





THE GAGE OF HONOUR.

VOL. I.



# THE GAGE OF HONOUR.

A Tale of the Great Mutiny.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'THE EASTERN HUNTERS,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# THE GAGE OF HONOUR.

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## CHAPTER I.

*Qui amicus est amat ; qui amat non utique semper amicus est. Itaque amicitia semper prodest ; amor etiam aliquando nocet.*—SENECA.

ON a fine bracing morning in the early part of November, 1854, a lady and gentleman were cantering leisurely along the road which led from the cantonment of Hussunabad, in Upper India, towards the open country.

The sun had not yet risen ; but the brilliant glow on the sky beyond the distant hills, firmly and distinctly traced

against it, indicated its approaching advent. The plain, on which the riders were entering, was an extensive tract of gently undulating grass-land, bounded by cultivated fields on one side, and on the other by a river of considerable magnitude. It was studded with groves and single forest trees of fair growth. These consisted, for the most part, of peepul, tamarind, and mango trees; but there was not wanting an admixture of others which served to break the monotony, and by their varied shades of green and russet, and difference of form and foliage, rendered the grouping more attractive to the eye. The grass at this season was parched and yellow, yet gave firmness and elasticity to the soil, and rendered the spot a most desirable one for a gallop. Save for this

appearance of aridity, the scene was one eminently park-like, and full of picturesque beauty.

As the father and daughter—for such they were—left the road and made across the open land, the lady's horse gave unmistakable symptoms of a desire to increase the pace, with, as it seemed, a corresponding feeling on the part of its rider—a very beautiful girl of about one-and-twenty. Her habit set off to the greatest advantage a form of delicate outline, sufficiently full, however—without the slightest tendency to robustness—to save it from the epithet thin. Apparently she was slightly above the middle stature of women, and sat her horse with an ease and grace which bespoke an accomplished horsewoman. Her hair of a golden brown

was gathered in a luxuriant mass under a sort of wide-awake hat, bound with a roll of white muslin. Large, intelligent-looking eyes of dark-gray, shaded by long lashes far darker than the hair, lit up a face whose *tout ensemble* was one of singular beauty—a beauty which, ordinarily and in repose, was calm and quiet, but which could quicken into the most vivid display of feeling when roused by any dominating impulse.

Her companion was a man of middle age, whose lineaments indicated his close relationship. But beyond mere outline of feature there was no resemblance. His expression was gross and coarse, and there were not wanting indications of those traces which are left by unbridled passions and long-continued self-indulgence. He



was a large and heavy man, whose activity in the saddle was hardly equal to the task of conducting a gallop-loving young woman of one-and-twenty.

‘Cannot you control that excitable animal of yours, Helen?’ he said, petulantly, to his daughter, as he brought his own horse to a walk, and the young lady’s began to pull on its bit, plunge, and show symptoms of an inclination to be off.

‘We are both anxious for a gallop, papa, and—ah!—here comes Frank Douglas, just in time to be my escort!’

Even as she spoke a young man rode up. Just touching his turban-bound cap with a ‘good morning, Colonel,’ as he passed the gentleman, and saluting the young lady as ‘Helen,’ he joined her on

the off-side. As he did so she touched her fiery little Arab, and intimated, much to its satisfaction, that an improvement in the pace was desirable.

Acting on the hint thus conveyed, and on its own impulses, the little gallop-way shot a-head, and both horses settled into a good exhilarating gallop.

As the two flew on, Colonel Fortescue shouted to his daughter; but whatever words of warning or remonstrance were uttered, she gave no signs of having heard them. With a fixed, determined look, she glanced neither to right nor left, but gazed steadily a-head, till, having placed a considerable distance between herself and her father, she slackened the pace, and turning to her companion said quickly, 'Now, Frank Douglas, I have acceded

to the wish you expressed at the bandstand yesterday evening, and have given you the opportunity you requested. I am ready to hear what you have to say, though, as the time must necessarily be short, I hope you will make it as brief as possible.'

The girl spoke this firmly, but with a heightened colour, and her voice trembled in the very slightest degree as she concluded her exhortation to brevity.

Her companion looked at her gravely and sadly as he replied :

'Thank you, Helen,—Miss Fortescue,—for giving me the opportunity. I will not detain you long, for I have little to say, not more indeed than what you must already know. Oh, why are you so cold and hard this morning? Helen, Helen,

you know that I love you. I thought—that is—I almost fancied that I was not indifferent to you till recently. Tell me, what have I done to cause such a change in you? Are you angry with me?’ and the speaker looked at her appealingly.

But she spoke not. Leaning forward over her horse’s neck, and still with the same hard, set look, as if fully determined in purpose and to hold in subjection all expression of feeling, she urged the little Arab to greater speed; then as suddenly checked him.

‘Tell me what it is,’ her companion continued in a sad, imploring voice.

He paused awhile as if waiting for an answer, but receiving none, he resumed more impetuously :

‘You do not speak. Give me some



hope. I love you so. Helen! darling! say you will one day be my wife. Not now, perhaps, but in the future. Oh, give me hope.'

For a moment, as she turned towards him, and met his earnest, impassioned gaze, her eyes wore a tender expression at strange variance with the compressed lips and set features. Her bosom throbbed a little too, ere with an effort she subdued a slight trembling she felt would appear in her voice, and then spoke collectedly :

'Listen to me, Frank. Let us talk of this matter calmly and quietly. Suppose—mind, I only say suppose—that I became your wife. On what should we have to live? You have yourself told me that you are in debt, and I have nothing.'

Here he made an effort to interrupt her, but checking him, she continued :

‘ I have expensive tastes, and you do not seem to be, by any means, a prudent or careful man, indeed rather an extravagant one. Only think, Frank ’—and as she called him by his Christian name, her voice softened, and she, for a moment, dwelt on the word, then quickly resumed :

‘ Think of what our *ménage* would be. Increasing debts ; all sorts of shifts to get money ; worries ; unhappiness ; perhaps failing health, and then, not improbably, failing affection. For even strong affection—and I do not deny you may feel such, though you overrate it at present—will succumb to the constant irritability caused by the friction and worries of pecuniary difficulties. I have, as you

may judge, seen something of the evils I speak of, and can realize their effects.'

'But,' her companion impetuously replied, 'I do not ask you to marry me now; only give me hope. I will retrench, save, work, if you will only promise. Oh, Helen! think of what you do. Don't throw away such a love as mine.'

'It cannot be,' she said, and there was a slight tinge of mournfulness in her voice. 'I did not intend, indeed hate, to speak on a certain subject. Don't think me indelicate for now doing so, but we must understand each other. You, probably, have conjectured that my father's home is not a very suitable one for me in many ways. Indeed, something has happened which obliges me to seek another. And—and—I have none to go

to, unless—you understand— I mean to say, that if a comfortable home were offered me— Oh, don't oblige me to say any more.'

'What?' he ejaculated. 'Do you mean to say that you would risk your happiness in the hands of such a man as Mr Ath—'

'Stop, stop,' she quickly exclaimed. 'This conversation has gone far enough. I cannot permit observations which it is not suitable for me to listen to. Let us part friends. I wish you well, very well, indeed, indeed. Some years hence you will find some one to love you and make a better wife than ever I could have made. Let us still be friends, and don't judge me harshly, for you know not all the motives by which I am actuated.'



‘I know this,’ he said gravely, ‘that such a marriage as you seem to contemplate is full of danger, and may bring bitter fruits of sorrow and repentance. Oh, be warned in time. Think of what a cheerless life it must become, when the absence of love on your part produces a corresponding feeling on that of your husband. Antipathy, even. Think of what you are doing. I ask not now on my account, but for your own sake.’

‘I have thought,’ she replied. ‘It must be; there is no help for it. I thank you sincerely for your interest and advice, but it *must* be.’

‘Why *must* it be? What can I say to induce you to pause before taking an irretrievable step, and committing a wrong? Yes, a wrong to me! For did

you not lead me to believe that you returned my affection ? ’

‘No, no ! a thousand times no !’ she vehemently ejaculated. ‘I am not guilty of doing that intentionally. I misjudged you. I thought at first you were but amusing yourself. I had been told you were a flirt : and when—well, yes,—when I found that you meant more than flirtation, and I—but never mind that. When I thought I saw you were beginning really to care for me, then I altered my demeanour. Oh, say that. Be generous, and do not accuse me of heartless coquetry. Forgive me even for what I have done.’

And she looked at him eagerly, beseechingly. All the hardness of expression had vanished.

‘Is that all perfectly true?’ he asked, gently. ‘Is there no self-accusation?’

‘There is. Ah! God help me, there is! But it is true. Oh, believe me, it is true. I never designed to entrap your affection. I bitterly repent what I have done. Forgive me!’

‘I have nothing to forgive,’ he said, in a quiet, measured voice, as he bent forward and stroked his horse’s neck. Then added, after a slight pause, ‘But if you think there is anything, then I do so freely. I was mistaken. Will you tell me if you think you could have loved me, had circumstances been more favourable?’

‘I don’t know. I cannot say. It is not a fair question,’ she exclaimed impetuously. ‘I cannot marry you, and

all other speculations are as unsatisfactory as unprofitable. But we may always be friends. Say that you will not altogether think ill of me. Remain my friend. Believe me, it is the best for both of us, and real, true friendship is very sweet.'

'Friendship is to love,' he replied, 'as this shrivelled, parched grass, over which we are riding, is to its fresh, luxuriant abundance in the monsoon.'

'Ay,' she quickly interposed, 'but both have the same germ.' Then added, almost with a sob, as her woman's strength nearly failed her, 'Oh, let it be friendship ! It cannot be love. I must marry at once, and anything of the sort is impossible between us.'

'I implore you once more to consider

what you are about, Helen,' he sadly said. 'Repentance will come too late to alter an irredeemable step. Are you positively determined on the course you have hinted at?'

'I am,' the girl answered, with a returning rigidity of expression. 'I have considered all, and fully decided on my course. Now let us part. But, oh, please remain my true friend whatever comes. Promise.' And she held out her gauntleted hand, as she checked her horse.

'I promise,' he said gravely, as he pressed her hand. 'I will leave you now to rejoin your father.'

Saying this, he touched his horse with the spurs, and dashed off. He was hurt, distressed, and deeply pained for

the girl—who was a distant relative—on her own account. But he recognized the truth of what she had said, and that a marriage between them was then impossible. He felt that she was determined, and that further argument was useless, for he knew something of her self-willed character. Much troubled in mind as he rode away, he swore to himself that, come what might, he would be to her a true friend in its highest sense. Foolish men, when under the influence of strong emotion, will sometimes make vows of a like nature, even when they cannot obtain all that their selfishness demands. We shall see how far this one was kept.

But the disturbance of his mind prompted him to active exertion. In-

creasing the pace he was going at, he galloped towards the cultivated land, which skirted the plain I have spoken of, and put his well-trained little hunter at the first hedge. This it flew in brilliant style, and he sailed away beyond. On return to stables an hour later, the condition of horse, if not rider, showed how severe had been the gallop.

Before proceeding farther, let me pause to sketch the man who has just made his temporary exit in such sporting fashion.

He was, without being handsome, a good-looking man, of some two or three years short of thirty. His frame, which was of middle height, was lean, active, and remarkably well-knit, perhaps looking just a little top-heavy, owing to the



square breadth of his shoulders. He was pale in complexion, with curly hair, whiskers and moustaches of very dark brown, eyes of deep hazel, and features a little large and irregular, but well cut. To many, perhaps to most, even to himself, he was, in several respects, an enigma. He seemed to live a sort of double life—something of that which a French writer has described as ‘*L’âme et la bête.*’ Sometimes one, sometimes the other predominated, according to the potency of the influences around him. Living the wild life of a soldier, amid all its temptations, all its laxity, and all its sins, he yet tenaciously clung to one better and purer. Two lives, one pure, the other impure, seemed ever to be running on side by side, and struggling

for the mastery. He was a man of strong passions. He recognized his failings, and lamented them. But he did not

‘Compound for sins he was inclined to,  
By damning those he had no mind to.’

He condemned himself, knowing that a man’s nature is not contaminated by the presence of strong passions or strong desires, but by the absence of their control. He felt that they give strength, energy, force to the character, if held in subjection ; but undisciplined, weaken and deface it. He desired to subordinate them, yet generally failed to do so.

He was much given to a metaphysical analysis of the workings of his spirit. He endeavoured to divest himself of all interested or prejudiced motives, and examine, on their true merits, the springs

of action, and weigh each counteracting and antagonistic influence. And not infrequently this probing of the 'mentis penetralia' led to complete mystification, and the adoption of views which appeared to simpler minds, and under less subtle distinctions, obviously erroneous.

By no means devoid of high aims and purposes, that worse double of himself seemed always to be intruding itself to counteract or overthrow them.

He usually had a platonic sort of friendship or *penchant* for some lady of his acquaintance — most commonly a married one. He clung to such, as tending to purify and elevate his nature. But his habits in this respect had procured for him a not altogether ill-deserved character for general flirtation.

Quick in temper, his impulses were naturally generous and chivalrous. And this completes all that it is here necessary to say concerning him.

As he rode away, Miss Fortescue pulled up her horse, and looked after the retreating horseman. 'Frank, Frank,' she cried. Then checking herself, murmured, 'No. It is for the best as it is—surely for the best. That would never have done. It would have been misery for him. Besides, my fate is marked out, and is unavoidable.'

As she came, however, to this conclusion, she sighed a little, and then prepared herself to meet the angry reprimand which she knew her conduct would elicit from her father.

The two had, early in their gallop,

amidst the various groves, lost sight of that gentleman, and she now cantered back to meet him. Their junction was soon effected, and he received her, not unnaturally, with marked displeasure.

‘I have told you frequently,’ he irritably began, ‘that I disapprove of your intimacy with Frank Douglas. Although a relative, it is quite unnecessary to make it so conspicuous. It was, besides, both indelicate and ill-bred to leave me in that fashion. I must insist, Helen, on more attention to my wishes. Since you have, through your own want of right feeling, been thrown [on my hands, I desire you to attend to my injunctions.’ He looked at her as he said this, expecting some symptom of dissent or dissatisfaction. But she spoke not a word.

After a pause he continued, 'I had asked Mr Atherton to join us in our morning's ride, and here you gallop away with a young man for whom I entertain a great dislike. You know what my wishes are with respect to that gentleman.'

'You mean Mr Atherton, papa?' the girl said coldly. 'I do. I see him coming now. All I ask is, don't be precipitate. I will endeavour in time to meet your wishes. You partly know why.'

Ignoring the concluding sentence, he brightened at the intimation thus conveyed, and in a voice and manner much more conciliatory, expressed his satisfaction at his daughter's good sense and approval of his plans, which, he intimated, were formed entirely for her good. 'His

dear daughter's well-being and happiness was his first concern ; and if, in pursuance of that, he seemed sometimes a little cross or unkind, she must attribute it entirely to solicitude on her account.'

He would, perhaps, have expatiated more fully on this theme, had he not observed a look of scorn on her face, and they were, too, shortly joined by Mr Atherton. That gentleman was the collector of the district, a civilian of high position, and, it was rumoured, of considerable wealth.

The morning ride was continued, and Colonel Fortescue marked with great satisfaction the attention paid to his daughter by Mr Atherton, and the submissive, though somewhat chilling, manner in which it was received. On their



return he asked their companion to join them in the morning cup of tea—an institution which, with accompaniments making it almost a meal, is in India as general as the five-o'clock tea gathering of ladies in England. Parade, or early morning ride, over, all seek to refresh themselves, and meet to talk over the news or current topics of the hour.

Mr Atherton expressed his pleasure, 'should it be quite convenient and agreeable to Miss Fortescue;' and, receiving as reply a few muttered words, in which 'happy' was alone perfectly distinguishable, accompanied father and daughter into the compound, or enclosure, surrounding their bungalow.

Tables and easy-chairs were already placed in the verandah on the shady side

of the house. The visitor, with eager haste, dismounted, and gave the usual assistance to the lady. She seemed determined on this occasion to accept it, though ordinarily she would have lightly dropped from her saddle to the ground without such aid. As her hand momentarily rested in his, she was aware of an unmistakeable pressure. Hastily calling to the portly, white-clad native servant to bring the tea-things, she ascended the steps into the verandah, whither she was followed by Mr Atherton.

He was a tall, somewhat spare man, of agreeable and gentlemanlike appearance, and looked young for his age, which was about five-and-forty.

Before joining them Colonel Fortescue went out to look after the dressing of his

horses, and to give some directions to his Sepoy orderly, for he commanded one of the native regiments of the garrison.

His one great mistake in life, as he often averred, had been marrying for love. In early life, during a sick furlough to England, he had met with and married a pretty but penniless girl. He soon tired of her; and when she died a year or two after giving birth to a little girl, there were not wanting ill-natured persons who asserted that it was a happy release for her, as his increasing unkindness, and his gambling and extravagant habits, surely foretold a miserable future.

Left a young widower, and by no means a sorrowing one, he had soon resumed his bachelor habits.

Brought up at home by his relatives,

his daughter had been for the most part educated at a fashionable school at a fashionable watering-place. With the usual accomplishments, and much tuition in carriage and deportment, she had been instructed that the great end and aim of woman's existence was to make a good marriage. The person to be married was not of so very much consequence. He simply represented matrimony, and matrimony, it was inculcated, represented a good position and establishment, and plenty of means. If the possessor of those advantages happened to be young, amiable, and good-looking, with congenial habits, tastes, and feelings, so much the better. If otherwise, all was subordinate to the principal requisites, and he simply their indispensable accompaniment.

It may be objected that such training is not exactly calculated to develop some of those trivial feminine qualities which a few ignorant men are foolish enough to require in their wives. But the Misses Simkinson, as they styled themselves, doubtless knew what they were about, and so ordered their instruction as to produce wares suitable to the demand.

Imbued with these wholesome sentiments, Helen Fortescue had passed two seasons in London with her relatives after leaving school. She was greatly admired, and more than one opportunity of establishing herself in life had been given her. But somehow, notwithstanding the excellent training she had undergone, the girl provokingly desired to combine with a good establishment love and respect for

the furnisher thereof. Being young, and perhaps foolish, she still hoped to do so at the end of the second season, and therefore felt in no hurry to sacrifice herself, for she had actually spoken of it in those terms. Very angry, then, were her friends when, at the very conclusion of the season, she refused the most eligible *parti* of their set. They so expressed themselves thereon that the proud, high-spirited girl deeply resented it. A rupture took place, and the ultimate consequence was the transfer of the dangerous charge of a self-willed and beautiful young woman to her father in India, much, it must be confessed, to Colonel Fortescue's dismay.

He had heard so much of his daughter's beauty, and had been so thoroughly

prepared to learn of her successful establishment with ultimate advantages to himself,—a matter he seldom lost sight of,—that having her thus suddenly thrown on his hands was productive of much disappointment and irritation. To have his lax bachelor habits interfered with by the presence in the house of his own daughter was more than he bargained for. However there was no help for it, so it behoved him, in every view, paternal and otherwise, to procure her a home of her own as quickly as might be.

To this end, he looked about for some eligible person, and his choice at once fell on Mr Atherton. Detrimentials there were in numbers ; and after her arrival, no light burden on his spirit was the fear that his self-willed daughter might,



despite her excellent training and his paternal advice, sacrifice the advantages of her beauty, and contract some foolish engagement with impecunious sub or hard-up captain. Such a casting of pearls before swine was quite opposed to his code of domestic morals.

Mr Atherton seemed suitable in every way. Moreover, at the last Bombay race meeting he had lost to that gentleman a sum which he had been quite unable to pay, and his commission was, therefore, dependent on the forbearance of the man who had the power to proclaim him a defaulter. It is true he knew that his friend was utterly heartless, regardless of aught save his own gratification. But that was not his business, he argued.

Directly he saw that Mr Atherton was

really attracted,—as, knowing the man, he had expected,—he took every means to render his house disagreeable to his daughter, with the object of inducing her the more readily to accede to the plans he had formed for her changing it for another's.

Thus, education, a father's commands, and circumstances had all combined to give prominence to the less amiable portions of the girl's character, and induce her to check the development of whatever of pure, tender, and loving hopes and wishes might be lying latent in her heart. That there were such is probable, as it was only after a severe mental and moral conflict that she finally decided—a fortnight later than the time of her appearance in these pages—to accept Mr Atherton's offer.

Indeed, she had at one time half made up her mind to refuse it. But it so happened that she became acquainted with the latest Platonic attachment of Mr Douglas, to which were added many details of recent occurrence, the offspring of the imagination of her informer. When, therefore, that gentleman once more appealed to her not to accept Mr Atherton, for whom he felt an instinctive antipathy, he was met with curt and decided replies. And in the strange, unfathomable mysteries of a woman's heart, that appeal may have had something to do with the acceptance which quickly followed.

The marriage formed the great social event of the year at Hussunabad, and it took place amid much outward rejoicing.

The evening before, Major St Clair, an

officer of the garrison, had placed in Miss Fortescue's hands a small packet, the gift, he said, of his friend Douglas, who, being absent on leave, had deputed him to present it.

Her first impulse was to refuse it. Then she hesitated, but on observing Major St Clair's surprise, hastily took it, and desiring him to thank his friend, put it aside unopened. The moment she was alone, however, she cut the thread and tore off the covering. The packet contained a ring, in which was set a single pearl of great purity, and on the inside of the circle was this inscription,—

‘Loyal à mort.’

