HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

IN TIMES OF PERIL: A TALE OF INDIA

George Henty

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
LIFE IN CANTONMENTS

Very bright and pretty, in the early springtime of the year 1857, were the British cantonments of Sandynugghur. As in all other British garrisons in India, they stood quite apart from the town, forming a suburb of their own. They consisted of the barracks, and of a maidan, or, as in England it would be called, "a common," on which the troops drilled and exercised, and round which stood the bungalows of the military and civil officers of the station, of the chaplain, and of the one or two merchants who completed the white population of the place.

Very pretty were these bungalows, built entirely upon the ground floor, in rustic fashion, wood entering largely into their composition. Some were thatched; others covered with slabs of wood or stone. All had wide verandas running around them, with tatties, or blinds, made of reeds or strips of wood, to let down, and give shade and coolness to the rooms therein. In some of them the visitor walked from the compound, or garden, directly into the dining-room; large, airy, with neither curtains, nor carpeting, nor matting, but with polished boards as flooring. The furniture here was generally plain and almost scanty, for, except at meal-times, the rooms were but little used.

Outside, in the veranda, is the real sitting-room of the bungalow. Here are placed a number of easy-chairs of all shapes, constructed of cane or bamboo—light, cool, and comfortable; these are moved, as the sun advances, to the shady side of the veranda, and in them the ladies read and work, the gentlemen smoke. In all bungalows built for the use of English families, there is, as was the case at Sandynugghur, a drawing-room as well as a dining-room, and this, being the ladies' especial domain, is generally furnished in European style, with a piano, light chintz chair-covers, and muslin curtains.

The bedroom opens out of the sitting-room; and almost every bedroom has its bathroom—that all-important adjunct in the East—attached to it. The windows all open down to the ground, and the servants generally come in and out through the veranda. Each window has its Venetian blind, which answers all purposes of a door, and yet permits the air to pass freely.

The veranda, in addition to serving as the general sitting-room to the family, acts as a servants' hall. Here at the side not used by the employers, the servants, when not otherwise engaged, sit on their mats, mend their clothes, talk and sleep; and it is wonderful how much sleep a Hindoo can get through in the twenty-four hours. The veranda is his bedroom as well as sitting-room; here, spreading a mat upon the ground, and rolling themselves up in a thin rug or blanket from the very top of their head to their feet, the servants sleep, looking like a number of mummies ranged against the wall. Out by the stables they have their quarters, where they cook and eat, and could, if they chose, sleep; but they prefer the coolness and freshness of the veranda, where, too, they are ready at hand whenever called. The gardens were all pretty, and well kept, with broad, shady trees, and great shrubs covered by bright masses of flower; for Sandynugghur had been a station for many years, and with plenty of water and a hot sun, vegetation is very rapid.

In two of the large reclining chairs two lads, of fifteen and sixteen respectively, were lolling idly; they had been reading, for books lay open in their laps, and they were now engaged in eating bananas, and in talking to two young ladies, some three years their senior, who were sitting working beside them.

"You boys will really make yourselves ill if you eat so many bananas."

"It is not that I care for them," said the eldest lad; "they are tasteless things, and a good apple is worth a hundred of them; but one must do something, and I am too lazy to go on with this Hindoo grammar; besides, a fellow can't work when you girls come out here and talk to him."

"That's very good, Ned; it is you that do all the talking; besides, you know that you ought to shut yourselves up in the study, and not sit here where you are sure to be interrupted."

"I have done three hours' steady work this morning with that wretched Moonshi, Kate; and three hours in this climate is as much as my brain will stand."

Kate Warrener and her brothers, Ned and Dick, were the children of the major of the One Hundred and Fifty-first Bengal Native Infantry, the regiment stationed at Sandynugghur. Rose Hertford, the other young lady, was their cousin. The three former were born in India, but had each gone to England at the age of nine for their education, and to save them from the effects of the climate which English children are seldom able to endure after that age. Their mother had sailed for England with Dick, the youngest, but had died soon after she reached home. Dick had a passion for the sea, and his father's relations having good interest, had obtained for him a berth as a midshipman in the royal navy, in which rank he had been serving for upward of a year. His ship being now in Indian waters, a month's leave had been granted him that he might go up the country to see his father. The other lad had arrived from England three months before, with his sister and cousin. Major Warrener had sent for his daughter, whose education was finished, to take the head of his house, and, as a companion, had invited Rose Hertford, who was the orphan child of his sister, to accompany her. Ned, who had been at Westminster till he left England, was intended for the Indian army. His father thought that it would be well for him to come out to India with his sister, as he himself would work with him, and complete his education, to enable him to pass the necessary examination—then not a very severe one—while he could be at the same time learning the native languages, which would be of immense benefit to him after he had entered the army. Coming out as they had done in the cold season, none of the four exhibited any of that pallor and lassitude which, at any rate during the summer heats, are the rule throughout the Anglo-Indian community.

As Ned finished his sentence the sound of the tread of two horses was heard along the road.

"Captains Dunlop and Manners," Dick exclaimed; "a shilling to a penny! Will either of you bet, girls?"

Neither his sister nor cousin replied to this offer; and the boys gave a sly nod of intelligence to each other, as two horsemen rode up to the veranda and dismounted; throwing their reins to the *syces*, who, whatever the pace at which their masters ride, run just behind, in readiness to take the horses, should they dismount.

"Good-morning, Miss Warrener; good-morning, Miss Hertford: we have brought you some interesting news."

"Indeed!" said the girls, as they shook hands with the newcomers, who were two as good specimens of tall, well-made, sunburnt Anglo-Saxons as one would wish to see. "What is it?"

"We have just got the news that a family of wild boars have come down, and are doing a lot of damage near Meanwerrie, four miles off. I suppose they have been disturbed somewhere further away, as we have not heard of any pig here for months; so to-morrow morning there is going to be grand pig-sticking; of course you will come out and see the fun?"

"We shall be delighted," said Kate; but Rose put in: "Yes; but oh! how unfortunate! it's Mrs. Briarley's garden party."

"That has been put off till next day. It is not often we get a chance at pig, and we have always got gardens. The two need not have interfered with each other, as we shall start at daylight for Meanwerrie; but we may be out some hours, and so it was thought better to put off the party to a day when there will be nothing else to do."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick; "I am in luck! I wanted, above all things, to see a wild boar hunt; do you think my father will let me have a spear?"

"Hardly, Dick, considering that last time you went out you tumbled off three times at some jumps two feet wide, and that, were you to fall in front of a pig, he would rip you up before you had time to think about it; besides which, you would almost certainly stick somebody with your spear."

Dick laughed.

"That was the first time I had ever been on a horse," he said; "will you ride, Ned?"

"No," said Ned; "I can ride fairly enough along a straight road, but it wants a first-rate rider to go across country at a gallop, looking at the boar instead of where you are going, and carrying a spear in one hand."

"Do you think papa will ride?" Kate asked.

"I don't know, Miss Warrener; the major is a famous spear; but here he is to speak for himself."

Major Warrener was in uniform, having just come up from the orderly-room. He was a tall, soldierly figure, inclining to stoutness. His general expression was that of cheeriness and good temper; but he was looking, as he drove up, grave and serious. His brow cleared, however, as his eye fell upon the group in the veranda.

"Ah! Dunlop, brought the news about the boar, eh?"

"You will take us with you?" the girls asked in a breath.

"Oh, yes, you shall go; I will drive you myself. I am getting too heavy for pig-sticking, especially with such responsibilities as you about. There, I will get out of this uniform; it's hot for the time of year. What are you drinking? nothing? Boy, bring some soda and brandy!"

Then, producing his cigar-case, he took a cheroot.

"Ag-low!" he shouted, and a native servant ran up with a piece of red-hot charcoal held in a little pair of tongs.

"There, sit down and make yourselves comfortable till I come back."

The lads, finding that their society was not particularly required, strolled off to the stables, where Ned entered into a conversation with the *syces* as to the distance to Meanwerrie and the direction in which that village lay. Like all Anglo-Indian children brought up in India, the boys had, when they left India, spoken the language fluently. They had almost entirely forgotten it during their stay in England, but it speedily came back again, and Ned, at the end of three months' work, found that he could get on very fairly. Dick had lost it altogether.

When they went back to the veranda they found that the girls had gone indoors, and that their father was sitting and smoking with his brother officers. When the lads came up the conversation ceased, and then the major said:

"It is as well the boys should know what is going on."

"What is it, father?" Ned asked, struck with the grave tone in which the major spoke, and at the serious expression in all their faces.

"Well, boys, for some months past there have been all sorts of curious rumors running through the country. Chupatties have been sent round, and that is always considered to portend something serious."

"Do you mean the chupatties we eat—flat cakes, father?"

"Yes, Ned. Nobody knows who sends them round, or the exact meaning of the signal, but it seems to be an equivalent for to 'prepare,' 'make ready.' Chupatties are quickly prepared; they are the bread eaten on a journey, and hence probably their signification. At any rate, these things have been circulated among the native troops all over the country. Strangers are known to have come and gone, and there is a general uneasy and unsettled feeling prevalent among the troops. A ridiculous rumor has circulated among them that the new cartridges have been greased with pig's fat, in order that the caste of all who put it to their lips might be destroyed. To-day I have received news from Calcutta that the Nineteenth native regiment at Berhampore has behaved in a grossly mutinous manner, and that it is feared the regiments at Barrackpore and Dumdum will follow their example. The affair has been suppressed, but there is an uneasy feeling abroad, and all the troops in Bengal proper appear tainted

with paltry disaffection. We have no reason for believing that the spirit has spread to the northwest, and are convinced that as far as our own regiment is concerned they can be relied on; but the affair, taken in connection with the previous rumors, is very strange, and I fear that there are lots of trouble ahead. I wish now that I had not had the girls out for another year; but I could not foresee this, and, indeed, until this morning, although there has been a good deal of talk, we all hoped it would have passed off without anything coming of it. One hopes still that it will spread no further; but should it do so, it is impossible to say what may happen. All we have to do is to be watchful, and to avoid with care anything that can offend the men's prejudices. We must explain to the native officers the folly of the greased cartridge story, and tell them to reassure the men. You don't see anything else to do, Dunlop?"

"No, major; I trust that the regiment is to be depended upon; it has always been well treated and the men have seemed attached to us all. We will do our best to reassure them; but if there is any insubordination, I hope that the colonel will give the men a lesson which will put an end to the nonsense in the bud."

"Of course you will stay to tiffin?" the major said, as the *kitmagar*, or head servant, announced that tiffin was ready.

"Many thanks, major, but we promised to tiff with Bullen, and he would be mad if we did not turn up. How are you thinking of going to-morrow? I intend to drive over, and send my horse on; so I can give one of your boys a lift in my buggy."

"Thank you," the major said, "that would suit us exactly. I shall drive in my dog-cart, which will carry four of us; and if you will take Dick, that will make it all right."

"What time do we start?"

"We are to be there by seven; we set it so late to give the ladies time to breakfast comfortably before starting. I will call here at half-past six for Dick; it will be all in my way. Good-morning."

Two minutes later the girls, Ned, and Dick came into the dining-room, and the party sat down to luncheon—a meal always called tiffin in India. It is a great mistake to suppose that people in India cannot eat because of the heat; in the extreme heat of summer their appetites do, no doubt, fall off; but at other times, they not only eat, but eat more largely than is good for them; and a good deal of the liver complaint which is the pest of India is in no small degree due to the fact that, the appetite being unnaturally stimulated by hot and piquant food, people eat more than in such a climate as this can be properly digested. The meal consisted of curries, with which were handed round chutney and Bombay ducks—a little fish about the size of a smelt, cut open, dried, and smoked with assafoetida, giving it an intolerably nasty taste to strangers, but one which Anglo-Indians become accustomed to and like—no one knows why they are called Bombay ducks—cutlets, plantains sliced and fried, pomegranates, and watermelons. They were waited upon by two servants, both dressed entirely in white, but wearing red turbans, very broad and shallow. These turbans denoted the particular tribe and sect to which their wearers belonged. The castes in India are almost innumerable, and each has a turban of a peculiar color or shape, and by these they can be at once distinguished by a resident. On their foreheads were lines and spots of a yellowish white paint, indicating also their caste, and the peculiar divinity to whose worship they were specially devoted. On their feet they wore slippers, and were as noiseless as cats in all their movements. There are no better or more pleasant waiters in the world than the natives of Hindostan.

Early as the hour named for the start would appear in England, it was by no means early for India, where every one is up and about soon after daylight—the morning hours up to eight o'clock being the most pleasant of the whole day.

Kate and Rose were up, and all had had "*chota hazaree*" (little breakfast) by half-past six, and were ready when Captain Dunlop drew up in his buggy—a conveyance which will only hold two. The dog-cart was already at the door, and the whole party were soon in motion. On the road they passed several of their friends, for every one was going out to the hunt, and merry greetings were exchanged.

The scenery round Sandynugghur resembles that which is common to all the great plains of India watered by the Ganges and Jumna. The country is for the most part perfectly flat, and cut up into little fields, divided by shallow ditches. Here and there nullahs, or deep watercourses, with tortuous channels and perpendicular sides, wind through the fields to the nearest stream. These nullahs constitute the great danger of hunting in the country. In the fields men may be noticed, in the scantiest of attire, working with hoes among their springing crops; women, wrapped up in the dark blue calico cloth which forms their ordinary costume, are working as hard as the men. Villages are scattered about, generally close to groves of trees. The huts are built of mud; most of them are flat-topped, but some are thatched with rushes. Rising above the villages is the mosque, where the population are Mohammedan, built of mud like the houses, but whitewashed and bright. The Hindoo villages generally, but not always, have their temples. The vegetation of the great plains of India is not tropical, according to the ideas of tropical vegetation gathered from British hothouses. There are a few palms and many bananas with their wide leaves, but the groves are composed of sturdy trees, whose appearance at a distance differs in no way from that of ordinary English forest trees. Viewed closer, the banian with its many stems is indeed a vegetable wonder; but, were it not for the villages and natives, a traveler might journey for very many miles across the plains of India without seeing anything which would specially remind him that he was out of England.

