


1-1-1913

*The judgment of the sword : the tale of the Kabul tragedy, and of the part played therein by Major Eldred Pottinger, the hero of Herat*

Maud Diver

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Diver, Maud the tale of the Kabul tragedy, and of the part played therein by Major Eldred Pottinger, the hero of Herat The judgment of the sword: the tale of the Kabul tragedy, and of the part played therein by Major Eldred Pottinger, the hero of Herat. London: Constable, 1913. xii, 640 p. : ill., ports., folded map

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THE JUDGMENT OF  
THE SWORD  
MAUD DIVER



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OF THE  
SWORD

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DIVER



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453120

Diver, J.H.M.

The judgment of the sword.

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THE JUDGMENT OF THE SWORD



SIRDAR MAHOMED AKBAR KHAN



# THE JUDGMENT OF THE SWORD

THE TALE OF THE KABUL TRAGEDY, AND  
OF THE PART PLAYED THEREIN BY MAJOR  
ELDRED POTTINGER, THE HERO OF HERAT

BY

MAUD DIVER

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN DESMOND, V.C.," "LILAMANI," ETC.

- "If you can dream and not make Dreams your master,  
If you can think, and not make Thought your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two imposters just the same. . . .
- "If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop to build 'em up with worn-out tools. . . .
- "If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,—  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it—  
And, what is more, you'll be a Man, my son."

RUDYARD KIPLING

LONDON  
CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD.

1913

453120

PR  
6007  
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REVISION

CONSULTANT & COMPANY, LTD.

1949

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE life-story of Eldred Pottinger presents itself naturally in two phases—phases more strikingly and dramatically contrasted than is often the case when Life, and not the romancist, weaves the tale. First Herat, action, fame; then Kabul, endurance, disaster. In Herat we had the hero—youth and courage triumphant over desperate odds. At Kabul we have the man—hampered, baulked, and finally traduced. No triumph here; yet—and this is the greater glory—no loss of spirit, courage, or faith.

In the first phase, his figure more or less dominated the stage, though even then he was being steadily drawn into the vortex of that Kabul tragedy, of which this book is a record.

In the second phase, Eldred Pottinger became a unit—though still a striking one—in a vast, crowded arena; for which cause this book is named, not after him, but after the great event in which he played so noble a part. No single figure, however heroic, could be made to dominate the tale of the First Afghan War without fatally upsetting the proportions of the whole; and Eldred Pottinger would have been the last man to wish himself thrust forward at the expense either of proportion or of truth.

A. Paul 10-25-74 Cyt

Thus it has seemed best to tell the whole wonderful tale so far as it can be told in one volume, merely giving rather more space and detail to those events in which Pottinger came conspicuously to the fore. By this means the part he was called on to play, and the unflinching courage with which he played it, will best be revealed, while British readers will be reminded of an object-lesson as dramatic and terrible as any in the annals of Empire.

True, neither men nor nations care to be gratuitously reminded of failures. Successes alone are deemed fit objects for remembrance, for commemoration. Let our failures be thrust into the nearest cupboard and the door slammed on their unflattering faces. Yet there is more to be learnt—both by men and nations—from looking failure frankly in the eyes, from sincere acknowledgment of the fact and the cause, than from the more popular process of “white-washing” that masquerades as patriotism. Not, “My country can do no wrong,” but, “Right or wrong, my country,” is the true patriotic note.

That history repeats itself is a truism, and, unhappily, blunders tend to repeat themselves no less; the more so, surely, where there exists a certain racial unwillingness to recognize them as such. In this year of grace 1913, the faith that recognized failure as a direct discipline of God is dim, if not extinct; yet there remains the stirring reminder of Mr. Page—in reference to the Pilgrim Fathers—that “it is destiny yet, destiny born of English character, that still regards failures as invitations to renewed effort.” Approached in this spirit, there may be gain as



well as pain in renewing acquaintance with the errors, and worse than errors, that disfigured the First Afghan War.

In fine, the comments of certain reviewers make it seem necessary to emphasize afresh the fact that here is no compound of history and romance, but the true romance of history; that neither book has any relation to the historical novel proper, except in *form*. If there is need for definition, dramatized history, perhaps, comes nearer the mark. In this volume every incident, even the slenderest, every conversation, and—in most cases—even the thoughts of those concerned, have been gathered from journals, letters, and biographies of the period.

For most of these, as before, I have to thank the India Office Library; but to cite all the authorities consulted would be a cumbrous business. Suffice it to say that, in addition to Sir Henry Durand and Sir John Kaye—the chief historians of the war—I am mainly indebted to Pottinger's own papers; to the journals of Lady Sale, Sir Vincent Eyre, and Sir George Lawrence; to Mrs. Colin Mackenzie's "Life" of her gallant husband, and the "Career of Major Broadfoot, C.B.," by Major William Broadfoot, R.E.

THE BIRCHES,  
HASLÈMERE,  
August 25, 1913.

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BOOK I  
NEMESIS

"Since I am sworn to live my life,  
And not to bear an easy heart,  
Some men may sit and drink apart,  
I bear a banner in the strife.

"Some can take quiet thought to wife,  
I am all day at tierce and carte,  
Since I am sworn to live my life,  
And not to bear an easy heart."

R. L. S.

---

"There is nothing more remarkable in the history of the world than the awful completeness, the sublime unity of this Kabul tragedy. In the pages of a heathen writer, over such a story as this would be cast the shadow of a tremendous Nemesis. The Christian historian uses other words; but the same idea runs, like a great river, through his narrative: 'For the Lord God of recompense shall surely requite.'"—SIR JOHN KAYE.



## I

"BEHOLD, once again, mine honoured friend . . . Kabul, City of Orchards, in the month of apple-blossoms! Blessed be Allah that again the privilege is mine to bring hither the Friend of Afghans and the Defender of Herat!"

Now—as on that earlier day of May, 1837—the speaker was Syud Mohun Shah. But on this occasion his escort had been a mere complimentary attention, a proof that his devotion to the Feringhi had survived the upheavals, mismanagement, and fitful recriminations which by now had gone far to alienate race from race and to lower British prestige in Afghanistan.

His gaze shifted, in speaking, from the familiar aspect of Kabul Valley to the changed aspect of the man who rode at his side: no longer a fair-skinned Afghan merchant, with all Asia before him, but a distinguished political officer, in the sun-helmet and travelling-suit of the period, well mounted, and attended by an imposing *cortège* of camels, mules, and superfluous followers not to be denied. The tone of his skin was several shades darker, and his beard several shades lighter, than on that earlier day. But the clear blue of the eyes remained unclouded, and the adventurous spirit unquenched, even by a year of desk work, Calcutta climate, and intermittent fever.

These things Mohun Shah noted, in a few seconds of friendly scrutiny, before he spoke again.

“No necessity *now*, Sahib, to assume turban and *choga* for travelling in this my country!”

Eldred Pottinger—looking out across the valley to the sunlit peaks beyond—shook his head. Then a suspicion of wistfulness in the Afghan’s tone impelled him to turn and confront his friend. “Is that a matter for regret—or for congratulation? What think you, Syud-jee?”

But the Afghan, like the Highlander, is an adept at polite evasion of yea and nay. “Is my wisdom greater than the wisdom of the Sahib? Whether for good or evil, doubtless these events are written in the plans of God.” A pause: then sincerity, and a large faith in the man at his side, prompted more open speech. “None the less, *one* thing is certain. Had the English come in their own might, openly desiring to set up the rule of justice and mercy, as in India, there had been more of straightforward blows, and less of that secret hate which to-day runs like poison through the veins of my countrymen. For now, behold, what is our portion? We have neither the justice of the English nor the strong hand of Dōst Mahomed Khan, but only a King, who is no King, having little power in his hands, and no love in his heart for a people he could neither conquer nor hold without foreign aid. Consider—you who know the Afghans as do few of your race—is there any hope of true peace, even if Macloten Sahib should empty his treasury and pour the oil of gilded speech on troubled waters? Speak the thought of your heart, Sahib, as friend to friend.”

Pottinger nodded smiling. “If not to you, Syud-jee, to whom else? Judging from things seen and heard on my journey, I find small promise of peace in any quarter. See how the Duranis and Ghilzais have made, out of mere taxation grievances, pretext for open revolt. Rawlinson Sahib knows——”

“Yea ; and the Generaili Sahib at Kandahar—he also knows how those same Ghilzais were once Kings of Afghanistan, taking command from no man, and carrying their conquests even to the capital of Iran. Shall such lions lie down like sheep before this jackal, who struts in a borrowed skin, with tail between his legs ?” The Syud leaned nearer and spoke lower, lest curious retainers had pricked up their ears. “It is even said—hath the Sahib heard?—that already the King tires of his new friends ; that he himself secretly sent word to the Duranis, countenancing their revolt.”

Pottinger started slightly, and lifted his brows. The suspicion was new to him, though far from incredible. But it seemed wiser to avoid open discussion of such things ; and the Syud went on : “Thus it is to befriend the jackal, for all his Sadozai blood, as we of his own race discovered aforetime. It is the nature of the ignoble to snatch at spoil won by others, and, hunger being appeased, to bite the hands that have no more to give. The Sahib understands ?”

“Yea, truly I understand. There be jackals of that *jāt* in every nation on earth. But now, Syud-jee, I must needs take leave of you and push on.”

It was an elaborate process, though Major Pottinger, C.B., Political Assistant to Sir William Macnaghten, had no longer to suffer the effusive Afghan embrace. With a mutually sincere “God protect you !” the two men parted. Syud Mohun Shah returned to the Valley of Pishin ; Eldred Pottinger rode leisurely on toward Kabul with the foreknowledge of impending catastrophe to cheer him by the way.

But since catastrophe implied danger, and danger action, such foreknowledge could not but quicken the pulse of a man thankful to escape at any price from the

enervating atmosphere of officialdom and the tyranny of the pen. True, he did not relish the prospect of serving again under Macnaghten, nor the discovery that promotion to so responsible a post as Political Agent of the Kohistan brought no increase of pay. Nevertheless, if trouble were brewing, better to be here in the throes of it than reading belated and inaccurate accounts two thousand miles away.

In this mood of mind he neared his destination, and became gradually aware of many changes that could not be distinguished afar off. An outcrop of tents among the black rocks showed where the reliefs were encamped at Siah Sung, and the fatal cantonments were by now an accomplished fact. Yet grim forebodings were manifestly out of keeping with the aspect and atmosphere of Kabul in that last week of May, 1841.

For by now the heavy spring rains were over, and triumphantly in orchard, field, and furrow Kabul had renewed her youth. It was the time of nightingale and thrush, of Friday pleasurings in the royal apple-orchards—pleasurings in which, four years<sup>earlier</sup>, a fair-skinned adventurous Afghan merchant had unostentatiously taken part. It was also the time of times for love-making, open and clandestine. To the woman of Kabul, intrigue is the breath of life, and possible conquests among the *Sahib-lōg* added zest to her immemorial pastime. The courtesy and chivalrous bearing of the foreigner too often contrasted unfavourably with the rough arrogance of her lord: hence complications. But the *burkha*—thrice blessed garment—discreetly shrouded all, while affording such tempting facilities, as may readily be imagined, though no Western imagination could even approximately do justice to Afghan facts.

In all lands and among all peoples the lure of the spring



is irresistible ; but nowhere is her voice more exquisitely compelling than in the stark regions of the north, where the tyranny of winter is a sensible actuality ; and Eldred Pottinger, nearing Kabul city in the glow of early evening, felt his own blood quicken in response to the glad, irresistible uprush of life renewed.

Blossoms everywhere—from the spring *sari* of green and white and rose, veiling the black boughs of fruit-trees, to the scattered patches of English flowers within the walls of those disastrous cantonments on the plain.<sup>1</sup> Three miles north of Kabul, near the Kohistan road, they now stood, almost completed, an eyesore from every practical point of view : bare and defenceless as sheepfolds against the day of vengeance, when the wolves of Afghanistan would be howling round them.

Picture an enclosure a thousand yards long by six hundred broad, surrounded by a ditch and contemptible ramparts bastioned at each corner. By way of improvement a second enclosure half as large again had been attached to the northern end of “lines” already too long. Macnaghten’s Residency occupied a part of this incubus, known as the “Mission Compound” : the remainder was packed with an irregular jumble of houses for his assistants, officers, and bodyguard. The corner bastions—presumably built by way of protection—were all commanded by some neighbouring fort or hill ; to say nothing of the Behmaru Heights, on the one hand ; and on the other, the barren, black ridge of the Siah Sung. In friendly proximity to the south-west angle nestled a bazaar village ; while across the road the King’s walled garden positively invited occupation ; and high over all the grey, battlemented walls and towers of the Bala Hissar seemed silently to mock at the costly ineffectual achievement asprawl on the

<sup>1</sup> See map at end of book.

plain beneath. Here, by way of royal guard, a small detachment was still quartered, and here, for a while, the magazine had been graciously permitted to remain. But six weeks earlier, on the return of headquarters from Jalálabad, there had been renewed royal objections; and Macnaghten had yielded yet again. Result—the entire magazine of ammunition and arms had been transferred to cantonments, and there stacked confidently in the open, close to the British lines.

No intrusive Brigadier Roberts now to harass the Envoy with counter-objections. He had long since been manœuvred off the scene; and his successor, Brigadier Anquetil—a more pliable man—had doubtless discovered that nothing was to be gained by remonstrance save unpopularity. The King had spoken and the thing was done.

But the crowning folly had yet to be told. The magazine was at least within cantonments; but the treasury—amounting to seventeen thousand pounds—still remained at Captain Johnson's house in the city across the river. The commissariat stores also remained where they had been carelessly lodged, in a small fort near the south-west bastion—a fort lamentably ill-placed in view of possible hostilities. But hostilities were not in the bond. Wherefore when Captain Skinner, Chief Commissariat Officer, urgently begged space within cantonments for his precious charge, he was told (as from Sir Willoughby) that none could be given him. They were “far too busy erecting barracks for the men to think of commissariat stores.”

Then, as now, soldier blamed political, and political blamed soldier; then, as now, both were more or less justified of their blame. If, in respect of those notorious cantonments, Sir Willoughby was responsible for flagrant faultiness of site and construction, the Envoy—as supreme civil authority—was no less responsible for sowing broad-

cast the impression that Afghanistan was a settled country and the Army of Occupation a mere police force stationed therein.

Eldred Pottinger had yet to discover the full measure of Macnaghten's infatuate optimism; he had yet to discover the positions of magazine and stores; but the man who had conducted the defence of Herat saw enough, at first sight, to offend the eye of a practical soldier, enough to set him wondering: "Are these men mad?"

No, they were duped merely, and the edge of professional zeal blunted by the irksome control of a civil power, controlled—in its turn—by a tardily thrifty Government two thousand miles away. To the same severe test Pottinger's own zeal was subjected also, before many months were out; for he was destined to suffer as much as any soldier of them all from Macnaghten's false optimism, false position, and false estimate of Afghan nationality.

But now, as he neared his journey's end, abstract reflection gave place to cheerful anticipation; for Login and Todd were still at Kabul, their return to India delayed by threatened disturbance in the Punjab. Pottinger looked forward keenly both to their companionship and to fuller news of the Herat catastrophe than had yet come his way. Better still was the prospect of meeting his brother. For Tom Pottinger, the invincibly cheerful, had been transferred at last, with his regiment, the 54th Native Infantry, to Kabul, the *ultima thule* of all young officers athirst for promotion and distinction. Most fortunate were those whom the gods disappointed of their desire; but at present neither Tom nor Eldred saw anything but good in the Providence that had brought them to Kabul; and the newcomer, passing through the gateway of the "sheep-fold on the plain," rode straight to his brother's quarters.

## II

THERE was much to hear and much to tell during that first long evening spent in the cramped space of Tom Pottinger's tent. Login—cheerful and vigorous as ever—came in later from the 13th mess, and the hand-clasp between the two friends was close and long.

The talk that followed took a more serious turn; for here was mutual knowledge and conviction backed by a strong mutual interest. Login spoke with his wonted enthusiasm of the Mission's achievements at Herat; and above all of Todd's conscientious efforts to uphold Lord Auckland's futile policy, without sacrificing the honour and dignity of Great Britain. Of this last Login could not speak without justifiable heat.

"The Governor-General will see for himself before long," said he, "that in order to influence a man like Yar Mahomed, we must not conciliate, but command. There's only one unfailing recipe for dealing with devils of that *jāt*. Thrash them well first: *then* they may be in a fit state to appreciate forbearance! *You'll* be having to do some thrashing out your way, Pottinger, to judge from the account of the natives given me by my friend Dick Maule, who raised the Kohistani regiment."

Pottinger nodded with conviction. "Your friend probably knows more about the temper of the Kohistanis than Sir William, whose eyes, I fear, will be rudely opened one of these days. However, when I have had

time to look round, I may find affairs in this quarter more satisfactory than they seem at first sight."

The next few days brought more of enlightenment than of satisfaction to a man gifted with perceptions uncomfortably clear. Troops there were in plenty, at the moment; for although reliefs had reached Jalálabad early in the year, Sale's Brigade still awaited an auspicious moment for the return march. To that brigade there had now been added the 44th Queen's under Brigadier Shelton; a troop of Bengal Horse Artillery under Captain Nicholl; Native Cavalry and Infantry, and the Shah's sappers and miners. But it was the leaders that chiefly engaged Pottinger's attention during his short stay at the capital; for not only a new brigade but a new General and staff had now appeared on the scene.

In the autumn of 1840 Sir Willoughby Cotton had resigned on the plea of ill-health, and to minds untainted by prejudice it had appeared that his obvious successor need only be summoned from Kandahar. But William Nott was hardly the man to accept nominal command; nor was he in favour, either at Kabul or Calcutta; and advancement, like kissing, goes by favour rather than desert. Had the decision rested with Sir Jasper Nicolls, Nott would have reigned at Kabul; and at the eleventh hour the Afghan drama might have been changed from a tragedy to a triumph.

But if Nott possessed a trick of speech too unvarnished, and of action too independent, for Macnaghten's taste, there were other competent Generals to be found in India; men with service experience, sound health, and knowledge of the country. There was also—unhappily for himself and his country—a veteran Queen's officer, crippled with rheumatic gout, and as ignorant of India and the native

soldier as the last-joined Ensign from Home. This man, of all others, was deliberately chosen by Lord Auckland, and sanctioned by a Whig Cabinet, as successor to Sir Willoughby Cotton in Afghanistan.

The word "deliberate" is not used unadvisedly. General Elphinstone—acutely sensible of his disabilities—refused the appointment more than once. But Lord Auckland, obsessed by his fatal choice, would not take "No" for answer. It was necessary for Macnaghten's convenience to secure a military chief unhampered with superfluous opinions; and Elphinstone, not long out from Home, nor likely to prove self-assertive, seemed the very peg for the vacant hole. Hence renewed pressure, which he lacked the moral courage to resist, lest repeated refusal savour of unsoldier-like shrinking from duty and responsibility. Moral courage of this quality is rare; and his final acceptance can scarcely be set down against him.

Elphinstone has been called "a favourite of Fortune," but seldom has favouritism been more ironically displayed than on the day when the veteran Guardsman found himself thrust into that coveted post of honour—the Kabul command. It is difficult to exonerate Lord Auckland, except on the score that reports from his Envoy implied the need of a mere military figure-head to parade the troops, and prop up the prestige of a justly unpopular King. In that case the real responsibility must rest with Macnaghten, whose phenomenal blindness, wilful or otherwise, recoiled in terrible fashion on his own head.

Something of the comments passed on Elphinstone's appointment had already been heard by Eldred Pottinger; but, even so, he stood amazed, when—on visiting the General—he found himself warmly welcomed by a courteous, gentle-spoken wreck of a man, prostrate in

a low straw chair, unable to move without help or walk without a couple of sticks. He had been very ill, he said, ever since his arrival. Fever and his old enemy rheumatic gout in a virulent form. Only during the last few days he had been able to get about; and he was soldier enough to be far from content with the look of things.

The cantonments, as a matter of course, came under discussion, and Elphinstone, too chivalrous to belittle his predecessor, shook his head in silent disapproval. "I can only suppose there was some misunderstanding at the time," he said. "Sir William seems satisfied that we need be under no apprehension. But danger or not, we ought to be in the Bala Hissar."

"Not a doubt of that, sir," said Pottinger quietly.

"There was one genuine objection, I believe," the old man went on. "The water-supply inside is limited, and the outside watercourse could be easily cut off. But I am under the impression"—he smiled faintly—"that this was not thought of, or even discovered, at the time. There was some talk of building a magazine fort on the south; but the site chosen seemed to me objectionably surrounded with cover, and I offered to buy up the land myself, that it might be cleared without offending our friends in the city. The Envoy, I regret to say, did not see fit to accept my proposal. Well—well—we are all in his hands, and he declares we have nothing to fear from these people. I devoutly hope he may be right. He ought to know the lie of the land by this time—eh?"

A hint of anxiety invaded Elphinstone's tone; but it was not Pottinger's place to question the capacity of his Chief. "Yes, indeed, sir, considering his opportunities, Sir William *ought* to know how matters stand here," he agreed in a non-committal tone; and was not a little relieved by the entrance of Captain Grant, A.A.G., a

man neither pleasant-spoken nor prepossessing, yet reputed to have considerable influence over the General. He came on a matter of business; and Pottinger, nothing loath, took leave of the kind-hearted, frail old man, whose country had done him so cruel a disservice in the guise of a complimentary tribute to his high character and connections.

Before leaving, Pottinger had some talk with Major Thain, A.D.C., in whom he recognized a man of fine soldierly temper. Captain Paton, Quartermaster-General, was also well spoken of in cantonments. But with the exception of these two, Pottinger was not favourably impressed with the officers of Elphinstone's staff: officers who, in the hour of crisis, might be called upon to make good the mental and physical infirmities of their Chief. The second-in-command, Colonel John Shelton, he was not likely to see, for the Brigadier had been sent to Peshawur on escort duty. But he had already been some months with the force; and, like Sir Peter Teazle, had left his character behind him for Pottinger to glean at second hand. It did not sound promising. Even his own officers spoke of him as harsh, imperious, and unyielding; while his inconsiderate treatment of men and animals on the march up from India had not made for popularity with the other regiments of his brigade. A soldier of unqualified courage and of many campaigns, he had yet earned no personal distinction or decoration; and for years he had commanded the 44th without gaining the affection of his officers or men. Facts so significant tell their own tale, and all things considered, Eldred Pottinger rode away from the General's quarters in a profoundly thoughtful mood of mind.

Twenty-four hours at Kabul had served to increase rather than dispel the haunting prescience of evil that shadowed



his sanguine spirit. Yet Macnaghten, who had spent two years in the district, seemed able to radiate confidence, to assert—hand on heart—that “from Mukúr to the Khyber Pass, all is content and tranquillity.” And as Pottinger turned his horse’s head into the Envoy’s compound, his heart echoed the General’s conclusion: “I devoutly hope he may be right!”

### III

ON entering the Mission drawing-room Pottinger found himself transported from the rough and ready accommodation of an advanced military outpost to the comforts and elegance of Anglo-Indian civilization as it obtained in the year 1841.

Pictures and Oriental hangings, lounges and tables set with costly knick-knacks, all were eloquent of woman's propensity for nest-making, no matter how unpromising the locality or the material at her command. Lady Macnaghten herself—in silk-embroidered shawl and flounces—advanced to greet him with prettily turned phrases in which laurels and heroism played their inevitable part.

To such embarrassing attentions, Pottinger, manlike, had no answer at command. Happily none was required of him. The voice of his hostess rippled cheerfully on, introducing him first to “my dear friend Lady Sale,” then “to her daughter, Mrs. Sturt, our Kabul bride.”

For this Afghan tragedy—notwithstanding its Homeric character of bloodshed and heroism, of wrongdoing and Nemesis, pity and terror—was not altogether lacking in the lighter elements of romance. Certain British officers of the garrison, untroubled by religious scruples, had wooed and married—according to Mahomedan law—the widows or daughters of well-born Afghans; while Sturt, the bold and capable successor of Henry Durand, had the

greater good fortune to win the only English girl available—the daughter of his stout-hearted Chief, Sir Robert Sale.

The bride smiled demurely, as brides were expected to do—and did—in those unregenerate days, when the average woman walked in the way she should go as a matter of course, without taking violent credit to herself for the achievement. Pottinger must needs be seated; listening, the while, with unwonted eagerness for the footstep of his Chief.

Lady Sale did most of the talking. She had a fluent tongue and a slightly caustic wit. Lady Macnaghten's lively ripple was submerged in the flood-tide of her shrewd, unvarnished strictures on men and things. Of the three women, if not the most attractive, Lady Sale was easily the most notable. Large-featured, dominant, and eminently capable, she had the long mouth of the humorist, and the alert eye of a nature quicker to observe and judge than to sympathize or condone. Yet, with all her individuality, she remained true to type: a garrison matron of the early nineteenth century, well versed in matters regimental; one that could tell a barrack-room tale with spirit and without mincing her epithets. Men, for the most part, found her "good company"; and Pottinger conceded the fact. Yet he breathed an almost audible sigh of relief when the door opened to admit Macnaghten, followed by George Lawrence and John Conolly—a man blessed with much the same beautiful nature as his brother, the hapless Arthur, already imprisoned with Stoddart at Bokhara.

William Macnaghten appeared little changed since Pottinger's first meeting with him in the Shah's camp at Nimlah eighteen months ago. A trifle thinner he certainly was; and his manner, though kindly and urbane as ever, betrayed signs of cheerfulness a little forced, of nerves

slightly overstrained. To Pottinger it was evident that, in spite of rose-coloured spectacles, the Envoy's faith in his Shah was less unassailably robust than it had been two years ago. Whether or no Macnaghten had ever admitted the fact to himself, the younger man found it difficult to guess, even when they had withdrawn to the privacy of the Envoy's study. For between these two, so antipathetic in temperament and point of view, there never was, nor ever could be, any real confidence, personal or political.

But at this particular moment Macnaghten could not conceal a passing anxiety, flavoured with a spice of irritation. It seemed that Aktur Khan—most hostile of the Duranis—had refrained from disbanding his followers, and was preparing for a fresh struggle against the detested novelty of taxation.

"In fact, one way and another," Macnaghten concluded with a sigh, "Rawlinson's letters have a regrettable tendency to strike a despondent note. It is my only quarrel with him. A most able and zealous officer! I congratulate myself on having chosen a man so peculiarly fitted for the difficult and delicate post of Kandahar."

And Macnaghten was justified of his self-congratulation; more than justified of his choice.

Though barely thirty-one, Henry Rawlinson had already made his mark in Persia, under Sir John McNeill. For uprightness, sound judgment, and thorough knowledge of Orientals, he stood second to none in the country; while his unflinching tact and forbearance made him perhaps the only man who could have worked in friendly conjunction with the brave but choleric William Nott.

His one drawback, in Macnaghten's eyes, was also, incidentally, the main drawback of Pottinger and of Nott. Like them, Rawlinson could not acquire the comfortable trick of self-deception. He saw men and things as they

were, and made no pretence to the contrary; or rather—in the words of his Chief—"took an unwarrantably gloomy view" of the British position in Afghanistan, and by frank statement of that view, marred the effect of Macnaghten's protestations to the contrary.

It was bad enough to have irresponsible youngsters croaking of unpopularity and disaffection. Such statements were utterly false as regards Kabul, and he did not choose to believe them of Kandahar, merely because Aktur Khan had a "pack of ragamuffins at his heels!"

By such verbal flippances Macnaghten sought to discount any lurking anxiety that may have troubled himself and others. He denied the existence of anything like national feeling among the Afghan tribes. Those who rebelled were dubbed "ragamuffins," "rascals," or "naughty children," according to the inspiration of the moment: never, by any chance, were they recognized as men in deadly earnest, bound together by three ties of the strongest—hatred of the infidel, a common love of independence, and a common religion. Pottinger, listening gravely, with comments few and brief, realized afresh that the task which had proved impossible at Herat was being again demanded of him, though in different guise; that, here as there, he would be obstructed at every turn by a policy diametrically opposed to his own.

If he had ridden away from the General's quarters in a thoughtful mood, he left the Mission bungalow in a mood approaching despondency. The shadow of coming evil loomed now so much more definite and threatening, that the light and colour of the spring evening, the laughter of young green, backed by the clean-cut commanding peaks of the Hindu Kush, affected him almost like the sight of a bridal wreath on the fleshless temples of a skull.

Given a free hand, a fair encounter, and a reasonable

chance of success, the prospect, however stormy, would merely have stimulated this born fighter, to whom so little chance of straightforward fighting was given. But to watch the oncoming of disaster with one hand behind his back, to associate himself, publicly and practically, with a line of policy more than likely to bring discredit on the country he loved—that was another matter altogether. So repugnant was the prospect to his whole nature, that he was seriously minded to turn his back on Kabul and apply for employment elsewhere. He has left it on record that he certainly would have done so but for heavy debts incurred to meet the expenses of his outfit and journey: debts he felt bound to pay off before taking so decisive a step. For the moment he had a sense of being caught in a trap. But he possessed, in full measure, the unquestioning faith of the period: the sustaining conviction that God, who had guided him hither, would direct his going in the way.

It was not for him to carve out his own destiny, but to do with might the immediate duty required of him. With that end in view he decided that it would be well to see Burnes before leaving Kabul. He, at least, had some knowledge of Afghan character. His position, too, gave him the right of freer speech. Surely he, of all men, could, if he would, remove the scales from Macnaghten's eyes before it was too late. Ay—if he would! But though Burnes, in his rôle of looker-on, saw clearly enough that all was going wrong, disgust at his own anomalous position, and the small heed paid to his tenders of advice, had long since reduced him to a philosophic shrugging of the shoulders whenever complaints or abuses reached his ears.

“*I have no responsibility. Why should I work?*” was his plausible if not very elevated view of the situation.

Much has been written of the evils arising from the clash between civil and military authority; whereas, in truth, the origin of all evil was this complete lack of concert between Resident and Envoy. There were faults on both sides, and extenuations no less; though the main source of friction lay less in themselves than in their relative positions. One or other should have been sent to Kabul. In sending both, Lord Auckland committed an error fatal for himself and them. If Burnes could not be trusted to inaugurate the restoration, it had been wiser to keep him quite outside the picture till Macnaghten was gazetted elsewhere. Instead, Burnes sat idle at Kabul, chafing at the discrepancy between Viceregal promise and performance. He still lived in the city, as did six or eight British officers of the Shah's force; and between good books, good wine, and good comrades, passed the time pleasantly enough.

"I am now a highly paid idler," he wrote to his brother in this very spring of Pottinger's return, "having no less than three thousand five hundred rupees a month, as Resident at Kabul, and being, as the lawyers call it, only counsel, and that a dumb one—by which I mean that I give paper opinions, but do not work them out! . . .

"I lead, however, a very pleasant life; and if rotundity and heartiness be proofs of health, I have them. Breakfast I have long made a public meal. Covers are laid for eight, and half a dozen of the officers drop in, as they feel disposed, to discuss a rare Scotch breakfast of smoked fish, salmon grills, devils and jellies, puff away at their cigars till ten (the hour of the assembly being nine). Then I am left to myself till evening, when my assistant and I sit down

to our quiet dinner, and discuss, with our Port, Men and Manners. Once in every week I give a party of eight, and as the good River Indus is a channel for luxuries as well as commerce, I can place before my friends at one-third in excess of the Bombay price, champagne, hock, madeira, sherry, port, claret, not forgetting a glass of Maraschino, and the hermetically sealed salmon and hotch-potch (all the way fra Aberdeen). And deuced good it is: the peas as big as if they had been soaked for bristling! . . .

“I wish I were provost myself here. I would be as happy as the Lord Mayor! . . .”

It was to one of these “rare Scotch breakfasts” that Pottinger sat down next morning with his brother Tom. Here he fell in with friends old and new: Captain Johnson, the Shah’s Paymaster; Charles Burnes; William Broadfoot—talented and charming—brother of the intrepid George, who was then marching up-country in charge of the King’s composite family party from Ludhiana.

The talk was chiefly of shooting prospects, a new play in rehearsal, and the latest gymkhana, and although Pottinger afterwards secured a brief interview with Burnes, he heard nothing that appreciably altered his own view of affairs. Burnes admitted that the chiefs grew more openly dissatisfied every month, and the English were, on the whole, less popular than they had been a year ago. As to the cause—well, there were many causes, naturally enough, and more or less inevitable. Women? No; no more than reason. The troops had been kept remarkably well in hand. And as for the officers, on the whole their conduct had been exemplary, for the Kabul beauties were by no means bashful, as no doubt Pottinger knew well enough. Seeing unseen, they would take violent fancies



to some passing Sahib, and think no shame of climbing secretly over the housetops till they reached his abode. Small wonder, then, that there had been occasional complaints in the city, but he had judged it wisest to take no notice, since they often sprang merely from personal malice. He opined that Pottinger would need to keep his eyes and ears very wide open in the Kohistan. But as to opening the eyes or ears of the Envoy, that was a task beyond the power of Hercules himself.

And again Pottinger went away thoughtful exceedingly, so that Tom's lively sallies fell upon deaf ears.

A day or two later came his written orders in the shape of a formal letter from the Envoy: and early in June Pottinger set his face toward the wild hill-country north of Kabul. With him, to his great satisfaction, went John Login; and Herat was still further represented by the six horsemen Pottinger had left at Jalalabad eighteen months ago. These had returned with joy to the household of the Sahib who had taught them the meaning of justice, and whom they served devotedly until the end.

#### IV

“ ABOVE—the Alps, Hindu Kush! Below me—Lombardy!”

Thus did Alexander Burnes, in one characteristic phrase, epitomize the charm of those three Afghan valleys—Charikar, Ghorbund, and Panjshir—collectively named the Kohistan<sup>1</sup> of Kabul. Why one particular corner of a region purely mountainous should have been christened the Kohistan it would need an Afghan to explain; though “It was so from the beginning” would doubtless be his luminous solution of the problem.

Forty miles north of Kabul, as the crow flies, the streams of these valleys unite and flow eastward into the rebellious district of Nijrāo, the theatre of Dōst Mahomed’s last stand. Of all the valleys under Pottinger’s charge, Nijrāo most nearly resembled a powder magazine ripe for explosion. Here, in Macnaghten’s playful phraseology, all the most incorrigibly “naughty boys” of the Kabul region foregathered to air their grievances and study how to hit back when the acceptable moment should arrive. Here the staunchest followers of the vanished Dōst found promising material to work on. For Nijrāo had never yet bowed the knee to Shah Shuja and his infidel supporters. Not even formal acknowledgment could be laid to its charge. In the main, its chiefs owned allegiance to one, Mir Musjidi, most inveterate of

<sup>1</sup> Hill-country.

rebels, and leading spirit of the region. Crippled with wounds, deprived of his estates, and dependent on brother-chiefs for his daily bread, he had held his own for two years, fighting the hated Feringhi whenever opportunity offered, and blackening their character when forced by circumstance to sheathe his sword. Though penniless, a halo of sanctity secured him from want, for among Afghans, superstition is the mainspring of charity; and the holy man sucks thereout no small advantage.

So much for Nijrão at the time that Pottinger took over charge from the late Dr. Lord's assistant, young Charles Rattray, who had done his utmost to acquaint himself with the true state of affairs, and had much instructive matter to place at Pottinger's disposal.

The chiefs of Kohistan proper were, he reported, more friendly than those of Nijrão, though even they could scarcely be called reliable, since they had reaped little advantage and much loss of influence from the new order of things.

To state their case and their grievances is practically to state those of their fellow-Khans throughout the country, and to throw light on much that afterwards befell. Their rebellion, so-called, was in effect a savage reassertion of the independence they had enjoyed under the rough and ready rule of the Amir:

Dōst Mahomed—when the mood was on—might brow-beat or dupe them in accepted Afghan fashion; but his own interests had bound him to overlook their more flagrant excesses in return for the support of their followers should quarrels arise. But the advent of Shah Shuja heralded a reversion to the old aggressive form of monarchy, backed by a power that could *compel* obedience and contribution, however unwilling, to the upkeep of the State. Savage races are proverbially impatient of

taxation, which in their case too often spells unjust exaction. Under the Dōst it had been a more or less spasmodic infliction, and official rapacity had been held in check by the combative independence of the people. But now the native collectors had little to fear so long as they evaded the arm of the Political Agent, that could reach out in all directions at once. Thus to the primal grievance of taxation had been added covert insolences and indignities, not to be tamely accepted by the most vengeful race on earth.

But there had been sops meted out also to those who professed loyalty to the Sadozai; and among the favoured ones were certain Kohistani chiefs who, in '39, had raised the insurrection that paralyzed Dōst Mahomed Khan. To these, at the close of Sale's campaign, subsidies had been promised by Prince Timur, sanctioned by Macnaghten and approved by the Shah, whereupon—believing that British pledges would be sacredly observed—"the discontented sat down and turned their attention to agriculture."

This was in the autumn of 1840, and in June, 1841, the same surface tranquillity prevailed. Pottinger promised himself a thorough tour of inspection so soon as he had gathered the reins of authority into his own hands. Meantime he had leisure to enjoy Login's companionship, to make friends with Rattray, and settle down after a fashion in the Political Agent's quarters; a group of four defensible mud "castles," placed in *echelon*, and collectively called Lughmāni. Like many other quarters assigned to officers at Kabul, these were the confiscated property of a rebel chief, who no doubt sat in the Nijrāo country, brooding on vengeance to come. The Afghan "castle" is simply a mud fort, built on the most primitive lines, a walled enclosure some hundred yards square, bastioned at each corner and entered by a single strong gate. The

walls, ranging from twenty to forty feet high, are loop-holed for muskets, and solid enough to resist the fire of small ordnance. Within, flat-roofed barns provide shelter, of much the same quality, for man and beast.

The best of these "desirable residences" had been assigned to the Political Agent, his assistant, and a Eurasian doctor named Grant. To Pottinger's lot fell a group of corner rooms, or rather byres, roughly furnished for habitation. Peeled poplars and willows did duty for rafter beams, and for roof the shavings were compounded with hard, trampled mud—a roof warranted to leak generously during the heavy spring rains.

"The carpentry work," wrote Pottinger to his favourite sister Harriet, "is the most singular I have ever before seen in a house for Europeans. We cannot live below on account of the fleas, and our passage up and down the low stairway is most dangerous. I have already broken my head twice, beside knocking the crown out of my hat, notwithstanding I am rather short. To aid these agreeable transits, wasps are never-ceasing in their attempts to lodge themselves in the bare beams, and frequently resist our passage *vi et armis*. Outside we have a wind like a hurricane blowing the greater part of twenty-four hours. However, we have fine large gardens, which my assistant has set in good order, and we have many English vegetables. Flowers have failed, but I hope to have some next year; as during the winter I will, in all probability, have plenty of time."

Yes, time there was, more than enough by far, for harassing anxiety, for bitter brooding on disaster and disgrace: no time to fulfil the hope of cultivating his garden.

But the hidden horrors of that winter were still afar off. Now it was June—June in the valleys of the Kohistan, compared by Burnes to those of Lombardy, though richer

in contrast and grander of outline than any like vision that Northern Italy can boast. In a region uniformly harsh and sterile, with a subsoil of boulders, life can only flourish in the network of ravines and canals that link valley to valley, or on the borders of streams and canals. Throughout the long winter ice and rock and boulder have it all their own way; but in June, when the melting snows and spring monsoon have wrought their miracle of transformation, it were hard to find anywhere a more striking combination of fertility and savage grandeur, of wood and water, vineyard and orchard, of meadow green, mountain grey, and ethereal snow-peaks a-glitter in the sun. Here and there the brown of clustered mud houses, or of an isolated castle, strikes the human note, and completes a picture perfect of its kind.

Pottinger's group of castles stood in the main valley of Charikar, through which ran the trade route from Kabul to the Turkistan frontier. The indispensable canal, almost parallel with the road, was beautified by an avenue of mulberry-trees, by vineyards and gardens aglow with early summer flowers. North and east and west high implacable mountains walled them in; on the west the Pughman Range, on the east the Koh-i-Safed. Only in the south toward Kabul low hills, easily traversed, linked the greater chains each to each.

Two and a half miles up the valley on the farther side of the canal stood the townlet of Charikar, guarded by the castle of its chief, Khojah Mir Khan. Here also—well commanded by the castle—were the quarters of the Charikar garrison. A regiment of Gurkhas—levied by the Shah, and officered by Englishmen—had lately relieved the Kohistanis under Login's friend, Maule. Half the new regiment consisted of young recruits, and most of the native officers were regimental failures of the Company's

service. But any shortcomings among the men were counterbalanced by four British officers of sterling quality. The Commandant, Captain Christopher Codrington, and his devoted Adjutant, John Haughton were soldiers of proven loyalty and courage; and is it not written: "Better an army of stags led by a lion, than an army of lions led by a stag"?

For the moment, however, the lions were peacefully, if uncongenially, engaged in completing half-built barracks, only a few degrees less indefensible than their larger prototype at Kabul. Codrington's heart sank at the prospect of squandering good money on accommodation so futile for an isolated regiment, supported only by a couple of light field-pieces, and the mounted escort at Lughmán, which Pottinger had wisely increased from twenty-five to seventy-five men. A troop of Anderson's Horse had indeed been detailed for Charikar; but for some reason, was never sent out. Its presence a few months later would have averted the worst. To make the whole position clear, let John Haughton's plain, soldierly indictment suffice:

"We had four walls varying from seven to twenty feet in height, pierced by two gateways east and west. The square was built on a slope so that its interior was commanded by trees bordering the canal, a hundred yards off. It was also commanded by the towers of Khojah Mir Khan's fort. Its north, south, and west faces were overlooked by a Mahomedan oratory. In front the banks of the canal and garden walls formed abundant shelter for an enemy. . . . Anyone acquainted with military matters will see that our arrangements were as bad as they well could be. The slightly defensive character which our barracks

took was in opposition to the intentions of the ruling authorities. The most rigid economy was the order of the day; and had it been possible (which it certainly was) to choose a defensible position, I feel sure that the proposal would have been negatived and the proposer would simply have brought himself into disgrace."

To his father he wrote :

"The place is charming; but I don't understand why we have been sent here, unless the Government are in a hurry to get rid of us."

Some such ironic thought occurred also to Eldred Pottinger the first time he rode out to visit his new neighbours. Maule, it appeared, had been told to build merely a barrack, at a cost not exceeding six hundred pounds. Codrington had boldly ventured a remonstrance—with the usual result; and he now declared his intention of adding corner bastions to his mud walls without further reference to Kabul authorities: a wise step on which he had reason to congratulate himself a few months later.

Pottinger rode back to his unimposing group of castles, wondering more than ever what the final upshot would be. All things conspired to confirm his conviction that the triumphal restoration was not merely unpopular, but woefully misgoverned by an ill-compounded blend of Afghan tyranny with Macnaghten's milk-and-water philanthropy. Yet the Envoy's zeal was unquestionable. It was knowledge he lacked—both of government and of men.

Well, he had asked for a full report on the state of the country: and he should be told the truth. If (in the face



of it) he would not act—let the blood of brave men be upon his head.

But the plain truth about Afghan affairs was the last thing William Macnaghten cared to face: and there you have the underlying cause of disunion between these two men. Pottinger, like Rawlinson, possessed the clear outlook and sane judgment of him who serves his country in the fullest sense of the word; while Macnaghten—high-minded gentleman though he was—suffered throughout from the myopic vision of the man so obsessed with one idea that neither the light of judgment nor of conscience can pierce the distorting fog of self-deception.

That night Pottinger sat late in his upstairs room, safe from the attentions of fleas, save for those that disturbed the dreams of his bull-terrier, Cæsar, who snored at his feet. The dog's warm body, pressed close against his master's leg, gave a grateful sense of companionship to a man singularly lonely, yet, in his secret heart, hungering always for home and human ties. Before sleep overtook him he had drafted, in rough, the report and suggestions that were to give Macnaghten the chance of saving one situation at least; and next morning a fair copy was written out for despatch. It began with a clear account of the Kohistan and of his own plans for opening up the country, followed by a soldierly proposal for strengthening the local garrison: a proposal worth citing in full.

“It appears most desirable,” he wrote, “to overawe the independent tribes; for while they are unsubdued, any disturbance about Cabool would encourage a number of well-armed and experienced skirmishers to come down on our outposts and in a strong country like Cabool such men want but an active leader to become a very inconvenient enemy.

. . . I therefore venture to submit for your consideration the propriety of stationing a force in the valley as a means of preventing any outbreak . . . for I feel assured the mountaineers would never think of making any serious attack if they knew they would have to fight their way through the valley with cavalry and artillery against them.

“It may be objected that sending out troops would cause suspicion and fear and possibly an outbreak. This, however, I do not expect. My reason for suggesting heavy artillery is to have the power of destroying castles without exposing the lives of our own soldiers; and besides the saving of time at the commencement of an insurrection, it is desirable to avail ourselves of the moral influence which a knowledge of our perfect readiness is sure to establish.”

But to the Government at Kabul, perfect readiness seemed a consummation devoutly to be avoided; and Macnaghten, as may be supposed, did not waste much time over the impracticable suggestion of a minor cantonment out at Charikar. It merely moved him to repeat his Lordship's express desire that the troops be dispersed as little as possible; adding thereto his own conviction that “while His Majesty is so strong at Kabul, the Kohistanis will never contemplate rebellion unless driven to it by extreme provocation.”

It was enough; yet Pottinger, meditating on the express desire of Government, marvelled at the inconsistency that left one unsupported Gurkha regiment fifty miles from Kabul, its very weakness more provocative than the presence of an army corps.

But such questions would ill befit a mere assistant, however high his reputation for sagacity and courage. The

decree had gone forth. Young Rattray shrugged his shoulders in disgust. He had been more than a year on the Turkistan frontier. Codrington and Haughton devoted themselves with soldierly stoicism to the completion of their ineffectual barrack-square, plus the unauthorized bastion at each corner. If the Government were anxious to be rid of them, it was not for them to make remarks. To do all that behoved them and, if needful, to die like men—that was their insignificant duty towards the Great Restoration; and, without a hint of heroics, they would fulfil it to the uttermost as a matter of course.

JULY slipped past swiftly, and on the whole peacefully, in the valleys of Kohistan. From the Ghilzai and Durani regions came rumours of renewed rebellion; and Login was recalled to the capital, where Macnaghten had temporary need of his services. The summons was no welcome one either to him or to Pottinger. They had done and endured much together, and hidden in the heart of each lay a warm regard for the other; but they parted cheerfully, as men part who are inured to the chances and changes of frontier service.

Pottinger rode out a few miles with his friend. Then Login rode on alone—and the hills received him, shutting him out of sight. They never met again.

The peaceful folk in the valley gave little trouble. They were very much occupied in gathering their multiple harvest, to the accompaniment of lively inroads from outlaws in hills; and Pottinger spent part of the month on a tour of inspection along Shah Shuja's north-eastern frontier. He visited castles innumerable, interviewed doubtful chiefs, and talked freely to the people of the country, with the result that at the end of the month Macnaghten received yet another report urging military measures more active than a mere addition to the garrison.

Pottinger now wrote frankly that rumours from Kandahar and Herat were infecting his own storm quarter. For

which reason he propounded the admirable and practical plan of marching the first division back to India via Charikar and Nijrão to Jalálabad, reducing obstreperous chiefs by the way.

Far from welcome was such plain speech and practical counsel to an Envoy whose minutes from Calcutta began and ended with injunctions to discourage everything in the shape of military movement, every proposal that implied even a trifling increase of expense.

Once again, therefore, Pottinger's attempt to avert the inevitable came to nothing. Instead of troops, a friendly Barakzai chief was deputed to open negotiations with the strong men of Nijrão; and week by week the friendly attentions of outlaws from the hills grew more daring, the petty tyrannies of native tax-collectors more galling to the chiefs of the Kohistan.

Thus did all things work diligently together for evil; and Pottinger, as the month wore on, was assailed with complaints from the people of the valley in whose eyes *he* was the real Governor, all-powerful to right their wrongs. But though Macnaghten's own rule was based on indiscriminate interference, his assistants were strictly enjoined not to meddle with internal affairs. Behold, therefore, a man of real knowledge condemned to look on with shackled hands while discontent and disloyalty flourished under his eyes.

As for the negotiations in Nijrão—conciliation is doubtless a Christian virtue, but in dealing with Afghans it should be dispensed in homœopathic doses, otherwise little mistakes arise that may breed big results. As it was, the warlike chiefs of Nijrão waxed fat on a diet of butter; and to Pottinger, at least, it was evident that the Biblical corollary was merely a question of time and opportunity.

Straws were not lacking to show which way the wind blew. The mountain robbers grew bolder still. They began to prowl round the half-finished barracks and the officers' tents. One night a musket was daringly stolen from Haughton's camp near the canal; another night the bugler awoke to find his bugle gone; and not long after an old fakir—to whom Haughton had shown kindness—told how these stolen treasures had been paraded in triumph throughout the valley of Nijrão. With folded hands the old man besought his friend to spend the winter in Kabul. He could tell nothing. He knew nothing except that there was evil in the air, and he could not withhold a word-warning from the Sahib.

Such minor portents were significant enough. But there were others—known only to Pottinger—more significant still. As early as July he had been puzzled and perturbed by complaints of a kind that could not be ignored like those of the people. They came mainly from the chiefs, and arose from a cause in which Pottinger conceived that his country's honour was involved. Briefly, the position was this: Among the many pledges given on Shah Shuja's restoration was one to raise the pay of loyal chiefs by the negative plan of exempting them from part of the land-tax—an order issued by Prince Timur and sanctioned by the British Government.

Now, one by one these men called privately on Pottinger, and each had the same tale to tell. Of a sudden, without reason given, the promised stipends were being refused them, the promised exemption ignored. Pottinger—never dreaming of State sanction—attributed this injustice to Court intrigue. He therefore wrote to Shah Shuja's Minister, Osman Khan, and for a time the deficits were made good.

August brought fresh complaints in greater numbers, and Pottinger now gave each defrauded chief a note of introduction to the Envoy himself.

Again, for a time, this wrought the desired effect, but in September many returned from Kabul unsatisfied and irate. The Lord Sahib himself had turned them away, informing them that the new arrangement was by order. This was more than Pottinger could believe. He could only suppose his notes had been prevented from reaching Macnaghten at all. Soothing the irate chiefs by an assurance that he would look into the matter himself, he wrote at once to Macnaghten, stating the whole case and the serious harm that might result if justice were not done. He marked his letter "Private Service," and begged the favour of an answer by return sowar.

It came forthwith: an answer so fraught with disaster, not to say disgrace, that Pottinger read it more than once before he grasped the truth and all that it involved. Macnaghten, it transpired, was merely carrying out Government orders. Owing to complaints received from England, it had been found necessary to reduce by one-third the gross amount paid to the militia and chiefs. Macnaghten was aware that this form of economy would prove unpopular, and he was loath to enforce it; but the order to retrench was imperative. Burnes approved the measure, and there seemed nothing else to be done.

Eldred Pottinger was not the man to accept such a conclusion unchallenged. For him it was no question of unpopularity, but of British pledges broken, British honour sullied, as—in spite of many errors—it had not been sullied yet; and that for a retrenchment which could hardly even be counted as such, since the money so

negatively given had no place in Government accounts at all.

For a while he sat motionless, leaning an elbow on the rough, littered table where he worked, reviewing the whole complication with that terrible sincerity of his, which could blink no shred of truth, however unpalatable. Steadily conviction grew in him that some attempt must be made to prevent the worst, and conviction goaded him into characteristic action.

Let him speak of it himself.

"I immediately laid before the Envoy as strong a remonstrance as became my situation, pointing out the danger likely to accrue from irritating the people in a province surrounded by rebellious districts, and more particularly the gross breach of faith which would be committed if this measure were enforced throughout the Kohistan. I begged that he would at least spare the chiefs installed last autumn—namely, those who had done good service or remained neutral during Sale's campaign against the Dōst. The Envoy replied that he could not help the reduction. His orders were peremptory; but the chiefs advanced under our knowledge last year should be considered as excused. While these measures were rendering us unpopular, the enemies of the foreign influence at Court were unceasing in their endeavours to blacken our character, encourage the outlaws, and prejudice the populace against us."

It was at this critical juncture that much capital was made out of scandalous tales concerning the partiality of Kabul beauties for Feringhi officers and men, who too readily turned this preference to their own advantage. Whether any foundation of fact underlay the mass of invention, it is not easy to say. Yet without a fire there is no smoke; and the evil, industriously tended, grew and



spread. In the Kohistan such tale-bearing, true or untrue, wrought harm incalculable. Week by week rumours of a widespread conspiracy grew more circumstantial, and Mir Musjidi went to and fro in the land sowing broadcast the seeds of rebellion.

The Gurkha officers, convinced that "something very wrong was going on," sent word to Pottinger in the hope that his knowledge might exceed their own. He bade Rattray write a line to Codrington promising him twenty-eight or forty-eight hours' notice of any hostile movement in the rebel country. So much warning he felt bound to insure them. "And I hope to God," he added fervently, "that I may be enabled to keep my word!"

For in this vital manner of gaining secret intelligence, he was hampered yet again by the panic craze for economy that had come too late.

Macnaghten's intelligence department was of the sketchiest, and mainly provided clever scoundrels with excellent opportunities for forgery. In Pottinger's case restricted rewards for information prevented the employment of reliable men, and by way of crippling him more completely, Macnaghten cavilled at the increase of his escort from twenty-five to seventy-five men.

"On what authority," he demanded, "has so large an escort been maintained? . . . As there is now one of the regular regiments stationed at Charikar a large personal escort must be unnecessary, and you will be pleased, from the 1st of October, to discharge the whole of your mounted escort, retaining only twenty-five men, including the five Heratis sanctioned in my letter of June 28th."

In the face of such penny-wise economy at so critical a moment it was hard for a practical, hot-headed man

to hold his peace. Destitute of cavalry, he was further to be denuded of the only men who could be utilized as scouts when trouble began in earnest; wherefore Macnaghten's latest order was not one to be fulfilled without remonstrance. No doubt little good would come of it. At best he would probably be offered a handful of men from the Shah's Irregular Horse, which, in spite of zealous British officers, had so far proved neither satisfactory nor reliable. Now, the sowars of Pottinger's escort, besides a good record of service, possessed the advantage of being Kohistanis, and from them alone could he hope to glean any inkling of hostile movements in the rebel country; which points he urged as decisively as his position would allow.

Three days later came Macnaghten's reply. It was precisely what Pottinger expected. The unwelcome order was confirmed, and his own argument ignored. His Kohistanis must go, and they went—not without lamentation. Public expenditure was reduced by four hundred rupees a month, and fifty good men were dismissed, probably to join the rebels, who could promise them stirring work in the near future.

Day by day rumours grew more threatening, facts more difficult to verify. One thing alone was certain: these independent mountaineers, who had revolted, not long since, against the tyranny of Dōst Mahomed, were now ripe for revolt against the more consummate tyranny of the Shah.

By the third week in September it was plain that some decisive step must be taken to scotch the snake if killing were beyond all hope; and since protests by letter had proved unavailing, Pottinger decided on riding into Kabul to reason with Macnaghten in person; to denounce the wrong and danger of practising economy at the cost of

honour, and insist on the saving grace of action before it was yet too late.

The quest was a noble one; and characteristic of the man, whose sagacity and courage might well give weight to his grave words of warning—if so be there were any that would heed.

But Sir William Macnaghten, envied of all the envious, now began to find himself wedged between two opposing forces—both inexorable, both outside his power to control. On one hand the Afghans cried out unceasingly: "Give, give! Or leave us to our own devices." On the other hand, Lord Auckland, hard pressed by the Home Government, kept a firmer hand on the lid of his treasure chest—the one real power in the land.

Authorities in Leadenhall Street, who had proudly fathered the military promenade of '39, were less eager to acknowledge their offspring in '41. A British Ministry, which had "made the Shah Shuja policy its own" found itself, on the eve of downfall, anxious to withdraw at any price from a conquest "the evils of which could not stand scrutiny, should power pass into other hands." Hence letters addressed to Lord Auckland "in a tone of complaint and reprehension quite inconsistent with the spirit of approbation that had marked the opening of the war."

The note of remonstrance had been sounded also in the spring of '41 by the Court of Directors. In a minute setting forth a frank and statesman-like view of the Afghan problem, they had urged Lord Auckland to make immediate choice between the only alternatives open to him—a speedy retreat from Afghanistan or a large addition to the Army of Occupation. They were convinced that he had no middle course to pursue "with safety and honour."

But the weak man and the man in a false position may

always be trusted to shuffle into the readiest compromise available; in this case, retrenchment. Lord Auckland had been warned against the middle course; yet that middle course was chosen—with what tragic sacrifice of safety and honour the sequel proved.

## VI

"BELIEVE me, my dear sir, the facts I have stated are common knowledge in the Kohistan. If we wish to avoid a serious outbreak in these parts there are only two courses open to us. Either the Shah must keep his pledged word, or we must act on the offensive, and nip rebellion in the bud. For myself, I can only urge most strongly the wisdom of seizing so excellent an opportunity to rid ourselves of the King's most dangerous enemies."

Thus spoke Pottinger, as he sat with Macnaghten in the sanctum where, a month earlier, he had listened sceptically to roseate visions of peace and goodwill. Now it was Macnaghten's turn to listen; and though the voice was the voice of the alarmist, the words were plainly those of a man who had thought and observed long before he took upon himself the thankless task of speech.

For this reason Macnaghten could not snap his fingers at the whole affair; and while he sat inwardly digesting the last practical proposition, Pottinger spoke again.

"If I may presume to offer an opinion, I submit that the first alternative is best, seeing the loss of honour involved in this new policy of reduction."

Macnaghten admitted the awkward fact. "It is a regrettable business," he agreed in all sincerity. "Unfortunately my orders are imperative."

"But surely there are other directions? Almost any form of retrenchment would be more honourable and

more profitable than this of the subsidies, which are, after all, just compensation for privileges foregone."

"My dear Pottinger, do you suppose I have not already put that before his Lordship as strongly as becomes me? The answer is always the same. If subsidies must be paid, let the King defray them from his own resources. God help the poor man and his resources! I have most reluctantly cut down his household expenses; and it seems unfair to heap further mortification on one whom we exalted to serve our own ends. It is a bad look-out, but the chiefs must swallow their bitter pill and make the best of it."

"Or the worst of it, which is much more probable," Pottinger corrected grimly. "I have good reason to believe that already a mutual league exists between the Ghilzais and Nijrābis to rise in a body on the first pretext."

Macnaghten waved aside the exaggerated idea. "Oh no—no! Not so bad as that, I hope. Personally I should not be at *all* averse to a little military fireworks in your quarter before we lose our extra men, *if* you can secure the General's consent."

Thankful for something definite to work upon, Pottinger rode off to Elphinstone's house.

But the old man's health was completely broken; and having sent in his resignation, he dreaded entanglement in any campaign, however small. Besides, he had heard most unpromising accounts of the Kohistan country as a theatre for military operations.

"From *whom*, sir?" Pottinger demanded, with repressed impatience. "Surely my opinion deserves equal consideration with that of officers who have probably never set foot in the country. If not, then perhaps you will permit me to conduct all the officers of the Quarter-

master-General's department—or any others you may choose—on a tour of observation through the Kohistan. But, believe me, time is everything. Whatever is decided on should be done *at once*."

He might almost as well have asked the sun to move backwards. Whatever Elphinstone may have been in younger days, his unhappiest fault at this period was a paralyzing lack of initiation and of confidence in his own judgment—however sound. A proposition so uncompromising could by no means be ceded offhand. It needed thinking over and discussing—favourite processes wherewith the Kabul garrison became all too familiar within the next few months.

Such half-hearted assent was but one degree better than refusal; and Pottinger, most quietly persistent of men, promptly rode on to the house of Alexander Burnes. Whatever his failings, he at least knew Afghanistan and the Afghans. He could not, in reason, be so blind as Macnaghten, nor so hivering as the invalid General. Yet with him Pottinger fared worse rather than better. From the first he had set his face against sending troops to Nijrão. He frankly admitted that it had been a "hard job" to stave off Pottinger's campaign—to stave off, in plain terms, the one move which might conceivably have saved the situation.

It was a singularly inopportune moment for demanding prompt action from any one of the Kabul triumvirate—a General who had resigned, and counted the days till he could be gone; an Envoy, already anticipating translation to a more tranquil sphere, also counting the days; a Resident, paid merely to *reside*, congenially occupied between his books and his harem; keeping a keener eye on the Indian post-bag than on the machinations of Afghan chiefs.

As for Shah Shuja, nominal head of all, he sat day by day in his dreary room of state brooding upon the vanity of human wishes, chafing more and more at his anomalous position, which he frankly declared he "did not understand." Of what use merely to sit upon the *masnad*<sup>1</sup> when he could trust no man in his own country; when all were engaged in setting him against the British, and the British against him. In everything these foreigners had their own way; yet all went wrong. Even at Ludhiana he had enjoyed more power than at Kabul, and in the end there would be nothing for it but a pilgrimage to Mecca—unfailing panacea of kingship uncrowned. So he, too, like the rest, had begun to turn the eyes of his mind elsewhere.

One man there was—though a mere underling—who possessed special facilities for keeping in touch with the seething undercurrent of affairs in Kabul:—Mohun Lal, munshi and devoted adherent of Burnes; a Kashmirian youth of moderate talent and more than moderate conceit of himself. It can at least be recorded to his credit that he served his British friends faithfully in their evil day; and at this time saw more plainly than they the inimical trend of events, the increasing friction between cantonments and Bala Hissar.

Such talk as Pottinger had with the munshi did not serve to lighten the load upon his heart. But those irksome days of waiting on the General's leisure were not entirely without compensation; for in the course of them he came to know three men with whom he was soon to be intimately associated in suffering and effort, in endurance and ultimate achievement. These were Colin Troup of the 48th Bengal Infantry, now in the Shah's service; Vincent Eyre, of the Bengal Artillery—hand-

<sup>1</sup> Throne.



some, gifted, full of life and humour; and last, the man to whom Pottinger drew closer than to any other, save Login, in the way of friendship—Colin Mackenzie.

If Eyre was handsome—with his bold black eyes and finely marked features—Mackenzie was something more. When he landed in India fifteen years earlier—a very Adonais for grace and vigour, with eyes like the sky, and a crop of golden curls like a child—the Adjutant of his regiment declared him “the most beautiful boy he had ever beheld,” and now at four-and-thirty he was still a radiant being, vividly alive; seemingly compact of fire and spirit, rather than of dust that to dust returns. To indite his graces of form and feature—the lithe limbs and shapely shoulders, the laughing eyes and imaginative brow—is still to miss the essence of the man, the talisman that drew all hearts.

In Colin Mackenzie the transparent enthusiasm and simplicity of a child were united with the bearing and courtesy of a King. As his name infers, the best blood of the Highlands ran in his veins, and although he set little store by his pedigree, he owed much to those mysterious hereditary influences which mere environment can neither eradicate nor produce. True, there was more of fire than force, more of ardour than cool judgment in his composition; but taken altogether he was a creature of rare courage and charm, rich in the essential stuff of which heroes are made. And already he had drunk deep of the cup of love and suffering. Husband, father, and widower before he was thirty, he had gone home, broken in health and spirits, and there had fallen in love at sight with a girl worthy in every way of his chivalrous devotion. Her parents, loath to let their daughter marry a subaltern who would carry her off to India, bade him come again in four years if he were still of the same mind. So without a

word spoken to Helen Douglas, except in the way of friendship, he had returned to India; and, though chosen for Afghan political service a year earlier, he had not reached Kabul till July. Here he had found his bosom friend George Broadfoot—a Captain of Madras Infantry—who had safely escorted through the Punjab and the Afghan defiles the Royal family party from Ludhiana. He had reached Kabul late in June, and there remained in charge of the Shah's sappers and miners.

He also—like Mackenzie, whom he dearly loved—was a hero in the grain, though on a greater scale, as Mackenzie himself would have been the first to avow. A giant in intellect and resolution—head and shoulders above the common run of men—he stands clearly portrayed by Henry Havelock, in a tribute of equal sincerity and truth. “To love and admire him, it was only necessary to understand—and *not to envy* . . . the vigour and grasp of his mind, the largeness and tenderness of his heart, and the more than Roman self-devotion of his character.”

Of these three—Havelock, Mackenzie, and Broadfoot—Mackenzie alone remained at Kabul, where he acquitted himself in a manner worthy of his lineage and his name. Shortly after his arrival he had gone with two other officers on a tour of pleasure through the Kohistan; and frankly rejoiced at his good fortune in returning just in time to meet the “hero of Herat.” The two men were drawn to one another instinctively by that mysterious law of opposites which works almost as unfailingly in friendship as in love. But upon this occasion they only saw enough of each other to realize that they would gladly see more; for there came news from the Kohistan that rendered Pottinger anxious to be back at his post.

The General, it seemed, was still deliberating; but Pottinger could no longer wait upon his leisure. Bitterly

disappointed and disgusted, he turned his back once more upon Kabul, little dreaming as he rode away under the clear September sky in what adventurous and tragical fashion he would re-enter the gates of the "great folly in the plain."

## VII

If September had been a month of signs and tokens, October proved a month of alarms and excursions significant enough to enlighten any man whose ears were not hermetically sealed against the clamour of facts.

Scarcely had Pottinger left cantonments, when news arrived of trouble in Zurmat, whither Captain Hay and a few Afghan levies had been sent to collect revenue and capture a couple of noted robbers. By false reports, Hay had been led to attack a fort too strong for him. He was now in an awkward strait; and the force that should have marched on Nijrão was promptly despatched to Zurmat. With it went Captain Macgregor, Political Officer of the Jalálabad district, to coerce the fiery Afghan and prevent needless bloodshed.

The force being gone, Macnaghten could no longer defer the task of revealing to the Kabul and Ghilzai chiefs the urgent need for reducing State expenses and the awkward effect of this process upon their own pockets.

The case of the Ghilzais was harder, in one respect, than that of the Kohistanis. Not only were they to lose their privilege of certain exemptions, but also an annual subsidy, withdrawn by Dōst Mahomed and restored by Shah Shuja, on condition that they should keep the passes open for traffic between Kabul and Peshawur. This yearly stipend, whereby they set great store, amounted to no more than three thousand pounds; for

the saving of which paltry sum Macnaghten was called upon to perpetrate a breach of faith and risk raising a storm of resentment that would shake his cherished Afghan policy to its foundations. Better, infinitely better to have recalled Burnes, who drew more than that amount for doing precisely nothing.

In justice to William Macnaghten, it should be remembered that he shrank from executing so palpable an act of folly—and worse than folly. But weary of vain remonstrance, he believed himself bound to give way—and chance the result. Yet were there others of more resolute fibre—Pottinger and Colin Mackenzie among them—who believed otherwise. For the man who is master of his own soul knows that there are times when refusal to obey even a Government order may be his truest duty to that Government—and, what is more, to his country; knows that one in authority at so perilous an outpost should be an absolute pachyderm as to reproaches; should be at all times willing to sacrifice his position rather than his well-founded opinion, because such obstinacy is the best service he can render to the State.

But such obstinacy is born, not made. To expect it from a Macnaghten were unreasonable and unjust. His courage was not of that quality, nor was he a man to sacrifice his position for any consideration. For him the word of Government was as the Word of God. Wherefore, at the end of September, he called an assembly of the Kabul and Ghilzai chiefs, and told them the plain truth in plain terms.

They listened with the baffling phlegm of Orientals, betraying neither emotion nor surprise. They merely shook their heads, caressed their beards and muttered "*Wah-wah!*" in deep-chested tones. A remonstrance or two was put forward; but Macnaghten made it clear that

these could avail them nothing: whereat they rose up and departed, quietly and orderly as they had come.

Being gone, the duty-ridden Euvoy breathed a sigh of relief. The ordeal was over. They had accepted the inevitable like men.

He was mistaken. The ordeal was yet to come. For he had read his Æsop's fables to small purpose, and had still to learn that the wolf is most dangerous when he arrays him like a lamb. Pottinger was justified of his uncredited belief. Between the Ghilzai and Nijrão leaders understanding was complete. For months their pride had been brought low, their independence curbed; for months the red flame of vengeance had burned in their hearts, awaiting the acceptable moment to leap forth unashamed.

Now, in the last resort, they went boldly to their puppet King, laid before him their grievances and craved his indulgence, with a view to discovering how much true power was permitted him by those who ruled in his name. The Shah's answer left little room for doubt. Disappointed, embittered, and loath to see Burnes—whom he hated—step into Macnaghten's place, he made answer sullenly: "Fools and blind! Why come ye to me? Hath not Osman Khan—through lip service to the Lord Sahib—more power in his finger than I in all my body? As for yourselves—your remedy is in your own hands. *Bismillah!* Have the chiefs of Afghanistan turned cowards that they cannot strike a blow for the honour of their country?"

It was a challenge—no less; a challenge such as that which wrought the murder of Becket. Mohun Lal declared that these "sad and severe words" were not intended by Shah Shuja as an incitement to open rebellion; but the implication was plain as daylight to

the chiefs. Not only was their own power gone, but also the power of their King. All was in readiness, and by this last indignity, this flagrant breach of faith, the hated Feringhis had sealed their own doom.

The Shah had spoken. It was the signal.

## VIII

AND while the city brooded darkly on vengeance, in cantonments all was cheerful preparation for changes, welcome beyond measure to those concerned.

Sir William was at last formally appointed Governor of Bombay; leaving Burnes to fill his place, till the pleasure of Government should be known. His Afghan experience had been unique. He would not have missed it for the world. But two years of hard work and intermittent anxiety had told upon his health and his nerves; and Macnaghten rejoiced at the prospect of a change as congenial as it was complimentary. Lawrence's health had been failing also, and he was advised to leave the country for a year. Great, then, was his satisfaction on hearing that his beloved Chief had won Lord Auckland's consent to take him down as Military Secretary to Bombay. Lady Macnaghten was packing her innumerable trunks in happy anticipation of social triumphs to come. Elphinstone, now almost bedridden, was making his final arrangements to accompany the party; and Colin Mackenzie, seeing no political opening for himself, had decided to return with them as far as Peshawur.

They would be royally escorted. Sale's division was warned to be in readiness, that all might set out so soon as the troops returned from Zurmat. The thrill and stir of departure was in the air.

Brigadier Shelton, from his camp at Siah Sung, looked



on at the good fortune of others with envious eyes. From the first he had hated the country, the more so when he found that his lot was to be cast under canvas, instead of in a comfortable house, as became his rank; and his temper, none of the pleasantest, was not improved by failure to secure the right of taking over Sale's quarters on his departure.

And what of Burnes?

The beginning of his last month on earth found this most mercurial being in a very mixed frame of mind. A man of considerable talent and energy, he had suffered the hard experience of being overrated at the start and underrated as time went on. The strain of imprudence and instability in his nature had shaken Lord Auckland's original confidence in him; and there can be little doubt that Burnes had recognized this—bitterly. But now—at last, the cloud was lifting; the stumbling-block that had debarred him from supreme control was on the eve of removal. Whether the appointment were permanent or no, he would get in the thin end of the wedge. And yet! . . .

Nothing dulls the edge of achievement like over-long delay, and Burnes—the eager, the ambitious—drew near, without elation, to the summit of desire.

Meanwhile, the rest were cheerfully occupied in preparing to auction their superfluous belongings: when lo! like a bolt from the blue, came word that the Eastern Ghilzais had risen in a body, plundered a big *kafila* near Tazin, and blocked up all the passes between Kabul and Jalálabad.

It was the prelude; the first thunder-roll of universal storm. But to the dwellers in the "folly on the plain," it seemed no more than a local outburst of temper at a

very inopportune moment. The Ghilzais' pockets had been touched; and they were hitting back in their own playful fashion. But British troops could hit harder; and soon all would be well.

For the uninitiated such a conclusion was natural enough. Burnes and Macnaghten should have known better; but there is proof in plenty that they did not.

On the 1st of October it was known that the passes were blocked. On the 2nd, Macnaghten persuaded his King to send a flying message bidding the Ghilzais return to their allegiance, and promising that any just complaints should have consideration. So far, well enough. But the messenger chosen was one Humza Khan, Governor of the Ghilzais, whose own stipend had been cut, and who had been forward in urging resistance—a choice incredible as it was futile.

On the 2nd of October, then, the King's emissary set out with praiseworthy alacrity on his errand:—an olive-branch in one hand, the other—in effect—“stuck out behind his back to signal ‘Strike again!’” And next day Macnaghten, as was his wont, penned a long screed to his most favoured correspondent, Rawlinson, at Kandahar.

“I am suffering a little anxiety just now, as the Eastern Ghilzais have turned *Yaghee*, in consequence, I believe, of the reduction of their allowances. . . . They are very kind in breaking out just at the moment most opportune for our purposes. The troops will take them *en route* to India.”

Thus Macnaghten; and Burnes, in the heart of the city—with a paid spy for newswriter and the zealous Mohun Lal at his elbow—also treated the outbreak with contempt. “A mere tempest in a teapot,” he assured George Broadfoot, who shrewdly suspected otherwise. In vain did Mohun Lal report that all the principal chiefs, after their

interview with the King, had signed a solemn engagement—writ upon the sacred leaves of the Koran—to rid the country of foreigners and infidels. As usual among Afghans, one of the minor conspirators had turned traitor in the hope of reward. The Koran, said he, had been sent into the country, that fresh signatures might be gleaned. At a word from Burnes—a word tipped with gold—the incriminating book should be seized and brought to Kabul, whereby the British might know who were their enemies and who their friends. Mohun Lal urged acceptance of this offer, but Burnes pooh-poohed the whole tale.

There had been whispered warnings also in the Envoy's ear, hints of treachery brewing; but he had merely thanked the officious, and passed on unperturbed. Now treachery spoke plain in the sudden, ominous stroke that cut off all communication with India; and within a few days Burnes received proof more decisive still that the officious had indeed spoken truth.

On the morning of that fateful 2nd of October, two officers had left Kabul for Peshawur, escorted by twenty horsemen, with never a thought of adventure by the way. News of the rising followed upon their heels and saved them from immediate death that lurked within the jaws of the Khurd Kabul Pass. After brief delay, they were joined by a loyal chief, Mahomed Azim Khan, and four hundred horse. The chief brought a note from Burnes bidding them join the bearer, who had promised he would see them safely to Gandanak. Avoiding Khurd Kabul, the little party tried another route, only to find that every available pass was a hornets' net of Ghilzais, and they must needs fight their way to Tazin.

Happily for Captain Gray and his friend, their guide proved himself sterling metal; though temptation must have been severe when, at Tazin, the Ghilzai leaders offered

him three thousand rupees a piece for the "infidel dogs," without whom he might pass on untouched. Behind them were Ghilzais, before them Ghilzais and again Ghilzais without number, yearning to christen their rocks with infidel blood. The passes toward Gandamak swarmed with them. But Azim Khan—bold as he was staunch—struck up into the mountains by a mere goat-track, and so brought his charges to comparative safety in the valley of Lughmán.

It was now the morning of the 6th, four days since they left Kabul; and to the two British officers it had become painfully clear that here was no impulsive outburst of annoyance, but—as Pottinger had hinted—a great concerted uprising with one definite end in view. To their own conviction was added fresh confirmation from the lips of Mahomed Azim Khan, who told them privately of his fears for their ultimate fate, since the word had gone forth that all Afghanistan should make one cause of it and expel or murder every Feringhi in the land.

No discredit to those isolated Englishmen if their hearts failed them as they listened. Their first thought was for fellow-countrymen at Kabul, on the eve of marching down to Peshawur, all unprepared for the parting benedictions that awaited them by the way.

Surely, by some means, a word of warning could be sent, and Azim Khan promised to do his best. A trooper was found ready to ride there by unfrequented paths and bring back word of reply for a consideration of twenty rupees, to be paid on his return. Thereupon Gray wrote officially to Sir Alexander Burnes, recording their misadventures, and warning him, in plain terms, that treachery was at their doors. He named his authority and extolled the gallantry of the chief.

On the morning of the 7th that letter sped towards

Kabul; and very soon the trooper brought back proof of its delivery under the hand of Burnes, who sent an acknowledgment, merely, to Azim Khan; never a word to Gray.

This set the two young officers wondering whether, by any incredible possibility, they had spent their money in vain. The letter, being official, should by rights have been handed on to the General and Envoy; but both men knew something of Burnes, who might conceivably have resented their warning as "interference" in a matter outside their sphere.

Yet apart from such trivialities of officialdom, was it conceivable that, in the face of a circumstantial warning, Burnes and Macnaghten could still walk in blindness, still refuse to face the truth?

## IX

ON that very 7th of October, William Macnaghten had arrived at the conclusion that it *might* be well to send a small force in advance of Sale's division—with which he and the General would march—to clear the Khurd Kabul and punish the “impudent rascals” who had dared to take up a position not fifteen miles from the capital!

During the past five days he had still remained sanguine outwardly; still believed himself so within. But the depths had been stirred by intermittent qualms; by whisperings—the faintest—of ugly possibilities that set his nerves on edge and wrought him to a pitch of irritability bewildering to those who had known him always as the most courteous and kindly of men. The idea of leaving the country disturbed for Burnes to earn the merit of pacifying it rankled bitterly; and on the 3rd he had written to Macgregor bidding him return with all despatch, never doubting that with a wave of his political wand tranquillity would be restored.

Meantime there was no denying that something ought to be done, were it only in the way of “demonstration”: a military move better beloved of politicals than of soldiers. Result—on the 7th, Colonel Monteath of the 35th N.I. was warned to have his regiment ready for marching at an hour's notice. He would be supported by a squadron of the 5th Bengal Cavalry, two guns and a hundred Sappers; so much information was vouchsafed

him; no more. To George Broadfoot, Commandant of the Sappers, the order was a godsend. It released his pent-up energies, and gave promise of action, for which the whole situation clamoured. Dowered with a clear-eyed perception that amounted to genius, it had not taken long to discover that "both Burnes and Macnaghten were grievously wrong, and in the same way; though Burnes would have managed a bad system better than Macnaghten."

That night he spent in the Resident's house, and sat up till near daylight speaking out his mind vigorously to the man who should have been foremost in realizing the significance of portents visible to the blindest. Broadfoot found him for once much shaken in his own opinions; yet, on the 8th, when Gray's letter arrived, no word of it seems to have reached cantonments.

Broadfoot himself spent that distracting day chiefly in cantering to and fro from the Mission bungalow to the General's quarters and back again, vainly seeking information as to the services required of him, the strength of the enemy and the chances of serious opposition. Before leaving the city, he sent an order to the smiths and armourers for an immediate supply of mining-tools—all his own having gone to Zurmat. His orderly brought back the disconcerting answer that no artificer in Kabul would work for a Feringhi. They had occupation enough in forging arms for another purpose of equal importance.

To Broadfoot the message struck an ominous note; but Burnes had an explanation ready to hand. The arms were probably needed for certain tribes about to migrate. The refusal was sheer insolence. He would send an order himself, and all would be well. The order sped forth accordingly—and all was not well.

Then George Broadfoot quietly took the law into his

own hands. He went straight to the bazaar, gave his orders, left a few sepoy to insure their execution, and on the morrow all he needed came to hand—"the best ever done for us in the city."

So much achieved, he hied him to cantonments on the morning of the 8th for further instructions from Colonel Monteath, of the 35th N.I., commanding the little force. But to wrest mining-tools from inimical Afghans was an easy task compared with that of wresting information from the British authorities at Kabul. Monteath knew nothing beyond the bare fact that he was to march on Jalálabad, and flatly refused to apply for further information.

"Sheer waste of breath and energy!" he declared with pardonable heat. "*I* know these people too well! It's not the custom here to consult or even instruct commanders of expeditions. We are sent on wild-goose chases, hounded into scrapes, and left to tackle them as best we can. If the Envoy's politicals pull us out, it's a feather in *his* cap. If they fail, *we* get all the kicks. I've had two years of it, Broadfoot, and I'm damned if *I* stir hand or foot except to obey orders!"

Such was the spirit bred by consistent misrule, even in soldiers of zeal and ability. But it had early been written of Broadfoot that his was "a spirit no difficulty could impede; no second-hand experience satisfy." Doubtless Monteath spoke truth; yet it behoved him none the less to do what he could.

Off he went, therefore, on his thankless errand. First to the Commissary of Ordnance, Vincent Eyre, where he set in train all that could be done without fuller knowledge; then to the General, whom he found very ill in bed. The kind old man insisted on rising and being supported to his study. But the effort so exhausted him that Broadfoot regretted having come, the more so when he discovered



that even the fountain-head of authority had no fuller knowledge of details than Monteath; and, like Monteath, shirked asking questions on a matter that he himself should have arranged.

In common fairness to Broadfoot, he at last gave him a private note to the Envoy, begging the latter to grant the Sapper's reasonable demand for instructions. But Macnaghten—more irritated and anxious by now than he cared to confess—was in no mood for awkward questions, even from Broadfoot, who had won high favour by his services to the Royal family.

"My dear sir, how should *I* know how many Ghilzais you will meet?" he queried irritably, "or foretell whether they mean to fight? Personally I believe we're exaggerating the whole business, but I don't feel called upon to turn prophet for the benefit of the General. State all your wants to him, and I'll sanction whatever he suggests. Stay—I'll write him a note."

Armed with this supposed olive-branch, Broadfoot sped back to Elphinstone, marvelling at Macnaghten's unwonted ill-temper. Indeed, between an irritable Envoy and a General far too weak and excitable for business, Broadfoot's quest seemed like to justify Monteath's denunciation. For the note proved no olive-branch. It merely wrought the sick man to renewed agitation and bitter complaint.

He read it aloud with querulous emphasis.

"Who would suppose from *that*," he demanded, flinging it aside, "that *I* am in command here? Command? Ever since my arrival I've been badgered out of my life, deprived of my rightful authority, reduced from a General to a Lord-Lieutenant's high constable, and an ill-informed one at that! Here we are with the passes blocked, India cut off, troops in plenty, yet powerless to strike a blow before it is too late. By God, it's scandalous!"

With one so ill and so obviously upset practical talk was impossible. Broadfoot tactfully changed the subject, and after some discussion of minor details took his leave.

Back once more to the Mission bungalow—balked, yet persistent—rode that indomitable soldier. Undismayed by peevishness and irritation, he established himself in Macnaghten's sanctum, determined there to remain till he had at least wrested from his host a few facts to work upon. But with all the will in the world, Macnaghten had none to give. Macgregor, it seemed, was the only man who knew anything of the country and the chiefs. Better wait, perhaps, till his return from Zurmat.

"To tell you the truth," concluded the Envoy hopefully, "I quite expect the villains to send in their submission this evening. Should they fail, Monteath might march to Butkhak by way of a demonstration. *That* will terrify them, and bring them to their knees."

Broadfoot looked thoughtful. "Suppose it doesn't? What then?" he asked quietly; and Macnaghten's irritation revived.

"In the event of that remote possibility, you can halt there till Macgregor returns from Zurmat."

At that George Broadfoot up and spoke with all the conviction that was in him. Straightly, yet with all due respect, he denounced any operation that savoured of half measures. Prepare diligently, make no move till the troops can march in full force, then never halt for a moment till the enemy is utterly destroyed: there you have the gist of his superlatively sound advice. Would that it had prevailed!

But on that critical morning of October William Macnaghten was in a mood so passionate and unreasonable that Broadfoot scarcely knew him for the kindly natured man who had been, from the first, so consistently his

friend. Vigorous counsel proved more than futile. It goaded him into open anger.

"My good sir, you are making mountains out of mole-hills!" he declared hotly. "Treating a contemptible local disturbance as if the whole country was at our throats! I tell you the Eastern Ghilzais are the most cowardly of all Afghans. If we but rattle a few sabres they'll bolt at sight. I am sorry our views differ so widely, but my instructions have been given. We are not going forth to war. It's a peaceful march to Jalálabad. And as for you and your Sappers, twenty men with pickaxes will be quite enough to knock the stones from under the gun-wheels."

Broadfoot rose and bowed stiffly.

"Very well, sir. Then there is no more to be said. Twenty of my men. Those are my orders?"

"Not at all—not at all. My *opinion* merely, given at the General's request. Get your orders from *him*. He is responsible for the numbers required."

So for the third time that day Broadfoot rode back on his tracks and sent up his name to the General, whom he found more than ever lost and perplexed. Matters were no-wise improved by the presence of Elphinstone's evil genius, Captain Grant, A.A.G. His abuse of the Envoy and insolent bearing toward his sick Chief pained Broadfoot exceedingly; the more so that the old man, instead of rebuking his junior, made feeble attempts to soothe him, without success.

Grant roughly advised the General to ignore Macnaghten and the Sappers.

"Neither they nor their tools were needed. Monteath had more than enough men." And the oracle, having spoken, vanished behind a newspaper, answering all further appeals with a curt "*You know best.*"

Needless to say, the whole interview proved fruitless as

those that had gone before. Elphinstone denounced the move as objectionable, but did not see how he could prevent it. Finally, after due vacillation, he gave Broadfoot leave to tell Macnaghten of his disapproval, in the hope of inducing the Envoy to countermand his own order.

Vain hope! Broadfoot—back yet again in the sanctum of the civil power—used all the tact and reasoning at his command; but unanswerable criticism of the cherished demonstration scheme was more than Macnaghten's jarred nerves could endure.

"Confound it all, Captain Broadfoot!" he cried out angrily. "If you are so apprehensive that Monteath's move will bring on an attack, you can remain behind. *You* are not indispensable. There are plenty of others."

Broadfoot was on his feet again, the hot blood tingling in his veins.

"I came at the General's request, sir," said he, "but I cannot stay to hear such language—from any man."

He bowed very low; and, without waiting for an answer, walked out of the room. Macnaghten followed. Neither man spoke. Broadfoot called for his horse, and gathered up the reins. Before he mounted, the Envoy came forward holding out his hand—ruffled still, yet regretful that, to Broadfoot of all men, he should have been causelessly irritable and unjust. Tongue-tied both, yet with a cordial grip of hands, the two men parted—not to meet again.

Riding back to his quarters, Broadfoot once more looked in on Elphinstone, only to find him in bed again, worn out and dispirited by the day's events. Touched to the heart, Broadfoot stayed on a while, listening patiently to a reiteration of his grievances against circumstances in general and Macnaghten in particular. When at length he rose to go, the old man clung to his hand, comforted

by the quietness and confidence that emanate from strength.

"Come and see me again before you leave," he said earnestly. "If this move is not countermanded, and if you really have to go out, for God's sake clear the passes quickly so that I may get away! Should any complications arise, I am utterly unfit to cope with them—unfit in body and mind; and so I have told Lord Auckland many times. I ought never to have come to this country; and even if I get away now, the chances are ten to one I shall never see Home again."

With that pitiful lamentation echoing in his mind, George Broadfoot rode on home, to reflect, not without bitterness, on a strenuous day's work empty of result—a day's work worth recording, since it reveals the fine temper of the man and throws a lurid light on one of the main elements in the Kabul tragedy, the tragedy of a house divided against itself.

THE march of Monteath's force to Butkhak ushered in the third act of that bewildering tragedy; and straightway Broadfoot's derided prophecy was fulfilled.

That night, as the Kabul garrison retired to rest, they were startled by volleys of musketry and the unmistakable note of the jezail. Sounds so threatening told their own story, and confirmation came with dawn. The 35th N.I. had been attacked; the Khurd Kabul bristled with Ghilzais, and there could be no question of marching to Jalálabad till it had been cleared.

Orders were issued that Sale's force should march at once, clear the pass, and then fall back on Butkhak to escort the Envoy's party that would join him there directly the troops should arrive from Zurmat. No word or thought, even now, of the new muskets demanded by Sale. The whole four thousand were left lying idle in the magazine to the ultimate advantage of Akbar Khan.

On the 11th all was in readiness. The cheery old Brigadier, most affectionate of men, took hurried leave of wife and daughter, commended them, for the moment, to Macnaghten's care, and rode cheerfully off, looking to meet them again in less than a week.

With his division there went two regiments of infantry, well supported by guns and cavalry, by Sappers, and two hundred Jezailchis (Afghan marksmen) under one Syud Mahomed Khan, called by his English friends the Laird

of Pughmán, and by the Afghans, for his superlative courage, Ján Fishán Khan, "he who flings away his life upon his foes." Never was name more justly given, and throughout all the exigencies of that terrible winter, the enemies of the British were the enemies of Ján Fishán Khan.

It was a fine force, all told, the flower of the Kabul garrison, needing only leadership and free scope for action to nip even formidable rebellion in the bud. So thought Macnaghten, heedless of urgent officials from Pottinger, strong in the belief that "Fighting Bob" would carry all before him: and the troops being gone, he sat down at his study table to encourage Rawlinson with a characteristic letter, writ in his liveliest vein. The pen moved over the paper as readily as the sanguine thoughts flowed through his mind.

"'One down, t'other come on' is the principle with these vagabonds, and lucky for us it is so! . . . The Eastern Ghilzais are now in an uproar and our communications completely cut off. This state of things—*Inshallah!*—will not last long. Only imagine the impudence of the rascals in having taken up a position with four or five hundred men in the Khurd Kabul Pass! I hope they will be driven out of that to-day or to-morrow, but the pass is an ugly one to force. . . . This *émeute* is particularly provoking just as I am about to quit Afghanistan. I had hoped to leave the country in perfect tranquillity; and I still think it will be quieter than ever it was after this insurrection has been put down. . . ."

Ay, after; but meantime the "vagabonds" were giving Sale a taste of their quality. His force, picking up Monteath's at Butkhak, had to fight its way through every step of the Khurd Kabul defile, the 13th and 35th crowning its almost inaccessible heights, while the guns and Sappers,

under Michael Dawes and Colin Mackenzie, forced the pass itself in gallant style.

Unhappily, on the heels of bold achievement followed an error of judgment to rob it of result. Once through the pass, Monteath's regiment, Dawes's guns, and a party of Sappers were encamped on the farther side, under the ægis of Macgregor, while the rest returned to Butkhak for those that were to join them before the middle of the month.

But Delay—that evil genius of the whole Kabul tragedy—had already begun her deadly work. Though Macgregor had returned and caught up the force, day followed day without any sign of more troops. Sale, who had been wounded in the first onset, lay waiting impatiently at Butkhak. Monteath—isolated and useless—waited still more impatiently in the Khurd Kabul Valley, where the Ghilzais made good their chance of harassing his little force. On the 15th Mackenzie was peremptorily recalled to the capital, which he had left “without leave or licence,” while Broadfoot received a severe reprimand on account of superfluous tools—a reprimand crossed on the road by an urgent demand for more. It seemed, he wrote afterwards, as if Providence had stiffened his neck on that occasion, since the “superfluous” tools and stores he clamoured for in October proved, six months later, mainly instrumental in saving Sale's force.

At last, on the 17th, came the troops from Zurmat; but by then all knew too well that the Eastern Ghilzais were out in force, and the peaceful march to Jalálabad was a mere figment of the Envoy's brain, facts already made known in the unheeded letter from Captain Gray. No question, as yet, of despatching invalids and ladies, nor of the Envoy's departure from his post; instead, Sale must be promptly reinforced by Griffiths and his gallant 37th,



by Abbott's guns, Sappers, and Irregular Horse, that he might again join Monteath and more completely "clear the coast."

This he did, without let or loss, till he reached the valley of Tazin. Here the Afghan chief had concentrated his men to defend his winter stock of food; and here was Sale's supreme chance of clearing the coast to some purpose. The fort and possessions of a leading rebel lay fairly within his grasp; Macnaghten had given him a splendid force, and now looked for news of unqualified success. But in sending Macgregor to shepherd that force, he had prepared the rod for his own back. Even as Sale's arm was uplifted to strike, a wave of the political wand fatally cancelled all.

The order had been given; Gunners, Sappers, and half the infantry awaited only the signal to advance: and instead there came the messenger of a contrite chief demanding audience. It was granted. By Macgregor's advice, Sale consented to forgo the argument of the sword, and to waste three days in valueless negotiation. It is true that Macgregor—a brave and sterling officer—perceived, more clearly than most, the real nature of the revolt, and was keenly aware of injustice and broken pledges underlying all. Nevertheless he did an ill service to his country that day.

In return for pie-crust promises and a few hostages of no distinction, the Ghilzai chiefs reaped the restoration of their stipends *plus* a grant of ten thousand rupees on the understanding that they would promptly clear the passes, restore all plunder, and keep better control over their followers, who were courteously assumed to be acting against their wishes. Such was the Treaty of Tazin—a treaty scathingly denounced by Durand as "calculated to stamp with crass imbecility the conduct of affairs; to

excite the scorn of embittered foes ; and to debase the British character as wanting alike in courage and common sense."

On the strength of it, Sale's troops were graciously permitted to go forward : the farther they could be lured from Kabul, the better for those who stood pledged to their extinction. But much plundering of camels—which the contrite one made no attempt to restore—had by now brought the chronic lack of cattle to such a pass that Sale, confiding in the treaty, decided to dispense with a part of his force. This time the isolated unfortunates were the 37th Native Infantry, three mountain guns, and three hundred Sappers. Their orders were to wait between Khurd Kabul and Tazín, either for reinforcements from Kabul or the Envoy's party, as events should decide. With three armed defiles in their rear, no means of movement, and no hold on Tazín Valley, the position of this little detachment was unenviable in the extreme ; while Sale himself pushed on, only to find that, in defiance of treaty, he had to fight his way against heavy odds to Gandamak. Here he encamped on the 30th to await further developments, having lost two hundred and fifty killed and wounded—a dearer bargain by far than the three thousand rupees that had been saved by irritating the chiefs.

Meantime, in Kabul cantonments impatience and anxiety grew apace, while the Kabul chiefs met nightly to hatch fresh plots and exchange congratulations. In their view, Macnaghten's attempt to crush the Ghilzais had failed signally ; and the time was ripe for a more decisive blow. In spite of universal hatred, the English never lacked a friend or two among individual Afghans ; and a Ghilzai chief, greatly attached to Captain Drummond, warned him that the local chiefs were on the eve of open insurrection,

adding that he himself had seen donkey-loads of gunpowder go forth to supply the Ghilzais in the passes. Drummond told Burnes, and Burnes casually mentioned the tale to Macnaghten—with the sole result that, at this eleventh hour, Nott, the maligned and unpopular, was hastily summoned to assume command. A month earlier his presence might have redeemed all. By now it was doubtful whether—if the order reached him—he could or would leave Kandahar.

Yet still Macnaghten wrote hopefully of the “last expiring efforts of the rebels”; and still he dismissed Pottinger’s gloomy reports from Lughmán as the creations of an excitable brain. These had grown gloomier as the month wore on: and now Pottinger repeated his belief in an extended conspiracy afoot, and urged immediate demand of hostages from the local chiefs. He was told that his suspicions were groundless; and not until the month was nearly out did he gain leave to procure hostages from his very good friends, the leading men of Kohistan.

Macnaghten—irritated rather than convinced by his assistant’s importunity—unburdened himself, as usual, to Rawlinson at Kandahar. “Pottinger writes as if he were about to be invaded by the Nijrowees; but I imagine there is little ground for this alarm. At all events the fellows will sneak into their holes again when they hear that the Ghilzais are quiet.” This on the 26th of October, when the gentle Ghilzais were thoroughly enjoying themselves at the expense of a General who felt bound by treaty not to act on the offensive. And again at the end of the month: “I trust I have at last got Pottinger into a pacific mood, though I tremble, whenever I open any of his letters, lest I should find he has got to loggerheads with some of his neighbours. . . .”

And even as he was writing, Pottinger's most hostile neighbour, Mir Musjidi, with a handful of followers, had secretly entered Kabul to enjoy his share of the plunder and the fun. "For where the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together."

They were gathering to some purpose in Kabul city during those last days of October, '41; and among them all was no more inveterate hater of the *Feringhi Sugs*,<sup>1</sup> no more unscrupulous scoundrel, than Abdullah Khan, chief of the powerful tribe of Achakzai. His own countrymen declared he had been suckled by the devil; and in early life, while living at the Court of Kashmir, he had exercised his genius for extortion in a manner so unique that for years the Kashmiris quailed at the mention of his name.

Being in need of money—a chronic condition among Afghans—he was inspired, over a bowl of wine, to offer the Governor three thousand rupees for the purchase of all the wind that blew over Kashmir. The Governor—a brother-scoundrel—laughingly accepted the offer, and with all due ceremony the Afghan announced his bargain, capping it by a threat of fine or imprisonment to any man who should dare winnow his grain or in any way use the wind of Kashmir without first buying leave from Abdullah Khan, Achakzai. The order was greeted by people and Governor alike as an excellent joke; though the first laughed honestly, the latter in his sleeve.

Slowly the immensity of the fraud dawned on them. Half dazed, half bewildered, they appealed to their ruler, who replied with a plausible air of concern: "A deceiver hath done this; but as for me I must abide by my promise." So the people went away sorrowful; and Abdullah proceeded to fine or punish even such as pre-

<sup>1</sup> Dogs.

sumed to buy a pigeon unlicensed by himself. It was an incredible state of affairs; a farce so near tragedy, that the Kashmiris, grown desperate, subscribed among themselves a large sum of money to buy back the wind of heaven from Abdullah Khan. This sum they solemnly presented to the Prince of Extortioners, begging in return that the wind might be allowed to blow freely over them once more, nor any such spell be laid upon it again.

The request was graciously granted. Abdullah departed with bulging pockets; and the Kashmirians saw him no more.

Now he abode in Kabul; and now he had business more bloodthirsty, plunder more comprehensive in view. For did not the Feringhi fools keep the bulk of their treasure in the city near the house of Sekunder Burnes, whom he, Abdullah, hated with a deadly hatred—not altogether without cause. Macloten Sahib, though gullible as a yearling babe, was of good heart: but no true son of Islam would suffer the supremacy of Sekunder Burnes, treacherous friend, licentious scoffer at God and His Prophet. Wherefore as the day of Macnaghten's departure drew near, Abdullah bestirred himself to foster the spirit of disaffection in and around Kabul.

To several chiefs of influence he indited a seditious letter declaring that the British Envoy shortly intended to have them all seized and transported to London! This wild tale wrought the desired effect; and relying on the inflammability of the people, he and his brother-conspirators proceeded to forge a Royal order bidding the true believers put every infidel to the sword. This forgery they achieved by the common process of washing out the contents of a genuine paper, saving only the seal, and writing above it their own inventions.

But all these things must be done in secret; for there

still remained fools not a few who favoured the infidels and would save them from impending danger. The whole Kazzilbash quarter and its chief, Khan Shereen Khan, were of this peculiar persuasion; as also were Osman Khan, Wazir (nephew of the Dōst), Nawab Zemán Khan, Abdul Rahím, 'Táj Mahomed (Barakzai), and several others, including the Amir's own brother Nawab Jubbar Khan. This being so, the outcome of an open insurrection in the city was by no means assured. The Feringhis, though fools, were stout fighters. They had five thousand troops at command, and the Kazzilbash horsemen would join them to a man. Yes, it would be a big *tamasha*; a game worth playing, whatever the outcome. And see how the Ghilzais had overreached the General Sahib, for all his troops!

Wherefore they continued their secret preparations unchecked, though not altogether unsuspected. John Conolly, the Envoy's cousin and secretary, warned Macnaghten that the Kabuli shopkeepers—convinced of an imminent rising—refused to deal with officers' servants lest they be murdered for favouring the Feringhis. Macnaghten dismissed the tale as bazaar gossip and did his best to forget it.

Nor did Mohun Lal—the officious, yet genuinely zealous—fare much better in his renewed efforts to convince Burnes that if this local conspiracy were not checked it would grow too strong for suppression even by British troops. Burnes merely sighed and shook his head. The whole country, he admitted, was in a most unsatisfactory state, but it would never do to appear afraid. Besides, the day had not yet come for *his* interference. Once let Macnaghten turn his back on Kabul, and all would be well;—the tribes conciliated by renewal of their stipends, the fashion of government

reformed. But until that day conspiracies and disaffections were none of his business.

Wherefore, the one man being as eager to depart as the other to see the last of him—petty personal considerations were permitted to outweigh the safety of women and children, the honour of England's good name; while every day of delay brought nearer the arrival of Mahomed Akbar Khan, avenger-in-chief, pledged by the immemorial law of his race to render burning for burning, wound for wound; pledged neither to rest nor stay his hand till the wrong done to his father had been washed out in rivers of infidel blood.

## BOOK II

### IF—?

“If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To hold their own long after both are gone,  
And still hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the will that says to them—‘Hold on!’”

KIPPLING.

“Master of masters, O Maker of heroes!  
Clean-slicing, swift-finisher,  
Making death beautiful,  
Life but a coin to be staked in the pastime,  
Whose issue is more than the transfer of being—  
I am the will of God,  
I am the Sword.”

HENLEY.



It—and again if—! The tragical tale of November, 1841, seems punctuated with that distracting word. If Macnaghten had known—if Burnes had acted—if the Bala Hissar had been promptly occupied—if the gallant little Charikar garrison had been strengthened—if Eldred Pottinger had not been debarred from knowledge and action by false economy and total lack of cavalry. Once begun, there seems no end to the dismal catalogue.

As for Pottinger, before the end of October he knew that Mir Musjidi, at the head of a small army, had left Nijrão; but beyond the bare fact he could learn nothing more. Isolated and ill-supported, either by money or bayonets, he and his companions three miles off could only await, blindfolded, the first straight blow which would set them free to hit back in kind.

For the defence of his own fort, should the worst befall, Pottinger had only his inadequate escort of twenty-five horsemen backed by the guard of a hundred Gurkhas, relieved weekly from Charikar; and even to high-hearted men like himself and Rattray the position seemed far from cheering.

On the 1st of November came a *posse* of Kohistani chiefs, with armed followers in proportion, to make friendly salaams, and present to the Burra Sahib certain men of Nijrão, anxious to help in crushing this rebellion, which they spoke of as a formidable affair. On the 2nd

came other chiefs, and again others, all profuse in offers of service, wherewith Pottinger was doubtfully impressed; seeing that their armed followers amounted to an irregular army. With the double object of dispersing them and proving their sincerity, he urged them to attack the castles of those chiefs who had followed Mir Musjidi. But like certain wedding guests, they all with one accord began to make excuse; and Pottinger, determined to betray neither suspicion nor alarm, took secret precautions to secure himself against attack. He managed to despatch, undetected, three reconnoitring parties; also a letter to Macnaghten informing him that he intended calling on the local Governor for his militia, and begging urgently for troops.

Little did he dream that, even while he sat writing, the first blood had been spilled, houses fired, and all the devils of hell unchained. But if he was ignorant of these things, his friends were not; and on receipt of the news, shaped their actions accordingly. Nevertheless his *kasid* proved a trusty one, and his letter arrived in time, as will be seen.

By the 3rd of November the army of his "friends" had swelled to alarming proportions. The fields round his castle were thronged with followers amounting to near three thousand; and while their leaders clamoured, Afghan fashion, for the reward of loyalty, fresh chiefs pressed in with fresh offers of service, bringing more men of Nijrão in their train.

No sign of the reconnoitring parties; no word of news from without, save rumours far from encouraging. A fog of suspicion and uncertainty enveloped all things; but Pottinger's mettle had already been tried in the furnace. He quietly sent word to the Gurkhas that, without ostentation, they should man the castle towers; and pro-

ceeded to quell the storm of altercation among his guests with convincing, level-headed speech.

Shortly after noon, Christopher Codrington walked in. He had come over from Charikar with a handful of Gurkhas to report that three of Haughton's servants, having set out early for Kabul, had just returned, bringing word that the road was occupied by Mir Musjidi, with thousands of rebels from Nijrão. This was the first certain news of insurrection that had reached him; and, at the time, the Charikar officers were disposed to blame him for the fact that, after promising them twenty-four hours' notice of trouble, he heard of it first through them. Later on they recognized that the real blame lay with Macnaghten's system, not with the man who was fated to suffer from it no less severely than themselves.

Now, at least, they knew the worst, and could face it like men. Bidding Codrington await him in the castle, Pottinger went out with his pacified guests to propound his demands to some petty chiefs gathered in a tent outside. Beyond the garden lay a stubble field where armed men hung about in groups; and beyond again massed Kohistanis, sullen and watchful, waited on events. Those in the field were clansmen of some standing; and to them it was suggested that Rattray might explain matters while Pottinger conferred with the rest.

As Rattray went forward to obey, a Kohistani, standing by him, spoke rapidly under his breath: "Sahib, for the love of God go not near those fellows! They are here for one purpose: to take the fort, and thereafter to attack cantonments. I speak truth."

For a moment Rattray paused: but the order had been given and must be obeyed. "Surely, my friend, you are mistaken," he whispered back—"they have eaten our salt. They would not so blacken their souls."

And with far less confidence in his heart than upon his lips, he went out, accompanied only by a chuprassi and Pottinger's munshi, Mohun Bir.

The clansmen greeted him with a shout. "*Inshallah!*" cried the foremost, "we shall all go on to-morrow to fight Mir Musjidi and his men."

"That is good hearing," answered Rattray. "If you fight for the King, my sowars shall go with you."