It did not adorn her fingers on the day of the marriage.

A few weeks after the marriage of his

daughter, Colonel Fortescue obtained furlough to England, whither he went rejoicing. This was somewhat to the surprise of many who were aware of the existence of reasons, not entirely disconnected with stamped paper and witnessed signatures, which, it was supposed, acted on him as strong inducements to remain in Eastern climes.

## CHAPTER II.

‘ All heaven and earth are still—though not in sleep,  
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most ;

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The sky is changed !—and such a change ! oh, night,  
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light  
Of a dark eye in woman ——’ CHILDE HAROLD.

UPWARDS of a year had passed since the events narrated in the last chapter, and the rainy season was now overdue.

The heat was stifling. For days the anxious, expectant residents in the station of Hussunabad—as indeed in the country generally—had been fondly looking for

the outbreak of the monsoon; exhausted nature, both in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, craved the blessing of moisture and a cooler atmosphere, after the long-continued drought and desiccating influence of the parching hot-weather winds. Even these had now ceased as regular visitants, and instead, a stagnant, fiery breathlessness pervaded heaven and earth.

‘On earth ’twas yet all calm around,—  
A pulseless silence; dread, profound.’

This was, however, occasionally relieved—if relief it could be called—by a weak and fitful blast, as if fresh wafted from still hotter, or even Plutonic, realms.

Tattees were now useless. With no regular dry wind to permeate the fibres of the wet and fragrant cuscus, and, in the coolness of its evaporation, to invigorate



those behind, those moistened screens were of no effect.

They had, accordingly, at the mess-house of the gallant ' Britain's Own ' regiment of foot been removed, and the men, till now employed outside in keeping them continually wet, had been dismissed. Exulting in their freedom, they had disappeared, either to commune over the friendly hubble-bubble, or sleep the sleep which a native seems, at all times, capable of, at will, invoking.

Dinner was over and the wine in course of circulation. After two or three rounds it was voted, however, by most of those present at table, that it would be pleasanter outside. There, at any rate, they would be free from the steams of dinner, and there also the grateful after-din-

ner cheroot might be indulged in without infringing the rules which prohibited smoking in the mess-room. An adjournment, therefore, to the verandah was made, and most of the party were shortly established there, along with the various decanters, bottles, tumblers, and glasses which accompanied the sudden exodus, and the teapots and chairs necessary for their maintenance. Once established there, each man assumed such position as ease or convenience dictated; but one, in general, with the heels considerably elevated. Some tilted back their chairs, and rested their feet against the white-washed pillars of unburnt brick which supported the roof. Others, in knots of three or four, made a spare chair the common centre and foot-rest, from which

their legs radiated. It might have been observed that but few, if any, of the entire party sat erect. A reclining or lolling position was one more grateful in that relaxing climate and season.

It was the weekly guest and band-night at the mess, and a considerable party, including civilians as well as members of most of the other regiments of the garrison, had assembled. I shall here only introduce a few of the party. With one, Douglas, we are already acquainted. He, as also Major St Clair, an officer commanding a regiment of irregular cavalry, were both dining with young Ned Percy. Between all three there existed sincere friendship of that unconventional, sincere type so prevalent in India, where one man loves another for himself and

not for position, or what he can do or give.

The young host was a gay, thoughtless, warm-hearted fellow of high birth, whose radical opinions—more expressed than real—had greatly disgusted his noble relatives. The fact was, that the lad had an intuitive sense of humour and fun ; and with this was combined a very keen scent for, and dislike of, social shams and humbugs, with which he waged perpetual warfare. This, perhaps, had induced him to cultivate to great perfection that form of repartee which he himself was in the habit of referring to as ‘chaff.’ He chaffed everybody. His commanding officer, indeed, an unbending martinet of grave and stern exterior, was not exempt from having fun poked at him. And it was his chaffing treatment of his august

grandfather, whose pompous tone he privately ridiculed, together with his slangy conversation and the generally radical views it had pleased him to express in the most noble's hearing, which had led to his banishment to a regiment in India. He had taken a very complete rise out of that ornament to the aristocracy, and took much credit to and greatly prided himself on the achievement.

But, being a lad of strong sporting tendencies, of energy, spirit, and enterprise, he felt by no means averse to change the palling conventional home life, with its numerous restrictions, for one embracing adventure, greater freedom, and the exciting concomitants of big-game shooting, pig-sticking, and perhaps war.

I should mention that Ensign Percy

particularly affected, and had a high appreciation of, Yankee language, such as it is given us to admire in various books of the day. These idiomatic peculiarities had been originally adopted by him when a boy at Eton, from observing the horror and consternation which they created among some of the dignified seigneurs of his family, including the nobleman before-mentioned.

The third member of the little group, St Clair, was distantly related to young Percy; and being his senior by many years, had been asked to give heed to the young fellow, for whom he entertained a real affection. And it was, perhaps, owing to the marked dissimilarity between them, that that affection was fully returned. Percy regarded the elder man

with sentiments of reverence he was little in the habit of feeling, and still less of expressing, for any one. Men and women, he thought, were born to be chaffed. But it was noticeable that, though he frequently addressed St Clair in familiar terms such as he was in the habit of using, he never chaffed him openly or covertly, directly or indirectly.

St Clair was a man of that rare stamp who deeply impresses his fellow-men by the mere force of a simple, single-minded nature. He was, it was true, somewhat diffident and reserved, but this did not prevent his influence being felt. Young men, among themselves, laughed at him for the pure and stainless character of his moral life, yet, somehow, they generally came, on acquaintance, to



respect it. He was trusted by all, whether men or women. With a well-proved but unostentatious courage was combined much gentleness of disposition—an association so attractive to many women, and so much at variance with that self-asserting, obtrusive form of animal courage so attractive to others.

He was considerably above the middle height, and of commanding presence. His face would have been called plain by many. Dark blue eyes were the only good feature in it, and his hair was light. But his physique was splendid. In this alone could he bear any comparison with those heroes who possess so irresistible a fascination for the young lady novel-readers of the day. In everything else, moral and physical, he differed.

It may thus be seen that the three friends were quite dissimilar in character. But there existed between them the common bond of great sincerity of nature. To this, too, should be added, a genuine interest in field sports, and no light appreciation of their value, and the advantages resulting from their pursuit.

Even now they were speculating on the near approach of rain, and discussing the prospect of shikar, as they sat in the verandah puffing at their cheroots and, ever and anon, casting glances of interest at the sky.

The moon was shining, and seemed to emit a palpable, tangible heat. But its light was dim and uncertain, casting shadows of the mess-house and adjacent trees with an edge blurred and indistinct.

The parched and withered grass of the

compound, over which the shadows fell, and the sandy road which led to the door, looked hot and baked. The white pillars at the entrance contrasted with the dark green of the prickly-pear hedge, but these too loomed vague, and undefined. The nearest bungalows, each standing in its own enclosure, in many of which were trees of moderate height, tall shrubs, and pleasant gardens, seemed to be enveloped in a haze, which rendered still more indistinct the more distant barracks and farther foliage. The neighbouring hills were altogether shut out. This mistiness had been combined with a deathly stillness. But insensibly, as several strong gusts swept through the cantonments, the hazy appearance disappeared, and the moonlight became occasionally intercepted by fast-

flying scud. In the horizon dense masses of cloud could be observed ; but these had for many consecutive nights appeared, packed and consolidated, but without farther effect than rendering sick with deferred hope the anxious spectators. Distant thunder had regularly been heard, and the piles of indigo cloud had been constantly lit up by broad formless blazes of light ; as if from amidst its chinks and crannies had suddenly been opened, and as quickly shut, the portals of a brilliantly illumined interior. These had now given place to distinct and vivid flashes. Heavy masses of vapour, too, turning and twisting into wreaths and columns, detached themselves from the comparatively level front of the advancing host, and sallied into the open firmament.

In a comparatively sudden manner, the whole sky became overcast. Clouds seemed to rise up from all quarters. The wind arose and came and went in fitful but strong gusts, from various points of the compass. Anon, however, it settled more steadily in one direction, increasing continuously in force. The thunder-clap followed more and more closely on the lightning's flash, and the trees groaned as the wind rushed through them. Soon a few drops of rain fell ; and, with a wild elemental crash, the gale swept over the cantonment, the clouds opened, and a deluge descended on the cracked and thirsty earth, in many parts, literally as metaphorically, gaping to receive it. The long-desired monsoon had fairly set in.

Most of the party had watched with great interest the approach of the tempest, and speculated on the probable results. As the rain swept in to the verandah, chairs were moved, but the deliciously cool freshness and humidity of the air, so quickly succeeding the previous heat and dryness, induced many still to remain, though with the penalty of getting their clothes more or less wet.

‘It’s coming down with a vengeance, now that it has commenced,’ said Percy. ‘I shall put myself outside a brandy and soda peg. What say you, Douglas? St Clair, I know, will stick to claret.’

‘Thanks, I’ll follow your example,’ replied Douglas. ‘If this continues, we shall soon have the grass up, and quail and floriken in.’

‘And pig out of the jungles and all about the country,’ suggested Percy.

‘And the course in going good order,’ said St Clair.

‘The poor cattle, too, will get a bite now, and be a little less lean and leathery,’ observed the fat Major of the regiment, who combined a taste for the good things of the world with extreme good-nature.

‘And I say, Percy, my dear boy, you are aware of the great esteem I have for you.’

‘O yes, Major, I know,’ was the reply. ‘And it has always a tendency to increase at the floriken season, and when duck and snipe first come in. However, I’ve been sorry to see you looking so very thin and delicate lately, and suppose your invalid state requires nourishment. I’ll send you my first floriken and help you



to eat them. You know, Major, I'm a great admirer of your culinary skill. Do you agree ?'

'Will a duck swim ?' returned Major Plumptree. 'I give you a free passport to my tiffin table. And, Ned, I'm a great hand at boiled quail with chillie sauce. Don't forget that. Another thing I would like to impress on you,' continued the Major, with much seriousness. 'Porcupines, and those big fat lizards, are excellent provender, and always acceptable. A baked porcupine, sir, or a salmis d'ichneumon is a dish for a king.'

'So is a quart of ale, according to Autolycus. But, Major, I really hope that

"—good digestion waits on appetite,  
And health on both."

Don't you ever suffer from such omnivorous feeding?' Thus spoke Dr Cruickshanks, the staff-surgeon, a man who, having in his youth been member of a Shakespeare spouting club, was in the habit of quoting his favourite, in season or out of season.

'Do I look like it?' was the Major's rejoinder.

'Why, no, not exactly. You would have suited Julius Cæsar very well.'

'Why?' demanded the Major.

'Oh, nothing particular. Only something relating to good living.' But though Dr Cruickshanks thus politely refrained from farther public reference, he was heard by those near him to murmur to himself—

'Let me have men about me that are fat,  
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.'

‘Come, come, doctor, draw it mild,’ observed the good-natured Major, who overheard a portion of the aside, and knew his friend’s peculiarity.

‘A most libellous quotation, I should say,’ remarked Ned Percy; and then added *sotto voce* to Douglas, ‘I’m sure the Major’s greatest enemy couldn’t accuse the neat and unassuming style of his hair as being sleek-headed.’

Now as Major Plumptree’s cranium was covered with thick, stubby hair, cut to the length of about an inch all round, and standing erect, perhaps no one would have ventured on such an accusation. The personality of the observation was none the less reprehensible. But Mr Percy was a privileged person; and being a great favourite, especially with the last

two speakers, sometimes, even aloud, exceeded the limits of good taste in indulging his irrepressible disposition to chaff.

The doctor, however, hastened to turn the conversation by addressing a very handsome man who sat near him.

‘I suppose, Lawson,’ he said, ‘you will establish the fortnightly assemblies now that the rain has come down. When do you propose commencing?’

‘As soon as I can persuade my fellow committee-men to do so, you may be sure,’ replied Lawson, who was Aide-de-camp to the general officer commanding the division, and a great beauty-man.

He certainly was very good-looking. Dark hair and eyes contrasted with a complexion of great brilliancy, and, with a set of regular features, had earned for

him the sobriquet of 'Adonis Lawson.'

'Ah! haw!' said Major Highton, who had recently arrived at the station with a squadron of H. M. 8th regiment of Dragoon Guards. 'I'm glad to heaw that you have these—haw—social gatherings. They enliven the place. Indiaw is bad enough without a fellow's being condemned to entire seclusion. There seem some pretty women heaw. But Indian women want *ton*. Are there any worth cultivating?'

'I should rather think there were, Major,' broke in the irrepressible Mr Percy, who had an instinctive dislike to the outward signs and symbols of swelldom and treated their possessors with engaging familiarity. 'I can put you up to a capital thing or two. There are one or two

very neat fillies and a most promising forty-year-old, one of the sweetest things out, and such action. I recommend her to your notice. Ah, you will find Miss Frumper *some*. Congenial spirits, you know, and that sort of thing.' The lady referred to was a gushing young thing of undecided age, and was accused by most of the foolish young men of the garrison of being as affected and spiteful as she was certainly plain, and what they, at any rate, called old.

Had there been light to render the operation successful, Major Highton would have stuck his glass in his eye, and stared at his youthful informant. As that, however, in the present instance, would have been ineffectual, he contented himself with muttering a few words in which

‘daivilish familiaw!’ and ‘cawnfounded presuming!’ were audible to his nearest neighbours.

‘Ned, Ned,’ said St Clair reproachfully, in a low voice, ‘you are incorrigible.’

‘I know I am, old man,’ was the reply in the same tone. ‘Who wouldn’t be with such a self-sufficient ass as that? I shall cultivate him religiously, and it sha’n’t be my fault if I don’t take a few rises out of him. I’ll bet anything he is the son of a tailor or hatter, or has something to do with mule twist, or something of that sort. I saw him making up to Nora Creina the other day at the band in a most condescending manner, as if she must deeply feel the honour. I hate your haw-haw snob.’



‘Yes, my dear boy, that is all very well. But why should you constitute yourself judge, and make yourself disagreeable? The man may be very harmless.’

‘Now, don’t; it is just like you, Hugh. You always want to lighten a man’s offences,’ said young Percy. ‘I was discussing him with jolly Mrs Playfair, and she quite agreed with me. So leave me to work my wicked will off him. Douglas, I am sure, thinks as I do.’

‘I should like to see him after a pig, before I decide on his merits,’ said the individual referred to. ‘He talks very big of hunting at home, and his splendid stable of hunters. But I say, Percy, you seem to have quite a flirtation with Mrs Playfair.’

‘ Dear old thing ! yes,’ was the reply. ‘ Now, although sometimes she is a little—well, just a little vulgar, she is worth fifty of your thorough-going fine ladies. She is my greatest favourite, and no end of a chum, always barring Nora Creina, to whom my first allegiance is due.’

This aside conversation was, however, interrupted by some one inquiring from St Clair about the annual monsoon race-meeting, of which he was secretary. On this the conversation became general about horses, training, and the state of the race-course, subjects in which most present took great interest. Lawson, indeed, wished there and then, either to take or give long odds about certain horses mentioned as entered for the principal races. He had the reputation of

being a generally knowing hand, and successful on the turf as in the boudoir. St Clair, to whom he had addressed himself, told him he never betted, but ran his horses for sport.

Some time later the party broke up. The rains continued to fall steadily, all delighting in the sound and the anticipation it led to.

‘ “ A naughty night to swim in,” ’ said Dr Cruickshanks, as he mounted his pony to ride home ; and his opinion was echoed by most who, either mounted or walking, cloaked and lanterned, or otherwise, found it no easy matter to wade through the sheets of water, or find a passage through the nullahs and impromptu water-courses which, deep and swollen, swept through the cantonments. Unlucky the officer

who was that night on line or regimental duty, and who had to make his rounds and pick his way to the various guards which he was obliged to visit.

It will be seen by the foregoing conversation, that, for various reasons, the change of weather was hailed by the male members of society at Hussunabad with much satisfaction. Nor was it less welcome to those of the other sex. Out-door exercise would now be more attainable, and the season more conducive to the enjoyment of balls and the other gaieties which it would originate. Dresses, for long lain hidden from the sight of man, would now have opportunities of being displayed, and adorn, or be adorned by, their owners.

## CHAPTER III.

‘Thou art not steep’d in golden languors,  
 No trancèd summer calm is thine,  
 Ever varying Madeline.  
 Through light and shadow thou dost range,  
 Sudden glances, sweet and strange,  
 Delicious spites and darling angers,  
 And airy forms of flitting change.’—MADELINE.

VERY singular to the inhabitant of more temperate regions would appear the sudden change wrought in the face of nature by the advent of the monsoon.

By the power, as it were, of an enchanter’s wand, or like a transformation scene in a pantomime, the aspect of the country undergoes a complete alteration.

The transition from arid and waterless sterility to brilliant, green luxuriance, full tanks, and flowing streams, is as rapid as delightful. The revivification of nature is attained by no gradual process, but appears almost instantaneous; and a stranger might deem that, within a few days, he was sojourning in two totally different countries.

The monotonous brilliance of incessant sun-glare which, for the last eight or nine months, has fatigued by its sameness, now gives place to the charm derivable from the various combinations of clouds, with their light and shade and changing effect on the landscape.

The first wild burst of the monsoon was over, and, a week or so after its commencement, the training-ground on

the race-course afforded very fair going.

Training had commenced in earnest, so as to get the horses prepared and into something like form before the meeting in the middle of September. The course, which was of light soil and well elevated, was of oval form and about a mile and a half round. It was prettily situated about a quarter of a mile from, but within the actual limits of, cantonments.

At this season the stand and its vicinity formed an agreeable and favourite morning resort, not only for those training, but also for spectators—including ladies, who frequently made it the object of their morning ride.

Many of the horses had their gallops at and soon after day-break. But these were animals, either belonging to civilians



of the place, or composing long strings, the property of native dealers, or well-known racing gentlemen living at a distance, and in the charge of regular jockeys or trainers. Owing to engagements of a more pressing character, such as parades, military men could not always be present till a later hour.

On the day of which I speak, however, there was a large assembly of these, as well as others, for it was the usual weekly brigade holiday, on which none but strictly necessary duties are permitted.

This is authorized at many stations, so as to enable both officers and men to make up parties for cricket, sport, or other amusements. It was, then, yet early when groups of men from cantonments, some on foot, some on horseback,

were engaged in criticizing the gallops of the different horses training, and chatting among themselves.

On the stand itself, an oblong structure with a roof supported by pillars, but otherwise open on all sides, stood General Marston, the officer in command of the division of which Hussunabad was the head-quarters. He was a keen racing man, and was even now engaged in watching the performances of his large stud of horses, and timing every round as each galloped past. On one side was Mrs Atherton, as beautiful as when, eighteen months before, she had refused Douglas. The polite old General seemed somewhat puzzled and confused by her neighbourhood, or, it may have been, by that of another lady who, ever and anon, tried to

peep into his time-book, and detect the figures inserted. And indeed colder subjects might have felt distracted from their occupations by the pair of bright black eyes which attempted to master the secrets of his private training notes. Moreover, she formed the point of attraction to what the old fellow called 'a mob of men,' all of which interfered with his avocations.

But the General professed to be her devoted slave. And, in good sooth, it was difficult to withstand the fascinations of the lively, graceful little witch of nineteen, who had turned half the heads in cantonments—old as well as young.

Without being decidedly pretty, Norah Selby was, indeed, as pleasant a little piece of nature's workmanship to look

upon as the heart of man need desire. She was a brunette, with the rich, warm colour of health glowing in her cheeks, and its sparkle giving light to her flashing eyes. Brimful of life and spirits, and with all the capacity of enjoyment engendered by her nineteen summers, it was hardly perhaps to be wondered at that she was a little fast and flirty, and, in the very *abandon* of innocent gaiety, not so reticent, or observant of the *convenances* of society, as she should have been. A mouth—fully large—was incessantly displaying its two rows of very white inhabitants, and a nose, decidedly *retroussé*, gave more of piquancy than beauty to the varying expression of her cheerful face. Her black hair had in it an untameable ripple, which fully displayed

itself over the clear, open brow. Her figure was sufficiently plump ; but though somewhat *petite*, beautifully proportioned, and was well set-off by the riding-habit she now wore ;—when, indeed, is a good figure not so ?

In fine, her *tout ensemble* left on the mind of a stranger the impression of something, not very beautiful indeed, but irresistibly charming and attractive.

It was affirmed that only one man in the station was wholly insensible to the influence of her appearance. Even those recently from England, some of whom professed to be *blasé* to female charms, became her unresisting slaves. The latter afforded her considerable amusement by their used-up airs, and not unfrequently formed the target of some

vivacious badinage. Percy, however, was a great friend and ally, and he much regretted that his relative St Clair was not on the same familiar terms. The latter, indeed, was the man I have referred to, who was said to be quite unsusceptible to the girl's charm of manner.

He had been heard to say that 'Miss Selby was rather a sweet and pleasant-looking girl, and that it was a great pity she flirted so much.' This had been repeated to her with the usual additions gathered in transit through a chain of communications involving several links. She had pouted on hearing it, tossed her head, and then laughed; and finally flirted with redoubled assiduity whenever he happened to be present.

In that occupation she was at present engaged generally, but had desisted with the commendable object of ascertaining the import of General Marston's pencilings in his training note-book. She took some interest in the horses, too, as they swept past in their gallops, and inquired after their names and owners.

