Henty George Alfred

# The Lost Heir

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**Henty G.**

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I.
## A BRAVE ACTION

A number of soldiers were standing in the road near the bungalow of Brigadier-General Mathieson, the officer in command of the force in the cantonments of Benares and the surrounding district.

"They are coming now, I think," one sergeant said to another. "It is a bad business. They say the General is terribly hurt, and it was thought better to bring him and the other fellow who was mixed up in it down in doolies. I heard Captain Harvey say in the orderly-room that they have arranged relays of bearers every five miles all the way down. He is a good fellow is the General, and we should all miss him. He is not one of the sort who has everything comfortable himself and don't care a rap how the soldiers get on: he sees to the comfort of everyone and spends his money freely, too. He don't seem to care what he lays out in making the quarters of the married men comfortable, and in getting any amount of ice for the hospital, and extra punkawallahs in the barrack rooms during the hot season. He goes out and sees to everything himself. Why, on the march I have known him, when all the doolies were full, give up his own horse to a man who had fallen out. He has had bad luck too; lost his wife years ago by cholera, and he has got no one to care for but his girl. She was only a few months old when her mother died. Of course she was sent off to England, and has been there ever since. He must be a rich man, besides his pay and allowances; but it aint every rich man who spends his money as he does. There won't be a dry eye in the cantonment if he goes under."

"How was it the other man got hurt?"

"Well, I hear that the tiger sprang on to the General's elephant and seized him by the leg. They both went off together, and the brute shifted its hold to the shoulder, and carried him into the jungle; then the other fellow slipped off his elephant and ran after the tiger. He got badly mauled too; but he killed the brute and saved the General's life."

"By Jove! that was a plucky thing. Who was he?"

"Why, he was the chap who was walking backwards and forwards with the General when the band was playing yesterday evening. Several of the men remarked how like he was to you, Sanderson. I noticed it, too. There certainly was a strong likeness."

"Yes, some of the fellows were saying so," Sanderson replied. "He passed close to me, and I saw that he was about my height and build, but of course I did not notice the likeness; a man does not know his own face much. Anyhow, he only sees his full face, and doesn't know how he looks sideways. He is a civilian, isn't he?"

"Yes, I believe so; I know that the General is putting him up at his quarters. He has been here about a week. I think he is some man from England, traveling, I suppose, to see the world. I heard the Adjutant speak of him as Mr. Simcoe when he was talking about the affair."

"Of course they will take him to the General's bungalow?"

"No; he is going to the next. Major Walker is away on leave, and the doctor says that it is better that they should be in different bungalows, because then if one gets delirious and noisy he won't disturb the other. Dr. Hunter is going to take up his quarters there to look after him, with his own servants and a couple of hospital orderlies."

By this time several officers were gathered at the entrance to the General's bungalow, two mounted troopers having brought in the news a few minutes before that the doolies were within a mile.

They came along now, each carried by four men, maintaining a swift but smooth and steady pace, and abstaining from the monotonous chant usually kept up. A doctor was riding by the side of the doolies, and two mounted orderlies with baskets containing ice and surgical dressings rode fifty paces in the rear. The curtains of the doolies had been removed to allow of a free passage of air, and mosquito curtains hung round to prevent insects annoying the sufferers.

There was a low murmur of sympathy from the soldiers as the doolies passed them, and many a muttered "God bless you, sir, and bring you through it all right." Then, as the injured men were carried into the two bungalows, most of the soldiers strolled off, some, however, remaining near in hopes of getting a favorable report from an orderly or servant. A group of officers remained under the shade of a tree near until the surgeon who had ridden in with the doolies came out.

"What is the report, McManus?" one of them asked, as he approached.

"There is no change since I sent off my report last night," he said. "The General is very badly hurt; I certainly should not like to give an opinion at present whether he will get over it or not. If he does it will be a very narrow shave. He was insensible till we lifted him into the doolie at eight o'clock yesterday evening, when the motion seemed to rouse him a little, and he just opened his eyes; and each time we changed bearers he has had a little ice between his lips, and a drink of lime juice and water with a dash of brandy in it. He has known me each time, and whispered a word or two, asking after the other."

"And how is he?"

"I have no doubt that he will do; that is, of course, if fever does not set in badly. His wounds are not so severe as the General's, and he is a much younger man, and, as I should say, with a good constitution. If there is no complication he ought to be about again in a month's time. He is perfectly sensible. Let him lie quiet for a day or two; after that it would be as well if some of you who have met him at the General's would drop in occasionally for a short chat with him; but of course we must wait to see if there is going to be much fever."

"And did it happen as they say, doctor? The dispatch told us very little beyond the fact that the General was thrown from his elephant, just as the tiger sprang, and that it seized him and carried him into the jungle; that Simcoe slipped off his pad and ran in and attacked the tiger; that he saved the General's life and killed the animal, but is sadly hurt himself."

"That is about it, except that he did not kill the tiger. Metcalf, Colvin, and Smith all ran in, and firing together knocked it over stone dead. It was an extraordinarily plucky action of Simcoe, for he had emptied his rifle, and had nothing but it and a knife when he ran in."

"You don't say so! By Jove! that was an extraordinary act of pluck; one would almost say of madness, if he hadn't succeeded in drawing the brute off Mathieson, and so gaining time for the others to come up. It was a miracle that he wasn't killed. Well, we shall not have quite so easy a time of it for a bit. Of course Murdock, as senior officer, will take command of the brigade, but he won't be half as considerate for our comfort as Mathieson has been. He is rather a scoffer at what he calls new-fangled ways, and he will be as likely to march the men out in the heat of the day as at five in the morning."

The two sergeants who had been talking walked back together to their quarters. Both of them were on the brigade staff. Sanderson was the Paymaster's clerk, Nichol worked in the orderly-room. At the sergeants' mess the conversation naturally turned on the tiger hunt and its consequences.

"I have been in some tough fights," one of the older men said, "and I don't know that I ever felt badly scared – one hasn't time to think of that when one is at work – but to rush in against a wounded tiger with nothing but an empty gun and a hunting-knife is not the sort of job that I should like to tackle. It makes one's blood run cold to think of it. I consider that everyone in the brigade ought to subscribe a day's pay to get something to give that man, as a token of our admiration for his pluck and of our gratitude for his having saved General Mathieson's life."

There was a general expression of approval at the idea. Then Sanderson said:

"I think it is a thing that ought to be done, but it is not for us to begin it. If we hear of anything of that sort done by the officers, two or three of us might go up and say that it was the general wish among the non-coms. and men to take a share in it; but it would never do for us to begin."

"That is right enough; the officers certainly would not like such a thing to begin from below. We had better wait and see whether there is any movement that way. I dare say that it will depend a great deal on whether the General gets over it or not."

The opportunity did not come. At the end of five weeks Mr. Simcoe was well enough to travel by easy stages down to the coast, acting upon the advice that he should, for the present, give up all idea of making a tour through India, and had better take a sea voyage to Australia or the Cape, or, better still, take his passage home at once. Had the day and hour of his leaving been known, there was not a white soldier in the cantonments who would not have turned out to give him a hearty cheer, but although going on well the doctor said that all excitement should be avoided. It would be quite enough for him to have to say good-by to the friends who had been in the habit of coming in to talk with him daily, but anything like a public greeting by the men would be likely to upset him. It was not, therefore, until Simcoe was some way down the river that his departure became known to the troops.

Six weeks later there was a sensation in the cantonments. General Mathieson had so far recovered that he was able to be carried up to the hills, and the camp was still growling at the irritating orders and regulations of his temporary successor in command, when the news spread that Staff Pay-Sergeant Sanderson had deserted. He had obtained a fortnight's furlough, saying that he wanted to pay a visit to some old comrades at Allahabad; at the end of the fortnight he had not returned, and the Staff Paymaster had gone strictly into his accounts and found that there was a deficiency of over £300, which he himself would of course be called upon to make good. He had, indeed, helped to bring about the deficiency by placing entire confidence in the sergeant and by neglecting to check his accounts regularly.

Letters were at once written to the heads of the police at Calcutta and Bombay, and to all the principal places on the roads to those ports; but it was felt that, with such a start as he had got, the chances were all in his favor.

It was soon ascertained at Allahabad that he had not been there. Inquiries at the various dak-bungalows satisfied the authorities that he had not traveled by land. If he had gone down to Calcutta he had gone by boat; but he might have started on the long land journey across to Bombay, or have even made for Madras. No distinct clew, however, could be obtained.

The Paymaster obtained leave and went down to Calcutta and inspected all the lists of passengers and made inquiries as to them; but there were then but few white men in the country, save those holding civil or military positions and the merchants at the large ports, therefore there was not much difficulty in ascertaining the identity of everyone who had left Calcutta during the past month, unless, indeed, he had taken a passage in some native craft to Rangoon or possibly Singapore.

On his arrival at Calcutta he heard of an event which caused deep and general regret when known at Benares, and for a time threw even the desertion of Sergeant Sanderson into the shade. The *Nepaul*, in which John Simcoe had sailed, had been lost in a typhoon in the Bay of Bengal when but six days out. There was no possible doubt as to his fate, for a vessel half a mile distant had seen her founder, but could render no assistance, being herself dismasted and unmanageable and the sea so tremendous that no boat could have lived in it for a moment. As both ships belonged to the East India Company, and were well known to each other, the captain and officials of the *Ceylon* had no doubt whatever as to her identity, and, indeed, the remains of a boat bearing the *Nepaul's* name were picked up a few days later near the spot where she had gone down.

"It's hard luck, that is what I call it," Sergeant Nichol said with great emphasis when the matter was talked over in the sergeants' mess. "Here is a man who faces a wounded tiger with nothing but a hunting-knife, and recovers from his wounds; here is the General, whose life he saved, going on

first-rate, and yet he loses his life himself, drowned at sea. I call that about as hard luck as anything I have heard of."

"Hard luck indeed!" another said. "If he had died of his wounds it would have been only what might have been expected; but to get over them and then to get drowned almost as soon as he had started is, as you say, Nichol, very hard luck. I am sure the General will be terribly cut up about it. I heard Major Butler tell Captain Thompson that he had heard from Dr. Hunter that when the General began to get round and heard that Simcoe had gone, while he was lying there too ill to know anything about it, he regularly broke down and cried like a child; and I am sure the fact that he will never have the chance of thanking him now will hurt him as bad as those tiger's claws."

"And so there is no news of Sanderson?"

"Not that I have heard. Maybe he has got clean away; but I should say it's more likely that he is lying low in some sailors' haunt until the matter blows over. Then, like enough, he will put on sea-togs and ship under another name before the mast in some trader knocking about among the islands, and by the time she comes back he could take a passage home without questions being asked. He is a sharp fellow is Sanderson. I never quite liked him myself, but I never thought he was a rogue. It will teach Captain Smalley to be more careful in future. I heard that he was going home on his long leave in the spring, but I suppose he will not be able to do so now for a year or so; three hundred pounds is a big sum to have to fork out."

The news of the loss of the *Nepaul*, with all hands, did indeed hit General Mathieson very heavily, and for a time seriously delayed the progress that he was making towards recovery.

"It's bad enough to think," he said, "that I shall never have an opportunity of thanking that gallant fellow for my life; but it is even worse to know that my rescue has brought about his death, for had it not been for that he would have by this time been up at Delhi or in Oude instead of lying at the bottom of the sea. I would give half my fortune to grasp his hand again and tell him what I feel."

General Mathieson's ill luck stuck to him. He gained strength so slowly that he was ordered home, and it was three years before he rejoined. Four years later his daughter came out to him, and for a time his home in Delhi, where he was now stationed, was a happy one. The girl showed no desire to marry, and refused several very favorable offers; but after she had been out four years she married a rising young civilian who was also stationed at Delhi. The union was a happy one, except that the first two children born to them died in infancy. They were girls. The third was a boy, who at the age of eight months was sent home under the charge of an officer's wife returning with her children to England. When they arrived there he was placed in charge of Mrs. Covington, a niece of the General's. But before he reached the shores of England he was an orphan. An epidemic of cholera broke out at the station at which his father, who was now a deputy collector, was living, and he and his wife were among the first victims of the scourge.

General Mathieson was now a major-general, and in command of the troops in the Calcutta district. This blow decided him to resign his command and return to England. He was now sixty; the climate of India had suited him, and he was still a hale, active man. Being generally popular he was soon at home in London, where he took a house in Hyde Park Gardens and became a regular frequenter of the Oriental and East Indian United Service Clubs, of which he had been for years a member, went a good deal into society, and when at home took a lively interest in his grandson, often running down to his niece's place, near Warwick, to see how he was getting on.

The ayah who had come with the child from India had been sent back a few months after they arrived, for his mother had written to Mrs. Covington requesting that he should have a white nurse. "The native servants," she wrote, "spoil the children dreadfully, and let them have entirely their own way, and the consequence is that they grow up domineering, bad-tempered, and irritable. I have seen so many cases of it here that Herbert and I have quite decided that our child shall not be spoilt in this way, but shall be brought up in England as English children are, to obey their nurses and to do as they are ordered."

As Mrs. Covington's was a large country house the child was no trouble; an excellent nurse was obtained, and the boy throve under her care.

The General now much regretted having remained so many years in India, and if an old comrade remarked, "I never could make out why you stuck to it so long, Mathieson; it was ridiculous for a man with a large private fortune, such as you have," he would reply, "I can only suppose it was because I was an old fool. But, you see, I had no particular reason for coming home. I lost my only sister three years after I went out, and had never seen her only daughter, my niece Mary Covington. Of course I hoped for another bout of active service, and when the chance came at last up in the north, there was I stuck down in Calcutta. If it hadn't been for Jane I should certainly have given it up in disgust when I found I was practically shelved. But she always used to come down and stay with me for a month or two in the cool season, and as she was the only person in the world I cared for, I held on from year to year, grumbling of course, as pretty well every Anglo-Indian does, but without having sufficient resolution to throw it up. I ought to have stayed at home for good after that mauling I got from the tiger; but, you see, I was never really myself while I was at home. I did not feel up to going to clubs, and could not enter into London life at all, but spent most of my time at my own place, which was within a drive of Mary Covington's, who had then just married.

"Well, you see, I got deucedly tired of life down there. I knew nothing whatever of farming, and though I tried to get up an interest in it I failed altogether. Of course there was a certain amount of society of a sort, and everyone called, and one had to go out to dinner-parties. But such dinner-parties! Why, a dinner in India was worth a score of them. Most of them were very stiff and formal, and after the women had gone upstairs, the men talked of nothing but hunting and shooting and crops and cattle; so at last I could stand it no longer, but threw up six months of my furlough and went out again. Yes, of course I had Jane, but at that time she was but fourteen, and was a girl at school; and when I talked of bringing her home and having a governess, everyone seemed to think that it would be the worst thing possible for her, and no doubt they were right, for the life would have been as dull for her as it was for me.

