ATHLESTANE FORD

ALLEN UPWARD

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Athelstane Ford

BY

ALLEN UPWARD

AUTHOR OF “THE PRINCE OF BALKISTAN,” “A CROWN OF STRAW,”
“SECRETS OF THE COURTS OF EUROPE,” ETC

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ATHELSTANE FORD

CHAPTER I

COUSIN RUPERT GAINS A RECRUIT

It has not happened to many men, as I think, to have fallen into the hands of as cruel and bloodthirsty a monster as ever defiled God's earth, and to have escaped to tell the tale. Yet it is of this that I have come to write; and of all the hardships and perils which I went through from the time I fled from my father's house to seek for treasure in the East Indies; and of the battles in which I fought; and of the madness of love and jealousy which I knew; and of how the man I trusted became my enemy, and pursued me with his vengeance; and of the treasure which I found in the palace of the Hindoo king; and of how I returned at last to my own home.

Nor do I greatly expect that the hearing of these things will be effectual to hinder those who come after me from adventuring in their turn, for young blood will have its way, like sap in the veins of a growing tree. But there are times when I think that if I could have looked forward and seen what was to come, and all the dire straits through which I was to pass—both among my own countrymen and in those distant lands—I might have given a different welcome to my cousin Rupert when he came riding into Brandon, on the evening of that day which was to be the last of my boyhood.

I had come out of the house before supper was laid, as I often used, and had made my way along the edge of the dyke which runs through our meadows into the broad, which we call Breydon Water; and there by the margin of the broad I stood, while the sun was setting behind me, and watched the light flush and fade over the grey spire and high red roofs of Yarmouth town. Many a night I had come there to the same spot and gazed with wistful eyes at that prospect; for though I was, in a manner, familiar with the old town, and had gone in there on market days many a time since I was a boy, yet, at this hour, and seen across the water in the bright blaze of the sunset, it seemed to be strangely removed and glorified—like that city which Christian had a prospect of from the Delectable Mountains—and I could never think of it as other than an enchanted region, the gate of the great world, where the hours throbbed with action, and life was more full and splendid than in our lonely grange among the broads; and my heart was

fretted within me, and day by day the longing grew upon me to break out of the narrow limits in which my life was bound, and take my way thither into the glamour and the mystery of the world.

Then all at once, as I stood there and gazed, I was aware of the sound of a horse's hoofs coming over the wet grass, and turned and saw my cousin riding towards me on his black mare and waving his whip to me as he came.

I had a great affection for my cousin in those days, mingled with a sort of dreadful admiration for the character he bore. He was my elder by nearly ten years, and had been, in my eyes, a man ever since I was a child, so that I looked up to him with reverence, and thought nothing so delightful as to have him come down, bringing the air and rumour of the outside world into our quiet homestead. Indeed, he seemed to be of a superior order to us, and might almost be reckoned as one of the gentry, for his father came of the Gurneys of Lynn, and had set up a great brewery of ale there, by which he enriched himself past all counting. How such a man had come to marry my aunt I never knew, for my father kept silence on the subject, and Rupert himself could tell me nothing of his mother, who had died when he was but an infant. Nor was there much intercourse between our families, except that twice a year, at Lady-day and Christmas, Mr. Gurney would send us a barrel of his best brewing; and once a year, on the 1st of January—for he would give no countenance to the feasts of the Church—my father despatched a pair of fine turkeys to Lynn.

Cousin Rupert always showed a friendship for us, and I believe would have given us his company more often but for my father's disapproval of his manner of life; for he was already known as a wild companion, and one who set little store by religion and respectability. There was even a scandalous report that he had been fined by the Aldermen of Yarmouth under the new statute made against profane swearing. They had fixed his fine, so it was said, at two shillings, being the penalty for common persons above the degree of a day labourer; but my cousin Rupert, taking out his purse with a great air, demanded to have his oath assessed like a gentleman's, and paid down a silver crown upon the table.

Since then he had been away beyond seas, nor had I set eyes on him for the best part of three years. It was thought that he had been taking some part in the wars which then raged all over Europe; and difficult enough it was to understand what they were all about, and whom we were fighting; for at one time we were on the side of the great Empress Maria Theresa, and against the young King of Prussia, who was dubbed an infidel; and then later on we were fighting against the

Empress—it is true she was a Papist—and King Frederic was in all men's mouths as the Protestant hero: I remember myself seeing his portrait painted up on the sign-board of the inn at Blundell. However, we were always against the French, whatever happened.

But, as it turned out, all this had no concern with my cousin. I cannot tell how glad I was to see him back again, and I think he was not ill-pleased at seeing me.

"Hallo, is that young Athelstane!" he called out as soon as he was near enough. "Come on with me, cousin, and help me to put up my horse. I have ridden out from Yarmouth, and I mean to sleep here to-night."

He sounded his words in the mincing, London fashion, which was then beginning to spread among the better class in Norfolk; but I cannot imitate his speech, and so write it down as if it were plain English.

Quick as my feet could carry me I ran forward in front of the horse, and was there with the gate of the yard open before my cousin came up.

My father turned out of doors at the clatter, and looked not over pleased when he caught sight of Rupert's dark face. However, he was a man who would never shut the door against his own blood, and he gave him some sort of a friendly greeting.

"Well, Nephew Rupert, how long have you been back in England?" he asked him, as soon as the horse had been taken in and given its feed.

"It is scarce a month since I landed," my cousin answered; "but being in Yarmouth, and you so near, I could not forbear riding over to spend a night with you."

By this time we were come into the house, and my mother was in the hall to welcome him, which she did with great kindness; for though he was not of her kin, I believe she loved him better than my father did. But that is saying little, for who was there about her that she did not love? Even those who held aloof from my father as a stubborn Independent had a kindness for my mother, who seemed to understand nought of differences in religion, except between Christian and heathen.

My father was of a different stamp. It was his boast that he was related to the family of the famous John Bradshaw, the judge who pronounced sentence on King Charles I, and whose house stands on Yarmouth quay to this day. My father

has many a time pointed it out to me, and told me of the secret conclave held there of the Independent leaders, when it was resolved to bring the unfortunate king to the block. I have often thought that it was well for us that my father was a freeholder, owning the fee simple of Brandon Farm; for the gentry around were now all become staunch Churchmen, though loyal to King George II, and showing no favour to the young Pretender in his late desperate rebellion. Of that, however, I remember little, being scarce twelve years old when it occurred.

With the Rector of Brandon parish we held scant intercourse, except at tithing time, when my father always received him with grim civility and bade him take what the law gave him, since title from the Gospel he had none. Our only friend in the neighbourhood was one Abner Thurstan, a farmer who lived over the border in Blundell parish; but as he was an Anabaptist—or Baptist as they were then beginning to call themselves—and my father had a great contempt and dislike for the visionary ideas of that sect, even he came but seldom to our house. His daughter Patience was a great favourite with my mother; and for that matter I did not dislike the child, and would oftentimes pluck her an apple from our trees or cut a whistle for her out of a twig of elder wood.

The man whom my father most held in esteem was Mr. Peter Walpole, a wool factor of Norwich, and a very religious man. He had a great gift in the expounding of Scripture and in prayer, and it was his custom once in every month to ride over to our house from Norwich of a Saturday and hold a service on the next day for such as chose to come. This was before the Methodists had arisen in our parts, and there was no other means of hearing the Gospel in country places, the Church clergy being for the most part men of the world.

Lest I seem to be wandering from my story, let me say here that my father had been in treaty with this Mr. Peter Walpole concerning my apprenticeship to him in Norwich. After moping a long time at the dullness of my life in Brandon I had plucked up courage to tell my father that I would fain be abroad. He heard me less unkindly than I had feared, and contrived this plan for settling me away from home for a few years, after which, he was pleased to say, I might have sense enough to wish to come back. Good Mr. Walpole came into the scheme very readily, and I believe it was only a matter of fifty pounds between them before the thing could be carried out; but each held firmly to his own view of the bargain, and though there was the same friendship between them as ever, and Mr. Walpole prayed over the business in our house, they could by no means come to terms.

Things stood at this pass, and I was sorely impatient with it all, when, as I have said, my cousin Rupert arrived, and, for good or evil, gave my life a far different turn.

As soon as my father had seen to it that the cloth was laid for four, and sent down the maid with orders to fill a jug from the barrel on the right-hand side of the cellar door, he turned to Rupert.

“You shall taste your father’s brewing,” he said. “I trust all is well with him?”

“I have no doubt it is, and I am much obliged to you, sir,” answered he carelessly. “To tell you the truth, I have not yet found my way to Lynn.”

“What, nephew! Have you come here before paying your respects to your own father?”

“I am afraid it is even so; and I will not pay you so poor a compliment as to remark that Brandon Grange lies forty miles nearer to Yarmouth than King’s Lynn.”

“Fie, young man, I am ashamed to hear you! I doubt whether I ought to have let you cross my threshold if I had known of this. Jessica,” he added, turning to my mother, “here is a youth who comes to pay you a visit before he has so much as set eyes on Lynn brewery, after three years!”

And thrice during the evening he returned to the same subject, each time rating master Rupert soundly for his filial neglect, and pointing out the many advantages which his father’s rich house at Lynn had over what it pleased him to call the homely grange of Brandon.

He questioned Rupert while we supped concerning his adventures, and what quarter of the world he had been in. But as to this my cousin maintained a singular reserve, merely stating that he had spent most of the time on a voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to the factories of the great East India Company, of Leadenhall Street in the City of London.

All this time I listened, saying nothing, for it was not my father’s custom to permit me to speak in his presence, unless I was first questioned. I cared for this the less because I knew that as soon as we were upstairs together my cousin would unburden himself to me freely. And already I scented some mystery under his guarded speech, which made me impatient for the time when we should be alone. I listened with an ill grace to the chapter which my father read to the

household after supper, and it seemed to me that he had never prayed at such length and to so little purpose. I thought it especially needless that he should petition, for the space of full five minutes, for the fruitfulness of our flocks, for by this time the ewes had all dropped their lambs, and not one of them was a weakling.

Nevertheless it was over at last, and I quickly lighted the candle and conducted my cousin upstairs. He was always my bedfellow on the occasions of his visits to Brandon, and never spared to keep me awake as long as it pleased him to talk to me.

As soon as we were snugly settled in bed, Rupert, as I had expected, laid aside his reserve.

“Now, Cousin Athelstane, what do you suppose it is that has brought me here?”

I could only shake my head in sign of pure ignorance.

“I will tell you. I have come here to offer you a berth on board my ship, the *Fair Maid*, now lying in Yarmouth river.”

My breath was fairly taken away by this announcement. All the dreams I had cherished for so long seemed suddenly to have put on substance, and what was yesterday a thousand miles away had come at one word within my reach. Yet I could only stammer out—

“The *Fair Maid*? Is that the ship in which you went to the East Indies? And is she bound thither again?”

Rupert nodded his head.

“She sails as soon as ever she can be fitted out, and we are shipping the bravest fellows in all Norfolk for our crew. A word in your ear, cousin: we sail with letters of marque against the Frenchmen, and it will go hard if you or I come back with less than a thousand pounds to our share.”

“What! Is the *Fair Maid* a privateer?”

I spoke in some dismay, for in those days privateers bore a bad name. They were commissioned only to prey upon the commerce of such countries as we were at war with, but it was currently believed that they did not always look too closely at the flag of a vessel which fell in their way, and that if peace was proclaimed

while they were abroad on a cruise they took care not to hear of it till such time as suited their convenience. Among good men, therefore, they were esteemed little better than pirates, and I could understand why my cousin had been so chary in speaking about his voyage to my father.

“You needn’t look so scared, youngster,” he said, noting my behaviour. “Our commission was signed by his Majesty King George himself; and even the Frenchmen we took had nothing to complain of beyond the loss of their property, and occasionally their lives when we found that necessary to our own safety.”

I felt my flesh creep, and yet the fascination of it was stronger than the dread.

“You mean you killed them?” I asked, gazing into his face as if I had never seen it before.

“We had to, sometimes, lest they should tell tales against us. Off Mauritius we were chased more than once by a sloop of war, and it would have gone hard with us if we had been captured. The French there have got a devil of a governor, La Bourdonnais, and he has vessels perpetually prowling up and down in those seas, and as far as Pondicherry and Chandernagore. But what do you say, cousin? Are you man enough to join us? You have the right stuff in you, I warrant—all the Fords have. Our great-grandfather fought at Naseby, and though he was a scurvy Roundhead, I’ll swear he gave a good account of himself.”

I hesitated, my whole heart on fire to accept, and yet held back by a subtle distrust for which I could in no way account.

“Come, boy, you have only to slip away to-morrow night, after I have gone, and join me privately in Yarmouth, at the sign of the ‘Three-decker.’ I will tell my worthy uncle in the morning that I am on my way to East Dereham and Lynn, so it will be long enough before they suspect where you are gone. And by the time the hue and cry reaches Yarmouth you shall be safely stowed in the hold of the *Fair Maid*, or maybe in a snug attic of the tavern, where only a bird could find you out.”

I made little more ado, but gave my consent, whereupon my cousin, reaching down to the pocket of his breeches which he had cast on the foot of the bed, drew out a golden guinea, which he pressed into my hand.

“Here is handsel for your engagement,” he said. And that settled, he turned over and betook himself to sleep, leaving me to get out of bed and extinguish the

light.

But I could not sleep so easily, and lay there tossing and turning far into the night, while I speculated on the new life that lay before me and all the great deeds I would do.

CHAPTER II

THE TAVERN OF THE "THREE-DECKER"

Early in the morning after breakfast Cousin Rupert left us, giving out, as he had promised, that he was on the way to see his father at Lynn. And as he told me afterwards, he kept his horse on that road till he had passed through the village, when he turned, and skirting the river as far as Raynham ferry, crossed it there, and so rode into Yarmouth.

All that day I went about with a strange lightness in my breast, so that I could scarce keep from laughing out. And when my father admonished me, pretty roughly, for not having mended the fence of the fowl walk to his liking, I minded it no more than if it had been old Sugden the rat-catcher. Once or twice during the dinner I caught my mother looking at me with a certain apprehension, as if she observed somewhat unusual in my behaviour. I fancy she thought I might be sickening for the ague, which was very rife in those parts. My mother was a great physician, and always kept ready a store of the Jesuits' bark—the only good thing, my father was accustomed to say, that had ever come out of Rome.

In the afternoon I walked into Blundell to bid a sort of farewell to little Patience Thurstan. I found her set on a stool in the porch, threading beads, for she was but a child; and to see her jump up when I drew nigh, and run to meet me, was a pleasant sight to carry away in my memory through the stormy days which were to follow.

Knowing her to be faithful, from her behaviour in many a childish confidence we had had together, I made no scruple to tell her I was leaving Brandon; though I forbore to say whither I was bound, lest they should torment the girl with questions afterwards. And I knew that Patience would not tell a lie, and deny the knowledge if she possessed it. But I half repented what I had done when the poor little thing fell a-crying, and besought me not to go away. I had nothing else to bestow upon her, so I was forced to give her my cousin Rupert's guinea for a keepsake, telling her to buy a doll or a ribbon with it next time she went into Norwich fair.

With that I came away, beginning for the first time to feel how serious was the

step I contemplated. But I had given my word, and I could not now draw back even if I had felt inclined.

The chapter my father read to us that night, I remember well, was out of the book of Ezekiel, in which the prophet dealt with the city of Tyrus, and denounced the judgments of the Lord on her pride and luxury, on her ships of fir and cedar with sails of purple embroidery, on her mariners and men of war, on her merchandise of silver and brass, of horses and mules, of ebony and precious stones, and of honey and oil and wine and spices and white wool. And the words sounded in my ear like a denunciation of the places I had chosen to go among; and I was glad when it was all over; and I went upstairs to my bedroom, hearing my father shoot the great bolts of the house door for the last time.

I made shift to take off my coat and shoes, and got into the bed, lest my mother should come in to bid me good-night, as she sometimes did. And well it was that I had thought of this, for in her anxiety about me she followed me up soon after with a dose of the Jesuits' bark, which she compelled me to swallow, though sorely against my will. Then she sat down by the bedside for the space of, I daresay, fifteen minutes, or longer as it seemed to me then, and fell to stroking my hair, which I wore without a queue, my father setting his face against that French fashion.

I fidgetted so much that at length my mother perceived that I would be alone. I heard her draw a sigh as she rose to go away, and then, tucking the bedclothes round me with great care, she gave me a kiss and left me.

I waited as long as I could contain my impatience, for my parents to fall asleep. Then I arose softly, without rekindling the light, which my mother had blown out, completed my dress, and filled a small knapsack with such few things as I had immediate need for. I remembered also to put in my pocket a bright guinea which good Mr. Walpole had presented me with in my twelfth year as a reward for having repeated the 119th Psalm, and which my father had strictly forbidden me to spend.

Thus provided, I opened the door of my bedroom and crept out, carrying my shoes in my hand. I crossed the landing, treading like a thief, to the door of the room where my parents slept, and laid my lips against the panel that was nearest to my mother's side. And with that I found my eyes were smarting, and a lump rose in my throat, so that I turned away hastily, and made the best of my way down the stairs, and by unbarring the kitchen door, out into the open air. Then I

turned my back on the house where I was born, and set out to walk through the night to Yarmouth.

Lest my father should surmise where I was, I had got ready a feigned letter in which I pretended—I am ashamed to say so—that seeing no likelihood of Mr. Walpole's receiving me without that extra fifty pounds which stuck so in my father's gizzard, I had taken the resolution of going up to London to seek my fortune; and I promised to send him news as soon as I should arrive there; which promise, as it turned out, I had no opportunity of keeping or breaking, for I did not set foot in that great city until years had passed, and I had gone through the wonderful adventures which were to make a man of me, and had come thither as the messenger of the second greatest Englishman, as I think, who has lived in my time; aye, and had speech of him who was the greatest of all. But of this hereafter.

The clammy air of the marshes clung about me and chilled my spirits, as I proceeded through the desolate region which lay between me and the town. The road hereabouts runs straight along for miles, without hedge or fence, save for a couple of upright posts, with three or four crossbars, rising up here and there at the corners of the fields where the dykes run into one another. A hundred years before all this part of Norfolk had been little better than a fen, which the Brandon Water overflowed at spring tides, till engineers had come over to us from Holland, who taught us to make these dykes and embankments after the fashion of their country. And, indeed, the people of Bury have a tradition that the ocean itself once came up over these parts, and that their hamlet, however since decayed, was then a flourishing town and seaport; but I could never find that any one outside of Bury believed in this legend.

Be that as it may, I had but a doleful walk of it; moreover, I was fain to button up my coat and pull my collar close about my neck, by reason of the cutting wind which blew across from the German seas. Nor did I meet any adventure on the way, but in avoiding the turnpike at Broxall I was forced to leap a dyke in the dark, and missing the further bank by about a foot, I fell into the water knee-deep. I got a sound drenching, but no other damage except for the mud bespattering my clothes, which must have presented a sorry spectacle had there been any there to observe me.

The noise of my splash brought out the pike-man, uttering many oaths, to see who it was that had been defrauding his gate. But I got nimbly on to my legs and ran past, and though he made a show of chasing me for a short space, he soon

thought better of it, and went back to his bed.

It must have been, I suppose, half-way between midnight and dawn when I arrived in Yarmouth. And well pleased I was when I had safely crossed the bridge across the Bure river and felt the pavement of the town underneath my feet. For though there was not another soul abroad in the streets at that hour, that I could perceive, yet the knowledge that the houses on either hand were full of sleeping folks seemed to be some company after the desolateness I had just come through.

I had never before been in a great town at night, and I was much amazed by the splendour of the illumination from the lamps which hung across the high streets, and made almost as much brightness as if there had been a moon. Being somewhat afraid of meeting with the watch, for I did not then know the habits of these gentry as well as I did afterwards, I soon left the region of the lights, and turned down into the lanes, which the men of Yarmouth call rows, and of which they are not a little proud, and to my mind with some warrant, for, though strait, these passages are very regularly built, and beautifully paved with cobblestones, and are besides so numerous that I have never seen the like in any city I have visited, neither in Europe nor in the Indies.

In the end I got out from among the houses, and arrived upon the sea-beach, where I discovered a sheltered pit among the sand hillocks, which they call denes, and there I lay down and slept off my weariness.

When I awoke the sun was so far up that I judged it to be nearly nine o’clock. Taking shame that I had proved such a sluggard, I rose up quickly, and brushed away the sand, which I was rejoiced to perceive had finely cleansed away the mud from the dyke at Broxall. This done I made the best of my way into the town to keep my rendezvous with Cousin Rupert, for I was sharply beset by hunger.

I had to ask my way more than once before I could find out the tavern, which lay down on the quay, over against the river Yare. By this I soon saw that the “Three-decker” had a reputation not over and above savoury among the townsfolk, for the more respectable of those I addressed myself to gave me harsh looks before answering my question. And no doubt the soberness of my dress and carriage must have made it seem strange that I should be seeking the whereabouts of such a haunt.

I will not deny that this observation a little daunted me when I found myself at

the door of the house. The tavern was by way of being an ancient one, for the oak props were blackened with age and the upper storeys jutted out one above the other, in the way our forefathers were used to build in walled towns, where every foot of space was of account. Nor did the place look to be ill-kept, though situated in a mean part of the town beside the fish market. However, it was no time for me to make reflections, having come so far, wherefore I quickly drew the latch and stepped inside.

I had no need of a guide to conduct me to the parlour, for I caught a hubbub of voices coming from my right hand, above which rose a roaring stave in chorus, interspersed with a clapping of hands and a rapping of mugs upon the table. I undid the door, meaning to slip in quietly, but no sooner did I pass my head into the room than the entertainment suddenly ceased, and the whole crew turned to observe my entrance.

Truly it was easier for them to discern me than for me to do the same by them, for besides the dismay of meeting so many faces at once, the whole room was filled with the smoke of tobacco, a thing which was strange to me, and which caused my eyes to tingle, besides tempting me to cough. I made out, however, that there was at least a score of men present, the most part of them seated round a table in the middle of the room, at the head of which table stood a high arm-chair, and in it, as I believe, the biggest man I had ever seen. The looks of the company are past my power to describe, being such as to make me feel as if I had broke into Bedlam. Their faces were all red and blotched with drink, and their heads covered with extravagant ringlets, which might never have seen a comb, while their dress was disordered to indecency, and the whole table was covered with a confusion of tankards and bottles and tobacco-pipes, not to mention playing-cards and dice. The huge man at their head bore a most terrifying aspect. He had an immense head set on a neck so short and thick that it seemed as if he must infallibly choke at every morsel he swallowed, and a belly capacious enough to have held a firkin of liquor. He had made himself easy by unbuttoning his waistcoat and the upper part of his breeches, and lolled back in his seat as if he had no mind to stir for the rest of the morning. One of his eyes was closed up, and had a French plaister across it, but the other stared and rolled enough for two.

On a bench in the window there were two other men withdrawn by themselves; but these I did not at first notice, being taken up with attending to this one-eyed ruffian.

“Who in the foul fiend’s name have we here?” he called out as soon as I was come in, using many other oaths beside, which I have no need to set forth. “Is this some sprouting soul-catcher come to bestow upon us a word in season? Speak, boy, your name and business? Show your colours, d’ye hear! Or will you mount the table and pitch up a godly psalm for our sinful ears? A blister on the brat’s tongue; why don’t he answer?”

I stood aghast at this scurrilous address, the like of which I had never yet heard. The others followed it up with shouts of applause, and one of those at my end of the table rose and came towards me, making as if he would catch me by the shoulder to drag me forward.

But this I was not inclined to suffer.

“My name need not concern you,” I said, replying to their chairman. “As for my business here, I have come to inquire after a kinsman of mine who uses this house. Stand back, sir, I am not to be mauled by you!”

I spoke these last words sharply to the fellow who had tried to lay hold of me. Though some years my senior he was but a lean, spindle-shanked creature, whom I felt better able to give a buffet to than to take one from him.

The big man let loose a round dozen of oaths.

“Here’s a fine cockerel come into our own house of call to beard us!” he exclaimed between his profanities. “I should like to know who uses the ‘Three-decker,’ when the crew of the *Fair Maid* are here, without our licence? What is the matter with you, Trickster Tim? Are you afraid to handle the yokel?”

Thus egged on, the man, who had given way under my angry looks, made at me again. But my blood was now up, and I dealt him a blow on the jaw which sent him down fairly to the floor. He got up, spluttering blood, his clothes all smeared with the sawdust and the stains of liquor, and the whole party leaped to their feet at the same time, as if they would set upon me.

I doubt but I should have fared roughly at their hands if I had not been delivered by a most unexpected diversion.

“Stand clear, you cowards, and leave Tim Watts to fight his own corner, if he can!”

I turned round to the window at these words and beheld to my joy my cousin

Rupert, who had been one of the two sitting there apart, and who had now risen, pale and very angry, with his hand on the basket of a cutlass which he wore at his belt.

Though I should have thought it kinder if he had come to my assistance earlier, instead of leaving me to show what I was made of first, I hailed his interference with much relief, and stepped quickly to his side.

But the fellows he had rebuked looked sourly in our direction and began to grumble to each other.

“No orders here!” came from one man. “No lieutenants over us ashore!” said another. “We’re all equal in the ‘Three-decker.’”

“Silence, Jim Palmer!” cried Rupert sternly. “And you too, Andrews; I thought you had more manhood in you! What reason had you for baiting this young man when he came in civilly? Do you know who he is, you fools? This is my own cousin, who has just given the slip to his sour old Puritan of a father, and come here to join our jolly fellowship!”

I felt some pricks of shame at this lewd reference to my father. But Rupert’s words completely turned the tide in my favour; and when he went on to call for the potman and order a quart of ale and a noggin of gin all round the table, I became the most popular man in the assembly for at least half an hour. My health was called for by the man in the chair who had so abused me, and who, as I now found out, was the boatswain, or foreman of the crew. They even would have Trickster Tim to apologise and shake me by the hand. He tried to go through this performance with an air of cordiality, but succeeded very ill.

After this my cousin drew me aside and presented me to his companion, whom he named to me as Mr. Sims, the captain of the *Fair Maid*. However, it did not take me long to see that though Mr. Sims commanded the vessel, by reason of his skill in navigation, yet my cousin was the real moving spirit of the entire ship’s company, and could turn the captain round his little finger, if he had a mind.

Pens and ink were then sent for, and a sheet of parchment, on which Captain Sims, who was an old hand at this work, himself drew up the articles of my apprenticeship. It was necessary that I should ship before the mast, he explained, in order to avoid provoking the jealousy of the crew; but they both promised me that I should be rated as an officer as soon as a fair excuse offered itself for my

promotion. The others present were all called round to witness me sign the indenture, after which, like a vain young fool, I must needs produce Mr. Walpole's guinea and order a fresh supply of liquor as far as it would go. This display of spirit, as they esteemed it, did my business with the crew, who having now been ashore for four weeks had spent most of their money, without in any degree lessening their thirst. But I fear good Mr. Walpole would have been but ill-satisfied if he could have known how his money was spent.

This business disposed of, Rupert thought it prudent to take me inside and have me bestowed in some safe corner of the house till the search after me should have blown over. And the first person whose help he must needs obtain in this was the tavern keeper's niece, Marian, whom I thought then, and think to this day, the most handsome creature that there was in the world, and whom I loved desperately from that hour.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE RIVALRY

And now, lest it be wondered what was done by them at home in the matter of my flight, I will tell here so much as I afterwards came to know.

When the letter which I had left behind me was put into my father's hands, it appears, he read it once through, and delivered it to my mother. Next, without saying one word, he went out by himself into the stable, saddled his great horse, Gustavus, which stood seventeen hands high, presently mounted it, and rode off at a strong gallop, setting his face towards the London road.

It was not till the end of the second day that he came back, the horse covered with dirt to the shoulders. He said nothing of where he had been, but walked into the house with a stern face, and called for the family Bible, which had belonged to his grandfather in the time of the Commonwealth. This book was bound in parchment and fastened with iron clasps, and lay always on the top shelf of the old oak press, whence it had not been taken down once in a dozen years.

My mother brought it to him trembling, and when she saw him open it at the blank page within the cover, whereon were written the names of all the Fords for four generations, she fell upon her knees and implored him not to carry out what he had in his mind. But he heeded her no more than if he had been stone deaf, and taking a pen in his right hand drew it through my name and the date of my birth and baptism, making a line right across the page, which looks as if it had been drawn with a ruler to this day. Then he threw the sand upon it, and as soon as it was dry closed the book and handed it back to my mother, who was fain to restore it to its place.

All this time not a word had passed his lips. At supper my father ate but little, and drank still less. When it was time for prayers he bade my mother read the chapter instead of him, as was his wont when greatly fatigued. Whereupon that sweet saint, as I must ever have leave to call her, turned, not to the prophecy of Ezekiel, but to the gospel of Saint Luke, and read out from that chapter which contains the parable of the Prodigal Son. And when she came to the words, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"—when she

had come to this place, my father, who had sat and listened hitherto, cried out in a harsh voice—

“Stop, woman!”

And he took the Bible from her and turned over the leaves till he was at the book of Ezekiel, and read the chapter in order as usual.

Nevertheless in the night my mother, who lay awake weeping, heard him give more than one sigh; and presently, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out of the room and downstairs, and stayed away above an hour; after which he came back and lay down again. And he strictly forbade her ever to utter my name in his hearing from that time.

I lay in hiding above a week before I durst venture abroad except at night. And very soothing to my spirit those night rambles were, though melancholy; for the look of all things was so changed and solemn under the black sky, or in the silent radiance of the moon, the houses were so oppressively still, and the masts of the ships so spectral upon the water, that it seemed to me by the end of those few days, that I had been exploring another world, and had got at last to be familiar with its ways.

In the daytime I was safe enough in my snug quarters in the tavern, for not a soul knew I was there save the privateer’s crew. And to do those ruffians justice, though there were few other crimes they stuck at, I believe that a thousand pounds would not have tempted one of them to give me up after I had been duly embodied in their company. Indeed, I found some of them to be good fellows enough, and grew not to dislike old Muzzy, the boatswain—for so he was called, though I know not if it was his proper name or one bestowed upon him by his mates. He was, if I mistake not, a foundling. He had conceived a huge friendship for me, and would come upstairs to the garret where I was secluded, and give me lessons in the broadsword exercise by the hour, the knowledge of which stood me in good stead in not very long.

But practise how I might, I never reached that perfection which the boatswain had attained, who was, I do think, the most complete master of his weapon then alive. I have heard, not from his mouth only, but from others of the crew, of the duel which he fought with three Frenchmen together, at a time of peace between

the countries, in Civita Vecchia, and how he left them all dead upon the ground. For such were English tars in those days, a manly race of whom we have but few left now.

The rest of the crew I pass over as being of a class common enough in all our seaports. The profane language they constantly employed grew, by dint of repetition, to have no meaning in my ears, as I am sure it had none, for the most part, in theirs. The thing which I found it hardest to accustom myself to was the smoking of tobacco. Indeed, after I had lit my first pipe I fell so ill that I looked upon it as a judgment of Providence, and vowed I would never light another. But seeing all the rest at it day by day, I soon ventured again, and came at last to enjoy it no less than they did. And no doubt if there were anything mischievous in this habit when pursued in moderation, it would have been denounced by the sacred writers, who would, by means of their inspiration, have foreseen its introduction into these regions, though not then known.

But what will for ever make memorable to me the days which I spent in Yarmouth, waiting for the *Fair Maid* to be equipped for sea, was the deep joy of my first love for the woman whose lot was to be so strangely cast in with mine. I do not know whether she at first failed to perceive this passion, or whether she slighted it as the heedless fancy of a lad, for she behaved towards me as if there could be no such thoughts between us, caressing me openly before company, and thereby causing me the keenest joy and anguish at the same time.

Mistress Marian Rising, to give her her full description, was, as I have said, the niece of my host. Her own parents were settled in the East India Company’s factory at Fort William, on the river Hooghley, where her father did business in drugs and was amassing, according to report, a considerable fortune. She told me that her people had refused to carry her out with them to the East, on account of the unhealthiness of that climate, but being now grown of age she was resolved to take the first occasion of going out there to join them.

She spoke much of the marvels of that great region which we now call Indostan, and of which little then was known in my part of Norfolk, describing the vast wealth and luxury of its people, the power and splendour of the nabobs and princes, and the curiosity of their buildings and manufactures. Of all these she spoke as familiarly as if she had dwelt among them, deeming, I suppose, that the connection between her and that region invested her with authority on the subject. I need scarce say that I drank in every word with greedy ears, and was become daily more inflamed with desire to voyage thither.

My cousin Rupert was frequently a third party in our conversations. He used a tone of familiarity with Marian which I was inclined to resent, though she took it in good part. But he deeply offended me one day that we were together by referring openly to what I thought my secret passion for the girl.

We had been discussing the question of how far it was safe for me to venture abroad into the streets, and he wound up by saying—

“To speak my mind plainly, Mistress Marian, I think it is high time my cousin got further out of reach of your fascination. You and he have been too much together of late; and if I mistake not Master Athelstane would not object to prolong his captivity for ever on such terms.”

“What do you mean?” I cried angrily.

But the girl only laughed.

“Be quiet, sir!” she said. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself for showing jealousy of a mere boy like this! Why, he is scarce old enough to notice whether I have brown eyes or black.”

This made me still more angry with Rupert.

“Mere boy as I am, I will thank you not to meddle between me and any lady who may choose to favour me with her goodwill!” I told him.

“I crave your pardon, my venerable cousin,” sneered Rupert. “I was not aware that matters between Mrs. Rising and you had made such progress. I would offer to go to Saint Nicholas, and bid them put up the banns next Sunday, if I were not afraid it might bring my worthy uncle over from Brandon with a whip and a dog-collar.”

I sprang to my feet as red as fire, and was as likely to have answered him with a blow as a word, if Marian had not come between us.

“Sit down, you foolish boy,” she said, giving me a look that turned my wrath into secret exultation. “As for you, Rupert Gurney, I have told you before that I will not endure your hectoring temper. If you cannot behave more civilly, there are plenty of other inns in Great Yarmouth, and you had better betake yourself to one of them.”

Rupert now saw he had gone too far, and passed off the thing as a pleasantry.

After that he became as friendly to me as ever; but I could not so soon get over his ungenerous words, and I think I never felt quite the same love and admiration for him afterwards.

About this time I overheard a conversation between Mr. Sims and my cousin which I by no means liked. They were seated in the parlour of the inn by themselves, overhauling the ship's papers, which they took out of a tin case, such as is used by mariners to guard against the chances of a wetting. I had come in to join them, for they sometimes used me as a clerk in the business of the ship, and found them too busy to heed my presence.

"I tell you, Gurney, I mislike it," Captain Sims was saying. "Here is the date of our commission, by which, as you may see, it has run out since the conclusion of the peace. The *Fair Maid* cannot sail under that."

Rupert cursed the commission, and cursed the date upon it, with much heartiness.

"We must sail without it, then, that's all!" he said, as soon as he had finished cursing. "It will be all one by the time we make Gheriah. Thanks to this cursed peace we might as well whistle for another as apply to the Admiralty Commissioners."

"Nay, not so fast!" exclaimed the other, drawing back in his chair. "That were to proclaim ourselves pirates at once."

"Well, and pray what else have we been till now?" returned my cousin, giving him a nasty look.

Mr. Sims shook his head gravely.

"No; I have been a privateersman all my life, barring a few smuggling ventures in the late peace, but I have never put to sea without my letters of marque and reprisal, duly signed and sealed."

Rupert curled his lip as he looked at the other.

"And what did your letters of marque say as to the Portuguese slaver we sank in the Gaboons?" he demanded scornfully. "And what of that Bristol schooner we mistook for a Frenchman off Finisterre, and had a thousand pounds of coffee out of, before we discovered the error?"

“No matter,” said Sims, setting his fist upon the table with an angry thump; “I don’t profess to be more particular than other men when I get on the high seas; but I’ve always got my letters of marque on board, and as long as I have them, d’ye see, they can’t hang me.”

Rupert seemed to be casting about for some way to satisfy his scruples. Presently he said—

“There’s no other way for it, then—we must alter the date.”

Mr. Sims gave a start, and let drop an oath.

“You’re a strange man, Gurney,” he said; “I can’t make you out this morning. You talk of forging the king’s commission as if it were no more than altering the log. Why, man, that’s a worse hanging matter than sailing with no papers at all!”

My cousin fairly lost his temper at this, and cursed the other for a thin-skinned numbskull.

“Either we sail or we don’t,” he concluded by saying, “and either we sail with a commission or without it. I am ready here to alter the date with my own hand—it is but turning a IV into a VI—to give us two years more, and you need know nothing of the matter.”

The captain came into this with surprising readiness thinking, no doubt, that he had sufficiently guarded his own neck in the business. Then for the first time they perceived me; and Sims was for making me take an oath on the gospels not to betray what I had heard. But Rupert rebuked him sharply, bidding him to know that no Ford had ever committed treachery or dishonour within the memory of man, any more, he was good enough to say, than the Gurneys themselves.

And this testimony of his so soothed me that I allowed my conscience to slumber in the matter of the forged commission. Yet it was plain enough to me by this time that my cousin was a desperate scoundrel, and that the company I had enlisted among were little better than a gang of pirates, if better they could be called.

I daresay it was not to be expected that I should associate for long with such men without falling into their ways. But what prevailed most to change me from my former character, and wrought on me for evil was, I verily believe, the frenzy of the passion which possessed me for Marian.

By this time I had gathered courage to let her know how she stood in my regard, and with the worst result for me that could have happened. For she would listen well-pleased to all the desperate love I poured into her ear, and then the next day I would find her closeted with my cousin Rupert, who was become her bold and notorious wooer, or else with one of the flash young gentlemen of the town, who frequented the tavern for no other purpose but to make love to her, and brought her presents of rings and lockets and suchlike matters, which she never scrupled to accept. And when I upbraided her for this wantonness, she gave me cruel words.

“I would have you to know that I am not your mistress, pert young sir, any more than I am your cousin’s! And I suppose I am free to do as I please, without your leave first had! If it likes me to entertain the society of other young gentlemen, be sure I shall do so; and as for the trinkets you are pleased to be jealous of, it will be time enough to cast them in my teeth when you have better to bestow on me yourself.”

With that she flung away, leaving me sore distressed and amazed. But though this speech removed somewhat of my blindness, yet the love I had for her was no whit lessened, but rather increased in vehemence. And seeing that I had but little money of my own to procure her such toys as she spoke of, I forthwith betook me to dicing and gambling, which hitherto I had refrained from, in the hopes of bettering my estate.

The luck I had in this was very various, so that at one time guineas seemed to be dropping out of my pockets, whereas at others I might ransack them through without finding so much as a silver penny. And according to the state of my fortunes, so did I prosper in Marian’s regard; and in this ill-state of my affairs I grew reckless, and drank to drive away better thoughts, and so came on rapidly to the evil hour which was to end it all.

For, as it happened, I was one night throwing the dice with my cousin Rupert, and he had won of me, and as I went on, drinking in between whiles, I lost what little coolness I had started with, and finally staked my last penny on the last throw, and lost that too. Then I flung myself back from the table with an oath.

“Fair and softly, cousin,” said Rupert, picking up the money I had thrown before him. “It does not much matter who wins, seeing that it all goes into the same pocket afterwards.”

“What do you mean?” I cried sharply. For nothing angered me more than to have

him say anything which glanced at our rivalry for Marian, in which business I had too much reason to suspect he was more fortunate than myself. That very day, moreover, I had found them together, and they had looked ill-pleased at being disturbed.

“Faith, I think you must know my meaning well enough by this time,” answered Rupert, with an insulting smile. “Before you try to play the gallant you must line your pocket better.”

“Hold your tongue!” I said fiercely. “I am not used to buy favours, like some who have nothing but their purse to commend them.”

“Then you should go where favours are not sold,” he sneered, with an evil smile.

“Those words in your teeth!” I shouted, starting up and clapping my hand on my sword, which I had bought two days before of a Jew.

By this time the noise of our quarrel had aroused the whole room, and the company were crowding round us, the men of the *Fair Maid* in the front. Rupert bit his lip as he saw where he stood.

“Peace, youngster,” he said, with a threatening look which belied his words. “I will not be forced into a quarrel here.”

“Here or outside, I care not,” says I, “but I swear you shall take back the slander you have cast upon a woman you are not fit to speak with!”

“D—n you!” says Rupert, “do you want me to fight for a——”

He got no farther, for with that I caught up the dice-box and dashed it between his eyes, so that he fairly staggered back, and the blood started from his nostrils. And then, almost before I knew what was happening, his sword was out, and mine was clashing against it, and the table was overturned on the floor, and then there was a rush and a shout, and some one was holding me back from behind, while Mr. Sims and the boatswain stood between us, and Rupert, with a look on his face which I had never seen there before, was saying in a very steady voice—

“Gentlemen, you may arrange it as you please, but take notice that it must be *à la mort*.”

CHAPTER IV

“À LA MORT”

So it had come to this, that before the dust of my father’s fields was well off my shoes I was committed to a duel to the death with a desperate, vindictive man, who had been steeped in bloodshed before I had ever handled a sword, and that man my own near kinsman.

At the time I was less frightened than I have often been since in thinking over it. The others were more alarmed for me than I was for myself, and I heard Mr. Sims and old Muzzy urging upon Rupert to let the matter go no further. But this he would not now hear of, and in the state of mind I was then in I should have been little better satisfied than he to have had the affair patched up.

At last they saw it was of no use to seek an accommodation between us, and they withdrew together to settle how we were to fight, Captain Sims, as I understood, acting in my cousin’s interest, while the boatswain did the same office for me.