Then he proceeded to explain the plan of action that Pottinger had urged upon the chiefs; till—of a sudden, realization flashed on him that he spoke to deaf ears and hostile minds.

A swift, forward movement among the Afghans confirmed his fears. The underlings took fright and bolted; Rattray quietly turned about to leave the field——

At that moment a Hazirbash sowar crept into the tent where Pottinger sat, and, catching his eye, made a signal of warning, finger on lip.

Scarcely had Pottinger grasped his meaning when a shot rang out, sharp and startling; another, and another——

The Afghans rose and fled, while he himself hurried through the postern gate into his Fort, and ran up on to the ramparts to discover the enemy's first move.

All about the castle was tumult and commotion, swarms of men running hither and thither, the late "tenderers of assistance" making off in all directions with the plunder of the Hazirbash camp. And there out in the open field, to Pottinger's grief and dismay, lay Charles Rattray, shot down before he could reach safety. Dead? No; he moved, he raised an arm. But as Pottinger turned quickly to send him assistance, a party of Kohistanis entered the field, saw that the infidel still lived, and discharged half a dozen bullets into his body.

So died Charles Rattray, as hundreds of his kind have

died before and since, in the fearless, unquestioning discharge of his duty. To Pottinger his death meant more than the loss of a devoted, indefatigable assistant; but time there was none for grief or thought.

Roughly reckoned, the Afghans numbered more than three thousand, while he had but a hundred Gurkhas and twenty-five sowars wherewith to hold his four castles against them. Unless help came from Charikar, the position was desperate. A yelling horde crowded in on all sides, assailing them from the shelter of walls and watercourses with showers of lead. The Gurkhas responded manfully, and cleared the open ground. Then, in a passing lull, came the sound of firing other than that of matchlock and jezail: the friendly note of the musket, the familiar war-cry, "*Gorak-nath-ke-jai!*"

"Trust John!" said Codrington; and Haughton it was. Approaching with admirable caution, he and his men had taken the Afghans by surprise, and had cleared the walled garden close to the fort. Here he was joined by Codrington, and before dark they had driven off the enemy with severe loss. Disaster was averted for the moment, and Pottinger breathed more freely than he had done for many days; but the Gurkha officers, having done what they could, must return at once to the regiment. Codrington detailed a few sepoy to remain at Lughmán, thus strengthening the garrison to a hundred and twenty men.

"I'm afraid it's the best we can do for you, Major," said he at parting, "and little enough at that; but Haughton shall come back first thing with provisions and ammunition, and a fresh detachment to relieve your guard."

"Thanks; I'll send out some sowars to take over the goods," answered Pottinger, "and, please God, we'll hold our own in spite of all!"

Next morning, early, he was upon the ramparts, scouring with his field-glasses the main road that ran beside the canal to Charikar. Though all Afghanistan was in a ferment, the face of the mountains, the calm of the blue enclosing heavens, remained serenely unperturbed. Though the gutters of Kabul ran blood, the glory of the autumn morning was not dimmed. The mulberry-trees along the canal banks scattered the last of their golden largesse. The autumn splendour of the vineyards was waning fast, though still the crescent light revealed splashes of crimson, sienna, and scarlet flame. New-born films of smoke brooded over forts and hamlets as tenderly as though the hearts within were not brooding on battle and murder and sudden death.

The man who stood alone in the midst of it all was too poignantly concerned for the fate of a few insignificant units of humanity to be any way affected by Nature's indifference to their fate. For him the most enthralling feature of the landscape was a dust-cloud on the Charikar road. Codrington had been as good as his word. They must have started at dawn, and with luck might arrive before the enemy had recovered from the blow dealt him overnight.

As they neared that point on the main road where a walled lane struck off sharply to the left and wound snake-like toward Lughmáni Castle, brown figures, hurrying cautiously down the mountain on their right, announced that the enemy was thoroughly awake and alert. At this point Pottinger's horsemen had orders to meet the troops and take charge of the ponies loaded with ammunition and food; but as yet there was no sign of them, and the numbers on the hill increased with amazing swiftness.

Now the troops halted expectant, Haughton having

strict orders not to enter the lane. Still no horsemen emerged to meet him. Instead, Pottinger saw a company of Gurkhas detach itself from the main body and double up the hillside with intent to turn the Kohistanis who threatened their flank. He recognized the leader as Ensign Salisbury, and applauded the move; but soon anxiety gripped him afresh, and he leaned forward holding his breath.

For the Afghans had retreated with pleasing promptitude, and the handful of young soldiers, flushed with success, followed after, all unaware that retreat had become a feint to cut them off from the main body.

Haughton saw this and promptly sounded the recall. The troops ran on.

Again and again the peremptory bugle-notes rang out. On sped the infatuate boys, thoroughly out of hand. From every hamlet and garden Afghans came pouring forth, so suddenly and swiftly that it seemed as if they sprang out of the earth; while the bulk of Haughton's remaining men, under Sergeant Hanrahan, dashed gallantly up to the rescue of their brothers in arms.

The rugged hillside, empty and silent half an hour since, was alive with the inhuman din of battle, with puffs of smoke and wicked jets of flame, with confused masses of men who yelled and ran together; men who flung up their arms and fell; those behind stumbling blindly over them as though they were trunks of trees.

While yet the issue was doubtful, Pottinger, glancing down, saw that at last the sowars were on the road. But instead of retreating with their treasure, they lingered, argued, and gesticulated in a fashion so unmistakable that the watcher's heart stood still.

Was it possible that they were refusing to return? Haughton's commanding gesture confirmed the idea; and

while Pottinger rapidly revolved a fresh plan of action, the fight on the hill surged down to the road, a party of Afghan cavalry galloped up, sowars and baggage-ponies alike were swept into the thick of the struggle—and all hope of relief was at an end.

With sinking heart Pottinger saw how the stubborn little band of Gurkhas gave way at last before overwhelming numbers; saw how the dust and tumult, the glitter of naked swords, and the answering challenge of Haughton's six-pounder ebbed, like a great retreating wave, farther and farther from his isolated post, where was neither enough of ammunition or provision for a determined stand, nor even the certainty of loyal support within.

Eldred Pottinger turned away his eyes at last from that terrible confirmation of his repeated prophecy, and sat down upon the rampart; his practical brain rapidly reviewing ways and means of dealing with his own unenviable plight. His mood prompted stubborn resistance, however desperate. Wisdom counselled an immediate retreat on Charikar, a move sufficiently perilous; but under cover of the darkness he resolved, God helping him, to carry it through. With an enemy at least four thousand strong infesting the valley, Codrington could not be expected to make a second attempt at sending relief, nor could Pottinger, with his reduced escort, send any word of communication to Charikar. To this misguided attempt at economy he owed both his lamentable ignorance of Mir Musjidi's opening move and his inability even to attempt a defence of his post.

As an item of purely arithmetical interest, it may be added that the four hundred rupees saved since the 1st of October would now be somewhat disproportionately cancelled by the loss of Government treasure amounting



to ten thousand rupees, that must be abandoned for lack of men to carry it off. Retreat would, in fact, mean loss of everything: official documents, personal belongings, and, worst of all, the horses whom Pottinger loved only one degree less than Cæsar himself. It was a bitter prospect—not to be dwelt upon. As matters stood, they might consider themselves fortunate if they escaped with their lives; and Pottinger went down to breakfast—the last he was to enjoy for many days—with his mind made up, his plans cut and dried.

The better to disguise these last, he ordered in grain as if for a long defence, nor were the Afghans backward in the matter of investment. While devoting themselves mainly to Charikar, they had ample men to spare for the weaker post. Before dusk the castle was surrounded, and the enemy had seized cover up to the very gate. Here, in a gun-shed built against the wall, they industriously started mining; while the Feringhi, destined to be blown out of his lair, quietly marshalled his little garrison outside a postern on the farther side of the fort.

Then—having successfully separated his troops from the mixed crowd of followers within—he picked up Cæsar, tucked that dignified person under his poshteen, and gave the welcome order: “We march to Charikar.”

Among those left in Lughmání Castle were the twenty-four hostages so tardily obtained, and certain Gurkha sentries, stationed on the towers, who either had not heard or not understood the summons to come down. Their absence was discovered too late, and Pottinger, though deeply distressed, could not—on the bare chance of recovering seven or eight men—endanger the lives of all.

Stealthily as mice within reach of a sleeping cat, he and his little party crept past the investing posts, and threaded their way along the narrow lane, with ears alert for the

first sound that would tell them their escape was known. The silence about them, pregnant with danger, became almost oppressive; but each hundred yards gained lightened their hearts. At last the lane lay behind them, they had crossed the bridge, then the main road, and, skirting the foot of the hills, came safely within hail of Charikar.

Here were lights, but little movement. The investment was not yet stringent, and hope rose high.

Suddenly through the dark Pottinger saw two figures approaching. Without a word he signalled a halt. The figures halted also, one towering head and shoulders above the other; Haughton unmistakably, and Pottinger let out a breath of relief.

"Major! You've *done* it!" came the subaltern's voice, guarded, yet exultant. "Men and all—without pursuit?"

"Yes, thank God! We've not so much as put up a dog."

"Thank God indeed!" the other echoed fervently; and for these men the words were no trite formula. "Come in, come in. Codrington and Rose will be overjoyed. We had a hot time of it this morning. I managed to keep 'em at bay with the gun, and the trail broke just as we reached the gate. We've a good many wounded for you, Doctor. Poor Salisbury's badly hurt, I'm afraid."

"We'll see—we'll see," Grant murmured encouragingly. But encouragement died on his lips when he had examined the wounds. Ensign Salisbury, not yet twenty, had fought his last fight.

Yet although one of their number lay dying, that night was the pleasantest they were permitted to spend for many weeks, ay, and many months to come. Haughton's joy in recovering his men—whom he loved as his own children—was dashed when he learnt how the sentries had been left to their fate.

“But, please God, they’ll make their way to us somehow!” he declared with conviction.

“And *you’ll* have no peace of mind till they do!” Codrington added, smiling at the boy who had played a hero’s part that day, and whose conduct he had belauded in a long report to Government; a report now locked in the post-bag that was never to be delivered.

The enemy, content with his day’s work, gave them respite that night; and—all due precautions taken—they slept in snatches, as soldiers sleep on the eve of action, heartened by the assurance that relief must certainly arrive from Kabul within the next few days.

## II

EARLY on that critical 5th of November, before the first glimmer of dawn, those devoted comrades Haughton and Codrington took final stock of their position; determined the duties of each; the order of defence.

It was plain that—Lughmáni having fallen—the full brunt of hostility would be concentrated on themselves; and the barracks, ineffectual at best, were not even complete. The main entry, facing the canal, yawned gateless; and although the bitter Afghan winter was upon them, no doors had been supplied for any of the rooms. In the open gateway stood, by way of dragon, the eighteen-pounder gun demanded by Pottinger months earlier, and sent out under protest—“merely by way of moral effect.”

For the rest, they had two hundred rounds per musket, sixty rounds of shot to serve the six-pounders, and a fair supply of lead dug from the target butts. This could be cast into bullets and sewn up in bags, made from the carpet of Haughton's deserted tent, by the tailors and women of the Regiment. These, including children, totalled a hundred and forty ineffectual units to feed and defend. The detachment itself mustered only seven hundred and forty men with a couple of British non-commissioned officers—one already wounded—and a handful of Punjabis to man the guns.

These must now prepare to pit themselves against

thousands of fanatics well supplied with promiscuous cover, including a half-built mess-house and stables, across the canal. This last the enemy had converted into a firing-trench by turning off the water, a twofold blow; for water there was none in barracks, unless rain came to fill the tank.

If anything could daunt those two fearless spirits taking counsel together in the grey of morning, it was the prospect of protracted fighting without water, hell's most exquisite torment, as every soldier knows. But the fighting would not be protracted. With five thousand troops only two days march away, relief was bound to arrive before things grew desperate. Pottinger's demand had been urgent. It could not be ignored. A squadron of cavalry, and a Horse-Artillery gun could cover the distance in no time; and every man of them would be worth his weight in Company's rupees.

Meantime—they would do their utmost and be prepared for the worst. Codrington—a married man—slipped one cold hand into an inner breast-pocket. It rested there an instant on a leather case that held a picture of his wife.

But their talk was purely of the business in hand. Provisions? Haughton had brought from the town everything he could lay hands on. He believed they had enough to last seven days. They congratulated themselves on the seeming friendliness of old Khojah Mir Khan, owner of the castle that so aggressively commanded the barrack square. Between them they had successfully talked him over before Pottinger's arrival; and now fifty Gurkhas, under a native officer, were in possession.

Pottinger—with his knowledge of the infernal machine most dreaded by Asiatics—was a real acquisition, provided

he showed no disposition to make his rank an excuse for assuming military command. On the night of his arrival they had privately discussed the unwelcome possibility; and had decided that by the rules of the Service supreme military authority must remain with the officers of the Regiment.

Their anxiety had proved superfluous. Pottinger was never the man to snatch at command. As Political officer, he knew himself supreme; as soldier, he had simply volunteered his services, and had been asked to take charge of the guns.

Thus had all been amicably settled; all feasible preparation made. As for the odds against them, every true soldier accepts these as "fortune o' war." Given food, water, and ammunition, *plus* a leader, fired with the spirit of "No surrender," the odds are a comparatively minor affair. Such was the faith of Codrington and Haughton; but the odds proved greater than either could have believed.

While they talked, a whiteness, that was not yet sunlight, had permeated the grey. The mountains towering on either hand had loomed gradually nearer; Titanic spectators, oppressive in their terrible composure. Behind the Koh-i-Sufaid day broke unclouded in a flood of primrose light; as it were a halo behind the heads of the Great Ones, proclaiming them holy.

The two friends, noting these things from Codrington's upper room opposite the gateway, stood silent for several minutes. Each knew that the other was praying, and either would have acknowledged the fact without a shadow of awkwardness or false shame. The light grew; the magical instant of arrest, that imperceptibly divides night from day, was gone.

From the south-east bastion rang out the brisk, challenging notes of *reveillé*. From below came the

clatter of cooking-pots and the voices of women; and away, from beyond Khojah Mir's fort, where clustered the hovels of Charikar, came a sound of more sinister import—the throbbing of a thousand Afghan drums, the very spirit of war made audible. As light increased, that muttered threat swelled louder and louder; the near hills caught and passed it on, till the horizon seemed to reverberate with ghostly purrings, as of a monster tiger about to spring; and in spite of lurking anxieties, the sound sent an electrical thrill through every heart.

There was no more time for talk. Codrington rapidly repeated his plans for the day's defence: half the troops would be sent out as skirmishers, half remain to hold the fort. Pottinger and his two six-pounders would support the skirmishers; Haughton with a strong party would hold the outposts nearest the canal—three enclosures of vital importance, for to lose them was to lose touch with the few remaining puddles that stood for the water-supply of over a thousand souls.

“After to-day,” Codrington added ruefully, “the horses and cattle will have to go without”—the which they did.

He himself, while commanding and supervising the whole, would take charge of some huts near the yawning eastern gateway whence the bore of the eighteen-pounder looked grimly forth.

Both men knew that directly the sun's rim appeared above the snows that sinister purring would cease and the Afghans emerge in thousands to surround the fort. It had become a matter of minutes now, but before they expired, officers and men were all at their posts—the women huddled up, wailing and praying, in an inner room; while against the farthest wall crouched Codrington's Calcutta Babu, a shapeless, shuddering heap of manhood, utterly unmanned.

The peaks flamed. The sun came forth from his chamber. Houses, gardens, and ravines belched forth a yelling multitude, their swords flashing, exultant, in the sunlight. As the torrents of spring rush headlong into the valleys, so did that surging, shouting mass of fanaticism rush headlong upon the contemptible handful of infidels, who would all be cut in pieces before the sun flamed again behind the Pughmán hills.

The infidels had their own opinion on the subject, and maintained it with incredible tenacity. Ringed in and fiercely assailed, they nevertheless stood their ground—for a time.

The outlying skirmishers were the first who suffered; and to their support Pottinger led out his six-pounders, glad to be once again a soldier doing soldier's work. But his joy was short-lived. For the inside of an hour he moved to and fro amid the smoke and thunder of his guns—amid the crackle of musketry, the yells of the smiters, the shrieks and groans of the smitten—shouting instruction and encouragement, using his own revolver with deadly precision; marvelling always at the mass of men and horses hurled on one weak-disciplined regiment, that surged back one moment, only to surge forward afresh with the impetus of an advancing wave. The number of Afghans appeared to have increased tenfold during the night; and every man among them was not merely a murderous weapon, but a stentorian voice. To savage races the war-cry is more than half the joy of battle—a cross between talisman and prayer.

“*Yah Allah-illah! Dum-i-char yar! Maro, bhai-marro!*”<sup>1</sup> A forest of uplifted knives swung downward at the word—here upon yielding flesh, there turned aside by the deathly, curved kookri of the Gurkhas, who at every

<sup>1</sup> Kill, brothers, kill.



discharge of the guns flung back their own stirring challenge: "*Jai-jai!*<sup>1</sup> *Gorak-nath-ke-jai!*"

Genuine war this: no mere duel to order between masses individually neutral, but an orgie of savage passion let loose, each unit fired with the lust of slaughter. Even outside Herat, Pottinger had seen nothing to equal, in sheer volume and ferocity, this opening assault upon the ill-placed, incomplete fort of Charikar.

Over by Codrington's huts the fight was hottest. Here the Afghans, intent on rushing that gateless gateway, had concentrated in fullest force. Once let them demolish its stubborn defenders, and the thing was done. To capture the gun, the gateway, the fort itself, would be a matter of hours, if that. It was rather more than a matter of hours, as the Afghans found to their exceeding surprise. The skirmishers were yielding again, and Pottinger, striving to hold them in check, was himself checked by a stinging shock, a burning pain in his thigh. Almost he had fallen, but with the help of a gunner he managed to keep erect. Clutching the man's shoulder, he ground his teeth upon a curse, wrung from him by fierce vexation rather than by pain. For though he might force himself to hold out half an hour or so, after that he would be no more than a useless log.

He did hold out; but loss of blood soon tells, even upon the strongest. Swaying uncertainly, he exhorted his little detachment to make one more stand against the Afghan devils; then, half-fainting, suffered himself to be led to Codrington's upper room, opposite the gateway—and his fighting share in the defence was over. As Political officer, thank God! he could still do his duty, but the active work he so loved was persistently denied him throughout this last phase of his Afghan service.

<sup>1</sup> Victory, victory.

They laid him on Codrington's bed, and even as his head touched the pillow he lost hold of reality. His mind grew strangely light, strangely detached from the helpless hulk upon the bed; even the pain of his wound seemed a cloudy remembrance rather than a fact. The intermittent roar of battle waxed dim and dimmer, till he floated free from all sense of time and place. He was a boy again, dozing on the beach in summer, hearing through his dreams the soft thunder of waves breaking on the rocks of Ireland—the rocks of Home——!

A spoonful of brandy forced between his teeth banished the exquisite illusion, and dragged him back to acute consciousness. His head ached horribly; someone seemed to have lighted a fire inside his wounded leg; and Dr. Grant stood over him, looking absurdly distressed.

"A bad business, Major, for us all," he said. "Bullet's lodged in the thigh, I'm afraid. Extraction would be—h'm—difficult. But if it's left alone there will be trouble—inflammation."

"Leave it alone, for God's sake!" muttered the wounded man, "and attend to the other poor devils who need more immediate help. I'm well enough for the present."

Unconvinced and reluctant, Dr. Grant obeyed. The need of his services increased every moment. The wounded came in all too freely, and the wails of the women were heart-breaking to hear.

Encouraged by the rout of the skirmishers, the enemy had pressed in on all sides, especially on Haughton's outposts and the coveted group of huts before the gate. Here, against incredible odds, Codrington's Gurkhas still held their own. Always, at the least hint of wavering, the voice of their adored Captain Sahib rang out above the din:

"Stand close, men—stand close! No surrender! Give them the *koolcri*—smite the——"

This time the voice broke off suddenly, and with a choking gasp Christopher Codrington staggered backward, a bullet through his chest.

Those nearest caught him in their arms, and a great cry went up: "The Captain Sahib! They have slain the Captain Sahib!"

Not yet. Codrington, speechless and in mortal agony, managed to wave his sword, urging them on to fresh endeavour. Again the cry went up—savage, defiant: "Smite the Afghan devils to perdition! *Gorak-nath-ke-jai!*" And while those little lions of Nepal returned to the attack, their Captain staggered back to barracks, with the help of three sepoy, who cried like children at sight of his distress.

Within the gates endurance failed him, and he sank heavily to the ground. "Water," he breathed—"for the love of God, water!"

Already the priceless fluid was scarce, but they found some and gave it him. Then, between them, they carried him to that same upper room where Pottinger was lying, and there placed him on the same bed.

Codrington, scarcely able to speak for the blood that choked him, bade the sepoy carry word to Haughton that the command of affairs had now devolved on him, and he should return to barracks at once.

Not without difficulty and danger, these men made their way to the three enclosures near the canal, where Haughton had been desperately engaged since morning.

Here they found him—hoarse, thirsty, begrimed with powder and blood; yet in high spirits because the position was still his own. At sight of them sudden dread came upon him, and before they could speak—he knew. Their tale, and the tears they could not withhold, almost unmanned him. But in the face of a hydra-headed,

ubiquitous enemy there was no time for even such grief as his, no possibility either of obeying that summons from his "beloved commander." Hastily tearing the wrapper from a cartridge, he scribbled in charcoal a few words of explanation and regret. Then he also—like the sepoy in the hut—returned to the attack with a new and terrible hatred in his heart.

All now hung upon his exertions, and from dawn to dusk—without pause, without refreshment, beyond an occasional sip of water—he fought like a man possessed. No matter how fierce the struggle at any given point, so long as he was there all went well; but if events drew him elsewhere, unconsciously resistance would slacken, and the enemy, creeping up, snatch some advantage not easily regained. To the Afghans it must have seemed that he bore a charmed life, for though bullets rained unceasingly, and he always in the thick of them—an admirable target, over six feet high—none injured him.

Toward afternoon he was heartened by the news that Codrington's company, though driven out of the huts, still held the main gateway, and had beaten back the enemy with severe loss. Success so gallant should be gallantly followed up, and straightway he organized a *sortie*; drove the Afghans pell-mell out of a garden they had occupied since morning, and held it against their most desperate onsets till after dark.

By then it was clear, even to these insatiable warriors, that no more could be done till next day; and in any case the Mahomedan seldom fights after sundown. Gradually the investing thousands drew away into the town and neighbouring villages, leaving behind them strong pickets to keep guard over the mousehole, and enliven the midnight hours with an occasional stab in the dark.

But for a space there was respite—respite to breathe and think and remember. Debarred from the anodyne of action, realization of his imminent loss came back upon Haughton with redoubled anguish. Tears ached in his throat; but choking back the mere luxury of grief, he hurried with long strides to that upper room, where lay the man he loved as Jonathan loved David.

Codrington, sunk into semi-unconsciousness, heard the familiar step, and opened his eyes. The light that lightened them and the heroic attempt at a smile brought John Haughton to his knees beside the bed. He laid his forehead on the hand that grasped his own, and a great sob broke in his throat.

More poignantly tragic than all the roar and racket of the day seemed to Pottinger that sound of inarticulate anguish from the boy of four-and-twenty who had fought like a demigod for near twelve hours;—the boy to whom it was mainly due that anyone remained alive to fight on the morrow. And in the silence that followed, those two brave spirits took leave of each other for all time; happy in this, at least, that no shadow of doubt clouded their hope of reunion hereafter.

At length, with a supreme effort, Codrington spoke. "Well done, John—well done!" One hand fumbled uncertainly in his coat. "My watch"—he gasped for breath—"can you find it? Keep it—wear it—for me."

Haughton, lifting up his head, felt cautiously for the precious legacy. But it had slipped under Codrington's body; and before it could be found the inexorable voice of duty wrenched them apart. Without a word they grasped hands—and John Haughton hurried away.

Codrington, roused from the stupor of weakness, made a futile attempt to move, and at once Pottinger's arm was round his shoulders.

"My dear fellow, what is it?" he asked tenderly.

"Pencil—paper." The words were a mere breath.

Pottinger called to his servant, who brought them, and stood by holding a candle while the dying man, in defiance of pain and weakness, wrote a few words to his wife. With shaking fingers he drew out the leather case in his breast-pocket, wrapped the paper round it, and scrawling thereon an English address, thrust the packet into Pottinger's hand. Then he sank back gasping, and with a feeble gesture indicated his haversack that hung on a chair near by. It held his telescope, pistols, and other valuables. "Take it quickly—Haughton Sahib—from me," he commanded—and could no more.

Dr. Grant, hurrying in a few moments later with soup and restoratives, found him seemingly dead in Pottinger's arms. But although the last conscious effort of brain and will had been spent, the spirit lingered for another twenty-four hours in its shattered temple of clay.

Young Salisbury—released from pain none could alleviate—had died during the afternoon.

That night there was food for all—siege rations, but sufficient. There was also water to wash it down—very far from sufficient; a quart a head. It seemed a hardship at the time; yet before many days were out there was scarce one who would not have sold himself to perdition for half a teacup of the precious fluid. Haughton's food was brought to him at his post—a barrack chair near the main gateway. From that night onward he neither sat down to a meal, nor took off his clothes, nor lay down to rest, for more than a week.

Singing, shouting, and false attacks enlivened the sleepless hours; and at dawn, town, hamlet, and ravine again poured forth their thousands, who returned to the attack with vigour renewed by food and sleep.

They found the infidel dogs obstinate as ever. The garden whence they had been driven was hotly attacked and recaptured, Haughton being occupied elsewhere; but hearing the news, he promptly determined to retrieve their loss, and the thing was done by a daring *coup de main*.

They were thus enabled to secure all the water left in the pools of the canal; while a few men were spared from the defence to pile up, on each side of the eighteen-pounder, raw material supplied for the gateway, so as to form at once a rough protection and a barricade.

All that day, as before, they fought without respite, hoping persistently for relief from Kabul which alone could make victory sure.

By evening their numbers were cruelly diminished. More than two hundred lay dead or wounded to the death, among the last their gallant Sergeant-Major—Byrne; and those that remained were worn out with thirty-six hours of fasting and fatigue. Haughton himself had been struck on the throat by a bullet that must have killed him on the spot, but for a square yard of Multan silk wound closely about his neck.

Towards dusk as usual the enemy drew off again, amazed, yet satisfied that the end was sure; and Haughton, returning to cantonments, grimed, weary, and parched with thirst, found Grant awaiting him with the news that Codrington had died soon after midday.

For an instant he set his teeth hard; then:

“Thank God!” he said gravely and steadily. “We could never have moved him, if it came to the worst. But, Doctor, we must positively keep this news from the men. They are fagged out, mind and body, and it would demoralize them outright. I have told them that relief is certain. I hope to God it is!”

Grant nodded. “The Major has been troubled about

it all day. He has written another appeal for assistance in invisible ink between the lines of a native letter. He wants you to find two men who will venture out with it unarmed. They should go to-night."

"They shall. There will be no difficulty. It's a good idea."

Then he passed on to the upper room opposite the gateway.

That evening Haughton decided—reluctantly, yet not without a sense of inexpressible relief—that it was futile to expend precious ammunition and yet more precious lives in attempting to hold any outposts save Khojah Mir's fort. This would give the reduced garrison less than half the space to defend, and the canal being empty, the enclosures near it had lost their value. The men, revived by a modicum of food and drink, cheered by the hope of relief and by assurance that their Captain Sahib still lived, quietly took up their posts for the night.

Then, as the sky darkened and the stars flashed out, two camp followers set to work with spades, secretly and silently, behind an unfinished building once intended for a magazine. There, half an hour later, two British officers, dead before their prime, were confided to the stony-hearted soil of Afghanistan, with no rites of burial save the tears and unspoken prayers of those who remained to keep the flag flying.

So passed Christopher Codrington, "an officer of whose merits it were difficult to speak too highly," worshipped by all who served him, and united to John Haughton by that rare bond between man and man which does in truth surpass the love of woman.

And while that secret burial was in progress, two insignificant shadows slipped stealthily out of the postern



gate, past the investing posts, where paid *claqueurs* were tuning up for their nightly concert, and on into the heart of darkness beyond—two unarmed Gurkhas carrying to Kabul Pottinger's last appeal for that immediate relief without which surrender must be merely a question of time.

### III

AND what of Kabul herself? What hope of help from that unprepared, indefensible sheepfold on the plain?

The tale is ill to tell. The story of Charikar, however tragical, is a story of gallant endurance, gallant endeavour. But at Kabul—though flashes of heroism were gloriously present, like stars on a night of storm—the darker shadows prevailed, shadows of delay and indecision, of ill-temper and divided counsels; a paralytic lack of the spirit that dares all and achieves all; a state of things aptly summarized in the aphorism: "It is not in mere death that men die most."

The death of Codrington, the sufferings of Haughton and Pottinger, were joyful and glorious things compared with much that was done and endured throughout the long, ignominious weeks of the Kabul siege: and in these early days of November, dramatic interest is focused for a brief and tragic space on the figure of Alexander Burnes. As probable Envoy-elect, the eyes of many in Kabul were turned on him—not, as has been seen, with confidence or esteem. But for these he cared little, could he but once get the reins firmly within his own grasp. Devout lover though he was of wine and women and books, he loved personal dominion more than all; and throughout that month of alarums and excursions, he had been tantalized by the vision of his desire set just out of reach; distracted with long looking for official confirmation that would decide his fate once for all.

Whatever his failings, he had suffered his fill of hope deferred: small wonder then that—being what he was—he should refuse credence to any act or word which threatened to prolong the days of waiting. It is but fair to add that neither he, nor any other, dreamed of a Nemesis so overwhelming as that which loomed nearer with every day of blindness, wilful or otherwise.

The 31st of October found him still looking for the sanction that came not, still swayed, mercurially, between hope and fear. That day was the anniversary of his arrival in India twenty years before; and now, with Scottish susceptibility to signs and omens, he wrote in his journal: "Ay! what will this day bring forth? It will make or mar me, I suppose. Before the sun sets I shall know whether I go to Europe or succeed Macnaghten."

But the sun set; and that momentous day brought no certain word from Calcutta, only vague and flattering newspaper reports that were as fuel to the fire of his suspense. "I grow very tired of praise," he wrote next morning, "and I suppose I shall grow tired of censure in time——"

Here the journal broke off abruptly. Time was not given him. That significant anniversary did, after all, prove the turning-point of his fate in a fashion quite other than he desired, or—in charity let us add—than he deserved.

For on that day there drew near to Kabul city, Amnullah Khan, lord of the Loghur Valley; one who, at a word, could bring ten thousand men into the field. Old, palsy-stricken, and almost speechless, he was yet, of all the chiefs save Abdullah, the most powerful, the most inimical. The son of a camel-driver, he had won position and wealth by sheer force of personality; and Dōst Mahomed, fearing his insatiable ambition, had banished him from the

Loghur Valley to Kandahar. He had therefore been prompt to join Shah Shuja; and, by the influence of Burnes and Macnaghten, had been restored to place and power. Now, at the call of his brother-chiefs, he was hastening toward Kabul, intent on meting out to both an Afghan's gratitude.

On the 1st of November he arrived at the house of Sydat Khan, Alakzai, and heard, with satisfaction, how cunningly the Burra Sahib had been hoodwinked by loud assurance of friendship; how on that very day a party of chiefs had called on him to pay their farewell respects; the date of his departure being fixed for the 4th of November. But although Sir William might propose, disposal rested with the followers of Allah and his Prophet.

That night Burnes rode into cantonments for a farewell dinner with Macnaghten, whose mind must not be unsettled on any account: and whom he warmly congratulated—with how much sincerity, let God be his Judge—on leaving the country at a season of such profound tranquillity.

Soon after nine o'clock, he rode homeward in a cheerful mood of mind. Captain Johnson, who had also dined in cantonments, sat later over his wine and was finally persuaded not to return that night: the first time in two and a half years that he had slept outside the city.

Burnes sat up with a book long after his brother Charles and William Broadfoot, his secretary, had gone to bed. Warnings of widespread conspiracy had grown more frequent of late; but to ask for a stronger guard would be to acknowledge fear and to unsettle Macnaghten's mind. Before midnight, Táj Mahomed, Barakzai, came yet again and spoke his mind freely—but to small purpose.

Worried, yet by no means alarmed, Burnes slept soundly: and Bhow Singh, chuprassi, slept also at his post. Before

dawn, however, he rose up, slipped on his chuprass, and hurried into the Char Chowk to spy out the land. Here, to his surprise, he met the Wazir, Osman Khan, riding in haste towards his master's house.

"I go to warn Sekunder Burnes," said he. "I am come from those who seek his life." And Bhow Singh, his heart in his mouth, ran back beside the Minister's horse.

Burnes, hustled out of sleep, was again confronted with the news that instant danger threatened. Osman Khan begged urgently that all three would come with him into the Bala Hissar or ride at once into cantonments. But Burnes, too often over-credulous, proved on this critical day a very Thomas for disbelief.

"Do you come here, Wazir Sahib, to teach me my duty?" he demanded almost roughly.

Osman Khan shrugged his shoulders and turned to depart. "*My* duty was to bring warning," said he; "whether false or true will speedily be seen."

It was seen. As he mounted and rode off, Aminullah's followers appeared at the opposite end of the street.

A mere riot Burnes deemed it; but here at least was reality; and straightway he despatched a messenger to Macnaghten, demanding that troops be promptly sent to the city, as the people were in an excited state and he feared an attack on his house.

But cantonments were three miles off; and moment by moment that ominous roar swelled louder till an armed crowd surged and shouted under his very windows. At that time they numbered about fifty; and Burnes forbade his handful of sepoy to fire till he had spoken them fair.

As well might he have addressed a pack of wolves. They answered him with yells, execrations, and random shots. They surged nearer, increasing every moment in number

and fury. The treasury was openly attacked; and the Kotwal of the city,—whom Burnes had lately dismissed from office—came forward joyfully with wood and torches to fire the outer gate.

More arrivals, and again more, till the street, and others adjoining it, were filled with a tossing sea of heads. It was no longer possible to restrain the sepoy, and firing became general. William Broadfoot fired also, from the balcony; while the elder Burnes looked desperately out over that seething mass of hatred for the gleam of British bayonets that would surely not be long delayed.

No sign of them yet: and the next instant Broadfoot pitched forward mortally hurt.

The brave spirit, the incomparable friend, was gone: and Burnes, distracted between grief and fuller realization, essayed a last desperate appeal to the avarice of those whom neither tears nor prayers could move. Making his voice heard with difficulty, he flung dignity to the winds, and offered large sums of money to any or all who would save his brother and himself.

In reply came the crackle of flames from his stables, where a party had discovered good material for a bonfire.

It was now eight o'clock. The mob had reached his house before seven. The sound of firing must have been heard both in the Bala Hissar and in cantonments; yet no sign of troops to the rescue.

His heart failed him. He redoubled his offers.

“Make your sepoy stop firing, then, and come down to the garden,” cried some: the rest sent bullets for reply, and the stables burned merrily. Charles and his sepoy went on firing as before.

A Kashmiri Mussulman, at Burnes's elbow, spoke hurriedly in his ear: “Let these others stop shooting: then let the Sahib and his brother go quickly into the

house. Put on native dress, and I swear by the holy Koran that I will lead you both through the garden to the Kazzilbash Fort, where all are your friends."

A desperate scheme, but the whole position was desperate: and since no help came from his own folk, he snatched at the first that offered.

Muffled in cloaks, the brothers stumbled down the narrow staircase hard upon the heels of their one friend. Now they stood in the garden; and not a hundred yards off surged that hideous sea of faces, all intent on the balcony, still calling to them to come forth.

For one merciful instant escape seemed possible; the next their guide sprang forward with uplifted arm: "See, friends, here is Sekunder Burnes!" he cried, with a loud voice; and the roaring sea of faces swept forward—

The rest was butchery, swift and complete.

Johnson's guard—staunch to the last—was overpowered, the treasury sacked, seventeen thousand pounds of Government money was confiscated, Government records burned, and every inmate of the two houses—women and children not excepted—put to the sword.

So fell the worst-hated white man in Afghanistan; the man in whom energy, talent, and high ambition had been fatally linked with instability, lack of judgment, and the still more fatal lack of that moral motive force which is the foundation-stone of all great character.

Successful beyond all hope, the crowd surged on, swelling in volume and ferocity as it went; moving always toward the Kazzilbash quarter. For there, on the outskirts of the city, were two forts that promised a further harvest for the sword of Islam.

The larger of these, just beyond the river, served as the quarters of Brigadier Anquetil, Commandant of the Shah's force; also as *godown* for his commissariat stores in

charge of Colin Mackenzie. Close by was the house of Captain Troup, the Shah's Brigade Major; and within musket-shot, on the city side of the river, stood the second fort, a strong defensible tower, occupied by Captain Trevor, his wife and seven children. All had the usual sepoy guard—fifteen or twenty men, and a Havildar. Trevor had, in addition, a body of the Hazirbash Corps; and by happy chance a detachment of Sappers and Jezailchis—a hundred and fifty in all—were camped in a neighbouring mulberry-grove, known as the Yabu Khana.

Anquetil and Troup had ridden out very early, as was the general habit even in winter, and had not returned. Remained only Mackenzie in one fort, and Trevor in the other, with the added anxiety of a large family on his hands.

Startled, soon after dawn, by the sound of shots and the roar of an angry crowd, they waited anxiously for some word of explanation, which did not reach them till near eight o'clock; when they heard that Burnes's house had been attacked, and he himself wounded. Trevor promptly despatched that report to the Envoy, adding: "I hope it is all a lie, but I earnestly recommend that the business be checked before night at any risk. Khan Shereen Khan and two others are here. The plot is a party one; but our slackness may make it serious."

This at eight o'clock: and not long after came other chiefs of note—Osman Khan, Abdul Rahim Khan and Taj Mahomed—all offering their services in support of British authority. But British authority made no sign: so two hours later Trevor wrote again: "Here is a note from Mackenzie. The enemy are not now many; but if you leave them a few hours longer all Kabul may be up. . . . I must remove Mrs. Trevor to-night. Never was so disgraceful a business!"



At midday, no help being forthcoming, he wrote yet once more : "The firing seems to have ceased except from the Brigadier's fort; but I am unable to learn with any authority what is doing in the town. The Hazirbash show much zeal; nevertheless I enter entirely into the feelings of Bluebeard's wife when she cried : ' Sister Ann ! Sister Ann ! ' "

This note and its forerunners duly reached their destination ; but although by now the sun rode high in the heavens, his rays revealed no welcome glitter of bayonets advancing through the trees.

#### IV

"THE Austrians," said Napoleon on a critical occasion, "do not know the value of moments." And on the morning of that bewildering 2nd of November the Kabul authorities forgot the value not only of moments and hours, but of half a dozen other things necessary to the salvation of their own lives and their country's honour.

Whatever else may have been lacking in that hour of crisis, troops were not. Witness Durand's plain statement: "On the morning of November 2nd, Shelton was encamped on the Siah Sung hills, a mile and a half from cantonments, from which he was separated by the Kabul River. He was about the same distance from the Bala Hissar, and had with him H.M. 44th Foot, a wing of the 54th N.I., the 6th Shah's Infantry, the 5th Cavalry, and a battery of five six-pounders, three companies of Broadfoot's Sappers, and two Rissalahs of Irregular Horse. Elphinstone had therefore, on this eventful morning, a strong, well-equipped force. The Shah was in the Bala Hissar, and had as guard Campbell's Hindustani Regiment, some Afghans, four hundred Jezailchis, five hundred Hindustanis, and several guns."

Yet for more than six hours rebellion raged unchecked; three murdered British officers lay unavenged and two others appealed in vain for help.

No doubt the first feeling now—as on that earlier day in October—was one of pure vexation. Departure was so

near; stacked trunks and *kiltas* spoke eloquently of the road. Before dawn John Conolly was busy giving some final directions, when an Afghan rushed wildly up shouting that Kabul was in revolt. The sound of firing confirmed him, and Conolly hurried to his Chief.

Macnaghten, though amazed, was not discomposed. Ordering his horse, he cantered off to the General's quarters, where the news—that sped on before him—had wrought dire dismay. Thain, Grant, and Bellew took part in their "earnest consultation"; and suddenly, into the midst of it, came George Lawrence, his cheerful face a travesty of itself.

"Ah, Lawrence!" There was genuine relief in Macnaghten's voice. "Here's an urgent note from Burnes. What's *your* advice?"

Lawrence glanced at the note, then spoke with his wonted rapid decision.

"I should say march a regiment straight to Sir Alexander's house; and from there send out strong parties to seize Aminullah and Abdullah Khan."

But authority looked doubtful over so wild a proposal: and finally scouted it as "pure insanity."

"Send Shelton's force, then, to occupy the upper citadel," urged Lawrence—unextinguished, if dismayed. "From there he would command the whole city, and be ready for prompt action, if required. That surely, sir, is feasible enough!"

Yes; after deliberation they decided that it was. Young Sturt, their one engineer, was called for and despatched to bid Shelton send half his force into cantonments and have the rest in readiness to occupy the Bala Hissar, if the King desired: a very different message from the one Lawrence had proposed.

He himself was to ride out and prepare His Majesty for

Shelton's advent. On a powerful horse of Macnaghten's, with four troopers, he set out at a hard gallop, bidding his men use the spur, and on no account draw rein.

The command proved a wise one; for as they passed the fort of Mahmud Khan an Afghan sprang out and lunged furiously. Lawrence parried the blade with his stick, drew his sword, and galloped on.

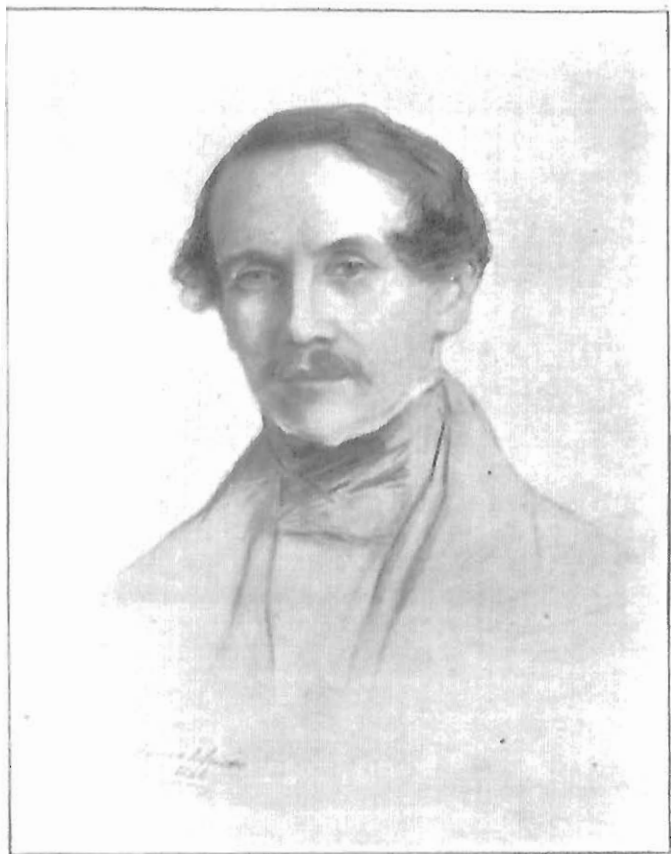
Next moment they were startled by an explosion of musketry from an innocent-looking ditch. Had not the firing been high and their pace of the swiftest, they must all have been killed. As it was, they still fled on untouched, clattered through the gateway of the Bala Hissar; and three minutes later George Lawrence stood breathless in the presence of the King.

The old man—whatever his supposed share in the disturbance—was by now in a state of unfeigned agitation. His servants had fled. His eldest son and Minister had gone forth into the city with some of Campbell's troops, and were probably being cut to pieces for their pains. In any case—Lawrence reflected bitterly—they were doing what should by rights have been done by soldiers of the Company or the Queen.

“*Wah-wah*, Laren Sahib!” the old man cried out. “Is not this what I *told* Macloten Sahib would happen if he would not kill these sons of Satan before their plans were ripe? And what in God's name is to be done *now*?”

Lawrence spoke of Shelton's orders to occupy the upper Hissar; but the Shah demurred. “Wait a little and see how it fares with my son,” said he. “Send word to Shelton Sahib.”

While he spoke, a great clamour arose without; and lo! Sturt, sword in hand, half ran, half stumbled into the room, bleeding profusely from wounds about his face and neck. Speaking with painful jerks, he explained that



CAPTAIN GEORGE ST. P. LAWRENCE  
11th Light Cavalry  
(Secretary to Sir William Macnaghten)

he came from Shelton, who had sent him to discover the reason for delay. While dismounting, he had been attacked and stabbed three times before he could escape.

The Shah, blustering like a royal turkey, despatched his Master of Horse to seek out and slay the assassin; while Lawrence tenderly washed and staunched three very ugly wounds.

In a palanquin, guarded by fifty lancers, the wounded Sapper was jogged painfully back to cantonments; and Lawrence at last won leave to bring Shelton's troops himself from the Siah Sung.

He found the Brigadier in a state of high disgust at delay caused by consideration for the feelings of a King whose subjects had murdered those of the Queen. In his first note to Elphinstone *he* had counselled prompt action; and by way of reply he and his men had been kept hanging about under arms for more than two hours. Lawrence had no liking for the Brigadier—none had; but he sympathized with his immediate grievance and escorted him with all speed to the Lahore Gate.

Thence he galloped back to report progress and take counsel with his Chief. For him at least, that deplorable 2nd of November was a day of action and strenuous exertion—to small purpose.

“In cantonments all was confusion and indecision,” wrote Lady Sale, whose pen, in those days, was apt, not unnaturally, to be dipped in acid. “The Envoy mounted his horse and rode to the gateway, and then rode back again—the best thing he could do! Sir William and Lady Macnaghten had vacated the Residency before 11 a.m., and came into cantonments. It appears very strange that troops were not immediately sent into the city! But the fancied security of those in power is the result of deference to the opinions of Lord Auckland,

whose sovereign will and pleasure it is that tranquillity do reign in Afghanistan, that the lawless Afghans are as peaceable as London citizens; and . . . most dutifully do we appear to shut our eyes to our possible fate!"

By three o'clock Lawrence was back at the Bala Hissar with Troup, Johnson, and a strong escort. Here they found Shelton playing a couple of guns over the city, and receiving for answer a rattling chorus of jezails—a mere duel of shot and bullets signifying nothing.

Lawrence, very much a soldier, ventured remonstrance; whereat Shelton demanded violently: "What the devil would you have me do?"

"Enter the city," came the prompt reply.

"The city? Good God, man! My force is inadequate. It's plain *you* don't know what street-fighting means."

"I know that Kabul city is not an ideal battle-ground; but I also know that our place is inside it. You asked my opinion. I have told you what I would do myself."

Shelton merely shrugged his shoulders; and Lawrence, disheartened yet persistent, begged that the guns might be raised to a position whence they could be used with more telling effect. Shelton complied ungraciously; and directed Captain Nicholl to move his guns up the hill. Little was gained by the move, and Lawrence, thoroughly disgusted, galloped back once again to cantonments, in hopes that there he might find something for a man to *do*.

He found that the Envoy had already sent messengers recalling Sale and asking help from Nott. Major Griffiths, with the little force isolated by Sale, had also been recalled.

But though Lawrence loyally commended the energy and resolution shown by his Chief, who "alone comprehended the gravity of the crisis," he was prone to forget that Macnaghten possessed knowledge which the soldiers

did not ; that Elphinstone had long been misled by him as to the true temper of the Afghans, while Shelton and his officers were practically new to the country. Yet Macnaghten—in spite of knowledge—does not seem to have realized one whit the all-importance of an immediate attack on the disturbed quarter of the city.

Not until late afternoon did circumstantial news arrive of the morning's hideous doings. At the same time came a hasty note from Colin Mackenzie. He and Trevor—though resolutely holding their own—were in desperate need of help. To his dismay, Lawrence discovered that more than one appeal had come in during the day ; and now Mackenzie wrote more urgently still, begging for ammunition *at least*, if troops could not be spared.

Here was work after Lawrence's own heart. Unwearied in spirit, if not in body, he hurried to the General's quarters, and craved the loan of two companies that he might at once set out to reinforce his friend with ammunition and men.

"The distance is but a mile and a half, sir," he added persuasively, "and I can lead the men by a route that would expose them to very little street-firing."

He might as well have addressed empty air. Not that the General was unsympathetic ; far from it. He was genuinely distressed. But his evil genius, Captain Grant, and the pessimistic Bellew were prompt in denouncing Lawrence's proposal as "most imprudent." Impossible to avoid street-firing ; and the peculiar deadliness thereof was again flung in his teeth. Hard to listen coolly to such vapouring when English lives and England's reputation hung in the balance ; hard not to retort that omelettes could not be made without breaking eggs. But foregoing the petty satisfaction, Lawrence departed, raging against the paralytic inertia that seemed to have fallen



like a blight on those who alone could organize concerted and effective action.

Nor did he rage the less when evening brought a note from the General woefully eloquent of incapacity and irresolution.

"My dear Sir William," wrote the unhappy old man, "since you left me I have been considering what can be done to-morrow. Our dilemma is a difficult one. . . . We must see what the morning brings, and then think what can be done. . . ."

That last gives the keynote of the whole siege—thinking about to-morrow instead of acting to-day; or in Lady Sale's trenchant phrase, "eternal blatherings of doing and nothing done."

So waned the 2nd of November 1841. The sun set, and the stars came out, and night fell on apathy and confusion in high places: on anxiety and bitterness of heart among those who could only perceive and not do.

In the city it fell on frank astonishment, touched with a dawning sense of triumph. The race that had gone from strength to strength in Hindustan could not, it seemed, be reckoned to hit back when wronged: a form of self-restraint undreamed of in Afghan philosophy. Yet still the Kazzilbash and Barakzai chiefs remained neutral, awaiting possibilities; and still the main instigators kept within doors, hesitating to associate themselves openly with the morning's debauch.

Only through the dark, word must have gone northward that decided the policy of fellow-chiefs then assembling round Lughmán.

The stars waned; and at daybreak the dwellers in the sheepfold were startled by firing on the Siah Sung hills. Drums beat to arms; all was bustle and confusion. But the supposed enemy proved to be Major Griffiths and his

determined little band of sepoy, with a handful of Sappers and two mountain train guns. Let Lawrence himself sing their praises.

“The force had been assailed by swarms of Afghans, and had to fight their way from Khurd Kabul until within sight of cantonments. They had, by their bold bearing and discipline, utterly baffled their enemies, arriving in perfect order, with their followers, tents, and baggage. . . . The arrival of this brave body of men greatly cheered our troops, but they did not seem to arouse our military chiefs to greater energy.”

Not without reason was the 37th N.I. reckoned one of the finest troops in the service; and no doubt, had they been ordered at once to march on a bare two miles, and relieve British officers in sore straits, they would have done so cheerfully and with entire success. As it was, their arrival merely led to the strengthening of Shelton's force; and an abortive attempt—not to relieve Mackenzie, but to carry out a combined attack on the Lahore Gate.

Even this—the first serious attempt at a move—was not made till three o'clock of a winter afternoon: by which time the road between city and cantonments had become a hornet's nest of Afghans ready to spit fire from every fort and ditch. Conditions called for a strong detachment and a bold leader—Griffiths, for choice. Instead there went forth a weak detachment indifferently led: Shelton having been instructed to meet and co-operate with the force under Major Swayne. But Shelton, for reasons of his own, failed to co-operate. In Lawrence's opinion, he was “determined not to act”: and Swayne, unsupported, had no choice but retreat. So fell the evening of the 3rd of November upon an inactive, dispirited garrison, and an undisciplined enemy, emboldened by impunity, glutted with success.

Yet, street-firing or no, there remained many things obvious and practical that cried out to be done. In Durand's opinion, "Trevor and Mackenzie should have been immediately supported, and the Shah's commissariat either brought off or destroyed. Self-preservation pointed out the vital importance of the Commissariat Fort near cantonments: and neither military genius nor skill was requisite to secure communication with this all-important post. . . . With ordinary exertion every woman and child, all stores, guns, and every fighting man might have been within the Bala Hissar before daybreak of the 4th of November. The force thus concentrated . . . would have been at liberty to act on the offensive or defensive, as required. All this was safe, obvious, and practicable. But Elphinstone preferred paralyzing his force by giving it two separate *enceintes* to defend instead of one: the larger being indefensible and little strengthened by the precaution that mounted guns for which there were no gunners. Trevor and Mackenzie he left to their fate."

## V

BUT Trevor and Mackenzie were men to be reckoned with—even in the face of desertion. They at least could be trusted to keep alive their country's reputation for daring and resource.

Some idea has been given of the position of their respective forts. Mackenzie stood on the hither side of the river, near the mulberry-grove of the Yabu Khana, where Ferris's Jezailchis were encamped; and Trevor's seven hundred yards off across the stream, not far from the village of Deh-i-Afghan, most westerly suburb of Kabul city. Spreading far beyond the Yabu Khana and circling the fort to the river's edge, were other groves and walled gardens, excellent for cover.

Early on that fateful Tuesday, the 2nd of November, Colin Mackenzie was making his final preparations to join Sir William in cantonments, and march down with him as far as Peshawur. He was alone—Troup and Anquetil not having returned—when a scuffle and exclamations outside made him look up with a start. There before him stood a native, stripped and covered with blood; two deep sabre-cuts on his head and three musket-holes in his body.

"*Bismillah!*" cried Mackenzie. "From what nest of robbers hast thou sprung?"

Faint with pain and fear, the man told his tale. He—a sowar of the Burra Sahib—had been sent with a message

to Trevor Sahib. But near the city he had been set upon by devils of hell, from whom he had barely escaped with his life. Here was "a pretty strong hint as to how matters were going": and Mackenzie lost no time in acting accordingly. All the gates were secured by order; and he hurriedly went out into the Yabu Khana to gather in Broadfoot's Sappers and Ferris's Jezailchis. Beyond the exchange of occasional friendly greetings, these last were unknown to him. But they answered his call for help as though they had been his own sepoys; and no man ever had a more devoted second than he in their native officer Hasan Khan. For the magic of Colin Mackenzie's personality—his sympathetic understanding, his unfailing chivalry and courage—acted like a talisman on men of every race and creed. The Afghans themselves called him *Shah-i-Feringhi*;<sup>1</sup> and now, in the hour of his danger, they came at his bidding—a hundred and fifty all told.

Scarcely were they safe inside, when the male population of Deh-i-Afghan swarmed down upon them: and, throughout the day, in spite of desperate sallies, held all the ground up to Mackenzie's very walls. Inevitably they cut off the canal: but an old well was found within; and the water—though uninviting—was pronounced "drinkable." The only serious shortage was ammunition—the life-blood of war: and towards afternoon he succeeded in sending a note across to Captain Trevor, who still appeared to hold his tower unmolested. For even at that hour friendly chiefs were with him, only awaiting some decisive move to justify them in openly siding with the British cause.

Mackenzie's note—duly forwarded—was that same urgent request which Lawrence was not permitted to fulfil.

So the day waned. Mackenzie and his handful of men

<sup>1</sup> Feringhi king.

fighting, always fighting; and between whiles straining their eyes for the "glitter of bayonets through the trees." Instead, came certain news of the morning's tragedy, and the sky in that direction grew red with flames.

All night, at intervals, they were tormented by trivial attacks and by a horrible suspicion that the Afghans were undermining their north-west tower. A spirited rally at dawn confirmed their fears; and Mackenzie, possessing no hand-grenades, could only sink a shaft inside the tower. On the brink of this he stationed four resolute men, with orders to shoot the first Afghan they spied.

The extent of the fort had kept every man on duty from the start, and now many began to wax weary; nor were matters improved by incessant wailing of women over the dead and dying. On Mackenzie—the one white man in the midst of them—hung the issue of the whole. Like Haughton at Charikar, he must needs keep moving from post to post, commanding, exhorting and—as often as not—chaffing his hard-pressed defenders. His absence, even for five minutes, visibly disheartened the sepoys; and upon a man so sensitive, so highly wrought, the unceasing tension involved a severer strain than more pedestrian natures can conceive.

Hour by hour his ammunition dwindled. Hour by hour conviction grew in him that he had been abandoned by his countrymen; and about noon came two servants from Trevor's tower, wailing and wringing their hands.

*Wah-wah!* was the like ever heard? The Afghans had seized the Sahib's house, and the Sahib himself, the Memsahib and all the *Baba-lög* had been put to the sword.

Here was a tale to dishearten soldiers already verging on despair; a tale Mackenzie could scarce bring himself to credit in spite of ocular proof that the first part of it

was true. From his own ramparts he could watch the scene of plunder going merrily forward in Trevor's tower, which completely overlooked his own defences; hence fresh calamities. From the summit, Afghan marksmen now used their bigger jezails with a deadly accuracy that soon cleared his western face of defenders; and only by crawling up a narrow stairway and whisking through the door above, at the risk of his life, could Mackenzie manage to visit the tower that was now almost undermined.

By afternoon matters looked blacker than ever. Further resistance seemed sheer folly. Captain Troup's guard, forced to abandon their post, clamoured for admittance. A large wall-piece<sup>1</sup> was added to the jezails on Trevor's tower; while below, a jubilant crowd brought firewood and poles, anointed with combustibles, to burn down the outer door. The wounded were dying for lack of medical aid, and ammunition was practically at an end.

Evening brought the crowning calamity—mutiny within. Hasan Khan—a Jemadar of untiring courage and devotion—reported that some sowars had begun pulling down the barricades on one side, with intent to escape and save themselves by the speed of their horses.

It was a crisis demanding just such courage and magnetism, just such unswerving faith in God's protection, as Mackenzie of all men most abundantly possessed. Either he must compel obedience by native power of command; or—failing—be prepared to meet a violent death. He was so prepared—and that although he loved Helen Douglas better than his own soul, and craved life mainly that he might win home and make her his own.

“I will go to them, my friend,” said he quietly; and taking up a double-barrelled gun, he went.

<sup>1</sup> A long gun too heavy to hold.

At his appearance the sowars turned and faced him—half fearful, half defiant. His head erect, his blue eyes bright with anger, he looked what they had named him—a king of men: and his voice, though quiet, had the level note of command.

“What is this coward’s talk I hear?” said he. “Shut that door at once and rebuild the barricades; or by Allah!”—he shouldered and cocked his gun—“I shoot the first man that disobeys me.”

For a perceptible fraction of a minute they wavered—then he knew that he had won.

The door was closed; the barricade built up. But the crisis warned him that the end was at hand, and he was not unprepared for the next word from Hasan Khan.

“*Hazúr*, I speak for all. Forty hours now we have worked and fought without rest, looking for help that cometh not. Your Honour hath touched no food; the wounded die unattended; and there remaineth scarce one round of ammunition. Is it not enough? If it be the Sahib’s will that we die here like rats in a hole—*Inshallah*, we will die! But in my opinion retreat were now no dishonour.”

“True talk, Hasan Khan,” Mackenzie answered without hesitation. “You have all done good work—retreat will be a perilous matter, seeing the number of women and children. But if all property is sacrificed, by God’s will it may be done!”

A perilous matter it proved; and a feat wellnigh impossible to enforce wholesale sacrifice of belongings. There were even found mothers readier to desert their yearling babes than stir without their cherished pots and pans.

That there might be baggage-ponies enough for these women and the wounded, Mackenzie left all his own belongings; carrying nothing with him but a certain



pocket Testament given him by Helen Douglas on the eve of his departure from Scotland.

The night was moonless and bitter cold, and the fugitives had two investing circles to win through. Mackenzie bade the Jezailchis lead and answer every challenge. Followed the sorry calvacade of *yabus*,<sup>1</sup> bearing the helpless ones; while Mackenzie and a few regulars—who would, he believed, stand by him if attacked—brought up the rear.

Hasan Khan—zealous for the safety of the man he had come to worship—ventured respectfully to quarrel with the order of march. Would not the Sahib be persuaded to ride in the van? he begged—again, and yet again. But Mackenzie laughingly persisted in keeping his “post of honour in the rear”: and thus they set out upon their venturesome bid for safety.

Within half a mile the rear lost touch with the advance, which was actively engaged some way ahead, and Mackenzie, to his disgust, found himself suddenly alone in the midst of a wailing crowd of women and children.

His regulars had quietly slipped on ahead in the darkness, and there remained with him but one faithful chuprassi and two sowars.

From vexation at his awkward strait, Mackenzie was distracted by yells of protest that rose suddenly above the general chorus of woe, and urging his horse into the midst of his incapables, he soon discovered the cause. A Hindustani woman—determined to save both her cooking-pots and her child—had staggered so far under the double burden. Now, confronted by the final wrench of decision, the cooking-pots had it; and the child, unceremoniously deposited by the wayside, proceeded to raise objections that endangered the lives of all.

Danger or no, the woman's unnatural conduct so in-

<sup>1</sup> Ponies.

furiated the gentle and chivalrous Scot, that he drew his sword and smote that bewildered mother with the flat of it till she dropped her bundles and snatched up her babe. Then, with a parting threat to any who dared follow her example, he rode forward alone through a dark and narrow lane, in the hope of discovering his whereabouts and lighting on the road they had missed.

Fortunately he had not troubled to sheathe his sword, for he cantered straight into a party of horsemen, and believing them to be his own Jezailchis, greeted them with words of cheer.

He was answered by a hoarse shout of triumph: "*Wah-illah! Feringhi hast!*" And the supposed Jezailchis fell upon him with swords and knives to the glory of God.

Swift as thought Mackenzie wheeled about and spurred his horse mercilessly, parrying with miraculous dexterity the blows that rained on him right and left. Once only his blade met substance softer than steel, and the sword-arm of his foremost assailant fell to the ground. But there were others—scores of them, and now a violent blow on the back of his head knocked him half out of the saddle.

In the last flash of consciousness came the thought: "So *this* is the end of all—a miserable end indeed! Into Thy hands, O God—!"

Then darkness fell; and he slipped downward, still clutching the reins, one foot caught in the stirrup—

By rights it should have been the end. But in war miracles abound, though men call them by other names.

How, or how long after he knew not—the dead man, who had commended his soul to God, found himself upright in the saddle, clear-headed, uninjured, urging his horse to a gallop, a whole picket firing after them. Unscathed they sped through two volleys of musketry, distanced their pursuers, covered two fields at a hand-gallop,

and so gained a road that led round the western end of the Shah's garden.

Here Mackenzie drew rein and went softly—not for long. Too soon there loomed ahead another body of horsemen—and fearless though he was, his heart stood still. Retreat were madness; and again commending himself to God, he charged boldly into the thick of them, trusting that the weight of his horse might clear a pathway for him, and reserving his sword-cuts for the final struggle.

Well that he did so, for—when the impetus of his onset had sent half a dozen men sprawling—he discovered with a shock, violent as his own impact, that he had charged into his brave Jezailchis and Hasan Khan!

No more than a sleepy post or two now lay between them and their goal. Safety seemed almost unthinkable; but within half an hour they had ridden past British sentries into the fatal enclosure—for them a haven of peace and rest.

Gradually stragglers dropped in also. Women and children and followers—all came safely through that venturesome retreat; though two companies of soldiers had not been permitted to run so grave a risk.

Better still, Mackenzie soon learnt that the tale of wholesale slaughter in Trevor's tower was a lie, invented to dispirit his men; that Trevor and his party had, in fact, escaped by one gate just as the rebels entered at another. Guarded by a handful of the loyal Hazirbash Corps, they had quietly walked into cantonments; the children carried by the soldiers, Mrs. Trevor wading through the river on foot. A Hindustani trooper, flinging out his arm to ward off a blow aimed at her, had his hand cut off at the wrist; yet he walked on as if nothing had happened, till they reached their destination. So it came about that a woman and seven young children owed their safety to a few

Afghan Irregulars, because Elphinstone's troops must not be exposed to street-firing, no matter how laudable the end in view.

As for Mackenzie, though no help could be given him, he was publicly thanked next morning by the General and Envoy for a defence, notable at any time; but inestimable at a moment when Afghans were beginning to doubt the quality of troops whose discipline, valour, and vigour had never yet been called in question by friend or foe.

George Broadfoot—writing months afterwards—summed up the affair in a few sarcastic lines:

“For two days Colin fought, and then cut his way to the force who did not seem able to cut their way to him, bringing in all his crowd . . . and himself getting two sabre-wounds. A more heroic action never was performed. The unhappy women and children have *since* perished or gone into slavery because five thousand men could not do what he did.”

But the bare facts, plainly told, are in themselves a more caustic comment on the military Chiefs of Kabul than any sarcasm of tongue or pen. Bitter to reflect that if Mackenzie had been reinforced by a couple of regiments, the British had remained, throughout, masters of the city. Yet another “If” to swell the inglorious score——

## VI

Brave and hopeful though he was, Colin Mackenzie's first rapid survey of men and things within Kabul cantonments gave him small food for encouragement. All attempt at vigorous measures for crushing a tentative rebellion seemed to have been tacitly given up, and to him it was plain that the root cause of failure lay less in the circumstances than in the British leaders themselves. Obstacles and difficulties there were in plenty. But it is the soldier's duty and glory to override both; and when every allowance had been made, the fact remains that the lack of a General imbued with the "spirit of offensive" was the alpha and omega of all evils that befell the Kabul army, which included, as has been seen, officers of superlative quality, chained hand and foot by the iron laws of their Service.

That both Elphinstone and Shelton were men of valour was nothing to the purpose. Many a man of fine physical courage will fail under the *moral* strain of high command in war. Neither possessed the personality of a leader; neither had any knowledge of the country or the people; hence their persistent disregard of the first rule of Eastern warfare: "When you are pitted against Asiatics, always go for them."

For Elphinstone's paralysis at the outset there were excuses in plenty: but none for the fact that he limited his exertions to recalling the 37th N.I. and mounting

the guns for defence ; unless, indeed, as Durand charitably suggests, “severe pain and suffering had not only shattered the health, but weakened the judgment and mental energy of as brave a gentleman as ever fought under his country’s colours.”

Yet those who served with the kind old man could not choose but love him, even while they were maddened at every turn by his deplorable unfitness for a crisis into which he had been thrust by the mockery of fate.

“Our unhappy General,” lamented Vincent Eyre, most loyal of subalterns, “could neither act vigorously nor deliberate wisely. But let it not be supposed that he was a mere automaton. Happy for us had it been so! Beset with evils, real and imaginary, he would apply for an opinion to almost every officer who came for orders. No one who was not present can conceive the difficulty of transacting business with him. For myself, I rarely wasted time or temper in asking for orders, but just did what seemed right on my own responsibility. . . .”

Well that there were more than a few such spirits in the British lines. But in serious crises, where the call for organized action is supreme, no General, however incapable, can be openly superseded by his subordinates.

It was just such a crisis that arose to confound Elphinstone the Unready on that critical 4th of November—a turning-point for good or evil.

For now the Afghans, greatly daring, threatened the Commissariat (or *godown*<sup>1</sup>), Fort, not four hundred yards from cantonments, the storehouse of tons of grain and all medical stores. Twenty-four hours earlier they had threatened the neighbouring fort of Mahomed Sharif, which Elphinstone would fain have occupied there and then ; but this—his one attempt at an offensive move—

<sup>1</sup> Storehouse.

had been discouraged by Macnaghten as "impolitic." Elphinstone, too weak and worried to insist, had said no more; and that night the post had been occupied in force by Afghan matchlock-men, unhampered by scruples of policy, and supremely versed in the stroke and counter-stroke of war.

Now, on the morning of the 4th, that preliminary pounce was followed up to some purpose; and before noon both the fort (so considerably left empty) and the Shah Bagh, adjoining it, bristled with armed men.

Soon after came a note from Ensign Warren, in charge of the Godown Fort. He and his guard of a hundred sepoy were so hard pressed that unless promptly reinforced they might be unable to hold out. A man of taciturn habit and of cool courage was this young Ensign, one little disposed to exaggerate danger or lose his head in emergency. Plainly, therefore, something must be done, and the General—dumbfounded always by an unexpected call for action—had the happy inspiration of detaching two companies of the 44th to "assist Warren in evacuating his position!!!" The whiplike phrase is Lady Sale's.

Already a spontaneous attempt to send relief and ammunition had cost the life of a good officer and accomplished nothing. Now went forth the General's little word of encouragement to retire; and the Afghans, never dreaming that he was playing into their hands, gave the redcoats greeting with a display of fireworks calculated to shake the stoutest nerves. The 44th stood their ground till both Captains had been killed and three subalterns wounded: then the recall rang out, and yet another failure was added to the list.

The news wrought more than mere discouragement, for now the meaning of the move stood revealed.

Picture the sensations of a beleaguered garrison when they learnt that the man so averse to "needless effusion of blood" was preparing to fling away with both hands all their wheat, medicine, clothing, and—crowning calamity—their store of wine and rum. As a tigress when her cubs are threatened, so raged the British Tommy at thought of losing his "tot" of rum. Assured of that, he could and did endure much; without it—blasphemy unprintable fills the pause.

As for the Commissariat Officers, Boyd and Johnson, the tale goaded them to open remonstrance. This scandalous thing simply could not be.

Behold, therefore, a distraught General still further distraught by plain-spoken representations from Captain Boyd, *plus* the announcement that he had but two days' provisions left in camp. Elphinstone listened, agreed, and promised reinforcements; but in the meantime a small party of Native Cavalry had gone upon the same errand as the 44th, with precisely the same result. The General's heart bled for troops so mercilessly exposed, and his resolution wavered.

Evening brought Boyd again, supported by Johnson, emphatic in renewed declaration that sacrifice of supplies inferred sacrifice of the whole force. Unhappily, there were certain staff-officers present, skilled in the manufacture of obstacles and doubts. These now urged the impossibility of relieving Warren without first capturing Mahomed Sharif's Fort—a serious undertaking at eight o'clock of a winter's evening. But Johnson had discovered that the Afghans in the fort were few and off their guard, and Boyd volunteered, with a small storming party, to blow in the gate himself. While the General still wavered, came another note from Warren, of darker complexion than the first.



The enemy was undermining one of his towers and preparing to burn down the gate. Several sepoy had deserted, and the temper of the rest made it unlikely that he could hold out, unless immediately reinforced. Further vacillation were criminal, and the Commissariat Officers departed, in the full assurance that soon after midnight the hostile fort should be stormed and Warren relieved.

Followed arguments as to ways and means, that gave fresh scope for unsettling the General's mind. Major Thain—a fine, level-headed soldier—withdrawed his advice in disgust, merely answering when addressed; while Vincent Eyre, who was present, also kept silence, supposing that a Subaltern could have no voice in such a council. Yet to him of a sudden the General appealed, as the only artillery officer present.

“I should be glad to have your private opinion on one or two questions, Eyre,” he said kindly, and drew the wondering Gunner into his own room. The door being shut, he was no longer a General honouring a trusted Subaltern, but a frail, shaken old man clutching desperately at the vigour and confidence of youth.

“Eyre, for God's sake, tell me plainly what you think I ought to do! Look at the death-roll to-day! It may be a weakness, but I can't *bear* to feel responsible for such frightful loss of life. And we need every single man, if we are ever to get safe out of this accursed country. Tell me—what do *you* think yourself?”

Pitiful, tragical, the spectacle of one so broken subjected to the strain of high command; but let blame rest where it should, on the man who coerced him against his will.

Vincent Eyre, thus challenged, answered right soldierly:

“I think, sir, that in a crisis so desperate officers and men must be prepared to sacrifice their lives. I think

(and so do we all) that a few deaths, however regrettable, cannot possibly be weighed in the balance against the safety of the whole force, not to say the honour of British arms."

It was well spoken, and in his heart the old man must have known it; yet still he paced the room in uncertainty and agitation, a reed shaken with the wind—

And all the while Ensign Warren, with his handful of half-mutinous men, was holding on, as it were, by his eyelids, and wondering "what the hell" they were doing at headquarters. Though his own life were of no account, it seemed impossible that they should sacrifice their whole supply of grain and stores without a blow.

But the man who should have been ordering the advance could think of nothing more effectual than fresh discussion. Grant as usual multiplied objections, while Eyre did his best to clinch matters by a proposal to consult Sturt, the garrison Engineer. Permission given, he and Sturt, with Warburton—a Shah's gunner—devised a surer plan than blowing up the gate of the smaller fort.

By a miracle their plan was sanctioned, and a note despatched to Warren promising reinforcements before two in the morning.

But later counsels bred fresh complications and delay, so that the east had lightened before all could be got under arms. Captain Bellew with a storming party was at the Kohistan Gate, and a detachment of the 44th awaited only the signal to march, when the word went round: "Too late!" Ensign Warren had just entered cantonments, and the Afghans had seized the Godown Fort.

On the ears of an incredulous and infuriated garrison the words fell dismally as the knell of doom.

Warren, disgusted at having been forced into unheroic retreat, had waited till near five for the promised troops;

then the Afghan had fired his gate, and there had been no choice but to escape through a hole in the wall, previously prepared to let in reinforcements—that never came.

Officially called upon to state his reasons for deserting his post, he replied by demanding a Court of Inquiry on the subject; but it was not deemed expedient to comply with his request. Ensign Warren would have come out of it unscathed, which is more than can be said for certain officers of higher rank, though the names of those responsible for the final delay are significantly suppressed in all records of that discreditable night's work.

Well might the Afghans feel justified of their belief in the intervention of God Himself, who had palpably darkened the counsels of the Feringhi, that the sword of Islam might prevail. Across this tragic page of history the fatalistic phrase, "It is written," seems scrolled in letters of fire.

## VII

"HOLY Moses! did a self-respectin' British soldier ever see the like! A bloomin' hant's nest, runnin' over with blacks—an' only yesterday 'twas *our* Godown Fort! A mighty *philanthropic* General we've got! Pervidin' a bran-tub, free gratis, for them hairy devils; and pourin' every mite of our rum down their blarsted throats!"

The speaker, a corporal of the 44th, stood upon the south-west rampart watching the scene of plunder that went forward merrily between the supply store and the Shah Bagh. His companion growled out an unprintable oath and spat in speechless disgust.

The corporal, more explosive by nature, nodded savagely.

"Right *you* are! An' we got to stand 'ere lookin' on an' enjoyin' the joke—*by* order! Oh, my Gawd!"

The last was a groan wrung from the depths—a groan echoed by scores of brave hearts, British and Indian, on that disgraceful morning of November, when the Afghans discovered—to their amazement and advantage—that five thousand British troops could "sit down tamely and see themselves bearded at their very gates by a few contemptible, ill-armed savages." Small wonder that this spiritless surrender proved the first fatal blow to British supremacy at Kabul; small wonder that Barakzais, Kazzilbashes, and others, who had so far remained neutral, now openly took part against them from that day forward.

As to the Commissariat Officers, their wrath knew no bounds; and for the rest, as realization bit deep into every heart, "one universal feeling of indignation pervaded the garrison." Among the troops—more especially the native ones—mere anger was salted with a fine spirit of impatience to march out and recapture the fort—a spirit worthy of prompt encouragement. One regiment, supported by artillery, would have sufficed; yet, not without strenuous appeal did Eyre win leave to take out his guns and keep the road clear for a storming party—two weak British companies, under Major Swayne—destined for the fort of Mahomed Sharif. Despite his dread of reverses, Elphinstone seemed incapable of making one bold bid for success.

Eyre blazed and thundered valiantly for more than ten minutes, under a sharp fire. No sign of the Infantry, whose orders were to advance rapidly, under cover of the guns, and blow up the gate. But Swayne, not greatly given to advancing, had, instead, sought the cover of a wall, and thence responded ineffectually to heavy firing from the fort. Elphinstone, distressed at such waste of ammunition, ordered the recall, to the infinite disgust of Eyre and of the entire garrison.

The 37th, more impatient than ever, openly clamoured to be led out by their lion-hearted leader. Whether the General ever knew this seems uncertain: at all events, nothing more was done that day. The Afghans enjoyed their triumph to the full.

And up at the Bala Hissar, in the Gate of the Harem Serai, sat the bewildered old King, shakily holding a telescope to his eyes; watching, spell-bound, the scenes enacted below; and muttering at intervals with justifiable conviction: "*Bismillah!* These English are mad!"

Whatever his original sympathy with the chiefs, or his

veiled approval of retaliation, the *tamasha* had proved too alarming for his taste; and by now he was at his wits' end, genuinely fearful of the outcome.

There were those also in cantonments who began to be fearful of the outcome, with such a General in command. Sturt—the one garrison Engineer—had lain abed for three days, fretting himself crazy at the heaping of failure on failure that must steadily sap the spirits of all. But on the morning of the 6th—ignoring the dissuasion of his women-folk—he rose at dawn, struggled painfully into shirt and flannel trousers, and hurried to the works; having won reluctant permission from Elphinstone to make any arrangements he deemed “safe from chance of failure” for a fresh attack on the fort.

It took hours to evolve order from chaos and encourage exasperated troops: but by exerting himself to the utmost, he got men and things into position soon after ten o'clock. Then was the whole cantonment cheered by the thunder of three nine-pounders and of two twenty-four-pound howitzers across the road. Elphinstone alone was perturbed by those welcome voices: for within half an hour the strange-looking Engineer in bandages and shirt-sleeves was politely accosted by Major Thain, A.D.C.

The General requested that Lieutenant Sturt would be careful in expending ammunition, as powder was scarce: a statement difficult to make with a straight face, since Thain knew as well as Sturt that the magazine held ammunition enough for a twelve months siege.

Sturt, as behoved him, acknowledged the order—and quietly ignored it. Before noon the fort was breached and the gate blown in by Bellew—valiant in action if timid in counsel.

Up through the breach rushed the storming party—three companies this time, splendidly led by Griffiths. A

short shock of resistance, swords against bayonets, and the crest was won.

On the summit appeared a single figure—triumphant, conspicuous—Ensign Raban of the 44th, waving his sword and cheering lustily. The next moment he fell forward, his cheering silenced by a bullet in the heart. An incident merely—however tragical for those who slept, unknowing, six thousand miles away.

The rest rushed on, mad with the joy of achievement;—and again the summit was crowned; this time by a sepoy of the 37th waving an Afghan standard,—his own trophy, whereby he won promotion.

Envious troops watching from the ramparts cheered themselves hoarse. The fort had been carried. One decisive blow had been struck at last; a blow that must be driven home by clearing the Shah Bagh and pursuing the ousted Afghans, who made straight for the Behmáru hills.

There was no lack of zeal among officers and men. In and around the garden, Eyre with his guns, and Mackenzie—now commandant of his faithful Jezailchis—did noble service. Thain, leading a handful of cavalry, infantry and one Horse Artillery gun, scoured the plain, and—in conjunction with Anderson's Horse—executed more than one brilliant cavalry charge. For hours the Behmáru ridge was alive with Afghan horsemen who, in spite of superior numbers, showed little inclination for open encounter on the plain.

Lady Sale and her daughter, from their post of observation on the house-top, watched with palpitating eagerness the progress of events. All was clearly visible:—the flash of pistol and matchlocks, the glitter of swords, the downward rush of Afghan horsemen, each with a foot-soldier behind him, to be dropped when necessary, fresh for combat.

But to the eye of the soldierly old lady the whole was little more than "a very exciting and provoking spectacle." Though all arms did gallantly, they failed of definite achievement for lack of the guiding brain that should have converted mere skirmishing into an organized action, temporary triumph into lasting success.

Such men, it was plain, needed only a leader, vigorous and purposeful, to have beaten five times their number in open fight. But beyond that unheeded request to Sturt, Elphinstone seems to have had little voice in the day's proceedings; and the troops returned at nightfall without having attempted the main object in view—an attack on the Commissariat Fort. Nothing great had been purposed or designed; and as for beating the enemy, Elphinstone seemed to take no count of this, the most obvious way out of his dilemma.

Already he had urged Macnaghten seriously to consider their chances of making terms, if driven to the extremity of retreat. Nor were his failing spirits lifted by the arrival, late in the afternoon, of Pottinger's statement that nothing short of instant help could save the Gurkha Regiment from annihilation. What help or hope from a reed shaken with the wind?

"This is most distressing," wrote Elphinstone to the Envoy. "Can nothing be done by the promise of a lakh of rupees to any of the Kohistan chiefs, to bring them off?" And again, harping on the "serious and awful" question of ammunition, he repeated the advisability of treating for themselves also, adding: "Do not suppose I wish to recommend terms that would reflect disgrace on us. But this fact of ammunition must not be lost sight of. . . . Our case is not yet desperate. I do not mean to imply that; but it must be borne in mind that it goes very fast."



It speaks well for Macnaghten that such communications stirred him, not to apprehension, but rather to impatience and disgust. Ammunition or no, with such a man in command, the case of the British army at Kabul seemed like to go very fast indeed.

Yet there still remained soldierly spirits unquenched by the General's apathy, as was proven by the council of war held that evening at Lady Sale's house. Here Sturt, Eyre, Paton, and Bellew, devised between them a vigorous and practical plan for carrying the Shah Bagh and the Commissariat Fort at daybreak. Lady Sale, present as usual, followed the talk with emphatic approval. "Everything was so clearly explained," said she, "that even *I* understood it as well as hemming the handkerchief I was making. . . . Plans were sketched and all minutiae written out, so that the General might have no questions to ask. . . ."

The scheme, though promptly submitted, had not been sanctioned by midnight, and next morning, after due discussion and deliberation, the General in Council decided that nothing further could safely be done!

As for Pottinger's appeal, the news—while it saddened all—had fired the chivalrous spirit of Colin Mackenzie to action. Within an hour of its arrival he had called on the General, urgently demanding a supply of ammunition and the loan of two hundred horse. Given these, he was prepared to set out at once, and, by making a forced night-march, arrive at Charikar early on the 7th.

But the General in Council smiled a composite smile and shook a collective head. It found the suggestion quite unpracticable; and Mackenzie's gallant impulse fared no better than that of Lawrence four days earlier.

In plain terms a General, not yet invested, with ample ammunition and troops at command, would stir neither hand nor foot to save the Charikar garrison from its fate.

## VIII

ON that same 7th of November, when by rights they should have waked to greet Mackenzie and his men, Pottinger and Haughton braced themselves to win through yet another day of desperate, unequal struggle and of hope deferred.

Dawn—ushered in by the challenging notes of *revillé*, and the muttering of Afghan drums—found Haughton at his post in the gateway. Here, on a barrack-chair beside the eighteen-pounder, he had spent three bitter nights, going the round of his defences at intervals, to see that all was well and to combat the cold that chilled his marrow in defiance of muffler, leggings, and sheepskin coat.

Sleep, even the desire of sleep, had forsaken him; and in any case, the Afghans would have allowed him no such luxury. For while the warriors took their rest, men of peace were constrained to enliven the infidels with drums and strange instruments, with war-cries and feigned attacks, in the hope of wearing out a garrison whose obstinacy seemed proof against lead and steel. Of this cunning device, Haughton was not yet aware, and the strain of unceasing vigilance began to tell heavily on all, the more so that diminishing numbers condemned the men to unrelieved duty night and day.

But for the moment there was respite; and now, as the bugle-notes died into silence, came Codrington's servant,

to that chair by the gateway, bearing a priceless cup of tea and two sodden biscuits, Haughton's only regular meal in the twenty-four hours. For him the tea was nectar, the biscuits ambrosia, and without them he vowed he could never have held out as he did. Followed a leisurely cheroot to soothe his overstrung nerves; then he arose and stretched himself expansively, fortified in body and spirit for the worst that the day might bring forth.

And above him, in that upper room of sacred memories, Eldred Pottinger sipped his own appointed share of nectar, braced himself to renewed endurance of his own appointed ordeal, in some respects the harder of the two. For the born soldier it needed perhaps a higher form of courage not to give place to the devil as he lay alone, hour after hour, fevered and in pain; shelved, useless, at a moment when every officer was worth half a dozen, anxiety gnawing at his heart, the roar of battle in his ears. What little he could do by taking thought had already been done. A dozen rifles—his own property, brought from Lughmánu—he had given over to Haughton's marksmen. He had superintended the erection of scaffolding in his own room, with loopholes above it, and had boxes placed upon the roof by way of improvising cover for half a dozen men. The rest it was Haughton's privilege to achieve; and each day deepened Pottinger's admiration of the young man's gallantry and leadership, admiration tinged with generous and not unnatural envy.

In truth the feats of resistance achieved by John Haughton and his devoted band of Gurkhas against twenty times their own number read like the ancient triumphs of Judah in Canaan when the Lord God of Israel fought for His people. To Him alone the hero of that defence gave glory, as his own manly record bears witness. "It seemed, indeed, as if the whole male popu-

lation of the country had assembled against us. I am sure I am within bounds when I say that on the 5th and subsequent days we were besieged by no less than twenty thousand armed men. Had they been at all organized and directed by any man of ability, our destruction was certain. An overruling Providence, however, made their numbers of no avail, their utmost efforts fruitless. The very excess of their numbers gave us nerve; we also felt assured that relief would be sent from Kabul when our situation became known."

To the modern man of much knowledge and little faith such words savour of an almost childish simplicity; yet possibly by virtue of that childish quality, that assured reliance on a Strength above and beyond his own, John Haughton found courage to fight on, without sleep, with little food or rest, and a water-supply that dwindled daily.

On this, the fourth morning of investment, daylight found them as usual, enclosed by a ring of Afghans formed up just beyond the range of "Brown Bess"; whence they proceeded to throw out parties of marksmen under cover of cairns, walls, and the group of huts, whose defence had cost Codrington his life.

From that post of vantage bullets whistled through the open gateway and even to the doorless enclosure where women wailed and prayed. One of these unwelcome visitors, as if cynically purposeful, fared still farther, and entering an inner room found out the timorous man of Bengal, who for three days had not dared desert the one corner he believed to be safe. Now he lay writhing on the ground, with few to pity him and none to honour him, when dead, with orthodox lamentations.

But though bullets through the gate were, in soldierly phrase, "annoying," there came others during the morning that gave Haughton furiously to think.

Shots began dropping into the barrack-square itself. A curtain hung up behind the gun in the gateway wrought little effect; and Haughton soon realized that the firing came from Khojah Mir's fort. The discovery told its own tale. Through pressure or treachery that little detachment must have succumbed—and their last remaining outpost was gone; the very core of their little fort exposed to a horde of marksmen who could pick them off without fear of retaliation.

It was a moment to brace or break a man; but despair evolved an expedient—a device, ridiculously simple, well known among the Japanese. The walls of the officers' tents were rapidly fixed up along the north and south parapets—with miraculous effect.

Haughton—snatching a midday meal of raisins and fried flour—chuckled with boyish satisfaction at having “scored a point.” Who would dream of mere canvas checking bullets? But the Afghans were too shrewd to fire aimlessly; and the “annoyance” ceased on the spot. That evening the Subadar responsible for Khojah Mir's fort presented himself at the gateway, anxious to explain and to convey a message from the chief. It seemed that the Mahomedan munshi, sent as interpreter, had convinced him that their case was hopeless, and he entreated the Sahibs to consider terms of surrender.

The Sahibs refused point-blank; but a conference would give respite to the harassed troops and possibly yield information, for which all craved. They sent word that on the morrow they would confer.

That afternoon, during a lull in the enemy's attentions, they buried their dead—fifty of them—in a great pit intended for a tank. The horses and cattle Haughton shrank from burying with his fallen comrades. They were quartered, therefore, and flung over the walls for

further removal when opportunity offered. At dusk he strolled out as usual, a little beyond the gate, hoping always that his lost sheep, left at Lughmáni, might by some means find their way back to the fold.

And to-night they came. Afar off, in the half dark, he knew them and gave them greeting. At sound of his voice they ran forward; and he, British officer though he was, took them in his arms and blessed them as though they had been his own sons. "Europeans who have been in India," he wrote afterwards, "can alone judge the exuberant feelings by which I must have been actuated to indulge in such an unwonted demonstration of regard."

The party returned to barracks talking eagerly; and in spite of dire straits, threatened water-famine, and the ever-present shadow of death, there was joy that night in the fort of Charikar.

Next morning two chiefs of Nijrão, long-locked and eagle-eyed, were ushered by a guard of Gurkhas into Pottinger's room; while Haughton, who remained without, took all possible precautions against that which they feared beyond everything—treachery.

The interview was long and wordy and of little avail. It served to convince Pottinger that most of the Afghans believed they were obeying a Royal mandate to expel or destroy every Feringhi in the land. As for terms of surrender, the chiefs promised safe retreat for all, if Christians and Hindus alike would embrace the faith of Islam.

To such terms Pottinger's answer may be guessed.

"We came into this country," said he, "to help a Mahomedan King recover his rights. We are here to help him keep them. We are therefore within the pale of Islam and exempt from all coercion on the score of religion."

The bearers of the olive-branch shook their heads. "Will you and your soldier-*lög* surrender at His Majesty's commands?"

"Without an order written and sealed by the King himself, I will do nothing of the kind," the wounded man made answer quietly. "You have leave to depart."

And all night long Haughton sat again in his chair, alert, unsleeping, entertained by the concert in the canal: upheld by the conviction that the morrow must assuredly bring some sign of relief.

The morrow brought a messenger from yet another Nijrão chief, demanding audience of the "Burra Sahib." Tempted again by the desire for information—a commodity even scarcer than water—Haughton let him in, not without qualms; for it was plain that such visits tended to demoralize his men.

But the Afghan's demands were preposterous—guns, money, hostages, and the like; his information, nil; and Haughton said in his heart: "Never again!"

He said it also to his visitor, adding sternly: "If you *do* come any more it will be at your peril. Though I am no "Burra Sahib," it is I who command these troops; and, as God is above us, I will string you up for all your friends to see. Englishmen do not surrender. It is enough."

The visitor went his way marvelling at one who could speak thus after five days of desperate fighting; though the hopelessness of his case was plain to see as the Pughmán Hills at noon.

As for Haughton, he hurried back to Pottinger's room. There also, as commander, he spoke his mind on the subject, greatly to Pottinger's approval, while they discouraged the thought of "tiffin" with plates of dried mulberries. For though stores were plenty, water could no longer be wasted on so superfluous a luxury as cooking

food. Washing had long been out of the question, even for the wounded, whose need was sorest.

Before the impromptu meal was ended, came the sound of hurrying feet and the voice of a Subadar breathless with excitement.

Bidden to enter he poured forth his tale, the words tripping over each other. From the bastion he commanded, all had seen at last the sight of sights—a cloud of dust on the Kabul road. It moved steadily nearer. In the midst of it were mounted men. If the Sahib would bring his magic glass——

But the Sahib had already snatched up Codrington's telescope and was gone.

Eldred Pottinger lay back upon his pillow, heart and pulses beating to suffocation, scarcely able to endure the minutes that must pass before Haughton could bring confirmation of the news.

The Subadar scurried back to his post. There stood Haughton, looking, looking, into the heart of that advancing dust-cloud.

Relief—not a doubt of it! The orderly movement proclaimed regular troops; the white head-dresses, plainly seen, suggested the 5th Cavalry: and when at length he lowered the instrument, tears of joy streamed unheeded down his cheeks. There were tears in the men's eyes also, and broken sentences of jubilation on their lips. Impossible, all in a moment, to grasp their good fortune.

Before returning to Pottinger, Haughton must needs confirm the evidence of his own senses; and again he put the glass to his eyes.

The dust-cloud had come appreciably nearer. But the orderly body of horsemen, the plainly seen white turbans—what on earth had become of them all? In that moment the wheels of his being seemed to stand still, and the



blood ebbed back to his heart. Then he realized what had happened.

The fantastic play of mirage on sun and dust had transfigured a herd of cattle into that which they hungered to see. He put down the telescope and quietly explained the phenomenon to his Gurkhas.

No tears now: no broken sentences. In the face of joy, they could give way to emotion: in the face of bitter disappointment they could and did quit them like men.

Haughton, no less of a Stoic, went slowly back to Pottinger's room. For the first time, in the few and brave years of his life, he came near to despair.

The hours dragged by heavy as lead. The morning's visit had spared them the one general attack that marked each day. Fighting was desultory; spirits at the lowest ebb.

Near sunset a Syud was announced at the main gate, demanding admittance as a friend. Unchallenged, by reason of his holiness, he had passed through the Afghan pickets. He came from Kabul and desired speech of the Sahibs; though his news was not of a nature to lift their hearts.

Eager to hear, none the less, they assembled in Pottinger's room—Haughton, Rose, Grant, and one British sergeant.

There—as day waned behind the hills—they heard the tale of that incredible 2nd of November, and the still more incredible days that followed; they heard of guns captured, many deaths, incessant fighting. And when the Syud had made an end of his tale, they knew that their hope of relief was a vain dream, their lesser plight a side-issue with which Kabul was in no position to cope.

Fortified by knowledge of the worst, they saw their duty plain. Obviously, their own capitulation would

release their besiegers to swell the numbers pressing heavily on Kabul: therefore, God helping them, they would hold out to the last.

Hungry, thirsty, wounded, and desperately weary, they were not beaten yet by any means, as the Afghans should discover on the morrow. In that little council of five—and one a half-caste—there was no dissentient voice. Their house, though small, was not divided against itself. It was founded on the rock of human courage and super-human faith.

## IX

BUT for all their courage and devotion, it became hourly clearer that the enemy without possessed two powerful allies within.

Ammunition dwindled fast—and water, still faster. The guns were served mainly with fragments of lead sewed up in canvas bags; and as a last resource Haughton had collected all the copper coins available. Nails and scraps of iron were contributed by the armourer, who now received orders to cut up the drag-chain of the eighteen-pounder. For the gun-bullocks were dying, and if it came to retreat, the guns would have to be spiked.

As for water—since the canal supply failed, a small postern gate, at the back, was opened each night after dark, that the men might slip out and fill their *lotahs* from pits and hollows near the walls, while those who had neither *lotahs* nor canteens soaked their grimy rags and wrung them out to the last drop.

To-night the water-seekers reported that the pits were almost empty. “After to-morrow,” they said, “no more water for any man unless we can raid the spring,”—a small one higher up the hill.

“We *will* raid the spring,” Haughton replied in a tone as assured as though he had said, “We will parade to-morrow at six.” And the men who loved him went away comforted. Haughton Sahib had never yet filled their stomachs with empty speech.

That night, while Pottinger lay unsleeping on his bed, and Haughton kept vigil at the gateway, their attention was attracted by a concert of unusual vigour proceeding from the south-east bastion. Mere bravado, Haughton believed it; others thought that an attempt at mining was on foot, and that—should it succeed—were an end of all. But Haughton went among them, speaking brave words; bidding them keep a strict lookout till morning, when it would be easy to destroy any harm that had been done.

Then he returned to his own post, where a small reserve was always ready for prompt action in case of emergencies. And to-night he had need of them.

Soon after twelve the garrison was appalled by the thunder of an explosion, shouts of triumph, and the clamour of jezails. One conviction shook the hearts of all—the south-east bastion was down! The guard—panic-stricken and demoralized—fled incontinently, and a cry went up that the enemy was among them.

Haughton wasted no time in refutation. Within five minutes he and his reserve—and a few others rallied in passing—had crowned the breach.

They found it unoccupied! Beyond a vigorous outburst of firing, nothing had been done. Had a storming party rushed in, the fort must have been carried. But the Afghans had never a brain among them to organize or command.

In no time Haughton's men had barricaded the breach with boards and sandbags. It was not a large one; and daylight revealed that there had been no regular mining from the huts. One man had boldly sat at the foot of the bastion and dug a hole, which he loaded and fired, while his friends provided the concert to distract attention. Evidently the main idea was to give the garrison a fright;

and Haughton decreed that a piece of lighted port-fire be dropped near each bastion every half-hour throughout the night.

The nerves of his Gurkhas were in no fit condition to appreciate the humours of such barbaric practical jokes.

To the man who loved them as his own children, it was heartbreaking to see how, day by day, their number dwindled; their suffering and privation increased; while their spirit and power of resistance flagged. All that a devoted leader could do for them—short of the one impossibility—Haughton did. Such food as could be eaten uncooked, they had without stint, besides a generous supply of mutton from the officers' mess-flock. But little was used. They said it only increased their thirst; though some, grown desperate, sucked the raw flesh to moisten their swollen lips and tongues.

"Fighting is at all times dry work, but fighting without water is nearly impossible," wrote John Haughton, in his unvarnished record of that heroic little siege. "The misery was great. . . . Even while still unconfined to our barracks, food was only obtainable at irregular intervals. Our voices were hoarse, our lips cracked, our faces begrimed with smoke and dust, our eyes bloodshot. I do not remember to have sat down to a meal after the evening Pottinger joined us; my food being chiefly mulberries, brought from the Fakir's Takia in front, or fried flour brought in by the sepoy. Truly we were one!"

Zealous to give what help they might to those from whom they could get none, officers and men shared, in equal measure, the glory and anguish of holding out to the limit of common human endurance—and beyond. Hunger, thirst, weariness—even the heart-piercing cries of

sick and wounded, for water that none could give—failed to shake their resolve; though, on this morning of the 10th, Haughton gave orders that all available water should be brought in after dark, guarded by sentries, and measured out to the last drop.

Beyond the disappearance of that last drop none had courage to look.

To-day the general attack failed not, neither did Haughton's resolute repulse. But about noon, sudden cessation of firing suggested fresh overtures; and he, looking out, saw his visitor at the gate—not the gentleman he had warned, but another: a genuine Afghan, of magnificent build and defiant bearing, who fairly forced himself in to have speech with the Burra Sahib.

The interview proved brief and fruitless. The visitor's demands were bold as his bearing; and Pottinger would have none of them. In fact, it was clear to both officers that the man had been sent to spy out the land; and Haughton, with characteristic boldness, invited him, before leaving, to "take a thorough look round."

The Afghan laughed and complied. They strolled through the barracks in friendly fashion, a stalwart pair, Haughton playing cicerone with imperturbable good humour.

"You perceive," said he, "that we are few and weak; it is easy enough to force an entrance, especially at that corner"—he indicated the damaged bastion. "When you want to see us again, come up that way like a man; and we will give you greeting! To come through the gate is against the rules of the game, besides being waste of time for all."

And so an end of the would-be negotiator.

"He was the perfection of health and strength," wrote Haughton, "but I don't think he quite approved of the

spirit he found inside our place":—a spirit worthy of the race that fought at Agincourt.

After dark, as ordered, the men brought in every available drop of water—much of it liquid mud.

So great was the crush, so wild the excitement of desperate men and women, that Haughton had to superintend in person, till the precious fluid had been lodged under a strong guard, and a Subadar told off to serve it out—half a teacup to each fighting man. Women, children, camp-followers, not to mention horses and bullocks—who had touched no water for a week—must of necessity go without.

But soon a cry of partiality was raised. The men insisted that only from the Sahib would all receive fair treatment, and Haughton consented to serve them himself. Then they were satisfied; though every man, from Brahmin and Rajput downward, lost caste by receiving water in a Christian teacup from a Christian hand. By their willingness may be gauged the measure of their anguish.

Mercifully there comes a point in prolonged suffering when the nerves of pain are numbed; the faculties are dulled; apathy supervenes; and against apathy the devils of hell sling their arrows in vain.

It was this last that now began to be fatally apparent in Haughton's little garrison, especially among the Hindus. Worse still, there had been whispered hints of treachery brewing among the gunners—the only Mahomedans of the party. But without tangible proof, Haughton could neither punish them nor turn them out of barracks. They were as his right arm; and they had so far fought like men. Without them resistance would be at an end. True, one of them had deserted, and the rest had demanded their pay. For answer, he had issued a private

order that credit be given them at the regimental shops, and a vigilant eye be kept on their movements. For himself, he was busy organizing a sortie in search of water that might lift the hearts and dispel the apathy of his beloved men.

By the night of the 11th, nothing was left but a small vesselful belonging to Mr. Rose, and this had been set aside to insure the four officers their morning cup of tea—the only fluid any of them had tasted for three days. And on the morrow that too would be gone.

The morrow found them in every way much worse off. Since the 5th, snow had fallen even on the lower hills. It was piercingly cold; the sepoys worn out; the enemy diabolically skilful in contrivances to dispirit them. Haughton, for all his own invincible courage, knew that the end was not far off.

That morning, during the usual attack, several men were absent, and had to be driven up from the barracks like sheep to the slaughter. Even so, others slunk off again—among them a Native Officer; and Haughton could not overlook this last. Hurrying after the hapless Subadar he dragged him into the open square, tore off his uniform in the presence of all, dismissed him from the Regiment, and sent him to work as a coolie among the camp-followers.

Haughton himself—pitiful rather than angry—probably suffered as much as the offender: but he knew that certain diseases need desperate remedies, and he was justified of his act. By way of encouragement to those who had done well, he at once announced his intention of taking out a hundred men himself that night to the new canal cut, which—if reached undetected—would yield treasure in abundance. Since Ramzán began, the enemy had been less vigilant at night. For now they fought fasting, and



the one big meal at sundown conduced to heavier sleep. Wherefore, carried out boldly and in silence, the sortie could hardly fail of success.

Thus matters were settled, to the satisfaction of all—or so it seemed. But an hour later the Native Officers came privately to Haughton, and besought him—as he valued the lives of all—not to adventure out in his own person. Better by far to go without water than risk loss of him who was the leading spirit of the defence. Without him would they not be as shepherdless sheep? In less than twelve hours all would be put to the sword.

And Haughton knew that it was so. They themselves, with one or two exceptions, had small control over the men. Ensign Rose had only been transferred to the Regiment six months earlier, and Pottinger was disabled by his wound from active command. Recognizing these things, he consented, unwillingly enough, to place the sortie in charge of Rose and his best Native Officer. All was explained beforehand, with the utmost detail and precision—the route, the points to be held till the water-carriers returned, and, above all, the paramount necessity for silence.

Close on midnight he sent them forth and took up his unvarying post in the gateway, there to await the result. This night was the ninth he had spent in that chair without closing his eyes. Once, in the daytime, he had tried to snatch an hour's oblivion—without success. Now he sat listening—listening, while interminable ages slipped by; till the silence was shattered by a volley at the unfinished mess-house across the canal, where the enemy had lately assembled in force. Another volley at the canal itself; then scattered firing from several pickets. None of these points had been included in his plan; and anxiety increased tenfold.

At last, at long last, came the sound of returning steps. The postern door was opened and the adventurers rushed in, rampant with triumph, flourishing a green standard of regal proportions; but of water they had little or none to show for their pains; and what cared men dying of thirst for the spilled blood of Afghans or the capture of a flag?

Haughton's brave heart sank within him, but he listened patiently to their tale.

The cut had been rapidly discovered; but once within reach of water the men had got fairly out of hand. Filling all the vessels and drinking till they could no more, they had clamoured to make good their chance of taking the enemy unawares. A thousand or so were said to be assembled near the mess-house, and thither they went; young Rose, it seems, unable to resist the infectious spirit of adventure.

Finding that all had gone sound asleep without planting a sentry, their joy knew no bounds. One volley they fired upon "the slumbering crowd of faces beneath them"; then charged. Bayonet and *kookri* did the rest. It was an orgie of slaughter; their purpose clean forgotten; control at an end. Then of a sudden triumph changed to panic; and fearful of retaliation, the men had bolted back into barracks leaving their officer alone. For all that, they were in high spirits and mightily pleased with their achievement.

Not so Haughton; for the sortie had, after all, failed in its object. The meagre supply of water brought in was promptly conserved; and but for passing relief they were no better off than before.

Haughton recognized the fact that night; and on the morrow it was plain to him that others recognized it also. Whispered consultations among the native officers could

have but one meaning; and when at last they found courage to approach him in a body, he knew their errand only too well. They announced respectfully that for nine days they had held their own against a multitude; that without water they could fight no more. The Sahib would surely understand.

He did understand; and straightway pledged his life on an attempt to lead them to water that night. Such a pledge from such a man sufficed. They went away satisfied, and Haughton himself hurried to Pottinger's room.

Here, for the first time, a council was held—not to discuss the question of retreat, but of the least perilous route. It had come to that. All recognized the necessity and the less said of it the better.

Killed and wounded, they had lost nearly half their number. There remained little more than three hundred and fifty worn-out men under arms, with one hundred and forty women and children *plus* a rabble of camp-followers: all destitute of water. Though their musket ammunition had been carefully husbanded, the wildest makeshifts could produce no more for the guns. They were close beset by overwhelming numbers; all hope of relief was gone. Remained the choice of death, of surrender to a notoriously faithless enemy, or the attempt to join, by stealth, their comrades at Kabul. No dishonour to them they that chose the last, in the hope that, by a rapid unencumbered march, a remnant at least might be saved.

Much hung on the route; and here Pottinger's careful study of the country proved invaluable. He traced on the map a line of road skirting the foothills; a road little likely to be watched and—better than all—abounding in water. At dusk the little remnant should be formed up outside the postern. Haughton and Pottinger would lead the

advance, Grant, the main body; Rose and the sergeant bringing up the rear.

Haughton desired that, until that moment, the real nature of their move be kept secret from the men. "Our preparations will rouse no curiosity," said he. "I have pledged my life to lead them to water to-night."

"They will find it in plenty," Pottinger assured him, "about four miles out."

"Good. We can tell them so; and at the same time announce their destination. God helping us, the thing *can* be done."

