HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

THROUGH THREE CAMPAIGNS: A STORY OF CHITRAL, TIRAH AND ASHANTI

George Henty

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Содержание

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Preface

Our little wars attract far less attention among the people of this country than they deserve. They are frequently carried out in circumstances of the most adverse kind. Our enemies, although ignorant of military discipline are, as a rule, extremely brave; and are thoroughly capable of using the natural advantages of their country. Our men are called upon to bear enormous fatigue, and endure extremes in climate. The fighting is incessant, the peril constant. Nevertheless, they show a magnificent contempt for danger and difficulty; and fight with a valour and determination worthy of the highest praise.

I have chosen, as an illustration of this, three campaigns; namely, the relief of Chitral, the Tirah campaign, and the relief of Coomassie. The first two were conducted in a mountainous country, affording every advantage to the enemy; where passes had to be scaled, torrents to be forded, and deep snow to be crossed. In the other, the country was a combination of morass and thick forest, frequently intersected by wide and deep rivers. The work, moreover, had to be done in a tropical climate, during the rainy season. The conditions, therefore, were much more trying than in the case of former expeditions which had crossed the same ground and, in addition, the enemy were vastly more numerous and more determined; and had, in recent years, mastered the art of building extremely formidable stockades.

The country has a right to be proud, indeed, of the prowess both of our own troops and of our native regiments. Boys who wish to obtain fuller details of these campaigns I would refer to Sir George Robertson's Chitral; H. C. Thomson's Chitral Campaign; Lieutenant Beynon's With Kelly to Chitral; Colonel Hutchison's Campaign in Tirah; Viscount Fincastle and P. C. Eliott Lockhart's A Frontier Campaign; and Captain Harold C. J. Biss's The Relief of Kumasi, from which I have principally drawn the historical portion of my story.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: An Expedition

"Well, Lisle, my boy, the time is drawing very near when you will have to go home. My brother John will look after you, and choose some good crammer to push you on. You are nearly sixteen, now, and it is high time you buckled to."

"But you have always taught me, father!"

"Yes, that is all very well, but I could not devote three hours a day to you. I think I may say that you are thoroughly well grounded–I hope as well as most public-school boys of your own age–but I can go no further with you. You have no idea what cramming is necessary, now, for a young fellow to pass into the army. Still I think that, by hard work with some man who prepares students for the army, you may be able to rub through. I have always saved up money for this, for my brother is by no means a rich man, and crammers are very expensive; so the next time I see a chance of sending you down to Calcutta, down you go. My agents there will see you on board a ship, and do everything that is necessary."

"Of course, father, if I must go, I must; but it will be beastly, after the jolly time I have spent in the regiment, to set to and do nothing but grind, for the next three years."

"We all have to do a good many unpleasant things, Lisle; and as we have decided that you shall enter the army, you must make up your mind to do the necessary work, even though it be disagreeable."

"All right, father! I know what depends upon it, and I will set to."

"I have no doubt you will, Lisle, for you have plenty of common sense, though you are a little inclined to mischief–not that you are altogether to blame for that, for the officers encourage you in it."

This conversation took place between Captain Bullen, of the 32nd Pioneers, and his son. The regiment was in cantonments near the northern frontier of India. The captain had lost his wife some years before and, as their two youngest children had also died, he had not been able to bring himself to send the remaining boy home. The climate was excellent, and the boy enjoyed as good health as if he had been in England. Captain Bullen had taken a great deal of pains with his son's education but, as he said, he had now taught the boy all that he knew; and felt that he ought to go to England, and be regularly coached for the army.

Next day the captain entered his quarters, hurriedly.

"I am off," he said. "Those rascally Afridis have come down and looted several villages; and I am to go up, in command of a couple of companies, to give them a lesson."

"They are not very strong, are they, father?"

"No, I don't suppose they can put a couple of hundred men in the field. We shall take the two mountain guns with us, and batter holes in their fortresses, and then attack and carry them easily. There is no sign of movement among the other tribes, so we need not expect any serious opposition."

A week later, the little detachment entered the valley in which the Afridi villages lay. The work had been fatiguing, for the country was very rough; and the mules that carried the guns met with such difficulties that the infantry had to turn to, and improve the paths–if paths they could be called, for they were often little better than undefined tracks. As the expedition moved up the valley, the tribesmen opened on them a distant fire; but scattered after a few shells from the mountain guns were thrown among them. The fortified houses, however, were stubbornly held; and indeed, were only carried after the guns had broken in the doors, or made a breach in the walls.

During the attack on the last house, a shot struck Captain Bullen in the chest, and he instantly fell. When they saw this, the Pioneers dashed forward with a howl of rage, carried the fort, and bayoneted its defenders. The doctor of the party at once examined the wound, and saw that it would probably be fatal.

"Patch me up, Lloyd, so that I may get back to camp and see my boy again," the wounded man whispered.

"I will do my best," the doctor said, "but I doubt whether you will be able to stand the journey."

The Pioneers, after setting fire to all the houses in the valley, started at once for home. Captain Bullen was placed on a stretcher, and four men at a time carried him down, taking the utmost pains not to jolt or shake him. His face was covered with light boughs, to keep off the flies; and everything that was possible was done to conduce to his comfort.

The doctor watched him anxiously. His condition became more serious, every day. As they neared the camp, a messenger was sent down with a report from the native officer of what had happened; and the Pioneers all came out to see their favourite officer brought in; and stood, mournful and silent, as he was carried to his bungalow.

"Don't come in yet, lad," the surgeon said, to Lisle. "Your father, at present, is incapable of speaking; and he must have a little rest before you see him, for the slightest excitement would probably cause a gush of blood to the wound, which would be fatal."

Lisle's grief was unbounded. He could not listen to the kind words with which the officers tried to soothe him, but wandered away out of camp and, throwing himself down, wept unrestrainedly for an hour. Then he roused himself, and walked slowly back. By a mighty effort he had composed himself, for he knew that he must be calm when he saw his father.

Half an hour later, the doctor beckoned him in.

"He is conscious now," he said, "and has whispered that he wishes to see you. He has been very calm, all the way down, and has spoken of you often."

"I will do my best," Lisle muttered, keeping down his tears with a tremendous effort; and then went into his father's room.

He could not trust himself to speak a word but, walking up, took his father's hand and, kneeling down, pressed it to his lips, his whole form shaking with agitation.

"I am glad I have held out until I got back," his father said, in a low voice. "It is all up with me, my boy, and I have only a few hours to live, at most. I am sorry, now, that you did not start for England before this happened; but I have no doubt that it is all for the best. I shall die, as I should wish to die, doing my duty and, except for leaving you, I shall feel small regret."

"Must you leave me, father?" Lisle sobbed.

"Yes, my boy, I have known it from the first. It is only my intense desire to see you again that has kept me up. The doctor said he did not expect that I should last more than two or three days, at most.

"You will bear in mind what I said to you, the day before we started. I have no fear about you, Lisle; I am sure you will make an honest gentleman and a brave soldier, and will do credit to our name. I should stay here a few weeks longer, if I were you, until some others are going down. The officers are all fond of you, and it would be better for you to have company, than to make the long journey to the coast alone.

"My voice is failing me, lad, and I can say no more, now; but you can sit here with me, till the end comes. It will not be long. When you have completed your training, the fact that I have died in this way will give you a good claim to a commission."

Lisle sat with his father for some hours. Occasionally the dying man moved and, leaning over him, he could catch the words "God bless you!" Before midnight the brave spirit had passed away, and Lisle went out and cried like a child, till morning.

The funeral took place next day. After it was over, the colonel sent for Lisle; who had now, after a hard struggle, recovered his composure.

"Did your father give you any instructions, Lisle? You may be sure that whatever he said we will carry out."

"He said that he thought it would be best for me to stay here for a few weeks as, among so many kind friends, I should be able to bear it better than if I went down at once."

"Quite right, lad! We shall all be very glad to have you with us. You can remain in the bungalow as long as you like. It is not likely to be wanted, for some months. Your father's butler and one or two servants will be enough to look after you; and you will, of course, remain a member of the mess. In this way, I hope you will have recovered some of your cheerfulness before you start."

It was a hard time for Lisle for the next week or two, for everything reminded him of his father. The risaldar major and the other native officers, with all of whom he was familiar, grasped him by the hand when they met, in token of their sympathy; and the sepoys stood at attention, with mournful faces, when he passed them. He spent the heat of the day with his books, and only stirred out in the early morning and evening, meals being considerately sent down to him from the mess. At the end of a fortnight he made a great effort and joined the mess, and the kindness with which the officers spoke to him gradually cheered him.

Then there came an excitement which cheered him further. There were rumours of disaffection among the hill tribes, and the chances of a campaign were discussed with animation, both among officers and soldiers. The regiment was a very fine one, composed of sturdy Punjabis; and all agreed that, if there were an expedition, they would probably form part of it. Lisle entered fully into the general feeling, and his eyes glistened as he listened to the sepoys talking of the expeditions in which they had taken part.

"It would be splendid to go," he said to himself, "but I don't see how the colonel could take me. I shall certainly ask him, when the time comes; but I feel sure that he will refuse. Of course, I ought to be starting before long for Calcutta; but the expedition will probably not last many weeks and, if I were to go with it, the excitement would keep me from thinking, and do me a lot of good. Besides, a few weeks could make no difference in my working up for the examination."

The more he thought of it, the more he felt determined to go with the column. He felt sure that he could disguise himself so that no one would suspect who he was. He had been so long associated with the regiment that he talked Punjabi as well as English.

His father had now been dead two months and, as the rumours from across the frontier grew more and more serious, he was filled with fear lest an opportunity should occur to send him down country before the regiment marched; in which case all his plans would be upset. Day after day passed, however, without his hearing anything about it, till one day the colonel sent for him.

"The time has come, lad, when we must part. We shall all be very sorry to lose you, but it cannot be helped. I have received orders, this morning, to go up to Chitral; and am sending down some sick, at once. You must start with them. When you reach the railway, you will be able to get a through ticket to Calcutta.

"As long as it was likely that we should be going down ourselves, I was glad to keep you here; but now that we have got orders to go off and have a talk with these tribes in the north, it is clearly impossible for us to keep you any longer. I am very sorry, my boy, for you know we all like you, for your own sake and for your good father's."

"I am awfully obliged to you all, colonel. You have been very good to me, since my father was killed. I feel that I have had no right to stop here so long; but I quite understand that, now you are moving up into the hills, you cannot keep me.

"I suppose I could not go as a volunteer, colonel?" he asked, wistfully.

"Quite impossible," the colonel said, decidedly. "Even if you had been older, I could not have taken you. Every mouth will have to be fed, and the difficulties of transport will be great. There is no possibility, whatever, of our smuggling a lad of your age up with us.

"Besides, you know that you ought to go to England, without further delay. You want to gain a commission, and to do that you must pass a very stiff examination, indeed. So for your own sake, it is advisable that you should get to work without any unnecessary delay.

"A party of invalids will be going down tomorrow, and you can go with them as far as Peshawar. There, of course, you will take train either to Calcutta or Bombay. I know that you have plenty of

funds for your journey to England. I think you said that it was an uncle to whom you were going. Mind you impress upon him the fact that it is absolutely necessary that you should go to a first-rate school or, better still, to a private crammer, if you are to have a chance of getting into the service by a competitive examination."

"Very well, colonel. I am sure that I am very grateful to you, and all the officers of the regiment, for the kindness you have shown me, especially since my father's death. I shall always remember it."

"That is all right, Lisle. It has been a pleasure to have you with us. I am sure we shall all be sorry to lose you, but I hope that some day we shall meet again, when you are an officer in one of our regiments."

Lisle returned to the bungalow and called the butler, the only servant he had retained.

"Look here, Robah, the colonel says that I must go down with a sick party, tomorrow. As I have told you, I am determined to go up country with the troops. Of course, I must be in disguise. How do you think that I had better go?"

The man shook his head.

"The young sahib had better join his friends in England."

"It is useless to talk about that," Lisle said. "I have told you I mean to go up, and go up I will. There ought to be no difficulty about it. I speak three or four of these frontier languages, as well as I speak English. I have at least learnt that. I have picked them up by talking to the natives, and partly from the moonshee I have had, for four years. My dear father always impressed upon me the utility of these to an officer; and said that, if I could take up native languages in my examinations, it would go a long way towards making up for other deficiencies. So I am all right, so far as language is concerned.

"It seems to me that my best plan will be to go up as a mule driver."

"It is as the sahib wills," the old man said. "His servant will do all he can to help him."

"Well, Robah, I want you in the first place to get me a disguise. You may as well get two suits. I am sure to get wet, sometimes, and shall require a change. I shall take a couple of my own vests and drawers, to wear under them; for we shall probably experience very cold weather in the mountains."

"They are serving out clothes to the carriers, sahib."

"Yes, I forgot that. Well, I want you to go into their camp, and arrange with one of the headmen to let me take the place of one of the drivers. Some of the men will be willing enough to get off the job, and a tip of forty rupees would completely settle the matter with him. Of course, I shall start with the sick escort but, as there will be several waggons going down with them, they will not travel far; and at the first halting place I can slip away, and come back here. You will be waiting for me on the road outside the camp, early in the morning, and take me to the headman.

"By the way, I shall want you to make up a bottle of stain for my hands and feet; for of course I shall go in the native sandals."

"I will do these things, sahib. How about your luggage?"

"Before I leave the camp tonight I shall put fresh labels on them, directing them to be taken to the store of Messieurs Parfit, who were my father's agents; and to be left there until I send for them. I shall give the sergeant, who goes down with the sick, money to pay for their carriage to Calcutta.

"And about yourself, Robah?"

"I shall stay here at the bungalow till another regiment comes up to take your place. Perhaps you will give me a chit, saying that I have been in your father's service fourteen years, and that you have found me faithful and useful. If I cannot find employment, I shall go home. I have saved enough money."

An hour later, Robah again entered the room.

"I have been thinking, sahib, of a better plan. You wish to see fighting, do you not?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, sahib, if you go in the baggage train you might be miles away, and see nothing of it. Now, it seems to me that it would be almost as easy for you to go as a soldier in the regiment, as in the transport train."

"Do you think so, Robah?" Lisle exclaimed excitedly.

"I think so, sahib. You see, you know all the native officers, and your father was a great favourite among them. If you were dressed in uniform, and took your place in the ranks, it is very unlikely that any of the English officers would notice you. These matters are left in the hands of the native officers.

"Yesterday a young private died, who had but just passed the recruit stage, and had been only once or twice on parade. You might take his name. It is most unlikely that any of the white officers will notice that your face is a fresh one and, if they did ask the question, the native officer would give that name. The English officer would not be at all likely to notice that this was the name of a man who had died. Deaths are not uncommon and, as the regiment is just moving, the matter would receive no attention. The book of this man would be handed to you, and it would all seem regular."

"That is a splendid idea, Robah. Which officer do you think I had better speak to?"

"I should speak to Risaldar Gholam Singh. He was the chief native officer in your father's wing of the regiment. If he consents, he would order all the native officers under him to hold their tongues and, as you are a favourite with them all, your secret would be kept."

"It is a grand idea, and I certainly don't see why it should not work out properly."

"I have no doubt that the risaldar major will do all he can for you."

"Do you think so, Robah?"

"I am sure he will. He was very much attached to your father, and felt his loss as much as anyone. Indeed, I think that every one of the native officers will do all he can for you."

"That would make it very easy for me," Lisle said. "Till you suggested it, the idea of going as a soldier never occurred to me but, with their assistance, it will not be difficult."

"Shall I go and fetch the risaldar here, sahib?"

"Do so. I shall be on thorns until I see him."

In a few minutes the officer, a tall and stately Punjabi, entered.

"Risaldar," Lisle said, "I know you were very much attached to my father."

"I was, sahib."

"Well, I want you to do something for me."

"It would be a pleasure for me to do so, and you have only to ask for me to grant it, if it is in my power."

