THROUGH THE SIKH WAR.

G.A. HENTY

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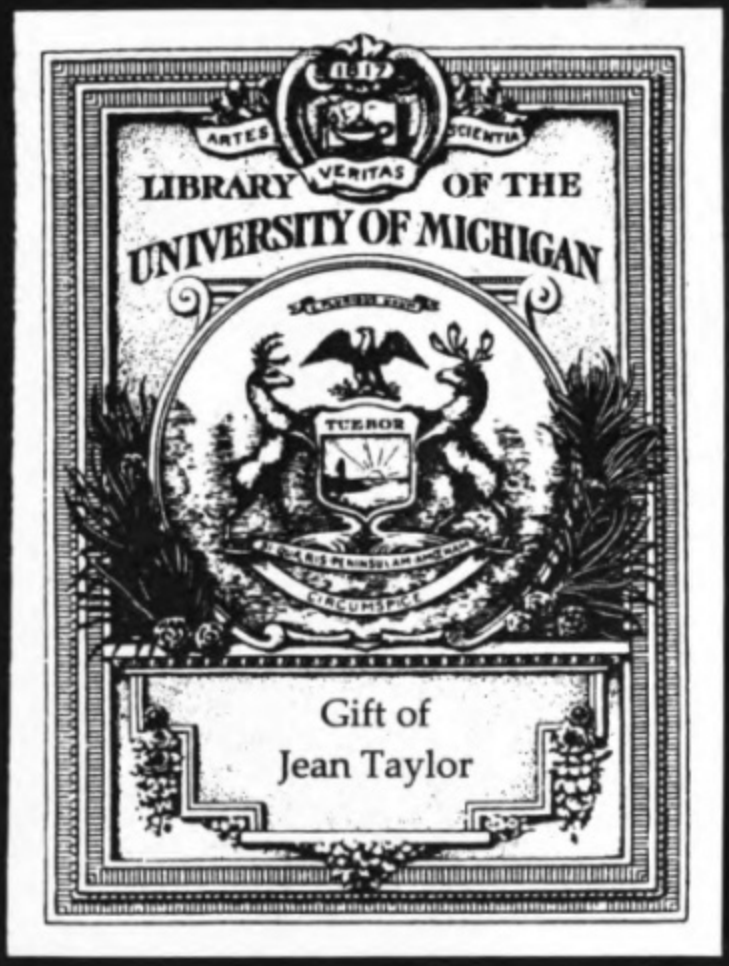

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PERCY THREATENS TO SHOOT THE FERRYMEN.

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PERCY THREATENS TO SHOOT THE FERRYMEN.

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THROUGH THE SIKH WAR

A TALE OF
THE CONQUEST OF THE PUNJAUB

BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "Beric the Briton," "The Dash for Khartoum," "Held Fast for England," "With Clive in India," &c.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAL HURST
AND MAP OF THE PUNJAUB

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1893

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PREFACE

MY DEAR LADS,

Among the many wars by which, province by province, the Empire of India was won, few, if any, were more brilliant and hard fought than those which terminated in the annexation of the Punjaub. It is satisfactory to know that the conquest of the Sikhs—a brave and independent race—was not brought about by any of the intrigues which marred the brilliancy of some of our early conquests, or by greed for additional territory, but was the result of a wanton invasion of the states under our protection by the turbulent soldiery of the Punjaub, who believed themselves invincible, and embarked upon the conflict with a confident belief that they would make themselves masters of Delhi, if not drive us completely out of India. It was fortunate for Britain that the struggle was not delayed for a few years, and that there was time for the Punjaub to become well contented with our rule before the outbreak of the Mutiny; for had the Punjaub declared against us at that critical period it would assuredly have turned the scale, and the work of conquering India must needs have been undertaken anew. I have endeavoured, while keeping my hero well in the foreground, to relate the whole of the leading incidents in the two Sikh wars.

Yours sincerely,

G. A. HENTY.

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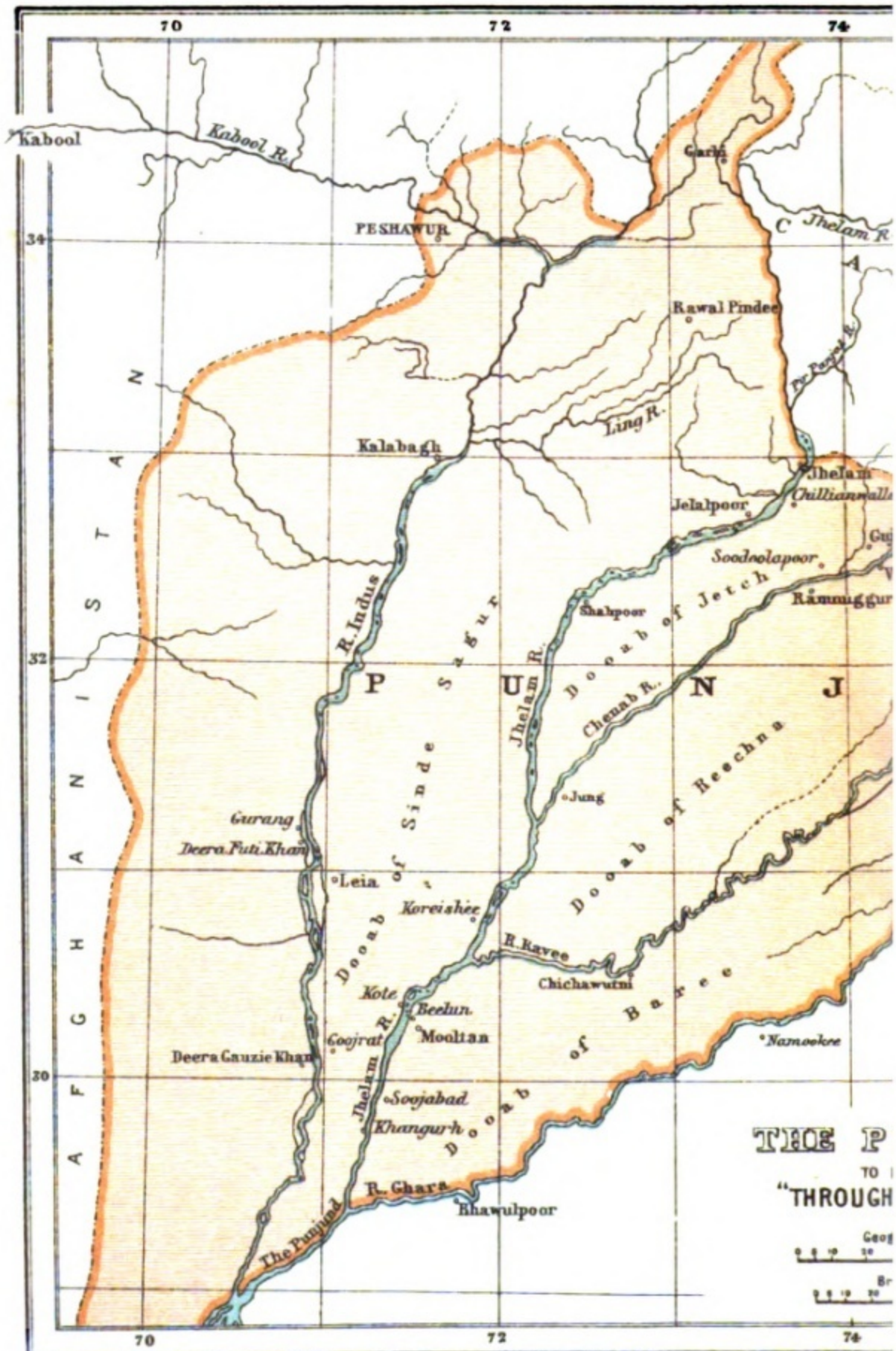

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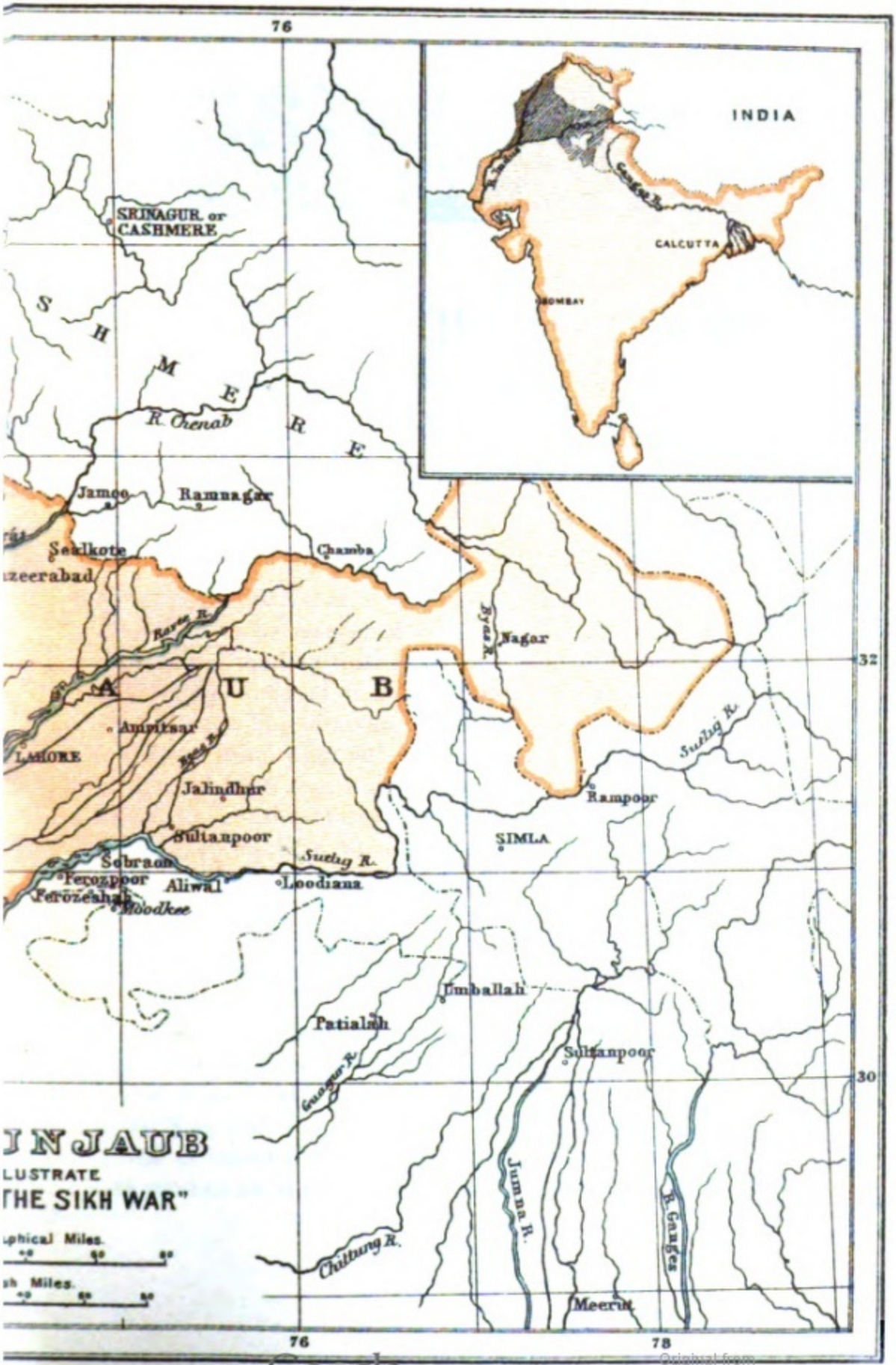

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THROUGH THE SIKH WAR

A STORY OF THE CONQUEST OF INDIA

CHAPTER I

EASTWARD HO!

"GROVES, here is a letter for you," Dr. Bubear, the head-master of a large school at Dulwich, said, as the boys rose from their places to leave the school-room at the conclusion of their work. The lad addressed, a boy of about fifteen, went up to the desk.

"It is from your father's lawyers, Messrs. Sims & Hammond. I have received one from them myself. I think you will find it satisfactory," and he nodded kindly. "You had better stop in here to read it, for it looks somewhat bulky, and I fancy contains an inclosure."

Percy Groves returned to his seat, and did not open the letter until he was alone in the school-room. It was a long time since he had received one. Fifteen months before he had lost his father. Major Groves had returned on half-pay a year before his death, being obliged to quit the service from the effects of a severe wound which he received at the storming of Ghuznee. His regiment had been absent several years from England, and after he had left the service and taken a house at Dulwich, he had made but few acquaintances, spending most of his time at the military club to which he belonged.

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Percy, who was an only child, had been born in India—his mother dying when he was five years old. His father had kept him three years longer with him, and had then sent him home to England to the care of his grandfather, who had, however, died a year later; and from that time Percy had known no home but Dr. Bubear's, until his father returned and took up his residence near the school. A few days before his death Major Groves had a long talk with his son.

"I am troubled about you, Percy," he said. "Besides my half-pay I have but three thousand pounds—a sum sufficient indeed to finish your education, pay your expenses at the University if you decide to go into one of the learned professions, and to help you a bit until you make your way. I have written to three or four of my old friends, who will, when the time comes, do their best to procure you a commission in the army, in case you have a fancy then, as I know you have now, for soldiering. Lastly, there is my brother. We have never kept up much correspondence, but we have always been good friends; he was in the army himself, but sold out after only serving a year, as he saw that there was very little chance of active sevice in Europe. He knocked about the world for some years and then went out to India, and the next I heard of him was that he had entered the service of Runjeet Singh, the leader of the Sikhs, who had great respect for European troops, and employed a number of foreign officers—Italian, German, and a few English—to train his troops on our method.

"I have not heard of him for some three or four years, but when I did he was still in the Sikh service, and held the rank of colonel, and was, I heard, high in favour with Runjeet Singh, and there I have no doubt he is still, that is if he is alive. No doubt he is married to some dusky princess, and has probably accumulated a fortune. These adventurers, as Europeans in the service of native princes are generally called, either get murdered soon after they get out there, or else

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accumulate large fortunes. I have no doubt that if he is alive he will take charge of you.

"The life is an adventurous one, and I do not say that I should advise you to adopt it; but in that respect you must decide for yourself, when you reach the age to do so. If your uncle is able to push your fortune out there you might do worse than stay with him; if, on the other hand, when you get to the age of seventeen or eighteen, you do not care to remain in India, you must come home and get the officers to whom I have written to use their influence to obtain a commission for you, which they will, I have no doubt, be able to do, as the son of an officer forced to retire from the service in consequence of wounds is always considered to have a claim.

"In that case the knowledge that you will obtain of Indian methods and languages would be a very great assistance to you. But mind, if you do go out to your uncle it will not be possible for you afterwards to choose one of the learned professions, for however much you may try to educate yourself out there, you will not be up to the mark of lads who have gone through the regular course of schooling here."

"I don't care for that, father; I have always made up my mind to be a soldier, as you were. I should like very much to go out to my uncle if he will have me."

The major was silent for a few minutes.

"I don't know that it is a wise step," he murmured to himself; "but the boy has no friends here—my old comrades will do what they can for him when the time comes, but until then he will have but a lonely life.

"Very well, Percy," he went on, turning to his son, "I will write to your uncle. It may be eighteen months before you get an answer from him—that is all the better. Work hard at school, lad, and learn as much as you can, for you will get but little learning out there. If your uncle does not care to have you, or thinks that things are too disturbed and unsettled out there for him to undertake the responsibility, you must

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fall back on the other plan and remain at Dr. Bubear's until you are seventeen. I have written letters to the friends who promised to see after your commission; you will find them in my desk. Keep them by you until you are leaving school, and then post them, that is if your wish to go into the army is unchanged. If it should be changed, Messrs. Sims & Hammond, my lawyers, will put you in the way of carrying out your wishes in whatever direction they may lie."

There had been several such talks between father and son, and Percy knew that he should not have his father long with him. He listened, therefore, gravely to his words, but without showing emotion; for although when alone he often gave way to tears, he knew that the major, himself a quiet and self-restrained man, was adverse to any display of feeling. The boy did not think the end was so near, and though prepared in some way for the blow, it was a terrible shock to him when his father, five days later, expired. He had again become a boarder at Dr. Bubear's, remaining there during the holidays as well as in school-time.

Two or three times old friends of his father had come to see him, and had taken him out for the day. This was the only change he had had, but he had worked hard and risen considerably in his place in the school. In accordance with instructions from Messrs. Sims & Hammond he had gone regularly to a riding-school, as the major, knowing the Sikhs to be a nation of horsemen, had thought it desirable that he should learn to have a good seat on a horse. The lawyers had also arranged that he should twice a week have lessons in Hindustani, and he was allowed to work at this instead of Greek. His progress was comparatively rapid, as after a time the language he had heard spoken for the first eight years of his life came back to him rapidly. He had hardly begun to look for a reply from his uncle when Dr. Bubear handed him the letter, which he doubted not contained the answer. He had hardly hoped that it would be favourable, for during the

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intervening time he had learned something of what was going on in the Punjaub, and knew that since Runjeet Singh's death there had been many troubles there, and that things were in a very unsettled state.

This information he had received from one of the boys whose father was a director of the East India Company. The doctor's words, however, gave him some hope, and when alone he opened the letter with less trepidation than he would otherwise have felt. Messrs. Sims & Hammond wrote as follows:—

"We have pleasure in forwarding to you a communication from Colonel Roland Groves, which was inclosed in one sent to us. In the latter he expressed his readiness to receive you, while pointing out that the position of affairs in the Punjaub was unsettled in the extreme. He doubtless speaks further of this in his letter to you. As our late client, your father, instructed us that we were to be guided entirely by your decision in the matter, we leave it in your hands, observing, however, that in the face of your uncle's statements with regard to the country, it appears to us that to go out to him at present would be an exceedingly ill-advised and rash step. Should you, however, decide upon doing so, we will, upon hearing from you, take the necessary steps for obtaining your outfit and securing your berth. A client of ours in Calcutta will, we doubt not, arrange on your arrival there for forwarding you up the country to your uncle."

Having read this, Percy broke the seal of the inclosure and read as follows:—

"My Dear Nephew,—I am filled with grief to learn from a letter, forwarded to me after his death, that your father is no more. It is many years since I saw him; but we were always capital friends, though as unlike in disposition as two brothers could be. He tells me that he has no friends in England in whose charge he could place you, and asks if I will have you out with me until you are of an age to enter the army at home,

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if, indeed, you do not decide to follow my example and take service with one of the native princes.

"As far as taking charge of you goes, I am perfectly ready to do so—indeed more than ready; for it will give me great pleasure to have poor Hugo's son with me and to treat him as my own, for I am childless. But the sort of career I have chosen is pretty nearly closed. The Company have most of India under their thumb, and allow no English except their own officials to take service with the protected princes. At present the Punjaub is independent, but I don't think it can remain so much longer. Since the death of the Old Lion, as Runjeet Singh was called, things have gone from bad to worse. One ruler after another has been set up, and either dethroned or assassinated. The army is practically master of the country; and one of its first steps was to demand the dismissal of all foreign officers, and the greater part of us were accordingly discharged.

"Some of them left the country; others, like myself, are living on the estates granted us by Runjeet Singh, and on the pickings, which were considerable, that had come to us during our term of service, and we are waiting to see what may be the next turn of the wheel. Life here is something like that of a baron of old in England. My house is, in fact, a fortress perched on a rock. I have a garrison of several hundred picked men, and as I am a much easier master than most of these Sikhs, who wring the last farthing from the cultivators, I could raise a thousand more at a couple of days' notice. Still the place is not impregnable; and in the present disturbed state of the land, where there is practically no law save that of might, I might be besieged by some powerful Rajah, and in the event of the place being taken there is no doubt what my fate would be.

"However, at present the great men are too intent upon quarrelling with each other to trouble about me, especially as they know that the place is not to be taken without hard

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knocks. Moreover, although we who take service with foreign princes have no claim whatever for protection from our own countrymen, the fact of my being an Englishman is to some extent a safeguard. However, I want to put the case fairly before you; and if you come out here I will do my best for you—I will try to fill, as far as I can, your father's place. At the same time I warn you that the position here is a perilous one, and that there is no predicting how matters may turn out. My own opinion is, however, that our people can never permit the state of things that prevails here to go on, and will be forced to interfere before long. The Sikhs think that they are fully a match for us. I know better. They are brave, but so impatient of discipline, that although they look well enough on parade they would become a mere mob when fighting began.

"I need not say that the annexation of the Punjaub by the English would suit me admirably, but there will be a time of great trouble and danger before that can be accomplished. I daresay you wonder that I do not come home, having made, as you may suppose, a fortune amply sufficient to live upon there. But I do not think I shall ever do that; I have lived too long in India to settle down to English ways. Now that your poor father has gone I have not a single friend in England, and the humdrum life would kill me in no time, after having for four-and-twenty years lived in an atmosphere of intrigue, excitement, and danger.

"Now you know all about it, Percy, and can judge for yourself. By the time you get this letter you will be almost fifteen, and, as your father tells me that he has talked the matter over with you, capable of forming some sort of an opinion. As far as money goes, do not let that influence you one way or the other. The Old Lion was one of the most liberal of paymasters; and although one spends money freely out here, I took care to transmit a considerable portion of the presents I received and the money I earned to a firm who act as my agents in Calcutta, so as to be in safety if at any time I

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had to make a bolt of it. That money will some day be yours whether you come out to me or not, for I have no one else to leave it to; and I am, by the ~~same~~ ~~mess~~enger who carries this letter to the British agent at Loodiana, sending instructions to my agents that in case of anything happening to me, the money is to be transferred to your name, and they are to communicate with the firm who are, as your father tells me, his lawyers in London.

"I don't know whether I am acting altogether wisely in agreeing to your coming out; and I certainly should not have done so if it had not been that your father, who must have been perfectly aware of the disturbed state of this country, evidently wished that it should be so. Well, if the life has its dangers, it has its advantages. In our army at home an officer is but one bit of a great machine; his life is a routine, and in peace time as dull as ditch-water. Here a man has, every day and every hour, need of his brains, his courage, quickness, and spirit. In war-time we fight the enemies of the Maharajah; in peace we have to combat the intrigues of our enemies and rivals, to guard against the dangers of assassination, to countermine the approaches of the enemy, to be ready for instant flight, or sudden favour and promotion.

"It is a man's life, Percy, and to a man of spirit worth a hundred existences at home. If I knew you personally I could form a better idea as to whether I ought to say to you, stay where you are, or, come here. Your father says that he thinks you have a fair share of pluck and determination, and that he considers you to be as sharp and shrewd as most boys of your age. As he was the last man in the world to speak one word beyond what he considered due, I take it that his estimate of your character is in no way too flattering.

"Think it over yourself, Percy. Can you thrash most fellows your own age? Can you run as far and as fast as most of them? Can you take a caning without whimpering over it? Do you feel, in fact, that you are able to go through fully as

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much as any of your companions? Are you good at planning a piece of mischief, and ready to take the lead in carrying it out? For though such gifts as these do not recommend a boy to the favour of his schoolmaster, they are worth more out here than a knowledge of all the dead languages. It is pluck and endurance, and a downright love of adventure and danger, that have made us the masters of the greater part of India, and will ere long make us rulers of the whole of it; and it is of no use anyone coming out here, especially to take service with one of the native princes, unless he is disposed to love danger for its own sake, and to feel that he is willing and ready to meet it from whatever quarter it may come. However, there is no occasion for you to make up your mind at present upon more than the point whether you will come out to me for three or four years; when it will be time enough to make your final decision. In any case you may always consider me your affectionate uncle, ROLAND."