An unnatural quiet without caught his attention. "No firing! The devils must have some new game on foot. I'd better be off and see what's up." He hurried away, followed by Rose to a lookout post near the north-east bastion; and the Subadar of artillery seeing them go, followed also—black treachery in his heart.

## X

For some reason it was clear that hostilities had been suspended; and now, from his post on the bastion, Haughton saw a Mahomedan gunner, oiled, combed, and spotless, approaching the gate. His object was plain.

"Is that the deserter?" Haughton asked, "or the man who was cut off in one of our sorties?"

And the Subadar at his elbow answered: "It is the deserter, Sahib. Doubtless he cometh to make terms."

"No more terms for me," said Haughton with decision, and, unarmed as he was, ran quickly down to meet the olive-bearer at the gate and prevent any demoralizing talk with his men.

He arrived just in time. The Mahomedan, seeing his intent, tried to slip past unhindered. Haughton seized him by the collar. He promptly slid to the ground, Haughton stooping with him, determined not to let go.

But, as he stooped, a sword struck him with tremendous force on the back of his neck. Half-stunned, he fell forward, losing his man; and quick as thought the blows were repeated. One bit deep into his shoulder, another fractured his forearm, and a third almost severed his right hand. The whole thing passed in a flash; and at the moment none were near to check the cowardly assault. But the sharp pain in his wrist roused Haughton. Staggering to his feet, he confronted his assailant, the Subadar of artillery, who glared at him like a madman; the sword

—snatched from Rose in passing—swung aloft with intent to strike again.

Haughton, unarmed and severely wounded, had no choice but retreat. With surprising alacrity he sprang up a ladder to the roof of the barricade, and thence cried aloud to the men below: "Treachery! Treachery! Shoot those *nimák haráms!* They are off to the enemy!"

It was true. All the Mahomedans in barracks made a rush for the gateway, their departure speeded by a rain of bullets.

Haughton—the blood spouting from an artery in his wrist—reeled suddenly, half fainting, but two men near him quickly bound up the wound. Between them the sturdy little Gurkhas supported their six-foot leader to the room below Pottinger's, and there laid him on his bed, in cruel pain, effectually disabled from further action or even command; and now, besides young Rose and a Eurasian doctor, Charikar Fort had no leader any more.

All had been skilfully arranged. The gunners, sick of futile resistance, had agreed to kill Haughton and desert in a body, while the Afghans, seizing the moment of confusion and dismay, were to carry the place by escalade. But even now they did not realize the temper of Gurkhas and British officers with their backs against a wall.

Haughton's fall and the flight of his gunners was the signal for a vigorous onset from all sides at once; and Pottinger, hearing, where he lay, the ominous outburst of firearms, was seized with sudden fear that retreat had been anticipated and the Gurkhas driven from the walls. He shouted for his servant, who came running in with news of all that had passed; news serious enough, but not the worst—as yet.

"Help me into a chair," he commanded straightway,

and it was done. "Now call others and carry me quickly to the gate. If I cannot fight, I *can* command."

To the gate they carried him, and there he found to his relief that Grant, with admirable promptitude, had rallied the men just in time to secure the opening and upset the calculations of their enemies.

Now, under Pottinger's directions, the eighteen-pounder was brought into play; till those who had rushed the position, confident of victory, had been repulsed with loss and with no little amazement at men who did not appear to know the meaning of defeat.

Thus danger was averted—for the moment; and the Native Officers, yea, even the sepoy, crowded round Pottinger's chair voluble in assurance of fidelity.

But with fidelity, as with love, the mere need of assurance damns its quality; and so soon as Pottinger departed to rest and prepare for the night's adventure, those faithful ones proceeded to rifle Codrington's quarters. That done, in the very face of the enemy's fire they pulled down and pillaged other officers' boxes, piled up as traverses to protect the open gateway. By these and other signs it was too plain that, although the Afghans had been foiled, the attack on Haughton and the desertion of the gunners had utterly demoralized his remaining troops. Within a couple of hours his devoted few had become a mere rabble, over whom none could exercise control.

Pottinger's heart sank at the prospect of marshalling them over fifty miles of unknown road in the dark; for now the responsibility of leadership would rest entirely on his own shoulders. It seemed more than doubtful whether poor Haughton could even sit a horse for fifty miles and reach Kabul alive. The Subadar, though he had failed of killing his man, had done his work well. Grant reported four severe wounds. The first blow had severed

all the neck muscles on one side of the back ; the right shoulder was badly gashed, the left forearm broken, and the right hand so nearly gone that the Doctor feared it would have to come off before they started. Such news took the heart out of all, and increased tenfold the odds against them. Pottinger had no personal connection with the men ; Rose little hold over them. Haughton alone could have preserved some shred of discipline, whereon hung their one chance of success.

A valiant attempt was made, none the less, to preserve the order of their going. They were to leave the fort in two parties—the advance and main body by the postern, the rear by the canal gateway. Thus, in case of detection, one party at least might escape while the other engaged the enemy. All going well, they were to join forces on their old parade-ground, and so onward along Pottinger's chosen route.

But the task of getting the troops together would have taxed the patience of Job. They were entirely taken up with their families, and, in spite of strict orders to the contrary, were loading themselves promiscuously with all they could lay hands on. Women wailed and wrangled ; men stumbled, swearing, over bodies of wounded comrades ; and round the regimental cash-chest a free fight was in progress, for here a Jemadar was serving out cash in a *lotah* to any who thrust out an open hand or the corner of a loin-cloth. The barrack-square was a seething mass of confusion, worse confounded by the darkness that shrouded all.

At length, after maddening delay, the last sheep was herded into place, the last gun spiked by Grant himself. The magazine was left intact, lest its explosion rouse the enemy and destroy the wounded, who must, of dire necessity, remain behind.



Rose and his party formed up near the big gate. Pottinger, with a small advance guard, rode out of the postern to await the main body. Then, when all was ready, Grant and a couple of men came into Haughton's room.

He lay on his bed, half unconscious from pain and exhaustion, strangely indifferent to the stir of preparation in which he should have been the leading spirit.

"Well, we're ready at last, thank God!" said the Doctor cheerfully. "Do you think you can hang on to a saddle if these men support you on each side?"

The answer, though faint, was unhesitating. "Don't worry. I'll manage all right."

"Good. And how about the hand? It wasn't set properly, I'm afraid, and it'll give you no end of pain. Better have it off and be done with it, eh?"

Haughton tried to smile. "Very well—if there's isn't a chance——"

His voice trailed off to incoherence, and Grant regarded him ruefully.

"Wish to God I had some spirits to revive you; but there's not a drop of liquid in the damned place except this bottle of ether. Better than nothing, anyway."

He uncorked it in speaking. Mercifully, the smell proved too powerful. Haughton fainted outright, and Grant made good his opportunity. Rapidly, by the wavering light of an oiled rag, he cut off Haughton's hand at the wrist, sewing the skin together with an ordinary needle and thread.

A drink of ether revived his patient, whom he then set in the saddle and led out of the postern, a Gurkha supporting him on either side, a cushion held under his chin to keep his head up. In this fashion he must contrive to ride fifty miles on a horse that had been ten days

without water and five days without food. Pottinger's favourite Arab—indeed, every animal among them—was in a like case.

And now all were safe outside; the familiar postern closed behind them, before them the unfathomable night, brilliant with frosty stars.

They started, Pottinger leading; Cæsar, a dim white speck, trotting sturdily "to heel."

On the parade-ground, half a mile off, they halted to wait for Rose. But the men, once headed towards water and Kabul, were as hard to check as runaway horses. Pottinger exerted himself to the utmost, and though some still pushed on unheeding, the bulk remained.

Followed a maddening halt in darkness and bitter cold, for the rear guard to come up. Even now they were by no means safe from discovery, and the strictest silence was enjoined.

It was broken suddenly by the wailing of a child, and Grant swore under his breath.

"Confound that brat! I'll soon stop its noise."

He did so effectually, by snatching it from the woman near him and dashing its head on the ground.

Still they waited; no sign of Rose. A man was sent back to bring the party in. He did not return. Then Grant himself volunteered to take a few men and find out what was wrong. They also did not return.

Invaluable minutes slipped by. The cold penetrated even their poshteens, and at last Pottinger spoke.

"Look here, Haughton, it's useless coming outside our defences merely to hang about till we are all cut up. Grant and Rose know the direction. Leave the rear-guard to them, and let us save our own party at least. What do you think?"

"I think we have waited long enough," Haughton an-

swered reluctantly, yet with conviction; and they rode on, Pottinger leading as before, the explorer's instinct guiding him aright.

Behind and yet farther behind them, in the fort of Charikar, those whom they had so unwillingly deserted lay awaiting the dawn; and at long last it came.

Then, as the east brightened, a figure dragged itself out into the empty square and crawled slowly, with many pauses by the way, to the top of the north-east bastion.

It was the Bugle Major. Throughout the siege he had proven his quality again and again; and now, before death claimed him, he rendered one last service to the leader who had fought like a demi-god, and would surely one day be War Lord of Hindustan.

He reached the summit and paused, nerving himself for the effort; then the notes of *reveillé* rang out—cheerful, defiant—even as they had done every morning, with the clockwork regularity of peace-time, by way of a hint to the enemy that all was well within.

This morning they accepted the hint in perfect good faith, answering it as usual with the sullen muttering of drums; and not until long after daylight did they discover that the nest was empty, the birds had flown.

Those indomitable infidels had triumphed in spite of all! But it was a far cry to Kabul; and straightway parties were despatched to intercept and cut them up. The rest went into the fort to slay the few that remained. But the Bugle Major was dead already, still holding the bugle in his clenched hand.

## XI

"*HERE* we are! Sinjit Dara. Plenty of water for all."

It was Pottinger who spoke, and the last words were superfluous; for the heavenly music was in their ears. With a shout the advance guard rushed to the edge of the stream, crouched and drank like mad things, half choking themselves in their haste to find relief.

Difficult to get *lotahs* filled for the two officers; but in time it was done, and the wounded men drank deep again, and yet again. The famished horses drank also, nor was Caesar forgotten by his devoted master.

Then the main body came up, and demoralization was complete. They still numbered more than a hundred, though many stragglers had fallen out by the way, and at the sound of water they lost their heads. None could await his turn, and the lower bank being crowded they were soon scattered far up the hillside, seeking readier access to Paradise, the last shred of control lost beyond recall.

Pottinger, having shouted himself hoarse, turned to Haughton with a sigh. "You see how it is, my dear fellow. Quite beyond *my* power to lead them and shepherd them as well. It's near midnight now, and time is everything. We must just push on, and let those follow who will."

It was the voice of common sense and common prudence, and Haughton perforce agreed, though the necessity

almost broke his heart. Impossible to gauge his suffering of body and mind throughout that terrible interminable ride. How deeply he loved his men has already been seen, and a tithe of what he felt at this crisis may be judged by his comment on the event.

“Pottinger’s feeling and mine probably differed. He had been nine days in bed, and was comparatively cool. I had been the whole time in constant excitement. He did not belong to the Regiment. I did. Nothing would have induced me to part company with my men so long as they would follow me. He now saw them for what they really were—a disorderly mob, useless as soldiers.”

And now again the remnant that was left went forward, Pottinger explaining to the Native Officers that for a time they must desert the road, so as to avoid villages and possible outposts of the enemy.

After a while they halted again, till the main body came up, woefully diminished in numbers. Then on—interminably—at a snail’s pace, stumbling over rough tracks and uneven ground; halting incessantly for the straggling few who could be induced to leave the water of life, which had proved all too soon the water of destruction.

“Listen!” said Haughton suddenly. “What’s that? Firing?”

Pottinger listened. “Jezails,” said he. “And—yes, by Heaven! Muskets! Providential that we left the main road! Is it possible the rear guard can already have got so far?”

It was possible—as they learnt long afterwards. The firing—that continued intermittently and then died away—was the last stand of young Rose and his men; a gallant stand, in which all were cut to pieces save a few who escaped into the hills and lived to tell the tale.

Those left by the stream, careless of all but the blessed relief from thirst, could hardly escape the same fate. But the more prudent few pushed on in the wake of two wounded and weary British officers, whose strength was fast giving out. Slowly, laboriously, they made their way back to the smoother main road, only to desert it again when Pottinger knew they were nearing the hill-town of Istalif. Here he repeated his former manœuvre, climbing the hillside and skirting round the back of the city, by unfrequented paths, in the hope of finding his way back to the main road a few miles farther on.

By the time this was achieved, and the usual halt took place, they found their Regiment That Was amounted to eight men.

Long waiting brought no sign of more. Numbed with cold, they went back on their tracks for some distance; they even ventured to shout. No answering shout came to cheer them, and wearily they stumbled back to their halting-place.

Then Pottinger laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"Believe me, my dear Haughton, this sort of thing is worse than useless," he said gently. "We are wasting valuable time and strength to no purpose. It is near morning now, and we have come little more than twenty miles. Unless we give up this eternal halting, and push steadily on, you will never hold out till we reach Kabul."

It was the truth, as Haughton knew only too well. "Do what you think best," he said; and they went forward, till light awoke in the east, till rocks and trees and the shoulders of hills, that crowded closer round them, came darkly out of the night.

While it was yet dusk they stumbled on a water-mill, where they once more relieved a thirst that seemed unquenchable, and filled such small vessels as they could carry.

The miller, awake and busy, hurried out with a welcome which they dared not return; and the Afghan went back to his work marvelling that men who must have ridden all night should neglect so God-sent a chance of rest and refreshment. How great was their need of both they dared not admit even to themselves, and silently, stoically, they struggled on. The reddening east touched the snows to life, and they dared go no farther till night cloaked them once more.

By this time five out of the eight natives who had reached Istalif were gone the way of the rest, and there now remained, out of some four hundred and fifty men, women, and children who hopefully left the gates of Charikar, two officers and a munshi, all mounted; on foot, a regimental sutler, one Gurkha orderly, and one stout-hearted dog. Both officers were partially disguised by turbans drawn down over their faces and the indispensable poshteen. Seen casually, in the half-light, they might well pass for Afghans, yet they dared not risk encounters by day.

"What hope of refuge in a country alive with enemies?" was the uppermost thought in the minds of both. Immediately ahead lay the low range half-way between Charikar and Kabul; above them loomed the walls of a fortified village, and beyond the village a naked hill seemed to promise total absence of human life.

"If we could climb up there," said Pottinger, "we ought to be safe out of harm's way till the evening."

The natives agreed, but Haughton, his clarity of thought unclouded by suffering, advocated one of the dry and deep ravines channelling the plain below the village.

"They're bound to know by now that we've left Charikar, and the chances are they wouldn't dream of looking

for us so close to danger in the pocket of a village. They'd think we were bound to make for the hills."

There was much wisdom in the argument, as the day gave proof.

Long before noon shots rang out high above them, and they, lying in the sunless depths, could see a body of Afghans scouring the hillside, tracking down and shooting fugitive Gurkhas who had escaped from Rose's detachment or strayed from their own. More than once a search-party passed so close to them that they shrank farther into the shadow of the nullah and held their breath. At the critical moment, Cusar sat up and sniffed apprehensively, pricking his ears.

"If that dog barks we're done for," Haughton whispered between set teeth; and Pottinger, putting an arm round his dumb friend, drew him close into the shelter of his coat.

"The poor old man is far too tired to bark," said he; and it was true.

Gradually the shots moved away, grew more infrequent, ceased altogether, and they knew that once again God had spared their lives. The effect of reaction after strain warned them that they had drawn heavily on their small store of strength—and the worst of their journey was yet to come.

A mouthful of ether revived Haughton. He had brought the bottle away in his breast-pocket, and had drunk nearly half a pint during the night. Without that bottle, though his great spare frame was capable of almost unlimited endurance, he could never have survived the rigours and suffering of that terrible thirty-eight hours. They had brought a little food also, chiefly in the form of dried mulberries, these being plentiful and easily carried, and most of the water they could bring in from the mill-stream was given to Haughton as a matter of course.



Now, while he rested, Pottinger took stock of their exact position. It was clear to him that last night's march had been a trifling affair compared to the one ahead. By some means they must cross the low, rugged hills that barred their way, and the only two roads over the range were certain to be closely beset by their friends of Charikar.

As a matter of fact, their escape was already known in Kabul city, though not in cantonments; and an ally of the rebels was out, with his most active followers, patrolling the heights they were bound to cross.

But Pottinger, who had often ridden to and fro, knew of a goat-track that ran between the more frequented paths.

"I've never actually been that way," said he; "but if we can find it and follow it, we're safe to reach Kabul—*some* time! In any case, though, it will be a tough job for the horses and a tougher one for you. The deuce of it is that we daren't stir till dark, and we may fail to hit the path."

They did so fail, for the night was moonless and dark as the nether pit. Watch-fires, gleaming in every direction, warned them that the more frequented ways would prove inevitable death-traps; and now, for the first time, utter weakness of the flesh had nearly persuaded them to give up further effort in despair—nearly, but not quite.

Summoning the utmost courage at their command, they boldly adventured straight up the rugged slope, trusting mainly to their horses for avoidance of pitfalls and treacherous chasms common to the plains and lower hills of the country. If sheer daring and fortitude could command success, those two men stood assured of it, and neither was likely to forget while he lived that nightmare ride, beset at every step by peril of rocks and peril of the sword.

Only Pottinger's geographical genius and the providential bottle in Haughton's pocket redeemed the attempt from madness. Track of any kind there was none, and scarcely a mile of level till the ridge was crossed. Weak and exhausted, their hardy Turcoman horses strained up ascents almost impracticable, slipped and stumbled down corresponding slopes, their progress one eternal see-saw of the roughest, that at last seemed to Haughton as though it had been from the beginning and would be to the end of time.

How he kept his seat at all was a miracle only to be accounted for by the God-given dominion of spirit over flesh, often experienced by great natures at great crises. Over such ground the men afoot could give him little support, and more than once he slipped from his saddle on to the rocks.

His third fall left him so bruised, so shaken, that even his courage could not face the prospect of a fourth, and he waved away the orderly who would have helped him up.

Pottinger, grievously distressed, knelt beside him with words of encouragement and cheer.

"No hurry, my dear fellow. You'll feel better in a moment. There's still a drop of ether to put heart into you."

But Haughton breathed heavily and shook his head. "It's useless, Major. I've hung on as long as I can. I'm played out—hindering your progress, and all to no purpose. *Your* safety is of greater importance than mine. Go on, I implore you, and leave me to take my chance. Mān Singh will stop with me."

Pottinger pressed the hand he held. "Don't talk nonsense, man," he said gruffly, and had to clear his throat before he could go on. "I don't stir from here till you're fit to move."

“Major—for God’s sake!”

Pottinger checked him with a gesture. “You just lie quiet for an hour and try to sleep.” He spoke soothingly as to a sick child. “I’ll see if I can find a path. We’re over the worst ground by now.”

Too weak to combat a resolution that at any time more than matched his own, Haughton obeyed. Sleep was impossible; but the ether and the mere cessation of movement soothed his overwrought body and mind.

Pottinger, having found a path, lay down beside him; and in spite of the cold, an hour’s halt renewed their failing strength, their power to persevere.

Helped again into the saddle, Haughton clung to it tenaciously while they climbed the last ridge and dropped down, with thankful hearts, into Kabul Valley near the southern end of the great lake.

Only six miles more! But those six miles bristled with dangers other than they had surmounted hitherto. Even as they reached the plain they were startled by a furious outburst of barking, and knew that they must have ridden into an encampment of Afghan nomads, whose black blanket tents were invisible a few yards off. Mercifully the shepherds either slept sound or did not care to face the bitter cold; and they rode on by a path that skirted the lake, hoping to reach cantonments on the side farthest from the town.

But Pottinger, unfamiliar with this part of the valley, missed his way in the dark; and before long they realized that, instead of nearing cantonments, they were nearing a large castle in the suburb of Deh-i-Afghan, not far from the scene of Mackenzie’s valiant defence.

Under the walls of that castle they needs must pass: and for all their caution, sentries challenged them from the towers. Pottinger replied in Persian that they were ser-

vants of a native chief, whom he named. But either his accent or his statement roused suspicion.

"Stop a moment, friend, till I come down," called the unseen voice from above.

"All right. No hurry," came the answer from below, and three jaded horses were urged into the semblance of a canter.

"Thank God!" breathed Pottinger as they drew rein. "But we can't turn back without increasing their suspicion, and if we go on we must run the gauntlet of the city." He struck a match and looked at his watch. "Just three. They'll hardly be stirring for another two hours and it's our quickest way. I think we'll risk it—eh, Haughton?"

"I'm willing," was the quiet reply: and they rode on—through narrow streets dark and silent as the tomb, penned in on either side by houses full of sleeping enemies. But here again, as on the mountains, by the mercy of that God in whom they trusted, no man discovered them—no harm befell.

At the fortified house of a Hindu merchant the sutler left them. But Mān Singh, faint and footsore, preferred to push on and share the remaining danger with his Sahib.

Through the great bazaar and the narrow lanes leading on to the outskirts of the city they rode unchallenged, save by an occasional sleepy watchman who scarce heeded their reply. Once they came on a wakeful Fakir, smoking in an empty doorway. The old man raised a hand and blessed them as they passed.

And now they were clear of the city; clear, almost, of danger, they fondly hoped; and actually riding down the path towards cantonments. No sign of life here, and they breathed more freely. Then—turning a sharp corner, they entered a lane not twenty feet wide, with open shops

on either side ; shops full of men, talking and smoking by the light of cotton wicks flaring in oil.

A quavering flame must have lit up Mān Singh's cross-belts and breastplates ; for a peremptory voice called on them to stop. But they, neither answering nor quickening their pace, rode on unheeding as though they were deaf men.

Then arose a mighty hue and cry—"Stop them!—shoot!" "They are infidels!"

A volley rang out, so startling the used-up horses that they managed to break into a canter which soon carried them out of musket-shot ; Mān Singh keeping up with them manfully till it was clear that the Afghans would not trouble to give chase.

But the firing had roused the British garrison : and as they neared the ramparts, they were challenged sharply, first from a large fort on their right, then from the cantonments field-work.

At last, with no small difficulty they made their way past inexorable sentries, round to the only door whereat they could gain access. This they reached at four of the morning ; and here, in reply to the inevitable query, they could give their own names :—names that passed swiftly from mouth to mouth till a shout went up of mingled welcome and amazement.

Haughton, frozen and half fainting, was lifted from his horse and fell prone on a bench in the guard-room. Lying there, on the brink of unconsciousness, he knew that he could not have ridden ten yards farther to save his own life—or another's.

Pottinger—less faint, though exhausted with pain and hunger—demanded that a doctor be brought immediately for his friend.

He came in due time, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

But Pottinger knew him by name, and did not think well enough of his reputation to care about putting so serious a case into his hands. Nor was reluctance decreased when a few practical questions compelled admission that the medical stores of the said doctor's regiment consisted of an empty quart bottle, a funnel, and a lump of chalk.

Pottinger, pointing out that his friend was in a critical condition, politely demanded a doctor who could give him relief at once.

The proceeding took time, for all the world was abed. But in due course a more capable man arrived, Dr. Bryce, attached to the Horse Artillery. With him came George Lawrence and many others, who, in the words of Vincent Eyre, greeted them "as men risen from the dead."

And with that glad fervour of greeting ends the story of Charikar—the story of a siege as dogged and spirited as any in the annals of Indian history: though the Subaltern who lost all and dared all sooner than yield, earned thereby neither recognition nor reward—no uncommon event in those benighted times when reporters and picturesque journalism were not, when duty and not decoration was the word of the day.

## BOOK III

### THE CUP OF TREMBLING

"Thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling and  
wrung them out. . . . They that afflict thee have said to thy  
soul, Bow down that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy  
body as the ground and as the street to them that went over."

ISAIAH.

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"And still we love the evil cause,  
And of the just effect complain :  
We tread upon life's broken laws,  
And murmur at our self-inflicted pain."

## I

"It's a chapter of miracles all through. Humanly speaking, you and Haughton have no business to be here!"

Thus George Lawrence, cloaking emotion under deliberate lightness of speech.

Pottinger smiled. "It is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes," he said simply. "Haughton's leadership and courage are beyond all praise. I hope they may be recognized by a substantial reward."

"I hope so indeed—if we come safely out of this scrape. But upon my soul, Pottinger, it takes all a man's faith in Providence to look forward even a week. Not that our position is so desperate or the enemy invincible; but simply that we have no real commander, no energy, no unity. A house divided——"

He sighed impatiently. Lightness forsook him, and strolling to the window he looked out upon a rayless winter sunset, thrumming with his fingers on the ledge.

The two men were in Lawrence's house, Pottinger still occupying his bed, where he had been placed on arrival thirty-six hours earlier. Haughton had been sent straight to the Vincent Eyres, whither Pottinger would follow him on the morrow. The scraps of information already gleaned did not sound promising; and he knew, none better, that the optimism of "Cocky Lawrence" would not wear thin without serious cause.

"Is it really as bad as all that?" he asked at length.



"I didn't sleep a great deal last night; but things seemed pretty quiet. And this morning, too——"

"Oh yes. For the moment they're quiet enough. Thanks to Sir William's energy and resolution we captured a couple of their forts on the 10th, and blew up a few others; and on the 13th we gave them a sound thrashing out at Behmáru. But we've paid a heavy price—nearly three hundred killed and wounded. It was a case of victory in the teeth of muddles, and you wouldn't believe the trouble Sir William had both times to get Shelton and his troops out at all. The Envoy's the only civilian among them, but, by Gad, since this trouble broke out, he's shown himself the truest soldier in camp! As for our so-called leaders, ever since they flung away the Commissariat Fort, our men have been steadily losing what little confidence in them they ever possessed. Last week poor Sir William thought matters might be improved by calling in Shelton to co-operate, if not to take over command. The Brigadier at least has health, energy, and courage. But he also has the devil's own temper; and you'll soon see for yourself what their co-operation amounts to! Shelton makes no secret of his contempt for the General, and furiously resents a syllable of advice from the Envoy. Even in action, for all his courage, he has shown himself no General; and unless he gets his own way in everything, he doesn't seem to care a damn how the affair turns out. Worst of all, he harps openly and persistently on retreat as our only means of salvation. Would you believe it, even before he left the Bala Hissar, he gave orders, purely on his own authority, that the men were to prepare for immediate retreat to India. That's no mere rumour. I have it straight from Sergeant Cleland, of the Horse Artillery, who was naturally furious. They're splendid fellows—Nicholl and his troop. If only we had

a few more like them and the 37th, even *Shelton* would hardly have the face to croak about retreat!"

Lawrence spoke rapidly, vehemently, and Pottinger was quick to catch his mood.

"I never heard of a more disgraceful state of things," said he. "At Charikar we had twenty thousand Afghans howling round us, and our water cut off; but, thank God, we had the right spirit inside. I would like to hear a great deal more. Are you too busy to spare me an hour?"

Lawrence glanced at his watch. "I think the Envoy might survive my absence till dinner-time! Have a cheroot. Though we *are* on half rations, we've still a few luxuries left."

He drew a chair to the bedside, propped up his guest with the help of a greatcoat, and in less than half an hour had lost all count of time.

Lawrence was a born talker; Eldred Pottinger a born listener; and there, in the fast failing light, he listened with pain and dismay to the record of that disastrous fortnight since the attack on Burnes.

Shelton's recall from the Bala Hissar, on the 9th of November, had resulted in two decisive actions, and, for a brief while, great things had been hoped from his advent, universally unpopular though he was. Black-browed, black-bearded, short and squarely built, one empty coat-sleeve pinned to his breast, and the gleam of sullen fire in his eyes, he looked what he was, a sturdy uncompromising soldier of the bull-dog type. The troops knew nothing of his generalship; but hoped he would be keen to fight, and would not send them out in miserable dribblets lest cantonments fall into the enemy's hands.

Some there were who doubted, and among these was Lady Sale, who wrote in her journal on the 8th: "Notwithstanding his personal bravery, I consider his arrival

as a dark cloud overshadowing us." And her belief was more prophetic than she knew.

When all allowance has been made for the Brigadier's difficult position, all honour done to his coolness and gallantry in action, the indisputable truth remains that John Shelton, from first to last, neither considered nor cared for any man save himself, and from first to last exercised a baleful influence over the fate of the Kabul force.

Encouraged by his partial success on the 10th, and the capture of forts recorded by Lawrence, many had waxed urgent for immediate occupation of the city and Bala Hissar. In spite of good comrades lost, in spite of funerals, whereof there were no end, a thrill of hope renewed seemed astir throughout the garrison. Even the 44th, though known to dislike their Colonel, were fired with passing enthusiasm for the "little Brig," and declared themselves ready to follow him anywhere.

Clearly it was the time of times for a decisive move. Yet nothing was done: and three days later, the Afghans reappeared in great strength on Behmáru Ridge. Here, by means of elephants, they had lodged a couple of guns, and now proceeded to cannonade cantonments, without any appreciable response.

Again it was the civilian who urged the miserable implication of weakness, again opposition was his portion; and meanwhile, Afghan cannon boomed unchallenged from the ridge.

At length, goaded by Shelton's covert sneers, Macnaghten spoken his mind with unwonted heat.

"Brigadier Shelton," said he, "I beg to insist that those guns be captured to-day *at all risks*. If you let yourself be bearded in this fashion, you must be prepared for any disgrace, even for the loss of our post."

Shelton's gruff rejoinder was inaudible. Elphinstone

murmured of responsibility; and once more Macnaghten took it on himself.

But the best part of the day was gone. The sun hung low and crimson above Behmáru Ridge; and Shelton's column was greeted half-way up the hill by an impetuous charge of horsemen before which his ranks broke and fled to the plain. Here, supported by the reserve and Eyre's guns, they rallied and again advanced to the attack. Anderson—most daring and gallant of riders—headed the counter-charge that drove the enemy clear to the crest and turned the fortune of the day.

Hard pressed by horse and foot the Afghans fled along the ridge, forsaking their guns. By now, dusk had deepened to darkness and there was no moon. But a flying messenger from Macnaghten entreated that no effort might be spared to "complete the triumph of the day by bringing off both guns." One had been silenced already and harnessed to spare horses. The other was awkwardly placed in a ravine half-way down the hill; and from a coign of vantage the Afghans rained bullets round their treasure. Darkness deepened every moment, and "the British soldier—all his character reversed—seeing the danger, not the honour of the exploit, shrank from the perilous service"; nor could the more forward 37th be persuaded to lead where the white man so obstinately hung back.

Happily at such moments there is always a British officer zealous to uphold his country's credit—at any risk. In this case, it was Vincent Eyre. "If the gun cannot be taken," said he, "it can be spiked." And it was so. Accompanied by a single artillery man, he clambered down into the zone of fire, silenced the gun for ever, and returned unscathed.

It was eight o'clock before the troops re-entered their sheepfold, flushed with a victory that led no whither,

though it might have resulted in capture of the city had an earlier start been made.

And so an end of the tale George Lawrence had to tell; a tale too obviously charged with elements fatal to success. Its mere recital roused him to renewed indictment of the military chiefs.

"They resent Sir William's interference; yet conveniently ignore all they have owed it this last week. Even Shelton's success on the 13th was scored in spite of himself, and it was his own pig-headed procrastination that robbed it of practical advantage."

Pottinger nodded thoughtfully. "What puzzles *me*," he said slowly, "is why you are all here at this time of day, instead of safe inside the Bala Hissar, where you could defy all Afghanistan and have twice as many men available for active operations."

"Not for lack of urging and arguing, I can assure you! Start and the Envoy have made themselves thoroughly unpopular by pressing the point in and out of season; and every day's delay gives more colour to the insane outcry about risk and loss of public buildings! As if a man could stir a hand in war without risk or loss!"

Pottinger flung out an impatient exclamation. "We are safe to lose things more irreplaceable than public buildings if we stay on here. The move's quite feasible, even now——" He drew a small pocket-book from under his pillow. "I was thinking it out while I lay awake last night, and this morning I made a few notes. See here"—— Lawrence leaned forward with quickened interest—"first, to cover our move, we must take the Yaghi Fort, either by a *coup de main*, or by regular breech and assault: restore the redoubt over the bridge across the river and run up four more on the Siah Sung heights: one on the south spur, where the road from camp and citadel enters

the hills ; one up above at the highest point of the road ; the third on the Takt-i-Nadir ; and the fourth on the Khak-i-Balkhi. These, with the guns from the citadel, would command the entire approach. They should each be manned with one gun and a hundred men, under Captains instructed to hold their posts to the last. Practicable enough, eh ? We could turn Shelton's victory to some account by beginning at once, before the enemy has recovered from his thrashing. If we could only establish and occupy one redoubt, the fire from that and the citadel would enable us to manage the rest, in spite of opposition. What d'you think ?"

"I think," answered Lawrence with conviction, "that if *you* were in command here we should stand a good fighting chance of saving our own lives and old England's honour. As it is—well—can I take your notes ?"

"By all means——"

"I'll show them to Sir William, and get him to press the scheme if he sees the remotest prospect of a hearing. It's all we poor Politicals can do, and we earn nothing but curses for our pains. Au revoir."

He was gone ; and Eldred Pottinger lay a long while in the dark, maturing his plan and thinking with very mixed feelings on the tale he had heard. Making due allowance for Lawrence's blind faith in Macnaghten, it did indeed seem that now, at the eleventh hour, his energy and courage might well redeem the "effrontery with which he had sought to mislead others and himself," were he not balked by the imbecile opposition of those in command. As for the Bala Hissar scheme, it would be strange indeed if Macnaghten, himself, and Lawrence between them, backed by Sturt, Mackenzie, and Eyre, could not make headway against that same opposition, on one point at least—and that the most vital of all.

## II

AND what can be said of John Shelton, to whom so great an opportunity was given? Had he been a true soldier, a noble-hearted man, he might have atoned for poor Elphinstone's infirmities, upheld Macnaghten's courage, and covered himself with glory. Yet few who served under him throughout that discreditable siege could find much to record in his favour beyond physical courage. True, before his arrival, the army was partially disorganized by a week of failure, and the whole atmosphere tainted with discouragement, while he himself was checked and thwarted at every turn by a General whose orders and counter-orders kept his temper in a perpetual ferment, whose infirmities and indecisions alike moved him to un pitying contempt; and who yet clung pertinaciously to the semblance of supreme command. Still, the deeper truth remains that men, worthy of the name, have dared and done greatly in the teeth of conditions no less disheartening than these.

As for Elphinstone—had Shelton been other than he was, the old man could soon have been induced to relinquish the burden of a responsibility for which he knew himself unfit. On the night of the 8th his Staff-Officers had, indeed, actually persuaded him to lay himself up and make over the control of affairs to Brigadier Shelton. That officer, accordingly, found himself on arrival put in orders to command cantonments. Yet

before the day was out, while he was superintending certain alterations, General Elphinstone hobbled up on his crutches with the reminder that he still held supreme command, and no changes could be made without his authority. Such a check at the start would have annoyed any man; and to one of Shelton's temper it was fatal. But that it did not spring from mere vacillation was proved by Elphinstone's own statement, as will afterwards appear.

From the first their inherent disunion was obvious to all. Elphinstone—angered by the discovery of those private, unauthorized orders to prepare for retreat—had protested strongly, and forbidden all such demoralizing talk; which command Shelton saw fit to ignore.

As for the rights and wrongs of this vexed question, it has been urged that Shelton probably had in mind the horrors of Moscow and his own experience of Sir John Moore's delayed retreat through Spain, an experience that might well make him anxious to be gone, since firewood was becoming scarce, and the weather-wise foretold a winter exceptionally early and severe.

“The natural conclusion is,” adds the Brigadier's ablest apologist, “that, had General Shelton been in command, he would, regardless of the Envoy, have retreated on Jalálabad; and there is every reason to believe that he would have saved the greater part of the Kabul force.”

Easy to argue thus after the event; but who could foresee, in early November, the unparalleled conjunction of calamities ahead? Nott might yet send reinforcements. Sale's recall from Gandamak had been urgent; his return was feasible. As for the only honourable form of retreat—in light marching order and without terms—it appears to have been voted impracticable from the first.

Shelton was right, past question, in his belief that



anything were better than sitting still to be bearded by savages in a weak, ill-manned cantonment. He was wrong—disastrously wrong—in setting his face against the one safe and practical alternative—prompt occupation of the Bala Hissar. And, since most arguments in favour of retreat applied almost equally well to the simpler, shorter move, it seems probable that he was less concerned, at heart, for the honour and safety of the force, than for his own acknowledged desire to get out of the country at any price.

Nothing could have been worse for the troops than friction between their leaders on so vital a question; nothing more fatal, on every count, than the conjunction at Kabul of these two men, “so utterly unlike each other yet so equal in their incapacity for command. . . . Each made the other worse. Elphinstone knew nothing of the Native Army; Shelton was violently prejudiced against it. Elphinstone had no opinion of his own . . . Shelton was obstinately wedded to his own opinions. . . . To overrule and thwart him at the commencement of an enterprise was to insure its failure. . . . Had he exercised chief control, though he might have committed errors, he would probably have distinguished himself.” As it was, he lost his temper, sneered at Macnaghten, and opposed every measure likely to defer retreat.

Well might Macnaghten pin all his hopes of salvation on two things—relief from without, and the power of the money-bag to break up the league against him. Misguided or no, his courage proved itself, in the last resort, of finer quality than that of Elphinstone or Shelton; proved itself ready to do all and dare all rather than disgrace his country by open surrender. Since he could not force the Generals to quit them like men, he resolved to work instead upon Afghan rivalry and greed.

It was a dangerous game—and he knew it; nor was danger lessened by the fact that it must be played on paper through the agency of Burnes's untrustworthy munshi—Mohun Lal. The munshi—on that fatal 2nd—had ignominiously escaped death by hiding beneath the cloak of a friendly Afghan, and since then had dwelt in Kabul under protection of the friendly Kazzilbash chief Khan Shereen Khan. Mohun Lal it was who now made overtures to the Ghilzais in Macnaghten's name. Two lakhs and a substantial advance should be theirs, if they would either support Shah Shuja or depart to their own country and keep the passes open as of old.

The Ghilzais, Afghan-like, demanded a larger advance. Macnaghten in his turn demanded hostages, by way of security. They, anxious for secrecy, proffered, instead, a sealed agreement; but at the eleventh hour, Macnaghten drew back. Negotiations were closed, and the Ghilzais—lords of all the country between Kabul and Peshawur—were mortally offended to boot.

That first false step bred a host of evils. But, for the moment, Macnaghten merely saw himself well rid of a doubtful bargain, and shifted his gilded attentions to the Kazzilbash clan.

Such transactions—wise or unwise—were all in the common way of diplomacy; but unhappily the munshi's instructions did not end here. To Conolly's letter—written but three days after the outbreak—a postscript was added: "I promise ten thousand rupees for the head of each of the principal rebel chiefs." And again, after the action of the 10th, he pressed the point with increasing urgency. "Why do you not write? . . . If Khan Shereen is not inclined to do service, try other Kazzilbash chiefs independently. Exert yourself. . . . There is a man called Hájí Ali, who might be induced by a bribe

to bring in the heads of one or two Mufsidis.<sup>1</sup> Endeavour to let him know that ten thousand or even fifteen thousand rupees will be given for each head."

Here were injunctions explicit enough; so explicit as to make a timorous slave of the pen give pause, lest zeal outrun discretion and his own life be taken as forfeit. Hence an ingenuous request to Macnaghten for further orders, on the plea that he could not find out by Lieutenant Conolly's notes "how the rebels are to be assassinated; but the men now employed promised to go into their houses and cut off their heads when they may be without attendants."

The rebels in question were Mir Musjidi and Abdullah Khan, who—as instigators of the massacre on the 2nd—were deemed fit subjects for such summary, if unscrupulous, retribution. It does not appear that Mohun Lal was rebuked on this occasion for his frank statement of facts. Yet two weeks later, Macnaghten was grieved to find that the munshi had ever supposed himself authorized to "encourage assassination"; and later still, before a conference of the chiefs, he declared that nothing would induce him to pay a price for blood. From these puzzling contradictions there sprang an after-crop of fierce controversy that convinced neither Macnaghten's detractor's nor his devotees. Without question Mohun Lal acted on orders from Conolly, who, in his turn, must have been authorized by Macnaghten or the Shah. So much at least is certain—"and with God be the rest."

Macnaghten, meanwhile, looked anxiously for the troops that should soon be approaching from Gandamak. Rumours, as usual, had been many and conflicting; actual letters, rare. So alert were the Afghans in detecting and torturing suspected *kasids*, that by now the boldest could

<sup>1</sup> Rebels.

scarcely be bribed to venture in that direction. None the less, Macnaghten had smuggled several appeals both to Macgregor and Sale. On the 12th he again despatched a few hurried lines to the former: "I have written to you four times requesting you to come up with Sale's brigade as soon as possible. . . . As the Ghilzais are here, I should think you would not meet with much opposition except in the Khurd Kabul Pass." On the 14th, despite Shelton's action, he wrote more imperatively still. "If you have not yet started I earnestly beg you will do so immediately. Our situation is very precarious; but with your assistance, we shall do well; and you *must* render it, if you have any regard for our lives or the honour of our country. . . ." Yet, two days later, all hearts were chilled by a report that Sale had already moved, not back to Kabul—but on to Jalálabad.

The first shock of amazement over, reaction set in. They told each other vehemently the thing was impossible; a mere ruse of the enemy; while Macnaghten, distracted between hope and fear, sat down and wrote yet again: "We learn, to our dismay, that you have gone to Jalálabad. Our situation is desperate if you do not immediately return to our relief. I beg you will do so without a moment's delay. . . ." and so on and so forth, as before; the whole to be sent off next morning.

But near midnight came one with a letter from Macgregor himself—torn for safety into three pieces and hidden in different parts of his clothing. A small letter, hidden in his mouth, he had swallowed on seeing the enemy: but the fragments, in spite of drastic search, had remained undiscovered.

Piecing them together and hurriedly scanning their contents, Macnaghten soon learnt that the incredible report was true; that all hope of relief from that quarter was at an end.

Sitting alone in the enveloping silence of night, he confronted that disheartening fact, without criticism, without blame; but his heart was heavy as a stone.

How many of his urgent appeals reached Gandamak is not certain; but the order to return had come safely to hand. On its receipt, wrote Macgregor, Sale had summoned a Council of War, which decreed that obedience was impracticable, for more reasons than one.

Useless to question the ethics of that decree. Right or wrong, the thing was done past recall. Not until now did Macnaghten realize how firmly he had counted on Sale, whose defection left him clinging, with no very certain grasp, to the forlorn hope of later reliefs from Kandahar.

### III

AMONG all the vagaries and perversities of human nature there are few more unaccountable than those of the average man or woman at the critical turning-points of life. None among those who knew and loved Sir Robert Sale could have believed that he—the warm-hearted, the lion-hearted, more valiant in fight than sagacious in command—would, in the hour of crisis, choose a course of action “more creditable to the prudence of the General than to the generous instincts of the man.” If ever there was a man of generous instincts, it was Robert Sale; and in so desperate a case a little imprudence had been more easily forgiven than excess of caution.

By all at Kabul—as by Macnaghten—his decision was accepted without blame. To them his reasons appeared valid enough—lack of baggage-cattle, worn-out troops and a heavy tale of sick and wounded; yet were those reasons deemed inadequate by some of the ablest officers under him, foremost amongst whom was Broadfoot. To him the duty of that particular moment seemed clear as daylight—an immediate arrangement to place all sick, wounded, and baggage, under a strong guard, in one of the defensible forts near Gandamak, then—a rapid unencumbered march back to Kabul.

What Griffiths could do with one sepoy regiment and three mountain guns, Sale could surely do with a brigade. On the other hand, his troops were exhausted with their

hard-fought journey; Elphinstone's force was large enough, in all conscience, to take care of itself; and he may well have underrated the imbecility which reigned at Kabul. Hence that refusal to return, whereby he denied himself, humanly speaking, "the honour and satisfaction of retrieving the state of affairs at the capital."

It will always remain a moot question whether his troops would have arrived in a fit state to achieve this; but he would have brought to Kabul that which she needed even more than troops, two officers undemoralized by misfortune: one—Henry Havelock—"who would have recalled the discipline and spirit of poor Elphinstone's troops, if mortal man could do it; the other, George Broadfoot, who, in the last resort, would have dared to supply the army with a leader."

But it was ordained otherwise—very much otherwise; for Sale inexplicably capped his refusal to return by throwing up all attempt at connection with Elphinstone and marching in an opposite direction. Had he held his own at Gandamak he would at least have threatened the passes, kept the Ghilzais in check, and ensured a comparatively safe withdrawal of the Kabul force. But for reasons best known to himself, he chose Jalálabad; on which choice no severer comment can be passed than the tale that has yet to be told.

And now to those in desperate straits at Kabul, remained only the chance that a detachment from Kandahar might reach them, by forced marches, before snow should softly and silently complete their investment and isolate them for six months at least. Without question the achievement was possible—if Nott were in the vein.

The *débâcle*, in some form, he had long foreseen; but the day of its coming found him very much taken up with

his own immediate complications. On the 31st of October he had at last been officially requested to assume general command of the troops in Afghanistan till the pleasure of Government should be known. That order—once the summit of his ambition—was acknowledged without elation: and on the 2nd of November, while Burnes was pleading vainly for his life, Nott was giving hearty welcome to the 40th Queen's, and four guns sent up to relieve the Bengal batteries and three native regiments, due to start for India on the 8th.

But on the 9th came rumours so alarming that a command raced after them to halt until further orders. The tale, from Nott's point of view, is best told in his own letters, that reflect so faithfully the fiery, upright, yet intolerant spirit of the man.

“ Danger is come! and now those authorities who were so haughty are completely paralyzed, and fear to act, and the military have not sufficient authority. The responsibility of halting this large homeward-bound column is great and heavy, but someone must *act* and *suffer* the consequences. . . .

“ Macnaghten and General Elphinstone have made a pretty mess of it in the neighbourhood of Cabul; and what is worse, the moral influence of their doings is fast extending over the whole country. Deep snow may put a stop to it for a few months, but the seeds will remain beneath, and spring upon us with redoubled force. . . .”

On the 14th came at last a *kasid* from Kabul, who produced from his mouth a quill. Rolled up within it Nott found a scrap of native paper covered with writing, close and small. The date was November 3rd; the signature J. Paton, Captain.



That adventurous quill had been eleven days in transit, and had passed through the hands of Colonel Palmer at Ghazni, and Major Lynch at Kelat-i-Ghilzai. Each commented briefly on Elphinstone's urgent demand that all troops destined for India should march to Kabul instead—supported by Horse Artillery and cavalry—with the “utmost practicable expedition.”

Such orders left nothing to Nott's discretion. Though he scorned them as futile clutchings at help that would arrive too late, they must, on the face of them, be promptly obeyed. The regiments that had so joyfully turned their steps towards India were recalled; and two days later the whole column, under Colonel Maclaren, was despatched, with a parting benediction in Nott's most characteristic vein. “Remember all of you,” said he in taking leave of Maclaren and his staff, “this move on Kabul is not *my* doing. I am compelled to obey a superior authority; but in my own private opinion I am sending you all to destruction.”

Such words from such a man were little like to infuse zeal and determination into officers already disappointed by an unwelcome recall. They were words no General was justified in speaking, however strong his own private opinion; the full measure of which may be judged by the vehement mingling of protest and prophecy poured forth to his daughter when the troops were gone:

“I have received a *positive* order from the Envoy and Elphinstone to send troops to Cabul, and therefore they marched this morning. This is *against my* judgment: first, because I think, at this time of year, they *cannot* get there; besides which it is likely they will have to fight every foot of the ground from Ghuznee . . . and second, they will be five weeks in

getting there, before which everything will be settled one way or the other ; thirdly, could I have kept the troops *here* I could have preserved the whole of Afghanistan, whatever the result at Cabul may be. Now these troops can be of no use *there*, and their removal will, I fear, ruin us *here*, for the people to-day openly talk of attacking us. . . . If they rise, which I think they will, we shall be in a very awkward situation. We must do our best, that is all, and we will do so too ; but it is provoking that I am obliged strictly to obey the orders of such stupid people, when I know these orders go to ruin the affairs of the British Government, and to cut the throats of my handful of soldiers, and my own. Had they not divided my force, this country would have been safe ; now it is very doubtful. How strange that Macnaghten has never been right, even by chance !”

That last sweeping assertion might have been modified had he served with Macnaghten through the Kabul siege ; but the man's prejudices were—like his whole nature—strong and deep ; nor was he apt to make allowances, either for others or himself. Broadly speaking, Macnaghten was responsible for the Kabul rising, for the spirit of fanatical hatred rampant throughout the country. Broadly speaking, therefore, Macnaghten must be anathema to every Englishman jealous for the honour of his country. Such was the plain logic of William Nott. For himself—having obeyed those despised Kabul authorities, under compulsion—he promptly concentrated his whole force at Kandahar, brought in all available supplies, turned out every superfluous or suspected Afghan—and grimly awaited the worst.

#### IV

IN Kabul cantonments, as cold increased while food and firewood dwindled, that same spirit of awaiting the worst grew all too prevalent—with a difference.

Nott awaited it, armed and well prepared; those at Kabul with increasing demoralization.

“It is more than shocking, it is shameful,” wrote Lady Sale with her downright frankness, “to hear the way officers go on croaking before their men. It is sufficient to dispirit them and prevent them fighting for us. . . . Colonel Oliver (5th N.I.) is one of our greatest croakers. Being told by some man of his corps with great *jee* that a quantity of grain had been brought in, he replied: ‘Quite useless. You will never live to eat it.’ Whatever we may think ourselves, it is best to put a good face on the business.”

Happily, there were many of Lady Sale’s mind to counteract the influence of Shelton, Oliver, and their like. In the house of Vincent Eyre, where Haughton and Pottinger now shared a room, the voice of the croaker was never heard. Here Sturt and Mackenzie, Lawrence, and others of their kind, held private councils more vigorous and practical than those that obtained in the General’s quarters; councils that were too seldom allowed to bear fruit in action. Here, too, while the effectives went about their work, the ineffectives were well cared for by Mrs. Eyre. Short and square of build, with kindly

eyes and an obstinate mouth, Emily Eyre had none of her husband's self-confident verve and charm; but in her quiet pedestrian fashion she was a good wife and mother. She was also an excellent nurse, as Pottinger and Haughton discovered to their lasting gratitude; though the latter was still too weak, too constantly in pain, to realize much beyond the desolating fact that he, John Haughton, heart and soul a regimental officer, stood bereft of that regiment for which he would gladly have laid down his life.

With Pottinger it was otherwise. Disgusted at the prevailing pessimism and inaction, he still hoped, with the help of Lawrence, Eyre, and Sturt, to carry out his Bala Hissar scheme before the Afghans were ready for a fresh attack.

But each day, as perception grew clearer, hope grew fainter. Lawrence, at all events, had done his best. He had spoken to the Envoy, who had again spoken to the General. Both men had been to see Pottinger on the subject; but Shelton—and again Shelton—was the burden of their lament. True, the General himself, shattered in nerve and health, shrank from the risk involved, but he could have been easily overruled were not Shelton, Grant, or Bellew eternally at hand. Even Macnaghten began to waver under the pressure of their persistent opposition: and while they wrangled the precious spell of quiescence slipped unutilized away.

On the 21st, after dinner, Mackenzie and Sturt dropped into Pottinger's room; Sturt in a state of high indignation at Shelton's refusal to despatch a picket, with guns, to intercept supplies that passed daily into the city from beyond the Siah Sung.

"The man's a damned obstructionist! I've no patience with him!" the Sapper flung out hotly. "Before God,

if those dearest to me were not in cantonments, they might blow up the whole place for all I'd care!"

"I beg leave to doubt that!" Mackenzie remarked smiling; and before Sturt could reply Eyre burst in upon them, good news radiating from him like light from a lantern.

"Gentlemen! I've *done* it at last!" he announced with a dramatic flourish. "The Bala Hissar—no less! By the blessing of Providence I got the poor old General into my clutches this evening. No staff-officers admitted! And I fairly battered him into consent. He will see *you* to-morrow, Pottinger. Meantime, we have orders to draw up a paper showing exactly the proportion of stores and ammunition required, and the best means of transporting it to the citadel. I am to proceed with preparing loads. Anderson is warned to have his corps ready. You and I can make headway with our report to-night,—and, please God, we'll have no countermanding this time."

"Please Shelton!" muttered Sturt with a wry smile; and the junior council went home to bed in better spirits than it had known these many days.

That precious spell of quiescence, though wasted in cantonments, had not been wasted in the city, and the morrow brought a fresh outbreak of hostilities that for the moment shelved all thought of an immediate move.

The garrison awoke early to the distant thunder of drums; and soon after, came forth Afghan horse and foot in formidable numbers. Streaming across the plain, they crowned their favourite ridge between cantonments and the Great Lake, obviously bent on occupying the village called Behmáru (husbandless), from the tragedy of a beautiful girl buried within its walls.

Set on a slope at the north-east end of the ridge, within easy musket-shot of the Mission Compound, this village should from the first have been held by a small detachment of British troops—a measure urged by Macnaghten without avail. Its people were friendly, its owner open to bribery, whereby alone the Envoy and two distracted Commissariat Officers had staved off impending starvation. Once let the rebels establish themselves in Behmáru, and the rear defences would become untenable, the supply problem impossible to solve.

But Shelton and Elphinstone, it seemed, cared for none of these things. To-day, as before, Macnaghten demanded the despatch of a strong force to occupy the village. To-day, as before, Shelton sneeringly dismissed civilian interference; urging in excuse the condition of his men, exhausted by incessant duty, starved on half rations of parched wheat.

“I presume, sir,” said he to Elphinstone, with his satiric air of deference, “that, as Brigadier, I have *some* sort of voice in the matter; and, for my part, I protest against an action that will merely increase our sick and wounded without proportionate advantage gained.”

But for once Elphinstone saw with the eyes of Macnaghten; saw, too, that there were limits to letting the obstructionist have things all his own way, even for the sake of peace. Followed very high and very plain language between General and Brigadier, resulting in an order that immediate steps should be taken to secure the village.

But those who knew Shelton, knew by this time how much to expect from any movement forced on him against his will: delay in the first place, and in the second, an unpromising leader. With Griffiths and his 37th, Mackenzie and his dare-devil Jezailchis at command, Shelton pre-

ferred before either—Swayne, the proverbially ineffectual, and the 5th N.I.

Before the detachment, with a handful of cavalry and a mountain gun, had made its leisurely way to Behmáru, the forestallers had been forestalled by a party of Kohistanis of no great strength, and Swayne, disconcerted, would neither advance nor retire. Vincent Eyre, galloping out to support him with the Horse Artillery gun, found him in an orchard by the roadside, blazing away uselessly at an enemy whose numbers were swelled every moment by reinforcements from the city. Concentrated on the knoll above the village, they were now in a position to make themselves very unpleasant—if no worse. Maddening work for Eyre, Anderson, and Walker, exposed in an open field, wasting time and ammunition, to say nothing of risking their lives, in support of a leader who had apparently come to play at fireworks and keep the enemy amused.

Hour after hour Swayne clung to his orchard. The gunners loaded and fired, loaded and fired; the cavalry sat on their horses, useless and disgusted, watching the hedges and walls and the ridge spit flame.

About sunset Shelton sauntered out with a few more of the 5th to see what was up. A cross-fire opened on the guns from a fort behind, and Eyre shifted their position. While doing so his bridle-hand dropped—limp and shattered. He glanced down at it, feeling nothing for the moment but an access of helpless irritation, then, swearing under his breath, he grasped the reins with his right hand and rode on.

Cold and darkness increased; and still the ridge spat flame. Nothing had been done, and now nothing could be done, but to recall troops harassed and exhausted without rhyme or reason—so far as they could see. Behmáru

had not been stormed, another failure had been added to their list, and the only Gunner available for outside operations had been seriously disabled. Such was the net result of six hours' fighting, and the men did not feel proud of themselves or of their leaders—which was worse than all.

Shelton had proved his point after a fashion peculiarly his own; but the obstinate fact remained that Behmáru could not be tamely allowed to go the way of the Godown Fort unless the military Chiefs were prepared to surrender at discretion for lack of supplies. That the Afghans knew this, their tactics gave proof. Now was the moment by one vigorous counterstroke to thwart their designs. So spake Macnaghten that very night when the General called a Council to discuss the situation, and the one civilian among them stood up in the midst of it to urge active measures on soldiers strangely reluctant to act.

An atmosphere of indifference, almost antagonism, seemed to brood over them as they listened. Elphinstone, courteous always, but profoundly distrustful, looked as if he had been far better in bed. Shelton, who grumbled unceasingly at the cold, had come armed as usual with his red cotton quilt, and now lay rolled up in it on a straw lounge—a martyr to the call of duty. Grant, Bellew, and Colonel Oliver—croaker-in-chief—could all be relied on to raise difficulties and distract the General, rather than to support his frailty of body and mind.

But to-night Macnaghten was not to be argued or sneered out of his humour. The day's failure must be retrieved forthwith, to which soldierly statement Nicholl's guns—shelling the city from the Bala Hissar—boomed approval at regular intervals. As strong a force as could possibly be spared must march out and occupy the heights before the Afghans returned—as they surely would at



dawn. That much, as British Envoy, he had a right to demand. That much—after due canvassing and cavilling—was conceded, and shortly after midnight a strong force, with the Horse-Artillery gun, would be under arms; Brigadier Shelton to command the whole.

At this point Shelton disentangled himself from his rezai, yawned, sat upright, and begged to state that if they expected him to do any good by going out, they must give him at least a couple of guns. The Council admitted the justice of his demand, but regretted that only one Horse-Artillery gun could be manned for field operations. The mountain train gun had unfortunately been damaged that day, and could not be got ready for action till the following afternoon. Shelton shrugged his shoulders, and further begged to recommend that, while half the detachment occupied the hill half should simultaneously attack Behmáru. The Council failed to see the force of his suggestion. They conceived that when the hill was occupied in force, the Afghans would abandon the village.

Said Shelton with lowering brows: "Quite the contrary; in my opinion they will hold it with greater pertinacity—unless simultaneously attacked."

But none agreed with him, and he departed in the worst possible temper. With an obstinate man, as with a pulling horse, it is sometimes advisable to give him his head; and on that particular evening, in view of Shelton's known peculiarities, it had been better for himself and others had all minor details been left to his own discretion. As it was, he took the field in a tempestuous mood that augured ill for the troops under his command.

By two in the morning, under a moonless sky of flashing stars, they were drawn up in close order, eight hundred all told, awaiting the signal to advance. The ancient

earth, dead asleep, seemed to hold her breath in the grip of frost as they emerged from the west gate on to the plain—an army of shadows; cavalry first, then the lonely gun, with two hundred spare men to help it up the ascent, and a hundred Sappers for earthworks. Last, in a compact black mass, the infantry—seventeen weak companies; those of the 44th under Captain Leighton, of the 37th under Major Kershaw, 13th L.I., and the 5th under their own Colonel Oliver, a man of much flesh, much courage, but of a very woeful countenance; the whole led by Shelton, with Mackenzie—specially requested—for A.D.C. Even Shelton could not fall foul of so blessed a disposition; and though Mackenzie himself heartily disliked the Brigadier, he avoided friction with him merely by being the man he was.

On and out into the windless frosty dark streamed that silent mobile mass of shadows; on and out, towards the immobile mass that loomed ahead, backed afar off by the giants of Pughmán, their rugged shoulders blotting out the stars.

## V

DARKER and colder than ever, it seemed, on the crest of the ridge that Shelton had been sent out to occupy, and continued to occupy—"amid the astonished consideration of men and angels"—for endless unprofitable hours.

Up through a narrow gorge of rock and boulder his solitary six-pounder had been hauled and hoisted by the heroic efforts of four horses and two hundred men. Thence the eight hundred, silent as might be, had made their way to the north-eastern end, and there concentrated on a knoll overlooking Behmáru. To left of them a level plain spread away towards the foot-hills, the Great Lake lying asleep on its bosom. To right of them the cantonments made a long, unbroken ink-smudge, lit by intermittent flashes of Warburton's guns. Still farther east rose the Bala Hissar; and behind them, all Kabul slept undisturbed, unaware.

The little village beneath slept also. Only, in an open enclosure under the knoll, watch-fires leapt fitfully, and leaping, showed huddled Kohistanis grown weary of watching. Full on to that enclosure Sergeant Mulhall directed his gun, and suddenly, above the sleepers, heaven opened. Out of the innocuous dark came lightning, thunder, and a hailstorm of grape.

A shout went up, half terror, half defiance. Men stumbled blindly to their feet and fell back again—dead. Others, snatching up their weapons, answered the unseen

devils with a volley from their jezails; then they also fled to the shelter of houses or towers, whence they responded to Mulhall's thunder, with small effect.

Now was the moment for immediate action.

The downward rush of a storming party would have sufficed, and within half an hour the village must have been theirs. Mackenzie, Bellew, Kershaw were urgent for advance. Sheer waste of breath. Shelton disapproved of night-attacks. He would wait till dawn. He waited accordingly, while the cold and the sense of having been balked of a rightful triumph took heart and zest out of his men.

Slowly the sky changed colour; the stars grew pale. The fire from Behmáru had slackened steadily, and now shadowy figures could be seen scurrying over the plain to take refuge in a distant fort. Not a hundred men remained in the village when the long-delayed order was given: Swayne, with a handful of the 44th, to storm the main gate; Kershaw, with two companies of the 37th, to co-operate from above.

Was it fatality, or sheer lack of sense, that reiterate choice of Swayne, renowned among his fellows as one who never succeeded in any enterprise? His present task seemed simple enough, for the main gate was open, and through it the Afghans were retreating in crowds. But, by some triumph of stupidity, Swayne stumbled on a mere wicket, which he tried to force under a sharp fire from within. It would appear that he made no great effort to carry the place. His men fell right and left; and he himself, shot in the neck, was not slow in obeying Shelton's order of recall.

Kershaw, amazed and indignant, offered to go down at once and discount the false start. For reward he was peremptorily told to mind his own business; and from

that time forward the main object of the expedition seemed to be tacitly given up.

The sky lightened; the stars vanished; a herald radiance gilded the south-east; and long before the sun appeared city, fort, and cantonments were very much awake.

Macnaghten, Lawrence, Eyre, Sturt, and a dozen others were early on the ramparts, close-buttoned in sheepskin coats, field-glasses at their eyes. Lady Sale, among her chimney-pots—that afforded cover from stray bullets—had “a fine view of the whole field of action” scarce a mile away. Elphinstone came up later with Grant, and in the hearts of all lurked a conviction that this day’s issue would decide their fate.

The sick and wounded, debarred from the thrill of looking on, lay listening—listening to the reiterate crackle and roar of musket and guns, longing for news that none could spare time to bring them. Among these were Pottinger and Haughton, alone in their small room, girding at their respective disabilities. To Pottinger the sensation irresistibly recalled Charikar. It seemed his hard fate, throughout this time of movement and stress, to be eternally listening, waiting, wondering, while others bore the burden and reaped the glory of action—that was, for him, the breath of life.

But this morning rebellion against his own lot was tempered by compassion for Haughton, whose patience under affliction was, to Pottinger, no whit less admirable than his heroism at Charikar. Young Dr. Bryce, after consultation with others, had decreed that he must undergo a second amputation, or he would probably die of exhaustion. The 23rd was the date fixed, and early that morning came Bryce, a trifle hurried and distraught; laid out, in full view of his patient, a sinister array of imple-

ments, vanished again on some slight pretext, and did not return; for the roll of drums thrilled through cantonments like distant thunder, presaging storm, and the ramparts claimed him as they claimed all on that radiant November morning.

The city, roused by strange doings on the hilltop, poured forth her tribesmen in response—a formidable mass of horse and foot, some fifteen thousand in all. In the first slant rays of light the cavalry streamed across the plain. The footmen, climbing the southern end of the hill, swarmed over it like ants, clustering thickest where the narrow gorge cleft it in two.

And lo, across the cleft Shelton's handful of troops, chilled to the bone, faint with fatigue and thirst, their water-bottles empty, and never a drop to be found on that inhospitable height. Down there, in Behmáru village, were water, fire, and cover in abundance. By seizing and holding it Shelton would, at one stroke, have achieved his objective, doubled the strength of his position, and minimized the sufferings of his men. But most of those present knew, by experience, that superfluous consideration for troops serving under him was not "the Brigadier's way"—a fact amply proved by his proceedings on the ridge.

Leaving Kershaw with three companies to keep the knoll above the village, Shelton had marched the rest of his troops towards the gorge. Here they were massed in mixed squares, soldiers with sepoy, one regiment with another, so that no man knew his place, and all previous training was annulled. Never, perhaps, save on Behmáru Heights, have British squares been so formed and so placed—perched, unprotected, on a steep ridge "to resist the distant fire of infantry; thus presenting a solid mass against the aim of the best marksmen in the world." Two

hundred yards behind the first square a second was drawn up, and jammed in between the two, helpless and disgusted, were troops of cavalry that should have been acting freely on the plain below.

The Afghans, crouched behind boulders and hillocks, must have laughed in their hearts, whilst their bullets decimated that jumbled mass of troops. . . .

For at every volley the men fell, the horses fell; and their comrades, filling up the gaps, knew themselves doomed without hope of retaliation. Laing, in charge of the Sappers, urged rapid construction of breastworks. No time for construction, he was told; the men were too busy fighting. Too busy falling, rather; for the jezails rang out again; and again the front ranks were mown down.

Mercifully there was the gun—the one gun that had no business to be there without a fellow to take up fire when the vent became too hot for serving. But it was a gun from Nicholl's troop, and under Sergeant Mulhall's direction was served so nobly, so unceasingly, that too soon the vent became useless, and the ammunition vanished with frightful speed. Messengers to cantonments, demanding more, hurried downhill in the teeth of flying bullets, and for a space the gun fell silent. But still the jezails sang on—thousands of them in one breath; and still the foremost ranks fell to pieces like a shattered wall.

On the plain, vast masses of cavalry, sweeping and whirling, threatened Shelton's right flank, reinforced Behmáru, and surrounded the British position at all points but that which faced cantonments. Gun and musket ammunition were almost spent, but soon the vent would be cool enough to serve it with what remained.

It was now near ten. For more than six hours, without food or drink, the troops had uselessly occupied that accursed ridge; for three hours more they had been merci-

lessly exposed by a leader in whom all confidence was gone. And still the jezails sang on—exultant, distracting attention from doings unseen by Shelton because of rising ground, yet clearly visible from the ramparts across the plain.

Through their field-glasses those distant watchers saw how a small party of Ghazis—perhaps a hundred and fifty—crept down into the gorge and clambered cautiously up toward that unsuspecting square. Suddenly they sprang into view, crouched behind boulders, and fired with deadly precision. A volley from the startled troops sent a hundred bullets keening harmlessly over their heads; and they, springing nearer, planted three standards—red, yellow, and green—within thirty yards of Shelton's sullen, dispirited front rank.

Straightway there rang out the order: "Forward—fix bayonets—*charge!*"

Not a man stirred—but many fell. Dead tired and hungry, utterly disheartened by their false position, nothing would now induce them to stir hand or foot at Shelton's command. He himself stood forward; bullets buzzing round him like hornets. "Come on, men! Damn you, come on!" he shouted furiously. "Fix bayonets—*charge!*"

Not a bayonet was shifted. He stood alone. Only the Ghazis came on.

"Ten rupees for the man who takes a standard—*Now then!*" he called, reduced to bribery; and Mackenzie capped him promptly: "A hundred rupees for the flag!"

A pause;—then there came forward one solitary Havildar of the 37th; and Mackenzie, bitterly disheartened, bade him return to his place.

It was all a matter of minutes—desperate minutes,



unforgettable to those who survived. Officers vainly commanding, vainly exhorting, themselves set gallant examples—equally vain. Mackintosh, Laing, Troup, Leighton, Mackenzie—all sprang out of the ranks and snatching up great stones, hurled them at the Ghazis, who responded in kind.

Mackintosh fell dead. A bullet took Mackenzie in the shoulder. He swayed faint and dizzy; but a Sergeant put an arm round him, supporting him to the rear.

Very soon he was back again; and as he returned, there leaped a Ghazi ahead of his fellows, whirling his blade and yelling defiance.

Forth to meet him ran the one gallant Havildar, who, instead of charging, dealt him a side-stroke that brought both men to earth. Locked in a death-grip, they rose and fell and rose again; while thousands looked on.

The Ghazi prevailed; but a bullet nipped his triumph in the bud; and over the fallen pair the Afghans made a swift determined rush on Mulhall's silenced gun.

Shelton's front ranks, utterly confounded, wavered, broke and fled like sheep. Only the gunners valiantly stood their ground; young Laing waving his sword and cheering them on. One fell; another fell. Three times Mulhall was struck, yet he budged not a foot. Then Laing pitched forward, his sword still aloft, a cheer on his lips, "the battle spirit hurtling his blood. . . ."

And now it was Anderson and Bott who took up the word. "Cavalry to the front! Draw swords! Gallop—charge!"

On the last word three or four officers cantered forward—alone.

Three hundred good troopers, demoralized by bad generalship, could not be induced to charge half their own number on foot.

The Ghazis shouted afresh, and with one irresistible rush overwhelmed the guns. Mulhall and his two unwounded men, staunch to the last, fell back—heart-sick and desperate—on the ranks that would give them no support.

But panic had not yet demoralized all. The second square held. Kershaw's reserve held. Shelton, suddenly inspired, bade the 'Halt' be sounded; and that which the men would not do to command, they did by instinct. Mechanically obedient, they stopped dead, turned about and fell into line. The officers cheered and led them on. With a great shout the men followed,—and now it was the Ghazis who fled, astounded, forsaking the gun, but carrying off the limber and horses.

Mulhall and his dauntless two pounced upon their treasure, cool enough now for instant use. Apt to the moment's need came ammunition from cantonments; and the devoted lascars who brought it returned yet again with a flying demand for fresh horses and limber, *plus* the mountain train gun; a request sent direct to Grant by Colin Troup.

And now the welcome thunder boomed forth again. Home batteries roared in reply. Shrapnel and grape did their appointed work; and suddenly, on the plain, arose a tumult—not of triumph, but dismay. Abdullah Khan, leader of cavalry, had fallen mortally hurt. Straightway his followers closed round him, careless of all but the need of conveying him safely from the field. Panic confusion spread fast and far. The cavalry, with one accord, swarmed after their wounded leader. The infantry, hearing that cry and supposing them discomfited, followed suit; till the thousands that swarmed upon the hill were in full flight; and to all appearance the British troops were left victors in spite of themselves.

Lady Sale, on her housetop, believing all was well

ended, hurried down to snatch a hasty breakfast and record her vision of the fight. On the ramparts, she saw Macnaghten and Elphinstone standing together; heard the civilian beg the soldier to send out fresh troops and pursue the flying Afghans into the city: heard the soldier denounce that admirable suggestion as "a wild scheme," quite unfeasible; and so passed on in high disgust. At all events, thought she, Shelton must either follow up the advantage so miraculously given, or fall back on Behmáru and hold it in strength.

But Shelton did neither. His troops, though partially in hand again, were now too few, too worn out and disheartened for a vigorous advance. Wherefore he clung obstinately to the hill he had been sent to hold; while the Afghans, heartened by reinforcements from the city, came swarming back again with renewed vigour and zest.

In that moment the phantom gleam of victory was extinguished for good.

Horses and a limber had arrived from cantonments, but no second gun; and the odds were fearfully against the dispirited handful on the ridge. So plain to Colin Mackenzie was their false position, their uncertain temper and the certainty of defeat in its most disastrous form, that he begged Shelton either to fall back on the village or retreat while yet there was time.

"No need for either," was the answer he got. "We'll hold the hill some time longer yet."

Mackenzie scanned the unpromising lines of faces in that first square. "How long, I wonder?" was his thought; but no more could be said.

From the city and from outlying villages the returning tide of Afghans swept forward—untrained, undisciplined, but resistless as the sea. Soon the plains on either hand were black with them: the hill was black with them: the

air filled with their leaden greetings to the fool Feringhis, who did not seem to know when victory was theirs. And still they swarmed upward, more and yet more of them; till the ridge became a giant porcupine dealing death from every quill.

Again the jezails rang out. Again Shelton's front ranks were mown down like grass in spring and the thunder of that unequal fight rolled on.

Mulhall's gunners loading and firing, loading and firing, wrought terrible havoc in the close-packed crowd; but living men poured like water into the gaps; with every service the vent grew hotter; and still no sign of the second gun.

By now it was near noon. For ten unprofitable hours the eight hundred—that were not now six hundred—had held the ridge, with little advantage to others and at hideous disadvantage to themselves; for there were surer hands and eyes than their own across the gorge.

Thrice the face of Shelton's first square went all to pieces; thrice it was made up. He himself, always in the hottest of the fire, was struck five times without appreciable effect.

"Mackenzie!" he shouted, "tell Kershaw to bring up the reserve."

Mackenzie galloped along the ridge; found the reserve fighting its own sharp fight with a strongly reinforced Behmáru; found Kershaw loth to obey an order that would make bad worse by cutting them off from cantonments.

"Tell the Brigadier," said he, "that if we are to get back at all—which we ought to have done an hour ago—I beg to suggest that he should retire on me. My position here is twice as strong as his own."

Mackenzie nodding decisive agreement, rode off.

And while he rode, the distant watchers on the ramparts could see how again a party of Ghazis—more formidable than the first—crept down and up the narrow gorge, and rushed, with a demoniacal yell, on Shelton's demoralized square. By ill-luck, he himself stepped back a few paces to give an order—and the trifling movement sufficed. Appalled by that sudden onset, the front ranks wavered and broke; stumbled blindly over dead and dying; pitched headlong into rear-rank comrades, who turned and ran also:—anywhere, anywhere, away from the forest of naked blades that descended all bright and rose all red. . . .

In vain officers shouted, coerced, appealed. Soldiers and sepoy alike were now mere panic-stricken units of humanity—not troops any more. . . .

Earth holds many kinds of hells; but few more hideous than that of a battle-field where the men's courage and confidence in their General are gone beyond recall; and officers, the bravest and the most devoted, have no power to save them from themselves. So it was that day on Behmáru ridge. The second square, seeing the first in full flight, the onrush of Ghazis, the knives bright with blood of their comrades, broke and ran also, deaf to entreaty or command.

Mackenzie's heart sickened as he charged into the midst of them, seeking the Brigadier. Instead, he came upon Troup, dismounted and shepherding certain backward ones with the flat of his sword.

"Mount, 'Troup, mount!" he shouted; "and find out what's come to that second gun. It might just prevent the very worst——"

Even while he spoke, Troup, on his gallows, flashed past—and on down the rugged slope towards cantonments. From the western plain a horde of cavalry came charging up and over the ridge with splendid effect, to the utter

discomfiture of Shelton's broken battalions; up and over, before Kershaw could join the main body, isolating his three companies and cutting them up almost to a man. The carnage was fearful; horses riding men down and striking them under; oaths, yells, adjurations of officers; and over all the brooding smoke-cloud from thousands of jezails, the ceaseless roar of savage warfare.

Now, as before, the European gunners and their Sergeant, fronting the gorge, were the last to give way; and even when the bad moment came, they met it like men. Whipping out their swords, they swung round and dashed, full gallop, down the steep descent; dashed headlong through the nightmare chaos of friend and foe, heedless of all but the safety of their gun. Behind them it lurched and clattered like a live thing. The ground was horribly uneven. There were hummocks, there were boulders, and great stones without number. Over them all the gun leaped unharmed till the plain was almost reached and the hearts of the gunners gladdened at the sight. One more stretch of bad ground—the last: and so it proved.

There came a tremendous lurch, and the gun-carriage that had righted itself a dozen times crashed over, wheels aloft. The horses, checked in mid-career, strained madly at their traces, pawing the air. The men—only three of them alive now, and they desperately wounded—could do no more. Surrounded and overwhelmed, three invincibles against thousands, they escaped as by a miracle, with bare life; but the gun—so nobly served, so nobly defended—was theirs no longer, to serve or to defend.

On, inexorably on, they were swept by the mingled tide of flight and pursuit, of friend and foe; cavalry and infantry violently shaken together like pieces of a broken puzzle, and so closely mingled that gunners on the

ramparts dared not fire lest they kill their own who were falling too fast. In the midst of that surging pandemonium their comrades, even on the brink of safety, were being sabred, ridden down, trampled under by relentless fanatics.

Yet all were not relentless. Round Kershaw and his remnant, in their evil hour, there rode three times the Minister, Osman Khan, with a handful of men, their swords cleaving the air, yet never descending to smite—whereby alone that remnant lived to tell the tale.

And what of Troup's bold dash for the mountain train gun that was to avert the worst?

Long since he had galloped unscathed through the western gate; had found the gun, with its infantry escort just ready to start; had given the word and turned his horse, when Grant, of all people, came upon the scene. Promptly and peremptorily he vetoed the move, on the score that it was now too late, and that lives would be sacrificed to no purpose. Yet was Eyre convinced that, if the lesser gun had gone out then, it would have saved the greater one and averted the supreme disaster of the day.

But, though Troup was frustrated, there were others who did what little they could to check the exultant foe. From the Mission Compound the Shah's 6th Infantry opened a brisk fire. Lieutenant Hardyman, with a troop of cavalry, charged across the plain to join Walker, and a handful of sowars rallied by heroic effort. But even as they met, Walker doubled up in the saddle and was carried back to die.

Hasan Khan and his Jezzailchis still crouched behind walls and watercourses, still loaded and fired with deliberate aim and murderous effect. Here Mackenzie joined them and remained to help. Heart-breaking to

witness the panic flight of men, who were no cowards by nature; the futile heroism of officers, rallying and imploring to the last. So complete was the rout that detachments in the Yaghi Fort and a small Musjid near cantonments left their posts and fled back to the sheepfold, convinced that the end of all had come.

Elphinstone, almost beside himself, hobbled out of the gate to rally the fugitives; fired, no doubt, by the pathetic hope that the sight of their decrepit leader fearlessly exposing himself might shame them to a semblance of manhood.

Vain hope! Ten minutes found him back within the gates, scarcely able to stand against the inpouring torrent of humanity.

"Useless, sir, useless!" he lamented to Macnaghten. "They're no better than a flock of sheep on the run. I *did* manage to get a handful together. But Lord, sir, when I said to them "Eyes right!" they all looked the other way." Which priceless remark Lady Sale chanced to hear in passing, and duly recorded that night.

"A flock of sheep on the run" they were indeed, that pitiful rabble of horse and foot, pursuers and pursued, George Lawrence, watching from the ramparts, never forgot the mingled shame and horror of the sight; shame, intensified by the conviction of all who stood there that pursuit would not cease at the gateway; that the victorious thousands must inevitably gallop on unchecked, and crown their achievement with wholesale massacre.

The main mass of cavalry swept near and nearer, headed by Osman Khan; but at the last—as if obedient to some preconceived plan or sudden word of command—every man of them wheeled sharply to the right. Straightway the gates crashed to, and the victors, with shouts of exultation, galloped on to the city.



There had been many black days in Kabul cantonments; but, so far, none blacker than this. From that time even the most sanguine, the most resolute, began to lose heart; so obvious was it that the incompetent leadership had broken the spirit of men already unnerved by cold and hunger and incessant duty. Only, in justice to Shelton, it should be remembered that, if his original suggestion had been followed, or he had been reinforced at the critical moment, as Macnaghten proposed, victory would have been decisive, and he himself extolled to the skies. As it was, none had a good word for him, while the conviction lay like a stone upon the hearts of all that nothing more could be achieved by fighting.

And as if by way of ironic consolation, came sounds of lively jubilation from the city, confirming the rumoured arrival of Mahomed Akbar Khan. It was the beginning of the end.

## VI

AMONG all the tribal chiefs gathered together in Kabul city, Akbar Khan stood out in high relief as his father, the Amir, had done before him. A man of fine physique and commanding presence, of unlimited resource and daring, a son with family wrongs to redress and a lost kingdom to regain, he seemed to the Afghans a heaven-sent leader, pre-ordained to exert a mighty influence over the destinies of all.

Of a truth Dōst Mahomed had passed on much of his remarkable personality to this, his favourite son: the finely cut aquiline features and breadth of brow; the mingled power and sensuality of mouth and chin; the fine modelling of eyes darkly aglow with a fiery spirit, quick to leap forth in fierce words and fiercer deeds. But though the face showed much of the Amir's native nobility and good humour, there was more of cruelty in the curves of the nostrils and of the sensuous lips. Like his father, Akbar's finer qualities were inherent, his worst faults the outcome of a youth so undisciplined that he had no notion of self-control. Like his father, therefore, Akbar was compact of bewildering contradictions. He possessed talent without knowledge, energy without prudence, courage without coolness, decision without self-control, liberality without principle. Among friends he was the most jovial and good-hearted of men; but once let that inner fire flare up, and he was capable of committing any

atrocities in the sacred name of revenge. Impetuous and passionate though he was; blown this way and that by gusts of violent feeling; yet his courage and penetration, his past injuries and present ambitions, marked him as the leader of leaders for the Afghan cause.

For more than two years, at the pleasure of his enemies, Mahomed Akbar had been outcast from home and country. Now it was meet that others should suffer at his pleasure; and his fixed determination to prevail infected even those among the chiefs who most resented Barakzai dominion—the Duranis, Kazzilbashes, and the lords of the Kohistan. That his appearance on the scene had coincided with a victory snatched from the very jaws of defeat, was an omen obviously in his favour; and he made the most of a happy chance.

As a matter of fact, he had arrived on the 22nd and had discovered without loss of time the weakest points in the British position. But at present he preferred ostensibly to leave matters in the hands of his cousin, Osman Khan, whom the Envoy trusted more readily than any of his fellows. Had he not, on that fatal 2nd of November, saved the life of Captain Henry Drummond, an officer in the Shah's service, and kept him until now in the sacred precincts of his zenana?

Nor was Drummond the only British officer so honoured and so saved from death. Handsome James Skinner—commonly called "Gentleman Jim"—had, on that same morning, disguised himself as an Afghan and slipped through a side-door into the house next his own, just in time to escape the inrush of an infuriated mob. His neighbour, grateful for past kindness, welcomed him warmly. A party of pursuing Afghans followed after; but there came swiftly forth from the women's quarters a little old lady, who—in defiance of danger and every pre-

judice of her race—seized Skinner by the hand crying out joyfully, “My son! my son! is it thou indeed?” Waving aside those who came near, she drew him rapidly within, where none dared follow; then, murmuring shyly, “The Sahib will forgive,” bade him sit in a corner and flung a *burkha* over his head. She was the mother of his host, it transpired; and the Sahib did more than forgive. He blest that noble little woman from his heart, while he heard afar off the groans and imprecations of those who searched his house in vain.

There he had remained these three weeks, treated by the family as one of themselves; and though the whole place was searched more than once, none betrayed him, nor did the men of the household dream of resenting his presence in the zenana;—facts sufficient to prove that although his race might be detested on political grounds, the Sahib himself was treated on his merits.

Akbar knew already of Drummond’s whereabouts; but of Skinner’s not yet. He was much taken up, for the moment, with other discoveries more essential to his evolving plan of campaign. From the Ghilzais he had heard their version of Macnaghten’s abortive attempt to buy their friendship; and Mohun Lal’s secret transactions were beginning to leak out. The munshi had been singularly unwise in his choice of confidants: and now something more than a whisper went round that Abdullah had not been wounded by a British shell, but shot from behind a wall by one Abdul Aziz, who came by night and clamoured for “balance due,” assuring Mohun Lal that poison would soon complete the work of the jezail.

On the 26th also Mir Musjidi died very suddenly—it was said from the result of former wounds. But there were those who knew otherwise; and again Mohun Lal was pestered for “balance due.” Convinced that he was

obeying, through Conolly, the orders of Macnaghten, he had already advanced nine thousand rupees. But the remaining twelve thousand was not lightly to be squandered; wherefore, with a Shylock nicety, he refused to pay the balance, alleging that the heads had not been brought in according to agreement.

Here was folly piled on infamy. Such a secret was not likely to be well guarded by disappointed and angry men; and whispers soon gave place to open speech free from any peddling exactitude as to facts. Amazed and indignant chiefs became suddenly aware that the British Envoy was reported to have set a price on their heads; that he, the fountain of honour and justice, had been tampering with their followers, trying to do by underhand means that which his troops lacked courage to achieve.

Akbar's arrival at such a moment was doubly propitious, both for himself and them. "Naturally embittered," wrote Durand, "against the British power, intimation of these secret machinations enabled him to keep alive suspicion, destroy all confidence in British good faith, and fan into flame the spirit of implacable hostility." Very soon also he realized that the battle was no longer against soldiers but against three indefatigable Commissariat officers; that to defeat the three, by forbidding villagers to deal with them on pain of death, would be to hold in the hollow of his hand a starving army—that is worse than none.

Thus swiftly and vigorously he laid his plans for ultimate victory; for the present, it was deemed that Generals openly defeated might be sufficiently humbled and alarmed to consider terms of surrender. On the 24th, therefore, Macnaghten received a letter to that effect from his good friend Osman Khan, who took great credit to himself for "checking the ardour" of his followers and

saving the British force from total destruction; which last was not the wish of any right-minded Afghan chiefs. They desired only that the British should depart in peace, leaving them to rule their own land with a King of their own choosing: a friendly and reasonable statement of the case.

But Macnaghten had also received through Conolly an urgent request from the King of Lord Auckland's choosing, that the whole force should join him in the Bala Hissar without loss of time. Conolly agreed that thus alone could the safety and honour of that force be insured; and Macnaghten's conviction on that point has already been shown. But Shelton and Elphinstone, notorious for disagreement, were in this respect fatally united. Had they been in league with Akbar, they could not have played more persistently into his hands. Elphinstone now declared himself "the more confirmed in his original opinion," from the harassed and dispirited state of the troops; and Shelton marshalled a formidable array of objections. These entirely failed to convince Pottinger and Eyre, who still declared the move to be practicable and imperative; the risks of a kind that "soldiers ought unhesitatingly to incur." Better, in their view, the dreaded ruin than inglorious surrender; better, infinitely better, death than disgrace.

But though there were many like-minded among their fellows, such sentiments did not find favour with the General's Council, on whose action, or inaction, hung the lives of all; and Macnaghten, distracted by military apathy and indecision, turned his mind reluctantly towards the letter of Osman Khan. Next morning he wrote of it to Elphinstone, at the same time asking him, in plain terms, whether he really believed it impossible to hold his position in the country. Elphinstone's reply was unequivocal. A

long letter, parading the difficulties and deficiencies that beset him, paved the way for his foregone conclusion: "I am of opinion that it is not feasible any longer to maintain our position in this country, and that you ought to avail yourself of the offer to negotiate."

Confronted by that proof of incapacity and unsoldierly spirit, Macnaghten could do no less than send word to the city that a deputation would be received and reasonable terms considered. Accordingly, on the 27th, two minor chiefs, duly met by Lawrence and Trevor, were ushered into the guard-room of the eastern gate, where Macnaghten awaited them. The talk that followed was full of bombast on the one hand, and on the other of increasing conviction that the way of negotiation was the way of open indignity and disgrace.

The Afghans, arrogant and offensive, vaunted the right of conquerors to dictate terms; demanded that the whole garrison should surrender at discretion. Macnaghten flatly refused; and the deadlock was complete.

The dismissed chiefs swaggered to the threshold, and Macnaghten, checked at every turn, rode sorrowfully back to the tents where he and his wife had taken up their abode on the 2nd of November.

Evening brought a letter repeating the morning's programme with variations. The King and his family to be given up; all arms and ammunition surrendered; married men, women and children, given up as hostages; the remainder to rely on Afghan generosity, in which case they might be allowed to leave the country unmolested, on the condition that they should never return.

Macnaghten, sitting in his office tent with Lawrence and Mackenzie, looked up with anger in his eyes.

'Read *that*,' said he. "That is the sort of thing we expose ourselves to by bargaining instead of fighting for

our lives. What kind of answer, I ask you, can one send to proposals so insolent and overbearing?"

Mackenzie took the paper held out to him, but flung it down half read.

"There is only one possible answer, sir. Tell them, in plain terms, that we prefer death to dishonour; that we put our trust in the God of Battles, and in His name bid them come on!"

It was a chivalrous answer, worthy of the man, and it was despatched to the city that night.



## VII

But it was one thing to invoke the God of Battles and quite another to infuse the battle-spirit into that ill-placed, ill-commanded force.

The men who ran from Behmáru Ridge were no cowards. The shame of defeat hung heavy upon them, and they themselves were ready enough for any enterprise whereby their lost honour might be retrieved. Yet even a more warlike chief than Elphinstone might well have hesitated to send them out again under a Brigadier who either did not know, or did not heed, the first principles of command in the field, and whose heart was set, not on victory, but on retreat at any price.

It has been said that if some of the younger officers "had only dared to take the leadership into their own hands the honour of our arms would even then have been assured, while the breach of discipline would have been gladly justified by an admiring nation." But such a "deed of happy daring" would entail loss of an officer's commission should he fail; and among the more forward spirits at Kabul those few who were not either disabled by wounds, or by the brand of "political" on their brow, were for the most part mere subalterns, whom Shelton would no doubt have promptly put under arrest.

The 27th brought the first fall of snow, and the cold strengthened steadily; yet still firewood was doled out for cooking only, and the misery of the sepoy was great.

"The horses, too," wrote Lady Sale, "are hard up for

grain, and one of them is averred to have eaten his comrade's tail! . . . The politicals are again very mysterious, but we know they are treating: Whenever the horizon clears a little, mystery becomes the order of the day! . . . The Macnaghtens have left their refuge in cantonments and are gone into the great house again, which they think will tend to quiet people's minds."

But whether or no Macnaghten managed to quiet other people's minds, he found it a hard matter to quiet his own. Two things alone upheld him: faith in the almighty money-bag, and hope of Maclaren's force from Kandahar. Of this last, no news as yet; and the money-bag, though potent in the abstract, was not being turned, in the concrete, to profitable account. Had the Afghan nation possessed one huge throat into which the silver stream could be poured, all might have been well. But to bribe one party was simply to whet the greed of another; and the spar Macnaghten clung to, in his extremity, became the sword that should pierce his soul. As for the troops, day by day discipline grew more lax, demoralization more complete. Thain and Lawrence did what they could in the way of remonstrance; but their seniors paid small heed.

Shortly after the Behmáru disaster a party of Afghans had amused themselves by damaging the bridge over the river. No practical steps had been taken to protect it; and now came another party, more daring still. There—in open daylight, three hundred and fifty yards from ramparts bristling with cannon—they carried off what timber they needed, and burnt the rest. "Comment on such an insult offered us is needless," wrote Johnson that night in his journal. "The bridge is not much use at this season, but the disgrace attaching to our military authorities is indelible! . . . The name of our troops is daily more and more tarnished. . . ."

And now, at this critical state of affairs, Envoy and General were again in correspondence over the main problem—Bala Hissar or retreat. Macnaghten still upheld the more honourable course. But his sound arguments and brave words were as seed sown upon stony ground; and, at length, maddened by such suicidal opposition, he determined to bring the matter to an official issue, once for all. On the 8th he wrote a short formal note asking if it were Elphinstone's definite opinion that to hold out further would entail useless sacrifice, and that the only alternative was negotiation "for a safe retreat on the most favourable terms."

The General-in-Council was troubled with no doubts on the matter. Its opinion was for once unanimous: "No time to be lost in negotiating for a safe retreat from the country." That was the finale of a long letter wherein difficulty was heaped on difficulty till the pile toppled over—a letter signed and counter-signed—Elphinstone, Shelton, Anquetil, and Chambers.

Macnaghten laid it down with a sigh of despair. Obstacles in themselves had no power to shake his courage; but the faint-hearted attitude of the men whose business it was to override them, seemed fiendishly designed to break his optimistic spirit on the wheel. True, he was answerable for their plight; but they were retaliating on him more cruelly than they realized or he deserved. Bowed down with the burden of responsibility, distracted by conscientious scruples in respect of his duty to the Shah, he sat long alone that evening revolving the problem of the morrow, praying for news of relief that alone could avert the final indignity of surrender.

And, while he agonized thus, for the benefit of military leaders who would not fight their own fight like men, those leaders were congenially engaged in discussing minor

details of the coming retreat. Officers with local knowledge being invited, Mackenzie was among them, ready to help if needs must. But readiness was soon changed to impatience, and impatience to wrath, when he found the real business of the evening discarded in favour of a vigorous attack on Sir William Macnaghten—Shelton, as usual, in the van. The Envoy's political measures, one after another, were ruthlessly condemned; even his character was not spared; till Mackenzie—junior or no—sprang up and spoke with imperious heat:

“*Really*, gentlemen! I am amazed and disgusted to find a military council degraded in an arena of personal abuse. We are here to discuss a very serious subject; and instead you are all behaving more like troublesome schoolboys than like bearded men. As one who knows Sir William better than you all, I claim some right to speak in his defence——”

But Shelton, rising also, waved him aside, for the Scot's eyes had directly challenged his own. “Confound your impudence Mackenzie! I *will* sneer at him—I like to sneer at him!”

Mackenzie would have flung back a hot retort; but the General put out a gently protesting hand and ventured the proposal that as they needed information which the Envoy might possess, Captain Mackenzie had better ride over and ask him to join them.

He joined them accordingly, bringing George Lawrence; and at once laid before them a practical plan whereby quite a large quantity of grain might be procured from a fort named Khojah Ruwash, four miles north of cantonments. Let a gun and an infantry detachment go out there in the small hours, with Johnson as purchaser. If the people refused to sell, both village and grain could be taken by force—and surrender deferred.

Shelton vetoed the proposal on principle; Elphinstone murmured of risks; Grant hummed and hawed. The discussion waxed stormy and stormier. But several juniors supported the Envoy: and it was finally decided that the party should leave the Kohistan gate at four in the morning; grass being laid over the bridge to deaden sound. Lawrence—stung by a covert sneer from Shelton—offered to take charge of the gun with the Envoy's cavalry escort; and at one o'clock the conference broke up.

Three hours later Lawrence and Hopkins, with their men, were at the Kohistan gate. No sign of the promised preparations; no drawbridge down; no grass; no orders given to the officer in charge. Lawrence—enraged—promptly suspected Shelton; cantered off to Grant's house; roused him, without compunction, and bade him wake the Brigadier. What passed between them Lawrence never knew; but it seemed that a rumour of Kohistanis in force at Behmáru had alarmed the General, and no expedition would take place.

George Lawrence—fuming inwardly—rode home to breakfast. In his opinion it seemed “abundantly clear that the military Chiefs were determined not to avail themselves of the many opportunities which offered of procuring provisions; that their sole object was retreat . . . and if the force were well supplied, their chief pretext would be removed.” Lawrence may have been wrong, but events go far to justify his judgment.

So dawned the 9th of December, in renewed disappointment and failure. A second pressing invitation from Shah Shuja, though it cheered Macnaghten for the moment, failed to rouse Elphinstone, or to demolish the Brigadier's stock arguments—lack of forage and firewood, risk of defeat, triumph of the enemy if cantonments were abandoned. Macnaghten, unextinguished, pounced on

that last, and rent it to shreds. A triumph for the enemy to abandon cantonments? This from men who clamoured to forsake every position in the country! In the one event, partial triumph would be discounted by their own fuller power to strike; in the other, Afghan triumph and British disgrace would be complete.

But he spoke to deaf ears. John Conolly—bearer of the invitation—went away sorrowful; and Macnaghten, no less sorrowful, accepted an offer to reopen negotiation with the chiefs.

They agreed to meet outside cantonments on the 11th, and consider a draft treaty of eighteen articles drawn up by himself. He would take with him only Lawrence, Trevor, Mackenzie, and a small escort; no troops. By this daring display of confidence and courage he hoped to revive faith in his own sincerity, which had been badly shattered, not without cause.

In vain his wife clung to him, entreating him, with tears and caresses, not to go near those treacherous men! Heart-broken at the change in her husband, distracted by haunting presentiments of evil, she would not lightly be denied; but neither would her husband lightly be dissuaded. His duty, however dangerous, was clear before him. The troops could not or would not fight. Johnson had reported that the quantity of dirt mixed in with his grain left only one day's supply in store. Colonel Palmer wrote that Maclaren's brigade would probably be turned back by snow; and Macnaghten confronted by failure on every side must, in duty bound, do what he could: the which he did, with a manliness and daring that almost atoned for every error in the past. But no amount of atonement has power to cancel the law that he who breaks pays; and though, in this case, payment involved the fate of thousands, William Macnaghten paid also—to the uttermost farthing.

On the 11th, near the ruined bridge, he spent two hours in conference with the chiefs of the principal Afghan tribes, and the main terms of his treaty were accepted by all. Those terms stipulated that the British should evacuate Afghanistan unmolested—not to return; that food and transport should be supplied for the march, and all prisoners released; that Dōst Mahomed and every exile should return, and the Shah himself be allowed the option of remaining at Kabul or returning to Ludhiana with his British friends. In either case the Afghan Government would pay him a lakh of rupees a year.

On the whole, dignity and cordiality prevailed throughout; Akbar's occasional signs of violence being promptly checked by his companions. Nevertheless, he would not bind himself to supply provisions unless Macnaghten also bound himself to leave the Bala Hissar and cantonments within three days: and "upon this compact," says Durand, "the treaty was accepted; but as there was a thorough want of confidence in the Envoy's sincerity, Captain Trevor had to accompany the chiefs as hostage for Macnaghten's good faith."

So they rode back three, who had ridden out four; and Mrs. Trevor's pillow that night must have been wet with tears.

Macnaghten's own heart was heavy as a mill-stone. If the Afghans distrusted him, he returned the compliment tenfold. But the military authorities were satisfied at last—they, whose duty and glory it was to overcome difficulties and disregard danger, where their country's honour was involved.

## VIII

THE treaty that was to purchase safety and remove all stumbling-blocks merely paved the way for further humiliation. But mercifully man lives from day to day; and the blacker his plight the deeper his reliance on the hidden possibilities of the morrow.

Macnaghten had promised that Elphinstone's army should march in three days; but the 16th found him still sitting in his familiar *dufter*, still awaiting provisions and transport, without which no move could be made. Yet the Bala Hissar had been evacuated—the Bala Hissar where all might have held out to the last. Major Ewart with the 54th, and gallant Captain Nicholl, with his half troop of Horse Artillery, had marched into cantonments that morning, ruefully enough, hard pressed by Ghazis, whom the chiefs declared themselves unable to control, and who now infested the gates, beating back friendly folk with grain to sell. On these sacred uncontrollables not a shot might now be fired without the most urgent necessity, lest Afghan good feeling be checked!

A lakh of rupees sent to Akbar had produced neither camels nor provisions; and there now lay before Macnaghten a letter from Elphinstone, pointing out that the cattle would soon be too weak to march unless forage were immediately supplied. Thus pressed, Macnaghten sent a line of remonstrance to the chiefs; and their reply betrayed the measure of sincerity that was in them: "So



long as your people occupy such strong positions as the Magazine, the Musjid, and the Forts of Rikab Bashi and Zulfikar, our people do not believe you are intending to depart. Let these forts be made over to us and grain in plenty shall be sent."

Insolence heaped on injury! Even Elphinstone denounced the demand as unwarrantable: even Shelton was strongly opposed to such wholesale and injudicious surrender. Macnaghten grew hopeful. "Then, for God's sake," cried he, "let us have done with treaties and march out in order of battle. Now that fresh troops have come in, why not enter the city or fight under its walls?"

Such wild talk restored them to their senses. Battles had no place in their scheme of things.

"In that case," replied Macnaghten, "the forts must be given up. Refusal would only exasperate the chiefs; and we are completely in their hands as regards provisions."

The forts were given up accordingly, on the understanding that they should be garrisoned by men well under control.

That afternoon Lawrence and Macnaghten, with tears of shame and indignation in their eyes, stood together on a mound near the Masjid, while those four strongholds—the last props of British power in Kabul—which had cost so much blood to secure, were made over to their exulting enemies.

Before sunset, those enemies—converted by a stroke of the pen into "allies"—were in full possession. Crowds of them gathered on the ramparts of the Magazine Fort, in view of the whole cantonment, and there sat exchanging sallies over the discomfited garrison within.

That night Lady Sale sat down to write up her journal with bitterness in her heart. "To prove our good faith and our belief in the chiefs," she wrote, "we are to-day

placed entirely in their power. They know we are starving; that our horses and cattle have pretty well eaten up the twigs and bark of the trees. The horses gnaw tent-pegs. I was even gravely told they had eaten the trunion of a gun! *Nothing is satisfied* except the pariah dogs who are gorged with eating dead camels and horses. . . ."

On the 19th they woke to find snow falling quietly, relentlessly. The earlier slight fall had vanished and given place to prolonged frost. But the chance of departure before the worst came had either not been taken or given; and to-day from dawn to dark the air was thick with feathery flakes that whirled and fell, till all the valley was white with them; till they gleamed, near a foot deep, on the walls of forts and the flat roofs of Kabul city. Difficult to realize that this marvel of softness and brilliance, which in a few hours had translated their world into fairyland, was to prove an enemy more pitiless than the steel of Afghan knives or the stone of Afghan hearts.

Whatever the reason of that week's delay—whether the bad faith of the chiefs, the Shah's irresolution, or the Envoy's reluctance to face enforced withdrawal from the scene of his former triumphs—it had cut away from under their feet all hope of an orderly retreat on Jalálabad, and on the 19th Macnaghten's last straw broke in his hand. He learnt now for certain that Macfarlane, finding snow in the Ghazni highlands, and hampered by loss of cattle, had returned to Kandahar—the more readily, perhaps, because Nott was sure to approve his decision. News of the latter, and of Sale, had arrived two days earlier. Both were faring well. All was reported quiet again round Kandahar; and the reason is not far to seek. Nott's measures had been miles removed from those of Elphinstone. He had not scrupled to discourage Afghan atten-

tions by ordering a captured chief to be blown away from a gun. Thereafter, alert and ready, to the last least buckle on the uniform of the last least recruit, he sat waiting for the rest to "come on."

"I am not to be caught sleeping like my Kabul friends," he wrote to his elder daughter at this very time. "I have made every preparation . . . and when the day arrives, I think I shall give a satisfactory account of the enemy—that is, if I am not interfered with by men in power. . . . I have hitherto turned a deaf ear to those around. I dare say they think themselves right; but I am not going to sit quiet and see the throats of my officers and men cut, owing to the folly of others. . . . It is cold and frosty. We go to parade at ten and remain at exercise till twelve. I have concentrated my troops here, and have nine thousand of all kinds. . . . At present we have only the ground we stand on; but when weather will permit of field operations, I hope to make these people here *know our power*. . . ."

Pure refreshment to turn from the tale of Kabul to an atmosphere so vigorous and manly as these words suggest. With Nott at his elbow, Macnaghten had never been degraded to such pitiful shifts; to that last most fatal error of trying to beat Orientals at their own game. Yet he owed it to his own prejudice, his own amazing ignorance of men, that this indomitable General had not long since reigned supreme at Kabul.

Sale's position, though better than Elphinstone's, was worse than Nott's; for Jalálabad—the Abode of Splendour—was even more miserably ruinous and indefensible than the "folly on the plain." But Sale, though an indifferant General, was happy in possessing exceptionally fine officers; unhappy only by reason of increasing anxiety as to the outcome of the deadlock at Kabul. All dreaded

the "insanity" of premature capitulation, though they had Macnaghten's assurance that he would postpone it to the last.

And by the 20th Macnaghten knew that the "last" had come indeed. More snow had fallen; the "uncontrollable" Ghazis grew daily more insolent in their bearing towards troops forbidden by their own commandant to retaliate with grape. Supplies of grain sent in were far from sufficient; and Shelton, it transpired, had been privately arranging with Akbar to send in forage for his own use, which transaction earned him a severe reprimand.

Tāj Mahomed—the faithful Barakzai who would have saved Burnes—had been to see Sturt, and assured him privately that Akbar meant treachery. Sturt, fully convinced of that same, went straight to the General, and pleaded that a treaty, already broken by both parties, should no longer be held binding; that the garrison should immediately and openly fall back on Jalālabad, there to await reinforcements now coming up through the Punjab. If all private property were abandoned he would undertake to find transport for ineffectives, ammunition, and stores. But the thing must be done *at once*. He might have spared himself the pains. Elphinstone, with his unfailing courtesy, assured him Macnaghten had just gone out to "settle matters in a friendly conference with the chiefs," and the superfluous subaltern returned home in disgust.

So also did Macnaghten from his "friendly conference," whereat Akbar Khan, grown arrogant and overbearing, had demanded immediate surrender of the nine-pounder guns and four hostages, naming Shelton, Grant, Conolly, and Airey as men of some standing. Macnaghten had conceded the hostages, but refused the guns. Trevor—

by reason of his wife's urgency—was to be sent back next day, and the departure of the troops had been fixed for Thursday the 22nd. More money was given for baggage animals, but none had been sent, and there were those who believed that Akbar was using these funds to further his own ends. Hasan Khan, the faithful and devoted, was of this mind. Urgently, respectfully, he entreated the Envoy to hold no more personal meetings with the Sirdar, unless he and his Jezailchis were allowed to be present. He, who best knew his own countrymen, bade the Sahib remember that for them treachery was no dishonour, but common tactics of war. Macnaghten, impressed by the man's loyalty and courage, could do no less than echo Sturt's appeal of the morning to "break off all negotiations as futile and vain, and take our chance in the field." But for all such vigorous counsels Elphinstone had one answer—too few troops could be spared, and even those could not now be depended on for discipline and courage against heavy odds. Macnaghten knew that it was so; yet he laid small blame on the men, demoralized by such leadership as they had been cursed withal.

