in the market, you will know how much food can be got for a small amount of lead. I would that I could do more for you, and assist your flight."

"You have done much indeed, very much and, should I regain my friends, I will endeavour to do as much by one of your countrymen, for your sake. I hope that, when this war is over, I may meet you again."

"I hope so," the Burman said warmly. "I cannot but think that you will succeed in getting away."

"My son," the old priest said, when Stanley returned to his cell, "I am going to my prayers. I always rise at this hour, and pray till morning; therefore you may as well lay yourself down on these leaves. There is another cell, like this, in the opposite corner of the temple. In the morning you can cut boughs, and roof it like this; and make your bed there. There is no room for another, here; and it will doubtless be more pleasant for you to have a place to yourself, where you can go and come as you like; for in the day women come up to consult me, and ask for my prayers–but mind how you enter it for the first time as, like as not, there will be snakes sheltering there."

Stanley lay awake for a time, listening to the monotonous voice of the priest as he repeated his prayers; but his senses soon wandered, and he slept soundly till daybreak.

His first step was to cut a stout stick, and he then proceeded to the other cell, which was partially blocked up with stone from the fallen roof. It took him two hours to carry this stuff out, and he

killed no less than nine snakes that he disturbed in his work. The prospect of sleeping in a place so frequented was not a pleasant one, especially as the cell had no door to it; and he resolved at once to erect some sort of bed place, where he might be beyond their reach. For this purpose he cut two poles, each three or four inches longer than the cell. One end of each he sharpened, and drove in between the interstices of the stone, at a distance of some two feet and a half apart and four feet from the ground. The other ends he hammered with a heavy stone against the opposite wall, until they would go down no farther. Then he split up some more wood and lashed strips, almost touching each other, underneath the two poles, by the aid of some strong creepers. Then he filled up the bed place, between the poles, with dry leaves.

One end of the bed was some inches higher than the other. This was immaterial, and he felt satisfied that even the craftiest snake could not reach him.

As to the roof, he was by no means particular about it. In this part of Burma the rainfall is very small, the inundations being the effect of heavy rains in the distant hill country which, as they come down, raise the level of the rivers, in some cases, as much as eighteen feet, and overflow the low-lying country.

Before beginning to construct the bed, he had carried the snakes into the Phongee; after first cutting off their heads which, as he knew, the Burmans never touch.

"This is good, indeed, my son," the priest said. "Here we have our breakfast and dinner. I will boil some rice, and fry four of them for breakfast."

The bed was but half completed, when he heard the priest sound a bell. It was doubtless used as a call to prayer. However, Stanley rightly conjectured that, in this case, it was a summons to a meal; and was soon seated on the ground by the side of the priest. Little was said at breakfast, which Stanley enjoyed heartily.

"So my friend Thekyn is starting for the wars. What think you of it, my son? Shall we easily overpower these barbarians? We have never met them in war before and, doubtless, their methods of fighting are different from ours."

"Quite different. Their men are trained as soldiers. They act as one man, while the Burmese fight each for himself. Then they have cannon with them, which they can drag about quickly, and use with great effect. Although they are few, in comparison with the armies going down to attack them, the latter will find it very difficult work to turn them out of Rangoon."

"Do you think that they will beat us, then?"

"That I cannot say, but I should not be surprised if it were to prove so."

"The Burmese have never been beaten yet," the priest said. "They have been victorious over all their enemies."

"The Burmese are very brave," Stanley agreed, "but, hitherto, they have only fought against people less warlike than themselves. Now they have to deal with a nation that has made war a study, and which always keeps up a large army of men who are trained to fight, and who spend all their time in military exercises. It is not that they are stronger than the Burmese, for the Burmese are very strong men; but only that men who are trained to act together must, necessarily, possess a great advantage over those who have had no such training–who simply take up arms for the occasion and, when the trouble is over, return to their homes and lay them by, until called out to fight again.

"Besides, their weapons are better than yours; and they have many cannon which, by practice, they can load and fire very quickly; and each of which, when the armies are near each other, can fire fifty or sixty bullets at once."