"Of course now it is different. I feel as young and as well as I did twenty years ago, and can thoroughly enjoy my life in London, though I still fight very shy of the country. It is a satisfaction to me to know that things are pretty quiet in India at present, so that I am losing nothing that way, and if I were out there I should be only holding inspections at Barrakpoor, Dumdum, or on the Maidan at Calcutta. Of course it was pleasant enough in its way, for I never felt the heat; but as a man gets on in life he doesn't have quite so much enjoyment out of it as he used to do. The men around him are a good deal younger than himself. He knows all the old messroom jokes, and one bit of scandal is like scores of others he has heard in his time.

"I am heartily glad that I have come home. Many of you here are about my own standing, and there is plenty to talk about of old friends and old days. You were a young ensign when I was a captain, but Bulstrode and I got our companies within a few days of each other. Of course he is only a lieutenant-colonel, while I am a major-general, but that is because he had the good sense to quit the service years ago. There are scores of others in the club just about my own standing, and one gets one's rubber of whist in the afternoon, and we dine together and run down the cooking and wines, although every one of us knows at heart that they are both infinitely better than we got in India, except at the clubs in the Presidency towns.

"Then, of course, we all agree that the service is going to the dogs, that the Sepoys are over-indulged and will some day give us a lot of trouble. I keep my liver all right by taking a long ride every morning, and altogether I think I can say that I thoroughly enjoy myself."

The General, on his first visit to England, had endeavored, but in vain, to find out the family of John Simcoe. He had advertised largely, but without effect.

"I want to find them out," he said to his niece; "I owe that man a debt of gratitude I can never repay, but doubtless there are some of his family who may be in circumstances where I could give

them a helping hand. There may be young brothers – of course I could get them cadetships in the Indian army – maybe portionless sisters."

"But if he was traveling in India for pleasure he must have been a well-to-do young fellow. Men cannot wander about in the East without having a pretty full purse."

"Yes, no doubt; but I don't fancy it was so in his case, and he said casually that he had come in for some money, and, as he had always had a great desire to travel, he thought that he could do nothing better than spend a year or two in the East, but that he hoped before it was gone he should fall on his legs and obtain some sort of employment. He did not care much what it was, so that it was not quill-driving. He thought that he could turn his hands to most things. I laughed at the time, for I was by no means sure that he was in earnest, but I have felt since that he must have been. If it had not been so, my advertisements would surely have caught the eye of someone who knew his family. A family wealthy enough for one of the sons to start on two years' travel must be in a fair position, whether in town or country. Had it been so I should have heard of it, and therefore I think that what he said must have had some foundation in fact. He was certainly a gentleman in manner, and my idea now is that he belonged to a middle-class family, probably in some provincial town, and that, having come into some money at the death of his father or some other relative, he followed his natural bent and started on a sort of roving expedition, thinking, as many people do think, that India is a land where you have only to stretch out your hands and shake the pagoda tree.

"He would have found out his mistake, poor fellow, if he had lived. The days are long past when any dashing young adventurer can obtain a post of honor in the pay of an Indian Rajah. Still, of course, after what he did for me, had he remained in India, and I found that he really wanted a berth, I might have done something for him. I know numbers of these Indian princes, some of them intimately, and to some I have been of very considerable service; and I fancy that I might have got him a berth of some kind or other without much difficulty. Or had he made up his mind to return to England I would have set him up in any business he had a fancy for. He has gone now, and I wish I could pay someone he cared for a little of the debt of gratitude I owe him. Well, I have done my best and have failed, from no fault of my own; but remember that if ever you hear of a family of the name of Simcoe, I want you to make inquiries about them, and to give me full particulars concerning them."

But no news ever reached the General on this head, and it was a frequent cause of lamentation to him, when he finally settled in town, that although he had again advertised he had heard nothing whatever of the family of which he was in search.

# CHAPTER II.
# IN THE SOUTH SEAS

An island in the Pacific. The sun was shining down from a cloudless sky, the sea was breaking on the white beach, there was just sufficient breeze to move the leaves of the cocoanut trees that formed a dark band behind the sands. A small brig of about a hundred tons' burden lay anchored a short distance from the shore. The paint was off in many places, and everywhere blistered by the sun. Her sails hung loosely in the gaskets, and the slackness of her ropes and her general air of untidiness alike showed the absence of any sort of discipline on board.

In front of a rough shanty, built just within the line of shade of the cocoanuts, sat three men. Two drunken sailors lay asleep some fifty yards away. On the stump of a tree in front of the bench on which the three men were sitting were placed several black bottles and three tin pannikins, while two gourds filled with water and covered with broad banana leaves stood erect in holes dug in the sand.

"I tell you what it is, Atkins, your men are carrying it on too far. Bill here, and I, were good friends with the natives; the chief gave us wives, and we got on well enough with them. What with the cocoanuts, which are free to us all, and the patches of ground to cultivate, we had all we wanted, and with the store of beads and bright cotton we brought here with us we paid the natives to fish for pearls for us, and have collected enough copra to trade for rum and whatever else we want. You have got all our copra on board, and a good stock of native trumperies, and I should recommend you to be off, both for your own sake and ours. Your men have been more or less drunk ever since they came here. I don't mind a drinking bout myself now and again, but it does not do to keep it up. However, it would be no odds to us whether your men were drunk all the time or not if they would but get drunk on board, but they will bring the liquor on shore, and then they get quarrelsome, use their fists on the natives, and meddle with the women. Now, these fellows are quiet and gentle enough if they are left alone and treated fairly, but I don't blame them for getting riled up when they are ill-treated, and I tell you they are riled up pretty badly now. My woman has spoken to me more than once, and from what she says there is likely to be trouble, not only for you but for us."

"Well, Sim," the man that he was addressing said, "there is reason enough in what you say. I don't care myself a snap for these black fellows; a couple of musket-shots would send them all flying. But, you see, though I am skipper, the men all have shares and do pretty much as they like. At present they like to stay here, and I suppose they will stay here till they are tired of it."

"Well, Atkins, if I were in your place I should very soon make a change, and if you like, Bill and I will help you. You have got six men; well, if you shot three of them the other three would think better of it; and if they didn't I would settle them too."

"It is all very well talking like that, Sim. How could I sail the brig without hands? If I only kept three of them I should be very short-handed, and if I ever did manage to get to port they would lay a complaint against me for shooting the others. It is all very well for you to talk; you have lived here long enough to know that one can only get the very worst class of fellows to sail with one in craft like this and for this sort of trade. It pays well if one gets back safely, but what with the risk of being cast ashore or being killed by the natives, who are savage enough in some of the islands, it stands to reason that a man who can get a berth in any other sort of craft won't sail with us. But it is just the sort of life to suit chaps like these; it means easy work, plenty of loafing about, and if things turn out well a good lump of money at the end of the voyage. However, they ought to have had enough of it this job; the rum is nearly gone, and if you will come off to-morrow I will let you have what remains, though if they are sober I doubt if they will let you take it away."

"We will risk that," the third man said. "We are not nice about using our pistols, if you are. I was saying to Simcoe here, things are going a lot too far. Enough mischief has been done already,

and I am by no means sure that when you have gone they won't make it hot for us. We are very comfortable here, and we are not doing badly, and I don't care about being turned out of it."

"The pearl fishing is turning out well?" Atkins asked quietly.

"It might be worse and it might be better. Anyhow, we are content to remain here for a bit.

"I don't like it, Jack," he said, as the skipper, having in vain tried to rouse the two drunken men, rowed himself off to the brig. "My woman told me this morning that there had been a big talk among the natives, and that though they did not tell her anything, she thought that they had made up their minds to wipe the whites out altogether. They said that if we hadn't been here, the brig would not have come; which is like enough, for Atkins only put in because he was an old chum of ours, and thought that we should have got copra enough to make it worth his while to come round. Well, if the niggers only wiped out the crew, and burned the ship, I should say nothing against it, as long as they let Atkins alone. He has stood by me in more than one rough-and-tumble business, and I am bound to stand by him. But there aint no discrimination among the niggers. Besides, I am not saying but that he has been pretty rough with them himself.

"It makes all the difference whether you settle down and go in for making a pile, or if you only stop to water and take in fruit; we agreed as to that when we landed here. When we stopped here before and found them friendly and pleasant, and we says to each other, 'If we can but get on smooth with them and set them fishing for us we might make a good thing out of it.' You see, we had bought some oysters one of them brought up after a dive, and had found two or three pearls in them.

"Well, we have been here nine months, and I don't say I am not getting tired of it; but it is worth stopping for. You know we reckoned last week that the pearls we have got ought to be worth two or three thousand pounds, and we agreed that we would stay here till we have two bags the size of the one we have got; but unless Atkins gets those fellows off, I doubt if we shan't have to go before that. There is no reasoning with these niggers; if they had any sense they would see that we can't help these things."

"Perhaps what the women tell us is untrue," the other suggested.

"Don't you think that," Simcoe said; "these black women are always true to their white men when they are decently treated. Besides, none of the natives have been near us to-day. That, of course, might be because they are afraid of these chaps; but from this shanty we can see the canoes, and not one has gone out to-day. Who is to blame them, when one of their chiefs was shot yesterday without a shadow of excuse? I don't say that I think so much of a nigger's life one way or another; and having been in some stiff fights together, as you know, I have always taken my share. But I am dead against shooting without some reason; it spoils trade, and makes it unsafe even to land for water. I have half a mind, Bill, to go on board and ask Atkins to take us away with him; we could mighty soon settle matters with the crew, and if there was a fight and we had to shoot them all, we could take the brig into port well enough."

"No, no," said Bill, "it has not come to that yet. Don't let us give up a good thing until we are sure that the game is up."

"Well, just as you like; I am ready to run the risk if you are. It would be hard, if the worst came to the worst, if we couldn't fight our way down to our canoe, and once on board that we could laugh at them; for as we have proved over and over again, they have not one that can touch her."

"Well, I will be off to my hut; the sun is just setting and my supper will be ready for me." He strolled off to his shanty, which lay back some distance in the wood. Simcoe entered the hut, where a native woman was cooking.

"Nothing fresh, I suppose?" he asked in her language.

She shook her head. "None of our people have been near us to-day."

"Well, Polly," – for so her white master had christened her, her native appellation being too long for ordinary conversation, – "it is a bad business, and I am sorry for it; but when these fellows have sailed away it will soon come all right again."

"Polly hopes so," she said. "Polly very much afraid."

"Well, you had better go to-morrow and see them, and tell them, as I have told them already, we are very sorry for the goings on of these people, but it is not our fault. You have no fear that they will hurt you, have you? Because if so, don't you go."

"They no hurt Polly now," she said; "they know that if I do not come back you be on guard."

"Well, I don't think there is any danger at present, but it is as well to be ready. Do you take down to the canoe three or four dozen cocoanuts and four or five big bunches of plantains, and you may as well take three or four gourds of water. If we have to take to the boat, will you go with me or stay here?"

"Polly will go with her master," the woman said; "if she stay here they will kill her."

"I am glad enough for you to go with me, Polly," he said. "You have been a good little woman, and I don't know how I should get on without you now; though why they should kill you I don't know, seeing that your head chief gave you to me himself."

"Kill everything belonging to white man," she said quietly; and the man knew in his heart that it would probably be so. She put his supper on the table and then made several journeys backwards and forwards to the canoe, which lay afloat in a little cove a couple of hundred yards away. When she had done she stood at the table and ate the remains of the supper.

An hour later the man was sitting on the bench outside smoking his pipe, when he heard the sound of heavy footsteps among the trees. He knew this was no native tread.

"What is it, Bill?" he asked, as the man came up.

"Well, I came to tell you that there is a big row going on among the natives. I can hear their tom-tom things beating furiously, and occasionally they set up a tremendous yell. I tell you I don't like it, Simcoe; I don't like it a bit. I sent my woman to see what it was all about, but though she had been away three hours, she hadn't come back when I started out to talk it over with you."

"There has been a biggish row going on on board the brig too," the other said. "I have heard Atkins storming, and a good deal of shouting among the men. I suppose you have got your pearls all right in your belt? Things begin to have an awkward look, and we may have to bolt at short notice."

"You trust me for that, Simcoe; I have had them on me ever since the brig came in. I had no fear of the natives stealing them out of my hut, but if one of those fellows were to drop in and see them he would think nothing of knifing the woman and carrying them off."

"I see you have brought your gun with you."

"Yes, and my pistols too. I suppose you are loaded, and ready to catch up at a moment's notice?"

"Yes; my girl has been carrying down cocoanuts and plantains to the canoe, so, if we have to make a bolt, we can hold on comfortably enough until we get to the next island, which is not above three days' sail, and lies dead to leeward, as the wind is at present. Still, Bill, I hope it is not coming to that. I think it is likely enough they may attack the brig in their canoes, but they have always been so friendly with us that I really don't think they can turn against us now; they must know that we cannot help these people's doings."

"That is all very well," the other said, "but you and I know half a dozen cases in which the niggers have attacked a ship, and in every case beachcombers were killed too."

Simcoe made no answer; he knew that it was so, and could hardly hope that there would be an exception in their case. After thinking for a minute he said, "Well, Bill, in that case I think the safest plan will be to take to the canoe at once. We can stay away a few weeks and then come back here and see how matters stand."

"But how about Atkins?"

"Well, we will shout and get him ashore and tell him what we think of it, and give him the choice of either stopping or going with us. Nothing can be fairer than that. If he chooses to stop and harm comes of it we cannot blame ourselves. If we come back in a few weeks of course we should not land until we had overhauled one of their canoes and found out what the feeling of the people

was. They will have got over their fit of rage, and like enough they will have said to each other, 'We were better off when the two white men were here. They paid us for our fishing and our copra, and never did us any harm. I wish they were back again.'"

"That is reasonable enough," the other agreed. "What about the trade things?"

"Well, we have only got some beads and small knick-knacks left. Polly shall carry them down to the canoe; we shall want them for trading till we come back here again."

He said a few words to the woman, who at once began to carry the things down to the canoe. Then he went down to the beach and shouted, "Atkins!"

"Hullo!" came back from the brig.

"Come ashore; we want to talk to you about something particular." They saw the dinghy pulled up to the ship's side, then Atkins rowed ashore.