Percy read the letter through very carefully. It was something like what he had expected, for his father had in his last days spoken much to him of his brother.

"He was cut out for the life he has led, Percy," he had said to him. "He was the leader in all mischief at school; he had any amount of energy and life. He would not have made a good officer in the king's service; for he was impatient of authority, and would have been at loggerheads with the adjutant, and perhaps with the colonel, in no time. Once he set his mind to do a thing he would do it, whatever it was; and his straightforwardness and loyal nature would certainly win for him the confidence of any of these Indian princes, accustomed as they are to being surrounded with intriguers ready at all times to take sides with the most powerful, and to sell themselves to the highest bidder. He will tell you frankly whether he thinks you had better come out to him or stay at home. But mind, if you do go out he will expect a good deal of you, and if you don't do credit to him as well as to your-

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self, he will have no hesitation in packing you off home again at an hour's notice."

Percy was pleased to see that, although he warned him of the difficulties and dangers of the position, his uncle clearly did wish him to come out to him, and he had no hesitation whatever in making his decision. After reading the letter for the third time, he placed it in his pocket and went across to the doctor's.

"I expected you, Groves," the latter said, when he was shown into his study. "So your uncle is willing to receive you, but leaves the choice entirely to yourself. That is what Messrs. Sims & Hammond said in their letter to me. Evidently they think it a very foolish business, but say that as they are bound by their instructions they have only to carry them out if you decide to go, but they hope that I shall use my influence to induce you to decide upon remaining here. I have no intention of doing so. It was for your father to make his choice, and he made it. He knows the country and he knows your uncle's character, and as he thought the opening a good one for you, I do not feel that it lies within my province to influence your decision in any way. I need hardly ask what the decision is. I know that you have been looking forward to the receipt of this letter, and the ardour with which you have worked at Hindustani, as your master tells me, shows that your wishes lay in that direction. So you have made up your mind to go?"

"Yes, sir. My uncle does not try to persuade me to come, but he says that he will be very glad to have me with him. He lives in a fortified castle with a lot of retainers, like a feudal baron, he says."

"Then I am quite sure no more need be said," the doctor replied smiling; "I don't think any boy could withstand the prospect of living in a fortified castle. And now I suppose you want to go and see the solicitors?"

"If you please, sir."

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"Very well. I will give you leave off school this afternoon. If you find that there is a ship sailing shortly you will have many preparations to make, and as I am quite sure your thoughts will be too occupied to think of lessons you may consider them at an end. If, however, you find it will be some little time before you are able to sail, I shall expect you to put the matter altogether out of your head until the time approaches, and to work as hard as you can; though we will give up Latin, and you can devote yourself entirely to Hindustani. Let me see you when you return from the lawyer's. You know the way to London Bridge. You cross that, and anyone you meet will then direct you to Fenchurch Street. You had better have your dinner before you start."

Messrs. Sims & Hammond did not conceal from Percy their opinion that his decision to go out to join his uncle savoured of lunacy. "We are willing to carry out your father's instructions," the senior partner said, shrugging his shoulders. "We considered it our duty to express our opinion frankly on the subject to him. Having done that without avail, our duty in the matter is at an end. We find it a not unusual thing for our clients to prefer their own opinions to ours, not unfrequently to their own cost. Since we have received your uncle's communication yesterday, we have made inquiries as to the vessels loading for Calcutta, and find that the Indiaman the *Deccan* will sail in ten days' time. That will, I take it, be sufficient time for you to make your preparations. One of our clerks will at once go with you to take your berth, and then accompany you to some outfitter's to get all that is requisite. Your father left with us a list of the clothing and other matters he considered would be required in the event of your going."

Five minutes later Percy set out in charge of an elderly clerk, and by the close of the afternoon the passage was taken and the whole of the outfit ordered, and Percy walked back to Dulwich quite overwhelmed at the extent of the wardrobe that

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his father had deemed necessary for him for the voyage. Several suits of clothes had, in accordance with the instructions on the list, been ordered, of a size considerably too large for him at present. Major Groves had appended a note to the list, saying that he did not consider it necessary that a large stock of such clothes should be provided, as there would be no difficulty in having them made in India, and that, moreover, Percy would probably, to some extent, wear native attire.

The ten days passed rapidly. Percy, although nominally free from the school-room, nevertheless worked with ardour at his Hindustani.

"You have made great progress, Groves," his teacher said on the last day. "I should advise you strongly to work several hours a day at it during the voyage. Some of the passengers who are returning to India are sure to have with them native servants and ayahs, and you had best take every opportunity of speaking with them. You must remember that there are a large number of dialects, and even of distinct languages, in India; and it is probable that you will find your Hindustani of little use to you in Northern India. Still, it will greatly facilitate your learning the other languages, and most of the educated natives understand it, as, like French on the Continent, it is the general medium of communication between the natives of different parts of the country. Possibly you may find among the servants on board a native of Northern India, and may be able to commence your study of Punjaubi with him."

Two days before the vessel sailed Percy went by appointment to the lawyer's office, and Mr. Hammond took him to the shipping office and introduced him to the captain of the *Deccan*.

"I will give an eye to the lad as far as I can, Mr. Hammond," Captain Grierson said; "though, to tell you the truth, I would almost as lief have a monkey as a boy to look after. Still I don't feel the responsibility as great as that of my young

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lady passengers. Do what I may, they will indulge in flirtation, and I have to bear the brunt of the anger of the relatives to whom they are consigned in India, when they discover that my charges have already disposed of themselves on the voyage."

During those last days Percy was the object of the greatest envy and admiration of his school-fellows. To be going all the way out to India by himself was in itself splendid; but the idea that he was to live in a castle with armed retainers, and the possibility of a siege and all other sorts of unknown dangers, seemed almost too great a stroke of good fortune to fall to the lot of anybody. Most of his effects had been sent direct on board the *Deccan*, but he had obtained from the store where they had been deposited, the cases containing his father's rifles, double-barrelled gun and pistols, and the fact that he was the possessor of such arms greatly heightened the admiration of his companions.

But even the knowledge that the pistols were in his cabin, and the other arms stowed below with the greater portion of his belongings, scarcely sufficed to keep up his spirits as he stood, a solitary and rather forlorn boy, on the deck of the great ship as she warped out through the dock-gates.

The doctor had come down early to see him on board, but had been obliged to return at once to his duties at the school, and everyone but himself seemed to have friends to see them off. The entrance to the docks was crowded with people waving their handkerchiefs and shouting *adieux* to those on board, while many who were to land at Gravesend were on deck chatting with their friends. The captain stopped good-naturedly by his side for a moment as he passed along.

"All alone, Groves, eh? You will soon make friends, and I think you are really better off than those who haven't got over saying their last good-byes yet. I always think it is much better to finish all that sort of thing at home, instead of prolonging the pain. Here, Harcourt," he called to a young

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fellow about sixteen, in a midshipman's dress, "you haven't anything to do just at present. Give an eye to this youngster; he is going out to join an uncle in India, and is all alone on board. Introduce him to the other midshipmen when you get an opportunity. I have told the steward to mess him with you; he will be much more comfortable there than he would be with the people in the cabin aft. You will like that arrangement, won't you, Groves?"

"Very much indeed, sir," Percy said, feeling as if a great load had been lifted off his mind. Harcourt led him down between decks to the ward-room, as they called it, where the third and fourth officers and the four midshipmen messed.

"This is our palace, Groves. A bit of a hole in comparison with the saloon, but a snug little den, too, when everything is going on well and everyone is in good temper. I will tell the others that the skipper has made you free of it. The third and fourth officers are both good fellows, and I think you will find it comfortable. If you don't, you have got the saloon to fall back upon."

"I am sure to find it comfortable," Percy said confidently. "I have come fresh from school, you know, and am not accustomed to luxuries; I should find it miserable among all those grown-up people. I only wish I was going out as a midshipman instead of a passenger, so as to have something to do."

"Ah, well, you can talk to the skipper about that. Perhaps he will put you on a watch if you ask him. I don't say the work is very lively, for it isn't; but I know that I should be very sorry to have to make the voyage with nothing to do but walk about with my hands in my pockets. However, I must go on deck now. We had our breakfast long ago; we dine at two bells, that is one o'clock. If you can't hold on until then I will get our steward to bring you a biscuit."

"I can hold on very well. I had a cup of tea and something to eat before I left."

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Percy followed Harcourt on deck again, and feeling now more settled as to his position, was able to look on with interest and pleasure at what was being done around him. The passengers had settled themselves a little; some had got out their chairs, and were seated chatting in groups, but the ladies for the most part were below arranging their cabins. Men in couples walked up and down the waist smoking, or leaned against the bulwarks discussing the voyage and their mutual acquaintances. Most of the sails had now been set, for the wind was favourable, and the great ship was running fast down the river and was just passing Woolwich. A sailor, barefooted and with his trousers turned up to his knees, was sluicing the decks with water. Others were coiling up ropes. Others again, dressed more in accordance with Percy's ideas as to the neatness of a sailor's costume, were standing at the sheets and braces in readiness to trim the sails to port or starboard, as the sharp turns of the river brought the wind on one quarter or the other.

Percy was surprised at the silence that reigned among so many men, but he understood the reason when the sharp orders were shouted from the quarter-deck where the first officer was standing by the side of the pilot. Then there was a hauling of ropes and a creaking of blocks, and the towering pile of yards and sails swung over. Now and then the ship's course was suddenly changed to avoid some barge or smaller craft that got in her way, sometimes missing by the smallest margin running them down. On one or two of these occasions a mate shouted angrily down at those in charge of these craft, and these shouted as angrily back again. Once past Erith the river widened and the dangers of collision ceased, for the craft were all proceeding in the same direction; for the stream was now running too strongly for the barges to attempt to make their way against it, even by hugging the shore and keeping in back waters. At twelve o'clock the luncheon bell rang, and the passengers disappeared from deck. But Percy was so

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absorbed in watching the shore that he was quite surprised when Harcourt touched him on the shoulder and said:

"There are two bells, youngster. You must keep your ears open or you will be missing your meals; for they do not ring for us, and anyone who does not turn up to his grub goes without it."

The voyage was a very pleasant one to Percy Groves. The captain did not allow him to act as a volunteer midshipman; but it was not long before he ceased to regret this decision, for he found among the four or five native servants returning to India with their masters one from the Punjaub. The man's duties on board occupied but a very small portion of his time, as he had little to do except wait on his master at meals; and he was very glad to arrange, for what seemed to Percy a ridiculously small sum, to spend five or six hours a day in conversation with him. Accordingly, after breakfast and dinner the two took seats up in the bow, Percy on a low stool, the native squatted beside him, and there spent hours, at first in learning the Punjaubi equivalents for Hindustani words, and then, as time went on, in conversation.

The native knew a little Hindustani, and could get on fairly in English, so that they were able from the first to comprehend each other; and as Percy's former studies helped him materially, he picked up Punjaubi quickly, and by the end of the voyage was able to express himself in it with considerable freedom. He was always up early in the morning, and until breakfast-time chatted with any officers or midshipmen off duty, and sometimes with the early risers among the passengers—two or three of whom, when they found that the lad was a first-class passenger on his way out to India to join an uncle, became very friendly with him, being struck with the steady way in which he passed the greater portion of the day in preparing himself, as far as possible, for the life he was about to lead.

"Why don't you come aft, Groves?" one of them asked him.

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PERCY LEARNS THE PUNJAUBI LANGUAGE.

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"I should feel altogether strange, sir. The two officers and the midshipmen are all very kind and friendly, and we live very well there, and I feel much more at home than I should do with the ladies. I have not been accustomed to ladies. I do not remember my mother, and for years I lived altogether at school. After my father came back, and I lived at home with him, only gentlemen came to the house. I like it all very much, and should not like to change. Besides, if I got to know a good many passengers, I might not be able to spend so much time in work; and I do so want when I join my uncle to be able to be useful to him, which I could not be if I did not know anything of the language."

"Well, I am sure, Groves, your uncle ought to be pleased when you join him to know how hard you have worked. It would be a very good thing if every young cadet and writer who went out would do as you do, and prepare himself for his work out there, instead of wasting six months in lounging about, trying to make himself agreeable to the women on board. He would not only find it very useful out there, but he would find it very profitable. For a young fellow who, on arrival, was able to speak one of the languages pretty fluently, would be certain to attract the notice of the authorities, and would find himself in a responsible and well-paid berth, while the others were kept at desks in Calcutta or Bombay, or sent out as assistants to unimportant posts.

"It is my servant who is teaching you, and he tells me that you are making wonderful progress, and that you already know as much of the language as many officers who have been in India for years. I can tell you, too, that you could not have taken up a more useful dialect than Punjaubi. At present, of course, the Punjaub is independent, and the consequence is there are very few officials who have taken the trouble to learn the language; but no one doubts that the time is not very far distant when we shall have to interfere there, and in a few years we may have to take it over altogether. In that case I

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need hardly say that there will be a great demand for officials able to speak the language; and should you enter the Company's service, you would have every chance of obtaining a post there of greater importance and profit than you could hope to reach after years of service under ordinary conditions.

"I myself am stationed in the province south of the Sutlej, which the Sikhs at any rate consider to be a part of the Punjaub, and am pretty well acquainted with what is going on at Lahore. I don't know your uncle personally, although of course I know him well by reputation. He was one of the best of the European officers in the Sikh service; and although, like all the others, he was dismissed at the bidding of the mutinous soldiery, I have always heard him spoken well of. He was popular among the men of the two regiments that he commanded, and bore an excellent reputation among the natives generally, abstaining from the high-handed exactions by which some of the foreign officers amassed large sums of money. He is said to have been prompt in action, to have maintained excellent order amongst his men, to have protected the natives against any acts of plunderng or misconduct, and the districts where he was stationed were contented and prosperous.

"Like most of the other foreign officers, he held himself altogether aloof from court intrigues. Doubtless they were perfectly right in doing so; but for all that, as matters have turned out, it might have been better for the Punjaub had these officers gone beyond their duties and thrown their whole weight into the scale in favour of some strong man who would have put a stop to the dissensions that if they continue will certainly bring ruin upon the country.

"However, their position was a very difficult one. The Sikh chieftains were always adverse to Runjeet Singh's policy of Europeanizing his army, and were extremely jealous of the favour he extended to the Europeans in his service; consequently the position of these officers was, from the moment of

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his death, an extremely delicate one. Moreover, it is probable that the Indian authorities would have viewed with considerable disfavour the passing of the affairs of the Punjaub into the hands of European adventurers, of whom only two or three were English. The foreigners, of course, would have had no sympathy whatever with our aims, and would indeed have been formidable opponents in case of trouble, their interests lying entirely in the maintenance of the present state of things in the Punjaub.

"You are going out to the most troubled portion of India, youngster; and I almost wonder at your uncle allowing you to come, for there will be a great convulsion there before matters finally settle down."

"So he told me when he wrote, sir. I am only going out to him till I get old enough to either go into the army or to enter the Company's service, if my father's friends can obtain a commission or a writership for me."

"Get a writership, my boy, if you have the chance. The civil service is vastly better paid than the military. Well, it may be that we shall be thrown together again out there. It is nearly time for our commissioner at Loodiana to go home for his furlough, and I think it very probable that I shall be appointed to his post during his absence, in which case I am pretty certain to be in communication with your uncle; and it may be that when the time comes I shall be able to lend you a helping hand to enter the service. If you stick to work as you are doing now, I shall certainly feel justified in recommending you as one who would prove a valuable young officer in the Punjaub if we become its masters, or on the frontier if the country still maintains its independence. In the meantime, if there be trouble in the Punjaub and you have to fly for your life, remember you will find a hearty welcome at Loodiana."

The voyage was free from any incidents of importance. The *Deccan* rounded the Cape without experiencing any

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unusually bad weather, and except for one or two minor gales the weather was fine throughout the voyage.

Most of the passengers were delighted when she dropped anchor at last in the Hooghly, but much as Percy longed to see the wonders of India, he was almost sorry when the voyage came to an end, for the time had passed very pleasantly to him. This had been especially the case towards the latter portion; for his studies had increased in interest as he acquired a knowledge of the language, and by the end of the voyage he had come to know a good many of the passengers. His first friend, Mr. Fullarton, had spoken warmly to others in favour of the quiet lad, of whom they caught sight when they happened to stroll forward to smoke a cigar, occupied so intently upon his conversations with the native beside him.

"I hate book-worms," one of them had said when Mr. Fullarton had first spoken to him on the subject. "Give me a lad with pluck and spirit, and I don't care a snap of the finger whether he can construe Euripides or solve a problem in high mathematics. What we want for India are men who can ride and shoot, who are ready at any moment to start on a hundred-mile journey on horseback, who will scale a hill fort with a handful of men, or with half a dozen Sowars tackle a dacoit and his band. What do the natives care for our learning? It is our pluck and fighting powers that have made us their masters."

"That is all very true, Lyndhurst, and I thoroughly agree with you that of all ways of choosing officials for India examinations would be the very worst; but this lad is not a book-worm at all in your sense of the word. He knows that it will be of great advantage to him when he arrives in India to be able to speak the language, and he has accordingly set himself to do it with a dogged perseverance that would do credit to a man. Look how he has utilized the voyage, while the cadets and ensigns and young civilians have thrown away six months of their lives in absolute idleness. Besides, I am

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sure the boy does not lack either pluck or spirit. I am up a good deal earlier than you are in the morning, and I see him going about the rigging like a monkey. He is quite as much at home up there as are any of the midshipmen, some of whom have been four or five years at sea. I saw him sky-larking the other evening with two or three of them, and I can tell you he quite held his own. He is certainly a favourite with all the officers. I should be ready to wager that when the time comes he will turn out well, whatever circumstances he may fall upon. He is a merry fellow too, and has one of the most infectious laughs I ever heard; he is no more like your ideal book-worm than I am."

The only time that Percy came aft and mixed with the other passengers was when they practised rifle or pistol shooting, sometimes at empty bottles thrown into the sea, sometimes at bottles swinging from one or other of the yardarms. This amusement was practised three or four times a week, for it was a matter of importance to every man, military or civilian, to be a good shot. It was useful in the hunting of tigers and other big game. Life might depend upon proficiency with a pistol if attacked by a fanatic or in a brush with dacoits, while for men likely to be engaged with the fierce tribesmen of the hills, or in conflict with Sikh, Beloochee, Pathan, or Afghan, a quick eye and a steady hand were essential.

Encouraged by Mr. Fullarton, Percy got out his pistols on the first day when the practice began, and never missed an opportunity afterwards. "Never mind the rifle," his friend said; "you are not likely to do tiger-hunting at present, and you will have plenty of time and opportunities for that later on. Stick to your pistol practice; you are going among a wild set of people, where the knife is readily drawn in a quarrel, and where men do not hesitate to rid themselves of a foe or a rival by assassination. Practise with your pistols steadily on every occasion here, and keep it up afterwards; it may be of more use to you than everything you have learnt at school from the

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day when you first went there. You know I approve of your sticking to your Punjaubi, but you can well spare an hour three or four times a week; and although it may do you more good in your future career to be a good linguist than to be a good pistol-shot, the last may be the means of saving your life, and unless you can do that, your study of languages will be so much time thrown away."

And so by the end of the voyage Percy became a very fair shot with the pistol, and indeed there were few of the passengers who could break a swinging bottle more frequently than he. He was surprised, when the anchor dropped, at the eagerness evinced by the majority of the passengers to get on shore. He himself looked on quietly, for the captain had said to him early that morning, "There is no use in your hurrying ashore, Groves; you know no one there, and an hour earlier or later will make no difference to you. I shall be going off this afternoon and will take you with me, and after I have been to the shipping office I will go with you to the people you have letters for. I know them personally, and an introduction from me will probably interest them more in you than will the formal letter those lawyer fellows are likely to have written."

The captain's introduction was of great benefit to Percy. The agent took an interest in him, and put him up at his house for a fortnight. At the end of that time he arranged for him to take a passage up country in a native craft that two or three officers had chartered to convey them to Delhi, beyond which town there would be no difficulty in hiring a boat to the point at which he would disembark, and thence travel up by road. He enjoyed his journey much, although it occupied a considerable time. He could have gone very much faster by road; but time was no particular object, and the agent thought that he would be cheated right and left in his bargains for vehicles, and might not improbably have some of his baggage stolen. Percy greatly preferred the passage by river, and

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when finally he had to take to a close vehicle, he congratulated himself that he had accomplished the greater part of the journey free from the dust, heat, and inconveniences of land travel. He learned that he would have done much better had he taken his passage from England to the other side of India and ascended the Indus, but he supposed that his uncle had directed him to come *via* Calcutta because his own agent was there and could make the arrangements for him, and he perhaps considered that the passage thence by water would be much safer than one through the recently-conquered province of Scinde.

This was indeed, as he afterwards learnt, the reason why Calcutta had been chosen instead of Bombay. There had, about the time his uncle wrote, been a number of robberies, sometimes accompanied by murder, of persons travelling up the Indus in boat, and it was for this reason the longer and safer route up the Jumna had been chosen. He left the boat at Sultanpoor, and had about a hundred miles of travel thence through Umballah and Sirhind to Loodiana, a station in what was known as the protected district. Here on the frontier of the Punjaub were stationed some British troops with a Resident, whose special duty was to keep the government informed of what was going on upon the other side of the Sutlej.

The agent had advised him on his arrival at Loodiana to go straight to the Residency.

"It is probable that your uncle will have written to the Resident about your coming, and that instructions as to the best course for pursuing your journey may be awaiting you there. It is a long way from Loodiana to his place, which lies quite in the north of the Punjaub, and but a short distance from the Afghan frontier. He will know about what time you will arrive, and may even have sent down one of his officers to accompany you on the way. He could not, of course, guess that you would know any of the languages, and it would be

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impossible for you, speaking nothing but English, to make your way alone through the Punjaub. Even as it is, I should advise you, should you on arriving at Loodiana find no one there from your uncle, to send up word that you have arrived, and to wait quietly, even if it be a month, till you hear from him."

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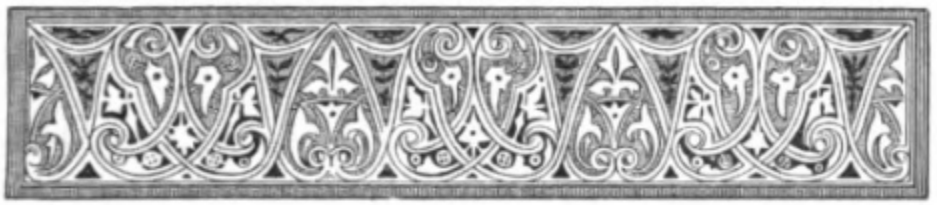

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF WAR

LEAVING the cart with his luggage a short distance away, Percy entered the office of the Residency, and giving his name to a clerk said that he was desirous of speaking to the Resident.