"I have heard a strange story that the barbarians have a ship without sails, with a great chimney that pours out quantities of black smoke, and a wheel on each side and, as the wheels move round, the vessel can go straight up the river against the tide, even if the wind is blowing strongly down."

"It is true, father, there are many such ships; but only two or three that have made the long voyage across stormy seas to India."

"It is wonderful how these men can force fire to be their servant, and how it can make the wheels of the ship to move round."

"That I cannot tell you, father. I have never seen one of these vessels, though I have heard of them."

The priest said no more, but evidently fell into a profound meditation; and Stanley, getting quietly up, returned to his work. The priest came in, just as he had completed his bed.

"That is well," he said, looking at it approvingly. "I myself, although I know that, until my time has come, no creature can harm me, cannot resist a shudder when I hear one rustling amid the leaves of my bed; for they come in, although some of my friends have had a door placed to exclude their entry at night. I wander but little from my cell, and always close the door after me; but they enter, sometimes, when I am meditating, and forgetful of earthly matters, and the first I know of their presence is the rustling of the leaves in the bed, at night. Were I as strong in faith as I should be, I would heed it not. I tell myself so; but my fear is stronger than my will, and I am forced to rise, turn up the leaves with a stick until I find them, and then I open the door and eject them, with as much gentleness as may be."

"I should get no sleep at all," Stanley said. "I don't think that even a door would make me feel any safer, for I might forget to shut it, sometimes. Tomorrow, father, I will wage war with them, and see if I cannot decrease their numbers considerably."

Stanley's first task was to clear the bushes away from the court of the temple; and this, after several days' hard work, he carried out; although he soon saw that by so doing he would not diminish the number of the snakes, for the greater portion of the area was covered with blocks of fallen stone, among which the reptiles found an impenetrable shelter. The clearance effected, however, was so far useful that, while the creatures were before altogether hidden from sight by the bushes, they could now be killed when they came out to bask in the sun on the uncovered stones; and he could, every day, destroy a dozen or more without the slightest difficulty.

Ten days after he had finished the work, he heard the sound of men's voices and, peeping out, saw a Burmese officer with a party of eight armed men going to the Phongee's cell. It was possible that they might have come on other business, but it was more probable they had come in search of him. Some of the women who had come up to the hermit had seen him at work; and might have mentioned, on their return, that the priest had a man at work clearing away the bushes. The matter might have come to the ears of some officer anxious to distinguish himself, and the idea that this was the prisoner for whom a search was being made occurred to him.

Stanley shrank back into his cell, took up the bundle of clothes that served as his pillow, got on to the bed and, standing on it, was able to get his fingers on to the top of the wall. He hoisted himself up, made his way through the boughs of the roof, and dropped on to the ground outside. Then he went round by the back of the temple, until he stood outside the priest's cell, and could hear the voices within without difficulty.

"Then you know nothing whatever of this man?"

"Nothing whatever," he replied. "As I have told you, he came to me and asked for shelter. I gave him such poor assistance as I could, as I should give it to anyone who asked me. He has been no burden upon me, for he has killed enough snakes for my food and his own."

"You know not of what part he is a native?"

"Not at all; I asked him no questions. It was no business of mine."

"Could you form any idea from his speech?"

"His speech was ours. It seemed to me that it was that of a native of the lower provinces."

"Where is he now?"

"I know not."

"You say that, at present, he is away."

"Not seeing him in front, I thought he had gone out; for he comes and goes as he pleases. He is not a hired servant, but a guest. He cut down the bushes here, in order that he might more easily kill the snakes; for which, indeed, I am thankful to him, not only for the food that they afford, but because they were in such abundance, and so fearless, that they often came in here, knowing that they had naught to fear from me."

"Then you think that he will return soon?"

"As he told me not of his intention of going out at all, I cannot say. He is away, sometimes, for hours in the forest."

"Well, in any case, we shall watch here until his return. It may be that he is some idle fellow, who prefers killing snakes to honest work; but it may also be that he is the escaped prisoner of whom we are in search."