There were a considerable number of traps assembled when Major Warrener drew up, and some eight or ten gentlemen on horseback, each carrying a boar-spear—a weapon not unlike the lance of an English cavalryman, but shorter in the handle. The riders were mostly dressed in coats of the Norfolk jacket type, and knee-breeches with thick gaiters. The material of their clothes was a coarse but very strong cloth of native make, gray or brown in color. Some wore round hats and forage caps with puggarees twisted round them.

A chorus of greeting saluted the party as they drove up.

"Well, young ladies," the colonel said, "so you have come out to see the death of the boar,

"'The boar, the boar, the mighty boar,'

as the song says? So you are not going to take a spear to-day, major? Think it's time to leave it to the youngsters, eh?"

"Where are the wild boars, Mrs. Renwick?" Kate asked of the colonel's wife.

"Pig, my dear; we always call them pig when we speak of them together, though we talk of the father of the family as the boar. Do you see that clump of long grass and jungle right across the plain? That's where they are. They have been watched all night. They went out to feed before daybreak and have just gone back again. Do you think we are in the best place for seeing the sport, Major Warrener?"

"I think, Mrs. Renwick, that if you leave your trap and go up to the top of that knoll, two hundred yards to the right, you will get a really good view of the plain."

Mrs. Renwick alighted from the dog-cart in which the colonel had driven her, and the whole party, following her example, walked in a laughing group to the spot which Major Warrener had indicated, and which was pronounced as just the place. The *syces* stood at the heads of the horses, and those who were going to take part in the sport cantered off toward the spot where the pigs were lurking, making, however, a wide *détour* so as to approach it from the other side, as it was desired to drive them across the plain. At some distance behind the clump were stationed a number of natives, with a variety of mongrel village curs. When they saw the horsemen approach they came up and prepared to enter the jungle to drive out the pigs.

The horsemen took up their position on either side of the patch in readiness to start as soon as the animals were fairly off. A number of villagers, in whose fields of young rice the family had done much damage during the few days that they had taken up their abode in their present quarters, were assembled on such little rises of ground as were likely to give a good view of the proceedings. There were about a dozen horsemen with spears; of these, three or four were novices, and these intended

to try their skill for the first time upon the "squeakers," as the young pigs are called, while the others prepared for a race after the old ones.

Great nerve, considerable skill, and first-rate horsemanship are required for the sport of pigsticking. The horse, too, must be fast, steady, well-trained and quick, for without all these advantages the sport is a dangerous one. The wild boar is, at the start, as fast as a horse. He is very quick at turning, and when pressed always attacks his pursuers, and as he rushes past will lay open the leg or flank of a horse with a sweeping cut with his sharp tusk. If he can knock a horse down the position of his rider would be serious indeed, were not help to arrive in time to draw off the attention of the enraged animal from his foe. Heavy falls, too, take place over watercourses and nullahs, and in some parts of India the difficulties are greatly increased by bowlders of all kinds being scattered over the ground, and by the frequent occurrence of bushes and shrubs armed with most formidable spines and thorns. Conspicuous among these is the bush known as the "wait-a-bit thorn," which is furnished with two kinds of thorn—the one long, stiff, and penetrating, the other short and curved, with a forked point almost like a fishhook. When this once takes hold it is almost necessary to cut the cloth to obtain a release.

Scarcely had the beaters, with much shouting and clamor, entered the patch of bush in which the pigs were lying, than the porcine family, consisting of a splendid boar and sow, and eight nearly full-grown squeakers, darted out on the open, and in a moment the horsemen were off in pursuit. The ground was deep and heavy, and the pigs at the first burst gained fast upon their pursuers. There was no attempt on the part of the pigs to keep together, and directly after starting they began to diverge. The old boar and sow both kept across the plain—one bearing toward the left, the other to the right. The squeakers ran in all directions—some at right angles to the line that the old ones were taking. The object of one and all was to gain cover of some kind.

With their hats pressed well down upon their heads, and their spears advanced with the head some two or three feet from the ground, the hunters started after them—some making after the boar, some after the sow, according to the position which they occupied at the commencement of the chase, while some of the young hands dashed off in pursuit of the squeakers.

There were five, however, after the boar; Captain Dunlop, a young ensign named Skinner, the Scotch doctor of the regiment, and two civilians. For a short time they kept together, and then Captain Dunlop and Skinner began to draw ahead of the others.

The boar was a stanch one, and a mile had been passed before his speed began sensibly to diminish. The young ensign, who was mounted on a very fast Arab, began to draw up to him three or four lengths ahead of Captain Dunlop, bearing his horse so as to get upon the left side of the boar, in order to permit him to use his spear to advantage.

He was nearly up to him when Captain Dunlop, who saw the boar glancing back savagely, cried:

"Look out, Skinner! he will be round in a moment; keep your horse well in hand!"

A moment later the boar was round. The horse, young and unbroken at the work, started violently, swerved, and, before his rider could get him round, the boar was upon him. In an instant the horse was upon the ground, with a long gash upon his flank, and Skinner, flying through the air, fell almost directly in the boar's way.

Fortunately for the young ensign, Captain Dunlop, as he shouted his warning, had turned his horse to the left, so as to cut off the boar when he turned, and he was now so close that the boar, in passing, had only time to give a vicious blow at the fallen man, which laid his arm open from his shoulder to his elbow.

At that instant Captain Dunlop arrived, and his spear pierced the animal's flank. His aim was, however, disconcerted by his horse, at the moment he struck, leaping over the fallen ensign; the wound, therefore, was but a glancing one, and in a moment the boar was round upon his new assailant. Fortunately the horse was a well-trained one, and needed not the sharp touch of his master's rein to wheel sharp round on his hind legs, and dart off at full speed. The boar swerved off again, and

continued his original line of flight, his object being to gain a thick patch of jungle, now little over a quarter of a mile distant; the detention, however, was fatal to him, for the doctor, who was close on Captain Dunlop's heels, now brought up his horse with a rush and, with a well-aimed thrust, ran the animal through, completely pinning him to the earth. The honor of his death was therefore divided between the doctor and Captain Dunlop, for the latter had drawn first blood, or, as it is termed, had taken first spear, while the former had scored the kill.

The sow had been more fortunate than her lord. She had taken a line across a part of the plain which was intersected by several nullahs. She, too, had been wounded, but one of the nullahs had thrown out several of her pursuers: one rider had been sent over his horse's head and stunned; and the sow, turning sharp down a deep and precipitous gully, had made her escape. Three of the squeakers fell to the spears of the Griffs—young hands—and the rest had escaped. The boar had been killed only a short distance from the rise upon which the spectators from Sandynugghur were assembled, and the beaters soon tied its four legs together, and, putting a pole through them, six of them carried the beast up to the colonel's wife for inspection.

"What a savage-looking brute it is!" said Kate; "not a bit like a pig, with all those long bristles, and that sharp high back, and those tremendous tusks."

"Will you accept the skin, Miss Warrener?" Captain Dunlop said to her afterward; "I have arranged with the doctor. He is to have the hams, and I am to have the hide. If you will, I will have it dressed and mounted."

"Thank you, Captain Dunlop, I should like it very much;" but, as it turned out, Kate Warrener never got the skin.

The boar killed, the doctor's first care was to attend to the wounded, and Skinner's arm was soon bound up, and he was sent home in a buggy; the man who was stunned came to in a short time. The unsuccessful ones were much laughed at by the colonel and major, for allowing half the game started to get away.

"You ought not to grumble, colonel," Captain Manners said. "If we had killed them all, we might not have had another run for months; as it is, we will have some more sport next week."

There was some consultation as to the chance of getting the sow even now, but it was generally agreed that she would follow the nullah down, cross the stream, and get into a large canebrake beyond, from which it would take hours to dislodge her; so a general move was made to the carriages, and in a short time the whole party were on their way back to Sandynugghur.

CHAPTER II
THE OUTBREAK

A week after the boar-hunt came the news that a Sepoy named Mangul Pandy, belonging to the Thirty-fourth Native Infantry, stationed at Barrackpore, a place only a few miles out of Calcutta, had, on the 29th of March, rushed out upon the parade ground and called upon the men to mutiny. He then shot the European sergeant-major of the regiment, and cut down an officer. Pandy continued to exhort the men to rise to arms, and although his comrades would not join him, they refused to make any movement to arrest him. General Hearsey now arrived on the parade ground with his son and a Major Ross, and at once rode at the man, who, finding that his comrades would not assist him, discharged the contents of the musket into his own body.

Two days later the mutinous Nineteenth were disbanded at Barrackpore. On the 3rd of April Mangul Pandy, who had only wounded himself, was hung, and the same doom was allotted to a native officer of his regiment, for refusing to order the men to assist the officer attacked by that mutineer, and for himself inciting the men to rise against the government.

"What do you think of the news, papa?" Dick asked his father.

"I hope that the example which has been set by the execution of these ringleaders, and by the disbandment of the Nineteenth, may have a wholesome effect, Dick; but we shall see before long."

It needed no great lapse of time to show that this lesson had been ineffectual. From nearly every station throughout Bengal and the northwest provinces came rumors of disaffection; at Agra, at Umballah, and at other places incendiary fires broke out with alarming frequency, letters were from time to time intercepted, calling upon the Sepoys to revolt, while at Lucknow serious disturbances occurred, and the Seventh Regiment were disarmed by Sir Henry Lawrence, the Commissioner of Oude. So the month of April passed, and as it went on the feeling of disquiet and danger grew deeper and more general. It was like the anxious time preceding a thunderstorm, the cloud was gathering, but how or when it would burst none could say. Many still maintained stoutly that there was no danger whatever, and that the whole thing would blow over; but men with wives and families were generally inclined to take a more somber view of the case. Nor is this to be wondered at. The British form an almost inappreciable portion of the population of India; they are isolated in a throng of natives, outnumbered by a thousand to one. A man might therefore well feel his helplessness to render any assistance to those dear to him in the event of a general uprising of the people. Soldiers without family ties take things lightly, they are ready for danger and for death if needs be, but they can always hope to get through somehow; but the man with a wife and children in India, at the time when a general outbreak was anticipated, would have the deepest cause for anxiety. Not, however, that at this time any one at Sandynugghur looked for anything so terrible. There was a spirit of insubordination abroad in the native troops, no doubt, but no one doubted but that it would, with more or less trouble, be put down. And so things went on as usual, and the garden parties and the drives, and the friendly evening visiting continued just as before. It was at one of these pleasant evening gatherings that the first blow fell. Most of the officers of the station, their wives, and the two or three civilians were collected at Major Warrener's. The windows were all open. The girls were playing a duet on the piano; five or six other ladies were in the drawing-room and about the same number of gentlemen were standing or sitting by them, some four or five were lounging in the veranda enjoying their cheroots; native servants in their white dresses moved noiselessly about with iced lemonade and wine, when a Sepoy came up the walk.

"What is it?" asked Major Warrener, who was one of the group in the veranda.

"Dispatch for the colonel, Sahib."

The colonel, who was sitting next to the major, held out his hand for the message, and was rising, when Major Warrener said:

"Don't move, colonel; boy, bring a candle."

The servant brought it: the colonel opened the envelope and glanced at the dispatch. He uttered an exclamation which was half a groan, half a cry.

"Good Heaven! what is the matter, colonel?"

"The native troops at Meerut have mutinied, have murdered their officers and all the European men, women, and children they could find, and are marching upon Delhi. Look after your regiment."

A low cry broke from the major. This was indeed awful news, and for a moment the two men sat half-stunned at the calamity, while the sound of music and merry talk came in through the open window like a mockery on their ears.

"Let us take a turn in the compound," said the major, "where no one can hear us."

For half an hour they walked up and down the garden. There could be no doubt about the truth of the news, for it was an official telegram from the adjutant at Meerut; and as to the extent of the misfortune, it was terrible.

"There is not a single white regiment at Delhi," exclaimed the colonel; "these fiends will have it all their own way, and at Delhi there are scores of European families. Delhi once in their hands will be a center, and the mutiny will spread like wildfire over India. What was the general at Meerut about? what were the white troops up to? It is as inexplicable as it is terrible. Is there anything to be done, major, do you think?" But Major Warrener could think of nothing. The men at present knew nothing of the news, but the tidings would reach them in two or three days; for news in India spreads from village to village, and town to town, with almost incredible speed, and Meerut was but a hundred and fifty miles distant.

"Had we better tell them inside?" the major asked.

"No," answered the colonel; "let them be happy for to-night; they will know the news to-morrow. As they are breaking up, ask all the officers to come round to the messroom; I will meet them there, and we can talk the matter over; but let the ladies have one more quiet night; they will want all their strength and fortitude for what is to come."

And so, clearing their brows, they went into the house and listened to the music, and joined in the talk until ten o'clock struck and every one got up to go, and so ended the last happy evening at Sandynugghur.

The next morning brought the news of the rising at Delhi, but it was not till two days later that letters giving any details of these terrible events arrived, and the full extent of the awful calamity was known.

The flame broke out at Meerut at seven o'clock in the evening of Sunday, the 10th of May. On the previous day a punishment parade had been held to witness the military degradation of a number of men of the Third Native Cavalry, who had been guilty of mutinous conduct in respect to the cartridges. The native regiments at the station consisted of the Third Cavalry, the Eleventh and Twentieth Infantry; there were also in garrison the Sixtieth Rifles, the Sixth Dragoon Guards, and two batteries of artillery; a force amply sufficient, if properly handled, to have crushed the native troops, and to have nipped the mutiny in the bud. Unhappily, they were not well handled. The cantonments of Meerut were of great extent, being nearly five miles in length by two in breadth, the barracks of the British troops were situated at some distance from those of the native regiments, and the action of the troops was paralyzed by the incompetency of the general, an old man who had lost all energy, and who remained in a state of indecision while the men of the native regiments shot their officers, murdered all the women and children, and the white inhabitants whose bungalows were situated at their end of their cantonment, opened the jail doors, and after setting fire to the whole of this quarter of Meerut, marched off toward Delhi, unmolested by the British troops. Even then an orderly sent off with dispatches to the officer commanding at Delhi, informing him of what had happened, and

bidding him beware, might have saved the lives of hundreds of Englishmen and women, even if it were too late to save Delhi; but nothing whatever was done; the English troops made a few meaningless and uncertain movements, and marched back to their barracks. No one came forward to take the lead. So the white troops of Meerut remained stationary under arms all night, and the English population of Delhi were left to their fate.