The clerk on his return from the inner room requested Percy to follow him. An officer was sitting at a desk. He looked up with a smile as the lad entered, and Percy was astonished to see Mr. Fullarton, to whom he had said good-bye on board the *Deccan*.

"You did not expect to see me here, Groves?" he said as he shook him cordially by the hand.

"No indeed, sir, I had not the slightest idea that you had left Calcutta. I am glad indeed to see you."

"I only stopped there a few hours," the officer said. "As soon as I got to Government House I was told that Macpherson was ill, and that I must travel up at full speed to relieve him, so I started next morning and travelled as fast as horses could take me up the country. I have been here for more than three weeks. I have not forgotten you, and as soon as I arrived here I sent off a *chit* to your uncle to tell him that you had landed at Calcutta, and would probably be here in the course of a fortnight or three weeks. Two days ago one of his native officers with an escort of sixteen men turned up

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here. They are encamped on the plain over there. You will know the tent by a blue flag flying before it.

"I told your uncle that I had made your acquaintance on board the ship, and that I thought he would be very well pleased with you. I did not tell him anything about your having picked up so much Punjaubi, but left it for you to give him a pleasant surprise. Of course you will put up here for to-night." I shall be knocking off work in a quarter of an hour, and in the meantime you may as well go and have your bath, after which you will feel more comfortable. I will send a man across to your fellows to tell them you have arrived, and will be ready to start in the morning. By the way, I think it would be as well if you went over there at once; it would please them, and there is nothing like making a good impression. My buggy will be at the door in ten minutes, and I will drive you out there. So you had better have a preliminary wash now, and can take your bath after we get back."

Touching the bell a servant entered. Mr. Fullarton gave him orders to take Percy to a room, to have what boxes he required carried up there, and to pile the rest in the hall. By the time Percy had got rid of some of the dust of travel, and changed his travelling suit for another, the Resident was ready, and they were soon driving over the sandy plain in a light trap drawn by a wiry-looking native pony. In a few minutes they reached a small tent, before which waved a blue flag. As they approached a stir was seen. A native officer ran out of the tent, ranged his men in military order, and placing himself in front of them saluted as the Resident drove up.

"Good afternoon, Nand Chund; I have brought the colonel's nephew over to see you. He has just arrived, and will be ready to start with you to-morrow, but even before eating he wished to see the officer whom his uncle had chosen as his escort."

The Sikh raised his hand to his cap in salute to Percy, and

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said in his native tongue: "All happiness to the nephew of my good lord!"

"Thank you, Nand Chund," Percy replied in the same tongue, "I am sure that you must be an officer in whom my uncle has great trust and confidence or he would not have chosen you for such a mission."

The Sikh looked greatly surprised at being thus answered in his own language.

"I did not know," he said, "that the young sahib had acquired our tongue. My lord told me you would not understand me, and that I should have to explain to you by signs anything that it was necessary for you to know."

"I speak your language but poorly at present, but I hope to do so well before I have been long with you," Percy answered. "My uncle was well, I hope, when you left him?"

"He was well, sahib; though much troubled by the machinations of powerful ones who are his enemies; but his heart was light at the news that you would soon be with him."

After a little further conversation Percy drove off with Mr. Fullarton, after having, at a hint from the latter, handed to the officer twenty rupees, to be laid out in providing a feast for the troopers.

"They will all be as drunk as hogs to-night," Mr. Fullarton said; "the Sikhs are one of the few races in India who drink to excess. They do so from the highest to the lowest. The Old Lion himself used to be drunk every night. However, as they will have a good meal before setting-to at the liquor, you will see that they will all be as fresh and bright in the morning as if they had touched nothing stronger than tea. They have wonderful constitutions, and after a few hours' sleep shake off the effects of a carouse that would make an Englishman ill for three or four days."

After an hour's drive they returned to the Residency. As they entered the house Percy was greeted by his former instructor, who had been out when he first arrived, and who now conducted him to his room.

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"It is far better here than on board the ship, sahib," he said. "There Ram Singh was of no account, even the common sailors pushed and jostled him; here he is Fullarton Sahib's butler, and gives orders to all the servants."

"No doubt you feel it in that way," Percy laughed. "I feel it is better because here is a great cool room and quiet, and a bath ready for me without having to wait for an hour for my turn. It is certainly very much more comfortable, but there are drawbacks too. There was no dust on board ship, no occasion for an armed guard, no fear of disturbance or troubles."

"That is so, sahib; but what would life be worth if sometimes we did not have a change and adventure. As I have told you, I have had my share of it, and now I am well content to be the head servant of the Burra-sahib. But my lord is young, and it is well for him that he should learn to bear himself as a man, and to face danger."

"Well, it may be so, Ram Singh, but just at present it seems to me that I should prefer a peaceful life for a few years."

"The sooner a cockerel learns to use his spurs, the better fighting bird he will turn out," the man said sententiously.

"Yes, that is all very well," Percy replied. "But if he gets badly mauled when he is a cockerel he is likely to shirk fighting afterwards."

After taking his bath and dressing himself in a suit of white linen, Percy went down to dinner. He was pleased to find himself alone with Mr. Fullarton, who in the course of the evening told him much more than he had hitherto known of the state of affairs in the Punjaub.

"Things look very bad," he said. "But it is possible that they may go on for months and even years before the crisis comes. As to this, however, your uncle will be able to tell you more than I can. Mine is, of course, the official view of matters, gleaned from the reports of men in our pay at Lahore and other places in the Punjaub. The reports of such men,

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however, are always open to grave suspicion. As they take bribes from us they may take bribes from others, or may be are in some way interested in deceiving us. Your uncle will doubtless be much better informed. Although he has taken no active part in the plots and conspiracies that have been continually going on ever since the death of Runjeet Singh, he must have been more or less behind the scenes throughout, and will certainly have tried and trusted agents at Lahore.

"At present you are only interested in these matters as far as they concern the safety of your uncle and yourself. Still it is always useful in a country like this to have an insight into what is going on around you. Should there be trouble, remember that the Sikhs value courage, quickness, and decision above all things. I am not supposing for a moment that you are likely to show the white-feather, still you may be involved in danger that would shake the nerves of hardened men. The thing to remember is always to assume an air of courage and coolness. To show weakness would forfeit the respect of your own people, and would in no way alter the fate that would befall you if you fell into the hands of your foes. You know the old saying—'Assume a virtue if you have it not.' That you should be alarmed in such a position would be only natural, but you must if possible conceal the fact, and must nerve yourself to put on as great an air of coolness and indifference as you can muster. Remember there are very few men who do not feel horribly uncomfortable when exposed to great dangers, and that bravery exists not so much in having no feeling of fear as of concealing all expression of it.

"When you hear a man boasting that he has never felt fear, and that he enjoys being under fire, take my word for it he is a liar. In the heat of battle, and especially in the excitement of a cavalry charge, the sensation of fear is lost; but in the preliminary stage I never knew a man yet who, speaking honestly, would not confess that he felt horribly nervous. I will not keep you up any longer, you have had a long journey

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to-day and must be early in bed. You will be called before daybreak, for you may be sure your men will be here before the sun is up, and they will be gratified to find that you are prepared to be off. I need not repeat now what I told you on board the ship, that should you have to fly for your life you will meet with a warm welcome here."

It was still dark when Percy was aroused by Ram Singh.

"It is time to get up, sahib. I have water boiling, and there will be a cup of tea ready for you as soon as you have had your bath. The bheesti is outside with the water-skin."

"All right!" Percy said, jumping out of bed. "Send him in."

Taking a bath consisted of squatting down in the corner of the room, where the floor was made to slope to a hole which carried off the water poured from a skin over the head of the bather. As he dressed, Percy drank a cup of tea and ate a couple of biscuits, while Ram Singh packed up his trunk again. He had just finished when he heard the trampling of horses. He at once went out.

"You are in good time, Nand Chund."

"It would not have done to have kept the sahib waiting," the Sikh said, "though we scarce expected to find him ready for us so soon."

He then ordered the baggage-horses to be brought up, and four strong ponies were led forward. Percy's trunks, which had all been made of a size suited to such transport, were firmly lashed one on each side of each saddle. When this was done a handsome horse was brought forward for Percy. He was about to turn to enter the house to say good-bye to Mr. Fullarton, who had the night before told him he should be up before he started, when the Resident made his appearance.

"I always rise before the sun," he said, "and take a drive or a ride, and am back before it gets too hot for pleasure. Then I have a bath, change of clothes, and am ready for my

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work. Early morning and evening are the only times that life is enjoyable here, and unless one takes exercise then one cannot expect to keep in health. Good-bye, Groves. Tell your uncle to keep me informed of what is going on whenever he gets an opportunity. Take care of yourself, and, whatever comes, keep your head clear and your wits sharpened. Many a life is thrown away from want of prompt decision at a critical moment."

Percy shook hands with his kind friend, and then leapt into the saddle without putting his foot into the stirrup, a trick he had learned at the riding-school. A murmur of approval ran through the men, who muttered to themselves, "He understands a horse; a brisk young fellow, he will do no discredit to our lord." Then he took his place by the side of Nand Chund, waved his hand to Mr. Fullarton, and started. His companion at once put his horse to a hand gallop.

"Surely you do not mean to travel far at this speed?" Percy said. "The pack-animals will not be able to keep up with us."

"They will follow, sahib. You see I have left four men in charge of them."

"Yes, and you have eight men here. Where are the other four, for I counted sixteen yesterday?"

"They started before dark, sahib, with the four other baggage animals. Two of them we shall find when we halt for food, when the sun gets high. They will have pitched a tent in the shade of some tree, and will have the meal cooked in readiness for us. The other two will have gone forward to the point where we shall rest for the night. They have another tent, and will have the evening meal in readiness. So it will be each day. They will travel by night, we by day. At the end of three days we shall have reached a point where care will be a necessity, and will then travel in a body."

"But from whom have we reason to fear danger?" Percy asked.

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"We do not fear danger," the Sikh replied, "but we prepare to meet it. In the first place there are robbers—bands of men who acknowledge no master, such as deserters from the army, fugitives who have excited the enmity of some powerful chief, and criminals who have escaped justice. Such men form bands, rob villages, plunder well-to-do peasants, and waylay, rob, and murder travellers. These are the ordinary foes; all those who journey have to prepare for them, and they are not really dangerous to a well-armed party. Then, again, there are the bands by profession robbers, but who are for the time hired by some powerful or wealthy sirdar who wishes to gratify a private spite. Openly perhaps he would not dare to move, and he therefore remains in the background, and hires bands of robbers to do his business. Such bands are far more formidable than those composed of ordinary marauders, for they are of a strength proportioned to the object they have to accomplish, and may even number hundreds.

"It is these against whom we have to take precautions. My lord your uncle has powerful enemies, and these doubtless employ spies, and are made aware of all that passes in his stronghold. Should they have learned that he was expecting your arrival, they would of course see that your capture would be a valuable one, as they could work on him through you. At any rate the departure of my band is sure to be noticed, and though we travelled by a circuitous route we may probably have been tracked to Loodiana. Besides, they might think that I had some important mission to the British Resident there, and that I may be the bearer of some letter that might enable them to work my master's ruin, and so will spare no pains to wrest it from me.

"For the first three days we do not follow the route leading to my lord's stronghold, consequently there is little fear of an ambush; but during the last five days of the journey, when we are making for the fortress, we shall have to sleep with one eye open, to travel by unfrequented roads, and for the most part

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by night. The colonel would have come himself to meet you, but in the first place his visit to Loodiana would be seized upon by his enemies as a proof that he was leagued with the British, and in the second his presence is required in the castle, where, so long as he is present, there is little fear of any sudden surprise or attack, but were he away some traitor might corrupt a guard or open a gate, and thus let in the troops of an enemy."

"But there is no civil war, Nand Chund. How then could a chief venture to attack my uncle?"

"There is no war," the Sikh repeated, "but the sirdars never hesitate to collect their followers and attack a rival when they have a chance. Even in the days of Runjeet Singh this was so; for although his hand was a heavy one, it was easy to bribe those about him to place the matter in a favourable light, and a handsome present would do the rest. But since the Lion has passed away there has been no power in the land. The government has been feeble, and the great sirdars have done as it pleases them, so there is everywhere rapine and confusion. Those who are strong take from those who are weak; the traders who prospered and grew rich in the old days now fly the land or bury their wealth, and assume the appearance of poverty; the markets are deserted, and towns flourishing under Runjeet are now well-nigh deserted."

"But why have they a special animosity against my uncle?"

"First because he is a European, secondly because he is wealthy, thirdly because those who fly from the extortion or the tyranny of others find a refuge with him, lastly because the district under his charge is flourishing and prosperous while others are impoverished. Merchants elsewhere clamour for the rights that he gives those under his protection, and for taxes as light as those imposed by him in his district."

"But I thought that all Europeans had been deprived of commands," Percy said.

"That is true, but in this country a man only surrenders a

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his death there was no strong hand, and the force which the Old Lion had trained to conquer his foes turned upon the country and became its master. They clamoured for the dismissal of all foreign officers, for increase of pay, for the right to choose their own leaders, and all these things they obtained. There is no longer discipline or order. They oppress the people, they dictate terms to the court, they can make or unmake maharajahs. If at present they are quiet, it is because they have everything they can ask for. Thus then there is no one to control the sirdars, who can do as it pleases them, if only they keep on good terms with the leaders of the army. That would matter but little, but when they wish to attack each other they have but to buy the services of a regiment or two and the thing is done. There lies the danger of our lord.

"Those most hostile to him would not dare to attack with their own followers, but they will sooner or later obtain the assistance of some of the military chiefs; the more so that these are hostile themselves to our lord because he is a foreigner, and at present the cry is, death to the foreigner. It is only because the colonel had so good a name in the army, —for all knew that although nowhere was discipline more strict, he was always just and kindly, that no man was punished without cause, that he had no favourites, that he oppressed none, and used all the influence he possessed with the old maharajah to obtain the pay for his men regularly,—that the military chiefs have so far failed to get the soldiers to consent to any movement against him.

"Besides, the troops are aware that he is a brave leader, and know that his men will die in his defence. Therefore, it would need a higher bribe than usual to induce them to risk their lives in a struggle from which they would gain nothing. It is far easier to revolt for extra pay than to obtain the money by an attack on the colonel's fortress. Thus, for aught we know, it may be years before serious trouble comes. It will depend upon what events occur. At present the soldiers are

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well content to do nothing but eat and drink at the expense of the people. In time they will become restless, and then, who knows, they may attack and plunder the strong places, or they may make war upon the English. They believe that they are invincible. They have an immense number of guns, and they think that because the Sikhs have conquered Cashmere and wrested territory from the Afghans, and hold all the country north of the Sutlej, nothing can withstand them. I know nothing, I am but an ignorant man as to all things outside our country; but I know that the English conquered Scinde although its sirdars and soldiers were many and brave, that they made themselves masters of Afghanistan, and even after their great misfortune there came back and again took Cabul and punished the Afghans; and I say to myself, Why should the Sikhs want to fight this people, who do not interfere with them, and who have always respected the treaties they have made with us?

"The Old Lion, who feared no one and who spread his rule far and wide, always kept friends with the English, although most of his chiefs would have taken advantage of their trouble in Afghanistan to go to war with them. He knew the power of the foreigners, and was always ready to engage white officers to teach his soldiers. He had a wiser head than any of the soldiers who are now ready to raise the cry of war with the English; and I know our lord's opinion is, that should we engage in a struggle with his people we shall assuredly be beaten. But what avail are these things with men puffed up with pride, and with the belief that they are invincible. It is certain that some day or other the army will clamour for war with the English, and who is there to say them nay? Not the boy, Maharajah Dhuleep Singh, nor the Ranee, his mother and guardian. Then we shall see how things will go."

"There is no doubt how things will go," Percy said. "The English will conquer the country, as they have all the other parts of India that have tried their strength with them."

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"They have never fought a country like ours," the officer said a little proudly. "The army is a hundred and fifty thousand strong, and the chiefs must all join, so there will be two hundred thousand at least, and all good fighting men. They are well armed and have vast stores of guns and ammunition; they have been taught to fight in European fashion. We are told that if all the British troops in India came against them they would number scarce fifty thousand."

"That may be," Percy agreed, "but they would win—they always have won, and often against odds quite as great. Besides, when your two hundred thousand men are in the field you would have your whole fighting power, while if it were necessary England could send out army after army as strong as that now in India. How far is it to our first halting-place? The sun is beginning to get very hot."

"It is three hours' ride from Loodiana. Going at an easy pace we shall be there in another hour."

Percy was heartily glad when his companion pointed out a yellow speck under a clump of trees and told him it was the tent. "I brought with us only small tents, such as the soldiers use on their expeditions," he said, "so as to excite the less attention; they are mere shelters from the sun and night air."

"That is all we want, Nand Chund."

"They weigh only a few pounds, sahib, and can be carried by a horseman in addition to his ordinary baggage. We have three or four of them with us, so that we can at any time pitch one should we arrive at a halting-place before the baggage animals."

A quarter of an hour later Percy was lying under the shade of the tent, the sides of which were tied up to permit the air to pass freely through. In a short time tiffin was served, consisting of an excellent pillau of fowl, a dish of meat prepared with savoury condiments, followed by an assortment of delicious fruit. The drink consisted of water cooled in a porous jar, flavoured with the juice of a slightly acid fruit.

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"I would have brought wine," the officer said apologetically, "but my lord your uncle said that you would not be accustomed to it, and that, riding in the sun, it was better you should take only cooling liquors. He has sent, however, a tin filled with an herb that with hot water makes a drink of which he is very fond; it is sent up to him in a chest from Calcutta. He said you would know what to do with it. He calls it tea."

"I am glad of that," Percy said. "There is no difficulty in preparing it. It needs but boiling water poured over it. I will have some this evening. I am very fond of it too, but I am accustomed to drink it with sugar and milk."

"We have sugar," the man said, "but milk will be difficult to obtain. Our master never uses it with his tea."

"I shall get accustomed to it," Percy said, "though I am sure I sha'n't like it so well at first. At what time do we move on again?"

"In about six hours, if it so pleases you. It is ten o'clock now, by four the sun will have lost some of its power."

"How many hours' ride shall we have?"

"Three hours at a canter. We are doing but a short journey to-day, as it is the first. After this we shall never be less than eight hours in the saddle; that is, if it is not too much for you."

"Oh, it is not too much," Percy replied, "but I shall feel rather stiff for the first day or two, after not having ridden for so many months; but I certainly should be glad to travel as much as possible in the evening."

"We can do that, sahib, for we shall have a moon for the next week."

"How may days will it take us altogether?"

"We are now but half a mile from Aliwal, where we shall cross the Sutlej, and shall encamp to-night near Sultanpoor. As I told you, we are to-day travelling as if going to Lahore. To-morrow we shall strike north and shall camp near Adinana-

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gar. The next morning we shall cross the Ravee, and shall then turn to the north-west, pass by Kailapore and Sealkote, cross the Chenab and Jhelum rivers, then ride north some forty miles, where we shall strike the hills and reach our lord's district, which extends some thirty miles either way among the hills. This is the route by which I hope to travel, but if I hear of danger by the way we shall of course strike off to the right or left as may be most convenient. The journeys are from thirty to forty miles a day. Our horses could, of course, go much farther, but we must regulate our speed by that of the baggage animals. We shall be fully a week upon the road. Coming down we did it in five days in order to be in time for your arrival."

"Those eight trunks are not all filled with my things," Percy said with a laugh. "You must not think I travel about with all that luggage. Four of them are mine, the other four are filled with things my uncle wrote to his agents at home to get for him and send out with me. I have no idea what is in them."

"The baggage is nothing if we were travelling in peaceful times," the Sikh said, "but at present the lighter one goes the less likelihood of being meddled with. As it is, you will not know your boxes when we come up with the baggage animals this evening. It would never have done to be travelling through the Punjaub at present with boxes of English make; they would be looted by the first party of soldiers who came across them. I had them measured the evening you came to my tent, and carpenters were at work all night to make boxes that would contain them. Then the boxes would be sewn up in matting before the animals started this morning, and marked with native marks to the address of a merchant in Jummoo. The road for the first four days is the same as if we were going there. Thus if the matting is cut, the native box will be seen inside.

"The four men with them are dismounted, and their horses

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led by those who came on here ahead of us. Jummoo was the safest place that we could choose to address the packages to, for Ghoolab Singh is one of the most powerful of our chiefs; the most powerful perhaps. He is brother of Dhyan Singh, who was Runjeet Singh's chief counsellor, and uncle of Heera Singh, who succeeded his father after his murder by Ajeet Singh. He it is who is your uncle's principal enemy, as it is his son who obtained the appointment of governor of the district. Baggage directed to a merchant in Jummoo is therefore less likely to be interfered with than if intended for another town, as complaints laid before Ghoolab by an influential merchant might cause inquiries to be made and punishment to be dealt out to those who have interfered with his goods in transit. Ghoolab's name is still powerful, even with the soldiers, and his influence among the leaders is quite sufficient to obtain some sort of redress for injuries committed upon those wealthy enough to pay for his protection."

"It seems a curious state of things to anyone coming straight from England," Percy said, "where the law protects everyone, and where the richest and most powerful dare not wrong the poorest peasant."

"That is good," the Sikh said thoughtfully, twirling his moustache, "but in that case how can the rich obtain any advantage from their money? How, indeed, can they become rich?"

"By the rents they obtain from those who cultivate their estates; from mines and from money invested in public funds or companies."

"And what do they find for their retainers to do?"

"They have no retainers; that is, no armed retainers. Of course, they have servants who do the service of their houses and look after the stables and gardens and so on, but they do not carry arms themselves, nor do any of their servants."

"But if they are wronged by a neighbour, what do they do then?"

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"They simply go to the courts of law for redress, just as anyone else would do. The cases are heard and the decisions given by the judges, and the richest man has to obey them just the same as the poorest."

"It sounds very good," the Sikh said thoughtfully, "but it seems to me that your country must be a very bad one for fighting men and those who live by adventure."

"Those who want to fight can enter the army and fight the battles of their country abroad, while those fond of adventure can go to sea or can visit wild countries, or can go out to the colonies, where it is a hard, rough life, but where an active man can acquire wealth."

"Now the sahib had better lie down and get a sleep till it is time to be moving," Nand Chund said rising. "My men are all asleep already, it is getting too hot even to talk."

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CHAPTER III

AT THE CASTLE

FOR four days the journey was pursued without incident. They had brought with them a sufficient store of provisions for the journey, and travelled by by-paths, avoiding villages as much as possible, halting for five or six hours in the middle of the day, and performing the greater portion of the distance after sunset. Just as they had started for their evening ride on the fifth day two horsemen overtook them and reined up as they did so.

"We have missed our path," one said, "can you tell us how far it is to a place where we can find shelter for the night?"

"Ten miles farther you will find yourselves in the main road, a mile from Sealkote."

"If you are bound thither we shall be glad to ride with you for protection," one said. "There are many parties of *budmashes* about, but they will hardly interfere with so strong and respectable a company."