"I think it is in your power," Lisle said. "I will tell you what I want. I have made up my mind to go with this expedition. I thought of disguising myself, and going as a baggage coolie; but in that case I should be always in the rear and see none of the fighting, and I have made up my mind to go as a private in the ranks."

"As a private, sahib?" the officer exclaimed, in astonishment. "Surely that would be impossible. You would be detected at the first halt. Besides, how could the son of our dear captain go as a private?"

"I do not object to go as a private, risaldar. Of course I should stain myself and, in uniform, it is not likely that any of the white officers would notice a strange face."

"But you would have to eat with the others, to mix with them as one of themselves, to suffer all sorts of hardships."

"All that is nothing," Lisle said. "I have been with the regiment so long that I know all the ways of the men, and I don't think that I should be likely to make any mistake that would attract their attention. As to the language, I know it perfectly."

"I hardly dare do such a thing, sahib. If you were discovered on the march, the colonel and officers would be very angry with me."

"Even if I were discovered, it need not be known that you had assisted me, risaldar. You may be sure that I should never tell. If you were questioned, you could declare that you had taken me for an ordinary recruit. If I deceived everyone else, I might very well deceive you."

The risaldar stood thoughtful for some time.

"It might possibly be managed," he said at last. "I would do much for Captain Bullen's son, even risk the anger of the colonel."

"I understand that a sepoy died yesterday. He was quite a young recruit, and the white officers had not come to know his face. I might say that I am a relation of his, and am very anxious to take his place."

"You could take his place in the ranks under his name."

"That would certainly be a good plan, if it could be carried out. I should only be asked a few questions by the sepoys of my company. It would seem to them natural that I should take my cousin's place; and that, as the regiment was moving, and there was no time to teach me drill, I should be expected to pick up what I could on the way. But indeed, I have watched the regiment so often that I think I know all the commands and movements, and could go through them without hesitation. Besides, there won't be much drilling on the march. There will probably be a good deal of skirmishing, and perhaps some rough fighting."

"But if you were to be killed, sahib, what then?"

"I don't mean to be killed if I can help it," Lisle said; "but if I am, I shall be buried as one of the sepoys. The officers will all believe that I have gone home and, though they may wonder a little that I never write to them, they will think it is because I am too busy. It will be a long time, indeed, before any of my friends write to ask about me; and then it will be supposed that I have been accidentally killed or drowned.

"At any rate, I should have the satisfaction of being killed in the Queen's service. All the men are delighted at going, and they will run the same risk as I do."

"Well, sahib," the risaldar said, "I will do it. I would very much prefer that you had never asked me, but I cannot say 'no' to you. I will think it over; and tell you, tomorrow morning, what seems to me the best plan. I don't see, at present, how you are to disappear and join the regiment."

"That is easy enough," Lisle said. "I am going to start tomorrow with the sick convoy; but shall slip away from them, after I have gone a short distance. Robah will meet me with my uniform and rifle; and I shall come into the camp again, in uniform, after it is dark."

"You appear to have thought it all out," the officer said, "and if your scheme can be carried out, there should be no difficulty, after the first day or two. You are more likely to pass unnoticed, on a march, than you would be if you were staying here. The men will have other things to think about, and you will only have three men marching with you in the column to ask questions. Indeed, there is very little talking on the line of march.

"Well, I will think it over, and see you in the morning."

This was as good as consent, and Lisle was highly delighted. In the morning, the risaldar called again.

"I have spoken," the risaldar said, "to the three officers of the company to which the soldier Mutteh Ghar belonged; and they all agreed, willingly, to help you to carry out your scheme, and think that there is very little probability of the fact that you are a new recruit being noticed. The general discipline of the regiment is in our hands. The British officers direct, but we carry out their orders. As the man was only on parade twice and, on neither of these occasions, came under general inspection of the white officers, it is probable that they do not know his face. It is certainly best that you should take Mutteh Ghar's name, as the soldiers will see nothing strange in our placing a young recruit in the ranks, after his cousin had died in the regiment. We are all of opinion, therefore, that you can take your place without difficulty; and that the chance of the change being detected by the British officers is extremely slight. We think, however, that it will be next to impossible for you always to

keep up your character, and believe that you will find it so hard to live under the same conditions as the others that you yourself will tire of it."

"I can assure you that there is no fear of that," Lisle said earnestly. "I want to take part in the expedition, and am quite prepared to share in the habits and hardships of the men, whatever they may be. You know, if I were discovered I should be sent off at once, even if a fight were imminent. I think I can say that, when I undertake a thing, I will carry it through.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I feel to you all, for aiding me to carry out my wish. Will you kindly convey my thanks to the officers of the company, and particularly urge upon them that they must show me no favour, and pay no more attention to me than to the other men? Anything of that sort would certainly give rise to comment and suspicion."

"I have already told them that," the officer said, "and I think they thoroughly understand how they must act.

"The sick party are to start tomorrow morning. How do you wish the uniform of your supposed cousin to be sent to you?"

"If you hand it over to Robah, he will bring it out to me. The rifle, of course, should be handed quietly to me when I return to camp. I cannot march in with it. I shall not come in till after dark. Then the havildar must take me to one of the sepoy tents, and mention to the men there that I am Mutteh Ghar's cousin; and that, as a great favour, I am to be allowed to accompany the regiment."

"Of course, you will take with you the usual underclothes to put on, when you lay aside your uniform; and especially the loincloth, and light linen jacket, which the men use in undress."

"I will see to all that, risaldar. I can assure you that, so far from finding it a trouble to act as a native, I shall really enjoy it; and shall make very light of any hardships that I may have to undergo. When it comes to fighting I am, as you know, a very good shot; and should certainly be able to do my part, with credit."

"I will tell the havildar to be on the lookout for you, when you come into camp, and to bring you straight to me. I will then see that your uniforms and belts are properly put on, before I send you off under his charge. I hope the matter may turn out well. If it does not, you must remember that I have done my part because you urged it upon me, and prayed me to assist you for your father's sake."

"I shall never forget that, Gholam Singh, and shall always feel deeply indebted to you."

When the risaldar had left, Lisle called Robah in.

"All is arranged, Robah; and now it remains only to carry out the details. In the first place, you must get me the stain; in the second, you must go into the bazaar and buy me a loincloth and light jacket, such as the soldiers wear when they lay aside their uniforms. As to the uniform, that is already arranged for; and I shall, of course, have one of the sheepskin greatcoats that have just been served out, and which I expect I shall find indispensable. Put in my kit bag one pair of my thickest woollen vests and drawers. I cannot carry more, for I mean to take one suit of my own clothes to put on in case, by any accident, I should be discovered and sent back. I can get that carried on the baggage waggon.

"Tomorrow we shall start at five o'clock in the morning and, at the first halt, I shall leave the party quietly. I have no doubt that Gholam Singh will give orders, to the native officer in charge, that I am to be permitted to do so without remark. As soon as I leave the convoy you must join me with my uniform and, above all, with the stain. You can bring out a bag with some provisions for the day, for I shall not return to camp until after dark."

When Robah went away to make the necessary purchases, Lisle packed up his baggage and labelled it. His father's effects had all been sold, a few days after his death; as it would not have paid to send them home. They had fetched good prices, and had been gladly bought up by the other officers; some as mementoes of their late comrade, and some because they were useful.

Several of the officers came in and chatted with him while he was packing, all expressing regret that he was leaving. At mess that evening they drank his health, and a pleasant journey; and he gravely

returned thanks. When the mess broke up he returned to the bungalow, and packed a small canvas bag with the suit he was going to take with him.

Then he examined and tried on the uniform of the dead sepoy; which Robah had, that evening, received from the risaldar. It fitted him fairly well. In addition to the regular uniform there was a posteen, or sheepskin coat; loose boots made of soft skin, so that the feet could be wrapped up in cloth before they were put on; and putties, or leggings, consisting of a very long strip of cloth terminating with a shorter strip of leather. These things had been served out that day to the troops, and were to be put on over the usual leg wrappings when they came to snow-covered country. They were to be carried with the men's kits till required. For ordinary wear there were the regular boots, which were strapped on like sandals.

"Well, I think I ought to be able to stand anything in the way of cold, with this sheepskin coat and the leggings, together with my own warm underclothing."

"You are sure," Robah said, "that you understand the proper folding of your turban?"

"I think so, Robah. I have seen them done up hundreds of times but, nevertheless, you shall give me a lesson when you join me tomorrow. We shall have plenty of time for it.

"Now, can you think of anything else that would be useful? If so, you can buy it tomorrow before you come out to meet me."

"No, sahib. There are the warm mittens that have been served out for mountain work; and you might take a pair of your own gloves to wear under them for, from all I hear, you will want them when you are standing out all night on picket work, among the hills."

"No, I won't take the gloves, Robah. With two pairs on, my fingers would be so muffled that I should not be able to do good shooting."

"Well, it will be cold work, for it is very late in the season and, you know, goggles have been served out to all the men to save them from snow blindness, from which they would otherwise suffer severely. I have been on expeditions in which a third of the men were quite blind, when they returned to camp."

"It must look very rum to see a whole regiment marching in goggles," Lisle laughed; "still, anything is better than being blinded."

"I shall see you sometimes, sahib; for the major engaged me, this morning, to go with him as his personal servant, as his own man is in feeble health and, though I am now getting on in years, I am still strong enough to travel with the regiment."

"I am delighted, indeed, to hear that, Robah. I shall be very glad to steal away sometimes, and have a chat with you. It will be a great pleasure to have someone I can talk to, who knows me. Of course, the native officer in command of my company will not be able to show me any favour, nor should I wish him to do so. It seems like keeping one friend, while I am cut off from all others; though I dare say I shall make some new ones among the sepoys. I have no doubt you will be very comfortable with the major."

"Yes, sahib, I am sure that he is a kind master. I shall be able, I hope, sometimes to give you a small quantity of whisky, to mix with the water in your bottle."

"No, no, Robah, when the baggage is cut down there will be very little of that taken and, however much there might be, I could not accept any that you had taken from the major's store. I must fare just the same as the others."

"Well, sahib, I hope that, at any rate, you will carry a small flask of it under your uniform. You may not want it but, if you were wounded and lying in the snow, it would be very valuable to you for, mixed with the water in your bottle, and taken from time to time, it would sustain you until you could be carried down to camp."

"That is a very good idea, Robah, and I will certainly adopt it. I will carry half a pint about with me, for emergencies such as you describe. If I do not want it, myself, it may turn out useful to keep up some wounded comrade. It will not add much to the load that I shall have to carry, and which I

expect I shall feel, when we first march. As I am now, I think I could keep up with the best marcher in the regiment but, with the weight of the clothes and pouches, a hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition, and my rifle, it will be a very different thing; and I shall be desperately tired, by the time we get to the end of the day's march.

"Now it is twelve o'clock, and time to turn in, for we march at five."

The next morning, when the sick convoy started, the white officers came up to say goodbye to Lisle; and all expressed their regret that he could not accompany the regiment. The butler had gone on ahead and, as soon as Lisle slipped away, he came up to him and assisted him to make his toilet. He stained him from head to foot, dyed his hair, and fastened in it some long bunches of black horse hair, which he would wear in the Punjabi fashion on the top of his head. With the same dye he darkened his eyelashes and, when he had put on his uniform, he said:

"As far as looks go, sahib, it is certain that no one would suspect that you were not a native. There is a large bottle of stain. You will only have to do yourself over, afresh, about once in ten days. A little of this mixed with three times the amount of water will be sufficient for, if you were to put it on by itself, it would make you a great deal too dark."

They spent the day in a grove and, when evening approached, returned to camp.

"And now, goodbye, sahib! The regiment will march tomorrow morning, at daybreak. I may not have an opportunity of seeing you again, before we start. I hope I have done right, in aiding you in your desire to accompany the expedition; but I have done it for the best, and you must not blame me if harm comes of it."

"That you may be sure I will not, and I am greatly obliged to you. Now, for the present, goodbye!"

Chapter 2: The Start

The havildar was on the lookout for Lisle when he entered the camp; but he did not know him, in his changed attire and stained face, until the lad spoke to him.

"You are well disguised, indeed, sahib," he said. "I had no idea that it was you. Now, my instructions are to take you to Gholam Singh's tent."

Here Lisle found the risaldar and the other two native officers. He saluted as he entered. The risaldar examined him carefully, before speaking.

"Good!" he said; "I did not think that a white sahib could ever disguise himself to pass as a native, though I know that it has been done before now. Certainly I have no fear of any of the white officers finding that you are not what you seem to be. I am more afraid, however, of the men. Still, even if they guessed who you are, they would not, I am sure, betray you.

"Here are your rifle and bayonet. These complete your outfit. I see that you have brought your kit with you. It is rather more bulky than usual, but will pass with the rest.

"The subadar will take you down to the men's lines. I have arranged that you shall be on the baggage guard, at first, so that you will gradually begin to know a few men of your company. They will report to the rest the story you tell them, and you will soon be received as one of themselves.

"I will see that that sack of yours goes with the rest of the kits in the baggage waggon. These officers of your company all understand that you are to be treated like the rest of the men, and not to be shown any favour. At the same time, when in camp, if there is anything that you desire, or any complaint you have to make, you can talk quietly to one of them; and he will report it to me, in which case you may be sure that I shall set the matter right, if possible."

"I don't think there is any fear of that, risaldar. I am pretty well able to take care of myself. My father gave me many lessons in boxing; and I fancy that, although most of the men are a great deal bigger and stronger than I am, I shall be able to hold my own."

"I hope so, Bullen," the havildar said gravely, "but I trust that there will be no occasion to show your skill. We Punjabis are a quiet race of men; and though, of course, quarrels occasionally occur among us, they generally end in abuse, and very seldom come to blows. The greater portion of the regiment has been with us for some years. They know each other well, and are not given to quarrelling. They will scarcely even permit their juniors to go to extremes, and I need not say that the officers of the company would interfere, at once, if they saw any signs of a disturbance.

"I have had a meal cooked, which I hope you will eat with us. It is the last you are likely to be able to enjoy, for some time. We shall feel honoured if you will sit down with us."

An excellent repast was served, and Lisle did it full justice. Then the officers all shook him by the hand, and he started with the subadar for the men's lines, with hearty thanks to the others. When they arrived at the huts, the subadar led the way in.

"Here is a new comrade," he said, as some of the men roused themselves from the ground on his entrance. "He is a cousin of Mutteh Ghar, and bears the same name. It seems that he has served in another regiment, for a short time; but was discharged, owing to sickness. He has now perfectly recovered health, and has come to join his cousin; who, on his arrival, he finds to be dead. He is very anxious to accompany the regiment and, as he understands his work, the risaldar has consented to let him go, instead of remaining behind at the depot.

"He is, of course, much affected by the loss of his cousin; and hopes that he will not be worried by questions. He will be on baggage guard tomorrow, and so will be left alone, until he recovers somewhat from his disappointment and grief."

"I will see to it, subadar," one of the sergeants said. "Mutteh Ghar was a nice young fellow, and we shall all welcome his cousin among us, if he is at all like him."

"Thank you, sergeant! I am sure you will all like him, when you come to know him; for he is a well-spoken young fellow, and I hope that he will make as good a soldier. Good night!"

So saying, he turned and left the tent.

Half an hour later, Lisle was on parade. There were but eight British officers; including the colonel, major, and adjutant, and one company officer to each two companies. The inspection was a brief one. The company officer walked along the line, paying but little attention to the men; but carefully scrutinizing their arms, to see that they were in perfect order. The regiment was put through a few simple manoeuvres; and then dismissed, as work in earnest would begin on the following morning.

Four men in each company were then told off to pack the baggage in the carts. Lisle was one of those furnished by his company. There was little talk while they were at work. In two hours the carts were packed. Then, as they returned to the lines, his three comrades entered into conversation with him.

"You are lucky to be taken," one said, "being only a recruit. I suppose it was done so that you might fill the place of your cousin?"

"Yes, that was it. They said that I had a claim; so that, if I chose, I could send money home to his family."