For himself, wedged between imbecility on one hand and systematic treachery on the other, worn out with plotting, counter-plotting, and sleepless nights, he was driven to his wits' end. Treachery or no, insanity or no, there seemed never a loophole through which he might escape the disgrace and peril of capitulation. In this last resort, neither men, money-bags nor bayonets availed him anything. Distracted by doubt as to whom he could trust—even were a treaty signed and sealed—he had latterly been turning his attentions from one to another, snatching at any fresh combination that seemed to promise the best results. By advertising his friendship with the Barakzai, he had hoped to make the Duranis and Kazzil-

bashes rally round the Shah—not altogether in vain. To-night, therefore, haunted by Hasan Khan's warning, he wrote to Mohun Lal: "You can tell the Ghilzais and Khan Shereen [Kazzilbash] that after they have declared for His Majesty and us, and sent in a hundred *kurwoars* of grain, I shall be glad to give them a bond for five lakhs. . . ."

Next morning, rising early from a pillow that had failed to induce sleep, he wrote yet again: "In conversing you must say distinctly that I am ready to stand by my engagement with the Barakzais; but if any portion of the Afghans wish us to remain, I shall think myself at liberty to break my agreement of going away on the 22nd. . . . If the Ghilzais and Kazzilbashes wish us to stay, let them declare so openly. . . . But anything that is intended in our favour *must* appear before noon to-morrow."

If secret qualms visited him as to the ethics of the desperate game he played, no doubt he dismissed them on the plea he did not feel bound to keep strict faith with the faithless. "His desperate efforts to save the last shreds of his country's honour plunged him into courses that compromised his own. Whichever way he turned was hell . . . and his better nature had become, like the dyer's hand, subdued to what it worked in."

That afternoon—in pursuance of Barakzai arrangements—Connolly and Airey were sent over to the city as hostages, while Lawrence was persuaded to part with a pair of double-barrelled pistols, so pointedly admired by Akbar, that Macnaghten wished to send them by Connolly as a gift. Lawrence frankly owned his reluctance, but Macnaghten pressed the point as a personal favour—and he gave in. So the two hostages, *plus* the pistols, went forth to the city; Drummond and Trevor being graciously permitted to return.

Of the two other hostages demanded, Shelton flatly refused; and Grant either did the same, or Elphinstone did it for him. It was a dangerous and distasteful duty, this of acting hostage to an enemy as treacherous as he was cruel. Shelton had more than once declared that nothing would induce him to undertake it; but happily for Macnaghten there were others in cantonments ready to go, if need be, though they disliked it no less. Pottinger—still suffering from his inflamed wound—and Warburton, of the Shah's Gunners, offered themselves instead; and Macnaghten sent word that they should be handed over on the departure of the troops.

The 22nd brought no friendly declaration from the Kazzilbash folk, so the final ignominy of departure seemed fixed without hope of change. In this his hour of extremity, all things and all men conspired against William Macnaghten. Every staff he leant on proved a broken reed. Elphinstone and Shelton had failed him utterly; Sale and Nott scarcely less. Now the Kazzilbashes failed him like the rest. Yet even so, he could not tamely accept the inevitable as the General and his Council appeared to do. Still he ransacked his distraught brain for fresh possibilities, still clung desperately to the hope of a reprieve. These last weeks of perilous uncertainty had told upon him cruelly. To those who knew him best he seemed a changed man, restless, irritable, and distrait, swayed violently between the extremes of hope and despair.

To-night the last prevailed; to-night he was in the mood to catch at any straw; and to-night—as if by some fiendish intuition—it pleased Akbar to set before him a gilded snare that should test his sincerity once for all.

The Sirdar's suspicions—wakeful always—had been roused by his evident reluctance to depart. Ignorant of

the apathetic spirit that balked him, Akbar found Macnaghten's conduct inexplicable, save on the ground that he cherished some deep design, such as that which had led to the deaths of Mir Musjidi and Abdullah Khan. Wherefore—late on the 22nd, when dinner was half over at the Residency—there entered the Rajput Jemadar of Chuprassies, announcing visitors from Kabul city, Captain Skinner Sahib, with Afghan friends.

Macnaghten rose from his seat. "*Salaam do—salaam do!*" he said hurriedly; and "Gentleman Jim" appeared on the words—very handsome and distinguished-looking in his *choga* and turban. None had seen him since the 1st of November, and he was a man beloved of all.

The first glad greeting over, Macnaghten asked him anxiously of his errand. Skinner laughed.

"I feel like a man loaded with combustibles," said he. "I am charged with a message from Akbar of the most portentous nature! But dinner first, business afterwards; and for details I am to refer you to my companions, Mahomed Sadik, and our Lohani friend, Surwar Khan."

Dinner, as may be imagined, was swiftly disposed of; and thereafter the four disappeared into Macnaghten's office, leaving Mackenzie puzzled and more than a little anxious for the man whom he loved, less blindly, yet no less loyally than did George Lawrence, who chanced to be dining out that night.

Within the study came revelations—so superbly daring that they fairly upset the balance of Macnaghten's harassed mind.

Akbar's proposal, in plain terms, was on this wise. Let Sir William come out next morning to meet himself and a few immediate friends, that a final arrangement might be made. Let the General have a large body of troops in readiness; and let these, on a given signal, join with the



followers of Akbar, assault Mahmud Khan's fort and secure the person of Aminullah, now in command there with several thousand men. "For a certain sum," added Mahomed Sadik with an insinuating leer, "the Lord Sahib should be presented with Aminullah's head."

But Macnaghten indignantly waved the proposal aside. "It was not his custom," said he, "nor the custom of his country, to pay a price for blood."

Mahomed Sadik raised polite eyebrows, possibly sceptical. The distinction between paying for a man's death or for his capture by treachery was too nice to be appreciated by an Afghan, who, moreover, believed that the Envoy had indirectly compassed the earlier "removal" of rebel chiefs. But let that pass, and let the Lord Sahib hear the rest, which was greatly to his advantage. Aminullah being captured, and all others subdued by the combined strength of British and Ghilzai arms, the former would be permitted to "save their purdah" by remaining in the country six months longer, and then departing as if of their own free-will. Shah Shuja, if he chose, might continue King, with Mahomed Akbar for his Wazir; and—here came the crowning item—the said Akbar was to receive, as reward from the British Government, a bonus of three hundred thousand pounds, *plus* forty thousand a year for life!

"To this wild proposal," says Mackenzie, "Sir William gave ear with an eagerness which nothing can account for but the supposition that his strong mind had been harassed till it in some degree lost its equipoise, for he not only assented to these terms, but actually gave Mahomed Sadik a Persian paper to that effect written in his own hand."

And so an end of that fatal conference, from which Macnaghten emerged with eyes unnaturally bright, a nervous, hurried manner, and lips that breathed no word

of the transaction even to Trevor, Lawrence, or Mackenzie. Distracted though he was, the man must have known in his secret heart that he had set his hand to a compact as impracticable as it was dishonest; and he could not bear—yet—to see the reflection of that knowledge in the eyes of his friends.

Wherefore Lawrence and Mackenzie had to sleep on their anxiety, while Skinner and his companions carried back to Kabul proofs that may well have astounded Akbar Khan. Unable to gauge the full measure of Macnaghten's desperate plight, he saw only the Envoy's readiness to snatch at an offer which involved the perfidious sacrifice of an "ally"; saw himself justified, his worst suspicions confirmed. After such clear proof, he argued, no reliance could be placed even on the most solemn engagement; no blame cast on him or his friends if they resolved "to ensnare Macnaghten in the net he was spreading for another; to take vengeance on him and his starving troops for the insults and injuries which a selfish ambitious policy had heaped upon Afghanistan."

## IX

WHETHER William Macnaghten slept soundly that night, as a man reprieved, or lay awake tormented with doubts, none knew—nor ever will know. But with morning came the call for action that implied, first, the call for speech. Lawrence and Mackenzie must know. Elphinstone must know. What would they all think? What did he think himself? The probability is, he did not allow himself to think at all. Wedged helplessly between a perfidious enemy, a paralyzed General and a starving army, he saw only the gleam of daylight ahead—the lives of thousands saved; British “purdah” saved; the old King saved also from the ignominy of deposition; and, dazzled by the delusive brilliancy of that gleam, he could not or would not haggle over the means to so great an end.

But with Mackenzie and Lawrence it would be otherwise; hence his reluctance to speak. Nerving himself for the ordeal, he sent word bidding them accompany him to a conference at noon. Mackenzie came first, and to him Macnaghten unburdened his soul.

Mackenzie was silent a moment, scarcely daring to speak his honest thought. Then he said gravely: “I beg of you, sir, be very careful. I feel convinced it is a plot against you.”

“A plot!” Macnaghten started, then added hastily, testily: “Let me alone for that—trust me for that. I must see the General and give the needful directions.”

Mackenzie said no more. The time for argument was passed; but his eyes were eloquent, and Macnaghten must have been glad to escape their mute appeal.

Elphinstone proved no less encouraging. Dreading fresh complications, and all unused to the shifts and trickery of Eastern diplomacy, he shook a dubious head over Macnaghten's tale. The whole thing sounded to him extravagant, and very dangerous. But for seven weeks the word had been so persistently on his lips, that now, when he spoke common prudence, it fell unheeded on Macnaghten's ears.

The prominence of Akbar alarmed him. "And what," he asked, "have our good friends Osman Khan and Zeman Khan to say to all this?"

Macnaghten hurriedly waved them aside. "Nothing at all. Nothing at all. They are not in the plot."

"Plot? I don't like that word, Macnaghten. It has an ominous sound. Are you quite sure there is no fear of treachery?"

Macnaghten was by no means sure; and the very uncertainty made him irritable. "My dear sir, pray don't disturb yourself," he retorted with a touch of heat. "Leave it all to me. I understand these things——"

"I'm hanged if I do!" Elphinstone answered with a wry smile. "And there is really nothing more I can do for you?"

"Nothing at all, except to have those two regiments with two guns under arms just outside, without making any fuss, ready to march on Mahmud's fort; and have the garrison thoroughly on the alert."

"I will do my best," the old man answered; and did not see the Envoy again till near noon, when he met him riding with his three brave companions and sixteen sowars towards the Siah Sung gate.

"You are actually off?" he asked with an anxious glance at Macnaghten, whose manner was unusually hurried and perturbed. "I don't half like this business. I have no faith in it."

At that the Envoy drew rein, and anger flashed in his eyes. "If *that's* the case, sir, why not order out the troops and meet the enemy in open fight? I'll go with you gladly. I am certain we should beat them—and all would be well."

The General's sigh was almost a groan. "Macnaghten, I *can't*. The troops are not to be depended on—you know that."

It was the old unanswerable lament, and Macnaghten with a gesture of acquiescence rode on, sick at heart. Dependable or no, he would have given the troops another chance that day and risked the result.

Their way out lay through the Siah Song gate, the spot chosen being close to Mahmud Khan's fort; and around the gateway hovered a rabble of Ghazis, fully armed. Lawrence requested the officer on guard to disperse them, and thereafter to tell the field officer that, as the Envoy was holding a conference, he wanted the reserve guard drawn up outside, to be ready for any emergency; an order that was either not given or flatly ignored. Hurrying on to join Macnaghten, Lawrence found him in a state of nervous tension, heightened by the fact that no troops or guns were yet to be seen.

"Isn't it disgraceful, Lawrence?" he said bitterly. "Elphinstone and Shelton are both aware that this is a most critical business. Yet nothing is ready. Not even the ramparts fully manned. But it's all of a piece with the rest. Come now, we must get on." He glanced nervously over his shoulder. "Surely the escort is smaller than usual?"

"You said ten men, sir," Lawrence answered, "I've brought sixteen. Shall I ride back and tell Le Geyt to bring on the rest? He wanted very much to come."

"Do so; and tell Shelton I have started."

It was a day of still, keen frost; a day of blue and gold and unsullied whiteness. Shadows had shrunk to vanishing-point; all angles were hidden, all roughness made smooth by myriads of snowflakes woven into a glittering mantle that left no crevice gaping, no hilltop uncrowned. By contrast, the faces and forms of the approaching Afghans looked sinister as the shadow of death in the sunlit eyes of youth.

When Lawrence, with Mackenzie, rejoined the party, they found the bodyguard had been ordered to halt near the fort, while Macnaghten and Trevor rode forward alone to meet Akbar's cavalcade. Truly if Macnaghten's game was a desperate one, and his nerves overwrought, his courage was more than equal to the occasion. For there were signs abroad sufficient to excite alarm. The advancing party far outnumbered their own. Crowds of armed Afghans hung about the fort, and a large body of horsemen hovered expectant, on the Siah Sung heights. Yet Macnaghten spoke hopefully, as he rode, of the possibility of binding Akbar's interests firmly to their own.

"You, Lawrence," he said, "must be ready to ride on to the Bala Hissar and tell the Shah of our coming."

Lawrence assented. "And I hope to Heaven, sir," he added fervently, "that matters will turn out as you expect. But I am afraid there is great danger of treachery."

"Danger? Treachery? Of course there is!" Macnaghten interposed with sudden passion. "But what can I do? The General won't fight. No aid can reach us from any quarter. The Afghans are only playing with us.

Not one item of their treaty have they fulfilled. But the chance of saving our honour is worth any risk. *You* know well enough the life I've led these last six weeks. Before God, I'd rather die a hundred deaths than live them over again."

And in that spirit he went forward to meet the handsome young Afghan, who—in his close-fitting steel helmet and cloak—looked more than ever like a Paladin of the Crusades, his romantic figure and haughty bearing contrasting notably with that of his ally—or victim, as events should prove.

With him came his father-in-law, Mahomed Shah Khan; his half-brother Sultan Ján, handsome and vain as himself; the Chief of Kabul police, and others of the Ghilzai clan, including a brother of Aminullah Khan. This fact alone might have disturbed Macnaghten had he noted it—which he probably did not. His mind, set upon a desperate errand, saw nothing but the end in view: and to Akbar's formal greeting, "*Salaam Aleikum*," he answered cordially: "Sirdar Sahib, here is Grant Sahib's Arab that you so admired."

Akbar smiled suavely, as the fowler might smile upon a netted bird, not yet aware of the toils. "Many thanks," said he. "Also for the pistols of Lawrence Sahib which you see I am wearing! Shall we dismount?"

"By all means."

They had halted some three hundred and fifty yards from cantonments, near a group of hillocks; and now, on the farther side of these, rugs were laid upon the snow. The whole party dismounting, Macnaghten reclined on a slope, Trevor sat by him, and Lawrence, keenly watchful of the dark faces round, stood, as it were on guard, close behind his beloved Chief.

Mackenzie—his spirit strangely shadowed by presenti-

ment of evil—could scarcely bring himself to dismount. But any sign of hesitation would have been fatal: and as he alighted, he heard Akbar ask the Envoy with pointed significance if he were prepared to carry out the whole proposition sent in the night before.

“Why not?” asked Macnaghten, a hint of challenge in his tone. Then the two lowered their voices, while Mackenzie’s attention was drawn off by his old friend, Moyanudin, Chief of the Kabul police. He rose; and they stood apart, the Afghan larding his talk with extravagant compliment. For all that, Mackenzie noted how Akbar’s armed followers closed in and in upon the group, till Lawrence quietly suggested that they should be kept farther off since the meeting was confidential. A few of the chiefs affected to discourage them with whips; but Akbar cried out jovially: “Let them alone. Lawrence Sahib need not be alarmed! They are all in the secret.”

And Mackenzie went on with his talk; but not for long.

Suddenly he saw Akbar rise to his feet; heard him call out hurriedly: “*Bigeer! Bigeer!*”<sup>1</sup> and at the same time grasp the Envoy’s left wrist, his jovial face distorted with diabolical passion. Sultan Ján seized the right wrist; and between them they dragged him stooping and resisting down the slope.

Straightway the crowd closed in upon them. A shout went up: “The troops are coming!” And Mackenzie, starting forward, realized that his own right arm was imprisoned, the muzzle of a pistol at his temple, and all about him a thicket of drawn swords and cocked jezails.

One glimpse he had of Macnaghten’s face, blanched with horror and amazement: one cry he heard from him—a vain cry: “*Az baráe Khudá!*” He saw a scarlet figure flash past,—and fall; and knew it for the devoted Rajput

<sup>1</sup> Seize! seize!

<sup>2</sup> For God’s sake.



Jemadar. He saw Lawrence, surrounded and dragged towards the horse of Mahomed Shah Khan: saw how the escort turned about and fled;—the rest was a confused struggle of horses and men, of shouts and shots and trampled snow—but never a sign of the supposed troops from cantonments.

Mackenzie, relieved of his sword, was hurried through the snow by the Chief of police, whose exhortations were enforced by the whistle of bullets over their heads.

At last they found a horse. “Mount, Mackenzie Sahib, mount behind me,” cried his captor, now his zealous defender, and they set off at a canter over the frozen snow towards the fort.

Around and behind them surged an infuriated crowd, shouting: “Kill the Kafir! Let him be *kurbán*<sup>1</sup>!”

Blows rained right and left; but the men dared not fire, lest they harm Moyan-ud-din or those of his party, who defended Mackenzie more than once at the risk of their own lives.

At length, scrambling up a frosty slope, the over-burdened horse slipped and fell. Mackenzie’s cap had been snatched off; and now, stunned by a blow on the head, he fell forward—happily clear of the animal’s hoofs. With a rush, Moyan-ud-din’s people closed round him. Seizing him in their arms and warding off other blows that fell, they hurried on toward the fort.

By the time Mackenzie’s brain had cleared, they were under its walls, where he spied the mounted figure of Akbar Khan—proudly exultant, sitting at the receipt of congratulation. Relief was momentary. An infuriate Ghazi pounced on him, and a dozen others rushed forward. But Akbar laid about among them manfully; and again Moyan-ud-din’s people surrounded their charge, pressed him up

<sup>1</sup> Sacrifice.

against the wall and covered him up with their bodies, crying out that none should touch him.

Safe for the moment, his eyes sought anxiously for some trace of his friends. Trevor he had seen once, riding behind him with another chief. No sign of him now, or of the other two, and Mackenzie's brave heart failed him.

Then did Akbar, who had shielded him from blows, turn in the saddle and jeer at his helplessness. "You'll seize my country, will you?" he cried in triumphant derision. "*Bismillah!* You'll seize my country!" And shaking his sword at his prisoner, he galloped off towards the city.

Being gone, the wolves made another rush upon their prey. But Akbar's father-in-law, coming out of the fort with a strong guard, balked them again; and Mackenzie, feeling very much like a football in a close scrimmage, found himself half shoved, half carried, into the shelter of the very stronghold they had come out to attack.

Here, in a low, dark room, lit only by a grated window in the outer wall, he recognized with a leap of the heart George Lawrence—disarmed, bruised, and exhausted, like himself, but otherwise unhurt.

"Mackenzie!" "Lawrence!" The cries were simultaneous. Then, as Mackenzie sank back against the wall, his friend whispered hoarsely: "Sir William—Trevor—where *are* they?"

"God knows!"

Lawrence groaned; and for a long while they sat silent, each thankful at least for the other's presence. Impossible to talk much, even had they any heart for speech. The clamour without grew deafening; and the Ghazis, discovering them, thronged round the windows, blocking it

up with murderous faces, cursing and spitting at them through the bars. Once the faces dispersed, and the snout of a blunderbuss appeared, only to be knocked up by one of the guard. It exploded harmlessly; and in its place a severed hand, stuck on a spike, was jerked up and down to the accompaniment of jeering cries: "*Yulli—Yulli!* Your own hands will soon be as this one. Look well!"

Instead, they covered their eyes and shuddered at the hideous implication that might or might not be true. Soon came chiefs to reassure them, all so friendly in their bearing that Lawrence ventured the one question that ached for utterance.

"The Lord Sahib, Trevor Sahib—are they also safe? And why not here?"

"Let not your heart be disturbed, Lawrence Sahib," answered Mahomed Shah, his own defender. "They are unharmed like yourselves, but have been taken on to the city, whither we shall take you also to-night when these clamourers have departed."

Lawrence thanked him, and prayed God his words were true. Certainly his own and Mackenzie's treatment seemed to justify such a hope.

All the afternoon their friends remained in that lower room, not merely to entertain, but to protect them; for the crowd made more than one violent attempt to force the door. Toward evening came Aminullah himself, their destined prisoner. Whether or no he realized this fact, there was here no show of friendship, but frank and even bloodthirsty hate.

Nodding a palsied head, he showed his teeth in a vulpine snarl. "Wait only a little and you shall be blown away from guns. Any death is too merciful for such dogs!" Certain of his followers pushed forward officiously, as if to make good the threat, but were at

once thrust back by Ghilzai chiefs, who roundly abused Aminullah for using such language to his guests.

Throughout the day, parties of retainers had dropped in to join in the general congratulations; among them all was only one noble-looking old Mullah who took another view of the matter. Strong in the courage of disapproval, he stood up in the midst of them, like some old Jewish prophet come to life, and denounced the seizure of men who trusted them as foul treachery, a disgrace to Islam, that would surely bring down the wrath of God upon their heads.

But the wrath of God, though a high-sounding calamity, was vague and far off, while the capture of four high-caste political officers was an immediate and tangible good. So they paid no heed to his words. Instead—being practical men, with practical work on hand—they gave their prisoners food, and poshteens to sleep on till midnight; then, with the true meanness of your well-born Afghan, despoiled them, sleeping, of watches, silk handkerchiefs, and rings.

At midnight they were roused, set upon horses, and escorted through the ghostly valley, through dark and soundless streets, with their snow-capped houses, till they came to that of Mahomed Akbar Khan. He rose from his bed and gave them courteous greeting, lamented the sad events of the day, and supposed they would be glad to see Skinner Sahib.

Glad? They would be overjoyed; and were led at once to his room. They found him awake, sitting on his charpoy in Afghan undress. On their entrance he rose, without a word, and the flickering light of two *chirágs* showed his face unnaturally grave, even constrained.

Lawrence ran forward impulsively and grasped his hands. "Here we are, all safe, Jim. And *here's* a pretty mess!"

Still Skinner's face did not relax. His lips moved, but no sound came; Lawrence—startled and bewildered—loosed his hands.

"My dear fellow, what's the matter?" he asked blankly.

"Matter? Don't you *know*?"

"We only know we've escaped with our lives, like the others, and we're prisoners—what else?"

"Only this,"—Skinner spoke slowly, solemnly—"they have lied to you. The Envoy—is *dead*. I myself saw his head brought into this courtyard. And poor Trevor was killed too. The horse fell, and before he could be saved he was set upon by Mullah Momin, who hated him—and cut to pieces."

The two men listened in a stunned silence, hearing the words, yet scarcely able to grasp the hideous fact. Lawrence—who had loved Macnaghten as his own father—stepped backward blindly, uncertainly, sat down on Skinner's truckle bed, and hid his face in his hands. Sitting thus, he heard other details; heard them with a kind of numb detachment, as though the familiar voices were talking in another world.

Akbar, it seemed, had not publicly admitted the murder. It was assumed to be the work of Ghazis—always conveniently beyond control. No killing had been included in the original design. Each officer was to be carried off by a chief, and the four were to be held as hostages for the restoration of Dōst Mahomed. But when Akbar announced that he must take Macnaghten to see Newab Zemán Khan, the Envoy had remonstrated and risen up to go. It was then that Akbar had caught hold of him. Angered by still further resistance, he had lost his temper, and upon the cry that troops were coming to foil his plan, he had whipped out Lawrence's pistol and fired twice—

The rest was left to the Ghazis—certain to be thorough

in their work. Both bodies had been dragged with indignity through the streets of Kabul and hung up in the bazaar; while Macnaghten's head gruesomely adorned the Char Chowk—the most public part of the city. Such was the account of Mahomed Sadik, who saw all, and who had now confessed to Skinner that Akbar's proposition was a trap to test the sincerity of Macnaghten in his dealings with the chiefs.

The three spent a miserable night, Mackenzie sharing Skinner's charpoy, Lawrence rolled in a sheepskin on the ground, his unsleeping brain tormented with visions called up by Skinner's tale.

Morning brought no sign from cantonments; only more friendly amenities from Akbar. They were his honoured guests, like Skinner Sahib; but he advised the precautionary adoption of Afghan dress.

Thus transformed, they accompanied him later to the house of Nawab Zemán Khan, where they found Conolly and Airey with the principal chiefs sitting in council on the next move. All, including Akbar Khan, were loud in lamentation of Macnaghten's death, while they frankly blamed him for having brought it on himself by non-fulfilment of the original treaty, ignoring—Afghan-like—the fact that this had been promptly annulled by their own bad faith. Followed a lively consideration of new concessions to be wrested from a garrison shorn of its Lord Sahib.

Drafted and signed by the four principals—Akbar, Zemán Khan, Aminullah, and Osman Khan—their amended treaty was despatched by special messenger to the General; and with it went a note from Lawrence to Lady Sale, enclosing one to Lady Macnaghten from Conolly and one for poor Mrs. Trevor, whose very natural anxiety for her husband's return to cantonments had proved fatal both for herself and him.

The council ended, back they fared to Akbar's house; and there they were closely confined in an inner room, not of discourtesy, but of necessity, as their double journey gave proof. And now Lawrence—who had born up stoically so far—broke down altogether. It was as if the actual fact of his loss had reached his ears without reaching his heart until he saw it set down by his own hand in those notes to Mrs. Trevor and Lady Sale. Now, as he lay prone upon his charpoy, choking back the tears that pricked like knives, the words he had written echoed with maddening iteration through the chambers of his brain.

"Sir William has been murdered—murdered—murdered," repeated the devils within, as though seeking to familiarize him with the hideous word, the still more hideous fact. The man on whom he had lavished a blindly chivalrous devotion—gone before his time; his reward unreaped, his policy and labour in Afghanistan brought utterly to naught. In the eyes of Lawrence, Macnaghten could do no wrong. Even in respect of accepting Akbar's proposals his supreme champion found him "perfectly justified" on the plea that the chiefs had broken their treaty, and that no reliance could be placed on them *as a body*. Yet were there others, unbiassed by personal contact, like Durand, who saw him as "the victim of his own truthless, unscrupulous policy," a victim whose "high courage almost atoned for his moral and political errors." Easy for men far removed, in time and space, from the harassing misery of those six weeks to sit in judgment on one tempted beyond the common limit, distracted by a fiendish tangle of events that seemed deliberately hounding him to his doom.

Judgment is for historians. Here, in the plain tale of his ambition, triumph, and undoing, he stands revealed as a man of many lovable and even noble qualities; high

principled in theory, yet hampered in action by a strain of mental and moral obliquity; hampered above all by an abnormal development of that metaphorical blind spot in the eye, which, however convenient individually, is fatal to administrative work of the first quality. Even the best of his friends—Lawrence always excepted—saw that in spite of his brilliant attainments he was woefully out of place in his self-chosen post of honour. “Poor Macnaghten,” wrote Broadfoot afterwards, “ought never to have left the Secretary’s office. He was ignorant of men even to simplicity, and utterly incapable of forming or guiding *administrative* measures.”

But like many another man of ability, the one thing he could not do was the one thing he would do—to the dire disadvantage of others besides himself. Taken all in all, his Afghan service figures as a series of disastrous mistakes followed by heroic and equally disastrous efforts to atone for them—too late.



BOOK IV  
THE SWORD OF ISLAM

The evil, and offenceless  
Thou smit'st—and both are senseless,  
Against thine eye defenceless,  
The false man and the true:  
Our simplest and sublimest,  
Our bravest and our primest,  
Are in thy hands, who climb'st  
The Heavens without a clue:  
Crush these, the brazen-throated—  
But these, the self-devoted,  
The deep loved and unmoted,  
Why dost thou crush them too?

Is he dumb? Defy then!  
Art thou indignant? Die, thou—  
Bowed down and battle-writhen;  
But never stoop to sue!

HERBERT TRENCH.

ON Eldred Pottinger the tragical collapse of Macnaghten's Afghan policy fell with peculiar force. Others lost health, property, life: but he, throughout his career, had suffered, in addition, the repeated mortification of seeing his plans frustrated, his sound advice rejected, by a chief who could neither see clearly himself, nor tolerate plain speaking from an assistant, however intimate his knowledge of the country.

Macnaghten's blindness to the guile of Yar Mahomed, and his later exertions in favour of Todd, had practically annulled Pottinger's work at Herat. By Macnaghten he had been persistently checked and hampered in his efforts to forestall insurrection and minimize its effect, with the result that he had lost all private property and papers, and still remained incapacitated by a wound that threatened permanent injury to his leg. And now—in dying—the Envoy had unconsciously, ironically, crowned all by bequeathing to him a legacy of responsibility hard to shoulder, even in perfect health:—a great chance, truly; did not the obstinacy of Shelton make any hope of turning it to good account seem infinitesimal indeed.

Incredible though it sounds, the fact remains that not until the arrival of Lawrence's note was anything known for certain of the fate of those who had ridden out twenty-four hours earlier and had not returned. Stranger still, though signs of a scuffle had been seen from the ramparts,

by more than a few, and though two unhappy women were in an agony of suspense all day, no attempt had been made at reprisal or even inquiry; if we except a letter written to Sir William that evening—by which time the unhappy Envoy had passed beyond the reach of requests for information.

Reports from the ramparts had been contradictory. Ensign Warren stoutly maintained that he had seen Sir William fall to the ground; another officer had seen two bodies lying on the plain; yet not a man was sent to reconnoitre, or attempt to bring them in. No sortie was made; nor even a gun fired.

Le Geyt, taking out the rest of the escort, had been met by the first party, with the flagrant lie that Lawrence and Mackenzie had ordered them back. Questioned, they admitted that the conference had been broken up, and the Lord Sahib, with the others, carried off to the Yaghi Fort. They believed the Sahibs were safe; and the military authorities saw fit to accept their tale. All the regiments were kept under arms; for what purpose is best known to those who gave the order, since they did not venture a yard outside the walls.

In vain Sturt declared his conviction of treachery, and urged the General first to attack Mahmud Khan's fort, then to start at once, without baggage, for Jalálabad. In vain Pottinger—called on to act for Macnaghten in his absence—urged an immediate attack on the city. Elphinstone was, on this solitary occasion, curiously certain that nothing serious had gone wrong. Grant rode round, by his orders, to tell the waiting troops that the conference had been interrupted and the officers removed to the city, but they would shortly return to cantonments.

They did not return, shortly or at length. Towards night a camp-follower of the 54th brought word that

Trevor and the Envoy had been killed, but the news was kept secret pending more certain confirmation. Towards night, also, sounds of disturbance from the city brought the troops out again. The ramparts were manned in view of a possible attack from Ghazis; while the said Ghazis were mustering to withstand wrathful Feringhis, strangely slow to smite.

Even when the truth stood revealed, no thought of vengeance perturbed the well-regulated souls of the "High in Place." It was the troops—the common sepoy and soldiers—that waxed indignant and clamoured vulgarly for retaliation; the troops and certain firebrands among the younger officers, who, thank God! had no voice in the matter. But it was disconcerting to find that chief among the firebrands was the wounded Political Officer, whom they called on forthwith to ratify the interrupted treaty, that they might shake the snows of this accursed country off their feet.

Eldred Pottinger had no intention of signing a treaty, futile as it was disgraceful, until he had done his utmost to rouse the atrophied military spirit of men who could not, surely, be altogether blind to the soldier's point of view. In those first days of bewilderment and renewed indecision he had only one word in his vocabulary—fight, fight, fight! Even were defeat certain, annihilation certain—which he did not choose to believe—let them fight their way to the Bala Hissar or, if preferred, to Jalálabad, "waiting for no further communication with the enemy."

On the 24th he was again importunate for a prompt attack on the city, and there can be little doubt that the troops—in their first flush of indignation—would have stormed and carried it out of hand. The murders of William Broadfoot and the brothers Burnes had gone un-avenged. Was Macnaghten's to share the same fate?

It seemed probable, so far as the General-in-Council was concerned. If the one word in Pottinger's vocabulary was "fight," the one word in theirs was "retreat." Shelton sneered at every mention of the Bala Hissar; and the fact that he had spent a week there seemed to render him, in Elphinstone's eyes, the supreme authority on the subject. He stoutly declared the move impracticable. Pottinger as stoutly refuted all his arguments, till he was reduced to "founding its impossibility on want of firewood!" In any case Shelton did not see that it was Pottinger's business to suggest military operations. His business was to consider the treaty and ratify it without loss of time—the treaty that now contained threw new objectionable clauses: all treasure to be given up, all guns left behind except six, the present hostages to be exchanged for married officers with their families, Sale's name being specially mentioned.

Was ever man thrust against his will into opposition so detestable? The insolence of those fresh clauses—the last one above all—made Pottinger's blood boil, and strengthened his resolve to resist capitulation so far as his newly gotten authority would allow. Yet Elphinstone saw fit to bid Major Thain sound all the married officers; sugaring the detestable suggestion with promise of two thousand rupees a month for those who would remain.

Their answers stand recorded by Lady Sale.

"Lieutenant Eyre said if it was to be productive of great good, he would stay with his wife and child. The rest refused to risk the safety of their families. Captain Anderson said he would rather put a pistol to his wife's head; and Sturt that his wife and mother should only be taken at the point of the bayonet; for himself he was ready to perform any duty imposed on him."

These replies received, consultation was renewed. More protestations from Pottinger, more sneers and obstructions

from Shelton, backed by Elphinstone's dismal conviction that further resistance was useless; that they were pledged by Macnaghten's acts to accept the treaty and pay the promised sums. Both men appeared to ignore the fact that a treacherous murder had cleaned the slate.

Of a truth, Eldred Pottinger's isolation in that poor-spirited assembly was about as enviable as that of Daniel in the lions' den—less enviable, rather, in that it was not his mere life these lions would destroy, but his high reputation, hardly earned, and the honour of his country's arms. Still suffering greatly from his wound, he found himself, without warning or preparation, filling a post of the gravest responsibility and danger; unacquainted with the views of Government, with Macnaghten's plans or even with previous events in all their bearings; called upon to save a starving army, so critically placed that military prowess and vigour alone could procure its salvation; urged by military leaders, who would not fight, to ratify a treaty objectionable as a whole and still more objectionable in certain specific demands.

Worse than all, not a man among them seemed to understand his repugnance to the whole transaction, or in any degree to share his views. Even the dead Envoy seemed arrayed with them against him; for although Macnaghten had urged the Bala Hissar move, he had privately expressed his conviction that it would be merely a case of delaying the inevitable till the spring. Letters from Calcutta, he said, had led him to believe that Government would not, on the whole, regret a disturbance which afforded clear pretext for breaking off all connection with the country. Pottinger had not forgotten the Envoy's insistence on this point, which he now saw emphasized by arrangements for evacuation and promises of money for safe conduct to Peshawur. Knowledge of these facts, rather

than the demands of Elphinstone and Shelton, finally impelled him to consider the enemy's proposals; though he could not be induced to accept them in their present form.

It was late when the discussion ended, and no reply was sent that night. But early on Christmas morning, one Naib Amir set out through the snow carrying the fatal treaty, amended by British comments, especially as regards those four new articles. In respect of ammunition it was written by the Council: "You have granted us six guns. Half a company would thus remain without equipment. Be good enough to give three more small guns, such as are drawn by mules. It will be a great kindness." To the demand for married hostages there could be no question of assent. It was denounced as "a proposal contrary to all order." The officers' families had refused, and no one could order them.

To the articles already sanctioned by Macnaghten only one other comment of importance was added by the chiefs: that "friendly relations be continued; that the Afghans, without consent and advice of the English, shall not form any connection with a foreign Power; and should they ever ask assistance against invasion, the English shall not delay in sending it." Beneath this article was written: "It is agreed to, so far as we are concerned; but these engagements require the sanction of the Governor-General. We can only recommend them for approval, which, please God, will be granted."

Those articles promising instant evacuation of Jalálabad, Ghazni, and Kandahar, had been vainly combated by Pottinger on the grounds that, according to international law, a General has no right to sign any treaty whose items he cannot enforce, nor to capitulate for any but those under his immediate command; that by capitulating he

forfeits all authority over those who are not in similar straits. Elphinstone and Shelton—bent on safety at any price—argued that refusal on this head would mean renewed hostilities, for which their troops were quite unfit. Thus, they had no choice but to make the necessary promise and hope that the respective commanders would support their given word. Pottinger paid those commanders the compliment of doubting that sanguine expectation; but, the rest being fatally unanimous, all three articles bore the formula: "It is agreed."

And while the Naib Amir rode city-ward, the Kabul garrison awoke to the fact that it was Christmas morning; surely the most cheerless that ever dawned on British soldiers in a strange land.

For Eldred Pottinger it was a day of heart-searching and anxiety unspeakable. Two points only stood out clear:—were it not for Shelton, he would have his own way all along the line; but Shelton or no Shelton, he would not put his name to that disgraceful document without a last supreme effort to save the Kabul authorities in spite of themselves. After yesterday, hope of success was slender enough. Indeed, where Macnaghten had failed, it seemed sheer arrogance to hope at all. For though Pottinger, as a man, had three times the force and resolution of the dead Envoy, he lacked the mystic halo of high official authority. Him, the military council regarded merely as a Senior Political Assistant, called in to carry out their wishes and complete what Macnaghten had begun, they themselves not being empowered to conduct negotiations with their new allies. The higher functions of Envoy were not his to assume; nor, in the last resort, could all the Envoys in heaven or earth force a General to fight against his will. He could only advise and insist to the uttermost. The ultimate authority was Elphinstone's;



and that authority being a mere name, the position resolved itself into a duel between Pottinger and Shelton. Dogged men both; but while Pottinger stood alone, Shelton's doggedness was backed by five other officers of rank all equally bent on capitulation.

Not a promising array of facts by any means; yet Pottinger faced them unflinchingly as he sat alone on that sorrowful evening, shutting the door of his heart against importunate memories of Home. Plainly, if the morrow brought no news to strengthen his hand, there remained but two alternatives to signing the amended treaty. In the first place, he might take the line Macnaghten had threatened—throw all the Shah's troops into the Bala Hissar and stand or fall with the King. By this move he would keep his own name untarnished, save a large sum of money, and the British officers in the Shah's service. For the rest of the army, it would probably mean annihilation; he being, in Skinner's absence, the only one among them with any extensive knowledge of the language or the people; and to his chivalrous nature such a move savoured of deserting an army that, for lack of fire and food and leadership, seemed unable to strike a blow in its own defence.

He therefore dismissed that alternative and fell to considering the second—an open appeal to the army, against the decree of its Chief. Here was an inspiration that stirred all the soldier in him, by the very dangers it involved; an act so daring, so out of order, that nothing short of unquestioned success would be accepted as justification. And here mere physical incapacity balked the high courage that would fain have dared all on the chance of saving England's honour, if not her troops. Could he have assumed personal leadership—as Broadfoot in the last resort would have done—success were conceivable,

almost certain. But with his staunchest champions—Lawrence and Mackenzie—prisoned in the city, and he barely able to sit a horse, the issue was more than doubtful. Terms once refused could not be renewed; and on so frail a chance to create an open breach between military and political authority would be ill-advised, dangerous, unfair to those hapless thousands whose lives hung on the wisdom and vigour of the few.

No—there was nothing for it but to make one more resolute stand; and failing, to grant these men the loan of his name while disclaiming all responsibility for the outcome. What that outcome might be—for himself, he did not choose to consider in detail. He could but do his utmost to uphold the right, and leave his own future in the hands of God.

## II

EARLY next day he stood before General Elphinstone with a cleared brow and the light of hope in his eyes. News—almost un hoped for—had come to strengthen his hands in the shape of letters from Macgregor at Jalálabad and Makeson at Peshawur; letters addressed to the dead Envoy and opened by one who brought to Macnaghten's duties all Macnaghten's constancy and courage, with more than Macnaghten's resolution and singleness of heart.

Both Jalálabad and Peshawur sent the same words of encouragement—advance reinforcements already at Peshawur, the 16th Lancers with the 9th and 31st Regiments close behind; both gave the same counsel: "Hold out at Kabul to the last."

In the face of such news, it seemed to Pottinger that even Elphinstone's Council of War must cease to be a Council of Capitulation. Reinforcements might be long in coming; but the mere announcement, coupled with refusal to treat, would have an admirable moral effect. And there was more than this. Naib Amir—returning with verbal concessions to certain of Pottinger's demands—reported that in the city feuds were running higher than ever, that Shah Shuja had now a definite party of his own, which seemed to be daily gathering strength. Osman Khan, also, had privately sent word that he himself would conduct the British force safely to Peshawur for a consideration of five lakhs—a third of the sum promised to the faction as a whole.

To this array of facts Pottinger added his firm belief that the clouds were dispersing, and that, in any case, every consideration of safety and honour bound them to the manlier course. His words and bearing so clearly impressed Elphinstone that, had the General been the only obstacle to reckon with, his triumph had been complete. But Elphinstone was the last man to reverse the decision of his Council out of hand. He could only call upon its members to reassemble at his house that afternoon.

They did not look a promising audience, when Pottinger again stood before them, even as Macnaghten had stood little more than a month ago, resolved, even as Macnaghten had been, to urge active measures on soldiers who flatly refused to act. Elphinstone—thinner and more jaded than on that earlier day—sat doubled up in his chair, his crutches propped against either arm—apt figurehead for a demoralized army. For the rest—Anquetil and Chambers, attentive but non-committal; Bellew, always with a hampering doubt or suggestion up his sleeve; Grant, coldly cautious and obstructive, as Shelton himself, who had brought with him, as before, the inevitable *resai*.<sup>1</sup> Being plagued with a severe cold, he had rolled himself in the quilt and now lay full length on his favourite lounge, seemingly asleep. From his point of view, no doubt, the reassembly was a mere farce, a wearisome repetition of arguments already refuted and dismissed.

As for Pottinger, disgusted yet undaunted, he braced himself afresh to the thankless task of pleading with these, his incomprehensible fellow-men.

How severe an ordeal it was, for one by nature inarticulate, so to stand and so to plead, those others could not be expected to realize. The hidden fire and force of the man, his superlative courage, moral and physical, had

<sup>1</sup> Quilt.

but one natural outlet—action. And there were other drawbacks, trivial-sounding, yet of potent influence at such a moment. Eldred Pottinger possessed neither a commanding presence nor the gift of persuasive and compelling speech; but only the prestige of heroic deeds, the resolution of a loyal and upright heart; only plain arguments, plainly set forth—arguments “as weighty in themselves as the spirit that informed them was noble.”

And to-day those arguments were strengthened by facts encouraging enough to rouse the most supine. Earnestly, almost hopefully, Pottinger laid them before the Council—Osman's Khan's offer, the strengthening of Shah Shuja's party, and, best of all, the news from Peshawur and Jalálabad.

His statements were received in silence; not a tense silence alive with interest, but the dead, discouraging silence of sheer indifference. Only Elphinstone cast an anxious eye upon the Brigadier, who apparently had heard nothing: and Pottinger went doggedly on.

He restated his own conviction that Macnaghten's treacherous murder had altered the whole aspect of affairs. He begged there might be no further talk of treaty or negotiation, for three good reasons not lightly to be dismissed. Firstly, his knowledge of present events and of Afghan character led him to believe that the enemy were deceiving them to their own undoing; that the chiefs had neither will nor power to make good the undertaking for which they demanded the exorbitant payment of a hundred and forty thousand pounds in advance. Secondly, he, Pottinger, considered it their bounden duty to abstain from any measure that would shackle Government as to the future; the more so that news of advancing troops implied a probable desire to keep a foothold in the country. Thirdly, he repeated his belief that they

had no right to treat for anything, but the moment ; no right to order other commanding officers to give up trusts confided to them ; above all, no shadow of right to sacrifice so large a sum of public money merely to save their own lives, which they might yet save with untarnished honour by their own exertions.

If the General still believed that retreat was inevitable, let it at least be a fighting retreat. Let them sacrifice all baggage, stores, even camp-followers, and cut their own way down to Jalalabad like men, without wasting good money on scoundrels, or hampering the Government which it was their duty to serve, not to embarrass with further complications. Bereft though they were of dominion and of outside help, none could rob them of courage, or of the power to resolve that they would die fighting, and in no baser way.

There spoke the spirit that set a halo about the defence of Charikar, the spirit that upheld Yar Mahomed and his Afghans for ten months at Herat. Such words spoken by such a man need no cheap tricks of rhetoric to enhance their effect ; and the silence, when Eldred Pottinger ceased speaking, held a faint vibration of response that had not been there when he began.

Chambers and Anquetil stirred in their seats. Elphinstone squared his shoulders and looked up, a gleam of approval in his tired eyes. When he spoke, approval—tentative but sincere—sounded also in his voice ; and thereupon Shelton—who had seemingly slept with one ear open—came suddenly to life. This futile repetition of stale arguments must not by any means be allowed to upset the apple-cart. Pottinger's exhortation was altogether too sound and too manly not to madden one who was no coward, and had yet deliberately chosen to play the coward's part.

He sat upright now, flung aside his quilt, and denounced, root and branch, the mad proposal of a fighting retreat which would simply mean wholesale slaughter. Irritated always by opposition—which he religiously meted out to others—he fairly lost his temper. In Pottinger's own words "he attacked me, not my arguments, which he called absurd and foolish. He declared that we could not possibly maintain ourselves at Kabul, and that the army could only be saved by treaty. Moreover, he considered Sale compromised, and bound to fall back on Peshawur. As for the money, he said that, to save the troops at Kabul, it would be well laid out, that our first care should be for ourselves, and much more in the same strain. Indeed, he went so far that I remember telling him it would be better to lead the troops out, and either carry the city by assault or die in the attempt; since, by his proposal, we should be dishonoured and disgraced, and the stigma of cowardice fixed on us for ever."

But though Pottinger retorted thus hotly, it was now all too clear that the faint response evoked by his appeal had been extinguished by Shelton's pedestrian insistence on safety—safety at any price.

The odds were six to one; but Pottinger was not beaten yet. There still remained his last card, played many times, and worth playing once again—the Bala Hissar; the move favoured by every man—aye, and every woman—of spirit in cantonments; banned only by the General-in-Council from first to last.

And to-day, though Pottinger waxed almost eloquent, their opposition was solid as ever. Even from Elphinstone, the waverer, no shadow of encouragement. In the words of Durand: "His own high courage and undaunted spirit met with no sympathy from that gloomy, depressed council,

which overruled his opinion and instructed him to negotiate at all cost alike of money and honour."

Baffled, outvoted, with his back against the wall, he was yet not bound to obey these men; and he would have insisted, even now, on that one obvious means of salvation, had he not already seen and heard too much of Shelton's tactics when forced into action against his will. He knew there would be no hearty co-operation, that the plan would probably fail; and if, once more, he was tempted to appeal to the army, wisdom bade him repress the heroic impulse. Firmly convinced that, in the circumstances, nothing could be more fatal than open disunion in their ranks, he considered it his duty to yield—under compulsion.

In a few blunt words he notified the fact that, as Political Officer, he protested vehemently against capitulation; and since they were determined to disregard his advice, he could not hold himself responsible for the outcome. Having been overruled in a Council of War, he considered himself, thenceforward, merely their agent, and in that sole capacity—to prevent further complications—he was prepared to carry out their decision.

They, on their part, were quite ready to accept his services, caring nothing at all for his personal dilemma, provided they could get their own way:—and there remained no more to be said. Pottinger, angered and bitterly mortified, put his own name above Elphinstone's on the hated document, in the full knowledge that, despite his vehement disclaimer, he thereby made the opinions of those others practically his own; that he, no less than Elphinstone, would be brought to account for all the ills that must follow upon this day of procrastination and peril.

Then, having done all they required of him, he went



out without a word ; out and on, through the glare of sunlit snow, to the privacy of his own room, where he could be alone with the realization of all that his mere signature had power to bring down on others—and on himself.

In the past six years Eldred Pottinger had endured his full share of common human suffering ; yet, on that 26th of December, he felt as if hitherto he had scarcely known the meaning of the word. Even his earlier success at Herat seemed, in that black moment, too trivial a thing to counterbalance this new crushing sense of failure—failure to save his country's honour and possibly thousands of his fellow-men. To Government his protest and defence would become known, in leisurely course of time ; but for the general public he would simply be the man who ratified a dishonourable treaty and blackened England's good name in the eyes of all Afghanistan.

Even here in Kabul, except amongst his closest friends, he would be judged as one with that graceless council, a party to its cowardly surrender. Lawrence would know the truth and appreciate the peculiar difficulties of his position ; so also would Haughton, Eyre, and Mackenzie. That they did so their after-comment bears witness. Mackenzie's, that Pottinger would have valued above all, is worth quoting in full :—

“Macnaghten,” he wrote, “had special powers that died with him, and on his death the General's authority was recognized by all as supreme. Pottinger acted solely as his go-between with the Afghans. He signed the treaty in soldierly obedience, knowing full well that he would be held responsible for that which was the work of others. The General and five other officers were unanimous against him ; and the hero of Herat was obliged to do the thing that he abhorred.”

The last is not too strong; "repugnance" was Pottinger's own word. And crueller than all else was the haunting certainty that, but for Shelton, his own will and courage would have prevailed. There were many men who disliked John Shelton; but in that hour Pottinger must have hated him with a very human hatred. A nature so mellow, so little tainted with egotism, could never give place to mere bitterness; but the ardour and hopefulness of youth seemed quenched in him, and the iron ate deep into his soul. From that day forward he was a changed man.

### III

THE hateful necessity of the 26th of December was but the preface to other necessities equally hateful; for the treaty would not be ratified and sealed by eighteen honourable chiefs till all its clauses had been fulfilled. By way of prelude they demanded payment of moneys not included in the bond; fourteen lakhs promised by Macnaghten, and another five for the privilege of being escorted by Osman Khan—in all, a hundred and ninety thousand pounds. The greed of a Yar Mahomed was child's play to this!

Pottinger saw that demand for what it was—barefaced extortion, without the smallest guarantee for services rendered in return; and once more he made a stand against it, even to the point of refusal. The retort of the chiefs was simple and effective: they promptly cut off supplies. On the other hand was the General-in-Council, "urgent to avoid renewal of hostilities, cost what it might." Wedged thus between two inexorables Pottinger, in his own phrase, must needs "suffer the imposition."

So large a sum necessitated bills drawn on the Government of India—bills that should be payable only when all conditions were fulfilled, and so made out that the chiefs could neither market them in Kabul nor raise money on them in advance. They must be signed by Pottinger; and should Government disapprove or dishonour them, all blame would rest on him. How far he, as a mere

Political Agent, had the right so to involve the Supreme Powers, it seemed futile to consider. It was a case of payment or hostilities; and since the military chiefs would not fight, he must perforce pay, and risk the result.

But first of all he demanded the release of Lawrence, who, as Secretary to Macnaghten, was the right man to prepare Government bills. His request was granted; and at dawn on the 29th there rode up to the Siah Sung gate of cantonments a small man in full Afghan costume, his face carefully concealed by the fall of his turban. With him rode the heir of Aminullah Khan and a hundred followers of the same chief, who seemed to grow more friendly as Akbar grew more openly hostile. Within gunshot of the walls they halted, and Lawrence rode forward alone, past the sentry—who greeted him with a shout of joy—and on to Elphinstone's house, where Pottinger gave him a cordial welcome.

He had been gone less than a week, but they found him changed indeed—grave, haggard, and “looking ten years older” from all he had gone through. More heart-breaking even than his own grief was that of the two widowed wives, whom he must interview in turn; and who, woman-like, craved the very details it most hurt him to tell and them to hear.

Greetings over, he devoted himself to Pottinger; for there was much to talk of besides that hateful business of the bills. Five days in Kabul city had given him all too clear an insight into the real temper of the leading chiefs; insight whereby he could and did confirm Pottinger's belief that honour, dignity, and money would all be sacrificed in vain.

To begin with, Mahomed Akbar, self-elected guardian of the British force, had vehemently opposed Lawrence's release; had privately boasted of Macnaghten's murder,

and declared his fixed resolve to gain possession of all the British women, and cut up the force, allowing one man only to escape, that he might tell his countrymen, and so cool their zeal for Afghan invasion. As for Aminullah, he had refused to believe, treaty or no treaty, that the British Generals would be mad enough to stir out of cantonments; and on Lawrence's assurance that they would keep their word, had bade him advise Elphinstone to avoid the Khurd Kabul Passes, which were all under the authority of Akbar Khan, and march instead through his own country, where power to protect them would be his.

To be compelled—in the face of such facts—to abase themselves in mock friendship and draw preposterous bills on Government was enough to madden men more phlegmatic than George Lawrence and Eldred Pottinger.

“Let the General hear all that before we send in the bills,” said the latter decisively. “The chiefs *must* know we don't trust them; and with the Bala Hissar at our elbow and the King anxious to receive us, no wonder they think us mad fools, thoroughly deserving of the fate in store for us. If only you and I could have *carte blanche* for thirty-six hours, the thing could easily be done even now. See here——”

He opened his small leather pocket-book—the property of a dead Sapper—at the page where his protest of the 26th stood recorded in small clear writing.

“I've worked the whole thing out afresh on the bare chance. It must be done at night, of course; and I would protect no baggage, only ammunition and the sick. Some of these could go on transport cattle, some walk, and a few bad cases could go in litters. I would place the magazines and stores round a pile of our spare powder, so as to blow up everything directly the vanguard was safe out of camp. As for the force itself—two regiments and

two guns on the Siah Sung; four guns and another regiment in the grove at its base. The ground from there to the old fort, near the river, could be held by six guns, one regiment and half the cavalry, which would still leave spare troops to cover the destruction of the magazine. By carefully timing beforehand the start of different bodies, making convenient outlets from cantonments and not allowing private baggage to march with the force, I would take my oath that the troops and ammunition at least would get safely through. The loss of the rest, though melancholy, would be immaterial; but with common prudence and courage on our part, there need be no loss at all. The position is a strong one. Our guns would form a cross-fire on every part of the ground in front, and those of the citadel could be placed at right angles to the line. It is merely a matter of resolution, organization, and despatch."

But among the Commandants at Kabul all three were lacking, and even Lawrence's representations merely drew a refusal from Elphinstone to change his line of route, on the plea that the troops would have to be kept longer on the snow. Most insanely and most fatally did he and Shelton stop their ears to argument, rumour, or fact, that threatened the life of their cherished treaty; and the bills were made out in due form. Lawrence did what he could to modify a bad bargain by stipulating that they should be cashed only on receipt of certificates from Peshawur of *the safe arrival there of all troops*, and by warning the Kabul bankers of that fact."

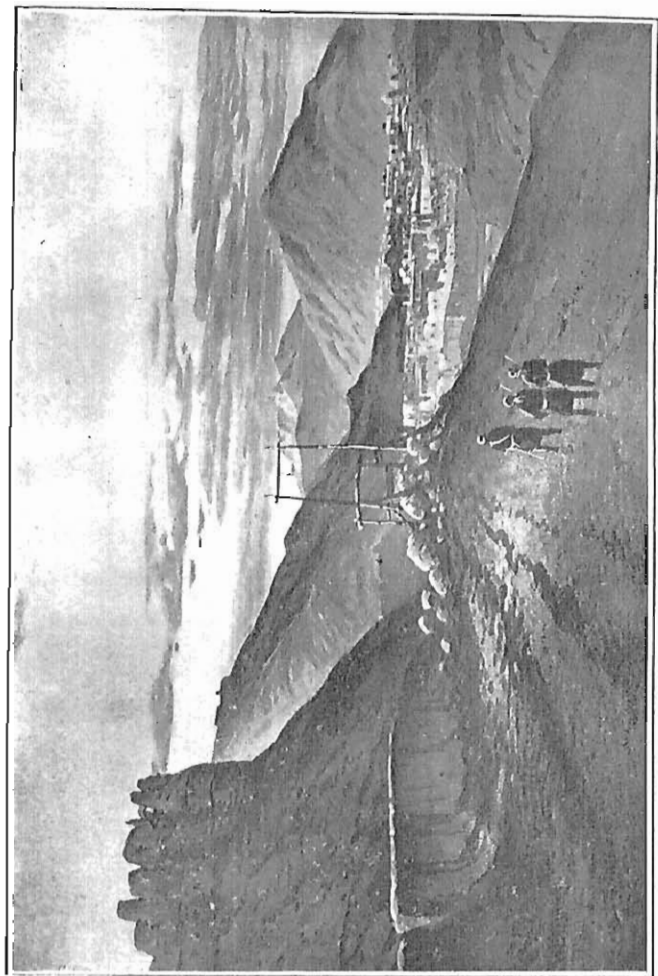
Next in order, the chiefs demanded immediate surrender of all guns, except the six field-pieces graciously permitted to accompany the force. To the soldiers this last was the crowning indignity; a very biting of the dust, an open shame that no British troops could justly be called upon

to endure. Even the military chiefs were troubled with unpleasant qualms when the hour of surrender came. But though Pottinger vehemently urged refusal, Elphinstone could not face the prospect of renewed hostilities, and Shelton would not face any act that might delay his departure from the country.

There was no help for it; the guns must go. Pottinger, still desperately hoping to avert the worst, refused to deliver up all at once. He agreed instead, to surrender them two by two on successive days, a faint alleviation of loss that could by no means modify the indelible disgrace.

Never before or since—thankfully be it recorded—has any British force so demeaned itself in the eyes of an enemy, whose tone grew daily more arrogant and dictatorial, as did Elphinstone's army at Kabul. Throughout that last week of 1841 the bitter bread of humiliation was their portion, with never an honest blow permitted in return. Vain the indignation of junior officers! Vain caustic outpourings in their journals, though these remain for proof that the right spirit was abundantly present in that beleaguered sheepfold on the plain.

Johnson, wrestling with the food problem, wrote on the 28th: "The Ghilzais still infest our gates and insult us in every possible way; stop our supplies coming in; and ill-treat those who bring them. No notice taken by the General, though our officers and men are burning for revenge. Several of my native friends from the city come daily to see me, and all agree that we have brought our misfortunes on ourselves. . . . They also tell me that no dependence is to be placed on the promises of the chiefs. Now that they are in a measure paid in advance, everyone of them will do his utmost to destroy us." And again on the 30th: "More guns and ammunition made over to the



KABUL CITY FROM THE BALA HISSAR  
(From a Sepia Sketch by Sir Thomas Holdich, K.C.M.G.)



enemy, or what are called our 'new allies.' Precious allies, who are only waiting to annihilate us!"

On the 29th fresh mortification for Pottinger, whose signature was required to official letters commanding the prompt evacuation of Jalálabad and Kandahar. Once already he had insisted, and to-day he insisted again, that Elphinstone "had no right to order other commanding officers to give up the trusts confided to them." The old man listened politely—and repeated his request. It was a regrettable necessity; but they were bound by treaty;—and so on and so forth without end. Weary of vain repetition, Pottinger "generously affixed his signature to Elphinstone's letter," heartily praying that both Sale and Nott would have the strength of mind to disobey. For himself, the signing of those letters was but another drop in a cup of bitterness already full to the brim.

On this unhappy day were delivered up the remaining hostages—Captains Walsh, Webb, Warburton and Drummond; Conolly and Airey, already in Kabul, completing the promised half-dozen. With them went a detachment of sick and wounded, who would no doubt be better off in the care of Nawab Zemán Khan than exposed to the rigours of a hundred-mile march through defiles choked with snow. Yet such was now the horror of Afghan treachery that many would sooner have faced those dangers than be consigned to the kindest chief of them all. John Haughton, still very far from recovery, went in that first detachment. He and Pottinger had shared a room since their arrival: and now they parted with but the slenderest hope of ever meeting again.

The following evening—all having been sent—Skinner and Mackenzie were allowed to return; a welcome event indeed after so much of humiliation and pain.

Pottinger at once demanded Skinner for his assistant;

and, though the days of their association were few and tragic, never was man better served.

From the 27th onward it had snowed and snowed and snowed with soul-sickening persistence. All things, animate and inanimate, seemed in league against them. Hourly, rumour assigned them a different date of departure; and with each day of delay the snow deepened, the cold increased, the faint hope of reaching Jalálabad waxed fainter still.

Thus, dark with foreboding, bright with an ever-fresh mantle of snow, the old year waned and died; the year that had seen British power and prestige in Afghanistan fall step by step unto this last—when British Generals, in the name of that Government they had sworn to uphold, deliberately laid down their bodies “as the ground and as the street to them that went over.”

#### IV

“NEW YEAR’S DAY! God grant we may never see such another! My kind Kazzilbash friends, Naib Sharif and Ali Reza Khan, sent me in secretly some very excellent cakes for the road, as we shall not get a particle of firewood ere we reach a milder climate. How dreary a prospect we have before us!”

Thus Johnson, on the first day of 1842, that opened ominously as ’41 had closed:—a leaden sky; snow falling steadily in great flakes that softly obliterated every feature of the landscape; the sepoy’s starved and shivering; the Hindostanis watching, in huddled misery, the workings of an evil spirit hitherto unknown. The 3rd was the momentary date of departure; and on New Year’s Day every compound and barrack-square was thronged with Afghans, bantering, and bargaining, bartering curiosities for superfluous books or clothes, cast aside by officers to lighten their baggage.

Gossip and discussion flowed freely as to the supposed exodus of the troops. “Few of the Afghans,” said Lawrence, “credited the report; not supposing we could be so insane as to leave our position. . . .” For though rumours were varied and contradictory—as is the nature of the breed—one deep underlying note of warning sounded through them all: “Hold cantonments or the Bala Hissar and put not your faith in Akbar Khan.” Pottinger’s advice, repeated again and yet again, with as little effect.

To Sturt came his old friend Taj Mahomed with overtures from the Kohistanis, who were receiving none of the promised lakhs. Said they, if only the force would refuse to move, they would send in provisions, attack and fire Kabul, or go down and bring up reinforcements from Jalálabad. They proffered hostages for their good faith; and concluded with the old refrain: "The chiefs are false and will attack you on the road."

These things Sturt reported as in duty bound; and was bidden for his pains to keep the matter quiet, as "in the present state of things, it might cause excitement if generally known."

Shah Shuja sent urgent word to Lawrence—his only friend among the officers—begging that he would warn the General on no account to leave cantonments. The King dared not write himself: but the gist of his message was on this wise: "So long as you hold your position, little harm can befall. Once outside it—you are dead men." From a friendly Kazzilbash came advice of much the same tenor. Both messages Lawrence reported to Pottinger, who took him straightway to the General's house. But Shah Shuja implied the Bala Hissar, and the British Chiefs would have none of his favours; rather would they desert the King whom they had been ostensibly sent to uphold.

Lawrence and Pottinger departed with lips close-set, but with cursing and bitterness in their hearts. Shah Shuja marvelled regretfully at the new Feringhi madness: and as for Akbar, he must have marvelled no less, in another tone of voice. That his surprise and self-gratulation were tinged with scorn an intercepted letter to his brother gives proof.

Having taken full credit to himself for Macnaghten's murder, he added his own free translation of the result:

“From this act much strength has been added unto the cause of Islam, and a deadly blow given to the infidels and English. The rest of the army in the cantonments cried for quarter, and begged and entreated that their lives might be spared, and they safely conducted to Peshawur; and they would give up all guns, stores and baggage. Please God, in two or three days we'll either give them quarter and get them out of the cantonments, or cut them in pieces and plunder and destroy. . . . For this part of the country, be at ease. . . . Do your duty and destroy the infidels of that side. . . . Be comforted!”

Meanwhile those whom he depicted as begging and entreating that their lives might be spared were kept waiting from day to day for escort and provisions which Akbar was not minded to send till he knew that Sale's garrison had marched from Jalálabad. Every night, from New Year's Eve onward, they lay down to sleep confident that marching orders *must* be issued on the morrow. Once or twice they were so issued, only to be withdrawn before the day was out.

The starved and shivering troops began to grow desperate and to fear, like Israel in Egypt, that Pharaoh would never let them go. Officers had long since made all their arrangements, had weeded out their belongings, and sent special treasures to friends in the city, trusting that one day they might see them again. Sturt, a book-lover, was anxious to save some of his most precious volumes; and accordingly the sheep were divided from the goats.

The sheep having been packed, it chanced that Lady Sale picked up from among the goats a volume of Campbell's poems, which opened at "Hohenlinden." With her mind elsewhere, she was glancing through

the poem, when suddenly the last verse sprang out from the rest—vivid, prophetic.

“ Few, few shall part where many meet,  
The snow shall be their winding sheet,  
And every turf beneath their feet,  
Shall be a soldier's sepulchre.”

The practical old lady closed the book with a snap, and flung it aside. But that haunting verse would not be so cavalierly dismissed. It seemed photographed on her brain. Look where she would, it confronted her with its ominous iteration, its threat of tragedy to be;—look where she would, confusion, apathy, and utter lack of organized arrangements confirmed her fear that the oracle spoke truth. Though individual officers bestirred themselves, though the force lay down each night expecting orders on the morrow, neither the General and his Staff, nor the Second-in-command seemed practically concerned for the well-being of their troops during the arduous march ahead.

At night the thermometer fell many degrees below zero. At noon “with an enormous blazing fire” it rose to a few degrees above freezing-point in the sitting-room of Lady Sale. But the sepoys had neither sitting-rooms, nor blazing fires. When all the wood in store had been served out, they were told that Afghan chiefs objected to the destruction of fruit-trees. Kabul city was Olympus in those days; her posse of wrangling chieftains, Jove and his satellites,—all-powerful to save or destroy. Small wonder that wood, public and private, was promiscuously stolen; that officers were reduced, before leaving, to breaking up chairs, and cupboards, and chests of drawers for the bare necessity of cooking food. Lady Sale's last few meals at Kabul were cooked with the wood of her own dining-table.

The fact that scores of starved followers were already frost-bitten pointed to a serious danger ahead for the men. Unless practical precautions were taken, the first two marches would cripple them all. Thus spoke Pottinger, from first-hand experience of more than one Afghan winter. He urged insistently the importance of exchanging hard leather boots for swathed feet and ankles; begged that all old blankets, horse cloths, and spare woollen stuff might be torn into strips and served out to the troops before frost accomplished its deadly work; and underlined his advice by pointing out that every Afghan round them had swathed his feet in rags the moment snow began to fall.

As usual, he spoke to deaf ears. As usual, authority listened politely; appeared duly impressed; and straight-way shifted its attention to matters of greater moment. And so the disastrous tale runs on.

Lady Sale—writing up her journal on the 4th—concluded, with a phlegm, born of repetition: "The Afghans still tell us we are doomed. Táj Mahomed says Mrs. Sturt and I must wear neemchees<sup>1</sup> over our habits—common leather ones, and turbans, and ride mixed up with the sowars; not to go in palkis, or keep near the other ladies, as they are very likely to be attacked."

This—though in six months Mrs. Sturt would be a mother—they decided to do.

A letter from Sale received that same day faintly cheered their hearts. He still "trusted in God" that the Kandahar force might arrive in time to prevent terms "disgraceful to our reputation in India." He recorded, by way of encouragement, the arrival at Peshawur of cavalry and ammunition, in advance of a Brigade under Colonel Wild.

<sup>1</sup> Sheepskin coats = poshteens.

But it was a far cry to Kabul from Peshawur, with fanatics blocking the passes and more than half the route under deep snow. To distracted British officers, penned up in the sheepfold, they sounded very faint, the footsteps of those marching thousands—the advance guard of an Army of Retribution that could by no means arrive in time to save the Army of Occupation from its fate. For the said army—in the person of its Generals—did not feel called upon to occupy, any longer, an exceedingly precarious and uncomfortable post. The end was at hand now; the fatal exodus a matter of days.

The 5th brought another message from the Shah offering asylum in the Bala Hissar to any English ladies who would join him, that they might not be destroyed with the rest. Nothing, of course, would induce the women to go; but the offer spurred Pottinger to one more protest, even at the eleventh hour. In spite of anger and dissent, in spite of failure on failure, all that was manliest and most chivalrous in his nature constrained him to leave no stone unturned.

“Come on, Lawrence,” said he. “We’ll go up to the General’s and have another fight for it. If we are in orders to march to-morrow, why not march straight to the Bala Hissar, instead of to Jalálabad?”

Lawrence responded readily; and they found Elphinstone, as always, attended by Grant and Bellew. These, at sight of Pottinger, guessed his errand and raised ironical brows. The confounded persistence of the man! A persistence worthy of him who forced the Afghans to hold their own at Herat, yet woefully wasted on his own countrymen.

Lawrence opened fire by delivering Shah Shuja’s message, which did not altogether fail of its effect; and Pottinger made haste to press the slight advantage gained.



He begged the General to consider how the King's position and party had been strengthened within the last few weeks; and capped all by his bold suggestion for the morrow. Let the advance guard be halted on the Siah Sung hills, till the main closed up with it and the rear guard was clear of cantonments; then, instead of taking the road to Jalálabad, let them wheel sharply to the right and march straight for the Bala Hissar.

At that point Grant and Bellew fairly burst out laughing. It was the most potent argument they could use; and the General, taking his cue from them—slowly shook his head.

But the Politicals had come prepared for action, and were not to be lightly brushed aside.

"I assure you, sir," Pottinger urged persuasively, "the thing's perfectly feasible; Captain Lawrence and I are willing to accept all responsibility and to vouch for the success of the move if we march early, without camp-followers."

Elphinstone pondered the matter for a few distracted seconds, and promptly a difficulty reared its head.

"Have you considered what his Majesty would say to such a wholesale invasion?"

"His Majesty would be delighted, sir," Lawrence declared with emphasis. "I myself would gladly ride on in advance with the Mission escort and announce our intention; one shot to be fired as the signal that all is well."

Still Elphinstone looked troubled. There seemed no eluding these men. But yet another difficulty came to his rescue.

"If I agree to your suggestion," he asked, "can you guarantee us *supplies*?"

Both were too truthful for evasion even to gain their point.

"Well—not absolutely," Lawrence made answer; "but we are convinced that between us we could secure plenty for all."

It was a loophole; and it sufficed. Again the General shook his head.

"No—no—it won't do," said he. "The whole thing is too vague—too risky. Our plans are fixed. It would be fatal to upset them at the last minute. We retreat!"

Grant and Bellew nodded sagacious approval; and bitterly angered, the two Politicals withdrew. Straightway orders were issued—for the third time within a week—that each man should take three days' provisions in his haversack, and the whole force be ready to march at dawn. But beyond a breach in the walls, already begun, and a temporary bridge of guns and waggons to be thrown across the Kabul river—no organized arrangements appear to have been made.

That evening John Sturt—tired out with working at the breach all day and dreading the morrow—added a few significant lines to a letter destined for Sir Robert Sale. "Dissensions run high among the rebels. The Shah's party gains ground and must succeed; and yet—*we march to-morrow!!!* We shall have a fight—but courage! Man will not help us—God only can!"

## V

DAY dawned on the 6th of January in a clear, unclouded glory; from the first rose-flush through flame colour to palest topaz; till colour was drowned in sheer light—and lo, the sun!

Clean-cut against his unveiled splendour showed towers and battlements of the Bala Hissar and rocks of the Siah Sung—black no longer, their harsh outlines softened and beautified by a mantle of frozen snow. And over all the valley of Kabul, on its flat roofs, ramparts, and city walls, that same glittering mantle lay three feet deep; a mantle beautiful exceedingly to the eye, fatal exceedingly to the march of a heavily hampered army.

As on the day of Macnaghten's murder, so on this day of infinitely greater tragedy, the heavens declared the glory of God; and earth, wrapped in her borrowed robes of purity, spoke peace where there was no peace. The sun swung clear of the last mountain curve, gathering up the long shadows of morning till snow-crystals flashed a million welcomes. Theirs was the entire valley and the emptiness thereof—a waiting emptiness, soon to be filled with terrible things.

At the river's edge, half a mile from cantonments, Sturt and his Sappers were already at work on a superfluous bridge of gun carriages overlaid with planks. Useless to affirm that the river was fordable; that the men were bound to wet their feet and legs walking through deep

snow; that, in any case, one narrow bridge for a force numbering thousands would prove merely a fatal source of delay. An order was an order, however futile: and while Sturt waded up to his hips in ice-cold water, Elphinstone sat at breakfast—his last civilized meal on earth—with God knows what of misery and anxiety in his heart. Grant and Bellew sat with him, but none were in the mood for superfluous talk. It was nearly nine o'clock; but, though much of the baggage had left cantonments, Sturt's gun-carriages had not yet gone out; and when Shelton arrived with a request that they might be sent at once, Elphinstone—rarely irritable—dismissed him with a rebuff. The Brigadier shrugged his shoulders and departed fuming; his incipient zeal quenched for good.

After him came Pottinger—still scarcely able to walk, even with a stick. He came to propose that—as neither the promised escort nor provisions had arrived—departure should be delayed till he had sent a message to the city demanding both.

But for once Elphinstone was decisive. Departure could be delayed no longer. He was sick of procrastination. The men were sick of it.

“God knows *I* am sick of it too, sir!” Pottinger answered feelingly. “But we have agreed to accept their escort. By leaving without it we should not only anger the chiefs, but put ourselves in the wrong. And with a man like Mahomed Akbar in power, the result might be serious indeed.”

This last was undeniable; but still Elphinstone made answer that, although Major Pottinger's information was regrettable, his advice—in the circumstances—was impracticable. The troops must march and hope for the best.

"In that case, sir," retorted Pottinger decisively, "the sooner the better and the quicker the better. I presume you will push on to Khurd Kabul to-night?"

"I hope so—I hope so," the General murmured uneasily; and with that Pottinger took his leave—no less disgusted than Shelton, though with this difference, that neither ridicule nor rebuff could cure him of doing his utmost for that unhappy army, whose leaders seemed obstinately bent upon its destruction.

From the comparative quiet of the General's compound he rode straight into the heart of the pandemonium.

Only those who have travelled with large bodies of Asiatics can dimly picture the scene; confusion of tongues as in Babel, noise as of the crack of doom; roaring of remonstrant camels, oaths of their drivers, high-pitched wrangling of women, stentorian words of command, the clank of accoutrements, and the tramping of many feet: sixteen thousand human beings on the eve of a move—and such a move! Look where he might, no vestige of empty space: everywhere men, women, and children, ponies, dogs, and camels innumerable: camels couchant, camels rampant, camels exceedingly well-behaved, padding noiselessly behind their drivers, spurning the more obstreperous with contemptuous eyelids: an orgie of disorganized movement and sound.

Yet in the midst of it, among the troops, some semblance of order prevailed. The 5th Light Cavalry, 54th Native Infantry, and 6th Shah's Infantry, told off for the rear guard under Colonel Chambers, manned the walls and bastions till the rest should be clear of cantonments. The advance under Anquetil had already formed up—a hundred and forty sabres, three mounted train guns, graciously conceded, Sappers and the 44th Queen's. Lawrence, with his precious charge of doolies and the

Mission escort, horse and foot, completed Anquetil's command.

By this time all ladies and children had been packed away in the said doolies, snugly wrapped up against the bitter cold, with a little food to cheer them by the way. Including the three who rode, they numbered over thirty, all told: Mrs. Trevor, with seven fatherless children ranging from ten years downward, Lady Macnaghten, childless, hugging two cherished cats; Mrs. Boyd, with two children and another well on its way; Mrs. Waller, equally unfit for rough travelling, her first still a baby in arms; Mrs. Anderson and three children, the youngest ten days old; Mrs. Eyre with her son, and little Mrs. Mainwaring, a mere girl, whose husband was at Jalálabad, and her first baby not three weeks old. These, with Conductor Riley and two soldiers' wives completed Lawrence's contingent; and the whole advance marched soon after nine, to make way for Shelton's cumbrous main column, in charge of baggage and treasure.

Already a disorderly mob of animals and camp-followers thronged about Sturt's unfinished bridge, fighting for a foothold on its rattling planks, sooner than plunge into cold water and tramp in frozen garments for the rest of the way. Lady Sale and her daughter rode through the canal and river with the troopers; but the rest took endless ages filing over that misguided bridge.

The sun rode higher, the invaluable hours slipped away; and still Shelton's column remained stationary, half in and half out of cantonments, the sepoy's feet—unprotected by woollen wrappings—frozen before they set out; and still no sign of escort or provisions from the city.

By now, Afghans from neighbouring villages were swarming round the gates and walls. At first they had seemed mere good-natured onlookers; but unarmed camp-

followers tempted them past endurance, and soon the snow, defiled by much trampling, was bright with their blood. Sight of it inflamed the Ghazis, and a few shots rang out. Officers of the waiting troops began to ask each other what "the hell would happen next," and what had come to the General and the Brigadier.

Mackenzie—who had been hard at work since dawn—galloped back into cantonments on a voyage of discovery, and found the General on horseback at his own door, wondering miserably whether or not they ought to start after all. Pottinger's remonstrance, though dismissed, seemed to stick unpleasantly in his mind.

But the time for indecision was past, and Mackenzie said as much. The Afghans grew hourly more insolent; the troops more dispirited. Behmáru was pouring forth its thousands to sack the Mission compound, and the Shah's 6th—manning the walls—was an unreliable Corps. In fine, Mackenzie begged the General either to order an immediate advance or repel the Afghans by force.

Thus exhorted, Elphinstone chose the former, and Mackenzie nodded approval. "Very good, sir. I'll tell the Brigadier."

But before he reached the gate, the old man called after him. "Mackenzie, don't—*don't* do it!"

Too late. The Scot, affecting deafness, galloped on. The order was given; the column set in motion; Shelton, Pottinger and Skinner with the General and his staff at its head.

Once across the river, they made fair progress, the fresh snow lay a foot deep in the track rising to several feet on either hand. Before them, in a long narrow file, stretched the advance guard, nearly a thousand strong; behind them trailed their own interminable column, that lost itself in cantonments and continued till near sundown, to

saunter forth toward the bridge where congestion grew more desperate every hour.

All hope of reaching Khurd Kabul plateau that night died in the hearts of those who looked back. For, fatally entangled with the baggage, was a vast disorganized mob of followers; men, women, and children mixing themselves with the troops; clogging at every step the progress of an army, and sealing its doom. Some had hurried forward with the advance guard; and the main column found the wayside thick with their dead and dying; some frozen, some wounded, others sitting quietly down in despair to await the end.

As the head of Shelton's column neared the Siah Sung hills, a flying party of horsemen from the city came up with a letter for Pottinger from Newab Zemán Khan.

"Halt" was sounded, and fear clutched at every heart. It seemed as if Afghanistan would never let them go. The Nawab—sincerest of all the chiefs—reproached Pottinger for starting before the escort was ready, and begged them, as they valued their safety, to return and wait one more day.

Pottinger handed the letter to Elphinstone, who returned it with a rueful smile: "Too late now!" he muttered, and one backward glance confirmed the saddest words in human speech.

The men of Behmáru had evidently seized the Mission enclosure. A small army of plunderers harried the baggage column and the struggling thousands by the bridge. Return would involve hostilities; and Pottinger scribbled a hasty note to Conolly bidding him explain their situation to the good Nawab.

Again the bugle rang out; and two miles of humanity surged forward in response.

Up and over the bleak Siah Sung they plodded heavily



through half-frozen snow; on and up, past the site of their once jovial camp; and at every step the grey bulwark of the Bala Hissar loomed nearer, silently eloquent of strength and protection which their leaders would not suffer them to accept.

Even the unquenchable spirit of George Lawrence sank within him at thought of the past, of its triumphs and ambitions so ignominiously brought to naught. Both he and Pottinger cast longing eyes at that grey bulwark as they neared the point where they had planned to halt and outwit the enemy by a master-stroke that might have redeemed all. Both were convinced that even now the thing could be achieved with some measure of success—if only the "halt" were sounded and the order passed through the ranks.

But no halt was sounded, no order passed, and the Bala Hissar, their last hope of salvation, drew irrevocably farther and farther away.

The conviction that they were a doomed force lay like a stone on Lawrence's heart, though he manfully discouraged it by cantering up and down the line of doolies; heartening the terrified women and children with forced jokes on the humours of the march; shepherding like any collie, doolie-bearers who hurried forward, doolie-bearers who lagged behind, frozen stumbling creatures who could by no means be induced to keep in line.

If he could not dispel foreboding, he could in a measure combat the deadening influence of a cold that defied posh-teens and triumphed over the midday sun. Once the zenith was past, every half-hour increased the sum of human misery scattered now along three miles of track. By sunset they had covered but two more. Five miles in eight hours. A record march! And they could scarcely have felt wearier had it been fifty.

But mere weariness was luxury compared with the prospect of a bivouac in the snow. Shelter there was none, baggage none, food none—save a few scraps in the doolies—not even a stick of wood for fires to cheer the heart and thaw the blood that seemed frozen in their veins. Useless to push on farther. Fragments of the main column still strewed the entire track; and the rear guard was not yet clear of the sheepfold, round which the wolves were howling now in very deed.

No orders were given; no camp marked out; nor any attempt made to sweep away the snow. Each corps, as it came up, bivouacked anywhere, anyhow; soldiers and camp-followers huddled together in one tangled mass of misery; horses, camels, and ponies hemming them in. Men who for over two months had been short of food, short of firewood, short of rest, were in no fit state for the rigours of winter marching in Afghanistan, rigours multiplied tenfold by utter lack of forethought and organization. Not a voice was heard among them; and their silence was the measure of their torpor and despair. Scores of them quietly lay down in the snow that night to sleep—or to die, whichever the gods decreed; and they were the more fortunate who slept too sound for waking.

The ladies and children remained in their doolies, miserably enough. Lawrence rescued three of his own servants from the *mêlée*; faithful creatures assiduous to achieve some sort of comfort for their Sahib. Having scraped away the snow, they found and pitched a sepoy's tent, into which crept Lawrence, Major Scott, and young Le Geyt, thankful even for the ghost of a covering; still more thankful for a few mouthfuls of Lady Macnaghten's cold meat and sherry, without which they would have slept starving, as did the bulk of that unhappy crowd.

Pottinger—cold, wounded, and very weary from this

first day in the saddle since Charikar—slept in the open with a group of other officers, Cæsar's warm body pressed close against his own. Mackenzie fared royally, sharing, with twenty Jezailchis and Hasan Khan, a camp-bed of their own invention. A circular space, cleared of snow, was carpeted with eleven poshteens, and on them the twenty-two men lay down, their feet towards the centre, their bodies close packed as herrings in a tin. Eleven more poshteens, spread over them, completed a nest perfect of its kind. Let wind and frost do its worst, they at least would sleep sound. It had needed very little exercise of forethought on the part of commanding officers to have discovered and utilized this device for their own troops to the saving of infinite misery and countless lives.

Two more small tents having been unearthed; one was given over to Elphinstone, and the other to Lady Sale and her daughter, they being destitute of all but a roll of bedding that had served as saddle for their ayah who pluckily kept up with the advance guard.

The bedding was given up to the Sturts; and while the young wife clung close to her husband, haunted by unspoken fears for the morrow, Johnson produced for Lady Sale a straw chair, in which she doubled up her long legs awkwardly enough. Mr. Mein of the 13th, the ayah, and their dog, fitted themselves into the remaining space. Sleep was out of the question. Hour after hour the elder woman sat huddled together, a strange-looking figure in poshteen and turban, cramped and stiffened with cold; tormented by the iteration of those ominous lines from Hohenlinden.

“I am far from being a believer in presentiment,” she wrote next day, “but this verse is never absent from my thoughts. Heaven forbid that our fears should be realized!”

The delays and disasters of that first miserable march might well breed despondence in the stoutest heart, and as day's crimson aftermath faded, there came another radiance in the west—lurid and fearful, yet sublime. Tongues of flame leaped snakelike, sank into blackness and leaped afresh, till the very sky changed colour, and the snow for miles round was illumined with their unearthly light. The whole mile-long cantonment blazed to heaven, as it were a vast funeral pyre, not merely of bricks and mortar, but of all the ambitions and jealousies, the falsehoods and failures, the triumphs, the friendships and the heroism crowded into three years of brief and delusive dominion over a people, untamed and untameable so long as mountains, jezails and sabres grow wild in the good land of Afghanistan.

And the rear guard?

Always the worst sufferers, their interminable day, that had begun at six in the morning, did not end till two hours after midnight. With them, among many others, were Vincent Eyre, Tom Pottinger, and Captain James Marshall of the Shah's 6th, brother-in-law of Henry Lawrence and an officer of no little promise. For eleven hours their troops had manned the walls, while a never-ending file of animals streamed forth of the gates, only to be checked at canal or river. Here the banks had grown so slippery that the camels sprawled, fell, and lay about in heaps, while nimble Afghans made haste to appropriate treasure-trove so conveniently set within their reach.

For a time the horsemen of Nawab Zeman Khan did what they could. But they were few and not overzealous, the Ghazis many and irresistible. Long before sunset the cantonments were overrun with them, their savage yells rising triumphant above the composite babel

that swelled and sank and swelled again throughout that unforgettable day. The rear guard, driven from the walls, formed up on the plain, only to be ignominiously "sniped" from its own ramparts. The two Horse Artillery guns were at the last spiked and abandoned, to Eyre's bitter distress; and not until hours after sunset did the last units of Elphinstone's army set their feet in the blood-stained track marked out by thousands that had gone before and scores that had fallen by the way.

The flare from the Ghazis' bonfires played freakishly on faces of the dead, distorting them to a ghastly semblance of life. Now and again a child whimpered, and everywhere dark masses of baggage rolls, *khillias*, trunks, told of wholesale loss.

It was two of the morning when the last of them stumbled into the encampment at Baigrami—if encampment that could be called which suggested rather a concourse of the dead. Like those who arrived earlier, they lay down anywhere, anyhow, to sleep, or to die as the gods might decree.

Yet this was but the beginning of sorrows.

## VI

THE sun, that had risen on a radiant emptiness, that had set upon roarings, yellings and conflagration as of Tophet, went on his eternally unshadowed way over happier regions of earth; glowed upon fair unravaged spaces of the New World, gleamed upon the aloof unearthly purity of the South Pole; and—five hours after the last straggler had dropped exhausted into the snow—came again to the valley of Kabul, as if to see how they fared who had so strangely disported themselves during his last visitation.

Again snow crystals flashed a million welcomes: but how was the Queen among valleys disfigured, her glittering mantle defiled! The funeral pyre, almost burnt out, smouldered sullenly under a pall of blue smoke swayed lightly by the wind. Here and there among the ruins the nozzle of a gun peered out; but the Ghazis had burnt the carriages, and those guns would never now serve any Afghan chief of them all.

The ground, on every side, was black with blown ashes and charred fragments; and from that tragic blot upon the valley the track of the retreating army showed all too clear in the new light. Out across the plain it stretched; up and over the Siah Sung, till it touched that other blot upon the snow at Baigram. But here there was life; though frost had taken heavy toll during the night. Before the first sunbeam reached the sleeping camp, spasmodic heavings and stirrings had begun. Units broke off

from the mass; groups followed suit. Here ponies staggered to their feet and shook themselves, there camels unfolded irresponsible legs; swearing, camel-fashion, at the hardness of their lot. Officers rose up, cramped and frozen, and shook the snow off their cloaks. Lawrence woke to find close outside his tent, a grey-haired conductor of ordnance, sword in hand, frozen to death. No bugle sounded; no orders were given. No cheerful bustle; no crackle of twigs or clatter of pots; no hope of relief from the pangs of hunger and cold. Camp-followers, baggage coolies, sepoy's whose muskets had dropped from frozen fingers, rose up numbed and dazed, stared helplessly round, and stumbled on:—on toward Hindustan, and all things implied in that magical word; away, at any price, from this unfamiliar nightmare of snow and starvation and pursuing fiends that yelled. With just so much of purpose in their hearts they stumbled along; and others followed, hundreds of others, to the utter confusion of the troops, who at the start were herded into some semblance of formation.

The rear guard of yesterday was the advance guard of to-day. To the front then, 54th, 5th Light Cavalry, Gunners, and Shah's 6th. But the gunners had no guns; and the officers of the 6th, it seemed—had no men. Vain bugle calls, vain search through that seething mass of humanity, revealed the fact that save for a few straggling files, the Shah's 6th was not; neither were the Shah's Sappers and Miners, two hundred and fifty in number. The men had gone quietly back on their tracks during the night, in no spirit of fanaticism, but in sheer despair; preferring the chance of imprisonment to the certainty of death by frost, bullet, or snow.

Forward then, Light Cavalry and 54th; the last a skeleton corps mustering half yesterday's strength.

The remaining Native Regiments were in much the same case. More than half the sepoy—frost-bitten, starving and hopeless—had flung away their muskets and mixed themselves with the crowd. Discipline was at an end. That which twenty-four hours earlier had been an army was now become a rabble of men and animals impossible to control, herded forward by an enemy who very soon re-appeared upon the scene.

The advance, as before, moved off unmolested, forcing its way through the crowd, followed by Lawrence and his doolie-bearers, whose vagaries yesterday were as nothing to those of to-day. Elphinstone and his staff, with Pottinger and Skinner, Nicholl and two of his guns, Shelton with the 37th, guarding the treasure, made such headway as obstructing thousands would allow. The cold was intense; many degrees below zero; and lowered vitality made it harder to bear. Feet and hands ached intolerably. Misery trod hard on the heels of misery; yet they stumbled resolutely on, buoyed up by the conviction that they would surely camp that night on the farther side of Khurd Kabul Pass. If they could not make ten miles a day—what hope of Jalálabad?

The Afghans were few as yet; but their numbers increased every moment; and the baggage—all that remained of it—was not permitted to depart in peace. Before half the mass of protesting camels had been shepherded from their halting-place, the vultures had swooped down again, hungry for plunder, and the rear guard, as usual, fared worst of all.

To-day it consisted of Anquetil's detachment—the 44th with three mounted train guns and a Rissallah of Cavalry. They moved off in fair order, unhindered, and thanking their stars. But gratulation was premature. Suddenly from a small fort above the road came the inevitable rush



of yelling devils, the glitter of brandished knives. The chance of seizing three guns was irresistible; and—to the discredit of the escort—proved easier than it looked.

Young Green, the officer in charge, fought nobly, as also did White of the 44th; but his men backed away without a shot fired, and the Afghans yelled again—triumphant. The guns were theirs. But though British troops would not act, they had still to reckon with British officers. Green and Anquetil—boy and veteran—sprang into the midst of them, careless of brandished knives, and themselves spiked their treasures before these were wrested away.

Yet the loss held, and the disgrace,—that bit far deeper into Anquetil's heart. "Too had to speak about," was all he could say, when Lawrence came galloping back soon after, in search of Mrs. Boyd—who had mounted and gone off with her husband, while the devoted sheep-dog's attention was engaged elsewhere.

The doolie-bearers, most of them on the verge of collapse, had given him a lively time. At the first sounds of disturbance in the rear, fright completed what cold had begun; and Lady Macnaghten found herself unceremoniously dumped in the snow, while half a dozen coolies tragically announced their determination to give up the ghost sooner than stir another step.

Scared, cold and miserable, the "Burra Mem" of Kabul peered nervously out. "Oh Captain Lawrence . . . Captain Lawrence!"

He was beside her in a moment. "I can't force them," he said. "The poor wretches are done for. If you will do me the honour to share my saddle, I'll see that you don't fall off. My Arab is a Hercules, quite able to carry us both."

He did so, cheerfully, for more than two miles. But

an awkward position became an anxious one, as the enemy increased on both flanks; while a party of horsemen charged playfully into the baggage column, carrying off what they could, and slashing at all within reach.

There reigned confusion and dismay unspeakable;—the falling bodies, the blood upon the snow, the cries, the curses, the groans.

Lady Macnaghten clung close, hiding her eyes; and the heart of George Lawrence that knew no fear for himself grew alarmed for his "precious burden." A camel with empty panniers lolloped by, trailing a nose rope;—the very thing! Lawrence caught the rope, dismounted and forced the contemptuous one to his knees. Then, packing her Ladyship into one pannier, he balanced her with a bundle of clothes from Mrs. Boyd's doolie, covered her with a poshteen—and the thing was done.

On again toward Butkhak;—only a mile more and they would reach the jaws of Khurd Kabul, the first and most terrible of four defiles that loomed between them and Jalálabad.

In five hours they had come four miles—an improvement on yesterday; but every step of that short march had been taken in blood. The Horse Artillery team had collapsed. Nicholl, cut to the heart, had been forced to spike and abandon two more guns; and to-day, as yesterday, scattered belongings, and fallen bodies marked the way they had come.

Slowly, following the course of the river, they neared those rocky ranges that form as it were a labyrinthine gateway, sixty miles long, guarding the Queen among Valleys from intrusion of any save the boldest; exacting, from all comers, terrible toll. In the midst of unrelieved whiteness, hills so startlingly craggy and abrupt, made ink-black masses of shadow. Neither vertical cliffs nor the

dragon's teeth of rock above them would suffer the glittering mantle to conceal their true character. And of such was the gateway of Kabul—a monochrome of savage grandeur, of bright lights and sinister shadows; and in the midst, most sinister shadow of all, the yawning gap through which Elphinstone's rabble army must pass.

But it was not yet one o'clock. Surely by sunset this first, and worst, pass could be cleared. To achieve that end the officers were prepared for any effort. Grant, riding with Johnson, not far behind Elphinstone's party, voiced the conviction of all. "It's our one chance of getting off scot free: and if only those confounded Politicals——"

Peremptory bugle notes checked his speech.—"Halt!" The men could scarcely believe their ears; and Grant's broken sentence ended in an oath.

Other bugles took up the unwelcome order. The troops obeyed. The crowd, in two minds on the subject, surged forward and backward with confused heavings. Hope, that had fluttered a broken wing, dropped dead in the hearts of all.

The rear guard, it seemed, was hard beset and in danger of being cut off; the defile ahead was reported strongly occupied; and once again there came flying horsemen from Kabul with a note from Newab Zeman Khan. More than ever the old man regretted that untimely start, and entreated Pottinger to halt till he should send firewood, provisions, and a strong party of followers to disperse the Ghilzais assembling in the Pass.

Difficult, in a case so desperate, to decide what was best to be done. On one hand, every hour of delay was fraught with peril. On the other, the plight of the sepoys—after thirty hours under arms without shelter or food—was pitiful to behold. Utter confusion reigned in

all ranks. To enter such a defile without some attempt at re-formation were madness; and, all things considered, there seemed wisdom in a few hours' halt, while the sun gave a measure of warmth, and a forward move at dusk. By this means they would avoid both another night in the snow, and the friendly attentions of Ghilzais, who would retire as usual with the sun.

An order to this effect brought Shelton galloping to the front, full of sound and fury. Another halt in the snow, said he, would destroy the army. If the General had any hope of their salvation, let him heed neither chiefs nor Politicals; but push on at all risks, shaking off the deadly encumbrance of baggage and camp-followers.

Sound advice,—if a trifle belated. Two weeks earlier he had rejected it with contumely. Two weeks earlier Pottinger had vainly urged the sacrifice of impedimenta, the forced marches, the fighting retreat—if retreat must be; had vainly taken for his text, "Put not your trust in Princes!"

Now—when disaster was come upon them, by reason of Princes and impedimenta—Shelton saw, too late, the evils of both. Too late: for this time the pliable General could by no means be talked over. The order was issued—rest, re-formation, and march at dusk: a reasonable order, had it been carried out. But the stars in their courses fought against that doomed army; and before dusk, decision was taken out of Elphinstone's hands.

During the afternoon Ghilzais and more Ghilzais swarmed round the halting troops with obvious intent of crowning the lesser heights. Them Shelton forestalled, and gallantly kept at bay till near sunset, when they retired for food and prayer. Then, as the sun dropped red and rayless, someone sighted a large body of horse moving darkly over the snow. Wood and provisions?

The Nawab's followers? Again hope fluttered—hard to kill. A rider detached himself and galloped up to the General's party. He reported the approach of his master, Mahomed Akbar Khan. Those three words sounded the knell of hope; and there was no resurrection.

Mahomed Akbar—sanctified instrument of vengeance—sent smooth messages to the "High of rank and respected Eldred Pottinger," reproaching him and the most noble Generals for departing without escort, contrary to agreement. He desired Lawrence and Skinner Sahibs to come and speak with him that friendship and understanding be made complete.

"You go, Skinner," Lawrence urged, half laughing. "I've had more than enough of the gentleman!"

And handsome Jim Skinner, the most chivalrous soul alive, rode off through the dusk to confer with Akbar Khan; though he, too, had had more than enough of the gentleman, and saw in his arrival the doom of Elphinstone's force. Akbar had brought neither wood nor provisions; but had been sent—so he said—to protect them from the fanatics assembling in the hills. Their unauthorized departure had aroused suspicion that they meant to attempt a junction with Sale; that the combined forces would then effectually resist them, and their whole design be brought to naught. For this reason he had been empowered to demand six more hostages for Sale's retreat, and to bid them halt either at Butkhak or Tazin till word arrived that he had left Jalalabad. They would meantime be supplied with all necessaries and the passes should be cleared.

It was dark when Skinner returned with these "friendly" messages that hinted at the hand of steel under the velvet glove; and no reply could be sent till morning. There were not wanting those who still com-

mended the night march as more imperative now than before; but Elphinstone, always unmanned by sudden crises, fell a prey to bogies of doubt and difficulty pressed upon him by others.

Precisely who those others may have been is not quite clear. According to Eyre, Akbar insisted; according to Pottinger, Lawrence, and Lady Sale, the General was dissuaded by the officers of his Staff from the bold step that might conceivably have averted the worst; and the "politic barbarian" gained his point. Instead of pushing resolutely on, his victims sate them down at the mouth of the passes that the Ghilzais might have full time to occupy them in force. Mahomed Akbar must have smiled to himself that night.

Little cause was there for smiling in the bivouac near the gate of Khurd Kabul. To those unsheltered thousands night brought neither rest nor sleep; but cold and darkness merely, with their attendant trains of horrors, starvation, frost-bite, utter exhaustion, and—for the more favoured—death. To-night the snow was deeper, the frost keener—12° below zero—the misery and confusion heightened tenfold, and to-night no spark of hope remained to warm their hearts within their frozen bodies; but only paralyzing certainty that the true arbiter of their destiny was not Elphinstone, but Akbar Khan.

Foodless, hopeless, fireless, they laid them down; men, women, and children, fifteen thousand or more, with many hundred horses, camels, and ponies, jammed together in one unmanageable mass of misery; the closer the better, that even a little warmth might be preserved by contact. Here and there in the outer darkness shadowy figures crouched round fitful tongues of flame. Sepoys, half crazy with cold and emptiness, were burning their caps, accoutrements, even their great-coats,

to win a few moments of relief from the stealthy pitiless grip of frost. And not sepoy only. Twelve officers crowded round the hot ashes of a pistol-case, heartening themselves with a few stray bottles of wine and with flashes of that unquenchable spirit whereby mere man becomes hero, rises triumphant above the worst that Fate can inflict.

To-night the English women and children still had a few doolies among them, a few Kabul cakes, a little wine and tea. The three sepoy's tents had also survived the march; and even shelter so inadequate seemed an insolence of luxury to those hundreds who lay without under a ruthless heaven, where stars glittered like points of steel.

Towards the small hours there came a change; an ominous breath out of the north brought slow-moving galleons of cloud, that spread and spread, blotting out the points of steel. Those who lay awake saw with dismay how one constellation after another was swallowed up, of blackness that slowly, slowly turned to grey; till, at long last, there dawned, gloomily and piercingly cold, the 8th of January.

They that had lain down fireless had but a pallid gleam of sun to cheer them waking, and that gleam found them already astir. Lawrence had packed his precious charges into camel panniers; Mrs. Boyd and her youngest boy, balanced by eight-year-old Mary Anderson and little Mrs. Mainwaring—hardly fit to be out of bed—rolled in a shawl with her babe at her breast. Mrs. Anderson and her two other children were balanced by several little Trevors, half frightened, half thrilled, at the wild adventure afoot. Mrs. Eyre preferred to ride, while Freddy, envied of his playfellows, was spared the indignity of travelling in a basket, and strapped instead to the back of a devoted Afghan servant, who could be trusted to defend the child's life with his own.

But though women and children were packed up and Lawrence's escort mounted, the moment of departure was still hours away. The Ghilzais, who vanished with the sunset, had returned with the dawn, swarming thickest on the rocks south of the camp, and already adding terror to confusion by a dropping fire from above. Camp-followers, seizing any baggage animal at hand, made a rush for the mouth of the Pass. Boxes of ammunition and plate, stores and private property, cumbered the ground. The Gunners had broached a cask of spirits, and the British soldiers swarmed about it, each man fighting for a share. . . .

Lawrence, strolling beyond the rear pickets, suddenly saw the whole conglomerate mass of men and animals violently convulsed and rolled backward upon itself "like an enormous wave." He ran forward, his pulses leaping; and lo, Captain Anderson, in hot haste. "Ah, Lawrence, *there* you are! The enemy are on us. Have you any of the escort mounted?"

"All of them," shouted Lawrence as he ran; and within three minutes was astride of his Turcoman, jostling his way to the front whence came the many-throated chorus of jezails. Here Thain, with splendid promptitude, had taken to himself two hundred of the 44th, and a company of the 37th N.I. These, with Lawrence's escort and Anderson's horse, executed a vigorous charge that scattered an astounded enemy in all directions. It was gallantly done, and went far to justify Lawrence's conviction that even now the British troops—under leaders like Anderson, Mackenzie and Thain—could have driven the Afghans into Kabul and entered the Bala Hissar in triumph.

Vain dream! Instead, came an order to join the General, and he cantered back wondering anxiously, "What next?"



With Elphinstone were Anquetil, Skinner, and Pottinger in earnest talk. Pottinger, chilled to the bone and in cruel pain, looked strained and worn, but entirely master of himself. He greeted Lawrence with a fervent "Well done!" and with the slow, grave smile that had grown very rare of late.

It seemed that while Lawrence fought, Skinner had again seen Akbar, and brought back his ultimatum: four hostages and a halt at Butkhak till Sale retreated, or six hostages and a halt at Tazin; Akbar, meanwhile, to provide necessaries and protect the troops from fanatics for a consideration of fifteen thousand rupees. Arrogant proposals, galling to British pride: but the Barakzai had them in his net, and unless Elphinstone would fight his way back to Kabul they must perforce consent.

Elphinstone had no thought of fighting. He had chosen Tazin, where the country was more open, the climate milder, and they would be free of snow. But six hostages was a large order. Shelton and Lawrence had been specially named as men of rank, military and political. But on this point Lawrence was decisive.

"You will excuse *me*, sir, I hope. I have no wish to give up my important and honourable charge, and would far rather remain with the army."

Elphinstone looked distressed. "Shelton will refuse, too, I am certain. He has been dead set against it all along. I would rather not be obliged to order him to go. It is awkward—very."

Then Pottinger spoke. "If it would be any convenience to you, sir, I am willing to offer myself in his place; and as it would be a great mark of confidence on my part, it might induce the Sirdar to spare Captain Lawrence as well. I am so useless on account of my wound, that he is really more capable of conducting the Mission; and, as

I say, my volunteering might induce Akbar to abate his demands."

The chivalry and modesty of that proposal were alike characteristic of the man, and Elphinstone fully appreciated both.

"My dear sir," said he, "I am infinitely obliged to you. As to being of use, with your knowledge of the language and the people, you could probably do far more for us with the Chief than with the army."

Pottinger inclined his head. "I hope so, sir. You may be sure I shall do my best."

"And if the Sirdar insists on a General officer," put in Anquetil, "I'll join you. It's an unpleasant business, but some of us must put up with it, and you can count on me. I'll see you to the outposts, anyway."

"Thank you, sir," said Pottinger with quiet emphasis, and they moved off together.

It was now nearly eleven. For more than three hours women and children had waited in camel panniers and on horseback with nothing to warm or fortify them but a few mouthfuls of Kabul cake and a little wine from the 54th Mess stores; wine, which in their extremity the youngest could swallow without ill-effect.

"For myself," said Lady Sale, "as I sat my horse for hours in the cold I felt very grateful for a tumbler of sherry that at any other time would have made me quite unladylike. . . . Cups full of sherry were given to young children without in the least affecting their heads."

So they waited and waited in the sunless cold; above them, cloud galleons heavy with snow; before them, flanked by stupendous cliffs, the very Gate of Death; while Akbar spoke Pottinger fair, and Pottinger did what he could to save others from a dangerous duty, heartily detested by all.

At last came his note to Lawrence that ended the misery of delay ; ended also Lawrence's hope of remaining with the army. Akbar, frankly impressed by Pottinger's "mark of confidence," would neither press his demand for six hostages, nor for a general officer. But Lawrence he must have—being shrewd enough to recognize the more valuable man. For the third hostage Pottinger might name any officer he chose. He named Colin Mackenzie, whose Jezailchis were reduced to a skeleton force, and who could be relied on implicitly for ready response to the call of duty. James Skinner he deputed to act in his stead, and take charge of the Mission. The General looked rueful at the prospect of losing Lawrence, but go he must ; and he rode off accordingly with Mackenzie, a dead weight of foreboding on the hearts of both.