"We travel slowly," Nand Chund said, "and shall not reach Sealkote to-night. When the beasts are tired we shall halt."

"We are in no hurry, and do not care whether we reach the town to-night or to-morrow morning, therefore if you have no

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objection we will share your bivouac. Far better to lose a few hours than to run the risk of having our throats cut."

"As you will," Nand Chund said. "You are very welcome to stay with us, if it so pleases you."

As they rode the strangers chatted with Nand Chund, Percy reining back his horse and riding among the men. After travelling about five miles Nand Chund ordered a halt, the baggage animals were unloaded, a tent pitched, and two of his men began to prepare a meal, while the others looked to the horses. The two strangers also dismounted and spoke for a time together, then one said to the Sikh officer:

"You will think that we do not know our own minds, but we have concluded that as the moon is bright and our horses fairly fresh we will push on to Sealkote."

"It is for you to decide," Nand Chund said. "You are welcome to stay with us, and free to ride on if you prefer it." After a few inquiries about the way the two men mounted and rode on. As soon as the sound of the horses' hoofs became faint Chund spoke to one of his men, who immediately left the party and glided away to the right.

"I have sent him to watch them," Nand Chund said to Percy; "I warrant they will halt before they are gone half a mile. My man will keep in the fields till he gets near them, and will bring us word if they move on."

"What do you suspect them to be?"

"I have no doubt they are enemies. They may have been on our track since we started, or only for the last day's march, but they are watching us no doubt."

"What makes you think so, Nand Chund?"

"Many things. It was unlikely that they would be upon this by-path instead of on the main road. That they should offer to stop with us when they were so well mounted, was singular, also their change of intentions when they found that we were going to halt. Their conversation too was not that of honest men."

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"What did they talk about?"

"They said they were coming from Lahore, and talked of all the doings there."

"What was the harm in that?" Percy asked in surprise.

"Only that it was natural when falling in with a party like ours that they should have asked many questions. Whence we came, and whither were we going? What merchandise we carried? Were we trading on our own account, or were we carrying goods for some trader? How was it that I had such a strong armed party with me? These are the questions honest men would ask, but they spoke only of their own doings and asked no word about ours. I have no doubt whatever that they know who I am and who you are, and that all they really wanted to learn was where we intended to stop. Now they are, I am certain, watching us, or probably one may have ridden off to carry the news and fetch their band, while the other remains to see that we do not move our camp."

"What are you going to do, Nand Chund?"

"I shall wait till Ruzam returns. If they should have ridden straight on we shall move at once; if they both remain on watch, and it seems that they are likely to do so till morning, I shall, when Ruzam returns, go off with four of the men, and making a circuit come down upon them from behind and despatch them. If one goes and the other remains on watch, Ruzam can be trusted to give a good account of him before he returns here."

"But it would be terrible to kill two men who have not actually harmed us," Percy said, shocked at this, his first experience of the customs of the Punjaub.

"They have not done us much harm yet," Nand Chund said grimly; "but they are endeavouring to draw us into an ambush, which will cost us our lives and you your liberty, and perhaps our lord his fortress and his life. Therefore I shall have no more hesitation in killing them than I should in shooting a lurking tiger."

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Three hours passed, and then Ruzam glided into the camp.

"What is your news, Ruzam?"

"They have just left," the man said; "I have been close to them all the time listening to their talk. They have been watching you from a spot half a mile away. They would have come up to hear what you were saying, but neither would stay behind alone, saying what was true enough, that we also might be watching them, and if they separated they might be taken singly. For the same reason neither would stay while the other rode forward. I could have shot one, but I could not have been sure of killing the second before he rode off, and so thought it better to be quiet. At last they concluded that you had really encamped for the night, and that they could safely ride off with the news. It was unfortunate that the moonlight was so bright, for it prevented my crawling up close enough to attack them before they could mount."

"Did you hear what roads are likely to be beset?"

"No, they did not enter into particulars; but they said that they would be sure to have you, as there would be parties on every road. It is the young sahib they are anxious to capture; and the orders were strict that he was to be taken unharmed, and that all the rest of us were to be killed or taken prisoners."

"We will delay no longer," Nand Chund said. "We will leave the tent standing and put some fresh wood on the fire. They can be at Sealkote in an hour, and perhaps will return with a party without delay. Load up the horses and let us be off. Did you hear them say where they have come from, Ruzam?"

"Yes, sahib, there were six of them at Loodiana. They must have got news from someone in the fortress of the object of our journey, they arrived there on the day after you did. The morning we started one man was sent off with the news while the others followed us, not together but singly, so that every road we could take should be followed and our steps

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traced. Each night one man has been despatched with the news of our halting-places."

"You see, sahib," Nand Chund said to Percy, "I was not wrong in saying that our ride would be a dangerous one, and truly so far our enemies have been more than a match for us; now we must see if we cannot double upon them."

As soon as the baggage was packed the party mounted, and to Percy's surprise the officer led the way back along the road by which they had come.

"It is of no use our going forward," he said. "Doubtless they will take some little time in getting the members of the band, who are at Sealkote, together and making a start—we can calculate on at least an hour for that—but that only gives us three hours' start. They will, I hope, make sure that we have continued our journey, and will ride on fast so as to overtake us before daylight. We will go back for a mile and then turn off across the fields by some country track, and we may hope before we have travelled very far to hit upon another leading in the direction we want to go. We shall have the moon for another five or six hours, and after that we will travel by torchlight. We have brought some torches with us. One will be enough to show us any ditches or nullahs when we are proceeding across country, when we are on a road we can do without it."

Two of the men dismounted, and giving their horses to their comrades went on ahead searching for some track across the fields. After half an hour's riding one was found, it was a mere pathway used by peasants, and turning off on it the party followed it in single file.

"Would it not be better to leave the baggage behind us," Percy asked the officer. "Then we could go on at a gallop. It would be a nuisance to lose all the things, but that would be of no odds in comparison to our lives."

"No, sahib, the colonel's boxes may be of importance. And at any rate, it has not come to that yet. If we are

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attacked and have to ride for it, of course we must leave them, for whatever may be in the boxes the colonel sets your life at a much higher value. But I hope now we shall outwit them. The road we were travelling will be known to them, and it is along that they will be gathering, therefore we may well give them the slip. We will cross the Chenab at daylight at Gazerabad, and cross the Jhelum by boats a few miles below Jetalpore. They would be on the watch for us there. Then I think we shall be safe till we get near the colonel's fortress. That of course will be the most dangerous portion of the journey, since they will know by whatever road we travel it is for that point we are making. We will halt in a grove, and I shall send two of the men off on horseback by different roads. We may calculate that one of them at least will reach the fortress, and the colonel will then send out a force sufficient to beat off any attack likely to be made, for, as our strength is known, some thirty or forty men will have been considered ample for the work."

"That seems a very good plan," Percy agreed. "I wonder that they should dare to venture into my uncle's district, where, as you say, the people are all favourable to him."

"There are many valleys and nullahs in which they could conceal themselves; besides, much of the country is uncultivated, and they could lie hid for a fortnight without much fear of being discovered if they took provisions with them and encamped near water."

All night the journey continued. Percy was so sleepy that he several times dozed off in his seat, and woke with a start, finding himself reeling in the saddle. At times, however, he was obliged to pay attention to their course, for it was often a mere track, that even the men walking ahead had difficulty in following. There were deep nullahs to be crossed, and once or twice wide water-courses, dry now, but covered with stones and boulders. These were, as Nand Chund told him, foaming torrents in the wet season, and at such times quite

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impassable. Occasionally the track turned off in a direction quite different to that they were following; and they then directed their course by the stars, a man going ahead with a torch until they came again upon cultivated ground and struck upon a path leading in the right direction.

The two rivers were crossed safely, and they then rode north for two days.

Percy felt thankful indeed when, after pushing on all that last night, Nand Chund, upon arriving at a clump of bushes, decided to halt just as daylight was beginning to break in the east. The two best-mounted men received their instructions, and at once rode on at a brisk pace, while the rest entered the bushes and dismounted, the men with their long knives clearing a space sufficiently large for the party. A fire was lit and food cooked, then four men were placed on watch at the edge of the thicket, and the rest threw themselves down to sleep. It seemed to Percy that he had hardly closed his eyes, but he knew he must have slept for some hours, from the heat of the sun blazing down upon him, when Nand Chund put his hand on his shoulder and said:

"All is well, sahib. A party of horse are approaching, and I doubt not that the colonel is with them."

Percy leapt to his feet and made his way to the edge of the thicket.

"They are our men," Nand Chund said; "they are riding in regular lines." A minute or two later he added, "There is the colonel himself at their head—the officer with the white horse-hair crest to his helmet."

Unless so informed Percy would have had no idea that the tall bearded man in silk attire was an Englishman, until he leapt from his horse beside him, exclaiming heartily, "Well, Percy, my boy, I am glad indeed to see you safe and sound. I have been in a fidget about you for the last week; for I have had news that bands of strange horsemen had been seen on the roads, and there were reports that some of them had

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entered my district, though where they had gone none knew. However, all is well that ends well. I was delighted when two fellows rode into the fortress this morning, within a few minutes of each other, with the news that you had got thus far, and were hiding here till I came out to fetch you. You may imagine we were not long in getting into the saddle. Well, this has been a rough beginning, lad; but your troubles are at an end now. You may be sure that there is no foe near at hand who will venture to try conclusions with four hundred of the best troops in the Punjaub. I hardly fancied that you would have come, Percy. I don't know when I have been so pleased as when I received the letter from Mr. Fullarton at Loodiana, saying that you had come out with him, and would probably be there in a few days."

"I was very glad to come, uncle,—very. It did not take me five minutes to decide about coming after I had read your letter."

"You are something like what I expected you to be, Percy, although not altogether. I fancied that you would be more like what your father was at your age. It seems but yesterday that we were boys together, though it is so many years ago. But I don't see the likeness—I think you are more like what I was. Your father, dear good fellow as he was, always looked as if he had a stiff collar on. Even from a boy he was all for method and order; and no doubt he was right enough, though I hated both. Well, you may as well mount, and you can tell me about your voyage as we ride back. You have done your work well, Nand Chund. I knew that I could safely trust the boy in your charge. Have you been troubled by the way?"

"Only once have we absolutely seen them, sahib;" and the officer gave the colonel a short account of the incident of the pretended travellers.

"So they were at Loodiana the day after you arrived? Then someone must have sent off word of the object of your

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mission as soon as you started. We must find out these traitors, Nand Chund, and make an end of them. However, we will talk that over afterwards."

By this time the horses had been led out from the thicket. The colonel watched Percy critically as he mounted, and nodded approvingly as he sprang into the saddle.

"That is right, lad; I see that you are at home on a horse. We shall make a Sikh of you before long. How have you got on with him, Nand Chund? You must have been quite in a fog, Percy, as to what was going on. Your tongue must have had quite a holiday since you left Loodiana."

"The young sahib speaks Punjaubi very fairly, colonel, and we had no difficulty in understanding each other."

"Speaks Punjaubi!" the colonel repeated. "You must be dreaming, Nand Chund. How can the boy have learned the language. I suppose you mean Hindustani—though how he could have picked that up in an English school is more than I can understand. There was no such thing heard of when I was a boy."

"It is Punjaubi he speaks, colonel, though he told me he could also make himself understood in Hindustani," the officer said in the native language.

"Nand Chund tells me that you can speak Punjaubi, Percy, but in truth I can hardly believe him."

"I don't speak it very well yet, uncle, but I can get on with it. I worked five or six hours a day on the voyage out with a Punjaubi servant of Mr. Fullarton. I thought it would be of great use for me to know something of the language when I arrived. As to the Hindustani, I have had a master at school twice a week for more than a year before I sailed."

"I am delighted, Percy. You must have worked hard indeed to speak as fluently as you do, and it does you tremendous credit. I own I should never have thought of spending my time on board ship learning a language. You do take after your father more than me, after all; it is just the sort of thing

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he would have done. Well, I am pleased, boy,—very pleased. Mr. Fullarton spoke in very favourable terms about you when he wrote. I wondered then how he should know anything about a boy of your age who chanced to be a fellow-passenger, but thought it was merely a bit of civility on his part, and meant nothing. I suppose he heard from his servant that you were working up the language with him, and so came to take an interest in you. Perhaps you sat near him at table?"

"No, uncle; I took my meals with the second and third officers and the midshipmen. The captain offered to put me there; it was so much nicer than going among a lot of grown-up people, and of course it gave me a great deal more time for work. But towards the end of the voyage I came to know most of the passengers. Mr. Fullarton was the first to be kind to me. He used very often to come forward to where I was working with Ram Singh—that was the name of his servant,—and he would explain things about the grammar that I could not understand and Ram Singh could not tell me, for of course he didn't know anything about grammar."

"Well, you can ride, you can talk Punjaubi fairly, and you know something of Hindustani. That is a capital beginning, Percy. Have you any other accomplishments?"

"Nothing that I know of," Percy laughed, "except that on the way out I practised pistol-shooting; and before we got to Calcutta there were not many on board who shot much better. Mr. Fullarton made me practise from the first, and told me that to shoot straight was one of the most valuable accomplishments I could have in India."

"He was perfectly right," the colonel said heartily. "A quick eye and hand with the pistol are invaluable, especially in a country like this, where assassination is the most ordinary way of getting rid of an enemy. My pistol has saved my life several times, and the fact that I am a dead shot has no doubt saved me from many other such attempts. Even the most

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desperate men hesitate at undertaking a job which involves certain death; for even if they planted a dagger between my shoulders before I had time to lay hands on the butt of a pistol, they would be killed to a certainty by my men. You must keep that up, lad, till you can hit an egg swinging at the end of a string nine times out of ten at twelve paces. It is very seldom that you want to use a pistol at a longer range than that. Now, am I at all like what you expected me to be?"

"I don't think I had formed any distinct idea about you, uncle. Father said you were taller than he was and bigger, and of course I expected you to be very sunburnt and brown, and that perhaps you would have a beard, as most of the Sikhs have beards; I thought too, that perhaps you would dress to some extent like a native; but I did not expect to see you altogether like a Sikh."

"We all adopted the native costume to a great extent," the colonel said. "Of course there was always a prejudice against us, and anything like a European dress would have constantly kept it before the minds of our men that we were foreigners. The dress, too, was lighter and more easy than our own in a climate like this, and I don't think anyone could deny for a moment that it is a good deal more picturesque."

The colonel was indeed in the complete garb of a Sikh warrior of rank. On his head he wore a close-fitting steel cap, beautifully inlaid with gold. A slender shaft rose three inches above the top, and in this was inserted a plume of white horse-hair, that fell down over the helmet. From the lower edge of the steel cap fell a curtain of light steel links, covering the forehead down to the eyebrows, and then falling so as to shield the cheeks and the neck behind. In front was a steel bar, inlaid like the helmet. This was now pushed up, but when required it could be lowered down over the nose almost to the chin, so as to afford protection against a sword-stroke from the side. A robe of thickly quilted silk fell from

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the neck to the knees. Round the body were four pieces of armour, of work similar to the helmet. One of these formed a back, and the other the front piece, two smaller plates cut out under the arm connected these together.

Across the back was slung a shield of about eighteen inches in diameter, also of steel inlaid with gold. In action it was held in the left hand, and not upon the arm like those in use in Europe in the middle ages. The arms themselves were protected by steel pieces from the elbow to the wrist, the hands being covered by fine but strong link-mail, kept in place by straps across the palm of the hand. The legs were covered by long tightly-fitting white trousers reaching to the feet. The sash of purple with gold embroidery bristled with pistols and daggers. All the armour, although strong and capable of resisting a sword-cut or a spear-thrust, was very light, the steel being of the finest temper and quality. The costume was an exceedingly picturesque one, and showed off the colonel's powerful figure to advantage.

The officers were very similarly attired. The soldiers were for the most part dressed in chain-armour, with shields larger than those of the officers, but of leather with metal bosses; some wore turbans, others steel caps.

"What do you think of my men, Percy?" the colonel asked, as he reined in his horse and watched the horsemen trot past four abreast.

"They are fine-looking men," Percy said doubtfully, "but they would look a great deal better if they were all dressed alike."

"Ah! that is your European notion, Percy. No doubt to an English eye, accustomed to our cavalry, they do look rather a scratch lot, but dress makes no difference when it comes to fighting. From the first the Maharajah's European officers had to abandon the idea of introducing anything like uniformity in dress. The men clothe themselves; and in addition to the expense it would be to them to get new clothes on

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joining, their feeling of independence would revolt against any dictation on such a subject. It has all along been very difficult to get them to submit to anything like European discipline, but to attempt to introduce uniformity of garb would produce a revolution among them. There is no such thing as uniformity even in the attire of the most highly-favoured troops of the native princes, and the appearance of their escort and retinue is varied in the extreme.

"Richly-dressed nobles ride side by side with men whose armour and trappings have come down to them from many generations. Some carry lances, some matchlocks, some only swords; some are pretty nearly naked to the waist, others are swathed up to the eyes in gaudy-coloured robes. So that a man's arms are serviceable, and he is willing to learn his drill, is obedient to discipline and of good behaviour, I care nothing for his clothes; though as far as I can I discourage any from dressing more showily than the rest, and of course insist that all are fairly dressed in accordance with their notions. You must remember that until the days of Marlborough there were nothing like uniforms in European armies, especially among the cavalry. And even in his time there was very considerable latitude in the matter of dress."

"I suppose I shall have to dress in Sikh fashion, uncle?"

"It will be certainly better, lad. Indoors their dress is easy and flowing, and you will find it comfortable. Your European dress will at once mark you out, and should there be troubles your chances of escape would be vastly greater in Sikh costume, than in anything which would at once point you out as a European. In the course of a year you will speak the language like a native, for, as you may suppose, you will hear nothing else, except when we are alone together. And indeed to me Punjaubi now comes much more naturally than English. If it were not that I have always made a point of getting a box of European books sent up from Calcutta whenever an opportunity offers, I should almost have forgotten

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my native tongue. There, that is the fortress. It looks fairly strong, does it not?"

They had just ascended a brow, and as they did so the stronghold came suddenly into view. It stood on a rocky spur, running out from the hills behind it. This broke suddenly away at the foot of the walls, and seemed to Percy to be almost perpendicular on three sides.

"It looks tremendously strong, uncle. Surely nobody could scale those rocks?"

"No; except by treachery it is impregnable on the sides you see, or at any rate on two of them. On the side facing us it is very steep, indeed almost inaccessible. There is a footpath cut for the most part in the rock. It zigzags up the face, and there is a small gateway, though you can't see it from here, by which the fortress is entered from this side. There are three places that can only be climbed by ladders, and when these are removed nothing, unless provided with wings, could get up. The weakest side is, of course, that which we don't see, where the spur runs up to the hills behind. I have taken every pains to strengthen it there, and have blasted a cut thirty feet deep and as many wide, at the foot of the wall across the shoulder. I have, indeed, very largely added to the strength of the whole place since I was first appointed governor ten years ago. At that time I only resided here occasionally, sometimes moving about in the towns and villages, at others absent, often for months, with my three regiments, on some military expedition. But I foresaw that there would be troubles at Runjeet Singh's death, and quietly and steadily prepared for them.

"I knew the weak points of the place. For when I was first appointed, my predecessor, as is often the case, declined to hand over the fortress to me, and I had to capture it. It was no easy matter then, but I managed one night with a hundred picked men to scale the rock unnoticed, when a storm was raging. Then we threw up a rope with a grapnel to the top

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of the wall, drew up a rope-ladder, and so got a footing; we crept along the walls with scarcely any opposition, for the sentries were cowering under shelter of the parapet, and we reached the gate before the garrison had taken the alarm. The rest was easy; we threw open the gates, fired a couple of guns as a signal, and the main body of my troops, who had moved unperceived to a point a quarter of a mile away, hurried up, and we were speedily masters of the place. I at once resolved that I would do my best to avoid being turned out in so summary a manner. So far I have succeeded. There have been two or three attempts to take the place, but none of them were serious, for I take care that my sentries don't sleep at their posts, and it would need a regular siege by a large force to take it; I mean, of course, by Sikhs. The British have proved over and over again that rock fortresses considered impregnable can be taken without serious difficulty by determined men."

"How large is it, uncle?"

"It is about a quarter of a mile from end to end, and at the widest point it is about two hundred and fifty yards from wall to wall. So there is plenty of room not only for my troops but for a large number of fugitives from the country round. I have grain stored away sufficient for a year, even if the strength of the garrison was doubled. Water was of course the principal difficulty. There were some large tanks when I took possession, but I have greatly added to them. Of course all the water that falls on the roofs in the rainy season is carefully collected and stored; and in addition, I have constructed troughs to a streamlet six miles away in the hills. This brings me down sufficient water for our daily needs without touching the supply in the tanks, which is stringently preserved in case of a siege, for, of course, an enemy would as a first step intercept my supply from the hills.

"The supply in the tanks is certainly ample for many

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months, and would of course be replenished in the wet season, so I have no anxiety on that head. I always keep a considerable amount of salt in the magazines, and on the approach of an enemy, cattle would be driven in, slaughtered, and salted; but in fact meat is a matter of minor necessity here, for although the Sikhs have no objection to eat it, they can do very well without it, and are perfectly content if they can get plenty of the native grain and a proportion of rice."

The road wound up the valley under the foot of the rock on which the fortress stood, and then climbed the hill by zigzags cut at an easy gradient until it reached the level of the shoulder, which it followed down to the castle, a quarter of a mile away. The wall on this side was much higher than that on the other faces. The gate was flanked by two massive stone towers, and two others rose at the angles. A drawbridge was lowered as they approached, and over this they crossed the deep fosse that had been cut by the colonel. Ten cannon were placed on the wall and four on each of the towers.

"It would be a hard nut to crack, Percy," his uncle said, as they rode into the gateway.

"It would indeed, uncle. No wonder you have been left here unmolested."

Passing through the gateway they were faced by another wall, which extended in a semicircle in front of them. Four cannon frowned down on the gateway from embrasures, and the parapet, which was very high, was closely loop-holed for musketry. Turning to the right, they rode between the end of this wall and the main one, and then turning sharply to the left rode into the town. Percy had expected to find only a barrack, but there was a main street with shops on either side, where commodities of all kinds were sold. Behind these were the buildings where the troops were lodged, and in the centre of the town stood a large and handsome stone building, the residence of the governor. Everything was scrupulously clean

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and tidy. Women were drawing water from conduits, children played about unconcernedly, and everything looked so quiet and peaceful that Percy wondered vaguely whether the inhabitants shared to any extent in the doubts that his uncle had expressed to him of his ability to hold the place against such a force as might possibly be brought against it.

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PERCY AND HIS UNCLE ENTER THE ZENANA.

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CHAPTER IV

A RAID FROM THE HILLS

AS the party rode through the street the people looked up in surprise at the young European riding by the side of the governor. It was evident that though the secret of his coming had reached the ear of an enemy, it had been well preserved in the town.

On his alighting at the entrance to the governor's house the colonel said, "Now I will introduce you to my wife. She is most anxious to see you, and is quite delighted at the thought of your coming."