‘Will any one be good enough to take away this young lady for a gallop?’ at length inquired the persecuted old General, laughingly. ‘She has upset all my calculations, and I really don’t know if Talisman’s time is Lucifer’s, or Lucifer’s his or any others. I shall really write to the race secretary to turn all ladies off the course during training hours.’

‘I should like to see any race secre-



tary turn *me* off,' said the young lady majestically.

'Ah, you don't know how firm and decided ours is, though,' retorted the General. 'You would be afraid to disobey his orders, whatever you might do mine.'

'Who is he?' inquired Miss Selby, briefly.

'Your special aversion, Major St Clair,' said the General. 'Ah! and here he comes to enforce my request.'

The girl's face changed in an instant, as she turned and saw that the gentleman referred to was indeed entering the race stand. Its brightness and assumption of coquettish disdain seemed suddenly to vanish, and a curious, constrained look came into it. Those who observed it

believed that she had never forgiven St Clair for the opinions he had expressed about her. It was, however, but for a second. In the next she had turned from the General's side, made a laughing remark to one or two young men standing on the other, whispered to her friend Mrs Atherton, and then moved away towards a lady about whom was also gathered a knot of officers laughing and talking.

‘Let us go for a gallop, aunt,’ she said; ‘it is so fresh and pleasant.’

‘With all my heart, dear,’ was the reply of the other lady, who was none other than Mrs Playfair, the wife of the Colonel commanding the ‘Britain's Own,’ and a lady of—well it is invidious to specify how many summers—let me say

no longer in the bloom of youth and beauty.

She was usually referred to as ‘awfully jolly,’ by the young men of her acquaintance, with whom she was very popular. And, if truth be told, she greatly preferred the society, generally, of the young subalterns to the more dignified, if less amusing, companionship of the civil and military elders. She was noted for her good dinners; and though, as Percy had hinted, a little loud and vulgar, was an excellent creature, and made her austere old martinet of a husband a very good wife. This he had the good sense to acknowledge, and allowed her to go her own way. Many a young fellow—and, for matter of that, older ones also—had cause to remember her kindly minis-

trations and the good things provided by her when sickness visited them. Her genuine good heart covered a multitude of sins in the little matter of mere external refinement. Delicacy of feeling, a true, unselfish, and loving nature, and genial disposition, made amends for much in the estimation of those who knew her, and who preferred some of the inner essentials of real refinement to its outward show.

The ladies descended the steps, and the horses having been called for, they were quickly mounted by the assistance of some of the ready cavaliers in attendance; many of these began in haste, too, to mount their own, desirous of accompanying the fair horsewomen, but were checked in their ardour.

‘Now, I tell you what it is,’ said Mrs Playfair, ‘I am not going to allow a lot of harum-scarum fellows to frighten our horses by galloping about like madmen. I want a quieter escort—let me see!—ah, Major St Clair, would you be kind enough to accompany us?’ And she looked up at that gentleman as he watched their movements from the stand above.

‘I should have been delighted,’ he said, as he raised his morning cap, ‘but I have promised to time Tearaway, who is to have a trial spin this morning.’

‘Aunt, aunt, how can you?’ I knew he would excuse himself, said the girl in a whisper. ‘You know he hates me;’ and then passionately added, ‘I wouldn’t accept his aid in anything.’

Saying this, she insensibly struck her

little Arab smartly with her light riding-whip. Fired by such unusual treatment, the spirited little animal dashed off into the race-course, and hearing a horse coming up behind at a sharp pace, fairly took the bit in its teeth and bolted.

The horse behind was none other than the redoubtable 'Tearaway' himself. He had just been started by Douglas, under whose pilotage he was. Though a fine horse, he was emphatically a brute, with a wayward, savage temper, sometimes quite uncontrollable, even by so good and experienced a horseman as his present rider. Directly he saw Miss Selby's horse dash off in front, he laid back his ears, and ceased bucking, which had hitherto been his amusement since he started. Instead, he began to plunge violently, and

at last, getting his head almost between his knees, despite all Douglas' exertions, followed the example just set him, and bolted also. With his long stride he soon closed on the off side of the less powerful animal in front, and the emulation kept both going at full speed in the race so involuntary on the part of the riders.

For a short time they kept to the course. But soon Miss Selby's horse at the turn sprang over the little trench which marked its outer circle, and went off across country, followed by 'Tear-away.'

Douglas could not help admiring the resolute way in which the girl kept her horse together, even although she had lost control over it. But he had little time just then for admiration. His own un-



manageable brute required all his attention. He was aware, too, that they were rushing straight on towards the rocky, precipitous bluff of the river which a short distance in front crossed their line. In the maddened ungovernable state of the two horses, and their fiery emulation, they might rush on, regardless or unknowing of the danger till either too close to avoid going down, or so swerve on the very brink as probably to upset both horse and rider, in either case to be dashed into the flooded river.

He was now close alongside of his fair competitor, and by great exertion kept Tearaway from forging ahead.

In a few hasty words, Douglas informed his companion of the danger, and entreated her to remain calm and cool and

do as he told her. Had it not been for her, he believed he could manage so far to guide his own animal as to avoid the danger ; but to leave the bright, lovable girl to destruction was impossible.

Nearer and nearer they approached, and Douglas could discern the rough outline of the top of the cliffs and the further bank. He saw that his companion was getting exhausted, and no time was to be lost in making a last desperate attempt to change their course, even if it could not be altogether arrested.

‘I shall try,’ he said, quickly but clearly, ‘to bring my horse gradually round to the left in front of yours. Your horse will, I hope, be obliged to turn with it. Bear with all your strength on the near rein—the left, I mean. I must

shoot ahead first. Be calm and watch me.'

Saying this, he let go Tearaway's head, and the impetuous brute, thus released, raised it and, rejoicing in his liberty, shot in front. For a few seconds he was indulged with freedom from great restraint, a light pull only—just to feel it—being kept on his mouth. After a brief interval, however, Douglas suddenly took a violent haul at his head, bearing with all his strength, especially on the near rein, and at the same time digging his left spur deep into the horse's flank. The sudden and resolute check had more influence than the sustained pull. Obeying the impulse given by hand and foot, the irritated brute, snorting and shaking his head with disgust at the restraining influence which

he could not altogether ignore, came gradually round in front of Miss Selby. Acting as she had been instructed, that young lady had the satisfaction of finding her horse following the direction thus given, and also inclining to the left on the inside of Tearaway. Continuing the plan of operations thus far successful, Douglas managed to guide both round in a wide circle till they were making their way back towards the course, and the great danger was avoided.

The pace had told, especially on the lady's horse, which now began to flag, and was soon pulled to a more suitable speed, even by the tired wrists of the half-exhausted girl. It was not so easy, however, to bring into control the powerful and half-trained Tearaway; but he

too was, in the end, obliged to succumb.

They were met on their return by several gentlemen, who had galloped after them in much concern at observing the line their bolting horses had taken. By these the young lady was soon escorted in safety to her aunt, whose pale and anxious face showed how much she had felt her niece's brief but perilous gallop.

Observing that his companionship was no longer necessary, Douglas, with set teeth and wrinkled forehead, took Tear-away on to the course, and cramming in his spurs again sent him along, muttering fiercely, 'You *shall* have it now, since you want it.'

Some one called after him, but he gave no heed, and continued his career.

Miss Selby, after looking round in

vain for Mr Douglas to express the deep gratitude she felt, refused to dismount, and accompanied her aunt home. The elder lady was very grave, and spoke little. Neither was her niece inclined to talk, so they rode on silently, and at last reaching the bungalow in safety, dismounted and went in.

They had only been seated, however, a short time, when the younger lady said,

‘Why did you ask Major St Clair to accompany us, aunt? You know we dislike each other, and you see he had not even the civility to gallop after us, and try to help me, as so many did.’

‘Hush, hush, my child,’ replied Mrs Playfair, in a half-frightened voice. ‘He was the first to perceive your danger. He sprang on his great horse and galloped

away, as he said, to try and interpose between you and the river, which he thought he might do by cutting across by those terrible nullahs away to the left of the course. He tried to jump the big one which drains the parade ground. It was too broad, and his horse fell, and—and—I didn't want to tell you just now—he remained on the ground insensible.'

'I—I—don't think I am very well,' said the girl faintly, and then burst into a paroxysm of tears. She was not one of the swooning sort.

'My darling, the exertion and excitement have been too much for you. You want rest;' and the good lady insisted on putting her niece to bed, and very shortly despatched a servant to inquire after Major St Clair.



Happily that gentleman had soon rallied from the shock of his fall, which took place as narrated, and after some assistance from those who had seen the accident, was able to re-mount and ride slowly home.

## CHAPTER IV.

‘Tuebor.’—*Motto of* LORD TORRINGTON.

THERE was great friendship between Mrs Atherton and Norah Selby. The latter was at present on a temporary visit to Mrs Playfair, in the military cantonment, but her home was with her father—the judge of the district—whose house was situated about two miles away from the station, and between that and the city of Hussunabad. It had once been a native palace, built on the banks of the river amid beautiful groves and gardens. But

when the district came into English hands, it had, like other similar buildings, undergone some alterations, and thereafter became the residence of one of the principal civilians of the place.

The Athertons' bungalow was at some distance on the river above. They were the nearest neighbours; and frequent intercourse—including whole days spent in each other's society, when the gentlemen were in office—cemented the affectionate friendship with which each had been inclined to regard the other from the first. Mrs Atherton, being the elder by four years, and also a matron, naturally assumed the leading part in their acquaintance; and, of course, equally naturally, took much thought to herself regarding the establishment of her friend.

She anxiously weighed the respective merits of those who might be deemed worthy of aspiring to the honour of the young lady's hand. But whenever she had hinted at such matters with the object of finding if there was any particular favourite, Miss Selby had always laughed, and said, 'that, with the exception of young Percy and the General, she liked all her admirers equally; and had not the slightest intention, just yet, of giving up her liberty to any one existing. She greatly preferred papa to all the rest of his sex put together.'

To say that the eighteen months which now constituted Mrs Atherton's married life had been a time of unalloyed happiness, would be to assert what is rarely true of any marriage, and cer-

tainly was very inapplicable to the one in question.

Pleased with his beautiful possession, Mr Atherton had, for a few months, been kind enough to his wife, and she earnestly endeavoured to encourage something of affection for him. But when she thought she really had brought herself to feel a little warmly, he would do or say something which changed the whole current of her ideas. Their thoughts ran in grooves totally dissimilar. There was an incompatibility of nature and uncongeniality of tastes and feelings which rendered hopeless any genuine affection either on one side or the other. And it was not very long before this became apparent to both. She, indeed, strove hard against the conviction, and struggled awhile, hoping

against hope; but ere long its certainty was forced upon her.

He, man like and more selfish—synonymous terms, perhaps—made no effort to oppose his growing conviction that they were quite unsuited to each other. Had he accepted the situation in a philosophic spirit, and allowed an indolent or polite indifference to replace what never had been love, they might still have got on as well as many of their neighbours, and lived, if not in the bonds of affection, at any rate in fair peace and amity. She would gladly have done so, and endeavoured to fulfil her duties as best she could.

But he was unwise in his generation, and sought to bring her spirit into subjection to his will. He little knew at

first the task he had set himself. He forgot that, though it be simple as pleasant to rule a woman through her affections; dangerous through her passions; and easy, though cowardly, through her fears,—it becomes to any man a task of superlative difficulty to impose a presumed masculine ascendancy on a woman of spirit and strong will when he has not the power to influence her through any of these. Well for him, for both, had he been able to realize this.

A man of some intellectual calibre, but of small and narrow mind—a not unfrequent combination—he mistook intellectual superiority for a general moral power and force of will, and he therefore sought to bend her proud spirit till subservient to his own. To this end, among



other means, he adopted a system of constant carping and fault-finding, which sometimes roused her to fits of angry vehemence. During the early part of his marital training he was somewhat surprised, and perhaps a little frightened at these ; but coming in time to understand that she was by no means devoid of a sense of duty in her position as wife, he mocked at them. From passionate resistance, therefore, she had now schooled herself into the assumption of a rigid indifference, or a cold impassibility. Though he could not be altogether mistaken in the nature of her feelings, he prided himself on the success of his treatment. He might, perhaps, have felt less satisfied had he penetrated the recesses of her spirit, and unmasked the wild, volcanic

turmoil which too often, alas, lay concealed beneath the calmness of her outward demeanour, or the scorn disguised by its coldness.

Douglas' warning words had not been long in becoming realized, but she only acknowledged to her own heart how completely she repented the step she had taken.

In such a state of mind, a woman too often falls an easy prey to those social hawks, ever hovering on the look-out to gratify their vanity, or what is worse, by the capture of the foolish bird which too confidently exposes itself to danger.

Of such a type was Lawson. I have said he was handsome. But to this he added the still greater charm of a silky, flattering deference of manner to women,

and an assumed sympathy with their more subtle feelings and weaknesses which influenced them strongly. He possessed, too, a fascinating address, quick apprehension, much cool audacity, and a heart utterly selfish and unscrupulous.

What wonder, then, that he was a great favourite, and had the reputation of being most successful in quarters where he desired success. He was, undoubtedly, a very dangerous friend and companion for a woman in Mrs Atherton's state of mind.

But he very well knew how to mask his intentions. Without startling her by any outward professions, he implied his deep commiseration and sympathy. He both soothed and deceived her. Thus he gained a footing of intimacy, and led her

to believe in his manly trueness of nature.

But, if she did not recognize the danger which beset her, another did so. Douglas rightly gauged the man's character, and, in his own self-appointed *rôle* of professed and accepted friend, determined to oppose what he believed to be the machinations of her enemy.

He was not, never had been, a friend or intimate of Mr Atherton's. But he knew something, and guessed more, of the terms subsisting between that gentleman and his wife. He was quite aware, too, of a certain influence he possessed over her.

Douglas dreaded the contaminating influence of a spirit like Lawson's, and its effect on the moral freshness of her nature. The professed regard and marked

attentions, too, of such a man, were of themselves compromising in the sight of those to whom his character was known.

With the object, therefore, of counteracting the insidious approaches of the covert enemy, he thought a countermine justifiable. To effect this, he determined, after a serious mental conflict, to take advantage of his influence, and endeavour to induce her to—love himself. This was to be her safe-guard. And it was illustrative of the man that he reasoned himself into the adoption of this expedient in perfect good faith. His object was her good; and he believed himself fully possessed of the ability to check himself from drifting into that vortex of sinful wish, which he condemned as much in his own person as in that of another. She should

love him with a pure affection, and he would be to her as a brother.

Acting on this impulse, he had sought to interest her affections as well as friendly feelings. But it was not long before his conscience smote him. He saw that she was becoming deeply interested in him, and soon he began to feel dissatisfaction with himself.

In this frame of mind he had gone out on a shooting expedition with his friend St Clair, and in a moment of that free communion, which such close companionship induces, had confided to his friend his many doubts and perplexities.

Unhesitatingly, the singleness of nature, and strong, but simple mind, of the elder man detected the fallacies of the other's reasoning, and he gently but

firmly reproved him. ‘“Do not evil that good may come.” What more do you want?’ he asked. ‘Surely that contains the essence of the most astute philosophy. Man should do his best to guide circumstances, but we cannot by taking thought to ourselves surely divine the result of any course of action. Our miserable puny attempts to influence evil by evil may end in evil and not good. Whatever may be to come, let us, therefore, act rightly. Depend on it, old fellow, it’s the wisest as well as best plan. Just think of what you are about.’

‘I have, God help me. I’ve thought of it till I am utterly confused. But my feelings for her are of no ordinary nature.’

‘Whatever they are now,’ St Clair rejoined, ‘they *may* merge in others. Take



care, Douglas ; remember the danger. A young and beautiful woman, grateful, impulsive, and craving affection—an unloved husband—sympathy indulged—opportunity—a moment of weakness, and then—for her deathless remorse, a life-long sense of irremediable sin. And for you,—what ?’

‘ I have seen what you describe,’ the other huskily answered, as the bitter memory of a most pitiable event with which his earlier life had been associated, was aroused by the other’s words. ‘ You are right, St Clair. Though, under any circumstances, I should have little fear for either of us.’

‘ Believe me, indeed I am. Avoid temptation : I know little of women, it may be. But if her friendship is of the

force and depth you imagine, that of itself will go far to help her. But do not seek to add passion to it, or if successful, both may be lost. Exert the self-control which any one deserving the name of man should exercise.'

'Ay, dear old fellow,' Douglas replied. 'You in your noble, simple life are above these influences. I would give much to be like you.'

'Douglas,' said St Clair very gravely, and with a pained expression, 'I am but a man, and feel as other men. But, it is my conviction that life, rightly considered, is but one prolonged effort of self-control. I only wish I could act up to my convictions. But this I know, that the more exercised it is, the easier it becomes, in whatever way employed.'

‘I know no man in the world who lives a purer, more self-denying life than you do, St Clair. It is not only friendship or affection which gives you influence over a man like myself, but their combination with respect. In the matter of which we have been speaking, I shall follow your advice, and check the familiar nature of our friendship.’

It was a sudden and unrestrained impulse which had induced Douglas to speak to his friend on so delicate a subject. To him alone of all men in the world could he have done so. He was Quixotically chivalrous in regarding what he deemed was in any way connected with a woman’s secret. But in this instance, he did not regret that he had unburthened his mind. It had led him to see more

clearly the error of his former course of action, and to resolve resolutely to alter it, and avoid the seductive charm of a too familiar intercourse with a woman for whom he knew that he felt a strong attachment. He had done so, without, of course, assigning any reason. At first she was a little surprised; then hurt and angry. She felt much; and was deeply pained to think that he had tired of her friendship. She resented it all the more, perhaps, because with her regard had been combined a tenderness of affection which she never attempted to analyze. Thus, coldness and estrangement took the place of the friendly warmth which had hitherto characterized their intercourse. And this he attributed, in some measure, to the rising influence of

Lawson, whose designs he watched.

Such was the relative state of feeling of some of those I have introduced, when, a few days after Miss Selby's dangerous gallop, Hussunabad rejoiced in a general invitation from the Rajah of Sungumpore.

That native potentate was a Rajpoot chief of considerable wealth and influence. His territories, at the distance of a few miles only, marched with the British district of Hussunabad; and as he affected the society of Englishmen, he was in the habit of giving grand fêtes and sporting pic-nics to the society there.

Sungumpore was a large and strongly fortified town distant about 120 miles, and there he principally resided; but he possessed a country palace, situated in the

midst of a pleasant sporting district on the confines of his boundary and within a dozen miles of Hussunabad.

At this he was now on a visit, and thence had issued an invitation, not only to gentlemen, but to such ladies as felt inclined to 'render the Rajah's heart a perfect spring of unquenchable delight, and his palace a celestial garden, wherein might for a season blossom the fairest flowers of English beauty.'

As the chief did the thing in first-rate style, and his fêtes were popular, a considerable number of ladies were found willing to gratify their princely neighbour's heart, and make floral his abode. Of gentlemen, only a percentage per regiment were able to avail themselves of the Rajah's hospitality, as the station

elders considered themselves obliged to put some restriction on the number.

The invitation was for two days, so as to include one night, and enable all to be spectators of a grand display of fireworks on and about the lake on which the palace was situated. Upon its shore were pitched a number of tents for the occupation of those gentlemen for whom there was no room in the separate portion of the palace which was set apart for visitors.

Unfortunately, even pleasure parties have sometimes their serious drawbacks. In India especially so, when civilities are exchanged between English officers and natives of rank. A good deal of formality was dispensed with on this occasion, it being unofficial. But on the morning of



their visit, General Marston and Mr Selby, together with Brigadier Simpson and Mr Atherton, and many others, were obliged to mount on elephants when they had reached a certain named spot, and thence proceed in state to meet and be welcomed by the Rajah. That scion of a noble race, mounted, like his guests, on an elephant, was gorgeously bedecked with numberless jewels. Attended by a most noisy rabble, consisting of followers both on foot and mounted, he received the visitors with great *empressement* and much oily gladness, outside the village through which he escorted them.

These matters of native etiquette have, however, so often been described, that I shall not weary my readers with any lengthened narration of the formalities



incidental to the occasion. Enough to say that, enveloped in dust, and surrounded by the curveting of horses, the shouting of men, the waving of gaudy banners, the beating of kettledrums, and other noisy instruments, and all the mixed splendour and squalor of an Eastern court, both host and visitors passed on their way—if not rejoicing, at any rate pretending it.

‘What a slimy sort of customer, and what humbug all this is!’ observed Percy, who, never having been present at any ceremonial of the sort before, and wishing to see it, had formed one of the General’s party.

‘Oleaginous, certainly,’ replied Dr Cruickshanks, who was Percy’s companion in a somewhat contracted howdah.

‘ But there’s no more humbug in it, Ned, than in hundreds of London drawing-rooms. Though we do ridicule all these formalities, it is much the same as in more western lands. We are going to be fed, and you know “the sauce to meat is ceremony.” ’

‘ I’m sure I don’t know that, doctor. If you had said it was the sauce to drink, now, I could much better have understood it. This dust is enough to choke one, and makes me awfully thirsty. By the way, is our oily friend liberal with his liquor ? ’

‘ Very. He does the thing in style. Champagne for dinner, and lesser liquids at all other times when wanted.’

‘ Ah, we’ve come to a sort of place, then, abounding in wine and oil.’