"They are good men, the white officers," another said. "They are like fathers to us, and we will follow them anywhere. We lately lost one of them, and miss him sorely. However, they are all good.

"We are all glad to be going on service. It is dull work in cantonments."

On arriving at the lines of the company, one of them said:

"The risaldar said that you will take your cousin's place. He slept in the same hut as I. You will soon find yourself at home with us."

He introduced Lisle to the other occupants of the hut, eighteen in number. Lisle then proceeded to follow the example of the others, by taking off his uniform and stripping to the loincloth, and a little calico jacket. He felt very strange at first, accustomed though he was to see the soldiers return to their native costume.

"Your rations are there, and those of our new comrade," one of the party said.

Several fires were burning, and Lisle followed the example of his comrade, and took the lota which formed part of his equipment, filled it with water, and put it in the ashes; adding, as soon as it boiled, the handful of rice, some ghee, and a tiny portion of meat. In an hour the meal was cooked and, taking it from the fire, he sat down in a place apart; as is usual among the native troops, who generally have an objection to eat before others.

"Those who have money," his comrade said, "can buy herbs and condiments of the little traders, and greatly improve their mess."

This Lisle knew well.

"I have a few pice," he said, "but must be careful till I get my pay."

As soon as night fell all turned in, as they were to start at daylight.

"Here is room for you at my side, comrade," the sergeant said. "You had better get to sleep, as soon as you can. Of course, you have your blanket with you?"

"Yes, sergeant."

Lisle rolled himself in his blanket and lay down, covering his face, as is the habit of all natives of India. It was some time before he went to sleep. The events of the day had been exciting, and he was overjoyed at finding that his plan had so far succeeded. He was now one of the regiment and, unless something altogether unexpected happened, he was certain to take part in a stirring campaign.

While it was still dark, he was aroused by the sound of a bugle.

"The men told off to the baggage guard will at once proceed to pack the waggons," the sergeant said.

Lisle at once got up and put on his uniform, as did three other men in the tent. The kits and baggage had already been packed, the night before; and the men of the guard, consisting of a half

company, proceeded to the waggons. Half an hour afterwards, another bugle roused the remainder of the regiment, and they soon fell in.

It was broad daylight when they started, the baggage followed a little later. The havildar who was in charge of them was, fortunately, one of those of Lisle's company. There was but little talk at the hurried start. Two men accompanied each of the twelve company waggons. Half the remainder marched in front, and the others behind. Lisle had been told off to the first waggon.

It was a long march, two ordinary stages being done in one. As the animals were fresh, the transport arrived at the camping ground within an hour of the main column. Accustomed though he was to exercise, Lisle found the weight of his rifle, pouches, and ammunition tell terribly upon him. He was not used to the boots and, before half the journey was completed, began to limp. The havildar, noticing this, ordered him to take his place on the top of the baggage on his waggon.

"It is natural that you should feel it, at first, Mutteh Ghar," he said. "You will find it easy enough to keep up with them, after a few days' rest."

Lisle was thankful, indeed, for he had begun to feel that he should never be able to hold on to the end of the march. He remained on the baggage for a couple of hours, and then again took his place by the side of the waggon; receiving an approving nod from the havildar, as he did so.

When the halt was called, the men at once crowded round the waggons. The kits were distributed and, in a few minutes, the regiment had the appearance of a concourse of peaceable peasants. No tents had been taken with them. Waterproof sheets had been provided and, with these, little shelters had been erected, each accommodating three men. The sergeant told Lisle off to share one of these shelters with two other men. A party meanwhile had gone to collect firewood and, in half an hour, the men were cooking their rice.

"Well, how did you like the march?" one of them said to Lisle.

"I found it very hard work," Lisle said, "but the havildar let me ride on the top of one of the waggons for a couple of hours and, after that, I was able to march in with the rest."

"It was a rough march for a recruit," the other said, "but you will soon get used to that. Grease your feet well before you put on your bandages. You will find that that will ease them very much, and that you will not get sore feet, as you would if you marched without preparation."

Lisle took the advice, and devoted a portion of his rations for the purpose, the last thing at night; and found that it abated the heat in his feet, and he was able to get about in comfort.

Each soldier carried a little cooking pot. Although the regiment was composed principally of Punjabis, many of the men were of different nationalities and, although the Punjabis are much less particular about caste than the people of Southern India, every man prepared his meal separately. The rations consisted of rice, ghee, a little curry powder, and a portion of mutton. From these Lisle managed to concoct a savoury mess, as he had often watched the men cooking their meals.

The sergeant had evidently chosen two good men to share the tent with Lisle. They were both old soldiers, not given to much talking; and were kind to their young comrade, giving him hints about cooking and making himself comfortable, and abstaining from asking many questions. They were easily satisfied with his answers and, after the meal was eaten, sat down with him and talked of the coming campaign. Neither of them had ever been to Chitral, but they knew by hearsay the nature of the road, and discussed the probability of the point at which serious opposition would begin; both agreeing that the difficulties of crossing the passes, now that these would be covered with snow, would be far greater than any stand the tribesmen might make.

"They are tough fighters, no doubt," one of them said; "and we shall have more difficulty, with them, than we have ever had before; for they say that a great many of them are armed with good rifles, and will therefore be able to annoy us at a distance, when their old matchlocks would have been useless."

"And they are good shots, too."

"There is no doubt about that; quite as good as we are, I should say. There will be a tremendous lot of flanking work to keep them at a distance but, when it comes to anything like regular fighting, we shall sweep them before us.

"From what I hear, however, we shall only have three or four guns with us. That is a pity for, though the tribesmen can stand against a heavy rifle fire, they have a profound respect for guns. I expect, therefore, that we shall have some stiff fighting.

"How do you like the prospect, Mutteh Ghar?"

"I don't suppose I shall mind it when I get accustomed to it," Lisle said. "It was because I heard that the regiment was about to advance that I hurried up to join. I don't think I should have enlisted, had it been going to stay in the cantonment."

"That is the right spirit," the other said approvingly. "It is the same with all of us. There is no difficulty in getting recruits, when there is fighting to be done. It is the dull life in camp that prevents men from joining. We have enlisted twice as many men, in the past three months, as in three years before."

So they talked till night fell and then turned in; putting Lisle between them, that being the warmest position.

In the morning the march was resumed in the same order, Lisle again taking his place with the baggage guard. The march this time was only a single one; but it was long, nevertheless. Lisle was able to keep his place till the end, feeling great benefit from the ghee which he had rubbed on his feet. The havildar, at starting, said a few cheering words to him; and told him that, when he felt tired, he could put his rifle and pouch in the waggon, as there was no possibility of their being wanted.

His two comrades, when they heard that he had accomplished the march without falling out, praised him highly.

"You have showed good courage in holding on," one of them said. "The march was nothing to us seasoned men, but it must have been trying to you, especially as your feet cannot have recovered from yesterday. I see that you will make a good soldier, and one who will not shirk his work. Another week, and you will march as well as the best of us."

"I hope so," Lisle said. "I have always been considered a good walker. As soon as I get accustomed to the weight of the rifle and pouch, I have no doubt that I shall get on well enough."

"I am sure you will," the other said cordially, "and I think we are as good marchers as any in India. We certainly have that reputation and, no doubt, it was for that reason we were chosen for the expedition, although there are several other regiments nearer to the spot.

"From what I hear, Colonel Kelly will be the commanding officer of the column, and we could not wish for a better. I hear that there is another column, and a much stronger one, going from Peshawar. That will put us all on our mettle, and I will warrant that we shall be the first to arrive there; not only because we are good marchers, but because the larger the column, the more trouble it has with its baggage.

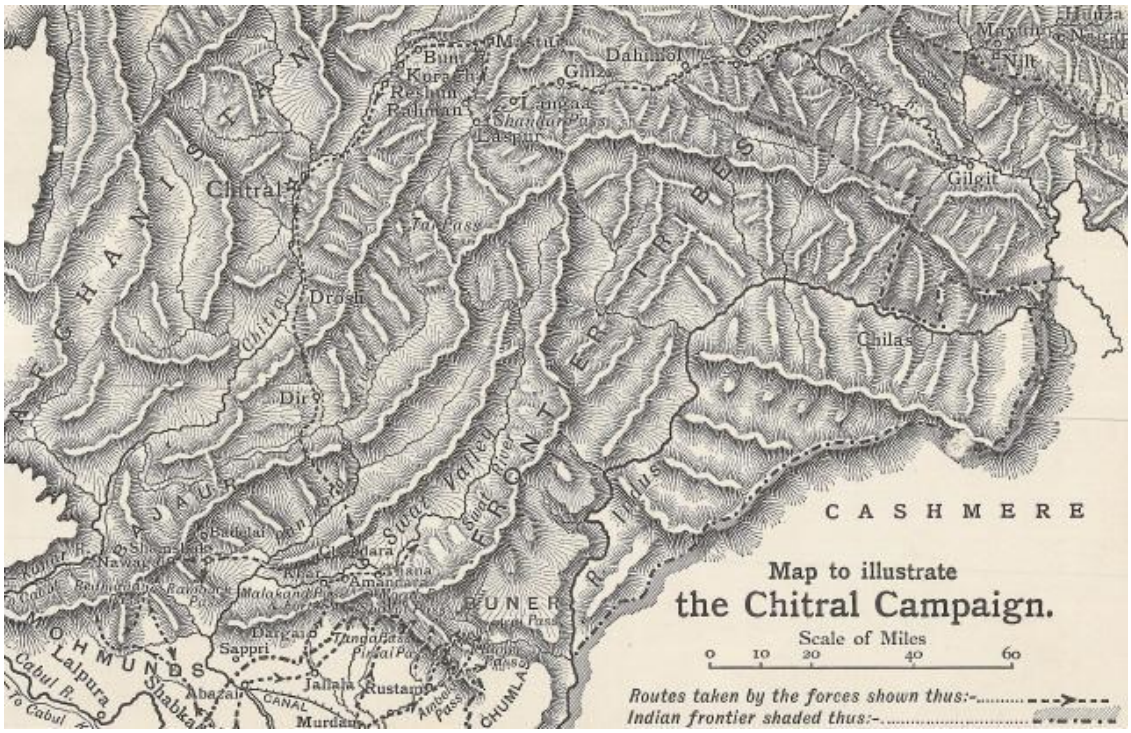
"Baggage is the curse of these expeditions. What has to be considered is not how far the troops can go, but how far the baggage animals can keep up with them. Some of the animals are no doubt good, but many of them are altogether unfitted for the work. When these break down they block a whole line; and often, even if the march is a short one, it is very late at night before the last of the baggage comes in; which means that we get neither kit, blankets, nor food, and think ourselves lucky if we get them the next morning.

"The government is, we all think, much to blame in these matters. Instead of procuring strong animals, and paying a fair price for them; they buy animals that are not fit to do one good day's march. Of course, in the end this stinginess costs them more in money, and lives, than if they had provided suitable animals at the outset."

Lisle had had a great deal of practice with the rifle, and had carried away several prizes shot for by the officers; but he was unaccustomed to carry one for so many hours, and he felt grateful,

indeed, when a halt was sounded. Fires were lighted, and food cooked; and then all lay down, or sat in groups in the shade of a grove. The sense of the strangeness of his condition had begun to wear off, and he laughed and talked with the others, without restraint.

Up to the time when he joined the regiment, Lisle had heard a good deal of the state of affairs at Chitral; and his impression of the natives was that they were as savage and treacherous a race as was to be found in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Beyond that, he had not interested himself in the matter; but now, from the talk of his companions, he gained a pretty clear idea of the situation.



Old Aman-ul-mulk had died in August, 1892. He had reigned long; and had, by various conquests and judicious marriages, raised Chitral to a position of importance. The Chitralis are an Aryan race, and not Pathans; and have a deep-rooted hatred of the Afghans.

In 1878 Aman placed Chitral under the nominal suzerainty of the Maharajah of Kashmir and, Kashmir being one of the tributary states of the Indian Empire, this brought them into direct communication with the government of India; and Aman received with great cordiality two missions sent to him. When he died, his eldest son Nizam was away from Chitral; and the government was seized by his second son, Afzul; who, however, was murdered by his uncle, Sher Afzul. Nizam at once hurried to Chitral; and Sher Afzul fled to Cabul, Nizam becoming the head of the state or, as it was called, Mehtar. Being weak, he asked for a political officer to reside in his territory; and Captain Younghusband, with an escort of Sikhs, was accordingly sent to Mastuj, a fort in Upper Chitral.

However, in November Nizam was also murdered, by a younger brother, Amir. Amir hurried to Chitral, and demanded recognition from Lieutenant Gurdon; who was, at the time, acting as assistant British agent. He replied that he had no power to grant recognition, until he was instructed by the government in India. Amir thereupon stopped his letters, and for a long time he was in imminent danger, as he had only an escort of eight Sikhs.

On the 8th of January, fifty men of the 14th Sikhs marched down from Mastuj and, on the 1st of February, Mr. Robertson, the British agent, arrived from Gilgit. He had with him an escort of two hundred and eighty men of the 4th Kashmir Rifles, and thirty-three Sikhs; and was accompanied by three European officers. When he arrived he heard that Umra Khan had, at the invitation of Amir, marched into Chitral; but that his progress had been barred by the strong fort of Drosh. As

the Chitralis hate the Pathans, they were not inclined to yield to the orders of Amir to surrender the fort, and were consequently attacked. The place, however, was surrendered by the treachery of the governor. Amir then advanced, and was joined by Sher Afzul.

Mr. Robertson wrote to Amir Khan, saying that he must leave the Chitral territory. Amir paid no attention to the order, and Mr. Robertson reported this to the government of India. They issued, in March, 1895, a proclamation warning the Chitralis to abstain from giving assistance to Amir Khan, and intimating that a force sufficient to overcome all resistance was being assembled; but that as soon as it had attained its object, it would be withdrawn.

The Chitralis, who now preferred Sher Afzul to Amir, made common cause with the former. Mr. Robertson learned that men were already at work, breaking up the road between Chitral and Mastuj; and accordingly moved from the house he had occupied to the fort, which was large enough to receive the force with him.

On the 1st of March, all communications between Mr. Robertson and Mastuj had ceased; and troops were at once ordered to assemble, to march to his relief. It was clearly impossible for our agent to retire as, in order to do so, he would have to negotiate several terrible passes, where a mere handful of men could destroy a regiment. Thus it was that the Pioneers had been ordered to break up their cantonment, and advance with all speed to Gilgit.

Hostilities had already begun. A native officer had started, with forty men and sixty boxes of ammunition, for Chitral; and had reached Buni, when he received information that his advance was likely to be opposed. He accordingly halted and wrote to Lieutenant Moberley, special duty officer with the Kashmir troops in Mastuj. The local men reported to Moberley that no hostile attack upon the troops was at all likely but, as there was a spirit of unrest in the air, he wrote to Captain Ross, who was with Lieutenant Jones, and requested him to make a double march into Mastuj. This Captain Ross did and, on the evening of the 4th of March, started to reinforce the little body of men that was blocked at Buni.

On the same day a party of sappers and miners, under Lieutenants Fowler and Edwards, also marched forward to Mastuj. When Captain Ross arrived at Buni he found that all was quiet, and he therefore returned to Mastuj, with news to that effect. The party of sappers were to march, the next morning, with the ammunition escort.

On the evening of that day a note was received from Lieutenant Edwards, dated from a small village two miles beyond Buni, saying that he heard that he was to be attacked in a defile, a short distance away. He started with a force of ninety-six men, in all. They carried with them nine days' rations, and one hundred and forty rounds of ammunition.

Captain Ross at once marched for Buni, and arrived there the same evening. Here he left a young native officer and thirty-three rank and file while, with Lieutenant Jones and the rest of his little force, he marched for Reshun, where Lieutenant Edwards' party were detained. They halted in the middle of the day; and arrived, at one o'clock, at a hamlet halfway to Reshun.

Shortly after starting, they were attacked. Lieutenant Jones, one of the few survivors of the party, handed in the following report of this bad business.