Passing through the great hall, where the colonel received visitors, listened to complaints, and administered justice, they passed through a richly-carved doorway into an inner room. Here was a table and writing-desk, with a large English arm-chair.

"I never could fall into the Eastern custom of sitting tailor-ways and writing on a pad on my knees, but have kept, as you see, to a table and comfortable chair. This we may call my private business sanctum."

Drawing aside a heavy curtain in one corner of the room he entered an ante-chamber, whose walls were covered with elaborate carvings. A cushioned divan ran round it, and there was a thick carpet over the greater part of the marble floor. Another curtain was drawn aside, and they then entered the principal room of the zenana. A lady some forty

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years old was seated on a divan, and rose at once as they came in.

"Welcome back, my lord," she said to the colonel. "I knew that with the force you took with you there was no reason for anxiety, but in spite of that I was anxious. I always am when you go beyond the walls. One can never say what will happen."

"You are a great deal more nervous for me than you are for yourself," the colonel said. "This is my nephew, who has come so many thousand miles to be with us. You can speak to him in your own tongue, for I find, to my astonishment, that he has studied it on board ship during the voyage to such good purpose that he can get along very fairly."

"I am glad of that," she said, holding her hand out to Percy. "I have been wondering how I should talk with you when my lord is not here to interpret, and how I should be able to manage things when you understood nothing that was said. I am very glad you have come. I have no children, and hitherto my lord has not cared to follow our custom and to adopt one. Not that I have been lonely for eight years, for since the death of Runjeet Singh my lord has always dwelt with me, and I have never been alone, except when he made short tours through his district. Now you will be as a son; and even when he is away I shall feel that there is someone whom I can trust entirely to look after the defence of the fortress during his absence."

"I am sure there are numbers of my officers whom you can trust entirely, Mahtab."

"There are many whom we think we can trust, Roland; but who can say with certainty? Have we not seen at Lahore how one after another proved faithless to their benefactors? Who can say of another man that he cannot be bought? Percy is young yet—he is but fifteen, you tell me—but in another three years he will be grown up, and will become your right hand, providing he is not tired of our life here."

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"Oh, there is no fear of that!" Percy broke in. "There will be heaps for me to do. In the first place, I have to learn to speak the language perfectly, then I have to acquire the manners and customs of the people and how to drill troops. I hope, uncle, you will begin soon to teach me to ride as well as the Sikhs do."

"That part is not difficult, Percy. The Sikhs may be called a nation of horsemen, but it would be more true to say that they are a nation of men who ride horses. I admit that they have firm seats, and can sit their horses up and down hill in the roughest country, but as for taking a leap either wide or high they would not be in it with English cavalrymen. What with their peaked-up saddles and their short stirrups and sharp bits they check a horse's speed and spoil his temper, while they themselves have no freedom of action, and could no more stand up in their saddles to deliver a downright blow than they could fly. I had a fair seat on horseback when a boy, and used to ride to hounds, and during the short time I was in the army rode more than one steeple-chase, but I was certainly nothing particular as a horseman. Here I am considered extraordinary. I hope in a short time to make you as good a rider as I am. Nor will you be long in learning your drill, for that is simple enough, being little more than forming from column into line and from line into column.

"A regiment that can do that is considered as fairly competent. I have got my men to charge in fair order, instead of each man going off at a bat as fast as his horse can lay foot to the ground, and with that I am satisfied. It is useless to teach them skirmishing and outpost work, for these seem to come naturally to them. Therefore all the drill that there is to be learnt may be acquired by a sharp fellow in the course of a week. Indeed, recruits generally take their places in the ranks at once, and soon get hustled into knowing what they have got to do.

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"As to the language, I grant that it will take some hard work before you learn to speak like a native, still as you will hear no other tongue you will pick it up naturally and without much regular work except to acquire the niceties of the language. Nand Chund speaks it very correctly, and I will give you into his special charge, and if you talk to him and he corrects you for a couple of hours a day it will be quite enough in the way of work. You may also, if you like, go on with your Hindustani. I have a factotum, a sort of secretary and steward rolled into one, who speaks it fluently; and it would be as well that you should understand it, for although it would be no use to you here, it may be valuable if in the future your lot is cast in other parts of India. You will every day do a little sword exercise. Nand Chund is a good swordsman. When you have learnt all he can teach you I will put you on with some others so that you may learn a trick from one and a trick from another. Your pistol shooting you will of course keep up."

"And when you have nothing better to do," Mahtab said, "I shall always be glad to have you here. Two or three of my maids are wonderful story-tellers, and know among them, I think, all the stories of the history of the Punjaub. I don't say that these are all strictly true, but certainly they are all founded on fact, and as they are all about war, and love, and stratagems, and wonderful exploits, imprisonments, and escapes, they will amuse you, and at the same time be good practice."

"I shall like that very much, aunt. Do you speak any English yourself?"

"A little," Mahtab said. "I can hardly talk it at all, but my lord taught me so that if he wished to write to me, or I to him, we could send letters to each other, and should these fall into others' hands they would not be understood."

"We have found it useful several times," the colonel said. "She has sent me warnings that have enabled me to avoid

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falling into traps; and once, that was before I was governor here, I was able, when engaged on an expedition three hundred miles away, to warn her of a plot to seize her in her house. The messenger I sent was captured, but as there was nothing upon him save a scrap of paper with a few words they did not understand, they tossed it with contempt on the ground. My man was a sharp fellow, and happened to be bare-footed, and presently he managed to shift his position so as to stand on the piece of paper and grasp it with his toes. He was led off a prisoner, but made his escape in the night and brought my *chit* to my wife, who, being warned, assembled some friends of mine, and when the fellows came to carry out their design beat them off handsomely."

"I can see that it must be very useful in that way, uncle, and that it would be just the same as a secret code. Does aunt remain shut up here, or does she go about as ladies do in England?"

"Not quite so freely as that, Percy, but she certainly does not remain shut up. The Sikh women have much more liberty than those in other parts of India, and naturally I have persuaded her to adopt our customs in that respect to a considerable extent. It is true that when she goes out she is always veiled; but that is a concession to the general feeling. In fact her veil is no thicker than that worn by English ladies, certainly no thicker than a widow's, and even that she throws aside when travelling with me outside a town."

"I am at home in this district," the lady said. "My father was a rajah, and was lord of this territory until Runjeet Singh's troops overcame him. He was killed in the defence of his fortress; not this, but another thirty miles away. Your uncle was in command of one of the regiments, and my mother and I were sent to Lahore under his escort. He saw and took a fancy to me. He was so kind and considerate on the journey, that in spite of his being an enemy I fell in love with him. When we arrived in Lahore Runjeet Singh asked

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him what present he should make him for his good services, and when he said he should choose my hand, Runjeet gave it willingly, and with it a *jaghir*—that is," she added, seeing that Percy looked puzzled, "a grant of land—of a considerable portion of my father's territory. It was partly on that account that some years afterwards he was chosen as governor of the district, and I doubt whether, valiant as he is, he would ever have taken this fortress, had it not been that two of my father's old retainers, who had lived here for many years, acted as guides, and showed him a way up the rock they had been in the habit of using as boys."

"And now, wife," the colonel broke in, "we are both of us forgetting that the boy has had nothing to eat this morning, and I only swallowed a mouthful before starting."

"It is all ready, Roland, though I had forgotten all about it."

She clapped her hands, and on an attendant entering gave orders that a meal should be served. Four young women brought in a table, which they placed before her divan. Two English chairs were set beside it, and in a minute or two a variety of dishes were placed on the table.

"I suppose you would rather have a cut off a joint, Percy, than all these messes," the colonel said as they did justice to the meal.

"I don't know, uncle. They are very nice, but I don't think there is so much flavour in the meat as there is in an English joint."

"Certainly there is not, as a rule, in India; but I think that our sheep, which pasture right up among the hills, make as good mutton as we have at home. Still I don't pretend to be a judge; I own that I have quite forgotten the flavour of English meat."

The next six months' life at the fortress was, with one exception, uneventful. Percy worked steadily at Punjaubi, and had come to speak so well that he could pass as a native

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in an ordinary conversation. He had learnt his drill, and now took his place regularly in the ranks of the cavalry regiment as an under officer. An hour a day was devoted to sword exercise and pistol shooting, and for an hour he worked at Hindustani. The hot hours of the day were generally spent in Mahtab's company, talking to her, or listening to the long stories of her attendants. When it became cool he mounted his horse and rode down to the plain with his uncle. An escort always accompanied them to prevent a surprise. There he went through a course of horsemanship, his uncle teaching him to leap over substitutes for hurdles, or across a wide trench dug out for the purpose. After he had taken these obstacles a few times one of the best Sikh horsemen would take him in hand, and he learnt to perform the feats of leaning over and picking up a handkerchief or a javelin from the ground, carrying off a ring hanging from a string, or lifting a tent-peg from the ground at the point of his spear.

One day a mounted man rode in at full speed. He dismounted at the door of the colonel's residence, and the servant took in word that he had brought news of importance and begged to be allowed to see him at once. The man was covered with dust, and had a bandage stained with blood round his head. He made his salaam and then stood waiting to be questioned.

"Where do you come from?" the colonel asked.

"From the village of Jaegwar, your excellency."

"What has happened there?"

"Last night, sahib, the Turgars from the hills came down upon us. They burnt the village and killed many. They have carried off the cattle and the women. Three of the villages have been destroyed. We did our best, but we were taken by surprise, and but few of us escaped. I myself got a deep graze with a bullet as I rode off. I have come to pray for your lordship's protection, and that it will please you to punish these robbers and to recover the women and stolen property."

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"I will do what I can," the colonel said quietly, "and can promise you that I will teach these mountain robbers a lesson. Whether I can recover what they have carried off is another matter." He struck the bell and a servant entered.

"Let this man's horse be put in the stable and well fed. See that he himself has food, and tell the *hakim* to see to his wound. Send an orderly to Nand Chund, Sohan Verdi, and Lal Boghra, and beg them to come here immediately."

"Who are these Turgars, uncle?"

"They are a tribe of hill robbers on the other side of the river. The country nominally belongs to Cashmere, but the government at Sirinagur has no more authority over these hill tribes than it has over the Highlanders of Scotland. Jaegwar lies forty miles to the north, and it will be a troublesome business to punish these beggars, who differ in no respect from the Pathan hill tribes along the whole range of mountains on the northern side of the Indus. It is some years since I had trouble with any of them, for on the last occasion I punished them so heavily they have been quiet ever since. No doubt some reports have reached them of the state of confusion in the Punjaub, and they think to take advantage of it. However, they will find out their mistake. I am just as much bound to protect my district as if I were still a dutiful servant of Lahore; as indeed I am, save in the matter of resigning my governorship, for only ten days since I sent off the annual amount at which the district was taxed when I took charge of it.

"The sum is not a large one; for at that time it was, I should say, the poorest district in the Punjaub, though now, thanks to the fact that life and property are both secure here, the population has increased fourfold, and the revenue tenfold. Still I have no doubt the amount I send is very useful at Lahore, where the treasury is said to be empty; and it enables my agent there to urge that I am faithful to the government, though I refuse to resign my post, where I was placed by

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Runjeet Singh, or to hand over the people he entrusted to my care to men who seek only to extort their last penny from them and to grind them into the dust."

The servant now announced that the three officers were in attendance. They were at once shown in, and the colonel informed them of the news he had received. "These robbers must be punished, and punished heavily," he went on, "for if they were permitted to plunder my people without retaliation we should have half a dozen of these hill clans following their example. The question is, what force can we send without unduly weakening the garrison here? Cavalry would be of little use, but I will take fifty troopers. We may find level bits of country where they can be made useful. Of course I will take the four mountain guns and the ten camel guns, and the 1st Company of Artillery, to whom they belong. But our chief dependence must be on infantry. I should say we could spare four hundred very well; that will leave an ample force against any sudden attack on the place; as to a serious expedition, I should certainly have warning from Lahore in time to return before it could arrive here. I shall myself accompany the expedition, and, Sohan Verdi, you will take the command of the fort in my absence. I know that I need not tell you to be vigilant. Nand Chund will go with me in command of the troop of cavalry, and you, Lal Boghra, of the infantry. Take No. 1 and 2 Companies of each of the regiments. As Rundoop Koor commands the Camel Battery, he will of course be in charge of the guns. Let the troops cook a meal at once and parade in an hour."

The officers saluted, and were about to retire when he added, "We will take no tents with us, or baggage of any kind, but I will see that there is an ample supply of grain and flour. Anything else that we may require we must take from the enemy."

"You will let me go with you, I hope, uncle?" Percy exclaimed as soon as the officers had left the room.

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"Certainly, Percy, it will be a good introduction for you to mountain warfare."

"Thank you, uncle; it will be a splendid change, and I shall enjoy it immensely. Can these Turgar fellows fight?"

"They can fight in their way well enough, but they are no good against disciplined troops."

"What is their way, uncle?"

"Their villages are all fortified, for when they are not engaged in plundering the villages of the plains they are constantly having petty wars with each other. Otherwise their only idea of fighting is to make sudden rushes down upon a column or a convoy struggling along some defile or up some breakneck path. These rushes are formidable enough against unsteady troops, but disciplined men who keep their heads and show a bold front can beat them off again easily enough. I need not say that one has to be careful on these expeditions, for a man who straggled away from the main body, under the belief that there was no enemy near, would be cut off to a certainty; so you will be pleased to remember that whatever happens you are to keep near me. Now I will go and give orders about the bullock carts and the provisions; there is no time to be lost. You had better go in and see Mahtab, and tell her what has happened. Ask her to get us something to eat before we start, and to see that provisions for our private consumption are put into the carts."

Percy was rather nervous at the mission, as he was afraid that his aunt would be alarmed at the thought of the colonel going into danger. She, however, took the news very coolly.

"We had many such expeditions when we first came here," she said. "Of course there is danger, but it is very slight; and the colonel has so often been in great danger and has come out unharmed, that I have ceased to worry about small things. The cannon generally do the work, and the tribesmen run before the infantry can attack them. The real danger is from surprises, and your uncle has had far too much experi-

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ence to be caught unawares. But you must be careful, Percy, not to wander away, or to get excited and dash on ahead; you must keep near to him."

"So he has ordered me, aunt, and I shall be very careful."

"I hope you will," she said seriously. "There is no glory to be gained in these hill fights, but foolhardiness may very well cost anyone his life. These tribesmen have plenty of courage, and are quite reckless of their lives if they can but cut down an enemy; they are as patient and watchful as wild beasts in pursuit of prey."

The preparations were soon made; the troops who were to take part in the expedition fell in at the appointed time, and the colonel, after making a careful inspection of them, placed himself at their head and led the way through the gate. Percy rode beside him, and immediately behind came the troop of cavalry; the artillery followed. The little guns were carried on the backs of the camels, the four mountain guns each drawn by as many animals. The infantry followed the battery, twelve bullock carts bringing up the rear.

"I am going to send the horse straight on, Percy. It is pretty certain the hillmen will have recrossed the river and be up in their villages before this; their tactics are always to strike a blow, collect their plunder, and be off again to the hills long before a force can be collected to oppose them. Still the cavalry will give the peasants confidence, and they will return to their homes when they hear that a force, however small, has arrived for their protection. They will be there by midnight, and will be able to gather news from the peasantry as to the villages these robbers came from, and inquire about roads and guides, so that when we get there to-morrow night no time need be lost about those matters. It is an important thing with these hill tribesmen to strike back as quickly as possible. I found when I first came here that nothing impressed them so much as the promptitude with which they were chased and punished. It was so different to

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the dawdling way in which native operations are conducted, that it took them completely by surprise. You know the old saying—he who gives quickly gives twice, and it is just as true of a blow as it is of money."

Half the journey was accomplished that day. The night was cold enough to render blazing fires most enjoyable, and Percy when he lay down felt the comfort of the long Sikh coat made of sheep-skin with the wool inside, and the outside decorated with patterns worked in coloured threads. The following evening they reached Jaegwar, and the colonel took up his quarters in the principal house in the village, to which some of the inhabitants were now returning. Nand Chund made his report as they were eating their supper.

"There were about five hundred of them came down, colonel, in seven different parties. As far as I can make out about three hundred of them were Turgars, and the others were Nagas and Kotahs. They killed about eighty men and carried off seventy or eighty women, and four or five hundred head of cattle. They burned four villages, and set on fire two or three houses here. Fortunately there was no wind, and the flames did not spread."

"Now as to the road, Nand Chund."

"The track, for they say it is nothing more up to the Turgar villages, crosses the river about two miles north of this place. There are five villages, all lying within a circle of about three miles. The nearest of them is six miles beyond the river. The fighting force is put as from twelve to fifteen hundred, but of course if the two other tribes aid them it would more than double that. There are some steep places on the road, and one very deep and narrow valley, quite a ravine I should say, to be passed through. If they get to know of our coming that is no doubt the place where they will fight. If we get through there before they can gather to oppose us they will, of course, make their stand at their villages, which are all high up on the hills."

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"The men have made two marches of twenty miles each," the colonel said; "it would be as well that they should have a day's rest before we advance, for it will be a heavy day's work. Besides, I would rather that the Turgars should hold the ravine or any other strong points they may have. Were we to march through these before they were ready to oppose us, they would say afterwards that we could never have got through had they known we were coming, but if we show them that they can no longer rely upon being able to arrest the advance of a column, it may be a long time before they venture upon another raid like this. However strong the place is, you may be sure we shall be able to turn them out of it. That rocket tube will astonish them. Besides, however strong the valley is we ought to be able to outflank it. Another advantage of a fight there is, that if we turn them out with a good deal of loss we shall carry the villages more easily, for it will shake their courage if they find they are unable to hold the place they had relied on as the main defence of their villages."

Accordingly the force rested the next day, and on the morning following started before it was light, and reached the ford across the river just as day was breaking.

"I have no doubt they are prepared for us," the colonel said, as he watched the troops and guns making their passage. "They would hardly have expected that a force would make its appearance here so soon, but they are sure to have placed scouts on the hills to give them warning."

"It is a wild-looking country," Percy said, as the increasing light enabled them to see hill rising behind hill.

"Yes. A battery or two of horse artillery, knowing the country well and taking post on the hills, would make it very hot for us. Fortunately there is no fear of anything of that sort. The wall pieces are all they have, besides muskets and matchlocks. The road seems to go straight up the hill and over the crest," he went on, after examining the ground with his field-glasses.

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"Ah! I can make out a group of three or four men, just to the left of that bush there. Do you see the smoke?—they have just lighted a fire. That is a signal, I have no doubt; as you see, the smoke is getting thicker and thicker."

Three or four minutes later two other columns of smoke were seen rising, one two or three miles to the right, the other as much to the left.

"Take a dozen of your troopers, Nand Chund, and skirmish up the hill; a company of infantry shall follow you. If you find only a handful of men there, drive them off; if they are in force, get near enough to draw their fire and find out their strength, and then fall back again upon the supporting company. We shall not be far behind. But it is hardly likely that you will be pressed, they will not be able to gather to offer any serious opposition until we get some miles further."

The little party of cavalry rode on, a company of infantry following close behind them. Colonel Groves waited until he saw the rest of the force cross the ford, and then set forward again. He had handed his glasses to Percy, who sat watching the advanced party as it ascended the hill. The horsemen had scattered along the hillside, and were several hundred yards ahead of the infantry.

"They are firing, uncle," he exclaimed presently. "I don't see the smoke, but I heard the sound of shots. There! I saw a puff of smoke just now."

"How many guns did you hear, Percy?"

"Five or six; I should say that is about all there are. I saw three standing up, and there may have been two or three more engaged in making the fire."

"It is hardly likely that they would have more than five or six men on watch. Even if they knew yesterday that we had come to the village, they would hardly keep more than a lookout here."

This was evidently the case, as the horsemen were seen to pass over the crest, and one of them soon reappeared and galloped down the hill.

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"Nand Chund reports, Colonel," he said when he arrived at the head of the column, "there were but four men, they fired a few shots at us. When we reached the top of the hill they were half-way down the other side. There is a good deal of bush and some wood down there. Nand Chund says that he will not advance further till the company in support joins him, as there might be a force hidden there."

"Quite right. Tell him that at any rate he is not to mount the next hill until we come up."

When the force arrived at the crest they saw Nand Chund and the footmen drawn up beyond the bush in the hollow.

"It is a good deal steeper beyond, uncle."

"Yes, a great deal steeper. There will be some little difficulty in getting our guns up; and if I mistake not, there is a body of men on the opposite crest."

A trooper was sent on to Nand Chund telling him to advance no farther until the whole force came up. When the force was united the colonel said: "This hill is too steep for you to act with effect, Nand Chund. Ride along the valley with the troop for a mile or so, climb the hillside, and then come back along the crest till within a quarter of a mile of them, and as soon as you see them begin to fall back before our advance, charge and take them in flank if they are not too strong, and chase them down the other side, but do not pursue too far."

The cavalry at once rode off. Two companies of infantry were then thrown forward in skirmishing order, the rest of the force followed two or three hundred yards behind them. When the skirmishers were half-way up the hill the enemy opened fire. Orders had been given to them to pay no attention to this, but to keep their muskets slung behind them, and to press forward. When they arrived within a hundred yards of the enemy they were to lie down and return their fire until the column came up. The order was carried out; but just as the colonel reached their line he saw Nand Chund's horse-

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men coming along the top at full speed. "Forward, men, at the double!" he shouted; and the troops, leaping to their feet, climbed rapidly up the hill. But it was over before they reached the top. The hillmen had not awaited the arrival of the cavalry, but had fled down the hill behind, the sowars pursuing them and cutting down several before they reached some very broken ground at its foot; from this they opened a sharp fire, and the cavalry at once retired up the hill again. The track now, instead of ascending the next rise, followed the valley down.

"You see," the colonel said when he reached the crest, "the valley makes a sharp bend half a mile down. No doubt that defile lies up there. You can see that the next hill is very much more lofty and rugged-looking. Well, Nand Chund, what force was there?"

"Somewhere about a hundred, colonel. I should not have charged them, but I saw they were beginning to make off."

"They are gathering like a snowball," the colonel remarked. "I expect that when we reach the defile we shall find their whole force there."

For another two miles they followed the valley, which grew narrower as they advanced, the sides being more and more precipitous. Parties of men had been seen moving about higher up, and presently a scattering fire was opened. The colonel ordered two parties, each a hundred strong, to make their way up the hill on either side and then to advance along it, keeping abreast of the column.

"If the opposition is serious," he said, "I will aid you with the guns."

In a short time the hillsides were dotted with puffs of smoke. Little could be seen of the enemy, who lay behind rocks, occasionally running back and then dropping again behind fresh shelter as the troops advanced. The fire on both sides momentarily became hotter. The four mountain guns now opened fire, throwing shell high up on the hillside.

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The natives could be seen bolting from their shelters, and the two flanking companies, which had been almost brought to a standstill, resumed their advance.