‘Just so ; and the former seems more to your taste than the latter. But, bless me!’ ejaculated Dr Cruickshanks, as he writhed on his seat in the vain endeavour to render his position easier, ‘how exceedingly contracted this howdah is ! I shall be glad enough to reach the palace, and “take mine ease in mine inn.” ’

No doubt the howdah’s dimensions were on a somewhat limited scale. But the fault, Percy thought, lay principally in the doctor’s length of limb, for he was a man fearfully and wonderfully made about the legs. When seated he appeared to be below the ordinary stature of man ; but once standing erect, the spectator wondered to see a person very considerably above it. In fact, his very short body bore no relative proportion to a very

long, attenuated pair of legs, which gave one the impression of always trying to get away one from the other. This may have been owing to their excessive familiarity at the knees, which, breeding the proverbial contempt, had gradually created such estrangement lower down, as to render impossible any approach to terms of intimacy between a pair of long, bony feet.

The palace was reached in due course, and, after receiving his guests with the usual courtesies, and the prescribed ceremonies of welcome, the Rajah retired to his own apartments, leaving certain functionaries in constant attendance.

A messman from Hussunabad had been engaged to supply the meals to the

large party assembled, at which, of course, the high-caste chief was not himself present. But they were none the less appreciated on this account ; and when the first-arrived party had been augmented by numbers of others, including the ladies, all sat down to a well-arranged breakfast in a room overlooking the island-studded, hill-engirt lake.

Captain Lawson had attended Mrs Atherton and her party in their ride out, until obliged to push on and join the General, and take his part in the ceremonies of reception.

Douglas, riding moodily alone, had joined them on the road. And some devil had whispered to Mrs Atherton that the looks of her cousin—he was only a Scotch one, removed any number of

times—expressed something which she did not care to analyze, but yet should resent. Their estrangement had been increasing for some time past; and deeming it to be his fault, she had determined to show that others might feel a warm friendship for her as well as himself, and one, perhaps, more lasting.

Lawson was riding on her whip hand, and using all his arts to ingratiate himself in her favour. And his efforts were really, on this occasion, seconded by a feeling which, infinitesimal though it was, had some remote kinship with one of love. She had been listening to him with pleased attention, which attention was redoubled when Douglas rode up, and simply bowing to her, took up his station by the side of Norah Selby. He

was on very good terms with the latter lady. She liked him, and was grateful for the assistance he had rendered in her runaway gallop. He, too, liked and admired her, for he had early learnt to discriminate between her childish craving to be liked and desire to please, and real flirtation. He fully distinguished between the innocent fastness of a high-principled, well-brought-up girl, and such as is ascribed to the present girl of the period. Amiability of nature, he knew, has a tendency to generate a disposition to flirtiness.

Had there been none other on whom his interest was so fully concentrated, he might have loved the girl instead of only liking her; for she possessed that pure and simple spirit before which, whether



in man or woman, he always prostrated himself. So he chatted and laughed with her, apparently oblivious or careless of the marked attention which Lawson was paying to Mrs Atherton.

So it went on; and angry feelings were insensibly stealing into the hearts of both the cousins—for I may as well refer to them as such. Bitter as the ashes of Dead-sea fruit is that taste of the dust of scorned or dead affection. And, alas! how prone we are unreasonably to create for ourselves from an unsubstantial myth that which may sever the closest ties which connect our mortal interests. Sightless things of earth, groping in the dark, what right have we to arrogate to ourselves an immortal divination or unerring insight into the



impenetrable mysteries of a fellow-spirit ?

Lawson at last galloped ahead to join the General, and the rest followed more quietly, but no conversation ensued between the cousins. Indeed, each rather avoided the other. It was only when they reached the palace, and Douglas proffered his assistance to help Mrs Atherton from her horse, that she addressed him.

‘Thank you, Mr Douglas ’—it was the first time she had called him by his surname since they had decided to do otherwise on their first meeting in India, and she laid the slightest stress on the word. ‘You see, Captain Lawson has forestalled you ;’ and she gave her hand with a smile to the latter as he hastily stepped forward to give the required aid. Douglas had been nearest, for the other only came out

of the building as they rode up ; but he shrunk back as if she had struck him. He looked straight at her, however, and then raising his hat, turned and walked away.

Was she pleased or grieved at the little stab she had given him ; or were her feelings on the subject mixed, as she observed the twitch of pain which for a brief moment started into his face ? Pleased, perhaps, at feeling her still existing power to raise such ; grieved, perchance, at having exerted that power since she did possess it. But who can analyze or separate the varied currents which flow from that deep well-spring of vivid feeling, the heart of a passionate woman ?

Breakfast over, the party broke up

into various sections with the object of employing themselves during the morning in any way that fancy dictated. The ladies remained within-doors, and were shown over some of the private rooms of the palace, and even introduced into the sacred precincts of the zenana, and to the head queen herself—a very fat and formidable-looking old woman. A few other younger and prettier wives, however, together with numerous favourites and a considerable detachment of sons, had all accompanied the Rajah to his country palace. He was a most domestic man, and not insensible, it was said, to the influence of petticoat government.

The mysterious regions of the zenana apartments were of course banned and barred to the gentlemen, who were fain to

content themselves with a visit to the armoury and other public rooms. But many employed themselves in boating, and others shooting. The opposite side of the lake was however tabooed. At some distance beyond it there was a preserve, and as several miserable specimens of bovine old age and attenuation had been tied to various trees in and about it, it was hoped that one or two tigers might be attracted to the spot, and linger in the deep jungle, thus affording sport for the morrow. The season was not that best adapted for 'big-game' shooting, owing to various reasons. When the air is cool and water plentiful, animals wander more. The luxuriant growth of vegetation, consequent on the first fall of rain, also greatly increases the difficulties in tracking, driving, and sight-

ing the game. But the chance of a tiger, under any circumstances, is one which few keen hunters, accustomed to the sport, can well withstand.

The morning soon passed away, and though some few still remained absent, the majority assembled at tiffin, as the afternoon was to be devoted to an exhibition of fights between various wild animals.

Douglas had gone out with young Percy, and their bag, as well as those of others, consisting of rain quail, black partridges, and hares, was inspected with evident relish by Major Plumptree. And this inspection led to a lengthened interview between him and the messman.

St Clair had been one of those who did a little boating—an exercise he was

both fond of and an adept in. Mr Selby, Mr Atherton, and one or two others, accompanied him. The first-named civilian was a great admirer of the powerful soldier; and from the fact, perhaps, of being himself deficient in muscular development, and unused to those exercises in which it is best displayed, all the more highly regarded men who were otherwise.

Lawson remained in attendance on Mrs Atherton, as she sketched from a window of the palace. And Douglas on his return knew it, and it increased the bitterness of his spirit.

The wild-beast fights came off according to programme. The Rajah, with his attendant inferior chiefs on one hand, and his guests on the other, occupied a

raised and covered pavilion overlooking a large, high-walled enclosure. By his especial request the ladies, too, were present, though the spectacle was not one likely to meet either with their approval or interest. Curiosity, however, was not without its influence in inducing them to accede to their host's invitation.

He received them with a well-bred courtesy and deference which a native gentleman of rank—especially a Rajpoot or Mussulman—rarely fails to exhibit in his intercourse with those who, from birth or position, are entitled to be treated with politeness. They afford a very excellent example which, it is to be feared, is not always followed in Eastern lands by those who profess to be more highly civilized.



He was too courteous to stare boldly at any of his lady guests, but it was evident that his admiration was greatly excited by the beauty of Mrs Atherton.

The first animal introduced to afford sport was a jackass, who was driven in through a door, and, on the retreat of his guardians, proceeded most unconcernedly to rub himself against the wall.

To him shortly entered, however, a hyæna, who was brought to the gate in the large wooden trap in which he had been recently caught, and there turned loose into the arena.

Taking not the slightest notice of the donkey, he slunk away into the corner farthest from the spectators, and lay down in the shade. Some men now entered, and by main force pushed the



donkey towards him, and stirred him up with the point of a long spear. But he would have nothing to say to his supposed prey, and only retired snarling to another corner. Neither, indeed, did the donkey show any very great signs of interest, nor, indeed, of alarm. All he did was to sing his pæan in the most discordant asinine music. This was evidently a failure, to the great satisfaction of all the ladies, and most of the gentlemen.

Fighting rams and buck antelopes were then introduced, and respectively ran their courses, no doubt to the great interest of the natives present, many of whom, probably, had heavy bets depending on the success of some selected favourite. But after a few encounters,

the sport lost its attractions for the English spectators.

A couple of tigers were next turned in, and now the gentlemen, at any rate, became seriously interested. Emitting a low, rumbling sound rather than a growl, each eyed the other with a malevolent look as they paced with majestic walk about the court.

Apparently, however, neither were anxious to come to close quarters, or, as Percy observed, 'one's afraid and the other daren't.' To bring this about, a large lump of raw flesh was thrown between them, and as both had been kept without food for some time, this produced the desired effect.

With a startling suddenness, two brindled bodies were seen to cleave the

air, and come in contact over the coveted prize.

Twisting, writhing, and rearing up on end one against the other, uttering all the time a snarling growl, both of the beautiful creatures, so perfect in the muscular grace and action of animal form, struggled for the mastery.

‘I’ll lay an even bet the big one wins,’ exclaimed Lawson, carried away by the excitement of the scene and his own betting proclivities, and for the moment completely oblivious of that other game he was playing.

‘Done. I’ll take you to a fifty’ (rupees, be it remembered, only). ‘Will that suit you?’ retorted Douglas, equally excited, but not oblivious of the said game. He would just then have opposed

the first speaker in anything, even to the risk of both their lives. Moreover, he had marked the greater depth of girth and apparent weight of the lower tiger.

‘All right ; consider it booked,’ was the reply.

‘I’ll back Douglas’ opinion,’ said Percy. ‘Have another fifty on, Lawson?’

‘Yes, done with you, too.’

‘What are the Sahibs speaking of?’ inquired the Rajah—not apparently very greatly interested in the scene in progress before him—of General Marston, who sat on his right hand.

‘They are making bets as to which will win,’ was the reply.

‘Which did the Sahib who spoke first bet on?’ asked the Rajah.

‘The big one,’ the General answered.

‘He will lose. The other is stronger, and always gets the best of it at last.’

‘Then they have fought before?’ inquired the General.

‘Oh yes. It is only when very hungry the big one would fight with the other at all.’

The Rajah’s words were soon verified. The greater length of the one tiger seemed at first to give a preponderance in the struggle from its height when rearing up. But the shorter and stouter animal soon evinced its superiority. Indeed the fierceness of the conflict was more apparent than real.

The larger and lighter tiger in a short time gave way, and slunk from the contest, leaving the victor to enjoy his well-earned meal at leisure.

This, however, was shortly interrupted by the shouts of men on the walls ; and the two combatants were partly driven, partly enticed toward their cages, which were pushed just within the gates and contained some allurements in the shape of lumps of flesh.

To this now succeeded fights between elephants. These were ushered in from different directions, each driven by a mahout, and conducted towards a low wall which separated one from the other. The fight, such as it was, took place in reality just above it. The wall was strong, and built to prevent the animal which proved stoutest continuing the assault and boring his adversary to a dangerous result.

The first crash or two was viewed with interest by those of the spectators who

had seen nothing of the kind before. But in this instance, also, the combatants required some urging to induce them to meet in battle. The mahouts remained astride of their charges' necks during the whole of the fray, and seemed really interested and excited,—no wonder, perhaps. Their strenuous exertions, however, had to be seconded by several spearmen, who gently urged on and probably irritated the huge animals by the application behind of a slight stimulant in the shape of pointed steel.

““ Honour pricks me on,” ’ observed Dr Cruickshanks. ‘ And really, those mahouts might ask, with Falstaff, “ Yea ! But how if honour prick me off when I come on ? ” ’ ”

‘ By Jove ! ’ remarked Percy, ‘ I think



it's the reverse. They prick honour on. Just look at the spearmen and at that mahout, how excited he is, and digging away at his elephant's head with his iron spike for the bare life !'

'Wah, wah ! Shabash, gallant Hyder ! Brave Acbar ! good Hatti !' resounded from the natives around, as they incited the animals to use their utmost strength in the coming encounter.

It was not long before they were wrought to the requisite pitch. After some manœuvring with their trunks they made a short rush each from his respective side, and met with foreheads opposed above the wall with a crash which resounded far and wide. This was effected without any apparent superiority on the part of either.



Backing for a few short steps, again they rushed on and met in ponderous collision. And now each endeavoured to push back the other by main strength and weight, interlacing their enormous tusks to give them greater hold.

This after awhile ended in the repulse of the weaker. Once more, however, he was urged to the combat; but the superiority of the other was incontestable, and ere long, despite the most urgent appeals both of steel and voice, he refused to go any more into action.

With this the sports concluded, and the party broke up, the English to reunite at dinner, and all in the evening at the nautch, and then on the banks of the lake or in boats upon it.

It so happened that Mr Selby was

talking to St Clair just before dinner was announced, and it chanced that his daughter came to him to remind him of some plan connected with seeing the fireworks. ‘Yes, my dear, I have arranged it all; I shall have to go in the Rajah’s state barge, so will your uncle. But Major St Clair here has kindly promised to convoy you and your aunt. You see it wouldn’t be according to native etiquette for ladies to come with us. Ah, there is dinner. Would you be good enough to give your arm to my daughter, St Clair?’

St Clair expressed his pleasure, and Miss Selby did not of course outwardly intimate the contrary, even if she felt it, as from her oft-expressed dislike of her companion she perhaps did.

‘I couldn’t help myself, Helen dear,’

she afterwards explained to Mrs Atherton, with a slight increase of colour. ‘It was so annoying. I happened to be there just as dinner was announced, and papa asked him to take me in, and so I was obliged to go. And do you know, he is to convoy us on the lake?’

‘I know, Norah dear. But did Major St Clair make himself so very disagreeable at dinner? I know you regard him almost as an enemy. You seemed to get on pretty well, I thought.’

‘Y-e-e-s, *pretty* well. I think he is more endurable than he was. Besides, one likes to hear a man *talk*, sometimes. It’s a relief from mere commonplace *chatter* and *small talk*.’

‘Oh, he talked, did he? what about?’

‘Ever so many things, and not badly

either; I shouldn't wonder, after all, if he improves on acquaintance.'

'Then cultivate it, child.'

'That I'm sure I shall not,' Norah replied, drawing herself up in a stately manner. 'If he likes to make himself agreeable, and talk to me, of course he can. But although you, and papa, and some others, think so much of him, I may not share those opinions. And I certainly don't intend to *cultivate* his acquaintance.'

'Well, well, never mind,' Mrs Ather-ton observed, smiling. 'Perhaps he'll cultivate yours.'

'Now, don't tell him to do so,' ejaculated the girl in a hurried and anxious voice; 'I will never forgive you, Helen, if you say anything about my not disliking him quite so much as I did. If you do I

declare I'll soon put a stop to all further acquaintance with him.'

'Dear me, child, what a flutter you are in. Of course I don't intend to say anything about it to him. By-the-by, you and Mr Douglas seem to be great friends. Do you like him?'

And Mrs Atherton made the inquiry with much outward equanimity.

'Very much,' was the reply. 'I think we shall be great friends. I suppose you won't object to your cousin becoming an ally of mine!'

'I object? oh dear, no! Only I'm afraid he is not a very constant ally—at least, he likes change.'

'Does he? I suppose we all do that. I should have thought, though, he was pretty constant as a friend.'

As the elder lady showed no inclination to pursue the subject, it dropt, and soon after a summons was received which obliged them to prepare for the nautch.

That and the fireworks went off as such things usually do ; but owing to the situation the latter were, perhaps, more successful than common. As seen from the lake, too, the palace presented a very pretty spectacle. It was lighted up by thousands of little coloured lanterns which were hung in close array along every line and angle, and defined, in myriads of brilliant stars, the shape and proportions of the irregular building. All the windows, too, were completely lighted from within, and served to heighten the effect.

## CHAPTER V.

‘ They may call this sport, but I’m blessed if it’s pleasure.’

—SEYMOUR’S *Sketches*.

MOST of the ladies rode, or drove, or palkee’d back to Hussunabad on the following morning, as the day was to be devoted to the tiger hunt, a sport in which, unfortunately, they could not join. Many of the gentlemen accompanied them. But there still remained behind more than enough to supply a sufficiency of guns for the battue, of which nature it partook more than of that of a scientific hunt.

The Shikarees had reported that no less than three of the wretched superannuated kine had fallen victims to one or more tigers. They themselves affirmed their belief that four of the latter were in occupation of the cover or the adjacent rocky, jungle-grown nullahs and low hills. The foot-prints were numerous. But at that season tigers wander much, and are not generally to be tracked and marked down or ringed with such certainty as is the case in the hot weather. At the latter time the jungle is thin, and water becomes scarce, so tigers are constrained to seek the near neighbourhood of the fewer favoured spots where it is to be found, and are then more easily traced to their lairs. However there appeared, on this occasion, every prospect of finding



one or more in the favourite jungle which the Rajah preserved, into which no villagers were allowed to enter to feed cattle, or cut wood and grass, or in any other way disturb it.

A small army was collected to assist in the beat. Numbers of elephants, too, some with howdahs, others only with pads, were also assembled. The Rajah and General Marston were to occupy a handsome howdah which was carried by a noble-looking old tusker. He, with two others, were known as regular Shikaree elephants, and being used to the sport, usually might be relied on to stand firm to a tiger's charge. But by far the greater number were unentered to big-game, and useful only to enable the rider to view the scene from a distance. These might

bolt at the first sight or roar of a tiger near them. Some were only baggage elephants intended to help in the beat or carry the dead game.

To such old sportsmen as St Clair and Douglas, the disappointments arising from riding an elephant which will not properly face a tiger, were well known. The dangerous disagreeables too of clinging on to one bolting through jungle, with guns and rifles shaken out, had not been untested by either. So, since they were unable to get seats on either of the three staunch animals, they determined to trust to their own legs, or a tree, or rock, as opportunity presented. Percy, who had taken his first lesson in tiger-shooting with his two friends the previous hot season, and several others, followed their example.

Dr Cruickshanks also, who had never seen a tiger killed, and was no shot, determined to avail himself of their superior woodcraft, and get placed by them in some safe 'coign of vantage' whence he might witness the sport.

The head Shikaree remained to conduct the 'big-wigs' and organize the beat. One of his assistants, therefore, was selected by the other sportsmen to guide them to their places, and afford all the information his local knowledge enabled him to impart.

The jungle lay in a little valley formed by two low irregular ranges of rocky hills. At one end these approached, and the stream-bed, more open above, had there cleft a deep passage through the rocky barrier, and formed a ravine of consider-

able depth and width. There was a good deal of water in it at this season ; but enough of rugged, rock-strewn, and jungle-grown ground existed on either hand, between the water and the steep sides of the ravine, to give passage to wild animals.

The beat was to commence from the upper, and more open, end ; and those tigers escaping, wounded or unseen, from the sportsmen on the elephants, it was expected would endeavour to get away by this outlet, or by two or three nullahs which seamed the low hills.

To these spots, then, the half-dozen gunners, and one or two who were spectators only, betook themselves. Lots were drawn and places assigned accordingly. To St Clair, Percy, and Captain Goodall,

an officer of the regiment to which Douglas belonged, fell the duty of guarding the large ravine ; while to Douglas, Vivian of the 'Britain's Own,' and Estcourt of the artillery, were assigned positions commanding the principal lines of escape by the hills. The doctor elected to establish himself in the ravine, since that was deemed the most likely place of exit.

St Clair got upon a rock on the top of one bank ; Goodall mounted into a tree on the other ; while Percy perched himself in one in the middle of the ravine. The doctor ensconced himself opposite, with a deep pool of water between his tree and that occupied by Percy. With some difficulty he climbed into his tree, whose branches projected over the water, and sat there, as he himself said, 'like

Patience on a monument,' with his long legs dangling within a dozen or so of feet from the water's edge.

The beat commenced, and ere long warning signals were given that game was a-foot. A few shots next intimated that those mounted on elephants had viewed something or other. About this period Dr Cruickshanks was suddenly startled by a sound as of heavy bodies crashing through jungle and over stones, and gesticulated wildly to his neighbours to intimate the fact well known to themselves. He would have shouted, had it not been impressed upon him, with all sorts of threatened penalties in case of disobedience, that on no account must he speak or leave his tree till leave were given him. On these conditions only had he been

allowed to join. The noise proceeded from a sounder of pig who rattled past, and went on their way unmolested.

Some hard firing now took place on one side of the jungle above, and the roars of a tiger and shouts of men announced an action in progress. One had been viewed by General Marston as it crossed an artificial ride, cut in the thick jungle. A snap shot had taken effect, and led to a general encounter. As St Clair and his friends had predicted, more than one elephant deserted the field of battle and fled in headlong haste. A charge, however, on one of the staunch old animals had been met by a well-delivered brace of bullets from Colonel Playfair, and another brace from his companion, and the tiger soon after fell with numerous wounds.

This was all well enough for those well mounted ; but to those whose [animals would not go near the scene of action, it was tantalizing in the extreme.

As for the party whose fortunes I am more particularly describing, they waited long without seeing anything. So long, indeed, that Dr Cruickshanks, much incommoded by the confined nature of his seat, sought temporarily to shift his position to a branch nearer the ground.