"I have been having a row with the crew," he said. "I thought it was coming to fighting. Two or three of them took up handspikes, but I drew my pistols and things calmed down. What do you want me for?"

"Bill here has brought news that there is a row among the natives. They are beating their drums and yelling like fiends, and we expect it means mischief. At any rate it comes to this: we are so convinced that there is going to be trouble that we mean to cut and run at once. We have got enough grub put on board our canoe to take us to the next island, but we did not want to leave you in the lurch, to be speared by the niggers, so we have called you to offer you a seat in the canoe."

"That is friendly," Atkins said, "but I should lose the ship and cargo; and pretty near all that I have got is in her. Why should not you two bring your canoe off alongside and hoist her up? Then we could get up anchor and be off. Three of the fellows are dead-drunk and the other three half stupid. I would give you each a share in the profits of the voyage."

"Well, what do you think of that, Simcoe?" Bill said.

"I tell you straight I don't care for it. You and I are both good paddlers, and the canoe sails like a witch in a light wind. Once afloat in her and we are safe, but you can't say as much for the brig. I have sailed in her before now, and I know that she is slow, unless it is blowing half a gale. It is like enough that the natives may be watching her now, and if they saw us get under way they would be after her, and would go six feet to her one. As to fighting, what could we three do? The others would be of no use whatever. No, I like our plan best by far."

"Well, I don't know what to say," Atkins said. "It is hard to make a choice. Of course if I were sure that the natives really meant mischief I would go with you, but we cannot be sure of that."

"I feel pretty sure of it anyhow," Bill said. "My girl would be safe to follow me here when she got back and found the hut empty, but I am mightily afraid that some harm has come to her, or she would have been back long before this. It wasn't half a mile to go, and she might have been there and back in half an hour, and she has been gone now over three hours, and I feel nasty about it, I can tell you. I wish your crew were all sober, Atkins, and that we had a score of men that I could put my hand on among the islands. I should not be talking about taking to a canoe then, but I would just go in and give it them so hot that they would never try their pranks on again."

"Have you got all the things in, Polly?" Simcoe asked the woman, as she crouched down by the door of the hut.

"Got all in," she said. "Why not go? Very bad wait here."

"Well, I think you are about right. At any rate, we will go and get on board and wait a spear's-throw off the shore for an hour or so. If Bill's Susan comes here and finds we have gone she is pretty safe to guess that we shall be on board the canoe and waiting for her. What do you say to that, Bill?"

"That suits me; nothing can be fairer. If she comes we can take her on board, if she doesn't I shall know that they have killed her, and I will jot it down against them and come back here some day before long and take it out of them. And you, Atkins?"

"I will go straight on board. Like enough it is all a false alarm, and I aint going to lose the brig and all that she has got on board till I am downright certain that they – "

He stopped suddenly, and the others leaped to their feet as a burst of savage yells broke out across the water.

"By Heavens, they are attacking the ship!" Simcoe cried; "they will be here in a moment. Come on, Polly! come on, Atkins! we have no choice now." Taking up his arms, he started to run. "Quick, quick!" he cried; "I can hear them."

They had gone but some thirty yards when a number of natives burst from the wood. Had they arrived a minute sooner at the hut none of its occupants would have lived to tell the tale, but the impatience of those in the canoes lying round the brig had caused the alarm to be given before they had placed themselves in readiness for a simultaneous rush on the hut. There was no further occasion for silence; a wild yell burst out as they caught sight of the flying figures, and a dozen spears flew through the air.

"Don't stop to fire!" Simcoe shouted; "we shall have to make a stand at the boat and shall want every barrel."

They were three-quarters of the way to the boat and the natives were still some twenty yards behind them. Suddenly Bill stumbled; then with a savage oath he turned and emptied both barrels of his fowling-piece into the natives, and the two leading men fell forward on their faces, and some shouts and yells told that some of the shots had taken effect on those behind.

"Are you wounded, Bill?" Simcoe asked.

"Yes, I am hit hard. Run on, man; I think I am done for."

"Nonsense!" Simcoe exclaimed. "Catch hold of my arm; I will help you along."

One native was in advance of the rest. He raised his arm to hurl his spear, but the native woman, who had all along been running behind Simcoe, threw herself forward, and the spear pierced her through the body. With an exclamation of fury Simcoe leveled his musket and shot the native through the head.

"Throw your arms round my neck, Bill; the poor girl is done for, curse them. Can you hold on?"

"Yes, I think so," he replied.

Simcoe was a very powerful man, and with his comrade on his back he ran on almost as swiftly as before.

"Now, Atkins, give them every barrel that you have got, then lift Bill into the boat, and I will keep them back. I am not going until I have paid some of them out for poor Polly."

Atkins fired his pistols, and with so steady an aim that each shot brought down a savage; then he lifted Bill from Simcoe's shoulders and laid him in the canoe.

"Get up the sail!" Simcoe shouted. "They will riddle us with spears if we paddle." He shot down four of the natives with his double-barreled pistols, and then clubbing his gun threw himself with a hoarse shout upon them. The loss of seven of their leaders had caused their followers to hesitate, and the fury of Simcoe's attack and the tremendous blows he dealt completed their discomfiture, and they turned and fled in dismay.

"Now is your time!" Atkins shouted; "I have cut the cord and got the sail up." Turning, Simcoe was in a moment knee-deep in the water; pushing the boat off, he threw himself into it.

"Lie down, man, lie down!" he shouted to Atkins. But the warning was too late; the moment Simcoe turned the natives had turned also, and as they reached the water's edge half a dozen spears were flung. Two of them struck Atkins full in the body, and with a cry he threw up his arms and fell over the side of the canoe. Then came several splashes in the water. Simcoe drew the pistols from his companion's belt, and, raising himself high enough to look over the stern, shot two of the savages who were wading out waist deep, and were but a few paces behind.

The sail was now doing its work, and the boat was beginning to glide through the water at a rate that even the best swimmers could not hope to emulate. As soon as he was out of reach of the

spears Simcoe threw the boat up into the wind, reloaded his pistols and those of his comrade, and opened fire upon the group of natives clustered at the water's edge. Like most men of his class, he was a first-rate shot. Three of the natives fell and the rest fled. Then with a stroke of the paddle he put the boat before the wind again, and soon left the island far behind.

"This has been a pretty night's work," he muttered. "Poor little Polly killed! She gave her life to save me, and there is no doubt she did save me too, for that fellow's spear must have gone right through me. I am afraid that they have done for Bill too." He stooped over his comrade. The shaft of the spear had broken off, but the jagged piece with the head attached stuck out just over the hip. "I am afraid it is all up with him; however, I must take it out and bandage him as well as I can."

A groan burst from the wounded man as Simcoe with some effort drew the jagged spear from the wound. Then he took off his own shirt and tore some strips off it and tightly bandaged the wound.

"I can do nothing else until the morning," he said. "Well, Polly, I have paid them out for you. I have shot seven or eight and smashed the skulls of as many more. Of course they have done for those drunkards on board the brig. I did not hear a single pistol fired, and I expect that they knocked them on the head in their drunken sleep. The brutes! if they had had their senses about them we might have made a fair fight; though I expect that they would have been too many for us."

Just as daylight was breaking Bill opened his eyes.

"How do you feel, old man?"

"I am going, Simcoe. You stood by me like a man; I heard it all till Atkins laid me in the boat. Where is he?"

"He is gone, Bill. Instead of throwing himself down in the boat, as I shouted to him directly he got up the sail, he stood there watching, I suppose, until I was in. He got two spears in his body and fell overboard dead, I have no doubt."

"Look here, Sim!" The latter had to bend down his ear to listen. The words came faintly and slowly. "If you ever go back home again, you look up my brother. He is no more on the square than I was, but he is a clever fellow. He lives respectable – Rose Cottage, Pentonville Hill. Don't forget it. He goes by the name of Harrison. I wrote to him every two or three years, and got an answer about the same. Tell him how his brother Bill died, and how you carried him off when the blacks were yelling round. We were fond of each other, Tom and I. You keep the pearls, Sim; he don't want them. He is a top-sawyer in his way, he is, and has offered again and again that if I would come home he would set me up in any line I liked. I thought perhaps I should go home some day. Tom and I were great friends. I remember – " His eyelids drooped, his lips moved, and in another minute no sounds came from them. He gave one deep sigh, and then all was over.

"A good partner and a good chum," Simcoe muttered as he looked down into the man's face. "Well, well, I have lost a good many chums in the last ten years, but not one I missed as I shall miss Bill. It is hard, he and Polly going at the same time. There are not many fellows that I would have lain down to sleep with, with fifteen hundred pounds' or so worth of pearls in my belt, not out in these islands. But I never had any fear with him. Well, well," he went on, as he took the bag of pearls from his comrade's belt and placed it in his own, "There is a consolation everywhere, though we might have doubled and trebled this lot if we had stopped three months longer, which we should have done if Atkins had not brought that brig of his in. I can't think why he did it. He might have been sure that with that drunken lot of villains trouble would come of it sooner or later. He wasn't a bad fellow either, but too fond of liquor."

# CHAPTER III.
# A DEAF GIRL

"Yes, Lady Moulton, I will undertake the gypsy tent business at your fête; that is to say, I will see to the getting up of the tent, provide a gypsy for you, and someone to stand at the door and let in one visitor at a time and receive the money. Do you mean to make it a fixed charge, or leave it to each to pay the gypsy?"

"Which do you think will be best, Hilda? Of course the great thing is to get as much money for the decayed ladies as possible."

"I should say that it would be best to let them give what they like to the gypsy, Lady Moulton."

"But she might keep some of it herself."

"I think I can guarantee that she won't do that; I will get a dependable gypsy. You see, you could not charge above a shilling entrance, and very likely she would get a good deal more than that given to her."

"Well, my dear, I leave it all to you. Spare no expense about the tent and its fitting up. I have set my heart upon the affair being a success, and I think everything else has been most satisfactorily arranged. It is a very happy thought of yours about the gypsy; I hope that you will find a clever one. But you must mind and impress upon her that we don't want any evil predictions. Nothing could be in worse taste. It is all very well when a girl is promised a rich husband and everything to match, but if she were told that she would never get married, or would die young, or something of that sort, it would be a most unpleasant business."

"I quite agree with you, and will see that everything shall be 'couleur de rose' as to the future, and that she shall confine herself as much as possible to the past and present."

"I leave it in your hands, and I am sure that it will be done nicely."

Lady Moulton was a leading member of society, a charming woman with a rich and indulgent husband. Her home was a pleasant one, and her balls were among the most popular of the season. She had, as her friends said, but one failing, namely, her ardor for "The Society for Affording Aid to Decayed Ladies." It was on behalf of this institution that she was now organizing a fête in the grounds of her residence at Richmond. Hilda Covington was an orphan and an heiress, and was the ward of her uncle, an old Indian officer, who had been a great friend of Lady Moulton's father. She had been ushered into society under her ladyship's auspices. She had, however, rather forfeited that lady's favorable opinion by refusing two or three unexceptionable offers.

"My dear," she remonstrated, "no girl can afford to throw away such chances, even if she is, as you are, well endowed, pretty, and clever."

The girl laughed.

"I am not aware that I am clever at all, Lady Moulton. I speak German and French perfectly, because I have been four or five years in Hanover; but beyond that I am not aware of possessing any special accomplishments."

"But you are clever, my dear," the other said decidedly. "The way you seem to understand people's characters astonishes me. Sometimes it seems to me that you are almost a witch."

"You are arguing against yourself," the girl laughed. "If I am such a good judge of character I am not likely to make a mistake in such an important matter as choosing a husband for myself."

Lady Moulton was silenced, but not convinced; however, she had good sense enough to drop the subject. General Mathieson had already told her that although he should not interfere in any way with any choice Hilda might make, he should make it an absolute condition that she should not marry until she came of age; and as she was at present but eighteen, many things might occur in the three years' interval.

On her return home, after arranging to provide a gypsy for Lady Moulton's fête, Hilda related what had occurred to a girl friend who was staying with her.

"Of course, Netta, I mean to be the gypsy myself; but you must help me. It would never do for me to be suspected of being the sorceress, and so you must be my double, so that I can, from time to time, go out and mix with the crowd. A few minutes at a time will do."

The other laughed. "But what should I say to them, Hilda?"

"Oh, it is as easy as A B C. All that you will have to do is to speak ambiguously, hint at coming changes, foresee a few troubles in the way, and prophesy a happy solution of the difficulties. I will take upon myself the business of surprising them, and I fancy that I shall be able to astonish a few of them so much that even if some do get only commonplaces we shall make a general sensation. Of course, we must get two disguises. I shall have a small tent behind the other where I can change. It won't take a moment – a skirt, and a shawl to go over my head and partly hide my face, can be slipped on and off in an instant. Of course I shall have a black wig and some sort of yellow wash that can be taken off with a damp towel. I shall place the tent so that I can leave from behind without being noticed. As we shall have the tent a good deal darkened there will be no fear of the differences between the two gypsies being discovered, and, indeed, people are not likely to compare notes very closely."

"Well, I suppose you will have your way as usual, Hilda."

"I like that!" the other said, with a laugh. "You were my guide and counselor for five years, and now you pretend that I always have my own way. Why, I cannot even get my own way in persuading you to come and settle over here. I am quite sure that you would get lots of pupils, when people understand the system and its advantages."

"That is all very well, Hilda, but, you see, in the first place I have no friends here except yourself, and in the second it requires a good deal of money to get up an establishment and to wait until one gets pupils. My aunt would, I know, put in the money she saved when you were with us if I were to ask her, but I wouldn't do so. To begin with, she regards that as my fortune at her death. She has said over and over again how happy the knowledge makes her that I shall not be left absolutely penniless, except, of course, what I can get for the house and furniture, and I would do anything rather than sell that. She admits that I might keep myself by teaching deaf children, but, as she says, no one can answer for their health. I might have a long illness that would throw me out. I might suddenly lose a situation, say, from the death of a pupil, and might be a long time before I could hear of another. She said to me once, 'I do hope, Netta, you will never embark one penny of the little money that will come to you in any sort of enterprise or speculation, however promising it may look.' We had been talking of exactly the plan that you are now speaking of. 'The mere furnishing of a house in England large enough to take a dozen children would swallow up a considerable sum. At first you might have to wait some time till you could obtain more than two or three children, and there would be the rent and expenses going on, and you might find yourself without money and in debt before it began to pay its way; therefore I do hope that you will keep the money untouched except to meet your expenses in times of illness or of necessity of some kind. If you can save up money sufficient to start an establishment, it will, I think, be a good thing, especially if you could secure the promise of four or five pupils to come to you at once. If in a few years you should see your way to insure starting with enough pupils to pay your way, and I am alive at the time, I would draw out enough to furnish the house and will look after it for you.' That was a great concession on her part, but I certainly would not let her do it, for she is so happy in her home now, and I know that she would worry herself to death."