"I hear little of what passes in the town," the priest said, quietly. "News would disturb my meditations, and I never question those who come here to ask for my prayers. I have heard of the escape of no prisoner."

"It was a young English officer who got away. There has been a great stir about it. Every house in the town has been searched, and every guard boat on the river has been warned to allow no boat to pass, without assuring themselves that he is not on board."

"This was a brown man, like ourselves, clad only in a petticoat of rough cloth, like other peasants."

"He may have dyed his skin," the officer said. "At any rate, we will stay until he returns, and question him. Two of my men shall take their places just inside the entrance, and seize him as he enters. Has he arms?"

"None, save his knife and the stick with which he kills the snakes. It may be that he has seen you coming hither and, if he has committed any crime, he would flee, and not return here at all."

"If he does not come back before it is the hour when I must return to the town, I shall leave four men to watch for him; and they will wait here, if it is for a week, until he comes back again."

"You can do as you please," the priest said, "only I pray you withdraw your men from the neighbourhood of this cell. I would not that my meditations were disturbed by their talk. I have come hither for peace and quietness, and to be apart from the world and its distractions."

"You shall not be disturbed," the officer said respectfully, and Stanley heard a movement of feet, and then the closing of the door.

Thinking it probable that the officer might make a search round the temple, he at once made off into the wood behind the temple. As soon as he was well among the trees, he exchanged his cloth for the disguise he had worn in the town and, folding it up to be used as a blanket at night, he went further into the wood, sat down, and proceeded to think what his next step had best be. It was evident that he could not return to the temple for the present; and it was clear, also, that the search for him was still maintained, and that it would not be safe to attempt to descend the river. He regretted that he had been obliged to leave the place without saying goodbye to the priest, and again thanking him for the shelter that he had given him; but he was sure that, when he did not return, the old man would guess that he had caught sight of the officer and his party entering the temple, and had at once fled. Had he not known that the guard would remain there, he would have waited until they returned to the town, and would then have gone in and seen the priest; but as they would remain there for some days, he thought it was as well to abandon all idea of returning, as the suspicions that he might be the man sought for would be heightened by his continued absence, and the watch might be continued for a long time, on the chance of his coming back.

He concluded that, at any rate, his best course would be to endeavour to make his way for a considerable distance down the country; and then to try and get a boat. He knew that the country near the river was comparatively thickly populated, and that the distances between the villages were not great, so that he would find no great difficulty in purchasing provisions. The dress he had brought

with him was not altogether unfavourable for such a purpose, as he could easily pass as a sub-officer, whose duty it was to inquire whether the villages had each sent all their able-bodied men to the war. The only drawback to it would be that, if instructions for his arrest had been sent down to the villages along the road, as well as those by the river, they would have probably been directed to specially look for one clad in such attire. However, it would be open to him, at any moment, to take to his peasant's disguise again.

He at last determined to make a start and, by nightfall, had traversed several miles through the great forest stretching along by the side of the Panlaung river. He had asked many questions of his friend the officer, as they went up to the temple, as to the roads. He was told that there was one running almost due south to Ramuthayn, by which he could travel down to Rangoon, by way of Tannoo. This, however, would take him a long distance from the main river, and he decided that he would presently strike the road that ran about halfway between the hills and the Irrawaddy. He would follow that for a time, and would try and strike the river somewhere between Meloun and Keow-Uan.

Below this point there was a network of rivers, and but few villages, and the country was swampy and unhealthy. He infinitely preferred the risks of the descent by the river to those by road; and it seemed to him that, if he could but obtain possession of one of the small native fishing boats, he could drop down at night, unnoticed, as the width of the river at Ava was upwards of a thousand yards and, below that town, often considerably exceeded that breadth.

When it became too dark to proceed further, he sat down at the foot of a tree. He regretted that he had no means of lighting a fire; and determined that, at any risk, he would obtain the means of doing so at the first village that he came to–for he knew that there were both tigers and leopards in the jungles. He thought, however, that they were not likely to be numerous, so near the capital; and the old priest had never alluded to them as a source of danger though, indeed, it had never occurred to him to ask.