While they were discussing it, which it took them some time to do, Rupert and I sat on opposite sides of the room. He put on a great air of indifference, talking familiarly with those of his friends who stood about him, while I could do nothing but stare across at him with a horrible fascination, as the man by whose hand, in all likelihood, I was to die within the next half-hour. I remember noting for the first time what a finely formed person he had, tall and supple as a lath of steel. As far as that went I was no weakling, and I have been told that at that time we greatly resembled each other, though I do not think I can ever have shared my cousin’s good looks.

I was becoming feverish over the delay of our seconds, if such they can be called, when they rose from their corner, and the boatswain came across to me with a very grave air, Mr. Sims at the same time going over to Rupert.

“We have arranged,” the boatswain said to me, in a serious voice, “that you are to fight out at sea. A boat is to be moored to the buoy off the mouth of the river, and you will be rowed out and put into it together, one at each end. You are to be armed with cutlasses and left there together. There will be a pair of sculls on board, and the one who kills the other will throw his body overboard, so as to

leave no trace, and then row ashore. If the boat does not return at the end of an hour, we shall come out to her to see what has happened. Do you agree to this?”

He spoke these words in a distinct, loud voice, so as to be overheard by those who stood next. Then, before I could answer, he bent over quickly and laid his lips to my ear, whispering—

“Refuse it, boy, refuse it! It will be a narrow match enough between you with the cutlass, which was the weapon I stuck out for for your sake. But out in a trumpery rocking boat, with you a landlubber against a man that has been at sea these ten years, I would not give a farden for your life.”

He said this with many strong oaths, for I honestly believe the old pirate had got an affection for me. But he wasted his breath as far as I was concerned, my pride being then too fierce to admit of my shrinking from any terms that might be offered by the other side.

“Tell them I accept,” I said sullenly, “and make no more ado about it. How soon can we reach this place?”

The old fellow cursed me roundly for an obstinate, bloody-minded young fool.

“Give me a hug,” he wound up by saying, “for blast me if you ain’t a youngster after my own heart!” And he fell to and embraced me heartily, kissing me on both cheeks, and shedding tears plentifully; for he was three-parts drunk, and clearly looked upon me as a dead man.

And in that light I saw that the company present regarded me, my cousin’s prowess being well known by many duels which he had fought in the past; and though I had pretty well made up my mind that I was to die, I suffered no small discouragement and chagrin from the compassionate looks which were cast upon me. My old enemy, Trickster Tim, also thought this a safe occasion to insult me, coming up close before me and peering into my face, as if I were already so much carrion. Nor had I the spirit to resent his insolence.

Captain Sims now led the way out of the house, holding Rupert by the arm, while I followed with my friend. The rest of the crew swarmed out after us, but old Muzzy sharply ordered them back, taking only two men to pull the oars, for we had a long way to row before the buoy could be reached.

It was a miserable voyage for me, sitting there in the stern, not three paces from Rupert, shivering in the cold night air, and perhaps from fear as well, as we

dropped slowly down the river, past the black piles of the landing jetties and the sleeping ships. Our course was lit only by the stars, save where a ship's light cast a sickly gleam upon the water as we approached it, and faded away as we rowed on. The whole way I never once opened my lips, but the others talked together in low voices, turning themselves away from me in the same manner as if I were a convict being led to execution. And as for my own thoughts, they were distracted enough, especially when I called to mind my dear mother and my good and upright father, and how little they imagined the business in which I was now engaged. These reflections so softened me that I believe if my cousin had made the least move towards a reconcilement my whole wrath would have melted away. But no doubt he had made up his mind that only my death could restore his authority amongst the ruffians whom he led.

At last our dreary passage was ended, and we were arrived at the place agreed on for the encounter. We had towed down a smaller boat in our wake, and this they now fastened to the buoy, and we stepped into it, Rupert at the bows and I at the stern. Then the boatswain gripped my hand for the last time, whispering to me to beware of Gurney's upper-cut, and so they bade us farewell and rowed off quickly in the darkness, like men who would avoid the sight of a murder.

So there were we, left alone in that frail compartment, out there upon the heaving water, with nothing but death in our hearts. I had but time to breathe a prayer, which I did with some misgiving as to how it would be received, when my cousin drew his cutlass and stepped into the centre of the boat. I rose to meet him with my weapon in my hand, and we stood there facing one another, with only the width of the seat between us.

"Are you ready?" says Rupert quickly. And before I had time to answer he brought down his cutlass with such force that unless I had guarded it the blade would have split open my head.

It was now that I had reason to be thankful for the lessons I had received at the hands of the boatswain, for Rupert's blows came so thick and fast that I had all I could do to parry them. I bore his last caution to me in mind, and soon found the importance of it, for though my cousin made many feints at my shoulder and other parts of my body, yet the only blow into which he put his real force was the upper-cut at my head.

I kept my eyes fixed upon his, as I had been taught, and soon saw a savage light arising therein when he found he made so little impression on me. Indeed, if we

had fought on firm ground I believe that, as the boatswain said, I should have been his match, but the rocking of the boat gave him an advantage, and presently he pursued a feint further than I expected, and gave me a gash of about three inches long in my left thigh.

The first smart of the wound made me gasp for breath, but the next moment it had so raised my fury that I left off the defensive and fell upon my enemy with all my might, hitting and slashing so desperately that, do what he would, I broke down his guard and laid open his forehead over his right eye, and the blood began to trickle down his face.

This transformed his own anger into a tempest, and now, indeed, we went at it more like two savages than Christian men. For the cutlass, by the very reason that it is not so deadly an instrument as the small-sword, is capable of inflicting a very great many wounds before any fatal effect takes place. And so, becoming less heedful of our guard as we warmed to it, we wounded each other all over the body in a most desperate manner, till my cousin seemed to me to be covered with blood from head to foot, and I can have been little better, for I felt the blood running from me at above a dozen places.

My enemy was the first to see the folly of this, for he began to change his tactics, drawing back from my assault and keeping on the defensive till he should lure me on to give him an advantage. And in this at length he had nearly succeeded, but happening to forget the seat which lay behind him in the bows of the boat, he overbalanced himself against it and fell backwards, still gripping his weapon in his hand.

I scorned to take advantage of this accident, but stayed where I was to give him time to get up. He lay upon his back for a minute, glaring sullenly at me to see if I would kill him. But finding that I had no such mind he recovered himself nimbly enough. And being, no doubt, still further enraged at this accident having put him, as it were, into my power, he now made at me with the most terrible vehemence, raining down blows upon me sufficient to have felled an ox. And then in the midst of it all, while I was warding off his fury, and the sparks flew from our weapons every instant, I suddenly felt my hand jarred as though I had touched a conger, and the blade of my cutlass snapped off at the hilt with a crash, and I stood there at his mercy.

He stopped short, as much astonished as I was, while I sank down on the seat next the stern, ready to sob, and put up my hands before my face.

“That cursed Jew has cheated me of my life!” I groaned between my set teeth.

Rupert rested the point of his cutlass upon the seat in front of him and looked over at me curiously.

“Young man,” he said, “your life is forfeit to me, and it hath never been said that Rupert Gurney spared an enemy. Yet, inasmuch as you are of my blood and but raw in the world, I have half a mind to make terms with you. Will you make your apology for the violence you put upon me in the tavern, and swear to repeat its terms before all those who were witnesses of our dispute?”

I looked up at him and smiled bitterly in his face.

“Do you understand me so little, and you a Ford by the mother’s side?” I answered him. “Now that I have no weapon you may murder me if you will, but apology you shall have none from me—unless,” I added, “you take back your insult to the woman I love.”

“You young fool!” he ground out savagely. “That drab you make such a to-do about has been mine this two months past.”

I leave it unsaid how these words affected me, both then and for long afterwards. For up to that moment I had looked upon the girl with as pure a reverence as any boy ever cherished for a maid, and my cousin’s vile boast, cast it back to him as I might, sank into my mind and worked there like a poison.

“I believe you lie,” I said to him with marvellous coldness. For what with the

loss of blood, and the despair which had seized upon me at the breaking of my weapon, and the news I had just received, I was become quite dispirited, and was indifferent to what he might do with me.

“Die, then, since you will have me kill you!” he exclaimed, and began advancing down the boat towards me.

But as he stepped over the middle seat it chanced that he struck his foot against one of the oars which lay along the boat’s bottom; and the rattling of this oar put a new thought into my mind.

It so happened that I had been used to play with the quarterstaff at home, and old Sugden, the rat-catcher, who was esteemed the greatest proficient in this sort of exercise in our part of the country, had had many a bout with me, in which, before I ran away, he had been forced to confess that I was very well able to cope with him. Now, therefore, in my extremity, seeing death so near at hand—for up to this moment I had hardly believed that my cousin would kill me—I made shift to snatch at an oar, and drawing it to me just in time put myself in a posture of defence before he could strike me.

He drew back, greatly astounded, and swore beneath his breath.

“What fool’s game is this, boy? Would you break honour with me? We were agreed to fight with cutlasses.”

“And now that my cutlass is broke foully you would take and murder me!” I retorted, and being now incensed at his bloodthirstiness, after I had once spared his life, I cursed him in the face for a coward.

This was more than he could bear. He leaped across the seat, with his head stooped, to come inside the sweep of my weapon, but this was a trick I had had experience of, and though I found my oar very heavy and cumbrous I yet managed to repulse him with a crack on the head. And immediately he raised his cutlass to strike back I caught him a very smart blow on the knuckles, and sent his weapon flying over the side of the boat into the water, where it instantly sank.

By this time I think we were both too furious to be willing to end the combat without one or the other’s death. Rupert, as soon as he knew what had happened, fairly sprang upon me, and clutched my throat, bearing me down with him into the boat. Here he knelt above me, squeezing my windpipe, and emitting horrid

snarls like a wild beast. My senses began to forsake me, and I was as good as lost, when, by the direct mercy of Providence, my right hand encountered the blade of my own cutlass, lying close beside us, which I instantly snatched at, and plunged as hard as I could thrust into Rupert's side. And with that, feeling his fingers relax themselves as he tottered sideways from off me, I raised myself half up, lifted him by the thighs, and cast him clean over the side of the boat into the sea. And that done I sank down again in a bloody swoon, and perceived nothing more.

It was, as I learned, above a week afterwards when I fully came to myself, and discovered that I was lying in my former garret at the "Three-decker." There was an old woman coming into the room to wait upon me, who told me that I had been brought ashore on the night of the duel by men wearing masks; and one of them, whom she knew by his voice and carriage to be the boatswain of the *Fair Maid*, had given money out of his pocket for me to be taken care of till such time as I should recover.

In the state of weakness to which I was reduced I shed tears at hearing of this kindness on the part of that rough man, who was, I sadly feared, a great scoundrel, of most villainous evil life. My next business was to ask what had become of him and the rest of the *Fair Maid's* crew.

"The *Fair Maid* sailed yesterday," the crone answered. "They warped her out on the afternoon ebb. 'Tis said she sails under a privateer's commission against the French."

I scarce knew whether to be glad of this news, or sorry. I told myself that I could hardly have looked for a welcome among those men after being the means of their lieutenant's death; and, moreover, I had learnt enough of their character to feel strongly averse to a cruise in such company. Yet they were the only friends I had, and I was grown used to them; and the thought that I was left there, as it were, alone, with nothing to turn to, made me very dismal after all.

It seemed somewhat strange to me, during the rest of that day, that Marian had never once come to inquire for me; but I put off speaking about it to the morrow. In the morning I awoke greatly refreshed, and feeling well enough to leave my bed, which I did, and came down into the bar of the house to look for her.

I found only her uncle, a weazened, peevish man, who had showed himself very little while the privateersmen were about his house. I bade him a courteous good morrow.

“Good morrow t’ye,” he snapped out churlishly. “I’m glad to see you’re about again, as I daresay you know your reckoning has run out.”

This I did not believe, but thought it beneath me to pick a quarrel with such a man. Besides, he was Marian’s uncle.

“Any charges you may have against me shall be fairly met,” I answered proudly. “But where is Mistress Marian? I have not seen her these two days.”

“And you’re not like to see her again, I take it,” he returned disagreeably. “At least, not in my house; I’ve had enough of the impudent baggage.”

“What are you saying, man?” I demanded, much dismayed. “You need not miscall your own niece, I should think. But what of her? Do you mean she has left you?”

“Aye, what else should I mean? And right glad I am to be rid of such a trollop, drawing all the rapscallions of the port in here, and bringing my tavern into disrepute.”

He spoke so bitterly that I believe he was trying to talk himself into thinking he had profited by her departure. For in reality she had brought him the chief part of his custom, and there was at that moment, as I could perceive, not a soul in the tavern beside ourselves. But I did not stop to reflect on this.

“Where has she gone? What has happened?” I questioned breathlessly, with a terrible fear in my heart.

“Nay, whither she has gone is more than I can tell you, for as likely as not the jade has lied to me. But she left this place two days ago, in the afternoon, and all the account she gave me was that she had taken her passage in the *Fair Maid* for her father’s house in Calcutta.”

I fell down on a bench, like a man stunned, and groaned aloud. Then I sprang to my feet again and made for the door.

“I will follow her!” I cried out madly. “If she has gone to the end of the world I will go after her, and all the devils in hell shall not hold me back!”

And leaving the man there, staring at me as if he thought I was crazed, I ran out of the house, and so stumbled right into the arms of a pressgang come ashore off a king’s ship which had that morning dropped anchor in Yarmouth Roads.

CHAPTER V

ON BOARD THE KING'S SHIP

The license of these pressgangs was so well known, and had been made familiar to me by so many tales, that I had little hope from the first of escaping their clutches. It is true they were only authorised to impress seamen and fishermen, and that after proving their commission before justices of the peace. But if report did not belie them, they looked not too closely into a man's seamanship; but, if they found a likely fellow, regarded all as fish which came into their net.

There was a lieutenant set above the fellows into whose hands I had fallen, a tall, lantern-jawed, middle-aged man, with a most abominable squint, and to him I addressed myself:

"Sir, I am not in a condition to be pressed by you, I am not a mariner by calling; and, moreover, I am but just risen from a bed of sickness."

He glanced over my dress before he answered, with something of a smile. And, indeed, for a landsman, my costume was something out of the way, for during the time since I had signed articles to Captain Sims I had done my best to equip myself in true sea-dog fashion.

"You surprise me, young sir," the lieutenant said presently, when he had surveyed me. "Your dress tallies but ill with your professions. If you wore but a cutlass, and had a pistol to your belt, I could have sworn you to be a smuggler at the least."

I hung my head at this, for it was my own vanity that had led me into the mess. I could only fall back on my second excuse.

"Nevertheless, you are mistaken, sir," I said. "But however that may be, be pleased to believe me when I tell you that I am scarce yet recovered from several severe wounds."

"Indeed! I thought I had seen you coming out of yonder tavern at a marvellous nimble gait. But my eyes are indifferent bad. Here, Master Veale, what say you, does this young man look too sick for our purpose? He says he is not recovered

of his wounds."

The man he applied to, who was master of the ship's cutter, answered him in the same jesting manner.

"I see nothing the matter with un, your honour. But perhaps we had best carry un aboard and let the ship's doctor feel his pulse."

"I protest against this treatment," I said angrily. "In the name of his Majesty, I say, unhandle me."

"Nay," quoth the lieutenant, "my hearing is as indifferent as my eyesight, and I follow you not. Master Veale, if this youngster uses any blasphemy or indecency let him be gagged till we come aboard again."

This threat was enough to silence me, if I had not been otherwise afraid to make a stir. For though I might have got some of the passers-by to succour me, it being broad daylight, and these impressments most unpopular among seafaring men, yet I foresaw that it would quickly come to a question of who I was, and if my name once became bruited abroad there were friends of my father's in the town who would have made short work of sending me back to him. And sooner than face the disgrace of this, as I considered it, I was willing to try my luck with King George.

I therefore walked along with the pressgang, by the side of Master Veale, who used me civilly enough when he found I had given up the thoughts of resisting.

I was not a little amazed and delighted when we came out upon the shore, and I caught sight of the *Talisman*, as she was called, riding at her anchor. For she was a great line-of-battle ship, such as I had never yet seen, carrying seventy-four guns upon her three decks, which rose above the water like a huge wall, with the muzzles of the cannon plainly visible through the opening of her portholes. This majestic mass lay like a floating fortress upon the waves, and overhead her three masts towered up into the very clouds, with their yards set in order, and the ropes crossing from one to the other as intricate as a spider's web. Last of all, from a flagstaff on the stern, brandished the ensign of Great Britain, in defiance of her enemies. And my heart swelled as I gazed upon it, and remembered how that banner had struck terror into the Frenchmen, and Dutch, and Spaniards, in so many great and memorable fights. Perhaps in that moment I had a foretaste of those glorious triumphs of the British arms in which I was hereafter to take a part.

As soon as we were brought on board this fine vessel—and by this time we had pressed two or three others of the Yarmouth men—we were presented to the captain for his inspection.

The captain, it was easy to perceive, was a man of great quality, being, as I learned before long, a nephew of Lord Saxmundham, in Suffolk, who at that time sat upon the Board of Admiralty. He had the most elegant hands and feet of any man I ever saw, and was dressed with great care, having long ruffles of the finest lace to his neck and wrists, and a gold-hilted small-sword by his side. Even my cousin Rupert beside him would have looked but a country boor.

He spoke to the lieutenant who had headed our party, drawling out his words in a fashion absurd in a London fop, but disgusting in the commander of a man-o'-war.

"Well, Mr. Griffiths, what sort of scum have you got hold of this time? Faugh!" he continued, taking out a pocket napkin to wipe his nose, "I declare the fellows all stink of herrings!"

This last was a downright lie, for I had never so much as stepped into a fishing smack. And besides, the herring fishery was not yet begun.

"Sir, that is a fault which can soon be amended," returned the lieutenant, biting his lip at the other's insolence. "For the rest, they looked to me to be sturdy rascals enough, and, I doubt, will make good seamen."

"Yes, looked to you, my good sir; but then, you know, your sight is none of the best," sneered the captain, between whom and his officer there appeared to be some jealousy.

Mr. Griffiths, though he had jested at his infirmity in speaking to me, writhed under this allusion to it from another. He gave his answer with spirit.

"Captain Wilding, I have done what you ordered me in impressing these men. If you don't think them serviceable I shall be happy to set them ashore again."

The other waved his napkin between them as if he would have brushed away a fly.

"There, there, my worthy man, that is quite enough! I have seen the tarry scoundrels, and as long as they have not the smallpox, I am content. Bestow them as you please."

Thereupon we were led into the fore part of the ship, to be rated according to our several abilities. And it fell out luckily for me, for the lieutenant, when he discovered that I had had some education, and could cast accounts—a business of which he plainly knew nothing—informed me that he believed the purser stood in need of an assistant, and offered to recommend me to him. This kindness on his part I gladly closed with, not that I liked the duty better than the common service of a ship, but because I guessed that I should thereby be delivered from the molestations of the crew, there being no greater pleasure to the vulgar of every profession than to rough-handle and abuse those who come newly amongst them. And herein, as it turned out, I had judged rightly, and for so long as I remained upon that ship I suffered no ill-usage, except at the hands of my superiors.

But before this was settled I had a favour to ask of the worthy lieutenant.

“One thing I must bargain for, with your leave, Lieutenant Griffiths,” I said to him, speaking boldly, as I discerned him to be favourable to me, “and that is, that if we should come to fighting with the enemy I am to take part with the rest.”

Mr. Griffiths laughed when he heard this demand.

“Why, there now,” he cried, slapping his thigh, “if I couldn’t have sworn that you were one of the sort we wanted directly I clapped eyes on you! Never fear, lad, you shall have your fill of fighting before we go into dock again; for—I will tell you so much—we are under orders to join Admiral Watson’s fleet at the Nore, and a man with a healthier stomach for such work never hoisted pennant on a three-decker.”

“I am glad, at all events, that we shall sail under a fighting admiral,” I responded saucily, “for, as for our captain——”

He stopped me at this point in a manner which terrified me, hurling a string of curses at my head sufficient to have sunk me through the deck.

“Hold your impertinent tongue!” he said in conclusion. “I would have you know better than to pass remarks on your officers in my hearing. I have had men put in irons for less. Follow me this minute to the purser, and remember you are on board of one of his Majesty’s ships, and not a dirty herring smack.”

By which I saw that, however this gentleman secretly despised his commanding officer, he was too honourable to encourage the tattle of his inferiors. In this no

doubt he showed his breeding; for it was his boast that he was sprung from one of the most ancient families in Wales, where the gentry, he was wont to say, are of older lineage than those of any other country in the world.

The purser proved to be a Scotchman, against which nation I had taken a strong prejudice, on account of the wicked and unnatural support given by them to the Chevalier in his bloody invasion of this kingdom, and which prejudice has since been further confirmed in me by the late mean and notorious conduct of Lord Bute. However, I found Mr. Sanders, the purser, to be a respectable, religious man, having as little love for Papists and Jacobites as I had myself. He received me without much civility, but if he showed me no great favour neither did he do me any injury, and in his accounts he cheated the crew as little as any purser I ever heard of.

But not to linger over these matters, the only thing that befell me during our voyage to the Nore was an extraordinary painful sickness and retching, the anguish of which I could not have believed possible to be borne, and which many times made me wish I had never quitted my father's house. During the continuance of this malady I was rendered quite unable to do my duty, to Mr. Sanders's no small discontent, and was left to the sole companionship of an Irishman, one Michael Sullivan, who became much attached to me, and soothed my sufferings by every means in his power. He was a corporal of the Marines, and had been three times promoted to be sergeant for his bravery in action, and three times degraded again for drunkenness. Among his comrades he was known as Irish Mick: and here I observed a peculiarity which I have found amongst others of that nation; for though he would continually be boasting of his country, and exalting the Irish race above every other on the face of the earth, yet no sooner did any of us remark on it to him that he was an Irishman than he straightway fell into a violent passion, as if we had laid some insult upon him.

While I lay thus ill, as I have said, I lost all thoughts of the quest I had meant to undertake for Marian, and would not have cared if the ship had been bound for the infernal regions. But as soon as I was recovered sufficiently to come on deck, whither I was very kindly assisted by the Irishman, I grew exceedingly curious as to our destination.

"Does any one know whither we are bound when we have joined the Admiral's fleet?" I asked of Sullivan.

"Faith, and it's that same question I'm just after putting to the boatswain's

mate," he answered, "and the sorrow a soul on board that knows any better than myself and yourself."

He pronounced his speech with a very rich brogue, which I shall no more attempt to imitate than Captain Wilding's affectation. For indeed there seem to be as many ways of pronouncing English as there are people that speak it, and even in Norfolk itself I have met with people who were not free from something like the Suffolk twang. Seeing, I suppose, that I was disappointed by this answer, he leant over and whispered in my ear—

"But it's my belief that King George is tired of the peace with the French, and that he's sending us out to sink a few of their ships and maybe bombard a town or two, just by way of letting them know that we're ready to begin again."

I answered him impatiently, for my sickness had made me fretful.

"I believe you are a fool, Mick! It is well known that we never go to war with the French unless they have first provoked us."

"Well, and sure haven't they provoked us enough by all their doings in America and the Indies, not to mention the battle of Fontenoy, which my own cousin Dennis helped them to win, more by token; though he got a bullet in his left arm before the fighting begun, and had to content himself with cheering while the others were at it."

"That will do," I said crossly, for I had heard of the battle of Fontenoy and his cousin Dennis before, and it was a sore point between us. Nor could I understand how a man who had the privilege of being born a British subject, though liable to the proper severities of the penal code against Papists, could traitorously desert his allegiance and take service with our natural enemies.

However, I learned nothing further of our destination till we reached the Nore, which we did about the end of the third day. Here we found the rest of the squadron awaiting us, and, the *Talisman* being the biggest ship in company, Admiral Watson immediately hauled down his pennant off the *Victory*, of fifty guns, and came aboard of us.

I was leaning over the chains with Sullivan when the barge came alongside, and could see a gentleman in the stern, sitting beside the Admiral, in a military uniform, and having a very resolute and commanding countenance.

"Who is that?" I asked.

“That? Why that’s Charlie Watson,” he replied, mistaking my meaning. “It’s myself that ought to know, for I sailed under him against the Spaniards in ’44, and a devil of a beating we gave them. Hooray!”

The cheer was taken up by the rest of the crew as they caught sight of this gallant seaman, who had been made Rear-Admiral of the Blue in his thirty-fifth year, and that without any influence at his back, but solely on account of his splendid services in the Spanish wars. Mr. Wilding, who had come up on deck to receive the Admiral, looked round very sourly when he heard the cheer, but was ashamed to openly rebuke us.

“Nay, but who is the other beside him,” I went on to ask, being strongly moved to interest by the sight of this gentleman. He appeared to be by some years junior to Mr. Watson, who was now somewhat over forty, but in spite of that, and of his treating the Admiral with much ceremony, there was that in the air of this officer which made an impression of authority, and which drew all eyes towards him as soon as they were arrived upon the quarterdeck.

Sullivan professed himself as ignorant as to the stranger’s identity as I was myself, nor was I near enough to hear what passed when Admiral Watson presented him to Mr. Wilding and the other officers. Nevertheless, I could see that they received him with extraordinary respect, even the captain seeming to brisk up and to put on a more manly carriage under this gentleman’s eye.

After giving one or two keen glances round the deck, which set us all on the alert, the officer walked quickly forward, and the whole party following him, they went below, immediately after which the signal for weighing anchor was made to the squadron, and the crew was set to work putting on all sail. In the midst of which business the report ran round the ship, and reached me I know not from what lips, that the passenger we had received on board was no other than the famous Mr. Robert Clive, who had just been created a lieutenant-colonel by the king, and whom we were carrying out to India to take up his government of Fort St. David in the Carnatic.

At this time, though Mr. Clive had not yet reached to that height of eminence which he afterwards attained, he was already known as one of the bravest Englishmen of his time, and I had heard from many quarters of his glorious exploits in the Indies. Although a civilian by profession, when the settlements of the East India Company in Madras were threatened with destruction by the French, he had exchanged his pen for a sword, and, with a mere handful of

English and Sepoys, had captured and maintained the town of Arcot against a great army of the French and their allies, after which he had beaten them in many engagements, and in the end wrested the entire province of the Carnatic from their hands. Since then he had been in England, where he had stood for the Parliament, and, as it was thought, had given up all intentions of returning to Indostan. Now the news that we had him on board with us, and that he was on his way out, no doubt to drive the last remains of the French power from that quarter of the world, came on my ears like the summons of a trumpet, and went far to make me content with the accident that had thrown me in the way of the pressgang.

Mr. Griffiths, the lieutenant, who had continued to take some notice of me, for which I was not ungrateful, chanced to come by while I was full of these thoughts, and after confirming the news which I had heard, fell to talking with me about our cruise.

“You see I did you a good turn by bringing you off from that muddy fishing-hole,” he was pleased to observe presently. “Now you are likely to see some service, and, if luck serves, to bring home a good share of prize-money.”

By this time I had called to mind the sailing of the *Fair Maid*, and the destination of that passenger of hers, to see whom once more I would have given all the prize-money in the world.

“Are we like to make the Hooghley river, do you think, sir, when we get out to the Indies?” I ventured to ask.

“That’s as it may be,” he answered, friendly enough. “All I can tell you—for I believe this to be no secret—is that our first port in those seas is Bombay. And further, since we cannot attack the French till war breaks out, I may give you to know that our first business is to root out certain pirates that infest that coast, and who have their headquarters at the citadel of Gheriah, in the Morattoes’ country.”

I turned silent at this, remembering how I had heard the name of Gheriah pronounced between my cousin and Mr. Sims in the parlour of the “Three-decker”, and feeling a dreadful apprehension that I was to meet with the privateers (as they called themselves) in circumstances which I had little desired.

Eleven months later—for we were beset by contrary winds all round the continent of Africa, and put in at divers places on the way—we came to an anchor in the harbour of Bombay. And there, riding at a mooring under the very walls of the fort, the first vessel that I saw was the *Fair Maid* herself, looking as peaceful as if she had never fired a gun.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

On our voyage outward one thing had occurred to me which, as it turned out afterwards, was to prove of very great consequence; this was my learning of the native Indian language.

Colonel Clive, who had never been at the pains to acquire it himself, had brought out in his train as secretary a Mr. Scrafton, who was well versed in the Indostanee, and who was obliging enough to offer to impart it to me, I having rendered him some services in the transcribing of his papers and accounts. Having much time on my hands on so long a voyage, I very thankfully accepted his proposal, though little then foreseeing the benefit I was to derive from it.

This connection between us brought me a good deal under the notice of Mr. Clive, who was several times pleased to address his conversation to me, and to inquire my name and what had brought me into that service.

When I told him I had run away from home he seemed not a little amused, though he affected to rebuke me.

“I perceive you are a young man of a reckless spirit,” he observed, but whether in irony or not I could not tell. “And pray what do you intend to do when we get to the Indies?”

“Why, sir,” I answered hardily, “as soon as war breaks out I mean to run away from the ship and enlist under your honour.”

“The devil you do!” he cried, a smile showing itself on his stern face. “Mr. Scrafton, do you hear my little purser here? I have a mind to report your speech to Mr. Sanders.”

But though he said this, I could see that he was not ill-pleased. And whether from that occasion or another, by the time our voyage was ended I was known all over the ship as Colonel Clive’s purser. And how proud the title made me I forbear to say, but I know that if Mr. Clive had ordered me to march into Delhi, and pluck the Great Mogul by the beard, I should have thought it a little thing to

do.

The first thing I did after we had dropped our anchor was to beg for leave to go ashore, which Mr. Sanders granted with some difficulty. Mr. Griffiths was good enough to give me a place in the cutter, and as soon as we were landed I separated myself from the rest, and without staying to examine the curiosities of Bombay, which is a fine great city, built on an island, I procured a boatman to take me off privately to the *Fair Maid*.

The boatman I applied to was an Indian. He used me with wondrous civility, calling me Sahib, which is an oriental term of respect, and bowing before me to the very ground. When we were got into the boat, however, he proved but a poor oarsman, and indeed all the natives of that country seem but a feeble race, owing, no doubt, to their idolatrous religion, which forbids them to eat flesh.

We arrived at the stern of the *Fair Maid* without accident, but to my surprise I could see nobody on the deck. Bidding the Indian wait for me I scrambled on board without hailing, and proceeded to examine the cabin. I found this likewise to be deserted, and was beginning to think the vessel was empty when, on turning to come out, I found myself face to face with a dark man in a turban, bearing a naked scymetar in his hand, who had crept in behind me.

“Who are you?” I demanded, addressing him in Indostanee.

But he shook his head, for, as I was to find out, the Morattoes, to which nation he belonged, speak a different dialect of their own.

While I was considering what to do with him, since his behaviour was very threatening, I was greatly relieved by seeing an Englishman come in after him, who proved, indeed, to be no other than my old acquaintance, Trickster Tim.

The sight of me gave him a great shock, and at first I believe he mistook me for a spirit from the other world, which perhaps was not strange, considering that he had last seen me on the other side of the globe, and lying very near to death’s door.

I spoke him friendly, nothing doubting that he would be pleased to welcome a fellow-countryman.

“Well, Tim, how d’ye do, and how are all aboard the *Fair Maid*?”

As soon as he had heard my voice his apprehensions vanished. He gazed at me

for a minute, as if undecided what to do, and then, putting on a smile, stepped forward and shook me by the hand.

“And how did you get here?” he asked. “We thought we had left you in Yarmouth.”

Not thinking any concealment needful, I told him my story, which he listened to very attentively. At the end he spoke some words to the Morattoe, who went out of the cabin.

“Sit down and make yourself comfortable,” he said to me. “Our men are all gone ashore, but the captain will come off presently and be right glad to see you safe again.”

“I can’t stay long,” I told him, “because I have only got leave for a couple of hours.”

At this he smiled a little queerly, but pulled out a bottle of rum and some glasses, and prevailed on me to take a drink with him. We sat thus for some time, talking, and he told me that the ship had been out there for more than a month, having escaped some of the headwinds we had had to contend with.

“And what of Mrs. Rising?” I said at last, for I had been shy of putting this question to such a man. “I understand she took passage with you.”

He grinned at this, rather maliciously.

“I thought you’d come to that,” he said. “I didn’t suppose it was for love of your comrades that you had come on board so quickly. As for Mistress Marian, she’s ashore, and for her address I may refer you to the captain when he finds you here.”

“The captain is rather slow in coming,” I observed, getting on to my feet. “I think I must be going ashore.”

With that I walked out of the cabin, Trickster Tim following at my heels. When I got on to the deck, I stared about me in dismay. Not a sign could I see of my boatman.

“What’s become of that fellow who brought me out?” I cried, turning to my companion.

The scoundrel laughed in my face.

“I sent word to him not to wait for you,” he coolly replied, “as I thought maybe you’d rather stay with us.”

“Rascal!” I shouted, taking him roughly by the arm. “What is the meaning of this villainy?”

“There’s the captain; you’d better ask him,” he answered.

And turning round as the sound of oars smote on my ears, I perceived a boat coming alongside, and seated upright in the stern the very man of all others whom I had never thought or wished to see again. It was my cousin Rupert.

He caught sight of me at the same moment, and a fierce scowl passed across his brow.

“Whom have you got there, Tim?” he called out, standing up in the boat to get a view of me.

“Mr. Ford, sir, purser’s assistant of his Majesty’s ship *Talisman*.”

At that moment the boat came alongside and my cousin leaped on to the deck, followed by four or five of the crew. He surveyed me with a glance of bitter hatred, mingled with triumph.

“So, cousin, I did not kill you after all! Never mind, I am glad you have remembered your old articles and are come to join us once more. We have lacked a cabin-boy since your desertion, and if his Majesty can spare you, we shall be glad of your services.”

I was too confounded to reply, or to take much heed of this mocking harangue. I had as firmly believed Rupert to be dead as, it seems, he had believed me. The truth, as I gathered it by degrees afterwards, seemed to be this: At the moment of my casting him out of the boat in which we had fought, the other boat was returning to find out what had been the result of the battle. They had first picked up Rupert out of the water, when he was on the point of death, and had then found me senseless, and to all appearance mortally wounded, where I had fallen. They carried us both back with them, and finding Rupert revived, had concealed him on the *Fair Maid* till she should sail. The boatswain, out of a kindness for me, and knowing the other’s vindictive nature, had persuaded him that it was impossible for me to recover, and so they had left me.

As soon as I was able to collect myself I demanded to have speech with Mr.

Sims, the captain.

“You will meet with Mr. Sims where you are going,” retorted Rupert. “In the meantime any business you have with the captain of this vessel may be transacted with me.”

“Then I insist that you put me ashore instantly,” I said, with resolution. “Would you kidnap me under the very guns of his Majesty’s fleet?”

“Not so fast,” returned Rupert, keeping his temper, as he could afford to do, having the upper hand. “You have forgot your indentures, by which you are bound apprentice to the good ship *Fair Maid*, sailing under his Majesty’s letters of marque and commission.”

“Under a forged commission,” I retorted hotly. “I refuse to be bound by indentures to a pirate!”

This outburst was, no doubt, what my cousin had been waiting for, to set the opinion of the crew against me. He now turned to his followers, very stern.

“Take this youth down to the forecastle and put him in irons. If he repeats his scandalous aspersions, I will bring him to trial as a deserter and mutineer.”

I had no means of resistance, and his orders were carried out, the scoundrel who had tricked me into waiting for Rupert’s return, taking especial pleasure to see that my irons were made secure. I scorned to question the dirty rascals further as to how my cousin came to be in command, but I guessed there had been some foul work on board since the vessel had left Yarmouth; and the next morning I learnt the whole story.

Old Muzzy, my firm friend, had been ashore all that night, very drunk, but soon after dawn he came off to the ship, and hearing of my plight, at once betook himself to where I was imprisoned. He embraced me very heartily, and as soon as I had satisfied him as to my recovery and subsequent adventures, he disclosed to me the situation of the *Fair Maid*.

“You see it’s like this, my boy. Mr. Sims is a good seaman, no one can’t say he’s not, but he’s too much of a lawyer to handle a craft like this. Now that cousin of yours, though he be a bloodthirsty, revengeful beast, as you should know by this time, yet he’s no lawyer. Captain Sims, there, he was all for letters of marque and such, but then, once a peace breaks out, where’s your letters of marque? They ain’t no more use than so much ballast. Now when we came out here, the

lieutenant he says, ‘Let’s go into Gheriah, and join the pirates there’—though according to him they aren’t what you may call pirates, being under a king of their own, who has as much right to give them commissions as King George himself. But Captain Sims he wouldn’t hear of it, the more so as there was a British squadron under Commodore Porter had been out from Bombay in the spring, and knocked some of their forts about their ears for them. But, you see, unless we joined them, we had nothing to do till such time as the war began again, unless we chose to take the risk of standing up and down the coast, as you may say, on our own hook. So the crew they sided with the lieutenant, that’s your cousin, and the end of it was there was a sort of a mutiny, and Captain Sims he was carried ashore at Gheriah and given up to the pirates, leastways to their king, and the lieutenant took his place.”

“Then the long and short of it is that this is a pirate ship,” was all I could say.

“Well, we are, and, in a manner of speaking, we aren’t. When we want to come into Bombay here we sail under King George’s flag, and when we’re in company with the pirates we fly theirs. Any way, we’ve taken two Dutch ships and an English one since we got out here, and that’s put money in our pockets, which is more than Captain Sims would have done with his lawyering.”

“And I suppose I am to be carried to Gheriah and given up to the pirates, like Mr. Sims,” I said bitterly.

But this the boatswain swore with many oaths he would not permit. Nevertheless I could see that he was strongly attached to my cousin’s interest, and not disposed to venture anything openly against him. Indeed, he tried very hard to persuade me to come into their plans, offering to reconcile me with Rupert if I would consent to do this. To these proposals, however, I would by no means consent, being more experienced by this time than when I had joined them at Yarmouth, and having a pretty shrewd notion of how Mr. Clive would regard my former comrades if they should fall into his hands. Finally, I besought the boatswain for news of Marian.

He drew a grave face at this name.

“Athelstane, lad, I would rather you’d ask me any other question than that. Plague take the girl, she was the cause of all the mischief between you and the lieutenant! Forget her, lad, forget her, she’s not worth your troubling after.”

But he might as well have pressed me to forget who I was, and the situation into

which my eagerness to hear of Marian had brought me.

Finding me resolute to know about her, he told me this much:—

“She came aboard while the *Fair Maid* was in the river, to nurse your cousin as he lay ill of his wounds. But I believe he had been tempting her before that to come out to the Indies with him, and she held back for him to go to church with her first, and this he didn’t care enough for her to do. Anyhow, it ended in his getting round her to trust herself with him, and he swore he would carry her straight to Calcutta and hand her over to her people there. When we got out here, and she found he had no such purpose, but meant to keep her in the fortress as long as it suited his pleasure, there was a terrible business betwixt them. But you know what the lieutenant is, and that it ain’t a few tears from a woman that’ll turn him from anything he has a mind to do. So he just set her ashore by force, and there she is, as much a prisoner as Mr. Sims himself.”

I was overcome with the horror of this news, though I suppose it was what I should have expected from my cousin’s character.

“Good heavens!” I cried out in my distraction. “Do you mean that she is in the hands of the pirates at Gheriah?”

“That’s about what it comes to. And the sooner you give up all thoughts of her the better for you, says I.”

Before I could frame any answer—and, indeed, I know not what answer I could have made—there was a great noise and trampling upon deck, and a man came down to tell us that the vessel was about to weigh anchor, and that the boatswain was wanted to attend to the service of the ship. Whereupon he left me, in the company of bitterer thoughts than a man can have more than once in his life.

I pass over the dreary time spent by me in that dismal confinement during our voyage. Old Muzzy visited me pretty often, and once Rupert himself came down and made offers towards a reconcilement.

“Say that you will join us honestly, and I will take off the irons, and rate you as one of the crew. And when occasion serves, I will cause you to be made lieutenant under me,” he promised, “for after all you are my own kinsman, and blood is thicker than water.”

Whether he was sincere in this, or was compelled to it by my friend the boatswain, I do not know. But I had only one reply to give him.

“And Marian, what of her?” I said indignantly.

A dark look came on his brow.

“Leave that business alone,” he said. “It were better for you, I warn you fairly. That woman is mine, and I will not suffer the Almighty Himself to come between us.”

At this blasphemous avowal I turned my back on him, and would entertain no further proposals. However, I knew from the boatswain that Rupert was first for throwing me overboard; and when Muzzy, who had much authority with the crew, would not consent to that, he was for putting me into the castle at Gheriah, along with the late captain. But this my sturdy champion also opposed, and the end of it was that I was left in my present quarters when the *Fair Maid* arrived in the pirates’ harbour, and brought them the news that a British squadron was on its way to besiege the place.

This intelligence Rupert had acquired before leaving Bombay, and it was this which had caused him to set sail with so much haste. Becoming very busied in preparations for the defence, I luckily slipped somewhat out of his mind, and the boatswain took advantage of this to soften the rigour of my imprisonment, allowing me to take the air on deck, and even going so far as to release me from my irons.