From Meerut to Delhi is thirty-two miles, and the mutineers of Meerut, marching all night, arrived near the town at eight in the morning. Singularly enough, the ancient capital of India, the place around which the aspiration of Hindoos and Mohammedans alike centered, and where the ex-emperor and his family still resided, was left entirely to the guard of native troops; not a single British regiment was there, not a battery of white troops. As the center of the province, a large white population were gathered there-the families of the officers of the native infantry and artillery, of the civil officers of the province, merchants, bankers, missionaries, and others. As at all other Indian towns, the great bulk of the white inhabitants lived in the cantonments outside the town; had it not been for this, not one would have escaped the slaughter that commenced as soon as the Third Cavalry from Meerut rode into the town. The Fifty-fourth Native Infantry, who had hastily been marched out to meet them, fraternized with them at once, and, standing quietly by, looked on while their officers were murdered by the cavalrymen. Then commenced a scene of murder and atrocity which is happily without parallel in history. Suffice to say, that with the exception of some half-dozen who in one way or other managed to escape, the whole of the white population inside the walls of Delhi were murdered under circumstances of the most horrible and revolting cruelty. Had the news of the outbreak of Meerut been sent by a swift mounted messenger, the whole of these hapless people would have had time to leave the town before the arrival of the mutineers. Those in the cantonments outside the city fared somewhat better. Some were killed, but the greater part made their escape; and although many were murdered on the way, either by villagers or by bodies of mutineers, the majority reached Meerut or Aliwal. The sufferers of Delhi did not die wholly unavenged. Inside the city walls was an immense magazine containing vast stores of powder, cartridges, and arms. It was all-important that this should not fall into the hands of the mutineers. This was in charge of Lieutenant Willoughby of the royal artillery, who had with him Lieutenants Forrest and Rayner, and six English warrant and non-commissioned officers, Buckley, Shaw, Scully, Crow, Edwards, and Stewart. The following account was given by Lieutenant Forrest:

"The gates of the magazine were closed and barricaded, and every possible arrangement that could be made was at once commenced. Inside the gate leading to the park were placed two six-pounders doubly charged with grape. These were under acting sub-conductor Crow and Sergeant Stewart, with lighted matches in their hands. Their orders were that if any attempt was made to force the gate the guns were to be fired at once, and they were to fall back to that part of the magazine where Lieutenant Willoughby and I were posted. The principal gate of the magazine was similarly defended by two guns and by the *chevaux-de-frise* laid down in the inside. For the further defense of this gate and the magazine in its vicinity, there were two six-pounders so placed as to command it and a small bastion close by. Within sixty yards of the gate, and commanding two cross roads, were three six-pounders, and one twenty-four pound howitzer, which could be so managed as to act upon any part of the magazine in that neighborhood. After all these guns and howitzers had been placed in the several positions above named, they were loaded with a double charge of grape. After these arrangements had been completed a train was laid ready to be fired at a preconcerted signal. On the enemy approaching the walls of the magazine, which was provided with scaling ladders, the native establishment at once deserted us by climbing up the sloped sheds on the inside of the magazine and descending the ladders on the outside."

When the attack began the mutineers climbed the walls in great numbers, and opened fire upon the little garrison; these replied by an incessant fire of grape-shot, which told severely upon the enemy. There were but two men to each gun, but they stood nobly to their pieces until all were more

or less wounded by the enemy's fire. Finding that no more could be done, Lieutenant Willoughby gave the order, Conductor Scully fired the several trains, and in another instant a tremendous explosion took place which shook all Delhi, and covered the city with a cloud of black smoke. It was calculated that from fifteen hundred to two thousand of the mutineers and rabble of the town were killed by the falling walls, or crushed under the masses of masonry. Lieutenants Willoughby, Forrest, Rayner, and Conductor Buckley survived the explosion, and effected their retreat in the confusion through a small sallyport on the river face. The mutineers were so enraged by their misfortune that they rushed to the palace and demanded of the king a number of European officers and ladies who had sought refuge under his protection. They were handed over to the mutineers, and at once slaughtered.

The Warreners listened with pale faces as their father, on his return from the orderly-room, where the news had been discussed, told them the sad story.

"There is nothing to be done, I suppose, papa?" Ned said gently.

"No, my boy; we are in the hands of God. We must wait now for what may come. At present the regiment professes its fidelity, and has now volunteered to march against the mutineers. The colonel believes them, so do some of the others; I do not; it may be that the men mean what they say at present, but we know that emissaries come and go, and every fresh rising will be an incentive to them. It is no use blinking the truth, dear; we are like men standing on a loaded mine which may at any moment explode. I have been thinking, indeed for the last week I have done nothing but think, what is best to be done. If the mutiny breaks out at night or at any time when we are not on parade, we have agreed that all the whites shall make at once for Mr. Thompson's house. It is the strongest of any of the residences—for there would of course be no getting to the messhouse—and then we will sell our lives as dearly as we may. If it happens when we are on parade, defense by the rest of the residents would be useless. There are but six civilians, with you two boys—for we have counted you—eight. Probably but few of you could gain Thompson's house in time; and if all did, your number would be too small to defend it. There remains then nothing but flight. The rising will most likely take place on parade. The residents have agreed that each day they will, on some excuses or other, have their traps at their door at that hour, so that at the sound of the first shot fired they may jump in and drive off."

"But, you, papa?" Kate asked.

"My dear," said her father, "I shall be on duty; so long as a vestige of the regiment remains as a regiment, I shall be with it; if the whole regiment breaks up and attacks us, those who do not fall at the first volley will be justified in trying to save their lives. The colonel, the adjutant, and myself are mounted officers, and two or three of the others will have their dogcarts each day brought up to the messhouse, as they often do. If there is a mutiny on parade, the unmounted officers will make for them, and we who are mounted will as far as possible cover their retreat. So it is arranged."

"But will the road be open to Meerut, uncle?" Rose asked after a pause, for the danger seemed so strange and terrible that they felt stunned by it.

"No, my dear; it certainly will not. There are three garrison towns between us, and they also will probably be up. The only thing is to keep to the road for the first ten or twelve miles, and then take to the woods, and make your way on foot. I have spoken to Saba this morning. We can trust her; she nursed you all, and has lived with me ever since as a sort of pensioner till you came out. I have asked her to get two dresses of Mussulman country women; in those only the eyes are visible, while the Hindoo dress gives no concealment. I have also ordered her to get me two dresses: one, such as a young Mussulman *zemindar* wears; the other, as his retainer. They are for you boys. Keep the bundles, when you get them, in that closet in the dining-room, so as to be close at hand; and in case of alarm, be sure and take them with you. Remember my instructions are absolute. If by day, escape in the trap at the first alarm; if the trap is not available, escape at once on foot. If you hear the enemy are close, hide till nightfall in that thick clump of bushes in the corner of the compound, then make for that copse of trees, and try and find your way to Meerut. I trust I may be with you, or that I may join you on the road. But in any case, it will relieve my anxiety greatly to know that your

course is laid down. If I had to return here to look for you, I should bring my pursuers after me, and your chance of escape would be gone—for I rely upon you all to follow my instructions to the letter."

"Yes, indeed, papa," was the unanimous answer of the young Warreners, who were deeply affected at the solemn manner in which their father spoke of the situation.

"I have a brace of revolvers upstairs," he said, "and will give one to each of you boys. Carry them always, but put them on under your coats, so that they may not be noticed; it would be as well for you to practice yourselves in their use; but when you do so, always go some distance from the station, so that the sound will not be heard."

"Can you give Rose and me a pistol each, too, papa?" Kate said quietly.

Major Warrener kissed his daughter and niece tenderly.

"I have a pair of small double-barreled pistols; you shall each have one," he answered with a deep sigh.

That afternoon the young Warreners and their cousin went out for a walk, and, fixing a piece of paper against a tree, practiced pistol shooting for an hour. Any passer-by ignorant of the circumstances would have wondered at the countenances of these young people, engaged, apparently, in the amusement of pistol practice. There was no smile on them, no merry laugh when the ball went wide of the mark, no triumphant shout at a successful shot. Their faces were set, pale, and earnest, Scarcely a word was spoken. Each loaded in silence, took up a place at the firing point, and aimed steadily and seriously; the boys with an angry eye and frowning brow, as if each time they were firing at a deadly foe; the girls as earnestly, and without any of the nervousness or timidity which would be natural in girls handling firearms for the first time. Each day the exercise was repeated, and after a week's practice all could hit, with a fair amount of certainty, a piece of paper six inches square, at a distance of ten yards.

During this time Captains Dunlop and Manners spent their whole time, when not engaged upon their military duties, at Major Warrener's. They were now the recognized lovers of Kate and Rose; and although, in those days of tremendous anxiety and peril, no formal engagements were entered upon, the young people understood each other, and Major Warrener gave his tacit approval. Very earnestly all the party hoped that when the dread moment came it might come when they were all together, so that they might share the same fate, whatever it might be. The young officers' buggies now stood all day in Major Warrener's compound, with the patient *syces* squatting near, or talking with the servants, while the major's horses stood ready saddled in the stables.

However much the party might hope to be together when the crisis came, they felt that it was improbable that they would be so, for at the first symptoms of mutiny it would be the duty of the officers to hasten to the barracks to endeavor to quell it, even if certain death should meet them there.

In the face of the tidings from Meerut and Delhi, all the pretense of confidence, which had hitherto been kept up at the station, came to an end; and even had there been implicit confidence in the regiment, the news of such terrible events would have caused an entire cessation of the little amusements and gatherings in which Sandynugghur had previously indulged.

As is usual in cases of extreme danger, the various temperaments of people come strongly into relief at these awful times. The pretty young wife of the doctor was nearly wild with alarm. Not daring to remain at home alone, she passed the day in going from house to house of her female friends. Advice and example she obtained from these, but poor comfort. The colonel's wife was as brave as any man in the station; she hardly shared her husband's opinion that the regiment would remain faithful in the midst of an almost general defection; but she was calm, self-possessed, and ready for the worst.

"It is no use crying, my dear," she said to the doctor's wife. "Our husbands have enough to worry them without being shaken by our tears. Death, after all, can only come once, and it is better to die with those we love than to be separated."

But there were not many tears shed in Sandynugghur. The women were pale and quiet. They shook hands with a pressure which meant much, lips quivered, and tears might drop when they spoke

of children at home; but this was not often, and day after day they bore the terrible strain with that heroic fortitude which characterized English women in India during the awful period of the mutiny. Ten days after the news came in of the rising at Delhi Major Warrener told his family, on his return from parade, that the regiment had again declared its fidelity, and had offered to march against the mutineers.

"I am glad of it," he said, "because it looks as if at present, at least, they have not made up their minds to mutiny, and I shall be able to go to mess with a lighter heart; as I told you yesterday, it is the colonel's birthday, so we all dine at mess."

In the meantime Saba had faithfully carried out her commission as to the dresses, and had added to the bundles a bottle containing a brown juice which she had extracted from some berries; this was to be used for staining the skin, and so completing the disguise. The Warreners knew that if their old nurse had any information as to any intended outbreak she would let them know; but she heard nothing. She was known to be so strongly attached to the major's family that, had the other servants known anything of it, they would have kept it from her.

The hour for the mess-dinner was eight, and the young Warreners had finished their evening meal before their father started.

"God bless you, my children, and watch over and protect us all till we meet again!" such was the solemn leave-taking with which the major and his children had parted—if only for half an hour—since the evil days began.

For an hour and a half the young Warreners and their cousin sat and read, and occasionally talked.

"It's time for tea," Kate said, looking at her watch; and she struck a bell upon the table.

Usually the response was almost instantaneous; but Kate waited two minutes, and then rang sharply twice. There was still no reply.

"He must be asleep," she said, "or out of hearing; but it is curious that none of the others answer!"

Dick went out into the veranda, but came in again in a minute or two:

"There is no one there, Kate; and I don't hear any of them about anywhere."

The four young people looked at each other. What did this mean? Had the servants left in a body? Did they know that something was going to happen? Such were the mute questions which their looks asked each other.

"Girls!" said Ned, "put your dark shawls round you. It may be nothing, but it is better to be prepared. Get the bundles out. Dick, put a bottle of wine in your pocket; and let us all fill our pockets with biscuits."

Silently and quietly the others did as he told them.

"There is that great biscuit-tin full," Ned said when they had filled their pockets; "let us empty it into that cloth, and tie it up. Now, if you will put your shawls on I will look in at the stables."

In a couple of minutes he returned.

"The horses are all unharnessed," he said, "and not a soul is to be seen. Ah, is that Saba?"

The old nurse had been found asleep in her favorite place outside the door of her young mistresses' room.

"Do you know what is the matter, Saba? All the servants are gone!"

The old nurse shook her head. "Bad news; no tell Saba."

"Now, Saba, get ready to start," for the nurse had declared that she would accompany them, to go into the villages to buy food; "Dick, come with me; we will put one of the horses into the dogcart."

They were leaving the room when they heard the sound of a rifle. As if it were the signal, in a moment the air rang with rifle shots, shouts, and yells. The boys leaped back into the room and caught up the bundles.

"Quick, for your lives, girls! some of them are not fifty yards off! To the bushes! Come, Saba!"