"Well, Netta, you know I am still ready to become the capitalist."

Both girls laughed merrily.

"Why not, Netta?" the speaker went on. "I know you said that you would not accept money as a loan even from me, which, as I told you, was very stupid and very disagreeable, but there is no reason why we should not do it in a business way. Other women go into business, why shouldn't I? As you know, I can't absolutely touch my money until I come of age, and it is nearly three years before

that; still, I feel sure that the General would let me have some money, and we could start the Institute. It would be great fun. Of course, in the first place, you would be principal, or lady superintendent, or whatever you like to call yourself, and you would draw, say, five hundred pounds a year. After that we could divide the profits."

Again both girls laughed.

"And that is what you call a business transaction?" the other said. "I know that your guardian is very kind, and indeed spoils you altogether, but I don't think that you would get him to advance you money for such a scheme."

"I am really in earnest, Netta."

"Oh, I don't say that you would not do it, if you could. However, I think, anyhow, we had better wait until you come of age. There is plenty of time. I am only twenty yet, and even in three years' time I doubt whether I should quite look the character of professor or lady superintendent."

"Well, directly I get of age I shall carry out my part of the plan," Hilda said positively, "and if you are disagreeable and won't do as I want you, I shall write to the professor and ask him to recommend a superintendent."

The other laughed again.

"You would have a difficulty, Hilda. You and I are, so far, the only two English girls who have learned the system, and either your superintendent would have to learn English or all her pupils would have to learn German."

"We will not discuss it further at present, Miss Purcell," Hilda said with dignity. "Oh, dear, those were happy days we had in that dear old house, with its pretty garden, when you were thirteen and I was eleven. I have got a great deal of fun from it since. One gets such curious little scraps of conversation."

"Then the people do not know what you learned over with us?"

"No, indeed; as you know, it was not for a year after I came back that I became altogether the General's ward, and my dear mother said to me just before she died, 'It would be better for you, dear, not to say anything about that curious accomplishment of yours. I know that you would never use it to any harm, but if people knew it they would be rather afraid of you.' Uncle said the same thing directly I got here. So of course I have kept it to myself, and indeed if they had not said so I should never have mentioned it, for it gives me a great deal of amusement."

When Hilda Covington was ten years old, she had, after a severe attack of scarlet fever, lost her hearing, and though her parents consulted the best specialists of the time, their remedies proved of no avail, and at last they could only express a hope, rather than an opinion, that in time, with added health and strength, nature might repair the damage. A year after her illness Mr. Covington heard of an aurist in Germany who had a European reputation, and he and Mrs. Covington took Hilda over to him. After examining her he said, "The mischief is serious, but not, I think, irreparable. It is a case requiring great care both as to dieting, exercise, and clothing. If it could be managed I should like to examine her ears once a fortnight, or once a month at the least. I have a house here where my patients live when under treatment, but I should not for a moment advise her being placed there. A child, to keep in good health, requires cheerful companions. If you will call again to-morrow I will think the matter over and let you know what I recommend."

Mr. and Mrs. Covington retired much depressed. His opinion was, perhaps, a little more favorable than any that they had received, but the thought that their only child must either make this considerable journey once a month or live there altogether was very painful to them. However, on talking it over, they agreed that it was far better that she should reside in Hanover for a time, with the hope of coming back cured, than that she should grow up hopelessly deaf.

"It will only be as if she were at school here," Mr. Covington said. "She will no doubt be taught to talk German and French, and even if she is never able to converse in these languages, it will add to her pleasures if she can read them."

The next day when they called upon the doctor he said, "If you can bring yourself to part with the child, I have, I think, found the very thing to suit her. In the first place you must know that there is in the town an establishment, conducted by a Professor Menzel, for the instruction of deaf mutes. It is quite a new system, and consists in teaching them to read from the lips of persons speaking to them the words that they are saying. The system is by no means difficult for those who have still, like your daughter, the power of speech, and who have lost only their hearing. But even those born deaf and dumb have learned to be able to converse to a certain degree, though their voices are never quite natural, for in nine cases out of ten deaf mutes are mutes only because they have never learned to use their tongue. However, happily that is beside the question in your daughter's case. I hope that she will regain her hearing; but should this unfortunately not be the case, it will at least be a great mitigation to her position to be able to read from the lips of those who address her what is said, and therefore to converse like an ordinary person. I can assure you that many of Herr Menzel's pupils can converse so easily and rapidly that no one would have the least idea of the misfortune from which they suffer, as in fact they feel no inconvenience beyond the fact that they are not aware of being addressed by anyone standing behind them, or whose face they do not happen to be watching."

"That would indeed be a blessing!" Mrs. Covington exclaimed. "I never heard of such a system."

"No, it is quite new, but as to its success there can be no question. I called upon Professor Menzel last evening. He said that as your daughter did not understand German the difficulties of her tuition would be very great. He has, however, among his pupils a young English girl two years older than your daughter. She lives with a maiden aunt, who has established herself here in order that her niece might have the benefit of learning the new system. Here is her name and address. The professor has reason to believe that her income is a small one, and imagines that she would gladly receive your daughter as a boarder. Her niece, who is a bright girl, would be a pleasant companion, and, moreover, having in the two years that she has been here made very great progress, she would be able to commence your daughter's education by conversing with her in English, and could act as her teacher in German also; and so soon as the language was fairly mastered your daughter could then become a pupil of the professor himself."

"That would be an excellent plan indeed," Mrs. Covington said, and her husband fully agreed with her. The doctor handed her a slip of paper with the name, "Miss Purcell, 2nd Etage, 5 Koenigstrasse."

Hilda had already been informed by the finger alphabet, which had been her means of communication since her illness, of the result of the conversation with the doctor on the previous day, and although she had cried at the thought of being separated from her father and mother, she had said that she would willingly bear anything if there was a hope of her regaining her hearing. She had watched earnestly the conversation between the doctor and her parents, and when the former had left and they explained what was proposed, her face brightened up.

"That will be very nice," she exclaimed, "and if I could but learn to understand in that way what people say, instead of watching their fingers (and some of them don't know the alphabet, and some who do are so slow that one loses all patience), it would be delightful."

Before going to see Miss Purcell, Mr. and Mrs. Covington talked the matter over together, and they agreed that, if Miss Purcell were the sort of person with whom Hilda could be happy, no plan could be better than that proposed.

"It certainly would not be nice for her," Mrs. Covington said, "to be living on a second floor in a street; she has always been accustomed to be so much in the open air, and as the doctors all agree that much depends upon her general health, I am sure it will be quite essential that she should be so now. I think that we should arrange to take some pretty little house with a good garden, just outside the town, and furnish it, and that Miss Purcell and her niece should move in there. Of course we should pay a liberal sum for board, and if she would agree, I should say that it would be best that we should treat the house as ours and should pay the expenses of keeping it up altogether. I don't suppose she

keeps a servant at present, and there are many little luxuries that Hilda has been accustomed to. Then, of course, we would pay so much to the niece for teaching Hilda German and beginning to teach her this system. I don't suppose the whole thing would cost more than three hundred pounds a year."

"The expense is nothing," Mr. Covington said. "We could afford it if it were five times the amount. I think your idea is a very good one, and we could arrange for her to have the use of a pony-carriage for two or three hours a day whenever she was disposed. The great thing is for her to be healthy and happy."

Ten minutes after they started with Hilda to see Miss Purcell, after having explained to her the plan they proposed. At this she was greatly pleased. The thought of a little house all to themselves and a girl friend was a great relief to her, and she looked brighter and happier than she had done since she had lost her hearing. When they knocked at the door of the apartment on the second floor, it was opened by a bright-faced girl of thirteen.

"This is Miss Purcell's, is it not?" Mrs. Covington asked.

"Yes, ma'am," the girl replied, with a slight expression of surprise which showed that visitors were very rare.

"Will you give my card to her and say that we shall be glad if she will allow us a few minutes' conversation with her?"

The girl went into the room and returned in a minute or two. "Will you come in?" she said. "My aunt will be glad to see you."

Miss Purcell was a woman of some fifty years old, with a pleasant, kindly face. The room was somewhat poorly furnished, but everything was scrupulously neat and tidy, and there was an air of comfort pervading it.

"We have called, Miss Purcell," Mrs. Covington began, "in consequence of what we have learned from Dr. Hartwig, whom we have come over to consult, and who has been good enough to see Professor Menzel. He has learned from him that your niece here is acquiring the system of learning to understand what is said by watching the lips of speakers. The doctor is of opinion that our daughter may in time outgrow the deafness that came on a year ago, after scarlet fever, but he wishes her to remain under his eye, and he suggested that it would be well that she should learn the new system, so that in case she does not recover her hearing she would still be able to mingle with other people. Hilda is delicate, and it is necessary that she should have a cheerful home; besides which she could not begin to learn the system until she had become familiar with German. The doctor suggested that if we could persuade you to do us the great kindness of taking her under your charge it would be the best possible arrangement."

"I should be glad to do so, madam, but I fear that I could not accommodate her, for it is a mere closet that my niece sleeps in, and the other apartments on this floor are all occupied. Were it not for that I should certainly be glad to consider the matter. It would be pleasant to Netta to have a companion, for it is but dull work for her alone with me. We have few acquaintances. I do not mind saying frankly that my means are straitened, and that I cannot indulge her with many pleasures. She is a grandniece of mine; her father died some years ago, her mother three years since, and naturally she came to me. Shortly after, she lost her hearing through measles. Just at that time I happened to hear from a German workman of the institution which had been started in this town, of which he was a native. I had no ties in England, and as I heard that living was cheap there, and that the fees were not large, I decided to come over and have her taught this new system, which would not only add greatly to her own happiness, but would give her the means of earning her livelihood when she grew up; for although I have a small pension, as my father was an Excise officer, this, of course, will expire at my death."

"Happily, Miss Purcell, we are in a position to say that money is no object to us. Hilda is our only child. We have talked it over, of course, and will tell you exactly what we propose, and I hope that you will fall in with the arrangement."

She then stated the plan that she and her husband had discussed.

"You see," she went on, "you would, in fact, be mistress of the house, and would have the entire management of everything as if it was your own. We are entirely ignorant of the cost of living here, or we might have proposed a fixed monthly payment for the expenses of servants and outgoings, and would still do that if you would prefer it, though we thought that it would be better that you should, at the end of each month, send us a line saying what the disbursements had been. We would wish everything done on a liberal scale. Hilda has little appetite, and it will, for a time, want tempting. However, that matter we could leave to you. We propose to pay a hundred a year to you for your personal services as mistress of the house, and fifty pounds to your niece as Hilda's companion and instructor in German and in the system, until she understands the language well enough to attend Professor Menzel's classes. If the house we take has a stable we should keep a pony and a light carriage, and a big lad or young man to look after it and drive, and to keep the garden in order in his spare time. I do hope, Miss Purcell, that you will oblige us by falling in with our plans. If you like we can give you a day to consider them."

"I do not require a minute," she replied; "my only hesitation is because the terms that you offer are altogether too liberal."

"That is our affair," Mrs. Covington said. "We want a comfortable, happy home for our child, and shall always feel under a deep obligation to you if you will consent."

"I do consent most willingly and gratefully. The arrangement will be a delightful one for me, and I am sure for Netta."

Netta, who had been standing where she could watch the lips of both speakers, clapped her hands joyously. "Oh, auntie, it will be splendid! Fancy having a house, and a garden, and a pony-chaise!"

"You understand all we have been saying then, Netta?"

"I understand it all," the girl replied. "I did not catch every word, but quite enough to know all that you were saying."

"That certainly is a proof of the goodness of the system," Mr. Covington said, speaking for the first time. "How long have you been learning?"

"Eighteen months, sir. We have been here two years, but I was six months learning German before I knew enough to begin, and for the next six months I could not get on very fast, as there were so many words that I did not know, so that really I have only been a year at it. The professor says that in another year I shall be nearly perfect and fit to begin to teach; and he has no doubt that he will be able to find me a situation where I can teach in the daytime and still live with my aunt."

In a week the necessary arrangements were all made. A pretty, furnished house, a quarter of a mile out of town, with a large garden and stables, had been taken, and Netta and Hilda had already become friends, for as the former had learned to talk with her fingers before she came out she was able to keep up her share of the conversation by that means while Hilda talked in reply.

"The fingers are useful as a help at first," Netta said, "but Professor Menzel will not allow any of his pupils to use their fingers, because they come to rely upon them instead of watching the lips."

# CHAPTER IV.
# THE GYPSY

Mr. and Mrs. Covington remained for a week after Hilda was installed with the Purcells in their new home. To her the house with its garden and pretty pony-carriage and pony were nothing remarkable, but Netta's enjoyment in all these things amused her, and the thought that she, too, would some day be able to talk and enjoy life as her companion did, greatly raised her spirits. Her father and mother were delighted at hearing her merry laugh mingled with that of Netta as they walked together in the garden, and they went home with lighter hearts and more hopeful spirits than they had felt since the child's illness began.

Every three or four months – for a journey to Hanover was a longer and more serious business in 1843 than it is at present – they went over to spend a week there. There could be no doubt from the first that the change was most beneficial to Hilda. Her cheeks regained their color and her limbs their firmness. She lost the dull look and the apathy to whatever was going on around her that had before distressed them. She progressed very rapidly in her study of German, and at the end of six months her conversations with Netta were entirely carried on in that language. She had made some little progress in reading from her companion's lips and had just entered at Herr Menzel's academy. She could now take long walks with Netta, and every afternoon, or, as summer came on, every evening, they drove together in the pony-chaise. With renewed health and strength there had been some slight improvement in her hearing. She could now faintly distinguish any loud sounds, such as those of the band of a regiment marching past her or a sudden peal of bells.

"I think that we shall make an eventual cure," Dr. Hartwig said. "It will be slow, and possibly her hearing may never be absolutely good; but at least we may hope that she may be able to eventually hear as well as nine people out of ten."

In another year she could, indeed, though with difficulty, hear voices, and when she had been at Hanover three years her cure was almost complete, and she now went every morning to school to learn French and music. She herself was quite content to remain there. She was very happy in her life and surroundings, and could now read with the greatest facility from the lips, and indeed preferred watching a speaker's mouth to listening to the voice. It was a source of endless amusement to her that she could, as she and Netta walked through the streets, read scraps of conversation between persons on the other side of the street or passing in carriages.