I was thus enabled to gain some idea of the place I had been brought to. When I first came up from below, after so long a time passed in obscurity, the daylight proved too much for my eyes, and I was obliged to close them, and accustom myself to the glare by degrees. As soon as I was able to look about me, however, I perceived that the *Fair Maid* was lying in a very spacious river, not far from the mouth, and over against a sort of rocky islet or peninsula, joined to the left bank of the river by a strip of sand. On the rock there was built a very strong castle, having a double wall and towers to protect it, but the cannons of rather poor calibre. Alongside of us lay the fleet of the pirates, composed of strange-looking vessels, having for the most part two masts, one very much in the stern, and rigged with a huge sail, the peak of which came much above the top of the mast. The prows of these vessels stretched a great way forward out of the water having the appearance of a bird’s beak. The larger of these vessels, of which there were about ten, are called grabs, and the smaller, of which I counted upwards of sixty, gallivats. These latter are managed with oars as well as sails, and when there is no wind they are employed to tow the grabs behind them, so

that in light weather it is easy for them to overtake the ship of which they are in pursuit. They were all armed with cannon, the grabs carrying as many as twenty or thirty 12-pounders, and the gallivats swivel-guns of 6 or 9 pounds.

We had lain in this position for more than a month, and I was beginning to be afraid that Admiral Watson had altered his intention of coming to reduce the pirates' stronghold, when one evening, as I sat on the deck, just at the time that the wind changed and began to blow in from the sea, I discerned a great commotion on shore in the fortress, and turning my eyes towards the river's mouth I beheld a most welcome sight, namely, a fleet of no less than fourteen ships, arranged in two lines, with the *Talisman* at their head, sailing proudly in, with the British flag flying at their peaks, and their tops all full of men, their guns run out through their portholes, and their decks cleared for action.

As silently and as orderly as if they were in mid-ocean without a foe in sight, they came sweeping up the river, doubled the rocky point, and anchored one after the other, within two hundred yards of the north wall of the fort.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIEGE OF GHERIAH

Hardly had the fleet taken up its position, when I saw on the land side a great army of Indians march down to the edge of the river and pitch their camp at the end of the sandy neck, so as to cut off all chance of escape from the defenders of the fort.

These, as I found out, were Morattoes, the king of that country, though not friendly to the English, having agreed to join them in this enterprise. Indeed, it appeared that the pirates themselves were revolted subjects of this king, having their origin in the treachery of one Angria, the Morattoe admiral, who cast off his allegiance and seized and fortified divers strong places along the coast, where he set up an independent power. For this reason the Morattoes had despatched an army under their principal general, Ramagee Punt, to assist in extirpating the pirates and regaining their former dominions.

As soon as the ships had swung to their anchors I saw a boat put off, bearing a flag of truce, to summon the pirates to yield up their fastness. But this proposal evidently miscarried, for the boat returned shortly, without any motions being made towards a surrender. At the same time I saw the gate on the landward side of the fortress opened and a chieftain wearing a rich dress come forth, accompanied by a train of attendants, and cross over the sand spit into the Morattoes' camp, from which he did not return that night.

This looked to me like a piece of treachery, as though the pirates were seeking to make terms with their fellow-countrymen behind the backs of the English. No doubt this transaction bore the same look to those on board the fleet, for when I came up on deck in the morning to see if any change had taken place during the night, I was astonished to see the space between the Morattoes' camp and the sand spit covered with tents, in which were about two thousand troops newly landed from the fleet, the last of the boats that had put them ashore being then half-way back, and rowing right round the grabs and gallivats, which were moored altogether close in under the walls of the fortress. It was not difficult for me to guess that this bold exploit was the work of Colonel Clive, who had thus placed himself between his treacherous allies and the enemy, effectually putting

a stop to all underhand communications between them. And I learned afterwards that but for this determined action on his part, the fortress would have been delivered up to Ramagee Punt that very morning, and the English excluded from all share of the prize.

I saw some messengers pass to and fro between the ships and the land, but nothing seemed to come of it, and finally, about ten o'clock I saw a signal run up on the *Talisman*, and immediately the side of every ship drove forth a vast cloud of smoke across the water, and the air was shaken by the discharge of at least three hundred guns.

Now the cowardice of the pirates was made manifest, for instead of manning their own fleet, which might have given much trouble if well handled, they left it exposed to the British fire, and withdrew behind the walls of their fort, from which they made a feeble reply to the broadsides of the squadron. The consequence was that before long one of the shells from the fleet set fire to a large grab, and the whole of the pirates' vessels, being made fast side by side, caught fire together, and were burnt to the water's edge, amid a continual noise of explosions every time the flames reached a loaded cannon or a powder barrel. Thus was destroyed in a few hours a navy which had for fifty years been the terror of the Malabar coast, and had preyed upon the commerce of every nation trading in those seas.

So taken up was I in watching this scene of destruction that I did not at first notice what was happening to the *Fair Maid*. Being anchored some way off the other vessels, and further up towards the sand spit, we escaped the damage that had been done to them, but now we attracted the attention of the British Fleet, and those on board naturally considering us as a prize captured by the pirates, one of the ships began to open fire on us, and sent a ball clean through the deck.

Up to this time the crew had lain inactive, taking no part in the fight. My cousin had gone ashore into the fort the night before, taking a part of the ship's company with him, and had not returned. The boatswain was left in command, with about twenty men under him, and these now began to see that they were in a trap, being too few to fight the ship to any purpose, while any attempt to land would expose them to a destructive fire either from the fleet or from Mr. Clive's troops, which would come along the sand spit to cut them off.

In this extremity old Muzzy took what was perhaps the boldest resolution any man could have come to. He decided to set sail, and pass right between the fort

and the ships, running the gauntlet of the whole squadron, and thus escape down the river and out to the open sea. The breeze blowing out to sea, as it always does for the first half of the day on this coast, the plan seemed a good one, if once they could pass through the fire of the squadron.

This course commending itself to the crew, the sails were hoisted accordingly, I lending a hand, for I had no desire either to take refuge with the pirates or to be sunk where we were; and having slipped our cable the *Fair Maid* got under weigh. This proceeding must have struck surprise into those who were watching us, for the frigate which had commenced to bombard us at once stopped fire, and waited to see what we would do. As we had no colours flying, it was difficult for them to know what we would be at, or whether we did not mean to surrender. Had we been only concerned with the fleet, our best course might have been to hoist the Union Jack; but in that case we had to fear the guns of the fort, close under which we meant to pass.

In this way we got along till we were right in the range of fire between the ships and the fort, and here for a minute all seemed over with us and I had fairly given myself up for lost. A whole broadside of thirty guns was fired right across us, and the only thing that saved us from being sunk instantly was our lying so low on the water that the bullets, being aimed at the walls of the fort, passed over our heads. As it was they did great damage to the rigging. The main topmast was shot away, the shrouds were torn to threads, and the gaff of the fore-topsail was badly wounded. Luckily for us the next vessel of the squadron had discharged its broadside just before we came into the line of fire, and the third merely signalled to know if we would surrender. Old Muzzy refused to answer the signal, and his conduct in this, and in not using the *Fair Maid's* own guns, clearly puzzled those on board the fleet.

By this time we had begun to round the corner of the rock, and paying away before the wind to go down the river, presented our stern to the remaining ships of the squadron. One of them gave us a broadside, but it was ill-directed, and only three balls took effect. They had aimed this time at the hull, luckily for the *Fair Maid*, as she could ill have stood another discharge at her rigging, and though the tiller was shot away, and some damage was done to the stern, it was not serious enough to cripple her.

But just as we were beginning to breathe we were dismayed at suddenly receiving a bullet from one of the guns of the fort, which ploughed right into the deck within two feet of where I stood. I looked up astonished, and beheld my

cousin Rupert, with the match still in his hand, looking over to watch the effect of his shot. The other men on board caught sight of him at the same moment, and a howl went up at this act of cold-blooded treachery. One of the fellows snatched up a loaded musket which lay on the deck, and discharged it at him, and I had the satisfaction to see him fall back swiftly, but whether actually struck by the bullet or no I could not tell.

Distracted by this unlooked-for attack, we had not noticed a fresh danger from the fleet. But now we perceived that the launch of the Admiral's own ship, the *Talisman*, had been manned, and was bearing right down on us, the men on board coming with great coolness and daring right past the guns of the fort. In this they were fortunately protected by the fact that the gunners were all engaged in replying to the fire of the fleet, which lay anchored above, and we being now past the direct line of fire, and out on the middle of the river, the garrison paid no attention to us. However, the launch would have had no chance of overtaking us but for the unlucky accident to the tiller, which had made the *Fair Maid* unmanageable for the moment, and caused her to come up to the wind. They were thus able to draw very near us before the man at the helm had contrived to rig up a makeshift tiller out of a splinter off the gunwale. Just as he began to get the ship's head round again the launch approached within hailing distance, and bade us surrender.

Old Muzzy strictly forbidding any reply, they fired a bullet at us from a small swivel gun in the bows. Thereupon one of the crew—the same man who had fired at Rupert—wanted to discharge the *Fair Maid's* stern gun at them; but this the boatswain would not permit.

"If we're caught running away, they may let us off," he said prudently; "but if we're caught after firing on the king's uniform, it's hanging for every mother's son of us."

The men saw the wisdom of this, and now the sails began to draw again, and give a fair chance of leaving the launch behind. No sooner did this happen, than I experienced a keen feeling of regret. I had aided heartily in our escape so far, believing it to be the only thing I could do, but now I thought I saw a chance of being restored to my ship I could not resist the temptation. I measured the distance between the *Fair Maid* and the launch with my eye, and, though a poor swimmer, considered I might manage to keep afloat till the launch should pick me up. I turned round, shook hands with old Muzzy, and before he knew what I had in mind, plunged over the side into the water.

I heard a cry go up from the crew, who at first thought it was an accident, my zeal in helping to work the ship having put it out of their minds that I was merely a prisoner. However, they had too much to do in looking after their own escape to give much thought to me; and in the end they got very fairly away, and disappeared outside the river's mouth.

In the meantime the launch came on towards me, and then a thing happened which I may truly say brought my heart into my mouth. For one of the marines in her, looking on me no doubt as one of the pirates, raised his musket and aimed it directly at my head. The sun was behind me, but fell full upon his face, and I could see the narrowing of his eye as he took aim, also the flash of the sunlight along the barrel. I had made up my mind that I was a dead man, and was even hoping that my death would be too swift for me to feel the pain of the wound, when I saw the gun struck up and heard the voice of Irish Mick crying out in a mixture of terror and laughter—

"Sure, don't you know him? It's the little purser!"

The recognition came almost as near killing as saving me, for in their amazement the men of the launch ceased rowing, and as in my expectancy of death I had lost all power of motion I was like to have been drowned. However, they rescued me just in time, and welcomed me on board with a heartiness which did much to make amends for the suffering I had gone through since I had left their company.

I told them my story, and had to tell it again to Mr. Griffiths and the purser when I reached the ship. Mr. Sanders received me coldly, and pronounced that I had been rightly served for hankering after my former evil companions, but the lieutenant spoke to me more kindly, and praised me for my refusal to join myself to the privateers, or rather pirates, for such they were now openly become.

I claimed his promise to let me take part in the fighting, to which he willingly consented; though, indeed, there was but little glory to be gained, as the pirates were now so cowed as to have pretty well ceased to return our fire, and before night they had made some fresh attempts towards a capitulation.

It fell through, however, and our bombardment was renewed the following day. The castle was so strong, the walls being hewn in many places out of the solid rock that we were unable to make much impression, but luckily if their walls were strong, the hearts of the pirates were too weak to prolong the defence, and it became merely a question of whether they should surrender to us or to

Ramagee Punt. The Morattoes struggled hard, but Colonel Clive stood at his post like a wall between them and the fort, and after two days the pirates saw that they had met their master, and opened the gates to him.

As soon as I knew that Mr. Clive's force would be the first to enter, I took Mr. Griffiths aside, and explained to him that there was an Englishwoman, in whom I was interested, inside the fortress, and after I had related the whole story to him he sent me ashore to the camp to lay the case before Mr. Clive.

That brave man—who was good enough to express his pleasure at seeing me safe again—heard me with great attention. As soon as I had told my story he turned to his secretary.

"Mr. Scrafton, you have heard what this young man says. I desire you will send at once for Angria's envoy, and tell him that if I find one hair of this girl's head has been injured I will hang him from his own walls."

He spoke this in a stern and terrible manner, which imparted some fear even to me. Within an hour the message came back from the pirates' chief that the Colonel's orders should be strictly obeyed.

This was while the negotiations for the surrender were still in progress. By the end of the second day's bombardment all was over, and Colonel Clive marched into the place at the head of 800 English and 1,000 Indian soldiers, who formed his whole army. I was allowed to enter at the same time.

We found the pirates drawn up inside to the number of several thousands. In so vast a crowd I could not distinguish the faces of any of the *Fair Maid* men, nor was there a sign to be seen of my cousin Rupert. Out of a feeling of shame I had concealed from Colonel Clive that this villain was among the pirates, but I made a strict search for him presently all through the place, without any result. I could only conclude that he must have been killed during the siege, unless he had made his escape in some way not easy to guess.

As soon as we had passed through the ranks of the pirates, whom Mr. Clive ordered to be disarmed and handed over to their Morattoe countrymen, we came into the inner court of the place, where we found Angria himself, surrounded by his chief men. He was a tall, handsome Indian, with a fierce, threatening countenance, surmounted by a crimson turban, which blazed with rich gems. His whole treasure lay beside him, and amounted, when it came to be reckoned up, to £120,000, which was divided among the fleet and army, I getting £6 for my

own share. It was considered a paltry booty by the men, and some hinted that the officers had taken more than their portion. There was also a dispute between the two services as to the amount of Mr. Clive's share, which the army insisted should be equal to a rear-admiral's, while the navy would not allow it to be more than a post-captain's. In order to settle the matter Admiral Watson very handsomely offered to make up the difference out of his own share, which the Colonel with equal handsomeness declined; and so the affair passed off.

But the greatest prize we gained in that action, to my thinking, was the woman whom I found crouched in terror upon the floor of a dark, stifling hut, built against one of the walls of the castle, and expecting every moment to find herself in the clutches of some savage enemy. For Rupert had cruelly forborne to tell her that the fortress was besieged by an English fleet, and when I entered the place where she was confined, she no doubt believed me to be some marauder of the same stamp as those among whom she had been kept a prisoner.

I stepped up beside her with a bursting heart, and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Marian," I said, "I am Athelstane Ford, who has come to set you free."

She trembled all over as she gave a quick look up at me, and then rose tottering on to her feet. And when I saw her face, how it was all shrunken from its former roundness, and the colour had gone from her cheeks, and the brightness from her eyes, as she stood there before me, with her dress all dishevelled, and her beautiful long hair ragged and wild, the tears started to my eyes, and I swore a deep oath that if my cousin Rupert ever met me face to face again he should not depart alive.

"Athelstane," she said presently, when we had stood gazing at each other like that for above a minute, "that detestable villain who is your kinsman has cruelly used me and betrayed me; but I believe you are a true man. Take me to my father, and I will bless the day that I ever saw you first." And before I knew what she would be at, she had knelt down and kissed my hand, with a passion of weeping, that proud, beautiful creature whom I had last seen in all the glory of her youth and loveliness, the jewel of her native town.

I raised her up tenderly, and drew her forth out of that vile place. A week later the Admiral carried his fleet back to Bombay; but I had got my discharge, and was with Marian on board the sloop *Thetis*, of twenty-six guns, bound for the river Hooghley with despatches.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE COMPANY'S SERVICE

And now I must pass quickly over that time of my life on which I should most love to linger, those halcyon hours when, with Marian by my side and the prospect bright before us, we voyaged through those Indian seas, down the long coast of Malabar and up the long coast of Coromandel, past the Isle of Serendib, and the reefs and foaming seas, to where the tangled banyan roots overgrow the muddy mouth of the Hooghley.

Being, as we were, the only two idle persons on board that ship, we were thrown upon each other's company day after day, and in the long talks we had together she gave me her account of the injuries which she had suffered at the hands of my cousin Gurney. And what pleased me most in these conversations was not to hear her kind and loving professions towards myself, so much as that bitterness which she now manifested against Rupert, for whom, she told me, she cherished a hatred as strong as her former liking and attachment.

"You are not to think," she said, "that I ever held your cousin in that regard which he was vain enough to believe and boast of. It is true we were good friends, and had been such before I had yet made your acquaintance. But he was a man for whom I had a strong distrust, and that in spite of his swaggering airs and gallant speeches, fit to turn the head of some silly, vain girl who knew nothing of the world."

"How came you to put yourself in that villain's hands," I asked, with some reproachfulness, "by venturing on board the *Fair Maid*?"

"I own that was a wrong, foolish act," she answered, "of which the wrongs I have suffered in consequence are sufficient proof. But when I first yielded to Rupert Gurney's solicitations to take my passage in that ship, I looked to the fact that Captain Sims was her commander, and it was him I relied on to afford me protection. Can you not understand how tired I was of my life in Yarmouth, in that old, dreary inn; and how I wished to be abroad and see the great world, and also to embrace my own parents, from whom I have been separated these twelve years?"

Thus she made her defence. Nor was I like to gainsay it, loving her as I did, with the same folly and blindness as of old, and ready to see and to hear just as she bade me, so that I might only be let hug myself in the belief that I had her affection in return.

“For the first part of our voyage,” she told me further, “all went well enough, until your cousin recovered of those wounds you had given him. Then he began to take a tone with me which I could ill brook; and you may imagine my uneasiness when I perceived that he had greater interest with the men than Mr. Sims, and that I was fairly in his power. As soon as we had got out in these seas he threw off all pretence of taking me to Fort William; and when I implored him at least to set me ashore in Bombay, where I might find another ship, he flatly refused, and told me plainly that I was nothing more than his prisoner. I applied to Mr. Sims for protection, but he answered that it was none of his business, and since I had come aboard freely there was nothing penal in detaining me. This man, I could see, was afraid of Gurney, who shortly after raised a mutiny against him, put him in irons, and carried him into Gheriah.”

I had forgotten to say that when we took the pirates’ castle, Captain Sims was found among the prisoners, who, producing his papers, and making out a long tale about his being an innocent merchant skipper, fallen into the hands of the Moors, not only got his freedom, but a handsome compensation out of the plunder of the place, with which he took passage home to England.

Marian told me that her complaints and anger at last drove Rupert to put her ashore, where he gave her, like Sims, into Angria’s custody.

“And the horrors of that prison,” she said, “are not to be described, nor even conceived by one who has not had experience of it. I was locked into a small cell, with scarce room to move or breathe, and the insufferable heat was such that I was forced to strip naked and lie on the floor, with scarce a rag to cover me. What would have happened to me if the fort had not been taken I dare not think. I must have gone mad or died.”

“Do not let us speak of it,” I said, soothing her. “All those horrors are passed, and not likely to return. Where we are going, in Calcutta, you will find friends and English customs; and your faithful servant, if you will have him as such, Athelstane Ford, will stand guard over you with his life.”

This was the nearest approach which I made to a declaration of my love, choosing rather to drift by force of circumstances into the position of Marian’s

accepted lover than hazard all I had gained by seeking to pluck the fruit before it was ripe. It was sufficient for me in the meantime to elicit from her those expressions of abhorrence towards my cousin (and late rival), which assured me that she was effectually cured of her unhappy tenderness for that villain.

“Thank heaven, you are not likely to be troubled with any further sight of him,” I said, to clinch the matter. “After these events Master Rupert will be no such fool as to endanger his neck by trespassing on the Company’s territories.”

“I wish never to see him, nor so much as to hear of him again,” Marian answered warmly.

With such assurances she satisfied me. Perhaps my hopes played me false, and made me take gratitude for something dearer; or it may be that Marian, who knew well enough what were my feelings towards her, did return me some fondness at this time, and was resigned to accept my suit. Even if I deceived myself, I will not repent it. For I know that this life of ours is but a series of illusions, where we stand like children at a peepshow in a fair, beholding pictures which we mistake for real things. So that I say that he who falsely thinks himself beloved is just as well off for that time as he who really is beloved. Yet so far as I was concerned, if any man had said to me then that Marian did not love me, I should have scorned him.

Of my love for her I must not speak at all, or I shall never have done. Long before we reached the Hooghley she had recovered from the ill effects of her imprisonment, and moved about the ship with that command which her beauty gave to her. Her charm was such as I have never seen in any other woman: compared with them she seemed like a bright child among old, sleeping men, almost like a living body among the withered tenants of the tombs. And before we had been upon our voyage above a fortnight the commander and both lieutenants of the *Thetis* were at her beck and call, while as for the little midshipmen, down to one youngster of twelve, they swore by her as if she were a goddess, and fought duels about her in the cockpit with their dirks.

Before we arrived in Bengal she talked to me much about her parents, who had been settled at Fort William for nearly twenty years. It was a long time since she had had news of them, she told me, but when she last heard her father was prospering in his business, which was that of a drug factor, not in the civil service of the East Indian Company, but trading under their licence, and shipping his merchandise in their bottoms. So much she knew, but nothing besides, and it

was with as much curiosity as myself that she saw the Sunderbunds drawing near, and our sloop anchoring off Falta to wait for a pilot up the river.

The Hooghley, famous as it is, is only one of the mouths of that great river the Ganges, sacred and renowned throughout Indostan. Yet it is upwards of forty miles long, for so great was the distance which separated us from our destination. By means of a fair wind we accomplished this difficult navigation, dangerous on account of the numerous shoals, in a very few hours, passing on our way the fort of Budge-Budge, where the Company kept a small garrison.

The scene along the banks of the river was most strange to me at this time, and made an impression not easy to be effaced. The trees which overhung the most part of the banks, of a character quite unlike those we have in Norfolk, were gloomy and forbidding in the extreme; but when we came to one of the people of the country's villages, and saw the men dressed in gay turbans, the women walking about with curious earthen vessels on their heads, and the stark naked black children playing in the water, I was altogether bewildered, and could scarcely credit that I, who saw these things and had come to dwell amongst them, was the same boy who had been bred up so peacefully in that English village among the flat meadows bordered by the shallow broad.

However, we came at last to that place since so celebrated, though then considered only as the third among the Company's settlements in the East; I mean Fort William. The fort itself was at this date of no great size or consequence; but in the neighbourhood along the river bank were many fine warehouses erected by the English. In the rear of these was built the native town, which the Moors call Calcutta. Here the houses are generally mean and dirty; but some of the rich Indians lived in very noble style, having fine gardens round their houses, ornamented with fountains and groves of tulip trees and mangoes.

Marian and I were put ashore in the ship's gig, having first bid adieu to the officers, and set about inquiring the way to Mr. Rising's house. In this at first we were unsuccessful, but at last I found an obliging person on the quay who directed his native servant to guide us to it.

This man, to whom I gave a handful of pice, conducted us through some narrow streets of the town, very ill-paved, and full of a most evil smell, to a lonely neighbourhood on the side of the river further up, where there was a house built in the Moorish fashion, and enclosed in a wild garden much overrun with weeds. All round this garden was a high wall, conformable to the jealous disposition of

these people. The entrance was by a narrow gate, and there was a miserable dwelling crouched against the wall inside, the door of which stood open. Some black children were playing in front of this hovel, who cried out when they saw us, and ran indoors. An Indian came out, very gaunt and fierce, who demanded in English what we did there.

“We are come to see Mr. Rising,” I told him, using his own language which Mr. Scrafton had taught me. “Is this his house?”

“It is, my lord,” says the fellow, much surprised, and giving a low bow, which they call a salawm.

With that I dismissed our conductor, and Mr. Rising’s gardener—for such he was—brought us to the house. We now saw that though originally a fine mansion it was sadly decayed. The walls should have been white, but excessive heat had cracked and blistered them, and turned everything to a yellowish hue. The Indian brought us inside, and into a long, low-ceilinged room with a great window opening on to the river. This room had no furniture except two small tables; but all round the walls was a covered settee, very broad, such as the Moors are used to sit on with their legs tucked up beneath them. To a European it is uncomfortable at first, but by degrees I grew accustomed to it. In this room presently Marian’s father came to us.

The first sight of Mr. Rising gave me a shock, and must, I think, have given a worse one to my companion. He was, as I knew, a man of middle age, yet he looked very, very old, being bent down and much wrinkled, with his hair nearly white. Moreover, his eyes wandered as if he were uncertain which way to look, and while he spoke his fingers worked strangely up and down his bosom, as if groping over the strings of some musical instrument.

“Well, sir,” he said in a thin, halting voice, seeming to find each word an effort, “what is your pleasure with me?”

“I have come here, sir,” I said, “with one whom you will rejoice to see. This is Mistress Marian Rising, your daughter, who has come out from England in my company.”

For at Marian’s prayer I had strictly promised to say nothing about the manner of her voyage, which might have done her some discredit with the Calcutta folk.

As I pronounced the above words the girl herself sprang forward and cast her

arms about her father’s neck.

“Father!” she said. “Don’t you know me—your little Marian, who has come home!” And she wept on his bosom.

Then it was a pity to see that ancient, stricken man wakening, as it seemed, out of his trance, and gradually making sure who it was that embraced him.

“My child! My child! Why have you come here?” he said presently. And then shed some tears himself, and clasped her to him, and kissed her.

“Where is my mother?” asked Marian, as soon as she had raised her head.

“Poor child! Your mother has been dead these eighteen months,” he answered sadly. “I should have written to tell you of it, but I was preparing for my passage home—indeed, I don’t know why I have not started before this.”

He gazed round him as he spoke, so as to convince me that indeed he did not know, and had lost the power—poor man!—to understand his circumstances or to take any resolution whatsoever.

I came away from that strange scene terrified, not so much by what I saw, as by an instinct I had that this man’s dreadful wreck was only a sign of that great and abiding horror which lay like a shadow all over the land; just as in the fable the glimpse of one monstrous foot was sufficient to warn the spectator that a giant came along. Which feeling in my mind was rather confirmed than dispelled when I came to learn, as I soon did, that Mr. Rising’s sad condition was brought about by the drug called opium, a staple of this country, the magical properties of which herb seemed to me then of a piece with the frightful sorceries and dark secret practices of the people, as I afterwards came to know them, and which, with their abominable idolatrous superstitions, used often to make me wonder that the Almighty did not destroy them with His plagues of fire and brimstone, like those wicked Cities of the Plain. Yet one good result of my observance of these people’s horrid customs was to inspire me with a becoming and devout gratitude that I had been born a citizen of Christian England, a blessing which we should the more prize since Providence has seen fit to deny it to so many millions of His creatures, and to bestow it upon a few. Sad it is that even among those few there should be found multitudes unmindful of their opportunities, who give themselves up to dissolute lives, or who turn away from the blessed truths of Scripture to hanker after liturgies and Romish inventions.

And now, having arrived safe in Calcutta, I looked forward to a period of rest and security not only for Marian, but myself, after the rough taste we had both had of fortune in her cantankerous mood. As soon as I had seen Marian lodged in her father's house, I sought out Mr. Holwell, one of the principal Company's servants in Calcutta, and commissioner over the police of the town. To this gentleman I brought a letter from Mr. Scrafton, to recommend me to his good offices, and having read it he at once received me very civilly and promised me his friendship.

He asked me many questions about the taking of Gheriah, and also about Mr Robert Clive, whose character stood high in the estimation of every one in Bengal, even the Moors having bestowed on him the name of Sabat Jung, signifying the daring in war.

"We had heard of this affair before you came," Mr. Holwell told me. "The man Angria was famous in these parts, and supposed to be invincible, so that his sudden destruction by our armament has given the natives here an altogether new idea of the English power. It will be well if this doesn't do us more harm than good, for the Moors are a jealous, suspicious race. Our agent in the neighbourhood of Moorshedabad, the Nabob's capital, has warned us that the English have many enemies at the Court, who seek to poison the Nabob's mind against us. I believe there are some spies come down here to examine our defences and the strength of our garrison."

"What!" I said. "Do you think the Nabob intends anything against us?"

"No, I don't say that," Mr. Holwell answered. "The present Nabob, Allaverdy Khan, has always been our good friend. But he is old and sick, and his nephew, who is likely to succeed him, is a dangerous young man, puffed up with pride and conceit. If he should come to the throne he is only too likely to find some pretext for harassing the Company."

To these forebodings I paid but little attention at the time, though I was soon to learn that they were not idle fears. Mr. Holwell, after having ascertained that I was acquainted with the Gentoo language, offered to procure me employment under the Company in one of their counting-houses, as interpreter, which offer I gladly accepted for the time. I was to receive a salary of 200 rupees by the month, in addition to which Mr. Holwell undertook to procure me a dustuck

from the Governor, enabling any merchandise I chose to trade in to pass through the province of Bengal free of taxes or duties to the Nabob's government.

I soon found out that this privilege of trading on their own account proved, together with the presents they received from native merchants who did business with the Company, the most valuable part of the livelihood of the Company's servants. Their salaries were so wretchedly small as to be insufficient for the necessities of life in this climate, where the poorest European is obliged to keep half a dozen black servants in his pay. For my part, I did not embark in trade myself, having no capital, but I accepted the offer of a Gentoo merchant to lend him the use of my dustuck to cover his goods, for which he paid me handsomely.

These Gentoos, as they are called in that part of India, are the original natives of the country, who follow the idolatrous religion taught by their Bramins, practising human sacrifices and other rites too vile for description. Over them the Moors have established their empire by force, but being a military race, incapable of business, they commit the details of their government to certain of the Gentoos, who collect their revenues, and amass great fortunes. They are very dishonest scoundrels, as I discovered, and at first, finding me new to the Company's business, I have no doubt they overreached me. At the same time I received many handsome gratifications from them, so that I came to consider myself ill-used when I did not pocket a hundred or two rupees over a transaction involving some thousands. But in the course of a few weeks, as I began to understand the trade better, and to cut down their exorbitant demands, these men marvellously abated their complaisance. Some of them, even, who had professed to know no English, suddenly showed themselves to be conversant with it, and chose to conduct their negotiations with some other servant of the Company.

During this time I was lodged, upon Mr. Holwell's recommendation, in the house of a respectable, God-fearing widow, Mrs. Bligh, whose son had recently gone up country to our factory at Cossimbuzar. Every day I attended at the counting-house, where I was placed under the orders of the Honourable Robert Byng, brother of the ill-fated admiral of the same name, and who managed the business of the Company's investment in rice, one of the principal branches of their trade. The Gentoo merchants came to us there to make contracts for the provision of such quantities as we required, after which they travelled about Bengal, purchasing the crops, and sending the grain down the river in barges, to be shipped at Calcutta for England.

Another staple of the Company's commerce, and the most valuable of all, is silk.

The Bengalee Indians are renowned for this manufacture, yet they have no regular places set apart for it, but in their villages scattered up and down the country, every man works for himself in his own hut, doing no more—such is the natural laziness of this people—than just sufficient to support him. The merchants are consequently obliged to travel about from place to place, collecting the stuff, which they do chiefly at the country fairs, where the peasantry assemble once a year, bringing their work to be disposed of. It is these customs of the people which have made it necessary for us to set up an establishment in their country, like the Dutch at Chinsurah and the French at Chander Nugger; for unless there were some English on the spot to collect this merchandise and have it ready against the arrival of the Company's fleet, the ships would often return empty, or be obliged to pay extravagant prices to the native monopolists of the trade.

While I was thus employed in the daytime, I seldom allowed an evening to pass without visiting Marian at her father's house. Here I was most kindly received, and for a time my hopes ran high. But, I cannot tell how it was, I began presently to discover a change in Marian for which I could not account. While her friendship towards me was in no way lessened, but if possible increased, I gradually became aware that I did not possess her entire confidence. She would sometimes look up disturbed, I had nearly said frightened, at my entrance. At other times when we were in the midst of conversation her attention seemed to wander, and her expression became troubled, as if she had some secret anxiety preying on her mind. I cannot say how unhappy I was made by these symptoms, though I was far indeed from guessing at their cause.

Suddenly, in the midst of these private disquietudes, an event happened which cast a shadow over the whole community of Calcutta. Intelligence arrived that Allaverdy Khan was dead, and his nephew Surajah Dowlah proclaimed Nabob of Bengal.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPY

So many accounts have been written of the events which took place in Bengal about this time, that I shall omit as much as possible of the public transactions in which I was concerned, dealing rather with my own particular adventures in the midst of them.

Of Surajah Dowlah, at the time of his accession, I knew only what was reported about him by common rumour in the settlement, which was that he was a young man of cruel and vicious propensities, ill-disposed towards the English in his country, and greedy for plunder. This was enough to make me share the uneasiness about his intentions towards us, which I found to prevail in the minds of Mr. Holwell, Mr. Byng, and other prudent persons. On the evening of the day on which I heard this news, therefore, I went round to Mr. Rising's house, to speak with Marian about her situation.

It was not quite dusk when I arrived, being the month of April. To my surprise I found the outer gate leading into the garden close shut, and it was not till after knocking and shouting for many minutes that the Indian porter condescended to come and open it. Being angry with the man for this unreasonable delay, I cuffed him as I passed in—for without some severities of this kind there is nothing to be done with the natives of Bengal. The fellow, instead of cringing before me as is the wont of these people, gave me a black look, and muttered sullenly—

"The lord is harsh to his servant, but another may be harsher to the lord."

Not knowing at this time the wonderful intelligence which prevails among the Indians, so that news of all kinds travels about among them by underground channels of which Europeans are not permitted to know, I did not sufficiently understand the gravity of this threat. Dismissing it as a mere piece of insolence, however unusual, I walked up to the house and opening the door for myself, came into the room where Marian usually received me and which was the same I have already described.

I found her sitting alone by the open window, in the dusk, looking out into the river. As I walked in she turned with the uneasy start I had remarked on former

occasions, and rising hurriedly, came to meet me.

“Good evening, Marian,” I said, taking her by the hand. “I should have been here sooner but for that surly gardener of yours, who kept me waiting at the gate.”

“I will speak to him about it,” she answered.

It was not light enough for me to see her face, but I observed that she spoke in a tone of indifference, as if scarcely heeding what she said. At the same time she took her seat on the divan, and asked me to sit by her.

“Is your father well?” I asked, putting the question out of courtesy, for by this time we both knew that the poor man was ruined by his dreadful habit, from which it was impossible he should ever be released.

“Yes, I think so. I have not seen him lately,” she said, still with the same distracted air.

I will confess, plainly, that I had begun to have fears for her, lest either the ravages of the climate, or the sufferings she had undergone, had wrought upon her mind.

“I come to bring you bad news,” I went on. “The Nabob has died.”

“So I have understood,” Marian replied in the same listless way. Then, seeming to recollect herself, she added quickly—“I learnt the news this afternoon from a friend.”

Since her arrival I knew that some of the ladies of the settlement had shown Marian some kindness, inviting her to their houses occasionally. One of these ladies, I concluded, had been beforehand with me in my intelligence.

“I am glad to see you so easy under the circumstances,” I said, feeling perhaps a little jealous. “I suppose you know that the new Nabob is no friend to the Company, and that we may have trouble with him before many months are past.”

“I suppose it may be so. But though Surajah Dowlah may have grounds for complaint against the Council here, I can’t think he will carry his resentment so far as to injure the peaceable inhabitants of Calcutta.”

I turned towards her, amazed.

“What do you say?” I cried. “You speak as though you were in the Nabob’s

interests! Have you been listening to the talk of some Moor or other? If so, let me tell you that they are nothing but liars and traitors, every mother's son of them!"

"You needn't be so fierce!" she returned, more warmly than she had yet spoken. "I have had no conversation with any Moor, or Gentoo either, upon the subject. Surely I may have leave to think as I choose, without being bound to take my opinions from Mr. Athelstane Ford!"

"Oh Marian, Marian!" I exclaimed bitterly, wounded by these unkind words. "What have I done to forfeit your confidence? Have I not been faithful and true to you from the first hour of our acquaintance till now? You know that I am the best friend you have, and one who would die to serve you. Yet these several days past you have behaved to me as if you had plans which you wished to keep from me. Do you doubt of my being ready to do anything you should bid me, even if it were to go to Moorshedabad and enlist with Surajah Dowlah himself? Why are we not to be open with each other? You know I love you; I have told you so often enough before we ever came out to this dreadful land; and I think I have shown myself ready to prove it as well. Even now I have come here simply to provide for your safety. In a few days the unfavourable monsoon will set in, after which no ship can leave the coast, but this week there is a vessel sailing for Madras, on which I am able to secure a passage for you, and for Mr. Rising as well, if he will go. I have come to offer you this opportunity, and entreat you to accept of it. And if there are any who would persuade you to remain, depend upon it, they are your enemies and not your friends."

She heard me out, sitting quite still and showing no sign of impatience. But when I had finished she said—

"I thank you, Athelstane, for your kind intentions, and for your goodness in the past, of which I do not need to be reminded. As for what you say about your love for me, since you have spoken so plainly, I must needs tell you that I am not able to return it. I have tried, both on the voyage hither and since; and I have failed. Your loving friend I am, and hope to remain always, no matter what may happen to part us for a time. Nevertheless, I don't share your fears of what the Moors may do against us, and I will not leave Calcutta, though I thank you for your offers."

She seemed as if about to say more, but stopped abruptly. Of the deep distress which I felt to hear her declare that my love for her was hopeless, I say nothing,

for what can be said? There are some to whom that great prize, the chief that life affords, namely the love of the woman they have chosen, is granted, but to most men, I suppose, it is denied; and I but shared the common lot. These things are the most important in our lives, they leave bruises whose marks are never quite effaced; yet all passes secretly; the business of life goes on, the world sees our actions, our outward triumphs and losses, and knows of nothing else. There was not a soul in Calcutta who ever knew what had passed between Marian and me on this occasion, and yet those few words were a worse grief to me than all the other sufferings I had to endure; and in that single hour I was changed from a boy into a man.

After this I dared not press her again on the subject of leaving Calcutta. With a heavy heart I watched the last ship go down the Hooghley on the way to England, and the very day after it had gone I received a message in writing from Mr. Holwell, in these words—

> "Haste to the Council meeting, and ask for me. We are in receipt of threatening letters from Moorshedabad, and need your services."

Not a little agitated, I thrust the letter into my pocket, and hastened round to Mr. Drake's, the Governor's house, where the Council was assembled, he being confined indoors by an illness. I sent in my name to Mr. Holwell, who immediately came out and fetched me into the room where they were met.

Mr. Drake lay on a couch against one of the windows, while the other gentlemen were seated around in a circle, facing him. He was a stout man with a red face, who had spent many years in the East Indies, and by dint of an important manner and never having been placed in any situation of real difficulty, had passed down to this time for a very prudent and capable person. On my entrance he spoke to me rather peremptorily—

"You are Mr. Ford, are you not?"

I nodded.

"I am told that you speak the Indostanee language. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "Mr. Holwell and Mr. Byng are aware of it."

"Very good." He nodded his head once or twice. "Those gentlemen have recommended you to the Council as a discreet, intelligent young man, which I do not doubt you are. There is an employment which I have to propose to you,

one which calls for those qualities, and also for courage. The question is, young man”—he fixed his eyes on me very sternly—“do you think you possess courage?”

“I don’t know,” I answered bluntly, not much liking his manner of questioning me.

“Ha!” He gave a sort of sniff, and looked about him scornfully.

“But I have fought one duel, and am ready to fight another with any one who doubts me,” I said, speaking in a modest voice. And some of the gentlemen laughed and clapped their hands.

The Governor frowned severely.

“I believe, Mr. Ford, that you intend no disrespect to this Council by your answer?” To this challenge I made no response. “Very good, I daresay you may be equal to the commission we have to offer you. You must know that we have received letters from the newly proclaimed Nabob of Bengal, complaining of certain improvements we have made in our defences. Those improvements were made in the prospect of the French war, but the Nabob chooses to regard them as directed against him. Now the point is this, that we believe information has been supplied to Surajah Dowlah by some person in this town, not one of the Indians, but a European, who must have some means unknown to us of coming to and fro. We have set a watch, but are unable to detect him. Mr. Holwell has suggested that you might undertake this task, and by reason of your ability to communicate with the Gentoos in their own language, succeed in discovering this person; in which case we are prepared to pay you a very handsome reward.”

I did not feel much inclined to this proposal at the first blush, considering that it carried little honour with it. But Mr. Holwell, who no doubt divined my objections, set himself to remove them.

“You will render the Company and the whole settlement a great service if you are able to effect this, Ford,” he said. “The fact is that the presence of a European spy, most probably a Frenchman, is a source of very great danger. There are many weak points in the fort, for instance, which would be overlooked by a Moor, but of which fatal advantage may be taken if they are communicated to an enemy by an intelligent observer. I think it is your plain duty to assist the Council if you can.”

“That is enough, sir; I will do my best,” I replied.

The Governor then dismissed me, and the Council broke up. I believe letters were sent to Surajah Dowlah, to explain the circumstances which had awaked his suspicions, but without any good effect. Meanwhile Mr. Holwell carried me to his house, where we laid our plans for the detection of the spy.

It was settled that I should assume the dress of a Moor, and in that character should pass my time about the fort and adjacent grounds, that being the place to which a person seeking information would be most likely to repair. Mr. Holwell provided me with a turban, jacket, and blue trousers, and I stained my face with a pigment which he assured me would not easily come off. At the same time I wore a scymetar in my belt, and put a pair of pistols in my bosom. Thus disguised I went out for a walk through the bazaars, and had the satisfaction to observe that I was everywhere taken for a Moor. But when I spoke I was not so successful, my practise in the language not being sufficient to impose upon the Indians.

As soon as I had satisfied myself by this experiment that my disguise was accurate, I returned towards the fort, and commenced walking about it, observing the persons who came in and out on their business. But though my suspicions were once or twice attracted to different ones, yet I found nothing to go upon. In this way not only one day passed, but several others, and I began to despair of success.

On the fourth day of my watch, however, about seven o’clock in the evening, as I happened to be looking abroad of the river, which is here pretty wide, and contained a good deal of small shipping, I noticed a man in a boat, which he rowed himself, who appeared to be lurking about for no very honest purpose. Instead of either landing or going off in some fixed direction, this man plied to and fro, close under the wall of the fort, which he seemed to examine very closely from time to time. As well as I could make out he was a Moor, and my instructions were to watch for a Frenchman, yet I was rendered so uneasy by the movements of this individual that I resolved to go out on the water, and examine him more closely. Accordingly I left the place where I was, near the north gate of the fort, and strolled down to a small flight of stairs on the river bank, where some boats lay for hire. Stepping into one of these, I cast off, and taking the oars, which I had learned to handle during my term of service on board the *Talisman*, rowed slowly out towards the spy, as I believed him to be.