They found Mahomed Akbar at a breakfast on the hillside with his own party—Pottinger in the seat of honour at his right hand. He rose to greet them, jovial and smiling ; apologized for recent "inconveniences," assured them that his men would disperse the Ghilzais, and bade them in the meantime sit and eat. Too hungry for squeamishness they complied ; though Lawrence could scarcely bring himself to eat from the same dish as the murderer of his Chief.

And while they sat thus the bugles sounded, "Advance !" familiar voices shouted words of command. Again they saw that unwieldy mass, among whom were seven hundred of their fellow-countrymen, surge like a great wave—not backward this time, but forward into the jaws of the Khurd Kabul Pass.

## VII

Gloomy and threatening, the Pass received them. Rising sheer from pedestals of jagged rock twin ranges of basalt walled them in ; and here, the monochrome effect was even more sinister than without. The broken track of stones and boulders, thick-coated with frozen snow, gleamed pallid and ghostly between masses of cliff, scored, carven and stained by the frosts of many thousand winters, the rain of many thousand springs. Fantastic streaks and blotches, as of spilled ink, were legacies from shining waterfalls. And there were other streaks and blotches more ancient still. Rusty red outcrops of ironstone, like weathered blood-stains, seemed legacies from titanic conflicts in the beginning of days ; and above, leagues above the heads of that insignificant multitude, black and craggy peaks were bitten out from a ragged grey ribbon of sky. No glimpse of life, save where an occasional bush, stunted, leafless, had sprung from chance seed dropped into a crevice by wind or flying bird. No sound of life save the irrepressible noise of the torrent, that not even forty-five degrees of frost could silence ; and that new noise coming on and on, in an ever-swelling crescendo—the noise of many thousand footsteps, of an army making haste to meet its doom.

The eight-mile march that sealed the fate of Elphinstone's army began with some slight attempt at order. For advance guard, 5th Native Infantry and Anderson's Horse ; for rear guard, 5th Light Cavalry, Scott with the

44th, Griffiths with the 37th, and Nicholl's two remaining guns, with two spare companies whose guns were not. Between these bodies—by way of main column—the General and Staff; the ladies in camel panniers, with Hasan Khan's Jezailchis and the Mission escort; camel-loads of treasure, what remained of it; with the 54th—also what remained of it—for guard. Baggage column, strictly speaking, there was none. In the wild confusion at dawn, camp-followers had seized any cattle they could lay hands on; and more than half the baggage and ammunition, saved from yesterday's march, still strewed the ground for the benefit of Ghilzai hordes.

The loss was incalculable. It did not bear thinking of: but the exigencies of the hour left no room for anxiety on the score of any other possession than life itself. Lady Macnaghten still clung to her cats, having no child to cling to, poor soul! And many dogs of all breeds, pinched and exhausted, limped in the wake of their masters through that fearsome Pass.

As for the camp-followers, still some ten thousand in number, strenuous efforts to separate them from the combatants had served no purpose but to multiply delays. Terrified, frost-bitten, and half blind from snow-glare they fled on, jostling one another in the narrow space, entangling themselves with skeleton regiments, to the fury and distraction of officers and the despair of their men.

The cold without was as nothing to the cold within. Icicles hung thick on the manes of the ponies and the beards of the men. Incessant crossing and re-crossing of the stream soon cased the legs of all in ice, and progress was further hindered by spurs from both ranges, so closely interlaced that never more than fifty yards could be seen at a glance. Every step of the track was commanded by the natural breastworks and peaks overhead: but for the

first half-mile there appeared no turbans among the rocks, no gleam of matchlocks. Was it possible, after all, that the Sirdar had kept his word?

It was not possible. As they pressed on, the cliff loomed closer, more threatening; the twilight deepened; and now from the dragon's teeth above, from ledges and impossible crevices of rocks, came the opening chorus: a hailstone chorus in very deed. But these hailstones bit and burned into the flesh, and struck horror into the hearts of those jostling thousands, giving fresh impetus to their mad scramble for safety—their onward rush toward the haven of Hindustan.

Stumbling and slipping over boulders mailed in frozen snow, crashing through deceptive layers of ice into water that seared frost-bitten feet like flame, flinging aside all impedimenta even to the babies on their hips, the agonized thousands pressed on. Anything to escape from the monstrous walls hemming them in, from a sky that spat jets of fire, hailstones of lead. So close-packed were they that at every step men fell, animals fell, women fell—screaming. To the slipperiness of frozen snow was added the slipperiness of blood. And always from behind more fugitives pressed on—and more and more.

None that survived would forget, while they lived, the sights and the sounds, the groans and cries and yells of triumph, the crackle of breaking ice, the roar of the torrent.

And many survived; many even passed unscathed through that murderous onslaught from the heights. With the advance guard rode several chiefs and three brave English women—Lady Sale, the Sturts, and the Eyres. The Afghans bade the ladies keep close to themselves for safety, and constantly made their followers shout to the hidden enemy above—with small effect. "These

chiefs," said Lady Sale, "certainly ran the same risk as we did. But I verily believe many of them would individually sacrifice themselves to rid the country of us. . . ." A belief not far short of the truth.

Many of their assailants—firing from ledges and crevices—were not fifty yards off; yet the bullets that whinged, whirred about them wrought amazingly little harm. Two struck Mrs. Sturt's pony. The brave little beast scrambled on unheeding. Three passed through Lady Sale's posh-teen, and a fourth entered her arm. Undaunted, they urged their horses to a canter over an up-hill track so broken, so slippery, that in cool blood they would have shirked attempting it at a walk. As for Mrs. Eyre, her pony—startled by a burst of firing nearer than usual—clamped his bit and bolted.

Away and away went Emily Eyre, far ahead of the advance; up and up that steadily ascending gorge, keeping her seat and also keeping her head, till the cliffs fell away, the world grew brighter, and lo, she, of all the Kabul garrison, was the first to win clear of the Pass.

Behind her, through the jostling thousands, the advance guard—less hampered than the main and rear—pushed on, till they too were almost clear of danger. Here they came across Thain's horse, shot through the loins. No sight of Thain—the gallant, the true-hearted—and Sturt declared he must go back on the bare chance of finding his friend. In vain wife and mother argued the hopelessness of such an errand. He went.

Before he had struggled back many yards his horse was shot under him; and even as he got upon his feet a bullet struck him in the groin. There he lay in helpless agony; and there must have been trampled by fugitives, or cut to pieces by foes, but that Mein of the 13th had followed him, found him, and stood beside him, for endless pre-

carious minutes, vainly begging help from those who rushed past; their minds intent only on the next corner, praying it might prove the last.

Almost had Mein given it up in despair, when Sergeant Deane of the Sappers emerged from the *mêlée*.

"Deane, for God's sake!" Mein shouted above the uproar. "Here's Lieutenant Sturt!"

No need for more. Deane had eyes for other things than the next corner. Between them they lifted the wounded man on to a quilt; and so bore him, with much painful jolting, beyond that Glen of Slaughter, into which the Ghilzais now rushed sword in hand, from lateral gorges, to complete the work of the jezail and christen their rocks indeed——

Thus the main column and rear guard, as usual, bore the full brunt of bullet and steel. And in the midst were English women and children, hiding their eyes and shaking with fear; while all about them bullets rained harmlessly, as if turned aside by an invisible hand.

But oh, the camels,—the camels! Fearful exceedingly, their poor inconsequent legs sliding this way and that; now on fallen bodies, now on treacherous ice that mailed the edge of the stream; they lurched and jolted onwards. Many were killed, and the rest must stumble over them how they might.

Of a sudden—crash! The camel bearing Mrs. Boyd and Mrs. Mainwaring fell, mortally wounded, sprawling in mid-stream; a stationary mark for bullets that still whizzed harmlessly past. The two women and two young children scrambled out of their panniers, stumbled blindly over dead bodies, their senses mercifully benumbed to the horrors around them by one wild desire to escape—to escape!

Mrs. Boyd, clutching her four-year-old son, was over-



taken by two Hindustani sowars. "Ride with us, Mem-sahib," they cried, "lest worse harm befall you."

It was no moment for hesitation. Mrs. Boyd mounted one horse, and resigned Hugh to the second sowar. Then on again, impelled always by that irresistible pressure from the rear. Impossible for the ponies to keep in touch; and Mrs. Boyd, hurried forward by her protector, suddenly lost sight of her boy. Frantic with grief, she would fain have ridden back for him; but the sepoy dragged resolutely at her bridle. It was madness, he said—madness; and she knew it.

Mrs. Mainwaring fared little better. Stumbling over horrors that had once been human, clasping the precious morsel of life under her shawl, she had no spare hand for Mary Anderson, and could only bid the child cling to her skirt. But in the wild helter-skelter of men and animals the two were soon wrenched apart. The child was gone. Useless to search for her in that terrible throng; as well seek a water-drop that has slipped into the ocean. With a broken sob, she struggled across the rushing torrent; men and women struck down close beside her; she, untouched, pushing on, blindly on—

Suddenly an Afghan horseman clattered up from behind; flourished his sword above her and roughly demanded the shawl that sheltered her child. With a scream of terror she shrank away from him. He thrust his horse nearer, as if to ride her down. But a shot rang out—close to her shoulder—and the Afghan rolled harmlessly out of his saddle.

White and shivering, the English girl confronted her deliverer—a grenadier sepoy of the 54th.

"Take my arm, Memsahib." He spoke rapidly, urgently; and she needed no second bidding. Clinging to her protector, she fared miraculously through the leaden

rain, through the ice-cold torrent, over rocks and boulders, to the mouth of the Pass.

There a bullet struck the sepoy, wounding him mortally. "Go on, Mem sahib, go on," he gasped in falling; and she went on—alone, the child still safe and warm at her breast.

But though there were now many who had won through, after a fashion, there were still thousands pressing on behind. There, in the centre of the Pass, where the track was narrowest, baggage, treasure, and the main mass of followers were jammed together in one conglomerate mass. For endless minutes, that seemed hours, the 37th, the 44th, and Nicholl's guns were kept stationary under heavy fire from an overhanging peak on the left; before them that immovable crowd; behind them Ghilzais crazy for their own share of glory; above them cliffs that rained death.

Here, more than elsewhere, officers fell; Scott of the 44th, Swinton, and young St. George. Here the once gallant 37th, frost-bitten and paralyzed, suffered Afghans unrebuked to snatch the very muskets from their hands and British soldiers to help themselves from their pouches. By sheer mismanagement and bad leadership the flower of the Company's army had been brought to this!

And the Gunners? They—the oldest troop in the Bengal Artillery, who had fought in Egypt, in Rajputana, and Nepau;—they, whose cheerfulness and fortitude under privation had filled the hearts of Artillery officers with pride—did here surpass themselves in heroic defence of their two remaining guns.

But neither gallantry nor heroism could avail to save both. Before the first was spiked and abandoned, a whole gun's crew had fallen at their posts. Then—the congestion ahead having relaxed a little—the last one of them

all was pushed on. Convinced by now that any further attempt at fighting merely spelled delay—and delay destruction—the rear guard, too, pressed forward like the rest; retreat became a rout; to free themselves from the horror of those appalling cliffs became the object of all——

The end—at last, the end!

Then, as the cliffs opened out, the Gunners, still unsubdued, halted their remaining treasure, waited till the crowd of camp-followers had passed on, and received the pursuing Ghilzais with round after round of grape. But against odds so desperate even the most determined valour could not avail them long. Many brave men fell; not least among them Captain Paton, of Elphinstone's staff; and in the end that stubborn few were overwhelmed. Broken in heart and body, yet still masters of themselves and of their gun, they followed perforce in the steps of their fellows.

The space about them widened; and even as they emerged on to the high tableland, twelve hundred feet above Butkhak, the first flakes of snow began to fall——

## VIII

But though Elphinstone's army had passed through that Glen of Slaughter, leaving three thousand dead and wounded in its wake, Akbar, with his horsemen and three hostages, were still behind—not far behind—the rear guard that was so mercilessly beset, that made so brave a stand.

At starting the three British officers—relieved of all weapons but their swords—were kept well within the circle of some thirty horsemen, not by way of guard, but by way of defence; no mere formality as they discovered before long. Akbar, courteous and deferential, rode at Pottinger's stirrup; Lawrence was attended by Sultan Ján, and Mackenzie by Abdul Ghyas, a cousin of the Sirdar.

Said Sultan Ján to Lawrence as they entered the twilight of the Pass: "If any of those scoundrels come too close to us, use your sword."

"Rely upon it, I will!" answered the Irishman as his horse crashed through ice into the stream.

The sound of that great going came back to them as they rode; and before long there came also the opening chorus of jezails. Pottinger commented sternly on a phenomenon quite out of keeping with the morning's promises; and Akbar, cursing those devils of Ghilzais, begged his friends to halt with Abdul Ghyas, while he and Sultan Ján rode forward to check the fanatics—if they could.

Apparently they failed, for the chorus increased rather; and after half an hour's halt the party moved on. Mackenzie now rode beside Pottinger on the same good horse that had carried his friend from Charikar; and as they went forward Pottinger said with quiet emphasis: "Mackenzie, *remember*, if I am killed, that I heard the Sirdar shout 'Slay them' in Pushtu, though he ordered them to stop firing in Persian, imagining that we should understand the last and not the first."

Mackenzie sighed. "God have mercy upon them all! It is going to be a gruesome business," he said.

A gruesome business they found it before many knife-blade corners had been turned; more and more so, as they neared the centre of the Pass, where the First Troop had so manfully stood their ground. Hitherto the bodies that hindered their progress had been mainly camp followers; but here, watched over by that spiked and lonely gun, their own dead lay in heaps; stripped already, most of them, by insatiate fanatics, who still thronged to the spot, rejoicing in their ghastly work.

It was a critical moment for three lightly guarded Feringhis to appear on the scene. At sight of them the Ghilzais shifted their attentions from the dead to the living, fiercely demanding that they be delivered up as sacrifices there and then. Infuriate with fanatical hate, they thrust themselves between the horses, brandishing knives red with blood.

"Look well, dogs of infidels!" they cried out—"Look well upon these carcasses around you. Soon you shall be even as these. *Yah-illah!* Many that came to Kabul for fruit have found the flavour too sharp for their stomachs! Why hinder us, brothers? *Kurbán! Kurbán!*"<sup>1</sup>

Hard for three men of equal spirit and temper not to

<sup>1</sup> A sacrifice.

silence jeers and threats with their own good swords. More than once their hands were at their hilts; yet the swords remained sheathed. To draw them would serve no purpose but to gratify anger at the cost of their own lives.

But so many and persistent were their assailants that Abdul Ghyas, honestly alarmed, bade them turn aside into a lesser gorge, and there take refuge behind rocks that formed a breastwork between them and that murderous crowd.

Here they remained a long while; hungry, thirsty, and frozen to the marrow. The gloaming deepened almost to darkness, and snow began to fall; aimlessly at first, in large white flakes that speedily thickened to a blinding storm. Akbar did not return. But at last came Sultan Ján, profuse in apology for the fury of the hill-people, himself bringing them a half-frozen Irishwoman, rescued from a Ghilzai fiend, who would have cut off her fingers to get at her rings. Stupefied as she was with fear and cold, they hoisted her up behind Mackenzie, tied the sleeves of a sheepskin coat about her neck, and bade her cling on for dear life.

Sultan Ján reported the Pass almost empty, but for those who would never leave it again; and they set out at a foot's pace through the gathering dusk. Driven snowflakes, that froze as they fell, stung their faces, adding misery to misery. A little way on they encountered two of Akbar's followers, bringing them, by his command, a wounded private of the 44th, and little Hugh Boyd, whose protector had been killed. Joyfully Lawrence took charge of the child and set him in front between his arms; while the wounded man, hoisted up behind him, clutched the saddle for support.

Then forward again through the dusk and the stinging

snowflakes, moody and silent all. The sights they saw and the cries of the wounded as they passed do not bear dwelling on. One only living thing they found unharmed, a small boy sitting dazed and half frozen beside his murdered mother. Mackenzie, recognizing the woman, bade one of the escort bring him the child, whom he set in front of his saddle, as Lawrence had set Hugh Boyd. The Irishwoman, astride behind him, clung like a limpet to his shoulders, licking up the snowflakes as they fell, and wailing at intervals: "Och, Captain *dear*, for the love o' God get me some wather!" Between her and the child, Mackenzie had his hands full, and Lawrence, following behind, noted with half-amused approval his anxiety to prevent the woman's petticoats from slipping up, by reason of her awkward position.

So, through the deepening dark and cold, their horses stumbled forward. Pottinger, cruelly exhausted with the pain and inflammation of his wound, could by now scarcely cling on to the saddle; and all three breathed a prayer of thankfulness when the cliffs drew away and their escort swerved sharply to the right.

Avoiding Elphinstone's most miserable encampment, they came at length to Khurd Kabul fort. But the owner being absent, they were denied admittance, and must struggle another two miles. Here in a smaller fort they at last found shelter and some measure of warmth—thirty-five of them, guards and all crowded into one windowless inner room. A roaring fire in the midst atoned for minor miseries; and sheep's-tail broth, with cakes of half-baked bread, were as nectar and ambrosia to men who had ridden fasting for nearly twelve hours.

To escape the acrid smoke that tormented their eyes they lay down at once in a circle, feet to the fire; Hugh Boyd nestling under Lawrence's cloak, "little Stoker"

under Mackenzie's and Cæsar, a desperately weary dog, sharing, as usual, his master's poshteen. Heart-broken and exhausted they soon fell asleep, not without anxious thoughts and prayers for those others, unsheltered, unfed, unwarmed, snowed upon mercilessly all night long.

Those others—huddled and heaped in the snow some two miles off—had need indeed of pity and of prayer, of fortitude, more than human, to carry them through the horrors of such a night following upon such a day.

The two first bivouacs in the snow were almost as nothing compared with this one on the Khurd Kabul plateau, with the snow for coverlet and winding sheet. To-night nearly all that were left of Elphinstone's regiments lay down fasting, not to sleep, but to endure, until the morning. For the ladies and children a few frozen eggs were found, and some bottles of wine, frozen also to the consistency of honey. For them and the wounded three small tents were pitched; and in one of these—where thirty men and women had packed themselves close—John Sturt lay dying.

All through that night of horror his young wife sat up beside him. What little could be done to allay the agony he suffered she did, with steady hands, brave and controlled, a worthy daughter of "Fighting Bob." Even within the tent snow lay thick, since none had had sufficient energy to clear it away. But once more the ayah and the bedding had survived; and the last gave some little comfort to the wounded man who had laid down his life for his friend—to no purpose; for Thain was safe after all.

Lady Sale crouched near him, close-buttoned in her poshteen; and at intervals his devoted comrades, Mein and Eyre, went to and fro through the camp seeking fire to



melt a cupful of snow that might assuage his intolerable thirst.

"It is only marvellous," wrote Vincent Eyre, "that any should have survived that fearful night!"

Yet delicate women survived it, and young children and infants who had scarcely yet caught hold on life. Sturt, the beloved husband, the untiring officer, only survived it to die in the first hours of daylight, leaving to his wife for consolation, the gift of gifts, and the memory of his heroic devotion to duty and to his friend.

Scores of others went upon their long journey that night; and many who woke stiff and frozen, looked enviously upon the dead. For them no more horror of snow, starvation, and pursuing fiends; but for those that remained, what limit to suffering—what hope of relief?

Not until morning was it fully known how few were those that remained. The 44th—six hundred strong at starting—now mustered barely two hundred and fifty men. The Cavalry and Irregular Horse were reduced from more than nine hundred to less than three, and the four Native Infantry Regiments—that on the 6th had numbered two thousand five hundred—now boasted barely a hundred and thirty men apiece. Thus in three days—by slaughter, by frost, by starvation, and desertion—Elphinstone's fighting force had dwindled from four thousand five hundred to less than a thousand; and of these more than a third were wounded, frost-bitten, totally unfit for action. Truly Mahomed Akbar had done his work well!

The first gleam of morning was the sign for confused stirrings among the camp-followers and a general stampede ahead. With them to-day went three-fourths of the sepoy, staying neither for bugle call, orders, or any attempt at formation. The movement was infectious; and soon a fragmentary advanced guard, with the women and

children, were well under way, regardless of the fact that Elphinstone had not meant to start till ten o'clock, and had already sent Skinner to interview Mahomed Akbar at the Khurd Kabul fort.

Here Skinner found, not only the Sirdar, but Sultan Ján's party, who had ridden back early to the larger fort. On either side of Akbar sat Pottinger and Lawrence, and it was clear from their faces that a matter of some importance was under discussion. After greetings, Lawrence spoke of the Sirdar's distress at the plight of the English ladies and children. Their own troops being now powerless to protect them, he had just proposed that all the married families and the wounded be at once made over to him; in which case he would hold himself responsible for their safety, and would afterwards forward them, under escort, to Jalálabad.

The proposition was a startling one, especially in the face of Akbar's earlier efforts to secure the British women and children. Yet their imminent peril was undeniable, and their plight—as pictured by Vincent Eyre—pitiful beyond words. "Up to this time they had scarcely tasted a meal since leaving Kabul. Some had infants a few days old at the breast. . . . others were far advanced in pregnancy. . . . Yet most had been without shelter, and—with the exception of Lady Macnaghten and Mrs. Trevor—had nothing in the world left but the clothes on their backs. . . . The offer of Mahomed Akbar was consequently their only chance of preservation."

So thought Lawrence and Pottinger, though none distrusted the Sirdar more deeply than they two; and Skinner, it appeared, had come to make the same proposal in the name of the General, who hoped "that such a mark of trust would elicit a corresponding feeling in Akbar Khan."

Trust or no trust, Akbar was as willing as Barkiss; but Skinner, drawing Lawrence aside, whispered: "I believe they have all marched!" Here was a dilemma, though not without remedy. Skinner must return and stop them, must also impress on the General that if the troops would halt that day, food and fuel would be theirs before night.

This last Pottinger and Lawrence fervently hoped he would have wisdom enough to refuse; but Elphinstone—broken with pain and shame—was in a mood to snatch at straws. Thain and young Melville of the 54th were despatched to check the fleeing crowd and bring them back to a camping ground, dismally strewn with their unburied dead.

That fiat roused broken-spirited men almost to open mutiny, and thenceforward the native troops—who had so far behaved remarkably well—deserted in numbers, perceiving too plainly the significance of these pernicious delays. Again, as on the 7th, Shelton denounced and thundered, without result. The magic words "food and fuel" served Akbar's purpose well.

What those ten Englishwomen felt on hearing their own destination was known to themselves alone. Lady Sale and her daughter—too heart-broken to care what befell them—mechanically obeyed; and all were convinced at parting that they would never meet again.

It was quite a cavalcade, and that a sad one, which set out at noon for Khurd Kabul fort. With those unhappy Englishwomen and twenty-two children went five husbands—Boyd, Anderson, Eyre, Waller, and Conductor Riley; also two wounded bachelors, Troup and Mein, as defenders of the widows, and those whose husbands were at Jalálabad. Slowly, silently, and by a circuitous route they made their way to the fort. There Akbar received them with all the courtesy of a medieval knight; bidding Lawrence explain

to Lady Macnaghten that she and her companions were his "honoured guests," that they should lack nothing he could give them, and should, on the first opportunity, be safely escorted to Jalálabad. Consoling words for those who could credit them—and they were few. But whatever the future might bring, it was no small matter—after three days of hunger, thirst, and suffering unspeakable—to be assured for the moment of warmth, shelter, and food, however rough; no small matter for Mrs. Boyd to hold in her arms the son she had mourned as dead.

Three windowless rooms, fourteen feet by ten, had been cleared out for them. Here fires crackled cheerfully, though smoke burned their throats and blinded their eyes. Here they were served with a mess of mutton bones and greasy rice; and here, stretched on the unclean mud floor of their hovels, they lay thinking anxiously of those they had left; seeing again, hearing again the sights and sounds of those awful three days, till sleep fell like a curtain, obliterating all.

## IX

To those they had left came neither fuel nor food; but only another night of anguish and starvation, that accomplished to the full its deadly work. More merciful by far had Akbar swooped down upon that helpless mob and butchered them while they slept. But in the heart of an Afghan mercy has no place; and there were other considerations also. His own and his father's family were in the hands of the British Government; wherefore, lest he endanger their safety, his part must be ostensibly to check, yet secretly to incite the fanatical fury of the tribes.

Dawn brought a gleam of sunshine—the first for two days; brought also the same mad onrush of followers, whose numbers neither slaughter nor frost nor starvation seemed appreciably to reduce. With them again went more than half the sepoy; their frost-bitten hands—raw, as if severely scalded—no longer able to hold a musket, much less pull a trigger; their one active sensation dread of being left in the rear.

That inhuman delay in the snow had paralyzed, mentally and bodily, even the strongest men; and the European soldiers, though few, were now almost the only effectives of Elphinstone's force—if force that could be called which had neither cohesion nor discipline; but only dogged British courage, which was not daunted yet by any means. If Akbar could be believed, there would be

no more pursuing Afghans. Hostilities would cease. Apparently he was believed by the military authorities, who, with most strange perversity, forbade their men to fire on the tribes.

Yet scarcely had the rear guard marched, when there began a wholesale butchery of the sick and wounded; while a strong party of horsemen charged down on the troops themselves. These were the 37th and 54th N.I.—not three hundred in all—with the Shah's 2nd Cavalry, who were promptly ordered to execute a countercharge. They obeyed at a hand gallop; and the officers of both regiments cheered them as they went.

Then, of a sudden, the cheers died on their lips. For the troopers, on reaching the Ghilzais, swerved smartly, flung up their swords, with a great shout, and showed a front against that decimated rear guard that looked for support to them alone.

It was dramatically done; brutally done. But the troopers were young; they could see no gain in flinging away their lives at command; and four such days and nights might well have demoralized better men. As for the deserted infantry, they could only face about and make the best of their way along the broken, uphill track toward the tremendous passes of the Huft Kotal, or Seven Hills.

Not far behind them Mahomed Akbar followed still, pitiless as a tiger on the heels of his prey. His "guests" and hostages he had exhorted to take another day's rest before coming on. But he himself must accompany the force; nominally to control, actually to applaud, the merciless butchery afoot.

To-day a rocky gorge two miles beyond Khurd Kabul was the appointed spot; a gorge in parts scarcely ten feet wide; and the advance—tramping doggedly through

the snow—saw, from afar, scurrying figures and peaked head-dresses gathering thick and thicker on the heights. Remembering Khurd Kabul, the bravest must have flinched as the road narrowed and mere rocks became cliffs—cliffs, illumined at their coming with the red flowers of death.

This insignificant pass was not a hundred yards long; and had they been unencumbered some small chance of retaliation had been theirs. But camp-followers clogged their every step; surging wildly this way and that, as bullets rained in front or in the rear. Soon more sepoy swelled their number. Panic-stricken, desperate, hundreds of men who had once been soldiers flung away their weapons and fled for dear life into the jaws of death. Again, as in the Khurd Kabul, the Ghilzais, having trapped them, swooped down with knives and murderous yells till the gorge was choked with living, dying, and dead.

Before that indiscriminate slaughter, the advanced guard had cleared the Pass and pushed on five miles to Kabar-i-Jabar, where they halted for the rear. More than an hour they waited, while camp-followers straggled in. Then, at long last, came a handful of wounded officers: and those who had waited knew that there was now no rear guard, no particle of baggage, no native army any more. They alone—some two hundred and fifty British soldiers, a hundred and fifty troopers, and fifty British gunners with their twelve-pounder—represented the entire Kabul force.

Yet, in spite of wholesale massacre, the camp-followers still numbered more than three thousand—a ghastly rabble, sepoy and servants, tangled up with unloaded baggage cattle, to whose level they were almost reduced by frost, starvation, and fear. In five days they had

crawled a bare twenty miles, and there remained forty more to cover before they could reach comparatively open country. Unhampered, they could have achieved the distance in two forced marches. But they were not unhampered—

The word was given to close up and march on, when Skinner reported a party of horsemen approaching—Akbar without a doubt. Having looked down upon that scene of butchery unmoved, he now waxed solicitous over the fragments that remained.

“Go, Skinner,” said Elphinstone, “and ask him *why* we are again attacked after a treaty has been signed, extra hostages given, and our safety guaranteed.”

Duly escorted, Skinner rode off. His mission proved futile. The Sirdar, having given the thumbscrew an extra turn, had a fresh proposal to make:—safe escort to Peshawur if all would lay down their arms, the officers only retaining their swords. Unless they came to him unarmed, he explained plausibly, his own followers would fear treachery, and trouble would arise. In parenthesis, he deeply regretted the rough handling of the troops by “dogs of Ghilzais,” impossible to control.

In such straits, and from such as Akbar, the General could scarcely have expected better terms; but though he had drunk deep of the cup of shame, this final indignity stuck in his throat. The Sirdar’s offer was refused, and the troops resumed their fearful march.

Down the steep and rocky descent from this highest point of the Huft Kotal, they dropped two thousand feet to the valley of Tazín; and all through the long nullah that leads to the valley, it was Khurd Kabul over again:—the onrush of camp-followers, the broken ranks, the carnage of knife and bullet. A handful of the 44th, under Shelton, brought up the rear; and their resolute



repulse of pursuing hordes proved, for a time, the salvation of all.

Faint and desperately weary; broken in body, but not yet in spirit, they emerged at last into the blessed open. So far their dead had been mainly camp-followers, sepoy and soldiers; but to-day they reckoned fifteen officers killed and wounded in that grim march from Khurd Kabul to Tazín.

Here they flung themselves down pell-mell upon the camping ground; thankful for respite, however brief, from the eternal tramp, tramp between cliffs that thundered and lightened, the eternal babel of yells, curses, and groans. Still close behind followed Akbar and his men, who took shelter in a fort higher up to keep watch over the movements of their prey.

Elphinstone, with a touch of his incurable vacillation, again despatched Skinner on a fruitless quest for "terms"; a quest that evoked the same proposal as at Kabar-i-Jabar. Even now—though their own fate was obviously a matter of hours—Elphinstone repeated that he could not so dishonour himself and his men: a gallant-sounding reply; robbed of its effect, unhappily, by all that had gone before. It is probable, also, that the Sirdar was, for the first time, quite sincere. "The few survivors," wrote Lawrence afterwards, "were no longer a source of dread; while their preservation might prove useful for his ulterior purposes. . . . The General and Shelton . . . had abandoned their post, their stores and treasure, when they had a well-equipped army to defend them; had allowed some eight thousand camp-followers to be butchered and their fighting men to be reduced to four hundred—it was surely too late *then* to talk of honour!"

They did talk of it nevertheless; and possibly the mere word helped to uphold them in their dark hour. Shelton

—with an energy that, a little earlier, might have retrieved all—insisted on a rapid night march to Jagdalak, a matter of twenty-two miles. Without food or shelter, what use to halt at Tázín? The Jagdalak Pass—though shorter and less stupendous than the Khurd Kabul—is the strongest and most dangerous of the four. Let them only steal a march on Akbar, clear that last barrier, and there was still a reasonable hope that most of them might reach Jalálabad.

The air was keen but still; the sky clear; and at sunset there would be a full moon. Everything favoured one desperate bid for safety. They had entered the valley at four o'clock; they would march at seven; giving out, as a blind, that they merely intended pushing on to Seh Baba for the night.

With what grief to the artillery men, only those know who have loved and served a gun—it was decided that the twelve-pounder must be spiked and left behind. To drag it any farther would merely entail useless delay. Latterly Captain Nicholl and his mounted gunners had been acting as dragoons; and, throughout the march, as throughout the siege, this dwindling band of heroes had, by their cheerfulness, daring, and fortitude, won the admiration of all, including the Afghans themselves. Now their last gun must go; and at seven, the four hundred and fifty, that were now little more than three hundred, set out on their bold attempt to march twenty-two miles by dawn.

Most of them had eaten nothing since they left Khurd Kabul that morning, and few ate anything before starting; though there still remained to them some biscuits, some odds and ends of regimental stores, a few frozen bottles of wine. But to-night the new wine of hope upheld them. They resolved to keep their move secret from the camp-followers, many of whom had fallen dead asleep. No

knowing what they might achieve, could they only get a clear start of these, their eternal stumbling-block and curse. But though they moved off swiftly and quietly, the crowd too soon discovered what was afoot; and all that could drag themselves along, came swarming after that unhappy few, for whom speed was the sole chance of salvation—

Dawn found the advance, not at Jagdalak, but at Katta Sung, faint with hunger, and half mad with thirst. Here they halted two hours, in the bitter cold, for the rear guard to come up; then on again, always on, with leaden limbs and yet more leaden hearts, that now ached for their own misery and now burned with shame for dishonour brought upon their country and their country's arms. Of that country itself—of its fields and woods, its untroubled homes, where Afghan yells, Afghan knives and jezails were utterly unknown—few dared to think; so little likely did it seem that any among them would live to see England again.

Brief respite, at starting, from cliffs and jezails, but as they neared Jagdalak the heights closed in on them; a rolling fire from above lined the road with dead and dying; and fighting, always fighting, they came at last into the valley. But the formidable Pass had still to be faced; and Akbar—taking a short cut across the hills—had arrived before them.

It was three in the afternoon when Elphinstone's advance entered Jagdalak Valley—twenty mounted officers and half a dozen leg-weary men. Still hard beset by sharpshooters, they crowned a height by the roadside, near some ruined walls, and Elphinstone called on his officers to "show a front." This they did, all twenty in line; and at once a bullet took Grant in the jaw, smashing the bone.

Johnson, who rode next him, helped him to the ground and propped him against the wall, where Dr. Brydon, of the 6th Shah's, promptly dressed the wound.

"*You'll* fight again, Grant," said he, encouragingly. "Hullo! What's up in the valley?"

He might well ask, for cheer upon cheer broke spontaneously from that line of British officers; and the heartening sound smote strangely on ears surfeited with groans and curses, yells and the clamour of firearms. They were cheering Shelton and his bull-dogs, who had just emerged into the open, still mercilessly beset, still gallantly contesting every step of the way. Such flashes of individual valour, however ineffectual, lent at least a measure of dignity, if not glory, to that unheroic retreat.

Joined by the rear guard, all that remained of them took shelter behind the ruins on the hill, and there flung themselves down, exhausted beyond thought or speech, by thirty hours of incessant marching, incessant fighting, incessant torment of hunger and thirst.

But little of rest was theirs, and less of refreshment within those ruined walls. Insatiable Ghilzais lost no time in occupying a couple of hills that completely commanded the position. Thence, for the inside of an hour, they contented themselves watching the doings of those below, as a cat watches a half-stunned mouse.

By this time the officers relatively outnumbered the men; not that they had fared better in any respect, but that they were better mounted, more provident, more resourceful. They were braced and upheld, also, by the knowledge that all hung upon their own exertions, their own unflinching fortitude; in other words, **on** the dominion of brain and spirit over matter which is **most** triumphantly proven by just such terrible tests of endurance. While

scores of the rank and file had fallen by the way for sheer lack of common grit and common prudence, the officers of the Kabul force had fallen only by compulsion of bullet or sword. Even the General—old, crippled, wounded, with the added weight of shame and misery on his heart—had survived, as by miracle, those four days and nights in the snow; and to-day, for all his exhaustion, his first concern was to relieve the misery of his men.

Three half-starved bullocks were found, killed, and ravenously devoured, even before the flesh was cold. But their thirst no man could quench. Snow still lay in places on the ground; and although they scooped it up greedily, it brought no alleviation, rather the reverse. Not a hundred and fifty paces from the walls ran a stream of clear water; but to venture near it was to court certain death. By some means they must endure; though the limit of endurance seemed long past.

The officers, who had still some bottles of wine, dined thankfully on portions of a fat Arab charger, grilling slices over brushwood fires and seasoning them with rock-salt. A stray camp-follower, rich in the possession of a little flour, busied himself with making chupattis and hawking them for twelve rupees apiece.

Round one of those brushwood fires sat three officers of the 6th: Dr. Brydon, James Marshall, and young Bird—a handsome boy, still full of life and spirits. During the meal Marshall dropped their precious morsel of rock-salt. It vanished in the snow, and he frowned distressfully—not merely at the loss.

“A bad omen, that,” he murmured, “spilling the salt!”

The others laughed at him. In straits so tragical men must laugh or go mad. But they remembered the incident afterwards—without laughter.

The barbarous picnic had been enlivened by stray shots, from which the enclosure afforded small shelter; and now came word of approaching horsemen—Akbar again. They brought a message that the Sirdar wished to speak with Skinner; and he, pressed by Elphinstone, chivalrously consented to go; though, in his heart, he foresaw a repetition of *Kabar-i-Jabar*—the plausible excuses, the renewed demands.

To him Akbar's tactics had long since been revealed in their true colours. For two days the force had been kept close to Kabul because the people would not follow on till they had glutted themselves with plunder and destruction. For five nights he had contrived to keep the troops at high altitudes, where frost and snow could be trusted to do his work for him, while he posed as saviour and defender of the distressed. Finally, by specious delays, he had arranged to have a fresh enemy ready to oppose them in every pass, while he steadily strengthened his hand by securing fresh hostages and prisoners of rank. Thus, under the sacred name of vengeance, he had violated every principle of good faith with an audacity exceeding even the common bounds of Afghan villainy. There was little of hope in the heart of James Skinner as he rode away.

Those he left behind him could not choose but cling to their last straw, and in the belief that a conference implied temporary truce, they flung themselves down to sleep. But the eagle-eyed enemy on the hills had their own ideas on the subject. Deliberately they chose that moment of utter prostration to pour volley upon volley into the huddled throng.

Instantly all was hideous confusion; a great shouting, a crazy rushing hither and thither to gain shelter from a sky that rained bullets. Twenty British soldiers volun-

teered to charge the Afghans from the heights, and Marshall offered to lead them. Exhausted though they were, their determined uprush was a sight to stir the blood, and their tormentors fled like sheep. Unhappily a chance bullet struck their leader, who fell mortally hurt. But there was life in him yet, and two of them carried him back to camp while the rest completed their task. Could they have held the hill respite had been won; but Elphinstone, not daring to divide his puny force, sounded the recall; and again implacable Ghilzais crept back to worry and destroy.

At five Skinner returned, his anticipations fulfilled. It was the General that Akbar now desired to see. He had received, or intercepted, a note from Sale refusing to evacuate Jalálabad. He wished the order to be repeated, while demanding Shelton and Johnson as hostages for Sale's compliance.

No good news this, and Elphinstone's sad heart sank within him. At Tazín he had received a note in cypher from John Conolly warning him that Akbar had left Kabul with the avowed resolve of getting into his hands the General and all the married families; but the broken old man had no more strength left in him to fight against fate. Refusal does not seem to have occurred to him, or even to Shelton, which is passing strange. There and then the three rode off, leaving Skinner in political charge, Anquetil in temporary command: and those that looked after them had no word of cheer for each other, knowing all too well how slender was the chance of their return.

## X

NIGHT fell, and they had not returned. Firing from above grew more fitful, and under cover of darkness a little water could be procured. Night passed—with short snatches of sleep, with interludes of sniping, and repressed moans of the wounded, more heart-rending than open lament. The moon rode high and higher, softening and glorifying the harsh face of the valley, transforming to a Dureresque ghastliness the scene within that Jagdalak enclosure, sacred to the memory of many brave men.

There were not now a hundred and fifty of the 44th, Nicholl had fifteen dismounted gunners, and the 5th Light Cavalry could boast twenty-five men. For the shepherding of this handful there still remained some fifty officers of all regiments, wounded and otherwise. Marshall still lived. Brydon had dressed his wound as well as might be and lay beside him all night. Moon-set gave place to a clear sunrise, flecked with feathers of scarlet cloud; and very early Thain rode out with Skinner, in hope of meeting some messenger from the Sirdar or the General.

They met instead a Ghilzai horseman, who glanced at Thain with insolent unconcern. Then, riding straight up to Skinner, he whipped out a pistol, shot him through the face, and galloped off. Thain supported his friend back to the enclosure, fierce anger and pain in his heart, emotions shared by every officer and man within the walls.



For the wound was serious, probably mortal, and Jim Skinner—a man of rare talent, nobility, and charm—was loved as few men have the gift to be loved by their fellows.

His wound, the lack of any word from Elphinstone, and the renewal of volleys from the hill brought even the most resolute hearts near to despair. Since the hill could not be held there was nothing for it but the exhausting and costly repetition of yesterday's manœuvre. Better far to be shot fighting than slaughtered like penned cattle. From dawn to noon charge followed charge with splendid effect. The few dismounted gunners joined the ranks of the 44th, and "gallantly supported on foot their deathless reputation." Always at their coming the Ghilzais fled; always, in interludes of exhaustion, they returned and rained bullets into the close-packed crowd.

And as the numbers below thinned, the numbers above increased.

The sun, riding golden-bright through an unclouded heaven, reached his zenith, looked down upon their anguish, and passed unconcerned upon his way. By that time the broken walls were completely surrounded. Every vantage ground above them thundered and lightened unceasingly: and still no word from the General; no hope of respite; little or no food.

For the men some ponies had been killed and served out raw. The officers eat grilled camels' flesh, hard and nauseous. For a few mouthfuls of water the boldest risked their lives. At three o'clock Skinner died. Anxiety deepened to anguish; and the question arose:—if no word came by sunset must they remain another night? Anquetil consulted his staff and their decision was unanimous. Unless news arrived, they would march after dark and make the best of their way to Jalálabad—a matter of fifty miles off.

The sun vanished early behind a threatening bank of cloud. Twilight deepened, and snow began to fall. Still no messenger appeared, and the inference was plain:—their General and Brigadier had been lured away on false pretences and were not permitted to return.

The order was issued: "Fall in at seven." So sudden a move might possibly secure them one unmolested march. But everything hung on speed; and the helpless crew of camp-followers clung to them still.

The 44th fell in—scarce a hundred of them—with Captain Souter in command. Anxious to save the regimental colours, he had torn one from its pole and wrapped it round his body beneath his poshteen. The Quartermaster Sergeant took the other; and so they moved off amid confusion indescribable; amid partings that wrenched the hearts out of men's bodies and pitiful entreaties from the wounded, who must needs remain to be butchered at dawn.

Brydon lifted Marshall on to his charger and rode beside him, leading the animal his friend was too weak to guide. Blair, Bott, and two other wounded officers of the 5th Cavalry were packed into camel panniers painfully enough; but a man would endure anything to escape from that human slaughter-house, where already they had lingered too long. The few remaining gunners and troopers had been told off for the advance. But, in the darkness and confusion, the 44th—supposing them gone—marched first. Before the rest could close up with them, the Ghilzais had discovered the move and swooped, yelling, upon their prey.

Clouds hid the moon, and darkness added its own horror to the pandemonium of that last march. Brydon—forcing his way through the press, found himself surrounded, pulled off his horse and felled by a blow on the head that must have killed him, but for an old copy of

*Blackwood's Magazine*, thrust inside his forage cap at starting, to wile away evening hours in camp. There had been no evening hours to wile away; but the world-famous magazine did him a better service on that night of January the 12th.

Half stunned, he managed to rise on one knee and meet the second blow with his own blade. His assailant bolted one way and Brydon another—minus horse, cap, magazine, and one shoe. Marshall—separated from him in the scrimmage—he never saw again.

Through that seething mass of humanity he forced his way unharmed; and soon realized that here, at last, was the fearsome Jagdalak Pass. Pushing on and up toward the summit, he became suddenly aware of a check ahead, that forced men and horses backward and increased tenfold the congestion, the terror, the hand to hand struggle for life. For, as those in front surged backward, pursuing fiends pressed forward, and demoralization was complete.

Reason enough for that strange behaviour of the advance:—there, at the summit, where the way was narrowest, the Ghilzais had set up a barrier, stiffened with prickly branches of the holly oak. Against that barrier officers, on spent horses, charged in vain. Men, no less spent, tried to scramble over it, only to fall back with torn hands and despairing hearts.

Here the Ghilzais had planned to enjoy their crowning orgie; but through ignorance of the night march, they were not ready to greet their victims. Shots and shouts, the inarticulate roar as of a frozen torrent let loose, soon brought them swarming to the spot. No gleam of pity in their hearts, but only fanatical lust of slaughter, as they coolly slanted their matchlocks, and at every volley despatched hundreds of unresisting infidels to hell.

Here, at this Jagdalak barrier, death struck at the

officers as never yet. Here fell Anquetil, struggling, even at the last, to maintain some shred of order. Here Chambers fell, and Thain, Harcourt, and Marshall. Blair, Bazett, and Bott, flung from their panniers, were mercilessly cut down. Here, too, fell Captain Nicholl and his little band of invincibles; and over their unwitting bodies the tide of massacre rolled on.

High upon the cliffs, darkness and light came in flashes; down in depths as of hell, "Death swung a terrible scythe." Horses, maddened by whip and spur, charged forward over dead and living, hurled themselves vainly at that stubborn barrier. And still the nightmare held:—the clash and clamour, the withering volleys and—dominating all—the demoniac yells of Ghilzais rejoicing in their work.

How long it lasted none who survived could tell. After endless ages, came a crash and a shout of exultation—a corner of the barrier was down. A horse and man were through; another and another. Crash again—the gap widened; and in one wild scrimmage those that were left pushed their way through, and on—down, down towards the river——

At that Jagdalak barrier the Kabul force practically ceased to be. Some thirty officers, with fifty infantry, six gunners and fifteen troopers, alone remained of an army that seven days earlier had marched out of Kabul well equipped, and strong enough "in the hands of a Nott or a Napier to have swept its discomfited foes in triumph before the colours of England."

No triumph here, nor any colours, save the flag still hid under Souter's coat. Yet did the unshaken courage of that last remnant shed, as it were, a sunset glory over the most inglorious and disastrous week experienced by British troops since Clive set foot in India.

Onward was still the word, and for a blessed breathing space they were unmolested. The Ghilzais were too well occupied, plundering the dead, to be zealous in pursuit of the living. But soon watch-fires, signalling their approach, spread, swift as meteors from hill to hill; and always, at their coming, jezails were ready slanted to greet them with a *feu-de-joie*. Three miles on, a second barrier crossed their path. No pandemonium now: they were too few. But though few, they were in no mood to lay down their bodies as the street for them that walk over; and attempts to overwhelm them were gallantly resisted—not without loss. They had drunk deep of death and horror in that awful week; and now—what mattered a few lives more or less? The unbroken spirit was all.

From the river below—when they reached it—a dozen or so of the better mounted officers and half a dozen of the more vigorous men pushed on ahead and lost all touch with the still cumbersome main body. With them went Bellew and Hopkins of the 6th, Steer of the 44th, and Dr. Brydon—mounted again, now, on the pony of a dead saddler, who, in falling, had carried away the near stirrup. The progress of the rest, under Griffiths, was still impeded by the straggling crowd and the solicitude of British soldiers for their wounded comrades, whom nothing would induce them to desert. Impossible, so handicapped, to make more than two miles an hour; but even so, God helping them, they would arrive somewhere, sometime, before their strength gave out.

On then, doggedly on—till the sun once more looked down over the hills to see how they fared—and lo, they had reached the tableland of Gandamak with its groups of cypresses and forest-trees, its magnificent boundary-wall of snow-peaks, all aflush in the dawn.

Open country at last, God be praised! Though hunger

held and thirst tormented, and their limbs were heavy with a monstrous fatigue, at last they had cleared those four terrible desiles that were now four charnel-houses of a massacred army.

Here the whole face of the land had a kindlier aspect. Snow had been left behind with the passes; and the morning air, though keen, blew sweet and fresh from the far hills. Not even physical misery—which was overwhelming—could dull the sensible relief to eye and mind of wider spaces, gentler outlines, after prolonged obsession of the terrific both in nature and man.

Daylight revealed their insignificance. There were left of them, twenty officers, six gunners, and fifty-two men of the 44th. They had made twenty-five miles that night, and yet another twenty-five divided them from their goal. But though Nature showed a kindlier face, the terrific inhuman form was with them still. Too soon the hillsides were alive with dark familiar figures, the plain between with horsemen and the gleam of swords. Every hut in the country had sent forth its menfolk to plunder and destroy.

Further progress was impossible. Briefly Griffiths gave the order to occupy a defensive position above the road and hold it to the last extremity.

There were but twenty swords among them, and twenty muskets, with two rounds of ammunition for each. But though all else was lacking, courage was not. Led by the officers, they crowned that height and held it—to the amazement of Afghans who had looked for sport, not warfare, from that exhausted few.

Came at length a party of horsemen from a neighbouring chief, who proffered overtures with an irresistible air of good faith. Griffiths, taking one of Johnson's clerks for interpreter, rode down the hill to a fort near by; and

for a space there was respite from a struggle that could have but one end. Affairs began to look more hopeful; and, while Griffiths conferred, a party of Ghilzais, strolling up the hill, exchanged lively sallies with those they had come out to slay—so strange a mixture is the Afghan of brutality and good humour. But the said infidels—half crazy with hunger and thirst—were in no mood for amenities; and when certain Afghans, grown bolder, snatched at their muskets, respite was at an end.

Driven from the hill, the enemy swarmed back in overwhelming numbers; while Jezailchis from an opposite height picked off man after man, officer after officer, with unerring aim. But those who charged up the slope, eager for hand to hand slaughter, found a thicket of swords and bayonets to give them welcome; and it was Ghilzais, not infidels, who fell backward, writhing and cursing, one upon another. Again and again they returned; again and again they were repulsed. But at every charge the British soldiers fell—the officers fell; till every man of them was dead or wounded.

Then, and not till then, did the Ghilzais prevail.

In that last stand at Gandamak died eighteen officers and fifty men—the end indeed! And there was no Kabul army any more.

Yet—by some unaccountable caprice—four Englishmen were taken alive that day; three gunners—whose strength and prowess may well have made them seem superhuman—and Captain Souter, who probably owed his life to the strange garment seen beneath his open coat; the Ghilzais supposing him some Bahadur for whom a large ransom would be given. Griffiths and Blewitt also, being detained in the fort, were saved; and sent, in due time, to swell Akbar's tale of honoured guests.

Remained only the forward few who had flung aside impedimenta and pushed on, at all risks, that some might arrive to tell the tale.

What time the dead lay thick on that little hill at Gandamak, seven, out of the twelve, with a few British soldiers, were taking their ease in a grassy glen nearly ten miles on, among the last of the hills, wondering how it fared with those they had left behind. At Gandamak their party had divided, some preferring a lower road through the valley, others preferring the hills. All who went by the valley road had been killed at the first village; but so far this favoured ten had not met a living soul.

Reluctantly they roused themselves and mounted, for they had still fifteen miles to make on starved horses, that were gleaning meagre refreshment from the glen. They were in a milder region now, not more than three thousand feet up; and the road lay downhill all the way. Arrived at the small town of Fathiabad, all seemed quiet. No sign of horsemen or of the scurrying figures they had learnt to dread.

"I'll ride over to the village and reconnoitre," said Bellew, and soon returned with a cheerful countenance. The headman had promised to bring them bread—a magic word to starving men. They waited in high hopes; but there came neither the headman nor the promised food.

Bellew rode up again to the village, which was set on a hill; but returned this time with a countenance far from cheerful.

"I meant it for the best," said he. "But I'm afraid I've ruined you all. From the top I could see cavalry coming up on all sides. No doubt that devil of a headman put up a signal while he kept us waiting. We must keep close together; push on; and hope for the best."



They pushed on; but in the face of such news it was difficult to hope for the best.

After them sped the villagers, calling out cheerfully, "Return, Sahibán, return. No harm will come; we are your very good friends."

Tormented with the longing for rest and food, Bellew rode back to question them. Out flashed the deathly Afghan knives, and before he could strike a blow in defence he was hacked to pieces by his "very good friends."

The six that were left spurred their horses to a feeble canter; the soldiers ran, and Brydon used his stirrup with good effect—too late!

A volley sped after them as they went, and the cavalry charged down upon them, slashing right and left. But the British officers slashed back with a will, and their noble horses stood them in good stead. Young Bird was cut down, and Dr. Harper, and every single soldier. The rest sped on—five of them, thanking their stars.

Three were well mounted, and Brydon soon found himself alone with young Steer of the 44th, who sat doubled up in his saddle, almost shaken off by every stumbling step of the horse that bled at the mouth and nostrils.

"Come on, Steer, we'll manage it yet," Brydon urged encouragingly. But the boy shook his head. "No use, Doctor. We're played out, both of us. You go on. I'll lie up in one of those caves over there till night and take my chance of getting on then."

In vain Brydon emphasized the madness of delay. Steer was past arguing. So long as he might lie down even for an hour he cared not what became of him. And Brydon reluctantly rode on alone into the landscape; a strange, yet tragic figure, hatless, weaponless, save for his sword; his unshod foot thrust into the only stirrup of his

wooden native saddle, himself half stupefied with fatigue and misery, doubtful exceedingly whether his poor beast could drag him over the last remaining miles.

With an effort he looked up, hoping for a sight of mud-walled towers on the far horizon. Instead, he saw twenty horsemen ahead, picking up large stones for greeting.

To a desperate man all things are possible. Brydon seized the reins in his teeth, kicked his pony into a gallop, and charged through those astounded sons of the Prophet, using his sword so skilfully that their knives could do him no hurt. A few stones struck him and his terrified animal, whose laboured breathing forced him to draw rein. The Afghans, freakish always, did not give chase, and the jaded pair struggled on.

Now, far and faint along the barren valley, showed the walls and towers that were for him as the gate of Paradise. But he had not run the last gauntlet yet, by any means.

A second body of horsemen loomed nearer. Nothing for it but to charge again; the which he managed by spurring the unhappy pony with the point of his sword. Again they were stoned and cut at, with no serious effect save that a large stone broke his sword, leaving a jagged six inches in the hilt; and even as he won clear of them a man on a mound fired close down on him, wounding his pony in the loin. The animal staggered a moment, then lurched bravely on. Brydon had scarcely the heart to force him; but the walls, that spelled safety, showed clearer almost at every stride.

More men ahead! The sight of them almost broke his nerve; but by their scarlet coats he supposed them a patrol of cavalry from the town. No such good fortune; they were Afghans again—and one of them was leading Collyer's horse. Those three, then, had gone the way of

the rest, and he alone remained—the last miserable fragment of an army.

All the more need that by some means he should win through; and now, by swerving aside, he succeeded in passing the troopers before they realized that the dishevelled figure was a Feringhi—a Sahib.

Then one of them turned. There was a shout, and a man made after him, cutting at him as he came.

Brydon, guarding with the broken sword, saw the last six inches knocked out of the hilt. The trooper's impetus carried him on; but swinging sharply, he rode at his man again.

As the knife descended, Brydon, unarmed and desperate, flung his hilt straight in the man's face. The Afghan swerved, and the blade that should have smitten an infidel to hell merely grazed his left hand. Dropping the reins, Brydon stopped to gather them in his right hand; and the man, imagining he sought a pistol, galloped off.

They were gone—all of them. He heard them clattering down the road. He was alone, wounded, yet safe; Jalálabad in sight. But the third encounter had proved the last straw. Quite suddenly his nerve went all to pieces. As his faithful pony stumbled along, he looked vaguely this way and that, starting at every shadow in his path. A great faintness came over him. Only by clutching the peak of the saddle could he manage to keep his seat. And always, in the midst of the dimness and new vague terror, another self, acutely aware, was wondering, wondering whether even now he would reach those blessed walls before he lost consciousness or his pony fell dead.

The walls—where were they? The horizon seemed to have slid miles away. He could not even see them now——

But there were men on those walls who had already seen him. Sale, Dennie, Havelock, Sinclair—all had levelled their field-glasses on that lonely tragical figure set in the midst of sterile spaces and barren hills; and as realization dawned on them the blood seemed to freeze in their veins.

Only a few days earlier they had heard how Akbar was inciting the chiefs in their neighbourhood to destroy the garrison at Jalálabad. Only one day earlier they had learnt for certain that Elphinstone's force had marched from Kabul under the safe conduct of that same Akbar Khan. What Sir Robert Sale felt at that moment who shall say? A few hoped obstinately; but the majority *knew*; and Colonel Dennie, with strange exactitude, prophesied the truth.

"You will see," said he solemnly. "Not a soul will reach here from Kabul except one man who will come to tell us the rest are destroyed."

So now, next morning, when they stood upon the ramparts looking out towards Gandamak, Dennie was the first to speak; and his words seemed the echo of an oracle.

"Didn't I tell you so? Here comes the messenger!"

BOOK V  
CAPTIVITY

"All strife and failure, all subjection, baffling, wrong, are instruments of life; the prophecies of its perfect ends. . . . Life is in that which we call failure, which we feel as loss, which throws us back upon ourselves. . . . It is in aspirations baffled, hopes destroyed, efforts that won no goal. . . ."—JAMES HINTON.

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"Follow after—we are waiting, by the trails that we lost,  
For the sound of many footsteps, for the tread of a host.  
Follow after—follow after—for the harvest is sown:  
By the bones about the wayside, ye shall come to your own!"  
KIPLING.

## I

ON that same January afternoon there trailed into the Jagdalak Valley a cavalcade of horses and camels, a few skeleton baggage animals, and straggling followers afoot. In the camel-panniers English women and children sat huddled together; the children pale and pinched, the women white-lipped and silent, with horror-haunted eyes. For seven days, that seemed more than seven years, they had endured the miseries of hunger and thirst, of rough progression and paralyzing cold, the mental strain of horror and anxiety beyond telling. And these last three marches, hard upon the heels of their massacred army, had fitly crowned the more active terror of those that went before.

"The corpses lay so thick," wrote Lady Sale, "that it was impossible to look away from them, as it required care to guide my horse so as not to tread upon the bodies." And worse even than the mangled dead were the mangled living; groups of them, at intervals, huddled together in stunned apathy or half-crazy despair.

At Tazin they found Melville of the 54th, severely wounded and a prisoner, left by Akbar to join his fellows as they passed through. On again next morning, haunted still by the mutilated bodies and the smell of blood, till sensitive nerves were blunted with a surfeit of horror. That night they halted near Seh Baba—another night in the snow; and on the 13th of January marched to Jagdalak through an aftermath of massacre more heartrending

than all. For now the white bodies of their own dead became more conspicuous, and officers were recognized, comrades of a happier day.

Within and around the Jagdalak enclosure the dead lay thick as autumn leaves, and there Lawrence recognized the body of James Skinner, "the high-minded soldier, the very impersonation of honour." Overcome with emotion, he turned to the Sirdar's servant at his elbow, demanding decent burial for that one man; and Musa Khan, impressed for the moment, bound himself with an oath—the only one he ever kept.

Once past that awful ruin, their active miseries were near an end. Up on the hillside they sighted Akbar's camp—a bivouac, save for three shabby tents; and thither they made their way.

"During the whole of these trying marches," wrote Lawrence afterwards, "I felt truly proud of my countrymen and women. All bore up so nobly and heroically against hunger, fatigue, cold, and other privations of no ordinary kind, as to call forth the admiration even of our Afghan guards."

A few more ragged tents were pitched for their reception, and great was their amazement to find here an addition to their party—Elphinstone, Shelton, and Johnson, treacherously detained, on pretence of negotiation, by Akbar Khan.

From Johnson they heard the tragic tale; the General was too heart-broken to speak of it, Shelton too irate.

They heard how Akbar, after luring them to his camp, had detained them for the night; how next morning Elphinstone's plea to return and share the danger with his troops had been met by the assurance that hostilities were suspended, and the Ghilzai chiefs coming in to make *salaam*. By bribery or coercion Akbar hoped to secure

their unmolested progress; but the Ghilzai chiefs had proved truculent, preferring Feringhi blood on their knives to Akbar's money in their pockets. The whole day had slipped by in fruitless "conferring." Elphinstone and Johnson had been allowed to write notes—that were never delivered; incessant firing from the hills had been plausibly explained away; and when at dusk Mahomed Shah announced that all had now been amicably arranged, it was found that the troops, for reasons of their own, had already marched.

Thus Johnson; scarcely less vexed at his own position than Shelton, who saw but one loophole of escape—a repetition by Elphinstone of his first order to evacuate Jalálabad. The unhappy General, half frantic with grief, was in no mood to urge another along the path of dishonourable surrender. But Shelton and Johnson were imperative; and he, in his misery, had almost yielded, when sounds of arrival interrupted the discussion, and Pottinger himself entered the tent.

With blunt decision he vetoed a proceeding no less dangerous than farcical; and Elphinstone's relief was obvious, though the immediate result of his refusal was unpleasant enough. Akbar, foiled in his scheme of wholesale evacuation, determined to hold fast that which he had gained to keep the balance true.

Next morning, therefore, they that had hoped to see Jalálabad before dark, found themselves instead shepherded westward toward the valley of Lughmán. Up an almost impracticable gorge—the wildest they had seen—their long-suffering animals scrambled and slid, riders clutching their horses' manes, lest they and the saddles should slip off together. Here was no ray of light, no vestige of life to cheer them, but at least they were free from the awful immanence of death.



Within five hours they had climbed a thousand feet to the summit of a lofty pass. Below and around them lay all the mountain-land of Afghanistan—a vision at once terrific and sublime. Even the heaviest snowfall known for thirty years could not altogether clothe those black and barren ranges. From gleaming valley and ridge dagger peaks sprang up, defiant, stabbing the blue. How should a land so fierce and pitiless breed other than fierce and pitiless men? It was as if Akbar had said in effect, to these his hapless guests: “Behold the harsh face of my country, and learn therefrom how much of mercy and consideration to expect from me and mine.”

Dusk found them near a small fort on the Panjshir River. But *kafirs* were not admitted even under the ægis of Akbar Khan, and there was nothing for it but another bivouac—the ninth and last. Elphinstone, Shelton, and Johnson—unduly favoured by the gods—dined on pillau and tea with Akbar, and slept luxuriously in a cowshed beside a blazing fire of southernwood. The remainder with saddles and bundles for pillows and trunks for shelter, made the best of their plight; and, fatigue overmastering misery, they fell sound asleep.

Off again before dawn, in the teeth of a pitiless wind. And first two branches of the Panjshir River must be crossed, an ordeal for women whose nerves had already been severely tried. Both streams were deep and rapid; the water up to the saddle-girths of a tall horse, the current so strong that several natives on ponies were swept away. Those on camels were fairly well off: but the chiefs showed a certain rough chivalry for the ladies who had chosen to ride; begging them to share their own strong horses. As this involved sitting astride behind the dreaded Akbar and his half-brother, Sultan Ján, the ladies were inclined rather to face the ordeal by water. But in

the end Mrs. Waller and Mrs. Eyre found courage to accept; while other chiefs rode beside Lady Sale and her daughter, keeping their horses' heads well up the stream.

They rode twenty miles that day over a stony-hearted tableland till they came to the village of Tighree, passing on their way the tomb of Lamech, father of Noah, a place of pilgrimage and supreme sanctity. Here they halted on the 16th; for it was Sunday, and Mahomedans, however rough, regard religious scruples before those of humanity.

Last Sunday the prisoners had waked from a night of horror, on the plateau beyond the "Glen of Slaughter." Their sole attempt at Divine worship had been the brief burial prayers read over the body of Sturt. To-day there remained among them two Prayer-books and a Bible picked up on the march by Mackenzie's "Man Friday"—Jacob Augustine, a Portuguese Christian, who had served him devotedly for seven years. Lawrence announced that he would read Matins in the courtyard of the fort; and there they assembled—a hundred British men and women and children, including private soldiers—to thank God for their present deliverance and to pray for protection through the dark uncertain days ahead.

There were prayers and a hymn, with suppressed sobs at intervals. Then, by way of homily, Lawrence read the first psalm for the day; a psalm so strangely, so appallingly apt that the words might have come direct from the reader's heart:—

"O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance. . . . The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the air. . . .

"Their blood have they shed like water on every side: and there was no man to bury them. . . .

"We are become an open shame to our enemies: a

scorn and derision to those that are round about us. . . .

“O remember not our old sins, but have mercy upon us, and that soon: for we are come in great misery. . . .

“Wherefore do the heathen say, Where is now thy God ?

“O let the vengeance of Thy servants' blood that is shed, be openly shewed upon the heathen in our sight.

“O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee: according to the greatness of Thy power preserve Thou them that are appointed to die.

“So we that are Thy people. . . shall always be showing forth Thy praise from generation to generation.”

Such words at such a moment were no familiar items of a Sunday service, to be murmured with devout inattention ; but an almost unendurable assault on the emotions. Sobs, impossible to stifle, broke out afresh ; so that the Afghans marvelled what manner of prayers these infidels offered to their God.

In the afternoon they had leisure for such rest as they could find in crowded mud hovels, innocent of light and air. But that evening Akbar privately told Lawrence and Pottinger that their presence was causing great excitement in the neighbourhood ; and Tighree, not being a walled village, he must move on next morning to a really strong fortress at Budiabad. He told them at the same time that, of all who left Jagdalak, Dr. Brydon alone had reached Jalálabad ; and it needed but this to fill their cup of misery.

But though all suffered cruelly, none were perhaps more deeply, more permanently affected by the horror and the

shame of that indelible week than Eldred Pottinger and General Elphinstone. The old man's increasing pain of body and anguish of mind distressed beyond measure the younger officers, who had loved him through all and in spite of all. Yet there was none that could comfort him or even express sympathy, since the least allusion to the subject affected him like the touch of a hand on a bared nerve.

As for Eldred Pottinger, the depth and measure of his suffering was known only to himself and his God. Among his companions in sorrow, he—who had always been reserved—now grew increasingly silent and aloof. Only his closest intimates—Lawrence and Mackenzie and Eyre—had power at times to lure him a little way out of his shell.

That night—dead weary though he was—he began a letter to Macgregor, regretting that his “communications still should be of so melancholy a nature,” and roughly recording the events of the march:—very roughly, for he wrote in the midst of a crowd with his paper on his knee. Completing his record with a list of the prisoners, he added:

“I have not yet fully understood the wants of the Sirdar. I shall, however, beg him to give me a list of the demands he has on us. I have told him that I have no hope you will evacuate Jellalabad except by force. I thought it best to tell him the truth at once and not let him buoy himself up with false hopes. I arrived just in time in his camp; as Shelton and Johnson were trying to get the General to write, and I fear the Sirdar would have considered they, or rather we, were trying to deceive him if he had found the letter was no use.”

Here weariness and the smoky atmosphere overpowered him. Rolled in his military cloak he laid himself down in a corner of the hovel told off for bachelors: but though sleep weighted his eyelids, the pain of his wound and the torment of thought delayed a long while the blessedness of oblivion. Sights and sounds, never to be forgotten, haunted his brain. He had leisure also, to realize the full horror of Akbar's news. With Anquetil's party there had gone fifty officers,—good comrades, stout hearts, and among them his own brother, Tom. If none but Brydon had escaped—and God send that the news was false!—where and how had the end come to Tom, the light-hearted, the ambitious—Tom, who could not rest content till he had joined the Kabul army?

From the silence of those overcrowded passes no answer was likely to come. Tom—though never so beloved—was but a unit among thousands; his own grief a drop in the ocean of misery that would roll on in time to India and England and devastate hundreds of homes beside his own.

But the pain of it all was as nothing beside the disgrace to his country's arms. One verse from the psalm of the morning seemed photographed on his brain: "We are become an open shame to our enemies, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us." The truth of those words hurt almost beyond endurance. Still more it hurt to realize that, by reason of Shelton's unyielding obstinacy, his own name would be inevitably linked with that disgrace; that hundreds of his own people—dependent on biassed gossip and inaccurate journals—would hold him virtually responsible for the thing he had vehemently opposed and abhorred. To him, as to every man of high character, his unspotted reputation was dearer than life; yet—sooner than fail the army altogether—he had flung that reputation into the market-place for

hundreds, who knew little and cared less, to defame at will. Small consolation to reflect that he had done his utmost—with God knows how much of persistence and zeal—to avert capitulation. The fact that his utmost had proved fruitless overshadowed all.

He, who at six-and-twenty had drunk the strong wine of victory, must now grit between his teeth the dust of defeat. It was ordained that he should touch the heights and the depths; that he should look on triumph and disaster, and know them for manifestations of the One of whom he could honestly say, with Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

As for the case of the poor old General, it hardly bore thinking of. That he should end a life of chivalrous and gallant service under a cloud—and such a cloud!—through the grievous error of accepting a command for which he knew himself unfit. Yet, in that he sinned, he had sinned through weakness; Shelton through sheer perversity and apparent determination to do the wrong thing at any price.

And always, behind the minor responsibility of the soldiers, there loomed the larger responsibility of Lord Auckland and Macnaghten for errors in the original design, for misrule following on unjust occupation of the country. But, to Pottinger, revolving these things between sleep and waking, in a mud hovel at Tighree, the whole complex question of responsibility seemed insignificant beside the glaring irredeemable fact that his country's honour had been tarnished, and a blow dealt to her supremacy in the field that would be felt throughout India, possibly throughout the Empire. All seemed now to hang on the power of Nott and Sale to rise up and redress the wrong done to their country and countrymen, no less by its own officers than by Mahomed Akbar Khan.

## II

THAT William Nott might be trusted to uphold England's honour, in his own far corner, none who knew the man could doubt. Invigorating as a breeze from the hills, after the atmosphere of a charnel house, his energetic spirit shines out in the New Year greeting to his "children."

"Many happy returns of the day to you, fair ladies! I suspect it will prove a very troublesome year for me. The Afghans keep us on the alert this frosty weather; but they have not yet assembled in what I call a tangible shape. When they do we shall give them a good licking. I fancy they do not like our state of preparation. Ah! well, they are funny fellows; and so I go to tiffin!"

The "funny fellows" were not slow in assuming tangible shape. Even before the Old Year ended, the heroic Janbaz corps, fired by rumours from Kabul, had mutinied, murdered two British officers, plundered the treasure chest, and fled for dear life. Hard on their heels sped a detachment of Native Cavalry, that meted out condign punishment, killing many, and dispersing the rest. And now, within a week of Nott's greeting to his "fair ladies," Sufter Jung—a younger son of Shah Shuja—had secretly left Kandahar, and thrown in his lot with one Atta Mahomed, who could put twenty thousand men into the field.

Four days later—the very day on which Elphinstone's

deserted troops were being slaughtered like cattle at Jagdalak—Atta Mahomed's twenty thousand had taken up a strong position on the right bank of the Argandab, within fifteen miles of Kandahar. Now was the moment for Nott's "good licking," and that ardent General was a man of his word; a man never to be tripped up by half-measures. He marched out promptly, with five and a half regiments, a fair body of cavalry, and sixteen guns. Result—an action that lasted twenty minutes; an action clearly thought out, vigorously carried through.

Crossing the river, his infantry advanced in columns of battalions, while the guns did deadly work. For a time the Afghans returned a wild, ineffective fire; then their ranks went to pieces. Ghilzais fled one way, Janbaz another, and valiant villagers scurried back to their homes. Nott, relentless in action, stormed the village; let slip the Cavalry and Horse Artillery after Atta Mahomed's men—and marched home, well satisfied, with trifling loss.

Pure refreshment to read of such generalship after that of Shelton and Elphinstone; the more so that this battle of Argandab was the first British success after two months of reverse piled upon reverse, that had culminated in a week of treachery, disaster, and suffering unparalleled in modern history. But Nott had no knowledge as yet of massacre, nor even of Macnaghten's murder; and as for an order to evacuate—though he had long foreseen insurrection, the idea of British retreat had never entered into his wildest dreams.

That much the same spirit prevailed at Jalálabad has been shown by Sale's refusal to capitulate. It is unhappily true that by standing his ground earlier he might have saved the greater part of Elphinstone's army. But now, in the face of its tragical annihilation, he and his



resolved to hold their own. Though an indifferent General and lacking the rare moral courage of a Nott, Sale was blest with as fine a set of officers as any leader could desire in the time of trouble. His Europeans were headed by Dennie, his sepoy by Monteath—good soldiers both. Abbott, Backhouse, and Dawes served the guns; Broadfoot, though an Infantry Captain, proved as superlative an engineer as he was a soldier and a man; and Havelock one of the staff.

All the drawbacks of the position at Kabul had originally been present at Jalálabad; a straggling indefensible *enceinte*, with little or no parapet; and the whole so dilapidated that through the breaches cattle were driven out to graze. But Broadfoot with his Sappers, and with the unauthorized tools from Kabul, had wrought such wonders that by the end of December he could truthfully write: "Now, if well managed, we could sustain here the attack of all Afghanistan. Despondency has been our chief danger. Do not let it extend to India, or evil indeed might befall. . . . Nothing is impossible with forethought, due preparation, and calm, obstinate courage. But these are rare qualities, all wanting here; gallantry and right-heartedness we have, but not the nerve to look the very worst in the face, and by preparing—or even unprepared—to meet it unshaken."

These words of wisdom and of rare perception were written on New Year's Day; and before the month was out men and events had conspired to prove their truth.

Meanwhile, the appearance of Brydon on the 13th, and the tragical tale he had to tell, could not but darken those clouds of despondency, more fatal than Afghan hordes to the integrity of Jalálabad. For nearly a week after the Doctor's arrival lights gleamed all night above the Kabul gate; and all day long, at intervals of fifteen minutes, the

“advance” rang out from the ramparts for the encouragement of fugitives. But there were none to hear. The hosts of Kabul, like the hosts of Sennacherib, were all dead men; and the long-drawn wail of the bugles—fitting dirge for a slaughtered army—served only to harrow the hearts of those within the walls.

Broadfoot, foreseeing delay of help from Peshawur, straightway reported to Sale the state of Jalálabad, its possibilities and resources, in view of a prolonged siege. If the General were prepared to hold the place to the last extremity—so be it; if not, he would do well to retreat at once, without terms, and fight his way to Peshawur. Sale—confident of speedy relief—resolved to stand his ground, and wrote accordingly to Sir Jasper Nicolls that he might rely on a “most determined defence of the place,” though reinforcements were urgently needed, and should be pushed forward with all possible speed.

So far well enough. But the gallant spirit shown at Jalálabad and Kandahar demanded vigorous collaboration from India, and Lord Auckland’s term of office was nearing an end; his spirit depressed by five years of war and worry; his mind convinced, too late, of errors there could be no undoing. Little hope from him for beleaguered garrisons in Afghanistan. He had no wish to encounter new hazards for reconquest, nor would he be “too profuse in sending strength forward.”

Remained the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Jasper Nicolls, an able soldier, but inimical, from the outset, to the wild and costly doings beyond the Indus. His chief concern, first and last, was for India, and the danger involved in the double drainage of money and troops; no imaginary danger by any means.

Thus, between a nervous Governor-General and a wary Commander-in-Chief, it had needed all the urgency of

George Clerk and Henry Lawrence to push forward the "one brigade with artillery," which Lord Auckland deemed sufficient to insure the safe withdrawal of Sale from Jalalabad. As Civil Officer at the frontier station of Ferozepore, it had been the congenial duty of Lawrence to hasten the departure of Wild's Native Infantry Brigade with foot artillerymen, *minus* guns, that were to be borrowed at Peshawur from accommodating Sikhs. But the raw-boned Irish Captain of Artillery, with a frame of whipcord and iron, a heart on fire with enthusiasm for service, and grey eyes deep-set under pent-house brows, was destined to do more than hasten the departure of troops. In this new exigency as much hung on the character of British politicals as on the quality of British troops; and Lord Auckland was more blessed than he realized in having a Clerk at the Sikh Court, with a Lawrence for his Assistant at Ferozepore.

George Clerk's influence with the Sikh ruler was founded on his own sterling qualities. There were probably few diplomatists in India who, at that time, could have secured even a show of co-operation from these so-called allies; and Clerk did more than this. He secured the services of Henry Lawrence to shepherd Wild's brigade through the country of Shere Singh.

The choice, in itself, reflected credit on his perception. Henry Lawrence was by no means the man whom the average British Agent would have chosen for so delicate and difficult a task. "Of all the Assistant Agents on the border," wrote Herbert Edwards, "Lawrence had the hottest temper. But in good truth it was not a time for phlegm; and Mr. Clerk judged well when he passed his finger over his arrow-heads and drew the sharpest from his quiver."

To Lawrence—the man—no appointment could have

been more welcome ; to Lawrence—the devoted husband—it involved a wrench of no common kind. For Henry and Honoria Lawrence were one—if ever man and woman achieved that miracle. From first to last, the two were wedded lovers in no cheap and sentimental sense of the word. Like Colin Mackenzie, Henry Lawrence had met the one woman while at home on leave ; but youth and humility had kept him silent. Returning to India, he served nine years for his Rachel ; and had, so far, reaped four years of very sufficient reward. Honoria had entered enthusiastically into the roughings of a survey officer's life. She had been "happiest of happy" in sharing with him the wretched accommodation of "castles" little better than cowsheds, among the foothills of Nepal. Or when "castles" were not available, what could be more welcome than Henry's tent, some ten feet square ? "A suspended shawl divided her bed and dressing-room from the hospitable breakfast-table ; and then both were in their glory." But the birth and death of their daughter, and the later birth of a son, had told so seriously on her health that she had been obliged, ruefully, to spend the summer of 1841 in the hills. Not until the 12th of November had she been able to join her husband ; and early in December came the fiat of a separation—indefinite, pregnant with danger. What the man felt remained hid in his heart ; but the woman could pour forth her feelings to one being at least—Henry's sister and her own closest friend.

"Oh, darling Lettice," she wrote, "this is a sore, sore discipline . . . I suppose when we are together we are too happy for mortals ; each year more and more so. . . . But indeed I could not have wished to hold my Henry back. . . . I only wish I was a man, that I might be going too. . . . You are the one person to whom I can write without constraint of our Henry. . . . Each year I feel but begin-

ning to estimate him ; and there is such simplicity in his goodness, such absence of effort. . . . His mind is like a house in which the commonest vessels are of gold ; yet their value is hardly known till we look at the stuff that others are made of."

With all due allowance for the partiality of a wife—and such a wife—few that knew Henry Lawrence intimately would find this beautiful simile an exaggeration of the truth.

So these two parted—with all the faith and courage of their kind—on the 16th of December ; and by the 28th Henry was writing from Peshawur : " Arrived all safe and am glad to find things not so bad as I expected."

But very soon, for all his brave optimism, he found things bad enough. Already there was growing up, in the Punjab, a stalwart Sikh army impatient of British alliance. At Peshawur no friendly spirit prevailed ; and the position of Wild's Brigade was unenviable indeed. Happy for him and for Mackeson that Clerk had been inspired to send them Henry Lawrence in their dark hour.

And while they wrestled manfully with the threefold problem of camels, commissariat, and refractory troops, yet another inspiration had visited the supreme authorities ; an inspiration destined vitally to affect the ultimate issue.

In spite of Lord Auckland's hesitancy and Nicoll's disapproval, it was becoming evident that a large force would soon be assembled at Peshawur ; and both men, however reluctant, realized that there must now be no question of failure ; that to command this last army a General must be found fitted to wield supreme military and political power in Afghanistan.

By this time, Lord Auckland had at least learnt that Indian experience was essential for an Afghan command ; yet, with a fatuity almost incredible, he again proposed an

officer physically unfit for active service. By good fortune, Lumley had the wisdom to abide by the decision of his doctor; and not till then did baffled Authority discover in General Pollock, of the Bengal Artillery, commanding at Agra, one who could safely be trusted to restore the tarnished lustre of England's arms. Though by no means a brilliant leader, like Nott, Pollock possessed in full measure the patience, coolness, and sagacity essential at so critical a juncture of affairs. The Army of Retribution needed a General equally cautious and determined, honest and courageous—qualities notably combined in the character of George Pollock.

It was on the 1st of January, 1842, that he sat in his veranda, lingering over his *chota hazri*; and, casually slitting the red tape of an official letter,—discovered, with amazement, that he had been chosen as leader for the fresh advance into Afghanistan. Within three days his *dák* had been laid, his son Robert requisitioned as A.D.C., and he himself was jogging northward as speedily as the traffic of the period would allow. With the best of luck he could not reach Peshawur in less than a month: and before that month was ended, all India rang with the awful news that the Kabul army was no more.

Here was a call for retribution that could not but stir the most phlegmatic heart; though the news from Peshawur that met the General on his upward march forbode still further delay.

Wild—goaded by urgent letters from Sale and Macgregor—had made a premature attempt to advance: a move partially justified by an Afridi attack on Ali Musjid, the key of the pass. Unhappily, he or Mackeson made the too common mistake of dividing their small force. On the 15th two regiments reached Ali Musjid, almost unopposed. But, owing to some blunder or mismanage-

ment, they found themselves, on arrival, isolated in a little fortress with barely enough food for a week: and Wild must needs follow them up; his two regiments stiffened with Sikh guns and Sikh troops.

But the Sikhs had no stomach for such service: and the remedy was simple enough. They mutinied, drove out their officers, and—in the words of Lawrence—“marched back to Peshawur as we marched to the pass.”

The guns behaved no better than their owners. Each in turn broke down at the first round; and the sepoy, discouraged by the double failure, too soon lost heart. The officers went forward. The men hung back. Several officers fell; Wild among them—severely wounded in the face. Lawrence exerted himself manfully to save the guns—in vain. The sepoy, eager only to escape from the pass, retired with unseemly haste to Jamrud—and all present hope of relieving Jalálabad was at end. Till Pollock joined them, no more could be done.

To his wife Lawrence wrote on a stray scrap of paper, words straight from his heart: “I’m quite well; but I’ve witnessed a shameful sight—our troops behaving ill before a handful of savages. . . . Do not fear for me, or think I expose myself unnecessarily. I do *not*: I am mindful of you, of my boy, and of myself.”

Honoría’s answer, sent by return *dák*, was worthy of the woman who had thrown in her lot with such a man. “No, my own husband, I do not think you forget wife and child when you fly about. I never wish you safe by keeping out of the way. I rejoice you are there, with your energy and sense; and if I could but be a button on your sleeve, I would never wish you to come away. . . . Who talked of your force turning back? God forbid! . . . I would not see you back to-morrow on such terms. . . . Why have we not one with the rod of

Moses to sound in every ear: 'Speak unto the children of Israel that they *go forward*. Be strong and show yourselves men!'

This from a mere woman; while officers at Peshawur were infuriating her husband and demoralizing their men by the same disgraceful croaking that had wrought such harm at Kabul; while Lord Auckland—his momentary spurt of indignation exhausted—openly avowed his desire to do as little as possible beyond the Indus lest an attempt to recover lost prestige result only in further disgrace.

But George Pollock,—the quiet, unassuming General hurrying up to the front—had quite another purpose hid in his heart; a purpose not to be shaken by an attack of nerves, whether in Government House or in the camp at Jamrud. On him, and on the task before him, all eyes were bent, all thoughts concentrated; while every lounge in countless bazaars—from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, cherished wild aspirations of throwing off for ever the detested yoke.

Millions thus speculated and prayed and waited: nor were there wanting astute observers—Native and European—who predicted the certainty of failure. Never, even before the Great Revolt, was the Indian Empire in graver danger than during those first months of 1842.

And still George Pollock marched on, through the interminable plains of the Punjab; his innate equanimity unshaken by the knowledge that on his own prowess, humanly speaking, hung the issue of all.



### III

ON the 22nd of January, when Wild lay wounded and sorrowful in Henry Lawrence's tent, and General Pollock had put half the Punjab behind him, some thirty of Akbar's "guests" sat at breakfast in the common mess-room, discussing with excellent appetites a great bowl of *dhall*,<sup>1</sup> coarse pollard *chupattis* and radishes that had run to seed. A concoction of parched rice and boiling water did service for coffee, and neither linen or cutlery graced the meal. Breakfast table and crockery were represented by a packing-case with the bowl of *dhall* set in the midst. Around it sat the breakfasters, on smaller trunks or on the mud floor. The *chupatti* served both as plate and bread. It was broken and dipped in the bowl; bitten and dipped in again. Manners and fastidiousness had been left behind, with all other paraphernalia of civilization, in Kabul cantonments. All the men of the party wore Afghan dress, with the single exception of Shelton, who advertised his detestation of the race by clinging to his battered, blood-stained uniform, for all its associations of horror and shame.

"The Afghans cook," wrote Lady Sale, "and we may well exclaim with Goldsmith, 'God sends meat, but the devil sends cooks!' For we get some greasy skin and bones . . . boiled in the same pot with the rice; . . . and eating their cakes of dough is an excellent recipe to obtain

<sup>1</sup> Lentils.

the heartburn. The rice, even, is rendered nauseous by having quantities of rancid *ghi* poured over it, such as in India we should have disdained to use for our lamps."

But, in spite of heartburn and rancid *ghi*, these captive breakfasters found themselves healthier and far more cheerful than a week earlier any of them could have imagined possible. The company of happy children went far to lift the heart. Not parents alone, but all who were responsive to the spirit of youth, felt thankful for their presence; even if, in such cramped quarters, their superfluous vitality might prove too much of a good thing. Healthy and unharmed they had passed through an ordeal of blood and fire such as few English children can have experienced before or since; and the rough picnic life in a mud fort, with elders who did not disdain to join them at "hop-sotch" and "blindman's buff," was, for them, an adventure of the first quality, full of amusement and surprise.

The women also, in their own fashion, helped to lighten the atmosphere, to grace even a bare mud room with a dim suggestion of home; and, save for Mrs. Sturt—who was broken with grief—they accepted the whole position far more lightly than did the men. The immediate horrors and privations once over, they appear, for the most part, to have been little concerned by the larger tragedy still hanging over their country.

Nor were all the men equally affected by any means. Those on whom the larger calamity weighed most heavily were Elphinstone and Pottinger, Eyre and Troup, Lawrence and Mackenzie; though the unfailing cheerfulness of the two last must often have belied the ache of shame and anxiety in their hearts.

Their desert island, the fortress of Budiabad, in the valley of Lughmán, proved a safe shelter if a rough one;

and the Afghan nobles were obviously anxious to make them comfortable, according to their own understanding of the word. The fort itself, a square building walled and bastioned, had a sturdier, more reputable air than any they had seen. An inner citadel, raised well above the ground, occupied two sides of the square and contained five tolerable rooms, larger and cleaner than they had dared to hope. These George Lawrence was called upon to distribute among some forty-five officers, women, and children, without giving undue cause for complaint; a hard matter so far as the women were concerned.

Number One was assigned to Lady Macnaghten and her cats, Mrs. Boyd with her two small sons, Mrs. Anderson and two daughters, Mrs. Mainwaring, and Mrs. Eyre. Number Two, having only a wooden partition for wall, was given to the three husbands and George Lawrence, on the understanding that it should serve also as a common mess-room for themselves and the others. In Number Three were Lady Sale and Mrs. Sturt, Mrs. Trevor and her brood of seven, Mrs. Waller and Conductor Riley's wife, with three children between them. Number Four was assigned to Mackenzie and Waller with Jacob, Riley, and a wounded soldier of the 44th. In Number Five the surplus bachelors—fifteen of them—must manage as best they could. The two soldiers' wives had a room underground, and the soldiers a stable, the horses being picketed near by.

To-day, the meal being over, Mackenzie joined Dr. Macgrath on "hospital duty" among the sick and wounded. Pottinger went, as usual, to sit with the General, and give what help he could to the frail old man; for Elphinstone had already begun penning disjointed notes of the siege, to defend his own character against the sweeping assertions he feared from Shelton on

their release: and in those days of mutual sorrow, the young soldier and the old one were drawn very close together. So Pottinger went off to sit with his friend; and Lawrence, springing to his feet, cried out: "Come on, youngsters! Time for drill!"

A dozen boys and girls ran out with him into the courtyard; and there, under a cloudless sky, George Lawrence held his morning parade, in which the unwounded soldiers would often take part, to the great delight of the "awkward squad."

This morning the marching and counter-marching was interrupted by a genuine event—a *kasid* from Jalálabad! Forth from his bag came a letter for Lady Sale, only three days old; one for Pottinger from Macgregor, and a few old newspapers that would be hungrily devoured by all. Sale wrote, in good heart, that they could hold their own for six months with the help of Wild's Brigade, which ought certainly to arrive on the 22nd, if not before; and the news made that Sunday a high day as well as a holy day at Budiabad.

Mackenzie read the service—he and Lawrence having agreed to "play parson" by turns; and soon after, they were enlivened by a visit from their jovial friends, Akbar and Sultan Ján. The last—though a fine-tempered man and the handsomer of the two—was vain and boastful as only an Afghan can be; while Akbar showed himself in all respects more of a gentleman; more chivalrous and considerate—just so long as his passions were not roused. He never spoke slightly of the British or triumphed over their discomfiture: a form of good feeling very unusual among his kind. To-day—when Lawrence mentioned their awkward lack of cash and clean clothes—he promised to send, at once, a good supply of material, with needles and thread for making, and a thousand rupees to be

divided between them. Lawrence thanked him heartily and proceeded to write out a receipt for all. Akbar, laughing, tore it across. "*Wah, wah!* Laren Sahib," said he. "Such things are only needed between traders, not between gentlemen."

His main business, however, was with "Pottinger Sahib," who must somehow be persuaded to write out, for Government, an account of the rebellion and retreat, wherein Akbar should figure as the would-be saviour of Elphinstone's force; his zeal annulled by infuriate Ghilzai chiefs.

But though he knew something, by now, of Lawrence and Mackenzie, he had much yet to learn of the quiet-spoken man with the disconcertingly direct blue eyes. Here was no second Macnaghten, pliable and confiding; but one whose blunt, uncompromising honesty seemed like to prove embarrassing as it was admirable: one that knew Afghans and Afghanistan something too well for Akbar's convenience. Had he not crossed swords with Yar Mahomed Khan?

To the Sirdar's request he replied that he would of course give Macgregor Sahib all the facts of the case. More than this could not be won from him, even by diplomatic pressure; but he readily consented to translate a Persian paper written by Akbar, setting forth his own position and demands.

Next morning, true to his word, the latter sent the promised rupees and the lengths of chintz and longcloth, more welcome even than the cash, since they could be turned to immediate use. For among the minor miseries of those first weeks the impossibility of cleanliness was by no means the least. Washing, in such circumstances and such bitter cold, could be little more than a form; while few except George Lawrence and Lady Macnaghten possessed any

means of changing their clothes. Lawrence at least had done what he could ; had distributed his wardrobe among the men, and given some precious flannel shirts to be cut up for the children.

The women of the party were not so blessed. Despite Laily Macnaghten's trunks, a modest request from Mrs. Eyre for the loan of a clean dress had been met by polite regrets that her ladyship really had not one to spare ! Mrs. Eyre, as may be supposed, went away something more than sorrowful, and spoke her mind openly in Number Three, where screams of disgust and dismay announced the discovery of the "first living louse !"

It was a painful moment for a well-brought-up English-woman, who never before had the creature's name upon her lips. The further discovery that, by this time, all shared the same affliction—to say nothing of attentions from the harmless necessary flea—salved the shock to their delicacy : while Lady Sale, nothing if not military, dispelled all lingering sensitiveness on the subject by christening the lice "Infantry" and the fleas "Light Cavalry."

But though sensitiveness might be blunted, disgust remained : and women who had worn the same clothes ever since the fatal 6th, pounced upon their share of chintz and longcloth like starving creatures on crusts of bread. Lawrence, on whom devolved the invidious task of apportioning money, food, and clothes, found it a hard matter to satisfy all.

Severe trials, followed by the enforced intimacy of prison life, brought strikingly into play good and bad impulses normally repressed, rubbed off the bloom of conventional polish, and engendered "a plainness of speech quite unheard of in good society." But on this welcome morning, minor discontents vanished in the joy of a day's occupation and the blessed prospect of clean clothes.

Unwonted industry prevailed in the common room, where half a dozen Englishwomen squatted on mats, native fashion, bolsters placed at their backs, ripping chintz and plying needles with a will; while small girls and a few accommodating men twisted the soft cotton into thread by rolling it between their hands.

Vincent Eyre—something of an artist and a clever writer of doggerel—added to the general amusement by making rapid sketches of one and another to be sent to friends at home. His wife sat on a box, with Mackenzie for cotton twister: which fact no doubt stirred envy in more than one feminine breast. For the friendly attentions of handsome Colin Mackenzie—though his heart was safe anchored in Scotland—caused a lively amount of jealousy even among women blest with husbands of their own.

Suddenly Mrs. Eyre's needle snapped in the hard, undressed material.

"*Oh!*" she sighed between vexation and despair. "It's the only one I've got. Lady Sale has some, I know; but I hate asking her or Lady Macnaghten for anything. You ask for a couple, Captain Mackenzie. Do! She couldn't refuse *you!*"

Mackenzie laughed and complied: though to make such a business of asking for a couple of needles seemed, to his masculine ignorance, ridiculous enough. It proved a more serious affair than he supposed. Lady Sale could be frigid when she chose: and though Mackenzie exerted all his charm of manner he failed to secure one needle, much less two. No doubt the good lady thought he should have been devoting himself to her or Mrs. Sturt: and, with a truly feminine sense of justice, punished Emily Eyre.

So much for the trivialities of prison life, broken at intervals by news of larger events, more fateful stirrings from without. The 25th brought rumours of Wild's

repulse on the Khyber; the 26th a tale that the Shah would shortly send four thousand men and all the Kabul guns to reason with Sale; while the 29th brought Akbar from the north; and from the south, Abdul Ghuffoor Khan with three camel-loads of "sundries" from Jalálabad.

Lady Sale felt herself passing rich with a closely packed chest of drawers; and the men were touched to the heart by a boxful of clothing contributed by the garrison, none too well off themselves in this respect, or in any other—save courage.

It was a great day! Lady Sale and Mrs. Mainwaring had letters from their husbands; Pottinger one from Macgregor; and George Lawrence heard that Henry had reached Peshawur, probably *en route* for Jalálabad.

As for the newspapers, though at any time oases in their desert of ignorance, they were to-day more eagerly scanned than ever before. And for this reason: the garrison had contrived, by cypher correspondence, to let them know that some genius in their midst had hit on a simple and unfailing method of eluding Akbar's vigilance. The readers were to search the papers carefully for dotted letters. These, set down in their sequence, would form words and phrases; whereby military or political news might be conveyed without risk. By this device they now learnt that Wild had failed to force the Khyber, and that Pollock was on his way to Peshawur.

Sultan Ján stayed over Sunday; and when service was ended, invited any who chose to take a walk with him outside the fort. Lawrence, with several of his "awkward squad," gladly accepted; and while they enjoyed their brief spell of freedom, Pottinger and Mackenzie squatted in Number Four, finishing letters which—with the aid of newly acquired rupees—were to be despatched by private *kasid* to Jalálabad.



Mackenzie, writing to Broadfoot, gave spontaneous utterance to his devotion and to the deeper thoughts of his soul. Pottinger, also, in his own fashion, was enlarging on the subject nearest his heart. To him it was a matter of the first importance that his own efforts to save the army and Shelton's opposition should be made clear, as soon as might be, to all at Jalalabad; and through Macgregor, to Government. It was also important that a letter so closely concerning Shelton, Elphinstone, and himself should not be overlooked by Akbar Khan. Hence his decision to risk a private despatch and hope for the best.

Macgregor's letter to himself, mainly political, contained one paragraph worth noting in view of that which so shortly befell. "Our duty to Government is, in my opinion, to hold our position until succour reaches us, and this we have resolved to do. . . . Write to me frequently and let me know how we can be useful to you. We deeply sympathize with you all. . . . I regret to say that I have heard nothing of your brother in the 54th N.I. I will write to the one in Bombay."

So Tom had gone the way of the rest; a painful certainty, but no shock. Pottinger had long since given up hope; and his letter to Macgregor, characteristically enough, contained no allusion to his own private loss.

" BUDYABAD,

" 30th January, 1842.

" MY DEAR MACGREGOR,

" I had the pleasure to receive your kind letter of the 26th yesterday. The clothes and other supplies sent by the same opportunity were most welcome, for many of us were badly off. We are all most grateful for the sympathizing kindness of our friends at Jelalabad. . . .

“I really think it is the Sirdar’s wish to be friends with us, but he has been brought up in the midst of treachery and does not know how to trust; and I regret that our own conduct in this country has put our Government’s faith on a par with themselves. Our defeat, though sufficiently galling to a soldier, really loses its sting when the taunts of our broken promises—which we know to be true—are thrown in our teeth by men who know truth but by name.

“Both General Elphinstone and I were glad of your resolution regarding our letter, as far as we were concerned. The fate of the Cabul force was sealed before you received the letter, and you were clearly exonerated from obedience when you were aware of our position.

“I am very anxious to send an account of our actions after the Envoy’s death; but I have lost my memoranda and will be obliged to make it out by degrees from recollection and the memory of friends. There are many points that my character requires me to explain; particularly that we continued our negotiations with the enemy in direct opposition to my advice, and that we were prevented from going into the Bala Hissar entirely by the obstinacy of Brigadier Shelton, who declared the attempt impracticable. The General, from his illness, was incapable of making up his mind; and the constant assertion of impossibility by his Second-in-Command outweighed the entreaties of the Envoy when alive, and of mine afterwards. A retreat on you was the only thing they would hear of; notwithstanding that I pointed out the very doubtful character of any engagement we might make with the chiefs, and begged they would spare us the dishonour and

Government the loss which any negotiations must entail. So seeing I could do nothing, I consented . . . I could not, however, persuade them to sacrifice baggage, and that was eventually one of the chief causes of our disaster. You may conceive my anxiety to have this subject properly made known to Government.

I am more anxious on the General's account, if it be possible, than on my own; for the noble courage and resignation with which he bears himself, under such a load of misfortune and physical suffering, makes a man's heart bleed for him, that he should have been fated to hold such a command when so incompetent from disease, and seconded so badly that the Second-in-Command would never give advice but to oppose that of others. . . ."

Both letters, with one from Lawrence, were despatched by private *kasid* that evening: and the three writers heartily prayed that they might not be baulked of reaching their destination by the vigilance of Mahomed Akbar Khan.

#### IV

LITTLE dreamed Eldred Pottinger when he risked good money and the wrath of Akbar to record his own scornful repudiation of a retreat with terms, that the tragedy of Kabul was, even then, in danger of being repeated at Jalálabad.

Within ten days of Brydon's arrival, with his tale of horror fresh in their ears, with camp-followers—stripped, starved, and frost-bitten—still crawling into cantonments, evacuation was seriously contemplated by Macgregor—and not by Macgregor alone.

At that very time, Broadfoot, ignorant as yet of the madness afoot, sat writing to a friend: "By labours unequalled we have given Government time to relieve us and retrieve the national fortunes. They have not used the opportunity, but sent battalions instead of armies, and we shall perhaps, nay *probably*, perish. But we shall fall with honour, with the consciousness that history will acquit *us* of failing in our duty . . . General Pollock . . . has with him two battalions only. . . . If he fails (and every obstacle will now be accumulated against him) none of us may live to tell the tale of our fall: but glorious, or at least honourable, rely on it, it will be."

Here, at all events, breathed the right spirit—a spirit strong enough to look the worst in the face and meet it without wavering.

Next morning came word that Sale, on hearing of

Wild's failure, had summoned a Council of War to consider an important matter on which he and Macgregor were agreed ; and Broadfoot—marvelling what the matter might be—rode up to the General's quarters at the hour named.

Here, besides Macgregor and Sale—with his staff officers, Havelock and Hamlet Wade—Broadfoot found his five fellow-commandants—Dennie and Monteath of the 13th and 35th ; Abbott and Backhouse of the Gunners ; Oldfield of the Cavalry.

Before that alert and attentive audience Macgregor laid a recent despatch from Shah Shuja :

“ Let it be know to the high and exalted in dignity, renowned for valour and resolution, George Macgregor Sahib Bahadur, that sometime since it came to the Royal ear that you had agreed with these people to take your departure. Since that, the illustrious Government has received no intimation of the subject. It is expedient that the above-named distinguished person should make known his present circumstances with despatch that they may be understood.”

To the due consideration of this letter and the King's private protestations of devotion, Macgregor added his own conviction that the garrison had been practically abandoned by Government, that Wild's failure and the closing of the Khyber had extinguished all hope of relief.

In view of these facts, he and the General had resolved to treat with Shah Shuja for a safe conduct to Peshawur ; and between them they had drawn up a suitable letter to the King. On the wording of this reply—virtually a compact with Akbar—Macgregor would be glad to hear the opinion of the Council, while reserving to himself the right to act as he chose.

A translation of the Persian original, submitted for approval, stated in effect that as the garrison only held Jalálabad for Shah Shuja, they were willing—on certain conditions—to depart at his request. The terms proposed were these: Prompt evacuation of the country; four British hostages to be given; an Afghan force, commanded by one of the King's sons, to be sent as escort to Peshawur; Akbar to be removed from the neighbourhood before they marched; Afghan hostages of high rank to be given as far as Peshawur, where these would be exchanged for all the British prisoners now in Akbar's hands.

This not very creditable document seems to have been read with equanimity by the officers concerned, till it reached George Broadfoot—junior member of the Council, yet its leader in the path of honour. He, disgusted beyond measure, flung it from him with contempt, and sprang up straightway to fight every clause of it tooth and nail.

A fair-haired, red-bearded man, this most resolute of soldiers, with all the energy and ardour, the strong feelings and fiery temper that belong to the red man always and make him the salt of the earth. Terms? His blood boiled at the shame and folly of the word.

While Afghan passes were choked with their dead, while maimed scarecrows, naked and starving, still crawled into cantonments, they could coolly discuss the *pros* and *cons* of capitulation! With all the vehemence that was in him, he denounced Macgregor's proposals root and branch. He denied that they held Jalálabad for Shah Shuja; denied the supposed intention of Government to evacuate the country; denied, above all, that they had been abandoned, weak though the measures for their relief might be. In effect, his harangue was a variant on the brave words he had written a few weeks earlier: "What a

change from the unvarying glory of the last half century when such questions are seriously discussed! All will yet be right if we quit ourselves like men . . . and come what may, it is our duty to prolong the struggle till we are *able* to conquer."

But too soon it became evident that the majority were against him. There were even those found who could sneer at his high-hearted indignation. Argument waxed fierce and fiercer, each man more eager to thrust in his own word than to hear another's objections.

A certain French letter from Government, quoted by Sale and afterwards produced, roused such a storm of indignation against the authorities in India that argument gave place to invective, and Broadfoot himself was almost borne down. Determined to hold his own, he lifted his voice above the uproar, reminding them that a new Governor-General was on his way out, that with the great Duke in office a weak war policy was impossible.

Useless all, Dennie and Abbott, ignoring his arguments, merely ridiculed his excitability; and he, perceiving how the red mist of anger darkened counsel, proposed that the discussion be adjourned till all could approach the subject with cooler minds. To this they agreed; and the "Jackdaw Parliament" was broken up till next day.

But for Broadfoot there could be no rest till the matter was settled. His vehemence was not—as those others had implied—a mere explosion of temper. It was the vehemence of a heroic nature, strong in feeling, strong in conviction. For him, as for Nott, patriotism was a living principle. "The name of England, her power, and her honour were a pride and joy to these two men irrespective of all personal ambition." In Broadfoot it burned like a consuming fire and drove him that evening

to Havelock's quarters, where he could speak his mind to one whose convictions matched his own, and who was yet of cooler judgment, and more sober speech.

Havelock dealt faithfully with his friend in respect of undue vehemence; and Broadfoot, a raging lion in council, was gentle as a lamb under the criticism of one he loved.

"I will go through Macgregor's letter again point by point," was his final decision. "I'll have everything down in black and white—and they *shall* hear me."

They did hear him; but not in the fashion he had hoped. As the sense of their hostility grew in him, his temper flared up afresh—and at once he lost ground.

Abbott and Dennie, who had ridiculed him the day before, remarked with ironical smiles that they feared Captain Broadfoot's judgment was somewhat obscured by the warmth of his temperament; and Macgregor capped his main arguments with an urgent assurance that the plan proposed was safe and honourable, or it would not be sanctioned by himself and General Sale. On what grounds he based his belief that the Afghans would certainly observe *this* treaty, he did not say: but so transparent was his conviction, so dark his picture of their perilous position, that he carried with him even such brave men as Abbot, Backhouse, and Monteath.

Broadfoot alone remained obdurate. Bringing out his papers, and holding his fiery spirit in leash, he proceeded to combat, one by one, the clauses of that suicidal treaty. He objected, scot and lot, to giving British hostages; and on this point alone the rest were with him. He objected strongly to showing fear of Akbar by demanding his removal: and no less strongly to the abject phrasing of Macgregor's miserable document. If nothing would dissuade them from surrender, he proposed to demand all prisoners before leaving cantonments.



Dead silence for a space. The proposal should have appealed to the heart of the General: yet, when the silence passed, he and Macgregor flatly vetoed the demand. Useless, said they; and likely to upset the whole plan, which stipulated for restoration of the prisoners at Peshawur.

Nothing daunted, Broadfoot pursued his course. He maintained that, by uniting vigour with moderation, they could hold their ground as long as they chose. They could colonize if they chose! As for the value of Afghan hostages, whereby Macgregor set such store—"What use," he demanded, "were hostages at Tazin? What earthly use would they be now, so long as *our* hostages and prisoners are in the enemy's hands?"