Moreover, he was thirsty. He had a flask in his pocket, which also fortunately contained a string. This he deemed would prove long enough, if tied to the cup of his flask, to admit of its being gently lowered to the pool below, from the lower branch, and a small supply of water drawn up.



He therefore descended to the bough, and proceeded eagerly, but cautiously, to effect his object. All around seemed so quiet and peaceful, he thought, as standing on the bough, with one hand grasping that he had just vacated to steady himself, with the other he let down his diminutive bucket. It safely reached the water, and was gently drawn up towards the thirsty, expectant operator. At last he held it in his hand, and pouring into it a fair modicum from its parent flask, for a moment revelled in delightful anticipation, and was on the point of tossing it down his throat, when his attention was diverted by a snarling sound.

Hastily looking towards the spot whence it proceeded, his eyes encountered the green orbs of a tremendous tiger.

Showing its teeth, and emitting the snarl I have referred to, it was standing on one side of a mass of rock, watching the unfortunate doctor at the distance of less than fifteen yards. The doctor was spell-bound. Fascinated, as the bird is said to be by the snake, he stood, cup in hand, gazing with a look of horror at his terrible visitor. He knew that he was within easy reach of a spring, and there stood the beast gazing at him, and evidently most mischievously inclined. The brute appeared to have risen out of the earth, so noiseless and sudden had been its arrival. There had been no signs of it there a few seconds before.

Just then, while the terrified doctor's gaze was still riveted on the savage face of his enemy, a shot resounded from Cap-

tain Goodall's position on the steep, rocky bank above. The tiger made a half-rear, and then wheeled rapidly round, as if snapping at the wound it had received in the ribs. Another shot from the same direction seemed to recall its wandering senses, and then, with a tremendous roar, it bounded forward straight for Dr Cruickshanks' tree.

'Murder! fire! help here!' was all that he had time to shout. To his horrified imagination it seemed as if a fearful thing, all eyes, teeth, and tail, was suddenly projected against his tree with the force of a catapult. Fortunate, indeed, was it for him that he stood on a bough between which and his assailant intervened several others. To one of these the savage, wounded beast was now

clinging and making desperate efforts to sustain itself. Unlike others of the cat tribe, owing, probably, to its great weight, a tiger is no climber. But in this instance it had sprung to the fork of a stout bough, and by its assistance and the parent trunk managed to hold on.

Actuated by the very imminence of the peril, the doctor's first impulse was to throw whatever came to hand. First, the much-coveted cup of brandy-and-water went flying at the tiger's head. It was immediately followed by the flask. The owner's puggree-bound hat next went skimming in the same direction. But all of no avail.

‘For God’s sake get out of the way!’ shouted Percy, from the other side of the pool. The rock had prevented his seeing

the tiger at first. 'Move your legs. I'll take him between them;' and then added to himself, in sheer anxiety, 'Those confounded legs are always in the way!'

The poor doctor was too terrified to heed these instructions, though he did get out of the way in a manner he little intended. Instinctively he had crept along the branch to as great a distance as possible from his dreaded neighbour, and without calculating if it were strong enough to bear his weight. Suddenly there was a crack, and in the next moment he was making futile clutches at other branches, as that he was on gave way. Down he went right into the deepest part of the pool. There was a tremendous splash, and the water closed over his head. A second or two after

this sudden disappearance, Percy's rifle spoke, and the tiger fell from its perch on to the very edge of the water. Recovering itself, however, it started up, roaring with full power, and bounded off along the ravine, just at the time the doctor's head reappeared, and he struck out with vigorous strokes for the opposite shore.

Another bullet from Percy was sent after the tiger, which, still continuing to roar, and clearing immense spaces at each bound, soon disappeared in the cover.

All that the poor doctor heard or thought of were those terrible roars. They seemed to be ringing in his very ears, and he felt persuaded that the horrible brute was chasing him in the water. Almost superhuman were his efforts as

he struggled on. He was soon within his depth, and faintly exclaiming, 'Kill him, oh, kill him,' rushed forward towards Percy's tree.

'It's all right, doctor. He's gone,' said Percy, who was utterly unable to help laughing at the extraordinary figure of his friend, and the extremity of his terror, though a few moments before his anxiety had been sincere as deep.

'Gone!' ejaculated the doctor, as he pulled up and, for the first time, looked round. 'Gone! So he is. Where's he gone to?'

'You frightened him away, doctor. He couldn't stand that look of yours in the water. And I don't wonder at it.'

'Is he really quite gone, though?' asked the doctor, much relieved at the

lad's chaff, which he felt indicated safety, but still trembling for the possible return of his dreaded foe.

‘Quite, and pretty well peppered too.’

‘Oh, Lord ! What an escape !’ and the worthy man mopped his wet face with his handkerchief. ‘I thought he was on the top of me. How *did* it all happen ?’

‘Ah, we’ll talk about all that afterwards,’ returned Percy, as he descended from his tree. ‘I must hail St Clair ; we must follow up the brute at once.’

‘Follow up !’ repeated the doctor in a fresh accession of nervous apprehension. ‘You don’t mean to say that you are going to follow that fearful, hellish animal on foot. You’ll all be killed.’

‘Depends on what St Clair says,’ was the reply. ‘But I rather think he won’t



let a wounded tiger get away without an effort to bag it.'

'Oh dear! oh dear! What shall I do? I wouldn't face that brute again to be made Inspector-General to-morrow. Oh, Ned! just give me hold of your flask, will you? I believe I threw mine at that snarling devil.'

Somewhat revived by a particularly stiff dose of brandy-and-water, and the congratulations of his friends, the doctor became more collected, and listened to the brief council of war, which ensued on the arrival of St Clair and Goodall, with more calmness than might have been expected. His suggestion, however, to wait for the elephants was rejected.

'Certainly; of course we must follow him up at once on foot,' said St Clair.

‘The ground is too rough for elephants. I’m sure you agree with me, Goodall.’

‘Yes. He is hard hit by both Percy and myself. It will never do to let him get away, and as for waiting for the elephants, that is useless. You had better come with us, doctor, and see the end of the fun.’

‘Fun, oh Lord! You call it fun, do you? But I suppose I must,’ was the reply, made in a very rueful voice. ‘I certainly won’t stay here all by myself; and, as I’m wringing wet, I must keep in motion. As for trees, I’m fully persuaded tigers can climb like cats.’

The Shikaree and two or three natives who accompanied the party were now consulted. They indicated the nature of the ground ahead, and expressed their

belief that the tiger would stick to the ravine, perhaps lie up in some of the many nooks and crevices which were formed by the overturned rocks, and afforded capital shelter.

The doctor's flask and hat were then recovered, and the party proceeded on further exploration in search of the wounded tiger.

The pug or track was first examined for a short distance. Large pools of blood were found on it, of that frothy nature which the hunter rejoices to see, denoting, as it generally does, a serious wound.

‘I think I caught him in the chest, with the first shot,’ observed Percy. ‘But the second probably missed—at least I didn’t catch the *thud* of the bullet.’

‘I suspect my second missed also,’ said

Goodall. 'The first hit him far back in the ribs.'

'Well, we ought to pick him up soon. I shouldn't think he would go very far with blood like this. Keep a bright look-out.' So said St Clair, who took the command of the party. All spoke in whispers, as their object was to advance without disturbing the pursued or hurrying it on ahead in case it was still moving.

Following on foot a wounded tiger through jungle is, as the uninitiated reader may well conceive, the most dangerous part of the sport. In ground tolerably open, the risk to three practised and well-armed hunters standing together would be comparatively small; but in close cover the tiger may be suddenly met with, and charge under circumstances where,

possibly, it could not be stopped before it reached its assailants.

A bold and successful hunter, St Clair was, at the same time, a cautious and experienced leader. For a short distance they followed on the spoor, till, from the tracks, it was evident that the tiger's bounds had ceased, and its furious speed subsided to a walk. All now, including the native Shikarees, climbed on to the rocks and carefully scanned the ground in front.

At the distance of between one and two hundred yards there appeared an accumulation of large blocks of stone piled in confused masses at the foot of the side of the ravine. They rose above the low jungle at their base in irregular summits, and, it was probable, in years long gone

by, had formed the scarp of the precipitous bank above.

Observing St Clair's eye to rest on these, the native whispered in his ear that it was a favourite resort of tigers, and the one they were pursuing might very likely have sought refuge there.

After thoroughly satisfying himself of the position of the spot, and its relative bearings, St Clair communicated his plan of operations. First, it was decided that they should, for the present, abandon the spoor, and emerging from the ravine, hastily make their way to any favourable opening below the spot indicated. Arrived there they would make a cast right across the ravine and search for the track. Should none be discovered, it would be evident that the hunted beast was yet be-

hind, and had most probably sought refuge in the lair described.

No objections being offered, except some unheeded remonstrances on the part of the doctor, who kept close behind his friends, the party proceeded as indicated. A favourable spot was found, and the Shika-rees, protected by the sportsmen, carefully examined the ground on a nearly direct line from side to side of the ravine. One or two old tracks there were, but no fresh one. The tiger had not advanced beyond the place examined.

Once more evacuating the ravine, they all now moved back to the top of the bank above the rocks spoken of, and endeavoured to discover if the tiger could be viewed from that commanding spot. But there appeared nothing to indicate his whereabouts.

‘We must get on the pug again and track him right up,’ said St Clair. ‘He may be lying under those rocks anywhere, and only to be seen from the way of his approach to them, if from there. If we find his track right up, and can’t find him, why then we must send for some fireworks to dislodge him.’

‘Oh Lord! oh Lord!’ ejaculated the doctor, ‘why can’t you send for the fireworks first, and do the thing comfortably? We have such a nice position here.’

‘Yes, doctor, a very good one,’ was the reply. ‘But then he may, you know, be moving, though I strongly suspect he is somewhere down there.’

In spite of the earnest remonstrances of the doctor—who seemed afraid to trust himself anywhere apart from his friends



in the jungle which his imagination peopled with savage beasts,—once more they took up the track.

Cautiously advancing in close array, with the tracker peering down at the ground, and the doctor and second gun-bearers close behind, the three hunters pushed their way through the jungle, keeping a keen look-out in front and to the flanks. It was somewhat more open than they expected, for the pugs led over a track considerably beaten and evidently in frequent use by wild animals.

Along this they continued silent but alert, keenly alive to every sound, and at last approached the favourite stronghold without meeting any signs of the presence of the enemy. The track led right into the mass of overturned rock, but nothing

could be seen of the tiger. Circling round outside, it was soon ascertained that no pug led from it. There the wounded animal had undoubtedly sought refuge.

‘Chuk,’ uttered the Shikaree, making a sound by pressing his tongue against his teeth ; and then as the hunters drew up, he pointed excitedly to an aperture in the rocks, distant from where they stood about thirty paces.

For a moment none of the hunters could make out anything in the deep gloom of the recess. Soon, however, something was seen waving from side to side, and they dimly discerned a shadowy form whose tail was angrily swaying to and fro.

‘I see his devilish eyes,’ whispered

the doctor, ensconcing himself behind St Clair; 'oh, how I wish I was out of it!'

'Can you both make him out?' asked St Clair, sharply.

'Yes.'

'Then aim steadily, and give him the right barrel; the left when he charges.'

The three rifles were almost simultaneously discharged. The rocks resounded with deafening roars, and the tiger rushed to the entrance of his den. He staggered on for a few yards, receiving the other barrels, and then fell over. The second guns were quickly seized, but the savage foe was already gathered to his fathers.

After taking a single shot at the prostrate form to make sure of his death, St Clair and his companions walked up to the splendid creature, and the doctor

shouted aloud in the exuberance of his gladness.

Joyfully, and now quite loquacious, he chatted over the incidents of the 'scrimmage' as they examined their prize and sat around and refreshed themselves with pipes and accompaniments.

'Well, doctor, are you satisfied now?' asked St Clair.

'That indeed I am. I wouldn't have that brute alive again for anything.

"Nothing in his life  
Became him like the leaving of it."

'Not even his vigorous efforts to form a closer acquaintance with an M.R.C.S.,' St Clair replied. 'But tell me how it all happened. I saw nothing of the first part of the affair, you know.'

This was related jointly by the others,

and the doctor was quite surprised to learn that the tiger had not sprung into the pool after him and given chase.

‘By-the-by, doctor,’ said Percy, ‘what an extraordinary man you are! You always *will* put those legs of yours in the way. Why didn’t you move them when I cried out? I could have taken the tiger between them.’

‘I’m much obliged to you, Ned, for your consideration, and especially for your after-proceedings,’ was the reply. ‘But as for shooting between my legs, why—you know, you might have hit them.’

‘Hit them! not so easy,’ observed Percy, as he closely and thoughtfully examined the articles referred to, now fully developed in all their natural attenuation

by the wet trousers which clung about them. 'I say, you fellows, why are the doctor's trousers like an idiot's head?' he asked, after a contemplative pause.

None of the fellows knew.

'Because they display a narrow and crooked understanding.'

'Ha! ha!' laughed the doctor, not a whit disconcerted, and as much amused as any of the others. 'Not so bad, Ned. Glad to see my improving society is drawing you out.'

I fear many will not be so easy as the doctor, and consider some of Mr Percy's remarks decidedly on the wrong side of the limits of good taste. But the unconstrained familiarity of jungle life permits a freedom of speech which, in more conventional society, and under the

greater restrictions of more ordinary intercourse in the world, would not be tolerated. Besides, as I have remarked, Percy, in consideration of his great good-temper and love of fun, was a privileged man.

‘Well!’ said the doctor, as some time later the party proceeded to join the rest who had finished the beat, ‘I have seen my first tiger killed, and it shan’t be my fault if it’s not the last. “There be some sports are painful, but their labour delight in them sets off,” says Ferdinand. If he had seen this, I’m perfectly certain he would not have included it among those which delight sets off. All I can say is, if ever you catch me out tiger-shooting again, then, “Write me down—an ass.”’

## CHAPTER VI.

‘Each spoke words of high disdain,  
 And insult to his heart’s best brother ;  
 But never either found another  
 To free the hollow heart from paining—  
 They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
 Like cliffs which had been rent asunder.’

CHRISTABEL. 7

MRS ATHERTON was seated in a lounging chair close to the open window of her drawing-room one clear forenoon soon after her return from the Rajah’s fête.

The fresh monsoon wind blew blandly in, and strayed through the masses of her beautiful hair. The landscape seen from the window, which was on the upper



story, was fair to look on. Below lay a garden open to the river which flowed rapidly past. The opposite bank was cleft with many a ravine and fissure, some partially filled with low jungle and trees of higher growth. Beyond lay an extensive plain, on which rough wooden ploughs, drawn by buffaloes and oxen, were hard at work. In other respects, too, it showed signs of active husbandry. Over it were scattered numerous groves of trees, many giving shelter to the native hamlets, and, occasionally, a white-domed temple with its staff and flaunting flag.

One majestic banyan tree, with its numerous offspring of downward shoots, themselves deep-rooted in the soil, was gay and lively with the promiscuous assemblage of carts, camels, oxen, horses,

and human beings, who sought its wide, umbrageous shelter, before and after the difficulties of transit at the ferry. This was situated some distance below Mr Selby's house, which, as I have before explained, was on the town-side of that occupied by the Athertons.

Lower still, towards the town, the foliage became very thick; and many a dome and minaret, some in ruins, rose grand and majestic amid the orange groves, and gardens, and high trees which lined the river's bank. Of the city itself only a portion could be distinguished in places where, through breaks in the foliage, the encircling walls, overtopped by high houses, appeared. But the still higher walls of a small native-built fort which rested on the river-bank, and dominated

the town, were plainly discernible. It contained the arsenal of the division.

The rich alluvial plain, which formed the valley of the river, was bounded at the distance of several miles by rugged hills of moderate height. Beyond these, blue and gray in the distance, and at this season with their summits not infrequently hidden in clouds, were peaked and pinnacled mountains, the dim outline of whose form alone was visible. At the distance of more than a mile up the river lay the military cantonment, between which and the city there was a direct road. In fact, the whole scene presented a

‘Sweet interchange  
Of hill and valley, river, woods, and plain.’

But my principal object in describing it is to enable the reader to understand

subsequent events, a proper comprehension of which depends on bearing in mind the relative situations.

Beautiful as was the scene mapped out before her, in its new clothing of verdure, and with its ever-varying alternations of light and shadow as the clouds flitted past, it seemed, just now, to have few charms for Mrs Atherton.

She had often lovingly regarded it, but at present she reclined with a book open on her lap, towards which her head was bent. She was not, however, reading. She seemed, rather, listlessly to regard the movements of her fingers, as she meditatively twirled round and round a single-pearl ring which encircled one of them.

To judge by her countenance, her

thoughts were sad, very sad; and the flush on her cheek told of some disturbing influence within. The long, dark lashes shaded, and almost entirely concealed, the downcast gray eyes, and her entire manner and position denoted abstraction of thought.

Mr Atherton had gone to his office, situated in a separate building in the neighbourhood, but somewhat remote from the house. His exit from home had been preceded by one of those disagreements now, unhappily, become so frequent:—a violent, insulting flow of words on his part, met on hers by a passive, contemptuous opposition.

Her reverie was interrupted by the entrance of an individual, clad in a long red coat, whose private, if not public

duty—he being in government pay—was to loiter outside and announce to the *mem Sahib* the approach of any visitor, or attend to her call. He now advanced with folded hands, and informed her that her slave had come to intimate the arrival of a gentleman. He was shortly followed by a regular servant of the house, who brought in a card on which was inscribed the name of Captain Lawson.

The usual time for formal morning calls is contained in the brief space between mid-day and the tiffin hour. For that social meal is not infrequently followed by a siesta, which occupies the period between it and the hour for dressing for the evening drive or ride. It was therefore nothing unusual for Captain Lawson to be now admitted, and Mrs

Atherton rose and welcomed him with evident pleasure as he entered.

He saw at once that she had recently been upset by something, and he guessed the cause, but was far too astute openly to allude to it. None knew better than he did how to convey the impression of his sympathy without overstepping the barrier which her womanly pride and social reserve placed on free communication. He knew a good deal of her character, but there was in it much which remained, and ever would remain to him, impenetrable.

‘I am so very glad you have come this morning, Captain Lawson,’ she said, after cordially shaking hands with him. ‘The Pearl, my dear little horse, has fallen lame. I know you are a great

authority on such matters, so I venture to ask you to have the kindness to look at him. Will you stay to tiffin and examine him afterwards ?’

‘ I shall be delighted,’ he replied, with a tender, sympathizing deference of manner. ‘ But I trust my visit is not acceptable on that account alone. I had hoped—indeed came—to try and amuse and cheer you in your solitude with my foolish chat. If earnest wishes could render me of any real use to you, I should be more than successful.’

‘ Thank you,’ she replied, a little hurriedly. ‘ I believe you mean to be most kind, and am grateful. I was feeling quite *ennuyée* just now, so you see your visit is acceptable—very acceptable. What is going on in your part of the world, in



cantonments? Are the preparations nearly complete for the ball to-morrow? I hope there will be no disappointment with respect to it.'

'None that I am aware of,' he replied. 'With regard to our cantonment gossip there is little to tell you. The *on dit* is that Mr Douglas is *épris* with the fair Norah. Grateful papa has asked him, it is said, several times to dinner, and they have been much together since that run-away gallop the other day. But you, no doubt, know far more about it than we do.'

'Indeed, I am ignorant of what you mention,' she answered, somewhat coldly. 'I have seen neither since the Rajah's *fête*.' And then, finding that she could not entirely repress a slight heightening

of colour, she got up, and went to fetch a large book of line engravings. ‘I have just received this book,’ she continued, ‘and should like to have your opinion of its contents.’

Obedying her invitation, he sat down beside her, and turned over the pages, while the book rested on a little work-table in front of her. Ever and anon he leant over more closely to examine any particular print, regarding which his remarks were usually sound and just, for he was a good judge. On one occasion, while they were thus occupied in inspecting one which had attracted the special attention of both, Douglas was announced, and following quickly on the heels of the servant, found them engaged as described.

The new-comer's face clouded as he advanced to greet Mrs Atherton. He had heard remarks made on the closeness of the intimacy subsisting between her and Lawson, which he was unable to resent or even deny.

She had shunned her cousin's society of late—or at least seemed to him to do so—in favour of a man who had publicly expressed his admiration for her. So Douglas, at last, after much hesitation, determined that in his capacity of hitherto acknowledged friend and relative, it had become his duty to warn her of the notice which her intimacy was attracting, and of the character of the man who was presuming on her ignorance. He had made his present visit with this intention, as he had heard Lawson say that he was going

out shooting. And now he found him in the closest companionship with the very person he had come to warn.

She could not be unaware of the expression of dissatisfaction on Douglas's face as he advanced and shook hands with her; and its perception imparted to her manner a more than ordinary coldness. He had, she thought, of his own wish and action of late repelled her friendship, and had no right to be dissatisfied if she found others to value what he scorned.

She, however, moved from her proximity to Lawson, and taking another seat, asked Mr Douglas to join them in inspecting the newly-arrived book. But the interest in it manifested by all soon became languid, for each was thinking of other subjects. Neither did the desultory

conversation which ensued do much to mend matters. In fact, both Lawson and Douglas talked against time, each anxious to see the other take his departure.

In the case of the former, this was combined with the hope that the invitation to tiffin would not be extended to his rival. Nor was it. As the hour approached, Douglas, most unwillingly, rose to leave, feeling pretty certain that Lawson had been asked to remain.