When he saw me coming towards him, he at first pulled a few strokes as if to make away, but being, as I suppose, reassured by the sight of my costume, he ceased rowing and waited for me to come up alongside. Glancing round from time to time as I drew near, I soon perceived that I had no Frenchman to deal with, or at least that, if I had, he had taken the same precaution as myself in assuming the dress of the country. Feeling desirous to test him, I hailed as soon as I came up, in the native tongue.

“Does my lord seek for anything that his servant may procure him?” I said, using their fulsome style.

He at once replied, in what was evidently a phrase learnt by rote—

“I cannot speak your language, but I am a friend of Omichund.”

Now this Omichund was a great, rich Gentoo, a banker and merchant who, having made huge profits as a broker in the matter of the Company’s investment for many years, had recently had his services dispensed with, and was believed to be disaffected on that account, and in correspondence with the Moorish Court. I needed no more to convince me that this was most likely the man whom I had been employed to apprehend. Not daring to speak English, and it being useless to address him in the Indostanee, I made signs that he should follow me, and commenced to row to the shore.

But here I was disappointed, for the fellow, instead of following me, at once began to move off in the opposite direction. Seeing this I at once turned, shouting after him, and pointing where I would have him go. He merely grinned and rowed further off, nor was it any better when I showed him one of my pistols, for he then merely increased his speed, so that I was obliged to pick up my oars again pretty quickly in order to pursue him.

Seeing that it was become a race between us, he bent to his oars, and I did the same, so that the two boats flew down the river, one about twelve lengths behind the other. But taking advantage of a string of barges which lay anchored out in the stream, he presently dodged me, running in round the tail of the line, and so altering his course up the stream. If I had not turned my head constantly to watch him, I should soon have lost him among the shipping, and these frequent turnings hindered my rowing, so that I could not gain on the other boat so fast as I should otherwise have done. For I soon perceived that I was the better rower of the two, or else had the quicker boat; and the spy seemed to perceive it too, for after taking me some distance up the middle of the river, he suddenly struck off

towards the bank, rowing hard for a house which had come in sight, standing on the river's edge.

As we approached this house I could just see (for it was growing dark) a large window standing open, not above a man's height from the water. To this my fellow rowed, and having brought his boat beneath it, threw down his oars, stood up on the gunwale, and with a desperate leap which nearly sunk the boat, gained the sill of the window and disappeared inside.

But I was close behind, running up against the side of his boat at the moment when he passed in at the window, so that by imitating his tactics I was able to leap through immediately after him. I stumbled in alighting, picked myself up, and glanced round, to perceive the man I had been pursuing standing over against me with a pistol in his hand. The next moment I had recognised the room, and there was Marian standing up with a distressed face, one hand on her bosom and the other stretched out between us.

"Stand back!" shouted the spy to her in English, in a voice that I could have recognised anywhere in the world. "This is a damned Indian spy, whom I will kill as soon as I have questioned him."

"You lie, Rupert Gurney," says I, quite calm and cold, as I drew out my own pistols and stood facing him. "'Tis you are the spy, in the service of a vile, treacherous, Moorish tyrant, to whom you would betray your countrymen."

I do not think I have ever seen a man so overwhelmed as was Rupert by those words, though the surprise of this encounter must in reality have been less to him than it was to me, since Marian had of course told him of my being in Calcutta. His jaw dropped, and he ceased to present his pistol at me, no doubt being well aware that I would not take him at a disadvantage.

"Yes," I continued, "not satisfied with your piracies and murders, for which you are justly afraid to show your face in any English community, you are now become a traitor and a public enemy. You have hired yourself out to that bad man, Surajah Dowlah, and go about to deliver your fellow Christians into the hands of Mussalmans and heathen."

"Not so fast, young man," says Rupert, resuming his natural insolence. "Your reproaches are unfair in one particular at least. I am no longer a Christian, having exchanged that religion for the more convenient and profitable one of the Alcoran."

He added a coarse jest which I am ashamed to write down, and which a year or two before I believe he would have been ashamed to utter. I have heard that residence in the East Indies has this effect upon some men, to change their characters to evil, so that when they return to Europe they are no longer fit for the decent society of their own country. And though my cousin Gurney was an unscrupulous and daring young man before ever he left Norfolk, yet I believe he was altered for the worse after his visiting those parts.

Marian, standing terrified between us, now interfered to say—

“Be silent, Rupert, if you please. And you, Athelstane, since you perceive your cousin is here under my father’s roof, I entreat you to retire as you came.”

“I cannot, Marian,” says I, very firm. “I am charged to take that traitor and villain, and I will do it, dead or alive.”

In spite of his bravado I could see Gurney wince under these words, though he affected to make light of them.

“Leave us together, girl,” he said to Marian. “I will tame this young cockerel, as I would have done before if he had fought me fairly, with the weapons agreed to be used by us.”

My blood boiled to hear this shameful taunt.

“You coward!” I cried, “I spared your life once, as you well know, and then you would have murdered me in cold blood because the cutlass broke that I had of a Jew! But I will fight you now with sword, pistol, or both, and this time I swear that you shall not escape with your life.”

But Marian would not consent to this.

“You are not to fight,” she exclaimed. “Do you hear me, Athelstane Ford? Your cousin wants nothing but to be allowed to go away in safety; and would you be the one to deliver your own blood up to justice? For shame!”

“Shame, indeed!” I retorted bitterly, all the anguish that was pent up in my heart breaking out. “Shame that I who have loved and served you, and delivered you out of the prison where this very man had put you, should be asked to spare him now by you, whom he has never truly loved, whom he has betrayed and slighted, and is ready to betray again. I know not, though I can guess, by what wheedling tale he has cozened you to forgive him, and to lend him shelter and protection in

his base designs; but do you think, Marian, that that villain standing there will care for you one moment longer than you can be of use to him, and that he will not leave you to a worse fate than before when he has done with you, and that without the least compunction? I have loved you a long time, Marian, but I have never understood you, and if this is your intention then I think you cannot be in your true mind."

I looked to see her break out and weep, but she did not. She cast her eyes to the ground, and said, when I had finished, speaking low—

"I think you are right, and that perhaps I am not in my true mind. For there are times when I know and see all the falsehood and wickedness of this man's heart as well as ever you can tell it me, and yet I tell you, to my own bitter shame, that I love him so that if he bids me follow him into any disgrace or crime, God help me, I cannot refuse!"

CHAPTER X

TAKEN CAPTIVE

Rupert, when he heard those words of Marian, gave a laugh, and advanced a step towards me.

“There now, you see how it is,” he said, “as I told you long ago in Yarmouth; but you wouldn’t believe me. Come, why need we keep up our quarrel any longer, when the girl tells you to your face that she prefers me? After all, we are of the same blood, good Norfolk dumplings both; and if I have done you any injury in the past, I am here ready to tender my best amends for it.”

He spoke this with a brave air, and I believe was going to offer me his hand. I must confess that I was a little touched with compunction at that mention of Norfolk, where I was born. Something, too, of that old superiority and fascination which this man had exercised over me in my boyhood revived as he spoke. But the memory of his subsequent treacheries and crimes was too strong for me to feel more than a momentary inclination towards yielding. I drew back from him, therefore, and shook my head.

“If we are related, it is a thing I cannot help, though it is to my shame,” I answered him. “But I will have no more part nor lot with you, were you the last of my kin left on earth. Do not suppose that, because Marian is so far bewitched that she has forgiven you your wicked treatment of her, I shall do the same. What are you now but a traitor to your countrymen, and a spy in the service of a bloody Indian tyrant? Rupert Gurney, I must tell you that I hold you for a detestable villain and a coward, and I will pursue you without truce and without rest till I have rid the earth of such a wretch. And I am here now ready to begin.”

My anger against him gathered and swelled as I spoke, recalling his base actions, so different from his words. He immediately let me see that his behaviour was not changed, for before I had well done speaking he suddenly raised his pistol and discharged it in my face; after which he turned and ran out through the doorway, without waiting to see the result of his shot. To do my cousin justice, I believe he had plenty of natural courage, being of the right Ford strain, as he said. But after that great combat which we had in the boat off Yarmouth river, he

never faced me again without a certain reluctance and blenching, as though his conscience misgave him.

I was very little hurt on this occasion, for the ball entered my mouth sideways, merely depriving me of two teeth, and issuing again through the left cheek. But the sudden pain and bleeding incommoded me so far as to hinder my pursuit of Rupert, so that he got clear away and left the town that night, it seems, for Moorshedabad.

I reported the affair to Mr. Drake, merely concealing some details, as that this was my kinsman; and he was so well satisfied to have got rid of him that he promised me I should receive half the reward offered for his capture. But the subsequent events doubtless put it out of his mind, for I never received anything. And on the whole I was satisfied with this, not wishing to make a profit, as it were, out of the treachery of one of my own family, however unworthy.

Even had I succeeded in taking Gurney, and had he been executed, it was now too late to have altered the course of events. Every day brought fresh intelligence confirming the hostility of the Nabob towards the English. One day he sent to demand the levelling of Fort William to the ground, the next he threatened the withdrawal of the Company's privileges, and in particular the dustucks, which he said were abused by being lent to Gentoos, his own subjects. Finally word came that Surajah Dowlah had marched out of Moorshedabad with his army, and had sat down before Cossimbuzar, where we had a factory and a small fort.

All this time the Governor and others of the Council had refused to believe that anything was intended beyond extorting a sum of money from the Company. But the wiser and more prudent ones, among whom were Messrs. Byng and Holwell, took a different view, which they made me share. Now at last Mr. Drake seemed to rouse from his supineness, and gave orders for the town and fort to be prepared against attack. Before these orders could be carried out, however, arrived the news that Mr. Watts, chief of the Cossimbuzar party, was a prisoner in the Nabob's hands, that the place was surrendered, and plundered by the Moors, and that our garrison, though promised security, had been so barbarously used by them that Mr. Elliott, the commanding officer, had taken his own life.

And now men began to tell each other fearful stories of Surajah Dowlah and his career. It was said that when he was a child his favourite pastime had been the torturing of birds and animals, from which, while still in his boyhood, he had passed to mutilating slaves; that not only had he given himself from his earliest

years to every species of oriental lust—some too vile to be named—but he was even a drunkard, a vice forbidden by the Alcoran and foreign to the manners of Indostan. To his great-uncle, the late Nabob, who doted on him to distraction, he had shown, it was said, the basest ingratitude, insolently taking advantage of the old man's affection to accomplish his crimes and murders with impunity, and, if restrained in any of his desires, to withdraw from the Court and threaten rebellion, knowing that his uncle would yield anything rather than endure the absence of his darling. At the present moment, it was affirmed, he had quarrelled with and set aside all the wisest and principal men in his dominions, and was governed by minions of his own, buffoons and such creatures, sprung from the lowest class and promoted to high stations as a reward for their participation in his guilty orgies. Such was the young man, incapable of reason or mercy, and passing from one transport of passion to another, who was now in full march with all his force against Calcutta, having sworn to exterminate the English from Bengal.

Immediately I found there was talk of resistance and fighting, I went to Mr. Byng and begged to be allowed to serve with the garrison. This offer he thankfully accepted, and in the course of a day or two every other Englishman in the town either volunteered or was pressed into the same service. Our regular garrison consisted of only two hundred European troops, to which were added some Topasses, a mixed breed of Indians and Portuguese, very suitable to be used as mercenaries, and about a thousand of the black natives armed as buxerries, or matchlock men. Out of regard to my having been the first to volunteer and to my former service on board a man-of-war, I was presently appointed a sergeant, and put in charge of a party of twelve men, assigned to the defence of the rope-walk which joins the main east road from the fort to the Morattoe ditch.

Besides this ditch, begun to be dug many years before at a time when the Morattoe armies were invading Bengal, and never finished, there was no fortification of any kind round the town; so that barricades had now to be thrown up, and guns planted in the streets at whatever points seemed most favourable for intercepting the advance of the enemy. The plan of defence, so far as any plan was adhered to in the confusion and panic which prevailed, was to defend these outposts as long as possible, then to retire into Fort William itself and stand a siege, and when the fort could be maintained no longer to take to the ships which lay in the river, and drop down the stream out of reach of the enemy.

My own post was, as I have said, at the rope-walk. At one end of this place, on

the main road into the town, was a battery under the command of a captain, so disposed as to check any advance. But in case the enemy should try to creep round through some side streets and take the battery in flank, our little party of twelve was stationed at the other end of the rope-walk, ready to detect and resist any such attempt.

The first notice we had of the arrival of the Moors' army was by a cannon fired on the north side of the town, at a place where the Morattoe ditch joined the river Hooghley. This being the direct way for an army coming from Moorshedabad to enter Calcutta, the Moors here made their first attack, and all that day the sound of cannon and musketry came to us on the breeze, without our seeing the enemy or knowing how the fortune of the day was turning. But with evening came the good news that the enemy had been repulsed and had drawn off to the other side of the ditch.

That night we did not dare to retire to rest indoors, but slept at our post, under a shed put up over some wheels on which the twine was wound. At four in the morning we were up and eating some bread and cold meat sent to us from the fort for our breakfast, when suddenly we heard a fearful rattle and crash of musketry close at hand. The enemy had been informed of the gap in the Morattoe ditch further south, had swarmed across it, and were now attacking our outposts all along the line.

Leaving our meal half-eaten, we sprang to our feet and took our weapons. I ordered the men not to expose themselves more than was needed, an order which one or two of them obeyed so zealously as to place themselves where they could neither see nor be seen by the enemy, and where all they did was to load their muskets and discharge them into the air in the direction from which the attack seemed to come. However, I found some braver than that, and as the Moors seemed much afraid of our fire we held them at bay well enough. Their own fire was more frightening than dangerous, the noise being out of all proportion to the number of persons hit. So much was this the case that after some hours had gone by without a single ball taking effect on any member of our party, their first fears wore off and all began to expose themselves in a very reckless manner.

There was a wall forming the side of the rope-walk, about four feet high, and behind this wall we stood and fired at the Moors as they showed themselves in any of the streets commanded by our position. I cannot describe how interested and excited I got in this cruel sport, for such it resembled. I chose for myself a long, narrow street leading to the southward, with about a dozen lanes crossing it

from east to west. Loading my gun and resting it on the coping of the wall with the muzzle pointed down this street, I kept my eyes on the various openings. Every quarter of an hour, perhaps, a small party of soldiers in bright silk turbans, with glittering arms and armour, would pass out from one of the lanes into this street, either crossing it or moving up or down. Each time I would wait till a whole group emerged, so as to have a bigger target, and then discharge my piece. Almost invariably a man would fall, and the whole party, terrified and not understanding the smallness of our force, would run into one of the lanes adjoining, leaving a wounded or dead man lying in the deserted street. This went on till, I think, fifteen or twenty bodies lay at different points along the roadway, besides those who, being slightly hurt, had crawled away into shelter.

In the end I suppose the Moorish leader in this part of the attack must have had notice of our proceedings; for presently a force of some thirty or forty Indians emerged suddenly from a corner very near the rope-walk and advanced towards us at a run, firing freely as they came. Now it was that one of our men was hit for the first time, a Company's servant named Parkes, a young lad who had arrived in Bengal only six weeks before from England. A ball struck him under the right eye, and he died in a few minutes.

This accident caused the rest of us to take more care. Nevertheless, we managed to get off a good volley before the enemy could arrive as far as the wall, wounding several. The rest wavered, and would, perhaps, have fled but for the action of their leader, a tall, fine man, having a great scymetar in his hand, with which he struck his men violently on the shoulders to urge them forward. Seeing them resume their rush at our position, I looked round at my own men, and to my disgust found several preparing to desert their places and retire further back.

"Stop!" I shouted angrily. "Let us show these black villains we are not afraid of them! Fix bayonets! Forward! Charge!"

With these words I leaped over the wall and ran at the enemy, followed by my whole party, except one man, who actually threw down his piece and fled, not stopping till he reached the fort. But he need not have done this, for had he stood a moment he would have seen the whole party of Moors break and fly without waiting to close with us, so much were they terrified by the way in which we sprang over the wall to come at them. And this is, indeed, the nature of all the natives of Indostan—to give way instantly that they meet an enemy who is more bent on fighting than they are themselves.

The only person to stand his ground was the leader of the party, who waited for us to come up, and then, singling me out, aimed a blow at me with his scymetar. Up to this moment I had been too busy to observe his face, and my rage knew no bounds when I discovered that I had to do with my renegade kinsman himself, who, it appears, had been searching for me from the very beginning of the battle. How it would now have gone between us I cannot say, for several of my men closing in round us almost immediately, Rupert saw his danger and ran off, and my duty to defend the rope-walk forbade me from following.

For the rest of that day we were not much disturbed, except by the continual pattering of bullets, which seemed to come from all quarters of the compass. When night came, being anxious to learn how the siege had progressed in other quarters, I sent a messenger to the fort, who brought back word that the enemy had made no very great impression so far, but that everything was in such a state of confusion and dismay at the headquarters that it was impossible we could hold out much longer.

Not to dwell on these particulars, the next day saw the end of this unhappy affair. Early in the forenoon the Moors made a very hot attack on the battery at the far end of our rope-walk, and at the same time a fresh party, headed by my wicked cousin, assailed our position. I restrained my men from discharging their muskets till the Indians were within a few paces of us, with the result that we did great execution, nearly a dozen of them falling. The rest fell back for a moment, but Gurney urging them on, they rushed up and made a desperate attempt to clamber over the wall.

While we were hard at work keeping them off with our bayonets, I heard a tremendous crash and shouting in the rear, from the point where the battery was placed. This noise seemed greatly to encourage our assailants, several of whom managed to get over the wall and engage in hand to hand conflicts with the men under me. Nevertheless, I stirred up my fellows to continue their resistance, and myself beat back two Moors, one of whom I ran through the body with my bayonet. So absorbed was I that I did not observe the approach of a young ensign from the battery, who came running along the rope-walk, shouting out—

“Fall back! fall back! The battery is abandoned to the enemy, and they will cut off your retreat.”

At this the men with me began to slacken their exertions, and some fairly took to their heels. However, I had just caught sight of Rupert advancing towards me

and did not feel inclined to budge.

“Come back, you fool!” shouted the little ensign, pale and breathless. “We are beaten, don’t you hear?”

I turned my head and scowled at him.

“You seem to be beaten, sir,” I said. “For my part, I am very comfortable where I am, and intend to go on fighting.”

With these words I turned to defend myself from Rupert, who was coming at me eagerly enough, as it seemed. The ensign fled without further parley, and I believe saved his life. So also did most of my companions, though two others were badly wounded, and unable to stir. For my part I was resolved to sell my life dearly, but this privilege was denied me. For Gurney, as soon as he saw how the land lay, and that I was left there alone, instantly drew back and ordered his men to take me a prisoner, which, being by this time about thirty or forty against one, they effected, whether I would or not.

My cousin’s exultation was very great when he thus had me for the second time in his power.

“Now, Master Athelstane,” he cried, “we shall see whether you get off as lightly as you did at Gheriah. You are not likely, I think, to be rescued by a fleet this time. But perhaps you will be glad that I should take you without more ado before the Nabob. He has a high opinion of the English, and no doubt will be glad to take you into his service and give you many handsome rewards.”

“Rupert Gurney,” I answered, “in mocking at one who is your prisoner, owing to no valour of yours, you merely show yourself to be a coward as well as a traitor. I care nothing for what the Nabob may do to me; and this I know, that I would rather he put me to death outright than enjoy his favour by such services as yours.”

“Thank you, cousin,” says Rupert, who was able to keep his temper now that he had the better of me. “I am glad to learn that you will not seek to undermine my credit with his Highness. But now, if you are sufficiently rested, let us proceed.”

Speaking these mocking words, he made his men bind my wrists together with a cord, and conducted me out of the streets of the town towards Surajah Dowlah’s camp.

The tent of the Nabob was a fine great pavilion of yellow and crimson cloth. All about the entrance stood his guards, very handsomely dressed, with silver and gold ornaments, and armed with all sorts of curious weapons, some of which I had not seen before. Inside, when we were presently admitted, the spectacle was still more striking. The Nabob sat on a high cushion, called the musnud, placed on a daïs which was raised several feet above the ground. On the daïs beside him stood three of his principal courtiers, in silk robes and turbans incrusted with gems, while others of inferior rank stood below the steps of the daïs. A slave beat the air with a fan of peacock's feathers over the Nabob's head.

I gazed with great curiosity and awe upon this young prince, who was now making his name terrible through Bengal. I was amazed to see that he was extremely young, scarce older than myself, with a face, I think, the handsomest of any Indian's I ever saw: yet his face was marred, and his youthfulness made unnatural by the ugly traces of his passions. His skin appeared coarse and blotched, his lips were thick and purple-coloured, and his teeth—an unusual thing among Moors—very black and dirty, when he spoke. He lay back somewhat on his throne, with his chin leaning on his breast and his heavy eyes turned to the ground. In spite of the waving of the fan, the heat seemed to oppress him; or else it was the weight of his turban, for he passed his hand over his brow every now and then as if he would have lifted it off. His fingers, I noticed, were much encumbered with rings, besides which he wore bracelets, and ear-rings in his ears. But when he lifted his eyes from the floor and looked at me, I was appalled by the expression in them, which was not that of common ferocity, but rather dreadful despair, like a lost soul that is goaded on to assuage its own pangs by the torture of others.

"Who is this dog?" he asked in a husky, soddened tone, as I was brought up to the foot of his daïs.

"It is one of the ungrateful wretches who have dared to resist the slaves of your sublime Highness," was the answer. Rupert had come in with me, so as to take the credit of my capture, but the conversation with the Nabob was carried on by one of the Indians, who seemed to be the lieutenant of the party.

"Is he one of the English?" demanded Surajah, casting an angry glance at me.

"Your exalted wisdom has said the word. Undoubtedly he belongs to that vile nation, whom the breath of your anger has even now destroyed."

"Ask him why his people have dared to resist my commands. Who is he? Is he

one of their principal men? Ask him where is their treasure?”

Before the Indian could translate these questions I answered them in the same language.

“I am an interpreter in the service of the Company, may it please your Highness. I am but newly arrived in your country, and know nothing of the other matters you have asked about.”

The Nabob gave a sullen frown.

“Take the wretch away out of my sight. He is a worthless capture,” he said.

But one of the three men on the daïs, a young, handsome Gentoo, with a cruel, cunning face—I afterwards heard he was Lal Moon, the Nabob’s chief favourite—bent over his master and whispered something in his ear. Instantly Surajah Dowlah sat up, furious.

“You have lied to me!” he screamed. “You speak our language, and yet you say you are but newly arrived. That must be a lie!”

He looked round at his courtiers, and there was a murmur of admiration at his sagacity.

“Your Highness is mistaken,” I said, keeping cool. “I learned the Indostanee language on my way out to the East Indies, from the secretary of Colonel Clive.”

As I pronounced this name I saw a movement among those present. The Nabob stared, not understanding to whom I referred; but an older man, with a proud, discontented, and yet apprehensive air, who also stood on the daïs, and was, I found out, Meer Jaffier, Surajah Dowlah’s uncle, and commander of his armies, this man, I say, spoke in explanation—

“The youth means that he came on the ship with Sabat Jung.”

No sooner did the Nabob hear this than he changed colour.

“Are you a friend of Sabat Jung’s? Is he coming to Bengal?” he asked, with scarcely concealed anxiety.

“Sabat Jung is my protector,” I replied, putting on a bolder air. “If he hears that any wrong has been done to the English in Calcutta, he will surely come here and avenge them.”

The courtiers exchanged looks of amazement at these words of defiance, doubtless expecting to see me led to instant execution. But I have an instinct which tells me when a man is afraid of me, and I could see that, for the time, Surajah Dowlah was cowed.

My cousin Gurney seized this opportunity to attract the Nabob's attention, and take credit for his exploit. He stepped towards me and said, in such Indostanee as he could command—

"Silence, wretch! Sabat Jung is in the Carnatic, nor would he dare to come into Bengal without the permission of the Lord of the English, Surajah Dowlah. When he hears of the conquest of Cossimbuzar and Fort William the heart of Sabat Jung will become as water."

I gave him a scornful look.

"If his Highness judges of the English by you he will be deceived," I said. "If you were ever to show your face in any place where Sabat Jung was he would have you hanged, as you very well know."

I kept my eyes fixed on the young Nabob's face as I spoke, and was pleased to see that I had made an impression. He looked uneasily from one to the other of us, and then, before Rupert could reply, ordered us both from his presence.

I found myself kept a close prisoner for that night and a part of the next day in the house of a rich Indian, which stood beside the Morattoe ditch. From this place I could hear some noise of guns occasionally, and was obliged to conjecture how the fight was going on. There was something very trying and painful in being near enough to a battle-field to share its anxieties without being allowed to join in the work. But I had a pretty sure presentiment that the affair would end badly for us, and so indeed it proved; for about four in the afternoon there was a great commotion outside the place where I was confined, and my guards came in to fetch me, telling me with cruel pleasure that Fort William had surrendered, and I was to be brought there to join the other prisoners.

I will not stay to describe the confused spectacle of the streets through which we passed on our way to the fort. What struck me most, and put a deep depression upon my spirits, was to see the fierce exultation of the native Indians in our discomfiture. In this hour of our overthrow these men, who had lived unmolested beneath our government, and thriven by means of our commerce, openly revealed all that vehement malice and hatred toward us which is, I suppose, part

of their nature, and not to be eradicated by any fairness of dealing. I should be ashamed to relate the vile things they said, and their gross behaviour, as I was led along a prisoner. I thank God I have since walked through those same streets in a different trim, and had those same wretches bowing and grovelling on the earth as I passed.

When I arrived at the fort I was horrified to find gathered there a large company of other English prisoners, to the number of about a hundred and fifty. Among them were both the Honourable Robert Byng and Mr. Holwell, who received me with surprise, having been assured by those men who had fought under me that they had seen me slain. Immediately after my joining them Mr. Holwell, who had become the chief of the party, was sent for by the Nabob to be examined. While he was away Mr. Byng told me the miserable circumstances of the capture of the fort, and how the Governor, Mr. Drake, had shamefully fled away overnight in a boat to the ships on the first alarm of the enemy's approach. Not content with this, he had carried off the whole of the shipping down the river to Govindpore, thus rendering hopeless the case of the English who had not escaped along with him, and that although it would have been easy to rescue them by sending a few boats to the shore. Of this, which I believe to be the most signal act of cowardice ever heard of, I forbear to write, lest I should fall into the use of opprobrious language. Yet I have often marvelled that those who had poor Mr. Byng—I mean the Admiral—shot on his own quarterdeck for his failure at Minorca, should have refused a gallows and a hempen noose to one who so richly deserved it as Governor Drake.

While Mr. Holwell was with the Nabob the rest of us stood under a strong guard in the courtyard of the fort, where we began to find the heat very burdensome, the more so as it was difficult to get anything to eat or drink. While we were thus situated I saw my cousin Rupert go by, wearing a rich new turban, to wait upon the Nabob. At this period he appeared to be in high favour at the Court. No doubt he had acquired influence with Surajah Dowlah by flattering his superiority to the English.

Mr. Holwell presently returned with the news that Surajah Dowlah was very much incensed against him, on account of the small sum found in the treasury of the fort, which amounted only to 54,000 Rs. The prince was firmly persuaded that the Company had somewhere concealed a vast treasure, which had been his principal motive to push the attack of the place. He had threatened Mr. Holwell very severely unless this treasure were found, and dismissed him to consult with his fellow-prisoners. This was bad news, for it was evidently impossible to persuade Surajah Dowlah that there was no such treasure, and he would therefore be inclined to look upon Mr. Holwell's failure to discover it as mere obstinacy.

We were discussing our prospects very gloomily when a party of Moors arrived,

bringing two fresh prisoners. I felt a sudden sickness when I recognised that these were none other than Marian herself with her father. Old Mr. Rising seemed to be dazed, and unconscious of what was happening to him, but Marian was suffering from visible terror. I hastened to her side, exclaiming—

“Marian, what do you do here? Why are you not gone with the other women?”—for all the Englishwomen and children had been put aboard the ships as soon as the Moors arrived outside the town.

Marian looked surprised and a little comforted to meet me in the same situation as herself.

“So you are a prisoner too!” she cried. “I confess I do not understand what has happened to my father and me, for Rupert especially enjoined and urged us to remain in our house, assuring us that his credit with the Nabob would serve not merely to protect us, but to secure high places and rewards for himself, which he intended I should share.”

She said this with a certain shame, but I was too anxious for her safety to retain my feelings of jealousy at such a moment.

“I will send for Gurney to come here,” I said. “I have just seen him go into the Nabob’s presence.”

I called one of the men who kept guard over us, and bade him go instantly and fetch my cousin. The Moor showed some disinclination to obey me, but I repeated my command in a tone so firm that he gave way, and sullenly complied.

In a minute or two Rupert came out, looking bewildered, and, I thought, somewhat alarmed. As soon as he saw who it was that had sent for him, however, his assurance returned, and he came to us with a jaunty air.

“Ha! Marian,” he said, taking no notice of me, “so you have found your way here, have you? I am pleased to greet you; but if you have sent for me to ask me to procure the release of your other admirer, whom I took prisoner yesterday, I must tell you fairly that I am not the least inclined to do it.”

“Nay, Rupert,” she answered, “I am ashamed to say that I had not thought of asking you anything on your cousin Athelstane’s behalf. ’Tis I and my father who are now prisoners, in spite of your pledges to us. Surely you will not suffer this!”

Thus she spoke to him, but, ah! not in the old self-confident strain, but with a certain mournful submission which wrung my very heartstrings.

“What do you say? You amaze me, Marian! This is a gross breach of the Serdar’s own promise to me, but I doubt not that it will at once be righted. As for your father, I do not say; it may be that the old man would be better off in captivity. But I take it on myself that you shall be released without delay. I will go straight and speak about it.”

He said all this so readily that I could not feel sure he was not sincere. Marian, poor girl, gladly believed him, and gave me a look which was plainly meant to protest against my entertaining evil thoughts of Rupert. He hurried away, as he had said, and at the same time Mr. Holwell was sent for again to the Nabob.

By this time it was getting to be near evening. The sun was dropping down on the other side of the river, and the long shadows of the palm trees rocked on the water. From where we stood we could see the soldiers going to and fro getting ready their evening meal, and hear an occasional shot in the town, where some Indian was letting off his musket by way of triumph for the victory. It was still hot, but a little breeze began to move up the river and flutter some pieces of linen that hung out drying in the lower courtyard, yesterday having been washing day in the fort.

Mr. Holwell and Rupert returned together, the former more cheerful, but Gurney very sulky, and making a show of being much annoyed.

“I have spoken to the Serdar, Marian, and could do nothing for to-night. He says that you are to remain with the other English till he can take the Nabob’s pleasure, who is now getting drunk, and difficult to deal with.”

Mr. Holwell confirmed the story, adding—

“Surajah Dowlah may scarce be spoken to. His looks are dreadful. Yet he has sworn to me on the faith of a soldier that no hair of any of our heads shall be injured.”

“That is right,” quoth Rupert. “So you see, Marian, it is but staying here with your other friends”—he gave me a jeering smile as he said this—“till to-morrow morning, when I will speak to the Nabob myself, at all hazards, and have you released.”

Poor Marian glanced at him in despair.

“Rupert, you won’t desert me!” she cried. “You don’t mean to leave me as you did in Gheriah in that horrid cell, from which I scarcely escaped alive?”

“Pooh, pooh, girl! No,” he answered lightly, “I shall be at hand. It is nothing. What is one night’s captivity? The soldiers will have orders to find you some comfortable room in the fort. I will see about your accommodation myself.”

With this promise on his lips he disappeared, and returned no more.

CHAPTER XI

THE BLACK HOLE

I have now to tell how we passed through that night, the memory of which to this day moves me to tremble and sicken like a man in strong fear.

At sunset the Moorish soldiers who had charge of the prisoners marched us all together into a covered gallery or verandah that ran along one side of the courtyard, from which it was screened off by a row of arches. While we waited here a part of the soldiers ran to and fro, as if looking for accommodation for us. Surajah Dowlah's promises, reported to us by Mr. Holwell, had so far raised our spirits that some of the prisoners made merry at the difficulty the guard seemed to be in. One man asked if we were to pass the night in that gallery. Another, who stood near me, observed in jest—

"They don't seem to know of the Black Hole."

"I'm afraid we shouldn't all go into that," replied another, laughing.

"What place do you mean?" I asked out of curiosity.

"It is the cell where they confine the soldiers of the garrison," explained the person next me. "It won't hold more than one or two persons."

Hardly had he given me this information before the officer in charge of our guard came hurrying up. He gave some directions to his men, who commenced pushing and urging us along the gallery to a small door in the wall at our back. This they threw open, and beckoned to the prisoners to enter.

"By heaven, it is the Black Hole!" exclaimed some one in the throng.

There was a murmur of disbelief, followed by one of indignation, as those who were in front looked in. The room was barely seven paces across each way, and very low. The only openings it contained, beside the doorway, were two small windows giving, not on to the open air, but merely on to the covered passage in which we had been standing.

"But this is absurd!" cried Mr. Holwell, remonstrating with the soldiers. "There

is not even standing-room for a hundred and fifty persons in there."

"They cannot intend that we are all to go in. We should be suffocated," said another.

The soldiers beginning to show anger, some of the company walked in to demonstrate how restricted the space was. Nevertheless the Moors continued to press us towards the doorway, and seeing that they were in earnest, I whispered to Marian to give me her arm, and went in with the first. By this means I was just in time to secure Marian a place at the corner of one of the windows, where she would have a chance to breathe. I took up my position next to her, and we were quickly surrounded and closely pressed on by those who followed. Before we had well realised what was happening to us, the whole of the prisoners had been thrust into the cell, and the door, which opened inwards, pulled to with a slam and locked.

The moment this happened I found myself bursting out into a most prodigious sweat—the water running out of my skin as though squeezed from a sponge—by the mere press of people in that confined space; and near as I stood to the window I soon began to experience a difficulty in breathing, so foul did the air immediately become. The sufferings of those further back in the apartment must of course have been much worse. The door was no sooner closed than those next to it began to make frantic efforts to open it again; but we were so closely packed that, even if the door had not been locked, it would have been scarcely possible to open it wide enough to allow of any persons going through. Every mind seemed to become at once possessed with a sense of our desperate situation, and the groans and cries for mercy became heartrending.

Mr. Holwell, having been the first to enter, had been fortunate enough to secure a place at the other window. He now exerted himself, as the leader of the party, to calm the tumult.

"Gentlemen," he said earnestly, "let me urge you to keep still. The only hope for us in this emergency is to behave quietly, and do what we can to relieve each other's sufferings. I will use my endeavours with the guard to procure our release, and in the meantime do you refrain from giving way to despair."

It was now dark within the room, but outside some of the guards had lit torches, by whose light I distinguished one old man, a Jemautdar, who appeared a little touched with pity for our distress. To this man Mr. Holwell appealed, through the window, offering him large rewards if he would have us transferred to some

more tolerable prison. At first the old Moor merely shook his head, but finally, when Mr. Holwell offered him a thousand rupees if he would remove even half the prisoners to another room, he shrugged his shoulders, muttered that he would see what could be done, and walked off.

During the few minutes which had already elapsed since our coming into the cell, the heat had increased to that degree as to be no longer tolerable. My skin and throat felt as though scorched by fire, and the atmosphere was so noxious that it became painful to breathe. I looked at Marian. She was very white, and stood moving her lips silently as though praying. Being the only female among us, those immediately round the window showed some desire to respect her weakness, but the pressure from behind was such that they were driven against her, in spite of themselves, and I had hard work to defend her from being crushed against the wall.

But when I glanced back into the room the sights revealed by the flickering torchlight convinced me that our sufferings were almost light in comparison with those of others. I saw one man, a few paces behind me, turn purple in the face, as if some one were strangling him. Two or three others had already fainted from the heat, and I heard some one whisper that they had fallen to the ground.

The Jemautdar presently returned, shaking his head, and said to Mr. Holwell—

“I can do nothing. It is by the Nabob’s orders that you are locked up, and I dare not interfere.”

“But we are dying, man!” cried Mr. Holwell. “The Nabob swore that he would spare our lives. Listen! I will give you two thousand rupees—anything—if you will procure us some relief!”

The old man went off once more, and hope revived for a moment. While we were thus waiting some one at the back of the room suddenly said aloud—

“Let us take off our clothes!”

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than in an instant, as it seemed, nearly every one was stark naked. They tore their things off furiously and cast them to the ground. I resisted the contagion as long as I could, but when I saw even Mr. Holwell, though nearer the air than myself, stripped to his shirt, I could not resist following his example; and in our dreadful extremity my unhappy companion was presently forced to do the same, hiding her face with her hands and choking

down great sobs.

When the Jemautdar returned for the second time he made it appear that our case was hopeless.

“No one dares help you,” he said, speaking with evident compunction. “Surajah Dowlah is asleep, and it is as much as any man’s life is worth to awake him.”

As soon as the meaning of these words was understood by the hundred and fifty miserable wretches inside, a pitiful, low wail went up. Then commenced that long, dreadful agony which so few were to survive, and which I only remember in successive glimpses of horror spread over hours that were like years.

One of the last things we did, before all self-control was lost, was to try and make a current of air by all sitting down together, and then suddenly rising; but unhappily by this time several had grown so weak that, having once gone down, they proved unequal to the effort of getting up again, and fell under the feet of their companions. Among these unfortunates was Marian’s father, Mr. Rising, who had come in with us, and stood a little way off in the press. Although preserving his dazed, unconscious air in the midst of these calamities, he had exhibited many symptoms of physical distress. He now remained sitting helpless on the floor, and while I was trying to contrive some means of assisting him, I saw the next man behind him very coolly step over his body, spurning it with his foot. Poor Mr. Rising fell on his back, groaning, and was instantly trodden out of sight.

My first impulse was to spare Marian the knowledge of her father’s shocking fate. Turning round hastily, I whispered—

“Don’t look behind you, for God’s sake!”

The words came too late. She turned her head, saw what had happened, and shrieked aloud.

That shriek was the signal for fifty others, like wild beasts answering each other in a wood, as the manhood of that tortured mob suddenly forsook it, to be succeeded by brute despair. Some began to hurl themselves against the door, others broke into frantic prayers and imprecations. The clamour died down, rose again, and finally settled into a monotonous, incessant cry for water.

All this time I had preserved my self-control very well, but when this cry for water was raised, either the excessive pain I endured, or else the mere example

of so many persons around me, so shook me that I could no longer command my motions, and I found myself screaming the words in Indostanee at the old Jemautdar as though I would have torn him in pieces.

The old man seemed to be really moved by our sufferings. He sent two or three of the soldiers to fetch water, and they presently came to the windows bearing it in skins.

It was a fatal act of mercy. The mere sight of the water instantly overthrew the reason of half the unhappy wretches behind us. A wild howl went up, and a frantic struggle commenced to get to the windows. Those who a few minutes before had been rational Christian beings were now to be seen fighting and striking each other as they leaped and plunged to climb over those in front. Marian, terror-stricken by the outburst, put her hands before her eyes, and would have been swept away from her place like a leaf if I had not set my back to hers and fought furiously against the lunatics behind. I can see now the dark, flushed face of one man, his parched tongue dropping out of his mouth, and his eyes rolling horribly, quite mad, as he flung himself upon me and tried to tear me down. To add to the horror, the Indian soldiers brought their torches to the windows in order to gloat on this scene. I heard them laugh like devils as the red light flashed on the naked heap of infuriated Englishmen writhing and fighting in that narrow hell.

After ten minutes the struggles began to die down through sheer exhaustion, and then those of us who stood next the windows were allowed to drink from the skins; after which we filled hats with the water and passed them into the back of the apartment. In this way every one obtained some, but no good effect was wrought thereby. So far as I was concerned, the heat and drought were so fearful that no sooner had I swallowed my share of the fluid than my throat became as dry as it had been before—the momentary relief served only to aggravate my torments.

Then as the fever gained upon me, my thoughts broke bounds, and there danced confusedly through my brain odd scraps of memories and pictures of other scenes. For whole moments together I lost the knowledge of where I was; those dark walls and haggard faces passed, and in their stead came visions of the pleasant places I used to know, the ruffling of the wind upon the Breydon Water and the dykes, the stir among the reeds and rushes, and the cattle browsing in the Norfolk fields. Instead of the swarthy Indian soldiers with their torches I saw the friendly, homely figures of the carters as they rode their horses to the pool at

sundown after the day's work was over, and the familiar groups of villagers, and the face of little Patience Thurstan as she looked up at me, ready to weep, that time I said goodbye to her on my last day at home; and there rose before me the likeness of the dear old homestead, the gables and the crooked chimney, and the porch with jasmine growing over one side and boys' love on the other; and I saw my father and my mother where they sat and faced each other across the hearthplace, and thought, maybe, of their son, so that there came over me a great and miserable longing to return to them; and, like the prodigal son when he ate husks among the swine, I repented of my rebellion and running away, and in that hour I took a resolution that if I ever outlived the night I would leave the wicked land of India for ever, and go back to my own country, and ask my father to forgive me, as I knew my mother had forgiven me long ago.