The valley narrowed more and more until it was but some ten or twelve yards wide at the bottom. The sides were covered with great boulders and jagged rocks, with bush growing up between them; from these a fierce fire was opened. The four mountain guns had been left behind at the spot where they could still assist the flanking companies; but the camel guns, guarded by the cavalry, advanced along the bottom, keeping up a rapid fire against the invisible foe. The infantry were directed to clear the rocks on either side. The fire was very brisk, and the reports being echoed and re-echoed from the hills, the sound seemed continuous.

It was evident that the enemy were far superior in number, and progress was very slow until the two flanking companies appeared high up on the hills, and advancing along them opened fire on the enemy below, who, although hidden from those in front of them, could be seen from above. The effect was immediate. The fire slackened, and the force pushed forward as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit, and in a quarter of an hour issued out at the other end of the ravine. Numbers of men could be seen ascending a hill in front of them, and on this, as the colonel had learnt before starting, the first of their villages was situated. There was a halt until the troops were again assembled and the mountain guns came up. The advance was then renewed.

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CHAPTER V

RETRIBUTION

UPON resuming his march the colonel divided the infantry into three bodies of equal strength. The first, which was accompanied by the guns, was to move by the path straight up the hill; the others, between whom the cavalry force was divided, were to ascend it a few hundred yards to the right and left of the central column, so as to flank the village on either side. For a time the enemy kept up a fire from the brow of the hill, but this died away as the troops, pressing rapidly forward, neared them, and in a short time the top of the hill was gained. The village stood a quarter of a mile away. It was surrounded by a high wall, above which could be seen the tower of the chief's fortalice.

"These little four-pounders will not be of much good in breaching that wall," the colonel said. "We must attack by the gate and batter that down. Percy, do you ride round to the column on the left, and see if there is any gate on that side. Do you, Nand Chund, do the same on the right. If there are gates there I will send some of the camel guns to try and beat them down. If they can't do it the gates must be blown in, there are men with powder-bags in each column. Let the cavalry work round behind the village, and see what the ground is like there. It looked to me as if it broke away on that side. If there are no gates in the side walls, let the

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right column move round to assist the cavalry to cut off the enemy's retreat. Let the infantry of the left column join us here for the attack on this gate. The fellows are evidently in strong force."

Indeed the wall was fringed with smoke, and the bullets were pattering round thick and fast. The men, however, had at once been placed in shelter behind a stone wall, and remained inactive for half an hour. When Percy and Nand Chund rode back within a minute or two of each other, their reports were similar. There were no gates in the side walls, while behind the wall on the other side there was a deep precipitous ravine, with but a few feet between its upper edge and the wall. The colonel gave the order that fifty of the infantry should remain on either side to fire down into the ravine as the enemy retired across it, and the rest should join him. The cavalry were to take post just out of fire on both flanks, to cut off any fugitives who might drop from the walls, and endeavour to escape from the top of the hill.

The time had not been lost, for the four mountain guns had kept up a steady fire at the gates in front, which were, when the two bodies of infantry came up, already torn and splintered, one of them being evidently thrown off its hinges. Then two of the companies advanced through the inclosures in skirmishing order, and when within fifty yards of the wall opened fire at its defenders, aided by the whole of the guns. After waiting for five minutes to allow the fire to have its effect, the colonel gave the word and the column ran forward towards the gate. A heavy fire was opened through the broken planks.

"Don't wait to return it," the colonel, who was riding at the head of column, shouted. "Throw yourselves against the gate, your weight will burst it down."

With a cheer the men rushed on, and as they reached the gate there was a crash. The shattered gate fell, and they poured into the village.

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The resistance was slight, for as soon as the column began to advance the fire from the wall had suddenly ceased. Ten or twelve men were shot or bayoneted at the gates, but as the troops spread through the village they met with no more antagonists. The doors of the houses stood open, but the hearths were cold, and the women and children had evidently been sent away early in the morning. As soon as he entered the gate and saw that resistance was over, the colonel shouted to the men behind to follow him, and rode straight through the village for the gate behind. He was, however, only in time to see the last of a crowd of men hurrying out through it; but an outbreak of firing both to the right and left showed that the parties posted there were harassing the fugitives in their retreat.

As soon as the men behind him came up he led them through the gate, bade them spread along the edge of the ravine and to open fire on the tribesmen, parties of whom were already beginning to mount the opposite side of the ravine. The fire was maintained with considerable effect until all were out of range, then the various detachments were called in by the sound of the bugle, and the troops ordered to cook a meal. While this was being done a thorough search was made through the village. In the chief's tower a considerable quantity of gunpowder was found stored, and as soon as the troops had finished their dinner fire was applied to every house in the village, and a length of fuse thrust into the powder. As they marched out through the gates by which the enemy had retreated, there was a heavy explosion, and the tower fell in ruins.

They then moved towards the next village, in which direction the enemy had retreated. They crossed the ravine, and then kept along a valley to the foot of the hill on which the village stood. The ground was covered with scrub and bush, and they were half-way up when there was a tremendous yell, and on either side a great number of half-naked figures sprang

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up, poured in a volley of matchlock balls, arrows, and spears, and then flung themselves upon the column.

Against younger troops the sudden assault might have been successful, but Colonel Groves' men were all old soldiers, and though taken by surprise faced both ways without confusion, and poured withering volleys into the enemy. Many fell, but the rest came on, and for a minute or two there was a fierce fight—bayonet against sword or spear; but the tribesmen in vain attempted to break the lines, and soon, in obedience to a shout from their leader, sprang away and threw themselves down among the bushes, vanishing almost as suddenly as they had appeared. The troops now assumed the offensive, and pouring volleys into the bushes as they advanced, swept through them, bayoneting all they found, until the Turgars again leapt to their feet and fled. The march was now resumed up the hill, and the village, which was found deserted, was taken possession of. Here the colonel determined to halt for the night. Sentries were placed at the gates and on the walls, and the troops fell out and scattered among the houses.

"I fancy that there will be no more fighting," Colonel Groves said to his nephew, who had ridden close beside him throughout the day. "They have had a tremendous lesson. I counted over fifty bodies as I crossed the ravine, and at least three times that number must have fallen in the attack upon us. We have destroyed one of their villages, and this is in our hands, and they must see that, unless they submit, the others will share the same fate. They have done their utmost and failed. I think they have had enough of it."

Late in the afternoon, indeed, a mounted man, accompanied by two foot-men, one of whom carried a white flag, was seen approaching the walls. Colonel Groves ordered them to be admitted, and they were brought before him.

"We don't want to fight any more," the chief said.

"I daresay not," the colonel replied, "but we are perfectly

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ready to go on fighting. You began it, and we have no intention of stopping yet."

"What conditions will you give?" the chief asked.

"The only conditions I will grant are these—the return of all the captives taken away, of every head of cattle, and of all articles stolen; the payment of a fine of five hundred cattle; and the delivery into my hands of the eldest sons of your twelve principal chiefs to hold as hostages for your good behaviour in the future. If these conditions are not accepted I shall burn your villages, and destroy your plantations and crops."

"We have not got all the prisoners," the chief said; "there were others with us who have taken their share."

"I shall reckon with them afterwards. I am only asking you to give up the prisoners and spoil you have in your hands. I shall find, when I have punished the other two tribes that were engaged with you, what captives they have, and if any are missing I shall return here and burn your villages over your heads."

"We cannot pay five hundred cattle."

"Oh, yes, you can! I know pretty well how many you have, and five hundred will not leave you altogether without some. I will not abate one from my demand, but I will consent to take the value of any deficiency in gold and silver ornaments, taken at their weight in metal. Those are my first conditions and my last, and you can carry them back to your chief."

"The three principal chiefs are killed," the man said, "but I will take your message back to my tribe."

"You had best return with an answer to-night, for at daybreak we shall fire this place and advance against the other villages."

"Will they agree, do you think?" Percy asked when the chief retired.

"They will agree," the colonel replied confidently. "The

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threat of destroying their plantations will induce them to yield. Their houses they can soon build up again, but, with the greater part of their cattle gone, the destruction of their plantations would mean starvation to all."

The colonel was not mistaken. There was no reply that night, but at daybreak on the following morning a procession was seen approaching the village. It consisted of more than half of the women who had been carried off, four hundred cattle from the plains, and five hundred of the little hill cattle. There were also twelve lads, a few of whom were almost men, while others were but four or five years old. Ambassadors soon arrived from the Naga and Kotah tribes. These had, as the colonel learnt from a captured native, sent contingents who had taken part in the fight on the previous day. Similar conditions to those imposed on the Turgars were demanded, except that the fine for each tribe was fixed at three hundred head of cattle only, the colonel knowing that they were poorer in this respect than the Turgars.

For two days messengers went and came, and it was only when at last the troops were upon the point of starting against them that they yielded, and on the following morning the captives, hostages, and cattle arrived at the village. The chiefs of all three tribes were ordered to attend that afternoon. The colonel addressed them, and severely admonished them as to their behaviour in the future. "If again," he said, "there is any outrage whatever upon your peaceable neighbours on the other side of the river, I warn you that no mercy will be shown you. Your villages will be destroyed, your plantations rooted up, your crops burned, and your country made desert from end to end. I punished your neighbours ten years ago, and I have punished you now. The next time I have to bring a force across the river I will root you out altogether."

The chiefs all gave the most solemn assurances that they would in future abstain from forays across the river, and in

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order to mingle clemency with justice, and to disembarrass himself of the trouble of looking after a number of prisoners, he restored to each of the tribes eight out of the twelve hostages that had been handed over, retaining only the sons of four leading chiefs. Upon the following morning the expedition marched back, two companies of the infantry and the guns forming the column, while the cavalry and the rest of the infantry looked after the great herd of cattle that had been collected, and escorted the rescued women, many of whom were completely prostrated by what they had gone through. The total loss of the column was but fifteen killed and fifty-three wounded.

"I am glad to be back again," the colonel said as they rode across the river. "It has been a very successful little expedition, and the lesson has been so severe that I do not think we are likely to have any more frontier trouble for some time. The other tribesmen will all be awed at the punishment we have inflicted."

"What will you do with the hostages, uncle?"

"I shall keep them for three or four months, and then send them back with a message to the effect that, feeling the tribes have been sufficiently punished, and being assured that they can now be relied upon to abstain from giving trouble, I am willing to trust them, and will therefore no longer deprive the chiefs of their children. Such clemency will aid the effect of the sharp lesson we have administered."

The joy of the villagers at the return of their wives, daughters, and cattle was unbounded, and blessings were showered on the governor, who had shown himself so zealous and powerful in protecting those under his rule.

Another two days' journey took them to the fortress, where their arrival with the eleven hundred captured cattle was hailed with lively satisfaction by the garrison.

Things returned to their normal state. Percy studied, rode, and drilled during the day, and spent his evenings in the

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zenana with his uncle and aunt, and from the former received a detailed account of the course of Sikh politics since the death of Runjeet Singh.

Up to the time of the death of the maharajah in 1839 the most friendly relations had been maintained between the Punjaub and the British. He was succeeded by his son, Khurruk Singh. He was a weak man, who possessed neither the firmness nor ambition of his father, and the real power was in the hands of Nonehal Singh, his son. He was a fiery young man, and shared to the full the hostility felt toward the British by most of the Sikh chiefs. His father died, and there was a general idea that the young rajah would speedily declare war against the English. He was, however, killed on his return from his father's funeral, by the elephant on which he was riding running against a beam supporting some stonework, which fell and killed both Nonehal and another prince who was riding with him.

There was little doubt that the affair was not an accident, but that the *mahoot* had been bribed by the adherents of Shere Singh, a reputed son of Runjeet Singh, who had many powerful supporters in his claim to the throne. The chief of these was Dhyan Singh, the prime minister of Runjeet, who had been removed from his office by Khurruk Singh, and who, with his two brothers, had been all-powerful during the later years of the Lion. A number of the chiefs, however, were by no means disposed to again submit to what was practically the rule of Dhyan and his brothers. Shere Singh had the advantage that, like Nonehal, he was very popular with the army, and for the moment he obtained possession of Lahore. He was, however, expelled by the mother of the late Nonehal, an able and ambitious woman. She, however, made the mistake of refusing Dhyan any employment, and the ex-vizier soon organized a party sufficiently strong to recall Shere Singh.

The ranee ordered the gates to be shut, but General Ventura ordered the soldiers to open them, and the ranee fled. As

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soon as Shere Singh was seated on the throne, he handed over the entire management of business to Dhyan Singh, and gave himself up to hunting, and drinking, and other pleasures. Dhyan was greatly offended at the conduct of the prince, who owed his elevation to the throne to him, and endeavoured to persuade him to act in a manner more worthy of his position, assuring him that the Sikhs would never submit to be governed by a prince who neglected all public affairs, and was habitually drunk. The prince was offended at the remonstrances of his minister. His boon companions fanned the flame of anger, and persuaded him while in a fit of drunkenness to sign an order for the execution of Dhyan Singh. The latter, however, was kept well informed by his agents in the maharajah's household of what was going on, and saw that his only hope of safety was in striking the first blow. He therefore gave orders to Ajeet Singh that the rajah should be killed. The officer was more rapid than the agents of Shere Singh, and the latter was shot immediately, and his son was at the same time murdered. Ajeet, however, either from disappointment at not receiving from Dhyan a reward equal to his expectations, or from some other cause, shot him in the back, and he fell dead a few hours after the murder of the maharajah.

Heera Singh, Dhyan's son, a great favourite with the troops, knew that the death of the maharajah had been determined upon by his father, and had left the city and gone to the camp of General Avitabile, another of the European officers of the Punjaub army. When the messenger arrived with the news that his father too was dead, he was in the act of haranguing the troops and preparing them for the news of the death of Shere Singh. Heera ascended to the flat roof of Avitabile's house, and sent messages to all the sirdars who happened to be in Lahore, begging them to come to him. On their arrival he unbuckled his sword and handed it to them, saying, "I am left alone and fatherless, and I throw myself on your protection. Either kill me or give me your support."

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The sirdars at once declared that they would follow him. Heera then harangued the soldiers, and offered them an increase of three rupees a month in their pay if they would declare for him. Ventura and Avitabile both espoused his cause, and with their troops marched against Lahore, where Ajeet Singh had caused Dhuleep Singh, a child of four years old, and the only lineal descendant of Runjeet left alive, to be proclaimed maharajah, and himself vizier. It was night when Heera arrived in Lahore. His guns blew open the Delhi gate of the town, and then a desperate battle commenced in the streets. Both sides had artillery, and the battle raged until the morning with terrible slaughter. Heera's troops were victorious; the fort was stormed, and Ajeet killed by a soldier as he tried to escape. Every man in the fort was killed and the city given up to plunder, and horrible cruelties perpetrated upon the connections and friends of Ajeet Singh.

Heera had no intention of grasping the dangerous position of maharajah, and as soon as the fighting was over he went and saluted the child Dhuleep as maharajah, assuming himself the position of prime minister his father had occupied. This was in 1843. At that time the British were occupied in conquering Gwalior, and the signal overthrow of the Mahrattas on the fields of Maharajaypoor and Punniar served for the moment to abate the eagerness of the army for a war against them. They were, however, as usual, mutinous and clamorous for still further increase in their pay, and the treasury at Lahore being empty, Heera Singh had the greatest difficulty in complying with their demands, and in order to do so he caused an uncle, who like Dhyan and Ghoolab had amassed enormous possessions, to be murdered, and used his wealth as a means of quieting the troops. These, however, soon advanced fresh demands, and Heera being unable to satisfy them was murdered.

At his death Dhuleep Singh's mother appointed her brother Juwaheer as vizier. The choice was not pleasing to the sol-

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diers, who invaded the palace and murdered him before the eyes of his sister and her child. Ghoolab Singh, the last survivor of the three great brothers, was invited to take the office of vizier, but he wisely declined the dangerous post. His possessions were vast, and his power almost equal to that of the ruler of the Punjaub. He was virtually supreme in all the northern territories that had been conquered in the time of Runjeet, and from his residence at Jummoo ruled over all Cashmere, together with the country stretching up to the borders of Afghanistan.

He it was who was the mover in the intrigues against Colonel Groves. One of the first demands made by the soldiers upon the accession of Heera Singh to power had been the immediate dismissal of all the foreign officers in his service, and greatly against his inclination, for he knew that these men alone had the power of keeping the mutinous soldiery in any degree of order, he had been forced to accede to it. Most of them had left the country at once, knowing that murder would speedily follow dismissal; but Colonel Groves having, since the death of Runjeet, successfully defeated all attempts to turn him out of his governorship and fortress, had determined to await the end, being sure that ere long the hatred of the Sikhs against the British would bring about a war that might entirely change the position.

It was a few months after Percy's arrival that Ghoolab refused to accept the post of vizier.

"That is good news, uncle, is it not?" he asked, when a messenger arrived bearing a letter containing the news, from a member of the court at Lahore who was in the colonel's pay and interest.

"I don't know, Percy, I rather think it would have been better if he had accepted the post. In the first place he would have had his hands so full that he would not have had time to give much attention to my affairs. Then if he had sent strong bodies of troops to attack this place, as likely

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as not they would have said that they were being sacrificed in his interest, and it would have been an occasion for a fresh mutiny. And lastly, the viziership has of late been fatal to its holders, and Ghoolab might have formed no exception, and I might have been freed from my most dangerous enemy. Now he will be able to carry on his intrigues from Jummoo without interruption. Since the death of Runjeet his hands have been tied to a certain extent, first by his brother Dhyan, and then by Heera being prime minister, and he had to take care that no movement of his endangered their popularity or position. Now that his two brothers and his nephew have gone, he need consult only what he thinks is his own interest, and it is distinctly his interest that his son should be governor of this district, which is flourishing and capable of being squeezed to a large extent, and which lies so close to his own territories."

"Is it only on account of this that he is your enemy, uncle?"

"No, the matter is of much longer standing. It began at one of the battles against the Afghans. The sirdars and their troops commanded by Ghoolab did very badly, and had it not been for the courage and obstinacy of my three regiments and those of Portalis we should have been defeated. Runjeet always managed to keep himself thoroughly well acquainted with what was going on, and Ghoolab was for a time in considerable disgrace, while very handsome presents were made to Portalis and myself, and three months' pay given to each of our officers and soldiers. I warned Portalis that Ghoolab would not forgive us, but he was a little headstrong and scoffed at the danger. Three months after, he fell by the knife of an assassin. He was a good comrade and friend of mine, and was indeed the only man among the European officers I really cared for, and I did not hesitate to denounce Ghoolab to Runjeet in open durbar as the author of his assassination. Of course I could not prove it, but the maharajah was certainly of my opinion, and Ghoolab was ordered to go

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and live on his estates, and was for some months in great disgrace.

"All my acquaintances warned me that I was throwing away my life by thus venturing to denounce one of the all-powerful trio of brothers. But, as you see, I have lived through it thus far. Still, it has only been by the most unceasing caution and wariness. I have had at least a dozen narrow escapes from assassination, and during the lifetime of Runjeet Singh the intrigues against me were incessant; but the Old Lion knew when he was well served, and stuck to me staunchly. He was, in the last year of his life, compelled by the pressure brought upon him to sign my dismissal, but he sent me a private note by the hands of a trusty messenger. It contained only a few words. '*I am obliged to yield, but there is no reason why you should do so. The sword should always protect the head.*' I was aware of what was going on at court, and had already resolved to hold my governorship till the last. But I was very glad to get the old man's note; he had been a kind and good master to me, and I should not have liked to take action that might appear rebellion against him. What others said or thought I did not care. Now I had the Old Lion's approval, my conscience was perfectly easy.

"Ghoolab himself commanded the force that came to put his son in possession, and the fact that he had to retire after losing some hundreds of men, without accomplishing his object, did not, as you may suppose, in any way diminish his feeling of unfriendliness towards me. I get constant and accurate intelligence of what takes place at Jummoo, and I know that I am constantly in his thoughts, and that denunciations of me form one of his staple subjects of conversation among his intimates. I need hardly tell you how great is the terror among the inhabitants of my districts at the thoughts of falling into Ghoolab's hands. The cruelty which he displayed in his conquest of Cashmere was appalling, thousands of people being put to death by all forms of torture.

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The trade of this district would be destroyed, the merchants plundered, and under one excuse or other all private property would be confiscated by him. Therefore I am well served. The traders have naturally agents and correspondents all over the Punjaub, who inform them of every rumour current, and these accounts are promptly transmitted to me, so that I get the earliest possible intelligence of every movement or intrigue as soon as it is set on foot, and no body of men can be set in motion within a couple of hundred miles of this fortress without my receiving news of it in the course of a day or two."

A few days later the colonel said when they met at breakfast: "There is trouble coming, Percy. I have had a letter from my agents at Lahore, saying that several of the *punchcs*—as the leaders of the soldiers are called—have for the last day or two been loudly denouncing me, saying that it is a disgrace to the Sikh nation that an insolent foreigner should not only remain among them, but, in the teeth of his dismissal by the ruler of Lahore, maintain himself by force of arms as the governor of a district of the Punjaub. As the ranee has no vizier, and is entirely helpless in the hands of the soldiers, there can be no doubt that she will authorize an expedition against me, and will indeed be glad to agree to a project which will remove a number of her insolent soldiery from the city. The clamour for a war against the British grows daily in strength, and most of the leading sirdars are in this matter in agreement with the troops, and the ranee cannot but think that it is very much better that they should occupy themselves in an expedition against a man in whom she has, of course, no interest, than embark in a great war which may end by costing her infant son his kingdom."

"What are you going to do, uncle?"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders. "Sharpen my sword, see that the guns are in good order, and overhaul our stock of ammunition. I feel quite convinced that we can repel all attacks by a mutinous horde like this, provided only that

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there is no treachery at work. That is our one weak point."

"You have never found out yet, uncle, who it was sent Ghoolab the news of my coming here?"

"No, I have no ground for suspicion against anyone. Nand Chund, and two or three of the officers of whose fidelity I feel absolutely sure, have been quietly trying to find out ever since you came here, but without success. Azim Bund, my steward, has also been trying in other quarters, but he too has altogether failed. Of course the traitor may be a member of my household and not one of my officers; in that case his treachery would be of little importance. Although by getting news of your coming he might have struck me a heavy blow, in other respects he can tell them nothing beyond the fact that I am alive and well, and very much on my guard. He may give them the number of cannons I have got, the amount of ammunition in stock, and the state of the food magazines, but the news can give them no satisfaction and can do me no harm.

"It is altogether different if it is an officer. In every considerable body of men there are a certain number who think they have a grievance of some kind; they have either been punished unjustly, or think they have been overlooked in promotion and that their services have not been sufficiently recognized. In some it is merely the desire for a change of any sort; and when the men know, as of course they do know, that the soldiers of the army are enriching themselves both at the expense of the government and of the population, they may feel dissatisfied with their dull life and regular pay here. At any rate there must be many who could be worked up by an astute rascal, and a gate thrown open, or a rope-ladder lowered over the wall, might lay the place at the mercy of our enemies. I have no fear whatever of this section being numerous enough to get up anything like a formidable mutiny, but a party of only twenty determined men might any night

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break their way in here and cut all our throats long before the troops could come to our assistance, might seize my wife's jewels and valuables, and make their escape by means of a rope-ladder over the wall. That, I think, is the most dangerous contingency. I always sleep with three brace of pistols within reach of my hand, and you know I have warned you to keep arms by your bedside; still, though we might sell our lives dearly, you may be sure that the attack would not be made except by a force sufficient for the purpose."