"Half a mile after leaving Koragh the road enters a narrow defile. The hills on the left bank consist of a succession of large stone shoots, with precipitous spurs in between. The road at the entrance to the defile, for about one hundred yards, runs quite close to the river; after that it lies along a narrow maidan, some thirty or forty yards in width, and is on the top of the river bank, which is here a cliff. This continues for about half a mile, then it ascends a steep spur.

"When the advanced party reached about halfway up this spur, it was fired on from a sangar which had been built across the road and, at the same time, men appeared on all the mountain tops and ridges, and stones were rolled down all the shoots. Captain Ross, who was with the advanced guard, fell back on the main body. All the coolies dropped their loads and bolted, as soon as the first

shot was fired. Captain Ross, after looking at the enemy's position, decided to fall back upon Koragh; as it would have been useless to go on to Reshun, leaving an enemy in such a position behind us."

Captain Ross ordered Lieutenant Jones to fall back with ten men, seize the lower end of the defile, and cover the retreat. No fewer than eight of his men were wounded, as he fell back. Captain Ross, on hearing this, ordered him to return, and the whole party took refuge in two caves, it being the intention of their commander to wait there until the moon rose, and then try to force his way out.

But when they started, they were assailed from above with such a torrent of rocks that they again retired to the caves. They then made an attempt to get to the top of the mountain, but their way was barred by a precipice; and they once more went back to the cave, where they remained all the next day.

It was then decided to make an attempt to cut their way out. They started at two in the morning. The enemy at once opened fire, and many were killed, among them Captain Ross himself. Lieutenant Jones with seventeen men reached the little maidan, and there remained for some minutes, keeping up a heavy fire on the enemy on both banks of the river, in order to help more men to get through.

Twice the enemy attempted to charge, but each time retired with heavy loss. Lieutenant Jones then again fell back, two of his party having been killed and one mortally wounded, and the lieutenant and nine sepoys wounded. When they reached Buni they prepared a house for defence, and remained there for seven days until reinforcements came up.

In the meantime the 20th Bengal Sappers and Miners, and the 42nd Kashmir Infantry had gone on, beyond the point where Captain Ross's detachment had been all but annihilated, and reached Reshun; and Lieutenants Edwards and Fowler, with the Bengal Sappers and ten Kashmir Infantry, went on to repair a break in the road, a few miles beyond that place. They took every precaution to guard against surprise. Lieutenant Fowler was sent to scale the heights on the left bank, so as to be able to look down into some sangars on the opposite side. With some difficulty, he found a way up the hillside. When he was examining the opposite cliff a shot was fired, and about two hundred men rushed out from the village and entered the sangars.

As Fowler was well above them, he kept up a heavy fire, and did great execution. The enemy, however, began to ascend the hills, and some appeared above him and began rolling down stones and firing into his party. Fowler himself was wounded in the back, a corporal was killed, and two other men wounded. He managed, however, to effect his retreat, and joined the main body.

As the enemy were now swarming on the hills, the party began to fall back to Reshun, which was two miles distant. They had an open plain to cross and a spur, a thousand feet high, to climb. During this part of the retreat an officer and several men were wounded but, on reaching the crest, the party halted and opened a steady fire upon the enemy; whom they thus managed to keep at a distance till they reached Reshun, which they did without further loss.

The force here were occupying a sangar they had formed, but so heavy a fire was opened, from the surrounding hills, that it was found impossible to hold the position. They therefore retired to some houses, where firewood and other supplies were found. The only drawback to this place was that it was more than a hundred yards from the river, and there was consequently great danger of their being cut off from the water.

As soon as they reached the houses they began to fortify them. The roofs were flat and, by piling stones along the edges, they converted them into sangars. The walls were loopholed, the entrances blocked up, and passages of communication opened between the houses. A party of Kashmir volunteers then went down to the other sangar and brought the wounded in, under a heavy fire.

At sunset the enemy's fire ceased, as it was the month of Ramzam, during which Mahomedans have to fast all day between sunrise and sunset. As night came on the little party took their places on the roofs, and remained there till daylight. By this time all were greatly exhausted for, during their terrible experiences of the previous day, they had had no food and little water.

When day dawned half the men were withdrawn from their posts, and a meal was cooked from the flour that had been found in the houses. A small ration of meat was also served out. During the day the enemy kept up a continuous fire but, as they showed no intention of attacking, the men were allowed to sleep by turns.

After dark Lieutenant Fowler and some volunteers started for the river, to bring in water. They made two trips, and filled up all the storage vessels at the disposal of the garrison. The night passed quietly but, just before dawn, the enemy charged down through the surrounding houses. Lieutenant Edwards and his party at once opened fire, at about twenty yards' range. Tom-toms were beaten furiously, to encourage the assailants; but the tribesmen could not pluck up courage to make a charge and, at nine o'clock, they all retired. During the attack four of the sepoys were killed, and six wounded.

Next night another effort was made to obtain water. Two sangars were stormed, and most of their occupants killed. The way to the water was now opened but, at this moment, heavy firing broke out at the fort; and Lieutenant Fowler, who was in command, recalled his men and returned to assist the garrison.

On the following day a white flag was hoisted, and an emissary from Sher Afzul said that all fighting had ceased. An armistice was accordingly arranged. All this, however, was but a snare for, a few days later, when the two British officers went out to witness a polo match, they were seized, bound with ropes, and carried off. At the same moment a fierce attack was made on a party of sepoys who had also come out. These fought stoutly, but were overpowered, most of them being killed.

The garrison of the post, however, under the command of Lieutenant Gurdon, continued to hold the little fort; and refused all invitation to come out to parley, after the treachery that had been shown to their comrades. The two officers were taken to Chitral, where they were received with kindness by Amir Khan.

The news of this disaster was carried to Peshawar by a native Mussulman officer, who had been liberated, where it created great excitement. As all communication with Chitral had ceased, the assistant British agent at Gilgit called up the Pioneers; who marched into Gilgit, four hundred strong, on the 20th of March. On the 21st news was received of the cutting up of Ross's party, and it was naturally supposed that that of Edwards was also destroyed.

Colonel Kelly of the Pioneers now commanded the troops, and all civil powers; and Major Borradale commanded the Pioneers. The available force consisted of the four hundred Pioneers, and the Guides. Lieutenant Stewart joined them with two guns of the Kashmir battery.

Two hundred Pioneers and the Guides started on the 23rd. The gazetteer states that it never rains in Gilgit, but it rained when the detachment started, and continued to pour for two days. The men had marched without tents. Colonel Kelly, the doctor, Leward, and a staff officer followed in the afternoon, and overtook the main body that evening.

The troops had made up little tents with their waterproof sheets. Colonel Kelly had a small tent, and the other officers turned in to a cow shed. The force was so small that the Pioneers asked the others to mess with them, each man providing himself with his own knife, fork, and spoon, and the pots being all collected for the cooking.

The next march was long and, in some places, severe. They were well received by the natives, whose chiefs always came out to greet them and, on the third day, reached Gupis, where a fort had been built by the Kashmir troops. At this point the horses and mules were all left behind, as the passes were said to be impassable for animals; and native coolies were hired to carry the baggage.

Lisle had enjoyed the march, and the strange life that he was leading. He was now quite at home with his company and, by the time they reached Gupis, had become a general favourite. At the end of the day, when a meal had been cooked and eaten, he would join in their songs round the fire and, as he had picked up several he had heard them sing, and had a fair voice, he was often called upon for a contribution. His vivacity and good spirits surprised the sepoys who, as a whole, were grave men, though they bore their hardships uncomplainingly. He had soon got over the feeling of

discomfort of going about with naked legs, and was as glad as the soldiers, themselves, to lay aside his uniform and get into native attire.

The sepoys had now regular rations of meat. It was always mutton, as beef was unobtainable; but it was much relished by the men, who cut it up into slices and broiled it over a fire.

Not for one moment did Lisle regret the step he had taken. Young and active, he thoroughly enjoyed the life; and looked forward eagerly to the time when they should meet the enemy, for no doubt whatever was now felt that they would meet with a desperate resistance on their march to Chitral. Fears were entertained, however, that when they got there, they would find that the garrison had been overpowered; for it was certain that against this force the chief attack of the enemy would be directed. The overthrow of Ross and his party showed that the enemy were sturdy fighters; and they were known to be armed with breech-loading rifles, of as good a quality as those carried by the troops.

In the open field all felt that, however numerous the tribesmen might be, they would stand no chance whatever; but the passes afforded them immense advantage, and rendered drill and discipline of little avail.

Chapter 3: The First Fight

And yet, though he kept up a cheerful appearance, Lisle's heart was often very heavy. The sight of the British officers continually recalled his father to his memory. But a short time back he had been with him, and now he was gone for ever. At times it seemed almost impossible that it could be so. He had been his constant companion when off duty; had devoted much time to helping him forward in his studies; had never, so far as he could remember, spoken a harsh word to him.

It seemed like a dream, those last hours he had passed by his father's bedside. Many times he lay awake in the night, his face wet with tears. But with reveille he would be up, laughing and joking with the soldiers, and raising a smile even on the face of the gravest.

It had taken him but a very short time to make himself at home in the regiment. The men sometimes looked at him with surprise, he was so different from themselves. They bore their hardships well, but it was with stern faces and grim determination; while this young soldier made a joke of them.

Sometimes he was questioned closely, but he always turned the questions off with a laugh. He had learned the place where his supposed cousin came from and, while sticking to this, he said that a good fairy must have presided over his birth; information that was much more gravely received than given, for the natives have their superstitions, and believe, as firmly as the inhabitants of these British islands did, two or three hundred years ago, in the existence of supernatural beings, good and bad.

"If you have been blessed by a fairy," one of the elder men suggested, "doubtless you will go through this campaign without harm. They are very powerful, some of these good people, and can bestow long life as well as other gifts."

"I don't know whether she will do that. She certainly gave me high spirits. I used to believe that what my mother said happened to her, the night after I was born, was not true, but only a dream. She solemnly declared that it was not, but I have always been famous for good spirits; and she may have been right, after all."

There was nothing Lisle liked better than being on night picket duty. Other men shirked it, but to him there was something delightful to stand there almost alone, rifle in hand, watching the expanse of snow for a moving figure. There was a charm in the dead silence. He liked to think quietly of the past and, somehow, he could do so far better, while engaged on this duty, than when lying awake in his little tent. The expanse and stillness calmed him, and agreed far more with his mood than the camp.

His sight was keen, even when his thoughts were farthest away and, three times, he sent a bullet through a lurking Pathan who was crawling up towards him, astonishing his comrades by the accuracy of his aim.

"I suppose," he said, when congratulated upon the third occasion on which he had laid one of the enemy low, "that the good fairy must have given me a quick eye, as well as good spirits."

"It is indeed extraordinary that you, a young recruit, should not only make out a man whom none of us saw; but that you should, each time, fetch him down at a distance of three or four hundred yards."

"I used to practice with my father's rifle," he said. "He was very fond of shikari, and I often went out with him. It needs a keener sight to put a bullet between the eyes of a tiger, than to hit a lurking Pathan."

So noted did he become for the accuracy of his aim that one of the native officers asked him, privately, if he would like to be always put on night duty.

"I should like it every other night," he said. "By resting every alternate night, and by snatching a couple of hours' sleep before going on duty, when we arrive at the end of a day's march in good time, I can manage very well."

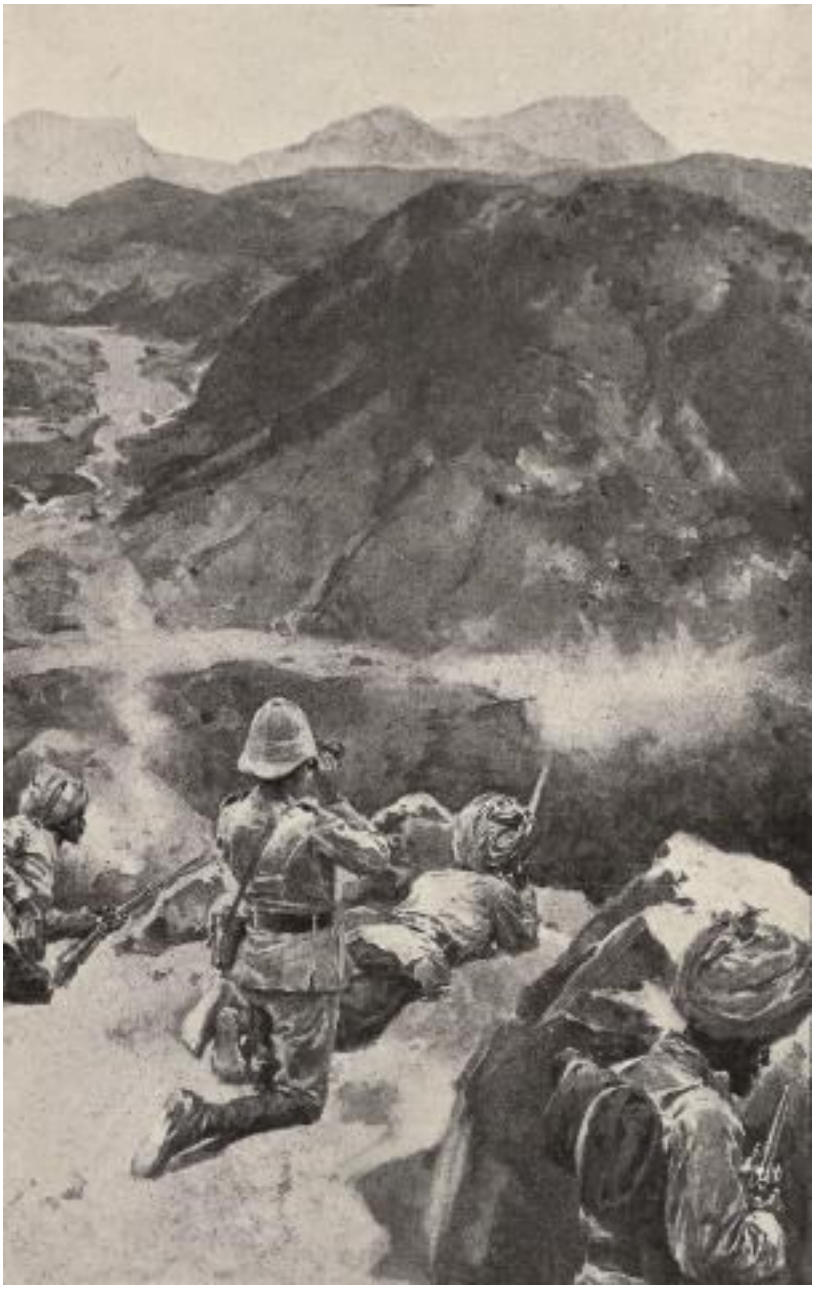
"I will arrange that for you," the officer said. "Certainly, no one would grudge you the duty."

One night, when there had been but little opposition during the day, Lisle was posted on a hill where the picket consisted of ten men; five of whom were on the crest, while the other five lay down in the snow. The day had been a hard one, and Lisle was less watchful than usual. It seemed to him that he had not closed his eyes for a minute, as he leant on his rifle; but it must have been much longer, for he suddenly started with a feeling that something was wrong, and saw a number of dark figures advancing along the crest towards him. He at once fired a shot, and fell back upon the next sentry. Dropping behind rocks, they answered the fire which the enemy had already opened upon them.

The whole picket quickly gathered and, for a time, checked the advance of the enemy; but these were too numerous to be kept at a distance, and parties of them pressed forward on each flank.

"We must retire till we can find better shelter," the sub-officer in command said. "We shall soon have reinforcements up from the camp, when it is seen that we are seriously engaged. Fall back, men, steadily. Take advantage of every bit of cover, but keep as well together as possible, without risk."

Firing steadily, they made their way down the hill, and finally took up a position among a clump of rocks. Two had been shot dead, and two others were wounded; and it was because these could not be left behind that the stand was made. The two wounded men, though partially disabled and unable to crawl, could still use their rifles; and the little party kept up so hot a fire that, though the enemy were massed from twenty to thirty yards away, they could not be brought to unite in a general attack; not even by the shouts and yells of their comrades behind, and a furious beating of tom-toms.