"Saba do more good here," the old nurse said, and seated herself quietly in the veranda.

It was but twenty yards to the bushes they had marked as the place of concealment; and as they entered and crouched down there came the sound of hurrying feet, and a band of Sepoys, led by one of the jemadars, or native officers, rushed up to the veranda from the back.

"Now," the jemadar shouted, "search the house; kill the boys, but keep the white women; they are too pretty to hurt."

Two minutes' search—in which furniture was upset, curtains pulled down, and chests ransacked—and a shout of rage proclaimed that the house was empty.

The jemadar shouted to his men: "Search the compound; they can't be far off; some of you run out to the plain; they can't have got a hundred yards away; besides, our guards out there will catch them."

The old nurse rose to her feet just as the Sepoys were rushing out on the search.

"It is of no use searching," she said; "they have been gone an hour."

"Gone an hour!" shouted the enraged jemadar; "who told them of the attack?"

"I told them," Saba said steadily; "Saba was true to her salt."

There was a yell of rage on the part of the mutineers, and half a dozen bayonets darted into the faithful old servant's body, and without a word she fell dead on the veranda, a victim to her noble fidelity to the children she had nursed.

"Now," the jemadar said, "strip the place; carry everything off; it is all to be divided to-morrow, and then we will have a blaze."

Five minutes sufficed to carry off all the portable articles from the bungalow; the furniture, as useless to the Sepoys, was left, but everything else was soon cleared away, and then the house was lit in half a dozen places. The fire ran quickly up the muslin curtains, caught the dry reeds of the tatties, ran up the bamboos which formed the top of the veranda, and in five minutes the house was a sheet of flame.

CHAPTER III
THE FLIGHT

The young Warreners and their cousin, hurrying on, soon gained the thick bush toward which they were directing their steps. As they cowered down in its shelter the girls pulled their shawls over their heads, and with their hands to their ears to keep out the noise of the awful din around them, they awaited, in shuddering horror, their fate. The boys sat, revolver in hand, determined to sell their lives dearly. Ned translated the jemadar's speech, and at his order to search the compound both felt that all was over, and, with a grasp of each other's hand, prepared to sally forth and die. Then came Saba's act of noble self-sacrifice, and the boys had difficulty in restraining themselves from rushing out to avenge her.

In the meantime the night was hideous with noises; musket shots, the sharp cracks of revolvers, shouts, cries, and at times the long shrill screams of women. It was too much to be borne, and feeling that for the present Saba's act had saved them, the boys, laying down their weapons, pressed their hands to their ears to keep out the din. There they sat for half an hour, stunned by the awful calamity, too horror-stricken at what had passed, and at the probable fate of their father, to find relief in tears.

At the end of that time the fire had burned itself out, and a few upright posts still flickering with tongues of fire, and a heap of glowing embers marked where the pretty bungalow, replete with every luxury and comfort, had stood an hour before.

Dick was the first to move; he touched Ned's arm.

"All is quiet here now, but they may take it into their heads to come back and search. We had better make for the trees; by keeping close to that cactus hedge we shall be in shadow all the way."

The girls were roused from their stupor of grief.

"Now, dears, we must be brave," said Ned, "and carry out our orders. God has protected us thus far; let us pray that He will continue to do so."

In another five minutes the little party, stealing cautiously out from their shelter, kept along close to the wall to a side door, through which they issued forth into the open. Ten steps took them to the cactus hedge, and stooping low under its shelter, they moved on till they safely reached the clump of trees.

For some time the little party crouched among the thick bushes, the silence broken only by the sobs of the girls. Ned and Richard said nothing, but the tears fell fast down their cheeks. The crackling of the flames of many of the burning bungalows could be distinctly heard; and outside the shadow of the trees it was nearly as light as day. Yells of triumph rose on the night air, but there was no firing or sounds of conflict, and resistance was plainly over. For a quarter of an hour they sat there, crushed with the immensity of the calamity. Then Ned roused himself and took the lead.

"Now, dears, the fires have burned down, and we must be moving, for we should be far away from here before morning. No doubt others have hidden in the woods round this place, and those black fiends will be searching everywhere to-morrow. Remember what our orders are;" and he paused for a moment to choke down the sob which would come when he thought of who had given the order, and how it was given. "We were to make for Meerut. Be strong and brave, girls, as father would have had you. I have gone over the course on the district map, and I think I can keep pretty straight for it. We need not change our clothes now; we can do that when we halt before daylight. We must walk all night, to be as far as possible away before the search begins. We know this country pretty well for some miles round, which will make it easier. Come, girls, take heart; it is possible yet that some of the officers have cut their way out, and our father may be among them. Who can say?"

"I knew that he had talked over with Dunlop and Manners the very best course to take whenever they might be attacked," Dick said in a more cheerful tone, "so they were sure to keep together, and

if any one has got away, they would." Neither of the boys had at heart the least hope, but they spoke as cheerfully as they could, to give strength and courage to the girls. Their words had their effect. Kate rose, and taking her cousin's arm said:

"Come, Rose, the boys are right. There is still some hope; let us cling to it as long as we can. Now let us be moving: but before we go, let us all thank God for having saved us from harm so far, and let us pray for His protection and help upon the road."

Silently the little group knelt in prayer, and when they rose followed Ned—who had naturally assumed the position of leader—out into the open country beyond the grove, without a word being spoken. The moon was as yet quite young, a favorable state for the fugitives, as it afforded light enough to see where they were going without giving so bright a light as to betray them to any one at a distance.

"The moon will be down in a couple of hours," Ned said; "but by that time we shall be beyond where any sentries are likely to have been placed on the road, so we can then trust ourselves on that till it begins to get daylight. We must keep in the fields till we are past Nussara, which is five miles by the road; then we can walk straight on. There is a nullah a few yards on; we had better keep in that for a quarter of a mile; it does not go quite the way we want, but it will be safer to follow it till we are well out of sight of any one who may be watching the plain."

They scrambled down into the bed of the nullah. Then Kate said, "Walk on as fast as you can, Ned; we can keep up with you, and if we hurry on we shan't be able to think."

"All right," Ned answered; "I will go fast for a bit, but you must not knock yourselves up; we have a long journey before us."

Walking fast, however, was impossible at the bottom of the nullah, for it was pitch dark between its steep banks, and there were bowlders and stones lying here and there. After half an hour's walking Ned scrambled up and looked back.

"It is quite safe now," he said; "let us make as straight as we can for Nussara."

Kate Warrener and Rose Hertford have never been able to recall any incidents of that night's walk. Mechanically, as in a dreadful dream, they followed Ned's guidance, stumbling across little watercourses, tramping through marshy rice-fields, climbing into and out of deep nullahs, now pausing to listen to the barking of a village dog, now making their way through a thick clump of trees, and at last tramping for hours—that seemed ages—along the dead flat of the highroad. This at the first faint dawn of morning they left, and took refuge in a thick grove a quarter of a mile from the highway. Before throwing themselves down to rest, the girls, at Ned's earnest request, tried to eat a piece of biscuit, but tried in vain, they, however, each sipped a little wine from the bottles, and then, utterly worn out and exhausted, soon forgot their misery in a deep and heavy sleep.

The sun was upon the point of setting when their companions aroused them, and they woke up to their sorrows and dangers. The day had passed quietly; the boys, after both sleeping for some four or five hours, had watched by turns. No one had approached the wood; but a party of four Sepoys, mounted on horses, had passed from Sandynugghur; and a larger party had, later in the afternoon, come along in the other direction. From this the boys guessed that a successful revolt had also taken place at Nalgwa, the next station to Sandynugghur.

"Now, girls, the first thing to do is to eat. Here are biscuits for some days, and the two bottles of wine, which we must be sparing of. Dick and I have eaten lots of biscuits, and have had some water from a well at a little distance behind the wood. There was a large gourd lying by it which we have taken the liberty of borrowing. You can drink some water if you like, but you must each take a glass of wine. You must keep up your strength. There is no one in sight, so if you like you can go to the well and have a wash. Don't be longer than you can help; it would be ruin to be seen before we have changed our clothes. While you are away washing, Dick and I will put on our dresses, and when you come back you can do the same. We can stain our faces and hands afterward."

The girls chose to have their wash first and their meal afterward, and felt refreshed and brighter after they had done so. Then they dressed in the clothes Saba had provided for them, and could, at

any other time, have laughed at the comicality of their aspect, muffled up in white, with only their eyes visible. The awkward shoes were the only part of the costume to which they objected; but the sight of European boots below the native dress would have betrayed them instantly; however, they determined to adopt them for walking in at nights, or when crossing the fields, and to put the native shoes in a bundle, to be worn in public.

The boys presently joined them, Ned in the dress of a young Mussulman zemindar, Dick as his follower.

"I should not have known you in the least," Rose said; "as far as appearances go, I think we are all safe now."

When it was quite dark they again started, regained the road, and kept steadily along it. After two hours' walking they approached a village. After some consultation it was decided that Dick, whose dress was the darkest and least noticeable, should steal forward and reconnoiter. If every one was indoors they would push boldly through; if not, they would make a circuit round it. In ten minutes he returned.

"Ned, there are two troopers' horses standing before the largest house of the place. I suppose they belong to some of the men of the cavalry regiment at Nalgwa. If we could but steal them!"

"Splendid, Dick; why should we not? I can get on one, you on the other; one of the girls can sit behind each of us, with her arms round our waists. What do you say, girls? With our dress it would be natural for us to be on horseback, and no one would ask any questions. We are pretty safe, because if they come out there are but two of them, and we are more than a match for them with our pistols."

"It seems a terrible risk to run, Ned; but I do think it would be our best plan. What do you say, Rose?"

"I think we had better try, Kate."

"Now let us settle everything before we start," said Ned. "We must mount first, I think, that we may be able to help you more easily; and you would have less risk of falling off if you get up in front of us. We can change when we have gone half a mile. Will you stand close to Dick, Kate, when he mounts; Rose, you keep close to me. The moment we are fairly in the saddle, and have got the reins in our hands, you put your foot on mine, and take hold of my hand, and climb up in the saddle in front of me. Put your arms round our necks and hold us, because we shall want one hand for the reins, the other for a pistol."

"Let us cut a stick, Ned, to give them a lick and make them start at a gallop."

Very gently, and with bated breath, they stole up the village. The horses were still standing with their reins thrown over a hook in the wall. Very quietly the boys unhooked the reins, but the horses moved uneasily, and objected to their mounting them, for horses accustomed to natives dislike to be touched by Europeans. However, the boys had just managed to climb into their seats when a shutter of the house opened, and a voice said in Hindostanee, "What is fidgeting the horses?" Then a head looked out.

"Some one is stealing the horses," he shouted.

"Quick, girls, up with you," Ned said; and the girls, as light as feathers, sprang up. "Go along," the boys cried, bringing down their sticks on the animals' sides. Dick's at once leaped forward, but Ned's horse only backed. Ned gave his stick to Rose and seized his pistol, which was cocked and ready for use. As he did so a native trooper rushed from the house. As he came out Ned fired, and the man fell forward on his face.

Startled by the shot, the horse darted off after his companion. For a few minutes they went forward at a gallop, the boys holding on as well as they could, but expecting every moment to be thrown off. For awhile shouts and cries were heard from the village, and then all was quiet again. The two boys reined in their horses.

"That was awful," Dick said; "I would rather sit on the yardarm in a storm than ride on that beast any further at the pace we have been going."

The girls had not spoken a word since they started, and they now slipped to the ground. It was not an easy thing for them to get up behind, and several slips were made before their attempts were successful. Once seated, they were more comfortable, and they again went on, this time at an easy canter. After half an hour's ride they came to a crossroad, and turned up there, going now at a walk. After awhile they took a well-marked path running in a parallel direction to the road; this they followed for some time, passing fearlessly through one or two small villages.

Then, feeling by the flagging walk of their horses that they were becoming fatigued, they plunged deep into a thick wood, dismounted, and prepared for the night. Attached to the saddle of each horse was a nose-bag with some forage. These were put on, the horses fastened up, and the little party were soon asleep again.

Before starting next morning the first care of the boys was to take off the embroidery of the horse-cloths, and as much of the metal work on the bridles as could be possibly dispensed with, in order to conceal the fact that the horses had belonged to a British cavalry regiment; then they mounted, with the girls behind them, and rode quietly forward, taking care not to travel by the main road, as the news of the carrying off the horses would have been generally known there.

They passed through several villages, attracting but little attention as they did so, for there was now nothing unusual in the appearance of a Mohammedan zemindar and follower riding with two closely-veiled women *en croupe*. Late in the afternoon they stopped at a village store, and Ned purchased, without exciting any apparent suspicion, some grain for the horses. That night they slept as usual in a wood, and congratulated themselves on having made fully twenty-five miles of their journey toward Meerut.

The next morning, after two miles' riding, they entered a large village. As they were passing through it a number of peasants suddenly rushed out into the road, and shouted to them to stop. They were armed with sticks and hoes, and a few had guns. Looking behind, Ned saw a similar body fill up the road behind them, cutting off their escape.

"Look, Ned, at that old fellow with the gun; that's the man who sold us the grain last night," Dick said.

"We must charge them, Dick; there's nothing else to do. Hold tight, girls. Now for your revolver, Dick! Now!"

And, digging their heels into their horses' side, the boys rode at the crowd of peasants. There was a discharge of guns, and Dick felt as if a hot iron had been drawn suddenly across his cheek; then they were in the midst of the crowd, emptying their revolvers with deadly effect among them; some fell, and the horses dashed forward, followed by the yells of their assailants. A minute later three or four more guns were discharged, the rear party having now joined the other, and being therefore able for the first time to fire.

Dick heard a little startled cry from Kate.

"Are you hurt, darling?" he cried in alarm.

"Nothing to speak of, Dick. Ride on."

In a quarter of a mile they drew rein, and found that a ball had passed through the upper part of Kate's arm, as it went round Dick's body. Fortunately it had gone through the flesh only, without touching the bone. Dick was bleeding copiously from a wound across the cheek.