Full of bitterness, he saw what he interpreted as a smile of triumph on Lawson's face as Mrs Atherton also rose, and bade him a cold adieu. And his face was sternly set, as they shook hands in that passive manner, so different to the active grasp of warm good-feeling.

‘I had wished to talk with you on a

subject which—but some other time, perhaps, you will be kind enough to spare me a few minutes.'

'Beg pardon, I'm sure,' interrupted Lawson. 'Cousinly confidences! I fear I have been unwittingly *de trop*;' and he rose as if with the object of retiring.

'Not at all. Oh, dear no. There are no particular "cousinly confidences," as you call them, between Mr Douglas and myself. I dare say the subject is of no importance. It can be postponed, I have no doubt, can it not, Mr Douglas?' And she looked at him haughtily, almost angrily. She was annoyed at his obliging her to say even so much.

'It rests with yourself,' he replied. 'I shall probably see you at the ball to-morrow. Good-morning.'

The first public ball of the season at a large up-country station is an important matter in the affairs of men, and still more of women. Hussunabad, besides having a considerable garrison, was the head-quarters of the military division as well as of the civil district. It was much resorted to also during the monsoon months, by many others who were able to choose their place of residence. Thus both the military and civil lines at this season contained an unusually large number of residents, always somewhat nomadic in India.

The evening came, and the mess-room appropriated for the occasion—much to the discomfort, but praiseworthy self-sacrifice, of the corps furnishing it—was duly decorated and lighted. The import-

ation of sofas, chairs, and other upholstery, had been going on throughout the day, and the unfortunate members of the mess were obliged to get their meals, as best they could, in out-of-the-way corners. This discomfort was now, however, at an end. The preparations were completed, lamps lighted, and the shining new holland was well and tightly stretched over the hard, smooth chunam floor—save for some want in spring, no bad substitute for polished boards. Couches and ottomans were placed around. Tables were arranged in the various ante-rooms, and various ‘cups’ manufactured to be deposited thereon. The billiard-table was boarded over, and, in that state, acted as a principal supper-table. In fact, everything indicated that all was ready.



Men, the larger part in military uniform, were the first to assemble. But the hour named had not long past when the families also began to arrive. Colonel and Mrs Playfair, in convoy of their niece, were among the earliest. The 'jolly woman' 'liked,' she said, 'as much as she could get of it.' The moment they entered the room the ladies were surrounded and importuned with numberless requests for this or that valse or quadrille. The younger was naturally the special object of all this *empressement*, but the aunt came in also for her fair share, especially in the square dances. It was not every one who possessed the weight, physical strength, and determination necessary to render a round one with her altogether so highly prized. But for a quadrille or

Lancers her spirits and fun made her in great request. It was not a mere duty-dancing desire which actuated the subalterns of her husband's corps.

Although Miss Selby had a smile or glance for most, and seemed to make but little distinction, it is hardly to be supposed that she had not some special favourites with whom she desired to dance. Such was the case, and Mr Douglas and his friend Percy were about the most favoured of those who succeeded in their applications. She had come with the full intention of enjoying herself to the utmost. The admiration she excited pleased her, but it had no effect in turning her head. She laughed, and talked, and flirted with a genuine gusto which high spirits, an unaffected nature, and nineteen years justify.

Amidst her manifold engagements, however, she found time to observe a little half-caste lady, who sat, forlorn and neglected, in a remote corner of the room. Her own success and happiness did not prevent her from feeling for the poor little thing. Animated by thorough kindness of disposition, she left her seat and took one next to Mrs De Silva, seeking, as she had before done, to give her confidence, and attract towards her some portion of the attention with which she was overwhelmed.

And the little, dusky, Indian-born was grateful with a passionate gratitude for this and other considerate kindnesses, which seemed small but were much to her. The attentions of the daughter of the principal civil officer of the place were of

real value to the poor despised widow of a half-caste assistant-surgeon.

Not unmarked was the act by a man who had hitherto held himself aloof from the throng which surrounded Miss Selby. He had not approached to ask for a dance, thinking, naturally enough, that the lively girl would be better pleased to have inscribed on her card, as partners, the names of the best dancers and most agreeable young men in the room, to that of a grave soldier more devoted to his profession than the ball-room. What had he, now advancing to middle age, to recommend him to the society of an attractive girl, half his age? Thus St Clair pondered, and it so happened that Miss Selby observed him standing apart.

As other ladies arrived, the throng

about her grew less dense, and St Clair at last advanced. But first he approached Mrs De Silva, and in the most deferential manner begged for a dance or two. This was the more readily allowed as but one solitary name had hitherto figured on her list. The little widow flushed with pleasure as he approached,—for he too, in his large, kindly nature had always treated her, as he would have done any woman in her position, with marked courtesy.

He next addressed Miss Selby, expressing a fear that he was too late to obtain the privilege of a dance. The young lady, who happened to be just then examining her own plethoric list, looked up, bowed, and said somewhat coldly that she believed her card was full. ‘No, on looking over it, she found there was one

quadrille left. It was the one before supper—would Major St Clair have that?’

‘Major St Clair would with the greatest pleasure.’ As he strode away, he marvelled how that particular quadrille came to be overlooked, involving as it did, according to custom, being taken in to supper also.

She too, perhaps, wondered a little at its being left blank, only she remembered that she had told Mr Percy that she would leave it open for the present. She could hardly refuse it to Major St Clair, when it was the only dance vacant. Can it possibly have been that, without herself recognizing the fact, some lurking wish to ‘talk’—as she had expressed it to Mrs Atherton—had actuated her in leaving a blank for the supper-dance?

In India, owing to the general scarcity of ladies, matrons are not esteemed particularly frisky, even should they dance the night through. There were, therefore, many on the look-out for so pretty a woman and so charming a valseuse as Mrs Atherton. But one or two seemed to have lain in wait for her appearance. Among these was Lawson, and to him her card was in the first instance confided. He was a capital dancer, and his name was put down for as many vales as she could be persuaded to allow him. Douglas also managed to secure a quadrille early in the evening,—the dance, as it happened, immediately succeeding that for which Lawson's name was down.

The dancing commenced. Perhaps one of the most noticeable traits of an



Indian, as distinguishing it from an English ball-room, apart from the necessities of climate, lies in the almost total absence of wall-flowers, and the enormous proportion of male loiterers about the doorways. At the commencement of each dance these flow into the room and take temporary possession of the seats and criticize the performers. At its conclusion, the tide ebbs back to verandahs and doorways. This occupation is varied by frequent visits to the refreshment-tables. Such is the employment of many men, who, either from inability, not caring to take the trouble to secure partners, or from the statistical fact of there being a great many more men than women, cannot, or will not, and certainly do not, dance. Some few get into tolerably quiet corners, and



make up rubbers of whist. And Mrs Atherton had not been ill-pleased to see that her husband had joined General Marston, Colonel Playfair, and Mr Selby in making up one of these. She was excessively fond of dancing, and wished to enjoy it uninterrupted by his remarks.

Lawson was an unmistakeably good valseur, and when the second valse was about to begin, glided forward to secure possession of Mrs Atherton's hand.

She rose with a smile as he offered his arm, and gave her dress that push back which effects so much. Moved by an involuntary impulse she would have found difficulty to analyze, she let her glance stray round as if in search of something as she did so. It encountered, and paused awhile on, that of Douglas, on whose

face a pained expression obviously rested.

She understood in a measure what it meant, and felt much annoyed at it. 'He presumes,' she thought, 'on a friendship which he has himself repudiated. His serious watchfulness is unbearable. He seems to be always on guard with me, as if I were a child and required looking after. I will not have it.'

Thinking thus, she turned to her partner and announced her readiness for a start, and they were soon whirling down the room. It was a pleasure to glide along under the guidance of so experienced and masterly a pilot, and she showed that she felt it.

Percy, who had been bold enough to undertake the task of piloting Mrs Playfair, found it considerably more arduous.

There was a good deal of hard, pounding work for him ; but he entered on it with great spirit, and that feeling of perfect self-satisfaction inspired by the consciousness of having done a good deed, and well performed one's allotted duties in life. He felt a glow of intense gratification as—during an early pause—he pointed out to his partner the tall, unbending form of Major Highton, labouring along in convoy of Miss Frumper.

‘ Do you see that ramrod of a dragoon and his promising forty-year-old partner ?’ he asked, as they stood criticizing those who flew, or staggered, or floated past. ‘ What a wiry grip she has of him ! *I* did it.’

‘ Did what ?’ the lady inquired.

‘ I paired those two charmers for this

waltz. She was sitting close to your niece. Well, he came up and asked *her* for this waltz. Miss Selby, however, was speaking to some one else, and didn't hear. So I turned to Miss Frumper and blandly informed her that Major Highton was asking her for the second waltz. Of course she jumped at it, and he was so much taken aback, that he could do nothing but stare at me as I moved away, while she was busy writing his name on her card. He couldn't get out of it, for Nora Creina had already engaged.'

'You are a most impudent fellow, and I won't have you call my niece "Nora Creina."' '

'Well, then, Norah. And I tell you what it is, I believe he is getting awfully spooney on her.'

‘Her name is Miss Selby. And I say, Ned, just you keep your observations to yourself.’

Mrs Playfair was in the common habit of addressing the young ‘subs’ of her husband’s regiment by their Christian names, and Mr Percy was especially distinguished in this way.

‘Not to be done,’ he replied. ‘I should explode if I tried it. But only let me catch him at it, that’s all. The form of the winner of that prize must be “tons” above his, even though he is so well in for that handicap, with his five thousand a-year. I wouldn’t permit it on any account.’

‘Very considerate of you, I am sure. But suppose she took a fancy to him? A sensible girl thinks differently to a

scapegrace like you, who not only thinks, but even speaks, evil of dignities.'

'You flatter me, indeed you do, Mrs. Playfair. But I know perfectly well that you look on him in the same light that I do. Why, he is the elongated embodiment of a platitude.'

'And, pray, what on earth is that?'

'Well, let me see; it requires consideration. Ah, I have it. He is the impersonation of a dull and stupid habit; and, thinking his meaningless swelldom the correct thing, forces it upon one as something *comme il faut*.'

'Well done, Ned. Upon my word, you are coming it strong to-night.'

'Neat idea, isn't it? I thought I should astonish you. But, *entre nous*, it took me some time to hit it off. How-

ever, we've had enough of him for the present. Just look at poor old St Clair. I pity him. There's a turn !'

The gentleman referred to was indeed an object of commiseration. Before he asked Mrs De Silva, he was perfectly aware that she had no ear for tune, and was something more than uncertain about her steps. But he knew she liked to dance, and, in his good nature, determined to gratify her. Do as he would, however, he was unsuccessful in making her keep step with him. So, giving it up at last in despair, he let her move as chance or her fancy dictated, and every now and then lifted her clean off the ground and plumped her down again to the time.

Miss Selby was in charge of Estcourt,



a gorgeously-arrayed horse-artilleryman, and seemed to be perfectly happy, entering into the full spirit of dancing for dancing's sake.

Douglas was piloting a fair, delicate-looking girl—one who seemed hardly fitted to withstand the influences of a tropical climate. She was the daughter of Brigadier Simpson who commanded the garrison, and believed to be engaged to Captain Goodall, an officer belonging to the native infantry regiment, of which Douglas was a member. Her *fiancé*, however, was better on parade and in charge of his native soldiers, of whom he had a high opinion, than engaged in steering a young lady through the mazes of a valse.

As he stopped with his partner at the end of the room, for one of the frequent



rests which Miss Simpson required, he found himself by the side of Captain Lawson and Mrs Atherton, who had also paused for a single brief rest.

She was looking beautiful. Her large eyes, somewhat dreamy in repose, were sparkling with animation. Her cheeks were slightly flushed with the exercise, and her whole expression denoted the pleasure which she had derived from her valse. Leaning on her partner's arm she smiled and chatted with him, and he looked down on her face with a regard in which lurked a sense of triumph mingled with admiration.

‘I would sooner be under your guidance than any one else’s,’ she said, referring to his valtzing. ‘We exactly suit each other.’

‘Indeed I hope so,’ was the reply. ‘I would that my guidance were as acceptable in other ways.’

To this she made no reply. She was thinking in what light it was meant. Just then, however, she caught Douglas’ eyes fixed upon her, sad and troubled, and she hastily answered, ‘You are very good, I am sure. Let us have another turn.’ And again Douglas watched her whirled away in the arms of the man from whom he piteously longed to defend her. He had heard the observation and seen the look which accompanied it, though she had not—and he determined, come what might, to warn her before the night was over. He saw young men laugh and whisper as they watched the handsome pair, and he felt stung almost to desper-

ation, as some loose observations, on one or two occasions, had reached his ear.

Meantime, she thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the valse, with little to mar her sense of enjoyment, but remembrance of the fact that the next dance belonged to Mr Douglas.

She had not been wont thus to anticipate spending a short time in the intimate society of one she believed to be her true friend. She had done that and relied on him. She believed him to be a man of honour—of that strict honour which involves something more than mere punctiliousness. A despicable vanity, easily wounded, might not infrequently more rightly express what passes by that name. Whether he deserved this high consideration was another matter: she believed he did.

She had liked his companionship ; but, somehow, she now wished that she were not going to dance the next dance with him.

He came, however, to claim it. It was a quadrille, and as she took his arm and they sought a place, Captain Lawson came hurriedly forward requesting to be their *vis-à-vis*. The face of Douglas darkened, and she observed it, but of course the request was allowed. During the quadrille, however, he talked freely on indifferent subjects, seemingly regardless of his rival. When the dance concluded, he asked her to walk in the cool fresh air outside. Assenting to this, they were shortly pacing down one of the hard gravel walks which intersected the mess-garden.

‘I wished, Mrs Atherton,’ he said,

when he found they were unembarrassed by the near presence of other couples similarly engaged in seeking the fresh air, — ‘I wished to speak a few words to you. And as I shall not probably find a more convenient opportunity than the present, will you permit me now to do so? You know that my friendship is sincere, and that I have ever earnestly desired to act up to the pledge of the lines engraved in your ring.’

She felt that his words imported something in connection with Captain Lawson, and her woman’s pride was immediately up in arms.

‘I shall be happy to hear anything dictated by friendship,’ she replied, a little coldly. ‘But even friendship has its limits.’

‘Real friendship,’ he said, ‘is too earnest, too sincere, to be easily daunted. It may indeed sometimes overstep the prescribed limits of ordinary intercourse, but it may become a duty to do so. Friendship may offend; create even a breach in itself. But the essence of its being is an abnegation of self and a lively desire for the welfare of another. You once yourself told me it was very sweet. You agree with me, do you not?’

‘Certainly, in a general way,’ she replied. ‘But there are many subjects which you yourself have admitted cannot well be talked about in a friendship like ours—a friendship, I mean, between two who have—that is—situated as we are. In other ways also it has its limits.’

‘Respect is a necessary ingredient, is

it not ?' he said. ' I think a man would fail in his friendship did he not point out what he believed to be a dangerous course, or one destructive of that respect.'

' I hope, Mr Douglas,' she warmly answered, ' I am not to infer that you consider I have done anything to destroy that respect on your part.'

' Please listen to me calmly, Mrs. Atherton. You know I have your best interests at heart. God knows what I am about to say is intensely painful to me. But it must be said. I am quite aware that my motives may be misinterpreted. But for your sake, not my own, I have determined to risk the continuation of our friendship. If you have ever felt a friendly feeling for me, I implore you to listen. I have determined to speak to



you on the subject of your intimacy with—'

'You have no right—' she began, but he interrupted her.

'I know it. I have none but that which I have arrogated to myself—your protection. For God's sake, hear me out. I wish to warn you against that man, whom you have distinguished above others, and whose society you appear to prefer. I tell you your name has been coupled with his in a way I cannot repeat, and that I am helpless to resent. Great intimacy with such a man alone is compromising. He is a deliberate villain, and I have every reason to believe seeks—'

'Stop, Mr Douglas ; this has gone quite far enough,—too far,' she passionately



exclaimed. 'It is cowardly to speak of a man so behind his back. You are jealous of his influence, and seek to injure him.'

'Helen ! Mrs Atherton !' Douglas was deadly pale as he spoke her name in a protesting, almost beseeching tone.

'You have said,' she continued with angry vehemence, not heeding him, 'more than any friendship could possibly warrant, reflecting on me, and calumniating another.'

'I did not reflect on you,' he said in a troubled voice. 'I merely wished to warn you. Your reproaches are utterly undeserved. I never thought to hear such from any one—least from you. You little know how much it has cost me to speak to you on this subject. I can do nothing further. I only say—Beware ! Still if I

ever can be of use I will. I ever remember and act up to the spirit of the inscription on your ring. I look upon it as the gage of my honour, to assist you if I can.'

'I do not want assistance, I am competent to take care of myself without being watched and lectured. Here, take back your ring,' she said vehemently, as she tore off her glove, and drew the pearl ring from one of her fingers. 'I will not have it, since it seems to indicate a right to insult me.'

Douglas took the ring thus offered, without a word. Had his altercation been with a man, anger—though perhaps restrained—would have held the most prominent place. But with her the feeling was one of deep dejection. He remained

quite calm, but deadly pale. Deeply distressed as he was, he accompanied her back to the mess-house without exchanging another word. She, on the contrary, was angry, flushed, and excited, with head erect, bosom heaving, and eyes sparkling. But she brought the outward semblance of her feelings under some control ere they again entered the ball-room.

With a slight bow she gave him dismissal, as she sank into the nearest seat in the shade of the inner verandah, and he left her.

He had thrown for sixes, and aces only had turned up. He was beaten, and he felt humiliated and sorely distressed. He was not a man who habitually drank much, but that evening he placed little restraint on a gnawing thirst.

Major St Clair and Miss Selby got on somewhat better than usual during supper and its preceding quadrille; and she confessed to herself that, after all, he was getting quite endurable, and he thought—not perhaps for the first time—what a charming, sparkling child she was, with her pretty little fascinating ways and complete absence of all affectation or self-consciousness. It made him quite interested and lively to talk to her, and draw out her quaint fancies and many of the dormant thoughts which his words awakened in her young spirit. She was a child of nature, passionate and impulsive. Much that her companion now extracted from her had hitherto lain fallow; and she was surprised to find herself expressing ideas and opinions of the existence of

which within she had hitherto been in complete ignorance.

Her father was a man highly educated and clever, and his daughter was the very apple of his eye; but it required some other talismanic influence so to sound the depths of her spirit as to stir what tranquilly reposed there. Call it elective affinity, congeniality of nature, mystic communion of spirits, or anything else—a magnetic influence does often exist, though it can be neither analyzed nor defined. Norah Selby felt something of this, and wondered at being attracted in any way towards the man whom until recently she had imagined that she greatly disliked.

Altogether she thoroughly enjoyed her first Indian ball. But it was otherwise

with Mrs Atherton, as far as related to that portion subsequent to her conversation with Douglas. In a spirit of obstinate defiance, she treated Lawson with a conspicuous partiality, which left him, when the party broke up, full of triumph at his success. But her passionate disdain for Douglas' warning words, and the way she exhibited it, brought her no pleasure.

## CHAPTER VII.

‘ Few were the words, and stern and high,  
That marked the foeman’s feudal hate ;  
For question fierce, and proud reply,  
Gave signal soon of dire debate.’

*Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

THE ball, as far at least as the lady portion of it was concerned, was over. But a large number of young men had returned to the supper-table when the ball-room was quite deserted, and recruited themselves after the labours of the evening. Unhappily that process of recruiting a little before dawn, and after a fair absorption of vinous stimulant

during a long evening, sometimes leads to the consumption of more than is good for the recipient. If the traditionary dicta be true, that 'claret is the liquor for boys, port for men, but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy,' why, we may certainly congratulate ourselves that we are fast advancing into an heroic age. The 'brandy and soda' of England, and the 'peg' of India, synonymous terms, seem to have established themselves as the favourite and indispensable drink of many British men, and—speak it not in Gath—not a few British women. The Indian appellation, which is said to have been derived from the asserted fact that each B. and S. was 'a peg in a man's coffin,' was frequent in the mouths of those lingering in the supper-room; and



no light labour was imposed on the native servants in supplying these demands.

Round one end of the table was gathered a knot of men discussing the events of the ball. And in the license and freedom from the ordinary restraining scruples which too often characterize meetings at such times, some were openly canvassing the real or presumed flirtations which had marked its progress. The character of many an unfortunate, but innocent woman, suffers from the often careless and thoughtless remarks on these occasions, and sometimes—let us hope very rarely—from the vile babblings of a flatulent vanity. If true, how simply detestable! If untrue, how—the English language contains no word to represent that cowardly and in-

famous sin. I speak in reference to women of fair repute. Others may be discussed without much damage to themselves, or involving much moral obliquity on the part of those discussing them.

Douglas was talking with Percy at some distance farther down the supper-table from the principal group at its head; and Percy observed his friend's countenance change as Mrs Atherton's name was mentioned, and she became the principal subject of discussion. At last Lawson was half chaffed, half complimented on the conquest which, by general consent, it was assumed he had made. It may have been partly owing to the quantity of wine he had imbibed after so much active exertion that he returned the chaff in a vaunting tone.