The question, though aimed at Macgregor, was answered by Sale.

"This much use, Captain Broadfoot, that I should execute a hostage without compunction if we were attacked."

Quick as thought came Broadfoot's counter-thrust. "Would you persist in that, sir, if the enemy hanged two ladies for every man we killed?"

To such a question the husband and father had no answer: and Broadfoot, possibly regretful, capped it quickly with another. "If the treaty were signed, and *still* they attacked us—what would you do?"

"Fight," was the laconic reply.

"Naturally, sir. Then why invite all Afghanistan round you *before* fighting?"

Again the question proved unanswerable; and now Abbott thrust in his oar. Good man and fine soldier though he was, he too had caught the prevailing disease of despondency. He argued that if they again refused to go, the Kabul hostages would be executed; moreover, the

fact that they were obviously abandoned by Government gave them every right to consider before all things their own safety and that of their troops.

Against such sentiments Broadfoot hurled fresh thunderbolts. "I deny both arguments," he declared warmly. "The safety of our troops, however important, is, and always must be, a subordinate consideration to the good of our country. As for our service here, it is no mere compact with Government, but a duty to England which we cannot, in honour, decline—whether we are supported or no. For my part, I would have this fundamental notion of duty to country, rather than compact with the existing Government, made more widely familiar to all; and I maintain, once more, that in our present crisis, that duty demands either resistance to the last, or a fighting retreat, in which if we fall, we fall like men."

It was Kabul over again. Here, as there, the voice of Broadfoot, like that of Pottinger, was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Though none among Broadfoot's hearers could refute his arguments, their silence was not of the kind that gives consent—as the sequent voting proved. Every man of them voted for capitulation, with the exception of Captain Oldfield, who had taken little part in the debate. Havelock, though one with Broadfoot, had no voice in the matter: and Macgregor's letter was sanctioned by an overruling majority, except on one point—the giving of British hostages, when already there were a dozen in Akbar's hands.

Even Macgregor's offer to go himself failed to win consent for this clause. Broadfoot denounced it as disgraceful; Oldfield, a quiet man, exclaimed with sudden heat: "I, for one, am prepared to fight here to the last drop of my blood; but nothing would induce me to be a hostage."

Said Monteath: "The clause would be useless. Not an officer would go."

"I would go, sir—if ordered," Broadfoot took him up promptly. "So long as we remain an army, I obey all orders. But once we capitulate, the first shot, in violation of treaty, sets me free to do as I please."

"And well would he have acted," adds Durand, "on the deep resolve of an heroic mind."

Thus ended—for the moment—that memorable debate, the most important event of the siege.

As the officers filed out Broadfoot could not withhold a parting thrust at the men he had failed to convince. "I congratulate you, gentlemen," said he with scathing emphasis, "on the figure you will cut should a relieving force arrive just as we are on the point of marching!"

"Not at all!" retorted Dennie hotly. "In such a case, of course we should not go."

"You would *have* to go, sir," came the quiet answer; "we should make you. Faith must be kept."

An awkward consideration quite outside the scope of Dennie's philosophy.

Next day that deplorable letter went to Kabul; and Broadfoot, as though Kings and treaties were not, set to work on his new ditch round the walls, much to the delight of the men, whose spirits had been depressed by an atmosphere of secret consultation among their officers.

Those officers now had leisure to consider, in quieter mood, their rash decision of the 27th. Backhouse—valiant and fiery as he was honest—had no sooner cooled down than he realized and regretted his strange blindness to the soldier's point of view. Monteath, who had been talked over by Macgregor, soon let fall remarks quite out of keeping with his vote. Dennie's natural courage gave signs of revival; and Broadfoot, noting these facts, re-

joined exceedingly. The letter would scarcely be answered under a week, and even so, he foresaw probable evasions and reservations that would provide loopholes of escape. Nor did he keep that expectation to himself.

In the long interval that elapsed he worked at more than his ditch:—this time not without result.

On the 8th of February, Macgregor received another royal effusion; a fulsome medley of devotion and reproach. On the 11th came the treaty, returned with the plain request: "If you are sincere in your offers, let all the chief gentlemen put their seals": and next day, Macgregor, having convened the said gentlemen, urged them to comply with that demand.

But again he had the red man to reckon with.

On the ground that the King's message implied doubt of their sincerity, Broadfoot moved that before any names were signed the whole matter should be thrashed out again. And behold, it was now he who carried the day, while Sale and Macgregor stood almost alone.

The General, having decided to accept the will of the majority, had now no choice but to give up his scheme for abandoning Jalálabad, and Macgregor could only express a hope that the day would not come when they would regret having refused such terms as he might not be able to procure again. They were willing, it seemed, to take that risk. Broadfoot's noble example had acted like a spiritual tonic, and renewed the manhood of all.

It remained only to draw up a suitable reply to the King, which evoked further heated discussion and further exhibition of temper. Sale, in particular, used strong language about the opposition he had met with from officers to whom he looked for support; opposition for which, in a cooler moment, he must have thanked God from the bottom of his heart.

A letter drawn up by Monteath and Dennie was promptly despatched, and the very next day Hamlet Wade wrote in his journal: "*Kasids* in from Pollock, saying that the 3rd Dragoons, etc., are on their way to join him; and that his instructions are, on no account to allow this garrison to be forced into a disastrous retreat. So we are not to be deserted, thank God!"

But whether they were to be rescued by Pollock or achieve their own deliverance, the outstanding fact remained that the true saviour of Jalálabad was George Broadfoot; that, except for his courage, resolution—ay, and violent temper—there had probably been no Jalálabad garrison to relieve.

## V

IN the Bachelors' Room at Budiabad, Eldred Pottinger sat beside the General's sleeping-mat. The sick man had been propped up with a couple of bolsters, and between them was an ancient backgammon board, sent from Jalálabad. Both men played in a desultory fashion; but the game, such as it was, served to distract Elphinstone's thoughts, that were never very far from the one tabooed subject—his own misfortune and the awful fate of his army. Sleeping and waking, the horrors of that murderous week haunted him to the verge of distraction, wherefore the bachelors of Number Five had need to be circumspect in their talk.

The depth of Pottinger's sympathy and understanding—implied, rather than expressed—made him a congenial companion to the heart-broken old man; and now the dice-box was rattled, the men shifted with only an occasional smile or exchange of glances; while Eyre, sitting some way off, was trying to make a sketch of Pottinger, with small success.

Sounds of a commotion without, brought Eyre to his feet. The clamour of voices suggested an arrival, always acceptable; and, on this 10th of February, more so than usual. For he found in the courtyard, not only their good postman, Abdul Ghuffoor, but Griffiths and Souter, with a dozen private soldiers, all of whom had been mourned as dead. Both officers were wounded and very weak, mere ghosts of their former selves. Both

had undergone great hardships and misery of mind from the failure of Sale's attempts to ransom them. A thousand rupees subscribed by the officers, and another thousand by the men, had been stolen in transit to the chief who held them; but, God be thanked, they were alive, and glad beyond words to see English faces and hear English voices again.

The excitement of greeting over, there was leisure to realize that, although Abdul had brought boxes and—better than all,—books, there were neither notes nor letters from their friends. Questioned, he told Lawrence privately that Akbar was in “the devil's own rage” with himself and Pottinger; that he had intercepted a private *kasid* to Jalálabad; and—though the letters were delivered—he had sworn that every prisoner of them all should suffer for their breach of faith. If it should happen again, woe betide them! To Pottinger himself he sent a few lines of solemn warning emphasized by significant allusion to the fate of Sir William Macnaghten, who had sought to deceive the nobles of Afghanistan, and paid for the attempt with his life.

Eldred Pottinger was not the man to be browbeaten by threats; but seeing how many others were involved, he felt bound to couple defence of his action with dignified apology. Both he and Lawrence wrote at once to the Sirdar, regretting their unintentional offence; and pointing out that, as they had never agreed not to communicate independently with their friends, there could be no breach of faith. Now that they knew his wishes, they would abstain from sending letters direct.

Jove graciously accepted explanation and regrets; but, by way of deterrent, decreed that all officers should give up their swords, which would be duly restored on departure.

To an officer of that period his sword was a more cherished insignia of rank and dignity than in our present

day of long-range fighting. But there was nothing for it: comply they must, if only for the sake of the women, whom they could better protect by placable behaviour than by wearing swords. The sympathy of Abdul and Dōst Mahomed went far to soften their resentment, and to maintain the prevailing spirit of good fellowship between captives and captors; a spirit not in any way marred by an outburst of thunder from Jove.

Indeed, between friendly chiefs, generous comrades at Jalálabad, and visits from Kabuli merchants, they were now better off, in every way, for occupation and mild amusement. The addition of books to their meagre resources was a boon unspeakable. Rough backgammon and draught-boards had been made for their use; and two or three packs of playing-cards, limp and dirty, were, for the children and their elders, treasures beyond price.

On the 12th came Jove himself, his brow unclouded; his mind occupied with matters more important than their late delinquency. For now he was marching on Jalálabad to bring down the head of the haughty, who had twice defied the order to depart in peace.

Frank and friendly always with Lawrence, he prated of the easy victory in store. "Jalálabad is a fortress of no strength. And by the favour of God I and my men will take it in three days."

"Not in three *months*, Sirdar Sahib!" Lawrence answered stoutly. "You have the men as well as the fortress to reckon with; and there will be no frost and snow there to do your fighting for you, as at Kabul."

The well-deserved hit glanced harmlessly aside. Akbar merely laughed and repeated his conviction. "Frost or no frost, in less than a week Sale and his garrison will join you here!" said he; and departed, leaving his prisoners anxious exceedingly, yet confident in defences repaired by Broadfoot, and in the soldierly spirit of the garrison.



## VI

THE 19th of February—a day not easily forgotten by Afghan or Englishman—dawned gloomy and oppressive. The clouds, that hung low and grey, had a sulphurous tinge. Over all the valley of Lughmán and its enclosing hills there brooded a heavy, unnatural stillness—not of peace, but as of a veiled threat, or a silent presence that refuses to be ignored.

The Afghans shook their heads. That angry light in the sky bespoke the wrath of God either with the Feringhis or themselves—who could tell? The Feringhis took a more practical interest in the matter; merely wondering what new visitation this inimical country had in store for them.

For several days the weather had been strangely variable. On the 17th snow had fallen all day and all night, painfully recalling the past. None who lived through the Kabul siege and retreat can ever again have enjoyed the beauty of a snow landscape; and all were thankful to see that glittering mantle dissolved by rain.

This morning the clouds suggested thunder. Beyond that they did not trouble their heads about the matter.

After breakfast they dispersed to their several occupations, or pretences of occupation, as the case might be. Lawrence marshalled his small contingent on the parade-ground. Lady Macnaghten was congenially engaged with her cats. Lady Sale climbed the narrow staircase that led

to the roof of their quarters, a bundle of wet linen in her arms; for there had just been a great washing. As servants were scarce, they had promoted a "sweeper" to the double duties of syce and *dhobi*, with a General's wife for Aide. "I hang up the clothes on the flat roof," quoth she. "We dispense with starch and ironing, and in our present situation must learn to do everything that is useful."

To that end she now emerged from the stairway—a tall, angular woman, turbaned and very homely clad. The roof, like all of its kind in the East, was designed for use. A low wall ran round it. There were benches and one or two boxes for stools, and the wide view down the length of the valley made it a refreshing change from a courtyard shut in by walls thirty feet high.

On one of the benches sat Shelton and Mackenzie, the older man with his hookah, the younger with a book. Shelton had by this time quarrelled with almost every officer in the fort, and of the women he took small account. Only between him and Mackenzie surface good-fellowship prevailed; chiefly because it takes two to make a quarrel—and Mackenzie would not.

The oppressive stillness deepened every moment; and of a sudden there came from everywhere at once hollow rumblings as of waggons over a stony street. Lady Sale felt the roof sway and tilt under her feet. But slight earthquakes were common in that region, and balancing herself as on a rolling ship, she quietly pursued her task.

Again that hollow rumbling, which now seemed to come from the hills at the far end of the valley, and looking in that direction, she saw a strange sight. It was as if a series of mines were being exploded, each one nearer and nearer to the fort of Budiabad. And as that ominous cloud rolled onward the rumbling and rocking increased.

Shelton, who had taken the sound for thunder, looked fiercely round at his companion.

"Keep still, can't you! How the devil can I smoke in comfort with you shaking the bench?"

Mackenzie, looking up quickly from his book, saw the cloud in the valley, felt the bench shaken again, and straightway sprang to his feet.

"It's not *me*, Brigadier," he cried. "It's an earthquake. Look sharp!"

He headed for the stairs, the roof cracking under him as he ran; and Shelton stumbled giddily after him, the precious hookah under his arm.

Lady Sale had been before them—her one thought, the beloved daughter and the grandson-to-be.

As they ran down, the stairs creaked and rocked; and the roof, not a formidable affair, fell, with a crash, down upon their heads. Beyond being half choked and smothered in dust, no hurt befell. Lady Sale, blinded and bewildered, saw before her only a heap of rubbish that brought her heart into her throat.

But from beyond the rubbish there came a joyful shout: "Lady Sale! Mackenzie! Come into the courtyard. We're all safe!"

Hurriedly they scrambled over the ruins of Number Four, into the blessed open; and at the same moment Private Moore, Elphinstone's soldier servant, came staggering out of Number Five with the sick General in his arms.

The courtyard—rolling in long waves that made the steadiest giddy and shook the heart of the bravest—was packed with a terrified crowd, some awed and still, some rushing to and fro in search of safe standing ground, most of them convinced that the day of judgment was at hand and their last hour had come. The picketed horses,

trembling violently, reared and plunged. Many broke their ropes and cantered wildly round the enclosure, adding yet another terror to that of the unquiet earth.

At every roll some part of their prison walls fell inward or outward with a thundering crash, so that the air was darkened with dust, and men gritted it between their teeth. It was as if the patient earth had suddenly waked to life, and was trying to rid herself of the burden of her myriad peoples, her thousand hills.

So far, not a soul had been hurt, but each perturbation was fraught with hideous possibilities, and the faces of the prisoners were white, their lips set, as they crowded together in the centre of the court, farthest from the crumbling walls. Near them stood a low building, with underground rooms, a harmless neighbour, judging from its height. But there came a sudden, violent convulsion; and close beside them the earth yawned wide, swallowing up their little store-house, that vanished miraculously as if through a trap-door.

With a great cry of terror, the crowd surged backward from that awful chasm and its geyser of dust.

"The stoutest hearts amongst us," said Lawrence, and his was one—"quailed at the appalling sight;" and even the Afghans, hardened though they were to yearly convulsions of their country, fell upon their knees, calling aloud on Allah to spare those who had sinned.

It seemed that Allah heard them, for the rocking soon became less violent; mere after-sighs, as it were, of an exhausted, disappointed earth; and Mackenzie, who had seen severe earthquakes during his Spanish service, assured them that the worst was over. The Afghans confirmed his statement, adding that lesser shocks would probably go on for weeks; and that much-enduring party of castaways, very giddy about the head, badly shaken in body

and mind, drew breath more freely and looked about them to estimate the damage done.

Walls, gateways, and bastions—also badly shaken—were cracked and, in part, thrown down. The outer wall of Number One had sunk two feet, and all the beams had started. Number Four was a mass of dust and shattered woodwork; Number Five almost intact. One or two natives had been killed; but among all the prisoners and their belongings, no living creature had even been hurt.

In the first moment of relief the thoughts of all flew straight to Jalálabad—its new defences probably flung down, its garrison delivered into the hands of the enemy, as if by direct intervention of God. Lawrence, remembering his last words to the Sirdar, saw Nature again “doing the fighting” for Akbar Khan. Snow and frost being absent, an earthquake of quite unusual violence had come to his aid. There was something almost uncanny in the coincidence, if indeed it were nothing more.

So the men stood about in groups anxiously discussing possibilities big with tragic significance for all:—and lo, the voice of Lady Macnaghten proclaiming with tears that her favourite cat was buried in the ruins!

Comedy struck sharp on tragedy had its tonic effect. What matter a hypothetical calamity thirty miles off, when a tearful woman at their elbows bewailed the loss of her cat? Straightway a rescue party was called for and the precious animal dug out—unharméd like the rest.

And now another unconscious touch of comedy was provided by Shelton—no comedy character by any means. The worst being over, and the treasured cat exhumed, he approached the rescue party, high dudgeon writ plain upon his brow.

“Mackenzie, I want to speak to you,” said he.

“Very well, sir,” replied the favoured one, with a twinkle at Lawrence in passing; and the two moved a little apart.

“Mackenzie,” repeated Shelton, with a portentous gravity. “Even in our deplorable situation seniority has its rights—yet you went downstairs *before me* this morning.”

The delinquent, scarcely able to keep a straight face, answered unabashed: “So I did. I’m sorry. It’s the fashion in earthquakes, Brigadier. I learnt it among the Spaniards in Manilla!”

The cool tone and the disarming smile precluded further argument. Shelton shrugged his shoulders, silenced, yet not placated; and Mackenzie, returning, confided the “Brigadier’s latest” to a jubilant audience among the ruins.

Followed the practical problem—where could they sleep with a reasonable chance of safety? Though the worst was over, smaller shocks—startling enough—were repeated almost every hour; and before nightfall there had been twenty-five at least. These did little more damage; and Number One was pronounced habitable; also Number Five, which was promptly given up by the bachelors to Lady Sale and all who had shared her ruined room.

The men, and those of the ladies who refused the shelter of any roof, must make the best of a bivouac in the courtyard, crowded though it was with all and sundry. The nights were still bitter cold and the dew heavy as fine rain. Some put up awnings for themselves; and for the General a small tent was pitched by the devoted Moore.

All night the earth heaved and sighed at intervals and sleep was broken by alarms. Next day Lady Sale wrote to her husband announcing their safety and begging for news; and on the 21st came Dōst Mahomed, to inquire after their health.

From him they learnt that their fort had suffered less

than any in the valley, many having been entirely destroyed and their inhabitants killed. Never within living memory, said he, had the hills of Afghanistan been so violently perturbed; and in the eyes of Mahomedans such visitations are never without cause. There were those who saw, in this exceeding anger of the earth, a judgment on themselves for treacherous and bloodthirsty slaughter; while others opined that they were punished for staying their hands while an infidel remained alive: a nice question, providing unlimited food for argument. To the prisoners it seemed merely that they were destined, for the sins of their Government and their leaders, to experience the worst that Afghanistan could do:—the unexampled treachery of her chiefs, the heaviest snowfall within memory, and now the very earth turned traitor under their feet.

Dōst Mahomed did what he could in the way of amelioration, and the roof of Number Four was propped up after a fashion. But mysterious heavings kept the nerves on edge, and in spite of drenching dews the courtyard still remained popular.

“All last night,” wrote Lady Sale on the 24th, “there was a tremulous motion as of a ship struck by a heavy sea accompanied by the sound of water breaking against a vessel. At other times we have the undulatory motion of a snake in the water; and reports like explosions of gunpowder: but the most uncommon sensation has been that of a heavy ball as if rolling over our roof, with a sound of distant thunder.”

Reports from Jakkalabad were varied and contradictory. One declared that the town had been destroyed and captured. Another told how an Afghan, sent to see how they fared, had been treated as Haughton treated the spy at Charikar—shown round the works by Sale and Macgregor, and told that they could not only withstand Akbar,

but that if he came against them, they would meet him in the open plain: which last rang true enough to be readily believed.

On the 21st the swords of Elphinstone and Shelton were returned with a gracious note from Akbar himself; and two days after, all were overjoyed by the appearance of Captain Bygrave—a veritable resurrection.

Half starved, maimed by frost-bite, and terribly depressed in mind, his tale was as strange as any in that long chapter of strange tales. On the 12th of January, before reaching the Jagdalak barrier, he had struck up a lateral gorge with Mr. Baness, a Delhi merchant, the two having determined to take their chance in the mountains. For seven days and six nights they had taken that chance, in very painful fashion, with only the rocks for shelter and a small bag of coffee for food. This they had eked out by taking six grains a day. Let the over-fed consider that trifling detail.

Their store spent, Baness had struggled on to Jalálabad, reaching it only in time to die. Bygrave, frost-bitten in both feet—the toes of one entirely gone—had got no farther than a friendly village near Gandamak. Here Akbar had heard of him and sent for him to join the “happy family,” who received him with open arms and proceeded to cheer him up to the best of its ability.

Elphinstone insisted on his sharing the small tent, now permanently occupied by Pottinger and himself. Since the earthquake he had become visibly worse. Besides the unhealed wound in his thigh, dysentery was steadily sapping his strength; and Akbar, informed of his precarious state, had sent word that if a *palki* could be procured the General should be sent at once to Jalálabad. But the *palki* did not seem to be forthcoming; and Elphinstone grew daily weaker in body, sadder at heart.



For all the loyal reticence of those about him, it was almost impossible to avoid occasional unguarded remarks that grated terribly on his wounded spirit; and just at this time, when his nerves were still ajar, he was stirred up, almost to frenzy, by some casual talk overheard while lying in his tent. Pottinger and Bygrave did what they could to comfort him. But the most sympathetic could not unsay the truth; and it was the truth that pierced his sensitive soul.

"Before God not a man of you all, not even Shelton," he declared passionately—"can blame me more than I blame myself. Fool—*fool* that I was to leave a happy home, in my uncertain state of health, and seek 'the bubble reputation' in a far country! Last night, lying awake, I was haunted by some lines of Gray that I learnt as a boy. You remember—'Eton College'?"

"Ambition this shall tempt to rise,  
Then whirl the wretch from high;  
To bitter scorn a sacrifice,  
And grinning Infamy."

"There was more. Yes—yes . . ."

"And keen Remorse with blood defiled . . ."

Shuddering, he lay back with closed eyes; and those others, silenced by the terrible aptness of his quotation, did but love him the more that he refused to be comforted.

One consolation at least was his, the sympathy and devotion of all who shared his captivity. In the face of shame and misery so patiently borne, how could they choose but forgive things suffered through his incompetence, who ought never to have been there. Shelton alone still remained obstinately hostile, obstinately aloof; still

declared his determination to cast the whole blame on Elphinstone, who would, no doubt, pay for the loss of an army with his life. That Elphinstone alone would be held officially responsible for the retreat and its result in no way justified the unchivalrous attitude of the man who had openly boasted of talking the General over to his point of view; the man who of all others had least right to cast the first stone.

It was in view of Shelton's attitude to his Chief that Vincent Eyre—after some private discussion of the matter—"determined at all risks to give the world the whole unvarnished truth."

The only detailed accounts that had survived the wreck were the journals of Captain Johnson and Lady Sale—invaluable both, so far as they went. But there was need of a record more impersonal, more military in character, that could be forwarded to Government directly it was written. For who could tell how many would live to regain their freedom; and it were intolerable to leave the General's character at the mercy of the Brigadier. Elphinstone's straggling notes amounted to little more than defence of himself on certain points; while Pottinger's own official account for Government—begun on the 1st of the month and lately completed—merely recorded, in bald outline, such events as came within the scope of his knowledge, and concluded with generous appreciation of those who had rendered services worthy of mark.

From him Eyre hoped to receive some help in his own undertaking; and with that view asked him to read the first chapter, and correct any mistakes about the Kohistan. But to Eldred Pottinger the whole subject was hardly less painful than to Elphinstone himself. After glancing through a few pages, he folded up the odd scraps of paper and handed them back to Eyre.

"I am glad you are doing this," said he quietly. "It ought to be done. But I'd rather not read any more. I have only one word of advice to you. Touch lightly on political matters, of which you know very little; and any details you may want about Charikar are at your service."

Disappointing, but not unnatural, as Eyre very well understood. From the rest he gleaned what little help they could give; but in the main, he relied on his own memory and observation and natural gift of the pen.

Such was the genesis of the famous document that supplied the British public with the first detailed accounts of the Kabul disaster; a document, afterwards denounced by Shelton through the Press as a "kind of picnic or Kabul cabal," a patchwork concocted by Pottinger, Mackenzie, Lawrence, and Eyre, with malicious intent to blacken his character before the world.

How far Eyre was indebted to Pottinger has already been seen, and the other two had little more say in the matter. For himself, the writing of that record provided absorbing occupation throughout the uneventful weeks that followed; weeks when the hearts of prisoners and freemen alike began to grow weary with waiting for the "tread of a host!"

## VII

If, to the prisoners, March proved uneventful, it was not so, by any means, at Jalálabad, Peshawur, and Calcutta.

At Jalálabad the earthquake had, as reported, destroyed in half an hour the labours of three months ; also, as reported, the garrison still held its own. None had been killed ; few injured. Only the town itself looked as if some Titan, striding across the earth, had tramped through the midst of it, kicking down all that stood in his way. Scarcely a house remained intact ; two bastions were badly damaged, the breaches in the walls were worse than on the day they had marched in ; and, to crown all, an Afghan army lay encamped across the river, not six miles off.

Broadfoot's first comment as he regarded the wreck of his labours, proclaimed him soldier to the core. No lamentation on his own account ; merely the quiet remark : " *Now* is the time for Akbar."

Now also was the time for George Broadfoot. To a genius of his quality all things are possible. That night the men slept at their alarm posts. Next day they were at work again, between the lesser shocks ; and within a fortnight the defences had arisen like magic, in many places even stronger than before. Still, over neighbouring villages, dust clouds blown by the wind showed like smoke from burnt-out fires ; still shocks of varying intensity kept their nerves at strain. But the walls remained intact ;

and as for Akbar—appalled by such unparalleled convulsions—he stirred not a foot till the 26th.

On that day he advanced in force; received a warm welcome from Abbott's guns; occupied the whole circle of commanding forts and heights, and the blockade of Jalálabad was complete.

By this time it was known that Pollock had reached Peshawur on the 5th with MacCaskill's brigade; and to Sale and Macgregor, in their ignorance, there seemed no earthly reason why the dust of his relieving column should not gladden their eyes before the week was out. But Sunday came and passed, and another Sunday drew near; and still no dust-cloud came to cheer them; only rumours, endless and contradictory; only the steady dwindling of musket-ammunition, of grain and food.

Their letters became urgent, even to impatience. They wrote openly of their fear that before long the increasing mass of Afghans would overwhelm the garrison, and even cast on Pollock the responsibility of their downfall—should it occur.

Such letters did not make matters easier for a fellow-General tied fast at Peshawur by arrogant Sikhs, and half mutinous troops. But there had been enough of failure already in this disastrous war; and Pollock was not the man to be worried into a premature advance.

On the 12th of March then, he sat alone in Mackeson's *dutier*, patiently and regretfully explaining matters to men rendered not a little irritable by the strain of hope deferred. The grave, concentrated face of George Pollock, with its rugged features and sunken eyes, its square, projecting chin and jaw, showed an admirable mixture of firmness and sweet temper that were, indeed, the very essence of his nature. A more complete contrast to

William Nott could scarcely be imagined. Here was no fiery, brilliant leader, obstinate and hot-headed, but a plain, unassuming man of middle height and reserved bearing, though a smile was never very far from the eyes: a man unadorned either by dashing or shining qualities; yet rich in judgment, patience, and foresight; with a balance and equanimity of spirit that could hold its own even when things looked blackest.

To Macgregor he wrote on the 12th of March:

“It must no doubt appear to you and Sale most extraordinary that, with the force I have here, I do not at once move on. God knows it has been my anxious wish to do so, but I have been helpless. I came on ahead to arrange for an advance; but was saluted with a report of eighteen hundred sick, and a bad feeling among the sepoys. I visited the hospital and endeavoured to encourage them; but they *had no heart*. . . . On the 1st instant . . . I had the mortification of knowing that the Hindus of four out of five native corps refused to advance. I immediately took measures to sift the evil and a reaction has taken place, in the belief that I will wait for reinforcements. . . . Your situation is never out of my thoughts; but having told you what I have, you and Sale will see that necessity alone has kept me here.”

This was no exaggerated statement of the case. Never, perhaps, did General find a more disheartening state of affairs than did Pollock when he had hurried up to his post, eager to advance at the first possible moment. Wild's failure had bred a holy terror of the black defile ahead, and mutilated natives, crawling into camp, told exaggerated tales of horrors experienced in that land of Mussulman devils. Worse than all, the speech and con-

duct of the Company's officers was such as to infuriate Lawrence and disgust the quieter natured General. Advance, for the present, was obviously out of the question. Though Sale might implore, and all India be waiting, with tense excitement, for the next act of that stupendous drama in the North, Pollock had the coolness and the courage to halt two months at Peshawur rather than go forward prematurely, at the risk of heaping failure on failure, and further disheartening the native troops.

While Clerk and Lawrence wrestled with reluctant Sikhs, while Mackeson bargained with grasping Khyberris for a free passage through the pass, Pollock quietly devoted himself to checking the hospital epidemic, which he soon perceived to be moral rather than physical, requiring attendance from himself rather than from his medical staff. That attendance he gave without stint and not without result. The "Generaili Sahib" soon became a familiar figure in all the hospital tents. Slowly but surely, his quiet kindly words of encouragement, his practical consideration for the men's creature comforts had their tonic effect on sepoys who were no cowards by nature. Slowly but surely, hospitals gave up their sick, and parade-grounds took on a more respectable appearance.

The prevailing disaffection, encouraged by the Sikhs, was a far more serious affair—how serious few Anglo-Indian officials realized at the time. It was said by some that Pollock exaggerated his pressing need for "more white faces"; but only those on the spot knew the falsity of this implication. Only they could gauge the effect upon the Native Army of "that lamentable Kabul expedition which destroyed our reputation for good faith, and the prestige of our invincibility."

And day by day worse details filtered down from

Afghanistan ; details magnified in importance by rumours from the Peshawur bazaars. "The lion was in the toils at last," said they, who longed to see him so, "his roar might still be terrible ; but it was music to the lesser beasts. If the mice would but hold aloof, he must surely die."

No spirit more infectious than the spirit of mutiny ; and with that temper abroad it had needed little more than a false step, a shadow of precipitancy or irresolution, to fan the spark to a flame and bring about the Great Rebellion fifteen years before its time.

That Eldred Pottinger was one of the very few who recognized this—though far from the spot—will presently be seen ; and had the Great Rebellion come then, with Sindh and the Punjab unconquered, with all Afghanistan up in arms, the lion might have died indeed.

Throughout that critical two months none gave his leader more invaluable help than did Captain Henry Lawrence ; that Lawrence of whom it was written by one of Pollock's officers : "He seems to mount the first flash of lightning that happens to be going his way ; and when you fancy him forty miles off, behold him at your side." The great lean frame of the man seemed consumed by the fiery spirit within : and his face was lean as his frame ; lantern-jawed, high cheek-boned, with grey eyes full of life and laughter under pent-house brows. He and Pollock worked well together ; and if Lawrence had a keen eye for the foibles of the older man, he did full justice to the qualities that made him so peculiarly the right peg in the right hole.

Pollock himself was more than fortunate in the three Politicals on that northern frontier, and generous in appreciation of their quality ; an appreciation very welcome at a time when the misdeeds of Macnaghten and Burnes, the indiscretions of Lord and Leech, had brought



some discredit on a service manned by as fine a body of men as India could then produce. To Clerk, Lawrence, and Mackeson, as much as to his own fitness for the task in hand, Pollock owed it that his force was finally able to advance intact—Sikhs, sepoys, and all.

But while Sale's letters grew more despairing, more impatient, the additional "white faces"—the 3rd Dragoons and Horse Artillery—were checked in their upward march by every conceivable accident and delay.

"God knows I am most anxious to move on," wrote Pollock to Macgregor on the 27th. "But my situation has been most embarrassing . . . and you may suppose what my feelings have been—wanting to relieve you, and knowing that my men would not go on. . . . I hope nothing will prevent my moving on the 31st."

That hope at least was fulfilled. On the 30th the 3rd Brigade marched. On the 31st the Army of Retribution moved forward from Peshawur to Jamrud; encamped at the mouth of the Khyber, and there halted again. Such an army was not to be flung into the jaws of such a defile without the utmost preparation and precaution—both of which take time; and both of which were the more necessary because of an unexpected check in Mackeson's plans for buying a free passage for the troops.

At the very moment when all was arranged, Akbar had marched eight hundred men with two guns to oppose Pollock at Ali Musjid. It was enough. The Afridis withdrew from their agreement—and Pollock quietly decided to force the Pass. It would entail further delay, but it could and should be done.

For four days that tremendous gorge yawned ahead of his troops, like an open sepulchre, wedged between naked and terrible crags, that flanking parties must somehow manage to crown. Those four days Pollock spent in

planning and executing final arrangements, "so perfect in conception, so complete in detail," that all risk of failure was reduced to vanishing-point. He interviewed, in person, every commanding officer; detailed the place of every animal and camp-follower in his central column. To the baggage problem he devoted special care, and ensured the co-operation of all by a personal appeal none could resist; a personal example none could choose but emulate. "Doubling up," even "quadrupling up" in the smallest of tents was cheerfully adopted by the officers.

"A subaltern's Regulation," wrote one of them, "we regard as a sort of imperial pavilion. The General himself does not aspire to so splendid an abode, but is content to share a little hill tent with his Aide and A.A.G. I expect the latter are not entirely well-pleased with his habit of forestalling the 'early village cock'!" The "Aide" in question being his own son Robert, may have shared the family weakness—so much the worse for the A.A.G.!

And now came the question of questions, for themselves at least—which Political should go forward with the army. Lawrence had counted on going. Pollock had set his heart on having the fiery gunner. Mackeson, as senior assistant, considered he had the better right. Naturally Lawrence disagreed with him; but seniority clinched all, and not even Pollock's sincere regret could soften the blow. One favour only Lawrence begged—to be allowed "to see the other side of the pass" (rather an Irish way of "not going on"); at any rate, to show the way down to the occupying of the entrance.

Such coaxing from a young gunner to an old one proved irresistible, and Lawrence had his way.

By the 4th of April all was ready at last. That evening George Pollock called once more on every commanding

officer, and returned from his tour of inspection with a thankful heart. Yet the tremor of anxiety could not altogether be stilled. So immensely much hung on the issue:—Sale's relief; his own reputation; the proving of Sikhs and sepoy. Above all, the supreme chance of eventually pushing on to Kabul; and there, on the scene of Elphinstone's humiliation, meting out condign punishment to Mahomed Akbar Khan.

Meanwhile the Afridis had been very much occupied in preparing a welcome after their kind. As at Jagdalak, it took the form of a barrier within the mouth of the pass, where they counted on throwing the whole column into confusion and reaping a fine harvest. But the British General, being very wide awake, had discovered their plan—and laid his own accordingly.

There was little sleep that night either for him or his senior officers. They merely lay down beside their arms and waited for the small hour that would set them free to act—at last. Between the clangour of camp bells, proclaiming the time, loomed great chasms of silence, till at last they proclaimed two of the morning:—and there followed the subdued hum of an army waking to life.

All was done swiftly and silently as might be. The General's order had been stringent: "No fires to be lighted, no drums to beat, no bugles to sound"; and soon after half-past two he made his way to Lawrence's tent, that they might set out together. There he found his fiery gunner sitting up in bed, pale as a ghost and deadly sick, with all the symptoms of incipient cholera. Grieved and dismayed though he was, Pollock could do no more than speak a few words of encouragement and hurry away, scarcely expecting to see Lawrence alive again.

But soon practical matters claimed his whole attention. Long before the appointed hour every unit of that well-

organized army was in its place, moving stealthily forward, in the chill of earliest morning, through two miles of stony hillocks that swell gradually into the jagged hills set about the entrance of the Khyber Pass.

The General's ponderous centre column, with its endless camels, its precious convoy of stores, ammunition and treasure for Jalálabad, was flanked by mobile columns of Light Infantry, told off to crown the heights; and although the sound of their going was hushed to the utmost, no precautions could still the clank of scabbards, the crashing of gun-wheels, or the clink of horseshoes on stone. But the Khyberis slept sound, secure in their reliance on British stupidity, and all unwitting that here was a General of another quality; while the troops, as is their way, reflected the spirit of their leader.

As for the sepoy, they were changed men. Pollock's personal encouragement, his careful attention to detail, had aroused, first, confidence in him, then confidence in themselves. It needed but one signal victory to complete the cure.

Arrived at the black chasm between the cliffs, the main column halted, while the flanking parties, British and native, scrambled like hill-goats up masses of rock that, on the right hand, seemed to defy the most adventurous. But gallant Colonel Taylor, of the 9th Foot, was not to be balked of his purpose, and stealing unseen round the base of the heights, he lighted on a practicable path.

Up and on he sped, closely followed by his men; and they again by sepoy and Ferris' Jezailchis—a splendid corps. Afridi pickets were startled out of sleep; and their wild-cat yell soon told anxious listeners below that on both sides the skirmishers were hotly engaged.

While the valiant struggle went forward above, the guns were ordered into position; and Pollock, watching

their movements in the dim light, suddenly rubbed his eyes and looked again. The General's mind was of a pedestrian order, not given to belief in ghosts; but the long lean figure on horseback, cantering here and there, helping Captain Alexander with the guns, was unmistakably that of the man he had given up for lost not two hours ago.

While astonishment still held him, Lawrence cantered up and touched his hat, his face still grey as death, but his eyes alight; his indomitable spirit triumphing visibly over ills that would have kept a lesser man prostrate, cursing his luck.

Pollock nodded approval, and Lawrence galloped back to his beloved guns, whose hour was at hand.

Afridi tribesmen, however resolute, proved no match for British infantry, who drove them back and back, till the heights were crowned, and the unassailable barrier taken in reverse. Flying white figures over the hills proclaimed the issue of the fight;—and Pollock knew that the moment for advance had come.

Orderly and unhindered, his centre column passed between towering walls of rock to the deserted barricade. Young Becher with his Sappers tore a passage through it. The guns, roaring approval, swept the lesser hills; and before the sun was a spear's height above the peaks, the Army of Retribution—with its victorious wings on either side—was “moving inch by inch to hard but certain victory.”

There would be further resistance, no doubt, at Ali Musjid, where Sultan Ján awaited them with a couple of British guns; but Henry Lawrence, returning that night to Peshawur, consoled his heavy heart with the thought that, though he would not be there to see, all must surely go well with an army so perfectly organized, so coolly and wisely led.

## VIII

THAT awful winter of 1841, with its indelible memories of bloodshed and disgrace, its phenomenal snowfall and earthquake, had given place to an early spring. By the 9th of April all the valleys of Afghanistan were alight and alive with white flashes of fruit blossom, with the gleam of young green, and the laughter of torrents let loose. Boughs of the wild almond were already a-blush. Tulips, iris, and narcissi lit up the stony foothills like many-coloured lamps; and whiffs of delicate scent, as if from a bed of violets and wallflowers, announced that somewhere the Persian iris was in bloom.

But to the handful of British prisoners at Budiabad, fenced in by thirty-foot walls of mud and stone, April was even as February and March, except that the sun grew daily stronger and the sky bluer, whenever the heavy spring rains gave either a fair chance of self-assertion.

March had brought only two events of any importance to those who waited patiently for some dim prospect of release. On the 14th, Mrs. Boyd had presented her husband with a daughter and Akbar with an additional "female captive"; and about the same time a stir had been created among the men by an announcement, made privately to Captain Johnson, that, for a trifling consideration of two lakhs, Mahomed Shah Khan would be willing to give them up.

Johnson, overjoyed, had promptly convened a meeting

to consider a proposal so tempting that he and some others were for accepting it out of hand.

But Eldred Pottinger set his face against any further enriching of Afghan chiefs, at the expense of Government, for the mere saving of their own skins. Many disagreed with him; and finally, the question was referred to Macgregor for fuller consideration. Macgregor might do what he would; Pottinger had suffered more than enough from fathering that which he disapproved. He who had once been ardent, hopeful, and fiery, now seemed daily more withdrawn into himself. His face, graver, sadder, more resolute than of old, yet showed no line nor hint of bitterness; a weed that could never flourish in such soil.

But though he would not countenance bribing Mahomed Shah, none longed more than he to shake the dust of Afghanistan from his feet, its grim associations out of his soul. It was his hope that if Pollock won through to Jalálabad, he might persuade Akbar to negotiate a full exchange of prisoners, and so lift the whole transaction to a more dignified political level. For the present, so far as they knew, Pollock was tied by the leg at Peshawur, and Akbar still hopeful of setting his foot upon the neck of Sale.

Not long after the refusal of Mahomed Shah's offer, it was rumoured that Akbar lay raging in his tent with two wounds; one received in fair fight, the other an accident, which he refused to credit as such. Remembering always those ill-advised machinations at Kabul, he suspected that Macgregor had bribed his attendant to let off a matchlock "by accident on purpose"; and vented his wrath, as is the way of man, on those nearest to him—the prisoners at Budiabad. Their friendly custodian was replaced by a gaunt, savage-looking Ghilzai, of whom they augured ill,

since he began by abusing his predecessor for a swindler and a thief.

But so far the new broom had behaved himself seemly; and his charges, in a rough fashion, had begun to make themselves more comfortable. They slept on charpoyes and sat upon stools; and a few mat-sheds put up in the courtyard lessened overcrowding in the rooms. Earthquakes were still incessant, but they had become hardened, and no after-shocks rivalled the first.

Now, with April, came hints of stirrings other than the uprush of new life in orchard and field. All through the first week their nerves were kept on edge by rumours so wild, so conflicting, that they knew not what to believe. One day Sultan Ján was reported on his way to oppose Pollock with three thousand men, and the prisoners were warned that at any moment they might be packed off to Kafiristan. Another day they were told that Mahomed Akbar had withdrawn his outposts, and liberty for all was near at hand. Again a few days, and their head gaoler, Dōst Mahomed the younger, returned from a visit to Kabul, bringing word of serious commotion in the city, and a report that Shah Shuja had been murdered by a son of Newab Zeman Khan.

On the 7th Lady Sale closed her entry with the words: "We know of a truth that the Afghans are burnishing up their arms. . . . Our force is reported to have reached Jalálabad. Our guards are all on the alert. A report that Akbar is killed; another, that he has fled to Gandamak. Our broken towers are manned and thirteen men added to our guard." On the 8th: "The first news this morning is that Mahomed Shah has been here during the night and removed his family from the valley. It is still reported that Akbar is dead."



With every hour suspense grew and deepened. All were utterly at a loss not only what to believe, but what to hope. Akbar might be cruel and treacherous; but, on the whole, he had used them well. His death would leave them to be fought over by squabbling chiefs, and probably won by Mahomed Shah Khan, beside whom Akbar was an angel of light.

Suddenly the oppression of ignorance was dispelled by news—glorious news! Sale and his garrison, it was said, had wrought their own deliverance. Early on the morning of the 7th all troops in the town had turned out, taken Akbar by surprise, and in two hours had captured his camp, his guns, and most of his private property. Victory had been signal and complete; but neither Akbar nor Mahomed Shah were killed. Both were reported to be well on their way to Budaabad—with what intent, who could tell? The thrill of pride and joy was poisoned by the secret fear that the lives of them and their children might be exacted as the price of victory.

All day they waited, wondering, sick with suspense; avoiding the one subject, yet unable to talk or think of anything else. Many believed that Sale must surely push on at once to their rescue, thereby making his triumph complete, and covering his garrison with glory. Towards evening a small crowd gathered on the ramparts, where they remained till dusk, straining their eyes for the gleam of bayonets that would flash the message: "All's well!"

There came no gleam to cheer them; and another night of suspense dragged its weary length over their heads. Impossible to keep away from the ramparts next morning; but though the road was clear, Sale came not, and all day long suspense consumed them. Nor was it sensibly allayed by the behaviour of their keeper and his men. "Our guard," wrote Johnson, "appear very mys-

terious, group together, talk in whispers. . . . Towards afternoon we asked several of them who had always been kind to us—what would become of us. They shook their heads and said: 'You are in the hands of God.' A frightful stillness seemed to prevail. By degrees we began to hear fearful rumours that we were all to be massacred at sunset . . . and knowing the revengeful temper of Afghans, nothing appeared more probable. Our anxiety and suspense increased as the day wore on."

At sunset came Mahomed Shah with an armed following; and the fashion of his greeting raised their spirits many degrees. They all sat down together, and he spoke without rancour of Akbar's defeat, bidding them prepare for an early start next morning. Not a word as to their destination; and again anxiety laid a cold hand upon their hearts. For eleven weeks that fort of Budiabad had been to them a city of refuge, comfortless, yet secure; and now—the road again, with its dangers and discomforts: which road, and whither?

None ventured to ask; but on rising to go, Mahomed Shah signified a wish for private talk with Pottinger and Lawrence. Both men went out with him, and to them he confessed that the rout had been complete; that the defeated chiefs had urged a massacre of all British captives; but Akbar had flatly refused, and had resolved merely to move farther out of reach.

In vain they proposed that, instead, he should take them straight to Jalálabad and make his own terms with Sale. He—the father-in-law of Akbar? Impossible! They must follow the Sirdar's fortunes; and at an early hour all must be prepared to start for the hills.

They were so prepared. Few save Lawrence, Lady Macnaghten, and Lady Sale had any possessions worth packing; and Mahomed Shah—lest they be hampered

with superfluous baggage—considerately appropriated what little they possessed.

In spite of heated remonstrance from Lawrence, his boxes were ransacked, and he himself relieved of his epaulettes, pouch, and belt. As for Lady Macnaghten, her trunks and person yielded treasure untold. With jealous care she had so far guarded her shawls and jewellery; the last valued at a hundred thousand pounds; and her feelings may be imagined when Mahomed Shah, having helped himself to the costliest wraps, made tender inquiry after the other valuables, whose whereabouts he shrewdly guessed.

Denial or resistance were worse than useless. The jewels were produced: and Mahomed Shah gloated unblushingly.

Lady Sale proved no such gold-mine. "My chest of drawers," said she, "they took possession of with great glee. I left some rubbish in them and some small bottles. I hope the Afghans will try their contents and find them efficacious: one contained nitric acid, and the other a strong solution of lunar caustic!"

The men, having little else, were deprived of their horses and given *yabus* on the plea of precaution against any attempt at escape. For the women and children, the sick General and Bygrave, no choice but camel panniers; and to the discomfort of these was added the reminder of horrors that all had vainly striven to forget.

The private soldiers—except Elphinstone's two servants, Miller and Moore—were left behind, with the promise that they should be released whenever ransom was forthcoming.

It was noon before the cumbersome procession—with its escort of fifty Afghan horse and foot—was well under way; and they had barely covered four miles when those behind called a halt.

"What next?" was the question that knocked at the hearts of all: and lo, from the south came a horseman at full gallop, waving his unwound turban and shouting in Persian: "*Shahbush!* War is at an end! The Feringhi army has been cut to pieces in the Khyber. All their guns and treasure taken by Sultan Ján!"

With a yell of joy the Afghan escort wheeled about brandishing their sabres in a fashion so threatening that Lawrence, for one awful moment, anticipated the massacre of all. But the moment passed; the excitement subsided; and the story of Pollock's discomfiture, in the narrowest part of the pass, was graphically told for the humbling of those who had the arrogance to hold up their heads in spite of all.

To that tale the English officers listened first with blank incredulity, then with stunned dismay; their last shred of doubt dispelled by an order to face about and march back to the fort. There—with what revulsion of feeling who can imagine—they learnt the truth from Mahomed Shah. General Pollock had not been beaten back. He had forced the Khyber, with little loss, and was marching in triumph on Jalálabad. They also learnt the reason of their abrupt return. So heated had been the dispute among the chiefs as to their disposal, that Akbar—fearing they might be seized on the march—had thought it better to change the known day of their departure. No need to unpack, as they would probably start next day: the which they did, in higher spirits by far: though even now they knew not whither they went.

The mere movement, exercise and fresh air, the radiant patches of cultivation, gleaming like jewels in the harsh setting of rock and cliff, lifted the hearts of all and quickened the blood in their veins.

At the twelfth mile they halted and found three tents

pitched for them near the river, in a meadow bright with mosaic patches of gentian, forget-me-not, campion, and cranes' bill—flowers poignantly eloquent of Home.

And everywhere, in tragic contrast to earth's renewal of her ancient rapture, havoc wrought by her upheaval met the eye. Not a fort was entire; very few habitable; most of them masses of ruins. A few hundred yards from their own camp they had passed the great Akbar, sitting at the roadside in his palanquin; his face pale and downcast, his arm in a sling; another Akbar altogether than the man who had left them in February boasting that he would soon return with more fish in his net.

Bowing courteously to all as they passed, he had beckoned to Lawrence, for whom his friendly feeling never wavered. To him he spoke in a free and soldierly manner of Sale's victory, and the gallant bearing of his men. "They would have taken me, Lawrence Sahib," he added smiling, "had their General only followed me a few miles farther. For I was long detained on the river bank by the making of a raft. But it is not the will of God that I shall fall into your hands——!"

Truly a strange and remarkable character, this fiery young Barakzai:—a singular mixture of savage cruelty and almost chivalrous generosity.

That night it rained in torrents; and next morning, when all were ready to start, their new keeper—a Sikh Rajah—bade the unmarried men remain behind. Owing to the difficulty of feeding so large a party, they were to travel by another route. It was the order of the Sirdar.

Order or no, prisoners or no, this was more than any man among them would endure.

"Come, Anderson," cried Lawrence, "we'll tackle him ourselves—you as a husband, I as a bachelor. So long as we all hang together, they may do what they please."

To this effect they harangued Akbar when they reached his camp. "Consider, Sirdar Sahib, that there be several without husbands and many fatherless children, who look to us bachelor-folk for protection and care."

Akbar listened, not unmoved. "That is true, or it would not be Lawrence Sahib who spoke. I had not thought of it. You and Troup may go with the women."

"No, no, Sirdar. Let us all go together as before, and we will make no trouble, whatever may happen."

For a perceptible moment Akbar hesitated. His favourite captive was not lightly to be denied.

"You are a great Bahadur!" said he, smiling. "Let it be as you wish."

Lawrence gave thanks in flowery Eastern fashion, and decided to make the most of Akbar's generous mood.

"One more word, Sirdar Sahib, and I have done. Think how much greater in the eyes of true men would be your name and fame, if, instead of dragging helpless women and children about your rough country, you should send them all direct to Jalálabad, keeping only us men in your power."

Again Akbar listened with friendly attention; and while he listened Mahomed Shah sauntered up, scrutinizing one and the other with keen inimical eyes. To him Lawrence repeated his demand; but all hope of winning consent was gone.

"It is well enough for these men to speak thus," the elder chief muttered into his beard; then, turning on the officers a diabolical leer: "But this I tell you, before God. So long as there remains an Afghan prisoner in India or a Feringhi soldier in my country, so long will we keep you—men, women, and children, *all*. When you cannot ride, you *shall* walk; when you cannot walk, you *shall* be dragged; and when you cannot be dragged,

you *shall* have your throats cut—men, women, and children, *all*.”

At that Lawrence swung round, indignation blazing in his eyes. “Mahomed Shah Khan, you call yourself a chief and a gentleman! *Warriors* do not speak thus to men whose hands are tied!”

But as he turned to be gone Akbar detained him with a compelling hand. “Oh, Lawrence Sahib, do not distress yourself. He is only trying you.”

“He will do better not to try me in *that* fashion,” Lawrence answered, only half appeased; and, having won his main point, he carried the glad news back to his waiting comrades.

Their road lay among low hills, over sandy soil; up, always up, through stony ravines, with here and there jewels of cultivation sparkling in the waste.

Between the heavy spring showers the sun scorched their backs and faces, to the great discomfiture of the ladies and invalids. The former all wore turbans like the men; and, except for Lady Sale, those who rode must sit astride with their bedding for saddle, and no stirrups. Mrs. Eyre alone was persuaded to adopt the burkha, and so to travel in a manner that appeared seemly to their Afghan guard.

In two days they covered twenty-four miles; and on the third their road zigzagged up a steep and rocky incline to the Windy-Back Pass, then dropped again to the Kabul river. Camels being unsafe, all must ride—ladies, children, and the General; Pottinger with Dōst Mahomed leading the way.

Their talk became so friendly and confidential that Pottinger urged immediate negotiations with Pollock on his arrival at Jalálabad. Escape from their walled prison and news of a double British victory seemed to set

freedom tantalizingly within reach. Dōst Mahomed had no quarrel with the suggestion. He would think it over. In the meantime Pottinger Sahib would do well to sound the Sirdar.

They found him down by the river, still in his affable mood. Pottinger was invited to share his raft; and once across the river they had a long conference; the first of many, all tending to one end. He also would think the matter over and answer more definitely when they reached their present destination—Tazín.

On the evening of the 15th they encamped outside the fort of Sarubi, among meadows gay with spring flowers; and great was their relief when the decree went forth that here they were to enjoy four days' rest from the exhausting rough and tumble of the road. Here, in this very field, then buried under three feet of snow—they had encamped three months earlier on that unforgettable 12th of January; and here, on the 15th of April, they awaited—with hope revived—the news that at last an Army of Retribution had joined forces with Sale at Jalálabad.



## IX

ON that very day George Pollock's victorious army had set up its unimposing array of native tents within seven miles of the garrison that had so triumphantly achieved its own deliverance; and the spirits of the said garrison were in a state of effervescence only to be realized by men who have endured and achieved in a manner worthy of the best traditions of their race. The secret of their endurance and achievement may be summed up in a sentence—mutual confidence and mutual esteem between officers and men. By this outstanding difference between Jalálabad and Kabul, was the one siege rendered a memory of glory, as the other was a memory of shame.

Now, by God's blessing, they had weathered the worst; and, although they hailed Pollock joyfully from afar, it was less as deliverer than as fellow-victor, opportunely come to enhance their own private and personal glory. It was all very human, very natural; and if it did seem a little unfair to the General who had wrought so zealously and been so cruelly hampered, Pollock himself would have been the last man to resent the fact.

Since the 1st of April the tide of their affairs had turned very completely in the right direction. They had opened the month by a daring raid on Akbar's flocks. A party of cavalry had sallied forth and swept in five hundred head. But Akbar's vengeance lagged; and five hundred sheep, among two thousand, went little further,

without miraculous aid, than the loaves and fishes in the desert of Galilee.

On the 5th came rumours of Pollock's defeat in the Khyber. On the 6th Akbar had fired a salute in honour of the event; and Sale's commanding officers straightway demanded leave—not for the first time—to attack the Sirdar's camp in force. All through March "Fighting Bob" had been strangely backward in acting up to the nickname of younger days. Most of the sorties had been made in his despite; and on this occasion his officers would take no denial. Broadfoot, wounded in March, was still on the sick-list; but Havelock—acting in his place—met Sale's objections and irritation by producing a complete plan of campaign. Abbott and Dennie had their corps under arms, without orders. Backhouse and Oldfield spoke their minds with characteristic freedom; and Sale—after thoroughly losing his temper with them all—gave them their head, which they would probably have taken, whether or no.

Early next morning they learnt that the rumour was false; but the order held. Only twelve men were left to guard the gates, while twelve hundred camp-followers—armed and embodied—manned the walls. The rest were out by daylight—three stripling columns led by Dennie, Havelock, and Monteath; Sale, on his white charger, at the head of all. One such gallant exodus from Kabul had changed the whole current of history.

The Afghans—some six thousand of them—were, on this great day, taken completely unawares. By seven of the morning all was over: the enemy in full flight; Akbar's camp in flames; his stores, ammunition, standards, horses, and—better than all—four surrendered British guns, brought in triumph to Jalálabad. Only one event clouded that day of rejoicing—the death of Colonel Dennie. For

the rest, their loss was slight, their gain enormous, their five months' siege practically at an end.

And now, on the 15th, officers, righteously elate, flocked out to welcome the new-comers. Mess that night, however rough and scanty, was a glorious meal not soon forgotten by those present. The jokes, the speeches, the cross-fire of questions and congratulations, the overflow of schoolboy spirits—that makes the British officer so engaging a type of manhood—all added their savour to Spartan fare. And there was wine also, which the Jalálabad officers had not tasted since November.

Above all, it may be imagined how the relieving army chaffed the starving and beleaguered garrison, who appeared "in the highest health, scrupulously clean-shaven, and dressed as neatly as if quartered in an Indian cantonment." Pollock's officers, by contrast, seemed rather a collection of well-mannered and capable tramps. "Owing to the reduction of baggage," wrote one of them "our clothes were torn and dirty, our lips and faces burnt and blistered; and although the troops—in array—made a goodly show . . . yet each individual was in himself a particularly shabby-looking person."

Yet these "shabby-looking persons," under their unassuming leader, had placed to their credit an achievement as notable as it was unique. They had, for the first time in history, carried, by force of arms, the terrible Khyber defile, twenty-six miles long; and that, with little loss and signal success. Hitherto, gold alone had availed to open this Castle Gate of Afghanistan. Timoor Lang and Nadir Shah, with their enormous armies, had bought a safe passage through it. Akbar the Great is said to have lost forty thousand men in trying to force it, and Aurungzeb failed to get through. Yet George

Pollock, with nine thousand troops, British and native, with a cool and thoughtful head upon his shoulders to boot, had won through it in less than a week—and broken the spell of centuries.

Next day, according to immemorial custom, the band of the 13th arrived to play them into cantonments.

More cheers, more shouting as they drew up; and then—a smile of amusement passed from face to face. For the 13th—in a pure spirit of waggery—turned about and struck up the beautiful Jacobite lament: “Eh, but ye’ve been lang a-coming!”

To that tune they marched till they sighted the walls of Jalálabad, manned by the whole garrison. The guns thundered a welcome; the troops shouted in chorus; again that night mess was a festival of congratulation and good cheer in the true sense of the word.

One more joke the 13th perpetrated, while spirits were still at their highest, and all things like to be taken in good part. Next morning there went the round of cantonments a notification to the effect that “the Governor-General has the greatest satisfaction in rendering thanks to General Pollock for his gallantry and good conduct in so firmly maintaining his post in General Avatible’s comfortable house in Peshawur, in spite of the urgent necessity of advancing to the rescue of the beleaguered garrison in Jalálabad.”

If the joke seemed a trifle ungracious, it bred no ill-feeling, and was soon forgotten. It was handsomely counter-balanced, also, by full recognition that although the Jalálabad heroes had raised their own siege, Pollock’s force could still claim the honour of achieving their relief. Without the knowledge of that victorious army at their back, Akbar would probably have made a firmer stand and would certainly have returned again. Without Pollock’s

arrival and support, they themselves would have been paralyzed, unable to advance or retreat. There was no grudging or petty jealousy on this score. Abbott himself wrote to his brother: "Pollock *did* relieve Jalálabad. Without him we could have done nothing; we could not even have retired without great loss." And Sale's despatch to Government opened with a clear statement of the fact.

But the despatch, reporting his own victory and Akbar's flight, had sped on before to Benares, where the new Governor-General was then halting on his way to Allaha-bad; and within a few days of its arrival, all India was stirred and uplifted by a public notification in Lord Ellenborough's best vein, extolling the exploits of that "illustrious garrison," and congratulating the army on "the return of victory to its ranks."

Not two weeks after, this handsome recognition was followed by a "general order" approving, with fine discrimination, the services of Pollock, and directing a donation of six months' *batta*<sup>1</sup> to every officer and man under Sale's command.

Here was a Governor-General who promised well, so far as the soldier was concerned. And the soldier had great need of encouragement at that critical period of Indian history, when the sorrowful administration of Lord Auckland closed in the piling of disaster on disaster, and the reins of Government passed into the hands of Lord Ellenborough,—Tory, yet ardent reformer; a statesman of brilliant ability; a soldier at heart; the very man to reassert the ancient glory of British arms; the great player for the great stage.

That simile, as applied to Lord Ellenborough, has a peculiar fitness. There was an irrepressible strain of the actor in his composition; a love of the high-sounding

<sup>1</sup> Allowances.

phrase, the dramatic effect; a frank predilection for the centre of the stage. To such a one—egoist, enthusiast and patriot—no appointment could have been more welcome; and to India, in her hour of difficulty, it was welcome no less. Reports of his energy and firmness had sped on before him; and his advent had been hailed as the dawning of a brighter day.

Yet, since his arrival in February, there had arisen, here and there, a lurking suspicion that the swing of the pendulum might prove too complete, after all. No lack of confidence here; but an airy self-sufficiency, a bombastic vein of talk, an excitable temper; in fine “a man of genius, whose love of mere effect often made him seem like a quack.”

In Lord Ellenborough, as statesman, and above all as Governor-General of India, this not uncommon blending was sometimes startlingly apparent. For him, “life arranged itself as a superb and showy pageant, in which he would fain form the central figure.” Yet, beneath these superficial posturings, those who became his friends discovered “a scholar and a gentleman, full of generous impulses, of patriotism, and soldierly feeling.” Unhappily for himself and others, the man’s real earnestness and fervid imagination were not leavened by the saving grace of humour—a lack more disastrous to character than it looks on paper. Hence the streak of prejudice and partiality that warped, too often, his naturally sound judgment of men and things.

Such—roughly estimated—was the man who took over the reins of Government at the height of a crisis more formidable than even the far-seeing recognized at the time. From his first public proclamation Anglo-Indians had hoped great things; a proclamation combining the large vision of the statesman with the energy and resolution of

the soldier:—in effect, Lord Ellenborough at his best. And of Lord Ellenborough it may aptly be said—as of the “little girl” with “the curl”—that when he was good, he was very very good, and when he was bad he was horrid.

Certainly that first Afghan proclamation satisfied all grades. In it the Governor-General recognized that any future course of action “must rest solely on military considerations and have regard . . . to the security of our troops in the field . . . and finally to the establishment of our military reputation by the infliction of some signal and decisive blow on the Afghans, which may make it appear that we have the power to inflict punishment on those who commit atrocities and violate their faith. . . .” Better still, his Lordship perceived the obvious advantage of re-occupying Kabul “even for a week”; and short of this no man across the Indus would consider the stain wiped out, the wholesale slaughter avenged.

So much for soldiers, impatient to advance. But with this decree there went forth another, equally wise in its essence; though unhappily—owing to Lord Ellenborough’s violent prejudice against a fine service—it led to unjust, indiscriminate detraction of Politicals in general and of the Afghan Political in particular.

That the hampering of soldiers by civil authority had wrought much evil in Afghanistan was recognized throughout India; and to Lord Ellenborough fell the congenial task of reparation. With a stroke of his pen, he beheaded political power at the seat of war; abolished the number of assistants and reduced the salaries of those that remained to bare military pay and allowances. Behind this seeming injustice lay zeal for the welfare of the Army, which undoubtedly suffered from the fact that political employ was absorbing all its best men; so that officers of any distinction felt it almost a hardship to be left with their

regiments. It is always thus when a country is in the making; for the simple reason that that contradiction in terms, the soldier-civilian, is supremely the right man for such work. Lord Ellenborough himself—for all his unreasoning prejudice—tacitly recognized this fact when the two soldiers, whom he delighted to honour, were rewarded, not with high command, but with posts of political importance.

In the meantime it pleased him to assume that “luxurious Politicals, as they are called, do not make hardy soldiers”; to denounce men like Outram and George Clerk—without any personal knowledge of either—as meddling amateurs; to write of Henry Lawrence and Macgregor as “hair-brained and foolish young men.”

Wherefore Nott and Pollock, greatly to their satisfaction, found themselves in supreme command of their respective divisions; and the “Politicals,” to do them justice, stepped down from their pedestals with a remarkably good grace. That stirring proclamation with its resolve to inflict “some signal and decisive blow” atoned for much in the eyes of men who, for the most part, were genuine soldiers, both in character and experience.

But that first proclamation contained yet another notable sentence: “In war, reputation is strength; but reputation is lost by the rash exposure of the most gallant troops under circumstances that render defeat more probable than victory.” And now, as time went on, Lord Ellenborough showed an increasing disposition to dwell on the second half of that sentence rather than the first.

To men on the spot, the least sign of hesitation to advance would naturally seem criminal. They had fuller knowledge of the country, of the Afghans, and of the troops under their own command. But to a Governor-General the Afghan question—though paramount at the



moment—was but one of several others urgently demanding consideration. With a war in China, a Madras army openly discontented, antagonistic Sikhs, and Sindh on the verge of rebellion, Lord Ellenborough had a difficult hand to play, quite apart from the incidental problem of regaining lost prestige beyond the Indus. He must needs give due weight to the fact that “behind Nott lay the army of Sindh, and behind Pollock the army of the Sikhs.” The slightest reverse wind would blow the spark of rebellion to flame: and the rise of those two armies in 1842 would have meant the destruction of every British soldier beyond the Indus. “The military position was an utterly false one, and Lord Ellenborough knew it.” He knew, too, that the loss of another army in Afghanistan might mean the loss of India itself.

These were thoughts calculated to shake the strongest mind; and, in addition, news of two reverses had lately come to hand. General England, marching up to join Nott, had been forced to fall back on Quetta. Ghazni, after remaining in a state of siege since December, had been surrendered by Colonel Palmer, and its force massacred, save for a few who remained as prisoners in the hands of its chief. Finally, Lord Ellenborough, for several months, mistrusted both his Generals at the front.

Result—on the 19th of April his Lordship's secretary wrote to Nott, bidding him draw off the garrison of Khelat-i-Ghilzai, evacuate Kandahar, and hold Quetta until the season should enable him to fall back on Sukkur. Pollock was similarly ordered to fall back on Peshawur, if this could be done without injury to the health of his troops. In Ellenborough's opinion only three considerations would justify him in delaying his withdrawal; negotiations, almost completed, for release of the prisoners; a lightly equipped force, already out for their rescue; or a

force from Kabul marching on Jalálabad. He did not recommend delay for the prisoners unless actually on their way, and he alluded only to those at Budiabad. Those at Kabul he did not think could be saved "by any treaty or agreement made under existing circumstances at Jalálabad."

And even while these unwelcome orders sped northward, Mr. Clerk—the "meddlesome amateur"—was submitting to the Governor-General his uncalled-for opinion that, "Major General Pollock is now in a position to judge how to act impressively on the Afghan nation for the recovery of our fame. But to produce the proper signal effect on India, the city of Cabul should be laid in ruins by a British force."

With such contrary winds of doctrine blowing this way and that, who could hazard a guess what the end would be?

## X

GENERAL ELPHINSTONE—most hapless favourite of fortune—was dying. For weeks Dr. Magrath had despaired of his recovery, but by now the end was a matter of days. Those who loved him could not, for his sake, wish otherwise, and the old man himself prayed frankly for the relief of death. Mortal illness and an unhealed wound were as nothing to the haunting horrors that came back upon him afresh with his return to scenes he had hoped never to set eyes on again. But even this last mercy was denied him; and on that same 19th of April—when Lord Ellenborough was despatching the withdrawal order that looked very like abandonment of their cause—the prisoners marched, through drenching rain, from Sarubi to Mahomed Khan's fort at Tazin.

Here, with the exception of Elphinstone and Pottinger, they slept herded together like sheep in a pen. "We stretched ourselves on the *nundahs*," wrote Lady Sale, "in our still wet clothes. In the night I began shivering again with fever, and Captain Anderson, my nearest bed-mate, covered me with a cloak that soon imparted warmth. We slept, large and small, thirty-four in a room fifteen feet by twelve; and we lay on the floor literally packed together, with a wood-fire in the centre and pine-torches for candles."

Pottinger, closeted with Akbar, seized the opportunity to press still more urgently the wisdom of coming to

terms with Pollock and thus avoiding further hostilities, for which Akbar's people seemed little inclined since their thrashing on the 7th.

"I very much doubt," he added with a significant look, "whether General Pollock will *consent* to treat unless you prove your sincerity by restoring the women and children, whom it is against custom and common chivalry to drag about the country like this. Your own women and children suffer no such indignity, as you very well know, whatever lies may have been told you on the subject."

The Sirdar looked obstinate. "Lies or no, those about me believe them, and I am not so sure——"

"Sirdar Sahib, such talk is wasted on me," Pottinger broke in abruptly. "You know—and I know. It is enough. Why not send an officer from here on a secret mission to Jalálabad, and discover what is the new General's countenance towards you. I myself would write to him on your behalf; and I would stake my life on it that any officer you choose to send will return. There now—that is a common-sense proposal, fair to both sides."

"Yes—yes; it is fair enough," Akbar admitted grudgingly. "I will think of it."

And with that for the moment Pottinger had to rest content. But the blessed possibility of action had re-awakened the persistence that was a basic element of his character, and there would be no peace for Akbar till Eldred Pottinger had his way.

Next morning Emily Eyre begged an empty cowshed for herself and her friend Mrs. Waller; and before evening Akbar's guests were increased by the arrival of another little girl whom her mother decided to christen Tazina, after the Valley of Trouble, in which she was born.

The Sirdar, on hearing of the event, laughed good-humouredly. "*Wah! Wah!* The better for me! The more of you the larger my ransom!"

But for all his smiling, he had never been quite his jovial self since the day of defeat. He was ill. The wound in his arm did not heal. The chiefs were enraged at his refusal to kill all prisoners. The faction against him in Kabul, headed by Zeman Khan, was fast gaining strength; while his own followers seemed to be dwindling away.

On the 21st came an alarming rumour that Futteh Jung (son of the murdered Shah) had planned a joint attack on Tazin Fort, with a party from Jalalabad, who were to attempt a rescue; and Akbar, fearful of losing his treasures, order their immediate removal into the higher valley of Zjandeh. Only the Eyres and Wallers, Pottinger and Mackenzie, Elphinstone and Magrath, were allowed to remain. For that matter of the secret mission was working in Akbar's mind; and, the rest being gone, he announced his willingness to send Mackenzie, so soon as a reliable escort could be found.

"For I tell you plainly," said he, "the journey will be one of great danger. The country you must cross is full of Ghilzais, still thirsting for Feringhi blood."

Ghilzais or no, Colin Mackenzie was ready for any enterprise that might mean patching up a truce and winning freedom for his friends. None the less was the Sirdar genuinely anxious to ensure his safety; for Mackenzie's unfailing friendliness and courtesy made him popular with all Afghans. Not so Eldred Pottinger. Whether among Asiatics or Europeans, the man commanded admiration rather than popularity; and Akbar, for his part, respected, feared and frankly hated "that grim and grumpy hero of Herat."

But Afghan predilection or the reverse concerned the grim and grumpy hero no whit. Akbar's consent being gained, he lost no time in laying before Pollock the Sirdar's

three chief requests: first the release of Dōst Mahomed and the withdrawal of all but a small body of troops, with an Agent empowered to draw up an agreement between both countries; second—if the British Government preferred war—an exchange of British prisoners for Dōst Mahomed and his family, the issue to depend on the sword; third—if neither suggestion found favour—the Afghan chiefs wished to know what they might expect from British clemency in the event of their submission.

For despatches so vital to all parties a bold and trusty escort must be found; and meantime poor Elphinstone grew rapidly worse. Medicine they had none for him, save a lump of opium found by chance in Mackenzie's pocket; and, finally—that his cup of suffering might be full—the 22nd brought rumours so alarming that Akbar decreed an immediate move to another fort a few miles up the valley.

Mrs. Waller and her two-days'-old babe were hastily stowed into an old camel pannier, slung on a pole, doolie-fashion, and carried by Afghans. The General, scarcely able to sit up, was hoisted on to a horse and supported on either side by his faithful soldier-servants. Mercifully the journey was short; but it proved his death-blow. Next day the well-born English gentleman gasped out his life on the floor of an unclean Afghan hovel; his head supported by Moore, who wept unashamedly at losing the kindest master a man ever had.

Colin Mackenzie, kneeling beside the dead soldier, kissed his hand; and Pottinger, though little given to demonstration, probably felt his death more than all. Not only had they been constant companions throughout nearly four months of imprisonment; but Pottinger's unceasing sympathy and concern for his lovable old friend had saved him from brooding over-much on the

loss of a brother and the probable damage done to his own reputation.

For now the occasional journals that found their way up from India began to be full of wild tales concerning the Kabul tragedy and its awful sequel in the passes. Fabrications foisted upon Dr. Brydon, garbled editions of facts, and, above all, unjust judgments on those held responsible by an ignorant public, all served to fill the news columns with the subject of the hour. Truth was a minor consideration. Fresh material was all. The picturesque journalism of to-day is a model of scientific accuracy compared with that of 1842; and editors, waxing righteously indignant, did not scruple to denounce Eldred Pottinger as the principal in framing a discreditable convention, or to saddle him with the onus of responsibility for all disasters that followed.

To Pottinger's proud, hurt spirit such distorted effusions were as hot oil on a raw wound. Nor was his pain lessened by the knowledge that English papers would repeat these loose statements, which were too old by the time they reached him to seem worth contradicting. In any case, the man's fastidious spirit shrank from the dust of controversy, from explanations probably unavailing. He had done his best to clear himself in the eyes of Government; and that must suffice. Let the Press sling its arrows unchallenged; for him remained dignified silence and unspeakable sadness of heart.

Mercifully the prospect of negotiation gave a fresh turn to his thoughts; and on the 23rd he was much engaged with last injunctions to Mackenzie who was to start that night.

For his guide through the Jubber Khel country, Akbar had secured one Batti Dast, a Rob Roy of the Ghilzais; straight and slender as a lance, hard-bitten as his own

rocks, untiring as his own streams; the finest specimen of a wiry mountaineer that Mackenzie had ever seen. Rob Roy it was who had contrived to ease Sale of many hundred camels during his unquiet march to Jalálabad in October, '41; and thereafter—with a truly Afghan eye to business—had resold them to the General in his extremity. He now swore to lead Mackenzie by unfrequented ways to Jalálabad and to defend him with his life. He and his three comrades would go a-foot; while the Scot, with two of Akbar's men, would ride.

So all was arranged for his perilous journey from which great events might spring. Eyre confided to his keeping the first half of his account written at Budiabad. Pottinger had a few words for his private ear; and Akbar begged him to find out whether this new British General would ensure him a large grant of land and free pardon if he agreed to act as the said General's lieutenant, and help him reconquer Afghanistan.

Then, pricked with sudden doubt, he added in a low tone: "Mackenzie Sahib, you *will* keep your word? You *will* return?"

At that Mackenzie lifted his handsome head. "Sirdar Sahib, is it possible that you, the son of an Amir, can ask me, an Englishman, such a question?"

The reproach so delicately conveyed covered Akbar with shame: "You are right—you are right. With such as you there is no doubt possible—*if* you live. But the dangers are many and the risk great."

"For that matter," answered Mackenzie quietly, "have no fear. I am in the hands of God."

It was agreed that they should set out after dark. The moon being just past the full would light them on their way; and in two days—Ghilzais permitting—they should reach their destination.



Good-byes were not easily said : so much hung on the venture ; so dear was Colin Mackenzie to all who knew him. There were then, in the fort, only the Eyres and Wallers, Pottinger, Magrath, and his own faithful Jacob ; and of that parting he wrote long afterwards : " All except Pottinger—whose spirit never quailed, and whose courage, moral and physical, was equal to any emergency—looked on me as devoted to almost certain destruction."

Cheered by that knowledge, he went out into the night with Sultan Ján ; and the rest must await his return with what patience they could command.

## XI

As for Colin Mackenzie, if his heart failed him, none guessed it as he followed in the wake of Batti the Robber on that adventurous night of April, forcing his reluctant animal up the bed of a mountain stream, breast high in parts; stumbling over boulders almost impassable; while Akbar's horsemen from behind swore roundly at the "devil's spawn" who had the insolence to bring them up such a road.

Rob Roy and his friends, tramping briskly ahead, seemed to find a torrent in flood as acceptable a highway as any other, and when imprecations waxed louder Batti flung a scornful retort over his shoulder.

"Only town-bred milksops cry out because their shoes are wet. This is a very good road!" Even as he spoke a small cascade blocked their advance; and, turning to Mackenzie, he added quietly: "Dismount, Sahib. Follow me close, and no harm shall happen!"

Though the moon must have risen by now, no gleam invaded the knife-blade defile. The foam of the torrent made a ghostly streak between walls of darkness; yet Batti found, by instinct rather than sight, a goat-track among the rocks on their left. Up that break-neck path he stepped lightly and alertly, his heavy matchlock laid across his back, the ends within the crook of his elbows; his breath so completely under control that he beguiled the way with snatches of Pushtu war-songs in the intervals of making friends with the Sahib.

Mackenzie found it all he could do to keep pace with his guide. In spite of a cutting wind from above, the sweat streamed from under his turban; and how led horses achieved the climb he never knew.

It was but one of the many miracles crowded into that astounding journey. Akbar's men grumbled worse than ever when breath permitted. But the Robber went his way unheeding; on and up, on and up, till they passed beyond the snow-line, and slipperiness was added to other dangers of the track, that fell away to the stream at an angle of forty-five degrees.

At the top of the pass the moon greeted them—new risen, heavenly, serene; queen of that vast solitude, her radiance eclipsing all but the greater stars. And on earth the change of scene matched the glory of the heavens. Emerging abruptly from the black and white of their featureless defile, they had come upon a height crowned with pines and majestic cedars outrivalling the giants of Lebanon. Here for centuries they had stood alone with God and the elements; their huge branches tossed abroad, defiant of storm; their dark heads caressed in turn by sun and moon, battered in turn by wind and rain.

Colin Mackenzie felt a catch in his breath as he looked upward. The sheer kingliness of them, self poised upon their prodigy of shade, with the untrodden snow for carpet and the unclouded heaven for canopy, seemed to his fervently religious spirit a symbol of God's own Kingship made manifest. To young Batti the Robber, stepping lithely beside him, they were landmarks merely, proclaiming the utmost summit at hand.

On that utmost summit stood a white flagged pole, and in passing it the Afghans stroked their beards, muttering a prayer. The climb was over, and now their road lay

along a snowy ridge, bright with moonlight. The track, not fifteen feet wide, dropped sheer on the one hand to a bottomless abyss; on the other, a black gulf opened out toward the Pass of Jagdalak and its fatal barrier, where—still untouched by decay—lay the bodies of many hundred brave men. Lost in tragic thought, Mackenzie lagged behind his guide, living again through those horrors of the past, scarcely daring to speculate on the future. Yet always, in his darkest hour, the face of Helen Douglas shone out like a star.

Suddenly the voice of Rob Roy dispelled his dream.

“Come on, Sahib. A man can ride here, and there is need of haste. From these devils of the Jubber Khel even I could not protect you should they catch sight of your skin!”

Thus encouraged, Mackenzie sprang into the saddle, and they pushed rapidly on, plunging out of the moonlight into a narrow ravine; winding their painful way along ancient watercourses, till dawn blossomed into daylight, and Mackenzie must muffle himself closely in the folds of his turban and cloak. For greater safety the Robber now occupied his saddle, bidding him ride pillion and keep his face hid.

Following the track of the Red River, they made their way toward the fortress of two Jubber Khel chiefs, who knew their mission and would grant them refreshment and rest. But the fortress was still afar off; and Mackenzie, perched on the brute's lean backbone, had much ado to keep his comfortless seat.

Once, after fording a deep stream, the Cape horse stumbled and flung his superfluous burden right into a crowd of ruffians who had been watching their progress from the farther shore.

Instantly a cry went up: “Strangers—strangers!” A

cry that rang in Mackenzie's ears like a knell of death.

For the first time—often though he had been in peril—he knew the extremity of mortal fear. For one desperate moment he was on the verge of dropping his disguise and braving the worst; but thought of all that his safety involved checked the mad impulse at its birth. Instead, he gathered his cloak about him, staggered to his feet, and stumbled forward, as if weak with sickness. Quick as lightning one of Batti's friends took the hint. Seizing Mackenzie by the arm, he reviled the beast that had misused so good a man; while Batti, the nimble-witted, held the crowd enthralled by an impromptu fairy tale of successes lately achieved by Akbar against the rival faction at Kabul.

The sick man was led away unobserved, and Rob Roy, his elaborate tale ended, rode on after his friends, well pleased with his own ready tongue and the astonishing coolness of the Sahib.

It was near noon when they halted at last, before the Castle of the Jubber Khel brothers, Sir Bolund and Sarfaráz Khan, and the inevitable posse of horsemen about the gate made Batti lead his sick man off to a neighbouring platform of rock. Here the Sahib must keep close, he whispered, till he himself had effected an entrance.

“Better to lie on your face,” was his parting counsel, “as if dead asleep.”

And the Sahib, obedient to the letter, lay on his face, his feet drawn up like a hedgehog lest a gleam of fair skin betray him.

An hour passed, an interminable hour. The sun smote upon his backbone like a sword of flame. His breath scorched his lips; his head swam. It seemed he had only escaped Afghan daggers to die of heat apoplexy.

Almost he had lost consciousness, when a voice roused him and he looked up. There stood above him a stranger, whose sinister aspect was not lessened by a claret stain across one cheek; and once again fear clutched at Mackenzie's heart. But the sinister one smiled and spoke smoothly, introducing himself as Sarfaráz Khan.

Mackenzie let out a breath of relief. "Khan Sahib," he said, "I am half dead of heat. For the love of God get me out of the sun!"

"Come, then," said his host; "there be trees and water in the family burying-ground."

And thither Mackenzie followed him, devoutly thankful to exchange "a real Papistical purgatory for a Mahomedan paradise."

Here were groves of fruit and plane trees, golden-green with new leafage, set on a slope that commanded the wide fertile valley of Isárák and the snow peaks beyond. Down through the grass a rivulet sparkled and sang—a rivulet that served Mackenzie as goblet and basin in one. Throwing aside the hated poshteen, alive with vermin, he flung himself on his knees, drank deep, cooled hands and brow, and then lay full length in the grass, while Sarfaráz went in search of refreshment. Great draughts of milk, "bannocks" and the pipe of welcome, made a new man of him. Lulled by the twittering of birds and the flash of the stream, he slept soundly, till they waked him at dusk for a talk with his hosts and preparation for the night's march.

His guards would now be two Jubber Khel men, of the Khan's own clan. Rob Roy took affectionate leave of him; the parting pipe was smoked, and "*Bismillah*" was the word.

Edging down again over broken dangerous ground into the valley of Isárák, they followed it westward; then

struck off toward Jalálabad, making straight for the Kabul River and leaving Gandamak on their left.

Before dawn they halted in a field of young wheat, from which the horses took toll after the free and easy fashion of the country, and by noon they had reached the river. A pause here for rest and refreshment—river water and a stale “bannock”—then on once more, under the blaze of a relentless sun; till the stony plain blossomed into fertility, and afar off through the haze loomed the walls of Jalálabad, the tents of Pollock’s camp.

It was dusk before they reached the outlying picket—Mackenzie stupefied with heat, and his horse so dead lame that it could not have carried him another hundred yards.

The familiar challenge sent a thrill through his veins, but it took time to convince the Subadar that the dark and haggard stranger, calling himself “Mackenzie,” was a Sahib indeed. Convinced at last, they led him to the Captain of the picket, who greeted him warmly and sent him on his own charger to Pollock’s tent.

Now all about him were the sights and sounds of a British camp, stirring a hundred memories, wakening the wildest hopes of immediate success. And none guessed who it was that rode through the midst of them.

Major Smith, D.A.A.G., standing at his tent door with a friend, looked up, with casual curiosity, at the three strange Afghans as they passed, and fairly jumped when the first rider accosted him in gentlemanly tones.

“Will you be good enough to direct me to General Pollock’s tent? I am Captain Mackenzie, on a mission from Tazán.”

“*Mackenzie!*”

The name was a talisman. Questions rained. Officers

gathered round, welcoming, congratulating. But Mackenzie must first deliver his precious documents, then enjoy the reward of daring; and so, after brief delay, he passed on—dead weary in body, elate in soul—to General Pollock's tent.



## XII

AN hour later he emerged from Macgregor's house—a new man. Soap and water, a clean suit of Afghan clothes, and a turban of fine white muslin had wrought wonders; and few men looked handsomer than Colin Mackenzie in a dress as becoming as any on earth. George Macgregor had claimed him as his guest; and he was to dine with General George Pollock at the 9th Mess. But first he must seek out that other George—supreme friend of his heart—still more or less disabled by his wound of the 24th of March, and by severe inflammation of the eyes.

News of Mackenzie's coming had sped through camp and cantonments; and now, when he reappeared, mounted on the borrowed charger, a shout of welcome greeted him. Men of the 18th—with their worn uniforms, tanned faces and scrutinizing eyes—pressed forward to greet him in person. Broadfoot's Sappers fairly mobbed him; kissing his hands, clinging to his boots, and calling down blessings on his head. It took time and tact to free himself; and riding on to Broadfoot's quarters he found his friend still very weak but ready for endless talk.

That night Mackenzie dined at the 9th Mess, and every man present must drink a health to him, were it only in *arrack* and water. Colonel Taylor produced his last few bottles of Madeira. There were speeches and singing; and all Jalálabad felt the happier for his coming. The

dangers of the journey were as nothing to the reward of such a welcome—such a breathing space of freedom, were it only for a week.

Mackenzie stayed till the 30th, spending most of his time in conference with Pollock, who had much to ask, and many things, strange and terrible, to hear. His answer to Akbar—in the form of a letter to Pottinger—was guarded and reasonable, though far from encouraging to the Sirdar himself. He wrote that kindness and good treatment to the prisoners would meet with due consideration from the British Government, and their release much more so; that so soon as they were delivered into his hands he would pay two lakhs to whomsoever the Sirdar might choose to send. Beyond this, nothing of any moment; and Akbar's private offer of service was practically ignored.

Mackenzie himself advised an immediate advance on the capital, while both routes were almost undefended. He begged the General not to let any anxiety for their fate weigh in the scale against the paramount consideration of lifting England's honour out of the dust. But though Pollock grew daily more impatient for instructions that would set him free to move, he wanted first of all to have the prisoners in his safe keeping. To Akbar himself he would extend no hand of friendship. He could only hope that two lakhs might prove sufficient temptation, and that Mackenzie's chivalrous exploit might not be altogether vain.

On the day of his departure camp and cantonments were stirred afresh by the arrival of Elphinstone's coffin, forwarded under escort; and by the tale of its barbarous treatment on the way. Marauding Ghilzais, believing it a treasure chest, had seized the coffin, broken it open, and vented their disappointment on the body of that most unfortunate man. Stripped and pelted with stones, it

would have been left for vultures to devour; but that Akbar—furious at the outrage—had sent men of his own to rescue it, and bring it in safety to Jalálabad. Here, the day after Mackenzie left, all that remained of General William Elphinstone was buried with military honours; while his sword and cap and his very few papers were forwarded home to tell their own deplorable tale.

And now Colin Mackenzie must turn his back deliberately on freedom, on Broadfoot, and on hospitable brother-officers. Many urged him to remain, but the voice of his most devoted friend was not heard among them. Wade proffered pistols; Macgregor begged him at least to stain his face. He refused both suggestions, declaring that if the Afghans *did* seize him, he could not bear the idea of being “found painted”! As for proposals to evade immediate return, he treated them with good-humoured ridicule; deeming it inconceivable that men could possibly speak so except as a joke.

Well might Broadfoot write afterwards to a friend: “Rare indeed is the courage necessary to execute such a task; and to do it, as he did, so cheerfully and full of vivacity, that most men thought him blind to the dangers before him; but alas, I knew he saw them too plainly; the thought of shrinking from his promise never found a moment’s rest in his mind.”

It was very early in the morning when he parted with Broadfoot and set his face towards Tazín. Good-byes having been said over-night, men and officers, with instinctive delicacy, kept well out of his way. None could bear to see him go; nor to make that going harder than it must be at the last.

Freshly mounted, with heart and courage high, he retraced his steps into the Jubber Khel country; up and over that stupendous Kharkachar Pass and down again

into the valley of Tazín. He travelled this time less rapidly but more safely; and arrived, without any adventure of moment, at sunset on the 3rd of May.

Though others had been regretfully left behind, it was good to set eyes again on Pottinger, whom he found alone with Akbar—the rest having been sent to join the main camp in the valley of Zjandeh.

The Sirdar welcomed him heartily, but with suppressed excitement; tore open Pollock's letter; glanced hurriedly through it; then, grinding his teeth with rage, he flung it on the ground.

“*Bismillah!* This is *nothing*. You have been gone a whole week—and you bring me only this! No word of friendship! No answer to my proposal for terms! You must go back, Mackenzie Sahib, that is all; and bring me something better than waste paper. Take a few hours for sleep and start again before dawn.”

Words and tone compelled obedience. The dangers of the road were as nothing to the danger of Akbar Khan in such a mood; and though Mackenzie's body might protest, there was a compensation in the prospect of a speedy return to Jalálabad.

Having eaten, he lay down and slept like a child; while Pottinger, with a pine torch for candle, and his knee for writing-table, laid before Pollock—first his own views, then the demands of Akbar Khan;—more extravagant this time by reason of his tempestuous mood.

“Sirdar Mahomed Akbar,” wrote Pottinger, “was disappointed with the offer made to him, and particularly the not receiving any reply to his own overture. . . . Situated as I am, my opinions are open to the charge of selfishness, if I give them in favour of the person who holds me prisoner; however, as I can bring testimony that I have always opposed any propositions made for our ransom

(because I consider it an improper precedent, and detrimental to the interests of the State), I will now venture a few observations on the subject, noticing, however, that I still consider ransoming prisoners for money as very objectionable. . . .

“Mahomed Akbar Khan has written a letter as a memorandum, which Captain Mackenzie will lay before you. The Sirdar has not signed it, as he fears it may be used against him in case of your not closing with his terms. What he states is, I believe, substantially true; and I do not think it unreasonable he should demand a promise of protection and friendly treatment if he breaks with his supporters, which the delivery of the prisoners is likely to cause. . . .

“His great fear (as it is of all Afghans) is of being removed from this country. He also asks for his own women, who are in his father's harem serai. . . .

“The last news from Cabool is, that Nawab Zeman Khan and his party have thrashed Aminullah, and have offered the crown to Mahomed Akbar Khan, with Zeman Khan for his Vizier. Parties have been coming in for several days to pay their respects, and invite the Sirdar to the capital. Under these circumstances, the conduct of the Sirdar, in continuing the negotiation, appears a proof of his sincerity; and I trust I may be pardoned for remarking that if his overtures . . . appear deserving of attention, you will recollect that the delay of referring them to Government will lose us the opportunity which now apparently offers itself. . . .”

Akbar's own letter seemed certainly to bear the stamp of sincerity, if sincerity were conceivable from such a man.

“MY FRIEND” (he wrote),

“In a letter for Pottinger Sahib, which Mackenzie Sahib has brought, there is nothing to give me con-

fidence. . . . If I allow the English who are my guests to depart according to your suggestion . . . all Mahomedans will be opposed to me. . . . Under these circumstances, I beg you to reflect that not having come to an understanding with you and having made enemies of them, how can I exist? . . . I prefer your friendship to the throne of Kabul, . . . and on this account I have written to show my friendship. Please God my services shall exceed the injuries I have done you. On condition that we are friends . . . I hope you will write down every article in a treaty signed and sealed."

Before dawn all things were ready, including Mackenzie, to whom Akbar again spoke urgently at parting.

"For the love of God, Mackenzie Sahib, I beg you to make the General understand that I care nothing for his money, but only for friendship. If the English will not grant me peace, they must not blame me if I fight. For yourself," he added by way of encouragement, "there is not so much danger now. The tale of your fidelity to oath has become known among my people: and though they may suppose you mad, there are not many who would readily harm a madman of so much courage and good faith."

There was truth in these words, though Akbar spoke them: and Colin Mackenzie's second journey was the safer in consequence. Again he travelled more leisurely, reaching Pollock's camp early on the 8th. News of his return sent the spirits of all up with a run. They naturally supposed that he brought Akbar's acceptance of the money offered; and great was their disappointment when they learnt that, instead, the Sirdar had raised his demands.

For Mackenzie, too, there was disappointment in store. Since his departure Pollock had received those peremptory withdrawal orders despatched on the 19th of April; orders

that seemed to Mackenzie, and to many others, strangely unmindful of those for whom he had now three times risked his life.

Prompt obedience, he rejoiced to hear, was out of the question. Carriage and provisions were inadequate; and both, said Pollock—with the ghost of a twinkle—would take time to collect. There was also a later Government letter—just come to hand; a letter in which Supreme Authority went so far as to suppose that he, Pollock, might already have been tempted to advance on Kabul, by the disunion among Afghan chiefs and the absence of organized opposition on the road. The bare suggestion that he might have acted thus in direct opposition to orders, seemed to imply discretionary powers; and Pollock had promptly despatched an “invisible” note to his brother-General at Kandahar, bidding him halt wherever he might be, till the result of his remonstrance against Government orders should be known.

Mackenzie—worn out with the triple journey, and disheartened by the tenor of Ellenborough’s letter—was comforted exceedingly by Pollock’s determined attitude. But his disposition towards Akbar was far less satisfactory to one whose freedom and safety hung upon a mutual compact between the two. For all his anxiety to secure the prisoners, Pollock wrote a second letter, cool and guarded as the first. He assumed that any terms between them would include amnesty for the past, but would make no rash promises as to the Sirdar’s future place of residence or restoration to power. These demands he dismissed as “out of place now,” and depending entirely “on future results, that are known to God alone.”

To the more personal appeal for friendship and proffer of alliance, no answer was vouchsafed. Only in the letter to Pottinger it was briefly mentioned and dismissed. “A

Persian memorandum, without seal or signature, does not evince that confidence and good faith which ought to be shown where a good understanding between parties is desired."

Had Pollock known more of the country and its people, he would better have realized Akbar's need for caution. As it was—ignorant of Afghans and hot against the man who had spilled so much innocent blood—he inclined to treat the Sirdar as a criminal rather than as a powerful chief, pledged to fight for his father's hand, yet anxious to negotiate with a greater power. Judged by Afghan standards, Akbar had mightily distinguished himself and avenged his father's wrongs; while Pollock saw him simply as a wholesale murderer, a monster of treachery and cruelty; as it were, a second Yar Mahomed Khan. He was apt to forget, in his righteous indignation, that men of one race and creed cannot justly be judged by the standards of another; and, though his attitude was a wholesome change from the abasement of British authorities at Kabul, it more than once endangered the lives of those he was most anxious to save.

That unsatisfactory letter—repeating an offer already spurned—was the net result of Mackenzie's second journey so far as the captives were concerned. To Pollock the time spent in his visitor's company had proved invaluable, though it was difficult to give a complete outsider an adequate idea of the confusion that had reigned in Kabul since the death of the Shah. His second son, Futteh Jung, a despicable creature, of few brains and many vices, had been formally proclaimed King by the Royal party. But the wretched Prince—remembering the vicissitudes of his father's life—had small taste for kingship; and Mackenzie's last talk with Pollock was interrupted by the arrival of an Arab from Kabul, bringing word that the



weakling was now besieged in the Bala Hissar, and, without help from the English, he could not hold out beyond the month.

"Tell him from me," said the General quietly, "that in three weeks my guns shall be heard in the Khurd Kabul Pass."

But Pollock reckoned without his camels and his Governor-General—the ultimate masters of the situation.

On the 10th Mackenzie set out again; to cover, for the fourth time, the rough ground between Jalálabad and Tazín. With him and his men went two reliable Afghans, Wali Mahomed and Shahudin: "the former, an astute and austere religious personage; the latter, fat, jovial, and undevout." All were laden with gifts, letters, and newspapers for the prisoners. So sincere was the sympathy of the whole force, that the very soldiers would fain have given the clothes off their backs in token of fellow-feeling. But there was a limit to what three men could carry, and to gifts for others were added provisions for themselves. This time the pain of leave-taking harder than ever; for whether Pollock succeeded in advancing, or Ellenborough in dragging him back, the prospect of freedom from captivity seemed faint and far indeed.

"Poor Colin Mackenzie, most noble Colin—'the modern Regulus,' as Havelock styles him—has been in again on his fruitless mission," wrote Broadfoot the devoted, when he was gone. "Heroism, such as his, may gild even defeats like ours. . . . His coming in here, and then—with death staring him in the face—going back, even when Akbar's conduct seemed to release him; above all, the motives from which he did it and the spirit in which he went, raise him to something more than the word hero can express, unless it be taken in its ancient noblest sense, and then never was it more worthily applied. . . ."

### XIII

IF Mackenzie's double embassy seemed fruitless in respect of the prisoners, it was not altogether barren of results. It had given General Pollock a clearer understanding of the whole situation, and strengthened his resolve to seize the first colourable excuse of advancing on Kabul. Lord Ellenborough's supposition that he might already have done so was a godsend, not to be wasted; and Mackenzie being gone, this most unaggressive of men sat down to write as bold an "official" as General ever penned.

He trusted he was not mistaken in supposing that his Lordship's last letter gave him discretionary power in respect of a forward move; and frankly stated that, but for lack of transport, he would now be several marches in advance of Jalálabad.

"With regard to our withdrawal at the present moment," he went on, "I fear it would have the very worst effect; it would be construed into a defeat, and our character as a powerful nation would be entirely lost in this part of the world. It is true that the garrison of Jellalabad has been relieved. . . . But the relief of that garrison is only one object. There still remains another, which we cannot disregard—I allude to the release of the prisoners. . . . If, while communications were in progress, we were to retire, it would be supposed that panic had seized us. I therefore think that our remaining in this vicinity—or perhaps a few marches in advance—is essential

to uphold the character of the British nation ; and in like manner General Nott might also hold his post. . . . I have less hesitation in expressing my opinion, as I could not move in less than eighteen or twenty days ; and our reply might reach me, by express, in twenty-two days. . . .”

Thus much of breathing space he could at least secure for himself and Nott. In the meantime there remained the serious difficulty of keeping hidden from his garrison orders that would produce the worst effect, if they leaked out.

On the 4th of May Lord Ellenborough had written to Sir Jasper : “ I have hitherto succeeded in preserving absolute secrecy with regard to the intentions I entertained as to withdrawing from Afghanistan.”

The statement was premature.

Not three weeks later, an officer of Pollock's staff rode up and asked him on parade whether he had yet received from headquarters the news of their immediate withdrawal. Pollock, utterly taken aback, demanded the speaker's authority for supposing such a thing. He was told “ an officer on the Commander-in-Chief's staff ” ; and next day he wrote his mind to Sir Jasper with the same straightforward courage as he had written it to Lord Ellenborough ten days before.

But no amount of remonstrance could undo the harm already done. The news spread fast and far. “ Mrs. This and Mrs. That were soon chattering about the happy event. They wrote of it to husbands at Jalálabad. The husbands told it to friends at mess, and wrote it back to Peshawur. The Sikh soldiery got hold of it. The Sikh Court knew all about it.” In this fashion are secrets kept in the Land of the Open Door.

And the news, as it spread, raised a storm of protest from “ every man of worth and courage on the Frontier.”

Richmond Shakespear wrote to no less a personage than the Government Secretary: "A retreat *now* would be ruinous. We may try to disguise the matter; but there is no concealing from Asia that leaving our guns and our hostages is disgraceful . . . and to incur such disgrace . . . would be to deserve all the ruin that would befall us. . . ."

Clerk, obliged to speak of it at the Lahore Court, declared that his "tongue had been tied with shame," and "thanked God the candles burnt very dim."

To Lawrence he wrote: "It is just as well you have not gone on. It would break your brother's heart to know you had come so near only to abandon him. Good God! It is to me so monstrous!"

Lawrence himself poured forth his impetuous thoughts—not always leavened with cool judgment—to the beloved woman at Kasauli: "The move, I think, is a very wrong one; likely to injure our name materially: and I cannot but regret it deeply—even though it takes me home. . . . Abstract principles are very well, but there are times when practice is better than theory; and promptness in wrong even better than tardiness in right."

As for Rawlinson and Nott—who heard nothing till the 17th of May—those peremptory orders from Allahabad came upon them "like a thunderclap." They had neither of them, "from Lord Ellenborough's former letter, thought such a measure possible till Kabul should be retaken."

Nott, already maddened by the paralysis of Lord Auckland's Government, had confidently counted on a forward move in the spring. The inglorious defeat of Brigadier England and his evident unreadiness to push on, had mightily enraged the General, and had brought the Brigadier under the lash of his sarcasm.

"I am well aware," he wrote, "that war cannot be

made without loss ; yet *perhaps* British troops can oppose Asiatic armies without defeat ; and I feel and know that British officers should never despair. . . . I am obliged to you for pointing out the many difficulties attending your position ; but you are aware that it is our first and only duty to overcome difficulties, when the national honour and military reputation is so deeply concerned. . . .”

There spoke the soldier, resolute and undismayed. Small wonder that his own troops had absolute faith in him ; and as for his faith in them, it amounted to a religion.

With such a man and such troops in the country, it is hard to understand why a Government, overburdened with debt, preferred the costliness and delay of marching an army up through the Punjab to the simple and obvious expedient of setting Nott free to make a forced march on Kabul by supplying him with reliable cavalry, with stores, ammunition, and a handful of troops to hold Kandahar. Thus reinforced, how zealously, how effectually he would have redeemed his country's honour, in half the time and at less than half the cost.

The mere fact that Kandahar was so superlatively well managed, so completely dominated by one personality as to be free from all wrangling or indecision, appear to have deprived it of any particular notice. It was a nation without a history, and its leader, sedulously kept in the background, had not yet been rated at his true worth, except by those on the spot.

But although the soldier remained undismayed, the man could pour out to his “children” the exceeding bitterness of his heart : “The people in power are all mad ; or Providence hath blinded their hearts for some wise purpose. I am very tired—tired of working, tired of this country, quite tired of the folly of my countrymen,

and I long more than ever for my *clay-built* cottage. My soldiers are four months in arrears; there is not one rupee in the Kandahar treasury, and no money can be borrowed. There is no medicine for the troops; no carriage cattle, nor money for hire, and therefore I cannot move. I have no good cavalry, and little ammunition. I have been calling for these for six months; but *not the least aid* has been given me. I might now have been on my way to Cabul. . . . They have sent five regiments of cavalry to be starved in the Khyber, and would not give me one. . . . How I do long to be in some nice spot in Australia!"

#### XIV

COLIN MACKENZIE, a solitary unite of British valour, faring in disguise through the land of the Jubber Khel, heard little or nothing of the political storm. He held as strong opinions on the subject of premature withdrawal as any thunderer of them all, but at present his attention was closely concerned with the minor consideration of out-witting murderous Afghans and faring unscathed, by way of the Zjandeh valley, to Kabul, whither Akbar had gone, with Pottinger and Troup.

Starting before noon, they came at nightfall to a village where many of Elphinstone's fugitives had been brutally tortured and killed. Discovery would have doomed Mackenzie to the same fate; so they slept without the walls, for a couple of hours only, intending to march all night, shaping their course for the Suliman range.

Noon next day found them in a savage defile cleft by the inevitable torrent through mighty sandstone cliffs unsoftened by so much as a tuft of grass. In that gloomy solitude of rock and stone was no sign or sound of life. Only, far overhead, there swooped and sailed a magnificent eagle, reminding Mackenzie of David's beautiful phrase: "I will take refuge under the shadow of His wings."

The two guides, nervously anxious for the safety of their charge, opined that here they might halt with safety and enjoy the food they had carried from Jalálabad. He that was "jovial and undevout" made haste to unpack

Mackenzie's basket, gleefully producing cold fowl, hard-boiled eggs, and biscuits—royal fare!

But very soon the "munching process" was arrested by the apparition of two fierce-looking ruffians, armed to the teeth, who seemed to have emerged from some crevice in the cliffs. Slowly, suspiciously, they drew nearer;—and not they alone. Behind them appeared another and another, and another; till the dismayed picnickers counted seven freebooters of the type that acknowledge neither chief nor clan, nor any earthly power save that of their own weapons and wits.

To make matters worse, Mackenzie had flung off his cloak, released his face from the mufflings of his turban, and must now confront these superfluous visitors unarmed—a Peringhi confessed; an infidel to slay whom were perhaps profitable, certainly meritorious.

His guides, whispering hurriedly together, seemed inclined for hostilities, that would simply spell destruction: but he, with amazing coolness, saw in a flash their one infinitesimal chance of escape.

Bidding them keep quiet and follow his lead, he greeted the strangers with a grave "*Salaam Aliakum*"; invited them to be seated and share a meal with fellow-travellers like themselves. The suspicious ones, being hungry and completely taken aback, sat down forthwith, and ate so heartily that their hosts were like to travel fasting for the rest of the way. Mackenzie, hoping that the Arab principle was in force among them, officiously proffered plenty of salt with the eggs; while his friends entertained them with a magniloquent description of himself as Akbar's valued ambassador and guest.

Happily they appeared to acknowledge, in some degree, the Sirdar's authority; and—the uneasy meal ended—the daring trio rose up to depart. None hindered them; and



they, scarcely believing their own good fortune, passed on ; though for some distance they travelled, in Spanish phrase, with their " beards on their shoulders."

The high fortress of the Jubber Khel brothers was again Mackenzie's half-way house, whence he was escorted to Zjandeh and Kabul by Sir Bolund Khan—he who boasted the truly Afghan distinction of having murdered James Skinner. Yet—such is the inconsistency of man—Colin Mackenzie was as safe in his keeping as though he had a British regiment at his back.

Not until Sunday the 16th did he reach the prisoners' camp in the high, almost inaccessible valley of Zjandeh. But though the way was rough, the camping-ground itself was a paradise at that smiling season of the year. Northward, the giant peaks of the Hindu Kush towered stupendous ; and in the south gleamed the lesser heights of the Safed Koh.