The defenders were all lying down, each of them having chosen a position where he could see through a crevice between the rocks. Lisle was lying next to the sergeant. Presently the latter gave an exclamation, fired his rifle, and shifted his position behind the rock.

"Mutteh Ghar," he said, "I have seen you bring down three of the skulking ruffians. Do you see those two there close together, about forty yards away? There is a man behind them who has just carried off two of my fingers.

"Keep your eye on those rocks. Just above where they touch each other there is an opening, through which you can see the snow behind. That is where he fired from. Oblige me by putting a ball in his head, when he raises it."

A couple of minutes passed. Lisle was lying with his rifle on the spot. Presently the opening was obscured, and he fired at once.

"Thank you!" the sergeant said. "You got him, sure enough. The head did not disappear to one side or to the other, but went straight back. I fancy that you must have hit him between the eyes."

Presently the enemy's fire became still more furious and, several times, some of them rose and ran two paces forward, but only to fall prone under the defenders' fire.

"I expect they see help coming up," Lisle said, "and are making a last effort to wipe us out before they arrive.

"I think they will try a rush," he continued, in a louder voice; "see that your magazines are filled up, lads, and don't waste a shot if they come at us."

A minute later there was a shrill and prolonged cry and, at once, twenty dark figures burst from their shelter and rushed forward. The defenders also sprang to their feet, and their rifles flashed out with a stream of fire. But the vacancies thus caused in the enemy's ranks were immediately filled.

"Now with your bayonets," the sergeant shouted. "Keep in a close body, and do you two wounded men cover us with a constant fire."

Then, with a cheer, the six men and the sergeant rushed forward. Much as the Afridis feared the bayonet, confident in their strength they withstood the charge. They had, fortunately, emptied their rifles before rushing forward but, drawing their knives, they fought fiercely. These, however, were no match for the bayonets and, consequently, they suffered heavily.

Three of the Pioneers received severe gashes. The group were brought to a standstill, and they stood in a little circle while the attack continued. One sepoy was stabbed to the heart by a fanatic, who rushed at his bayonet and, pushing himself along, fell dead as he struck his fatal blow.

Things were looking very bad. Scarce one had escaped without a wound, and the sergeant had dropped, bleeding profusely; when, to their delight, a volley burst from within fifty yards of them and, in an instant, their assailants turned and bolted.

After the sergeant had dropped, Lisle had somehow taken his place, cheering the men on and lending his aid to those most severely pressed. Once or twice he managed, after despatching an assailant, to slip a couple of cartridges into his rifle, and so added to the execution. Indeed, it was in no small account due to his exertions, after the sergeant fell, that the resistance was maintained.

A minute later, the active little Ghoorkhas rushed forward; and those who first arrived passed the little knot of defenders with a cheer, and set off in pursuit of the enemy. Presently, however, one of their officers came up.

"You have had a stiff fight, lads," he said, "and by the look of the ground round about, you must have defended yourselves gallantly; for there are a dozen dead bodies lying near you, and I can see many more, a little way up the hill. What have been your losses?"

The sergeant raised himself on his elbow.

"We had two killed, as we came down," he said, "and two others wounded. I believe one has fallen here, and I think most of us are wounded with knife thrusts."

"Well, you have done splendidly, sergeant. I will detach men to help to carry you and the wounded men down to the camp. The others can accompany them. We shall take up the work, now; but I am afraid we sha'n't have any fighting, though we may shoot down a few as they make off. I fancy, however, that the lesson you have given the beggars has taken all fight out of them."

When half down the hill, they met a party of the Pioneers coming out. The Ghoorkhas at once handed the wounded over to them, and started up the hill again. The sergeant had fainted from loss of blood, and no questions were asked till the injured men were all placed in little hospital tents, and their wounds attended to. Two of them had bullet wounds, and three had received knife wounds on the shoulder or arm. Only Lisle and one other escaped unhurt. As soon as the wounds had been attended to all, except the sergeant, and two more seriously wounded than the others, were sent off to their tents.

One of these was Lisle's tent fellow. He said:

"Mutteh Ghar, I don't know what to say to you. You seem but a lad, and a light-hearted one; but you have proved yourself the best of us all. I was lying next to you, and I will swear that you brought down eight of them with your rifle, before they charged. Even while I was fighting I always

heard your voice, like a trumpet; and after the sergeant had fallen you seemed to take command, as if it was your right. You saved my life when you bayoneted two of the three who were grappling with me, and you seemed to be everywhere."

"I did what little I could," Lisle said. "I certainly did not intend to take the command, when the sergeant fell; but somehow I could not help shouting and, as our circle had closed in so, I slipped out of my place and fought wherever the pressure was greatest."

"There is no doubt," the soldier said seriously, "that your mother's statement was a true one, and that a fairy did promise her to look after you. Out of the eleven of us, only one besides yourself has escaped without a wound; and yet none of us exposed himself more than you did. I shall not forget that I owe my life to you. We must find some other name for you. You can't be called 'the boy' any longer."

In the morning, one of the colonel's orderlies was told to fetch Lisle.

"The colonel wishes to see you, Mutteh Ghar."

Lisle put on his uniform with some uneasiness. He was conscious that, in the excitement of the fight of the night before, he had frequently shouted in English; and he feared that the sergeant had reported this. However, he marched to the spot where the colonel and a group of officers were standing, and then stood at attention.

"Mutteh Ghar," the colonel said, "the sergeant this morning made his report; and he states that, though all his men behaved admirably, you distinguished yourself in a singular manner. He says that before the final attack began you had killed eight or ten of the Pathans, that you were fighting beside him when he was wounded, and that you then seemed to take the command. Although lying on the ground, he was able to see what was going on; and he says that but for your cheers, and for the manner in which you went to the assistance of men hard pressed, he is convinced that the whole detachment would have been killed before the Ghoorkhas arrived."

"I had no idea of assuming the command, sir; but my tongue always runs fast, and I dare say I did shout, almost unconsciously. I think the sergeant has made more of my doings than I deserved."

"I don't think it likely. It is no small thing for so young a soldier to so distinguish himself. The sergeant will not be able to resume his duties for some time, and I therefore appoint you a corporal; and shall put your name in orders, today, for very distinguished service. How long is it since you joined the regiment?"

"A short time before we marched."

"Well, you have done honour to the corps and, in the name of myself and my officers, I thank you."

Lisle saluted, and returned to the lines.

"The colonel has made me a corporal," he answered, as the others gathered round and questioned him.

A cheer burst from them, for his tent companion, and the other men who had returned, had all spoken in the highest terms of his conduct. Lisle was quite confused by the heartiness of their reception.

"He is a wonderfully young fellow," the colonel said, as he left them. "The sergeant said that he was young, but really he looks little more than a boy. Curiously, his face reminds me of someone, though I cannot say whom; and yet, if he only joined a short time before we marched, it is not likely that I should have noticed him before."

"It was the same thing with me, colonel," the major said. "I have noticed him several times on the march and, while the rest of the regiment were plodding on in silence, he always seemed the centre of a merry group. I have often said, to myself, I wished we had a few more men in the regiment who could take the hardships they had to undergo as lightly and as merrily as he does. His face has also struck me as being somehow familiar.

"I was speaking to the sergeant about him, and he said that he was the most popular man in his company, and a general favourite. His temperament is altogether different from that of the majority of our soldiers, which is earnest and quiet."

Two or three of the other officers also spoke of noticing the cheerful influence he seemed to have on the men.

"I must have a talk with him," the colonel said, "after the campaign is over, and find out something about it. It is quite evident that his pluck is as great as his cheerfulness, and it is certainly very extraordinary that a young and recently-joined soldier should have such an influence with men many years older than himself. If I am not mistaken, we shall find him in the ranks of the native officers, before long. Considering his age, and what he has already done, he may well hope some day, if he escapes being killed, to be risaldar major of the regiment.

"I should almost fancy that he must be the son of some native of good family, but without influence to secure him a post as officer; and that he has run away to endeavour to fight his way up to a commission."

Henceforth Lisle stood in high regard among his comrades, and was known as the 'fighting boy' in the regiment. He himself was always ready to answer to any name by which he was addressed. He had no desire to push himself forward to any prominence among them, or of thinking himself any way above his comrades; but naturally he was pleased at finding himself generally liked. He had come to see the fighting, and take part in it, and had no thought of distinguishing himself especially; as he intended to leave the regiment as soon as the campaign was over, and carry out the plan which his father had formed for him. He feared to excite the jealousy of his comrades and, though there were no signs of this, he felt that his promotion caused some difference in the manner of other men towards him.

This was so marked, indeed, that he could not help thinking that the men by whose side he had fought had reported to their comrades that, in the heat of the fight, he had several times shouted in English; and that there were general suspicions as to his identity. As long as this was not communicated to the officers it did not matter; and indeed this was not likely for, if the feeling was noticed by the native officers, it would soon come to the ears of Gholam Singh, who would at once order the men to keep silence concerning it.

Gradually his nickname changed, and he became known among the sepoys of the regiment as the "young sahib." He protested against it, but in vain. It was not, however, without its advantages. At the end of a long march, the men who had brought in firewood always handed him some. Men would offer to clean his rifle, cook his dinner, and do other little offices for him. He would, however, never accept these kind offers.

"Why do they call you sahib?" one of the English officers asked him, when he heard him so addressed.

"I do not know," he answered. "It is a silly joke of the men. I have protested against it, without success. If they chose to call me 'colonel,' I could not help it. I suppose it is because they see that I am, like the white officers, always cheerful and good tempered. There is certainly no other reason that I know of."

"The regiment have taken to call Mutteh Ghar 'the young sahib,'" the officer reported, at mess that day. "I asked him about it, and he says no doubt it is because he is, like us, always good tempered and cheerful."

"He is certainly very unlike the others," the major said. "I have no doubt the men consider it a great compliment, to him, to call him so."

"Do you know, colonel," one of the subalterns said, "the idea has struck me that he may be young Bullen, who may have joined the regiment surreptitiously, instead of going down to Calcutta."

There was silence among the others.

"It can hardly be that, Macdonald," the colonel said, "though it is certainly curious that we seemed to feel that we knew his face, when he came up before us. The young scamp could never have played such an audacious trick upon us."

"I don't know, colonel," the major said, "he is just the sort of lad that would try such a scheme. I know I have twice seen him talking with my butler; who was, as you know, Captain Bullen's servant."

"Well, it may possibly be so," the colonel said, "but at any rate it is only suspicion, and we had better leave the matter as it stands. If it is young Bullen, I don't know that he has done a bad thing for himself. If he goes on as he has begun, his experience will go a long way towards getting him a commission; and he will be a great deal better off than if he were grinding up for two years in England. Such a strong recommendation as I could give him would be of great value to him and, moreover, he has a claim on the ground that his father was killed on service.

"At any rate, we must take no action, whatever, at present. It is no slight thing he has done; that is, if it be he. Few of us would care to go through this campaign as sepoys–their work is terribly hard, poor fellows–to say nothing of the unpleasantness of having to live among the natives. I certainly shall consider that he has well earned a commission, if he comes through the campaign."

"But he is too young for one," the major said.

"I should not think it necessary to mention his age, in recommending him," the colonel said. "We know that he is doing a man's work, manfully. He has earned, as you say, the general liking of the men; and is a deal better fitted for a commission than half the fellows they send out to us.

"Well, we may all be mistaken, and he may only be a brave young fellow of good ancestry; so we will think no more of it, at present, and we will wait to see how things turn out, before showing any signs of our suspicions."

Now, however, that the idea had been mooted, the officers, as they went up and down the line, looked closer at Lisle than they had hitherto done; and all agreed that, in spite of his uniform and his colour, he was Captain Bullen's son. Ignorant of their suspicions, Lisle carried out his work, as usual, as a sub-officer. He shared the shelter tents of the men, and performed his duties regularly. He still carried a rifle; and indeed, if this had not been the rule he would not have accepted his promotion, as he preferred fighting with a weapon to which he was accustomed.

His work during the day was but little changed. When the regiment was marching in a column, four abreast, he had his appointed place by the side of it and, when they arrived in camp, it was part of his duty to see that the little tents were all pitched, rations distributed, kits handed over, and the men made as comfortable as possible. No sub-officer was obeyed with greater alacrity and, when he returned from his picket in the early morning, he always found his ration ready cooked for him.

It was impossible for him to help feeling pleased at these signs of the liking of the men, and he redoubled his efforts to cheer them on the line of march; and to aid any men who seemed unable to climb up through the snow, by carrying their rifles and ammunition pouches for them. He had long since grown accustomed to carrying weights, and was able to keep up with the most seasoned marchers.

On two or three occasions Gholam Singh was able to report favourably of his conduct, in thus relieving men of their arms. The colonel always took these communications in the ordinary way.

"There is no doubt," he said, when the conversation turned on the subject, "that Gholam Singh must have been an accessory to young Bullen's plot. I have been looking up the list of the deceased sepoys, and I find that a recruit of the same name died, two days before we marched. In some way young Bullen, if it is really the boy, contrived to take the dead man's place and name. This could have been very well done, without any of us knowing. None of us were familiar with the dead man's appearance, and Gholam Singh, and some of the other native officers, must have arranged that he should take his place. If this has been the case I shall, of course, be obliged to speak sharply to the risaldar major; but in reality I shall not be very angry with him, for he will certainly have done young Bullen a good turn."

"I am sure it is Bullen," one of the officers said, "for when I came up suddenly behind him, today, I heard him whistling an English tune. Of course, it may have been played by the band when we were in camp, but whistling is not a common Punjabi accomplishment, and I don't know that I ever heard native boys whistle before. He stopped directly I came up, but I could make no mistake about the tune; for I hung behind a little, and was amused at seeing the men marching by him trying to keep step, while they were over their knees in snow. I caught a grin on their faces at their failure, though they looked as grave as usual when they saw me."

"Well, we must let things go on as they are," the colonel said, "until we get to Chitral. Then we will have him up, and get to the bottom of the affair. If it turns out to be Bullen, he must at once leave the ranks and join us again. I shall then have to ask for a commission for him, and give him temporary rank as junior lieutenant, until an answer to my recommendation arrives. Even if it is not Bullen, it may be–unlikely as it seems–some other Englishman; but in any case, we could not allow an Englishman to be in the ranks."

"I don't think there is any doubt about it, colonel," the major said. "I have had a good look at him, several times, and could almost swear to his identity, well as he is got up."

Lisle pursued the regular course of his work, in happy unconsciousness that any suspicion as to his identity entered the minds of his officers. His spirits were now not forced; the fatiguing marches, the night pickets, and the pressure of his duty so occupied his thoughts that he had little time to dwell upon his loss. It was now three months since his father had died, and yet it seemed to him in the far distance, so much had happened since. Occasionally he thought with disgust that, when this was all over, he must return to England to the uncle he had never seen, and become a schoolboy, spending his days in study; and perhaps, in the end, fail to pass his examination. He would be a stranger amongst strangers. He could not expect that his uncle should feel any particular interest in a lad he had never before seen, and he drew pictures to himself of the long, friendless interval before, even at the best, he could again don a uniform.

But upon such thoughts he did not allow himself to dwell. It had to be done, and he would, he supposed, get through it all right. He might find friends among the fellows at the same crammer's. At any rate, three years would soon pass, and he must make the best of it.

"I suppose the crammer will be in London," he said. "Everything there will be new to me and, no doubt, I shall find it very interesting. They say that it is an immense place, to which even the biggest Indian city is but a mere trifle. It will be curious to see everyone in dark clothes, with none of the gay colouring of India.

"Father often said that the pleasantest time of his life was the years he spent in England, while he was cramming for his exam. There were theatres, and all sorts of other places of amusement. He had the best of companions and, after they had finished their work, they were at liberty to do pretty nearly whatever they liked.