Another six months and both the doctor and Professor Menzel said that they could do nothing more for her. She was still somewhat hard of hearing; but not enough so to be noticeable; while she could with her eyes follow the most rapid speaker, and the Professor expressed his regret that so excellent an example of the benefit of his system should not be in circumstances that would compel her to make a living by becoming a teacher in it. Netta was now a paid assistant at the institution.

The end of what had been a very happy time to Hilda came abruptly and sadly, for three weeks before the date when her parents were to come over to take her home, Miss Purcell, on opening a letter that came just as they had finished breakfast, said, after sitting silent for a few minutes, "You need not put on your things, Hilda; you cannot go to school this morning; I have some bad news, dear – very bad news."

The tone of voice in which she spoke, even more than the words, sent a chill into the girl's heart.

"What is it, aunt?" she said, for she had from the first used the same term as Netta in addressing her.

"Your father has had a serious illness, my dear – a very, very serious and sudden illness, and your mother wishes you to go home at once."

Hilda looked at her with frightened, questioning eyes, while every vestige of color left her cheeks. "Is he – is he – " she asked.

"Here is an inclosure for you," Miss Purcell said, as she got up, and taking Hilda's hand in one of hers drew her with the other arm close to her; "your mother wrote to me that I might prepare you a little before giving it to you. A terrible misfortune has happened. Your dear father is dead. He died suddenly of an affection of the heart."

"Oh, no, no; it cannot be!" Hilda cried.

"It is true, my dear. God has taken him. You must be strong and brave, dear, for your mother's sake."

"Oh, my poor mother, my poor mother!" Hilda cried, bursting into a sudden flood of tears, "what will she do!"

It was not until some time afterwards that she was sufficiently composed to read her mother's letter, which caused her tears to flow afresh. After giving the details of her father's death, it went on:

"I have written to your uncle, General Mathieson, who is, I know, appointed one of the trustees, and is joined with me as your guardian. I have asked him to find and send over a courier to fetch you home, and no doubt he will arrive a day or two after you receive this letter. So please get everything ready to start at once, when he comes."

Two days later General Mathieson himself arrived, accompanied by a courier. It was a great comfort to Hilda that her uncle had come for her instead of a stranger.

"It is very kind of you to come yourself, uncle," she said as she threw herself crying into his arms.

"Of course I should come, dear," he said. "Who should fetch you except your uncle? I had to bring a courier with me, for I don't understand any of their languages, and he will take all trouble off my hands. Now let me look at your face." It was a pale, sad little face that was lifted up, but two days of sorrow had not obliterated the signs of health and well-being.

"Whiter than it ought to be," he said, "but clear and healthy, and very different from what it was when I saw you before you came out. You have grown wonderfully, child. Really, I should hardly have known you again."

And so he kept on for two or three minutes, to allow her to recover herself.

"Now, dear, you must take me in and introduce me to your kind friends here."

Hilda led the way into the sitting room.

"I have heard so much of you and your niece, Miss Purcell," he said as he shook hands with her, "that I do do not feel that you are a stranger. You certainly seem to have worked wonders between you for my niece, and I must own that in the first place I thought it a mistake her being here by herself, for I had no belief that either her hearing would be restored or that she would ever be able to follow what people were saying by only staring at their lips."

"Yes, indeed, Hanover has agreed with her, sir, and it is only a small part of the credit that is due to us."

"I must differ from you entirely, madam. If she had not been perfectly happy here with you, she would never have got on as she has done."

"Have you any luggage, sir? Of course you will stay with us to-night."

"No, thank you, Miss Purcell. We have already been to the Kaiserhof, and long before this my courier will have taken rooms and made every preparation for me. You see, I am accustomed to smoke at all times, and could not think of scenting a house, solely inhabited by ladies, with tobacco. Now, if you will excuse me, I will ask Hilda to put on her bonnet and take a stroll with me."

"I shall be very glad for her to do so. It is just getting cool and pleasant for walking, and half an hour in the fresh air will do her good."

It was an hour before they returned. General Mathieson had gently told her all there was to tell of her father's death, and turning from that he spoke of her mother, and how nobly she was

bearing her troubles, and erelong her tears, which had burst out anew, flowed more quietly, and she felt comforted. Presently she said suddenly:

"What is going to be done here, uncle? I have been thinking over that ever since it was settled that I was to come home next month, and I am sure that, although she has said nothing about it, Miss Purcell has felt the change that is coming. She said the other day, 'I shall not go back to the apartments where you found us, Hilda. You see, we are a great deal better off than we were before. In the first place I have had nothing whatever to spend, and during the four years the ridiculously liberal sum paid to Netta and myself has been all laid aside and has mounted up to six hundred pounds. My pension of eighty pounds a year has also accumulated, with the exception of a small sum required for our clothes, so that in fact I have nearly a thousand pounds laid by. Netta is earning thirty pounds a year at the Institute; with that and my pension and the interest on money saved we shall get on very comfortably.' I should not like, uncle, to think of them in a little stuffy place in the town. Having a nice garden and everything comfortable has done a great deal for Miss Purcell. Netta told me that she was very delicate before, and that she is quite a different woman since she came out here from the town. You cannot tell how kind she has always been. If I had been her own child, she could not have been more loving. In fact, no one could have told by her manner that she was not my mother and Netta my sister."

"Yes, dear, I ran down to your mother before starting to fetch you to help in the arrangements, and she spoke about Miss Purcell. Under ordinary circumstances, of course, at the end of the four years that you have been here the house would be given up and she would, as you say, go into a much smaller place; but your mother does not consider that these are ordinary circumstances, and thinks that her care and kindness have had quite as much to do with the improvement in your health as has the doctor. Of course we had no time to come to any definite plan, but she has settled that things are to go on here exactly as at present, except that your friend Netta will not be paid for acting as companion to you. I am to tell Miss Purcell that with that exception everything is to go on as before, and that your mother will need a change, and will probably come out here in a month or so for some time."

"Does she really mean that, uncle?"

"Certainly, and the idea is an excellent one. After such a shock as she has had an entire change of scene will be most valuable; and as she knows Miss Purcell well, and you like the place very much, I don't think that any better plan could be hit upon. I dare say she will stay here two or three months, and you can continue your studies. At the end of that time I have no doubt some plan that will give satisfaction to all parties will be hit upon."

Hilda returned to Hanover with her mother a month later. At the end of three months Mrs. Covington bought the house and presented the deeds to Miss Purcell, who had known nothing whatever of her intentions.

"I could not think of accepting it," she exclaimed.

"But you cannot help accepting it, dear Miss Purcell; here are the deeds in your name. The house will be rather large for you at present, but in a few years, indeed in two or three years, Netta could begin to take a few pupils. As soon as she is ready to do so I shall, of course, mention it among my friends, and be able to send a few children, whose parents would be ready to pay well to have them taught this wonderful method of brightening their lives, which is at present quite unknown in England."

So it was arranged; but a few months after her return to England Mrs. Covington, who had never altogether recovered from the shock of her husband's death, died after a short illness, and Hilda became an inmate of her uncle's house. Since that time three years had elapsed, and Hilda was now eighteen, and Netta was over for a two months' visit.

The scene in the grounds of Lady Moulton's charming villa at Richmond, a fortnight after the conversation between that lady and Hilda, was a gay one. Everyone in society had been invited and

there were but few refusals; the weather was lovely, and all agreed that even at Ascot the costumes were not brighter or more varied.

Although the fête was especially on behalf of a charity, no admission fees were charged to guests, but everyone understood that it would be his duty to lay out money at the various picturesque tents scattered about under the trees. In these were all the most popular entertainers of the day. In one pavilion John Parry gave a short entertainment every half-hour. In a larger one Mario, Grisi, Jenny Lind, and Alboni gave short concerts, and high as were the prices of admission, there was never a seat vacant. Conjurers had a tent, electro-biologists – then the latest rage from the United States – held their séances, and at some distance from the others Richardson's booth was in full swing. The Grenadiers' band and a string band played alternately.

Not the least attraction to many was the gypsy tent erected at the edge of a thick shrubbery, for it soon became rumored that the old gypsy woman there was no ordinary impostor, but really possessed of extraordinary powers of palmistry. Everything had been done to add to the air of mystery pervading the place. Externally it was but a long, narrow marquee. On entering, the inquirer was shown by an attendant to a seat in an apartment carpeted in red, with black hangings and black cloth lining the roof. From this hung a lamp, all other light being excluded. As each visitor came out from the inner apartment the next in order was shown in, and the heavy curtains shut off all sound of what was passing. Here sat an apparently aged gypsy on an old stump of a tree. A fire burned on the ground and a pot was suspended by a tripod over it; a hood above this carried the smoke out of the tent. The curtains here were red; the roof, as in the other compartment, black, but sprinkled with gold and silver stars. A stool was placed for the visitor close enough to the gypsy for the latter to examine her hand by the light of two torches, which were fastened to a rough sapling stuck in the ground.

Hilda possessed every advantage for making the most of the situation. Owing to her intimacy with Lady Moulton, and her experience for a year in the best London society, she knew all its gossip, while she had gathered much more than others knew from the conversations both of the dancers and the lookers-on.

The first to enter was a young man who had been laughingly challenged by the lady he was walking with to go in and have his fortune told.

"Be seated, my son," the old woman said; "give me your hand and a piece of money."

With a smile he handed her half a sovereign. She crossed his palm with it and then proceeded attentively to examine the lines.

"A fair beginning," she said, "and then troubles and difficulties. Here I see that, some three years back, there is the mark of blood; you won distinction in war. Then there is a cross-mark which would show a change. Some good fortune befell you. Then the lines darken. Things go from bad to worse as they proceed. You took to a vice – cards or horse-racing. Here are evil associates, but there is a white line that runs through them. There is a girl somewhere, with fair hair and blue eyes, who loves you, and whom you love, and whose happiness is imperiled by this vice and these associates. Beyond, there is another cross-line and signs of a conflict. What happens after will depend upon yourself. Either the white line and the true love will prove too powerful for the bad influences or these will end in ruin and – ah! sudden and violent death. Your future, therefore, depends upon yourself, and it is for you to say which influence must triumph. That is all."

Without a word he went out.

"You look pale, Mr. Desmond," the lady said when he rejoined her. "What has she told you?"

"I would rather not tell you, Mrs. Markham," he said seriously. "I thought it was going to be a joke, but it is very far from being one. Either the woman is a witch or she knew all about me personally, which is barely within the limits of possibility. At any rate she has given me something to think of."

"I will try myself," the lady said; "it is very interesting."

"I should advise you not to," he said earnestly.

"Nonsense!" she laughed; "I have no superstitions. I will go in and hear what she has to say." And leaving him, she entered the tent.

The gypsy examined her hand in silence. "I would rather not tell you what I see," she said as she dropped the hand. "Oh, ridiculous!" the lady exclaimed. "I have crossed your palm with gold, and I expect to get my money's worth," and she held out her hand again.

The gypsy again examined it.

"You stand at the crossing of the ways. There are two men – one dark, quiet, and earnest, who loves you. You love him, but not as he loves you; but your line of life runs smoothly until the other line, that of a brown man, becomes mixed up in it. He loves you too, with a hot, passionate love that would soon fade. You had a letter from him a day or two back. Last night, as he passed you in a dance, he whispered, 'I have not had an answer,' and the next time he passed you, you replied, 'You must give me another day or two.' Upon the answer you give the future of your life will depend. Here is a broad, fair line, and here is a short, jagged one, telling of terrible troubles and misery. It is for you to decide which course is to be yours."

As she released her hold of the hand it dropped nerveless. The gypsy poured out a glass of water from a jug by her side, but her visitor waved it aside, and with a great effort rose to her feet, her face as pale as death.

"My God!" she murmured to herself, "this woman is really a witch."

"They do not burn witches now," the gypsy said; "I only read what I see on the palm. You cannot deny that what I have said is true. Stay a moment and drink a glass of wine; you need it before you go out."

She took a bottle of wine from behind her seat, emptied the water on to the earth, half filled a tumbler, and held it out. The frightened woman felt that indeed she needed it before going out into the gay scene, and tossed it off.

"Thank you!" she said. "Whoever you are, I thank you. You have read my fate truly, and have helped me to decide it."

Desmond was waiting for her when she came out, but she passed him with a gesture.

"You are right!" she said. "She is a witch indeed!"

Few other stories told were as tragic, but in nearly every case the visitors retired puzzled at the knowledge the gypsy possessed of their life and surroundings, and it soon became rumored that the old woman's powers were something extraordinary, and the little ante-room was kept filled with visitors waiting their turn for an audience. No one noticed the long and frequent absences of Hilda Covington from the grounds. The tent had been placed with its back hiding a small path through the shrubbery. Through a peep-hole arranged in the curtain she was able to see who was waiting, and each time before leaving said a few words as to their lives which enabled Netta to support the character fairly. When the last guest had departed and she joined Lady Moulton, she handed over a bag containing nearly a hundred pounds.

"I have deducted five pounds for the gypsy," she said, "and eight pounds for the hire of the tent and its fittings."

"That is at least five times as much as I expected, Hilda. I have heard all sorts of marvelous stories of the power of your old woman. Several people told me that she seemed to know all about them, and told them things that they believed were only known to themselves. But how did she get so much money?"

Hilda laughed. "I hear that they began with half-sovereigns, but as soon as they heard of her real powers, they did not venture to present her with anything less than a sovereign, and in a good many cases they gave more – no doubt to propitiate her into giving them good fortunes. You see, each visitor only had two or three minutes' interview, so that she got through from twenty to thirty an hour; and as it lasted four hours she did exceedingly well."

"But who is the gypsy, and where did you find her?"

"The gypsy has gone, and is doubtless by this time in some caravan or gypsy tent. I do not think that you will ever find her again."

"I should have suspected that you played the gypsy yourself, Hilda, were it not that I saw you half a dozen times."

"I have no skill in palmistry," the girl laughed, "and certainly have not been in two places at once. I did my duty and heard Jenny Lind sing and Parry play, though I own that I did not patronize Richardson's booth."

"Well, it is extraordinary that this old woman should know the history of such a number of people as went into her tent, few of whom she could ever have heard of even by name, to say nothing of knowing them by sight."

Several ladies called within the next few days, specially to inquire from Lady Moulton about the gypsy.