The valley itself, thus regally flanked, was gay with masses of wild tulip and iris, fragrant with sweet-briar and the yellow dog-rose, alive with the music of running water and the song of birds. Mackenzie, riding up toward the small colony of blanket tents and arbours of juniper, was thrilled by the call of the cuckoo ; and a dozen English children, rosy and jubilant, rushed out to acclaim the new arrival, George Lawrence following in their wake. Supper that evening was a feast for all, though Mackenzie's news and the dwindling prospect of release dashed not a little their delight at his safe return.

Life at Zjandeh, however comfortless, proved in every way healthier, freer, and pleasanter than life at Budiabad. Their keeper was kindly, civil, and honest, as Afghans go. Mrs. Waller and her month-old babe were no whit the worse for their rough handling ; and the Andersons were still in the first flush of joy over the return of the

child lost to them in the Khurd Kabul Pass. Conolly, it seemed, had heard of her arrival in the City and had induced Zeman Khan to buy her for four hundred rupees. Thereafter she had lived in his harem, pampered and adored by its inmates, so that she had almost forgotten her own people, and now spoke nothing but Persian, though she still understood her mother tongue.

Pottinger and Troup, on reaching Kabul, had lost no time in regaining possession of the child, and Troup's servant, with a couple of Jezailchis, had brought her to Zjandeh on the 10th of May.

Mackenzie allowed himself only one night's rest in camp; and next morning he hurried on, by forced marches, to Kabul, where Pottinger, Troup, and Akbar looked anxiously for his coming.

His friends he found quartered in a lower room of the tower occupied by Akbar and Company, a mile and a half outside the city. From them he learnt how Prince Futteh Jung and the Sirdar, while flying at each other's throats, were both simulating a desire for British friendship in the hope of gaining their own ends free of cost to themselves. Futteh Jung's lamentations to Macgregor were full of entreaty—presumably sincere—for the prompt advance of Pollock and his hosts. "My anxiety for your departure for Kabul," he wrote in the middle of May, "appears thoroughly useless. . . . Although I have incessantly sent letters through Mohun Lal asking you to advance immediately, no symptoms of the kind have yet appeared."

Akbar, on the other hand, posed as one having the ear of the General Sahib, who had recognized his authority, and with whom he was in treaty for the restoration of Barakzai dominion in the land. Judge therefore his feelings when he received at Mackenzie's hand the unresponsive letter from that potential ally, who set aside

his every personal demand and even cast aspersion on his good faith.

If he had been furious before, he was doubly so now. " *Bismillah!* you are *fine* ambassador, Mackenzie Sahib! Three whole weeks I have waited; and you bring me a paper not worth two broken cowries! Your General Sahib writes as if to an enemy, not to a friend; while I, only a week ago, told Pottinger Sahib I have no wish to fight your people, and I will send the women back. But he also is a hard man. Look in his eyes. See if he believes!"

To placate Akbar Khan, when the volcano was in eruption, needed tact and courage of no common order. But the man who had dealt with a Yar Mahomed Khan was not easily overawed; and Pottinger did his best.

Bit by bit he went through Pollock's unpromising letter, toning down its apparent hostility, explaining the need for caution, the difficulties involved; adding significantly that, in view of late events, it was natural the General should mistrust the Sirdar till he gave some practical proof of sincerity, such as sending the women and children down to Jalálabad.

Akbar listened patiently till all was said, then: "Do I not need, also, proof of sincerity?" he demanded with a fine air of injured innocence. "Have the dealings of your own people these two years been always remarkable for truth and justice? These Feringhi folk"—he turned to those about him—"have a Holy Book bidding them if smitten on one cheek, to turn the other. Instead, what do they do? They are busy all the time writing other books—how to kill men. First they took India. Now they wish to take the Punjab. And they could not let even *us* alone! They make mountain guns and chase us into our hills. Well then, if we are seized by the throats,

we *must* struggle, and throw dust, or any weapon that comes into our hands."

"You forget, Sirdar Sahib," Pottinger interposed quietly, "that we did not come here to conquer your country, but to get rid of a neighbour who seemed dangerous to our Government. We had no wish to keep Afghanistan or ill-treat the inhabitants. It is through the rising of the people that these injuries have come about."

Akbar, nonplussed, could only scowl and shake his head. "No doubt—that is so. But now, when all is over, your General Sahib is *still* driving me to fight when it is my wish to be his friend."

This was the fact that rankled; a fact Pottinger was powerless to deny. Pollock, though intent on releasing the prisoners, was evidently resolved not to treat with Akbar on friendly terms; while Akbar was equally resolved not to give up the prisoners without assurance of some more lasting gain than a present of money; and the deadlock was complete.

Pottinger—incurably persistent—did not despair of trying again later on. For the moment he could only keep his senses alert and watch the trend of events.

The first development was a sudden order from Akbar that the prisoners at Zjandeh should be brought by rapid marches to the fort of Ali Mahomed, Kazzilbash, three miles from Kabul. The secret reason for this move was a rumour, not unfounded, that the Jubber Khel chiefs intended to attack the camp, carry off the prisoners, and sell them to Pollock on their own account, since Akbar proved so coy.

Instead, they were hurried to Kabul, covering forty miles of very rough country in two days, and reaching Ali Mahomed's fort at Shewaki on the 24th of May.

The said chief was by no means overjoyed at receiving

an order that his own women's apartments should be given over to the Sirdar's guests, who found their new quarters a very paradise, after a month of gipsying in juniper arbours and blanket tents. Besides two airy upstairs sleeping-rooms—one for the women and one for the men—they had leave to use, in the day-time, an octagon room with open-work lattices set in a tower above the roof. Here they could enjoy coolness, privacy, and a far-reaching view over forts, gardens and orchards; over corn-fields royally adorned with purple centauria, and a handsome plant of the lupin tribe. Better than all was the great walled garden, full of fruit, and sweet with the scent of roses and oleander. In the stream running through it the officers had leave to bathe.

On the 26th Akbar allowed Troup to ride out and greet them with lengths of chintz and cotton, money and other necessaries; and while he was away, his companions were honoured by an unexpected visit from Aminullah, with three or four leading chiefs.

Though Akbar and Mahomed Shah often came to sit with them and discuss the latest turn of the wheel, Aminullah had not so far honoured them; and a formal deputation boded some matter of importance in the wind.

The chiefs, troubled by false delicacy, straightway announced the reason of their assiduity—money. This business of fighting for a throne was proving something too costly for their taste; and such treasure as Kabul could boast was fast locked up in the Bala Hissar. In these straits they had bethought them of certain bills for fourteen lakhs shamefully dishonoured by the Indian Government; and after due discussion had come to the conclusion that now Pottinger Sahib was in Kabul they—Aminullah and Mahomed Shah—could surely persuade or force him to make out the bills afresh.

They began with persuasion; and Pottinger—taking his tone from theirs—seasoned his refusal with friendly explanation. He assured them that even were he willing—which he was not—such an act would be utterly useless. Not a single condition had been fulfilled; and the bills would simply be dishonoured again.

This they did not choose to believe. Besides, the bills could now be made payable without conditions.

For a time Pottinger reasoned and explained; then, emphatically repeated his refusal. Reason or no reason, he would sign no more bills for their benefit.

At that, persuasion gave place to stronger measures, to hectoring commands, to threats of torture pleasingly specified in detail: and well Pottinger knew them capable of all. What cared they for the vengeance of Pollock Sahib? He meant to fight them in any case; and they meant to have their money—or Pottinger might answer for the refusal with his life.

To these more forcible arguments Pottinger listened unmoved. Only that new stern expression, that made Akbar call him “grumpy,” grew a shade more marked. And when they had made an end of their inducements, he answered them with blunt, matter-of-fact decision: “You may as well cut off my head at once. For I will *never* make out those bills.”

Then silence fell—and lasted.

The chiefs, furious yet nonplussed, could hardly believe their ears. Plainly there was no more to be said: and they went off hastily to consult with Akbar Khan.

He knew his man better than they did. They might kill Pottinger Sahib in any way they pleased; but they would never bend him against his will. And as Akbar did not choose to kill his chief prisoner—Eldred Pottinger gained the day.

## XV

A few days later he sat cross-legged on the floor of his room, a book on one knee by way of board, writing letters for the English mail. Little of a letter-writer at any time, he had scarcely put pen to paper since the retreat from Charikar, except for political correspondence with Pollock and Macgregor, and spasmodic attempts at a journal of the dry bones order. The past was too terrible, the future too stormily uncertain, the present too full of bitter conviction that his character was being lied away, to make Home letters anything but painful for himself and for those who loved him. These facts and the uncertainty of transmission had conspired to keep him silent, save for the message sent through Macgregor that he was alive and well.

But recent letters from his mother and Harriett—written before news of the worst arrived—tugged at his heart-strings, impelling him to make the effort he shirked, on the bare chance that some day his rambling account of the Kabul tragedy would reach them and satisfy their longing for a word from him, though it could not but sadden them the more. And now there came urgent inquiries from Haughton's father as to the welfare and whereabouts of his son. It was but one cry among hundreds that must have gone forth during that awful winter and spring, when even those in India had no personal letters from Afghanistan between October and March.

Though Pottinger had not yet seen Haughton, he had

heard of him, and now made haste to reassure his father, who probably would not get that reassurance for two months at least.

“MY DEAR MR. HAUGHTON” (he wrote),

“I was gratified by your letter of 26th February, only a few days received, or should have answered it earlier . . . as I can most fully sympathize with your anxiety about your gallant son.

“He was cut down in a mutiny of the Artillery men, previous to our evacuation of the fortified barrack of Char-í-kar; and no language I am master of is sufficient to express my admiration of the fortitude and resolution he showed. It was particularly owing to his example and his exertions that we were able to hold out as long as we did. Before Captain Codrington died, he requested me to make special mention of him to the Government, and to represent that his conduct had shown him well fitted to command the Regiment. The wounds he received there was not time to dress before we marched, so that he had to bear up against their pain for two nights and a day. . . .

“Since my being brought here, I have been unable to see him, but learn, by means of the servants, that he is quite well again, and I have every hope of seeing him shortly. The first opportunity I have, I shall send him your letter; he expressed much anxiety to send information to you, particularly on Mrs. Haughton's account; and I believe his letters were lost during our unfortunate attempt to retreat. Haughton and I were inmates of the same room from the time we reached camp till Sir William Macnaghten's murder, when I was obliged to leave off care of self.



“At that period, things were as bad as they could be; the military would neither fight nor fly, and we had neither food nor fuel. I was compelled to renew Sir William Macnaghten’s convention by the same causes that he was compelled to open it; and the result, you will ere this have learned, was the utter destruction of the force. I have been preserved by giving myself up as a hostage: . . . both parties broke their pledges, and I am of course a prisoner. . . . In return for your prediction, I will also venture my opinion that, if more energy and wisdom are not shown, we shall in all probability receive another check. With General Pollock’s army some of the worst officers have been sent; the most miserable arrangements have been made, particularly in the Commissariat, so that I doubt if Pollock’s ability will be able to master it unless he has the fullest powers and support.

“The service is excessively unpopular with both officers and men; the former are great pecuniary losers, and the latter have been so alienated from their officers, by Lord William Bentinck’s arrangements, that we no longer get the sons of respectable landholders, but the poor and needy; to keep whom in order the lash is absolutely necessary; but not to be used, from his wise measure to gain *Home popularity*. Latterly every effort has been made to reduce the power of the commanding officers, and Government has, as you may see here, nearly succeeded. . . .

“If the Government does not take some decided steps to recover the affections of the Army, I really think a single spark will blow the sepoys into mutiny; for the zeal of the officers is cold; and it has been that alone which has prevented this spirit hitherto.

“The sole cause of our defeat was not this, to be sure; but it in a great measure aided the incompetence of our leaders. Every one in the force knew with what contempt military suggestions have been received; and that, joined to other causes, rendered them careless of consequences. I believe many thought the sooner they could get back the better, and hence did not oppose our retreat. . . .

“If Pollock can advance before the Bala Hissar falls, he will not meet much opposition, otherwise I fear he will.

“Trusting you will excuse this rough scrawl, which is written sitting on the floor with my knee as a support,

“I remain, my dear Sir,

“Yours very sincerely,

“ELDRED POTTINGER.”

How true was Eldred Pottinger's prophecy of mutiny to come, Indian history gave terrible proof fourteen years after his death.

One long letter proved sufficient exercise of the pen for that day; and he put off his own, that were harder to write, till the 1st of June. He decided to send a full account home *via* John, paper being scarce and the tale no pleasant one to tell twice over.

“I would have written long ago,” he assured his mother, “but for the uncertainty of transmission. God knows if any opportunity may occur by which I can send this. You will long ere this have learned that I am a prisoner, and have seen the accounts of the destruction of the force which occupied Cabool. . . .

“I was, as you may fancy, laid up as soon as I arrived in camp, so I can give you but little news of things which occurred. Suffice it to say, we were doing everything we could to destroy ourselves. General Elphinstone who, I fancy, was never a very strong or independent-minded man, was reduced by severe illness to but one remove from dotage. . . .

“The second-in-command, Colonel Shelton, I cannot describe to you, as I conclude his conduct will be investigated by court-martial. I may, however, mention that he was the sole cause of our leaving Kabul, and that he is said to be the most unpopular officer in the Bengal Army. When I came in the *morale* of the troops was sadly deteriorated, but they still had some life; however, on the 23rd the Commanders managed to destroy that by exposing a small body . . . to repeated attacks from ten times their number. . . . I am ashamed to say the Europeans of the 44th were the first that broke. The Artillerymen, though without an officer, . . . fought like heroes.

“After this affair no entreaty would induce the Commanders to allow of other operations. . . . They sat moodily and discontented till our provisions were exhausted, and then told Sir William Macnaghten he must treat for the evacuation of the country. . . . During the negotiations he was killed in a fray. . . . In consequence of my being the only one of his Assistants left . . . I was hauled out of my sick-room and obliged to negotiate for the safety of a parcel of fools, who were doing all they could to insure their own destruction; but they would not hear my advice. They would neither force their way to the citadel, nor attack the city, nor abandon their baggage and retreat upon Jalálabad. The consequence was, the

drawing up of a most disgraceful convention, and the utter destruction of our army. . . .”

Followed an outline of the tragedy already told and the news of her personal loss :

“I can give you no intelligence of poor Tom. The last I can certainly learn of him was the General employing him and some other officers to check a charge of the Afghan cavalry . . . and as he has not hitherto been heard of, I greatly fear that he has gone, as so many other brave fellows have done. I do not attempt to disguise the plain truth ; for, I believe, my dear Mother, that it will find you resigned to the will of God, and that you will receive comfort from the only source capable of affording it. I am totally unfit to offer you condolence. I have no idea when I may be released ; and I am so annoyed at the way I understand I have been traduced in the public journals that I scarcely care, but on account of my family. As my detention is uncertain, and I believe I am not entitled to any staff allowances whilst detained, I must recommend you to frugality. I wrote to Forbes and Co. to remit you £100 ; but as I have no funds unless I am released, you must not look for a continuation of these remittances. I will write to John on the subject, and beg of him to make some arrangement till I get released ; when I will, please God, take measures to prevent a recurrence of this. . . .

“ Believe me, my dear Mother,

“ Your very affectionate son,

ELDRED POTTINGER.”

A small half-sheet, minutely folded and addressed, was added to John Pottinger, then in Bombay.

"MY DEAR JOHN,

"I enclose a letter for our Mother, which read and forward. I have no time to write you a detailed account, or, indeed, paper to do it on. Your letter regarding Mr. Hoskin reached me. I am greatly grieved at what has passed. . . . I did not approve of the connection, but as it was made there was no use in objection, therefore I made none; and in no case do I think it desirable to quarrel with such scum. I should recommend you, therefore, to drop that connection quietly. By recrimination and calling up past actions, however pure you may be, you only run the chance of daubing yourself with the moral mud of such a character.

"I am still suffering much from my wound, and if I get released will probably have to go home in consequence. I have lost everything by the result of this outbreak. . . . So you must look after the allowance to my mother. . . . Give my love to your wife and kiss the children for me. I hope I may soon see you, but really there is a great chance of my being killed. A day or two ago the rascals here threatened to hold me responsible for the bills which Government dishonoured. They may do whatever they like; I'll not give them a scrape of my pen. So you have a chance of hearing of me burned or wedged to death. Don't mention this when you write home. No use frightening people.

"Captain Mackenzie of the Madras N.I. and Colin Troup of the 48th N.I. are my companions. If anything happens to me, they will give you the true account. Don't believe any other. . . .

"Your affectionate brother,

"ELDRED POTTINGEL."

These two letters written and despatched, Pottinger shut the door of his heart upon thoughts of Home and of those he seemed little likely ever to meet again.

June, though a month of distracting uncertainty at Kandahar and Jalálabad, was a month of crisis at Kabul.

By the beginning of July, Akbar had secured the Bala Hissar, enthroned the Saddozai for figurehead, and proclaimed himself "Prime Minister of all the Afghans." In that capacity he garrisoned the city with his own men, stripped the weakling Prince of all he possessed, and ensconced himself in the citadel, taking Troup and Pottinger with him. But before approaching Pollock again, he wished to strengthen his hand by gaining possession of all the prisoners and hostages, the sick and wounded left in the care of Zeman Khan.

These had already been wrested from the old man, bitterly against his will, and given over to the son of the late High Priest. On the day of their transfer the good Nawab had lined the streets with his own men, ridden with them himself to the High Priest's door, and, finally, by way of crowning security, had since lodged all his women-folk in the same house, knowing well that a Mussulman crowd, no matter how excited, will rarely, if ever, violate a harem.

From the holy man himself he had exacted a solemn oath never to give them up save to their own people. But what cared Akbar Khan for oaths, if they stood in the way of his desire? Day after day he pestered that reluctant priest; till, for a paltry four thousand rupees, the holy one washed his hands of pledges and hostages alike.

Then did Akbar straightway countenance a fresh embassy to Pollock—Troup this time, with one Háji

Bukhtiar for company; and Pottinger must be plagued afresh for his opinion as to the chances of success.

He could only repeat, for the hundredth time: "Prove your sincerity by sending the ladies and children."

To this proposal Akbar showed signs of consenting: but his implacable father-in-law would have none of it. Troup must go alone with the Háji; Pottinger must write as before; and he wrote accordingly.

In the beginning he had the honour to inform General Pollock that his letter of the 10th of May "was regarded as most offensive by Akbar Khan and as evincing hostility rather than a wish to treat." Truth compelled the statement; and having got it over he went on:

"It is not my duty to comment on your letter, and as my opinions were laid before you on the 3rd of May, there is no reply required from me. . . .

"I have sounded Mahomed Akbar as far as possible on the subject of his feelings towards us; they appear hostile, and I much doubt if he will consent to treat on any terms but those of retaining the country. I have told him that in my own opinion such will be inadmissible as a preliminary, if ever at all. . . . His father having given himself up voluntarily, he argues we have no right to detain him. . . .

"At present I do not think it would be advisable to ransom us for money, as he is in want of that necessary; and the name and character of the British must suffer . . . if we were to pay for the release of a few Europeans, while so many hundreds, indeed, I may say thousands, of our native soldiery and camp-followers are reduced to the condition of slavery throughout this country . . . and it appears to me

that Government will lay itself open to the charge of undue partiality if it release, as above, by ransom.

“Cabool is now completely in the hands of Akbar. Many are inimical to him, but his own energy and that of his supporters is so much the greatest, that no one is likely to oppose him, unless the British troops advance; and even then, I think, he will always be able to make his retreat good before any one here has courage to move. A proclamation threatening punishment if the ladies are withdrawn might do good. . . .

“Mahomed Shah Khan is the right hand and head of Mahomed Akbar. . . . He has chosen his principal line of action as our open enemy, and only enters into negotiations with you for the purpose of gaining insight into your plans. . . .”

On the 10th of July the two set out; and soon after, Pottinger paid one of his rare visits to Shewaki; drawn there no doubt by anxiety for Mackenzie, who lay dangerously ill of typhus—the result of hardship, fatigue, and strain of body and mind. Pottinger found him still in a critical state; too weak for speech, and delirious often, when he would take nothing except from Mrs. Eyre. She had given him her own charpoy, and had spent her last few rupees on fowls for broth, which revived him a little. Conductor Riley sat up at night with him; and the faithful Jacob was a willing slave to both. In this hour, when his life hung by a thread, the measure that Colin Mackenzie meted to others was measured to him again—pressed down and running over.

The sedentary life, confined space, and poor food had told heavily on the men: and rice-fields under water—living close round the fort—proved very unwholesome in



the heats of July. By the 16th Lawrence and several others were down with fever; Mrs. Trevor had given birth to a daughter; and Akbar had sent Dr. Campbell out to attend them all—no easy matter when medicines were practically *nil*.

The Sirdar, meantime, was zealously and effectually making hay out of renewed negotiations with the British General, while he waited impatiently for Troup's return from Jalálabad.

## XVI

BUT if Akbar was in a hurry, Pollock was not. For him delay meant more camels, more chance of a forward move. His bold letter of the 13th of May had elicited no reply from Ellenborough; nor had it been included in the Kabul correspondence sent to England. But by the middle of June, he had received *implied* permission to hold his ground till October, and to make his power felt in the neighbourhood:—permission he had turned to good account. For definite orders to advance, he still looked in vain.

No doubt Lord Ellenborough had his own good reasons, and lack of faith in his Generals may not have been the least among them. As late as the 7th of June he could still write home: "I regret to say that in Major-General Nott I do not entertain the smallest confidence as an officer. He is a brave man, but his own troops do not respect him as a General." And referring to Pollock's orders for June, he added: "I am doing all I possibly can to send on camels and mules, but I cannot make a General. . . . If he had any real mind, he would not be in the hands of the boys about him."

The boys in question were presumably Richmond Shakespear, and Macgregor, men of much frontier experience; and to these there entered, in July, Henry Lawrence, a man to be reckoned with, though his reputation had yet to be made.

Pollock had lately sent for him to shepherd his obstreperous Sikhs; and he had reached camp two days before Troup. A week after his arrival behold him ensconced in a corner of the General's underground room, regaling the dear wife at Kasauli with his impressions on things in general and the new Government in particular.

It was much, very much, to be a hundred miles nearer George, but unpromising negotiations and the uncertainty of advance chafed him almost beyond endurance. Hence the explosion on paper, no other being permissible: "There seems no doubt that the army of reserve is but a demonstration and a very silly one. We return, most likely, in October. Lord Ellenborough seems to be vindictively violent against all who think or urge otherwise. He has the oddest notions I have yet met with, as regards Politicals especially. . . . Yesterday the General, who is easily frightened, got a tart letter asking him who informed Mackeson that the Bala Hissar had fallen. . . . Just fancy the implication that Mackeson and I should not be told such intelligence! It makes me open my eyes and ask what I am here for. . . . Ask any of our directors to read any of the Indian papers, and then judge of our ruler. . . . He is a most dangerous man. . . . He seems to think it very improper that Pollock should tell the Political small fry what is going on; and has bothered the said Pollock exceedingly in consequence."

No doubt it may have been these botherings from Olympus that moved the "said Pollock" about this time, to treat Pottinger in a manner that was disheartening, to say the least of it, for a man in his position. The General wrote that he had entered into a truce with the Afghans till he should hear again from Government; adding that, as Pottinger's political functions were at an end, he need not interfere any further in arrangements for the

release of the prisoners. Little did he dream how much the prisoners would eventually owe to Pottinger's continued interference on their behalf; but whatever the latter may have felt at the moment, he wisely kept to himself.

Pollock detained Troup and his comrade at Jalálabad for more than a week. At first he seemed inclined to clinch matters; but of a sudden there came a mysterious change in his bearing; a light in his eye that had not been there before.

What did it mean? A whisper went round of fresh orders received from Calcutta. The staff was consumed with curiosity. But except for that new light in his eye, the General gave no sign. Not until the 24th did he dismiss the ambassadors, with no more than a message, almost a command: "Send in all English guns and captives to my camp, and your father and family shall be at once set free. As for leaving Afghanistan, I shall do so at my own convenience."

On the 27th, Troup reached Kabul, and his expectations were fulfilled. Akbar would have none of such treatment. He demanded a written agreement, as between chief and chief. Troup must go back and insist on this. Moreover Lawrence Sahib, if recovered, should go with him. Akbar had great faith in Lawrence Sahib; and hearing that his brother was with the General, his Asiatic brain jumped at the possibility of backstairs influence.

His message to Shewaki found Lawrence up and about, but, in Dr. Campbell's opinion, far too weak for such a journey. Lawrence thought otherwise. The prospect of meeting Henry, and of a week's freedom, carried all before it. Once in the saddle and in open country, he felt certain strength would return.

Akbar, as usual, received him with marked courtesy.

"You are quite sure you are strong enough in spite of your pale face?" he asked with genuine concern. "I cannot afford that *you* should risk your life. No other officer of them all can keep the Memsahibs and Baba-lōg in order!"

Lawrence was quite sure. He would return fitter than ever to cope with Memsahibs and Baba-lōg.

In that case he might go. But first Akbar summoned him, Pottinger, and Troup to discuss the gist of this last message that must decide matters once for all.

"Great men," said he—graciously including his visitors—"best show their wisdom by asking advice of one another." Therefore he had summoned the greatest of his guests to ask them by what means he might alter the General's countenance towards himself and his countrymen.

Pottinger—who of course would not write again—could only repeat the advice already given *ad nauseam*. "Send all the prisoners, or at least the women and children. General Pollock will treat on no other basis. If you delay now, he will consider treaty at an end and advance at once."

At that Akbar cast aside his veneer of urbanity and spoke hotly, straight from his heart.

"Without a written promise from your haughty General Sahib, I will send *no* prisoners to his camp. As Macloten Sahib deceived me at Kabul, so now Pollock Sahib would deceive me also, were I fool enough to put my hand twice in the fire. He would take the prisoners, and afterwards advance. What else is the meaning of all this useless talk? Even to-day it is said that General Nott is marching this way from Kandahar. Let Pollock Sahib advance also, if he will; but none of you shall he recover by force. Hear me now. Before my people I swear it. The first day I know that your General Sahibs

have started, I shall despatch all of you, sick and well, women and men, to Turkestan. That no rescue may be possible, you shall be scattered by twos and threes among different chiefs—and not one of you shall see England again! Now Lawrence Sahib, you may go. Tell *that* at Jalálabad, and they will give you a signed agreement. Have no fear!”

But the three who heard him—knowing the ways of British Generals and Pollock's ignorance of his man—could not choose but have great fear. True, Pollock had begun these negotiations with humane intent and honest zeal for their rescue; but a small force sent up at once had been more effectual, while obviating all possible accusation of deceit.

Of the machinery behind the General, Akbar knew nothing. He saw only a disposition to keep him in play, while provisions and cattle were collected;—nominally for departure; probably for advance. His inference and his anger were alike justifiable, and pregnant with danger for the men and women in his power.

They themselves heard, in the Sirdar's threat, their knell of doom. Well they knew—and bravely they admitted the truth—that British honour demanded an advance of her armies to Kabul; and well they knew also that Akbar would stop at nothing when he really found himself at bay.

In the words of Vincent Eyre, they one and all “faced the fact that death or slavery must be their portion unless Providence specially intervened.”

## XVII

AND what of that rumour from Kandahar?

It was not yet true; though a good deal nearer the truth than most fictions of its kind. All through June there had come no slackening of the rain, no touch of whip or spur from Allahabad. That Lord Ellenborough was gradually arriving at a truer estimate of at least one man at the wheel, Nott could not know. He only saw his "beautiful regiments" eating their heads off; his country's dishonour unavenged.

Early in June he wrote to his daughter a very lamentation of Jeremiah.

"I received an order from the Supreme Government months ago to fall back. I did not do so, and laid hold of an *if* in the letter as my excuse. But now—what *now*? . . . The keen wind, blowing over the bleached bones of our comrades . . . will whistle the imbecility . . . of some high functionaries over Asia; and the thousand petty States that did tremble even at the noble lion's *breathing*, will in future crow, in derision, if he attempt to roar. . . . I am ordered to *sneak* away, though with my beautiful regiments I could plant the British banner on the banks of the Caspian! . . . I have been unwell, and am still weak; enough to make me, I think, when I see Old England so disgraced. Well, I will bring my army safe off, and then farewell to a red coat——!"

July dragged away, three weeks of it, inactive as June; save that camels came in: camels that were to assist him in "sneaking away"—he who felt capable of sweeping all Afghanistan before the besom of his righteous wrath. And still Lord Ellenborough remained silent.

No wonder Nott's face looked gloomy as he strolled to and fro outside his bungalow early, very early, on the 22nd of July. The appearance of a *kasid* with his mail-bag merely raised a hope that it contained news of his beloved children; news so rare, so ardently desired.

But the bag contained no word from Calcutta; only a packet from Allahabad. Sick to the soul of Government platitudes, cumbrously worded, he broke the seal with listless inattention, and unfolded a letter so unusually long that a flicker of interest arose. He glanced rapidly down the first page. Then, of a sudden, he caught his breath; his eyes lightened, his pulses quickened. Here was a rocket from a clear sky!

The Governor-General—while re-asserting his determination to withdraw all troops in October—now felt inclined, by Nott's increased strength and improved means of movement, to leave the question of *route* entirely in his hands. The alternatives were these:—a simple, unopposed and inglorious retreat through Quetta and Sindh, or a bold rapid advance on Kabul, sacrificing all communication, on the Quetta side, and depending on the courage of his troops to establish a new communication by joining hands with Pollock between Kabul and Jalálabad.

The drawbacks and difficulties of this last move were fully emphasized by Ellenborough, more especially the problem of forage and provisions, which might ruin all: "and you must feel as I do," added his Lordship, "that the loss of another army, from whatever cause . . . might be fatal to our Government in India. I do not



under-value the aid which our Government in India would receive from the successful execution of a march by your army through Ghuzni and Cabul, over the scenes of our late disasters. . . . It is an object of just ambition which no one more than myself would rejoice to see effected ; but I see that failure in the attempt is certain and irretrievable ruin ; and I would endeavour to inspire you with the necessary caution and make you feel that, great as are the objects to be attained by success, the risk is great also. . . . You will recollect that what you will have to make is a successful march ; that this march must not be delayed by any hazardous operation against Ghuzni or Cabul. . . . You will bring away, from the tomb of Mahmud of Ghuzni, his club . . . and the gates of his tomb, which are the gates of the Temple of Somnath. They will be the just trophies of your successful march. You will not fail to disguise your intention of moving, and to acquaint Major-General Pollock with your plans as soon as you have formed them. A copy of this letter will be forwarded to Major-General Pollock to-day ; and he will be instructed, by a forward movement, to facilitate your advance. . . .”

It was this same copy, arriving before Troup left Jalála-bad, that had altered Pollock's bearing and brought a new gleam into his eyes.

“Nott will find some difficulty,” he wrote to a friend, “in resisting the glorious temptation ; but if he does resist, he is not the man I take him for.”

Nott had no thought of resisting. He felt strong enough, with a picked force, to choose the more dangerous and glorious line of march. His hour had come indeed ; and he had no mind to let it slip through his fingers.

He promptly acknowledged Ellenborough's letter, gave himself three or four days to ponder the subject in all its bearings, then sat down and announced his determination to

“retire” *via* Ghuzni and Kabul with a portion of his army, “a compact and well-trying force,” on which he could absolutely rely. The rest should join Brigadier England at Quetta and return to India by that route.

Never was General happier than Nott during that last week of July. Little disposition had he to cavil at Lord Ellenborough’s despatch; as did scores of others both in India and at home. By these it has been said that Ellenborough, while secretly favouring a triumphal march through Afghanistan, preferred to throw the whole onus of responsibility on to his Generals, rather than frankly to acknowledge his own change of mind; that “retiring” by an advance on Kabul was a contradiction in terms.

Actually, as a mere matter of figures, the route from Kabul to Ferozepore was some seventy miles shorter than the other; besides being infinitely more effective if successfully carried out: and as for the ungenerosity of leaving the final decision to Nott, Ellenborough could have paid that admirable General no higher compliment, nor one more entirely after his own heart. Though his orders were cautious in the extreme, they gave the man on the spot precisely that latitude of judgment which every true soldier craves; for which reason, no doubt, they were applauded by Wellington as “the handsomest instructions ever issued to any officer.” In fine, if Nott was satisfied, the rest might think what they pleased.

On the 27th, he despatched a line to Pollock announcing his decision; and thereafter devoted himself energetically to the task of making all arrangements for the double exit from Kandahar. It might be a matter of two weeks before he could start: but at last the move was in train; at last he was going on to Kabul, leaving the western corner where, for three years, he had been alternately fighting and eating out his heart.

From Allahabad letter now followed letter in rapid succession, each remarkable for the reliance of the writer on the wisdom and foresight of the Kandahar General. If Ellenborough had been slow to decide, there was now no delay or hesitation in his conduct of affairs. Unquestionably the desire for some such finale had long been lurking in his heart; and with characteristic energy he threw his whole soul into the scheme. "Once bestowing his confidence, he was prodigal of his aid, and generous in the expression of his applause."

How well Nott deserved this late-flowering confidence his actions gave proof. How keenly he appreciated it let his own pen bear witness:

"At last they have untied my hands; and mark me, the grass shall not grow under my feet. I have ten thousand things I should like to say, but I cannot. I have a march before me, truly! But never mind! Whatever may happen, I shall still be with my little army. They *shall* be victorious wherever they go, or I will perish."

Bold words: but the man who wrote them was no wind-bag. His self-reliance, if at times over-assertive, was founded on the rock of justifiable confidence in his men, and of their equal confidence in him. The two together spell victory, as Nott proved more than once during his progress to Kabul from Kandahar.

## XVIII

JALÁLABAD, on the 2nd of August, was neither an Abode of Splendour nor an Abode of Bliss. It was mainly an abode of earthquakes, flies, and hurricane winds that raced through the valley, at intervals filling every corner and crevice with powder of dust. And by now the heat was at its zenith. Officers and men had taken to burrowing in the sandy plain like rabbits, only sleeping in tents that were miniature ovens by day.

These underground rooms were roofed with mud and rushes, and, though windowless, provided some shelter from a merciless sun. Flies came also in myriads, polluting whatever they touched, and bringing sickness in their train, till the town was a lazar-house, and the camp little better.

Pollock, distressed beyond measure, had moved Sale's Brigade one march forward to Fatiabad, where they were happier in point of climate. But movement, action, was the true tonic for their sickness; and of this they saw no definite hope as yet. Though the General and a few of his intimates knew that their days of waiting were numbered, he thought it advisable to keep that knowledge close till he had definite word from Nott that the Kabul route was his choice.

For the first few days, after the arrival of that momentous letter, he had not even mentioned it to his Politicals or his Staff. But such superhuman reticence could not long

endure; and on the 25th Lawrence was writing of it to his wife: "The General has tried for three days to keep a secret; but this morning he came to my bedside to tell me. He is a funny old fellow. Can't stand being told he is in the hands of his Politicals. . . . He listens patiently to me; and, but for fear of the world's sneer, he would take me further into his confidence."

All who knew what was impending were now on the tiptoe of expectancy, looking daily for the scrap of paper that should reveal the mind of Nott. Meantime, there came distraction in the shape of three travel-weary horsemen in fruitless quest of terms for Akbar and release for themselves.

The party alighted at Henry's tent; and the Háji, who knew the brothers had not met for more than two years, was amazed at their British manner of greeting.

"*Wah! Wah!*" he exclaimed, "you Feringhi-*lóg* are the greatest conundrums of Allah's making! At least I thought you would fall into each other's arms!"

"Our hearts are not the less warm because we shake hands instead," the other answered quietly; but that was more than the Háji could be expected to believe.

Arrived in Pollock's tent, Lawrence saw at a glance that his countenance was not favourable either for Akbar or for release. Nor was that countenance improved by the reading of Akbar's letter, with its peremptory dictum that "the General must fix the day of his departure."

To Lawrence and Troup, Pollock revealed the portentous secret; adding his conviction that Nott would advance; in which circumstances all talk of terms would be a mere sham.

It went sore against the man's kindly nature even to *seem* no longer solicitous for recovery of the prisoners; but they must understand—as indeed they did—that no General,

of any sense or honesty, could hamper himself with conditions when advance was in the wind—advance that spelled retribution.

Moreover, he did not for one moment believe that Akbar would dare to carry out his threat. He had, on receiving Pottinger's last letter, made it known in Kabul that any who prevented the removal of the prisoners would be well rewarded, and that loss of them would be avenged by razing the city to the ground. He had been assured more than once that there was a party in Kabul willing to prevent their removal. In fine, he again dismissed the ambassadors with a brief letter—no more satisfactory than the rest—and a message that as regards his movements, "he would not be dictated to!"

"A pretty kind of communication," lamented Lawrence, "for us prisoners to make to the fiery Akbar Khan!"

Could Hájí Bukhtiar have heard the talk between George and his brother next day, he might have been readier to believe that great warmth of heart underlay that restrained clasp of hands.

Henry had a proposal to make. George had been ill; Henry declared himself in rude health. George, the father of four children, must—as a mere matter of arithmetic—take more thought for his own safety than for Henry's, who was the father of one; the upshot of this diplomatic preamble being that George must, in duty bound, allow Henry to go back in his stead.

George's answer may be imagined. Like Humpty Dumpty, he was weak at arithmetic. He could not do the sum except on paper! And there remained the crucial question—What would Honoria say?"

"That I was perfectly right," answered Honoria's husband, without a shadow of doubt.

But even such supreme sanction failed to shake the

obstinacy of George. Henry could ride out with them all to Osman Khan's fort; not a mile farther—and Henry must perforce give way. At Osman Khan's fort they parted, on the 6th of August, convinced in the deep of their hearts that they would never meet again. Yet, even so, they did not fall into each other's arms.

## XIX

KABUL again—on the 10th of August, 1842, at ten of the morning, and ill news for greeting. During their absence John Conolly, the gentle and beloved, had died of typhus at Shewaki, after five days' illness, and with hearts even heavier than before, they asked for the Sirdar.

In due time they were summoned to Akbar's assembly, and courteously received, though the chief's flushed face and glowing eyes betrayed the fact that he had already heard their answer from Háji Bukhtiar. Mahomed Shah, Dōst Mahomed, and Sultan Ján, sat near him; and turning to them, he indicated his ambassadors with a gracious sweep of the arm.

"Look you! Your own eyes are witness. These Englishmen have returned, though I never even asked them if they would."

"But you knew it, Sirdar," put in Lawrence, smiling. "You had no need to ask."

"Yes, I knew it," said Akbar; "but these, my chiefs, would not believe." He turned to them again. "Would *you* have come back if sent on such an errand, bringing such an answer?"

With one accord they cast up their eyes, wagging their beards. "Praise be to Allah, *we* are no such fools."

And Akbar knew that, for once in a way, they spoke truth. He himself could not choose but admire these



fools who would neither lie nor take a mean advantage of him even to save their lives.

Bidding them be seated, he asked for Pollock's letter, and read it scowling. Then, holding it disdainfully at arm's length, he delivered his own ultimatum in a loud voice that all might hear.

"In the name of God, what is this that you have brought me? No reply at all! I see now that this obstinate General Sahib is playing with me. I had supposed that the word of the English once given was law. He has shown me my error, and broken up all my hopes of peace without bloodshed. Now it must be war!"

The fiendish leer of Mahomed Shah plainly advertised approval. "I knew all this months ago, my son," said he. "These Feringhis have deceived us from the first. War is all they want. *War* let them have, to the sword hilt. Why waste breath and energy in empty talk? In the name of God let us destroy them all." Then turning to the ambassadors he added sneeringly: "Lawrence Sahib, you have done nothing for us by your exertions."

"Thank you, Khan Sahib," replied the Irishman with unruffled good humour. "You always manage to put in a good word for me!"

The quick rejoinder raised a general laugh that served to clear the air; and Akbar, his temper cooled, spoke quietly to Lawrence of his deep regret at Conolly's death, and his readiness to send him to Jalálabad for burial, an offer Lawrence thought better not to accept.

They spoke of Henry Lawrence, of the joy of meeting, the sorrow of parting. "And why did you not bring him with you?" asked Akbar the hospitable. "He would have been greatly welcome, and could have returned to Jalálabad when he pleased."

Lawrence thanked him, and added laughing: "Isn't

one of the family enough for you? My brother *did* offer to come in my place, but that I could not allow. Would you have accepted him instead of me?"

"No—by no means. I prize yourself too much! Now go to your friends at Shewaki and tell them to make ready for a rough march across the mountains. Your General shall not find you *here*."

Pleasant news to carry back to Shewaki, where fever had claimed more victims in his absence. Beautiful Mrs. Anderson lay half unconscious in a critical condition. Her husband was ill also; Mackenzie very little better; Mrs. Trevor dangerously ill. Lady Sale's grandchild, born on the 24th of July, had increased the number of womenfolk by one. Dr. Campbell had his hands full; his medicine chest empty.

To this sorrowful party Lawrence must announce the imminent prospect of transportation beyond the northern passes of the Hindu Kush. Letters, papers, and money from Jalálabad, though dearly welcome, failed to soften the effect of news that they could scarcely bring themselves to believe.

It was confirmed on the morrow by the arrival of the five remaining hostages, with Eldred Pottinger. These had been ordered out of the Bala Hissar by Akbar, who cavalierly told his men to "take away those dogs."

Lawrence, fearing immediate removal, rode in at once to Kabul, and finding the Sirdar in one of his friendly moods, ventured a suggestion. If Bamián were their destination, surely, in mercy, the Andersons and the Trevor family might remain behind, with Dr. Campbell to attend them. Akbar granted that reasonable request; but when Lawrence, encouraged, asked if he might stay also, prompt refusal was his portion. No men of any value should Pollock find within reach.

"At least you will give us two days' notice, Sirdar," he persisted with quiet courage, "that the ladies may have time to prepare for the journey?"

"Two days! You will not get two hours' notice. All depends on the movements of your Generals. I have news to-day that General Nott Sahib has left Kandahar, first destroying all guns and stores. Why destroy so much Government property? Can it be that he is leaving Kandahar for good? You are mad, all you Feringhis. Impossible to understand your motives and designs."

"We are not mad out at Shewaki," said Lawrence sadly, "but sore at heart and very ill, with no medicines or comforts for our relief. May we not send a list of our needs to Jalálabad? It is a small thing to ask."

"Yet I cannot grant it while your General treats me as an enemy. I have done all I can for friendship. You have only him to blame. I will provide carriage for all on the march—no more. It is enough."

With that meagre assurance Lawrence fared sorrowfully back to the fort.

On the morrow Pottinger and Troup rode into Kabul, where they stayed a day or two with the Great One who had dismissed them as "dogs"; and on the 23rd, to the surprise of all, including Akbar, there arrived a cavalcade of Afghans, nine of whom turned out to be the British prisoners from Ghazni. Shamshudin, their keeper, had long refused them to Akbar. Now for his own reasons he sent them unannounced, and "the arch-fiend of Kabul" gave them cordial greeting. With them came poor Colonel Palmer, who, like Elphinstone, was blamed by many and pitied by all; and among the subalterns was a stripling named John Nicholson, who, at Ghazni, had thrice driven the enemy back beyond the walls before he would listen to the order to make his company lay down

their arms; and when forced to obey, had yielded up his sword "with bitter tears." This was the first the world heard of John Nicholson; a beginning worthy of the man who fell gloriously at Delhi, leaving others to reap the fruits of his victory.

The sufferings of the nine—who had originally been ten—made the mere discomfort of Akbar's prisoners seem a thing of naught. Those at Ghazni had for two months been penned like animals in an unclean room, eighteen feet by thirteen, with one small window, afterwards blocked up. One of them had died of typhus; Colonel Palmer had been tortured in the belief that he had managed to secrete a large sum of money; and the clothes of all had rotted on their backs. Only since the middle of June they had been better housed and treated, owing to rumours that the Feringhi armies were at length bethinking themselves of retribution.

Akbar's friendly reception overwhelmed them. "I could not believe," wrote one, "that the stout, good-humoured, open-hearted looking young man, who was making such kind inquiries after our health . . . could be the murderer of Macnaghten and the leader of the massacre of our troops. . . . After many civil speeches he ordered dinner and sent for Pottinger and Troup. When they arrived . . . Akbar, his chiefs, and ourselves, all sat down to the best meal I had eaten for many a month. The Wazir chatted and joked on indifferent subjects, and shortly after dismissed us, saying he would make us over to Pottinger and Troup for the night, and that we might go and have a chat with them in private, as doubtless we were anxious to do."

Next morning the "arch-fiend" gave them an excellent breakfast, asked for a list of their needs, and supplied them with horses that they might join their friends. To

them Shewaki Fort, with its garden and stream and tower room, seemed a very elysium. But their enjoyment of comparative luxury was brief. On the 24th Troup and Campbell brought news that Sultan Ján had set out with a body of horsemen to oppose Nott; that now any hour the dread order might arrive: and on the 25th, while they sat at their midday meal,—it came.

At moonrise that night they were to set out for the high valley of Bamián—an eight days' march over three passes; presumably a prelude to the threatened dispersion among the chiefs of Turkistan. So much for General Pollock's incredulity, for his threats and offers of reward to those who should out-manœuvre Akbar Khan.

Though much of sorrow and anxiety had been theirs since that awful week in January, never till now had they felt destitute of hope. This last move, with its ominous implication, brought even the bravest near to despair.

Mercifully the hurry and bustle of preparation left little leisure for thought; time enough for that later on. Pottinger, hearing he was to go with the rest, though Troup would remain, rode at once into Kabul and asked leave to stay behind. He fared no better than Lawrence had done. Bygrave might remain with Troup if he chose; all the rest, Pottinger included, must go that night.

And that night they went.

Pottinger returned to find ponies and camels in attendance under their old friend Baha-udin, also a guard of some four hundred Irregulars, horse and foot, with a rough band of pillaged bugles, fifes, and drums. The infantry proved to be men of Captain Hopkins' old regiment, who had deserted bodily, in October, '41, on the reappearance of Dōst Mahomed in the Kohistan. The escort was commanded by one Saleh Mahomed, some time a Native Officer in the regiment that deserted, now lording

it over the Feringhis he had served; aping the Commander, with a blue frock-coat for uniform, and a great white horse for charger. His fellow-commandant, Akbar's Master of Horse, had probably been sent to keep a private eye on the turncoat lest there were any attempt at rescue.

Scarcely daring to hope for such good fortune, the prisoners put their few belongings together, with set lips and mournful eyes. All the women, with the exception of Lady Sale, packed themselves once more into the hated camel panniers. Ten invalid soldiers and several officers had no choice but to follow their example; among the last, Mackenzie and Pottinger, Waller and Eyre. Poor Colin was still so weak that it seemed hardly worth attempting the move, while the increased pain and inflammation of Pottinger's Charikar wound made him fear disease or rotting of the bone.

By ten o'clock all were ready: and at eleven, by the light of a waning moon, the unwieldy procession surged forward, marshalled by discordant strains of the bugles, fifes, and drums, that with great zeal and spirit proceeded to murder one or two old Regimental tunes.

On any other journey than this, the whole farcical proceeding would have seemed an excellent joke. But the hearts of all were too heavy for laughter. Their destination doubtful, their fate painfully certain,—the ghosts of those familiar tunes seemed to put the finishing touch to their despair. Even spirits so unconquerable as those of Pottinger and George Lawrence could find, that night, scarcely a crevice that looked to the sky.

"This," wrote Lawrence, "was the saddest of all our moves; and many of our number . . . abandoned all hope for the future. The moon did not last long, and as I wended my way through the darkness thoughts of Home and all my treasures there crowded upon my mind, filling

me with sadness. But the thought that I and they were in the hands of Him who is 'mighty to save,' strengthened and supported me, as it had done in many dangers, difficulties, and trials."

So they fared forward, that much-enduring handful of British men, women, and children, with surface pomp and ceremony, with much of discomfort and more of sorrow, through the dark of that summer night toward a future that loomed darker still——

But the occasion of their misery was, for the armies of Nott and Pollock, an occasion of hope and joy. While they stole away from Kabul, Nott was marching in triumph on Ghazni, impatient to wash out the stain of Palmer's surrender in Afghan blood.

Pollock had received, on the 15th, a few blunt lines written by his brother-General on the 27th of July. The news sent an electric thrill through camp and cantonments; a thrill that passed swiftly on to Sale's brigade at Fatiabad and evoked from the boyish affectionate old General a purely unofficial shout of joy.

"Hurrah!" he wrote, "this is good news. All here are prepared to . . . march as light as possible, and our officers are doubling up four in a hill tent. . . . *I am so excited I can scarce write!*"

Even Pollock, of the cool brain and steady pulse, could hardly brook the prospect of another week's delay, though he knew himself still lamentably short of carriage and provisions. Nott, a man of his word, had "supposed that he might reach Kabul by the 15th of September": and the thought of being a day behind the Kandahar force was not to be endured. It was an honourable race for glory; yet there is no denying that Nott—who had borne the burden and heat of the day, whose explicit orders

were to march on Kabul—had every right to count on entering the city first, and for the first time, with his “little army,” that was to carry all before it.

Pollock's orders, on the other hand, were to make a demonstration in Nott's favour. Lord Ellenborough had thought that he would probably not find it necessary to enter Kabul at all; and that there were forward spirits in his own camp who thought likewise is proved by the remark of Henry Lawrence to his wife: “I doubt his reaching Kabul unless he leaves half his force behind. . . . Indeed, it is the opinion of many in camp that he should not go at all, but simply make a strong demonstration. . . . It will require much strength of mind to induce him to forego the glory of a week at Kabul for the consciousness of having played the game allotted to him in a manner the least likely to prove disastrous. . . .”

But such strength of mind—entailing also such supreme self-denial as that of Outram before Lucknow—could not reasonably be expected of one man in five thousand. The Mutiny did produce one such in the “Bayard of India,” and the nineteenth century must rest content with that. George Pollock, after four weary months of waiting, had made up his mind to reach Kabul at any price; and on August the 20th—leaving a detachment to hold Jalálabad—he moved, with eight thousand of his best troops, toward Gandamak.

Here still further delay was their portion: but at last the Army of Retribution was astir in earnest; at last there was heard throughout Afghanistan “the sound of many footsteps, the tread of a host.”



BOOK VI  
COURAGE—I

“To men who know that God guides them, misfortunes become invitations to renewed effort. To them there is no such thing as discouragement . . . and every failure becomes a step towards ultimate success.” -PAGE, *On the Pilgrim Fathers*.

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“Lo, strength is of the plain root-virtues born ;  
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn ;  
Train by endeavour, by devotion shape.  
Strength is not won by miracle or rape ;  
It is the offspring of the modest years,  
The gift of sire to son.”

GEORGE MEREDITH.

## I

ON the 3rd of May, 1837, Eldred Pottinger had first set eyes on the valley of Maidan, loveliest of many lovely valleys in the wild hill region round Kabul. A subaltern-explorer—the world his oyster—he had ridden through the green length of it in the guise of a Bukhtiari merchant, with the good Mohun Shah for companion and protector in one. What had he not dreamed of achieving and of adding to the world's sum of knowledge during that seventy days' tramp from Bhuj to Kabul! And how divinely had the body's weariness been discounted by the hidden lantern of hope that burned steadily within!

Now, on the 27th of August, 1843, he lay taking his rest, after a long night march, in the shade of lordly poplars, beside a stream that rippled and raced, clear as crystal, down from the hills. The orchards below them were ruddy with fruit, the fields golden with standing corn. In five years the face of the valley had suffered no visible change. In five years the face of the man had been deeply scored by thought and suffering; yet had the spirit within lost nothing of courage, faith, and high resolve. Only the once steady light of hope now burned so dim that he believed it almost extinct.

Looking thoughtfully from one to another of his companions—who sat about in groups, talking, laughing, and eating fruit under the trees—he wondered how many hearts among them were heavier than his own.

The children, blessedly unaware of impending tragedy,

explored the camping-ground, and speculated on fresh adventures in store. Three tents had been pitched for the ladies; and all about them were their ineffectual escort, who formed pickets and mounted guard with ostentatious display of discipline and order.

Early that morning they had passed the road that led direct to Ghazni; and through this very valley Nott must fare on his march to Kabul. He was by now well on his way; and rumour reported that he would probably arrive on the 1st. The possibility lit a flicker of hope in their hearts; and already it had occurred to them that the man who had turned his coat once might conceivably be induced to turn it again.

Saleh Mahomed, their General—as he grandiloquently styled himself—had responded with the frank joviality of your true Afghan to the friendly overtures of Johnson and Lawrence. They had found him no fanatic; neither bigoted nor prejudiced; but a cheerful soldier of fortune, caring little for one faction or another; and ready, like Iago, for any service that would put money in his purse. Johnson, who had ridden with him throughout the march, had lent a willing ear to his traveller's tales; in the hope that by such flattering attention, the self-styled hero might be turned to good account; and to-day he confided to Pottinger his belief that diplomatic persuasion, tipped with silver, would almost certainly serve their turn. The possibility was no more than a chink in the blank wall confronting them, but to widen the chink it were worth straining every nerve.

After private discussion, then, it was decided that if Saleh Mahomed would agree either to halt, or to take short marches till Nott reached Maidan, they on their part would ensure him a lakh of rupees from themselves, and recommend him for a pension from Government.

Johnson supposed that Pottinger would be spokesman ; but Pottinger had small talent and less taste for diplomacy. "The fellow seems to dislike me, and I heartily return the compliment," said he bluntly. "Besides, as you have done the listening you would stand a better chance of being listened to in return."

Johnson, nothing loth, determined to broach the subject during the next march, their third since Shewaki. Their first journey had taken them very little way from Kabul ; and before moving on, they had been joined by Haughton, Evans, and all the ineffectives left there in January. They marched by moonlight in the small hours, sleeping till midnight, when drums and bugles sounded a parody of *réveillé* ; and before two of the morning their cavalcade was under way.

The beauty of the valley increased with every mile of progress ; and at nine they reached their halting-ground, where they bivouacked, as before, on a green slope in the flickering shade of poplars beside the inevitable stream.

During the journey Johnson had cautiously and half jestingly sounded his man. But honest Iago, being in a virtuous mood, spurned the base proposition with a fine show of wrath ; and, the further to vindicate his character, he at once exchanged his rôle of jovial good fellow for that of the stern, high-handed jailer. No casual straying now, beyond the line of sentries ; and, should any escape, he declared that the rest would be massacred without compunction. The chink, instead of widening, seemed hermetically sealed ; and every step northward a fresh nail in their coffins. . . .

On the 29th they entered the Hazara country where the Kazzilbash element prevailed. One of these friendly chiefs, as they neared his fort, had the courage and humanity to

come out and salute them with an offering of cakes, bread, and fruit. Undaunted by Saleh Mahomed's threats of reporting him to the Wazir, he spoke words of sympathy and encouragement to the Feringhis in distress, bidding them only keep up their spirits and all would yet go well.

Cheered not a little by that touch of human compassion, they pursued their unwilling way into a region wilder and more rugged than anything between Kabul and Gandamak; up hill and down, by a maddening see-saw process, till they came, on the last day of August, to the Hajiguk Pass; and dropped into the Helmund Valley, only to begin another climb next morning. Once they met a *kasid*, who hailed them in passing with news that the Feringhi General, having retaken Ghazni, was marching swiftly on Kabul; and they thanked God that retribution was come in earnest, even though it came too late to save their lives.

On the 2nd of September they confronted their last, most formidable climb over the Kalu Mountains by way of the Irak Pass, thirteen thousand feet high. So narrow, steep, and rugged, was the four-mile ascent, that camels, except for baggage, were out of the question. Ill or well, all must contrive to ride, with blankets for saddles and rope for reins. Even Mrs. Eyre and poor Colin Mackenzie—now almost at their last gasp—must cling on to a *yabu* as best they might; and Mrs. Sturt, with a baby five weeks old, managed by some means, to achieve that desperate climb.

By noon they reached the summit—and below and around them all Afghanistan lay unrolled; a chaos of rugged ranges, suggesting from that height a tempestuous ocean turned suddenly to stone. Here ran the swiftness of billowing ridges; there fell uncompromising cliffs from groups of savage peaks. All forms were there and every shade of mountain colouring, from outcrops of sandstone

and granite near at hand to the tenderer half-tones of madder, grey-green, and purple, as that multitude of mountains swept outward and upward to the far-off purity of the snows. Even their first view, from above Jagdalak, was eclipsed by the vastness and terrific grandeur of this vision from Kalu; a vision that appalled rather than uplifted the hearts of men and women to whom that pitiless region spelled slavery or death.

Over this very pass, three years earlier, the 37th Native Infantry had carried the British flag for the first time in history; had proudly unfurled it on the summit; and, at command of their officers, had given three cheers for England. Now, their bodies lay rotting in Afghan defiles; and Griffiths—who had led them with unfailing valour through victory and disaster—sat his wretched *yabu* amid that sorrowful company of prisoners. Lawrence, too, had shared in the first campaign against the Amir, and Pottinger had marched over the same mountains on his return from Herat to India, while the Great Game was at its height and the Great Illusion still held.

Now Illusion lay shattered; and—behold Reality!

This lofty Pass was their prison gate indeed: for thence, afar off, they had a glimpse of their destination, the narrow valley of Bamián. That night they slept at the foot of the Pass; and at dawn on the 3rd prepared for their last march.

High above their camp loomed the famous ruins of Zohák, rose red against the stone grey mountains beyond—a fortress the most ancient, picturesque and impregnable, in a land bristling with strongholds. Inaccessible at almost every point, the fort is set on an outlying spur of clay hills red as itself; cut off from the main ranges by deep ravines; and from Bamián Valley by red cliffs too sheer for scaling. From within the main circle of fortifica-

tions, the hill rises to a peak, ringed with a coronet of walls and bastions, red like the rest;—a dull angry red giving to the whole imposing structure an aspect so weird, so unearthly, that it is known among Afghans as the birth-place of Shaitán.

Leaving the devil's birthplace on their right, they entered at last the valley of Bamián, with its low red waves of rock, its primeval city of caves, its colossal idols and ancient unrecorded history: a valley of unique interest, wherein even captured travellers, broken in heart and hope, could find some distraction from personal misery till the worst was known.

By way of impressing the inhabitants—simple folk of the Hazara tribe—their General reappeared this morning in the borrowed glory of some departed officer's frock-coat and epaulettes; while the Master of Horse, not to be eclipsed, donned a full-dress tunic of scarlet and gold. Thus regally led, they marched seven miles to the accompaniment of their two drums and solitary fife. "The bugles sounded at intervals," wrote Lady Sale, "and the men marched to this discord in the most appropriate manner, invariably missing cadence and step."

Moving northward, always northward, they came at last to Bamián River, where the clay hills uprose into long lines of cliff, ranging from deep red to bluish-grey; and, widening gradually, gave to view the ancient honeycombed citadel of Ghul-ghula, its ruined towers crowning a lone pyramid of rock—a landmark visible for miles.

Opposite the strange city they halted—that little party of British captives—and set up their tents and ate their breakfast with sharpened appetites; excepti ngonly those who were too far gone in illness to care for anything on earth but respite from the jolting of *kajáwáhs* and freedom to stretch their cramped limbs.

Colin Mackenzie, more dead than alive, fell where he lay. Jacob, weeping unashamedly, helped Pottinger and Drummond to lift him into a cow-shed. Dr. Berwick found a little more quinine in his pocket and Pottinger brought tea from the gipsy breakfast going on outside. In this hovel most of the sick were stowed by way of shelter from the sharp night frosts; for the valley is over eight thousand feet up. The rest of the miserable "fort" allotted to them proved so dark and unclean that the women rebelled in a body and begged Lawrence to gain leave that all might remain in camp. It was a long-winded process and a stormy one: but Lawrence prevailed. In their flimsy tents, then, they settled themselves as best they might, unpacked their very few belongings, and slept sound for sheer weariness and heaviness of heart.

It was a mercy, if a negative one, that they were to march no farther. But, even were Akbar defeated, there seemed every likelihood that an order for their massacre or rapid removal would outstrip any troops who dared venture to their rescue over those three tooth-breaking passes that were as triple gates shutting out all hope of liberty and life.



## II

DURING the next few days they had ample leisure to look round them and to feel thankful for the neighbourhood of strange ruins, that roused enough of curiosity and interest to keep dismal forebodings at bay. The hill, honeycombed throughout with Buddhist temples and dwellings, was scarped on the north side into cliffs adorned at intervals with monster niches for idols; some fifty, some a hundred, some a hundred and eighty feet high. It was the largest of these that towered opposite their camp; a thing of sheer bulk, without line or curve of beauty, the shoulders draped Hindu fashion, the thirty-foot head crowned with a top-knot, and all the upper half of the face destroyed. Only the right leg remained, and that was gone from the knee downward. During the early Christian era this City of Caves had been a stronghold of Buddhism, inhabited by ten thousand monks; wherefore the idols have been zealously disfigured by Mahomedans of all ages.

Between the legs of the mutilated monster yawned an arched entrance to the great circular cave that opened into endless burrows, now occupied by *kafilas*, nomads, or refugees from pursuing vengeance. On the left shoulder a small hut could plainly be seen, and the niche above the head was said to have been plastered and painted fresco-wise; the colours still as bright as though their age were measured by decades, not by centuries.

All who could wield a pencil or had any taste for the antiquities were determined to explore the city; a

resolution that entailed further hot altercation with Saleh Mahomed. His bark proved worse than his bite; and, finding all objections overruled, he consented at last to daily excursions, well guarded by his own men.

The stairway leading up to the colossal image was choked with ruins. But the head of the lesser female figure proved accessible; and Eyre, by sheer persistence, won leave to make the ascent with a few Afghans for guard. Seated on the lady's crown—a small plateau a hundred and twenty feet up—he enjoyed a fine view of the country round and of the frescoes that roofed the niche.

Here some natives of the valley joined him and fell into talk. He found them intelligent and full of eager curiosity to know what was written in Feringhi books of this, their sole claim to distinction. Eyre told them of the Buddhist Monastery, of the belief that Alexander the Great had founded the city; and they, in return, told him things of more vital and immediate importance to himself.

The whole valley, said they, favoured Feringhi rather than Afghan rule. There were few among them who did not hope to see the release of the prisoners and the British Generals triumphant at Kabul.

Could there possibly be another chink in the blank wall ahead? Eyre spoke of it on his return; and hope, that no misery could kill outright, stirred faintly again in their hearts.

Among their troops they had discovered some friendly Hindustanis, an old servant of Pottinger's, and the remnant of his Herati escort, who hailed him with joy—when Saleh Mahomed's eye was turned elsewhere. With these they had secretly opened communication, and knew that, in emergency, they could be counted on for loyal help. But so long as their keeper remained incorruptible small hope of so joyful an event was theirs.

The seed sown on the march seemed to have fallen on stony ground. Though their friends among the guard broadly hinted that the General was one who would sell his soul for money, yet day followed day, and he made no sign. His manner since that peremptory refusal had never again been so open-hearted; and now, on the 9th of September, he announced that, as his men found it too much trouble to keep guard over a camp, he intended shifting them into the nearest fort. Neither grumbling nor entreaty would move him; and to the fort they went.

It proved a miserable specimen of its kind; boasting five sheds, of the darkest and dirtiest, lively only in respect of vermin. And what were five sheds among so many?

The solution of the riddle fell to the new committee—chosen on leaving Shewaki—Pottinger, Lawrence, and Webb, of the 38th Madras N.I.; Lawrence, for all his patience and good nature, having at last refused to carry on the thankless task alone. To-day, then, he and Pottinger decided that the sheds—which at least afforded privacy—be given over to the ladies, and that the men must make the best of the courtyard.

The huts were chosen by seniority; and to Lady Sale fell a dark cowshed, lit by a hole in the roof and a door at the end of a narrow passage. "This," she wrote, "was for Mrs. Sturt, myself, the baby, the ayah, and *the dog*, and was decidedly the best apartment there. . . . We soon set to; and by dint of hard working with sticks and stones . . . till both of us got blistered hands, we knocked two small windows out of the wall, and thus obtained darkness visible. . . . We were fortunate in our choice, though our nightly visitant, in the shape of the largest bug I have ever seen, was sufficiently disgusting. Lady Macnaghten, Captain and Mrs. Boyd, and Mrs. Mainwaring with the children, had no rest in the rooms they had taken. . . .

They had capital *shikar* all night, and in the morning got leave to pitch a tent near the gate."

This new move, with the closer confinement it entailed, reduced hope and spirits to their lowest ebb:—or, so they believed, till the 11th, when a report went round that plunged them still deeper into the depths.

There had been arrivals from Kabul the night before, bringing—it was said—a letter from Akbar, announcing Pollock's rapid advance, and bidding Saleh Mahomed march all the prisoners forthwith to Kúlum, where his friend, the Wali, would send an officer with two thousand men to take over charge.

At that news a horror of fear came upon them such as they had not felt since the awful days of the retreat. The ghost of a hope that it might not be true, seemed only like a half-open door, that would presently be slammed in their faces. Men certainly had arrived the night before; and if they were to start at once, there would soon come a messenger to seal their fate.

In due time he came. His master, he said, wished to speak with Pottinger Sahib, who, for once, made haste to obey. Such a call seemed certain confirmation of their worst fears; and Pottinger's heart knocked unpleasantly against his ribs as he entered Saleh Mahomed's tent.

With him were his brother and one Syud Morteza Khan, both lately come from Kabul; and Pottinger, as he greeted them, detected a friendly gleam in the Syud's eye that set his heart throbbing to quite another tune.

Akbar's order, it seemed, was a fact; a peremptory order not lightly to be disobeyed; but—honest Iago hummed and hawed—these, his brother and his friend, had brought certain proposals from Kabul that, in his opinion, required immediate consideration; proposals strangely resembling those made to him by his honourable

friends a fortnight ago. He wished to consult those friends before returning an answer.

“Of General Pollock I know nothing,” said the sometime incorruptible. “But you three gentlemen I know; and if you will swear by your Saviour to make good this new offer, I will deliver you to your own people. The Syud will explain.”

The which he proceeded to do with the leisurely deliberation of his kind.

He had come, it seemed, mainly at the instigation of one Ali Reza Khan, Kazzilbash, well known to Pottinger as a staunch friend of Mackenzie in particular and the British Raj in general. Akbar's sudden rise to power had obliged him and other friends of the English, including Ján Fishán Khan, to fly from Kabul and take refuge in the hills. But though a price was set on his head, the devoted Ali Reza had managed to keep in touch with the prisoners. At great risk to himself he had contrived to send them clothes and occasionally money; and to-day Pottinger heard with amazement and gratitude how the faithful one had been exerting himself ever since their departure for Bamián.

Encouraged, no doubt, by Pollock's public promise of reward, he had lost no time, said the Syud, in gaining possession of Saleh Mahomed's wife and family; the surest means of putting the screw on an Oriental. He had then sent a message to Troup, by Syud Morteza, proposing that the Syud himself should go on a mission to Bamián with urgent letters from Kazzilbash chiefs to their clansman, Saleh Mahomed, and promises of substantial reward if he would bring the prisoners back to Kabul instead of carrying them off to Kúlum.

Troup had readily vouched for rewards; Mohun Lal also had been zealous in this respect, and in urging active

measures to forestall the purpose of Akbar, should Pollock defeat him in the passes.

Thus, encouraged on all hands and enriched by an advance of a hundred rupees from the munshi, Syud Morteza had set out on his daring errand. It now remained only for the captives themselves to play their part with courage and address; and they might reasonably hope to meet Pollock at Kabul instead of dragging out lives of slavery in the wilds of Turkistan.

So astounding a change from the settled despair of a few hours earlier could hardly be grasped all in a moment. But the demand for instant action soon cleared Eldred Pottinger's brain and lit a new light in his eyes. Though in June he had written to his mother that, except on account of his family, he cared little what became of him, the unhopèd-for turn of the wheel must have made him realize how much he still did care in spite of all that news-writers and slanderers could do. Besides, there were those others, for whom his local knowledge and political prestige would be invaluable at this juncture of affairs. Above all, there were the women and children, whose sufferings hurt his chivalrous heart far more than any of them were likely to suppose.

Before that first interview was ended he had bound the lord of the blue frock-coat firmly to the interests of those he had been paid to destroy; had ensured him a reward of twenty thousand rupees—provided the rest of his friends were ready to bear their part in the engagement. Saleh Mahomed, once more the jovial soldier of fortune, beamed upon his chief captive and declared himself proud to assist in the liberation of so many brave men; but all must be set down on paper with the names of the principal officers attached to the bond.

Greatly revived in spirit, Pottinger hurried back to his

friends. A short conference, between the three some-time politicals and Johnson, resulted in unanimous support of the scheme.

"We had some misgivings," said Mackenzie afterwards, "that Saleh Mahomed only wanted our names in writing, as concerned in an attempt against the Sirdar, to betray us. . . . Nevertheless, the case being desperate, we agreed to run the risk."

They four, then, were prepared to sign the bond and carry through the bold scheme at all hazards if the rest would guarantee payment, between them, should Government refuse to sanction their bond. There remained the possibility that Saleh Mahomed would demand the signatures of Palmer and Shelton in addition to their own; in which case they foresaw breakers ahead. Shelton could be trusted to oppose, on principle, any plan that did not originate from himself, and Palmer's spirit seemed broken by his failure at Ghazni and his cruel treatment at the hands of Shamshudin. However, since their rank might lend prestige to the undertaking, they were invited to support it—with the result already foreseen.

Shelton denounced the whole affair as foolhardy and premature. It would serve no purpose but to embroil them seriously with Akbar, whose defeat was not yet certain; and he, for one, would give them neither his signature nor his support. Palmer, evidently nervous and uncertain, took his cue from the Brigadier. Argument soon degenerated to such futile altercation that Lawrence and Pottinger broke up the meeting.

Let the Colonels, if unconvinced, stand aside; *they* would consult their fellow-captives, and then settle matters with the Afghans, if Lady Sale would lend **her room**.

Lady Sale was delighted; so were they all. **The** mere word "freedom" went to their heads like wine. They were

ready for any hazard on the barest chance of success ; and after all, added Pottinger, if the plan proved an attempt to over-reach them, they could but try to seize the weapons of their guards and hold out in the fort till help arrived.

The adventurous spirit of the man, so long repressed, rose shiningly to the occasion. Casting aside all personal despondency, he flung himself heart and soul into an achievement worthy of his utmost efforts.

Straightway the Afghans were sent for ; and there, in Lady Sale's cow-shed—with her *resai* spread out for divan—the prelude to adventure was begun.

Mohun Lal, said Saleh Mahomed, had promised him, on behalf of General Pollock, the rewards already stated ; and the four officers, in whom he placed implicit faith, did not hesitate to undertake “ in the presence of God and Jesus Christ,” the payment of both reward and pension, coupled with a recommendation for regimental command in Government Service, whenever the said Saleh Mahomed should deliver them from the grasp of Mahomed Akbar Khan.

That momentous scrap of paper signed, they began at once to act as free men. It was no longer the Afghan's part to command and theirs to obey. In a twinkling their positions were reversed. Eldred Pottinger was now their acknowledged leader ; Lawrence, Mackenzie and Johnson his deputies ; Saleh Mahomed their very faithful servant, ready, if need be, to take up arms on their behalf.

Realization of these audacious doings sent an electric thrill through the hearts of men and women alike. Whatever the outcome, hope and effort, most powerful of stimulants, sufficed—for a time.

Eldred Pottinger, once unshackled, was not the man to let grass grow under his feet. No matter what qualms might lurk within, promptitude and a brazen front were



all. He, who had been told that he need interfere no further in arrangements for the release of his fellow-captives, now boldly resumed his former powers and embarked on the dangerous waters of Afghan conspiracy. No longer silent and aloof, he organized everything, thought of everything; and, above all, understood intimately the men with whom they had to deal.

Those among his companions who had known him only as the "grim and grumpy hero of Herat" were amazed at the energy, cheerfulness, and resource that had lain securely hid beneath that grave and thoughtful exterior. For himself, he had no time to realize his own transformation or its effect on others; he was entirely concerned with the first problem in his path—how to deal with the Mir Akor, Akbar's Master of Horse and confidential friend.

Impossible to secure the co-operation of him and his hundred Ghilzai matchlock-men; almost as impossible to seize them. Yet by some means they must be inveigled out of the way. The Mir also had received a letter from Akar commanding the prisoners' removal with the additional order—said Saleh Mahomed—that those who were too weak to travel should be killed. But this letter he did not produce; and the harrowing addendum was probably invented to enhance his own nobility and the value of his services.

That evening Syud Morteza was secretly despatched to invite the co-operation of a neutral Hazara chief, while Saleh Mahomed threw dust in the eyes of the Mir by parading his troops, whom he had secretly incited to clamour for their pay and refuse to march farther till it was supplied.

But next morning there was an end of pretence once for all. Very early Saleh Mahomed hoisted the Afghan

standard of rebellion—white, with a crimson edge and a green fringe; and before sunset it was made known throughout the valley that he and his British allies had openly risen against the Sirdar.

Now was the moment for Eldred Pottinger to assume full political powers; and straightway he issued a proclamation, in the grand style, calling on all right-minded Hazaras, who desired the return of British rule, to come in and tender their allegiance.

The first to arrive was Syud Morteza's friend, and the Governor of the valley sent effusive proffers of service. Pottinger replied that he could best serve them by supplying muskets and swords for their party.

To the Governor's fort, the Master of Horse had betaken himself on discovering the truth; and for several hours the two kept their men under arms, drums beating, colours flying, ready for any emergency, even for flight—should that seem safest.

Meantime, in the Yagi Fort, another problem demanded solution. As prisoners they were dependent on Akbar for supplies; as free men, they must by some means support themselves. Money they had little enough among them; but, of that little, each was ready to contribute a share toward the grand object of their liberation. The only exceptions now, as before, were Palmer and Shelton, who still shook their heads over the whole crazy proceeding. Palmer, indeed, had nothing to give; but Shelton was known to have more money than any of the others, and his refusal in such circumstances was hotly resented by all. But the subscriptions of the rest, if inadequate, gave them something to go on with; and next day came a windfall in the shape of a *kafila* passing from Kabul to Turkistan.

Each hour increased their daring: "*Possunt quia posse*

*videntur*" was their motto; and the travellers were summarily held up by Saleh Mahomed's men. They told how the Kazzilbashes had risen against Akbar, who had gone off with a large army to fight General Pollock in the Khurd Kabul Pass. All hung on the outcome of that fight, though for themselves Akbar's defeat might prove a more dangerous event than his victory.

After the usual rough amenities and recriminations, the travellers were allowed to pass on unmolested for a trifling consideration of four hundred rupees and some dresses of honour for friendly chiefs.

Still the Governor sent no arms for their party. Instead, there came rumours that he and the Mir Akor were conspiring to attack the Yaghi Fort; an unwelcome attention that must be discouraged forthwith.

Lacking arms, diplomacy was their only weapon; and Pottinger, happily inspired, employed men to frighten the Master of Horse, by confiding to him—as if in friendly warning — that the rebels, boundlessly arrogant, had resolved to seize him and his Ghilzais with the help of Saleh Mahomed's troops, to whom they had promised a gratuity of four months' pay.

Nor was that all. As the Governor seemed a doubtful ally, this audacious ex-captive virtually deposed him by sending word to his predecessor—a known friend of the British—that he could return and take his place. A proceeding so high-handed, seemingly backed by money, and by the arrival of two more chiefs at Yaghi Fort, produced the desired effect. The Governor, though he still shrank from sending arms, so changed his tone that Pottinger, by way of encouragement, held the new appointment in abeyance for the time being. The Master of Horse fled in haste to Kabul, carrying off his Ghilzai matchlock-men, and, incidentally, a handful of gold mohurs given him by

the prisoners to exchange into rupees. Though these were badly needed to buy flour for their budding commissariat, his departure was considered cheap at the price. By now it had needed more than the loss of a few rupees to cloud the spirits of those who a week earlier could see no crevice in the darkness ahead.

That day more chiefs came in, and all brought the same heartening assurance that the whole valley, from Sir Chashma to Syghan, was in sympathy with the new rebels, who were carrying all before them.

How much they owed to the confident bearing of the man who had come out of his shell to some purpose, was acknowledged by everyone, and recorded by Lady Sale.

“It would be great injustice to Major Pottinger” she wrote at this time, “not to mention the active part he took in affairs. From his perfect knowledge of Persian and his acquaintance with the manners and customs of the people, he well knew how to . . . take advantage of the slightest opening on their part in our favour. His coolness and decision were only equalled by the promptness with which he met the wishes of the chiefs; giving them *barats* on the neighbouring lands, empowering them to receive Government rents, etc.; all which documents—though he executed them with an air of great condescension and the gravity of a judge—he well knew were mere pieces of waste paper. Yet they had a magic charm for the time, which was all we required. . . . I wrote to Sale, informing him of our resolution to hold out till we received assistance, even should we be reduced to eating rats and mice, of which we have a grand store! . . . Mir Hassan offered his fort to us: it has a name which the wits pronounce as *foolhardy*, and say it is synonymous with our attempt! . . .”

Foolhardy or no, Eldred Pottinger went his way, un-

ruffled by covert sneers. Here, in the wilds, Shelton the obstructionist counted for nothing. He that had the gift and courage for leadership was free to exercise both unhampered; for the which Pottinger must have thanked God in his heart.

The second fort was accepted, and no time lost in preparing both for a state of siege; since they had every reason to believe that the Master of Horse had gone straight to Akbar and reported their rebellion in a teacup. Water was turned into the surrounding ditches, flour and provisions, such as they could afford, were laid in by Johnson—Commissariat Officer once more; and a supply of arms promised, if procurable, for officers and men.

A rising tide of encouragement and sympathy flowed in from all quarters: their only serious handicap was the lack of cash, indispensable always in securing the services of Orientals.

Shelton, tardily repentant—and seeing that their madness seemed likely to spell success—now came forward with the offer of a few rupees; an offer indignantly spurned by Johnson, who had twice appealed to him in vain. They could manage well enough without help from one who had grudged it when most needed. They could even afford a *kasid*, by whom Pottinger sent a few lines to Pollock; a bald array of facts that gave little idea of the romantic element in their proceedings, and still less of all that he, personally, had done and dared since the arrival of that embassy from Kabul which had emboldened them to work out their own salvation. None ever owed less to his own utterances than did Eldred Pottinger. The man was incapable of a flourish; and, as often happens with the genuinely modest, was apt to be taken at his own valuation.

With Pollock's letter went one to Nott, who could more

rapidly send help, since he must pass the northward road on his way to Kabul. Having no cypher arrangement with the Generals, Pottinger hit on the device of writing both letters in Greek characters.

To Nott, after telling their tale, he wrote: "Saleh Mahomed has promised, on receipt of an answer from you, to march to your camp. . . . If you could send some troops, under any circumstances, from Shish Táo . . . they would enable us to move safely. . . . Pay the bearer handsomely and let us hear from you soon. . . ."

The evening of the 14th saw Eldred Pottinger and his obedient servant, Saleh Mahomed, in solemn conference with their new allies, the Hazara chiefs. They opened their proceedings with the Fatihah—a prayer used by the Faithful on all important occasions; and closed them with an oath on the Koran to remain loyal throughout the whole undertaking.

Then that miraculously favoured party of rebels lay down to sleep, convinced, in spite of threatening uncertainties, that all would yet go well; and praying that the morrow might bring news of the crucial conflict between General Pollock and Mahomed Akbar Khan.

### III

Not much longer was suspense to be their portion. Even while they slept news of greater doings, beyond that far northern valley they had so successfully coerced, was speeding toward them, hidden on the person of some trusty *kasid*, who cheerfully carried his life in his hands.

After endless months of waiting, the work of retribution, so long prated of in polysyllables, was actively afoot.

On the 6th of September, just nine months after Elphinstone's fatal exodus, Nott was encamped near Ghazni, that had fallen like Jericho, not before the blast of his trumpets, but before the fear of his name. Since leaving Kandahar he had fought two actions; the first, a partial reverse, had been more than redeemed by a brilliant success two days later, when the Governor of Ghazni, with ten thousand followers, had been "thrashed" in Nott's best style, and had fallen back with unseemly haste upon his stronghold. Nott, arriving on the 5th, had laid all his plans for an assault. But these proved superfluous. After a few sharp skirmishes, Shamshudin and his followers decamped under cover of the darkness; and all next day the hills round Ghazni echoed the sullen thunder of destruction, the explosion of bursting guns, the roar and rattle of falling masonry, the crackling laughter of flames that devoured their prey. For miles round, the air was dark with the dust of that great falling, lurid with the

glow of a beacon fire, the most terrible that had ever been lighted in the land.

On the 7th of September, 1842, Ghazni, pride of the Ghilzais, was no more. Her walls and bastions, her town and citadel, were become a shapeless mass of ruins, dimly seen through a funeral pall of their own dust. The massacre of a British garrison and the wanton ill-treatment of British officers had been terribly avenged; and to Nott was vouchsafed the glory of striking the first blow in that long-deferred act of retribution. Though his hour had tarried long, it had proved worth waiting for. This ultimate triumph made full amends for the injustice of Keane in '39; and annulled his own bitter lamentation: "They can *never* compensate me for not having been at Ghazni." Here was compensation undreamed of, in those days, either by Afghan chief or British General.

To complete the sum of his ambitions there remained the final satisfaction of entering Kabul in triumph, of demolishing her Bala Hissar, and hoisting the Union Jack once more above that city of tragic memories. These things accomplished, he would cheerfully march back to India in the rear of a senior General's army.

But for all his impatience he was detained at Ghazni another day or two by Lord Ellenborough's determination to secure those worthless gates, wrested, eight centuries earlier, from the temple of Somnath, in Central India. By their tardy restoration the new Governor-General dreamed of propitiating the Hindus and wiping out an insult long since forgotten by themselves.

For this cause Nott—strictly obedient always—squandered his precious time, while Akbar, encamped outside Kabul, began to feel more and more like a corn of wheat between two grindstones.

Troup and Bygrave were with him; the sick, with



Dr. Campbell at Shewaki; the rest ready, if need be, for immediate transportation. Yet his reluctance to try conclusions with Pollock seemed sincere. Possibly he feared lest active opposition might damage his father's chance of restoration—the supreme wish of his heart. Wherefore he again persuaded his fellow-chiefs to countenance fresh overtures—if Troup could be induced to play ambassador for the third time of asking.

But Troup made answer frankly that the hour for overtures had gone by; that, as the Sirdar would not give up his prisoners, there remained only a last desperate appeal to arms. He would certainly be defeated, both officers assured him, by way of encouragement, and the boldest of the Barakzais shook a sorrowful head.

“In the name of God, I have no wish to oppose your General Sahib,” said he. “Have I not done my best to remove stones from the path of friendship? But the General will not walk in it, and the people here have no thought of submission. By fighting I have little to gain; everything to lose. But it is too late now for turning back.”

It was the ultimatum:—and he decided to make his last stand in the Khurd Kabul defile, still choked with the broken remnants of Elphinstone's army.

But Pollock seemed again likely to be “lang a-coming.” He was still at Gandamak, wrestling with camels and the provision problem; waiting for those strayed letters from Nott, who should by rights be reporting progress as he went.

On the 6th they came, several at once; and on the 7th, Pollock marched from Gandamak with his first division under the immediate command of Sale. With it went the pick of the “illustrious garrison,” the 13th and 35th, Abbot, Backhouse and Broadfoot's Sappers, besides

English cavalry, artillery, and the 9th Foot:—a division of which any General might feel proud.

Lawrence, left to follow on next day with MacCaskill's division, wrote of that great and glad outseting to his wife: "The General is going on to Cabul with twice the troops he has carriage for, in spite of all that is said to him. . . . He must at all risks try to get there before Nott. He may do so, but will hardly deserve reward."

It was a very human weakness, that desire to be first at the goal, a weakness fully shared by Nott; and now it was a neck and neck race between the two. Nott, at Ghazni, had ninety miles still to cover; Pollock, at Gandamak, little more than sixty. But between him and Kabul lay those four defiles full of dead men's bones, and he was the more likely to meet with stubborn opposition by the way.

He met it, in formidable strength, at the mouth of the dread Jagdalak Pass. Here, on their craggy heights, the Ghilzais were assembled to greet them. Picturesque standards, red, yellow, and green, proclaimed the presence of many distinguished chiefs. The amphitheatre of rocks on Pollock's left bristled with their *sangahs*, and on a conical hill to the right they clustered thick as bees in swarming-time. Their position was almost unassailable—and they knew it. Though British guns spoke to good purpose, and exploding shells wrought havoc, their answering fire slackened no whit.

Then Pollock turned to Sale, who rode at his side. "If the guns won't move them, let them have cold steel. Storm the heights and disperse them with your own Brigade."

A welcome order, brilliantly obeyed. At the given word, three columns of attack sprang into being:—Broadfoot and his Sappers for the extreme left; Taylor and his gallant 9th, with a few of the 35th N.I., to tackle a

hornet's nest in the shape of a ruined fort; Sale himself, with his beloved 13th and a stiffening of other troops, to scale the almost impracticable hill on the right.

Like hounds straining at the leash, they waited the word of command; then, in one simultaneous rush, they swarmed up the rocks, waking the echoes with cheer on cheer. This was not at all the fashion of fighting bargained for by Ghilzai chiefs, who had slaughtered broken battalions in that same pass nine months ago. Zealous for the integrity of their mountains, they rained bullets and hurled rocks upon that advancing forest of steel; and still that forest moved relentlessly upward. Though many fell hundreds more pressed on, encouraging each other, and disconcerting the keepers of the heights, by fresh outbursts of cheering whenever there was enough of breath in their bodies.

The Ghilzais, implacable to a broken army, quailed at the onset of these vociferous and superfluous Anglo-Saxons. For a breathing space they wavered, then lowered their standards, and fled like a scattered flock in all directions.

But though the gate of the Pass had been opened, the work of the invaders was not yet done. Certain of the flock, rallied by desperate chiefs, had merely retired to a more inaccessible peak. There they planted their standards again, and looked down on that valley-full of infidels, as who should say: "Not having wings, you cannot assail us here."

They could—and they did.

Their energies pent up with long waiting, their blood fired by the mute appeal of Elphinstone's unburied dead, they were in a mood to scale the skies at command; and Pollock declared victory incomplete until that precipitous height was cleared.

Forward again, then, Broadfoot with his columns, and Wilkinson of the 13th with his. Sale, wounded in the first onset, could only look on.

Forward and up, under cover of the guns, went those unwearied sepoy and soldiers, slipping, scrambling, assailed spasmodically from above; on and up, scaling, they hardly knew how, the naked and vertical rocks; till the Afghans—having small taste for the lion's jaws, when every tooth was a point of steel—again lowered their proud standards, and left that inaccessible height to those who by right of sheer daring had made it their own.

Victory was complete, poetic justice fittingly achieved—here at the mouth of that awful pass, where the Kabul force had ceased to be.

On again, without pause or rest, went the avengers, retracing step by step the route of that other army. Bones and skulls everywhere, and—worse than these—the pitiful shrivelled bodies preserved by frost, their faces recognizable often to men of Sale's brigade. Then, when the cliffs receded and Jagdalak was reached,—lo, that ruined enclosure, sepulchre of hundreds, whose silence cried louder than speech to the hearts of those that passed by.

No pause here, though men and cattle were exhausted and Sale counselled a halt. To Pollock, surfeited with haltings, the word was anathema; and with a night's rest at Seh Baba, they pushed forward to the valley of Tazin. Here the second division caught them up by a severe forced march, that made one full day's rest imperative for man and beast. On this point MacCaskill was obdurate, and Pollock reluctantly issued the order—no advance till the 13th.

Little though he guessed it, both he and the army owed much to MacCaskill that day.

Akbar, with sixteen thousand men strongly posted in the Khurd Kabul, had every chance of holding his own; yet now, when he looked for a rapid advance, this always bewildering General halted again. To the Afghan, a pause at such a moment implied either indecision or some

unknown obstacle. In either event, Akbar was tempted to move on and check these irresolute intruders at the mouth of the Tazín Pass. With the precipitous Huft Kotal behind him, his own position would be very little weaker, and he did not stay to consider how much better for the British army were the open spaces of Tazín.

So it came to pass, in the evening of the 12th, that British pickets on the heights found themselves surprised and forced into a sharp engagement. Foiled in that direction the Afghans reappeared, again and yet again, with a persistence that promised hot work on the morrow. Pollock—who had not counted on a big fight before Khurd Kabul—hardly closed his eyes. And all night long—while skirmishers kept the pickets occupied—Akbar's legions were creeping up and posting themselves on every hilltop not already occupied by British troops.

By morning, the army in the valley was surrounded, the entrance to the defile occupied in strength. Chiefs of all the leading tribes were there—Aminullah, Mahomed Shah, Akbar himself, with his picked body of Jezailchis; all the some-time hosts of the Budiabad prisoners, save Sultan Ján, who had gone to check the advance of Nott. The pick of Afghan marksmen and horsemen were arrayed against Pollock's army on that September morning. Every possible advantage was theirs—numbers, position, perfect knowledge of the country, and inherent talent for hill-fighting. More than that, they had come out to make their last stand, to save their capital from the fury of the avenger.

Against Akbar's sixteen thousand Pollock had but ten; and less than half of those knew anything of Afghans or Afghan warfare; but they had on their side, discipline and a deep-seated determination to reach Kabul at any hazard.

It was a great setting for a great fight; a position in which every arm saw a chance of distinction; cavalry on

the plain, infantry on the heights, and the guns—everywhere. Forward then—to the mouth of the Pass—Sale's advance guard, with whom rode Pollock; MacCaskill's main column and Colonel Richmond's rear guard, well supported by Lawrence with his Sikhs.

To the overture of the guns, the jezails sent a spirited reply. Three companies of British infantry assailed the heights; and the Afghans—fired by Akbar's presence—met them gallantly in full career. Cliffs and breastworks were bright with the glint of matchlocks, the flash of bared steel. From peaks yet more commanding, bullets rained. But to-day, as on the 8th, the stormers put their trust in bayonets and the sword. Once let them gain foothold on the crest, and they would bear down all before them.

Easier said than done! The Afghans fought that day as few had seen them fight before; contesting every inch of their sacred stronghold. But the stormers were out to redeem their country's honour:—and, for a space, a desperate struggle ensued.

Up unflinchingly, yard by yard, pressed the British infantry, bullet-proof, almost, in their carelessness of danger. Back and up, resisting always, went the peaked turbans, the dark faces fierce with hate. Even when the cliffs were scaled, and the crackle of musketry gave place to the swift silent persuasion of steel, they resisted still—for a while. Before they gave way, numbers had died the warrior's death that is a certain passport to the arms of houris, and an eternity of sensual joys.

The British troops, compassed about by the spirits of those whose bones filled the Jagdalak Pass, gave no quarter and asked none. Sword and bayonet reaped a fearful harvest; till standards were lowered, jezails put to silence, and the heights of Tazín nullah triumphantly crowned.

But in Afghanistan there are always heights beyond

heights, peaks beyond peaks ; and Akbar's legions retreated only to make a more stubborn stand on higher ground. From Tazin the defile rises steadily to the peaks of the Huft Kotal, the highest point between Kabul and Jalála-bad. Here the accursed Feringhi should *not* set foot if matchlock and naked crags could keep him at bay.

But on that 12th of September neither crags nor matchlocks, neither man nor devil could baulk the Feringhi of his will. Pollock, watching from below, was amazed to see how his troops surpassed themselves in valour and endurance. One spirit seemed to inflame soldier and sepoy alike. No matter how sheer the rocks, how galling the leaden hailstorm from above, no matter how fiercely the unclouded September sun beat upon their exhausted bodies—up and on they pressed, though many fell, and more were bruised or wounded ; up and on, cheering lustily at each fresh advance. Back and up, stoutly resistant as ever, went the peaked turbans, the lightning flashes from jezails—

And always where the heights were steepest, the fire hottest, there was George Broadfoot, prince of leaders, with his untiring Gurkhas—"the finest sight of the day." Pitted against the huge Afghans, they were as terriers attacking mastiffs. But the terriers prevailed. From post to post, from crag to crag, they pressed upward, till the utmost peak of the Huft Kotal was won—and cheer upon cheer proclaimed the good news to those engaged below.

There was still fighting in plenty before them. Those who had secured the heights must push on, over rock and crag, marching parallel to the columns in the defile. But the day was theirs. The Afghan ranks were broken past rallying ; though they made gallant, spasmodic efforts to regain lost ground. Even Akbar now recognized that the battle was lost beyond recall ; and, turning his back upon

the Kabul Passes, he fled, with his immediate followers, to the valley of Ghorbund.

And so an end of that stubborn contest at Tazin—a contest that for sheer gallantry and endurance has not often been surpassed. The Afghans had been squarely beaten on their own ground; and the victors—dead tired, yet righteously uplifted—encamped that night on the high plateau at the mouth of the Khurd Kabul Pass.

Next day they marched through that very Golgotha, where the dead of Elphinstone's army lay in heaps of fifties and hundreds; where, for three or four miles the gun wheels of the avengers crashed over the bones and skulls of those they had come to avenge. Here and there faces could be recognized; and always the hair on those pitiful skulls distinguished the white man from the dark. A march to make tigers of the veriest lambs; and muttered threats among the men warned their General that they must be ridden on the curb, if victory were not to be defaced by wanton outrage and destruction.

That night they slept at Butkhak, and on the 15th of September Pollock formed up his noble army for their last short march across the Queen of Valleys. No sign, as they went, of the rival encampment; and the General's pulse must have quickened at the conviction that the race was his own.

Square-cut against the morning sky showed battle-mented walls of the Bala Hissar, harsh rocks of the Siah Sung. These they had surmounted before noon; and thence looked down with very mixed feelings of pain, anger, and triumph, on the red and gold of fading orchards; on the shapeless funeral pyre beyond the canal; on mud walls and towers and close-packed houses:—Kabul—Kabul, at last!



#### IV

It was the afternoon of the 16th. Pollock sat writing at a camp table in his modest hill tent. All about him hundreds of other shabby tents, lines of picketed horses, cooking fires of camp-followers were set out, in orderly array, on a level plain between low hills that had once been the Kabul racecourse. Here, three years earlier, officers of the 13th and 35th had organized gymkhanas and fraternized with their very good comrades the Kabul chiefs. For them, this return to old haunts and old scenes must have been an experience strange and terrible indeed. For George Pollock that victorious march from the Khyber to Kabul was the supreme event of his life. Heavy responsibility had been his, but he had risen creditably to a critical occasion, and even in the first flush of achievement, he was prompt to acknowledge his great indebtedness to his troops.

"I think no officer," he wrote from Kabul, "could possibly have had finer regiments under his command. . . . To them do I owe all my success, which, as far as I am able to judge, has been complete. I hope the Governor-General may think so, and I shall be satisfied." Words more modest, at a moment of just pride, could hardly have been penned.

That morning he and his army had made a triumphal procession to the Bala Hissar; bands playing, colours flying. There, on the upper citadel, the British flag had been hoisted once again to the strains of the National

Anthem, and the resounding cheers of officers and men. In those cheers much pent-up emotion found wholesome vent, though the spirit of vengeance was not yet allayed.

With that ceremonial procession to the Bala Hissar went the chicken-hearted Prince Futteh Jung, who, a fortnight earlier, had ridden into Pollock's camp at Gandamak, a dishevelled fugitive from the tyranny of his Wazir. Pollock, forbidden by Ellenborough to countenance any ruler or faction, had clearly explained to the Prince that though he might enter the Bala Hissar under the ægis of British troops, no further support would be given him in the shape of men, money, or arms. All that the kind-hearted General could do in the way of indirect assistance, that he did. Thus, when the Union Jack was run up, Futteh Jung took his seat on the throne and a royal salute was fired, ostensibly for the remounting of British colours, but in the eyes of Afghans, as an honorary recognition of their latest King.

And now, while Pollock sat at work in his tent, after the events of the morning, there appeared at the entrance a stately Afghan requesting audience.

Permission given, he stepped up to the table and saluted in a soldierly fashion unusual among his kind. Standing with his back to the light, he announced in fluent Persian his willingness to lead a band of seven hundred Kazzilbash horsemen to rescue the prisoners at Bamián. He craved only the General's permission, and would start forthwith.

While he spoke, Pollock eyed him more closely, with a dim, puzzled sense of familiarity.

"Certainly you have my permission," said he, "and my grateful thanks for the offer. May I ask to whom——" Then the truth flashed on him—"Shakespeare!" he cried, and joined heartily in the laugh against himself.

"But I *have* your permission, sir!" said Shakespear in high delight. "I rode into Kabul in this guise and have been talking to the Kazzilbash chiefs. They say it is urgent that help should be sent, and were starting on their own account. But it seemed to me one of us ought to go with them——"

"Of course, of course; and no man could be fitter than yourself. I have a letter here from Major Pottinger, in Greek characters——"

It was the letter of the 14th; and it confirmed much that Sir Richmond Shakespear had heard in Kabul, where it was rumoured that the self-liberated captives had already marched, and that Sultan Ján had sent a strong party to intercept and recapture them by the way.

Hence imperative need for assistance and for haste, which fact Pollock was quick to recognize. In his eyes the recovery of all British prisoners was the trophy of trophies. Without them, the most brilliant victories, the most condign punishments, would lose half their value. Those left at Shewaki with Captain Troup were already in his camp; and for the safety of the rest, who had shown such courage and resource, he was ready to strain every nerve. Their recapture—in the hour of his triumph—would throw a cloud of tragedy over all.

In less than half an hour everything was settled. Sir Richmond and his Kazzilbashes must start at once, with ten thousand rupees to oil the wheels of their going; and, in view of emergencies, a detachment of regulars should follow as soon as might be. Henry Rawlinson, dressed as an Afghan, had ridden into camp that afternoon to announce the approach of Nott, and would rejoin his own General next morning. With him Pollock would send, by young Mayne, his D.Q.M.G., a letter asking Nott to despatch a brigade at once towards Bamián; the Kandahar force being seven miles nearer that region than his own.

But Nott had very decided ideas on the subject of dividing his force, as Rawlinson had good reason to know. Could the latter have had his way, a brigade would have been despatched from Argandeh two days earlier: a move he had urged more than once, and urged in vain. Nott had replied that Government instructions were definite, and he had but one object in view, that of "marching to India *via* Kabul without turning to the right or the left." He had been expressly bidden by Lord Ellenborough not to delay that march by "any hazardous operations"; and from his Lordship's despatches he judged that the recovery of the prisoners was "a matter of indifference to Government." In fine, he would not "separate his force unless positively ordered to do so by higher authority."

This was on the 14th just outside the valley of Maidan. Here news had reached him of Pollock's victory, and his intention of entering Kabul on the 15th. "It was a subject of great regret to us all," wrote Neill of the 40th Queen's, "that General Pollock had deemed it *expedient* to move on Kabul before our arrival; we having expected, from the arrangements made, that both armies were to enter that city on the same day."

To Nott the news must have been more than disappointing. Throughout his arduous march, the man's eager, excitable temper had been galled by illness and by manifold delays. Now, within twenty-five miles of Kabul it must have been maddening to think of those two days wasted at Ghazni in the futile despoiling of Mahmud's shrine. Even so, by a forced march he might have reached Kabul next day, but that he found the strong mountain positions between him and Maidan occupied by Shamshudin, with twelve thousand horse and foot.

The engagement that followed was short and sharp, and

entirely successful. The hills were cleared; the chiefs fled; and on went Nott's little army, leaving behind it not a few beacons in the shape of fired forts.

On the 17th they entered Kabul Valley at the end farthest from Pollock's camp; and here they met Rawlinson with Mayne and his escort of Irregular Cavalry. Mayne, introduced to the General by one of his Staff, delivered Pollock's request for a brigade, coupled with the assurance that the party would get into no difficulty and risk nothing. They were merely to make a demonstration in Shakespear's favour, mainly by way of moral effect.

Nott, who at best was short of temper and blunt of speech, found this simple request, at such a moment, peculiarly exasperating. He glanced through the note with unpromising brows; then, looking up, asked abruptly, and with seeming irrelevance: "How many days' supplies has General Pollock brought with him?"

"Enough for a week, I think, sir," answered Mayne; and was staggered by the angry counter-thrust.

"What business has General Pollock up at Kabul with only a *week's* supplies?"

Mayne, not choosing either to criticize or justify his own General, answered nothing.

No provocation like silence to a man of explosive temper; and Nott's wrath was promptly diverted from Pollock to Mayne, whose escort appeared to be crowding on to his own staff.

"Keep an eye on your escort, sir," said he brusquely. "Did you order them to halt on my reverse flank?"

"I did, sir," answered the younger man, cool as ever.

"Damn you, sir!" shouted this amazing General. "What do you mean by sending your escort there? Send them to hell, sir! Send them to hell!"

Mayne, accustomed to the courteous suavity of Pollock, scarcely knew which way to look. A staff officer near him murmured apologetic excuses; but his own temper was rising, and again he answered nothing.

“*Damn* you, sir!” repeated the exasperated Nott. “Can’t you speak Hindustani? Tell your escort at once to go to hell!”

Thus goaded, Mayne was compelled to answer. “I am not in the habit, sir,” said he—frigid without, fuming within—“of speaking to my men in that fashion; but I will remove them from your line of march.”

Nott’s fine mouth curved in a sarcastic smile. “By gad, sir, you are most obliging!” And turning in the saddle, he spoke his mind to those astonished troopers with such exceeding frankness that Mayne grew red with anger, and Nott’s Adjutant-General again murmured in his ear. The old man had not been well lately, and was in a peppery humour to-day.

Mayne, unappeased, made answer that he could not stand such conduct, even from a general officer, well or ill. Nothing would induce him to enter the General’s camp. He would await his answer at an outlying picket; nor could any persuasion turn him from his purpose.

Without further interchange of amenities, he withdrew his men; and Nott’s troops proceeded to their camping-ground on the hither side of Kabul, five miles from the rival army that had outstripped them and reaped the glory in which they might, at least, have been allowed to take part.

Such was William Nott’s entry into Kabul; an entry so different from the one he had pictured that his outburst of temper, though not justifiable, was, in the circumstances, humanly excusable. If Pollock had found it expedient not to delay his own entry, he might well have delayed the

ceremony of reoccupation till all could share alike in the thrill of achievement. So thought the Kandahar division, naturally enough; and as for Nott, however honourable the service proffered him, he had a small inclination to despatch half his force, without even a day's rest and refreshment, on a venture that seemed to him either very uncertain or quite unnecessary.

The moment his tent was pitched he sat down, in a cooler frame of mind, to indite a refusal that by no means implied inhumanity or indifference. He begged to point out that his men and cattle were exhausted, his camels dying, his store of money and supplies barely sufficient for the marches ahead. Finally, four years' service in Afghanistan made him strongly averse to sending out small detachments against an enemy of unknown strength. According to his latest news, Sultan Ján had started for Bamián two days earlier. He had probably joined forces with Akbar; and Nott, for his part, hourly expected to hear that Shakespear had been added to the number of their prisoners. If their forces were scattered, Shakespear's party would suffice: if concentrated, a whole division would be nearer the mark.

Should he still be positively ordered to divide his force, he would obey. "But, my dear General," he concluded with quiet insistence, "I feel assured you will excuse me when I most respectfully venture to protest against it under the circumstances above noted. I could have wished to have stated this to you in person; but I have been so very unwell for the last two months that I am sure you will kindly excuse me."

Such, right or wrong, was Nott's view of the case. Indifferent he could not be to the fate of the prisoners, sole British survivors of that awful retreat. He merely did not consider his own troops fit for the expedition.

But, at a time when the recovery of those prisoners was the first desire of every heart, any sign of defection—such as Nott's refusal and Lord Ellenborough's pre-occupation with other issues—could not fail to be resented, and even distorted into a carelessness equally foreign to the natures of both.

It was a pity, undeniably, that Lord Ellenborough's elaborate letter of the 4th of July contained no injunctions to ensure their recovery, though he could find time to write reams of fantastic matter about Nott's "just trophies," for which none, save the mullahs of the shrine, cared a brass farthing. These were to be escorted by a picked regiment, and the special officer in charge was to be paid, for the time, at the rate of a thousand rupees a month! Excusable eccentricity—had there not been, at Bamián, trophies ten times more just and valuable, about which he expressed no concern.

Well—Nott had secured his trophies; and Pollock—instructions or no—was determined to secure his. He had given Nott the first refusal; and when that refusal came he received it with equanimity. The delay was all that mattered;—how seriously he did not then realize; and since the winner could afford to be generous, he wrote suavely that the "brigade need not be sent"; that he himself would waive ceremony and call on his brother-General next day.

Then he sent for Sir Robert Sale—the fittest leader for a venture that so nearly concerned his heart—and bade him start without loss of time.

Sale departed glowing: but soon returned with a rueful countenance. The thing seemed impossible. His men were badly knocked up; quite unfit for forced marches; and he could not get the necessary stores.

Pollock made no comment on these excuses. "Well—



well, never mind," said he quietly, "I'll send the 9th. Taylor will go——"

At these words excuses melted into air. "No—oh no!" Sale broke in promptly, choking back his emotion. "I'll go, sir. I *must* go." And he went.