At first he smilingly left to be inferred more than he openly asserted. But, on some expression of doubt on the part of one of the party, he gave them to understand that ‘he—ah! in fact, he had full reason to know that he stood high in her good graces, and might certainly expect the reward of his devotion, and—’

But here he stopped short, and with a meaning smile, looked round on his nearer auditors.

Many of these, even half drunk as some were, felt disgusted at this open avowal, but none probably designed to take on himself the Quixotic duty of expressing it, or entering on the defence of a woman regarding whom they thought it not impossible that he spoke the truth.

Both Douglas and Percy heard it, and the former started to his feet with cheeks burning. Then suddenly, exerting a great effort of self-control, he sat down again.

Percy, however, turning towards Lawson, said, in a calm, measured way most unusual with him,

‘I think that any man who can make such a boast is as likely as not to have stated what is not a fact.’

There was a dead silence as this unequivocal accusation was made, and Lawson, reddening with shame and anger, turned towards his youthful reprover. He was beginning to speak in a voice and tone of ill-repressed passion, when another interposed. Captain Drew happened to be the senior officer present, who would

be himself called to account in event of high words passing. Being himself quite sober and collected, he forbade any farther dispute under pain of the delinquent being put in arrest.

At the same time Douglas hoarsely whispered in his young friend's ear,

‘For God’s sake, hush, Ned. A row here will only make it worse and do her name harm. I have an account to settle with that man. It is for me to protect her, and I claim the right. Leave it to me.’

Thus saying, he drew Percy away, for the latter at once recognized the truth of what his friend said with reference to the ill-advisedness of a public altercation; and the pair left the room while Lawson was arguing with Captain Drew.

‘Ned, dear lad,’ Douglas continued, as they walked towards Percy’s bungalow. ‘That was like your true, plucky nature. But a woman’s name always suffers for these rows in public, even in being defended. It makes the thing so much more prominent. Be assured Mrs Atherton shall not want a champion. Ned, I loved her—once. It’s my quarrel.’

‘Poor old boy!’ said the young fellow, in a kind and gentle voice, ‘I suppose I must leave it to you. Indeed, I have nothing to do with it. I only expressed an opinion, which I shall stick to.’

With this they separated, Percy to his bungalow, while Douglas continued to walk on till he reached the gate leading into the large compound which surrounded the house occupied by the General.

There he waited, till at last he saw the figure of a man approaching.

He had fully made up his mind. Mrs. Atherton's taunt, attributing to him cowardice in speaking so of a man behind his back, had been seething and rankling in his mind, and he craved an opportunity of showing its unfairness. When to this was added Lawson's infamous boast, he decided on his course of action, feeling it impossible to communicate the boast to her.

The days of duelling had even then gone by. But such things still were. For though the penalties, attaching to all concerned, were sufficiently deterrent, occasions have occurred in recent times, when, under guise of more peaceful parties, hostile meetings have taken place.



Douglas had time, during his watch, to turn the whole affair over in his mind. He would first demand that Lawson should apologize for his words, and refrain from farther pursuit of his evil intentions. If unsuccessful, he would offer him such insult that Lawson must either challenge him, lie under the ban of the insult, or bring it to the notice of the authorities. The third alternative he thought most unlikely, as Lawson would never run the chance of incurring the general scorn which might follow publicity—perhaps indeed of undergoing a court-martial for the words he had uttered. If the second course were adopted, he would make it so far public as to render it unbearable, and drive him away, whatever might happen to himself. If, as he expected,



the first were the course pursued—for he deemed his adversary no coward, and all seemed to favour it as the most probable one—then—the first object was her safety. To effect that for certain, he would, if he could, destroy his opponent. If he himself were the sufferer—surely, surely, she cared enough for him to render her in that case equally secure.

That he was actuated by many mixed feelings he was himself aware. But he firmly believed that his great aim and object was the preservation of her purity of mind. It had almost maddened him to hear the sneering remarks which had come under his notice. He wished all to bow the knee to the image of a pure woman, which he had himself set up for his own homage. True it is that the gold

is sometimes but gilt ; but till that is discovered the worshipper is happy. And though deadly the occasional discovery of the falseness of the metal, better that, than be unable to discern the real gold when met, and cry that all is brass, unworthy of homage.

Douglas was deeply moved by all that most stirs the depths ; and, in the loyalty of affection and friendship, ready to make any sacrifice on his own part. When a man of the world is so roused, he doesn't stop to calculate danger or scruples of conscience, nor always rightly estimate collateral disadvantages.

As Lawson turned to enter the gateway, Douglas suddenly advanced from the shadow of a tree, and stood fully fronting him.

‘Lawson,’ he calmly said, as the other was thus suddenly checked, ‘I want to say a few words to you before this night is over. It is useless beating about the bush, so I will come at once to the point. I heard your observation about Mrs Atherton a short while ago. Now I know, for I have heard you say, that you consider all women, however innocent, “fair game.” So I am aware that no scruples, no compassion for the remorse or despair a woman may feel, will have any weight with you. I do not think it possible that you can succeed, but you may harm her in many ways. Your designs with regard to Mrs Atherton are plain. I require you to apologize for what you said, and also to cease from farther great intimacy with that lady.’

‘Upon my word, Douglas,’ was the reply, ‘you are uncommonly cool, and your language by no means flattering. But, admitting, for the sake of argument, that your general notion of my opinions is correct, may I ask by what right you interfere with my intimacies?’

‘By the right, in this case,’ Douglas sternly said, ‘of relationship, though distant, to the lady. By the right, moreover, of one who has sworn to be her friend. And furthermore, generally, by the right which any just man must have when he sees the unequal match where there is nothing to lose on one side, and everything to lose with nothing to gain on the other.’

‘Very sentimental and praiseworthy, no doubt,’ said Lawson, coolly. ‘But it seems to me as if there was a little

jealousy at the bottom of such very high-flown morality.'

'I knew you would think so, or say it, at any rate. It would be time wasted to appeal to any feeling of honour or chivalry on your part. I believe you incapable of estimating any feeling which springs from a good or pure motive in such cases, or anything beyond the dictates of your own evil—'

'I tell you what it is, Douglas,' said Lawson angrily, 'we had better put an end to this interview. You do not yourself possess so sanctified a reputation with regard to women, as to make your preaching altogether appropriate. I can make some allowances for a man who has been cut out, but you are coming it rather too strong.'

‘I know that I am anything but a saint. But I am not a heartless scoundrel to seek the destruction of what is good and innocent. Once for all, will you promise to abstain from the pursuit of this poor girl, on whose unhappy position you are trading?’

‘I will not stand here to be insulted,’ was the angry rejoinder; ‘you shall answer to me for this language. Stand aside, and let me pass.’

‘You will *not* promise! then hear what I have got to say. Though you will be unsuccessful, her reputation must suffer. I swear, therefore, that if you do not retract what you have said about her, and abstain from farther pursuit—as God has made me, I will—’

‘I care not what you may do,’ broke

in Lawson vehemently; 'I shall retract nothing and make no promise. Again I say, let me pass;' and he made an effort to pass Douglas.

'Stop!' exclaimed Douglas fiercely; for passion was fast overcoming all scruples, all reticence, on the part of both. 'Hear my determination: I have sworn to protect her at all costs, and *will*, from a villain like you. I shall—'

But here he was interrupted by the other essaying to force his way past, and Douglas being resolute to prevent it, the result was a scuffle. Perhaps neither were fully aware if blows were exchanged or not, but a struggle for mastery ensued. Lawson was slightly the taller man, but less strongly built than Douglas, who, moreover, possessed the advantage de-



rived from constant exercise in athletic and sporting pursuits. The contest was brief: for a few seconds they stood locked in a struggle of passion and hate, without advantage to either; but the better-trained muscles soon told, and, with all his force, Douglas flung back his adversary, who fell with his head against the pillar of the gate and remained on the ground stunned and bleeding.

Douglas regarded his fallen foe fiercely for a few seconds, expecting him to rise; then, observing that he made no effort to do so, he hastily stooped down and examined him. Seeing at once that he was senseless, though not killed, he opened his collar, then raised the head by placing some clods of earth underneath. This done, he ran off at full speed to the out-



houses inhabited by the servants, and rousing them up sent one for the doctor, and called on others to follow with a native bedstead, himself carrying an earthen vessel full of water.

On again reaching the spot where he had left his prostrate adversary, he dashed the water in his face, but without reviving him. Lawson was then, by his directions, placed on the bedstead and carried to his room in the bungalow without arousing the General, who slept at the farther end of the house. Dr Cruickshanks, who was staff-surgeon, soon made his appearance, and Douglas anxiously waited for his verdict. This was satisfactory; the invalid would soon come round. ‘There was a slight asphyxia produced by concussion,’ so the doctor

described it, and then proceeded to ask how it had occurred.

Douglas muttered something about an accident at the gate.

‘ Ah ! ah ! Just so,’ said the doctor, ‘ pity young men will “ put an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains.” He is coming to now.’

Douglas did not then attempt to controvert the doctor’s apparent delusion as to the proximate cause of the accident ; but when he found that Lawson was coming round, slipped away, and went to his own bungalow. He left it for his antagonist to explain the cause if he thought it necessary, feeling at the same time pretty certain that he would not do so.

The ‘ argumentum ad hominem ’ is not one favoured by the military authorities ;

and the formula, 'contrary to the conduct of an officer and a gentleman,' is quite elastic enough to embrace such breaches of decorous personal intercourse. Neither of the combatants would willingly, therefore, reveal what had occurred, even had no other motives for concealment existed.

When, therefore, the report of an accident next morning was circulated, few attributed it to the real cause. Of that few, however, Percy was of course one, and Douglas thought it right to give him a brief outline of the affair.

Mrs Atherton heard of it. There came a whisper, moreover, from one of her dear lady friends next day, of the little episode at the supper-table which had preceded the accident, for one or two of the late sitters were married. And she

concluded that young Percy and Lawson had afterwards met, with disastrous result to the latter.

She at once despatched a chit (or little note) to Mr Percy, begging him to come and see her. This mandate the gentleman obeyed, with some curious qualms obscuring the usual lightness of his spirits, and depressing his young and joyous nature.

With a face preternaturally pleasant, however, and a smile of unusual brightness, he advanced to meet Mrs Atherton late in the afternoon. The instant the door had closed behind the retreating servant Mrs Atherton sprang forward, and taking the boy's offered hand in both of hers, bent over it.

Percy's face was almost ludicrous.

The desperate effort to appear unconcerned and jolly was at variance with his glistening eye and the lines of pity in his countenance. He made a feeble effort, however, to sustain his character, and managed to say,—

‘Oh, you know, it was all nothing! A winding-up of affairs. Company in course of liquidation, you know.’

‘Please, don’t,’ said the lady, as she still retained his hand. ‘How shall I sufficiently thank you for being the champion of a friendless woman? But you must tell me the whole truth. I know all, and fear that something dreadful may follow. Tell me, is that likely?’

Mr Percy thought it was extremely likely, but was sorely puzzled what to say. He did not at all like the idea of what

might occur on Lawson's recovery ; neither did he like the idea of communicating his fears to Mrs Atherton. Hovering between the two, he said nothing, but blankly smiled.

‘ Oh, pray tell me ! ’ she said. ‘ I cannot bear to think of the danger another might incur for me, and would risk anything rather than that this dreadful affair should end in what I fear.’

‘ I don't think I've got anything to tell, Mrs Atherton. Your fears probably exaggerate the affair. Don't let it worry you so.’

‘ I can't help it. And to think that no one but you could be found to defend the character of an absent woman from a cowardly, unmanly boaster ! At least *one* of those present might have done so.

Even if not that, he might have seen that it brought no farther evil to you.'

'Eh? To me? I don't clearly understand you.'

'Oh, it is no good to try and delude me. Of course I know that that man's accident is attributable to some quarrel with you, for you were both seen to leave the mess-room within a few minutes of each other. What can I do to prevent anything coming of it?'

'Me? quarrel with me? What do you mean, Mrs Atherton? I thought you knew that Douglas had served that scoundrel of a fellow as he deserved to be served.'

'What? Douglas!' exclaimed the lady, with passionate energy. 'Then he *did* defend me, and I have wronged him

doubly.' With this she buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

Percy regarded the repentant woman with an expression of genuine compassion for some time before he again spoke, and then with unwonted gravity.

'You certainly have done him wrong,' he said, 'if you thought he would never raise hand in your defence. It was his delicacy of feeling for you which guided him. Since so much has been said, I think I had better make a clean breast of it.' With this, the lad related all that had happened, and now did not hesitate to express his fears that, in the temper in which he believed both belligerents to be, there was the gravest cause for apprehension of a hostile meeting.

Mrs Atherton had heard all this with



a singular mixture of emotions. She had, on the night of the ball, been very wroth with Mr Douglas; but, on after thought, had bitterly repented of her hasty rejection of his friendship—for on mature consideration she felt that he meant kindly. Then on hearing of the subsequent affair, and, as she believed, of Douglas' indifference to the attack on her good name, the bitterness of faith misplaced swept over her soul, none the less vivid because it might be attributable to her own conduct. 'For to be wroth with those we love, doth work like madness in the brain.' The reaction had come. Her first feeling was one of deep satisfaction. The man for whom she felt strong affection was as her imagination had loved to depict him. He had told

her the truth at great sacrifice, and she had wronged him, very grievously wronged him in every way. And now, in return for the evil she had done him, he was about to risk his life for her. It should never be. Come what might, *that* should never be. Let her bear the penalty of her own misdeeds. Let her good name, her fame, her every hope and every cherished desire in this world, perish before she should bring on him an irretrievable wrong. Let her bow her head to the dust rather than he should suffer for his friendship.

Both had been for some time silent, as she thus rapidly reviewed the case as it stood in her own fancy, and her thoughts rushed swiftly to the conclusion that, at all hazards, an end must be at once put to the affair.

Looking up at her companion, she said, ‘I have decided what to do. I will go to the General, and explain everything to him. He is a gentleman, and will do what is right. And if my foolish conduct is very much to be blamed, let it be!’

Percy was somewhat startled at this sudden determination, and at first felt inclined to urge strong objections, for he was not clear in what light the General might regard it. If as the officer, there might be the devil to pay. If as a private gentleman, becoming by accident acquainted with certain facts, why—and here he looked earnestly at Mrs Atherton, as he thought—‘If she can’t do as she likes with him, by Jove! I don’t know who can.’

So, seeing that she was quite resolved,

and—although fearing that he had himself involuntarily infringed Douglas' confidence—also considering that, after all, it might be the best and most straightforward course, his objections were easily overcome by her determination.

The carriage was ordered; and Mr Atherton, on his return from office, was somewhat surprised to learn that his wife had already gone out. He did not, however, trouble himself about the matter, as they had arrived at that stage of indifference when, by tacit consent, each followed his or her inclinations of an evening. He had other carriages and other horses if he desired to use them.

Full of her sense of the wrong she had done to Douglas, and in the generous impulses it originated, she subdued

her feelings of pride, and of a woman's natural dislike to enter on the topic which must form the principal subject of her conversation with General Marston. She had resolved to do it, and no light or feeble protest on the part of her own feelings was sufficient to overcome that resolve.

She was at once admitted ; and leaving Mr Percy in an ante-room, sought the General's presence alone.

Full of her subject, the story was soon told. Her own foolish encouragement of Captain Lawson was not omitted. The only part on which she did not care to dilate was her conversation with Mr Douglas ; and indeed she contented herself with a brief reference to the sincere friendship which subsisted between them,

and that she had been warned by him of the dangerous character of Captain Lawson. She earnestly prayed that any farther collision might be stopped, but that no public notice should be taken of the *fracas*, both on her account and on that of those implicated. And to give effect to her request, she threw herself on her knees beside the old soldier's chair, and leaning her beautiful head on the side of his arm-chair, burst into tears.

He was a thorough gentleman, and moreover one firm and decisive. He was extremely wroth with the conduct of his aide-de-camp, and would gladly have more publicly noticed the matter. But beauty distressed was all-conquering.

He kissed her fair forehead—for he was a gallant old fellow—and, gently

raising her, told her to set her mind at rest. He would arrange it all.

Then escorting her to her carriage, he saw her drive off, and requested Percy to favour him with a few minutes' conversation.

Somewhat graver than usual, but quite unabashed, that gentleman obeyed, and in reply to various interrogatories acknowledged the facts of Captain Lawson's boastful expression and of his own comment thereon. He also admitted with reservation that in his opinion, Mr Douglas and Captain Lawson *had* had some words on the same subject, and that such *may* possibly have led to the accident which had befallen the latter. He furthermore considered, it *was* within the bounds of possibility that there might occur a 'difficulty' not entirely discon-



nected with pistols. And lastly, he himself assumed the offensive, and asked his interrogator if Captain Lawson had not very richly deserved what he had got, and whether he—the General, to wit—would not have done likewise under similar circumstances, in behalf of a good and such a very pretty woman. The good old fellow smiled at this home-thrust. Without any direct reply, however, he complimented his young friend on the part he had taken in the affair, and said that, at any rate, his observation was very nearly justifiable under the circumstances. He then desired him to seek his friend Douglas, and require him on his—the General's—part, to give his word of honour to do nothing farther in the matter pending his own arbitrament in



the case. With Captain Lawson, he farther told the lad, he would himself deal summarily. And summarily he did deal. For, as soon as Army Head-Quarters could be communicated with by telegram, a division order appeared to the effect that Captain Lawson, having resigned his appointment as aide-de-camp, was directed to proceed forthwith and rejoin his regiment, then quartered at a distant station. It furthermore intimated that Captain Vivian of the 'Britain's Own' was appointed to act as aide-de-camp pending confirmation by H. E. the commander-in-chief, or until farther orders. General Marston would gladly have appointed Percy himself on his personal staff, but under the circumstances, and his youth, decided that it was best not to do so.

The little world of Hussunabad was rather taken by surprise at this sudden change. But as Captain Lawson at once left, and all others concerned kept their own counsel, society, though striving to account for it, failed to make out any very perfect story. And it soon ceased the attempt to do so.

But before this change was effected, indeed on the evening of the scene last described, Douglas received a note blurred with tears. It ran as follows:—

‘I repent. From my inmost soul I repent. Forgive me. I entreat your forgiveness. Give me back my ring. Oh, give me back my ring.’

The ring was returned, and on the sheet of paper which enclosed it was inscribed the single sentence, ‘I forgive.’

## CHAPTER VIII.

‘ Bounded the fiery steed in air,  
The rider sate erect and fair, ,  
Then like a bolt from steel cross-bow  
Forth launched, along the plain they go.’

*Lady of the Lake.*

As the time appointed for the races drew near, the performances and condition of each horse engaged were carefully criticized, and formed prominent topics of conversation and comparison. To the owners themselves, the well-doing of their respective steeds was a matter of the deepest solicitude, and the training at this critical period was conducted with all

the care and judgment which each, according to his lights, possessed.

That amateur training certainly lends a great additional attraction to racing—considered as a sport, and not as a mere means of betting and gambling. Day after day to watch the improvement going on, the flesh hardening, and the muscles becoming more developed; to see the frame grow lean and wiry without attenuation, and the entire skin present to sight and touch the hue and consistency of health; to see the full bright eye, transparently red, open nostril, and lean jowl, all so indicative of caste and condition; and, withal, to know that the lungs are good, and the feet and legs—finer and more sinewy—retain their soundness;—that is indeed a pleasure, and

well rewards the trainer for his hours of care and anxiety, and his jealous personal superintendence of food and water, as each is varied in quantity according to the stage of training and constitution of the horse.

But, unfortunately, the course of training does not always 'run smooth' in India any more than elsewhere. Either from carelessness, inattention, or ill luck, many a promising racer—often at the last moment—breaks down, or otherwise so incapacitates himself as to render necessary the whole, or partial discontinuance of hard work. That is disappointing, the more so when there is no time for rest. It is not so much a matter of regret in India to those owners of large studs, who usually have several entries in each race, and whose

horses are trained by regular trainers. But to the sporting sub, or young civilian, who, perhaps, train a couple of animals for the sheer sport of the thing and the pleasure itself of training, it is very disheartening. Ignorance, of course, may—usually does—bring it about. But great care, attention, and caution in the preparation will, to some extent, make up for want of scientific knowledge and practice.

I have said that St Clair and Douglas were confederates. They had three horses in training, all of which were going well as the day approached.

Time-trials are the ordinary modes of discovering a horse's qualifications in India; and, as is inseparable from such tests, often greatly mislead. Where the owner has a well-known horse to lead the

unknown in a spin or trial, of course the form of the latter is more accurately ascertained, and time is additional guarantee of accuracy. Such, however, is exceptional, so that owners are for the most part compelled to trust to time-trials alone.

The public can easily satisfy themselves as far as regards the nature of the trials. It requires no touters; only it is expected, among a racing fraternity composed almost entirely of gentlemen, that no horse shall be timed by other than his owner. And, of course, no one but himself or jockey knows what weight is up.

There was considerable speculation on the forthcoming races; and the usual ordinary at one of the messes on the evening previous to the meeting was fully

attended, including most of those of the masculine gender who have appeared in these pages.

There is a system of lotteries in India which is, as far as I know, quite exceptional and peculiar to that country. Where there are no regular book-makers there are few willing to give the odds, so that backers of horses find it difficult to make bets on their respective fancies or opinions. Lotteries, to some extent, remedy this.