Such were the thoughts that, by fits and starts, passed through me during the first hours of the death struggle; but the worst horror of that awful night came presently. In the recesses of the chamber, furthest from the windows, a harder evil than the heat was the intolerable foulness of the air. Even where I was standing it had become an excruciating pain to breathe, and my breast felt as though laced about with iron bands. In the interior many had by this time dropped down, not so much suffocated as poisoned by the fetid gas they were compelled to inhale. And now at length I detected a new, indescribably nauseous odour, added to the acrid smell of the place. At first I tried to conceal even from my own mind what this was. But not for long. In a very few minutes the secret was known to all there. The unhappy man I had seen trodden down had been dead for about half an hour, and his body was already corrupt.

Then that whole den of madmen broke loose, raving and cursing; some imploring God to strike them dead, others casting the most foul and savage insults at the guards without, if by that means they might tempt them to fire in through the windows and put an end to what they endured. They struck at one another, they clutched each other's hair, surging and trampling one another down to gain an inch nearer the miserable air-holes which afforded the only chance of life. The floor was choked with corpses, among which the survivors were entangled in one seething mass. As for me, I became light-headed, and had only one blind instinct left, to strike down any man who attempted to thrust Marian from her breathing ground. I was aware that she had lost her senses and sunk down between me and the wall; yet I went on battling, as in some dreadful nightmare, with the furious forms that rose up and loomed out of the darkness. When I could no longer make out their faces I still struck out blindly, and heard

them go down heavily upon the pile of bodies behind which I stood entrenched. Hour after hour that ghastly combat raged, till the corpses were thrice and four times more numerous than those who still breathed; and at last an awful lethargy settled down over the scene, broken only when one of the survivors roused himself for an expiring effort that sent a quiver through the dead and dying heap.

After that I know no more, for when the morning broke, and the officers came to release the handful left alive, the energy that had held me up so long forsook me, and I sank down unconscious.

CHAPTER XII

RUPERT IN A NEW LIGHT

When I came to my senses again I was lying on the ground under the gallery. The door of that Gehenna was standing open, twenty paces from me, and the stench from the corpses piled within tainted the air of the whole court.

My first thought was of Marian. I looked round as well as I was able, but could see no signs of her. The great weakness in which I found myself was such as to prevent me from standing on my feet, but I lifted myself up so far as to lean on one elbow, and in that posture glanced round over the little group of those who survived.

I counted twenty-two in all, less than one-sixth of the number of those who had been promised the mercy of Surajah Dowlah on the evening of yesterday. Close beside me lay Mr. Holwell, seeming to breathe painfully, as he laboured to gain his self-command. I heard afterwards that this worthy gentleman had been found unconscious and almost lifeless, on the floor; and that a lane had had to be cleared through the dead to bring out the twenty-three of us that remained alive.

But, look where I would, Marian was not there, and my heart misgave me that that beautiful form was lying in the loathsome charnel-house whence I had so hardly come out. A man near me, who appeared to have preserved his strength better than most of us, presently observing my trouble, and guessing its cause, undertook to enlighten me.

“You look for Mistress Rising?” he said. “She was among the survivors; I saw her brought out immediately before you. But she is not here; one of the Moors’ officers led her away out of the fort, no doubt to bestow her in safe keeping somewhere in the town.”

This intelligence served to remove my worst apprehensions, yet it left me not a little uneasy as to what next might befall Marian among those in whose hands we were still captives. At the moment of which I speak, however, I was too ill to pursue the inquiry as to what had become of her. The fever I had taken during the night was still strong upon me, indeed we were all in a very pitiful state, scarce able to move or speak, and looking more like ghosts than men. It was not

till above a week had passed that I began to shake off the effects of those few hours' torture; and I sometimes think that I have never yet wholly recovered from them.

Nor must I spare to mention those other changes which were wrought in me by that night, passed, I may say, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Up to this time, I perceived on looking back over my previous adventures, I had been no better than a mad young fool, following after a will-o'-the-wisp to my own hurt and destruction. And though I cannot say that that ill-starred and calamitous love of mine for Marian, which had haunted me since I first saw her in the tavern of the "Three-decker" at Yarmouth, was abated at this time, yet I think I did now begin to perceive how evil an influence it had exerted over my life, and to gradually bring myself to a manlier frame of mind. So that I no longer hugged myself with false and pernicious hopes of what could never be brought to pass, but set myself resolutely to uproot this my besetting weakness, and thus to transfer Marian, as it might be, from the place of a mistress to that of an old and dear friend.

In all which resolves and efforts at amendments I found myself greatly helped and encouraged by the recollection of those better thoughts which had come to me in my distress, when my eyes were opened to the wickedness of which I had been guilty towards my parents. And from this time on, through all the vicissitudes I was yet to encounter, I looked forward steadily to the day when I should turn my feet once more towards home, and behold my father and my mother, and the simple, loving face of little Patience Thurstan.

But before that day came there were many things to be done, nor would I have willingly left the land of Indostan till I had seen the blood of the English he had so barbarously murdered revenged upon Surajah Dowlah's head. How this was to be brought about I did not then know, yet I had a confidence that it would be so, which sustained me. For I felt that I had witnessed, and been partly victim of, a most heinous and devilish crime, scarcely to be matched in the annals of mankind, and such as scarce any punishment within the power of man to inflict could wholly purge. It was as if there had been revealed to me, in the light of those flaring torches thrust in mockery between the bars of our prison windows, a whole secret hell of cruelty and darkness, such as our Christian land knows nothing of, which we can never understand, but which for ever lies waiting for the moment to burst forth, under the obsequious and servile behaviour of the natives of India. Since that time, I confess, I have never regarded, nor can regard, them as my fellow-beings; I look upon all faith or mercy shown to them

as wasted, and were it possible for the English to overthrow every one of their governments, and to reduce the whole peninsula into slavery, I should not think enough had been done to extinguish the memory of that one misdeed.

The cup of the Nabob's cruelty was even yet not full. In the morning, as soon as we had partaken of a little food and wine, merely enough to give us strength to stand up, our miserable remnant was ordered to come before him, to be questioned again.

We found Surajah Dowlah enthroned in the principal apartment of the fort, in even greater state than I had before seen him in, flushed with all the triumph of a conqueror. He looked to have just awakened from sleeping off a debauch, and glanced at us, as we came in, with a heavy, lowering eye. The supple, handsome Lal Moon was standing beside his master as usual, and close behind the favourite I saw my kinsman, with a countenance somewhat discomposed. He turned a very scrutinising look on our party, frowned when he caught sight of me, and was evidently disturbed at not perceiving Marian amongst the rest.

The Nabob, instead of displaying any interest in our condition, or pretending any regret for the massacre of our fellow prisoners, at once addressed Mr. Holwell in a very peremptory manner.

"Now, English dog, you have had a night to consider," he said insolently, "are you disposed to behave more civilly to me in the matter of the treasure?"

Poor Mr. Holwell had scarce strength enough to answer him. He said feebly—

"I can only repeat what I told you last night. Your Highness has been deceived. There is no treasure here of the Company."

"You are a liar, and the son of a liar!" returned Surajah fiercely. "Do you think I am a fool to believe that the English come all the way from your country here to amass a paltry sum of fifty thousand rupees? Such a sum would not pay the expense of your establishment here. I know well that you have a treasure somewhere hidden; but you are resolved to keep it from me, the rightful master of this country. I swear I will teach you that it is safer to stand in the path of a mad elephant than to disobey the least command of Surajah Dowlah!"

He rolled his eyes savagely as he made these threats, which struck dismay into the stoutest of us. Mr. Holwell attempted no further answer, and presently the Nabob rose in a fury and marched out of the hall, giving no orders concerning

our disposal.

As soon as he was gone the general of his army, Meer Jaffier, came down off the daïs and approached us. He began offering some expressions of sympathy to Mr. Holwell, and assured him that he would use his influence with his nephew to procure our release.

While Meer Jaffier was talking to Mr. Holwell, I saw my cousin slowly approaching me. I turned my back, so loth was I to hold intercourse with him, but he came up, and persisted in addressing me.

“Athelstane, what has become of Marian Rising?” he asked abruptly.

“Nay, I leave that to you to find out, who delivered her to Surajah Dowlah to be tortured and killed,” I answered bitterly.

“See here, cousin,” he said, infusing a touch of natural feeling into his voice, “I swear to you, on the faith of a Ford, that I had not so much as the least suspicion of the horrid treachery about to be practised on you last night by these damned black devils. If I could have had any notice of what was going forward, I would have returned last night at all hazards, and delivered you. As regards Marian, I had the most sacred pledges from both Meer Jaffier and Lal Moon that not one hair of her head should be injured. I swear it.”

“You swear very plentifully, it appears to me,” I returned, preserving a tone of mere contempt and hatred; “but I know not how your oaths can serve you at the present time. Thanks to your evil persuasions, the woman for whom you have many times pretended affection was last night brought to the very door of death, and is now ill and captive among the Moors. Me, your cousin, whom you first tempted to leave his home and friends, and have since betrayed and misused and many times attempted to slay, you see before you, in the power of those black fiends, as you call them, who appear to be your good friends. Had you not better prevail with them to put us both to death, and thus make an end of it?”

“No, by G——, Athelstane, you are wrong!” he exclaimed very earnestly. “I bear you no malice, nor ever should have done, had you not set yourself up as my rival and thwarted me on several occasions—and I am a man that will not brook opposition. As it is, if I have ever attempted anything against you, it was in hot blood, and had I hated you ten times worse than I did, yet last night’s business would have been too much for me to stomach.”

I gazed at him, doubtful whether to believe in his sincerity or no. It was difficult for me to refrain from some softening towards him as he thus spoke, and yet I asked myself whether these fair words were not the prelude to some new piece of knavery or treachery, for which he stood in need of my assistance.

He continued urging me.

“Have you forgot all those ties that are between us—our blood, and bringing-up in the same country, and the pleasant times we have had together when you were a youngster, and I was used to ride over to your house from Lynn, for my holidays? You were then content enough to call yourself your cousin Rupert’s little squire, and if it were a question of robbing orchards or taking bird’s-nests, you grudged to be left out. Can you not overlook the differences that have since arisen between us, and let us return to our former good comradeship and affection?”

Now I well knew that this man was a most accomplished villain, and an hour before I should have no more thought of sparing or making terms with him than with a speckled snake. Yet no sooner did he thus begin to wheedle me, than I found my just anger and hatred against him insensibly desert me.

“Why do you hold this language to me?” I said, as sullen as I could, so as to hide my secret relenting. “What need have you of me now? What fellowship can there be between a miserable prisoner in the Indians’ power, and you, their trusted friend and servant?”

He gave me a significant glance, and then stooped towards me, whispering—

“No, cousin, you are mistaken there, I tell you again. Either these Moors have all along meant to play me false, or else they consider themselves betrayed by me in the matter of the treasure which they expected to find. Instead of now enjoying their confidence, I find I am looked upon with distrust. They tell me nothing, and no longer consult with me about their dealings with the English. I tell you fairly, I am uneasy to find myself so much in their power as I am, and if I could I would gladly make my peace with my fellow-countrymen, and enter the service of the Company.”

This confession sounded to me sufficiently probable to be believed. I could now see plainly enough what was Rupert’s object in thus seeking to be reconciled with me. It was because I was the only witness against him in the English camp, able to denounce the crimes and treasons which he had committed, to the

governor and his council. It was evidently necessary for him to have some person to answer for him, in case he should seek service with the Company, and for this reason, I concluded, he had decided that it would be of more profit to him to have my friendship than to get rid of me altogether.

With these thoughts I suffered myself to entertain his proposals. But there was another question of more importance to me than Rupert Gurney's friendship or enmity.

"What of Marian?" I demanded. "Were you not the person who came for her this morning, and led her out of the fort?"

"No!" he cried, much disturbed. "Do you know what has happened to her? I have inquired everywhere, and been unable to gather the smallest information. It is this which has convinced me that I no longer possess the confidence of those about the Nabob. And I fear——"

He stopped, biting his lips, and looked at me, as if he would know what I suspected. I returned his look with interest.

"And I, too, fear," I answered solemnly. "And pray heaven that my fear is unfounded, for if it should turn out otherwise, after your persuading her to trust in your protection, I tell you plainly, Rupert Gurney, that I will never rest till I see you dead at my feet."

Though I thus threatened him, nevertheless I believed that he was really at a loss and anxious to find out what had become of Marian. He presently said to me—

"I will go now and make a further search, and if I hear any news, will let you know. And do you, on your part, trust me. If in the meantime I can do anything to effect your release, I will."

With that he went off. About the same time an order arrived for our removal, and we were carried away to another part of the fort.

Whether in consequence of my cousin's representations or of Meer Jaffier's, as is more probable, Surajah Dowlah suddenly decided to release all his English prisoners, except three or four of the principal ones, including Mr. Holwell. This intelligence was brought us about supper time, and an officer shortly after attended, to make the selection of those who were to be continued in captivity.

Not apprehending that any importance could be attached to me, I rose joyfully to

go out with those who were being dismissed, when, to my surprise, the officer told me in their language, very sharply, to keep my place.

“But why do you seek to detain this young man?” inquired Mr. Holwell. “He is not a person of any consequence among us.”

The Moor shook his head.

“This youth is to be kept in the Nabob’s hands because he is a friend of Sabat Jung’s,” he answered.

It may be imagined how mortified I was to find my boasting of the friendship of Colonel Clive thus turned against me. There was no help for it, however. With a heavy heart we saw our fellow-prisoners depart, some of them to examine their houses in Calcutta, others to take refuge with the English fleet, which about this time dropped down the river to Fulta, where it lay.

I heard afterwards that when the refugees arrived on board, and told the woeful tale of what had followed on the capture of Fort William, Mr. Drake and those with him bitterly repented of their cowardice and desertion. Messengers, that is to say, Indian spies, had already been despatched by land to Madras, the voyage thither being impossible at this time on account of the prevalent monsoon. Others were now sent after them, with letters recounting the whole of these transactions, and urgently entreating the Madras council to despatch succour at the earliest possible moment.

In the meanwhile, to pass over the next few days, Surajah Dowlah, finding no further mischief to execute in Calcutta, after he had plundered all the principal merchants, placed a force there under the command of an officer named Monichund, and marched back to Moorshedabad, carrying me in his train. My fellow prisoners, consisting of Mr. Holwell and two other gentlemen, named Walcot and Court (for poor Mr. Byng had been among those who perished in that cell of death), were despatched separately in irons, by a boat up the river.

If I had been traversing this strange, and in many parts beautiful, country under other circumstances I might have found much to interest me. But being, as I was, still weak and wretched from the effects of the night passed in the Black Hole, and, moreover, very anxious and troubled in mind about the fate of Marian (besides my own), I heeded little of it. The country was extremely flat, and much overgrown with trees, particularly mangoes, which tree hath a most delicious fruit, very grateful after toiling along the barren roads in the intolerable heat of

this climate. Travelling in company with an army, we were not able to see much of the country people, who feared the Nabob's character, and for the most part deserted their villages and retired into the woods while we passed. One day we lay without the walls of Chander Nugger, the French settlement in Bengal. These Frenchmen had managed to propitiate Surajah by aiding him with a supply of ammunition when he was on his march against Calcutta. To this they now added a large sum of money, and by this means prevailed on him to pass on without entering their town. They no doubt rejoiced, like true Frenchmen, at the misfortunes which had overtaken the English, not foreseeing at this time the happy revolution in our affairs which was to make them sing to another tune.

Our progress through the country was so gradual that it was about three weeks before we at last reached the Nabob's capital. During our long march I had not once seen my cousin, nor did I know what had become of him, nor whether he had stayed behind in Calcutta or attached himself to the Moors' army.

Moorshedabad is a great, rich place, very oriental in character, there being no foreigners resident in it, except a few Armenians, a race of thieves and pedlars, worse than Jews, who also infested Calcutta. But I had little opportunity of exploring its bazaars and palaces at this time, being conveyed straight to a filthy hut, formerly used as a cowshed, standing outside the Nabob's palace, where I found my companions already arrived, and where I was forced to lie on straw, and not allowed to move abroad.

In this miserable place, guarded by sentries, we lay for some days, being all of us too feeble to contrive any plan of escape. Each morning Surajah Dowlah sent a messenger to us, to ask if we were yet prepared to disclose the truth about the treasure. We were informed that he was deeply incensed at the failure of his raid on Fort William, to which it seems he had looked to bring enormous sums into his treasury.

On the third or fourth night, just as I was settling myself to sleep on a rude heap of straw which I had gathered together against the wall of the shed, the door softly opened and a man entered. As soon as he spoke I knew him at once to be my cousin Rupert.

"Which of you is named Ford?" he asked, speaking in the Indian language; for it was too dark for him to see my face.

"I am," I answered in English, sitting up.

He placed his finger to his lips, and stepped across the hut to where I was, while my three companions raised themselves eagerly on their elbows, to know what passed.

Rupert, who still wore his Moor's dress, kneeled down on the straw beside me, and whispered in my ear—

"Hist! I am come to arrange for your escape, but you must say no word to these others, lest they should want to join you, which would only serve to ruin our chance."

"In that case," said I, answering him aloud in English, for I mistrusted him, "it is useless to proceed. I will entertain no project to escape which does not include these gentlemen here with me."

Rupert ground his teeth, cursing me beneath his breath for a fool. But Mr. Holwell promptly rebuked me.

"You are not to act like that, Ford," he said. "Neither I, nor, I am sure, either of these other gentlemen would consent that you should refuse any offer of escape merely because it is not extended to us also."

My cousin, seeing that I was resolved not to have the conversation private between us two, now addressed himself to the others.

"I heartily wish it were in my power to deliver you all, gentlemen, but unfortunately that is what I can't do. I have secured a means by which I may carry off my young kinsman here, though at great danger to myself. But if it comes to the four of you, then I confess I must abandon the scheme."

On this Mr. Holwell renewed his protestations, urging me by no means to neglect Rupert's offer.

"But how is it, sir," he added, speaking not unkindly, "that I find you, an Englishman, and a relation of young Mr. Ford, in these parts, and apparently in a position of influence with the natives?"

"Oh, as to that, it is an old story," replied my cousin, coolly. "I came to Bengal first by land from the Malabar coast, in the time of the late Nabob, and for that reason I was not at first included in the hatred which Surajah Dowlah bore to the English on the Hooghley. However, the efforts which I made to restrain the Nabob's vindictive proceedings, and the disgust which I showed at his late

barbarities, have greatly weakened my credit with him. I believe he knows or suspects that I am merely casting about for an opportunity to quit his service, and has set spies on me accordingly. I have at last devised measures for making my way down to the coast, to our fellow-countrymen, and have bribed your gaolers to allow my cousin Ford to escape with me to-night, if he will."

So earnestly did Gurney tell this tale that I could see Mr. Holwell and the others were very favourably impressed, and took him for an honourably behaved man. As for me, I felt my cheeks burn with shame as I sat and listened, yet I neither felt inclined to admit to these gentlemen that I was cousin to a villain and a traitor, nor did I consider it to be my duty to denounce my own blood.

I therefore held my peace, while the conversation went on between the others. Mr. Holwell insisted that I should take Rupert's offer, and be the means of conveying news to our friends of where the other three lay. I demurred, and should perhaps have rejected the invitation in the end, had not my cousin taken advantage to slyly whisper in my ear—

"Don't you understand, fool? I have news of Marian, and want your aid to carry her off from Surajah Dowlah's harem!"

CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

As soon as I had heard that name from Rupert's lips, all my hesitation was at once overcome, as he no doubt foresaw would be the case.

"Come," I said, springing upon my feet with an energy I had not felt for some time, "let us be going, then."

My fellow prisoners looked not a little astonished at this sudden change in my resolution. However, they offered me their good wishes for the journey, and Mr. Holwell in particular entrusted me with some messages to Mr. Drake, in case I should succeed in penetrating to him. We had no certain information at this time as to the whereabouts of the English ships, but supposed them to be lying somewhere about the mouth of the Hooghley. It was judged best that I should carry no writing.

We two then crept softly out of the hut, my cousin going first, and I following. There was no moon abroad, but a sufficiency of light was afforded us by the extraordinary brilliancy of the stars, which appear much bigger, as well as thicker in the sky, in these latitudes than in England. At a short distance from the door of the shed I could perceive the sentinel, seated with his back towards us, his hands resting on his matchlock.

"This way," whispered Rupert in my ear. And turning in the opposite direction from the sentry, he stooped down and ran along under the shadow of a high wall which bordered a winding road.

The wall was about eight feet high, and enclosed a garden. Here and there it was overhung by branches of trees, whose foliage I failed to distinguish in the darkness, but I once or twice thought I smelt the fragrance of lemons. Within the garden behind the wall we could hear the tinkle of a fountain and a noise like the singing of some bird.

"What is this place?" I asked in a whisper, as I ran along by Rupert's side.

"Hush!" he answered crossly. "We shall be overheard. This is the Nabob's

garden, where are the pavilions of his women."

We ran on in silence for some little time longer, when we arrived at the end of the garden, and plunged into a narrow and dark lane that led out of the town. This passage we followed till we came out upon a deserted nook immediately under the walls of Moorshedabad, which were here much damaged, and matted with ivy and other weeds.

"Now," said Rupert, as he flung himself panting on the ground, in a little grassy place, "we can talk over our plans without fear of being disturbed."

I sat down beside him, inly marvelling at that great transformation which had so quickly converted us from deadly enemies seeking each other's lives, into allies, if not friends. After all our hostilities against each other in Great Yarmouth, at Gheriah, and in Calcutta, we were now in Moorshedabad, bound together by a common purpose, and that purpose concerned with her who had originally been the cause of our enmity.

I have often thought since that the change which took place in my cousin's behaviour about this time was due, not so much to any tardy pricks of conscience, as to a sort of dizziness of mind, brought about by the spectacle of the prodigious crimes of Surajah Dowlah. His own spirit, however bold and wicked, was daunted in the presence of this being who, though so much younger in years, was so greatly superior in evil; so that he shrank back, like one brought suddenly to the edge of a precipice. Perhaps he had a secret apprehension of his coming fate; at all events, it is certain that for a short time he manifested a hearty longing to return to the society of honest men.

As soon as we were seated his first act was to pluck off the turban he wore on his head, and cast it to the ground.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed. "What an intolerable thing to wear! If it were not for their turbans and their abstinence, I declare Mahometanism would suit me well enough."

I gazed at him in horror.

"Do you mean, Rupert, that you have really embraced that idolatrous sect?" I demanded.

"You need not look so scandalised, cousin," he retorted. "In the first place you are quite wrong to call it idolatrous, images of every kind being strictly

forbidden by the Alcoran. In the second place it is a very decent, respectable religion, as religions go, and extremely convenient for seafaring men who sometimes need an excuse for overhauling a Christian cargo."

"Rupert Gurney," I replied sternly, "you have within the hour brought me away out of prison, and for that I thank you. But I will neither listen to your blasphemous talk, nor suffer it, and rather than consent to do so I will go back to the place from which you took me but now."

"Fair and softly, young Athelstane," he answered grinning. "I see you are as fierce a Puritan as ever, and as I have lost the wish to quarrel with you I will endeavour to refrain from saying anything offensive to your delicacy. But do you, on your part, abstain from flying into a passion at every word that does not happen to sound to your liking; for patience is a virtue recommended, as I believe, by your religion as well as mine, and it seems to me that your stock of it is rather scant."

I cannot say how deeply mortified I was by this rebuke, which, coming from one whose evil life I held in just detestation, wrought more conviction in me than all the sermons I had heard from good Mr. Peter Walpole of Norwich, when I was a boy. I discovered, as though by a flash of light, how unchristian was the temper I had too often shown in my dealings, not only with my cousin, but with other persons, and from that moment I set an earnest watch on myself in this respect.

Forcing myself to acknowledge my error at once, though much against the grain, I said—

"I ask your pardon, Rupert, if I spoke harshly. But let us leave these questions, and come to the business in hand. What of Marian, and how do you propose that we should effect her escape?"

He looked at me surprised.

"Why, Athelstane, my boy, give me your hand!" he exclaimed, in a more cordial tone than I had ever heard him use before. "Curse me if I don't heartily wish we had never quarrelled!" I gave him my hand with some reluctance, and he proceeded. "You saw that garden which we passed on our way to this spot? The girl is detained a prisoner in one of the Nabob's summer-houses which stand within it. I have found means to corrupt one of the eunuchs who is a friend of mine, and anxious to stand well with the English. For I must tell you, Athelstane, that all is not working smoothly in the government here. Surajah Dowlah, by his

arrogance and violence, has made many enemies, among whom are his own uncle, Meer Jaffier, and Roy Dullub, the most important of the Gentoos. These men have a just apprehension of the vengeance which the English may take for the late invasion of their settlements, and moreover they stand in dread of the young Nabob's reckless temper, sometimes bordering on insanity. So that we have more friends than we know of in the Court. This eunuch, then, as I was going to say, has agreed to introduce me into the garden to-night, in about an hour's time through a small postern in the wall of which he has the key. He is going to conduct me to the summer-house where Marian is. There it may be necessary to use force to overpower the eunuchs in charge of the place, but if we succeed in doing that, as I think there is little doubt we shall, we have nothing to do but to carry her off and retire by the way we came. I have provided a safe retreat afterwards to the coast."

I fell in heartily with this scheme, which seemed to present a tolerable chance of success. Rupert went on to explain to me the means by which he hoped that we might afterwards be able to pass through the country without being stopped. He proposed that we should give it out that we were a party of Mahometan pilgrims bound for the mouth of the river, to take ship for Mecca; and he told me he had three horses already hired, with a driver, waiting for us in a certain place. In order that this scheme might be carried through it was necessary that I should be disguised to pass for a Moor, like himself. He now produced from his bosom a brown pigment, such as he had already used with good enough success on his own complexion, and carefully stained the skin of my face, also my feet and hands.

"Remember, above all," he said, while he was thus engaged, "if you would be taken for a Mahometan, never to wash your hands without washing your feet at the same time, for this custom is inveterate with them, and is, I think, the principal point of difference between the two religions."

When he had finished, I asked—

"And now what shall I do for a suitable dress?"

For I was still clad in the garments of rough canvas which the Moors had given to us on the morning after our release from the Black Hole.

"By the Lord Harry, I don't know what you can do!" cried Rupert. "I had overlooked that part of it. Unless you were to cut down one of these black rascals in the dark, and exchange suits with him?"

I declined to do what I thought would amount to committing a murder, although it were to be done upon an Indian; whereupon my cousin offered to kill the man, if I would wear the clothes. At last we agreed to procure the dress by peaceful means, if that should be possible, and set out on our return to the centre of the town.

Sure enough we had not gone a great way when we met a man of the city, a Gentoo, wearing a loose woollen robe and white turban, which we thought would pass, and which he agreed very easily to part with for five rupees. I offered him my canvas suit into the bargain, but this he rejected with disdain, on account of his religion, and walked off from us stark naked, but for a loin-cloth.

It was now time that we should repair to the meeting appointed by the eunuch. We found the postern without any difficulty, and as soon as my cousin had knocked twice in a peculiar manner the eunuch came and admitted us. This eunuch appeared to be a very civil, worthy person, very different to most of his kind, whom I have found to be full of spite and malice, and untrustworthy in all their dealings.

As soon as we were entered in the garden the eunuch conducted us through an orchard and down a grove of persimmons, to where there was a fountain, and close by it a square marble tank bordered by roses in white marble boxes. Here he left us for a moment, while he went forward to examine the summer-house, if there were any one stirring within. While we were waiting I took an interest in gazing at the clear water of the tank, and picturing the scene when the Nabob’s women came thither to bathe, as I heard was their daily custom.

Presently the eunuch returned, and beckoned to us.

“The Sahibs may go forward now,” he said. “The cage is shut and the birds are asleep.”

We followed him, and he brought us out upon an open space, and in the midst of it a small pavilion, like a temple, built in white stone or marble, in two storeys, very elegantly, with small pillars before it and a dome above, the whole covered over with fantastical designs of trees and flowers, curiously wrought in the stone.

The door of the pavilion was closed. In the upper storey I saw several lattices open, but no lights.

“What are we to do in the next place?” I asked of the eunuch.

He gave me an expressive look out of his black eyes, and silently delivered to me a scymetar which he carried.

“Let the Sahib knock, and when they who keep the door put forth their heads, let the Sahib strike them off,” he said, seeing me hesitate.

It had been well for us, as it turned out, if I had done as he bid me, for the squeamishness which we feel about shedding blood is not understood amongst Indians, and they despise us for it. However, before I could say anything further, my cousin stepped up to the door and knocked boldly.

There was a commotion inside. I drew my scymetar, and Rupert did the same. As soon as the door was unfastened from within, without waiting to parley, we flung ourselves through the opening, striking out blindly in the dark.

Instantly there went up a howl for mercy, and the eunuchs inside—for there were two of them, both well-armed—cast themselves down writhing on the floor, evidently in the expectation that they were immediately to be put to death. Rupert aimed a deadly blow at one of them, but I, like a fool, struck up his weapon.

“Stay,” I said, using the Gentoo language purposely that they might understand, “it may save us trouble to spare their lives, on condition that they strictly obey our instructions.”

The wretches hearing this, instantly broke into all sorts of grovelling entreaties and oaths of fidelity. Quite disgusted by their slavish cowardice, I said to them—

“Hold your tongues! You have in this house a prisoner, an Englishwoman, whom we have come to carry away. Let one of you go at once and bring her here.”

The eunuch furthest in from the door immediately leaped to his feet and made off down the passage. But Rupert, who knew more about these sort of creatures than I did at this time, strode after him, calling out—

“Stay! I will go with you!”

But the fellow, without turning his head, sprang up a narrow staircase at the end, and darting into the first room he came to above, slammed the door to, and had it fastened before Rupert could catch him up. In another moment we heard him yelling and squalling out of the window for assistance to come and take the murderers and ravishers that were broken into the garden.

My cousin came jumping down the stairs three steps at a time.

“This comes of your cursed softness!” he growled out savagely. “As though it were not a Christian act to cut the throats of as many of these hell-hounds as possible!”

He fetched a slash at the man who lay whining at our feet that nearly severed his head from his trunk.

“Now we must save ourselves if we can!” he muttered. And indeed it was time. The screams of the eunuch overhead had brought the whole place about our ears. As we stepped out of the pavilion again, we saw lights glittering through the trees all round us, and heard shouting and the running of feet. Our friendly eunuch had taken to flight, and we were left to extricate ourselves as best we could.

“We must not stay here or we shall be surrounded,” cried Rupert. “Which way is the gate?”

I strove to recollect, and then, taking what I thought to be the direction, we started off at a run.

Instantly that fiend who had betrayed us, leaning further out of the window to discover which way we fled, redoubled his cries. Looking back for a moment as we ran, I saw him pointing, and at the same time there was a movement of one of the other lattices, and I caught a glimpse of a white face and two hands thrust out with a despairing gesture, and knew that Marian was aware of our enterprise and that we had failed. Then the clamour on all sides grew louder, and men bearing lanterns and armed with swords and matchlocks burst out from the trees around the pavilion, and ran hither and thither, some towards the building, others searching for our track.

We ran like deer, bending down so as not to be seen, and dodging in among the trees and bushes. By this means we preserved ourselves from immediate capture, but soon missed our way, and found ourselves wandering about in the garden, stealing from one patch of cover to another; while every now and then a party of our pursuers would go past, so close that we could hear them speak, and see the sparks of lantern-light drip off the naked blades of their weapons as they thrust them into the bushes.

After several close escapes of this kind, when we at last stumbled on the postern,

more by luck than skill, we found it barred and locked, and the key removed. Before we could decide what next to do, on a sudden a party of four gigantic blacks burst out upon us, brandishing their weapons at our heads and calling on us, by all manner of filthy names, to surrender. I believe they expected us to prove an easy prey, but I was now grown desperate, and rushed so fiercely on him that came first and carried a lantern, that I fairly bore him to earth at the first shock. And when I looked round for another I found all three in full flight, one of them leaving his right hand behind, which Rupert had managed to slice off at the wrist with the first blow. They ran for their lives, shouting out that they had to do with two demons from the pit. Rupert, seeing the man I had struck down move, stepped over to him, quite cool, drew his blade across the poor wretch's throat, and wiped it on his turban. After this we lost no time in shifting our ground before the rest of the pursuers came up.

With the chase so hot after us, it had become plain that we must be taken before long, unless we could hit upon some means of escaping from the garden. In this strait I bethought myself of the trees whose boughs I had noticed from outside overhanging the wall, when we passed it earlier that night. I reminded Rupert of this, who exclaimed joyfully—

"Well done, cousin, I declare you have saved us now! I believe I can find that part of the garden easily enough, when it will be a simple matter to climb the trees and drop down on the other side of the wall."

We set out at once, Rupert leading the way, and turning from side to side as we heard the Moors shouting after us. They now felt pretty sure of our whereabouts, and began discharging their pieces where we went, so that the balls tore the leaves off the trees all round us, but luckily without doing us any damage. We arrived at the wall, and seeing a tree suitable for our purpose, made for it, but just as we reached it one of those black rascals we had put to flight espied us. He raised the cry, and instantly we found ourselves surrounded by the whole band, at least twenty of them rushing at us out of the dark, and all with the most murderous looks I have ever seen.

I now gave up all for lost, and planting myself with my back against the tree prepared to sell my life dear. Not so Rupert, who was already off the ground, climbing like a cat up the smooth trunk. He was out of sight among the branches directly, and in another minute would have been safely over the wall, when at a signal from their leader, about a dozen of the Moors who had firearms discharged them all together into the tree. I heard a groan and a sound of

scrambling above, and presently Rupert dropped, falling heavily straight on to the ground, where he lay quite still.

When I saw what had happened, I abandoned all further thoughts of resistance, and throwing away my weapon bade them do what they would with me. Even then, so great was the awe we had struck into them, that they advanced slowly, narrowing their circle all round, till at length the foremost took courage to lay his hand on my shoulder. They then led me away, jabbering the most horrid threats in my ear, while others picked up my unfortunate cousin, and carried him after, groaning miserably.

We were brought into a sort of guard-house, situated, as well as I could judge, in the centre of the garden, and there kept till morning, to await the Nabob's pleasure. Poor Rupert, who had broken his leg, tossed and moaned till daybreak, but I was so much exhausted that I could not keep awake, and fell into a sleep on the floor. In the morning, to my astonishment, I was offered some food, after which my captors dragged me pretty roughly into the palace. I said farewell to my cousin, doubting greatly whether I should ever see him again.

Surajah Dowlah, contrary to his custom, had me brought into him in his private apartments, there being present besides only some of the minions and low buffoons he kept by him to amuse him. He rolled his bloodshot eyes on me, as I was led in, looking as though he could have bit me, and played with a sharp, crooked knife which he had in his hand.

After overwhelming me with a torrent of imprecations which I should be ashamed to write down, he ordered me to tell him how I had got into his garden. Being well assured that nothing could make my position worse than it already was, and having some experience of the Nabob's character by this time, I resolved on defying him. I therefore answered boldly—

"I got into the garden by means which I have, and which I shall not disclose. Your Highness may rest assured that you cannot keep me out of any place into which I choose to penetrate. Nevertheless I intended no outrage on you. You hold prisoner a countrywoman of mine, whom I intended to deliver out of your hands; and let me warn your Highness that whatever you may order to be done with me, the English will never leave you in peace till you have set that woman free."

I was scarce prepared for the effect which these words produced on the intoxicated youth. He rose half way from his seat, raging like a fiend, then fell

back again white and crouching, as if I had been about to deal him a blow, then passed into a fresh paroxysm of rage, and so from one state of mind to another in a way at once alarming and pitiful to behold.

“Do you know in whose presence you stand, infidel?” he shrieked. “Do you know that I am lord and Subhadar of Bengal, of Behar, and Orissa; and that I have a million men who would die at my bidding? I will have you torn piecemeal, I will have your eyes picked out with knives and your flesh torn by hot pincers! I will plunge this knife into you, I will rip you up as I would a wild boar, I will strew your entrails on the earth, I will give your heart to dogs to devour!”

He went on in this terrifying manner till he was out of breath. During the whole time I stood regarding him with a cool, undismayed expression which, I believe, disconcerted him more than any words I could have used. Then I said—

“Surajah Dowlah, your words are the words of a boaster, who is bold only when he sees his enemy before him disarmed. Beware of what you do; you are walking in the dark! Do you believe the paltry handful of English whom you drove out of Calcutta count for anything in the strength of our nation? If so, let me tell you there are men about you, men who have your trust, who could teach you otherwise. You are being deceived if your spies have not already told you of the armament which he whom you call Sabat Jung is already preparing to invade your dominions, when every hair of an Englishman’s head that you have injured will have to be reckoned for. And it will be well for you if, among all those who crouch before you, you find any to fight for you in that day.”

The servile crew that stood round the tyrant here began to cry out at me, and drown my voice. But I was satisfied with the impression I had made on the mind of their master. He listened, hanging his head, and casting meaning glances at me, as if doubtful how far I had authority for what I said. Finally he ordered me to be kept under a strong guard, and I was conveyed back to the same prison I had escaped from overnight.

CHAPTER XIV

IN A STRANGE LAND

I have now come to a period which was in many respects the strangest of my whole life, so that I often look back on it with wonder; and sitting here at the open window, framed in honeysuckle and sweetbriar, with the sounds of the farm in my ears and the prospect of the peaceful broad in front of me, I ask myself if I be truly that adventurous youth who once dwelt in captivity for many months in the court of an Indian prince, half victim and half plaything, one day caressed and loaded with rich gifts, the next threatened with death and torture.

Yet so it was. After the attempt whose miscarriage I have just related, the demeanour of the Nabob underwent a singular change. He relented from his severity towards us, and in fact a few days after, riding past our place of imprisonment one morning, he stopped at the door and calling Mr. Holwell out to him, bade him and his two companions betake themselves where they would, since he desired never to hear of them again.

However, in this dismissal he did not include me, choosing to put me on a different footing from the other prisoners he had taken at Fort William, and to hold me as a hostage—for so I am sure he considered me—for the friendship of Colonel Clive. He offered me the choice between being kept in chains or giving him my parole not to leave Moorshedabad without his consent. The Moors do not accept each other's parole, but they trust that of a European, than which there can be no stronger proof of the dishonesty of their whole nation. I chose to comply with the Nabob's condition, as I considered that I ought not to quit the place without having effected something for Marian. And by giving my parole I trusted to obtain opportunities for communicating with her, as well as with my luckless cousin Gurney, whom I had not seen since the morning after our adventure.

Whether Surajah Dowlah suspected my designs, and took particular measures for baffling them, I cannot say. But during the time that now followed, try as I would, I never succeeded in so much as hearing the smallest news of either of the two persons whom I knew to be in Moorshedabad. So close is the secrecy maintained by Orientals that they might have both been carried off into the

recesses of Tartary, and yet not been more utterly out of my reach than they were, abiding in the same city.

Neither was I able to gain any certain tidings of my fellow countrymen. I only knew that the Nabob, intoxicated with the pride of his victory at Fort William, had neglected to take measures for pursuing the refugees and driving them from his country. So that they lay all together at Fulta, very miserably, wishing for succour to arrive from Madras, and passed the time, as I have since understood, in recriminations upon each other, for the misconduct and weakness which had brought about the fall of Calcutta. What were the real feelings of Surajah Dowlah towards myself I found it then, and find it still, very difficult to estimate. On many occasions he behaved towards me with the greatest kindness, and as though he had a real affection for me. He would send for me sometimes, when he was sober, and question me about the various kingdoms of Europe, particularly the French, English, and Dutch, those being the three nations which had factories in his dominions. It was plain that he did not believe very much of what I told him, supposing no doubt that I exaggerated in order to astonish him. I told him that the French were the most powerful military nation on the continent of Europe, but that we were their masters, having several times invaded and conquered their country. And I said that at sea the English had ever been reckoned the first of all nations, so much so that no foreign warship was allowed to pass through our seas without striking her topsails to any British vessel she might meet. When I spoke in this manner he would mock, and ask whether I supposed that a Frenchman would confirm these accounts, to which I made answer that such was scarcely to be expected, the French being a vain people, and given to boasting of their greatness.

When the Nabob had exhausted his questions—and he seldom asked me about any but military affairs—he would bestow on me a jewel, or a rich dress, and dismiss me with every mark of kindness. But on the very next day, perhaps, being sent for again, I found him in a drunken rage, ready to curse my nation and myself, and threatening to have my tongue pulled out for having abused him with lies and inventions about my miserable country. On these occasions I often heard him declare that the whole of Europe did not contain ten thousand men, and that as for King George, he was only fit to be a dewan or zamindar under himself.

It did not take me long to discover that the Nabob was entirely governed by those about him. When he could be prevailed on to listen to his uncle, Meer Jaffier, or to his aunt, the widow of Allaverdy Khan, his behaviour was rational

enough; but more often he fell under the influence of his detestable Gentoo favourite Lal Moon, and other scoundrels of that stamp, when he became little more than a drunken sot. I felt during this period as though I was shut in the same cage with a capricious tiger, who one moment purred and fawned on me and the next showed his teeth with horrid snarls, nor was there ever a day on which I could feel secure that I should not be delivered to the executioner before the sun set.

Through all these changes of demeanour I adhered to the firm conduct I had at first taken up, and by never permitting the tyrant to see that I feared him, succeeded time after time in damping his frenzy. At the same time I acquired the friendship and esteem of some of the most considerable persons of his Court, particularly Roy Dullub, the dewan already mentioned, and the famous Meer Jaffier. My hold on the friendship of this distinguished Moor was strengthened by an incident which I am about to relate.