"Another two inches to the right," he said, "and it would have taken me fairly in the mouth. It's well it's no worse."

Kate's arm was soon bandaged up, and a handkerchief tied round Dick's face. Ned proposed that for Kate's sake they should make a halt at the first wood they came to, but Kate would not hear of it.

"On the contrary, Ned, we ought to press forward as hard as we can, for it is very possible that at that village where we were recognized—I suppose because they had heard about the horses—they may have dispatched people to the main road, as well as further on to stop us here; and we may be

pursued at any moment, if there happens to be any native cavalry upon the road. Evidently they are very much in earnest about catching us, and have sent word to look after four people on two horses all over the country, or they could not have known about it at the village yesterday evening."

"I am afraid you are right, Kate; if we could turn off this road I should not fear, but the river cannot be far to our right, and the main road is to our left. There is nothing for it but to press straight on. Fortunately, the country is not thickly populated, and there is a good deal of jungle. If the worst comes to the worst, we must leave our horses and go on foot again. I fear that is more fatiguing for you, but we can hide ourselves a good deal better."

It was late in the afternoon when Rose cried. "They are coming, Ned; there is a party of cavalry behind!"

Ned looked round; and far back, along the straight road, he saw a body of horsemen.

"They are a long distance behind," he said; "now for a race!"

The boys plied their sticks, and the horses sprang on at full gallop.

"How much are they gaining, Rose?" he asked, after twenty minutes' hard riding.

"They are nearer, Ned—a good deal nearer; but they have not gained half their distance yet."

"The sun set fully ten minutes ago," Ned said; "in another half-hour it will be dark. Their horses must be done up, or they would gain faster on us, as ours have to carry double, and are getting terribly blown; but there is a wood, which looks a large one, a couple of miles ahead. If we can get there five minutes before them, we are safe."

By dint of flogging their horses they entered the wood while their pursuers were half a mile behind.

"Another hundred yards," Ned said, "and then halt. Now, off we get."

In an instant they leaped off, and gave a couple of sharp blows with their sticks to the horses, who dashed off at a gallop down the road.

It was already perfectly dark in the wood, and the fugitives hurried into the thickest part. In five minutes they heard the cavalry come thundering past.

"We must push on," Ned said; "fortunately, we have done no walking, for we must be far away by to-morrow morning. They will come up with the horses before very long, and will know we are in the wood, and they will search it through and through in the morning."

A quarter of a mile, and the wood grew thicker, being filled with an undergrowth of jungle.

"If you will stop here, Ned, I will push on through this jungle, and see how far it goes. The girls can never get through this. I think we are near the edge of the wood; it looks lighter ahead."

In ten minutes he came back.

"Ned, we are on the river; it is not fifty yards from here."

This was serious news.

"What a pity we did not take to the left instead of the right when we left the horses. However, they won't know which way we have gone, and must watch the whole wood. We must push forward, and, by keeping as close as we can to the river, shall most likely pass them; besides, they will be some time before they decide upon forming a chain round the wood, and as there are only about twenty of them they will be a long way apart. There! Do you hear them? They are coming back! Now let us go on again!"

In ten minutes they reached the edge of the wood. They could see nothing of the horsemen. Keeping in the fields, but close to the line of jungle that bordered the river, they walked onward for upward of an hour. Then they came upon the road. The river had made a bend, and the road now followed its bank.

"Shall we cross it, and keep in the open country, or follow it, girls?"

"Follow it as long as we can keep on walking," Kate said. "It is in the right direction, and we can go on so much faster than in the fields. If we hear them coming along we can get into the jungle on the bank."

"Listen, Kate," Rose said a few minutes afterward; "they are following!"

"I expect," Ned said, "they find that the wood is too big to be watched, and some of them are going on to get some help from the next garrison, or, perhaps, to rouse up a village and press them in the work. Trot on, girls; the jungle is so thick here you could hardly squeeze yourself in. We have plenty of time; they won't be here for five minutes yet."

CHAPTER IV
BROKEN DOWN

They ran at the top of their speed, but the sound of the horses' feet grew louder.

"There is a path leading to the river," Ned said; "let us turn down there; we can hide under the jungle on the bank."

Breathlessly they ran down to the river.

"Hurrah! here is a boat, jump in;" and in another minute they had pushed off from the bank, just as they heard a body of cavalry—for that they were troops they knew by the jingling of their accouterments—pass at a gallop. The stream was strong; and the boys found that with the rude oars they could make no way whatever.

"We had better land again, and get further from the river," Ned said. "We will push the boat off, and it will be supposed that we have gone off in it."

This was soon done, and having regained the road, they crossed it and struck over the fields.

The moon, which had been hitherto hidden under a passing cloud, was soon out fully, and for some time they kept across the country, carefully avoiding all villages. These were here more thinly scattered; patches of jungle and wood occurred more frequently; and it was evident that they were getting into a less highly cultivated district. It was long before daybreak that Rose declared that she was too fatigued to go further, and they entered a large wood. Here they lay down, and were soon fast asleep. It was broad daylight when the Warreners woke. Rose still slept on.

Presently Kate came to her brothers. "I am afraid Rose is going to be ill. She keeps talking and moaning in her sleep; her face is flushed, and her hands as hot as fire."

As they were looking sadly at her she opened her eyes.

"Is it time to get up?" she asked. "Oh, my head! it is aching terribly. Is the trap at the door?"

Then she closed her eyes again, and went on talking incoherently to herself.

"She has fever," Kate said, "and we must get her under shelter, at whatever risk."

"I heard a dog bark not far off, just as I went to sleep," Ned said. "I will go and reconnoiter. Dick, you had better stay here."

Dick nodded, and Ned advanced cautiously to the edge of the wood. There he saw a farmhouse of a better class than usual. Three peons were just starting for work, and an elderly man with a long beard was standing at the door. Then he went in, and after a few minutes reappeared with a long staff in his hands, and went out into the fields. He did not, however, follow the direction which the peons had taken, but took a line parallel with the edge of the wood. "He looks a decent old fellow," Ned said to himself; "I can but try; at any rate, at the worst I am more than a match for him."

So saying, he stepped out into the field. The farmer started with surprise at seeing a young Mussulman appear before him.

"I am English," Ned said at once. "I think you are kind by your face, and I tell you the truth. There are two English girls in the wood, and one is ill. We can go no further. Will you give them shelter?"

The old man stood for some time in thought.

"I have no complaint against the Feringhees," he said; "in my fathers time the country was red with blood, but all my life I have eaten my bread in peace, and no man has injured me. Where are the English ladies?"

Ned led the way to the spot where Rose was still lying. The old man looked at her flushed face, and then at Kate, and said:

"The English ladies have suffered much, and can have done harm to no one. I will shelter them. My wife and daughter will nurse the sick one. They will be in the women's chamber, and my servants

will not know that there is a stranger there. I believe that they would be faithful, but one who knows nothing can tell no tales. On the other side of the wood there is a shed. It is empty now, and none go near it. The English sahibs can live there, and each day I will bring them food. When their sister is well they can go on again."

Ned translated the old man's words, and Kate, who was kneeling by Rose, caught his hand and kissed it in her gratitude. He patted her head and said, "Poor child!"

"How are we to carry Rose? I don't think she can walk," Kate asked.

The farmer solved the difficulty by motioning them to stay where they were. He then went off, and in ten minutes returned, bearing a dried bullock's skin. On this Rose was laid. The Hindoo took the two ends at her feet, the boys each one of those by her head, and then, slung as in a hammock, Rose was carried to the house, where the wife and daughter of their host, prepared by him for what was coming, received them with many expressions of pity, and she was at once carried into the inner room. The farmer then placed before the boys two bowls of milk and some freshly made chupatties, and then gave them some food for the day. With an expression of fervent gratitude to him, and a kiss from Kate, who came out to tell them that Rose would be well nursed and cared for, the boys started for the hut in the direction the Hindoo pointed out to them. It was a small building, and had apparently been at some time used as a cattle shed. The floor was two feet deep in fodder of the stalks of Indian corn. Above was a sort of rough loft, in which grain had been stored.

The boys at once agreed that, to prevent suspicion, it was safer to occupy this, and they soon transferred enough of the fodder from below to make a comfortable bed. Then, feeling secure from discovery, even if by chance some passer-by should happen to glance into the shed, they were soon deep in a sounder sleep than they had enjoyed since they left Sandynugghur.

The next day, when the old man came to see them, he was accompanied by Kate. She looked pale and wan.

"How is Rose?" was their first question.

"She is as bad as she can be, dears. She has been delirious all night, and is so this morning. I did not like to leave her for a moment. But this kind old man wanted me to go with him, as I think he has something to say to you."

"Have you any news?" Ned asked him.

"My servants tell me that the Sepoys are searching the whole country, some of the officers have escaped from Sandynugghur, and also from Nalgwa, where the troops rose on the same night; some of the residents have escaped also. There is a reward offered for them alive or dead, and any one hiding them is to be punished with death. The white lady is very ill. She is in the hand of God; she may get better, she may die. If she gets better it will be weeks before she can go through the hardships of the journey to Meerut. I think it better that you should go on alone; the white ladies will be as my daughters. I have told my servants that my daughter is ill, so that if they hear cries and voices at night they will think that it is she who is in pain. You can do no good here. If the woods are searched you may be found; if you are found they will search everywhere closely, and may find them. I will hide them here safely. The orders are, I hear, that the captives taken are to be carried to Delhi; but if they should be found I will myself journey to Meerut to bring you the news. You will give me your names, and I will find you; then you may get help and rescue them on the way."

Ned translated the old man's opinion and kind offer to his brother and sister, and said that he was very unwilling to leave the girls—a sentiment in which Dick heartily joined.

Kate, however, at once expressed her warm approval of the plan.

"It will be weeks, dears, before Rose can walk again, and I shall have an anxious time with her. It would add greatly to my anxiety if I knew that you were near, and might at any time be captured and killed. If dear papa has escaped he will be in a terrible state of anxiety about us, and you could relieve him if you can join him at Meerut, and tell him how kindly we are treated here. Altogether,

boys, it would be so much better for you to go; for if the Sepoys do come, you could not defend us against more than two or three, and they are sure to come in a stronger party than that."

In spite of their disinclination to leave the girls without such protection as they could give them, the boys saw that the course advised was the best to be pursued, and told their Hindoo friend that they agreed to follow his counsel, thanking him in the warmest terms for his kindness.

He advised them to leave their Mohammedan dresses behind, and to dress in the simple costume of Hindoo peons, with which he could supply them. They would then attract far less attention, and could even by day pass across the fields without any comment whatever from the natives at work there, who would naturally suppose that they belonged to some village near at hand. "Englishmen could not do this," he said; "too much leg, too much arm, too much width of shoulders; but boys are thinner, and no one will notice the difference. In half an hour I will come back with the things." Ned gave him the rest of the berries, which they had preserved, and asked him to boil them up in a little water, as they would now have to color their bodies and arms and legs, in addition to their faces.

It was a sad parting between Kate and her brothers, for all felt that they might never meet again. Still the course decided upon was, under the circumstances, evidently the best that could be adopted.

In an hour the Hindoo returned. The boys took off their clothes, and stained themselves a deep brown from head to foot. The farmer then produced a razor and a bowl of water and some soap, and said that they must shave their hair off their heads, up to a level with the top of the ears, so as to leave only that which could be concealed by their turban. This, with some laughter—the first time they had smiled since they left Sandynugghur—they proceeded to do to each other, and the skin thus exposed they dyed the same color as the rest of the body. They then each put on a scanty loincloth, and wrapping a large piece of dark blue cotton stuff first round their waists and then over one shoulder, their costume was complete, with the exception of a pair of sandals and a white turban. The old Hindoo surveyed them gravely when their attire was completed, and expressed his belief that they would pass without exciting the slightest suspicion. Their pistols were a trouble. They were determined that, come what might, they would not go without these, and they were finally slung behind them from a strap passing round the waist under the loin-cloth; the spare ammunition and a supply of biscuit were stowed in stout cotton bags, with which their friend provided them, and which hung by a band passing over one shoulder. Their money and a box of matches they secured in a corner of their clothes. A couple of stout staves completed their outfit.

Bidding a grateful farewell to their friendly Hindoo, the boys started on their journey. The sandals they found so difficult to keep on that they took them off and carried them, except when they were passing over stony ground. They kept to bypaths and avoided all villages. Occasionally they met a native, but either they passed him without speech, or Ned muttered a salutation in answer to that of the passer. All day they walked, and far into the night. They had no fear of missing their way, as the road on one hand and the river on the other both ran to Meerut; and although these were sometimes ten miles apart, they served as a fair index as to the line they should take. The biscuits, eked out with such grain as they could pluck as they crossed the fields, lasted for two days; but at the end of that time it became necessary to seek another supply of food.

"I don't know what to ask for, Dick; and those niggers always chatter so much that I should have to answer, and then I should be found out directly. I think we must try some quiet huts at a distance from the road."

The wood in which they that night slept was near three or four scattered huts. In the morning they waited and watched for a long time until one of the cottages was, as far as they could judge, deserted, all its inmates being gone out to work in the fields. They then entered it boldly. It was empty. On hunting about they found some chupatties which had apparently been newly baked, a store of rice and of several other grains. They took the chupatties, five or six pounds of rice, and a little copper cooking-pot. They placed in a conspicuous position two rupees, which were more than equivalent to the value of the things they had taken, and went on their way rejoicing.

At midday they sat down, lit a fire with some dried sticks, and put their rice in the pot to boil. As Ned was stooping to pick up a stick he was startled by a simultaneous cry of "Look out!" from Dick, and a sharp hiss; and looking up, saw, three or four feet ahead of him, a cobra, with its hood inflated, and its head raised in the very act of springing. Just as it was darting itself forward Dick's stick came down with a sharp tap on its head and killed it.