In the morning he continued his way. He had gone but a mile when he heard a sudden scream in the wood, a short distance to his left. Feeling sure that it was a human being, in great fear or pain, he drew his knife and ran, at the top of his speed, in the direction of the cry; thinking that it might be some man, or woman, attacked by the robbers of the forest.

Suddenly he came upon a small open space, some twenty yards in diameter. He hesitated, when his eyes fell on a group in the centre. Two men were lying on the ground, and a leopard stood with a paw on each of them. They had guns lying beside them, and a fire was burning close by. He guessed that the animal had sprung from a tree, one of whose boughs extended almost as far as the centre of the opening. Probably it had killed one of the men in its spring for, at the moment when he saw the animal, it was licking the blood from the shoulder of the man on whom its right paw rested. The other was, as far as Stanley could see, unhurt.

His tread in the light Burmese shoes had been almost noiseless; and the leopard, which was keeping up a low growling, and whose back was towards him, had apparently not noticed it. He hesitated for a moment, and then decided to endeavour to save the man who was still alive. Creeping up stealthily, he gave a sudden spring upon the leopard, and buried his knife to the hilt in its body, just behind the shoulder.

With a terrible roar, it rolled over for a moment, and then struggled to its feet. The time had been sufficient for Stanley to pick up and cock one of the guns and, as the leopard turned to spring at him, he aimed between its eyes and fired. Again the beast rolled over, and Stanley caught up the other gun, thrust the muzzle within a foot of its head, and fired. The leopard gave a convulsive quiver, and lay dead.

Chapter 5: With Brigands

Stanley uttered an involuntary hurrah as the leopard expired; and at the sound the Burman, who had been lying motionless, leapt to his feet. He looked at the leopard, and then at his rescuer, and exclaimed in a tone of astonishment:

"You have slain the beast alone, and with no weapon but your knife!"

"No," Stanley replied; "I began the fight with my knife, only; but caught up one of those guns when I wounded him, and fired as he charged me. Then I finished him with the other."

"Comrade," the Burman said, "you have done a great deed, with courage. I, who am esteemed no coward, would never even have thought of attacking that great leopard with but a knife, and that to save the life of a stranger."

"I saw the guns lying on the ground. Had it not been for that, I should not have dared to attack the leopard, for it would have been certain death."

"Certain death, indeed. But tell me, first, how you did it. It seems to me well nigh a miracle."

"I was passing along, not far distant, when I heard your cry," Stanley said. "Thinking that it was some person in distress, I ran hither, and saw you both lying, with the leopard's forepaws upon you. The beast's back was turned to me and, as it was growling, it had not heard my approach. Seeing the guns lying there–and having no doubt that they were loaded–I stole up, sprang suddenly on the leopard, and drove my knife into it behind the shoulder. The blow rolled it over, and gave me time to pick up the gun. The rest was easy."

The man, without a word, examined the body of the leopard.

"It is as you say," he said. "It was well struck, and would probably have been fatal; but the animal would have torn you in pieces before he died, but for the guns.

"Well, comrade, you have saved my life; and I am your servant, so long as I live. I thought all was over with me. The leopard, as it sprang, threw its full weight on my comrade, here. We had just risen to our feet; and the blow struck me, also, to the ground. I raised that cry as I fell. I lay there, immovable. I felt the leopard's paw between my shoulders, and heard its angry growlings; and I held my breath, expecting every moment to feel its teeth in my neck.

"I had but one hope, namely, that the beast would carry off my comrade–who, I was well assured, was dead–to the jungle to devour him, and would then come back to fetch me. I managed to breathe once, very quietly, when I felt a movement of the leopard and, hearing a low sound, guessed that he was licking my comrade's blood; but slightly as I moved, the leopard noticed it, and stood straight up again over me. I dared not breathe again, but the time had come when I felt that I must do so, though I was sure that it would be the signal for my death.