"Everyone is talking about her," one said. "Certainly she told me several things about the past that it was hardly possible that a woman in her position could know. I have often heard that gypsies pick up information from servants, or in the country from village gossip; but at least a hundred people visited this woman's tent, and from what I hear everyone was as astonished as I was myself at her knowledge of their family matters. It is said that in some cases she went farther than this, and told them things about the present known only to themselves and two or three intimate friends. Some of them seemed to have been quite seriously affected. I saw Mrs. Markham just after she had left the tent, and she was as white as a sheet, and I know she drove away a few minutes afterwards."

To all inquiries Lady Moulton simply replied:

"I know no more about the gypsy than you do. Miss Covington took the entire management of the gypsy tent off my hands, saw to the tent being erected, and engaged the gypsy. Where she picked her up I have no idea, but I fancy that she must have got her from their encampment on Ham Common. She turned the matter off when I asked her point-blank, and I imagine that she must have given the old crone a promise not to let it be known who she was. They are curious people, the gypsies, and for aught I know may have an objection to any of the tribe going to a gathering like ours to tell fortunes."

Some appeals were made to Hilda personally; but Lady Moulton had told her the answer she had given, and taking her cue from it she was able to so shape her replies that her questioners left her convinced that she had really, while carrying out Lady Moulton's instructions, lighted on a gypsy possessing some of the secrets of the almost forgotten science of palmistry.

# CHAPTER V.
# A GAMBLING DEN

In a corner of one of the winding courts that lie behind Fleet Street stood a dingy-looking house, the lamp over the door bearing the words, "Billiards and Pool." During the daytime no one would be seen to enter save between the hours of twelve and two, when perhaps a dozen young fellows, after eating a frugal lunch, would resort there to pass their hour out of office in smoking and a game of billiards. Of an evening, however, there were lights in every window, and the click of balls could be heard from the ground floor and that above it. In each of these there were two tables, and the play continued uninterruptedly from seven until eleven or half-past.

The lights on the second floor, however, often burned until two or three o'clock in the morning, and it was here that the proprietor reaped by far the larger proportion of his profits. While the billiard-room windows generally stood open, those of the large room on the second floor were never raised, and when the lights below were extinguished, heavy curtains were dropped across the windows to keep both the light and the sounds within from being seen or heard in the court below. Here was a large roulette table, while along the sides of the room were smaller tables for those who preferred other games. Here almost every evening some thirty or forty men assembled. Of these, perhaps a third were clerks or shop assistants, the remainder foreigners of almost every nationality. Betting lists were exposed at one end of the room. Underneath these a bookmaker had a small table, and carried on his trade.

In 1851 there were a score of such places in the neighborhood of the Strand and Fleet Street, but few did a larger business than this. It was generally understood that Wilkinson, the proprietor, had been a soldier; but the belief originated rather from his upright carriage and a certain soldierly walk than from anything he had himself said, and he was not the sort of man whom even the most regular of the frequenters of his establishment cared to question. He was a tall man, some five-and-forty years of age, taciturn in speech, but firm in manner while business was going on. He kept admirable order in the place. He was generally to be found in the room on the second floor, but when a whistle blew, and one of the markers whispered up a speaking-tube that there was a dispute going on between the players or lookers-on, he was at once upon the spot.

"Now, gentlemen," he would say, interposing between them, "you know the rules of this establishment; the marker's decision on all points connected with the game is final, and must be accepted by both parties. I will have no quarrels or disputes here, and anyone making a row goes straight out into the street, and never comes in here again."

In the vast majority of cases this settled the matter; but when the men were flushed with liquor, and inclined to continue the dispute, they were seized by the collar by Wilkinson's strong arm and were summarily ejected from the house. In the inner room he preserved order as strictly, but had much more difficulty in doing so among the foreign element. Here quarrels were not uncommon, and knives occasionally drawn; but Wilkinson was a powerful man and a good boxer, and a flush hit from the shoulder always settled the business.

But though stern in the management of his establishment, Wilkinson was popular among its frequenters. He was acquainted with most of their callings and business. Indeed, none were admitted to the upper room unless well introduced by *habitués*, or until he had made private inquiries concerning them. Thus he knew among the foreigners whom he could trust, and how far, when, after a run of ill luck, they came to him and asked him for a loan, he could venture to go.

With the English portion of his customers he was still more liberal. He knew that he should not be a loser from transactions with them; they must repay him, for were it known to their employers that they were in the habit of gambling, it would mean instant dismissal. There were among them

several lawyers' clerks, some of whom were, in comparison with their means, deeply in debt to him. One or other of those he would often invite up to his private room on the floor above, where a bottle of good wine would be on the table, a box of excellent cigars beside it, and here they would chat more or less comfortably until the roulette room opened.

Mr. Wilkinson made no pretense that these meetings were simply for the purpose of drinking his wine and smoking his cigars. "I am a straightforward man," he would say, "and business is business. I oblige you, and I expect you to oblige me. I have always had a fancy that there is money to be made in connection with lawyers' businesses. There are missing heirs to be hunted up; there are provisos in deeds, of whose existence some one or other would give a good deal to know. Now, I am sure that you are not in a position to pay me the amount I have lent you, and for which I hold your I. O. U.'s. I have no idea of pressing you for the money, and shall be content to let it run on so long as you will let me know what is being done at your office. The arrangement is that you will tell me anything that you think can be used to advantage, and if money is made out of any information you may give me, I will engage to pay you a third of what it brings in. Now, I call that a fair bargain. What do you say?"

In some cases the offer was closed with at once; in others it was only agreed to after threats that the debt must be at once paid or an application would be made forthwith. So far the gambling-house keeper's expectations had not met with the success he had looked for. He had spent a good deal of time in endeavoring to find the descendants of persons who stood in the direct line of succession to properties, but of whom all clew had been lost. He had indeed obtained an insight into various family differences that had enabled him to successfully extort blackmail, but his gains in this way had not, so far, recouped him for the sums he had, as he considered, invested in the speculation.

He was, however, a patient man, and felt, no doubt, that sooner or later he should be able to make a coup that would set him up for life. Still he was disappointed; his idea had been the one held by many ignorant persons, that lawyers are as a class ready to resort to tricks of all kinds, in the interests of their clients or themselves. He had found that he had been altogether wrong, and that although there were a few firms which, working in connection with money-lenders, financial agents, and the lowest class of bill discounters, were mixed up in transactions of a more or less shady character, these were the black sheep of the profession, and that in the vast majority of cases the business transacted was purely technical and connected with the property of their clients. Nevertheless, he took copious notes of all he learned, contending that there was no saying what might come in useful some day.

"Well, Dawkins," he said one day to a dark-haired young fellow with a handsome face that already showed traces of the effect of late hours and dissipation, "I suppose it is the usual thing; the lawsuit as to the right of way at Brownsgrove is still going on, the settlements in Mr. Cochrane's marriage to Lady Gertrude Ivory are being drawn up, and other business of the same sort. You never give me a scrap of information that is of the slightest use. I am afraid that your firm is altogether too eminently respectable to have anything to do with doubtful transactions."

"I told you so from the first, Wilkinson; that whatever your game might be, there would be nothing in our office that could be of the least use to you, even if you had copies of every deed drawn up in it. Ours is what you might call a family business. Our clients have for the most part dealt with the firm for the last hundred years; that is to say, their families have. We have drawn their wills, their marriage settlements, their leases, and done everything relating to their property for years and years. My own work for the last two or three days has been drafting and engrossing the will of a General Mathieson, whose father and grandfather were our clients before him."

"Mathieson – he is an old Indian officer, isn't he, if it is the man I mean? He was in command at Benares twenty years ago. He was a handsome man, then, about my height and build."

"Yes, I have no doubt that is the man – John Le Marchand Mathieson."

"That is him. He was very popular with the troops. He used to spend a good deal of money in improving their rations and making them comfortable. Had a first-rate stable, and they used to say he was a rich man. Anyhow, he spent a good deal more than his pay."

"Yes, he was a second son, but his elder brother died, and he came into the property; but instead of coming home to enjoy it he stopped out in India for years after he came into it."

"He had a daughter, quite a little girl, in those days; her mother died out there. I suppose she inherits his property?"

"Well, no; she married some time back; she and her husband are both dead, and their son, a boy, six or seven years old, lives with the old man."

"How much does he leave?"

"Something over a hundred thousand pounds. At least I know that that is about the value of the estates, for we have always acted as his agents, collected the rents, and so on."

"I should like to see a copy of his will," Wilkinson said, after sitting for some time silent. "I don't want all the legal jargon, but just the list of the legacies."

"I can easily jot those down for you. The property goes to the grandson, and if he dies before coming of age, to a niece, Hilda Covington, who is his ward and lives with him. He leaves her beside only five hundred pounds, because she is herself an heiress. There are a score of small legacies, to old servants, soldiers, widows, and people of that sort."

"Well, you may as well give me the list entire."

Dawkins shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," he said; "the will was signed yesterday, but I have the note of instructions still by me, and will bring round the list to-morrow evening; though, upon my word, I don't see what interest it can possibly have for you."

"I don't know myself," the other said shortly, "but there is never any saying."

After talking for a few minutes on other subjects he said, "The room is open downstairs now, Dawkins, and as we have finished the bottle I will not keep you any longer. In fact, the name of that old General has called up some queer memories of old times, and I should like to think them over."

When the clerk had left, Wilkinson sat for a long time in thought.

"It is a great idea," he murmured to himself at last; "it will want a tremendous lot of planning to arrange it all, and of course it is tremendously risky. Still, it can be done, and the stake is worth trying for, even if it would be seven years' transportation if anything went wrong. In the first place I have to get some proofs of my identity. I own that I have neglected my family scandalously," and his face, which had been stern and hard, softened into a smile. "Then, of course, I must establish myself in chambers in the West End, and as I have three or four thousand pounds in hand I can carry on for two or three years, if necessary. At the worst the General is likely to add me to his list of legatees, but of course that would scarcely be worth playing for alone. The will is the thing. I don't see my way to that, but it is hard if it can't be managed somehow. The child is, of course, an obstacle, but that can certainly be got over, and as I don't suppose the old man is going to die at present I have time to make my plans. When I see how matters go I can put my hand on a man who could be relied on to help me carry out anything I might put in his way. Well, I always thought that I should hit on something good through these young scamps who come here, but this is a bigger thing than I ever dreamed of. It will certainly be a difficult game to play, but, knocking about all over the world as I have been for fifteen years before I came back and set up this show, I think that I have learned enough to pass muster anywhere."

Somewhat to the surprise of the *habitués* of the room below it was nearly eleven o'clock before the proprietor made his appearance there, and even when he did so he took little interest in what was going on, but moved restlessly from one room to another, smoking cigar after cigar without intermission, and acknowledging but briefly the greetings of those who were the most regular frequenters of his establishment.

Two days later the following advertisement appeared, not only in the London papers, but in a large number of country journals:

"John Simcoe: Any relatives of John Simcoe, who left England about the year 1830 or 1831, and is supposed to have been lost at sea in the Bay of Bengal, in the ship *Nepaul*, in December, 1832, are requested to communicate with J. W. Thompson & Co., Newspaper Agents, Fleet Street, when they will hear of something to their advantage."

Only one reply was received. It was dated "Myrtle Cottage, Stowmarket," and was as follows:

"Sir: A friend has shown me the advertisement in the Ipswich paper, which must, I think, refer to my nephew, who left here twenty years ago. I received a letter from him dated December 2, 1832, from Calcutta, saying that he was about to sail for China in the *Nepaul*. I never heard from him again, but the Rector here kindly made some inquiries for me some months afterwards, and learned that the vessel had never been heard of after sailing, but was believed to have foundered with all hands in a great gale that took place a few days after she sailed. So far as I know I am his only relative. Awaiting a further communication from you,
*"I remain,*
*"Your obedient servant,*
*"Martha Simcoe."*

Great was the excitement caused by the advertisement at Myrtle Cottage. Miss Simcoe, who with a tiny servant was the sole inmate of the cottage, had called together all her female acquaintances, and consulted them as to what the advertisement could mean, and as to the way in which she should answer it.

"Do you think it would be safe to reply at all?" she inquired anxiously. "You see, my nephew John was a very wild young fellow. I do not mean as to his conduct here; no one could say anything against that. He was a clerk in the bank, you know, and, I believe, was very well thought of; but when his father died, and he came into two thousand pounds, it seemed to turn his head. I know that he never liked the bank; he had always wanted to be either a soldier or a sailor, and directly he got the money he gave up his situation at the bank, and nothing would do but that he must travel. Everyone told him that it was madness; his Aunt Maria – poor soul, you all knew her – and I cried over it, but nothing would move him. A fine-looking fellow he was, as some of you will remember, standing six feet high, and, as everyone said, looking more like a soldier officer than a clerk at a bank.

"We asked him what he would do when his money was gone, but he laughed it off, and said that there were plenty of things for a man to do with a pair of strong arms. He said that he might enter the service of some Indian prince, or marry the daughter of a black king, or discover a diamond mine, and all sorts of nonsense of that sort. He bought such an outfit as you never did see – guns and pistols and all sorts of things; and as for clothes, why, a prince could not have wanted more. Shirts by the dozen, my dear; and I should say eight or ten suits of white clothes, which I told him would make him look like a cricketer or a baker. Why, it took three big trunks to hold all his things. But I will say for him that he wrote regular, either to me or to my sister Maria. Last time he wrote he said that he had been attacked by a tiger, but had got well again and was going to China, though what he wanted to go there for I am sure I don't know. He could not want to buy teacups and saucers; they would only get broken sending home. Well, his death was a great blow to us."

"I don't know whether I should answer the advertisement, Miss Simcoe," one of her friends said. "There is no saying what it might mean. Perhaps he got into debt in India, and the people think that they might get paid if they can find out his relations here."

The idea came like a douche of cold water upon the little gathering.

"But the advertisement says, 'will hear of something to their advantage,' Mrs. Maberley," Miss Simcoe urged timidly.

"Oh, that is nothing, my dear. That may be only a lawyer's trick; they are capable of anything, I have heard."

"But they could not make Miss Simcoe pay," another urged; "it seems to me much more likely that her nephew may have left some of his money in the hands of a banker at Calcutta, and now that it has been so many years unclaimed they are making inquiries to see who is his heir. That seems much more likely."

A murmur of assent ran round the circle, and after much discussion the answer was drafted, and Miss Simcoe, in a fever of anxiety, awaited the reply.

Two days later a tall, well-dressed man knocked at the door of Myrtle Cottage. It was a loud, authoritative knock, such as none of Miss Simcoe's usual visitors gave.

"It must be about the advertisement," she exclaimed.