"I think I shall get my uncle to send me to the same crammer as father went to, if he is still alive. I put down his address once, in my pocketbook, and shall be able to find it again when I get down to Calcutta, and recover my traps.

"Well, I need not worry myself by thinking of it, now. It will all come some day, and I dare say I shall find it pleasant enough, when I once get accustomed to it."

Such thoughts often passed through his mind at night for, during the day, he had not a minute to himself. He was almost sure, now, that the men had discovered his identity, by the many little marks of kindness they had shown him, and by the manner in which his fellow sub-officers always spoke to him with a certain air of respect. This, however, did not worry him. He felt certain that they would keep the secret; and at the end of the campaign he must, of course, disclose himself and obtain his discharge. Until then, no one would have time to think much of the matter, still less find any opportunity of reporting it to Colonel Kelly.

He wondered how the colonel would take it, when he went up to say who he was. He did not think he would be very seriously angry, though probably he would wig him sharply. At any rate he had not done badly, and had brought no discredit to the regiment.

He had unconsciously adopted the regimental belief that he was a lucky man, and should get through the campaign unhurt. He was particularly anxious that he should do so as, were he confined in hospital for a few days, he would have no opportunity of renewing his stain; in which case he would undoubtedly be detected. They had advanced so far now, however, that even if he were discovered, they could hardly send him back before he got to Chitral. He might, of course, be detained at Reshun, which would be a horrible nuisance.

One night his camp mate said to him:

"You ought to be with the officers, Bullen sahib. It is not right for you to be working as we do."

"Why do you call me Bullen Sahib, Pertusal?"

"Everyone knows it, sahib. Little by little we nave found you out. We had some suspicions from the first, but now we are sure of it. Only your father's son would have fought as you did on the hill and, when we came to look very closely at you, we all recognized you, in spite of your dye."

"Then I wish I hadn't fought quite so hard, Pertusal, for I had hoped that I had altogether escaped recognition. I thought that I could have gone through the campaign without anyone suspecting who I was."

"We did not suspect at first, sahib. We quite took you for one of ourselves. No, the cheerfulness with which you bore your hardships, and your readiness to assist anyone, surprised us. You were so different from us all that we could not help wondering who you were; but I don't think any of us really suspected that you were Captain Bullen's son, till that fight. I know that when I was busy fighting, sorely pushed as we were, I wondered when I heard you shout in English; and I had heard you call out so often, when you were playing cricket with the officers, that I recognized your voice at once.

"Then the wonder that we felt about you ceased. It seemed for a moment impossible, for I had seen you go off with the sick convoy. Then it seemed to me that it was just the thing that Captain Bullen's son might be expected to do. You would naturally want to see fighting, but I did wonder how you managed to come back and get enlisted into the regiment. I remember, now, that I wondered a little the first night you joined. You were in uniform and, as a rule, recruits don't go into uniform for some time after they have joined. It was therefore remarkable that you should turn up in uniform, rifle and all."

"It was the uniform of the original Mutteh Ghar," Lisle said. "My servant had managed to get it; and the story that I was the man's cousin, and was therefore permitted to take his place, was natural enough to pass."

"But some of our officers must have helped you, sahib?"

"Well, I won't say anything about that. I did manage to join in the way I wanted, and you and your comrade were both very kind to me."

"That was natural enough, sahib. You were a young recruit, and we understood that you were put with us two old soldiers in order that we might teach you your duty. It was not long, however, before we found that there was very little teaching necessary for, at the end of a week, you knew your work as well as any man in the regiment. We thought you a wonder, but we kept our thoughts to ourselves.

"Now that we know who you are, all the regiment is proud that your father's son has come among us, and shared our lot down to the smallest detail. I noticed that you were rather clumsy with your cooking, but even in that respect you soon learned how things should be done.

"I suppose, sahib, we shall lose you at the end of the campaign?"

"Yes; I shall have to start for England, at once; for in order to gain a commission, I must study hard for two or three years. Of course, I shall then have to declare myself to the officers, in order to get my discharge. I am afraid that the colonel will be very angry, but I cannot help that. I am quite

sure, however, that he will let me go, as soon as he knows who I am. It will be rather fun to see the surprise of the officers."

"I don't think the colonel will be angry, sahib. He might have been, if you had not done so well; but as it is, he cannot but be pleased that Captain Bullen's son should have so distinguished himself, even in the 32nd Pioneers, who have the reputation of being one of the best fighting regiments in all India."

"Well, I hope so, Pertusal. At any rate, I am extremely glad I came. I have seen what fighting is, and that under the most severe conditions. I have proved to myself that I can bear hardships without flinching; and I shall certainly be proud, all my life, that I have been one in the column for the relief of Chitral–that is to say, if we are the first."

"We shall be the first," the soldier said, positively. "It is hard work enough getting our baggage over the passes; but it will be harder still for the Peshawar force, encumbered with such a train as they will have to take with them.

"Ah! Sahib, if only our food were so condensed that we could carry a supply for twelve days about us, what would we not be able to do? We could rout the fiercest tribe on the frontier, without difficulty. We could march about fifteen or twenty miles a day, and more than that, if necessary. We could do wonders, indeed."

"I am afraid we shall never discover that," Lisle said. "The German soldiers do indeed carry condensed meat in sausages, and can take three or four days' supplies with them; but we have not yet discovered anything like food of which men could carry twelve days' supply. We may some day be able to do it but, even if it weighed but a pound a day, it would add heavily to the load to be carried."

"No one would mind that," Pertusal said. "Think what a comfort it would be, if we could make our breakfast before starting, eat a little in the middle of the day, and be sure of supper directly we got into camp; instead of having to wait hours and hours, and perhaps till the next morning, before the baggage train arrived. I would willingly carry double my present load, if I felt sure that I would gain that advantage. I know that the officers have tins of condensed milk, one of which can make more than a gallon; and that they carry cocoa, and other things, of which a little goes a long way. Now, if they could condense rice and ghee like that, we should be able to carry all that is necessary with us for twelve days. Mutton we could always get on a campaign, for the enemy's flocks are at our disposal; and it must be a bare place, indeed, where we could not find enough meat to keep us going. It is against our religion to eat beef, but few of us would hesitate to do so, on a campaign; and oxen are even more common than sheep.

"It is very little baggage we should have to take with us, then. Twenty ponies would carry sufficient for the regiment; and if government did but buy us good mules, we could always rely upon getting them into camp before dark. See what an advantage that would be! Ten men would do for the escort; whereas, at present, a hundred is not sufficient."

"Well, I wish it could be so," Lisle said. "But although some articles of food might be compressed, I don't think we should ever be able to compress rice or ghee. A handful of rice, when it is boiled, makes enough for a meal; and I don't imagine that it could possibly be condensed more than that."

"Well, it is getting late, and we march at daylight. Fortunately we have not to undress, but have only to turn in as we are."

Chapter 4: In The Passes

The march after leaving Dahimol was a short one. Here they were met by the governor of the upper parts of the valley, and he gave them very useful details of the state of parties in Chitral, and of the roads they would have to follow. He accompanied the force on the next day's march, and billeted all the troops in the villages; for which they were thankful enough, for they were now getting pretty high up in the hills, and the nights were decidedly cold.

They were now crossing a serious pass, and had reached the snow line; and the troops put on the goggles they had brought with them to protect their eyes from the dazzling glare of the snow. At two o'clock they reached the post at Ghizr, which was held by a body of Kashmir sappers and miners. The place had been fortified, and surrounded by a strong zereba. The troops were billeted in the neighbouring houses, and they halted for a day, in order to allow the second detachment of the Pioneers and the guns to come up. Here, also, they were joined by a hundred men of the native levies.

When they prepared for the start, the next morning, they found that a hundred of the coolies had bolted during the night. Two officers were despatched to find and fetch them back. Fifty were fortunately discovered, in a village not far off, and with these and some country ponies the force started. They passed up the valley and came upon a narrow plain. Here the snow was waist deep, and the men were forced to move in single file, the leaders changing places every hundred yards or so.

At last they came to a stop. The gun mules sank to their girths in the snow and, even then, were unable to obtain a footing. Men were sent out to try the depth of the snow on both sides of the valley, but they found no improvement. Obviously it was absolutely impossible for the mules and ponies to get farther over the snow, in its present state. It was already three o'clock in the afternoon, and only eight miles had been covered. The force therefore retired to the last village in the valley. Two hundred Pioneers under Borradaile, the sappers, and the Hunza levies were left here, with all the coolie transport.

Borradaile's orders were to force his way across the pass, next day; and entrench himself at Laspur, the first village on the other side. He was then to send back the coolies, in order that the remainder of the force might follow. With immense trouble and difficulty, the kits of the party that were to proceed were sorted out from the rest, the ammunition was divided and, at seven o'clock, the troops who were to return to Ghizr started on their cold march. They reached their destination after having been on foot some fifteen hours.

Lisle was with the advance party. They were all told off to houses in the little village. Fires were lighted and the weary men cooked their food and, huddling close together, and keeping the fires alight, slept in some sort of comfort. Next morning at daybreak they turned out and found, to their disgust, that the snow was coming down heavily, and that the difficulties would be even greater than on the previous day. Borradaile therefore sent back one of the levies, with a letter saying that it was impossible to advance; but that if the sky cleared, he would start on the following morning.

The Kashmir troops at Ghizr volunteered to go forward, and make a rush through the snow; and Stewart and his lieutenant, Gough, set out with fifty of them, taking with them half a dozen sledges that had been made out of boxes. On arriving at Tern, Stewart found fodder enough for the mules, and begged that the guns might be sent up. Borradaile had started early; and Stewart with the fifty Kashmir troops followed, staggering along dragging the guns and ammunition. The snow had ceased, but there was a bitter wind, and the glare from the newly-fallen snow was terrible.

The guns, wheels, and ammunition had been told off to different squads, who were relieved every fifty yards. In spite of the cold, the men were pouring with perspiration. At one point in the march a stream had to be crossed. This was done only with great difficulty, and the rear guard did not reach the camping ground, at the mouth of the Shandur Pass, until eleven at night; and even then

the guns had to be left a mile behind. Then the weary men had to cut fuel to light fires. Many of them were too exhausted to attempt to cook food, and at once went to sleep round the fires.

Early the next morning, the Pioneers and levies started to cross the pass. The Kashmir men brought up the guns into camp but, though the distance was short, the work took them the best part of the day. The march was not more than ten miles; but Borradaile's party, though they left Langar at daylight, did not reach Laspur till seven o'clock at night. The slope over the pass was a gradual one, and it was the depth of the snow, alone, that caused so much delay. The men suffered greatly from thirst, but refused to eat the snow, having a fixed belief that, if they did so, it would bring on violent illness.

On arriving at the top of the pass, the Hunza levies skirmished ahead. So unexpected was their arrival that the inhabitants of the village were all caught and, naturally, they expressed their extreme delight at this visit, and said that they would be glad to help us in any way. They were taken at their word, and sent back to bring up the guns. Their surprise was not feigned, for the Chitralis were convinced that it would be impossible to cross the pass, and letters were found stating that the British force was lying at Ghizr.

The feat, indeed, was a splendid one. Some two hundred and fifty men, Hindoos and Mussulmans had, at the worst time of the year, brought two mountain guns, with their carriages and ammunition, across a pass which was blocked for some twenty miles by deep, soft snow; at the same time carrying their own rifles, eighty rounds of ammunition, and heavy sheepskin coats. They had slept for two nights on the snow and, from dawn till dark, had been at work to the waist at every step, suffering acutely from the blinding glare and the bitter wind. Stewart and Gough had both taken their turns in carrying the guns, and both gave their snow glasses to sepoys who were without them.

Borradaile's first step was to put the place in a state of defence, and collect supplies and coolies. In the evening the guns were brought in by the Kashmir troops, who were loudly cheered by the Pioneers.

Lisle had borne his share in the hardships and had done so bravely, making light of the difficulties and cheering his comrades by his jokes. He had escaped the thirst which had been felt by so many, and was one of those who volunteered to assist in erecting defences, on the evening of their arrival at Laspur.

At two o'clock the next day, the rest of the force came into camp. A reconnoitring party went out and, three miles ahead, came upon the campfires of the enemy. They were seen, three miles farther down the valley, engaged in building sangars; but as the force consisted of only one hundred and fifty men, it was not thought advisable to attack, and the troops consequently returned to camp.

The next day was spent in making all the arrangements for the advance. Messengers were sent out to all the villages, calling on the men to come in and make their submission. This they did, at the same time bringing in supplies and, by night, a sufficient number of native coolies had been secured to carry all the baggage, including ammunition and guns.

A native chief came in with a levy of ninety native coolies. These were found most valuable, both in the work and in obtaining information. From their knowledge of the habits of the people, they were able to discover where the natives had hidden their supplies; which was generally in the most unlikely places.

The reconnoitring party had found that, some six miles on, the snow ceased; and all looked forward with delight to the change. A small garrison of about a hundred, principally levies, were left at Laspur; with instructions to come on when the second party arrived. The main force started at nine o'clock.

At Rahman the snow was left behind. Here they learned that the enemy would certainly fight, between the next village and Mastuj. Lieutenant Beynon went on with a party of levies and gained a hill, from which he could view the whole of the enemy's position. Here he could, with the aid of his glasses, count the men in each sangar, and make out the paths leading up the cliffs from the river.

When he had concluded his observations, he returned and reported to Colonel Kelly; and orders were issued for the attack, the next day.

The levies were expected to join the next morning. They were to advance with a guide, and turn out the enemy from the top of a dangerous shoot; from which they would be enabled to hurl down rocks upon the main body, as it advanced. Beynon was to start, at six, to work through the hills to the right rear of the enemy's position. The main body were to move forward at nine o'clock.

Beynon encountered enormous difficulties and, in many places, he and his men had to go on all fours to get along. He succeeded, however, in driving off the enemy; who occupied a number of sangars on the hills, and who could have greatly harassed the main body by rolling down rocks upon them.

The enemy's principal position consisted of sangars blocking the roads to the river, up to a fan-shaped alluvial piece of ground. The road led across this ground to the foot of a steep shoot, within five hundred yards of sangars on the opposite side of the river and, as it was totally devoid of any sort of shelter, it could be swept by avalanches of stones, by a few men placed on the heights for the purpose.

When the troops arrived within eight hundred yards, volley firing was opened; and the guns threw shells on the sangar on the extreme right of the enemy's position. The enemy were soon seen leaving it, and the fire was then directed on the next place, with the same result. Meanwhile Beynon had driven down those of the enemy who were posted on the hill; and general panic set in, the guns pouring shrapnel into them until they were beyond range.

The action was over in an hour after the firing of the first shot. The losses on our side were only one man severely, and three slightly wounded. After a short rest, the force again proceeded, and halted at a small village a mile and a half in advance. A ford was found, and the column again started. Presently they met a portion of the garrison who, finding the besieging force moving away, came out to see the reason.

In the meantime, the baggage column was being fiercely attacked; and an officer rode up, with the order that the 4th company were to go back to their assistance. The company was standing in reserve, eager to go forward to join in the fight and, without delay, they now went off at the double.

They were badly wanted. The baggage was struggling up the last kotal that the troops had passed, and the rear guard were engaged in a fierce fight with a great number of the enemy; some of whom were posted on a rise, while others came down so boldly that the struggle was sometimes hand to hand. When the 4th company reached the scene, they were at once scattered along the line of baggage.

For a time the enemy fell back but, seeing that the reinforcement was not a strong one, they were emboldened to attack again. Their assaults were repulsed with loss, but the column suffered severely from the fire on the heights.

"We must stop here," the officer in command said, "or we shall not get the baggage through before nightfall; and then they would have us pretty well at their mercy. The Punjabis must go up and clear the enemy off the hill, till the baggage has got through."

The Punjabis were soon gathered and, led by an English officer, they advanced up the hill at a running pace, until they came to a point so precipitous that they were sheltered from the enemy's fire. Here they were halted for a couple of minutes to gain breath, and then the order was given to climb the precipitous hill, which was some seventy feet high.