"Why don't you keep a strong guard in the house, uncle?"

"Because, my boy, I don't know who the traitors are. The officer in command might be the very man himself, and he might so contrive it that the guard was composed of men whom he had corrupted. Where should we be then?"

"But you might appoint Nand Chund to be always officer of the guard?"

"Constable of the palace—eh, Percy?"

"Well, you might call him what you like, uncle, but surely he would be able to pick out a dozen men of whose fidelity he was assured. The duty would not be severe, they would only have to furnish the two sentries at the door, instead of these being sent from one or other of the regiments."

"I will think of it, Percy. Just at present there is less ground for fear than usual, for if an expedition is on foot to attack us openly, such a plot as this would most certainly be delayed until there was a force outside where the conspirators could betake themselves after carrying their designs into execution. The fact that, even were they successful, they would certainly be pursued, and for the most part hunted down and slaughtered by the cavalry, has, no doubt, been one of the reasons why no such attempt as that we are talking of has been made long ago."

"Well, I do hope that when an army approaches you will do what Percy suggests," Mahtab, who had been listening silently to the conversation, said to her husband. "You have

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escaped so many times, Roland, that you have come to think that no attempt against your life will ever succeed, and certainly it is likely that Ghoolab, while organizing an open assault upon you, will take measures to secure his aim being carried out in other ways if possible."

"Very well, wife; you may consider it settled that on the day when an attacking force crosses the boundary of the province, Nand Chund shall be installed as chief of a special bodyguard here."

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CHAPTER VI

A SIEGE

NOT a day passed now without messengers coming in with warnings of approaching danger, and one morning early the officer on guard reported that a large number of persons could be seen approachng by the road from the south.

"Do they look like troops?" the colonel asked.

"No, sahib; they are on horseback and on foot, and there are many carts among them."

"I have no doubt then, Kur Aloof, that they are merchants of the towns coming in here for refuge. The enemy cannot be far off, and they know how the soldiers would squeeze them if they had a chance."

"Will you let all those people in here, uncle? They will eat up our provisions and drink up our water."

"As I told you, Percy, we have sufficient of both for a number double that at present within the walls. Did four times the total now here arrive the supplies would still hold out six months, and two months is the utmost that the siege is likely to last. One need never be afraid of a long siege by men commanded by leaders having no authority over them. A powerful prince might send troops on a siege and order them to maintain it until they captured the place, even if it took them ten years to do so, but at present the Punjaub is without a master, and the troops have only been induced

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to come here by the prospect of plunder. But as soon as they find that they make but little impression upon us, and that the siege, with its labours, and hardships, and dangers, may continue for many months, they will soon get tired of it, and in the absence of a controlling power will march away.

"They have a good many deserters from our service among them, and little as they love Europeans they will utilize their services, and I anticipate that for a while at least it will be made very hot for us. There are a score of points on that hillside half a mile away where guns can be posted to play on us, while we could make but a feeble return, and there is nothing like a plunging fire kept up night and day to weaken the spirits and lower the confidence of a garrison. That will be the time when the traitors, if there are any, will be busy among the men, and it will need unceasing care and vigilance to prevent trouble."

In a short time the people seen in the valley below began to enter the fortress. They were, as the colonel had anticipated, merchants and other people having something to lose, from the various towns in the district. Most of them brought with them carts laden with their choicest merchandise, and all had their portable valuables and money with them. They reported that news had come in the evening before, that a very large force had arrived at a point within fifteen miles of the frontier of the province, and that the soldiers had been promised the sack of all the towns and villages as an inducement for them to undertake the siege of the fortress.

"But how am I to feed so many mouths?" the colonel asked one of the leading merchants, with a smile.

"We know that our lord has great stores laid up in his magazines," the merchant answered, "and we are, of course, ready to pay for all that he will let us have."

"I have no doubt that the magazines will hold out as long as it is necessary," the colonel replied, "and as I regard all who enter here as my guests, each man, woman, and child

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shall draw rations of what food we have as long as it lasts. It has been bought out of the revenues of the province, and as each of you contributed, so shall you now share. But you know you will fare worse if the place is taken and you are found here than you would have done had you remained quietly at home."

The merchant shook his head. "There could be no worse, sahib. The soldiers plunder, kill, burn, and destroy as they did in Cashmere; they can do no more if they find us here. But we are not afraid of their taking the fortress. It is strong, and everyone knows my lord's valour and experience. The army will never be able to win their way in here."

"I hope not, my friends; I will certainly do my best to prevent them from doing so. And now about yourselves. The stream of fugitives grows broader and thicker every hour, and if it goes on like this, by nightfall we shall have over five thousand persons here in addition to the strength of the garrison. Against that I say nothing, a thousand at least will be able-bodied men capable of bearing arms, and I shall expect each to do his best; but where am I to stow so great a number? The barracks are already full, and but few indeed will be able to find lodging in the houses of the traders. I have tents and straw for two thousand people, but how can they be pitched? The ground is solid rock. There is no way of driving tent-pegs, and I see not how they can be erected."

"We might spread them over the carts, and so obtain a protection from the night air and a shelter for the women and children, and they might even erect poles in the carts themselves and stay them by ropes to the sides."

"That is a very good idea, and I will order the officer in charge of the stores to issue a tent to each owner of a cart, the others must manage as best they can. I daresay five hundred can be stowed away in the lofts of the stables and in other places not in use, while some with poles leaned against a wall and canvas spread over them can make shelters good enough

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on a pinch. The oxen must be given over to one of my officers, who will see that they are fed from the granaries and will kill them for food."

The colonel had not over-estimated the number of those likely to arrive, and before nightfall over five thousand had entered the fortress. Stringent orders were laid down that none save the regular troops should be allowed to approach the walls, and each party as it arrived was conducted to the spot allotted to it. Every open space was covered with shelters of one kind or another, the larger constructed of tents, the smaller of shawls and blankets. The principal street was left clear of such erections in order to admit of a free passage for the troops, but it was ordered that all cooking operations should be performed there, as fires would be dangerous in the extreme among the crowded tents. When night came, strong guards were placed on the walls, especially on that facing the shoulder of the hill, upon which any open attack must fall. Percy's idea was carried out, and a body-guard composed of six men from each of the two infantry regiments, and an equal number from the cavalry, marched into the governor's house under the command of Nand Chund. Their instructions were that no one was to be allowed to enter the house, whatever he might allege to be the nature of his business, unless furnished with a written order to do so from the governor.

Percy had been busy all day seeing that the new-comers fell into their places, and in aiding them to shake down in some sort of comfort, and he was thoroughly tired out when he joined the colonel and his wife in their room that evening.

"Well, uncle, I am glad it is coming at last. It is much better to know the worst than to go on wondering when it was going to begin."

"I don't know, Percy. I have been in so many troubles and frays and battles since I came out here, that the thought that we might have to stand a siege was no very great trouble

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to me; besides, there was always the possibility that something might occur to postpone it altogether. The soldiers and most of the sirdars seem bent upon having a fight with the English, and I greatly hoped that it would begin before Ghoolab's intrigues against me had come to a head. However, now it has come we must make the best of it, and I have no great fear of the result. While you have been busy with these people this afternoon I have been superintending the mounting of two heavy howitzers as mortars, and if they erect batteries on the hill, as I expect they will, we will see if we cannot drop a few shell among them. Nothing unsteadies artillerymen more than finding that the earthworks in front of them do not as they expect protect them, and that by no ingenuity can they defend themselves from missiles that seem to drop down from the sky upon them."

"But how do you do that, uncle?"

"Simply by the amount of powder you put in. A mortar is always fixed at a certain angle, and of course you fix a howitzer the same way when you use it for that purpose. With a mortar the amount of powder of a given strength required to send a shell to a given distance is known to every artilleryman, but with a howitzer one must get it by experiment. You first put in the amount of powder you think sufficient. The ball is fired up into the air, and you watch where it drops. If it is short you add an ounce or two of powder, as the case may be. If it is too far you decrease the charge until you find that the shell drops just behind the enemy's earthworks among the artillerymen serving a gun. Having once got the exact charge of course you stick to it. This sort of thing annoys the Sikhs, who are not much accustomed to shell. A few of them were sent up to Lahore, and I managed to get hold of one and had several hundred cast here to fit those two howitzers, and had a large number of fuses made and stored away for future use. If they try to climb the rocks, a few shells rolled down from the walls are likely to be very effective."

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"What are to be my duties principally, uncle?"

"Your chief duty will be to watch, Percy, especially at night. The officers will, of course, go their rounds frequently, but as there may be a traitor among them, I can place no absolute reliance on their vigilance. I shall myself be about as much as possible, but as I shall have to look after everything in the daytime I must take some rest at night; one cannot do two or three months without sleep. I shall release you from all duty during the day, although in case of a serious attack you will take your place on the wall; otherwise I wish you to sleep in the day and to keep a sharp look-out on everything at night, being constantly upon the walls seeing that the sentries are vigilant, and listening intently for anything that might indicate a movement from below. I shall tell off four of Nand Chund's party to accompany you, for if treachery is intended there would be no hesitation in planting a dagger in your heart and then getting rid of your body over the wall. You are nearly sixteen now, and strong and active, but on a dark night that would avail nothing against a lurking assassin."

"Shall I begin to-night, uncle?"

"There is no occasion for that. The enemy have not arrived yet, and indeed no one would dream of attempting to ascend the crag unaided. I fancy they will try an open assault to begin with. When they find that fails they may try surprise."

About midnight an officer reported that a dull confused sound could be heard down the valley. The colonel took a couple of signal rockets, with which one of the boxes brought by Percy from England was filled, and proceeded, accompanied by his nephew, Nand Chund, and four of his guard, to the wall at the lower end of the rock. Lanterns placed on the ground were burning here, and a party of artillerymen were standing by the four guns looking down the valley.

"How far do you think they are away?" the colonel asked the officer in command there.

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"A party of them have just crossed the wooden bridge over the stream, sahib. I heard the trampling of their horses upon it distinctly."

"That is fourteen hundred and thirteen yards from the foot of the rock. Drive those wedges a little farther. That is right. I cut those nicks upon them the other day when we had got the exact depression I required to lay the guns on the bridge. Now let us wait until another body of them are crossing."

Three or four minutes later the sound in the distance became suddenly louder.

"Now, Nand Chund, fire that rocket. I think you have got it about the right angle."

The rocket flew up in the air, and burst some distance away throwing out a dozen fire-balls. Their light enabled the governor to see right down the valley. Some slight alteration in the direction of the guns was made, and then one after another they were fired. Another rocket was now thrown up, and by its light the dark mass of men on or behind the bridge could be seen to be broken up and retreating. Almost at the same moment four guns were fired from an upper bastion.

"That is grape, Percy," the colonel said. The officer there was told to wait till the men could see a body of troops advancing up the valley. "Listen, there go the cavalry scampering back as hard as the horses can lay their feet to the ground. I doubt whether we shall hear anything more of them to-night."

"They could hardly hope to have passed without our noticing them. They must have been sure that we should have warning of their coming."

"No doubt, lad, but they may not have calculated on our opening fire upon them in the dark. They will not have reckoned upon the rockets, and hoped, I have no doubt, to push a part of their force past the place and up on to the brow before morning, for they would know well enough that they

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could not pass under the fire of our guns when the sun was once up."

"But how will they get there, uncle? now we have shown them that it is almost as dangerous by night as by day."

"Probably they will march round among the hills, and come down upon us. There will be no difficulty in infantry doing it, and they may manage to drag a few light guns with them, but they can't get anything like heavy artillery up there except by bringing them along below, and taking them up the regular road. That is the first of the difficulties they have to encounter, and as I have a large stock of blue lights I don't see how they are going to get up the hill, which is commanded by a dozen of our guns. They will be safe enough from our fire as they pass along under the craig, for there is not a gun that can be depressed sufficiently to bear upon them there, though we can annoy them by pitching shell and hand-grenades down upon them. Still, determined men might manage that, and might even make their way up the hill in face of our fire, but they could never drag heavy guns up a road which we can sweep with grape. So you see they have got a stiff problem to solve before they can get a battering-gun to play on our northern wall."

For another hour they kept watch. There was still a confused sound from the lower end of the valley, but nothing to indicate any renewed advance. They therefore returned to the house.

Percy was aroused at daybreak, and at once made his way to the battery, where they had been the night before. The colonel and several of his officers were already there. The lower end of the valley was occupied by a great mass of men, horses, and waggons. Tents had been erected here and there, and the banners of their occupants were flying before them.

"How strong do you think they are, uncle?" Percy asked.

"It is difficult to say, mixed up as all arms are in such confusion just as they reached the ground last night, but we

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guess them at about fifteen thousand. They have four batteries of field guns. There they are away to the right. They evidently came up together, and have kept something like order. We can make out several heavy guns mixed up with the waggons, but whether there are ten or twenty of them I could give no opinion. Do you see that large tent with the red and white flag? Those are the colours of Ghoolab Singh, and the tent no doubt is occupied by his son, the gentleman who was named my successor a week after the death of the Old Lion. He has been waiting some time, and is likely to wait longer. He is no doubt the nominal leader of the expedition; but I believe that he has none of the talent of his father or uncles, and matters will be directed really by the chiefs of the army. I have no doubt a council has been going on all night as to what the next move shall be, and the decision they have probably arrived at is to wait until they can get a better idea of the fortress and its surroundings."

A considerable movement was now going on in the enemy's camp, and the wind bore the sound of trumpets to the fortress.

"They are trying to get into something like order," Nand Chund remarked. "The waggons are drawing out of the mass to take up their positions in the rear, and the assembly calls of the different regiments are sounding. Ah! there is a party going out to reconnoitre."

As he spoke a party of horsemen rode out to the left of the camp. Several bright banners streamed in the air, and an escort of some fifty cavalry followed them. They mounted the hill on the opposite side of the valley until they reached a spot two or three hundred feet higher than the summit of the fortress, and just opposite to it. As soon as their object had been made out the colonel had sent word to the gunners at the batteries along that face ordering them not to fire.

"I do not wish to make any more bitter enemies," he said to his officers in reply to their look of surprise when he issued the order. "At present they are only fighting against me as

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instruments of Ghoolab Singh, and except on the ground that I am a foreigner, the soldiers have no animosity against me. If we were now to kill two or three of their favourite leaders, and perhaps some of the sirdars who have been bribed into entering upon this business, it would create an active animosity against me. Of course, when fighting begins they must all take their chance, but I don't wish to slay anyone before a single shot has been fired on their side."

The group of officers, who were but half a mile away, remained for ten minutes closely examining the fortress. They then slowly returned to camp.

"Our guns would carry easily enough into the midst of the camp, sahib," one of the officers remarked.

"I know they would, but I won't begin, for the same reason that I would not fire at the group of officers. We will let them open the ball."

An hour later a body of men which they estimated at five thousand marched away with two of the batteries of field guns, and soon were lost to sight as they wound round the hills skirting the valley.

"We shall see them at daylight to-morrow established on the hillside above us," the colonel said. "I have thought several times of establishing a fort near the crest there; but I should not be able to give it much support by my guns, and its garrison would not make any prolonged resistance when they once found themselves cut off altogether from us. With troops one could rely upon thoroughly, such a fort would immensely hinder the operations, and indeed they could do nothing until it was captured.

"It is a standard rule with us out here, Percy," he said afterwards, " never to count upon the natives unless you are with them yourself. The Sikhs are brave, but they want good leaders, and are not to be relied upon unless under the eye of an officer they respect. They may hate us as Europeans, but in the wars of Runjeet Singh they fought like lions under our

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command. You will see that that will be their weak point if they come to blows with the British. They will fight, and fight pluckily, but without Europeans to lead them they will fall into disorder, and there will be no one to rally and control them, to take advantage of any temporary success, or to retrieve a temporary failure. They don't know it themselves, but they will speedily learn it. Given English officers, the natives of India fight as well as our own men. The Sepoy regiments in Clive's days, and ever since, have shown themselves worthy of fighting by the side of their white comrades; but they would be worth very little if deprived of their European officers. Another thing against them is the slowness with which they work their guns. A battery of British artillery would fire five shots while they fire one, and their infantry are proportionately slow in their movements. We have all tried, but tried in vain, to get them to work with smartness. It does not seem, however, to be in them."

That night a vigilant watch was kept along the northern wall, but nothing was heard; and it was not till an hour after sunrise that a column was seen coming along the side of the hill above them. The guns were all manned and ready for action, but the colonel delayed giving the order until the enemy breached a sort of terrace on the face of the hill half a mile away, and three hundred feet higher than the level of the fortress. "Now," he said, "we will give them a hint to come no further. We could not prevent their establishing themselves on that terrace, but they must learn that they can come no nearer. Two or three shots will be a sufficient hint."

The guns opened fire, and the enemy, who were just commencing a further descent, retired hastily, and a few minutes later their field guns opened fire. They were no match, however, for the much heavier pieces on the walls; and after half an hour's exchange of shots they drew back their guns, two of which had been dismounted by well-aimed shots from the wall. Some of the party established themselves well back on the

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terrace, where they were out of sight of the fortress, but the main body ascended the hill again and encamped on the crest. Occasionally a gun was run forward, discharged, and withdrawn: and to this fire the garrison made no reply, the guns being very badly aimed, some of the shot flying right over the fortress, while others struck the ground outside the wall.

"Now we shall have quiet for a time, sahib," Nand Chund said to Percy, who was standing next to him. "They have done so much, and will want to settle what the next movement is to be."

"I think it will be our turn to move next, Nand Chund," the colonel, who had overheard his remark, observed. "To-night when it gets dark we will sally out, and see if we cannot take those gentlemen with the guns by surprise."

"It may be, colonel, that they will expect a sally, and will move their whole force down again on to the terrace after nightfall."

"It all depends who their leader is. If he is an enterprising fellow, that is what he would do."

"Do you know, uncle, I have been thinking that their camp down in the valley is smaller to-day than it was yesterday."

"Do you think so, Percy? I will go to the battery at the other end and have a look at it. It is possible that they may have sent off another party to join those fellows up there. If they have done that, they intend to try the effect of a *coup de main*, and to attack us in earnest some time before morning."

After a close examination of the enemy's camp, the colonel and his officers were all of opinion that although it occupied as much space as before, there were fewer men moving about than upon the preceding day.

"You have sharp eyes, Percy, and it is well that you noticed it. Had you not done so we might have run our heads into a trap, and instead of surprising them been surprised ourselves, and that by greatly superior numbers. I shall abandon the idea now and prepare to resist a serious assault to-night,

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and we will have every man capable of bearing arms in readiness. We will keep only a few men on the walls, and let the rest lie down at once with orders that they are to sleep if they can, as there will be no sleep for them to-night. Nand Chund, do you post half a dozen of your men at different points on the walls; let them keep a vigilant watch down upon the town itself, and see that no flag or other signal is waved from a roof or window. It may well be that there has been some arrangement made with a traitor here to give notice by signal of any intended sortie on our part."

Following his uncle's advice, Percy lay down for some hours; but he could not sleep, being too excited at the thought of the conflict that would probably take place during the night. When he went in to dinner the colonel was absent, being engaged in mustering and assigning to their various posts the able-bodied men among the fugitives. These were posted round the circuit of the walls, which were all, with the exception of the northern face, entrusted to their charge.

"It is probable," he told them, "that the enemy will make a diversion on this side when they attack on the other. It will not, however, be serious, for they can do nothing unless with the assistance of friends on the wall."

Among the servants of the traders were a good many who had served in the army. These were stationed at the guns, and enjoined to open fire upon the enemy's camp if they brought the heavy artillery they had there into play. To each battery and section of the wall a number of blue lights and fire-balls were served out—one or more of the former was to be lighted every few minutes, and the fire-balls occasionally thrown into the valley, so that no considerable body of the enemy could escape observation. The traders were appointed as commanders at the various points. Of the garrison a thousand men were placed on the north wall; the rest were stationed close at hand in readiness to support them, or to move to any point threatened.

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"Percy," the Ranee—as she was usually called in the fortress—said, as they sat waiting the colonel's return, "I want you to devote yourself to the protection of my husband to-night. I have no fear of the wall being carried by assault, it is too strong and will be too well defended for that, but I do fear for his life. That we have one or more traitors here we are sure, and an occasion like this with its confusion and excitement will afford them just the opportunity they desire. When all are engaged in repulsing the attack of an enemy it would be easy for an assassin to use knife or pistol without fear of the action being noticed, and the colonel will be thinking of nothing but directing his men and repulsing the attack. Therefore, I pray you station yourself near him. Leave the fighting to others, and keep your eye closely upon those about him, and your pistol in your hand in readiness for action."

"I will do so, aunt. If there is anyone here who wants to assassinate him, it is just the time he would choose for the attempt. I think it would be as well to ask Nand Chund to pick me out four of his best men, and to hand them over to my orders. However sharply I might look out in the darkness and confusion, someone might spring suddenly forward upon uncle from the side opposite that on which I was standing; but with five of us on the watch, we ought to be able to prevent anyone getting near him. I will tell no one the purpose for which I require the men, and will bid Nand Chund be equally silent. There is no saying who the traitor may be, perhaps someone we have never thought of suspecting; and if he knew we were on the watch he might drop it altogether. I only hope he will try it, it would be the best thing that could happen, as it would relieve us from the uncertainty we have been feeling. Nand Chund himself with the rest of his men will, I know, be on duty here; for I heard uncle give him his orders, which were that he was to suffer nothing, not even the entry of the enemy into the town, to induce him to leave the house, as traitors would be very likely to take advan-

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tage of the confusion to rush in and perhaps to kill you, and plunder and fire the place. There will be one advantage of my having these men with me. Uncle might send me round with a message to some other part of the wall, and I should be obliged for a time to be absent; but with them round him, I could leave him for a few minutes without fear."

"Do not do it if you can help it, Percy; the night will be dark, and if you keep well behind him he may not notice you, for he will have other things to think about. Should he send you on a message, take it yourself if it is of great importance; if not, send one of the men in your place. I rely upon you more than on anyone else. Ah, here is Roland at last."

By ten o'clock everyone was at his appointed post. The colonel took Percy with him on a circuit round the walls, where he exhorted everyone to be watchful and vigilant and to preserve absolute silence until they could hear the enemy in motion down the valley.

"I have no fear there whatever," he said, as he returned to the northern wall. "Even were there a score of men among our troops who have been bought over to play a treacherous part, they could do nothing where there are so many around them on the watch. Treachery strikes when least expected. It is powerless among a multitude, and all the traders and others from the towns know that their lives are at stake, and are just as well aware as I am that the place on that side is all but impregnable unless the assailants were aided from within. They can be trusted, therefore, to keep their eyes well open. I shall not assign you any special duty, Percy. I have told Ram Bund, your commander, that I shall keep you near myself, but there is no occasion for you to stay close to me. If you see any point specially threatened you can go there and encourage the men by your voice and presence, but I have no fear whatever that they will gain a footing on the wall.