The little servant had been enjoined to wear her Sunday clothes in case a visitor should come, and after a hasty glance to see if she was tidy, Miss Simcoe sat down in her little parlor, and tried to assume an appearance of calmness. The front door opened, and a man's voice inquired, "Is Miss Simcoe in?" Then the parlor door opened and the visitor entered, pushing past the girl, who had been instructed how to announce him in proper form, and exclaiming, "My dear Aunt Martha," fairly lifted the astonished old lady from her seat and kissed her.

"Dear me! Dear me!" she gasped, as he put her on her feet again, "can it be that you are my nephew John?"

"Why, don't you know me, aunt? Twenty years of knocking about have changed me sadly, I am afraid, but surely you must remember me."

"Ye – es," she said doubtfully, "yes, I think that I remember you. But, you see, we all thought that you were dead; and I have only got that likeness of you that was cut out in black paper by a man who came round when you were only eighteen, and somehow I have always thought of you as like that."

"Yes, I remember," he laughed. "Well, aunt, I have changed since then, there is no doubt. So you see I was not drowned, after all. I was picked up by a passing ship, clinging to a spar, but I lost all my money in the wreck of the *Nepaul*. I shipped before the mast. We traded among the islands for some months, then I had a row with the captain and ran away, and threw in my lot with the natives, and I have been knocking about in the East ever since, and have come back with enough to live on comfortably, and to help you, if you need it."

"Poor Maria died four years ago," she said tearfully. "It would have been a happiness to her indeed, poor creature, if you had come back before."

"I am sorry indeed to hear that," he replied. "Then you are living here all alone, aunt?"

"Yes, except for my little maid. You see, John, Maria and I laid out the money our father left us in life annuities, and as long as we lived together we did very comfortably. Since then, of course, I have had to draw in a little, but I manage very nicely."

"Well, well, aunt, there will be no occasion for you to stint yourself any more. As I said, I have come home with my purse warmly lined, and I shall make you an allowance of fifty pounds a year. You were always very kind to me as a boy, and I can very well afford it, and I dare say it will make all the difference to you."

"My dear John, I could not think of taking such a sum from you."

"Pooh, pooh, aunt! What is the use of money if one cannot use it to make one's friends comfortable? So that is settled, and I won't have anything more said about it."

The old lady wiped her eyes. "It is good of you, John, and it will indeed make all the difference to me. It will almost double my income, and I shan't have to look at every halfpenny before I spend it."

"That is all right, aunt; now let us sit down comfortably to chat about old times. You don't mind my smoking, I hope?"

Miss Simcoe, for almost the first time in her life, told a lie. "Not at all, John; not at all. Now, how was it that you did not come down yourself instead of putting in an advertisement, which I should never have seen if my friend Mrs. Maberley had not happened to notice it in the paper which she takes in regularly, and brought it in to show me?"

"Well, I could not bring myself to come down, aunt. Twenty years make great changes, and it would have been horrible to have come down here and found that you had all gone, and that I was friendless in the place where I had been brought up as a boy. I thought that, by my putting it into a local paper, someone who had known me would be sure to see it. Now let me hear about all the people that I knew."

John Simcoe stayed for three days quietly at the cottage. The news of his return spread rapidly, and soon many of the friends that had known him came to welcome him. His aunt had told her own circle of her nephew's wealth and liberality, and through them the news that John Simcoe had returned home a wealthy man was imparted to all their acquaintances. Some of his old friends declared that they should have known him anywhere; others said frankly that now they knew who he was they saw the likeness, but that if they had met him anywhere else they did not think they should have recognized him.

John Simcoe's memory had been greatly refreshed by his aunt's incessant talk about his early days and doings, and as his visitors were more anxious to hear of his adventures abroad than to talk of the days long past, he had no difficulty whatever in satisfying all as to his identity, even had not the question been settled by his liberality to his aunt, from whom no return whatever could possibly be expected. When he left he handed her fifty pounds in gold.

"I may as well give you a year's money at once," he said; "I am a careless man, and might forget to send it quarterly."

"Where can I write to you, John?" she asked.

"I cannot give you an address at present," he said; "I have only been stopping at a hotel until I could find chambers to suit me. Directly I do so I will drop you a line. I shall always be glad to hear of you, and will run down occasionally to see you and have a chat again with some of my old friends."

The return of John Simcoe served Stowmarket as a subject for conversation for some time. He had spent his money generously while there, and had given a dinner at the principal hotel to a score of those with whom he had been most intimate when a boy. Champagne had flowed in unstinted abundance, and it was generally voted that he was a capital fellow, and well deserved the good fortune that had attended him. In the quiet Suffolk town the tales of the adventures that he had gone through created quite a sensation, and when repeated by their fathers set half the boys of the place wild with a desire to imitate his example, and to embark in a life which was at once delightful, and ended in acquiring untold wealth. On leaving he pressed several of them, especially one who had been a fellow-clerk with him at the bank, and was now its manager, to pay him a visit whenever they came to town.

"I expect to be in diggings of my own in a week or two," he said, "and shall make a point of having a spare bed, to put up a friend at any time."

# CHAPTER VI.
# JOHN SIMCOE

General Mathieson was on the point of going out for a drive with his niece, who was buttoning her glove, when a servant entered the drawing room and said that a gentleman wished to speak to him.

"Who is he? Did he give you his name or say what was his business?"

"No, sir. I have not seen him before. He merely asked me to give you his message."

"I suppose I had better see him, Hilda."

"Well, uncle, I will get out of the way and go downstairs when he has come in. Don't let him keep you, for you know that when I have put you down at your club I have an engagement to take Lina Crossley to do some shopping first, and then for a drive in the park."

"I don't suppose that he will be five minutes, whoever he is."

Hilda slipped away just in time to avoid the visitor. As the manservant opened the door the General looked with some interest at the stranger, for such it seemed to him his visitor was. He was a tall man, well dressed, and yet without the precision that would mark him as being a member of a good club or an *habitué* of the Row.

"You don't remember me, General?" he said, with a slight smile.

"I cannot say that I do," the General replied. "Your face does not seem unfamiliar to me, though I cannot at the present moment place it."

"It is rather an uncommon name," the visitor said; "but I am not surprised that you do not remember it or me, for it is some twenty years since we met. My name is Simcoe."

"Twenty years!" the General repeated. "Then it must have been in India, for twenty years ago I was in command of the Benares district. Simcoe!" he broke off excitedly. "Of course I knew a gentleman of that name who did me an inestimable service; in fact, he saved my life."

"I don't know that it was as much as that, but at least I saved you from being mauled by a tiger."

"Bless me!" the General exclaimed, taking a step forward, "and you are the man. I recognize you now, and had I not believed that you had been lost at sea within a month after you had saved my life I should have known you at once, though, of course, twenty years have changed you a good deal. My dear sir, I am happy indeed to know that the report was a false one, and to meet you again." And he shook hands with his visitor with the greatest warmth.

"I am not surprised that you did not recognize me," the latter said; "I was but twenty-five then, and have been knocking about the world ever since, and have gone through some very rough times and done some very hard work. Of course you saw my name among the list of the passengers on board the *Nepaul*, which went down with, as was supposed, all hands in that tremendous storm in the Bay of Bengal. Happily, I escaped. I was washed overboard just as the wreck of the mainmast had been cut away. A wave carried me close to it; I climbed upon it and lashed myself to leeward of the top, which sheltered me a good deal. Five days later I was picked up insensible and was carried to Singapore. I was in hospital there for some weeks. When I quite recovered, being penniless, without references or friends, I shipped on board a vessel that was going on a trading voyage among the islands. I had come out to see the world, and thought that I might as well see it that way as another. It would take a long time to relate my after-adventures; suffice it that at last, after numerous wanderings, I became chief adviser of a powerful chief in Burmah, and finally have returned home, not exactly a rich man, but with enough to live upon in more than comfort for the rest of my life."

"How long have you been in London?"

"I have been here but a fortnight; I ran down home to see if I had relatives living, but found that an old lady was the sole survivor of my family. I need scarcely say that my first business on reaching London was to rig myself out in a presentable sort of way, and I may say that at present I feel very

uncomfortable in these garments after being twenty years without putting on a black coat. I happened the other day to see your name among those who attended the *levée*, and I said to myself at once, 'I will call upon the General and see if he has any remembrances of me.'"

At this moment a servant entered the room with a little note.

> "My Dear Uncle: It is very naughty of you to be so long. I am taking the carriage, and have told them to put the other horse into the brougham and bring it round for you at once."

For more than an hour the two men sat talking together, and Simcoe, on leaving, accepted a cordial invitation from the General to dinner on the following day.

"Well, uncle, who was it?" Hilda asked, when they met in the drawing room a few minutes before the dinner hour. "You said you would not be five minutes, and I waited for a quarter of an hour and then lost patience. I asked when I came in how long he had stayed, and heard that he did not leave until five o'clock."

"He was a man who had saved my life in India, child."

"Dear me! And have you never heard of him since, uncle?"

"No, dear. I did my best to find out his family, but had no idea of ever seeing the man himself, for the simple reason that I believed that he died twenty years ago. He had sailed in a vessel that was reported as lost with all hands, so you may well imagine my surprise when he told me who he was."

"Did you recognize him at once, uncle?"

"Not at first. Twenty years is a long time; and he was only about five-and-twenty when I knew him, and of course he has changed greatly. However, even before he told me who he was I was able to recall his face. He was a tall, active young fellow then, and I could certainly trace the likeness."

"I suppose he was in the army, uncle?"

"No; he was a young Englishman who was making a tour through India. I was in command at Benares at the time, and he brought me letters of introduction from a man who had come out in the same ship with him, and also from a friend of mine in Calcutta. A few days after he arrived I was on the point of going up with a party to do some tiger-shooting in the Terai, and I invited him to come with us. He was a pleasant fellow and soon made himself popular. He never said much about himself, but as far as I understood him he was not a rich man, but he was spending his money in seeing the world, with a sort of happy confidence that something would turn up when his money was gone.

"We were out a week and had fair sport. As you have often heard me say, I was passionately fond of big-game shooting, and I had had many narrow escapes in the course of my life, but I never had so narrow a one as happened to me on that occasion. We had wounded a tiger and had lost him. We had spent a couple of hours in beating the jungle, but without success, and had agreed that the brute could not have been hit as hard as we had believed, but must have made off altogether. We were within fifty yards of the edge of the jungle, when there was a sudden roar, and before I could use my rifle the tiger sprang. I was not in a howdah, but on a pad; and the tiger struck one of its forepaws on my knee. With the other he clung for a moment to the pad, and then we went down together. The brute seized me by the shoulder and sprang into the jungle again, carried me a dozen yards or so, and then lay down, still holding me by the shoulder.

"I was perfectly sensible, but felt somewhat dazed and stupid; I found myself vaguely thinking that he must, after all, have been very badly hit, and, instead of making off, had hid up within a short distance of the spot where we saw him. I was unable to move hand or foot, for he was lying on me, and his weight was pressing the life out of me. I know that I vaguely hoped I should die before he took a bite at my shoulder. I suppose that the whole thing did not last a minute, though to me it seemed an interminable time. Suddenly there was a rustling in the bush. With a deep growl the tiger loosed his hold of my shoulder, and, rising to his feet, faced half round. What happened after that I only know from hearsay.

"Simcoe, it seems, was riding in the howdah on an elephant behind mine. As the tiger sprang at my elephant he fired and hit the beast on the shoulder. It was that, no doubt, that caused its hold to relax, and brought us to the ground together. As the tiger sprang with me into the jungle Simcoe leaped down from the howdah and followed. He had only his empty rifle and a large hunting-knife. It was no easy work pushing his way through the jungle, but in a minute he came upon us. Clubbing his gun, he brought it down on the left side of the tiger's head before the brute, who was hampered by his broken shoulder, and weak from his previous wound, could spring. Had it not been that it was the right shoulder that was broken, the blow, heavy as it was, would have had little effect upon the brute; as it was, having no support on that side, it reeled half over and then, with a snarling growl, sprang upon its assailant. Simcoe partly leaped aside, and striking again with the barrel of his gun, – the butt had splintered with the first blow, – so far turned it aside that instead of receiving the blow direct, which would certainly have broken in his skull, it fell in a slanting direction on his left shoulder.

"The force was sufficient to knock him down, but, as he fell, he drew his knife. The tiger had leaped partly beyond him, so that he lay under its stomach, and it could not for the moment use either its teeth or claws. The pressure was terrible, but with his last remaining strength he drove the knife to the full length of its blade twice into the tiger's body. The animal rolled over for a moment, but there was still life in it, and it again sprang to its feet, when a couple of balls struck it in the head, and it fell dead. Three officers had slipped down from their howdahs when they saw Simcoe rushing into the jungle, and coming up just in time, they fired, and so finished the conflict.

"There was not much to choose between Simcoe and myself, though I had certainly got the worst of it. The flesh of his arm had been pretty well stripped off from the shoulder to the elbow; my shoulder had been broken, and the flesh torn by the brute's teeth, but as it had not shifted its hold from the time it first grasped me till it let go to face Simcoe, it was not so bad as it might have been. But the wound on the leg was more serious; its claws had struck just above the knee-cap and had completely torn it off. We were both insensible when we were lifted up and carried down to the camp. In a fortnight Simcoe was about; but it was some months before I could walk again, and, as you know, my right leg is still stiff. I had a very narrow escape of my life; fever set in, and when Simcoe went down country, a month after the affair, I was still lying between life and death, and never had an opportunity of thanking him for the manner in which, practically unarmed, he went in to face a wounded tiger in order to save my life. You may imagine, then, my regret when a month later we got the news that the *Nepaul*, in which he had sailed, had been lost with all hands."

"It was a gallant action indeed, uncle. You told me something about it soon after I came here, when I happened to ask you how it was that you walked so stiffly, but you did not tell it so fully. And what is he going to do now?"

"He is going to settle in London. He has been, as he says, knocking about in the East ever since, being engaged in all sorts of adventures; he has been for some time in the service of a native chief some way up near the borders of Burmah, Siam, and China, and somehow got possession of a large number of rubies and other precious stones, which he has turned into money, and now intends to take chambers and settle down to a quiet life, join a club, and so on. Of course I promised to do all in my power to further his object, and to introduce him into as much society as he cared for."

"What is he like, uncle?"

"He is about my height, and I suppose about five-and-forty – though he looks rather older. No wonder, after such a life as he has led. He carries himself well, and he is altogether much more presentable than you would expect under the circumstances. Indeed, had I not known that he had never served, I should unhesitatingly have put him down as having been in the army. There is something about the way he carries his shoulders that you seldom see except among men who have been drilled. He is coming here to dine to-morrow, so you will see him."