As soon as the rainy season was over, which lasted till the month of October, Surajah Dowlah marched out with his army into the country of Purneah, for the purpose of attacking his cousin, who was Phouzdar of that territory. The young Nabob bore a great hatred to this relation of his, and had frequently announced his intention of destroying him as soon as the weather should permit of his moving against him. At the head of the army, as usual, was the general, Meer Jaffier, and at my earnest request I was allowed to accompany him as one of his train.

We arrived at length, after a tedious march, at the foot of some hills, on the slope of which the Phouzdar’s army lay encamped. Our own force was much more numerous, but the Phouzdar’s position being a very strong one the Meer judged it not prudent to make an attack till he had had an opportunity of thoroughly examining the ground. With this view he chose out a small party, of whom I was one, and departed secretly from the camp at sunset, to explore the enemy’s neighbourhood.

The distance between the two armies was not very great; as near as I could judge it was about three miles. But we had no guide to direct us, and lost our way in the darkness, getting entangled first in the wood, and afterwards among a network of small, deep streams, too broad to jump, and dangerous to wade on account of the steepness of their banks and the slippery boulders with which their beds were strewn. So long did it take us to extricate ourselves out of these difficulties that when the sun rose we found ourselves close to the Phouzdar’s

camp, and within full view of his army. We turned to retreat, but at the same time a loud halloo was raised behind us, and a troop of horsemen, with waving ensigns and steel accoutrements shining in the sun, dashed out from the enemy's ranks and rode down upon us.

Meer Jaffier at once gave the order to face round, and form into a solid body to receive their onset. As they approached there was a tall young man in a high turban that blazed with diamonds, mounted on a noble white horse, who spurred swiftly in front, and rode straight for where our commander was posted, with me beside him. The Meer, who did not want courage, perceiving that this young man sought him out, instantly galloped forward to meet him, and cast his javelin. The javelin passed by the young man's ear; he pulled up his horse, and threw his own in return with such good aim that he struck Meer Jaffier on the shoulder, who reeled and fell off his horse on to the ground. The other instantly rode up and leaped off his white horse to despatch his enemy, but I was on the spot just in time, and without dismounting, succeeded in striking the young man on the neck with my scymetar with such force that he fell down dead.

No sooner did they see him fall than the whole troop of the enemy's horse turned round and went off, casting away their banners as they rode. Meer Jaffier, who had merely been stunned for the moment, came to himself directly afterwards, and on looking at the dead man's face recognised him to be no other than the Phouzdar of Purneah himself. We were informed afterwards that he had mistaken us for the Nabob's own bodyguard, and had come out to attack the Nabob himself.

This lucky accident put an end to the campaign, the whole country at once submitting to Surajah Dowlah. The ungrateful young tyrant chose to resent my action, declaring that it was his design to have put his cousin to death with his own hand, but Meer Jaffier expressed himself very handsomely about the service I had rendered him, and presented me with the white horse which the Phouzdar had ridden.

As soon as we were returned to Moorshedabad Surajah Dowlah marked his sense of resentment against me by withdrawing my liberty on parole, and ordering me into close confinement again. I thus learnt how dangerous is the path of those who would advance themselves at courts where everything depends on the personal favour of the monarch, and not, as in our own happy country, where the power is distributed among the Houses of Parliament and great Ministers, so that no man hath it in his power unduly to depress another.

However, I had not lain in my new prison very long before I had reason to rejoice at the Nabob's caprice, which had restored to me the right of plotting my escape from him. For one evening, when it began to be dusk, the door of my cell was suddenly opened, and the gaolers ushered in a person closely veiled and disguised, who, as soon as we were left alone, removed the wrappings from his face and showed himself to be none other than the Meer Jaffier in person.

"My son," he said to me, regarding me with a look of some concern, "there has this day arrived at the palace a messenger from Monichund, who brings tidings that Sabat Jung, with a great armament of ships and men, has arrived in the mouth of the Hooghley, breathing vengeance against our lord Surajah Dowlah. And this news has so infuriated him against the whole English nation that, unless you can contrive to get away from Moorshedabad to-night you are like to forfeit your life on the morrow."

Now whether this distinguished Moor was moved to this action by gratitude for my former service to him, or whether, as some of my friends think, he was already aiming at the treaty into which he afterwards entered with the English, and therefore wished to show his good will to us; yet of this I am sure, that he preserved my life on this night, an action for which I must always hold him in grateful remembrance. Under his directions I collected together my property, consisting chiefly of the gems which the Nabob had given me, and which I secreted on my person. He then brought me out of the prison, past the gaolers, whom he had bribed and dismissed, and took me by a back way to his own house. Here I found the beautiful white horse he had given me, which was named Ali, ready saddled and bridled for a journey. I had for some months been accustomed to wear the Moorish dress, so that I wanted nothing in the shape of disguise, save another application of my cousin Rupert's paint, which was not to be had.

"Mount," said the Meer, "and I will myself ride with you as far as the gate of the city and see you safely on your way."

Accordingly he had his own horse made ready, a small, powerful, black mare, like a jennet, and on this led the way through the streets of the city, now nearly empty, to the southern gate. As we rode along together he gave me advice as to how I should proceed.

"You may now pass well enough among the Mahometans," he said, "for you have learned a good deal of our manners, and if you had been willing to forsake

your degrading idolatry, and embrace the true worship of Allah, you might have attained to a high position among us. But now you are to pass through the country parts of Bengal, in which there are few or no Moors, but only Gentoos, of whom I would have you beware. For the secret hatred of these people for us, their rulers and governors, is very great, so that though you should pass among them for a Moor, you would fare little better than if they knew you to be a Christian and a foreigner. Above all, beware of their Bramins, a faithless, perjured race, given over to all kinds of vile, heathen practices, such as you have no notion of. Let a Bramin once raise his finger against you among these people and you are lost, for by means of their manifold sorceries they have reduced the whole Gentoo population to be their slaves."

He gave me some directions as to the road I was to travel, telling me I should have to make a circuit so as not to pass through Calcutta, which lay directly in the way to Fulta. The whole distance he estimated as a little more than two hundred miles, and he advised me to ride only at night, and conceal myself in the jungle during the day. I asked him what I should do to procure food.

"That will require some address," he answered, "but you must avoid entering a village. You will have to keep your eyes open as you ride along, and when you come to some hut standing by itself with no others near, enter boldly and demand provisions for yourself and your horse. Beware of offering any money in payment, or they will suspect you to be a fugitive and fall upon you; but if you hold yourself towards them with pride and sternness, giving them only curses and blows, they will respect and grovel before you, for such is the nature of the Bengalese."

As soon as we were arrived at the gate of the town Meer Jaffier bade me farewell.

"When you come before Sabat Jung you may salute him privately from me," he said at parting. "Tell him that my nephew's violence towards the English is far from commanding the approval of the elder and more prudent among us, and that we earnestly desire to see your factories restored and trade once more flourishing."

In these last expressions I knew him to be sincere. For since the destruction of the English factories there had been a great falling off in the revenues of Bengal, so much so that even the Nabob himself was now inclined to repent of his action.

I thanked and saluted my protector, and giving the rein to my willing steed,

galloped forth into the night. And now it would be easy for me to make a long story of those four days and nights which I spent in travelling through the unknown parts of Bengal, riding along dark forest paths with nothing to guide me but the stars, under mighty trees whose boughs arched overhead like caverns and grew downwards into the earth again, past sleeping Indian villages, where the dogs bayed behind prickly fences, swimming dark rivers on whose surface the reflections of strange idol temples rose and fell, and creeping through thick jungles where my ears were stunned by the screams of trooping jackals, and where my heart would sometimes come into my mouth as I saw the brown grass bend and shake with the passage of some great beast, and caught a glimpse of dark red stripes moving behind the reeds, and heard the heavy padding of its paws. But only once during this journey did I come into real danger, and that through a neglect of the wise advice given to me by my good friend at starting.

For though Meer Jaffier had so strictly warned me against the Indians, and particularly the Bramins, yet on the third night after my flight, beginning to feel somewhat confident by having got so far in safety, nothing would do but I must thrust my head into the lion’s den, by which I mean venture into one of their temples, at the very time they were busy about a great religious ceremony. I had been on my way since sundown, and had made very good progress, so that I supposed myself to have got over the greater part of my journey, when towards the middle of the night I came unexpectedly upon a great building, standing by itself on the edge of a stream, which building I at once knew to be a temple of the Gentoo religion.

Having passed several places of the same kind already I should not have taken much notice of this one, perhaps, if my attention had not been attracted by a peculiar drumming noise which seemed to proceed from the inside, and sounded very strange and awful in the darkness. I rode up as near as I dared, and then stopped, listening. The drumming grew louder and louder, and I presently began to distinguish a purpose in it. The sounds rose and fell in a certain regular order, very unlike the melody of our musical instruments, but yet very impressive to the ear. I found myself affected by a feeling of suspense as I listened, which quickly passed into one of fear, and at the same time I noticed that my horse had begun to shiver and sweat violently. The only effect of this was to fill me with a burning curiosity to know what this music was for. I tethered poor Ali to a tree, and though he seemed to be greatly distressed at being left alone, plunged into the undergrowth that surrounded the sides of the temple.

The whole place appeared to be in darkness. I groped my way at last to the foot

of a flight of steps leading up to the front, and finding nobody on guard climbed up softly on all fours, only staying now and then to breathe deeply, and to try and still the excessive beating of my heart. The drums continued to sound, the notes becoming harsher and more distinct as I approached. At the top of the steps I found myself before a little stone doorway, through which a very faint dusky glimmer emerged. I passed in, treading on tiptoe, and came along a narrow stone passage, down which the sound of the drumming made a dismal echo. At the further end of the passage the way was closed by a thick curtain made of a substance that felt like stiff leather, and was, I believe, the hide of an elephant. I pushed this back far enough to let me through, and passed straight into the midst of the place.

As I did so the beating of the tom-toms broke on my ears with such vehemence that I was well-nigh stunned, and a waving dance of torches and cressets bewildered my eyes. I stood on the edge of a range of steps looking down upon an amphitheatre crowded with men. On the other side, over against me, rose a hideous idol, as high as the roof, with many heads, each grinning horribly, whilst from its body there protruded a monstrous array of clutching arms and hands, with other disfigurements too loathsome to be set down. The persons underneath me were all leaping and whirling round, with many gestures of homage to the idol, and they uttered cries and screams which were drowned by the noise of the drums.

In the midst of their frenzy I saw a man dart out stark naked, prostrate himself for a moment at the idol’s feet, and then inflict a terrible gash on himself with a knife which he had in his hand. Instantly the yellings and drummings were redoubled, the mass of worshippers whirled themselves round more furiously than ever, and then another and another man leaped forward and cut himself, each one more savagely than his fellow. Though I have never known what it is to be faint or sick in battle at the sight of wounds, nor even in a hospital, the spectacle of these ghastly mutilations offered up by these Indians in their madness to the idol turned me cold. I stood there watching them, and saw the stones of the temple all bloody like a shambles, and the dark faces of the worshippers distorted like maniacs, amid the smoke and flare of the torches, and a din like that of the pit; and remembering the different worship in which I had been brought up, and the pious services conducted by good Mr. Walpole, I thanked the Almighty who had granted me the blessed privilege of being born in a Christian land.

And with this prayer in my heart I was turning to go when all at once I was

aware that I had been spied; the noise of the tom-toms and the screaming dropped as if by magic, the torches were extinguished as though a wind had suddenly passed through the place, and as I turned and fled I heard the pattering of innumerable naked feet behind me on the stones.

CHAPTER XV

THE COMING OF SABAT JUNG

If ever I felt afraid in my life it was when I fled out of the Indian temple with the whole swarm of devil-worshippers in full pursuit. I never thought I should have escaped alive, yet by the aid of Providence I did so, leaping down the steps by great bounds, finding my horse and unloosing him in the nick of time, and galloping off out of their reach. They kept up the pursuit for at least a mile, running with extraordinary swiftness, and tracking me like wolves; nevertheless in the end I got clean away.

This adventure served as a wholesome lesson to me to beware of meddling with the ways of strange peoples in a strange land. By dint of following Meer Jaffier's wise and prudent directions I got over the rest of my journey without hindrance, and as day was breaking at the end of the following night I rode down on to the shore of the Hooghley.

There the first thing that met my eyes was the pennant of my old commander, Admiral Watson, flying from the main truck of his Majesty's ship *Kent*, where she lay in the river, surrounded by a fleet, comprising the *Tyger*, *Salisbury*, *Bridgewater*, and a number of merchantmen. I gloated over this welcome sight almost with tears, as I realised that I was restored to my countrymen once more, after all my perils and wanderings. It did not take me long to reach the English camp on the edge of the river, where the spectacle of a turbaned Moor riding in on a white horse excited no small commotion.

I inquired for Colonel Clive, and was quickly brought to the door of his tent, where my kind friend Mr. Scrafton came out to speak to me. I was on the point of offering him my hand, but observing that he had no suspicions as to who it was I merely told him in Indostanee that I came from Moorshedabad, with a message from the Meer Jaffier, and suffered him to bring me in to Mr. Clive.

The famous Sabat Jung sat writing at a small table, from which he looked up as we entered, and cast a sharp glance over me. Mr. Scrafton spoke in English.

"Colonel, here is a Moor from the Nabob's capital, with a message from his general to you."

Mr. Clive laid down his pen.

“Tell him to deliver it,” he said.

Before Mr. Scrafton could interpret this command, which he was about to do, I interposed, addressing Mr. Clive in English.

“The Meer Jaffier bade me salute you privately, sir. Is it your pleasure that Mr. Scrafton should be present?”

The Colonel and his secretary stared at each other, as they well might.

“Who are you, man?” demanded Mr. Clive. “And how do you know this gentleman’s name?”

“I know his name very well, sir,” said I, “and I think he knows mine, unless by this time he has forgot his former pupil, Athelstane Ford.”

“By the Lord, if it isn’t my little purser!” exclaimed Colonel Clive.

And this great man was pleased to rise from his chair and shake me very warmly by the hand, declaring himself pleased to see me safe and sound again. Mr. Scrafton did the same, after which they made me sit down and tell the history of my adventures. They questioned me very closely about the character of Surajah Dowlah and the strength of his government, and after I had expressed my opinions, Mr. Clive told me that he believed he understood the Nabob’s character, and had written him a letter such as would send his heart into his boots.

“And that the whole of Indostan may know what I think of the young monster, I mean to send the letter open to his lieutenant, Monichund,” he said. “These barbarous nations shall be made to learn the English are their masters, and that every outrage upon an Englishman shall cost them dear.”

So at last there had come a man able to deal with the bloodthirsty savage Moors and their prince as they deserved; and a new page was turned over in the history of Bengal. And but for the anxiety that continually harassed my mind as to the fate of those two whom I had left in Moorshedabad, I mean Marian and my cousin, who, in spite of many crimes, had at last done something to atone for his past misconduct; but for this, the time which followed would have been full of satisfaction. For I was now to witness the closing acts of that great historic drama of which I have already chronicled the commencement. I was to assist at

the execution of justice on a great malefactor, and to see his victims repaid a hundredfold for the injuries they had suffered at his hands.

I had arrived in the English camp just in time to take part in the first of those celebrated operations by which the disgraceful surrender of Fort William was to be redeemed, and the English name was to be so signally advanced throughout the East Indies. Colonel Clive had despatched the letter he spoke of, to demand redress from the Nabob, but its language was so high and peremptory that Monichund, the Nabob's governor in Fort William, returned it, saying that he dared not transmit it to his master. Thereupon Mr. Clive, not sorry to have an excuse for hostilities, ordered an immediate advance on Calcutta.

The total number of troops employed on this memorable expedition was a little more than two thousand, of whom the most part were Telingies, or Sepoys, the English troops being between six and seven hundred. Most of these were Company's soldiers, though we had about one hundred men of Adlercron's regiment from Madras. We had also two field-pieces; the rest had been lost through the unfortunate grounding of the *Cumberland* outside the river. To this force was afterwards added a body of three hundred seamen from the ships, as I shall presently relate. This little army under Colonel Clive marched slowly up the bank of the Hooghley, while Admiral Watson followed and escorted us with his fleet.

On the second afternoon we lay at a place called Mayapore, between which and Calcutta, on the river's edge, stood the strong place of Budge-Budge, or Buz-Buzia as it is written by the learned. The Admiral had announced his intention of sailing up to attack this fort on the next day with the guns of the ships, and in order to prevent the garrison escaping Mr. Clive decided to march round during the night, and lay an ambush in the rear of the fort.

Accordingly we marched out of Mayapore about sunset, and were conducted by some Indian guides inland through a part of the country much broken up by swamps and watercourses, which made our progress so excessively tedious that it was not till the following sunrise that we arrived at the place appointed for the ambush. This was a hollow in the plain, where there was a deserted village, the hollow being surrounded by banks covered with thickets which, it was supposed, would conceal our presence from the enemy. The troops by this time being quite worn out, Colonel Clive gave them leave to lay down their arms and repose themselves, and so eagerly was the permission availed of that not a single sentinel was posted to give notice of the enemy's approach.

I was with Mr. Clive himself, who had allowed me to accompany him as a sort of military secretary, Mr. Scrafton not being a soldier. We lay down side by side, and I for one had no sooner closed my eyes than I fell asleep. But the very next moment, as it seemed to me, I awoke with a start, to the sound of a battle going on around me.

I sprang to my feet and took in the whole scene. A whole Indian army appeared to have surrounded the sleeping camp. The banks of the hollow were lined with swarthy troops, armed with matchlocks, from which they poured a steady fire upon our bewildered men, just roused from slumber, and groping in confusion after their arms. On an eminence a short way behind I espied an officer, whom I took to be Monichund himself, seated on an elephant, issuing orders to his troops. Our two field-pieces stood deserted in the way of the enemy, who advanced to take them, while the terrified artillerymen ran for shelter among the troops of the line. Our position looked desperate, and I turned anxiously to Colonel Clive to see what he would do.

Mr. Clive had sprung to his feet at the same moment with myself. For a moment he stood in an attitude of stern attention, his hands clenched, his lips compressed, and his eyes darting from point to point over the field. The next instant his voice rang out like the sound of a trumpet.

“Steady! Form in line! Face this way! Captain Campbell, form your men on the right. Captain Coote, take yours to the left. Where is Kilpatrick?”

He sprang forward among the disordered troops, rattling out commands and words of encouragement, and infusing a new spirit into them by his very presence and the air of cool resolution with which he moved and spoke. Like magic the little force disposed itself under his orders, and began to return the enemy’s fire. Astonished by this sudden transformation, the Moors halted in their attack, and seemed contented to hold the rest of the ridge. Colonel Clive instantly detected their hesitation, drew up two small detachments opposite the points where the enemy seemed to be in the greatest numbers and ordered them to charge. They dashed forward with a ringing cheer, gained the bank, and drove the enemy back into the village.

Taking advantage of this success, Mr. Clive turned his attention to the two field-pieces, which had been surrounded by a party of Monichund’s force.

“Go,” he said to me, “order up the volunteers, and rescue those guns.”

Elated by this commission I darted towards a little squad composed of some fifty of the Company's civil servants who had volunteered before we left Fulta.

"Come on," I shouted, "and take the guns!"

They responded with an answering shout, we charged on the Indians at the double and drove them off. The artillerymen came up, turned the guns on the village, and began to shell out the enemy. A minute afterwards a loud cheer announced a general advance of our whole force, and Monichund, turning his elephant, fled, followed by all his men.

While this was taking place the thunder of guns from the direction of the river told us that the fleet had come up, and was already at work silencing the artillery of the fort. Colonel Clive called back his men from the pursuit, and then, finding them utterly exhausted, he deferred the assault on the fort till the next day, and we again betook ourselves to repose.

The result of this affair was greatly to encourage us, while we afterwards learned that it had as much disheartened the Moors. That presumption which they had felt ever since the fall of Calcutta was now exchanged for a different feeling, so much so that it may not be too much to say that the fate of Bengal was decided by that morning's work. The admiration which I felt for Mr. Clive's conduct on this occasion emboldened me to offer him my congratulations on his victory, but he rebuked me for doing do.

"I will tell you what it is, young gentleman," he said to me, "I deserved to have been defeated for my carelessness in letting the beggars surprise me. It is true we beat them off, but that is no defence. A general should not allow himself to be caught napping in that fashion, and you may depend on it I shall say as little as possible about this day's work in my despatches to the Directors."

In this confidential way he was pleased to talk with me, a freedom which it was his habit to indulge in with all those of his subordinates whom he really liked. For this hero, as I must have leave to call him, was not one of those little great men who find it necessary to keep up their authority by a show of reserve and pompousness, but feeling that confidence in himself which would enable him to rely upon his actions as the proofs of his greatness, he despised the arts of inferior minds.

And now there happened an event, not only singular in itself, but interesting to me as bringing me back the company of an old friend whom I had never looked

to see again. In the evening of this same day, while the soldiers were at supper, a party of sailors were landed from the ships, being the force I have already mentioned, to be ready to take part in the assault the next day. Thinking it possible that some of my old comrades from the *Talisman* might be among them, about eight o'clock I strolled down to their quarters, where I found them all drinking together, without much appearance of discipline.

I walked past several groups without recognising any face that I knew, and was about to give up the quest, when I noticed a group of half a dozen who were straying in the direction of the silent fort. This seemed to me a very dangerous proceeding, and as I could see none of their officers near, I determined to follow and remonstrate with them. Accordingly I hastened after them as fast as I could go. By the way in which they walked, or rather staggered along, I saw they had been drinking pretty freely. Presently they set off at a run, paying no heed to my shouts, and I was obliged to follow till they stopped on the very edge of the ditch which went round the fort. Here I caught up with them, greatly surprised that the garrison had shown no signs of life. But before I could speak, or even distinctly see their faces, the tallest of the party, a man of great frame, began rolling down into the ditch, which was nearly dry.

I dared not call out for fear of drawing the attention of those in the fort, and watched him breathlessly as he plunged through the mud at the bottom of the ditch and scrambled up the opposite side.

"What is he doing?" I demanded in a whisper of the man who appeared to be the most sober of the group.

"It's a bet," he answered; "we bet him a quart of rum he wouldn't get to the top of the wall."

I stared at the fellow, hardly able to believe in such recklessness. Then I turned my eyes to the huge seaman on the opposite side of the ditch. He had just made good his footing on the top of the bank, and now he began climbing up the masonry like a cat, till at last his herculean figure stood out clear on the summit.

The next moment we saw him draw his cutlass and brandish it over his head, and a loud shout came across to us in a voice I knew full well.

"Come on, you beggars, I've taken the —— fort!"

It was old Muzzy, the boatswain of the *Fair Maid*.

Not for long did we hesitate, but rushing down into the ditch after him we were speedily in the fort. There our shouts roused first a company of Sepoys, and finally the whole force, who came trooping in, to find the place deserted, and the garrison fled secretly under cover of the darkness to Calcutta.

While this was going on I had approached my old friend, for so I cannot but call him. Indeed, in spite of his evil character and manifold breaches of the laws of God and man, the old fellow had shown me much kindness, for which I was not ungrateful, and this perhaps inclined me to look with an unduly lenient eye on his misdeeds. Going up to him, I clapped him on the back, and cried out—

"How goes it, old Muzzy? and what of the *Fair Maid* and the rest of her crew?"

The boatswain gave a great start, and turned round to me with a look of astonishment which quickly passed into one of delight.

"Why, drown me, if it ain't that young cockerel again!" he exclaimed.

And before I knew what he would be at, he cast his arms around me, and gave me a most evil-smelling kiss, fragrant of rum and tobacco. Then, still holding me firmly with his great hairy hands, as though he feared I should vanish into air, he put me back far enough for him to gaze at my face.

"Stab my vitals if I didn't think as you was suffocated in that there Black Hole!" He garnished his speech with many other expressions which I am ashamed to remember, far less to write here. "So we all heard aboard the ship. But you're alive, ain't ye now?" he added. "It's not the rum as makes me think I sees you?"

"I am Athelstane Ford," I answered, trying to shake myself free from his grasp, "and not a little glad to meet you again. But how did you come to be on a King's ship? Is the *Fair Maid*——"

"Hist!" He interrupted me with a warning frown, and cast an apprehensive glance behind him. "Not a word about her! It might be a hanging matter if it was known I had been in the boat that escaped from Gheriah. I'll tell you all about it by our two selves."

I took advantage of this offer to lead the way out of the fort. We walked back to the British lines together, old Muzzy still clutching me with one hand, and as soon as we had reached a quiet spot out of earshot we sat down and he commenced his tale.

“You see, it’s this way. Arter what happened when we was coming out of the river, where we lost you overboard, I come to the conclusion that that cousin o’ yours warn’t what I calls a honest man. Nobody can’t say as how I’m one of your squeamish sort, ’cause I ain’t. As fur as a bit o’ smuggling goes, or a bit of privateering, or even a bit o’ piracy, in a general way, I don’t say nothin’, but when it comes to taking and firing a culverin at your own ship, with your own mates aboard of her, why, d’ye see, I don’t call that honest. And when I find out as a man ain’t what I calls honest, I don’t sail in his company. Mind you, I’m not the man to deny that Captain Gurney has his good points; he ain’t no lawyer, that I’ll admit, and he’s as free with his rum-cask as any man I ever wish to sail under. But arter that business what I’ve mentioned, me and my mates swore we wouldn’t have nothing more to do with him.

“Well, when we got outside the river, we pointed her head for the nor’ard, and by keeping pretty close along the shore, though we hadn’t a soul on board that could navigate, we managed to bring the old *Fair Maid* safe into port—that’s Bombay. You may strike me blind as I set here, when I tells you that no sooner did we bring up in the harbour than who should we see carmly settin’ on the quay a-waiting for us but that eternal cousin of yourn! How on earth he got there’s a mystery, but there he was; and as soon as he sights the *Fair Maid* he comes off in a boat as cool as you please and takes the command again.”

“Why did you let him?” I asked, with a touch of my old resentment against Rupert. “Why didn’t you refuse to take him on board?”

Old Muzzy gave me a reproachful look and shook his head gravely.

“No, no, boy, we couldn’t go for to do that. That would ha’ been flat mutiny; and remember his name was on the ship’s books as first officer, and he might have pistolled us every one and had the law on his side. We didn’t dare leave him neither, ’cause that would ha’ been desertion, d’ye see, and he might have got out a warrant and had us brought on board again in irons.”

“What did you do, then?” I demanded as he paused, and a smile of deep cunning slowly overspread his face.

“I’ll tell you what we did, Athelstane, my hearty. We got ourselves pressed!”

“Pressed?”

“Took by the crimps, you understand, and pressed to serve King George. Oh, but

it was a rare spree to see them crimps a-laying in wait for us, and enticing us into their dens, and filling us up with rum till we nearly bust where we sat, so that they could go and bring the pressgang down upon us. And us all the time asking nothing better, and ready to serve of our own accord, only it might ha' looked suspicious, d'ye see, it being agin natur for a honest seaman to want to go on board a man-o'-war."

The boatswain began to quiver and roll to and fro with spasms of inward laughter at the recollection of his strategy.

"And you should ha' seen your cousin's face when he stood all alone on the deck of the *Fair Maid*, and saw a boatload of us being rowed past him to the *Tyger*, every man jack of us in irons, and laughing in his face as we went by! And so that's how it is as I'm in King George's uniform, and right glad I am to find you in company again. For if ever I took a fancy to a young feller, I took one to you from the moment I first clapped eyes on you, and says I to myself, 'I'll make that lad a tight sailor yet,' I says, and I'd ha' done it, my boy, but for that scrub of a cousin of yours. And I've taken a blessed fort to-night for King George; and I'll tell 'em you was with me, and in command of the party, and they'll put your name in the despatches, and make you an admiral yet, or my name ain't Muzzy!"

CHAPTER XVI

A BATTLE IN THE DARK

With some difficulty I persuaded my zealous friend to change his intention of ascribing to me the capture of Budge-Budge. It was well I did so, for Mr. Clive, when he heard the particulars of the affair, chose to resent the breach of discipline on the part of the sailors more than he approved of their reckless enterprise. So that old Muzzy, to his surprise, instead of being rewarded for his achievement, found himself lucky to get off with nothing worse than a reprimand for his drunkenness and disobedience to orders.

The next day we marched upon Calcutta.

The ships went before us to clear the way, but they met with no resistance, all the Indian forces retiring before our advance. In the affair before Budge-Budge it seems that one of the shots from the guns had passed close to the turban of Monichund, and this had so terrified him that he never halted in his retreat till he came to Moorshedabad, all the way communicating his own fears to the garrisons he passed. When we entered the town of Calcutta, therefore, we saw the English colours already flying again from the fort, Admiral Watson having sent a party ashore to take possession.

I am sorry to say that some bad blood arose between the gallant Admiral and Mr. Clive over this incident. In fact there had been already several jealousies between the two services, the Admiral and his officers affecting to regard the Company’s forces as on an inferior footing to themselves. This feeling was heightened by the fact that Mr. Watson’s rank in the navy was higher than that of Colonel Clive in the army, which gave him the precedence, though everybody knew that the real leader and director of the campaign was the Colonel.

I was with Mr. Clive when he came up to the entrance to the fort, and can still see the stern look on his face when the sentinel stationed there by Captain Coote refused him admission.

“Do you know who I am, fellow?” he cried. “I bid you let me pass this instant, or I will have you court-martialled as sure as my name is Robert Clive!”

The sentinel drew back, and we passed in, but were immediately met in the courtyard by Mr. Coote himself.

“What is the meaning of this performance, sir?” the Colonel asked him sternly. “Are you aware that I hold his Majesty’s commission as lieutenant-colonel, and that you and all your men are therefore under my commands?”

“I am very sorry sir,” replied the other, beginning to blench a little, “but I was put into possession of this place by Admiral Watson, who has given me his commission as governor, and bid me hold it on his behalf till the arrival of Mr. Drake.”

“Then, Captain Coote,” retorted Mr. Clive, turning pale, “I order you to give up this fort to me, as your superior officer on land, failing which I shall order you to be arrested.”

The Captain gave way at this threat, but contrived to despatch a message to Mr. Watson of what had occurred. The Admiral, whose spirit was as high as Mr. Clive’s, at once sent on shore to say that unless Mr. Clive instantly quitted the fort, leaving Captain Coote in possession, he should open fire on it from the *Kent*.

In the end, however, a compromise was effected, by virtue of which the Admiral was to hold the fort for the remainder of that day, in compliment to his services in having taken it, but at the end of that period he was to deliver it up to Mr. Clive as the military representative of the Company.

Such were some of the difficulties with which this distinguished man had to contend. He would sometimes say to me, in his moments of confidence—

“I declare to you, Ford, that if I had known how I was to be vexed and thwarted by those whose duty it is to assist me, I would never have undertaken this command. After ruining their own affairs these Bengal gentlemen criticise and hamper every step I take to restore them; and Admiral Watson is more zealous in maintaining what he considers the honours due to his profession, than he is in beating the Moors.”

But in spite of this occasional bitterness, the Colonel entertained a great respect for Mr. Watson’s courage and abilities as a seaman, more especially after the

celebrated affair of Chander Nugger. Whilst Mr. Clive, with the other members of the committee, was engaged in settling the affairs of Calcutta, some spies came in with the news that the town of Hooghley lay very open to attack, the garrison being greatly dismayed and ready to give up the place on very slight provocation. Accordingly the Admiral sailed up the river against it with his fleet, and some troops under Major Kilpatrick and Captain Coote, attacking it on the land side, it was taken with very little loss on our side, and destroyed. But as I was not present on this occasion, so I shall say little about it, except to remark that it served to yet further impress the Indians with a sense of our power, and put Surajah Dowlah on marching from Moorshedabad to crush us with all his force.

The state in which we found Calcutta was indeed pitiable. The native quarter, especially that inhabited by the meaner sort of people, was not much injured, but all the English mansions and factories lay in ruins. The unfortunate servants of the Company, although thus restored to their former home, found themselves without shelter or money, the traffic having, of course, entirely ceased. It was fortunate for me that I had been able to bring away the jewels which Surajah Dowlah had given me in his fits of maudlin friendship, for these fetched a good price among the Gentoo merchants, and procured me as much money as I had occasion for. But with most of the others, from Mr. Drake downwards, it was different; and if the plunder of Hooghley had not brought in about a lac and a half of rupees, about this time, into the Company’s coffers, I scarce know what they would have done.

News arrived from Aleppo, shortly after these transactions, that war had again broken out in Europe between us and the French. This raised the prospect of a fresh peril for us, it being feared that the French in Chander Nugger would join forces with the Nabob. So seriously did Colonel Clive regard this outlook, that he consented to send proposals for an accommodation to Surajah, who was now in full march to the southward. To these proposals the Nabob pretended to return a favourable answer, nevertheless he continued advancing, and in order to be prepared against him Mr. Clive fortified an entrenched camp just outside the Morattoe ditch, to the northward, by which the Moors would have to pass before they could attack the town.

Things were in this position when one morning about the beginning of February, rising at daybreak, and strolling outside the camp, I saw the whole horizon to the northward lit with the flames of burning villages. I hastened to rouse Mr. Clive, and he came out and stood beside me, watching, while from a cloud of dust

along the road the van of the approaching army emerged, one blaze of gorgeous uniforms and tossing spears, marching towards the Morattoe ditch.

For some time we stood in silence, as troop after troop came on, crowding along the high road, and casting fierce looks towards our encampment as they passed. A frown gathered on the Colonel's brow, and he began to think aloud, as was his custom sometimes, when we were alone.

"Shall I attack them now? I might cut off their vanguard, and again I might be caught between two fires. The rest of the army cannot be far behind—better wait and ascertain their numbers. Besides, it is too soon to say whether or no the Nabob means to play me false. An attack now would hazard everything; I am bound to wait and give them time to show their true inclinations."

He raised his head, and looked at me.

"Go round the town, Ford, rouse the outposts everywhere, and bid them stand on the defensive. If the Moors attempt to cross the ditch and enter the town, they are to beat them back, and send me word, but not to follow them. Then return to me."

I hastened away to execute these orders, which were duly carried out. In one or two places the Moors attempted incursions, but were speedily checked. This contented them for that day. On the following morning the main army, accompanied by Surajah Dowlah in person, debouched on the plains, and proceeded to spread itself round the threatened town.

In the afternoon Mr. Clive summoned me to him. I found him in the tent with Mr. Scrafton, and he held a letter in his hand.

"The Nabob has sent to me," he said, "desiring me to appoint some persons to treat with him of the peace, and I have chosen Mr. Scrafton and you as my deputies. What do you say, Ford? Are you ready to trust your head in the tiger's jaws again, after your late adventures?"

"If you think fit to send me, sir, I am ready at all times to obey any orders I may receive from Colonel Clive."

He smiled, well pleased.

"Well said, my lad. I knew you were something better than a purser, and as soon as this business is over I will see to it that you get a commission in the

Company’s forces, if that will serve your turn.”

I thanked him, and Mr. Scrafton and I at once set out for Surajah’s quarters, which we were informed were at a place called Nabob-gunge. But on arriving there we found that the treacherous Moor had pursued his march towards the town and when we at last overtook him, late in the evening, we found him with his headquarters established in a house belonging to the Gentoo merchant Omichund, which house lay actually within the Morattoe ditch, and was therefore included in the territories of Calcutta.

We were here received by Roy Dullub, the Dewan, who instantly recognised me, and manifested some alarm at my thus appearing in the character of Colonel Clive’s emissary. He glanced over us both with an air of suspicion, and desired to know whether we had pistols concealed in our dress.

Mr. Scrafton laughed in his face.

“We are not assassins,” he said severely. “We do not deal with our enemies in that way. If our employer, Mr. Clive, desires to kill the Nabob, rest assured he will come in broad daylight, at the head of his army, and do it that way.”

Roy Dullub gave way after this rebuke, and led us into the presence of his master. The Nabob was seated in full durbar, with all his officers round him and the evil Lal Moon crouched like a snake beside his ear. All the way round the walls of the apartment was placed a row of huge guards, men of formidable size and ferocious countenances, who, to appear still more dreadful, had their dresses stuffed out and their turbans of twice the common size. Throughout the audience they kept their eyes fixed on us with a most bloodthirsty expression, as though expecting the signal to fall upon and slay us.

Surajah Dowlah was little changed from when I had last seen him. His features still preserved that aspect of ruined handsomeness and marred and minished glory, which is ascribed to the fallen archangel by our great poet Milton—whom I, for one, will never stoop to compare with your writer of lascivious stage-plays and sonnets, after whom all the world is now running frantic. Roy Dullub handed the paper which we had brought containing our proposals to the Nabob, who read it over before he condescended to glance at us.

No sooner did he see me, however, than his face changed. He turned his head, and whispered something to his favourite, pointing to me at the same time. Then he addressed us, with smooth civility, pretending to ignore our previous

acquaintance.

“I will desire my ministers to consider your proposals,” he said. “The Dewan shall confer with you, and let you know my pleasure.”

“That is not enough for us,” replied Mr. Scrafton. He naturally took it on himself to speak, as my elder and superior. “Your Highness has committed a breach of good faith in crossing the English boundary while negotiations are in progress.”

“You need have no fear about that,” the Nabob responded. “My intentions towards the English are friendly. I come among you simply as a guest. Tell Sabat Jung that he may lay down his sword and confide in my goodwill.”

To this Mr. Scrafton replied by a fresh remonstrance, but he soon saw that nothing was to be got from Surajah, whose answers were evidently being inspired by his secret adviser, Lal Moon. At length the Nabob dismissed us, and we retired from the durbar.

As we were passing out we saw, standing in the doorway, the Gentoo Omichund, whose house we were in. This man, well known in Bengal, possessed large interests in Calcutta, as well as in other parts of the Nabob’s territories. For this reason he had long played a double game between the Moors and English, seeking to keep in with both sides. Now, as we came past, he fixed a significant look upon us, and whispered in English in my ear—

“Take care of yourself!” Then, as I stood still for an instant he added in the same sly tone, “Does your commander know that the Nabob’s cannon are not yet come up?”

Before I could answer he slipped away in the crowd. I followed on after Mr. Scrafton, and whispered to him what I had heard, as we were on our way to the Dewan’s tent.

“It is my opinion,” I added, “that we are to be detained as prisoners. The Nabob is merely amusing Mr. Clive till his batteries have arrived.”

Mr. Scrafton was alarmed. We looked round, and finding nobody near us ordered our attendants to put out their torches. We then turned aside among the other tents, threaded our way through them in the darkness till we came out on to the road running towards the English lines, and in this way contrived to escape and get back to camp.

In order to the better understanding of what now took place, in default of a chart, I must explain how the two armies were situated. The river Hooghley, which here runs pretty straight north and south, forms, as it were, the string of a bent bow, the bow itself being represented by the Morattoe ditch of which I have so often had occasion to speak. The whole of the territory thus enclosed belonged to the Company, and measured about five miles in length, and one and a half miles in breadth at its widest part. The fort and town of Calcutta occupied only a small space in the centre, the rest of the ground being broken up into gardens with a few country residences scattered about. Of these Omichund's house, now occupied by the Nabob, lay about a quarter of the way along the ditch, from the point where it joins the river Hooghley at the north end of the enclosure. The remainder of their army lay in tents along a space of three miles, but on the outside of the ditch. Colonel Clive, as I have before explained, had entrenched his camp also on the further side, next to the river, lying between that and the Moors' encampment.

The moment we had made our report to Colonel Clive his mind was made up. Springing on to his feet, and striding up and down in the tent, he exclaimed—

"That settles it, if we are to strike a blow at all it must be now! I have done my best to procure a peace, knowing the risk I run by undertaking the attack of an army of forty thousand men with the little handful I have here under my command. But it is plain that I have to choose between that and yielding everything to the Nabob. Mr. Scrafton, write a letter in my name to the Admiral, asking him for as many seamen as he can spare; and do you, Ford, go and summon the officers here to receive their orders."

The news that an attack was intended spread like wild-fire through the little camp, and caused the greatest excitement, many regarding it as a desperate venture from which we should never return alive. Our total force was 650 Englishmen, with 800 Sepoys, and another 100 to serve the artillery. These were reinforced by 600 men from the ships, armed with matchlocks, who were put ashore secretly at midnight. Our guns were six-pounders, and as we had no horses, except one which had come with the expedition from Madras, the cannon had to be drawn by seamen.

Old Muzzy was among the party, and was given charge of one of the guns, of which there were six altogether. I went up to speak to him before he set out, and found him much discontented with the service.

“It’s this way, my lad,” he said, addressing me with a freedom which I could not resent, considering what he had done for me in the past, “I understand sailing on salt water, and I understand fighting, but when they puts me in charge of this here craft on wheels, with neither spars nor yet oars to work it, and tells me to navigate it, I ain’t exactly sure of my soundings. It seems to me that there ought to be a windlass to draw her up. Bust my stays if I can make out how I’m to make her answer her helm!”

With these grumblings he entertained me till the signal was given to start, when I repaired to the side of Mr. Clive, who took his station in the centre of the column. We marched three abreast, four hundred of the Sepoys going in front, then the European troops, then the second half of the Sepoys, and last of all the guns escorted by the sailors. Mr. Clive’s plan, so far as he permitted it to be known, was to strike right through the Nabob’s army, before they were prepared to receive us, and attack the Nabob himself in Omichund’s enclosure.

It was just before daybreak when the head of our little column came upon the advance guard of the enemy. These at once fled, after discharging their pieces, but one of their shots, striking a Sepoy’s cartouch box, caused a slight explosion, which threw our advance into some confusion for a moment. We pressed forward, picking our way as we best could in the obscurity; for no sooner was it day than a thick fog, such as is common in this season of the year in Bengal, descended upon us, wrapping everything in darkness. We had gone perhaps half a mile without molestation, dispersing the scattered parties of the Indians as we advanced, when there broke upon our ears the sound of heavy galloping from the quarter where we supposed Omichund’s house to lie. Colonel Clive at once ordered a halt; we faced to the right, whence the sound proceeded, and as soon as the dim forms of the approaching squadron loomed upon us out of the mist, the word was given to fire. The whole line delivered a volley at a distance of about thirty paces, whereupon the phantom horsemen at once turned and fled back, uttering loud cries as they were swallowed up again in the darkness.