It was desperate work, for there were points so steep that the men were obliged to help each other up. Happily they were in shelter until they got to within twenty feet of its summit, the intervening distance being a steep slope. At this point they waited until the whole party had come up; and then, with a cheer, dashed up the slope.

The effect was instantaneous. The enemy, though outnumbering them by five to one, could not for a moment withstand the line of glittering bayonets; and fled precipitately, receiving volley after

volley from the Pioneers. As the situation was commanded by still higher slopes, the men were at once ordered to form a breastwork, from the stones that were lying about thickly. After a quarter of an hour's severe work, this was raised to a height of three feet, which was sufficient to enable the men to lie down in safety.

By the time the work was done, the enemy were again firing heavily, at a distance of four hundred yards, their bullets pattering against the stones. The Punjabis, however, did not return the fire but, turning round, directed their attention to the enemy on the other side of the valley, who were also in considerable force.

"Here!" the officer said to Lisle, "do you think you can pick off that fellow in the white burnoose? He is evidently an important leader, and it is through his efforts that the enemy continues to make such fierce attacks."

"I will try, sir," Lisle replied in Punjabi; "but I take it that the range must be from nine hundred to a thousand yards, which is a long distance for a shot at a single man."

Lying down at full length, he carefully aimed and fired. The officer was watching through his field glass.

"That was a good shot," he said. "You missed the man, but you killed a fellow closely following him. Lower your back sight a trifle, and try again."

The next shot also missed, but the third was correctly aimed, and the Pathan dropped to the ground. Some of his men at once carried off his body. His fall created much dismay; and as, at that moment, the whole of the Punjabis began to pepper his followers with volley firing, they lost heart and quickly retired up the hill.

"Put up your sights to twelve hundred yards," the officer said. "You must drive them higher up, if you can; for they do us as much harm, firing from there, as they would lower down. Fire independently. Don't hurry, but take good aim.

"That was a fine shot of yours, Mutteh Ghar," he said to Lisle, by whose side he was still standing; for they had gone so far down the slope that they were sheltered from the fire behind. "But for his fall, the baggage guard would have had to fight hard, for he was evidently inciting his men to make a combined rush. His fall, however, took the steam out of them altogether. How came you to be such a good shot?"

"My father was fond of shooting," Lisle said, "and I used often to go out with him."

"Well, you benefited by his teaching, anyhow," the officer said. "I doubt if there is any man in the regiment who could have picked off that fellow, at such a distance, in three shots. That has really been the turning point of the day.

"See, the baggage is moving on again. In another hour they will be all through.

"Now, lads, turn your attention to those fellows on the hill behind. As we have not been firing at them for some time, they will probably think we are short of ammunition. Let us show them that our pouches are still pretty full! We must drive them farther away for, if we do not, we shall get it hot when we go down to join the rear guard. Begin with a volley, and then continue with independent firing, at four hundred yards."

The tribesmen were standing up against the skyline.

"Now, be careful. At this distance, everyone ought to bring down his man."

Although that was not accomplished, a number of men were seen to fall, and the rest retired out of sight. Presently heads appeared, as the more resolute crawled back to the edge of the crest; and a regular duel now ensued. Four hundred yards is a short range with a Martini rifle, and it was not long before the Punjabis proved that they were at least as good shots as the tribesmen. They had the advantage, too, of the breastwork behind which to load, and had only to lift their heads to fire; whereas the Pathans were obliged to load as they lay.

Presently the firing ceased, but the many black heads dotting the edge of the crest testified to the accurate aim of the troops. The tribesmen, seeing that their friends on the other side of the valley had withdrawn, and finding that their own fire did not avail to drive their assailants back, had at last moved off.

For half an hour the Pioneers lay, watching the progress of the baggage and, when the last animal was seen to pass, they retired, taking up their position behind the rear guard. The column arrived in camp just as night fell.

"That young Bullen can shoot," the officer who commanded the company said, that evening, as the officers gathered round their fire. "When, as I told you, we had driven off the fellows on the right of the valley, things were looking bad on the left, where a chief in a white burnoose was working up a strong force to make a rush. I put young Bullen on to pick him off. The range was about nine hundred and fifty yards. His first shot went behind the chief. I did not see where the next shot struck, but I have no doubt it was close to him. Anyhow, the third rolled him over. I call that splendid shooting, especially as it was from a height, which makes it much more difficult to judge distance.

"The chief's fall took all the pluck out of the tribesmen and, as we opened upon them in volleys, they soon went to the right about. We peppered them all the way up the hill and, as I could see from my glasses, killed a good many of them. However, it took all the fight out of them, and they made no fresh attempt to harass the column."

"The young fellow was a first-rate shot," the colonel said. "If you remember he carried off several prizes, and certainly shot better than most of us; though there were one or two of the men who were his match. You did not speak to him in English, I hope, Villiers?"

"No, no, colonel. You said that he was to go on as if we did not know him, till we reached Chitral; and of course spoke to him in Punjabi.

"One thing is certain: if he had not brought down that chief, the enemy would have been among the baggage in a minute or two; so his shot was really the turning point of the fight."

"I will make him a present of twenty rupees, in the morning," the colonel said. "That is what I should have given to any sepoy who made so useful a shot, and it will be rather fun to see how he takes it."

"You will see he will take it without winking," the major said. "He will know very well that any hesitation would be noticed, and he will take it as calmly as if he were a native."

Accordingly the next morning, as the regiment fell in, the colonel called Lisle out from the ranks.

"Mutteh Ghar," he said, "Lieutenant Villiers reports that you did great service, yesterday, in picking off the leader of the Pathans who were attacking the column from the left. Here are twenty rupees, as a token of my satisfaction."

Lisle did not hesitate for a moment, but took off his turban, and held it out for the colonel to drop the money into it; murmuring his thanks as he did so. Then he put on his turban again, saluted, and retired.

"I told you he would not hesitate, colonel," the major laughed. "The young beggar was as cool as a cucumber, and I doubt if we should catch him napping, however much we tried."

"He is a fine young fellow, major, and will make a splendid officer. I shall be disappointed, indeed, if I fail to get him a commission."

"I don't think you are likely to fail, colonel. The young fellow has really distinguished himself greatly. Even without that, the fact that he enlisted to go through the campaign, and took his share with the troops both in their fighting and their hardships, would show that he really deserved a commission; even putting aside the fact of his father's death. It would be a thousand pities if such a promising young fellow should have to waste the next three years of his life, cramming up classics and mathematics. It would be like putting a young thoroughbred into a cart."

"That is so," the colonel said; "but there is no answering for the War Office, or saying what view they may take of any given subject. However, if we get first to Chitral, as I feel sure we shall do, I suppose I shall be in high favour; and they won't like to refuse so small a request, backed as it is by the facts of the case."

At half-past five the force marched into Mastuj, and found the garrison comfortably settled there, and well fed. The fort was a square building, with a tower at each corner and at the gateway. Late in the evening the baggage came in. The enemy had made no serious attack upon the place; and Moberley, who was in command, had even been able to send a force to Buni, whence they brought off Jones and the survivors of Ross's force.

The next day a fatigue party were sent out to destroy the enemy's sangars and, on the same day, the remaining half of the Pioneers came up. The day was spent by those in the fort in examining the state of supplies; and despatching messengers to all the villages round ordering them to send in supplies, and coolies to carry the baggage.

On the morning of the 1st of April, Beynon was sent on to reconnoitre the enemy's position; and returned with the report that it was a strong one. They had got very close to it, and had a fair view

of the position. Next morning the force started, the levies being ahead. It was a fine, bright morning. They crossed the river on a bridge built by the sappers.

When they reached the maidan, they found that it was a gentle, grassy slope. The levies were in advance, with two companies in the firing line, two in support, and the Kashmir company in reserve. In this order they pushed on, until they came under the fire of the sangars. Stewart brought his guns into action. After a time, the fire of the levies drove the enemy from the nearest sangar; while three of the Pioneer companies paid attention to another sangar.

Beynon was sent on, to find some way down into the valley. He found no path leading to the nullah. The drop from the edge was sheer, for some seventy feet; then came a ledge from which he thought they could scramble down to the edge of the stream, and thence to the opposite side, where he noticed a track. With this information, he went back to report to Colonel Kelly.

The sappers were brought up and, also, a reserve company of Kashmir troops. When Beynon got back to the nullah, he found the Pioneers extended along the edge, and Oldham's sappers already at work. These, aided by ropes and scaling ladders, got down to the ledge; and from this point they and Oldham slung themselves down to the bed of the stream, by the same means. A few sappers had followed, when a box of dynamite exploded with a violent detonation, and the rest of the company were called back.

Lisle happened to be stationed at the point where the descent was made, and when the explosion took place he seized the rope and, sliding down, joined the two officers and the eleven sappers who had passed. They scrambled to the opposite side, and saw that the Pioneers were moving down the nullah towards the river, while the levies were nearing the sangars. The enemy were seen bolting, and the little party opened fire upon them. The sappers were armed only with carbines, which were uncertain at so long a range; but Lisle, with his rifle, brought down an enemy at every shot.

"That is a good one," he muttered, as a mounted officer at whom he had aimed fell from his horse.

He was startled when the man behind him said:

"Hillo, young fellow, who on earth are you?

"I will tell you after it is done, sir," Lisle said. "But I hope you will keep my secret."

Some of the levies and a few Pioneers now came up, and they learned what had been the cause of the explosion. The Kashmir company had not followed and, as the sappers were at work, they had laid down cakes of dynamite at the head of the pass. One of the enemy's bullets striking these had ignited them, and the troops there were called upon to retire. The enemy, seeing our men falling back, rushed out of their sangars and opened fire; but were speedily driven in again by volleys from the Pioneers. Just then the levies showed on the ridge, and the Pioneers moved down the nullah, by a goat track they had found.

The battle was now over, and a company of Pioneers were sent ahead to the next village, while the rest of the force encamped. When all were settled down, Lisle saw Lieutenant Moberley walking along the lines of the regiment, and evidently looking for someone. Lisle hesitated a minute. If he remained quiet he might not be recognized by the officer, but in that case the latter might report what he had heard, and an investigation might be made. He therefore went forward to the officer.

"Ah!" the latter said, "you are the man I heard speak in English."

"It was very foolish, sir, but I had no idea that I should be overheard."

"Well, who are you, and how in the world is it that you are a private in the Pioneers?"

"My father was Captain Bullen, who was killed in a native raid. I remained with the regiment for a time, because there was no opportunity of my being sent home. I wanted to see the campaign, so I took the place of a sepoy who had died and, as I speak the language perfectly, it has never been suspected that I was anything but what I seem."

"Well, lad, I will keep your secret for a time, but when we get to Chitral I think it will be my duty to tell the colonel; especially as I shall report that you were with me, and behaved with the greatest

coolness, accounting for at least eight of the enemy. The campaign will be over, then, for we know that the Peshawar column are also near Chitral, so that there will be no chance of further fighting.

"I don't suppose you will be sent home. You have shown yourself a man, and I have no doubt that Colonel Kelly will make some mention in his report of your conduct, and strongly recommend you for a commission. In the circumstances, I should think it would be granted."

"Thank you indeed, sir! I am very comfortable as I am."

"How old are you?

"I am nearly sixteen, sir."

"Well, it won't be necessary to report that, for the people at home would consider you too young. I am sure you deserve a commission for the pluck you showed, in taking your place as a private among the natives. Your knowledge of the language, too, will be an argument in your favour.

"How was it that you joined our little party?"

"I acted on the impulse of the moment. I happened to be at the spot when your party were going down, and I saw that you would soon be in the thick of it, while we were only firing. I was just thinking about it, when there was a great burst of flame behind me. I did not know what it was, but that decided me. I caught hold of the rope and slipped down.

"Thank you very much for your promise, sir," and, saluting, Lisle drew back to his comrades.

"What was he saying to you?" one asked.

"He was asking how it was that I came to be among his party; and when I explained how it was that I left my place, he seemed perfectly satisfied; so I don't expect I shall hear anything more about it."

On the first day's march they came upon a deserted fort, where enough grain was discovered to last the force for months. Enough flour was also found to give a shovelful to each of the coolies; who were highly gratified, for most of them were altogether without food. The remainder of the flour was distributed among the sepoys, and as much grain was taken as carriage could be found for.

The next day's march was through a cultivated country. Six more marches took them to Chitral. They met with no opposition whatever, and their greatest trouble was in crossing rivers, the bridges having been destroyed.

When within a day's march from Chitral, they met a man bearing letters from the town. It was from Mr. Robertson, saying that Sher Afzul had fled on the night of the 18th of April; and that on that night the siege was raised. It also contained a list of the casualties, to be forwarded to England; the number being a hundred and four killed and wounded, out of one thousand and seventy combatants.

The force marched in at noon, the next day; and were received with great joy by the garrison. They bivouacked round the castle and, on the following day, the Kashmir garrison came out and camped with them; rejoicing much at the change from the poisoned atmosphere of the fort. They were mere walking skeletons.

Some days later the 3rd Brigade under General Gatacre arrived, followed by General Low and the headquarter staff.

The day after their arrival at Chitral, one of Kelly's orderlies came into the line and enquired for Mutteh Ghar. A short time before, Lisle had noticed Gholam Singh leave the colonel's tent; and guessed that he had been sharply questioned, by the colonel, as to the name he had gone under in the regiment. He at once followed the orderly to the tent.

"This is a nice trick you have played us, Lisle," the colonel said, as he entered. "To think that while we all thought you on your way down to Calcutta, you were acting as a private in the regiment! It was very wrong of Gholam Singh to consent to your doing so; but I was so pleased to know that you were here that I could not bring it in my heart to blow him up as he deserved. Unquestionably, he acted from the respect and affection that he felt for your father.

"What put the idea into your head?"

"I had quite made up my mind to go with the regiment, sir; and should have come as a mule driver or a coolie, if I had not got into the ranks."

"Well, it is done and cannot be undone. Lieutenant Moberley has reported most favourably of your conduct in the last fight, and Gholam Singh says that your conduct as a private has been excellent. You have become a great favourite with the men, by the cheerfulness with which you bore the hardships of the march; and kept up the spirits of the men by your jokes and example.

"But of course, this cannot go on. You must again become one of us and, on the march down, do officer's duty. I shall not fail to report the matter, and shall recommend you for a commission. I feel sure that, as the son of Captain Bullen, and for the services you have rendered during the campaign, together with your knowledge of the language, my recommendation will be effective.

"But I don't know what we can do about clothes. We are all practically in rags, and have only the things that we stand in."

"I have brought a suit with me in my kit, sir; and as we have had no inspection of kits, since we marched, they have not been noticed."

"Very well, lad. Put them on, and come back again in an hour. I will have the other officers of the regiment here. They will, I am sure, all be heartily glad to see you again.

"I suppose that stain won't get off you, for some time?"

"I don't think it will last over a week, sir; for I have had no chance of renewing it since our last fight. It is not so dark as it was, by a good bit; and I had intended to steal away, today, and renew it."

"We are all so sun burnt, or rather so snow burnt, that you are not much darker than the rest of us. Well, then, I shall expect you in an hour. You will, of course, hand over your uniform, rifle, and accoutrements to the quartermaster sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

Lisle went back to the lines and, taking his kit, went some little distance out of camp. Here he took off his uniform and put on the clothes he had worn before starting. He folded the uniform up and placed it, with his rifle and accoutrements, in a little heap.

Then he went to the tent where Robah's master lived. He had often spoken to Robah during the march and, waiting till he could catch his eye, he beckoned to him to come to him. Robah was immensely surprised at seeing him in his civilian dress, and hurried up to him.

"I have been found out, Robah, and am to join the officers on the march down. I am at present a young gentleman at large. You see that tree up there? At the foot you will find my uniform, rifle, and accoutrements. I want you to carry them to the quartermaster sergeant, and tell him to put them in store, as Mutteh Ghar has left the regiment. Of course, the story will soon be known, but I don't wish it to get about till I have seen the colonel again. I am glad to say that he is not angry with me; and has not reprimanded Gholam Singh, very severely, for aiding me in the matter."