As in more ordinary cases, the tickets of the lottery are not taken till the list is filled. The numbers are then placed in a soup-tureen, or anything handy, and the names of the horses engaged in another. A number is drawn by one person and a horse's name by another, till the names



are exhausted. This, of course, is all in ordinary routine. But then commences a new feature. The winner of each horse's name is obliged to allow it to be put up to public auction, and the sum it realizes only is the amount he receives for drawing it. He can himself buy it in, if he chooses; but this involves risk.

The person who buys such ticket is bound to pay the price at which he purchases it, twice;—once to the original drawer, and once to the lottery itself; the latter to go to the whole lottery stake, and become a portion of the winnings of the man who has been fortunate enough to buy the winner.

If, therefore, a man who draws a horse also buys it in, he is still liable for its single price, to go to the lottery in event of its not winning. If a man who has not

drawn a horse buys one in, he is liable to pay the same twice over.

It will thus be seen that the man who actually draws the winner—unless he buys it in—may not receive anything more than its value by auction.

The price, compared with the others, indicates the favour in which the horse is generally held, and may be assumed to be its market value. Thus :—If the tickets amount, say, to £100, and the price realized by the sale of the horses to another £100, and a horse sells for £20, the odds against him—as demonstrated by such lottery—would be £160\* to £40,

\* CLEAR WINNINGS.

Value of entire Lottery	.	.	£200
Deduct to be paid to drawer of horse	.		20
Do. to lottery	.	.	20
Balance	.	.	£160

or 4 to 1—i. e. ratio of the entire sum realizable to the entire risk.

Major St Clair neither betted nor joined in lotteries. He ran his horses for sport and sport alone. Douglas also thoroughly entered into the sport of the thing, but he did indulge in speculation, and he bought in Tearaway for the ‘Hus-sunabad Cup,’ though he was not lucky enough to draw him or any other horse. He was himself to ride him, and thought he had a fair outside chance.

Some rather fancied him, and some did not; but few were inclined to speculate in his favour. So Douglas bought him in pretty cheap.

‘Do you really think he will do the trick?’ asked Percy of his friend, as, together with St Clair, some time before

the races commenced, he inspected the redoubtable Tearaway on the course.

‘Well,’ replied Douglas, ‘if we bring him to the post; and if, when once we get him there, he doesn’t rear up and fall back, or lie down and roll over one, or set-to bucking and kicking instead of starting; or if he doesn’t bolt off the course, or create a cross or jostle, by rushing at another horse during the race; and I can manage to hold him straight; and he will condescend to answer when called on in the final struggle; why, I think he has a good chance, for he is a brute of extraordinary power, and can race if he pleases; moreover, he is very fit.’

‘Rather a gruesome category of if’s, but I have backed him, and Nora Creina insists on putting her gloves on him. I

shall try and induce her to lay against that great fiddle-headed beast which Highton has entered. I wish I was as sure about the man losing in the stake he is going in for as his ill-bred brute of a horse.'

'What! Do you think he is really making running for the Nora Creina prize?' asked Douglas.

'Cock sure. And, hang me, if I can make the baby out. She seems half inclined to encourage him, and takes his part whenever I fire a shot at him, which is pretty frequently. I don't like it at all.'

'Why don't you enter on your own account?' asked Douglas. 'Nice girl, and lots of tin, and you seem a great favourite.'

‘Of course I am. She is a first-rate fellow, and has the good taste to admire a congenial spirit. We are no end of cronies, but spooning doesn’t suit my constitution. She’ll flirt with anybody, in her childish way; but somehow, she doesn’t seem to care often for anything serious, though there are lots of fellows ready to make it so. And as I consider the child under the ægis of my protection, why, you see, I’m troubled about this dragoon.’

‘How kind of you!’ said Douglas; ‘and what an immense advantage that ægis must be to her!’

‘Well, but joking apart,’ said St Clair, as he stooped and passed his hand down Tearaway’s near fore-leg, ‘do you believe that it really is serious with Miss Selby in this case?’

‘Looks like it, old man,’ was Percy’s reply. ‘But these frank, natural, unaffected children are just as close and unreadable in heart affairs as any others, especially when they are fastish, and flirt like Nora Creina.’

It will be observed that Ensign Percy—in consideration, probably, of his additional year and greater knowledge of the world—assumed a patronizing and elderly tone in speaking of his young lady friend. And, indeed, boy though he was, and withal thoughtless and slangy, she might have found worse advisers and less useful companions among the older and more correct of those who sneered at their flirting friendship, and perhaps envied him his position in her good graces.

The little, temporary, grass-built stable in which the above conversation took place, was one of a number of similar structures which dotted the open level within the circuit of the race-course. They had been erected by trainers, for the purpose of receiving their horses after the morning's exercise, and give shelter while they underwent the necessary rubbing down before being led off, cool and refreshed, to their own stables in cantonments, the completion of their toilet being made there.

Most of the horses engaged in the forthcoming races had now been brought up to these sheds, before the bustle and turmoil of the assembling crowd rendered it a matter of difficulty or discomfort to the excitable animals.



Tearaway, who was a regular glutton for work, had by no means improved in temper, but was in splendid form; and, could he be properly controlled, stood a fair chance of winning his race, the Hus-sunabad Cup. He had legs and feet of iron, and no amount of work seemed to satisfy him or injure them. A long, level horse, rather low, with great depth of girth, thickness through, powerful loins, and muscular quarters, he appeared one well fitted to stay the two miles which formed the 'cup' course. His legs were somewhat short, and the shoulders only moderately good; but the shortness between knee and fetlock, and the well-let-down hocks, together with his long, sweeping stride, and daisy-cutting action, indicated pace.

Few, however, cared to back him; for in previous engagements his running had proved very uncertain.

After some little discussion between the confederates as to the best mode of running him, that important point was settled—contingent, however, on the particular view Tearaway himself might take of the arrangement.

This done, the trio of friends sauntered towards the race-stand, which was fast filling as the time for the first race drew near. Carriages, too, were driving up and being ranged alongside the course; and farther away the less aristocratic bullock-cart, and other vehicles of still less pretentious appearance, were rapidly assembling. A few horsemen and crowds of pedestrians, including English and

native soldiers, and the inhabitants of the city and cantonment bazaar, were also swarming on to the course.

Many of the rich natives, however, came in their own carriages, displaying in the whole turn-out a curious mixture of luxury and ostentation, with bad taste and shabbiness in the details of the appointments.

‘Well, St Clair, is that brute of yours in an amiable mood to-day?’ asked General Marston, as Major St Clair approached. ‘It is to be hoped so, for the sake of Douglas. I wouldn’t care to be in his boots.’

‘He’s looking like a lamb at present, sir. Talisman’s chance is not secure.’

Talisman was the General’s own entry for the race.

‘Perhaps not. But if Tearaway doesn’t beat him, I don’t think anything will; though Vanguard may have a chance. I understand your last trial was very successful.’

‘It was, General; both of speed and temper. For the beast ran away half-way round, and nearly pulled Douglas’ arms off.’

‘Well, the brute seems to be a favourite with the ladies, at any rate. I suppose for the reason that he is mad, self-willed, and ungovernable. Miss Selby was saying that she likes to see a high-couraged, resolute, independent nature in both man and beast.’

‘Indeed,’ said Major Highton, who was standing, with many others, in a group, chatting and laughing. ‘Aw!

I shall at once cultivate those quawltities.' And the speaker bowed to the young lady—perhaps with the weight of his compliment.

'The soil is a precious sight too poor for anything but tares to come up,' whispered Percy to her.

'How do you know?' retorted Miss Selby. 'Are you so well versed in their mode of cultivation?' Then turning to General Marston, she said, 'I added "gentleness" also, General.'

'Then I am afraid, Miss Selby, you won't find the combination in Tearaway,' observed St Clair.

'She'll find all she admires in the owner rather than the horse,' said Percy to Mrs Atherton. 'Pity she can't see it.'

‘Why?’ demanded the lady he addressed.

‘Oh, I don’t know. But you are her great friend. Do you really think that muff of a dragoon has a chance?’

‘I don’t know, I am sure. But suppose he has!’

‘Why, then, I think but lightly of her taste, and shall do my best to impress that conviction on her.’

But the conversation was here interrupted by the trumpet sounding the saddle, and those interested, either as owners or jockeys, in the first race, were soon busily engaged.

‘Is there any real danger in riding Tearaway?’ asked Mrs Atherton of Douglas, as he was about to leave the stand after the first race was over.

‘Oh no,’ was the reply, ‘I have ridden him hundreds of times. He is a little excitable with other horses, but we shall get him off all right, I’ve no doubt.’

‘I—I—am almost afraid there is danger,’ she said. Then added, very gently, ‘If there really is, could you not give up riding the horse? For—my—the sake of my friendship.’

He looked earnestly at her as she spoke, but her eyes were downcast, and then he answered lightly,—‘There is nothing to fear. Besides, if I win, it will be a capital thing for me in a pecuniary point. I couldn’t under any circumstances give up riding now.’

She said no more, and he soon after left to make his preparations.

There were ten starters for the Hus-

sunabad Cup, three or four of whom had not the ghost of a chance except in the opinion of their respective owners. Talisman and Vanguard—the latter of which belonged to a young civilian—were the two most fancied. Next in estimation came Red Rover, Snowball, and Ruby, in order named. Tearaway might be assumed to be the next in request. But his position was altogether doubtful, owing to his uncertain—or it might be more correct to say his very certain—temper.

Major Highton's horse, Moonshine, which Mr Percy had disparagingly referred to as a great fiddle-headed beast, was thought to have a very remote chance on account of his size and stride; but the remaining three were pronounced safe not to win.



Tearaway was a bright chestnut, with silvery mane and tail. Red Rover and Ruby were bays; the remainder were grays of one sort or another, the prevailing colour among Arabs in India.

All the nine—some ridden by professional, but most by gentlemen, jockeys—were cantered past the stand in due course, amid much admiring criticism from the interested spectators, and, in one or two cases, no little admiration on the part of the riders themselves, who had for the first time donned silk.

Tearaway it was deemed more prudent to lead quietly down to the starting-post, which was half-a-mile back.

As St Clair on one side, and a strong-limbed syce or native groom on the other, thus led him away, he was observed to put

back his ears and glance out of the corners of his eyes in that fashion which announced incipient dissatisfaction at the proceedings. He suffered himself to be quietly led, however, and walked up and down beyond the half-mile post till all the other horses were assembled, and were moving towards the starter. Some of them now displayed a little fractious impatience, occasioning the starting away of one or two. At this juncture, Tearaway, who had been taken back some distance, came to a stop, and resolutely refused to budge an inch farther. This obliged the starter to forego the opportunity he had of despatching the rest to a tolerably level start. Twice this occurred. At last Douglas requested St Clair to leave the horse's head, and let him, unaided, endea-

your to bring the brute to the starting-post. His persuasion was at first conciliatory, then became a little sharper, and at last the horse was induced to advance, looking about as if for some opportunity of exhibiting the annoyance he felt. But Douglas held him with a firm hand, and prevented any outward display of his state of mind.

Seizing the opportunity of his being within some few yards of the post, the rest at the time being in tolerably good order, the starter dropped his flag. As the bulk of the horses dashed off, Tear-away rose on his hind legs, and pawed at the air for several seconds, then plunging forward he tore away after the others at the top of his speed.

Quite unable to check him, all Douglas

aimed to do was to steer him through the rest of the horses without jostle or collision. Fortunately for him, he perceived an opening as he neared the ruck, got him safely through, and was soon alongside the leaders.

Vanguard and Ruby were making play, but at no very great pace. Moonshine was next, then came the rest in a cluster. Talisman was lying quietly behind, leaving others to do the work of forcing the running. There was soon very little room left for doubt as to which horse was going to do that, for Tearaway, holding on with unabated speed, soon led by two clear lengths, and was making the pace for all a cracker. This was not altogether what Douglas desired, though—as he had meant to take a prominent

position early in the race if it was being slowly run—it was not so bad as it might have been. So great, however, had now become the speed, that before the stand was reached, two were completely out-paced, and toiling along far in the rear, hopeless of overtaking the rest if it should continue as at present.

Moonshine had now assumed a more prominent position, and from his length of stride, seemed to be more at ease than most of his companions. Vanguard was lying on his quarter, a length or more in advance of Talisman, who was running in the centre of the group alongside Ruby. These were closely followed by Red Rover, Snowball, and another.

There was much excitement on the stand as the horses swept past in this order.

And as the sky-blue jacket and white hoop of Douglas still continued far ahead, and was observed to be gradually inclining, so as to take the inside of the course, speculation was rife as to when Tearaway would be either brought under control, or be forced by distress to fall back to his horses.

‘Too fast to last,’ said the General, as some one gave him the sharp ‘now’ as the leading horses passed the winning-post, and he marked the time of the first half mile. ‘Too fast by four or five seconds.’

‘True indeed,’ observed Dr Cruickshanks. ‘The same advice might be given to Douglas and Tearaway that Norfolk gave to Buckingham,—

“ We may outrun,  
By violent swiftness, that which we run at,  
And lose by over-running.”

Now, master Ned Percy, I think that is very appropriate. Have you got any witty remark to make ? ’

‘ No, doctor, certainly not ; only I am fully persuaded *you’ll* never lose anything by over-running. But just look ! Fiddle-head is actually drawing clear of the rest, and is going, I suppose, to challenge Tear-away for the lead. I wish he may get it.’

‘ Is that remark intended seriously or sarcastically ? ’ asked Miss Selby, who knew perfectly which horse was referred to as Fiddle-head.

‘ Both,’ was the reply ; ‘ for if he does, he won’t keep it long. He hasn’t got the stuff in him to last ;’ and then added, *sotto voce*, ‘ any more than his master.’

‘Mr Percy,’ said Miss Selby, drawing herself up with much dignity, without, however, raising her voice, ‘suppose you confine your remarks to the animals!’

‘So I do, Miss Selby. Horses and asses included;’ and then added, ‘Will you back Fiddle-head against Tearaway?’

Miss Selby did not condescend to reply to this, but turned away and addressed Mrs Atherton, close to whom she was sitting in one corner of the stand. Her friend was at the time intently engaged in watching the progress of the race.

Mrs Atherton, hardly heeding what had been said to her, drew her young friend’s attention to the farther changes taking place in the position of the horses, and Miss Selby now fixed her attention on what was in progress before them.



The horses had now nearly reached the mile post, and consequently nearly one half of the race had been run.

Tearaway still led, but Moonshine was not more than a length behind. Vanguard, Ruby, and Talisman, all within half that distance of each other, lay some two lengths behind Moonshine, the others much as before.

‘Still too fast to last,’ said the General, as Tearaway shot past the mile post, and the time was taken. But immediately after this, a considerable change took place. Douglas seemed now, for the first time, to have got fairly hold of his horse, and pulled him back, allowing Moonshine to draw level with him, and then take a slight lead. He apparently wished, if possible, to nurse Tearaway,

and let others now do the duty of making the running. It was evident that the rider of Moonshine was desirous of doing this, relying probably on his horse's size and stride to carry him through.

Soon Tearaway fell still farther back, and the three next horses had closed with, and then slightly headed, him. Vanguard, the leader of the three, was now next to, and a couple of lengths in rear of, Moonshine; while Snowball, from the rear division, had considerably improved his position, and almost joined those in front. This continued till, at the half-mile from home, Moonshine gradually fell back to the others; and at last was headed by Vanguard, who now assumed the lead, with Talisman and Ruby at his quarters, and Tearaway half a length behind them.

Moonshine's bolt was evidently shot, for he quickly fell to the rear, being passed by each in turn, Snowball among them. At the quarter-mile from home, Talisman closed with Vanguard, and the two came round the last turn locked together.

At the distance, the rider of Ruby determined to make an effort to reach the leaders, and closed till he hung on their quarter. Almost immediately after, too, Douglas thought the time had come to see if Tearaway was inclined to struggle and justify the careful nursing of the last three-quarters of a mile. Still sitting quiet, he let him go, and when about fifty yards from the winning-post, had drawn within a neck of Talisman, who had shaken off Vanguard, Ruby having taken his place. Here Tearaway seemed

to hang, and showed some indications of boring in on the other horses. This determined Douglas to make his last call on what he believed was still in the brute he rode. With hand and heel he suddenly exerted his whole force to throw Tearaway forward, and the horse responded by as suddenly shooting a-head. Talisman was called on almost at the same time, and answered gamely. But the immense power and splendid condition of Tearaway—for once made full use of—was not to be denied, and he shot past the post a winner by half a length.

Ruby was third about the same distance behind Talisman; Vanguard close up with him. Snowball was next, then Moonshine and Red Rover in close company, the others beaten off.

‘I am so glad!’ exclaimed Miss Selby, in a heartfelt manner, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, in the impulse and excitement of the moment, as she saw the chestnut unmistakeably first. And then happening to catch Major St Clair’s eye, and observing the look of additional pleasure which the observation called forth, she added, after a slight pause, ‘I have won so many gloves. Mr Percy, you promised to make up my book—how many?’

‘Well, let me see,’ said Mr Percy. ‘Here’s half-a-dozen against Fiddle—that is to say, Moonshine—with Major Highton. Sixes, Major, remember please,’ he continued, turning to that gentleman. ‘Then here’s half-a-dozen with the General against Talisman. Here’s some-

thing too with Mr Atherton, but I can't make out which horse it is; and—in fact, owing to my excellent advice, you have won a perfect hatful of gloves.'

'Your advice, indeed! Didn't I say all along that Tearaway would win? I—I congratulate you, Major St Clair.'

That officer, who was just leaving to look after his horse and jockey, expressed his thanks, and moved on. And amid all the various comments and criticisms which, now that the race was over, indicated much more unanimity of opinion than before,—most of the gentlemen also descended to look at the racers being led back, and see the jockeys go to scale.

Mrs Atherton had watched the race with the keenest anxiety, fearful to the last that Tearaway would behave in some

way so as to endanger his rider. As he was safely pulled up when it was over, she sat down with clasped hands and downcast looks, apparently half-forgetful of the moving throng around.

But she was roused from her reverie by her husband stooping over the back of her chair, and whispering in her ear, ‘I don’t think there would have been quite so much anxiety if I had been riding that amiable-tempered beast;’ and he laughed a sneering laugh.

She started and looked up at him, but said nothing, and he continued, ‘I needn’t remind you to congratulate the rider of the winner. See, he is looking at you! Why not wave your handkerchief to your successful knight? Blue is, I believe,

your favourite colour, and he carried it to the front.'

'Your sneers do not move me,' she said, 'better cease them. Norah, dear, come and hear what Mr Atherton has to say about the race. I think he has lost to you.'

But Mr Atherton turned away with another sneer on his lips.

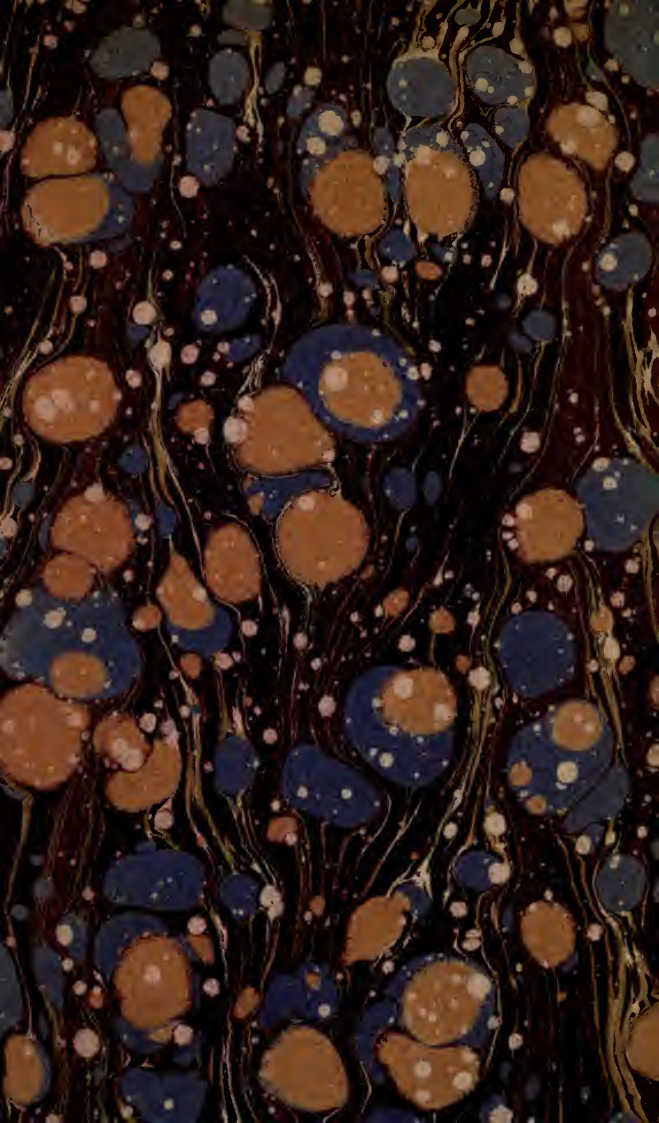
Strange to say, Miss Selby was, without knowing it, a protective influence to her friend. Her frank and innocent character acted as a spell over the evil part of the man's nature, and in her presence he rarely treated his wife in the taunting, disagreeable manner which, when alone, was now becoming habitual with him. There was something in the *naïveté*, and



joyous character of the girl which disarmed him of sneers and mesmerized his temper.

END OF VOL. I.





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The Gage of honour

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