"That was a close shave, Ned," the boy said, laughing; "if you had stooped he would have bit you on the face. What would have been the best thing to do if he had bitten you?"

"The best thing is to suck the wound instantly, to take out a knife and cut deeply in, and then, as we have no vesuvians, I should break up half a dozen pistol cartridges, put the powder into and on the wound, and set it alight. I believe that that is what they do in some parts of Eastern Europe in the case of the bites of mad dogs; and this, if no time is lost after the bite is given, is almost always effectual in keeping off hydrophobia."

"Well, Ned, I am very thankful that we had not to put the virtue of the receipt to a practical test."

"Would you like to eat the snake, Dick? I believe that snake is not at all bad eating."

"Thank you," Dick said, "I will take it on trust. We have got rice; and although I am not partial to rice it will do very well. If we could have got nothing else we might have tried the snake; but as it is, I had rather not. Two more days, Ned, and we shall be at Meerut. The old Hindoo said it was a hundred miles, and we go twenty-five a day, even with all our bends and turns to get out of the way of villages."

"Yes, I should think we do quite that, Dick. We walk from daylight to sunset, and often two or three hours by moonlight; and though we don't go very fast, we ought to get over a lot of ground. Listen! There is music!" Both held their breath. "Yes, there are the regular beats of a big drum. It is on the highroad, I should say, nearly abreast of us. If we go to that knoll we shall have a view of them; and there cannot be the least danger, as they must be fully a mile away."

Upon gaining the rise in question they saw a regiment in scarlet, winding along the road.

"Are they mutineers, Dick, or British?"

It was more than any one could say. Mounted officers rode at the head of the regiment; perfect order was to be observed in its marching; there was nothing that in any way differed from its ordinary aspect.

"Let us go back and get our rice and lota, Dick. We can't afford to lose that; and if we go at a trot for a couple of miles we can get round into some trees near the road, where we can see their faces. If the mounted officers are white it is all right; if not, they are mutineers."

Half an hour's trot brought them to such a point of vantage as they desired. Crouched in some bushes at the edge of a clump of trees, not fifty yards from the road, they awaited the passage of the regiment. They had not been in their hiding-place five minutes when the head of the column appeared.

"They march in very good order, Ned; do you think that they would keep up such discipline as that after they had mutinied?"

"I don't know. Dirk; but they'll want all their discipline when they come to meet our men. For anything we know we may be the two last white men left in India; but when the news gets to England there will be such a cry throughout the land that, if it needed a million men to win back the country, I believe they would be found and sent out. There! There are two mounted officers; I can't see their color, but I don't think they are white."

"No, Ned; I am sure they are not white; then they must be mutineers. Look! Look! Don't you see they have got three prisoners? There they are, marching in the middle of that column; they are officers; and oh! Ned! I do think that the middle one's father." And the excited boy, with tears of joy running down his cheeks, would have risen and dashed out had not Ned forcibly detained him.

"Hush! Dick! and keep quiet. Yes! It is father! and Dunlop and Manners. Thank God!" he said, in deep gratitude.

"Well, let's go to them, Ned; we may as well be all together."

"Keep quiet, Dick," the elder said, holding him down again; "you will destroy their chance as well as ours. We must rescue them if we can."

"How, Ned, how?"

"I don't know yet, Dick; but we must wait and see; anyhow, we will try. There goes the bugle for a halt. I expect they have done their day's march. Come on, Dick; we must get out of this. When they have once pitched their tents they will scatter about, and, as likely as not, some will come into this wood. Let us get further back, so as to be able to see them pitch their tents, and watch, if we can, where they put the prisoners."

The regiment piled arms, and waited until the bullock-carts came up with the tents. These were taken out and pitched on the other side of the road, and facing the wood. The ground being marked out, the men were told off to their quarters, and the poles of the tents aligned with as much regularity and exactness as could have been used when the regiment possessed its white officers.

Near the quarter-guard tent—that is, the tent of the men engaged upon actual duty—a small square tent was erected; and into this the three officers, who were handcuffed, were thrust; and two sentries, one in front, the other at the back of the tent, were placed.

"Now, Dick, we know all about it; let us get further away, and talk over how it is to be managed."

The task was one of extreme difficulty, and the boys were a long time arranging the details. Had there been but one sentry, the matter would have been easy enough: but with two sentries, and with the quarter guard close at hand, it seemed at first as if no possible scheme could be hit upon. The sentry at the back of the tent must be the one to be disposed of, and this must be done so noiselessly as not to alarm the man in front. Each marched backward and forward some eight paces to the right, and as much to the left, of the tent, halting occasionally. When both marched right and left at the same time, they were in sight of each other except during the time of passing before and behind the tent; when they walked alternately, the tent hid them altogether from each other.

"I suppose there is no chance of our being able to gag that fellow, Ned? It's horrid to think of killing a man in cold blood."

"There is no help for it, Dick. If he were alone, we might gag him; as it is, he must be killed. These scoundrels are all mutineers and murderers. This regiment has, no doubt, like the others, killed its officers, and all the men, women, and children at the station. I would not kill the man unless it could be helped, but our father's life depends upon it; and to save him I would, if there were no other way, cut the throats of the whole regiment while they were asleep! This is no ordinary war, Dick; it is a struggle for existence; and though I'm sure I hate the thought of it, I shall not hesitate for an instant."

"I shan't hesitate," the midshipman said; "but I wish the fellow could make a fight of it. However, as he would kill me if he had a chance, he mustn't grumble if I do the same for him. Now, Ned, you tell me exactly what I am to do, and you may rely on my doing it."

Every minute detail of the scheme was discussed and arranged; and then, as the sun set, the boys lit a fire in a nullah and boiled some rice, and ate their food with lighter hearts than they had done since they left Sandynugghur, for the knowledge that their father had escaped death had lifted a heavy burden from their hearts. As to the danger of the expedition that they were about to undertake, with the happy recklessness of boys they thought but little of it.

Across the plain they could see the campfires, but as the evening went on these gradually died away, and the sounds which had come faintly across the still night air ceased altogether. As patiently as might be, they waited until they guessed that it must be about ten o'clock. The night was, for the country, cold—a favorable circumstance, as the natives, who are very chilly, would be less likely to leave their tents if they felt restless. The moon was now half full and shining brightly, giving a light with which the boys could well have dispensed.

"Now, Dick, old boy, let's be moving. May God help us in our night's work!"

They made a considerable detour to approach the camp in the rear, where they rightly judged that the Sepoys, having no fear whatever of any hostile body being near, would have placed no sentries.

"Listen!" Dick said, as they were pausing to reconnoiter; "that sounded like a cannon in the far distance."

There was no doubt of it; faintly, but quite distinct, across the air came the sound of heavy cannon fired at regular intervals.

"Those cannon must be fired as a salute to some great chief newly arrived at Delhi—we should not fire so late, but I suppose they are not particular," Ned said; "we calculated it was not more than twenty-five miles off, and we should hear them at that distance easily. We had better wait a few minutes to see if any one comes out to listen to it."

But there was no movement among the white tents. Then they stole quietly into the camp.

The tents of the Indian native regiments are large, oblong tents, with two poles, holding thirty men each. They are manufactured at the government prison at Jubbalpore, and are made of thick cotton canvas, lined with red or blue cotton. In the daytime they open right along one side, the wall of the tent being propped outward, with two slight poles, so as to form a sort of veranda, and shade the inside of the tent while admitting the air. At night-time, in the cool season, this flap is let down and the tent closed. In front of the tents the muskets of the men inside are piled.

Into one of these tents Dick crawled, Ned watching outside. When Dick first entered it was so dark that he could see nothing; but the moonlight penetrated dimly through the double cotton, and he was soon able to discover objects around. The ground was all occupied by sleeping figures, each wrapped up from head to foot in his blanket, looking like so many mummies. Their uniforms were folded, and placed between their heads and the wall of the tent. Six of these, with the same number of caps, and six ammunition pouches and belts, and a uniform cloak, taken carefully off one of the sleepers, Dick collected and passed out through the door of the tent to Ned. Not a sleeper stirred while he did so, and he crept quietly out, with the first part of his task accomplished. Gathering the things together, the boys made all speed back to a clump of trees half a mile in the rear of the camp. Here Ned put on one of the uniforms and the cloak, and they then started back again for the camp.

The sentries upon the prisoners' tent were changed at twelve o'clock, and a few minutes later the sentry at the rear of the tent saw one of his comrades come out of one of the large tents close to the end of his beat. He was wrapped in his blanket, and his face was tied up with a cloth. Coughing violently, he squatted himself in front of his tent, and rocked himself to and fro, with his hands to his face, uttering occasional groans. This was all so natural—for the natives of India suffer much from neuralgia in the cold weather—that the sentry thought nothing of the matter. He continued to pace his beat, turning back each time when within a yard or two of the sufferer. The third time he did so the figure dropped off his blanket, and, with a sudden bound, threw himself on the sentry's back; at the same moment a Sepoy in uniform darted out from the tent. One hand of the assailant—in which was a damp cloth—was pressed tightly over the mouth and nostrils of the sentry; the other grasped the lock of his musket, so that it could not be discharged. Thrown backward off his balance, taken utterly by surprise, the sentry was unable even to struggle, and in an instant the second antagonist plunged a bayonet twice into his body, and he fell a lifeless mass on the ground. It was the work of an instant to drag the body a yard or two into the shadow of the tent, and before the other sentry appeared from the opposite side of the prisoner's tent the native was rocking himself as before; the sentry, wrapped in his cloak, was marching calmly on his beat. The whole affair had lasted but twenty seconds, and had passed as noiselessly as a dream.

The next time the sentry in front was hidden from view the native started from his sitting position and stole up behind the tent. Cautiously and quietly he cut a slit in the canvas and entered. Then he knelt down by the side of one of the sleepers, and kissed him. He moved in his sleep, and his disturber, putting his hand on his mouth to prevent sudden speech, shook him gently. The major opened his eyes.

"Father, it is I—Richard; hush! do not speak."

Then, as the bewildered man gradually understood what was said, his son fell on his neck, kissing him with passionate delight.

After the first rapturous joy of the recognition was over, "Ned and the girls?" Major Warrener asked.

"The girls are at present safe," Dick said; "Ned is outside behind. He is the sentry. Now, father, wake the others, and then let us steal off. Take off your boots; the men's tents are only ten yards behind; once there, you are safe. I will let Ned know when you are ready, and he will occupy the sentry. We can't silence him, because he is within sight of the sentry of the quarter-guard."

Major Warrener aroused his sleeping companions, and in a few whispered words told them what had happened. In silence they wrung Dick's hand, and then taking off their boots, stole one by one out of the tent. As Ned passed he exchanged a silent embrace with his father. The next time the sentry in front was passing before the tent, a heavy stone, hurled by Ned, crashed into a bush upon the other side of the road. The sentry halted instantly, and, with gun advanced, listened, but he could hear nothing, for his comrade was at that instant seized with a fit of coughing.

After standing in a listening attitude for three or four minutes the Sepoy supposed that the noise must have been caused by some large bird suddenly disturbed in the foliage.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked Ned, as their path crossed.

"Nothing," Ned answered, continuing his march.

For another quarter of an hour he passed backward and forward, his only fear being that the sentry might take it into his head to open the tent and look in to see if the prisoners were safe. In a quarter of an hour he knew that the fugitives would have gained the trees, and would have time to put on the Sepoy uniforms before he reached them; and also, by the aid of a couple of large stones, have got rid of their handcuffs, lie might therefore be off to join them.

Waiting till the sentry was at the other end of his beat, he slipped round the tent, stripped off his cloak, lay down his musket and belt—for Dick had arranged that they should carry off five muskets in their retreat—threw off the Sepoy jacket, and in light running order, darted through the tents. He calculated that he should have at least a couple of minutes start before his absence was discovered, another minute or two before the sentry was sufficiently sure of it to hail the quarter-guard and report the circumstance. Then would follow the discovery of the escape of the prisoners; but by that time he would be far out on the plain, and even if seen, which was unlikely, he was confident that he could outrun any native.

His anticipations turned out correct; he was already some distance off when he heard the call of the sentry to the quarter-guard, followed almost immediately by a still louder shout, that told that he had discovered the flight of the prisoners; then came the sound of a musket shot, a drum beat the alarm, and a babel of sounds rang on the still air. But by this time Ned was halfway to the clump of trees, and three minutes later he was in his father's arms. There was no time to talk then. Another coat was hurried on to him, an ammunition belt and pouch thrown over his shoulder, and Captain Manners carrying his musket until he should have quite recovered breath, the five went off at a steady trot, which after a quarter of an hour broke into a walk—for there was no fear of pursuit—in the direction in which they knew Delhi to lie.

CHAPTER V
BACK UNDER THE FLAG

"How far is it to Delhi? We heard the guns there just now."

"Not thirty miles."

"Have you heard how things are going on there?" Dick asked.

"According to the Sepoy reports, fresh regiments are pouring in from all quarters; and they boast that they are going to drive us out of the country. Our troops are still at Meerut, and a force is gathering at Umballah; but they are after all a mere handful."

"Do you think there is any chance of help coming to us?"

"None for the present. The Sepoys say that every station has gone down except Agra, Allahabad, and Benares, and that these are soon to go too. Cawnpore and Lucknow have risen."

"Are all the whites killed everywhere?"

"I am afraid they are all killed where there are no white troops; but there, we must hope that they are making a stand. We shall be a long time before we know anything. It is but a week yet since our station went; seven days longer since Delhi rose."

"It seems ages ago," Ned said. "You don't mean to try and get to Meerut to-night, I hope; we could walk as far if it were absolutely necessary, but we have done a long day's walk already."

"No, no, Ned. I only want to get well away from our late camp. To-morrow we will get near the river, hide all next day, and cross after nightfall. There is a clump of trees; we will pass the night there; I think we are safe enough now. The mutineers are too anxious to be at Delhi to spend much time in looking for us. Now, first of all, let us get a fire."