"That relieves me of anxiety, uncle; for you know you had a letter this morning from Colonel Fitzhugh, saying that he had been unexpectedly called out of town, and you said that you would ask

somebody at the club to fill his place, but you know you very often forget things that you ought to remember."

"I certainly had forgotten that when I asked him to come, and as I came home I blamed myself for not having asked someone else, so as to make up an even number."

A month later Mr. Simcoe had become an intimate of General Mathieson's house. It had always been a matter of deep regret to the General that he had been unable to thank the man who at terrible risk to his life had saved him from death, and that feeling was heightened when the news came that his preserver had been drowned, and that the opportunity of doing so was forever lost. He now spared no pains to further his wishes. He constantly invited him to lunch or dinner at his club, introduced him to all his friends in terms of the highest eulogium, and repeated over and over again the story of his heroic action. As his own club was a military one he could not propose him there, but he had no difficulty in getting friends to propose and support him for two other clubs of good standing.

Several of the officers to whom he introduced Simcoe had been at Benares at the time he was hurt. These he recognized at once, and was able to chat with them of their mutual acquaintances, and indeed surprised them by his knowledge of matters at the station that they would hardly have thought would be known to one who had made but a short stay there. One of them said as much, but Simcoe said, laughing, "You forget that I was laid up for a month. Everyone was very good to me, and I had generally one or two men sitting with me, and the amount of gossip I picked up about the station was wonderful. Of course there was nothing else to talk about; and as I have a good memory, I think I could tell you something about the private affairs of pretty nearly every civilian and military man on the station."

Everyone agreed that Simcoe was a very pleasant and amusing companion. He was full of anecdotes of the wild people that he had lived among and of the adventures and escapes he had gone through. Although none of the Benares friends of the General recognized Simcoe when they first met him, they speedily recalled his features. His instant recognition of them, his acquaintance with persons and scenes at and around Benares was such that they never for a moment doubted his identity, and as their remembrance of the General's visitor returned they even wondered that their recognition of him had not been as instant as his of them. As to his means, not even to the General had Simcoe explained his exact position. He had taken good apartments in Jermyn Street, gave excellent little dinners there, kept undeniably good wine and equally excellent cigars, dressed well, and was regarded as being a thoroughly good fellow.

The General was not a close observer. Had he been so, he would speedily have noticed that his niece, although always polite and courteous to Mr. Simcoe, did not receive him with the warmth and pleasure with which she greeted those who were her favorites. On his part the visitor spared no pains to make himself agreeable to her; he would at once volunteer to execute any commission for her if she happened to mention in his presence anything that she wanted. One evening when she was going to a ball he sent her an expensive bouquet of flowers. The next day when she saw him she said:

"I am very much obliged to you for those lovely flowers, and I carried the bouquet last night, but please do not send any more. I don't think that it is quite nice to accept presents from anyone except very near relations. It was very kind of you to think of it, but I would really rather that you did not do it again. Uncle gives me carte blanche in the way of flowers, but I do not avail myself of it very largely, for the scent is apt to make me feel faint, and beyond the smallest spray I seldom carry any. I made an exception last night, for those you sent me were most lovely. You don't mind my saying that, do you?"

"Not at all, Miss Covington; and I quite understand what you mean. It seemed natural to me to send you some flowers. Out in the Pacific Islands, especially at Samoa and Tahiti, and, indeed, more or less everywhere, women wear a profusion of flowers in their hair, and no present is so acceptable to them."

"I fancy flowers do not cost so much there as they do here, Mr. Simcoe?"

"No," the latter laughed; "for half a dollar one can get enough to render a girl the envy of all others."

"I think you were right to ask Mr. Simcoe not to repeat his present, Hilda," the General said. "I particularly noticed the bouquet that you carried last night."

"Yes, uncle, there was nothing equal to it in the room; it must have cost three or four guineas."

"I don't think that you quite like him; do you, Hilda?"

"I like him, uncle, because he saved your life; but in other respects I do not know that I do like him particularly. He is very pleasant and very amusing, but I don't feel that I quite understand him."

"How do you mean that you don't understand him?"

"I cannot quite explain, uncle. To begin with, I don't seem to get any nearer to him – I mean to what he really is. I know more of his adventures and his life than I did, but I know no more of him himself than I did three months ago when I first met him at dinner."

"At any rate you know that he is brave," the General said, somewhat gravely.

"Yes, I know that, of course; but a man can be brave, exceptionally brave, and yet not possess all other good qualities. He did behave like a hero in your case, and I need not say that I feel deeply grateful to him for the service that he rendered you; still, that is the only side of his nature that I feel certain about."

"Pooh! pooh! Hilda," the General said, with some irritation. "What do you know about nine-tenths of the men you meet? You cannot even tell that they are brave."

"No, uncle; I know only the side they choose to present to me, which is a pleasant side, and I do not care to know more. But it is different in this case. Mr. Simcoe is here nearly every day; he has become one of our inner circle; you are naturally deeply interested in him, and I am, therefore, interested in him also, and want to know more of him than I have got to know. He is brave and pleasant; is he also honest and honorable? Is he a man of thoroughly good principles? We know what he tells us of his life and his adventures, but he only tells us what he chooses."

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear child, you may say the same thing of pretty nearly every unmarried man you meet. When a man marries and sets up a household one does get to know something about him. There are his wife's relations, who, as a rule, speak with much frankness concerning a man who has married their daughter, sister, or cousin. But as to bachelors, as a rule one has to take them at their own valuation. Of course, I know no more than you do as to whether Simcoe is in all respects an honorable gentleman. It is quite sufficient that he saved my life, almost at the sacrifice of his own, and whatever the life he may have led since is no business of mine. He is distinctly popular among those I have introduced him to, and is not likely in any way to discredit that introduction."

That Hilda was not entirely satisfied was evident by the letter she wrote when her uncle had, as usual, gone up one afternoon to his club.

> "My Dear Netta: I have told you several times about the Mr. Simcoe who saved uncle's life out in India, and who is so intimate at the house. I can't say that either my acquaintance with or my liking for him increases. He does not stand the test of the system, and the more I watch his lips the less I understand him. He talks fluently and quickly, and yet somehow I feel that there is a hesitation in his speech, and that his lips are repeating what they have learned, and not speaking spontaneously. You know that we have noticed the same thing among those who have learned to speak by the system but are not yet perfect in it, so I need not explain further what I mean, as you will understand it. For example, I can always tell at a public meeting, or when listening to a preacher, whether he is speaking absolutely extemporarily or whether he has learned his speech by heart beforehand.
>
> "I really strongly misdoubt the man. Of course I know that he saved my uncle's life; beyond that I know nothing of him, and it is this very feeling that I do know

nothing that disquiets me. I can no more see into him than I can into a stone wall. I can quite understand that it is of very great importance to him to stand well with the General. He came here a stranger with a queer history. He knew no one; he had money and wanted to get into society. Through my uncle he has done so; he has been elected to two clubs, has made a great number of acquaintances, goes to the Row, the Royal Academy, the theaters, and so on, and is, at any rate, on nodding terms with a very large number of people. All this he owes to my uncle, and I fail to see what else he can wish for. It would be natural with so many other engagements that he should not come to us so often as he used to do, but there is no falling off in that respect. He is the tame cat of the establishment. I dare say you think me silly to worry over such a thing, but I can't help worrying. I hate things I don't understand, and I don't understand this man.

"Another thing is, Walter does not like him. He constantly brings the child toys, but Walter does not take to him, refuses absolutely to sit upon his knee, or to be petted by him in any way. I always think that it is a bad sign when a child won't take to a man. However, I will not bother you more about it now; I will keep him out of my letters as much as I can. I wish I could keep him out of my mind also. As I tell myself over and over again, he is nothing to me, and whether he possesses all the virtues or none of them is, or at any rate should be, a matter of indifference to me. I can't help wishing that you had come over here two months later, then I should have had the benefit of your advice and opinion, for you know, Netta, how accustomed I was for years to consider you almost, if not quite, infallible."

# CHAPTER VII.
# JOHN SIMCOE'S FRIEND

There was a great sensation among the frequenters of the house in Elephant Court when they were told that Wilkinson had sold the business, and the new proprietor would come in at once. The feeling among those who were in his debt was one of absolute dismay, for it seemed to them certain the amounts would be at once called in. To their surprise and relief Wilkinson went round among the foreigners, whose debts in no case exceeded five pounds, and handed to them their notes of hand.

"I am going out of the business," he said, "and shall be leaving for abroad in a day or so. I might, of course, have arranged with the new man for him to take over these papers, but he might not be as easy as I have been, and I should not like any of you to get into trouble. I have never pressed anyone since I have been here, still less taken anyone into court, and I should like to leave on friendly terms with all. So here are your papers; tear them up, and don't be fools enough to borrow again."

Towards his English clients, whose debts were generally from ten to twenty pounds, he took the same course, adding a little good advice as to dropping billiards and play altogether and making a fresh start.

"You have had a sharp lesson," he said, "and I know that you have been on thorns for the last year. I wanted to show you what folly it was to place yourself in the power of anyone to ruin you, and I fancy I have succeeded very well. There is no harm in a game of billiards now and then, but if you cannot play without betting you had better cut it altogether. As for the tables, it is simply madness. You must lose in the long run, and I am quite sure that I have got out of you several times the amount of the I. O. U.'s that I hold."

Never were men more surprised and more relieved. They could hardly believe that they were once more free men, and until a fresh set of players had succeeded them the billiard rooms were frequently almost deserted. To Dawkins Wilkinson was somewhat more explicit.

"You know," he said, "the interest I took in that will of General Mathieson. It was not the will so much as the man that I was so interested in. It showed me that he was most liberally disposed to those who had done him a service. Now, it happens that years ago, when he was at Benares, I saved his life from a tiger, and got mauled myself in doing so. I had not thought of the matter for many years, but your mention of his name recalled it to me. I had another name in those days – men often change their names when they knock about in queer places, as I have done. However, I called upon him, and he expressed himself most grateful. I need not say that I did not mention the billiard room to him. He naturally supposed that I had just arrived from abroad, and he has offered to introduce me to many of his friends; and I think that I have a good chance of being put down in his will for a decent sum. I brought money home with me from abroad and have made a goodish sum here, so I shall resume my proper name and go West, and drop this affair altogether. I am not likely to come against any of the crew here, and, as you see," and he removed a false beard and whiskers from his face, "I have shaved, though I got this hair to wear until I had finally cut the court. So you see you have unintentionally done me a considerable service, and in return I shall say nothing about that fifty pounds you owe me. Now, lad, try and keep yourself straight in future. You may not get out of another scrape as you have out of this. All I ask is that you will not mention what I have told you to anyone else. There is no fear of my being recognized, with a clean-shaven face and different toggery altogether, but at any rate it is as well that everyone but yourself should believe that, as I have given out, I have gone abroad again. I shall keep your I. O. U.'s, but I promise you that you shall hear no more of them as long as you hold your tongue as to what I have just told you. Possibly I may some day need your assistance, and in that case shall know where to write to you."

It was not until after a great deal of thought that John Simcoe had determined thus far to take Dawkins into his confidence, but he concluded at last that it was the safest thing to do. He was, as he knew, often sent by the firm with any communications that they might have to make to their clients, and should he meet him at the General's he might recognize him and give him some trouble. He had made no secret that he had turned his hand to many callings, and that his doings in the southern seas would not always bear close investigation, and the fact that he had once kept a billiard room could do him no special harm. As to the will, Dawkins certainly would not venture to own that he had repeated outside what had been done in the office. The man might be useful to him in the future. It was more than probable he would again involve himself in debt, and was just the weak and empty-headed young fellow who might be made a convenient tool should he require one.

So Elephant Court knew Mr. Wilkinson no more, and certainly none of the *habitués* could have recognized him in the smooth-shaven and faultlessly dressed man whom they might meet coming out of a West End club. Dawkins often turned the matter over in his mind, after his first relief had passed at finding the debt that had weighed so heavily upon him perfectly wiped out.

"There ought to be money in it," he said to himself, "but I don't see where it comes in. In the first place I could not say he had kept a gambling place without acknowledging that I had often been there, and I could not say that it was a conversation of mine about the General's will that put it into his head to call upon him, and lastly, he has me on the hip with those I. O. U.'s. Possibly if the General does leave him money, I may manage to get some out of him, though I am by no means sure of that. He is not a safe man to meddle with, and he might certainly do me more harm than I could do him."

The matter had dropped somewhat from his mind when, three months later, General Mathieson came into the office to have an interview with his principals.

After he had left the managing clerk was called in. On returning, he handed Dawkins a sheet of paper.

"You will prepare a fresh will for General Mathieson; it is to run exactly as at present, but this legacy is to be inserted after that to Miss Covington. It might just as well have been put in a codicil, but the General preferred to have it in the body of the will."

Dawkins looked at the instruction. It contained the words: "To John Simcoe, at present residing at 132 Jermyn Street, I bequeath the sum of ten thousand pounds, as a token of my gratitude for his heroic conduct in saving my life at the cost of great personal injury to himself from the grip of a tiger, in the year 1831."

"By Jove, he has done well for himself!" Dawkins muttered, as he sat down to his desk after the managing clerk had handed him the General's will from the iron box containing papers and documents relating to his affairs. "Ten thousand pounds! I wish I could light upon a general in a fix of some sort, though I don't know that I should care about a tiger. It is wonderful what luck some men have. I ought to get something out of this, if I could but see my way to it. Fancy the keeper of a billiard room and gaming house coming in for such a haul as this! It is disgusting!"

He set about preparing a draft of the will, but he found it difficult to keep his attention fixed upon his work, and when the chief clerk ran his eye over it he looked up in indignant surprise.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Mr. Dawkins? The thing is full of the most disgraceful blunders. In several cases it is not even sense. During all the time that I have been in this office I have never had such a disgraceful piece of work come into my hands before. Why, if the office boy had been told to make a copy of the will, he would have done it vastly better. What does it mean?"

"I am very sorry, sir," Dawkins said, "but I don't feel very well to-day, and I have got such a headache that I can scarcely see what I am writing."

"Well, well," his superior said, somewhat mollified, "that will account for it. I thought at first that you must have been drinking. You had better take your hat and be off. Go to the nearest chemist and take a dose, and then go home and lie down. You are worse than of no use in the state that you are. I hope that you will be all right in the morning, for we are, as you know, very busy at present,

and cannot spare a hand. Tear up that draft and hand the will and instructions to Mr. Macleod. The General will be down here at ten o'clock to-morrow to see it; he is like most military men, sharp and prompt, and when he wants a thing done he expects to have it done at once."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.