By this time it was evident that our position had become extremely perilous. We resumed our march, as nearly as we could keep it in the former direction, and continued groping our way in the mist through the heart of the enemy’s camp, firing volleys by platoons to right and left, but without knowing where our bullets went, while the men with the guns discharged single shots from time to time along the sides of the column into the darkness ahead.

After we had gone on in this fashion for some time, not receiving much

interruption from the enemy, but greatly troubled by the increasing obscurity, which rendered it difficult to see so much as a yard in front, there suddenly arose a murmur from amongst the Sepoys at the head of the column. Colonel Clive sent to demand the meaning of this, and the messenger returned with the intelligence that the men had stumbled upon a causeway, crossing our line of march, and leading to the Morattoe ditch on our right. He at once gave the order that the troops should mount upon this causeway and march towards the ditch. Unfortunately, however, no notice of this change in the direction was given to the artillerymen in the rear, who continued to fire, as they supposed, to the side of the column. A cannon ball came among the Sepoys on the causeway, killing several of them. Thereupon the rest sought shelter by leaping down on the other side of the causeway, and the whole forward part of the troops was huddled together in confusion.

The darkness made it difficult to ascertain at first what had happened, but as soon as Mr. Clive understood he gave the order to cease firing, and brought the whole force across the causeway, where he strove to restore their formation. It was his intention to have advanced along the causeway, driven away the Moors stationed to defend it, and forced his way through to the English side of the ditch. But while he was engaged in restoring order among the troops, the enemy, no doubt overhearing our movements, commenced a discharge on us from some cannon loaded with langrain, which they seemed to have brought up within a few hundred yards of us. The shot striking the troops while still bundled together, did us the most damage we received that day; indeed it was a very terrifying thing to suddenly hear the roar of artillery so close at hand, and see men falling right and left from shots fired by an invisible foe.

Under these circumstances it was wonderful to see the coolness of Colonel Clive, who continued to give his orders without appearing the least dismayed, and deployed the men into line again as steadily as though we were in our own camp, and not in the midst of the Moors. Abandoning all thoughts of the causeway, he ordered the column to resume its course to the southward, so as to reach the main road into Calcutta, by which we might cross the ditch and return in safety. This necessitated our leaving the wounded, about twenty in number, who broke into grievous cries at the prospect of being deserted to the cruelty of the Moors.

Among the voices raised in complaint I heard one which I believed I knew. I hastened to look among the figures on the ground, and presently made out the form of old Muzzy himself, who lay with his right leg doubled up under him.

“Is that you?” I exclaimed, bending over him. “Where have you been hurt? Is it serious?”

“Athelstane!” He looked up, turning his eyes on me with an appeal which went to my heart. “They’ve riddled my leg with their cursed heathenish small shot, curse them! If it had been a Christian bullet, now, I shouldn’t ha’ minded so much. Give me a hand, my boy, and I’ll see if I can stand up.”

I put my arms round him and lifted him partly from the ground, while he clutched at me with both hands. The next instant a groan broke from his clenched teeth.

“It’s no good, lad, I can’t do it. Go, and save yourself if you can; and leave old Muzzy to take his rating below decks at last!”

CHAPTER XVII

A MISSION OF DANGER

I got up and called to some sailors who were falling into the rear of the now departing column.

“Here, my men, here’s a comrade wounded and unable to walk. Will you leave him to be butchered by the Indians?”

They stopped, and cast hesitating looks at the old boatswain, where he lay groaning.

“There’s a-many of ’em about,” observed one man. “We can’t save them all, sir.”

“But this is an old friend of mine, who has saved my life before now,” I pleaded. And seeing them undecided, I went on, “What do you say; I will give you a hundred rupees—two hundred—apiece if you carry him safe into Calcutta?”

They brisked up when they heard this offer. A small tree with dark green leaves stood close by, from which they tore some branches, and quickly made out a rude litter. On to this they lifted my poor old friend, and so carried him off, renewing his groans at every step.

I marched alongside till we caught up with the rear of the column. Luckily we were not molested, for which I blessed the fog, though it was now showing signs of lifting away. Our progress was here extremely slow, the ground being broken up into a number of small rice-fields, separated by mud walls or mounds of earth, over which the field-pieces had to be lifted with infinite trouble, and in fact two of them were abandoned altogether, the sailors being too exhausted to draw them further. During this time I forbore to rejoin Colonel Clive, but used my freedom as a volunteer to remain with the sailors bearing old Muzzy, where I found my presence and encouragement very necessary to induce them to persevere in their task. As it was I was obliged to raise my offer to three hundred rupees before we had got to the high road.

The fog gradually clearing, we beheld parties of the enemy’s horse from time to time, threatening us, but they were easily dispersed by a few discharges of

musketry, and gave us far less annoyance than the impediments of the ground. At the end of another hour of this toilsome work we at length arrived at the road, where we found a considerable body of horse and foot posted in front of the bridge across the Morattoe ditch into the Company's territories, to prevent our passing.

At the same time the fog finally broke, and disclosed another numerous squadron coming down against our rear. The sailors at once faced about to defend the artillery, and I took my place among them, bidding the men with the litter press on towards the centre of the column. The Moors rode up with great determination, notwithstanding our fire, and one of them got near enough to me to aim a cut at my helmet, which I only avoided by bending my head to one side. At the same time I thrust my bayonet into his groin, and had the satisfaction of seeing him reel and fall from his horse as it turned and galloped off.

This charge being repulsed, we turned about again and rejoined our comrades, who had quickly dislodged the force opposed to them in front. The whole column then crossed the ditch, in broad daylight, and marched without further mishap into the town, where we arrived about midday, having been on the march for more than six hours, through the midst of a great army.

Such was this extraordinary exploit, to which, as I am assured, a parallel is scarcely to be found in the history of any age or nation. Nevertheless, at the moment its effect was to cast a gloom over the spirits of the troops. The officers, who could never forgive Colonel Clive for not having been, like themselves, regularly bred to the military profession, grumbled at and criticised his action, which they described as that of a mere braggadocio, who knew nothing of war. The fact was that the rules of war contained no prescription for the conquest of an army of forty thousand men by one of barely two thousand; and though the hero who led us was ever ready to attempt impossibilities, he could not always perform them.

As soon as I had seen old Muzzy safely bestowed in the hospital, where the surgeons declared that it would be necessary to amputate his leg, I hastened to report myself to my commander. He received me with kindness and no little surprise, having fully believed that I was killed. Indeed he told me that a soldier of Adlercron's regiment had assured him he had seen me fall. However, he fully approved of what I had done in rescuing my old comrade, only regretting it had not been in his power to save the rest of the wounded.

I found him much dispirited with the result of the morning's work.

"I have done nothing, Ford," he declared, "nothing. I have marched into the Nabob's camp, and marched out again, like the King of France in the nursery rhyme. And here are these gentlemen of the committee clamouring for peace, that they may get their revenues back again, and their dustucks, and I know not what else, with the Nabob and his army at their gates. You see what it is to be a commander—would to God I were back in England, enjoying my rest!"

The next day put a different complexion on our affairs. Secret messages arrived from Omichund to say that the Nabob had been terrified out of his wits, that he no longer considered himself safe even in the midst of his troops, and that we might depend on a peace being speedily concluded. Shortly afterwards a letter arrived, written by Surajah Dowlah's instructions to Colonel Clive, in which he referred to the treaty on foot between them, and complained bitterly of the attack upon his camp.

"Now, Ford," said the Colonel to me, when he had shown me this letter, "I feel a different man to what I did yesterday. Sit down and write my answer to this insolent Moor."

I took the pen, and he dictated the following letter, of which I have the draft still in my possession:—

> "*To his Highness Surajah Dowlah, Nabob of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa.*
>
> "SIR,—I have received your letter, and am unable to understand what it is that you complain of. I merely marched with a few of my troops through your camp to show you of what Englishmen are capable, but I had no hostile intentions, and was careful to refrain from hurting any of your soldiers, except such as imprudently opposed me. I have been, and still am, perfectly willing to make peace with you upon proper conditions.—I have the honour to remain your Highness's obedient servant,
>
> "ROBERT CLIVE."

This bitter jest completed the effect produced by the previous day's work. That very evening we heard that the Nabob had broken up his quarters, and withdrawn to a distance of several miles from the Company's territories; and a

few days later he signed a treaty granting full restitution to the Company of all that they had lost by the sack of Calcutta. This was just six weeks from the time we had started from Fulta.

During the period that followed I spent much of my time in the hospital, sitting by old Muzzy's bedside. He had borne the removal of his leg with great courage, but now that he began to mend I found him much depressed in his spirits.

"My day is over, boy," he would say, "I shall never sail salt water more. Old Muzzy is a dismasted hulk, only fit to be hauled up on the mud, and broken up for tinder. Drown me if I don't a'most wish the dogs had put a ball through my hull while they were about it, so that I could ha' gone down in deep water, with colours flying and all hands on deck, and heard the broadsides roaring over me to the last! That's the death for a British tar, my fine fellow, in action gallantly, and not to lie on the mud and rot away by inches like I'm fair to do."

I tried to cheer him up as best I could, though indeed I felt sorry enough myself to see that strong man laid helpless as a child. I thought it my duty to try and rouse him to some interest in better things, and brought a Bible to read to him.

In this I succeeded after a fashion. He listened very readily to the history of the Israelites, and expressed a huge admiration for Joshua and some of the Judges. But when I tried to pass on to the New Testament I must confess I met with more difficulties.

"No, no, don't read me that; it's too good for an old rakehelly tar like me," he persisted in saying. "Them apostles was fishermen, d'ye see, and the fishermen and longshore folk always was more peaceable and quieter-like than us deep-sea bilboes. You read me about that there fellow as slaughtered the Camelites; I understands him better. By Gosh, he gave 'em a warm time of it, on my swow, didn't he! Not much use them Camelites showing their heads when Joshua was in the offing! He swept their decks for 'em, clean, every time."

He meant the Amalekites. I could not quite approve of the spirit in which he took the sacred history, but still I felt that to get him to listen to the Scriptures at all was something, and the good seed might come up later on.

I pleased myself with these efforts to reform my poor old friend, and yet perhaps I should have been better employed in seeking to amend my own life. For though I can truly say that I lived honestly and soberly, yet all this time my heart was given up to thoughts of ambition and revenge, and the desire of riches; and

the good impressions wrought upon me by my sufferings in the Black Hole had almost faded clean out of my mind.

I was not present at the taking of Chander Nugger, which was the next great event in the East Indies, and therefore forbear from describing it. But this affair served to display yet further the duplicity and shifting policy of Surajah Dowlah, whose conduct evidently changed from day to day as the passion of hatred of the English, or fear of Colonel Clive, obtained the mastery in his bosom. On one day he sent permission for us to attack the French, on the next he wrote strictly forbidding it. Colonel Clive would have gone against them without waiting for the Nabob's leave, but Admiral Watson was more scrupulous, considering that to do so would be a violation of our recent treaty. Yet he did not shrink from upbraiding the Nabob in round terms, and sent him one letter in which he threatened, with the bluntness of a seaman, to kindle such a fire in his country as all the water in the Ganges should not be able to extinguish.

Finally the Nabob gave way, induced partly by his fears of the Pitans, a savage predatory tribe on the borders of Afghanistan, who from time to time broke into the Great Mogul's dominions, and were now threatening to march as far as Behar. Accordingly a joint expedition was made, and Chander Nugger taken after a brilliant action, in which, as Colonel Clive fully acknowledged, the Admiral signalised himself by conspicuous courage and seamanship.

All this time I lay ill in Calcutta of a low fever, which I had contracted in the hospital while attending on old Muzzy. It was now his turn to nurse me, which he did most assiduously, being now recovered, and able to get about well enough by means of a wooden leg.

As I lay there sick day after day I began once more to see things in a truer light. I longed most painfully to be at home among the scenes and friends of my youth, and I resolved, once I had risen from my sick bed, to let no motives of ambition or interest detain me any further in Indostan.

I communicated these sensible resolutions to old Muzzy, who thoroughly approved of them.

"And I tell you what, Athelstane, lad, we'll make our passage home in company," he said. "I've got a tidy bit o' prize-money left somewhere, enough to take me back to England, and mayhap a bit over, to keep me out of the workhouse when I gets there."

He put his hands into his hairy bosom and drew out a small canvas bag, which he shook out upon the coverlid of the bed. The contents made a small heap of gold and silver, amounting, as near as I could judge, to about £100 or £150 in English money, though the coins were of all countries—rupees, French crowns, moidores, and many others.

The old boatswain put his head on one side, casting looks of affectionate pride on his treasure.

“There, my lad, that’s my little fortin’, enough to pay my freight through to Davy Jones’s locker, I daresay. And if there’s any of it left over, by Gosh! you shall have it, for I’ve neither parent nor friend in the world, nor I don’t so much as know the place where I was born. And drown me if I don’t love you, my young matey!”

I was so weak at the time that these hearty expressions of the old fellow fairly melted me, though I could scarce refrain from smiling at the thoughts of the legacy which I was like to inherit.

“You shall come with me and welcome,” I told him. “We will start together as soon as ever I can get off this bed; and when we get to England I will bring you to my own home, and ask my parents to provide you with a shelter for my sake.”

“That’s right enough,” he answered, “and very kind of you. But, mind, old Muzzy ain’t looking for no charity. Where I goes, I takes my little fortin’, and them as takes care of me will get the benefit of it, d’ye see.”

He swept up the money into his bag again, and had just restored it to his bosom when there came a sound outside the door, and who should walk in but Colonel Clive!

I strove to raise myself in the bed as he entered, but this he at once prevented.

“Lie still, youngster!” he exclaimed, walking up to the bedside, followed by Mr. Scrafton. “Why, how’s this; they never told me you were ill till I was on the point of starting for Chander Nugger, when I had no time to come and see you? But you are on the high road to recovery by this time, surely?”

“Thank you, sir, I am much improved,” I managed to stammer out, overwhelmed by this condescension on the part of so great a man. “And are the French beaten?” I asked anxiously, for I had not heard the news.

The Colonel turned to Mr. Scrafton and laughed.

“There’s my little purser all over!” he exclaimed, with evident goodwill. “The French are beaten, and driven out of Bengal, I trust for ever, and their factories are become ours. And since you were unable to be present at the action, and to share in the spoil, I have remembered my promise to you, and brought you a sword instead.”

He took the weapon from the hands of Mr. Scrafton, who was carrying it, and laid it on the bed beside me. At the same time Mr. Scrafton handed me a paper, duly signed, containing my commission as an ensign in the service of the East India Company.

I could only murmur out my gratitude for these marks of consideration; while Mr. Clive went on to say—

“And now you must make haste and get about again, for as soon as you are able to travel I have an important mission for you to discharge.”

“And what is that, sir?” I asked, not very heartily.

The Colonel noticed my diffidence, and gave me a searching look.

“I ought to have said it is a very dangerous mission,” he observed.

I felt my cheeks turn red.

“Then sir, I think I am well enough to undertake it,” I replied, with some little temper. And I sat up in the bed.

Colonel Clive burst out laughing, and seizing me by the shoulders thrust me down again.

“There, that is right; there is not so much hurry about it as to drag you out of bed just yet. But as soon as you are well enough I mean you to go to Moorshedabad.”

I uttered a cry of surprise.

“I have some messages to send to Mr. Watts, who is acting there on our behalf,” Mr. Clive explained. “The affair is too risky for me to trust the ordinary service, and besides, from all I hear, you have made a great impression on the Nabob, and may serve a useful purpose by remaining in Moorshedabad for awhile. But I will tell you no more till you are better able to hear it.”

And with this, and many kind expressions about my health, he withdrew.

It did not take long for me to shake off the remains of my fever under these circumstances, and the moment I was able to go out of the house where I lay, I went to wait on my patron.

Colonel Clive received me in his private room in the fort, and dismissing everybody else, opened to me the nature of the mission entrusted to me. The late proceedings of his enemies against him in Parliament have made this business so notorious to the world that I shall be excused for expressing it very shortly in this place.

To be brief, the Colonel informed me that the moment for our long-delayed vengeance upon the wicked and bloodthirsty Surajah Dowlah was at length arrived. Tired with his cruelties, his own subjects had cast about for a means of getting rid of him, and overtures had been received from the principal men of the Nabob's Court inviting Colonel Clive to take part in a concerted scheme for his overthrow. A treaty had been drawn up between the parties, whereby it was provided that Colonel Clive should march against the Nabob's army with his whole force, now increased by the arrival of other ships from the Coromandel coast, and should be joined on the battle-field by Meer Jaffier, who undertook to desert from his nephew and bring over the part of the army under his command to the English side. In return for these services, supposing the victory should be obtained, the Company was to receive a crore of rupees in compensation for the injuries inflicted by the Nabob, while many millions were to be divided among Colonel Clive, the gentlemen of the Council and the officers and men of both services. Surajah Dowlah was to be deposed from the musnud, and his uncle, Meer Jaffier, elevated in his stead, the Meer binding himself to pay these sums out of the Nabob's treasure, and the payment being further guaranteed by Jugget Seet, the great banker of Moorshedabad, whose connexions extended over all parts of Indostan.

This treaty having been signed and executed by Colonel Clive and the other gentlemen of the Company, he now required me to carry it to Moorshedabad, were it was to be sworn to by Jugget Seet, the Meer Jaffier, and the other high officers of the Court who were parties to the design. At the same time he enjoined on me to observe the utmost secrecy.

"Remember," he said, "that if once Surajah Dowlah or his minion Lal Moon should get an inkling of this plot, his rage would break loose against every one

concerned in it. As it is Mr. Watts has had great difficulty in lulling his suspicions, and has several times been in great peril. But I suppose you are not the man to shrink back on that account."

"Give me the treaty, sir," I replied, "and I undertake to carry it to Moorshedabad. Am I to deliver it into Mr. Watts's hands?"

"Why, yes; that is, if you find him still there when you arrive. But you must use the greatest caution in communicating with him. Above all, beware of the Gentoo Omichund, who has already once threatened to betray us. We have been obliged to provide a duplicate treaty to satisfy him, in which is included a stipulation for three millions of rupees to be paid to him on our success. But you will explain to Meer Jaffier that this is merely a trick to which we have been obliged by Omichund's knavery. He shall not have a farthing."

Mr. Clive spoke these words very sternly. At the same time he handed me the two treaties, one drawn up upon white paper and the other on red.

"The red treaty is the one to be shown to Omichund," he explained. "Both must be executed by the parties to the conspiracy in Moorshedabad, but only the white one is to be sworn to. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

I rolled up the two papers and put them into my pocket. I did not then feel, nor have I since been able to understand, all the indignation which has been poured on Lord Clive's head for this artifice, by which a treacherous, overreaching scoundrel was robbed of the blackmail he had tried to extort. As to the charge which has been made against that great man of having caused Admiral Watson's name to be forged to the second treaty, I can only say that it was the general opinion at the time that the gallant Admiral was fully aware of what was being done, and, since he took no steps to restrain the use of his name, it appears to be all the same as though he had affixed it with his own hand.

However, it is not my intention to dwell upon these disputes, to which I am only induced to refer by a spirit of loyalty to my old commander and friend, for such he permitted me to call him.

"Remember," the Colonel said to me at parting, "above all, to show no fear of Surajah Dowlah. Mr. Watts is too modest in his behaviour, and for that reason the young tyrant despises and ill-uses him. But I think that is not a fault you are

likely to fall into; indeed, I have heard that during your former residence there you fairly awed the Nabob; so I have good hope that you will do the same again. The moment you have secured the execution of the treaties it will be time to fly, and as soon as I hear you are safe I shall put my troops on the march to Plassy."

CHAPTER XVIII

MEER JAFFIER'S OATH

I arrived in Moorshedabad without accident, and at once repaired to the house of the Company's agent, Mr. Watts.

I found this gentleman in a state of the utmost apprehension. The air was full of suspicion. Moorshedabad swarmed with the Nabob's spies, who watched the going in and coming out of every person whom their master had reason to distrust, and carried their reports to his infamous minion, Lal Moon. Mr. Watts assured me that he did not consider his own life to be worth a day's purchase, and the Nabob had uttered such threats against him on the last occasion of his going to the palace that he dared not present himself there again.

Fortunately for me Colonel Clive had provided me with an excuse for my journey in the shape of a letter to Surajah Dowlah, in which the Colonel renewed his expressions of friendship, but demanded the withdrawal of the Nabob's army from Plassy. This was a step which the conspirators considered indispensable to their design, as they had no expectation that Colonel Clive could overcome this force of forty thousand men as long as it kept the field.

Armed with the Colonel's letter I went to wait upon the Nabob, leaving Mr. Watts to exert his utmost diligence in procuring the necessary signatures to the treaties, which I delivered to him for the purpose.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of the Nabob's officers when I, who had fled secretly from the city six months before, presented myself before them in the character of an ambassador from Sabat Jung and boldly demanded an audience. They hastened to carry the news to the Nabob, and after a short time they returned and conducted me into his presence.

Although scarcely three months had elapsed since I had last seen Surajah Dowlah, I observed a change for the worse in his appearance. He sat on the royal musnud with the same state as formerly, clad in his gold-embroidered robes and turban sparkling with the light of many gems, surrounded by the same obsequious throng of courtiers and attended by his ferocious guards ready to take the life of any man present, at a nod from their despotic lord. Yet I discovered

something in his countenance which I had not seen there before. His head hung down with an air of weariness, and his gaze, instead of darting fiercely to and fro, seemed to shift and hesitate as if with a lurking distrust of those about him. He appeared to be in ill-health, and shifted fretfully about in his seat as he talked. On my part, I regarded him with different eyes from the time when I had come before him as a captive in his hands, when I had viewed him as a powerful tyrant, invested with all the horror of his recent crimes, and especially of that never-to-be-forgotten atrocity of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Now, on the last occasion on which I was ever to confront him, I did so as the emissary of one whose power was yet greater than his own, as the agent of an intrigue that menaced his throne and perhaps his life. And beneath the surface of pomp and power and the outward show of sovereignty, I looked deeper, and beheld merely a young man, scarce older than myself—in his nineteenth year—the victim of an evil education, corrupted by the possession of despotic power, rent and exhausted by his own evil passions, and surrounded by traitors secretly scheming for his downfall. Some of the dread and hatred which I had formerly felt for him was replaced by milder sentiments, and I could have found it in my heart to pity Surajah Dowlah.

As if to strengthen these impressions in my mind, the young Nabob was in a singularly amiable mood, and appeared glad to see me.

“So it is you again!” he was pleased to say when I was introduced. “I see that you have told me the truth, and that you are a friend of Sabat Jung’s. But why did you flee from me before? I regarded you with favour, and would not have put you to death.”

“Sir,” I answered, “I am obliged by your kind expressions, but I am an Englishman, and in my country there is no man who can put me to death unless I commit some crime against the laws; nor do I choose to live in any place where I hold my life by the favour of a prince.”

A murmur ran through the throng of courtiers at this reply, some of the high officers whom I knew to be concerned in the plot pretending to be especially shocked.

Surajah Dowlah raised his head and looked at me in some surprise.

“I should not care to be king of your country if I could not put a man to death when I wished to. Allah has created kings, and has put men’s lives into our hands. It is destiny. Those who fall by my hands would perish instead by

pestilence or famine or wild beasts if I forbore to slay them. They die because it is the will of Allah."

I listened in consternation to this frightful profession of fatalism by which Surajah Dowlah sought to decline the responsibility of his wicked acts. In the meantime he read the letter which I had brought from Colonel Clive.

"Why does Sabat Jung so earnestly desire me to disband my troops?" he asked presently.

"Your Highness's own conscience must tell you that," I returned. "So long as you keep your army in the field, threatening Calcutta, it is impossible to believe that you are in earnest in your professions of friendship towards the English. The present state of things keeps the minds of the merchants unsettled and prevents the resumption of trade, without which our factories cannot subsist in Bengal."

"No, no," the Nabob broke out, speaking very earnestly, "I design nothing against you. But I am in fear of the Morattoes, who meditate another invasion."

"Have no fear of that, sir. Colonel Clive will protect you, if necessary, against the Morattoes. But you may depend upon it he will never believe in your friendship till your troops are withdrawn from Plassy."

The Nabob seemed to meditate upon these words for a few minutes, during which nobody ventured to speak to him. Then he looked at me again, seeming as if he would search my heart.

"And suppose I comply with this demand, what security have I that the Colonel will not advance against this city? How do I know that he is not deceiving me? There are plots—yes, there are plots in the air!"

I felt a touch of contempt for him as I answered—

"That is a matter which I must take leave not to discuss. It is for your Highness to consider whether your conduct has been such as to conciliate the affections of your subjects, or whether it has not rather been calculated to make every man your secret enemy."

Surajah Dowlah started, and sank back on his seat, terrified by this unexpected plainness, which caused little less alarm among his suite. But I soon saw that my words had been rightly judged. Being an Oriental, the Nabob could not believe that I should have spoken like that if I had really been privy to any intrigues

against him. He therefore dismissed his fears, and finally promised to issue orders for his whole army to retire to Moorshedabad.

Satisfied with this success, I took my leave of him, his last words to me as I withdrew being—

“Tell the Colonel I trust him; I look upon him as my friend.”

Moved by these words more than I cared to admit even to myself, I returned to Mr. Watts, and, all being now in train, we pushed forward the affair of the signatures as rapidly as we dared.

During these few eventful days I neglected no means of inquiring after the fate of those whom I had left in the Nabob’s hands on my former flight from Moorshedabad. But though I questioned not merely the great officers of the Court, but also many of the eunuchs and inferior servants about the palace, I could learn nothing definite either of Marian or of Rupert. That they had not succeeded in recovering their freedom I was pretty well assured, but what had become of them, and whether they were alive or dead, was more than I could learn. The shadow and the secrecy of the East had closed like a curtain over their fates, and I was left to torment myself with miserable guesses in the darkness.

The business of signing the treaty went on as rapidly as it could be pushed. But the greed of the Gentoos at every step of the transaction was most disgusting, and the cowardice and treachery of the Moors scarcely less so. The Dewan, Roy Dullub, at first objected that all the Nabob’s treasure was not enough to satisfy the gratuities provided for in the treaty, but no sooner did Mr. Watts offer to make him agent for the distribution, with a commission of five in the hundred on all sums passing through his hands, than his scruples instantly vanished.

But at last everything was settled except the swearing of the treaty by Meer Jaffier, on which the whole affair turned. The Meer was just now arrived in Moorshedabad from Plassy, where he had been in command of one division of the Nabob’s army, the remainder having before been taken from him and given to Roy Dullub. It was reported that Surajah Dowlah had received his uncle very scurvily, and spoken to him with so much harshness that Meer Jaffier had at once retired to his palace, at the other end of the city, and surrounded himself with his guards. This palace resembled a fortress, having regular walls and towers, and being provided with cannons and other munitions for a siege.

Thither, on the following day, Mr. Watts went to visit him, but returned in much

alarm to say that the Meer had received him in public, in the hall of audience, surrounded by his officers, and had given him no chance to refer to the subject of the treaty.

While we were discussing what this could mean an Indian arrived, who proved to be a private messenger from Meer Jaffier himself.

This man informed us that Meer Jaffier had been obliged to receive Mr. Watts as he had done to deceive Lal Moon's spies, the Nabob's suspicions causing him to watch very strictly all intercourse between his great men and the English agents. What he now proposed was that Mr. Watts should come to his palace in the evening in a curtained litter, by which means he might be introduced unsuspected into the women's apartments, and there have a private conference with the Meer.

I could see that Mr. Watts regarded this invitation with very little confidence, his experiences in the Nabob's Court having rendered him cautious to an extreme. I therefore undertook to go in his place, an offer which he gladly accepted.

As there was nothing to detain either of us in Moorshedabad after the treaty had been confirmed, and every hour that passed rendered our situation more precarious, it was further arranged that Mr. Watts should take his departure at once, leaving me to follow during the night. Accordingly he gave out that he was going on a visit to Cossimbuzar on business connected with the Company's investment, and set out the same afternoon.

I waited till it was quite dark before I got into the litter, which had been prepared for me by two Indian servants on whose fidelity I depended. They bore me through the streets on their shoulders at a great pace, and, thanks to the respect which these people have for their women, I passed undiscovered. Once, indeed, we were stopped for a moment, and there was a short discussion, in which I heard the voices of my attendants, though I could not distinguish what was said. It terminated in a laugh, and they were suffered to proceed without the curtains having been withdrawn. But it may be imagined how my heart came into my mouth during the brief halt, and what relief I experienced when the palanquin was set down within the gates of Meer Jaffier's palace and I was able to step out.

The Meer received me in the presence of his son Meeram, a youth of sixteen, who bore a strong resemblance to his cousin the Nabob, a resemblance, as I was afterwards to learn, not confined to mere looks. He sat apart, staring at me with a sullen air of dislike, while his father perused the treaty.

Its terms appeared to give Meer Jaffier perfect satisfaction. As soon as he had read it, he asked—

“How soon will Colonel Clive be ready to take the field?”

“He is ready now,” I answered. “All he is waiting for is information from you as to the steps which you propose to take to support him.”

Meer Jaffier looked a little uneasy.

“You are my friend, I know,” he said. “You must speak good words on my behalf to Sabat Jung. Everything depends on him. Let him strike the first blow, and he will find every one prepared to join him.”

I shook my head.

“I am your friend, it is true,” I responded, “but I am still more the friend of Sabat Jung, and I must know the grounds on which he is to proceed. What force have you ready to bring to his assistance?”

“Do you mean what is the number of my division?”

“I mean the number on whom you can rely.”

“Three thousand horsemen.”

He glanced at me in some doubt as he spoke. I heard this number with dismay.

“Only three thousand! What succour is that?”

“But those are only my own men. There are several commanders who have been affronted by Surajah Dowlah, and are ready to turn their swords against him at the first opportunity. On the day of battle these will come over to us with their troops.”

“What assurance have you of that?” I asked.

“I know my countrymen. They judge a man by his deeds, and there is nothing that commands their respect like daring and success. Already they fear the Colonel; let them see him boldly attacking the Nabob, with me by his side, and they will quickly join us. Tell Sabat Jung my words.”

“And when do you intend to join the Colonel?” I inquired, beginning to fear that Meer Jaffier was likely to prove a broken reed to lean upon.

“I will join him as soon as the English troops come in sight of the city. Or if the Nabob keeps his army at Plassy, then I will join you as soon as the signal for battle is given. I will march over to you with a great part of the army, as many as I can persuade to join me, and the others will then take to flight. If I see an opportunity I will seize my nephew in his tent.”

With these promises he beguiled me into some confidence in him. Then placing a copy of the Alcoran upon his head, and resting one hand upon the head of his son Meeram, he solemnly swore to perform all that he had undertaken. He also signed the treaty, writing these words upon it in Persian—“In the name of Allah, and of the Prophet of Allah, I swear to abide by the terms of this treaty while I have life.”

As soon as this business was completed, the Meer said to me—

“And now, before you go, tell me what reward I may give you for your services in this affair?”

I hesitated. He evidently expected that I should name some large sum in rupees, such as was promised by the terms of the treaty to Mr. Watts and others of those privy to it.

“What I ask for is neither money nor jewels,” I said, “but the lives of the two persons who, I believe, are now kept somewhere concealed in the palace of the Nabob.”

Meer Jaffier understood me.

“You mean the Englishwoman who was brought here from Calcutta, and the Englishman who was formerly a spy in Surajah Dowlah’s service?”

I nodded my head.

“It may be that the woman is, as you say, still in the Nabob’s harem. But I cannot think that the man is alive. He has most probably been secretly put to death for his offence in breaking into the garden of the seraglio.”

“I took part in that offence, and yet I am alive still,” I answered.

“Well, what is it you ask of me?”

“I ask your promise that the moment Surajah Dowlah is overthrown, and the power has passed into your hands, you will aid me to ransack the palace of

Moorshedabad in search of that woman and that man."

Meer Jaffier bowed his head.

"You shall do so. Nay, more, to convince you that I am in earnest I will write you an authority now, before you leave me, which will become of effect as soon as Colonel Clive has driven my nephew from the musnud."

A few minutes afterwards I had re-entered the palanquin, and was being conveyed back to Mr. Watts's house.

The next day, rising early, I pretended some business with Mr. Watts, and followed after him on horseback to Cossimbuzar. Here I was met by some of his native servants, who told me that he had gone hunting the evening before, and had not returned. Desiring them to show me the way he had gone, I went on till I was out of sight, and then, striking into a gallop, rode southward for my life towards the English lines.

The sun was low down in the western sky, as, riding slowly on my exhausted beast, I drew near the village of Cutwah, and espied the uniforms of the English sentries gleaming through the trees. The first men who I came up to stood in a little group together, their muskets resting on the ground, while they talked together in low tones. They looked up as I approached, and seeing the Company's uniform, saluted me, while I stopped to show them the pass which I carried. But they said nothing, and as I passed on further into the camp I was struck by the silence that prevailed. All round me I saw the men cooking their suppers, or passing to and fro with water vessels, but their heads hung down, and I heard none of the cheering and singing which generally prevailed when Colonel Clive had his troops upon the march against an enemy.

Pressing forward to the headquarters, I found the same evidences of dejection increased on all sides, till at last I met Major Coote walking with two other officers away from the commander's tent. The Major at once stopped me, and asked me how I did, but in so dull a fashion that I could see he was as dispirited as the rest.

"I am quite well, I thank you, sir," I answered him, "but a little surprised at the state of the camp. I am but this moment arrived from Moorshedabad. Can you tell me if anything untoward has taken place?"

Major Coote turned to the two young officers, and signed to them to withdraw.

As soon as they were out of earshot he stepped up to the side of my horse, and laying his hand on the saddle addressed me in a low tone—

"Harkye, Ford, I know you to be a discreet youngster, and so I'll tell you my mind plainly. I don't know what news you bring from Moorshedabad, and I don't ask, but we've had such accounts from that cursed place lately that Colonel Clive has begun to believe that not a single man of them all is to be trusted, from Meer Jaffier down. He doesn't think them worth fighting for, and what's more, he doesn't think they mean to join him as they have promised. The long and short of it is, he has just called a council of war of all his officers—you would have been there if you had arrived an hour sooner, and therefore it's no breach of confidence to tell you—he called the council to decide whether we should go forward and fight, or give it up and go back. And he gave his own voice for going back, and the d—d council, two-thirds of 'em, followed suit; and the upshot of it is we're to put our tails between our legs and *go* back—and that's why you see the whole army ready to throw down their arms like so many children!"

I was aghast at this intelligence, hardly believing it possible that the courage of Colonel Clive should have failed him, though I was better able than most to estimate the worries and cares thrust upon his shoulders by the mingled folly and malice of those who should have given him their best support.

"Where is the Colonel?" I exclaimed. "I must see him at once! I have news that may induce him to change his mind. At all events, I'll take the liberty to persuade him."

"He wandered off by himself," Major Coote answered, brisking up a little. "He went into that grove of trees across there, as soon as the council was dismissed, and he has been there ever since."

I turned and looked at the grove. As I did so I saw some bushes parted, and the figure of my beloved chief emerged, walking with a swift, firm tread.

Instantly I flung myself from my horse, and rushed towards him. But he advanced of his own accord to where Major Coote stood watching us.

"I have altered my mind," he said briefly, with the martial ring in his voice that I had heard first on the morning of Monichund's attempted surprise before Budge-Budge. "I have come round to your opinion, Coote. To-morrow morning we march forward, and engage the enemy wherever we find him."

CHAPTER XIX

PLASSY

And now it befalls to me to relate what I saw of that famous day which changed the relations between the English and Moors throughout the whole empire of Indostan. And I think that never before nor since was such a singular engagement fought, and so little really done to effect so tremendous a result.

After I had communicated to Colonel Clive what had passed between Meer Jaffier and myself at our secret interview, he believed less than ever in the Meer's promises of assistance.

"I do not think the man means to betray me, but like all the Bengalese he is a coward, and dares not carry out his promises when the moment comes."

Such was his judgment, in which I was obliged to agree; though I confess I had a liking for Meer Jaffier, and felt much pity for him in his subsequent misfortunes.

It was one o'clock, an hour after midnight, when our little army of three thousand men arrived and took up their quarters in the grove of Plassy. Of these, two thousand were Sepoys, the remainder being European troops, with some sailors from the fleet and about one hundred Topasses: we had also eight field-pieces and two howitzers. The grove in which we encamped was enclosed in a bank and ditch, within which were mango trees, very regularly planted in straight rows, the whole place being about half a mile in length, and less than a quarter in breadth. It stood near the edge of the river, which defended it from approach on the left, where there was a small house or hunting lodge, which Colonel Clive chose as his headquarters. Facing the grove to the north was the entrenched camp where the Nabob's army had lain ever since their retreat from Calcutta. The troops had been partly withdrawn a few days before, but they were now returned; and we heard their drums and cymbals beating all night long.

Colonel Clive, who had restored me to my former position as his secretary, and kept me near him, bade me lie down and sleep in the lodge. But though I lay down, I was too excited to do more than doze off for a minute at a time, and every time that I opened my eyes I saw the Colonel either walking to and fro, as if impatient for the day to break, or sitting at a table with maps spread out before

him, studying them by the light of a torch. Sometimes he went out of the lodge for a few minutes to see that all was quiet, but soon returned and resumed his meditations.

As soon as it was light enough to see, I got up, unable to lie still any longer, and joined Mr. Clive.

“Ah, Ford, so you are awake, eh!” he observed smiling. “You don’t look as though you had slept very soundly. Let us get on to the roof, and perhaps we may see what those fellows are about.”

We mounted together by a narrow stair leading on to a flat roof, and looked about us. On the left the mist was slowly rising from the river, on the right the foliage of the trees hid our own troops from view. But in front of us to the north we beheld spread out a scene of such magnificence that I confess I trembled, and even Colonel Clive uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The Nabob’s army lay in their entrenched camp, one angle of the rampart, that nearest to us, being strengthened with a small redoubt armed with cannon. Behind and away almost as far as we could see, stretched the tents and lines of armed men, the whole just beginning to stir with the first movements of the day. In the midst rose a splendid pavilion, adorned by flags, before the door of which stood a train of horses and attendants, while lesser tents were pitched all round it, each one displaying the ensign of some great officer. Crowds of men could be seen pushing to and fro, catching up their weapons and falling into some sort of military order, while others brought up horses and elephants, the caparisons of which shone gaily with silk of many colours. So great was the throng, and so confused were their motions, that I could not even guess their numbers, but Colonel Clive, glancing over them with the eye of a veteran, declared that there must be at least fifty thousand men, of whom upwards of fifteen thousand were cavalry. Their guns I counted myself up to forty-three, and they had others which they left in the camp.

As we stood and watched, this great host began to slowly pour out from different openings in the rampart and advance on the plain, forming a sort of bow round the front and right flank of our position. The river, as I have said, protected the left, and they made no attempt to close round the rear.

“I wonder which is Meer Jaffier’s division?” muttered Colonel Clive anxiously, as the array extended itself. The infantry remained for the most part between the camp and our front, while the masses of cavalry spread away to our right,

forming their left wing. The army was not in one line, but seemed to advance in a number of detached bodies, the intervals between them being filled up with the guns.

This artillery was a truly formidable spectacle. Our own few guns were merely six-pounders, nor had we the means of transport for larger pieces. But many of the Nabob's cannon were of immense calibre, 24 and even 32-pounders, more suitable for siege guns than to be brought into action. They were mounted on high wooden stages, which bore not merely the cannon but the artillerymen and ammunition as well, and each of these carriages was drawn along by as many as eighty or a hundred huge white oxen, of the famous Purneah breed. Moreover, in case the oxen should not prove sufficient, an elephant walked behind each of these moving platforms, and butted it with his forehead from behind whenever it stuck from any difficulty of the ground.

Between the grove where we lay and the enemy's camp there were a couple of tanks, such as the Indians build to contain rain water. These tanks, being protected by banks of earth, served the purpose of redoubts, and we saw a small body of men, about forty or fifty, advance to the tank nearest us, dragging two light guns, with which they at once began playing on the grove.

"Those are white men!" exclaimed Colonel Clive, who had been watching this movement. "They must be Frenchmen sent from Brassy—unless they are some of those that escaped from Chander Nugger."

While he was speaking the fire from the tank was taken up by the rest of the Nabob's artillery, and a roar arose from the whole face of the advancing army. Colonel Clive watched the result closely for a few minutes.

"They are doing very little harm," he observed. "They fire too high. Most of the balls are passing over the heads of our men. But it will not do for us to stay in the shelter of the grove; they may think we are afraid of them."

He hurried down to the ground, bidding me keep near him, and went to where our men were waiting, just within the ditch which enclosed the grove. One Sepoy had been killed by the discharge from the tank, and three or four wounded, but otherwise we had not suffered.

The Colonel quickly made his dispositions, and the little force marched boldly out from its shelter and faced the enemy. At this the whole Moorish army halted, still out of point-blank range, and contented themselves with continuing their

artillery fire, which we returned as best we could with our few guns. Colonel Clive passed to and fro along the line several times, noting everything that happened, and anxiously watching for some symptom of the promised desertion by Meer Jaffier. But nothing happened, the Moor's infantry remained steady in our front, and the dark masses of cavalry continued to hang threateningly on our flank.

"I have brought my men out to give Meer Jaffier his chance," said Colonel Clive to me in a low tone, "but if he is afraid to move, we are done. It is impossible to order an advance in face of that army."