"We have never had a fire at night," Dick said, "since we started; we have been too much afraid of being seen."

"There is not much chance of its being observed in a wood; especially if the bushes are thick. We are four miles at least from the camp, and we are all wet through with dew. Now for sticks."

The whole party soon collected a pile of sticks; and the major was about to scatter some powder among the dead leaves, when Ned said, "We have matches, father."

"Oh, that's all right, Ned. There we are, fairly alight. Yes, we have chosen the place well; there are bushes all around. Now," he said, when the fire had burned up brightly, "let us hear the full story of what has passed; you gave us a short account when we first got free. Now let us hear all about it."

Ned and Dick told the story—sometimes one taking it up, sometimes the other. There were many questions from their auditors, and expressions of warm approval of their conduct; and Captain Dunlop threatened under his breath that if he ever had a chance he would not leave one cake of mud upon another in the village where Kate was wounded. He and Captain Manners proposed that they should go back, and afford what protection they could to the girls. But Major Warrener at once negatived this idea.

"If they could come straight back with us, I should say yes," he said, "for with us five we might hope to get them through safely; but even that would be very risky, for the larger the party is, the more easily it attracts attention, and the whole country is alive with rebels marching to Delhi. But as Rose cannot be fit to travel for weeks, we have no choice in the matter. They must remain where they are, and we can only hope and pray for their safety. Our duty lies clearly at Meerut, where every man who can sight a rifle will be wanted most urgently. Now let us be off to sleep; the fire has burned low, and in another hour or two it will be daybreak; however, there will be no reveille, and we can sleep on with lighter hearts than we have had for some time."

"What figures you are in those uniforms!" Dick said, laughing, next morning; "you can scarcely move in them, and they won't meet by eight or nine inches. It does not seem to me that they are any disguise at all. Any one could see in a moment that they were not made for you."

"They are wretchedly uncomfortable, Dick." his father said; "and, as you say, any one could see they were not made for us. But they are useful. As we go along, any one who saw us at a distance would take us for a straggling party of mutineers making our way to Delhi; while the bright scarlet of our own uniform would have told its tale miles off."

"I shall be glad enough to get rid of mine, Dick; I feel as if I had got into a boy's jacket by mistake. Jack Sepoy has no shoulders to speak of; as far as height goes he is well enough; but thirty Sepoys on parade take up no more room than twenty English. I had to take my jacket off last night and lay it over my shoulders; I might as well have tried to go to sleep in a vise. There! major; do you hear the music? These rascals are on the march again."

The strains of music came very faintly to the ear, for the bivouac was nearly a mile from the road.

"That is all right," the major said. "Now they have gone by, we can be moving. We must give them an hour's start."

"Now, father, we have not heard your adventures yet; please tell us all about them."

"Well, we have not had so much variety as you, but we have gone through a good deal. You know we had talked over the best possible course to take in case of an attack, come when it might. We had arranged what each should do in case of a night attack, or of a rising upon parade; and we had even considered the probability of being set upon when gathered in the messroom. We had all agreed that if taken by surprise, resistance would mean certain death; they would shoot us down through the doors and windows, and we should be like rats in a cage. We agreed, therefore, that in case of an attack, a simultaneous attempt to break out must be made, and we had even settled upon the window by which we should go. The married men were, of course, to make for their bungalows, except where, as in my case, I had made other arrangements; and the rest to various bungalows agreed upon, where traps were to be in readiness. Dunlop, Manners, and myself had agreed to make for Dunlop's, as it was the nearest, and his trap was to be ready that evening.

"There were not many who believed in a mutiny that night. The villains, only in the morning, having sworn to be faithful, deceived most of us, for it was very hard to believe they could be capable of such diabolical treachery. Swords and pistols were, of course, taken off, but instead of being left in the anteroom, were brought into the messroom. Some fellows put theirs in a corner, others against the wall behind them. I was sitting between Dunlop and Manners, and we were, as it happened, at the corner nearest the window fixed upon for the bolt. Things went on all right till dinner was over, There was an insolent look about some of the servants' faces I did not like, but nothing to take hold of. I pointed it out to Dunlop, and we agreed that the plan arranged was the best possible; and that, as resistance would be of no use, if at each of the eight large windows and the two doors a stream of musketry fire were being poured in, we would make a rush straight for the window. Presently the colonel rose and gave 'The Queen.' We all rose, and as if—as I have no doubt it was—the toast was the signal, there was a sudden trampling in the veranda outside, and at every window appeared a crowd of Sepoys, with their arms in their hands. I shouted, 'To the window for your lives!' and without stopping to get my sword, I dashed at the Sepoys who were there. Dunlop and Manners were with me, and before the scoundrels had time to get their guns to their shoulders, we were upon them. We are all big men; and our weight and impetus, and the surprise, were too much for them; we burst through them, standing as they did four or five deep, as if they had been reeds. They gave a yell of rage and astonishment as they went down like ninepins; but we scarcely saw it, for as we went through them the musketry fire broke out round the messroom.

"Whether any of the others tried to follow us, we don't know. I think most of them forgot their arrangement, and rushed to their arms: certainly some of them did so, for we heard the crack of

revolvers between the rifle shots. We made straight across the parade for Dunlop's bungalow, with musket balls flying in all directions, as soon as the fellows we had gone through recovered from their first astonishment; but they are not good shots at the best, and a man running at his top speed is not an easy mark by moonlight. We heard yells and musket shots all round, and knew that while a part of the regiment was attacking us, parties were told off to each bungalow. By the time we had got over the few hundred yards to Dunlop's, the whistling of the bullets round us had pretty well ceased, for the fellows had all emptied their muskets; besides, we were nearly out of range. None of them were near us, for they had stopped in their run to fire; they were too much interested in the massacre going on inside, and we seemed pretty safe; when, just as I entered the gate of the compound, a stray bullet hit me on the head, and down I went like a log.

"Happily, the syce had proved faithful; he had been with Dunlop ever since he joined the regiment, and Dunlop once risked his life to save him from a tiger. There was the syce with the trap. He had not dared bring it out till the first shot was fired, lest his fellow-servants, who were all traitors, should stop it; but the instant it began, he came round. They ran the horse up to where I was lying, lifted me in, and jumped in, and drove out of the gate as a score of fellows from the mess-house came making toward the bungalow. We had fifty yards' start, but they fired away at us, a ball passing through the syce's leg as he scrambled up behind. The horse went along at a gallop; but we were not safe, for parties were carrying on their hellish work in every bungalow, Dunlop and Manners were maddened by the screams they heard; and if it had not been for having me under their charge, and by the thoughts of the girls, I believe they would have jumped out and died fighting. A few of the black devils, hearing wheels, ran out and fired; but we kept on at a full gallop till we were well out of the place. A mile further Dunlop found the horse begin to slacken his speed, and to go very leisurely. He jumped out to see what was the matter, and found, as he expected, that the horse had been hit. He had one bullet in the neck, another in the side. It was evident that it could not go much further. They lifted me out and carried me to a patch of bushes thirty yards from the road. The syce was told to drive on quietly till the horse dropped. Dunlop gave him money and told him to meet us at Meerut."

"Why did you not keep him with you? he would have been very useful?" Dick asked.

"You see I wanted to get the trap as far away as possible before the horse fell," Captain Dunlop said. "We did not know how severely wounded the major was; indeed, we both feared he was killed; but the mutineers, when they found the dead horse in the morning, were certain to make a search in its neighbourhood, and would have found your father had he been close by laid up with a wound."

"Happily I now began to come to," the major went on, continuing his story. "The ball was nearly spent, and had given me a nasty scalp wound, and had stunned me, but I now began to come round. The instant I was able to understand where I was or what had happened, Dunlop and Manners, who were half-wild with excitement and grief, made me promise to lie quiet, while they went back to see what had become of you all. Of course I consented. They were away about three hours, for they had to make a circle of the cantonments, as our bungalow was quite at the other end. They brought cheering news. They had first been to the house, and found it utterly destroyed as they expected. That told them nothing; for if you had been killed, your bodies would probably have been burned with the house. Then they went out to the tope of trees where it was agreed that you should, if possible, first fly. Here they found a pocket-handkerchief of Rose's; and going round to the other side, found by the marks upon the soil that four of you had started together. With hearts immensely lightened by the discovery that you had, at any rate, all escaped from the first massacre, they hurried back to gladden me with the news. I was past understanding it when they arrived, for the intense pain in my head and my terrible anxiety about you had made me delirious. It would have been certain death to stay so near the road, so they dipped their handkerchiefs in water, and tied them round my head; and then supporting me, one on each side, they half-dragged, half-carried, me to a deserted and half-ruinous cottage, about a mile away.

"Next day I was still feverish, but fortunately no one came near us. Dunlop and Manners went out at night, and got a few bananas. Next morning our regiment marched away; and Dunlop then appealed to an old cottager for shelter and food for us all. He at once promised to aid us, and I was removed to his cottage, where everything in his power was done for me. I was now convalescent, and a day later we were talking of making a move forward. That night, however, the cottage was surrounded—whether the peasant himself or some one else betrayed us, we shall never know—but the men that we saw there belonged to a regiment of mutineers that had marched in that afternoon from Dollah. We saw at once that resistance was useless, and we were, moreover, without arms. Had we had them, I have no doubt we should have fought and been killed. As it was, we were bound and marched into the camp at Sandynugghur. It was resolved to take us in triumph into Delhi; and we were marched along with the regiment till you saw us. We had talked over every conceivable plan of escape, and had determined that we would try to-night, which will be the last halt before they get to Delhi. It is very unlikely that we should have succeeded, but it was better to be shot down than to be taken to Delhi and given over to the mob to torture before they killed us. I am convinced we had no chance of really getting off, and that you have saved our lives, just as Dunlop and Manners saved mine, at the risk of their own, on that first night of our flight. And now let us be on the march."

They had not gone far before the three officers found that it was impossible to walk in their Sepoy jackets. They accordingly took them off, and slung them from their muskets. Ned and Dick were fairly fitted. They halted for the night near the river, about ten miles above Delhi. In the morning they were off early. By nine o'clock they stood on the bank of the river, five miles higher up.

The river is wide, or rather the bed of the river is wide, half a mile at least; this in the rainy season is full to the brim, but at other times the stream is not more than half that width. After crossing the river they would have fifteen miles still to traverse to arrive at Meerut; and it was probable that the whole intervening country was in the hands of the Sepoys.

"Had we not better keep this side of the river for a bit, father?" Ned asked.

"No, my boy; we will cross here after dark, and make straight for Meerut. If we can't find a boat, we will each cut a large bundle of rushes, to act as a lifebuoy and carry your guns and ammunition, and so swim across after it is dark."

"Well, major, as the sun is getting awfully hot, I vote we get into the shade of those stunted trees, and have a nap till the afternoon. It won't do to begin even to make the raft till the sun is down."

Captain Dunlop's proposition was carried into effect; but it is questionable whether any of the party slept much, for they were excited by the thought that in a few hours they would be with friends, once more soldiers instead of fugitives, with power to fight in defense of their sovereign's dominions, and of the helpless women and children exposed to the fury of the atrocious mutineers. With these thoughts mingled the anxiety which was wearing them all, although each refrained from talking about it, as to the safety of the girls, whose lives wore dependent upon the fidelity of a native and his servants.

Over and over again, since they met the boys, had they regretted that they had not gone back to watch over them; but the fact that Rose might be weeks before she was able to stand, and that, as their protector had said, the presence of Europeans near them might be detected, and would be a source of constant danger, convinced them that they had taken the proper course. They knew, too, that in acting as they had done they were performing their duty; and that at a moment when the fate of British India trembled in the balance, the place of every soldier was by the side of the British troops who still maintained the old flag flying in the face of increasing numbers of the enemy. Still, although they knew that they were doing their duty, and were, moreover, taking the wisest course, the thoughts of the girls alone in the midst of danger, with one of them down with fever, tried them terribly, and they longed with a fierce desire for the excitement of work and of danger to keep them from thinking of it.

"Here, boys, is a ear of Indian corn apiece; eat that and then get to work."

The frugal meal was soon over, and they then set to work, cutting down, breaking off, and tearing up large reeds with which to make floats. The boys had knives, but the others had been

stripped of everything they had at the time of their capture. In about an hour, however, five bundles were made, each some six feet long and nearly three feet thick. The muskets and ammunition pouches were fastened on these, and soon after it was quite dark they entered the water.

"There are no crocodiles, I hope," Dick whispered to Ned.

"Nothing to fear in these large rivers; the chances of meeting one are very small."

"All right," Dick said. "Of course we've got to risk it. But they're as bad as sharks; and sharks, as the Yankee said, is pison. Well, here goes."

When the bundles were placed in the water they were lashed side by side with long trailing creepers which grew abundantly among the rushes; and they were thus secured from the risk of turning over from the weights on the top. Upon the raft thus formed their clothes were placed, and then, side by side, pushing it before them, the party shoved off from shore. In twenty minutes they touched ground on the other side. They dressed, examined their muskets to see if they were in good order, and then started in the direction in which they knew Meerut to be. Several times they paused and listened, for they could occasionally hear the noise of galloping men, and it was evident that there were troops of some kind or other moving about.

They walked for some hours until they thought that they could not be far from their destination, and had begun to congratulate themselves upon being near their friends, when the sound of a strong body of men was heard sweeping along the level plain across which they were now passing.

"There is a small building ahead," the major said; "run for that; they are coming across here."

They were seen, for a shout of "Who goes there?" in Hindostanee was heard.

"Give me your musket, Dick," Captain Dunlop exclaimed. For the lad, with the weight of his musket and ammunition, could hardly keep up with the others.

Just in time they reached the building in front of them, rushed in, and closed the door as the cavalry swept up. It was a small temple; a building of massive construction, with one little window about six inches square, and on the same side a strong door.

"Pile everything against the door," the major cried. "Dunlop, fire at once at them. Our only chance is to hold out with the hope that we may be heard, and that some of our fellows may come to the rescue."