Robah at once started on his mission, and Lisle then went into the camp, and strolled about until it was time to repair to the colonel's tent. He found the eight officers of the regiment gathered there.

"We were not mistaken, gentlemen," the colonel said. "This young scamp, instead of going down to Calcutta, left the convoy after it had marched a mile or two. Gholam Singh was in the secret, and had furnished him with the uniform and rifle of a man who had died, the day before. He put this on and marched boldly in. The other native officers of the company were in the secret, and gave out to the men that this was a new recruit, a cousin of the man we had just lost.

"Under that title he has passed through the campaign; living with the soldiers, sharing all their hardships; and being, for a time at least, altogether unsuspected of being aught but what he appeared. Gholam Singh said that his conduct was excellent; that he was a great favourite, with the men, for the good humour with which he bore the hardships. He was with Beynon and Moberley, and showed great pluck and steadiness in picking off several of the enemy, as they fled.

"Fortunately, Moberley overheard him mutter to himself in English, and so the matter came out. Moberley promised to keep silence till we got here and, this morning, he told the whole story. Of

course, we could not have poor Bullen's son remaining a private in the Pioneers, and he has joined us under the old conditions. I have given him the rank of lieutenant, and shall recommend him for a commission; which I have no doubt he will get, not only as the son of an officer who had done excellent service, but for the pluck and enterprise he has shown. His perfect knowledge of Punjabi will also, of course, count in his favour."

The officers all shook hands cordially with him, and congratulated him on the manner in which he had carried out his disguise; and he was at once made a member of the mess. Afterwards, two or three of them walked with him down to the lines of his company. The men regarded them with interest, and then burst into a loud cheer.

"That is good," the officer said. "It shows that you like him. Henceforth he will rank as one of the officers; and I hope you will all like him, in that capacity, as well as you did when he was one of yourselves."

They then walked off, leaving the company in a state of excitement.

In the afternoon, at mess, Lisle learned the whole details of the siege, which had been gathered from the officers of the garrison. On March 2nd, Mr. Robertson received information that Sher Afzul had arrived in the valley and, the next day, news came that he was, with a large following, at a small house in a ravine, about a mile and a quarter from the fort. Captain Campbell, with two hundred of the Kashmir Rifles, was sent out to make a reconnaissance. He was accompanied by Captains Townshend and Baird, and by Surgeon Captain Whitchurch and Lieutenant Gurdon. The rest were left in the bazaar, to hold the road.

The enemy, one hundred and fifty strong, were seen on the bare spur which forms the right bank of the ravine. To test whether or not they were hostile, a single shot was fired over them. They at once opened a heavy fire on the party and, at the same time, Captain Townshend became engaged with some of the enemy who were in hiding among rocks–evidently in considerable strength. It was subsequently discovered that, very shortly after Captain Campbell's party left the fort, and before hostilities began, the enemy had opened fire on the fort, and had crossed the river.

Captain Baird now advanced across the mouth of the ravine, and charged up the spur; the enemy retreating before them, firing as they went. Captain Baird fell, mortally wounded; and Lieutenant Gurdon, who had carried a message to him, was left in command. The enemy descended into the ravine and, crossing to the left bank, took Gurdon in rear.

In the meantime, affairs had not been going well with Captain Townshend's party. He had advanced within two hundred yards of the hamlet, keeping his men as well as he could under shelter, and firing in volleys. The enemy, however, kept on advancing, and overlapping his force on both flanks. They were well armed and skilful marksmen, and took shelter in such a marvellous way that there was nothing for our men to fire at, except a few puffs of smoke.

Captain Campbell then ordered a charge with the bayonet, to clear the hamlet. It was gallantly led, by Captain Townshend and two native officers. The ground being perfectly open, and the fire of the enemy being steady and continuous, the two native officers and four sepoys were killed at once.

When they got within forty yards of the village, which was concealed in a grove of trees, they found that it was a large place; with a wall, three hundred feet in length, behind which the enemy were posted in perfect cover. There was nothing for it but to retreat. Captain Campbell was, at this moment, shot in the knee; and Captain Townshend assumed the command. Captain Campbell was carried to the rear, and the force retired in alternate parties.

The retreat, however, was conducted slowly and deliberately; though the enemy, who came running out, soon overlapped the little column–some even getting behind it, while groups of fanatic swordsmen, from time to time, charged furiously down upon it. From all the hamlets they passed through, a fire was opened upon them by the Chitralis, those who were supposed to be friendly having gone over to the other side. So heavy was the fire that, at last, Townshend ordered his men to double. This they did with great steadiness; and he was able to rally them, without difficulty, at a small hamlet,

where he found Mr. Robertson encouraging the men he had brought out. A message was sent to the fort for reinforcements, and Lieutenant Harley led out fifty of the Sikhs, and covered the retreat to the fort.

In the meantime Gurdon, with his detachment and Captain Baird, were still far away on the steep side of the ravine. Dr. Whitchurch, who had dressed Baird's wound, was sent to take him to the rear; and it was then that Townshend's party began to retreat and, after fierce fighting, arrived at the fort, where they found that Whitchurch had not arrived.

The doctor had with him a handful of sepoys and Kashmir Rifles, and some stretcher bearers, under the command of a native officer. Matters had developed so rapidly that, in a very short time, they were behind Townshend's retreating parties, round which the enemy were swarming; and when the retirement became a rapid retreat, they dropped farther behind. Small detached parties soon became aware of their position, and attacked them. Three men, who were carrying the stretcher, were killed by successive shots and, when the fourth was hit, the stretcher could be no longer carried; so Captain Baird was partly carried, and partly dragged along the ground.

The enemy's fire became so hot that the party were compelled to make for the river bank. They had to charge, and carry, two or three stone walls. Once they were completely surrounded, but the gallant Kashmirs charged the enemy so furiously with rifle and bayonet that, at last, they made a way through them and reached the fort, where they had been given up for lost. Thirteen men, in all, came in; but only seven of these had fought their way through with Whitchurch; the other six being fugitives, who had joined him just before he had reached the fort. Half of Whitchurch's little party were killed, and Baird had been, again, twice wounded. Whitchurch, himself, marvellously escaped without a wound. No finer action was ever performed than that by this little body.

The total casualties of the day were very heavy. Of the hundred and fifty men actually engaged, twenty non-commissioned officers and men were killed, and twenty-eight wounded. Of the officers, Captain Campbell was badly wounded, and Captain Baird died on the following morning. The two native officers were killed.

The enemy's strength was computed to be from a thousand to twelve hundred men. Of these, five hundred were Umra Khan's men, who were armed with Martinis. Many of the others carried Sniders.

The whole of the Chitralis had now joined Sher Afzul, most of them doubtless being forced to do so, by fear of the consequences that would ensue should they refuse. The little fort thus stood isolated, in the midst of a powerful enemy and a hostile population. The villages stood on higher ground than the fort and, from all of them, a constant fusillade was kept up on the garrison, while they were engaged in the difficult work of putting the fort into a better condition of defence.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to take stock of the stores; and the next to estimate how many days it would last. Everyone was put upon half rations, and it was calculated that they could hold out two and a half months. It was found that they had two hundred and eighty rounds per man, besides Snider ammunition for the Kashmir Rifles, and three hundred rounds of Martini ammunition for the Sikhs.

When the fort was first occupied, it was found that there was an exposed approach to the river from the water tower, about thirty yards in width; and a covered way was at once built, going right down into the water. All through the siege this covered way was the main object of the enemy's attack; for they knew that, if they could cut off the water, they could easily reduce the garrison.

An abutment in the south wall of the fort, overlooking the garden, had been converted into a little bastion. The worst feature of the fort, however, was the large number of little buildings immediately outside the walls. These and the walls of the garden were demolished by moonlight. The stables, which were on the river face near the water tower, were loopholed; and efforts were made to loophole the basement walls of the tower, but these had to be abandoned, as there was a danger of disturbing the foundations.

Among the various ingenious plans hit upon by the besieged, one proved particularly useful. Loopholes were made in the gun tower; a wall was built up in the face of the water gate; and fireplaces were constructed by which the wood, being laid on a slab of stone, was pushed out some feet from the wall, and could be drawn into the fort when it was necessary to replenish the fire, without those attending it being exposed. These fires proved invaluable, when attacks were made upon dark nights. Projecting, as they did, seven feet from the wall, they threw it into shadow, so that the enemy could not see what to fire at; and, at the same time, they lit up the ground in front brilliantly, so that the defenders could make out their assailants, and fire with accuracy.

The fort was eighty yards in length. The walls were twenty-five feet in height, and the five towers fifty feet. It lay in a hollow in the lowest part of the valley, and was commanded on all sides by hills, on which the enemy erected numerous sangars. As, from these, the men moving about inside the fort were clearly visible to the enemy, barricades of stones had to be erected, along the sides of the yards, to afford cover to the men as they went to and from their posts.

On March 5th a letter was received from Umra Khan, stating that the British troops must leave Chitral at once, and that he would guarantee them a safe conduct. The offer was, naturally, refused. Next night the enemy, about two hundred strong, made a determined effort to fire the water tower. They brought faggots with them and, in spite of the heavy volleys poured upon them managed, under cover of the darkness, to creep into the tunnel leading to the water, and to light a large fire underneath the tower. They were, however, driven out; and three water carriers went into the tunnel, and put out the fire. They were just in time, for the flames had taken a firm hold of the wooden beams.

After this, twenty-five men were always stationed in the tower and, at night, another picket of twenty-five men were placed in the covered way leading to the water. The entrance to this, at the water side, was exposed to the enemy's fire; but a barricade of stones, with interstices to allow the water to go through, was built into the river, and formed an efficient screen to the water bearers.

On the night of the 14th, the enemy again made an attack on the water bearers, but were repulsed with loss. The water way was, indeed, a source of constant anxiety. Between it, and the trees at the northwest corner of the fort, there was a stretch of seventy yards of sandy beach; lying underneath an overhanging bank, which entirely covered it from the fire of the fort, so that the enemy were able to get right up to the water tunnel without exposing themselves.

On the 15th, Sher Afzul sent in a messenger, to say that a party of sepoys had been defeated at Reshun, and that an officer was captive in his camp. The next day a letter was received from Lieutenant Edwardes. A truce was made for three days and, afterwards, extended to six; but this came to an end on the 23rd of March, and hostilities again began.

The prospect was gloomy. The men were beginning to suffer in health from their long confinement, the paucity of their rations, and the terribly insanitary condition of the fort; and they had not heard of the approach of either Colonel Kelly's force or that under Sir Robert Low.

During the truce, a union jack had been made, and this was now hoisted on the flag tower, as a symbol of defiance. This cheered the spirits of the men and depressed those of the enemy, who began to see that the task before them was far more serious than they had hitherto supposed.

Gradually the attacks of the enemy became more feeble and, although the firing was almost continuous, it seemed as if the assailants trusted rather to famine, to reduce the fort, than to any exertion on their part. On April 6th they were very active, making two large sangars close to the main gate. Near these, and only fifty yards away from the gun tower, they were also hard at work, all day, in the summer house to the east of the fort.

The garrison, however, now received the news that a relief force had already arrived at Mastuj; in consequence of which they were saved from a further diminution of their scanty rations, which was already under discussion. The officers were comparatively well off, as they had plenty of horse flesh; but this the sepoys would not eat. The supply of ghee, which forms so prominent a part in

the diet of the natives, had already given out; and the sepoys had nothing but a scanty allowance of flour to maintain life.

The news that the relief party had arrived at Mastuj greatly cheered the garrison. That relief would come, sooner or later, they had no doubt; but they had not even hoped that it could be so near. While, however, the news thus raised the spirits of the defenders, it at the same time showed their assailants that, unless they obtained a speedy success, the game would be altogether up.

Before daybreak on the morning of the 7th, a terrific fire was opened upon the walls. The enemy were evidently in great strength. In an instant everyone was at his post, and steady volleys were poured into the darkness, on the garden side of the fort, whence the chief attack seemed to be coming. Suddenly a strong light was seen near the gun tower, and it was found that the enemy had heaped faggots against the walls. These, being constructed partly of wood, gradually caught fire.

Mr. Robertson, with some of the levies, horse keepers, and servants, at once set to work to extinguish the flames; but the conflagration was too much for them. The troops in reserve were then sent to aid them. The work was dangerous and difficult, the flames raged fiercely, and the enemy kept up a tremendous fire from behind the walls of the summer house. Nevertheless the men worked their hardest, throwing down earth and water on the fire.

Many were wounded at the work. The fire was so fierce that large holes had to be knocked through the lower stories of the tower, through which to attack the flames; and it was not until ten o'clock that the efforts of the besieged were crowned with success, and all was again quiet. Nothing could have exceeded the bravery and devotion shown by the native levies, the non-combatants, officers' servants, water carriers, syces, and even the Chitralis.

Great precautions were taken to prevent similar attempts to fire any of the towers. Earth was brought up, and water stored. The water carriers slept with the great leathern bags which they carried, full; and a special fire picket was organized. When, on the evening of the 15th, the enemy again tried to fire the gun tower, they were repulsed without difficulty. On the following night a determined attack in force was made, on all sides of the fort; but was defeated with much loss.

The enemy now began to make a great noise, with drums and pipes, in the summer house. This lasted continuously for several days, and one of the natives, who was aware that the enemy had started tunnelling, guessed that this stir might possibly be made to drown the noise of the mining. Men were put on to listen and, at midnight, the sentry in the gun tower reported that he heard the noise and, next morning, the sound was distinctly audible within a few feet of the tower.

It was evident that there was no time to be lost and, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Lieutenant Harley and a hundred men issued from the fort, at the garden gate, and rushed at the summer house. It was held by forty of the enemy, who fired a volley, and fled after some sharp hand-to-hand fighting. The head of the mine was found to be in the summer house, and the tunnel was full of Chitralis.

Harley stationed his men in the summer house to repel any attack and, with five sepoys, jumped down into the mine. The Chitralis, about thirty in number, came swarming out but, after a fierce fight, they were bayoneted. The mine was then cleared, and gunpowder placed in position.

Two Chitralis, who had lain quiet at the other end of the tunnel, tried to make their escape in the turmoil. One of the sepoys fired, and must have hit a bag of gunpowder; for immediately there was a violent explosion, and the mine was blown up, from end to end. Harley was knocked over, and the Sikhs who were with him had their hair and clothes singed; but none of the party were otherwise hurt.

All this time, the sepoys in the summer house had been subject to a heavy fusillade from a breastwork, close by, and from the loopholed walls in the garden; while from all the distant sangars and hills a continuous fire was opened, the natives evidently believing that the garrison were making a last and desperate sortie.

The work done, Harley and his men hurried back to the fort, having been out of it an hour and ten minutes. Of the hundred that went out twenty-two were hit, nine mortally. In and around the summer house, thirty-five of the enemy were bayoneted, and a dozen more shot. That evening

the garrison began to drive a couple of counter mines, to intercept any other mines that the enemy might attempt to make.

On the 18th the enemy were very quiet and, in the middle of the night, a man approached the fort and called out that Sher Afzul had fled, and that the relieving force was near at hand. Lieutenant Gurdon was sent out to reconnoitre, and he found that the whole place was deserted. The next afternoon, Colonel Kelly's force arrived.

Chapter 5: Promoted

As he was not now in uniform, Lisle kept carefully out of sight when General Gatacre's force marched in, which it did very shortly after Colonel Kelly's arrival. This was probably unnecessary caution for, in addition to Mr. Robertson, there were two or three other civilians in the garrison; but he was desirous of escaping observation until General Low, who would arrive next day, should have heard of his escapade.

At mess, however, several officers of General Gatacre's force dined with the regiment; who had exerted themselves to the utmost to provide a banquet for their guests. Most of these had, at one time or other, been cantoned with the Pioneers. Two or three of the junior officers were introduced to the newcomers, among them Lisle.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.