He walked down the line once again, and counted our casualties. By this time we had lost ten Europeans, and about twice as many Sepoys.

"That is enough," the Colonel exclaimed sharply. "It is useless to expose the men for nothing. Retire into the grove again."

This order was executed, and the enemy, appearing to gather courage from our retreat, advanced their artillery nearer, and quickened their fire. However, their aim continued very bad, most of the shot merely struck the branches of the trees, and the men were ordered to lie down for the sake of greater safety. I was pleased to observe that all, even the Sepoys and Topasses, displayed the utmost coolness and confidence. Several powder explosions happened about this time in different places in the enemy's ranks, and this served to increase the contempt of our own men for the Nabob's forces.

About eleven o'clock Colonel Clive called some of the officers together, and communicated his plans to them.

"It is quite clear that the Nabob is afraid to attack us at close quarters," he said, "or he would have ordered a further advance before this. Still I do not consider we are justified in quitting our shelter for the present, in the absence of any demonstration from Meer Jaffier. It will be better to let the cannonade go on for the rest of the day, and then try a night attack on their camp."

Most of the officers concurred in this opinion. As the Colonel and I were walking back to the lodge he turned to me suddenly, and asked me what I thought.

"Why, sir, to be plain with you, I think the only men we have to regard are those forty Frenchmen in the tank," I answered. "As far as the rest are concerned, I

very much doubt if they would stand five minutes against a charge."

The Colonel nodded.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you were right. But remember, Ford, that those nine hundred men are the only European troops in Bengal, and if I lose even two hundred of them this will be an expensive victory for me. What I want is to hold on till Surajah Dowlah's own troops desert him, and then I may win everything without loss of life."

I was much impressed by this glimpse into Mr. Clive's mind, which showed him as something very different from the reckless, hot-headed soldier some of his enemies have called him.

Just at this time a shower of rain fell, and soon after the fire of the enemy sensibly slackened, some of their powder evidently having been spoiled. Towards two o'clock a stranger thing took place, for the firing ceased altogether, and the Moors were perceived yoking their white oxen to the gun-stages again; and immediately after the whole army commenced to fall back slowly and re-enter the camp.

I was standing by myself outside the door of the lodge when this singular movement commenced, and I at once stepped inside to inform Colonel Clive. To my astonishment I found him asleep. The exhausting work of the last few days, followed by the total absence of rest on the previous night, had proved too much for him. He had fallen on to a chair, and dropped asleep unawares.

While I was hesitating whether to awaken him I heard some one approaching without. I went out softly, and found a sergeant of Major Kilpatrick's company, with a message for the Colonel.

"I will take your message, sergeant," I said, not wishing him to know of Mr. Clive's slumber.

"Faith, then, sir, it's just this," said the fellow, who was an Irishman, "that the enemy's beat, and runnin' away entirely, and Major Kilpathrick's just after starting to take the tank from those murderin' Frenchies, so as to annoy the Nabob's retreat."

I turned red at this insolent message, which did not even request Colonel Clive's permission for the movement. Dismissing the sergeant, I darted in and woke up my commander.

The Colonel was broad awake in an instant. When he heard what had happened he compressed his lips, without making any remark, and ran out of the lodge, and across the ground to where Kilpatrick was leading his company towards the tank.

“Halt!” shouted Colonel Clive, as he approached.

The Major stopped, and looked confused.

“I thought, sir, as every moment was precious——” he began, when Mr. Clive sharply cut him short.

“I will receive your apologies this evening, sir. At present my orders to you are to return and order up the whole force to support this movement which you have so rashly begun.”

He waited till the discomfited officer had retired, and then turning to me, he added with a touch of glee—

“Now, Ford, you and I will take the tank!”

The word was given to double, and we advanced at a run, whereupon the Frenchmen, after one discharge, evacuated their position, and retired upon the camp.

The rest of the English force now marched out from the grove, and advanced in line, pursuing the retreating enemy. But there was one part of the Nabob’s army which did not join in the movement of the rest. A large division of cavalry, one of those which had formed the threatening left wing, drew off from the rest and advanced towards our right rear.

Colonel Clive watched their movements with suspicion.

“Are these fellows trying to take our baggage?” he murmured. “Captain Grant, take three platoons and a field-piece, and see if you can fight off those horse.”

The order as given was obeyed, the slight demonstration proved sufficient, and the mysterious division drew away again out of range. In the meantime our main body advanced steadily, and kept up a brisk fire on the Nabob’s camp with our artillery. On this some of the retiring troops showed a disposition to come out again and renew the attack, encouraged by the example of the Frenchmen, who had got possession of the redoubt in the angle of the rampart, and were plying us

well with their guns. Seeing this disposition on the part of the enemy, Colonel Clive ordered some shot to be thrown among their cumbrous artillery trains. This was done with such effect that, numbers of the oxen being killed, the trains were thrown into confusion. At the same time some of the Moorish horse made a few ineffectual offers to charge, but were easily driven off, without ever coming to close quarters.

Whatever cause had prompted the strange retreat of the enemy, it was evident that the same cause was now operating to take all heart out of their defence. The only thing that gave us pause was the attitude of the Frenchmen in the redoubt, whose spirit communicated itself to the troops in their immediate neighbourhood. While things were in this doubtful posture, I happened to glance round to see what had become of the cavalry division repulsed by Captain Grant. To my surprise I saw them retiring slowly in an opposite direction to the Nabob's camp.

Instantly I grasped the situation.

"Colonel," I whispered hurriedly, "don't you see that that must be Meer Jaffier's division!"

Mr. Clive turned and stared for a moment in the direction I pointed in.

"You are right," he responded. "Meer Jaffier, of course! Well, since he has put off his assistance so long, he shall see how little we needed it!"

A thrill of fresh energy seemed to sweep through him as he began issuing his orders for the final charge. Two columns were told off, one to clear a small eminence to the right, the other to attack the French in their redoubt, while the main body was directed to follow up in a grand attack on the whole camp. By my special request I was allowed to join the column marching against the Frenchmen. We made a dash forward—once, twice, thrice the Frenchmen fired at us as we came on, then we saw them drop their linstocks and run, and in another five minutes it was all over. The entire English force was over the ramparts together, the army which had marched out so gallantly against us that morning was suddenly become a mere herd, a wretched mob of fugitives crushing one another in their eagerness to escape from us, and we picked our way amid the plunder of Surajah Dowlah's rich pavilion, victors of Plassy, masters and law-givers of Indostan!

CHAPTER XX

RETRIBUTION

Although, judged by the standard of such great battles as the King of Prussia's, or the famous victories won by Marlborough over the French, this affair of Plassy may seem to be but a trifling skirmish, yet the country whose fate was decided upon that field, namely the Subahdarship of Bengal, Orissa, and Behar, is equal in magnitude to the whole of King Frederic's dominions. In fact the blow struck that day resounded throughout the entire East Indies, procuring for the English an authority in every Court of Indostan, and for Mr. Clive the rank of Omrah, with many rich presents, from the Great Mogul himself.

For eight miles we kept up the pursuit of the flying Moors, and only rested from sheer weariness. The next morning Meer Jaffier rode into our camp at Daudpore, ill at ease. But Colonel Clive received him with friendship, and caused him to be saluted as the Nabob of Bengal. From him we learned the particulars of what had taken place on the previous day in Surajah Dowlah's camp.

The night before the battle the young Nabob had some suspicions that there was treachery going on round him. When the next morning he saw his army halting at a distance from the English lines, and refusing to come to close quarters, his suspicions were confirmed. One of his generals on whom he most relied was slain soon after the artillery combat commenced, and this further terrified him. Without quitting his tent he sent for Meer Jaffier, whose division was posted on the extreme right, and implored him to save the day. He even took off his turban, than which there can be no greater humiliation for an Oriental, and cast it at his uncle's feet, bidding him defend it. Meer Jaffier left the tent, and at once despatched a message of encouragement to Colonel Clive, which, however, never reached him. Shortly afterwards the unhappy Surajah Dowlah, vanquished by his own fears, or, it may be, by the stings of his remorseful conscience, mounted a swift camel and fled, and this was the signal for that general movement of retreat which had given us the victory.

After Colonel Clive and the new Nabob had discussed the situation for a short time, it was agreed between them that Meer Jaffier should proceed at once with his force to the capital to check any attempt at rallying on the part of Surajah

Dowlah. Colonel Clive, with the English army, was to follow more slowly.

The moment I heard of these arrangements, I asked the Colonel for permission to go forward in advance.

“Why, what do you desire to do?” he asked.

I showed him the written authority I had received from Meer Jaffier, and then, in as few words as possible, told him the story of Rupert and Marian, and of my resolution to deliver or avenge them.

“Go, my boy,” he said when I had finished. “I will give you an order in my own name, as well as that you have from the Meer Jaffier; and God grant you may be in time to save your cousin and your sweetheart from the fury of that young tiger we have driven into his lair.”

It was late at night that I came for the last time, riding on an elephant, into the city of Moorshedabad. Through the crowded streets I urged my way, escorted by a handful of Meer Jaffier’s horsemen, and seeing on every hand the tokens of the anarchy which had followed upon the news of Plassy. The people were abroad, lights gleamed in every direction, men ran hither and thither, and doors stood open with no one to guard the entrance.

As we drew near to the palace of the Nabob the confusion increased. From the shouts of the crowd in answer to our questions we gathered that Surajah Dowlah had entered the city secretly after his flight from the field of battle, that he had called his parasites around him, that there had been rumours of another levy and another battle, that his heart had again failed him, that he was expected to fly once more, that he might at that very moment be making his escape before the approach of his successor.

As the palace came into view it was evident that if Surajah Dowlah were not already gone, his presence had ceased to act as a restraint on his former servants. The courtyard was crammed with a struggling throng of palace menials and robbers out of the streets, all engaged in the work of plunder. Some were staggering down the steps, entangled in the folds of brocades and sumptuous shawls, others bore tulwars and scymetars encrusted with gems, some were stripping the gold off robes, others picking rubies and sapphires out of their sockets with the points of daggers, and secreting them about their persons. The ground was strewn with plunder thrown away in favour of something more valuable, rich vessels of green jade lay broken in one place, and silken garments

were trodden underfoot in another. And all this was merely the loot of the outer rooms of the palace, for the treasury was not yet touched.

At our approach the work ceased. The rioters began to escape, and the eunuchs and soldiers belonging to the palace shrank back to their quarters. Leaving Meer Jaffier's officer to deal with them, I dismounted from my elephant and pressed my way through into the deserted palace, taking with me only two men as a protection. I did not stay to explore the empty halls and dismantled chambers, but hurried as fast as I could go into the garden, and on to the well-remembered summer-house where I had caught my last glimpse of Marian on that night a year ago. I ran up to the door at which we had knocked the same night. It was standing open. I darted through, ran into each room, climbed the stair, and searched every nook and cranny above. Not a trace of her I sought was there.

Without lingering a moment I went on and explored the other buildings in the garden. In some of them I found frightened women, left alone, and expecting that I had come to slay them. But from none could I hear anything of the English captive. Here and there a frightened eunuch, dragged cowering from his hiding-place, recalled Marian's presence a year before, but could or would tell me nothing of her fate. I raved and stormed through the seraglio like one possessed, but it was all in vain.

I turned back to the main building, by this time in the hands of the new Nabob's servants, who were restoring it to some sort of order. They told me that Surajah Dowlah had got away an hour previously, having let himself down by a rope from a lattice into a boat on the river, with only two attendants. When I showed them the papers I had received from their master and also from Colonel Clive, they offered me every assistance, and even joined in the search. During several hours we ransacked every part of the palace, but found no signs of either of the English prisoners. The principal eunuchs were called and questioned. At first they declined to speak, but when one of the Moors with me threatened them with torture they became more communicative, and finally one of them asked if we had gone down into the secret dungeons.

This hint sent a cold shiver through my veins. I bade the eunuch lead the way, and he conducted us through a secret door, down a narrow winding stair into a horrible basement, constructed under the bed of the Ganges, where no light could come by day or night, except that brought by the torches of the gaolers. The place was like a maze, with branching passages and cells, almost every one of which held some victim of Oriental tyranny. But I had neither eyes nor

thoughts for what was around me, as we hurried down passage after passage and opened door after door in the search for those two whom I had come to save. Finally the eunuch stopped at a certain door at the very end of the darkest passage we had yet traversed. It was opened, and I looked in.

I could not at first believe that what I beheld was a human being. Stretched out on the damp soil of the den lay a miserable, shrunken object, a thing like a skeleton wrapped in parchment, with the faint outlines of a man. On our entrance it moved and just raised its head.

“What do you want?” it asked in Indostanee. And then in English it breathed, “Is this the end?”

It was the voice of my cousin Rupert!

With a cry, I was on my knees by his side, lifting his woeful head in my arms.

“Rupert! Look! It is your cousin Athelstane!”

He moved slowly and sat up. Then a shudder went through his attenuated frame.

“Don’t you see what they have done to me?” he groaned. “The devils have put out my eyes!”

And the devils had. Rupert Gurney, the bold, handsome, careless, wicked, swaggering Rupert, whom I had loved and feared and hated all my life, would never be bold nor handsome nor swaggering any more, and I should never need to fear or hate him again. His wickedness had been rewarded; his crimes had met a heavier retribution than any I had ever thought to inflict. He had fallen into the hands of one compared to whom he had been but a beginner in iniquity; one fit of Surajah Dowlah’s cruel frenzy had struck upon him, and had left him branded for life.

Of Marian's fate he knew nothing. As soon as I had given directions to have him carried up out of the dungeon I renewed my search for her with a heart ready to burst at the thought of what I might find.

When we did find her I was almost relieved. After the frightful apprehensions I had entertained, it seemed to be good fortune that she should be merely wasted away, without any outward disfigurement of that face that had been my beacon in dreams and raptures for those vain years. In my own arms I bore her out of that doleful place and up into the open air, through the palace now swarming with the stir and bustle of the newly arrived Nabob's Court, into the garden where the day was breaking and the birds were beginning to sing, and laid her down, at her own desire, on a bed in that very summer-house where I had tried—ah, why had I failed?—to rescue her on the night that seemed so long ago.

There for two days I never left her. Some of the eunuchs first, and afterwards some Indian women, came and waited on us, and brought us all the food we needed—and that was not much for either of us. She lay still, saying little, and sometimes holding my hand while she slept, and then waking up to shed tears upon it, and to murmur the gratitude which I had done so little to deserve. On the second day I had Rupert brought to her. He was better by this time, though still very weak, and just able to walk across the room with his arm resting in mine. I guided him to a seat beside her, and placed their hands in one another's, and then I came out quickly. I left them together; for if I had loved Marian, he had loved her too, and if my love for her had been the stronger, so had been hers for him. And I could not feel jealousy any longer now that Marian was dying.

For this was the end of it all, the end of my stormy love and rivalry and my adventures in the Indian realms. Marian, the beautiful Marian, the woman whose fascination had led me so far, and involved me among such strange events in such unwonted scenes, was dying. I had come too late to save her, and all I had done or attempted for her sake had been in vain. And when I knew this, when I looked back over those three troubled years and saw the outcome, there came borne in upon my mind a great resignation; I beheld myself as if I had been another person, and the folly and wickedness that was in my heart stood revealed to me as they had never been even in those dreadful hours in the Calcutta dungeon, when I sank down, as I believed, to die. Standing beside that bedside of the woman I had loved and sinned for, watching the grey stain of mortality creep out upon those glorious features, the world and all its prizes and possessions became to me a mockery, and all that remained to comfort me was

the memory of words I had read in that old Book at home: there, in that heathen palace, surrounded by the temples and trophies of false gods, was vouchsafed to me the light which I had refused to receive when I dwelt among Christians in a Christian land, and the Divine mercy which had followed me through so many wanderings overtook me at the last.

On the morning of the third day one of the Indian servants who waited upon us took me aside and whispered something in my ear—something which made my heart beat fiercely and sent a tingle through my veins.

I left the summer-house and took my way into the palace. Through the stately halls and along the marble pavements, amid the servile crowd that swarmed to pay homage to Meer Jaffier, I passed, and on till I came to that hideous stair up which I had brought two of Surajah Dowlah's victims such a short time before. On the way I gathered something of what had taken place.

One of Surajah Dowlah's former subjects, a man whose ears the young Nabob had barbarously cut off for some offence, had recognised him in his flight, and had betrayed him to the agents of his successor. He was brought back in chains to Moorshedabad and carried before Meer Jaffier, at whose feet he flung himself, sobbing, and beseeching that his miserable life might be spared. Meer Jaffier, partly moved by his entreaties, partly restrained by regard for Colonel Clive, had shown a wish to spare him. But in Meer Jaffier's son, young Meeram, the fallen tyrant had found a spirit as ferocious and ungovernable as his own. This boy—for he was scarcely sixteen—thirsted for his cousin's blood, and even attempted to stab him in Meer Jaffier's presence. Meer Jaffier, afraid of his son, had ordered the prisoner to be removed into the dungeons under a guard, and this was done. But the fury of Meeram was not to be appeased. In the dark hours of the night, unknown to his father, he had descended into the dungeon, bribed or overawed the guards, and——

They threw open the door. They held up their torches over a dark object lying on the ground. There, with a dozen red rents in the bosom of his tunic, with blood thickly soaked into the dye of his silk robe, with blood caked upon the rubies and emeralds in his turban, I saw Surajah Dowlah, dead!

For some minutes I stood still in the presence of this impressive retribution, recalling the brief but terrible career which had thus tragically ended. There lay the cruellest despot of his age, the practitioner of horrible debaucheries, the sworn enemy of the English name, who had driven us out of Bengal, and

perpetrated the never-to-be-forgotten massacre in which I had been so nearly included. I was but newly come out of the presence of two of his victims, and here I beheld him cut off from light more surely than the man he had blinded, dead while the woman he had murdered still breathed. I gazed, and was satisfied. The evil desires of vengeance which had tormented me for so long were utterly extinguished. I beheld before me the justice of high Heaven, and I came away, not exulting, but awed and subdued.

I returned to Marian's bedside, and from that time I did not leave her till the end. Occasionally she would talk to me in a low, sweet voice, calling back memories of the old town of Yarmouth and the pleasant scenes of her youth. Once she spoke to me of myself.

"I have treated you very ill, Athelstane. I knew that I could never repay you for your love, but it made me proud to have it; I liked to count upon your devotion to me, and I deceived and tempted you."

I tried to protest, but she would have it so.

"I have been wrong in everything I did to you," she said. "I ought never to have treated you as a friend, but as a stranger. Then you would have grown out of your foolish passion, and have forgotten me; for, believe me, Athelstane, I was not fit for you, nor you for me. Beneath your hot temper and adventurous spirit, in which you resemble your cousin, you are a very different nature. You are a Puritan at bottom, and your conscience will not let you rest except in sober, honest ways of life. It is better that you should take a wife from among your own people, one whose nature is in accord with what is deepest and best in you, and not with what is worst. Forgive me, Athelstane, and forget me, as one that crossed your life by an evil chance and wrought you only harm."

But that, as I told her with tears, I never could do, nor would believe. And even now, when I look back across the years with calmer vision and a wiser judgment, I am still glad that I knew and loved Marian Rising, and never wish to root the memory of that wild romance out of my heart.

She spoke to me also of my cousin Rupert, saying that she had long ago forgiven —indeed, I think she never was really able to resent—his wrongs done towards her, and asking me to do the same. I assured her that I had long ago buried all remains of ill-will between us, and I promised her that I would take him back to England with me, and endeavour to make his peace with his father at Lynn.

Soon afterwards she became very weak, and, seeing that the last moment was approaching, I fetched Rupert in to her. He stood with his head bowed above the bed, his hair streaked with grey and the marks of the agony he had suffered on his face, while Marian caught hold of his hand, and, with the feeble remains of her strength, carried it to her lips and kissed it. In the doorway stood an Indian, gazing at the sight with solemn, unmoved visage. Outside we could hear the distant clash of the temple gongs in honour of some sacrifice, and through the lattices there was a glimpse of high white walls, with narrow slits of windows, shaded over by the dark-green foliage of a teak tree. Was it all real? I asked myself, or some vision which had come to me in the night, and from which I should awake to find myself abed in my own little room at home in Brandon?

So the hour passed, and the last minute came.

“Pray for me, Athelstane,” Marian whispered to me, “for I have been a great sinner, and for myself I hardly dare to pray.”

So I knelt down upon the floor, and the blind man opposite me did the same; and as I used the familiar phrases which I had learned unconsciously in my youth from many repetitions, a peace stole over the room, and Rupert’s great sobs ceased to shake him, and the hand I held in my own grew very still and cold. And presently I looked up, and saw that Marian was dead.

CHAPTER XXI

COLONEL CLIVE'S MESSAGE

So now my career in the East Indies was over, and I set my face to return home.

The first person to whom I communicated my intention was Colonel Clive. He was at first astonished, and told me so.

"Why do you mean to leave me now, when all our affairs are prospering, and you have nothing to do but to stay on and enrich yourself? I have had it in my mind to promote you; indeed, I think you know that I am your good friend."

"I do, indeed, sir," I answered, "and I am most grateful for all your kindness to me. But it is right that I should tell you I am here in consequence of wrong-doing, which has, as I can now see, pursued my steps and caused me to be harassed with troubles and misfortunes from the very beginning to this hour."

"Why, what wrong have you been guilty of?" asked the Colonel, much interested. "I could have sworn you were the most honest young man in my company."

"I have run away from my home, sir. I have deceived and disobeyed my father and, I fear, caused great sorrow to my loving mother. I allowed myself to be tempted to leave them secretly, under cover of a falsehood, and to join a crew of privateers, who turned out to be pirates, the comrades of those whom you destroyed at Gheriah. In their company I fell into evil courses, and finally plunged into a murderous contest with one of my own flesh and blood. These things have long sat heavy on my mind. I have perceived their evil consequences, I have been visited with a bitter punishment, and I am now determined to go back to my parents and to obtain their forgiveness before it is too late."

Colonel Clive looked at me with some sympathy, mingled with wonder.

"I believe you have decided rightly," he said at last, when I had finished. "God forbid that I should keep you from making your peace with those who love you." His tone softened as he added: "My story is different to yours. I didn't run away;

I was driven, pitchforked out of doors, and stuck into a miserable billet at Madras, where I nearly ate my heart out with loneliness and repining. When I returned to England it was not to ask forgiveness, but to give it, if a son can take it upon himself to forgive his parent. No matter, all that is past now, and I believe my family have found out that I am worth the love they have to give me. Look here, my boy, I have no business to talk like this to you; but, after all, we can't be always thinking of rupees and Moorish tricks. Since you are bent on going to England, you shall start in the ship which I am sending from Calcutta with the news of our late proceedings, and I will give you a letter, which you are to deliver privately into the hands of Mr. Pitt."

At this name I looked up with flushing cheeks.

"The great Mr. Pitt?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, the great Mr. Pitt," returned Colonel Clive, with a slight inflection of bitterness in his tone. "But you are right, Ford, he is a very great man, and though his battles have been won within the four walls of St. Stephen's Chapel, while we lesser men have to fight in very different scenes, far be it from me to grudge all honour to the man who was the first to do honour to me. He is fortunate in having for his theatre the senate of a great kingdom of Europe, I unfortunate in having for mine a remote country of which half Europe has never heard. Still, I recognise his merits, and it is for that reason I am addressing myself to him on a subject which is near to my heart."

The Colonel paused for a few moments.

"But I cannot have you return to England empty-handed," he resumed. "What is your share of the gratuity promised to the army I do not yet know, but I tell you what you shall do: go into the treasury, and help yourself while there is time."

I stared at this permission, but Colonel Clive merely nodded his head, and turned to write the letter he had spoken of. Perceiving that he was in earnest, I went off to the Nabob's palace, and made my way to the treasury, where I found Mr. Watts and some others busily engaged in taking an inventory of everything it contained, which was to be shipped down the river in boats to Calcutta.

I walked through the rooms looking about me. Never in my life have I seen, nor am I like to see such a sight again. So much treasure was there scattered around me, that I could scarce believe it when Mr. Watts told me that the whole was insufficient to meet the sums pledged by Meer Jaffier. In every room I feasted

my eyes upon the light of countless jewels. Silver was heaped on every floor, and gold on every shelf. Great green jade jars contained nothing but uncut gems. All kinds of weapons were there, their very shapes disguised under the gold and jewel-work which loaded them. There were chairs of ivory, and a table of solid agate-stone. Massy chains of gold trailed from drawers, and bricks of silver were built up into banks along the walls. It was a confusion of magnificence, a very litter of precious things.

I informed Mr. Watts of the permission which Colonel Clive had given me to help myself, and he confirmed it.

“Take what you please,” he said carelessly. “You will find the emeralds run larger than any other stone, but some of them are flawed. There is a pretty string of rubies somewhere that it might be worth while to choose. The biggest diamond is already promised, but there are several lesser ones, uncut, which I should judge to be worth from twenty to forty thousand rupees each.”

He returned to his catalogue, and I to my exploration. After rejecting many necklaces and crowns that I did not deem to be of sufficient splendour, I finally fixed upon a tulwar, which I found in a box of mother-of-pearl by itself. The handle was set with an enormous sapphire, and the hilt incrusted with diamonds, some of them as big as my thumbnail. I was afterwards offered three thousand pounds for it by a Gentoo merchant in Calcutta, but preferred to bring it home with me, where it afterwards fetched more than double that sum at a goldsmith’s in Covent Garden.

Nor was this all that I brought away with me, for when I went to take leave of Meer Jaffier, he presented me, as a mark of his esteem, with a very handsome dress of gold cloth, and a string of pearls, valued afterwards at a thousand pounds. So that I was now become a rich man.

We buried Marian at night, by the Nabob’s permission, in a corner of the garden of the seraglio. The chaplain of the thirty-ninth regiment conducted the service, and I caused a slab of marble to be set up to mark the grave, inscribed simply with her name and the date of her death. This tomb, I have been told, still stands, and is pointed out to English visitors to Moorshedabad as the grave of the Englishwoman who was imprisoned in the Black Hole.

The following day, having received Colonel Clive’s letter, and bidden him an affectionate farewell, I embarked with Rupert upon one of the barges which were carrying the treasure down to Calcutta. The fleet started in procession, and went

down the river, with music playing on deck, flying flags by day, and coloured lanterns by night, till we reached the English settlement. There I found old Muzzy, patiently waiting for me, and full of pride in the victory, in which he was prone to attribute a great share to me.

Five months later we sailed up the Thames, and set foot once more on English soil.

One thing only detained me in London. This was the delivery of the letter which Colonel Clive had entrusted to me for Mr. Pitt.

It was a privilege which I could not rate too highly to be thus made the intermediary between the two greatest Englishmen of my time, men of a type that seems now to be lost among us. Since Colonel Clive we have had no victorious captain, and since Mr. Pitt, no mighty minister, and hence it is that our country, which under the rule of a Cromwell or a Pitt, hath risen to be the arbiter of Europe, and held all nations in awe, is now sunk, under the sway of feeble intellects, to a precarious position, the mock of every power, and saved only by her fleets from absolute destruction.

I do not find it easy to describe my sensations when I was ushered into the presence of the Great Commoner, and saw before me that majestic figure, with the profile of a Roman conqueror, and a glance hardly less terrible to encounter than the full blaze of the sun. When I have stood before the Nabob of Bengal, throned in the midst of his Court, I have seen in front of me nothing but a peevish, debauched young man, but when I came into the room where Mr. Pitt was I felt that I was in the presence of a ruler of men. His attitude, his commanding gestures, and the stately manner he had of slowly moving his head round upon his neck to look at you, made a most tremendous impression; and I found it easy to believe the stories of men having risen to speak against him in the House of Commons, and then shrunk back miserably into their seats at a mere look from this extraordinary person.

Mr. Pitt’s manner of reading Colonel Clive’s despatch further impressed me. He broke the seals, seemed to do no more than give it a few devouring glances, and then laid it aside as though he were already master of its contents.

“You are Ensign Ford?” he demanded abruptly, fixing his eye upon me.

“I am, sir.”

“Colonel Clive tells me in this letter that you possess his confidence. Do you think, if I were to tell you my sentiments verbally, you could transmit them faithfully to your employer?”

“I will do my best, sir,” I replied, not a little astonished at this proposal. But I have considered the matter since, and I can see that there were many things which Mr. Pitt might not wish to write with his own hand, though he had no objection to their being repeated by me.

“In this letter,” he proceeded, “Colonel Clive makes a very startling proposal, which is no less than that English troops should be sent out sufficient to conquer the whole of Bengal, and that thereafter the administration of all the Indian territories should be taken out of the hands of the Company and brought immediately under the Crown. Now what I wish you to tell him from me in reply is this, that I am bound to consider his proposal not merely as it affects our situation abroad, but also as it bears upon our government at home. I am the minister, not of a despotic empire like France or Spain, but of a free people, and I must not suffer anything which may assist the Crown to encroach upon our liberties. Those liberties rest upon the necessity which our kings are under of asking us to tax ourselves for their support. Give them a foreign empire like that of Spain in the Americas, and you run a danger of rendering them independent. The wealth arising from the revenues of Indostan would enable the Crown to keep up a standing army in time of peace, without the consent of Parliament. Moreover, the administration of these territories would give occasion for the creation of great numbers of offices and pensions, by means of which our people might be fatally corrupted.

“I would have you further point out to Colonel Clive on my behalf,” continued Mr. Pitt, “that those Indians, whom he proposes to make our fellow subjects, are accustomed to be the slaves of a despot, and being such, they may become dangerous instruments to make slaves of us. I should dread to see the sovereigns of this country calling themselves emperors in the Indies, and valuing that character above that of kings of Great Britain. Believe me, young man, it is not easy for a nation to play the despot abroad without losing its freedom at home; as I have frequently observed that those who had returned to this country after holding great places in the East, have shown themselves indifferent to the rights of the subject here.”

All this, and much more, did Mr. Pitt say to me, of which I have preserved only these meagre recollections. But how feeble an image do the written words

preserve of the eloquence with which he spoke, the enthusiasm which kindled in his eye when he touched upon our liberties, and the warning emphasis he laid upon his expressions about the power of the Crown! I felt almost as though I had been the bearer of propositions for some unnatural treason, and I was not a little relieved when Mr. Pitt finally concluded by bidding me thank Colonel Clive very heartily for his civility in writing to him, and promised to carefully consider of his suggestions.

To this he added some very high compliments to the Colonel’s great abilities and military glory, all of which I transmitted in a letter to Mr. Clive shortly afterwards. And I have set down the above warning of the great patriot minister in this place, for the instruction of posterity, in case a time should ever arrive when the people of this country, in their too eager grasping after foreign conquests contrary to the nature of an island, which is to rest content within the borders of its own seas, shall find they have bartered away the priceless heritage of their own freedom, and sunk into a mere unheeded fraction of a dominion which they no longer wield.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER MANY DAYS

It was about the hour of five o'clock in the afternoon, and being winter it was already dusk, when I came at last to my native place, and rode up to the gate of my father's house.

I had journeyed down as far as Norwich in company with my cousin Rupert, who was on his way to Lynn, and with my faithful friend, old Muzzy, who had sworn never to leave me, and whom I was not less loth to part with. And finding myself, as I came back into that country where I was born, utterly overmastered by a strong passion of home-sickness, I had no sooner procured comfortable lodgings for my companions in the Maid's Head Inn, of Norwich, than I got upon horseback and rode over by myself to look upon my father and mother again.

But as I came towards the house, the greater my longing was to enter it again, so much the more was I daunted by a fearful apprehension of the reception I should meet with, as well as of the changes which might have been wrought during my absence. So that at the last I dared not ride up boldly to the door, but came along softly, and dismounted and tied my horse to the outer gate. After which I slipped inside quietly, and round the side of the house to the window of the great parlour, through which I could see the warm glow of a fire illuminate the wintry mist without.

When I had come to the window I raised myself up till my head was on a level with the bottom panes, and looked within.

The room held four persons. On one side of the fire sat my father, seeming to be much older than I remembered him, in his great arm-chair, with pillows at the back. Standing up on the opposite side of the hearth was a figure which I quickly recognised for Mr. Peter Walpole, though his back was towards me. It was Saturday night, and he had plainly arrived a short time before me, from Norwich. Between the two was my mother, sitting placidly as of old, and unchanged except for a wistful sadness in her eyes, which it smote me to the heart to notice, and beside her a young woman, scarce more than a girl, with a singular sweet

expression on her face, who was at first strange to me.

Mr. Walpole was speaking when I first looked in upon them.

“We are like to have more news from the East Indies. The *Norwich Journal* announces that a Company’s ship has entered the Thames, bringing news of a great victory over the Moors of Bengal.”

My mother looked round sharply, and cried out—

“Tell me at once, Mr. Walpole, if you have heard anything of our boy?”

The good old man shook his head.

“No, no, ma’am, there is no news of that sort. I fear it will be long before we hear of him. Indeed, it is but a chance that he is out in the East Indies at all. We did but hear a rumour that he had been seen in Calcutta.”

My mother let her head droop upon her breast. The girl bent over to her and laid her hand upon my mother’s shoulder.

“Don’t let yourself think that Athelstane has come to harm,” she said in a sweet, clear voice. (And if I had not recognised the face I recognised the voice. It was my little playmate, Patience Thurstan.) “I have a faith which makes me sure that he is still alive, and will some day come back to us again.”

“No!” It was my father’s voice I heard, coming sternly from where he sat upright in his chair. “He will not come back here. He left this house of his own free will, left it in treachery and deceit. He has cast its dust from off his feet, and this is his home no more.”

My heart sank within me at these bitter words. But Patience pleaded for me still.

“Ah, but he will return, I know he will, and if he does you will forgive him, won’t you, Mr. Ford? After all he was but a boy when he ran away, too young to know what he was doing. How can we tell what suffering he has gone through since, how often he has repented of what he did, and longed to come back and be forgiven.”

Mr. Peter Walpole gave a groan.

“It is I was to blame, as much as the boy, come, brother Ford. Remember how I held out for that premium with him. Not but what the sum I named was just,

mind you; but I loved the lad and would have taken him without a premium at all, rather than he should have gone wandering about the world, to be murdered by heathen men and cannibals."

I cannot express how surprised and touched I was to hear Mr. Walpole speak thus of me. For I had ever regarded him as a cold, hard man, with no affections beyond money and religion. I looked anxiously for my father's reply.

"Nay, you were in no wise to blame, if you considered that what you asked was your right, though to my mind it savoured of extortion. It is my unhappy son whom I cannot excuse. Had he but come to me, and told me what was in his heart, it would have gone hard but I would have provided for him in some honest career. But to let himself be enticed away by pirates, as there is little doubt they were, and to dissemble his flight with falsehood, that was unworthy of a son of mine, and cannot be atoned for."

He gave a glance, half angry, half questioning, at my mother, as he concluded. I did the same, but was surprised to observe that her face was returned to its former placid composure, and she seemed not to heed my father's stern expressions.

Poor little Patience took them more to heart, and the tears shone in her eyes.

"Don't say you won't forgive him!" she implored. "Think, for aught we know he may now be pining in a Moorish dungeon, or lying wounded on the battle-field. Oh, Mr. Ford, he was your only son, and you loved him—you must love him still!"

"Silence, girl!" cried my father, very fierce. "How dare you tell me I love a rebellious child! I should wrong my conscience, and be false to my profession as a Christian man, if I were weak enough to do what you say."

Patience turned and appealed to my mother.

"Won't you speak to him, mother? Why do you sit there so quietly? You love Athelstane as much as—as much as any one."

My mother cast a tender glance at my father.

"Hush, child! There is no need to speak. Athelstane's father forgave him long ago."

I saw my father start and tremble.

“Woman! What is it you say? What do you know?” he exclaimed. “You saw me cross his name out of the Bible with my own hand!”

“Yes, dear,” my mother answered very softly, “but you wrote it in again that very night, when you thought I was asleep.”

And rising out of her chair she crossed over and took down the book from where it had lain those three years and more, and opened the page where, as I have often seen it since, my name was written in again in large letters, and underneath in a shaken hand, the words, “Oh, Athelstane, my son, my son!”

Then, whether because of the flickering of the firelight, or the steam of my breath upon the pane, I ceased to see very distinctly, and came away from the window, and went round to the door, where I gave a loud knock.

The door was opened by Patience, and seeing before her, as she thought, a stranger in a uniform coat, she uttered a cry of surprise.

“Who are you, sir?”

“I am an ensign in the East India Company’s service, as you see,” I answered, jesting to conceal the fullness of my heart.

But I suppose there was that within her which told her more quickly than her eyes who it was, for before I had spoken two words the little silly thing fell a-sobbing and crying, and I had to take her in my arms, without more ado, and bring her in with me.

My mother has always affirmed that she knew I was to return that night, even when I was outside by the window, and that the first step I made across the threshold told her all. But instead of running out to meet me, in her beautiful wisdom she went over to where my father sat still, and leant against his chair and put her arm round his neck.

So I found them when I came in alone, leaving Patience in the hall, and walked straight over, and would have knelt down before my father. But he prevented me, and rose out of his chair with a great cry, and drew me to him, and so stood holding me in silence, while my mother wept; and presently I saw his lips moving, and found that he was whispering to himself, “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

Afterwards we all knelt down together, while Mr. Walpole offered up a prayer; and then I sat in the midst and told them the whole story of my wanderings and perils as I have written it here. And later on, noting that Patience was dressed in black, I inquired, and found that she had lost her father nearly a year before, and was become my father's ward till she should attain the age of twenty-one, or marry with his consent.

It was not for a long time after that I surprised her little secret, and discovered that depth of true affection which had been waiting for me all those years beside my own hearth, while I was pursuing phantoms far away. But being alone with her one day, and our talk turning on the riches I had brought back with me, and how I was to bestow them, I said to her—

"For one thing, I must buy you a fairing, Patience, like I used to do when we were children together. Have you forgotten, I wonder, the guinea which I gave you to spend, on the last day I ever spent at home?"

"No, indeed, I have not. I remember it very well," she answered, blushing.

"Why, is that so? And pray what did you buy with it?" I asked smiling.

"Nothing at all," said Patience shortly.

"Nothing! What then——"

"I have it by me, somewhere." She pretended to speak carelessly, but my suspicions were aroused.

"I insist on knowing where, Patience," I said in a tone of command, such as I have never known her to resist.

"You must find out for yourself, then," says she, trying to defy me. (For the first and last time, God bless her!)

I took her by the arms and held her firmly.

"Now, Patience, tell me what you have done with my guinea," I demanded, quite stern.

"I kept it—for a keepsake. Oh, Athelstane, don't laugh at me, I have it on the ribbon round my neck!"

I didn't laugh at her. But I kissed her, and—well, well!—she kissed me back.

And I was surprised to find how little anybody else was surprised when they heard of it, and how they all seemed to take it as a matter of course, and my father told me quite coolly that he intended me to marry as soon as Patience should be eighteen, and to live on Abner Thurstan’s farm, which she had inherited by his will.

Of Rupert, as well as of old Muzzy, I must briefly speak. I conducted my cousin to his father, as I had promised, and sought to reconcile them. But I found my uncle to be harsher than I had expected. He had, besides, married again, and his wife looked sourly on the blind man she was asked to entertain in her house. The upshot of it was that I told her if she would take care of Rupert till I was married I would then have him to live with me. And in our house he still abides, a much altered man, given to the hearing of sermons, and never so happy as when Patience sits down to read him a piece from the Bible or the *Norwich Journal*; though sometimes a flash of his old spirit returns when I sit beside him after supper and talk over our old adventures in the East.

I found it more difficult at first to befriend old Muzzy. For though the old man professed to be, and I am sure really was, anxious to reform and lead a better life, he made but a poor business of it, and his constant profane oaths and habits of rum-drinking proved a severe trial to my mother and Patience. I had told them of his many services to me, including his having saved my life, and therefore they made it a duty to show kindness to the old man, and endeavour to bear with his ways. But I think they would have failed, and I should have been obliged to find a home for him elsewhere, but for his having accidentally told them of the affair outside Calcutta. No sooner did these tender-hearted women learn that I had saved old Muzzy’s life (as they chose to consider it) than they instantly conceived a strong affection for the old man, and instead of finding him a burden nothing pleased them better than to sit in his company while the boatswain related the story of my prowess, interrupting it at every minute to excuse himself for some dreadful expression which had brought the tears into their eyes. The tale lost nothing in the telling, and I am ashamed to say that he so improved upon it in course of time as to make it appear that I had marched single-handed through the Nabob’s entire army, severely wounded the Nabob himself, and slain many of his principal generals, and finally emerged, carrying old Muzzy himself across my shoulders like a suckling lamb.

Peace to old Muzzy! His heart was as innocent as his life and conversation were depraved. I believe my mother used to buy tobacco for him; and I am certain I once detected my wife secretly giving him rum.

In this peaceful manner my adventures ended, and I found myself, far beyond my deserts, settled at last in the land where I was born, among those who loved me and whom I loved.

And we are so made, and this life of ours is so strange a thing, that sometimes, when I walk abroad in the evening, as I was wont to do in my boyhood, and stand beside the lonely, rippling water of the broad, and watch the reflection of the sunset upon the distant walls of Yarmouth town; sometimes, I say, I ask myself whether all this has really been as I have thus written it, or whether all these events from my first running away from my father's roof; and those nights and days in the streets of yonder town and beneath the roof of the old "Three-decker"; and the woman I loved and fought for; and my cousin Rupert's enmity; and the voyage which I took to the East Indies, and the battles and perils which I passed through; and last of all that white tomb in the seraglio garden in far-off Moorshedabad; whether they are not dreams and visions which have come to me while I have slept.

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