On the 19th, his sixtieth birthday, he led out a strong detachment of all arms to meet and rescue the gallant little party that was rumoured to have marched already on its own responsibility.

## V

THAT rumour—unlike most of its breed—was true. On the 15th a *kasid* had brought the news they craved; news of the Jagdalak victory and the rapid approach of Nott. A letter from Mohun Lal had announced that the Kazzilbash chiefs were taking an active part against Akbar and sending a light force to their assistance.

Saleh Mahomed opined that they might safely march on the morrow. Pottinger backed the proposal—and on the morrow they marched accordingly. Anxious they could not fail to be; the more so, the nearer they drew towards friends and safety and the reality of freedom. But deeper than anxiety was their trust in Him who had so miraculously shielded and upheld them through all.

In the radiance of an unclouded dawn they mustered for the return march to Kabul—an event outside their wildest dreams, when they were herded from Shewaki Fort on that miserable night of August—a century ago!

To-day, as then, Saleh Mahomed's troops led the van: but to-day they could laugh at the vagaries of his solitary fife, his cracked trumpet and drums, whose cheerful dissonance gave an added thrill to the whole adventurous proceeding.

Behind them formed up Pottinger's ragged regiment—a very mixed company, ill and well, officers, women, and children, British soldiers, and two Government clerks; the brave bearing of all belying the nervous flutter within.

As before, most of the women were on camels; and many of the officers—Mackenzie and Haughton among them—were too ill to sit in a saddle. Pottinger's recent exertions had set up fresh inflammation in his wound; but ride he must—and did; the will triumphing over the body's weakness.

They hailed the sun's unclouded rising as a happy "presage of the future"; though to the officers it was plain that unless something more than a light Kazzilbash force were sent, their chances of reaching Kabul unmolested were small indeed. That the Mir Akor had betrayed them was certain. There were also perturbing rumours that the Wali of Kúlum's two thousand men had started in pursuit. All hung on the turn of a hair; and the riders, who pressed ahead of the camels, kept eyes and ears incessantly on the alert. Every stray horseman they sighted seemed a possible *avant courier* of troops marching to reclaim them and bring all their courage to naught.

Saleh Mahomed, anxious as themselves, put an equally brave face on the matter. Allah having so obviously shown them his favour, all must go well. In a very few days they would be joined to their friends in Kabul. "And then," he added with rueful conviction, "when you are all safe out of my grasp, you Sahib-lōg—forgetting past services—will crack your fingers in my face saying, 'You be damned!' Such is the way of men!"

They assured him, severally and collectively, that such was not the way of English gentlemen. His reward was certain, and their gratitude would never pass away.

For a space he pondered that consoling statement. Then said he: "Let us halt a little in the shade of these great rocks. I have a word for Captain Lawrence Sahib!"

They halted, wondering; glad to get out of the sun

that smote fiercely even in September through the rarefied air of the heights. Then the Afghan confided to Lawrence that he had managed to secure a few muskets and some ammunition, and had brought them with him on a camel. Would Lawrence Sahib offer them to his own soldiers, that they might have a small advance guard of Europeans "for a *show*."

Lawrence Sahib was delighted. Nothing could be better for the spirits of the men. There were fifty of them—six of Nicholl's troupe, seven of the 13th, and the rest privates of the 44th.

"Now, my lads," said he encouragingly, "here's Saleh Mahomed got arms and ammunition for some of you. Who volunteers to take a musket and lead our party?"

Only the six Horse Gunners came forward with alacrity. For the rest, nine months of hardship, depression, and lack of discipline, coupled with their recent conviction that the "game was up," had extinguished hope and even right feeling almost past revival—almost, but not quite.

It was Lady Sale who broke the awkward silence.

"Here, Captain Lawrence, you had better give *me* a musket!" she said, hoping to shame the men into some sense of duty. "I'll lead the party myself, and be proud of the honour."

Lawrence smiled his approbation. But never another man followed her lead; and he turned ruefully to the Commandant, bidding him keep the muskets for the present. If there were any swords, the officers would be thankful to carry arms once more. Swords were difficult to get, but the Afghan produced a few; and Lady Sale handed over to Lawrence the sword of her dead son-in-law, with the compliment that in his hands she knew it would be used to good purpose. Eyre gladly accepted a musket,

heavy though it was and troublesome to carry, with one hand still crippled from his old wound.

Thus enriched, they rode on down the valley and encamped close to the small forts of Topshi Bala, where they were cheered by another *kasid* with a Persian letter for Pottinger, giving very imperfect details of Pollock's victory at Tazin. Pillowed on that blessed assurance, they slept sound till the small hours, when all were startled wide awake by sounds of arrival.

The word went round: "A horseman"—and again dread of Akbar chilled their blood. But suspense was brief. Very soon Lawrence reported another letter for Pottinger; this time from Richmond Shakespear himself, reporting his arrival with seven hundred horsemen at Sir-i-Chashm, on the farther side of the passes.

Shakespear at Sir-i-Chashm! The words were as music in their ears. If the horsemen travelled well they might meet on the 18th, and already the 17th was two hours old.

Before dawn they were astir in earnest, the mercury of their spirits rising steadily as day grew and prevailed behind the peak of Kohi Baba that blocked the southward view.

Even the men of the 13th and 44th shook off the despondence that had sapped their manhood, and delighted Lawrence by begging for the muskets that yesterday they would not put out a hand to take.

Saleh Mahomed, overjoyed, bade his British guard march in extended line, without a rear rank, the better to impose on that visionary "enemy" who lurked round every corner or on the far side of every hill.

Eleven miles they marched without a sight of him; over the lofty Irák Pass—main gate of their prison; jolting and stumbling, cheerfully enough this time, along the rough road, their pace quickened by an alarming

report that a thousand men from Kúlum were in full pursuit.

To-day they could admire, with hearts exalted in thanksgiving, that vast and terrible view from the summit, though there were still many of them too seriously ill to care which way the camel's head was turned or what might lurk in the next ravine.

Chief of these were poor Haughton and Colin Mackenzie, who had never yet shaken off the jail fever that almost killed him in July. Roused by the arrival of Syud Morteza, and the need to give Pottinger every possible help in his splendid exertions for their deliverance, Mackenzie's gallant spirit had shaken off, for a time, the ills of the flesh. But this second rough march in the sun set the blood buzzing in his brain and pulses throbbing all over his body. His thoughts flowed together into formless incoherence; and at each jolt he felt himself clinging on to consciousness as if it were a rope, and he dangling by it over a bottomless abyss.

Lady Sale, still a good deal shaken with fever, preferred her saddle to the misery of doubling up her long legs in a camel pannier, two feet square; and Eldred Pottinger still managed, by some miracle of will, to hold his own.

Down, steadily down, they jolted and zigzagged into the green strip of valley that nestles between the passes of Irák and Hajiguk. There, at noon, they camped near a group of forts well above the valley, in a meadow where haycocks freshly stacked and a silver ribbon of water, winding through the grass, seemed a foretaste of blessed realities to come. Though dangers still encompassed them, and escape was far from certain, the whole world seemed new made since they had turned their backs on Bamián.

A sudden cry of "Horsemen on the hill!" put an end to lounging and dreams of home. Instantly all was

activity. Saleh Mahomed drew up his little band in martial order; and there knocked at every heart the unspoken question, "Friend or foe?" The first seemed impossible. With all the zeal in the world Sir Richmond Shakespear surely could not cover ninety miles of such country in two days. But even while they told each other the feat was impossible, the horsemen drew nearer and the banner of the Kazzilbash tribe could be plainly seen. Then their leader galloped forward—and doubt was at an end.

Pottinger, Lawrence, and Eyre, with most of the women and children, sprang up and hurried down the meadow to meet their deliverer, eastern fashion, at the edge of the carpet.

On some rocks by the roadside they sat down and awaited the coming of that winged horseman, who was already across the valley and breasting the hill.

At his approach they rose up simultaneously and waved their hands in reply to his salute; but when he dismounted, the cheer, with which they would fain have greeted him, died on their lips. The hearts of all were too full. Joy, relief, and overwhelming gratitude could find no apt expression in mere shouting, nor even in speech.

One after another they grasped his hand; some silently, some with awkward, heartfelt words of thanks and congratulation. Though turbans and eastern draperies belied their race, that greeting proclaimed them Anglo-Saxons all. Neither Easterns nor southerners could so have welcomed the man who had ridden ninety miles in two days, over the roughest roads in a rough country, to bid them good cheer and ensure their safety so far as seven hundred horse could do it. But Sir Richmond, being of one blood with them all, well understood, and probably preferred the silence that spoke plainer than words.

On up the hillside they went together. He, not having suffered, found speech easier; and they were hungry for news of their victorious armies. Well in advance of the fort, Saleh Mahomed's three hundred, with his sorry-looking advance guard of British soldiers, stood to attention; the trumpet, fife, and drums hammering out their only tune.

More hand-shakings here, more heartfelt greetings from all—with one sole exception. The marked constraint of Shelton's manner was obviously not due to British reserve. Even at this supreme moment he must needs strike a false note, must needs rebuke the man he should have thanked, because—forsooth—Sir Richmond had stayed to greet those who went out to meet him, instead of riding on first to report his arrival, in due form, to the Brigadier.

Far more excusable was Saleh Mahomed's passing jealousy of his Kazzilbash friends and their leader, whose arrival put his nose out of joint and minimized the credit due to himself. But jealousy soon evaporated under the hearty praise of the British officers; praise which Shakespear had the tact and the courage to crown by an exchange of turbans—the highest possible mark of esteem.

Then he passed on to the sick and wounded, kneeling first beside his friend Colin Mackenzie, whom he had met as Akbar's ambassador at Jalálabad. But Mackenzie, for the moment, could achieve no more than the ghost of a smile in response to Shakespear's strong hand-clasp and words of cheer. With the strange mental detachment of fever he had looked on at the stir of arrival; and the final exchange of turbans had roused him merely to a lazy wonder whether poor Shakespear would not be covered with vermin by way of reward.

But in spite of sick comrades, Shelton's ungraciousness, and the uncertainty that could only be dispelled by British troops, hope rose higher that evening than it had dared



to rise yet; and they lay down to sleep, comforted by Shakespear's assurance that they would hear of the promised troops next morning.

But morning brought neither word nor sign of them, only fresh reports of Afghans on the war-path. Shakespear, anxious and puzzled, sent a flying message to Pollock, that only prompt assistance could prevent the recapture of those he had come out to save. In any case, they decided to hurry on by forced marches; and that impediments might be reduced, all who could possibly cling on to a saddle must ride. Hazaras of the valley and their own Kazzilbash escort produced ninety horses between them. The sick, roused by the urgency of danger, forced themselves to mount and face the prospect of a twenty-mile ride. All were willing to endure any discomfort, any weariness, rather than fall again into the hands of Akbar Khan. That day they put the second high pass behind them and encamped beside the Helmund River. Still no sign of troops; and two hours before dawn they were off again on fresh horses, that happily grow wild in Afghanistan. To-day they must make thirty miles, since all seemed to hang on their own endeavours.

Before noon they had put a third pass behind them and reached the fort of Mustapha, the kindly old chief who had fed them with cakes on their outward journey and prophesied their speedy return. Now, carpets were spread outside the walls and a veritable feast prepared in their honour; sweets, fruit, cake—and luxuries of luxuries—tea out of china cups! Mustapha Khan, waiting on them himself, dwelt with pardonable pride on his own sagacious foreknowledge of events. Hard to tear themselves away from rest and refreshment so desperately needed. But Shakespear was imperative as any policeman on his nightly beat, and the bulk of them obediently "moved on."

Only Mackenzie and Haughton, too far gone for obedience, lay prostrate on the carpet. Not even the dread of pursuing Afghans could rouse them to stir hand or foot. With them, for help and protection, remained Pottinger, Eyre, and Gunner Dalton, all three more or less exhausted and in pain.

The rest being gone, they flung dignity to the winds and groaned in concert; till Pottinger's manful efforts to suppress lamentation produced a sound "between a roar and whistle," that tickled Mackenzie's irrepressible humour and set him laughing, ill as he was. Pottinger, delighted at his involuntary achievement, joined heartily in the laugh against himself. Eyre and Dalton laughed; they all laughed, except poor Haughton, who was too ill even to be aware of their foolishness. Once begun, they revelled in the pure relief of laughter for its own sake; laughter that served as a wholesome outlet for pent-up feelings, and triumphed over the body's misery—a very gift of the gods.

In the cool of evening, refreshed by another meal, they pulled themselves together and proceeded to the encampment at Tai-Khana, escorted by their assiduous friend, Mustapha Khan. In camp they found Sir Richmond swearing at the tardiness of troops that should have started on the 17th; his anxiety heightened by authentic reports, that the Safed Kak Pass ahead of them was occupied by robbers, and that Sultan Ján, with a strong force, was hanging about the neighbourhood; while a thousand men, sent by Akbar, had crossed Kalu Mountains close on their tracks, and were now in full pursuit.

Here, on the very threshold of safety, they found themselves hardly less in danger than at Bamián, and to be recaptured now would be worse—ininitely worse—than never having been rescued at all. It was enough to make Shakespear swear; he, who had exerted himself super-

humanly in the belief that he would be promptly followed up by a brigade. Nott's refusal to act was affecting the prisoners more seriously than he, or even Pollock, could have believed.

The Kazzilbashes, fearing a night attack, begged Shakespear to put the ladies in a neighbouring fort where defence would be more feasible than in camp. But Shakespear refused. He felt certain that his countrywomen—who had so bravely endured the worst—would sooner run any risks than enter an Afghan fort again—even for one night. Nor was he mistaken. And in camp they laid them down—not to sleep, but to await the dawn; starting at every sound, fearful of the worst just when the best was within reach.

But hour followed hour and there came no “worst”; only, at dawn, the cracked trumpet sounding *réveillé*; only the road again, that led them back into the lovely valley of Maidan, blackened and disfigured now, by burnt-out fires that marked the passing of Nott.

At noon they halted for refreshment on the shady banks of the stream; the very spot where they had vainly bribed Saleh Mahomed to give them their chance. Men and horses were desperately weary, and those unconscionable troops—said Shakespear—must, by now, be near at hand.

Even as he spoke, behold, an English officer cantering towards them; the herald of Sale's brigade.

The General had left his camp standing at Argandeh, and hearing of their approach, was marching to meet them. The 13th and the guns had been left to hold the Sufaid Kak, and Sale was riding on with the 3rd Dragoons.

Here was news to banish every ill! “I had had fever hanging about me for days,” said Lady Sale, “being scarce able to sit on my horse. . . . But this news renovated my strength. I shook off fever and all ills and anxiously

awaited his arrival, of which a cloud of dust was the fore-runner."

Out of that dust-cloud cantered a troop of cavalry in all the glory of war-worn scarlet and gold, led by Sale on the familiar white charger of Kabul days. If every heart beat quicker at sight of him, what of the wife and daughter who had given up hope of seeing him again?

Let the wife speak for herself: "It is impossible to express our feelings on Sale's approach. . . . Happiness so long delayed as to be almost unexpected, was actually painful and accompanied by a choking sensation that could not find relief in tears."

As for Sale, he dismounted and embraced them both, shook hands effusively all round; made one or two abortive efforts to speak; and failing, beamed broadly and indiscriminately on the world at large.

Then: "Come on," he said—"come on, all of you."

And they came on—all of them "a procession of glad spirits"; glad, grateful, and bewildered not a little by the narrowness of their escape, the knowledge that another twenty-four hours' delay would have frustrated all.

And again, as at the meeting with Shakespear, their silence was the measure of their emotion. Mackenzie, most affectionate of men, rode for a quarter of an hour beside Sale before he could find his voice. Then turning in his saddle, he muttered hurriedly: "General—I congratulate you!"

Sale, regarding him blankly, tried to speak, but only achieved a series of hideous grimaces; and spurring his charger, he cantered off as if to reconnoitre the next corner. Mackenzie, relieved at heart, looked after him, smiling, and decided to keep his sympathy to himself.

So they came to the Pass of Sufaid Koh, crowned—not by Afghan robbers, but by British bayonets and Back-

house's guns. If rescuers and rescued could not command their voices, the soldiers could—the guns could. As those eight Englishwomen—snatched from worse than death—mounted the hill, Sale's regiment raised three cheers for each in turn till the rocks about them rang again.

Then Backhouse gave the word, and the mountain guns thundered a royal salute. The men of the 13th, not content with cheering, pressed eagerly forward, each with a word or two of congratulation for his General's wife: and Lady Sale, whose tears could not fall at sight of her husband, broke down utterly in her attempt to greet his men.

Their twenty-five mile march from Argandeh to Kabul next day was an event not soon forgotten by those who took part in it; a march that atoned for much, though it could not blot out the memory of all.

They that had gone forth secretly at midnight on camels and *yabus* with a mock General and a handful of deserters for guard, came again—by the mercy of God and their own courage—in broad daylight with guns and drums, with their own cavalry and infantry and the men who had held Jalálabad for escort.

Nearing the city, they passed Nott's division, and his regiments—who had resented their loss of a great privilege—turned out in front of their lines to speed the procession with "three times three."

On they rode, to that stirring accompaniment, through the city and the Great Bazaar—no longer the world's mart, full of noisy cosmopolitan life, as Pottinger had first seen it in '37, but a place of unearthly emptiness and silence. For the bulk of merchants and people had fled at the approach of British troops; nor had all Pollock's hoisting of a figure-head and promises of fair treatment yet lured many back to their deserted homes.

On, past the ruined houses of Johnson and Burnes, till Eldred Pottinger—with a sharp contraction of the heart—saw once again the commanding battlements and towers of the Bala Hissar: battlements that he had last looked on from the snow-covered heights of the Siah Sung—

But this was no moment for black memories; and Pottinger's were effectually dispersed by the reverberate boom—boom—boom of Pollock's guns.

They also were firing a royal salute for those who had indeed and in truth arisen from the dead.

## VI

"MY DEAR JOHN," wrote Eldred Pottinger on the 22nd of September, "I have, thank God, got released; and, better still, I may say I owe it, and that of the other prisoners, under Providence, to my own exertions. . . ." Followed the tale in Pottinger's driest, baldest vein, of a march as romantic and adventurous as anything of its kind in modern history. "I have been turned out of my appointment," he added in conclusion, "and expect to be ordered down to Calcutta. If I can, I will see you on the way. I am floored still, with my leg. Write home and tell of my release; also to Hal. God bless you.—Your affectionate brother, ELDRED POTTINGER."

So much for Home, and all its blessed memories, undimmed by an absence of sixteen years; memories that crowded back on him the more insistently that for weeks he had given up thought or hope of seeing Ireland again.

But though he was now a stray unit of Pollock's army, his occupation gone, there still remained the formality of reporting his arrival, on paper, to the General Commanding; of justifying his brave doings at Bamián, and recording the success of their march till joined by the troops. Nor did he fail to acknowledge, in generous fashion, all that was due to the exertions of Mohun Lal, the three friendly Afghans, and last, though far from least, the Hazara chiefs. The remissions on their revenue signed by him at Bamián were not—as Lady Sale sup-

posed—so much waste paper. Pottinger was not the man to deceive those whose co-operation had averted the worst. The names of all and the amounts remitted were detailed in the margin of his report in the hope that Government would honour his given word.

“To Syud Morteza,” he added, “to whose exertions we chiefly owe our release, I have made no direct promise, but have held out hopes of a reward of five thousand rupees and a pension of a hundred a month, according to the hope held out by Mohun Lal. In concluding this, I venture to request your supporting the steps I have taken and recommending them to Government; and trust that my assuming the powers of a Political Agent, under the circumstances of the case, may be pardoned; for I believe in no other way could the release of our captives have been achieved; though I could with ease have effected my own escape. . . .”

The modesty of this last was a fitting pendant to the courage that had gone before. Mainly by his own energy, daring, and resource, he had averted a calamity that would have robbed the avenging armies of half their glory, had rendered a service to England and to his fellow-captives that well deserved public recognition: yet, while belauding the exertions of others, he merely asked pardon for his own unconstitutional, unofficial proceedings; and—like Hervé Riel when he had saved the French fleet—“that he asked and that he got—nothing more.”

Equally characteristic, in their way, were the exaggerated claims of Mohun Lal, who—in his own esteem—had played Providence to the captives ever since they reached Kabul; and who had himself “forced a party of two thousand to go and meet them on the way.”

“If I were not to run the personal risk while myself in confinement,” added this inimitable scribe, “they would



by this time be wandering and suffering on deserts of Turkistan. If Government take these my humble services into just and favourable view, I hope I shall be highly rewarded, because I saved the British name, which—if English ladies and officers were taken into Turkistan—would deeply suffer. I have not only done this, but spent not a fourth of the money offered by General Pollock, and by this means saved the Company's cash! I am very proud indeed of what I have done."

No doubt that sustaining pride was duly inflated by testimonials that flowed in to him from Pollock, Shakespear, Macgregor, and others high of rank. The prisoners, in the main, reserved their tribute for the more modest man; and not long after their arrival George Lawrence was writing to Honoria: "I have received a complimentary letter from *all*, thanking me for my attention during the last eight months; and Pottinger has been voted a bit of plate for his services in effecting our release."

On the 24th there was inaugurated, in Lady Sale's tent, a great gathering of ex-captives to celebrate the quadruple christening of four small people who had survived, as by a miracle, their Spartan introduction into the world:—one at Budiabad, two at Shewaki, and one, the most highly favoured, in a cow-shed at Tazín. The heroine of the occasion was, as a matter of course, the granddaughter—who should have been a grandson—of Sir Robert Sale.

It was a day of days for the women, too long debarred from the joys of civilized femininity. All were in wonderful health after their very rough picnic at Bamián.

"The ladies and children," wrote Henry Lawrence, "look lovely"; and went on to add, "Providence and their own courage saved the prisoners. . . . Pottinger managed admirably. All his comrades were surprised at the excellence of his arrangements. We are all well and in

great glee at getting our friends. . . . Indeed, Providence has wonderfully dealt with us. . . . At one time I thought I could not show my face again at P'erozepore. Now I feel we are in a measure whitewashed. Would that all traces of our disaster could be wiped away! . . . Supplies are coming in well, though there is much plundering going on, in spite of the General's orders. . . . Our army is badly off for carriage; and General Nott, though well provided, is averse to doing anything. He is very ill. He is angry at General Pollock being here first; and is as *yaghi* as any Afghan! . . ."

It was true; and, in a measure, justifiable. While Pollock bolstered up the wobbling Saddozai, and replenished his store of provisions, the hero of Kandahar sat—day after day—in his tent raging against the futilities and dangers of delay. A week at Kabul had not served to dispel his peppery humour; rather the reverse.

After months of independent and victorious action, nothing could have been more exasperating to a man of his temper than this unauthorized and seemingly indefinite halt by the way.

His provision and supply arrangements had been made to a nicety in accordance with Ellenborough's order that he should "carefully calculate the time required" to reach Jalálabad in the first week of October. Now he saw those provisions rapidly dwindling, while Pollock was "following at the heels and dancing attendance on a set of Afghans" whom Nott had come expressly to punish.

The officers of his staff must have found their illustrious General, in those last days of September, about as amiable as a lion in the toils. For he did not feel called upon to keep his righteous indignation to himself.

"What we are remaining here for I know not," he wrote to the daughter of his heart. "In fact I know

*nothing*, and am not admitted into the State secrets of a set of boys, by whom General Pollock seems to be surrounded. I only know that my army marched thus far, through the very heart of Afghanistan, *victorious*; and had I not been superseded, I would have blown up the Cabool Bala Hissar, asserted the national honour, and the reputation of the British arms, and, at this moment I should have been five marches on the road to Jellalabad. . . . I do not think that any disaster can possibly occur to such an army; but this I *do* know, that if it were possible, the people in power here would accomplish it; whether their want of energy and decision will bring it upon us, a few days will show. Recollect *I have nothing to do* with affairs here. . . . How I do long to hear of your health, and to be with you. Fancy how I feel this unnecessary delay."

Nor was his daughter the only recipient of that formidable gift, a piece of his mind. As early as the 22nd he was calling on Pollock to name the date of departure, and pointing out in very plain language the dangers of delay.

"I left Kandahar," he wrote, "with sufficient supplies to take my force to Jellalabad on full rations; but in consequence of the great delay . . . at this place, I am now reduced to provisions for seven days, exclusive of the little grain produced yesterday . . . I cannot see my Troops, who have overcome so many difficulties during the last four years, starve as long as supplies are in the country, and I must therefore send parties out to seize what will be sufficient, . . . paying for the same; . . . but I cannot properly arrange unless I am made acquainted with the probable day of our march from this place. I know that Futteh Jung and his party will do all in their power to keep us here as long as possible: but what is called his

party is really the party of Mahomed Akbar, and while we are delaying here, I have no doubt they are organizing a regular system of opposition in the passes; and unless we act with decision and energy, throwing aside pretended friends, we shall meet with considerable difficulty, and, perhaps, suffer some new disasters.

"I believe you must have received a copy of the Governor-General's despatch to my address under date 4th July last? If not I will do myself the pleasure of sending it for your perusal."

This last was a hard hit, and though there was much soldierly wisdom in this letter, its tone of voice would have evoked a sharp rebuke from the average General in command. But Pollock's temper was cool as Nott's was fiery. He had known he would have volcanic substance to deal with, and was determined not to quarrel with the hero of Kandahar. He must have known also that, from a military point of view, Nott's programme was the right one. He himself had arrived in Kabul doubly hampered—first, by the fact that Futteh Jung had thrown himself on British protection; secondly, by the fact that he had brought up far too many troops for his supply of carriage and provisions. Some sort of Government he must countenance for the moment to remedy the fatal paralysis of trade. Also, because there were, in his camp, men of local knowledge, he was the readier to distinguish between friend and foe; a distinction fertile in complications.

Now came news from the Kohistan that Aminullah and Mahomed Shah Khan had brought together the scattered Barakzai forces at Istalif, a fortified mountain city between Kabul and Charikar. A place of singular beauty and singular strength, it was deemed impregnable, and called by the Afghans their "Maiden City," never yet violated by an enemy.

Thither, at Pollock's coming, all the women of Kabul had been sent for safety, all merchandise, all plunder from the pitiful cantonments that still blackened the plain; and a number of Hindustani troops, whose fate, if not rescued, would be slavery for life. Aminullah, finding his overtures spurned, now joined hands again with the Barakzais; and it was said that the combined forces, mustered at Istalif, intended to fall upon the retiring British armies and harass them to the last. Akbar, too, they invited to join them in a city where none need fear capture or defeat.

But the Sirdar, still hovering uncertainly about the Ghorbund Pass, seemed in two minds on the matter. His family and belongings had already been despatched to Turkistan. For himself, he still clung to a hope that the politely obstinate General Sahib—desiring, perchance, to leave a friendly power behind him—might be induced to countenance a treaty with the son of Dōst Mahomed before leaving the country. The hoisting up of Futteh Jung, all must know to be a palpable farce. The throne and the power were his own, to take when he chose;—whether as enemy or friend it was for Pollock to decide. In this mood, by way of peace-offering, he generously restored Captain Bygrave, who had shared his flight and his uncertain hoverings since Tazīn.

Pollock was delighted to welcome Bygrave; but for peace-offerings he had no desire. In his opinion the hornet's nest at Istalif must be completely broken up before the armies marched; and if, at the same time, Akbar could be captured—so much the better. Nott might rage as he pleased. The thing must be done, and he must supply a brigade.

From Pollock's camp went those who had most distinguished themselves at Tazīn—Backhouse with his guns,

Broadfoot with his little Gurkhas, the 9th foot, and 26th Native Infantry; the whole under MacCaskill, with Havelock and Mayne for Staff Officers, and for Political, Eldred Pottinger, thankful exceedingly for work that would dispel the deadly influences of reaction after strain.

Though he had rested but four days and the pain of his leg was unpleasantly assertive, he did not choose that it should hamper him in a duty for which he was peculiarly fitted;—and it did not. Having no English clothes he must still wear Afghan dress; and though this might expose him to danger, it was not without advantages, especially in the matter of comfort.

To his great satisfaction he found that Mackenzie and Airey were to go—also as Afghans—with a party of Kazzilbash Horse led by Prince Shahpur—younger brother of Futteh Jung; but no more like his brother than King Hamlet to Claudius. The son of a Barakzai mother, he had the courage and physique of that remarkable clan. He only asked leave to take his men into the hills and attempt the capture of the redoubtable Sirdar; for which consummation none was more eager than Pottinger himself. He had even begged permission to accompany the Prince in his spirited undertaking; but had received no definite answer before the force marched.

By the 28th of September they were encamped in the familiar Kohistan Valley, on a fair green plain that swept unbroken to the opposite foot-hills, and merged into the lower gardens and orchards of Istalif. Behind these, terrace above terrace, each one narrower than the last, the Maiden City showed from afar like a fortified pyramid; its apex a shrine secluded by a group of stately planes already splashed with gold. Beyond that apex the naked mountain towered almost perpendicular, scarred with dizzy foot-tracks leading into Turkistan.

Strong, beautiful, inviolate, Istalif fronted the two brigades that marched out of the shadows in the first gleam of a bitter cold morning: Tulloch's column with Pollock's troops; Stacey, with Nott's; the cavalry massed on the plain to guard baggage and cut off fugitives. General MacCaskill had had the good sense to leave the plan of attack to Havelock, who virtually carried it through.

A combined assault on the right was changed, at the last moment, to a simultaneous one on both sides. To the left, then, Tulloch's column—9th and 26th, covered by Broadfoot's Sappers, always in the van.

The Afghans, mistaking the movement for retreat, gave them a furious welcome in the orchards at the city's base. **Hand to hand** they fought among the fruit-trees; bayonet against knife, marksmen peppering them from above. The sheer intrepidity of Broadfoot was a thing to delight the heart; and the Sappers made headway in the teeth of it all; while the 9th and 26th rushed gallantly to their support. Pace so swift and an advance so impetuous were more than the Kohistanis had bargained for. Confident in the tradition of their fortress-capital, they had made small preparation for defence. But the British troops were there to dispel tradition, and brilliantly they dispelled it that day.

While Pollock's Infantry wrought on the left base, three of Nott's finest sepoy regiments assailed the right in a fashion that would have overjoyed that devoted General; and within a few hours the Afghans realized that the Maiden City was maiden no more.

Already the infidels had gained the first terrace, and with shouts of triumph were swarming into the second; firing houses and property, sparing none save, so far as possible, the women and children. Of these there were many, far too many, in spite of the ghostly scurrying

figures that streamed up and out from the garden round the shrine into the unsheltered open: wives, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, all the harems of Istalif and of Kabul, fleeing from pollution; for bodily danger there was none. First by tens, then by twenties and fifties, they sped up the face of that inhospitable mountain—they who had probably never walked a mile in all their sheltered lives; till it seemed as if a billowing white sheet had been flung over the hill.

And with them went Aminullah Loghri—Pottinger's "paralytic old sinner"—fleeing not from pollution, but from cold steel. If that was to be the Feringhis' form of argument, he would "stay no longer question."

Far below, in an orchard at the city's base, MacCaskill, with Pottinger, Mackenzie, and his staff watched and waited on the progress of events, refreshing themselves, meantime, with ripe plums that were to be had for the taking. Mackenzie, dashing occasionally into the fray, narrowly escaped, more than once, being bayoneted by his own countrymen.

At last, after a longer absence than usual, he returned with a glowing countenance. "We've *done* it, sir," he cried triumphantly; "the place is entirely in our hands!"

Istalif—the inviolate—had been stormed and captured in half a dozen hours; and MacCaskill—Briton to the bone—merely nodded.

"All right," said he coolly. "Take a plum!"

And Mackenzie, thirsty with much smiting and shouting, took more than one.

Such is war—the obverse, comedy and good fellowship; the reverse—hell.

That night sleep was impossible for the wailing and lamentation, as of lost souls, that went up from the captured city. On the heights watch-fires, that gleamed



like fallen planets, showed where hundreds of unhoused women and children were burning the sparse clumps of brushwood to win a little respite from the cold. And if the hearts of chivalrous British officers ached for the suffering of the innocent, they had need to remind themselves that their own innocent women and children had suffered far worse things than a night or two on the mountains.

All next day the city was sacked and plundered with terrible completeness. Several hundred sepoys and camp-followers were recovered; maimed, half-starved creatures, the sight of whom lashed the native troops to fury. But though bloodshed, plunder, and destruction prevailed, there were no atrocities, no outrage; only punishment, dire and complete. And on the 30th, MacCaskill moved his force up the valley to make the wrath of England felt at Lughmáni and Charikar.

That the credit of capturing Istalif was Havelock's, few who were present would deny. Pottinger, for one, spoke his admiration warmly after the event, adding: "If only we had had *you* with us at Kabul, the whole affair would have gone differently, indeed!"

Havelock's answer was characteristic, both for its modesty and its truth. "I will not undertake to say that *I* could have saved Kabul," he said, with the quiet precision of utterance that made him seem a cold man. "But I feel confident that George Broadfoot would have done it." Nor was his confidence misplaced.

Now was the moment, in Pottinger's opinion, for prompt pursuit of Akbar; and a letter from Macgregor gave him the permission he craved. "If you can gain possession of Akbar Khan," it ran, "you will cover yourself with glory and deserve well of the State . . . but the General concludes that you will not undertake the chase unless there is a fair chance of success."

That there was such a chance seemed evident both to Pottinger and the Prince. But without the support of Kazzilbash horsemen nothing could be done; and in spite of MacCaskill's success, not all Shahpur's urgency would move them. They preferred returning to Kabul with their British friends; and Pottinger must, of necessity, forego the glory of capturing his late captor, an act of poetic justice that would have fitly crowned his achievement at Bamian.

By the 7th of October the troops were back at Kabul, well satisfied with the work of their hands. The mark of Feringhi retribution had been set to some purpose on the valley of the Kohistan. Remained now to set an equally effective mark on Kabul—sinner-in-chief.

And here arose one of the many evils of delay. To have marched up, destroyed the Bala Hissar, and marched on, would have been a simple and straightforward military measure. But after three weeks of friendly intercourse with the party in power, to say nothing of setting up their King, the question of punishment became a complicated matter.

MacCaskill's return brought Futtah Jung's illustrious reign abruptly to an end. With Akbar abroad nothing would induce him to remain on his "powder-barrel," and again he sought Pollock's protection, begging to be pensioned at Ludhiana, like his father before him. The Kazzilbashes, fearful for the fate of the Bala Hissar, promptly transferred their allegiance to Prince Shahpur. The brave boy was willing enough to hold his own as long as might be, but Pollock could countenance no more coronations. They might do anything they pleased in the way of king-making when he was gone. They begged the support of a few troops, a little money. He would grant neither; but he consented to spare the Bala Hissar and

destroy instead the famous Char Chuttar, the great domed bazaar, where Macnaghten's body had been exposed after his murder.

By this unjust measure the sword of retribution would fall not on the offending chiefs, but on unoffending merchants and citizens. Nott raged, as may be supposed. Ellenborough and the Duke of Wellington—when they heard of it—condemned the measure, but in the circumstances decision was no easy matter. Something had to be done; and thus, with a strange and tragical fitness, the war that had opened with one injustice closed with another.

The only just reason for saving the Bala Hissar does not seem to have been considered. On the return of the troops the kingdom, wrested from Dōst Mahomed on a false pretext, was to be restored, after being duly defaced and despoiled. The returning Amir would find Jalálabad, Ghazni, and Istalif in ruins. Had the Royal palace and citadel been added to these, his restoration would have been an ironical boon indeed. But by chance the Bala Hissar was saved—out of consideration for his enemies; and Captain Abbot spent two days blowing up the solid masonry of the Great Bazaar. A mosque near the cantonments,—ornamented with British relics, and named the Feringhi mosque in commemoration of their triumph,—was also fired, and the city gates were guarded to prevent destruction beyond the appointed limits:—vain precaution, with a professed work of vengeance afoot.

“The cry arose,” wrote Rawlinson, “that Kabul was given up to plunder. Both camps rushed into the city, and the consequence has been almost total destruction. . . . Numbers of people had returned to Kabul relying on our promises of protection. . . . They had, many of them, reopened their shops, and have now been reduced to utter

ruin. . . ." Given such an opening the result was inevitable. Sepoys and soldiers alike, were incensed to madness by reminders visible in every street; belts, pouches, and fragments of uniform only less eloquent than the bones by the way. In such a mood men would stick at nothing; and the avenging fires lighted on the 10th of October were still blazing on the 12th, when the unwieldy mass of an army in motion once more trailed its interminable length over the Siah Sung heights toward the dark mouth of the Khurd Kabul Pass.

But this army, though three times the size of that other, was orderly arranged, and—as yet—none harassed its going. Here was no rush and scramble of disorganized followers, no fanatic yelling of Ghazis, no blood upon the snow. Only, by way of reminder, the skies were challenged by the flames of another conflagration; and even as the army marched, the guns of the Bala Hissar were firing another Royal salute, that proclaimed Prince Shahpur King of all the Afghans.

The Fathiha was read; chiefs tendered their allegiance, and kept it—for the space of a month. But the solemn farce achieved its end. It saved the Bala Hissar—not for Shahpur, but for Dōst Mahomed Khan.

What *they* felt, who had marched with that other army, when once again the grim defile received them—who shall say? For them Khurd Kabul was no mere charnel-house, but a place of vivid and ineffaceable memories.

All the officers, except those given as hostages, had been formally placed under arrest as prisoners of war, pending inquiry into their conduct; and for many of them the reaction after strain—after the anxieties, excitements, and hardships of their adventurous march—had produced either illness of body or terrible depression of mind. Among the last were Pottinger and Eyre, whose fortitude

through the worst had been unfailling. In Pottinger's case depression was aggravated by acute anxiety as to the future, which of late there had seemed no need to consider at all. In respect of all that he had done, and, perforce left undone, his own conscience was clear; but he knew enough by now of Lord Ellenborough's prejudice against the Afghan Political and all his works to expect little of recognition or consideration at his hands. Bare justice was all he asked; but justice, however bare, is often harder to come by than generosity.

So thinking and so bracing himself, Eldred Pottinger rode with Pollock's army into the Khurd Kabul Pass, turning back as he went for a last sight of the Queen among Valleys, that he had looked upon five years earlier with a heart full of hope and high ambition.

Now it was autumn in the valley. The spring glory of her orchards was exchanged for the sober brown and gold of dying leaves; and there, where the mart of the world had reared its frescoed arcades, hung a sudden pall of smoke, sundered now and again by blades of fire, fit insignia of retribution.

## VII

At Ferozepore in December, 1842, Lord Ellenborough, "Friend of the Army," was in his glory:—he who would fain have been a soldier, who loved nothing better than the blare of trumpets and drums, the blaze of scarlet and gold, the thrill of many hundred feet marching in unison. And if his genuine admiration for the mere fighter led him to belittle the political and the civilian, there remains the extenuating fact that his military enthusiasm, however exaggerated, was, at that moment, of real value to India, and deserves to be leniently judged.

And the hundreds—nay thousands—gathered together at Ferozepore that Christmas to welcome the return of the two victorious armies, and an "illustrious garrison," were in a mood to judge leniently of all men and all things. Nowhere on earth is the spirit of festivity so all-pervading as in these canvas cities that spring up on the occasion of a great Durbar.

Arriving at Ferozepore on the 9th, Lord Ellenborough found the vast audience already assembled, the theatre set for the grand finale he had designed in honour of late successes and in the hope of discounting earlier disasters. Here were not only all heads of Indian Departments, guests from Europe, and a deputation from the Native States, but wives and sisters, tremulous with hope, counting the days, the hours, . . . none among them more impatiently than Honoria Lawrence.

What were Governor-Generals to her, when Henry and George were on their way to Ferozepore? And what were Henry and George to the Governor-General when he was superintending the decoration of elephants' trunks with red and white paint, or the arrangement of streamers for the "triumphal arch" on the hither side of the River Sutlej?

Across the river, at this point, was thrown a bridge of boats, gaudily decked with stripes of bunting, red, yellow, and blue. The arch itself, by courtesy so called, was rather a tawdry gallows—two uprights and a cross-bar—gay with bunting and tinsel; as complete a caricature of the triumphal as could well have been devised.

Lord Ellenborough had an unfortunate knack of provoking smiles when he was most in earnest; of appearing bombastic when he meant to be most impressive. Already he had evoked a storm of ridicule and satire from the Anglo-Indian Press, by his famous "Proclamation of the Gates" that called upon a mixed audience of Mahomedans and Hindus to rejoice because "the insult of eight hundred years is at last avenged. The Gates of the Temple of Somnath, so long the memorial of your humiliation, are become the proudest record of your national glory."

Had Lord Ellenborough been better known and more generally liked, much might have been forgiven him at a moment of elation.

But one who could frame that proclamation was little likely to be affected by ridicule; and while criticism rained, he returned with unabated zeal to his plans for the reception of his armies; more especially the reception of that "illustrious garrison" which he had determined to welcome with peculiar honours. He had already corresponded personally with one or two of the officers; had

appointed Abbott Honorary A.D.C., and Broadfoot—whose outstanding merits he had been quick to discern—an *aide* on his personal staff, until some permanent appointment could be found to mark his Lordship's high approval.

This favoured garrison was to cross the Sutlej three days in advance of Pollock's army; Broadfoot, the actual—if not official—saviour of Jalálabad, leading the way with his ragged little band of heroes, who had not so much as received their uniform, and “must even appear in sable (not fur)” and put up with being taken for coolies.

For the special glorification of Sale's force, two hundred and fifty elephants in war-paint and gold trappings were being trained to bow the knee, fling up their trunks and trumpet in unison. For them Nicholl's Army of Reserve, drawn up in line, was to present arms, and the artillery to fire a salute of nineteen guns.

Pollock and Nott would be welcomed with due ceremony; minus only the trumpeting of elephants, the salute and presenting of arms.

Such invidious distinctions at a time of universal rejoicing were in bad taste; to say the least of it. Nicolls did what he could in the way of remonstrance; but his Lordship was in a wayward mood. He chose, not all unreasonably, that those who had most often led the troops in action should lead them on their triumphal return. He did *not* choose that “the honours paid to the garrison should be extended to the rest of the army”—and the order held.

The reserve force had long been encamped on the wide plain outside Ferozepore, partly to greet returning heroes, partly to overawe obstreperous Sikhs, lest they hinder the march of British troops through the Punjab. By the 9th of December these were well on their way through that dusty desert, untroubled by hostilities, in spite of muttered



prophecies that the exalted ones would soon be driven from India as from Afghanistan.

The retreat from Kabul—though not brilliantly managed—had been on the whole an orderly affair. But the tribes would not suffer the infidel to depart without a sting in his tail: and at Peshawur an enemy, impervious to gunpowder, lay in wait to check their victorious march. Smallpox, dysentery, fever, decimated regiment after regiment in defiance of doctors. Scores of brave officers and men passed unscathed through perils and hardships of no common kind, only to die in that dreary camp on the outermost edge of Afghanistan.

Here announcements of honours, of medals and *batta* came to cheer those that survived: and here Pottinger—who had marched with Pollock's division—wrote to his mother:—

“MY DEAR MOTHER,

“I have no doubt that long ere this you have heard of my release from imprisonment. . . . I am glad to say that the release of my companions and self has been mainly owing to our own exertions; and my part was so prominent that I understand my fellow-detainers intend to present me with something as a mark of their feelings for my services. Several persons have laid more or less claim to the credit of our deliverance, but without right. We chiefly owe our escape to Providence, who graciously afforded us a favourable opportunity—and we took it. The measures taken by the authorities were tardy and apathetic . . . . but my friend, Sir Richmond Shakespeare, took on himself to start with seven hundred men, whose quick junction with us we owe to this step of his, and whose non-arrival might have exposed us to recapture. . . .”

After a short account of their uneventful march came matter more personal :

“I had a long letter from John the other day, and am greatly afraid he has suffered his affection for me and his feelings of family honour to carry him too far in publishing the papers he did. I have not yet seen them, and I feel very grateful for his conduct ; but I wish he had sent them to my father, and that he had first asked the Court of Directors to vindicate my fame by giving early publicity to such documents as might reach it. My friends here say that John has not in any way committed himself, and I am sanguine this is the case. . . .”

Wise or unwise, it was not in the nature of John Pottinger to see his imprisoned brother publicly traduced without taking up the cudgels on his behalf. Young, hot-headed, and readier with his pen than Eldred, he had written to the *Times*, as early as June, strongly protesting against unfounded assertions in the Home papers, and hoping, in conclusion, that the editor would help him to make known the rights of the case, lest his brother be made a scapegoat for errors committed in the teeth of his strenuous opposition. John's letter had appeared in August ; and though Eldred might shrink fastidiously from any approach to public controversy, he could not but appreciate the motive behind the act.

Thankful to win clear of the impedimenta that clogs a moving army, he pushed on from Peshawur with Airey, the Lawrences, and others who were not chained by duty to the unwieldy mass. On the way down he was met by news—not all unexpected—that gave him food both for anxiety and thought : news briefly and characteristically chronicled in his journal.

“I received a letter mentioning that a Court of Enquiry is to be held on me. Lumley Smith and Clerk the members, and Shelton as principal witness. My weak point said to be signing the treaty. I committed a great fault in not refusing to sign it. My principal reason was fear lest such refusal should prevent my getting on with the military and being of use to them. I wonder if Shelton will speak the truth. If he do not, I think Troup can give corroborative evidence to my objections.”

Personally he had no cause to fear the strictest investigation of his conduct; but Shelton—sole survivor of that unwarlike Council—was also the only possible source of complications that did not bear thinking of.

And long before they reached their destination came news from the north that seemed ironically to emphasize the futility alike of his own suffering and that of the hundreds who had paid even heavier toll than he in the past years.

Native friends at Kabul wrote that Akbar Khan, after allowing time for dissensions to multiply, had swooped down on Kabul, carrying all before him. Shahpur had been expelled, and, narrowly escaping with his life, had fled to join his father's family in India. Once more the strong Barakzai brothers divided the land between them. Nawab Zemán Khan ruled at Jalálabad; Sultan Ján at Kandahar, and Shamsudin had returned to his ruined citadel at Ghazni.

Lives, honour, money, prestige, flung broadcast to the four winds of heaven, had availed—precisely nothing; and all was as it had been before Simla secretaries dreamed of the Great Game in Central Asia. But whatever the faults and follies of the “high in place,” it could at least be said of the armies tramping wearily back across the Punjab, with dust of its highroads in

their throats and in their eyes, that they had done what they could.

By the middle of December they drew near at last to the city of welcome. There, on the very plain where Lord Auckland had proudly marshalled the Army of the Indus, gleamed another array of spotless tents; there, to and fro among them, moved other officers and men. Seldom in any great historical drama have the famous unities been so notably preserved. The Kabul tragedy ended, as it had begun, at Ferozepore, amid the blare of bugles, the glitter of uniforms, and the gratulations of a mixed multitude. But few, comparatively few of the men now marching toward the starting-point were of those who had marched away, with high hearts and flying colours, in November, 1838. A goodly number of Sale's brigade and of Nott's stout little force had been through the whole fiery furnace; and for them the thickness of a lifetime seemed packed between then and now.

On the 17th Sale's illustrious battalions—men and guns, camels and followers—clattered and rumbled across the garish bridge of boats and passed in procession under the triumphal gallows with shouts of laughter at the unsightly thing. But neither gallows nor an orgie of bunting could mar the impressiveness of those serried ranks of elephants, gorgeously caparisoned, drawn up in line, two deep, along the way the troops must go.

And high above the rest, outvying them in splendour, towered the monster elephant of State, consciously superior; his ears flapping, his vast back ablaze with scarlet and gold; his unwieldy howdah occupied by the Governor-General of India, ruler of one-fifth of the human race.

On they came, those battered and dwindled battalions—Sappers first, led by Broadfoot, in poshteen and forage cap; then the gallant 13th, that had served through all,

their shabby scarlet tunics ominously stained, their cheeks tanned and thin. Abbot, Backhouse, and Dawes, with their grim array of guns; Monteath, with the devoted 35th; on they came, bearded and rough-looking all, their horses jaded, their standards torn; nothing bright about them but their swords and musket locks and the brand new medals, thoughtfully forwarded by Lord Ellenborough for the occasion. No mere smartness of the parade-ground about men who had been too persistently engaged in the real thing to find time for parades; but they marched with the ease and swing of soldiers who for near two months had tramped mile after mile, day after day, all that stony, dusty distance from Kabul to Ferozepore.

As Sir Robert Sale, with his staff, set foot on the soil of British India, the guns roared and roared again. The troops cheered themselves hoarse. Ladies standing up in their carriages waved handkerchiefs already a little damp. Natives, packed twenty deep beyond the pale, yelled in sympathetic excitement. A dozen bands at once struck up "See the Conquering Hero comes."

And, regiment after regiment, led now by Ellenborough himself, the conquering heroes came, feeling a little shame-faced at their own exceeding prominence, yet withal profoundly moved and uplifted at heart.

Of a truth, the horrors of war have their great and glorious compensations—for those who survive.

Only in that universal roar of welcome the elephants refused to take part. No iron-tipped persuasion from their mahouts would induce the two hundred and fifty either to salaam, or bend the knee, or squeal in chorus. Unmoved, in the midst of the clamour, they stood blinking their small wicked-looking eyes, and leisurely swaying their trunks, as if in mild scorn of the shabby procession, ren-

dered shabbier by contrast with their own magnificent selves.

And beyond the elephants came a lesser avenue of scarlet and gold, two and a half miles long—Nicolls' Army of Reserve. No mild scorn here, but hearty human appreciation, tinged with envy, as regiment after regiment presented arms to the defenders of Jalálabad.

That night there sprang up beside the acres of canvas on the plain a host of smaller, shabbier tents, frayed and weather-beaten, pitched in serried ranks, rope between rope, "locked up" like soldiers in a column. Within each shabby tent two or three officers were doubled up. No playing at soldiers here, no regulation camp furniture, which they had almost forgotten how to need; for these camps of Sale's brigade had been moving castles in an enemy's country.

Now they were home again, something the worse for wear, but none the worse, without or within, for hard knocks, hard fare, and the harder realities of war. For though war is hell, as every warrior has borne witness, its fires are not purely destructive. Life is apt to be seen in truer proportion by men who, for months, have looked death in the face daily—not in theory, but in fact. Essentials stand out more clearly; non-essentials fall away; a disintegrating process badly needed, from time to time, if men are to keep their feet low, and their foreheads high.

Though England had lost heavily and gained nothing—save experience—by that disastrous war, there were English men who gained much in those four crowded years, even they that had seemingly lost their all.

On the 19th more elephants, more guards of honour, more cheering and brazen music for the General who had nipped mutiny in the bud, forced the Khyber, and relieved

Jalálabad; the General who brought back with him as "just trophies of his successful march," rescued British prisoners, sepoy and followers, not less than two thousand. Him also, Lord Ellenborough met at the edge of the carpet, and escorted with honours to his camping-ground: but, for him and his, no presenting of arms, no roar of welcoming guns.

Beside Sale's modest encampment there grew up a larger one, hardly less war-worn and shabby. Here, too, officers were doubled up three and four in sepoy's tents; and here were the Bamián prisoners—Eyres, Wallers, Andersons, Trevors—with few clothes to their backs, little money in their pockets, and little enough of jubilation in their hearts.

Two months of weary marching and still more weary halting had by no means dispelled the severe reaction of body and mind that deprived many of sleep, and peopled the women's dreams with nightmare horrors of the past. Nor was there, here, any special welcome to inspirit them. Lady Sale and Mrs. Sturt—being connected with the "illustrious garrison"—received their share of recognition even to dining at his Lordship's table with Sir Robert and other Jalálabadis. The rest had no place in the lively round of feasting and dancing and general glorification of British arms. They waited only till the inevitable Courts Martial should honourably acquit their husbands of having fallen into the hands of the enemy through any fault of their own.

So they:—and on the 23rd came Nott, last in order of arrival, yet unquestionably the finest General of the three: Nott, who, through good report and ill, through mismanagement and rebellion, had held in his unyielding grip the western door of Afghanistan; Nott, who, in the teeth of injustice and neglect, had never relaxed his

vigilance, and rarely suffered a reverse; who, for all his high-handed methods and irascible temper, had upheld in his person and his force the best traditions of British character in the East. Lord Ellenborough—slow to recognize his worth—had made practical amends by appointing him Resident at the Court of Lucknow—the most important post in his gift. Now on the 23rd the two, who had become friends on paper, met under the gaudy gallows; and almost from the moment of meeting their friendship was sealed.

Thus, though recognition had tarried long, it came at last to William Nott; came in such generous measure as Lord Ellenborough, of all men, best knew how to bestow.

The day after Christmas was chosen for the grand military finale, that was to ring down the curtain upon the Afghan drama; to drown, in the cheerful clamour of drums and trumpets, and the acclamations of the multitude, those tragic memories which it were wiser for the British in India to remember rather than forget.

There, on the great plain of Ferozepore—where, according to legend, Alexander the Great had commemorated the limits of his conquests—the combined troops of Nott and Pollock and Nicolls were arrayed in striking contrast—forty thousand of them with a hundred guns. There, for many hours, they were manœuvred and reviewed, cheered and admired by such a vast crowd as rarely came together in the India of those days.

Guns and again guns and more guns tore and clattered past the flagstaff; “Eyes right”; swords flashing up to the salute. After them thundered the cavalry at full gallop, with more flashing of swords, and gay little pennons fluttering from lance heads. Followed infantry at the double: a never-ending river of men: then the final



words of command that swept that ordered magnificence off the plain—battery by battery, regiment by regiment, each to its own appointed camp.

Last of all the brilliant assembly itself broke up like the waters of the deep :—and so far as the Army was concerned, the first Afghan War had come triumphantly to an end.

## VIII

SOCIALLY, the Ferozepore Durbar had merely been inaugurated by that dazzling display of imperial majesty and power; a display designed to encourage wavering Hindustanis and strike awe into the hostile heart of the Sikh Ráj. The women, content to play audience so far, now looked forward to a more active part in the programme. Dinners, balls, and race-meetings flourished; the first more abundantly, owing to Lord Ellenborough's gift for after-dinner oratory.

But among all the banquets graced with silken flags, with grandiloquence and champagne, were none that surpassed, in sheer enjoyment and good fellowship, a certain dinner in a certain unwieldy-looking tent that sprawled across one end of Sale's camp; a dinner given by the 35th N. I., at their own request, to their brothers in arms, the 13th Light Infantry. For nearly four years they had served together; their devotion had become a proverb; and now, before parting, the sepoy of the one regiment begged to express their feeling for the soldiers of the other in true *Beluiti*<sup>1</sup> fashion by a "great eating."

They, of course, could not sit down with their guests. But at least they could be present; and if this thing might be, their cup of joy would be full.

It had been no easy matter to arrange; but the will that finds the way had over-ridden every difficulty. To make that immense dining-room, all the largest tents had

<sup>1</sup> English.

been struck and pitched again in a mass, three deep, their extended tops roughly laced together. For tables the zealous hosts had thrown up trenches, beaten the tops hard, and covered all with yards of white bazaar cloth. Three hundred empty bottles did duty for candlesticks; and a platform of earth was raised at one end for the band. Here also the hosts could sit and look on. Finally, in their great thoughtfulness, they had requisitioned every doolie in camp, to be manned by themselves, lest any of their guests be "taken ill" before the end of the evening—politeness forbade more specific explanation.

Then, when preparation was complete, the senior Native Officers waited on Sir Robert Sale. Would he, of his kindness, permit all guards, on this one night, to be taken by themselves, that none of their brothers should be absent from the great feast—a request partially granted, to their immense delight.

On the night of nights, that unique banqueting hall, close-packed with scarlet-coated guests, was a scene of joy unadulterated. Each man found beside his plate a bottle of beer—nectar untasted for years—and an extra allowance of rum. Piles of oranges, almonds, and raisins, adorned the tablecloth; and between almost every course the "gallant 35th" must be toasted and cheered to the echo; till the whole camp was alive with the din, and a magnificent *aide* from the Governor-General's camp next door came over to demand "what was up," and stayed to join in the fun. It was a glorious affair; a fitting finale to years of fighting and hardship endured together; and, to the credit of the 13th be it said, the doolies proved a superfluous attention after all.

So, throughout those bustling weeks of Christmas and the New Year, soldiers and officers alike reaped compensation, after their kind. But there were those in that vast camp

for whom compensation was not; though they, too, were officers who had won promotion, by soldierly achievements, to frontier political service—the most arduous, dangerous, and responsible that India could offer.

While of dinners and complimentary speeches, in the Governor-General's banqueting tent, there seemed no end, certain men and certain names were made unenviably conspicuous by their absence. The soldier was everywhere; the Political—nowhere. Lord Ellenborough seemed to have a talent for such invidious distinctions; and for the many generous spirits in all three camps, his prejudiced exclusiveness went far to spoil the whole.

Strange that the man who worshipped gallantry for its own sake should have been wilfully blind to the brilliant exploits of Mackenzie; to the soldierly spirit and counsel of Eldred Pottinger. Months earlier George Broadfoot had written of his friend Colin, from Jalálabad: "Where one set of men cause the misfortune and others diminish its extent or its disgrace by their courage and skill, the latter surely should, and, I believe, usually do, receive their reward." There spoke justice; and if there were any three men in Ferozepore to whom those words peculiarly applied, they were Pottinger, Lawrence, and Mackenzie, the heroes alike of the siege, the retreat, and the long weary captivity that followed.

Lord Ellenborough, it would seem, saw this vexed question in another light than did George Broadfoot. Already in his manifesto proclaiming the end of the war, he had denounced Lord Auckland's Afghan policy root and branch. No recognition, accordingly, for those connected with it; only for those who had been instrumental, under his own authority, in redeeming it.

But to Eldred Pottinger, soon after his arrival, there came compensation for Government neglect that went

more straightly to his heart than any golden opinions from Supreme Authority.

On the 19th a letter had been brought to him addressed in Webb's handwriting. With a throb of pleasure he had broken the seal and read :

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Your exertions at Bameean for our release from captivity have elicited the warmest feelings of gratitude and admiration. The chief praise is due to you of making the Hazarah Sirdars friendly towards us, of binding Saleh Mahomed Khan firmly to our interests, and of perfecting the whole plan successfully. The cheerfulness and determination with which you entered on the difficult task imposed upon you must be ever gratefully remembered by us; and in token of our esteem and regard, we beg your acceptance of a piece of plate, which will be forwarded to you as soon as completed.

“Wishing you every success in your future career,

“We remain,

“Your obliged and sincere friends . . .”

To Webb's signature were added thirty-two others, from Lady Macnaghten's downwards; the signature of every prisoner released from Bamián—with two notable exceptions. Neither Shelton nor Palmer joined in that tribute of gratitude or subscribed to the handsome vase afterwards designed for Pottinger's acceptance.

That trophy he did not live to receive; but the impulse of gratitude—the true gift—was peculiarly appreciated by one whose passion for serving his kind stood proven by his work at Herat.

Profoundly moved, he read and re-read those few lines,

sincere in feeling as they were simple in expression: then, while his own heart glowed in response, he took up his pen and wrote:

“ FERROZEPOR, ”  
 “ 26th Dec. ’42.

“ MY DEAR LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

“ It is with real and heartfelt gratification that I acknowledge Lieutenant Webb’s letter conveying your sentiments on my humble endeavours towards our release. I shall always consider your unsought testimony to my exertion in liberating so many of my country-women and their children, and my comrades, as the proudest reward I could receive. I therefore beg you will accept my warmest thanks; and believe me, that I should prize any memorial of your esteem and regard as above all price. It would be unbecoming in me to undertake the credit you have, in so kind a manner, borne witness to; but permit me to say I also am under deep obligation to you all for the courage displayed by you and the trust you placed in me, which, joined with the cordial co-operation of my coadjutors (Captain G. St. P. Lawrence, 11th Light Cavalry, and Johnson, 26th Native Infantry), gave me the confidence necessary to take advantage of the favourable opening, which a merciful Providence had vouchsafed to us, when it was apparent to all that human aid was nearly hopeless. Trusting that the same Providence may prolong your lives in happiness, and shield you from a recurrence of the sad scenes we have lately undergone.

“ I remain,

“ Your obliged and faithful friend,

“ ELDRED POTTINGER.”

That done, he returned to writing far less congenial. It concerned yet another inquiry likely to bring him and George Lawrence into unpleasant collision with Shelton, their unfailing antagonist from Kabul days even to Bamián.

By this time Pottinger's private and public statements regarding his conduct at Kabul had come to Shelton's knowledge; also a private letter written by Lawrence had appeared in the *Dublin Evening Mail*; a letter no less damning than Pottinger's to Macgregor in January. The fact that both men had written the truth did not alleviate matters: rather the reverse. Infuriated by what he denounced as a malicious attack on his character, the late Brigadier, now Major-General, had straightway reported them to the Commander-in-Chief, requesting that they be called upon to justify their statements or be tried by Court Martial.

They were so called upon: and for answer—strong in the knowledge of facts and their own integrity—both declared themselves willing to give any explanation demanded by the private Court of Enquiry that would be convened on the 8th of January, when the more important trials would be over.

Till then Pottinger, however anxious, must possess himself in patience. But he wrote no Home letter to his mother that month, preferring to keep silence till he could announce the verdict passed on his conduct during that most unhappy and most critical fortnight of his life between Macnaghten's murder and Elphinstone's fatal retreat.

## IX

ON New Year's Day, 1842, Eldred Pottinger had arisen and gone about his business in the tragic certainty that neither word nor act of his could avert the final catastrophe. On New Year's Day, 1843, he stood up before a court of soldiers, with George Clerk as President, to answer for that one serious failure of his life; a failure for which Shelton's obstinacy was mainly responsible, first and last.

The Court had assembled by order, in General Lumley's large well-furnished tent:—six of them, Pottinger included. With Clerk sat Lumley himself; Sir Harry Smith, Adjutant-General of the Queen's Army; Colonel Wymer; and Colonel Monteath. To these four Clerk had read extracts from the Budiabad reports and other letters, but no oral evidence was to be called for except from Pottinger himself.

Said Clerk when the reading was over: "Why did you assume authority at Kabul on the death of the Envoy?"

"I was the senior officer of the Mission . . . and I was, besides, requested by General Elphinstone to take charge."

"What was the nature of the previous intercourse between yourself and the Envoy?"

"I had occasional conversations with Sir William on the state of affairs; but our intercourse was not constant, nor, I may say, confidential; for our opinions frequently differed, and I was never in full possession of his real sentiments and intentions."



"Did you know of the existence of any treaty?"

"I, of course, heard the common rumours of the camp, but I had no other information on the subject."

"When you became aware of existing circumstances, what course did you pursue?"

A large query this, involving a candid account of Elphinstone's Council of War and its most unsoldierly decision, of his own vain remonstrance against any but a fighting move.

And thereupon came the question of questions: "Having differed with the Council of War, did you afterwards yield to their opinion?"

"Under the circumstances," Pottinger replied, with quiet emphasis, "I conceived that my opposition would do harm rather than good. The Afghans would have suspected us of dissimulation if I had withdrawn. Besides, there was scarcely any other officer acquainted with the character or language of the people. Having thus consented I continued to act, but I considered—on their responsibility, as they had determined to take a line in opposition to my advice. . . . In the state of affairs, at that time, an open breach between the British authorities would have been most dangerous. . . . Having been overruled in a Council of War, I considered myself, thenceforward, a mere Agent of the Military Authorities, consenting to act for them with a view to preventing further embarrassment."

That straightforward answer plainly impressed his listeners; and Clerk, with a nod of satisfaction, passed on to the consideration of those unauthorized and repudiated bills. Again, simply and straightly, Pottinger recounted the facts, with a word for John Conolly, who had expressly warned the Hindus, after the massacre, that payment would be refused.

“And are *you* of opinion,” asked Clerk, “that the bills ought now to be paid?”

A plain “No” seemed the obvious answer; but Pottinger had thought the matter out in all its bearings.

“Speaking as a private individual,” said he, “on the broad principle of right and wrong, I should say that the bills are wholly invalidated by the non-fulfilment of the conditions. But, speaking as an officer of Government, I must modify this opinion. If we reject the bills *in toto* our public credit—one of the mainsprings of our power in the East—would suffer; and the most dangerous consequences might ensue from a refusal to honour our bills when drawn in circumstances of a suspicious character. If, on the other hand, we pay the whole sum, we incur serious loss and establish a most dangerous precedent. It might prompt the Afghans, or others, to extort by violence bills from any officer who may fall into their hands. I would recommend some compensation to those from whom money was forcibly extracted or who were deceived into paying the bills; but to those who well knew all the conditions, or were in collusion with the chiefs, I would refuse payment. From what I know of payments made at Kabul, I think two lakhs will liberally cover all loss.”

No fairer statement could have been made; and the five officers, deputed to hear and consider all, left that tent with but one opinion as to their own increased admiration for the grave, straight-spoken soldier-political whom Lord Ellenborough did not delight to honour.

Shelton and Lawrence, questioned next day, threw little fresh light on things. Lawrence could only speak of the bills; and Shelton bore grudging witness in Pottinger's favour. Pressed by Clerk, he admitted the opinion of the Council “that the Army should retire on Jalálabad.”

Then said Clerk: "State whether Major Pottinger coincided in that opinion?"

"To the best of my recollection, he did not coincide."

"Then what course did Major Pottinger propose?"

Shelton appeared to consider the matter. "The impression on my mind," said he, "is that Major Pottinger proposed that they should make the attempt to go from cantonments to the Bala Hissar."

"Was that the only alternative?"

But Shelton had had enough of the subject. "I do not remember any other," he answered gruffly—and was plagued no further.

The Court was satisfied; more than satisfied, as the verdict gave proof.

Lumley alone qualified exoneration with criticism. He disapproved the drawing of those extortionate bills as an unauthorized indiscretion; though what he himself would have done in such a crisis he might have found it difficult to say. He heartily approved Pottinger's advice to the Council; but condemned as an error the signing of a treaty "contrary to his own persuasion of what was right."

Not so Sir Harry Smith, who conceived that Major Pottinger—placed as he was in "a position of extreme difficulty and hazard"—had yielded his own strong opinion on grounds quite satisfactory and, "in all the perilous circumstances, justifiable."

To these opinions George Clerk added his own, that was of greater value by reason of his fuller knowledge.

"I consider," he said, "that Major Pottinger omitted *nothing*, so far as lay in his power, to maintain the honour of British arms and to secure the safety of the Army; and that he ultimately signed the treaty, contrary to his own judgment, through finding himself, in his peculiar official

position, under the unavoidable necessity of acting as agent for the Council of War."

Then, speaking for all present, he wound up with a tribute that went far to atone for minor disappointments: "The Court cannot conclude its proceedings without expressing a strong conviction that, throughout the whole period of the painful position in which Major Pottinger was unexpectedly placed, his conduct was marked by a degree of energy and manly firmness that stamps his character as one worthy of high admiration."

And so an end—the best he could have hoped—to doubts and anxieties that had plagued him pertinaciously for the space of a year. In the eyes of the Government he served, Pottinger's character was cleared; his reputation enhanced rather than damaged by things done and suffered in his own despite. A burden, long and stoically carried, was lifted from his heart. Remained only, to complete his satisfaction, the full publication of those proceedings that alone could re-establish him in the eyes of his countrymen at home and abroad. This he could count upon before the end of the month; and upheld by that expectation, he awaited with equanimity the minor affair of justifying his private letter to Macgregor.

During that first week of January, while the privileged and the free were disporting themselves after their kind, Court Martial followed Court Martial with clockwork similarity of proceeding and result. That honour might be satisfied the whole tale of Akbar's prisoners—hostages excepted—must be tried on the formal charge of "abandoning the force in the presence of the enemy, and seeking personal protection in the camp of Akbar Khan." Of that charge every man among them was fully and honourably acquitted: and these formal trials over, there followed the more serious business of inquiry into statements made by

two men of unquestioned veracity against Major-General Shelton—no mild antagonist to confront in such a case.

Pottinger, as chief spokesman on the first day, made out a strong and valid statement, backed by the evidence of several officers and the dead General's Memo, wherein Shelton stood arraigned for contumacy, neglect of orders, and dilatoriness that was the direct cause of more than one failure in the field.

Lawrence, speaking on the second day, was not far behind his friend; but it was already clear to both that no strict inquiry was intended. The Court found nothing that called for a Court Martial. It advised Shelton to leave well alone and make no defence.

But that was not John Shelton's way. Infuriated by the double arraignment—still more so, no doubt, by the unpalatable truths brought home to him—he denounced Pottinger's attack as excessively malicious, and insisted on time to make a reply.

It was given him—to his own undoing. Fresh cross-examination of witnesses revealed an array of facts so awkward that Pottinger and Lawrence, being quite devoid of malice, refused to ask another question, provided the Court found their conduct justifiable.

The Court could do no less. Moreover, it found General Shelton's conduct so questionable that he was placed under arrest. The trial he had practically brought upon his own head would be held on the 20th, at Ludhiana; all officers present to attend.

An unpleasant affair, honestly regretted by Pottinger and Lawrence, in spite of Shelton's violent language towards themselves.

By this time January was ten days old. Courts were surfeited with sitting, soldiers surfeited with reviews, bands, and bunting, with the lust of the eye and the

pride of life. Ever since the 4th, camps far-flung over the plain had been vanishing one after one—swiftly, orderly, as camps vanish in the East. Streets of tents were transformed into strings of camels, that sauntered casually, dustily down the Grand Trunk Road, in the wake of tramping men. Some of these had gone north-westward to Sindh, where Sir Charles Napier was coercing reluctant Amirs; some back to their own cantonments; some toward Delhi and Agra, where lesser festivities were pending. And every day individual parties had slipped away, by palanquin, by horse-*dák*, or by river, from that vast demonstration on the plain.

Nott, still shaken with illness, had gone long since to “embrace his children” and begin political life at the Court of Lucknow. Pollock, less favoured, was on his way to take over command of the Dinapore division. Most of the ex-prisoners were thankfully looking forward to long leave “at Home”; Mackenzie, dreaming of Helen Douglas, whom he had surely won the right to claim at last; all of them dreaming of summer in England; of roses and cropped lawns and church bells and the ordered peace of a world where tents and camels and the dust of India were not.

Partings everywhere; partings between regiments that had fought and endured together for years; between men who for months had slept three in a hill tent. Gone were the victorious armies of Nott and Pollock; and of the “illustrious garrison” there remained only a detachment privileged to escort Lord Ellenborough to Delhi. With him as aide-de-camp went Broadfoot, now Major Broadfoot, C.B., Commissioner, in prospect, of the Tenasserim Provinces on the Burmese coast.

And they, being gone, the Ferozepore Durbar was no more; neither was the Afghan War.

For four years blood and money had been poured out like water, honour sacrificed, and British rule in India endangered as never yet—to what end? Nominally to check Russo-Persian aggression, by establishing British influence in Central Asia, and to set up a “lasting barrier against encroachment” by exchanging a hostile power for a friendly one in Afghanistan.

Actually, the Afghan volcano left Russia unperturbed; while it gave her, free of cost, a valuable object-lesson on the joint evils of a too-forward policy and of war carried on without a base. England, in striking at her rival, had used the wrong weapon, and had succeeded only in harming herself. The “lasting barrier” had been swept away by the Afghans themselves; and there, where friendly feeling was the supreme need, every town and village had been left bristling with enemies. There, where the British name had been held in highest honour, it now spelled injustice, hatred, and revenge. From Kandahar to Kabul, from Kabul to Peshawur, blackened and ruined forts served rather to keep hatred alive than to assert supremacy in arms. In the eyes of Afghanistan and of India, the prestige of that supremacy had been fatally lost. Neither the victories of Nott and Pollock, nor the stout defence of Jalálabad could annul the achievement of Akbar Khan—the destruction and plunder of an army of soldiers hitherto believed invincible.

And to the bitter memories of the past few years Lord Ellenborough had nearly added another. With the return of the troops all Afghan prisoners had been proclaimed free men; a proclamation disfigured by the decree that the Amir and his sons should present themselves to his Lordship at the great Durbar. Happily there arose a popular outcry against such gratuitous humiliation of a much-wronged man: “and the decree issued in thoughtlessness

was revoked in good feeling." Dōst Mahomed, marching north from Ludhiana, called privately on the Governor-General, marching southward to Delhi; and thus the formalities were satisfied without insult heaped on injury.

At parting, the Amir was asked his opinion of the English in India, and his answer implied a reproach as just as it was free from rancour.

"I have been struck," said he, "with the magnitude of your power and your resources; with your ships, your arsenals, and your armies. But I cannot understand why the rulers of so great an Empire should have gone across the Indus to deprive me of my poor and barren country."

Through the many months of his detention, the same absence of rancour had prevailed. But when, in due time, his eyes beheld the blackened face of his poor and barren country, it is scarcely surprising that hatred did, for a time, flare up and prevail; that he sided even with his old enemies the Sikhs when they crossed the Sutlej in a vain attempt to check the advancing tide of British power.

Not until ten years after—when the memory of humiliation had faded and the integrity of his country was at stake—did he achieve at last the friendly alliance that he would fain have contracted in 1837. And later still, when the Great Revolt set all India ablaze, few were more staunch than Dōst Mahomed to the nation that had so unjustly and cavalierly thrust him from his throne.

But these things were still hid in the womb of the future; and in January, 1843, Lord Ellenborough progressed, with all due magnificence, to Agra by way of Delhi—the Sacred Gates lumbering in his train. Zealously, impressively, the voices of guns and drums, the voice of the Governor-General, and the mightier voice of the Press had proclaimed British disaster vindicated, tarnished



honour, regilt. Yet always beneath the gaudy trappings of victory there lurked the still small reminder that regilding, however complete, could not unmake history or change the hearts of men; the still small fear that those who had best forget would remember, and those who had best remember would—too soon—forget the awful price paid in blood and money and prestige for the initial injustice of the first Afghan War.

X

“CAMP :  
“*One march from Ludhiana.*  
“15th January, 1843.

“MY DEAR MOTHER,

I am afraid you will have felt vexed at my not writing; but the reason will, I trust, ensure your pardon. My conduct, subsequent to the death of Sir William Macnaghten, was ordered to be inquired into; and an explanation of a private letter concerning Major-General Shelton was required also. Of course I felt anxious, and I did not wish you to suffer likewise. My time also was fully employed in arranging for these enquiries. At last both are ended, and, I am happy to say, creditably for me. You will see, by the papers, the orders regarding the Political Inquiry; and the facts that were elicited by it will also, I believe, be published.”

That mother, reading her mail letter months afterwards, must have smiled in her heart—not without a glow of pride—to see how little Eldred, the man, was changed in essence from Eldred, the strong chivalrous boy, who, near or far, had given her a son’s devotion, and received in return the fullness of a mother’s love. And to the glow of pride must have been added a throb of glad anticipation as she read on :

“Directly Shelton’s Court Martial may be over, I shall proceed to join the Governor-General for the

purpose of settling some pecuniary matters. I will then come Home as fast as I possibly can, for which purpose I have got a medical certificate. The future must take care of itself. My present ideas are too confused to write upon; but I trust to get home by summer. . . .”

Blessed words—blessed prospect; no less for the mother than the son. But those pecuniary matters proved more complicated, more distracting than he reckoned for; and the hope of getting Home by summer seemed to retreat like a will o’ the wisp as the spring wore on.

The money question concerned arrears of pay and allowances due to the “honoured guests” of Akbar Khan; no small consideration for men who had been nine months without either, and had reached Ferozepore in a state of destitution, not to be relieved without much expenditure of red tape and much consulting of ancient oracles as to the rights of those in so unfortunate a case. The oracle—it would seem—had decreed in 1810 that, as prisoners of war, officers could draw full pay and only half the allowances of their rank.

But not all had been prisoners of war. Nine there were that had been hostages, ordered over on duty; a duty so distasteful, so dangerous, that increased allowances had been promised by Macnaghten and Elphinstone to all who would go. These also applied for money due to them, and learnt that on the subject of hostages the oracle was silent. The matter should be referred to the Court of Directors, and in the meantime the Governor-General graciously extended to the hostages the provision decreed for prisoners of war. They were not quite so grateful as they should have been, and it was on this matter that Pottinger meditated remonstrance.

Meantime, on the appearance of Ellenborough's General Order—quoting the oracle of 1810—the whole subject was hotly taken up by the Press.

The *Agra Akbar* was “quite sure it must have been painful to his Lordship to have found such a precedent existing . . . and that all would be glad to hear reasons for its non-enforcement in this case. . . .” The Editor made bold to point out that a literal interpretation of the old order, as binding in all cases, “was never intended, nor has it been practised, nor should it be now, when its enforcement must involve such cruel consequences to those who deserve far other thing from Government.”

The case of the hostages moved that righteously indignant Editor to expression stronger still. “We were astonished with a great astonishment,” wrote he, in a second leader following close upon the first, “to perceive that officers who had been hostages were to be subjected to the same deprivation as those who were prisoners of war. The cases are so very different that we cannot refrain from briefly, but strongly, remonstrating against such unworthy treatment. . . . Whether the duty in question was undertaken in self-devotion or under express orders, matters nothing; it was equally a duty to their country . . . a duty altogether outside the ordinary routine. . . . Indeed, by the Army generally, as well as by themselves, their post was esteemed that of the chiefest danger and honour. To treat such—in the matter of their claims on the State—as prisoners of war is as absurd as it is unjust. On the showing of the Governor-General himself, there is no analogy between the cases. . . . Precedent is the ground of penalty in the one case, and the want of precedent in the other. . . . This is very comical logic and questionable law. More than this—it is positively against recorded orders.”

Yet logic or no, justice or no, the General Order issued from Camp Futtehpore seemed likely to stand unless the Court of Directors chose to intervene. Pottinger, as senior hostage, fully intended to fight the thing out for himself and his fellows, together with the trifling detail of compensation for loss and of political pay due to himself, Lawrence, and Mackenzie, up to the date when all such posts were abolished by Ellenborough.

Was ever a more complete anti-climax to a great tragedy than this cheese-paring of payments, justly due to men who deserved rather a point to be stretched in their favour than the indignity of fighting for their mere rights?

Even among the favoured garrison of Jalábad there were few who had served their country more nobly, more gallantly, and more zealously than Eldred Pottinger, Colin Mackenzie, and George Lawrence—yet behold their reward! Lord Ellenborough's tacit ignoring of themselves and their services they had accepted without rancour, though not without very human disappointment. But this lesser matter of pay and allowances affected others beside themselves. George Lawrence had a wife and four children in England. Mackenzie was going home to marry. Pottinger made liberal allowances to his mother. His loss had been hers, and he naturally hoped to make it good. But for the moment other matters claimed his attention; and his journal—fitfully kept again since his release—was no vehicle for outpourings of the vexation and terrible depression that shadowed those first few months of liberty regained.

One solitary sentence written on the same day as the letter to his mother suggests rather than reveals perturbation within: "Malcolm returns by the steamer, when my Uncle's destination will be known. If I possibly can, I will change my service——*courage, mon ami*——!"

Of these, the last nine months of Eldred Pottinger's adventurous life, there remains no record save that fitful journal, two short letters to his mother and John, and one to Login from that Vans Agnew, whose murder marked the opening of the second Sikh War.

What he thought, what he hoped and felt, can be gleaned only from a chance phrase here and there. The very fitfulness with which that journal was kept—in spite of repeated resolves, in spite of the sorrowful fact that he had “nothing now to do but observe others”—implies a mind unsettled, ill at ease. As for the matter,—it was always the face of the country that he observed rather than the faces of his fellow-men. Neither fighting, philanthropic zeal, nor the absorbing work of a frontier Political had dimmed the inherent impulse of his heart—“for to admire and for to see, for to behold this world so wide.” That abiding interest in the earth and her peoples, which made him a born explorer, is revealed in every line of his journal. Only a glimpse here and there of the soul's deeper thoughts, only a very occasional gleam of his dry humour;—as on the day after he reached Ludhiana and visited the camp of the Commander-in-Chief.

“Called on the ladies at his Excellency's camp, and was asked to stay for tiffin. I wished myself away, and no doubt *they* wished me at the devil. Returning, walked through a native's cooking-place, which was on the road. Dr. Darby, who was with me, explained to me that I had defiled the fellow's dinner and recommended me to give him two annas. I received the information as if I had never heard of such a thing in my life; and got two long explanatory lectures on the subject!”

Picture the good doctor—probably new to the country—airing his local knowledge for the benefit of one who had lived among natives—as a native—for years; one who

listened with imperturbable gravity, quietly enjoying the joke in his heart.

With him at Ludhiana were Lawrence, Troup, Mackenzie, Anderson, and Airey, as principal witnesses against Shelton on the 20th; an unpleasant duty, much as they disliked the man. In their opinion the charges were grave enough, the evidence sufficient to make the chance of acquittal slender indeed. Those premature unauthorized orders to prepare for retreat: the disrespectful language and open contempt of his Chief, his final obstinacy and the secret correspondence with Akbar on account of forage, went to make up no very creditable tale of his conduct as second-in-command.

But Shelton, with his back against the wall, was not the man to stick at trifling inaccuracies. He denied that the said orders were either premature or unauthorized; denied the use of unbecoming language, and roundly abused the men who bore witness against him. There remained the trifling discrepancies that no written orders for retreat had been seen by anyone; that Shelton himself could neither remember their substance nor name the officer who brought them. For all that, he still asserted their existence; and the Court—in a fit of generosity—gave him the benefit of the doubt.

In fine, by some mysterious privilege of rank, some miracle of leniency or loyal reticence of his juniors, John Shelton was acquitted of all except the correspondence with Akbar, a matter that could be dismissed with a reprimand. His fatal opposition to the Bala Hissar move and his obstinate insistence on retreat appeared to count for nothing. The Court greatly regretted the terms he had used in alluding to those who bore witness against him; and finally expressed their opinion that, in circumstances of an unusual, difficult and distressing nature,

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Major-General Shelton had shown "considerable exertion," personal gallantry "of the highest kind," and "noble devotion as a soldier."

Remained only the anomaly that while Pottinger and Lawrence were privately justified of their letters, the man they arraigned was publicly exonerated of blame.

And so an end of Courts Martial, whereof their souls must have been weary. The Ludhiana camp broke up. Its units went their several ways. Shelton's took him to England, where he again commanded the 44th for the two remaining years of his life. Lawrence and Mackenzie went on to Agra to fight out the vexed question of compensation and allowances. But Eldred Pottinger did not choose to thrust himself and his affairs on a prejudiced Governor-General until the proceedings of the Political Inquiry had been published, and his character cleared in the eyes of all.

His restless spirit and love of the mountains drew him to Simla, one of the few hill stations then existing; Simla, the far-famed and as yet unseen. After the dust and turmoil of crowded camps; after the worry and friction and disappointment that had marred his return to India, the Road drew him like a magnet; spoke to his sore heart with the voice of an old and intimate friend. He journeyed alone; sleeping now at a *dúk* bungalow, now at a *kotwali*; now coming up with a moving regiment, or another lonely traveller; accepting their hospitality, and next day passing on, always on, till the first low crumplings of the hills showed blue through the dusty haze, and his heart went out to them in wordless greeting.

Here, among the foot-hills, he fell in with a Captain Johnston—not him of the Commissariat—and the two climbed up to "look at the new station of Kesowly" before passing on to the greater heights. Pottinger's

spirits rose with the rising pathway. Here was the grandeur without the savagery of Afghan mountain scenery.

"The great forest of Scotch firs," he wrote, "was the pleasantest sight I have seen for many a year. The view from the summit is beautiful; the unbounded plains on the south, and the sea of mountains with the snowy range in the far north. I cannot delineate my feelings; but I could sit for hours looking at such a scene."

Simla—with its social and official atmosphere—proved far less to his taste. Even in February the advance guard of summer's battalions had appeared on the scene. Pottinger was made hospitably welcome by "Boileau of the Engineers," and even constrained to accept an invitation to dine with Mrs. Erskine, sister of Lady Macnaghten, who had come straight to Simla from Peshawur. "I had no wish," wrote that incurable hermit, "but I was obliged to bow to my fate . . . and I was dying of sleep all the evening."

"Simla is a nice place enough," was his final verdict, "but it savours so of speculation that I soon got sick of it, and went out to Fagoo, intending to gain the top of Narkunda Pass. But I found the snow would delay me so much that I returned from Fagoo with my head full of a life of retirement in the woods and other things—that are not for me. . . ."

What "other things" one fain would know. But these glimpses are fragmentary all. They suggest the temper of a man of action linked anomalously with the spirit of the dreamer, and seem to indicate that he would more surely and congenially have achieved success along other paths than that in which Fate had set his feet, had time for achievement been granted him—which it was not.

Uplifted and refreshed in spirit, he turned his back on

the healing solitudes of mountain and forest only to be tripped up straightway by fresh vexation, fresh disappointment of a reasonable hope.

In the first newspaper that came to hand he found the announcement that would enable him to present himself at Agra: but, in place of the report he had every right to expect, there appeared a brief paragraph quoting the Court's "high admiration" of his conduct and character. That mere statement, however gratifying, was no proof of exoneration from blame. To the man who craved publication of the truth, it was as if he had asked for bread and been given a stone.

A "leader" on the subject, in the same paper, proved how well he was justified of his desire. "When a solemn Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of Major Pottinger," he read, "was publicly ordered by Lord Ellenborough, when the large powers entrusted to it . . . were seen . . . it was naturally supposed that the results would be published to an extent that might show that whatever doubt had existed—not in the mind of the public, but of the Governor-General—was at last cleared away: or to what degree it was established. . . . If his Lordship desired a secret inquiry and confidential report, it was ill-judged to have published, in his Order, what were the subjects of doubt. Placing these before the public, the inference was that it would be as fully informed of the actual results as it had been of the assumed necessity for this national inquiry. We have therefore been disappointed, inasmuch as instead of the whole report of the Inquiry we are only favoured with the Court's concluding paragraph. . . . This is complimentary to the individual, and, we have not the slightest doubt, well deserved; but it does not answer the questions for the solution of which the Court was alone assembled."

True enough: yet to question the fiat of Supreme Authority would be merely to knock his head against a stone wall. Justice, full and complete, was not to be his portion: and, schooled though he was to stoical endurance, that realization did not breed cheerful thoughts to bear him company on his long ride down and down from the lofty solitudes he loved to the dusty, featureless plains of the Punjab.

Two days he halted at Sabathu, and thence wrote of his disappointment to her who would share it in full. The restraint of that letter, the notable absence of resentment, even of complaint, bespeak, more eloquently than any eulogy, the man's native loftiness of spirit and of outlook—a quality rarer than talent, courage, or strength."

"The result of the Inquiry on me" (he wrote), "has been partially published, and is as favourable as even you could wish. I expected that the whole would be published, but the Governor-General has not chosen *even* to give the full verdict; and I must perforce rest contented. I, at present, intend to go immediately to his camp and at an interview—if he grant me one—state my services and ask for my pay while I was a hostage. I scarcely expect to get it; but consider it proper to ask before I appeal to the Home Authorities.

"I am much disappointed that my Uncle Henry has not been made a Peer. The Chinese Treaty is one of the best England has ever made. I doubt if any country ever terminated a war so honourably, so happily, and so moderately. . . . As soon as I can I will proceed to Calcutta, and I hope I shall see you by August."

But there was much of friction and more of disappointment to win through at Agra before Calcutta would be

reached. Here Lord Ellenborough had established himself in the Fort Palace, and here the Procession of the Gates had come to a dead stop. Against so strong a counter-current of public feeling even Lord Ellenborough could not persist in his original programme. The Gates, that were to have been solemnly escorted to Rajputana and restored to the new Temple of Somnath, were lodged instead, with other battle trophies, in the Dewan-i-am at Agra, where they remain unto this day.

At Agra, Pottinger found Lawrence and Mackenzie still wrestling with red tape; the latter in a very rebellious and belligerent frame of mind.

“First,” said he, “we are refused political pay because our appointments ceased when we went over. Second, we are refused military compensation because we were holding political appointments. Third, we are told that no officers given over to Akbar, after leaving Kabul, can be recognized as military hostages. A pretty tangle! All I can say is that if we were not obeying orders when we went over then we should have been tried by Court Martial. If we were not hostages, then we were deserters and traitors, and we deserve to be *shot!*”

Sound reasoning of its kind; and though Pottinger might smile at Mackenzie's vehemence, he was none the less determined to do what he could. To that end he called at Government House, and requested the honour of an interview, stating his business.

The request was refused. Whatever he had to say must be put on paper:—and it was so.

In the course of his statement he took occasion to point out that the duty of hostage was considered a peculiarly dangerous one: that officers were chosen with difficulty from among those who had voluntarily come to the country. “I feel convinced,” he added, “that few others

in the force would have remained ; and that none who did remain would willingly have done so had they fancied that their allowances would be reduced."

As all the hostages, save Drummond and Airey, had been serving under him, Pottinger felt bound to lay the whole case before his Lordship-in-Council, in the hope that he might be induced to reconsider his decision.

But his Lordship-in-Council would do nothing of the kind. His secretary duly informed Major Pottinger that the case had been referred to the Court of Directors ; that his Lordship could sanction no political pay after the day they went over to Akbar, nor any compensation for loss. Major Pottinger was considered to be at the disposal of the Bombay Government from the day he left Ludhiana.

Further remonstrance being obviously futile and undignified, Pottinger said no more ; and was bidden soon after to the public installation of Nott and Pollock as Knights of the Grand Cross of the Bath.

At sunrise, in the Fort Palace of Agra, the brother-Generals—who had little in common save courage, honesty, and mutual distaste for publicity—were honoured with an imposing ceremony, in which flags and guns and speeches played their inevitable part.

"Lord Ellenborough," wrote Pottinger afterwards, "made a fluent speech, praising them and himself, and abusing the late Government. Nott made a speech in reply, but so low as to be scarcely audible. . . . He also gave Lord Auckland's Government a rub, but more justly than the Governor-General had done."

Pollock lived long enough to reap the tardy award of a baronetcy ; but to Nott little time remained for enjoyment of his new sphere of action. Those four years of strenuous work in the background at Kandahar had broken his health past mending. In June he married

again. In November he went Home—to die; and, at the Court of Oudh, Pollock reigned in his stead.

Though scarcely a great General, Nott was of the stuff whereof they are made; and there was unquestionably a strain of nobility in the man. With the exception of Broadfoot—whose successful use of his opportunities was abnormal—none brought back from Afghanistan a reputation more enhanced than did the hero of Kandahar. For one short year he lived at peace, in his own land among his own people; and died on the 1st of January, 1845.

That year saw the passing of many besides Nott and Shelton. For in December, 1845, the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej, near the spot where the victorious armies had crossed in '43; and battle followed battle in fierce succession. At Mudki fell Sir Robert Sale and Sir John MacCaskill. Three days after, in the critical fight at Ferozshah, there fell George Broadfoot, as noble and heroic a soldier as ever drew sword; and more than that, a man equally great in character and intellect, in council and in action; one surely destined to rise high had he lived, and already reckoned by many the foremost man of his time.

But in April, 1843, the likelihood of Sikh invasion was no more than a cloud on the stormy political horizon, and men looked for the next explosion from Sindh.

Of Eldred Pottinger's doings and whereabouts that month, there remains no record beyond a brief mention in that letter from Vans Agnew to John Login at Lucknow: "Troup I have had a long talk with and like much; and I saw Pottinger once, though it never entered my head that the little man with the immense moustaches was the hero of Herat. All those that know him

tell one story—their admiration is unqualified. I am sorry to see that the G.G. will not listen to him. However, as he intended, in that case, to go home and *publish everything*, the world will be the gainer. The G.G. seems a great brute when he pleases. Pottinger and Outram are instances in point. . . .”

May brought him news bad and good:—the death of Troup at Aligarh, and the announcement that Sir Henry Pottinger had been fittingly appointed as the first British Governor of Hong Kong, the port he had won for England.

This last gave a fresh turn to Eldred's plans—and sealed his destiny. Eager always to explore a new country, and anxious for a sight of the Uncle he had not seen since that parting at Bhuj, he decided to go Home by way of China. His health had given out again, but the voyage would mend it; and the end of June found him at Calcutta, his passage taken in the *Prince Regent*, his departure fixed for the 1st of July.

Of all his friends, Colin Mackenzie alone was with him to the last. Colin it was who got him “a ten-oared boat, such as Pilots take with them,” and drove him to the landing-place, whence they must row down the Hoogli to Diamond Harbour, where the sailing-vessel lay at anchor. There the two, who had been drawn together by a mutual admiration that deepened with deeper knowledge, took leave of each other after the manner of their race.

A vigorous hand-clasp; a muttered “God speed you”; a promise to write often:—then Colin Mackenzie drove off into the dusty twilight, and Eldred Pottinger sat him down in the stern of his ten-oared boat.

Next day he stood on the deck of the *Prince Regent* watching the coast-line of India grow dim and dimmer, blue and bluer, till it melted into sea and sky—and was gone—



## THE LAST

HONG KONG in August, 1843:—a rough-cut island of granitic rock, barren, almost treeless; its sole crown of glory one of the finest harbours in the world; its main town, Victoria, an embryo, merely, of the imposing city of terraces that overlooks that harbour to-day:—an embryo likely to grow apace under the rule of a Governor as able as he was untiring in his devotion to duty.

Here Eldred Pottinger, the incurable wanderer, brought his wanderings to an end. Here, in the new Government House, he sat at ease, on the 23rd of August, announcing his safe arrival to John in Bombay:

“I wrote to you from Calcutta of my intention to come here. I had a very disagreeable voyage, but arrived all well. I found my Uncle looking far better than when I saw him last. He has asked me to apologize for not answering your last letter, and to explain that I have seen him too much engaged with public correspondence to have leisure for private letters unless urgent. He is generally at work before sunrise; and, except while dressing, he continues till it is too dark to see in his office. He sleeps very little, and I quite wonder how he keeps his health. He has asked me to stay as Consul at Canton till he can procure an officer fitted for that purpose. I was rather reluctant, but have consented. My leg is still annoying me a great deal, and I am afraid it will give me much more trouble than I calculated on.

“This place is very sickly at present. A sort of typhus

fever is laying hold of the people and doing much to thin our numbers. . . . I do not much admire the position. The harbour, however, is most beautiful, and said to be perfectly safe. It will be totally impossible to fortify a town built here—*i.e.*, without fearful expenditure; so it must depend mainly on the navy for protection. . . . My uncle thinks he will go Home at the end of the year, in which case I think I will accompany him.”

But the perverse Fate that, for seven years, had frustrated his every plan, pursued him even unto this last.

From the roof of that uncle, who loved him as a son, he had first set out upon his great adventure, in the fullness of youth and strength, ardour and hope; all Asia before him; no boundary to the long road he would travel, but the Great Wall of China, which he had dreamed of confronting before India claimed him again.

And behold it was Afghanistan that had claimed him. It was the walls of Herat, not the Wall of China, that had pronounced the unwelcome fiat—thus far, no farther.

Yet now, seven years after, wounded and travel-weary—hope quenched and ardour mellowed in the hard school of adversity—he had come to the goal of his dreams by ways unchosen and undreamed of, as are all the ways of life. And here, under the roof of that devoted uncle, the unwelcome fiat checked him again.

Ill already when he landed at Hong Kong, he fell too soon a victim to the fever that was reaping a terrible harvest there; and, at the very time when he had looked to start on his homeward journey, he was called upon instead to face that other Great Adventure, beside which the rest were as nothing.

That he met it with faith and fortitude unshaken, every incident of his short life gives proof. But there remains no record of the event beyond the bald official notification

brought to Calcutta, in December, by the ship that was called *Spiteful*—apt name for a vessel that brought such news.

Barely two-and-thirty, he had crowded into his seven years of Afghan service more than the events of an average lifetime. He had won from all who knew him “unqualified admiration,” coupled with the expectancy of greater things to come. He had passed unscathed—but for one severe wound—through perils of hardship and exposure, through perils of sickness, and through perils of the sword, to die of fever when all was over, just two years after his miraculous escape from Charikar. Unspoilt by success, unshaken by discouragement, Eldred Pottinger died, as he had lived, devoted to his friends, his country, and his high ideal of duty.

If those last months of his life were saddened by Government injustice and neglect, he left behind him no word of bitterness or complaint. Yet—could he have reached Home and realized how sincerely his character was respected by his countrymen, could he have known that whenever the tale of the Kabul tragedy was told his name would be honoured in remembrance, he would, no doubt, have died a happier man. For, in defiance of all the copy-books, virtue is *not* its own reward. That he did reap, in his few and brave years of life, a reward more satisfying, the beautiful memorial in Bombay Cathedral bears lasting witness: and from the Great Presidency he served, he could have asked no higher compliment than the life-pension granted, in recognition of his services, to her he had called “Mother” and loved as such.

Vain to speculate what he might have achieved “in the fullness of the years.” He lived long enough to prove the quality of his character—and to die of it; an event less unusual than it sounds.

Though typhus was the agent, his own innate unselfishness was the cause of that untimely death. The desire of his heart was towards Home: but his Uncle had need of him, and it sufficed.

Wounded and in low health, his chance of escape was small. The fever claimed him—and there an end; or should we not rather say a passing on to some larger furtherance and pursuing in a world of wider horizons where “law, life, joy, impulse are one thing?”

*August 12th, 1913.*

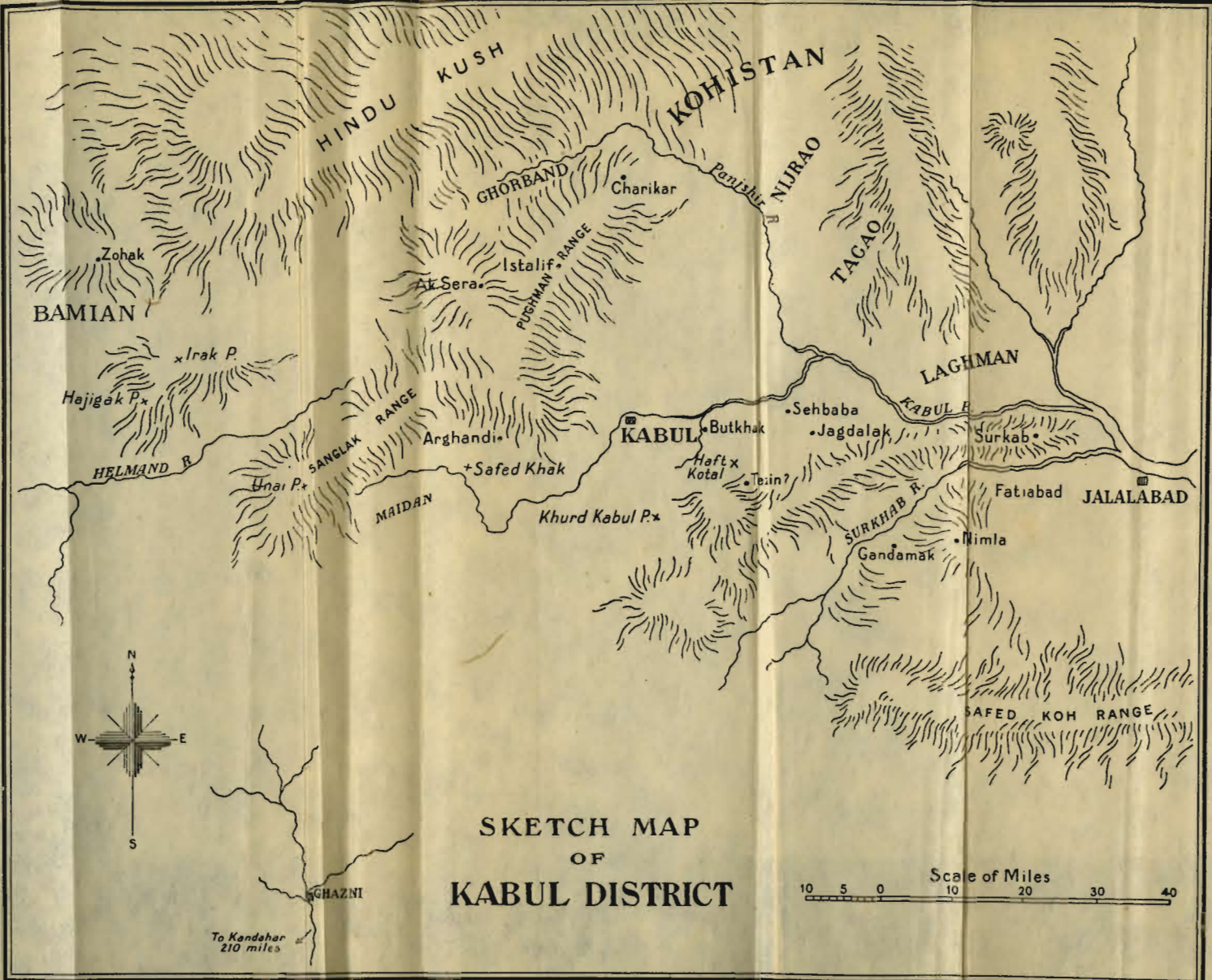
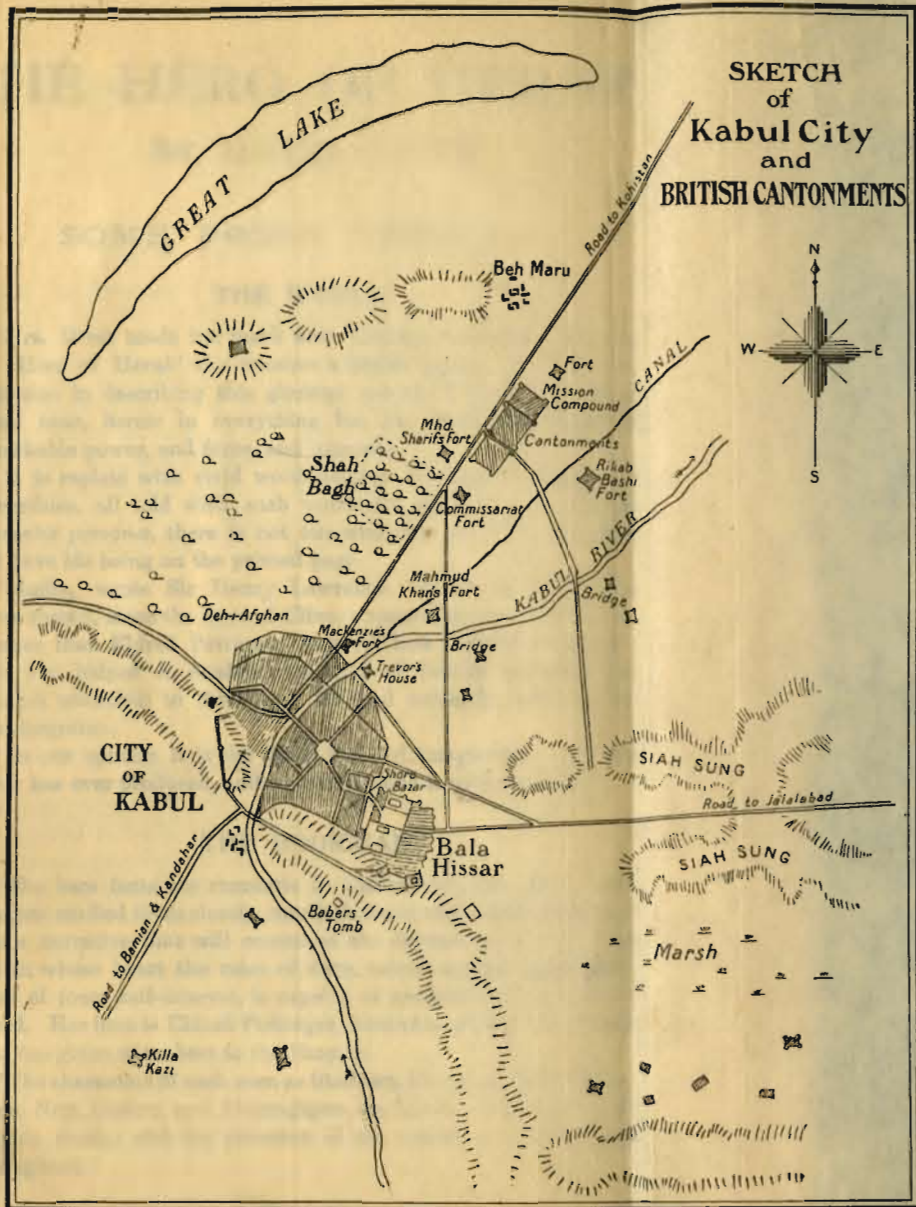
THE END



"India, fertile in heroes, has shown, since the days of Clive, no man of greater and earlier promise than **ELDRON POTTINGER**. Yet, hero as he was, you might have sat for weeks beside him at table and not have discovered that he had seen a shot fired. . . . Soldierly and straightforward, he gave his opinion decisively at the last Military Council . . . that it was destruction to retreat. But when the fiat was passed . . . he signed the doomed treaty, *knowing he would be held* responsible for what had been the work of others. . . . At Bamian his genius appeared to rise. . . . He seems to have been unanimously elected leader and to have effected what thousands of troops could not have done."

SIR HENRY LAWRENCE, K.C.B





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BY MAUD DIVER

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