"Then I knew not what had happened. There was a sharp pain as the leopard's claws contracted, and then there was a loud roar, and its weight was removed from me. Then I heard it snarl, as if about to spring. Then came the sound of a gun, a fall, and a struggle; and then the sound of another gun. Then I heard your shout, and knew the beast was dead.

"Now, sir, what can I do for you? Shall I first skin the leopard?"

"I care not for the skin," Stanley said. "It would be of no use to me."

"Then, with your permission, I will take it off, and keep it as long as I live, as a remembrance of the narrowest escape that I ever had."

"Is your comrade dead?"

"Yes," the man replied. "The leopard struck him between the shoulders as you see; and the force of the blow, and the weight of the spring, must have killed him instantaneously."

"Then I will take his sword, gun, and cartridges."

So Stanley undid the sword belt, and buckled it round him; put the bandolier of cartridges over his shoulders; and took up the gun and reloaded it, while the man was at work skinning the leopard.

This operation the man performed with great speed. It was evidently one that he had done before. As soon as the beast was flayed, he rolled up the skin and placed it on his shoulder.

"You are an officer, sir?" he asked.

"No; I am a fugitive."

While he had been watching the man, Stanley had debated over whether he should confide in him; and thought that, after the service he had rendered him, he could do so with safety.

"I am an Englishman–I was captured by Bandoola, at Ramoo, and sent a prisoner to Ava. I have escaped, and want to make my way down to Rangoon; but I heard that orders had been sent along the river to arrest me, and I do not, at present, know how to make my way down."

"Come with me," the man said. "I have friends in the forest, some distance from here. They will receive you gladly, when I tell them what you have done for me; and you will be safe until you choose to go. We are outlaws but, at present, we are masters of the forest. The government has its hands full, and there is no fear of their disturbing us."

Stanley thought over the matter, for a minute or two. Doubtless it was a robber band that he was asked to join, but the offer seemed to promise safety, for a time.

"I agree," he said, "so that you do not ask me to take part in any deeds of violence."

"About that, you shall do as you like," the man said; "but I can tell you that we make good hauls, sometimes. Our difficulty is not to capture booty, but to dispose of it.

"Have you a turban? For that helmet of yours is out of place, in the woods. The rest of your dress has nothing peculiar about it, and would attract no attention."

"I have a turban. I have been, lately, in the dress of a peasant. The cloth I wore lies fifty yards away; I dropped it as I ran. It will be useful to cover me at night, if for nothing else."

Stanley exchanged the helmet for the turban that he had before worn, and fetched the cloth.

"Will you bury your companion?" he said.

"It would be useless. He will sleep above ground, as well as below and, if we are to reach my comrades tonight, it is time for us to be moving."

They at once set out. After five hours' walking, they came upon the river Myitnge, the tributary that falls into the Irrawaddy at Ava. It was some four hundred yards across. The Burman walked along its banks for a short distance, and then pulled from a clump of bushes a small boat, that was just capable of carrying two. He put it in the water. They took their seats, and paddled across to the other side; where he carefully concealed it, as before.

"That is our ferry boat," he said. "It is not often used, for our headquarters are in the great forest we shall presently come to; but it is as well when, occasionally, parties are sent out to hunt us, to have the means of crossing to the other side."

Another two hours' walking, through cultivated fields, brought them to the edge of the forest.

"Here you are as safe as if you were in Rangoon," the Burman said. "In another hour we shall reach my comrades. As a rule, we change our headquarters frequently. At present there is no question of our being disturbed; so we have settled ourselves, for a time."

"Why were you and your comrade on the other side of the river?

"His village lies five miles beyond that forest," the man said. "At ordinary times, he dared not venture there; but he thought that, at present, most of the able men would be away, and so he could pay a visit to his friends. He asked me to accompany him and, as I had nothing better to do, I agreed to go. A convoy of traders, too strong to be attacked, had passed down from the hill country the morning before we started. There was not much probability that anyone would come again, for a few days."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.