Captain Dunlop fired just as the troopers dashed up to the door.

"Now, Manners, steady, pick off your man," the major said, as, aided by the boys, he jammed a beam of wood between the door and the wall, at such an angle that, except by breaking it to pieces, the door could not be forced.

"Now," he said, "it's my turn;" and he fired into the enraged enemy. "Now, Ned, steady. Are you loaded again, Dunlop?"

"Yes, major; just ready."

"Dick, you follow; take good aim."

The cavalry answered their fire, every shot of which was taking effect, by a confused discharge of their pistols at the door and window.

"Draw off!" their leader shouted; "rear-rank men hold the horses, front-rank men dismount and break in the door."

The order was obeyed; and the troopers rushed forward on foot, and were met by a steady fire, to which the straggling return of their pistols was but an inefficient answer. Vainly the mutineers hacked at the door with their sabers and struck it with their pommels.

"Throw yourselves against it, all at once," cried their leader; and a dozen men sent themselves against the door; it creaked and strained, but the beam kept it in its place.

"You keep up the fire through the window," said the major; "the boys and I will fire through the door."

Yells and shrieks followed each shot through the door, and after three or four minutes the troopers drew off.

"Any one hurt?" the major asked.

"I have got a bullet in my shoulder," said Captain Dunlop.

But that was the only reply. There was a shout outside, and Manners exclaimed: "Confound the fellows, they have got a big log of wood that will soon splinter the door."

"We must stop them as long as we can," said the major, as he fired among the men who were advancing with the log.

Several Sepoys fell before they got up to the house, but they pressed on, and, at the first blow given by the battering-ram driven by the men, the door split from top to bottom.

"Fix bayonets," the major said. "Now, Manners, you and I will hold them back. Not more than two can come at once, and their swords are of no use against bayonets in a narrow space. Dunlop, will you stand in reserve? you have still got your right hand; use your bayonet as a dagger if a rush comes. Boys, you go on loading and firing; put in four balls each time. If they get in, of course use your bayonets; there goes the door!"

A shout burst from the natives as the last portion of the door dropped from its hinges, and the doorway was open. There was, however, no inclination betrayed to make a rush.

"Forward! Death to the infidel dogs!" shouted their officer.

"Suppose you lead us," said one of the troopers; "the officers always show the way."

"Come, then," cried an old officer, on whose breast hung several medals; "follow me!"

Drawing his sword, he rushed forward, followed by twenty of his men. But as he passed over the threshold he and the trooper next to him fell beneath the bayonet thrusts of Major Warrener and his companion. The next two, pushed forward by their comrades, shared the same fate; while, as they fell, the muskets of Ned and Dick sent their contents into the mass. The rest recoiled from the fatal doorway, while the defenders set up a cheer of triumph. It was drowned in a crash of musketry, mingled with a cry of surprise and despair from the natives, as a body of British soldiers leaped from the wood, and followed their volley by an impetuous charge. The cavalry on the plain turned and fled at a gallop; and in five minutes, but for a few dark figures prostrate on the plain, not an enemy was in sight.

"Well, gentlemen, you have made a stout defense," the officer in command said, as he returned to the shrine, outside which the little party had gathered. "It seems as if you could have done without my help. Who are you, may I ask? And where have you sprung from?"

"Why, Sibbold, is it you? You haven't forgotten Warrener? And here are Dunlop and Manners."

"Hurrah!" shouted the officer. "Thank God, old fellows, you are saved; we fancied that you had all gone down. I am glad;" and he shook hands enthusiastically with his friends; while two of the officers, coming up, joined in the hearty greeting.

"Do those two men belong to your regiment?" Captain Sibbold asked. "If so, they are wonders; for I don't know a case as yet where any of the men proved true when the rest mutinied."

"They are my sons," Major Warrener answered.

"What?" exclaimed the other, laughing—believing that the major was joking.

"It's a fact, as you will see when they have got rid of the stains on their faces," he replied; while Captain Dunlop added, "and two as fine young fellows as ever stepped. Do you know that we three were prisoners, and that these lads rescued us from the middle of a pandy regiment. If they hadn't we should have been dead men before now. And now have you got anything to eat at Meerut, for we are famishing? In the next place, I have got a bullet in my shoulder, and shall enjoy my food all the more after it has been taken out. Our stories are long and will keep. How go things here?"

"Not very brightly, Dunlop; however, that will keep, too; now let us be off. Have we any casualties, sergeant?" he asked a non-commissioned officer who came up for orders.

"None, sir."

"What is the enemy's loss?"

"There are fifteen which can be fairly counted to us, sir, and nineteen here."

"That's a respectable total. Fall in, lads," he said to the men who had gathered round, "and let us get back. You will be glad to hear that these officers have escaped from the massacre at Sandynugghur."

There was a hearty cheer of satisfaction from the men, for Englishmen were knit very closely together in those terrible days. Then, falling in, the two companies of the Sixtieth Rifles marched back again to their cantonments at Meerut.

CHAPTER VI
A DASHING EXPEDITION

On arriving at the cantonments, the party were soon surrounded by the troops, who had been called under arms at the sound of distant firing, but had been dismissed again on the arrival of a message to the effect that the enemy had fled. The news had spread rapidly that some fugitives had escaped from Sandynugghur, where it was supposed that the massacre had been general; and officers pressed forward to shake their hands, and the men uttered words of kindly congratulation and welcome. The greeting swelled into a cheer as the detachment fell out, and, scattering among their comrades, told of the desperate defense, and of the slaughter inflicted upon the enemy by this handful of men. The fugitives were, of course, taken first to the messroom, Captain Dunlop being, however, carried off by the surgeon to his quarters, to have his wound examined and attended to.

It seemed almost like a dream to the worn and weary party, as they sat down again to a table laid with all the brightness and comfort of civilization, and felt that they were indeed safe among friends. Many were the questions asked them by officers who had friends and acquaintances among the military and civilians at Sandynugghur; and the fugitives learned that they were, so far as was known, the only survivors from the massacre. The story of their escape, and the safety of the girls, was told briefly, and listened to with eager interest; and very deep and hearty were the congratulations which the boys received for their share in the history. In return, Major Warrener learned what had taken place in the last ten days.

The story was not reassuring; tidings of evil were coming from all parts. As yet the number of stations where risings had taken place was comparatively small; but the position was everywhere critical. In Agra, Allahabad, and Benares, the attitude of the native troops and population was more than doubtful. At Lucknow and Cawnpore every precaution was being taken, but a rising was regarded as inevitable. In fact everywhere, save in the Punjab, trouble had either come or was coming. General Anson was collecting in all haste a force at Umballah, which was intended to advance upon Delhi—where the ex-king had been proclaimed Emperor of India—but his force would necessarily be an extremely small one; and no help could possibly arrive up country for many weeks. There was therefore only the Punjab to look to for aid. Happily, the troops of the Madras and Bombay presidencies had so far remained faithful.

"I suppose you have a good many men from Delhi, civilians and military, as well as from other places?"

"Oh, yes, we are crowded; every bungalow has been given up to the ladies, and we all sleep under canvas."

"I intend to ask leave to get up a troop of volunteers," Major Warrener said; "in the first place to go out and bring in my daughter and niece, and afterward to do any scouting or other duty that may be required."

"There has already been a talk of forming the unattached officers and civilians into a sort of irregular cavalry, so I should think that you will get leave; but it will be a hazardous business to make your way eighty miles through the country, especially as the mutineers are marching in all directions toward Delhi."

The next morning Major Warrener obtained permission, without difficulty, to carry out his scheme; and the news no sooner was known through the cantonments that a body of irregular horse was to be formed for scouting and general purposes, and that unattached officers might, until they received further orders, join it, than the tent which had been assigned to Major Warrener was besieged by men anxious to join a corps which seemed likely to afford them a chance of striking an early blow at the mutineers.

Hitherto, the officers who had escaped from Delhi and other stations, those who had come in from police duties in isolated districts, and civilians, both merchants and government officials, had been fretting that they could not be doing something to aid the great work of holding India, and punishing those who had murdered their friends and relations. Major Warrener's Light Horse, as it was to be called, afforded the opportunity desired, and by the next morning eighty-five volunteers had enrolled themselves. Some thirty-five of these were officers, the rest civilians. Many of them had ridden in, others had driven, so that most of them were already provided with horses. An appeal was made to the officers of the Meerut garrison, and to the civilians resident there, to give up any horses they might be able to spare for the public service, while others were bought from friendly zemindars. In a week the troop were all mounted, and during this time they had worked hard to acquire a sufficient amount of cavalry drill to enable them to perform such simple evolutions as might be necessary. Major Warrener divided the squadron into two troops, each with a captain and subaltern; all these officers being cavalrymen, as were the officers who did duty as sergeants. Thus Major Warrener had the general command, each troop being maneuvered by its own officers. In the ranks as simple privates were two majors and a dozen captains—among these latter, Captain Manners. Captain Dunlop was for the present in the surgeon's hands; but he was resolved that when the time came for a start for the rescue of the girls he would take his place in the ranks. The boys of course formed part of the troop. The uniform was simple, consisting simply of a sort of Norfolk jacket made of karkee, a kind of coarse brown holland of native make. Each man carried a revolver, and sword belt of brown leather. Their headgear was a cap of any kind, wrapped round and round with the thick folds of a brown puggaree. Beyond the Norfolk jacket and puggaree there was no actual uniform. Most of the men had hunting breeches, many had high boots, others had gaiters; but these were minor points, as were the horses' equipments.

Nothing had been said as to the intended expedition to bring in the fugitives, as native spies might have carried the news to the rebels, and so caused a renewed search to be made for their hiding-place. There was, therefore, a deep feeling of satisfaction, as well as of surprise, when, on the tenth day after the formation of the corps, the men were told, on being dismissed from morning parade, that the squadron would parade for duty at evening gunfire; that each man was to be provided with a blanket and a haversack, with cooked food sufficient for four days, and a bag with twenty pounds of forage for his horse, each horse to be well fed before coming on parade.

Had the route been free from enemies, the distance might have been done in two long night marches; but it would be necessary to make a detour on starting, so as to avoid striking the main road, as on the way out it was all-important to avoid detection, as the enemy might muster in such strength that their return would be difficult and dangerous in the extreme. The girls once in their hands, the return journey would be easy, as they could avoid any infantry, and had no fear of being able to cut their way through any body of cavalry whom they might accidentally come across, especially as they would have all the advantage of a surprise. Half an hour after sunset the squadron rode out from the lines at Meerut, amid a hearty cheer from the many troops at the station, who, hearing that Warrener's Light Horse were off on an expedition against the mutineers, had assembled to see the start. Major Warrener rode at the head of the squadron, with Captain Kent, who commanded the first troop, by his side, and behind them came two native guides well acquainted with the country. These had been dressed in the uniform of a native cavalry regiment, in order that if they passed any village and were challenged, they could ride forward and represent the troop as a body of native cavalry sent out from Delhi on a mission to a friendly rajah. The precaution was unnecessary. During two long night marches, with occasional halts to rest the horses, they rode without interruption. They passed through several villages; but although the tramp of the horses and the rattle of sabers must have been heard by the inhabitants, none stirred, for the mutineers took what they wanted without paying, and were already behaving as masters of the country; and even thus early the country people were beginning to doubt whether the fall of the English Raj, and the substitution of the old native

rule, with its war, its bloodshed, and its exactions, was by any means a benefit, so far as the tillers of the soil were concerned. Just before morning, on the third day, the troop halted in a thick grove, having watered their horses at a tank a half-hour before. They had ridden some seventy miles, and were, they calculated, about fifteen miles from the place where they had left the girls. It might have been possible to push on at once, but the day was breaking, and it would have been inexpedient to tire out the horses when they might want all their speed and strength on the return journey. Very slowly passed the day. Most of the men, after seeing to their horses and eating some food, threw themselves down and slept soundly. But Major Warrener, his sons, and Captains Dunlop and Manners were far too anxious to follow their example, for some time. It was more than a fortnight since the boys had left the ladies, and so many things, of which they hardly dare think, might have happened since.

"Don't let us talk about it any more," Major Warrener said at last; "we only add to each other's anxiety. Now, Dunlop, you must positively lie down; you know Johnson said it was mad in you to get on horseback till your bone had set firmly, and that it was ten to one in favor of inflammation coming on again. You have much to go through yet."

Gradually sleepiness overcame excitement, and with the exception of ten men told off as sentries and to look after the horses, the whole party slept quietly for some hours. It had been determined to start in time to arrive at the farmhouse before it was dark, as the boys required daylight to enable them to recognize the locality; besides which it was advisable to get as far back upon the return journey as possible before daybreak. The boys were now riding in front with their father.

"That is the wood," Ned said presently. "I know by those three palm trees growing together in a clump, at a short distance in advance. I noticed them particularly."

"Where is the house?" Major Warrener asked.

"We ought to see the house," Dick said, and he looked at his brother apprehensively.

"Yes," Ned said; "we certainly ought to see it."

"You are sure you are not mistaken in the locality?" their father asked.

"Quite sure," the boys answered together; "but the house–"

"Let us gallop on," Major Warrener said, catching the fear which was expressed in each of his sons' faces.

Five minutes' riding, and they drew up their horses with a cry of dismay. A large patch of wood ashes marked the spot where the house had stood. No words were needed; the truth was apparent; the fugitives had been discovered, and the abode of their protectors destroyed. Their two friends joined the little group, and the rest of the troop dismounted at a short distance, respecting the deep pain which the discovery had caused to their leader.

"What is to be done?" Major Warrener asked, breaking the deep silence.

For a moment no one answered; and then Dick said:

"Perhaps we may find some of the farmer's people in the hut where we slept, and we may get news from them."

"A capital thought, Dick," said Major Warrener. "We must not give up hope; there are no bodies lying about, so the farm people are probably alive. As to the girls, if they are carried off we must rescue them. Where is the hut?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.