"I shall take my post over the gateway, that is where I fancy

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the brunt of the attack will fall. They will either try to fill up the cut there with faggots or bundles of grass, or throw planks over and then blow in the gate. At least that is how we should act under the same circumstances, and as, if they make the attack, they must have some fellow of uncommon enterprise in command, it is likely he will proceed in the same course. As for the wall, it is fifty feet from the parapet to the bottom of the cut, and there are no native Indian troops who would try to scale such a wall on ladders in the face of a strong and determined garrison. Of course, if they could have brought their heavy guns up here, made a breach in the wall, and half filled up the cut with its ruins, it would have been a different affair altogether, though even then I feel sure that we could beat them off. As it is they can only reckon on finding us quite unprepared for an attack, and on carrying the place by a sudden rush. I believe myself that a quarter of an hour will see the end of it, and that as soon as they understand we are fully prepared they will give up the idea as hopeless. Now we have nothing to do but to wait. I expect the attack about an hour before daybreak, which is the hour at which they will think they are most likely to find the sentinels drowsy."

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CHAPTER VII

STARTLING NEWS

THE hours passed slowly as the garrison awaited the attack of the enemy. The men had been told that they could all lie down where they stood, leaving only the officers and sentries on watch; and the top of the wall and the yard behind were crowded with sleeping figures wrapt in their mantles. About two o'clock those on watch were sensible of a low confused sound in the air.

"They are moving," the colonel said to Percy, who was sitting on the parapet, against which he was leaning. "It is probable that they have been ordered to leave their shoes behind them; and in any case the walk of a Sikh in his soft leather shoes is almost noiseless, besides they are as yet a long distance away. They are coming down the hill," he continued a quarter of an hour later; "the noise is certainly more distinct. But I give them credit for the manner of their approach. We should scarce notice the noise if we were not prepared for it, and a drowsy sentry would take it for the wind rising among the hills. One can hardly imagine that ten thousand men are moving down towards us."

Two or three of the officers came up to report that they were sure the enemy were stirring, and the colonel ordered them to get all the men quietly under arms. Another half-hour passed.

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"They are a long time in coming, uncle," Percy said in a low voice.

"They are; they might have been here long before this. If I did not want to give them a lesson I would send up a rocket in order to find out what they are doing. I believe they are only a short distance away now, but we will wait for them to begin."

In a short time they were convinced that the enemy were within a hundred yards at most from the wall. Quiet as their movements were, a low hum as of orders being given in suppressed tones could be heard. On the walls all were in readiness. At a distance of a few yards apart men stood with port-fires in one hand and matches in the other, while between them lines of muskets rested on the parapet. Several times the watchers thought they could make out dim figures on the opposite side of the deep cut at the foot of the wall. Suddenly a bright light burst out exactly opposite the gate, and a moment later twenty guns opened, sending their balls crashing through the drawbridge and gate. At the same instant a rocket soared into the air from over the gateway, and a moment later a line of blue lights flashed out along the wall. A mass of men were rushing forward towards the gate, all carrying great bundles on their heads, while a tremendous yell burst from thousands of throats. It was answered by one of defiance from the wall.

The assailants paused for a moment in astonishment at the line of lights, and the proof that the garrison were prepared; but the pause was momentary, and they rushed forward again. The leaders were but a few yards from the edge of the cut when the colonel shouted "Fire!" A flash of flame ran along the wall, and twenty guns loaded to the muzzle with grape poured their contents among the enemy. Like a field of wheat levelled by the blast of a tornado the mob of men were swept to the earth, the few that remained erect throwing down their bundles and flying for their lives. Percy, mind-

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PERCY SHOOTS THE ASSASSIN DURING THE ATTACK ON THE FORTRESS.

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ful of his special work, had, the moment the light flashed out opposite the gate, summoned the four men, who were standing a short distance away, and stood on the watch near his uncle.

For a few minutes there was a duel between the guns of the fortress and the Sikh cannon, which had been drawn down by hand, the wheels thickly wrapped with cotton cloths to prevent the slightest sound being made. The infantry kept up a storm of fire, which was replied to by volleys of musketry from the defenders. The din was tremendous, and presently another body of men carrying long beams and planks again rushed forward. Many of them reached the edge of the moat and tried to push the poles across, but the destruction was so great from the musketry fire from the walls, and from six guns which had been kept in reserve loaded with grape, that the survivors again fell back followed by the exultant shouts of the garrison.

At the moment that they had advanced the two port-fires over the gate went out simultaneously, and before others could be lighted Percy saw a figure that had been crouching under the parapet a short distance off spring forward. The guard nearest to him also observed the movement, and threw himself in the man's way. A knife flashed in the air and he fell. His assailant then sprung towards the colonel, whose back was turned to him, when a ball from Percy's pistol struck him in the head and he fell dead in his tracks. The pistol-shot attracted no attention amid the roar of firearms, and Percy, without paying further attention to the fallen man, ordered the remaining three guards to redouble their vigilance.

"The scoundrel may not be alone," he said. "The attempt may be repeated."

With the retirement of the second body of men charged to bridge the fosse the enemy lost heart. It was evident even to the most determined that success was impossible, now that the garrison were prepared. The guns, too, suffered so terri-

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bly from the heavier metal of those on the wall, that half of them lay dismounted, and the gunners would no longer work the others in the face of the heavy fire that mowed them down. The yells subsided and the fire ceased, and as noiselessly as they had come the assailants glided away into the darkness, pursued, however, for some time by the bullets and shot of the defenders. Convinced that there was no fear of a repetition of the assault, the colonel ordered the greater part of the troops back to their quarters.

Now that the din near at hand had ceased, the rattle of musketry and the boom of guns could be heard from the other walls. The colonel hurried away to see what was going on there. He found that the moment the firing began on the north face of the fortress it broke out from the valleys on either side, where large numbers of men had stolen up in the darkness, while at the same time the heavy guns in the camp had also opened fire. The defenders had at once replied, and the fire had been continued on both sides, but it had begun to die away on the side of the assailants as soon as it ceased on the northern face. The colonel sent for a party of artillerymen to aid the men working the guns, and ordered a steady fire to be kept up on the camp, and then dismissed his allies to their tents and returned himself to his house, to which Percy had gone as soon as the fighting was over to tell his aunt that the attack had been repulsed and that all was well.

"Then my fears were groundless, Percy?"

"No, aunt, they were the means of saving my uncle's life," and he then related the attempt at assassination and its result.

"Heaven be praised!" she said, bursting into tears. "I had a presentiment of evil, as I have more than once had before when his life has been threatened. Thank God the danger has come and gone and that he is still unharmed. Did you know who the man was?"

"I did not notice, aunt, or think of looking at him after he had fallen. There was such a tremendous roar going on that I

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felt quite confused, and thought of nothing but that the attack might be repeated. I will go and see who it is as soon as it is light."

By this time some hot coffee had been prepared, and Percy had already partaken of it when the colonel returned. As he entered his wife threw herself into his arms.

"Thank God you have returned safe, Roland, and have once more escaped the dangers that threatened you."

"The dangers were not great this time, love, being only from a stray bullet; for the artillery confined their fire to the gate, in hopes no doubt that a lucky shot might bring the drawbridge down. Not that this was likely, for I had it fastened up by half a dozen chains, anyone of which would have held it."

"It was not the bullets of the enemy, but the knife of an assassin that I feared," she said.

"Pooh, pooh, my love! you are always dreaming of assassins."

"And not without reason, Roland; had it not been for Percy's pistol you would not be alive now."

The colonel looked surprised at Percy. "What does this mean, lad? I did not hear you fire, and, indeed, did not notice you from the time when the attack began to the time when it was over. Do you mean to say that my life was attempted, and that you saved me?"

"It was aunt's doing, not mine, uncle." Percy then related the injunctions his aunt had given him and the results.

"You have saved my life again, Mahtab," he said embracing his wife tenderly. "At least this time you and Percy have done it between you. And who is the traitor?"

"That Percy does not know; he did not think of examining the body."

"Then we will do so at once," the colonel said, putting on his cap again. "Daylight will soon be breaking, and as soon as it does the soldiers will be at work removing from the wall

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the bodies of those who fell in the fight. I heard just now that there were twenty-five men killed by the enemy's musket-fire, and another twenty or thirty hit in the hand or arm as they fired over the wall. Come along, Percy, you will know exactly where the man fell."

Calling a couple of his guards and bidding one bring a lantern with him, the colonel, accompanied by Percy, went to the wall, where the latter at once pointed out the body of the man he had shot, lying close to that of the guard who had fallen by his knife.

"Throw the light on his face," the colonel said, and as the soldier did so he uttered an exclamation of surprise and disgust.

"It is Azim Bund—the scoundrel! He was the last man I should have suspected. He was penniless when I picked him up years ago. He professed the greatest attachment for me, and being clever and shrewd I raised him step by step until at last he became my confidential steward. He was bound to me by every tie of gratitude, and I certainly thought him absolutely devoted to my interests. Ever since the attempt to seize you on your way here showed that there was a traitor in the fortress, he has appeared most earnest in his attempts to discover him; and to think that all this time it was the scoundrel himself! Mahtab has never liked the man, though she never suspected his fidelity. I suppose he had been heavily bribed, and had the promise of some good place from Ghoolab Singh. Well, he richly deserved the fate that has befallen him. I am glad that it was not a soldier, for I like to think that all my men are faithful to me to the last.

"That was a good shot of yours, Percy, your ball struck him just in the centre of the forehead. Well, there is one thing, there need be no fear at present of another attempt of this kind. This fellow would never have dared to make a confidant. An officer might enlist some of his men in such a plot, but a man in Azim's position would not venture to do so. A

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steward is not often popular with the men he looks after, and I don't think this fellow was any exception to the rule. Do you two men remain with the body until the morning, and see that no one touches it. You can search his pockets now, but it is not likely that such a cunning knave would be carrying any documents that would incriminate him, about on his person."

"There is nothing in his pockets, sahib," one of the soldiers said, "but I can feel he has a heavy belt round his body."

"Take it off and examine it."

It was found that a hundred gold *mohurs* were sewn up in the belt. "The first instalment of the price of my life," the colonel said. "Here is one apiece for you, men; the rest shall be laid out in charity. There must be scores of people who have been made homeless in the last day or two.

"In the morning make a thorough search of the fellow's clothes, he may have some paper sewn up in them. Now, Percy, we will go back to the house."

The Ranee was greatly agitated when she heard who was the author of the attack upon the colonel's life.

"It is terrible, Roland, to think that we can trust no one, and that for months your life has been endangered by that man. I cannot think why he waited so long."

"He was waiting for a safe opportunity, as he thought," the colonel replied. "Our private apartments are always locked at night, and during the day the opportunities for putting a knife into me without suspicion falling upon him were not frequent. No doubt he knew that Ghoolab was going to send an army here, and it was probably arranged that the affair should not take place until it arrived, as with me out of the way the garrison would probably surrender, and Ghoolab's son would only have to enter and take possession; and would, moreover, gain a certain amount of credit for what would be regarded as his capture of the place. He might, perhaps,

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have done it at night, but your idea of putting Nand Chund and the guard here would altogether upset that plan, and drive him to choose some other opportunity. At any rate we can sleep in peace now. It is morally certain that Azim would not run the risk of having an accomplice, especially as he would regard it as certain that he would be able to carry out his design without aid."

The morning light showed how terrible had been the effect of the fire of the besieged upon the assailants. The ground for two hundred yards back from the fosse was thickly strewn with dead, and around the spot where the cannon stood the men who had served them lay in heaps. After sending out a party to make sure that the enemy had all retired right, a force was sent out to collect and bring in the deserted guns and the wounded. There were over three hundred of the latter, and eight hundred dead were counted. Shortly afterwards two men with a white flag were seen coming down the hill.

The colonel and an officer went out to meet them, and it was found that they were the bearers of a request to be permitted to carry away the dead. This the colonel readily granted, being well pleased indeed at being saved the trouble of burying them, which would have been a work of great trouble and labour, owing to the shallowness of the soil. A large body of men came down for the purpose, but it was nightfall before the last of the bodies were carried away. The enemy's camp in the valley had, at daybreak, been removed out on to the plain, a mile and a half farther away, so as to be beyond the range of the guns.

Late in the afternoon a large force was seen to march in there, and the garrison had no doubt that this was the main body of the troops who had attacked them in the night.

A week passed without any further movement, and then it was noticed one morning that the tents had been struck, and shortly afterwards the whole army was seen to march away to

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the south. Some of the merchants at once sent off messengers to gather news, and by nightfall the colonel learnt that it was reported that the mother of the maharajah had consented to the demands of the army to make war against the British. An officer who had passed through the nearest town had stated that he was the bearer of despatches, ordering the force who were besieging the fortress to return at once to Lahore.

"That must have been very welcome news for every man in camp," the colonel said. "The soldiers must be already sick of the business, which must have cost them at least a thousand men, counting those that died after the fight from their wounds; and they must have seen well enough that this was nothing to what the loss would be before the place was captured. The leaders must be even more glad; the fact that no movement has been made since the repulse shows that they are at their wits' end as to what their next move should be. They must have known that another repulse might cause a mutiny among the troops, and might even cost them their lives. They must have been glad indeed at the news of their recall.

"And now, Percy, we must lose no time in warning our friends of what is intended. They may have got news already from Lahore; but we cannot risk that—their agents there may be imprisoned or killed, therefore you had better prepare to start for Loodiana in an hour's time. Nand Chund shall go with you again with fifty men. There will no doubt be many sirdars moving with their followers towards Lahore, and you will therefore excite little attention; and if questioned, Nand Chund will say that he is on his way to join the army. No, it will not be quite true; but that is a matter that will not rest at all heavily on his conscience. Lying is not considered a great moral offence at any time by the Sikhs, or indeed by any natives of India; and to deceive an enemy in time of war, is considered absolutely meritorious. There will be no occasion for you to say anything one way or another; he will

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appear as the head of the expedition, and you will pass unnoticed and unquestioned. Nand Chund is perfectly capable of talking for himself and half a dozen others. Fondness for using his tongue at all times is one of his principal failings."

"Am I to come straight back again, uncle?"

The colonel thought for a minute or two. "I will leave that entirely in your hands, Percy; you are old enough now to act on your own account. If you can be useful—and it is probable that you may be very useful owing to your acquaintance with the language and the knowledge that you have gained of the people—to the Resident at Loodiana, I should say that it would be best for you to put yourself at his service. It would be a very useful beginning for you, and would give you a claim that might be of great advantage to you in the future. Besides, I should think you would wish to see what is going on, and there are likely to be some stirring events in the next few months. Here we shall have a quiet time of it, for with a war with England on their hands no one will think of troubling about us, and they will need every man for the work they have cut out for themselves. Do you agree with me, Mahtab?"

"Yes, I shall be sorry, very sorry for him to go; but I think it would be best for him. You always tell me that if my people go to war with yours it is sure to end in the Punjaub being annexed. There will then be no career for him here, and it will be better so since his life would be, as yours has been, one of constant danger. Thus then, it will be much better for him to make friends with officers in the Company's service, so that he may, as you have pointed out many times, become an officer of theirs when they are masters of the Punjaub."

"You will want a servant; indeed you had better have two. They must be trusty men above all things, and shrewd fellows too, whom you can, if necessary, despatch on difficult errands. I should say you had better let Nand Chund pick you out two of his men, unless you have any fancy yourself."

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"He spoke very highly to me of those he chose for me last night, uncle. However, I will speak to him."

"Do so, Percy; a man may be faithful and an excellent guard, and yet not be the one you would choose as a servant. You want two cheery good-tempered fellows, who will always do what they are told without grumbling. I should say that you had better have Pathans, for a Sikh's sympathies would certainly be with his countrymen. I will walk down with you myself and have a chat with Nand Chund; next to a good horse and good arms, a good servant is the most important point on entering on a campaign; a handy fellow will make you comfortable under almost all circumstances, while with one who has not a knack of cooking, or of managing things for your comfort, you will be in all sorts of straits."

When the matter was explained to the officer he said: "You could not do better than take Akram Chunder, he is a Pathan, and one of the men you had last night. He was Sohan Verdi's own man for a time; but the major is hot-tempered, and spoke sharply to him one day, and he chose to go back into the ranks again. Sohan has told me more than once that he was one of the best men he ever had. He is a good soldier, he has been in your service for ten years, and he has a high character for courage. I do not think that the young sahib can do better than take him. As to the other he shall have my own man, Bhop Lal. He is an invaluable man in the field, merry, good-tempered, eager to please, ready to do anything for his master's comfort. Here, however, he has been too long inactive, and is getting idle. Were I going on a campaign I should be sorry indeed to part with him; but as it is I can find a man who will suit me just as well, and he is the very man for the young sahib; he is intelligent and trustworthy, a good groom and cook."

"Then Percy cannot do better than try them. Send for them to come to my house at once, I will myself speak to them and see how they like the proposal; a man who goes

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unwillingly had much better stop behind. I am obliged to you, Nand Chund, for giving up your man to my nephew."

Ten minutes later the servant announced that the two men were at the door, and they were at once brought in.

"My nephew is going to Loodiana," the colonel began, "and it may be that he will remain with his friends. You have, of course, both heard the news that the maharanee has yielded to the wishes of the army, and that they are going to war with the English. My nephew is going to join his own people, and will, I daresay, remain with them until the war is over. He wants two servants, good fellows who can be thoroughly relied upon, who can look after his comfort in the field, carry messages if necessary from one end of the country to the other, and who can be relied upon to be thoroughly faithful and devoted to him. I have consulted Nand Chund, and he has strongly recommended you both. I do not wish you to go unless you are perfectly willing to do so. While you are with him, you will receive double pay, and a present will not be wanting when he returns here if he gives a good report on your services. Now, what do you say?"

Both men expressed their willingness to follow Percy, and it was evident by their manner that they considered it no small honour to have been selected to attend upon the colonel's nephew.

"That is settled then," the colonel said. "I need tell you nothing about your duties, for you are both accustomed to the work. I will see that you are well mounted. Have you each good arms and a brace of pistols?" Both replied in the affirmative. "Make your preparations at once. Nand Chund will start in half an hour with fifty men to escort my nephew to Loodiana."

The men saluted and retired, and the colonel gave orders that two good horses should be picked out for them. Three quarters of an hour later Percy rode out from the gate of the fortress with his escort, his two followers falling in in the rear.

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Being this time unencumbered by baggage animals, the march was more rapid than it had been on the way up. As the country was full of armed parties making their way to Lahore, their passage attracted no attention until they turned off from the road to that city. After that they avoided towns, and riding without a halt for twelve hours they crossed the Sutlej on the evening of the fifth day, and on the following morning rode into Loodiana. A considerable change had taken place since Percy had left it six months before. Then there were but two or three battalions of troops stationed there, now the long line of tents showed that this force was largely augmented, and that six or seven thousand men were collected in the camp. It was evident that the British authorities were alive to the coming danger, and that they would not be surprised by the unprovoked invasion of the Sikhs.

Sir Henry Hardinge had arrived in July as governor-general, and being warned by the Residents at Loodiana and other frontier stations of the probability that the Sikh army would insist upon war, and overcome any opposition on the part of the maharanee, he had quietly made preparations for the event by moving up considerable bodies of troops to the north-west. It had indeed for some time been evident, that unless Ghoolab Singh accepted the office of prime minister troubles must come. He was the one man in the country whose personal power and influence would enable him to control the mutinous army, and his refusal to accept the post rendered it certain that the struggle would come sooner or later.

Ghoolab possessed talent and astuteness equal to that of his brother Dhyan, and was, like him, convinced that the power of England was too great for that of the Sikhs; he was, therefore, strongly against war. On the other hand his position was a difficult one. Had he attempted to stem the tide of popular clamour his own army would have turned against him, and he might have lost both his possessions and his life. He

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was therefore obliged to temporize, and believed that he would gain advantages whichever way the struggle went.

To the Sikhs, then, he professed a complete agreement with their views, but at the same time under one excuse or another he remained at Jummoo, replying to their repeated requests that he would advance with his army to Lahore, by saying that he was perfectly ready to do so, but that he thought it would be in all respects better to keep his army as a separate force and so co-operate with the main body. On the other hand he sent secret messages to the British, assuring them of his friendship, and promising them that whenever he saw the opportunity he would throw the whole weight of his influence and power into the scale on their side.

Nand Chund and his detachment of cavalry did not enter Loodiana, but took leave of Percy when they came within sight of the place, and started at once on their return.

"I shall travel by another road," he said, "and if we should be questioned hereafter we can strongly deny any report that we have paid a visit to Loodiana, for were it known it would excite a feeling against our lord, who would be accused of being in communication with the English. There is, it is true, no cause whatever to fear another attack upon the fortress while the war continues, but it might prejudice him afterwards, and if things go badly with the Sikhs some fanatic might endeavour to take vengeance upon him."

"Give my love to my uncle and aunt, and tell them I hope to see them again before long."

Percy's two followers closed up behind him, and as soon as the troops had started he rode with them into Loodiana.

The Resident was alighting from his horse at the door of his bungalow when Percy rode up.

"Ah, Groves, is it you?" he said. "I was wondering whether I should see you soon. I heard that an army had marched to attack your uncle's place, and a few days ago my agent at Lahore wrote me there were rumours that they had

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been repulsed with very heavy loss, which I was glad to hear, not only for your sake, but because a reverse of that sort would not raise the spirits of their army. How did it all end, and what are you here for? But you can tell me that while we are having tiffen; you know it is about my hour. You have become a regular young Sikh. I did not recognize you at the first glance in that finery."

"I have worn it ever since I have been there," Percy said. "I did not like it at first, but I soon got accustomed to it, and it is certainly cooler than my own clothes. But there is such a prejudice against Europeans that my uncle thought that I had much better follow his example and dress in the fashion of the country. I brought a couple of English suits down with me in my valise, but I was obliged to ride down in this dress in order to escape notice. Shall I change before tiffen, sir?"

"No, you look very well as you are, Groves. Have you come far this morning?"

"Only about ten miles. I came down with an escort of fifty men, and crossed the Sutlej yesterday evening. They left me a couple of miles outside the town."

"Well, you had better go in to your old room and have a wash while I take my bath. Tiffen will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

Two or three officers were present at tiffen, and these had difficulty at first in crediting Mr. Fullarton's assurance that the young Sikh to whom he introduced them was really an English lad. At tiffen Percy related the events of the siege of the fortress at his host's request.

"It must be a strong place by your description," Mr. Fullarton said when Percy concluded his narration, "and would puzzle even British troops to carry it by assault. Still I have no doubt our engineers would manage somehow to get heavy guns on to the hill commanding it, and once there it could not hold out long."

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"My uncle was quite aware of that, sir; but the Sikhs are very clumsy with their cannon, and he calculated that the troops would soon be tired of the siege. But it would certainly be a very difficult matter to get heavy guns up there. There is some sort of road round behind through the hills, but I believe it is a mere track, and uncle thought it hardly possible at any rate for the Sikhs to bring heavy artillery along it. The only other road is that commanded by the guns of the fortress, and runs but a little more than a quarter of a mile away from it. The guns could not be taken up without very heavy loss."

After the officers had left, Mr. Fullarton asked, "And how about yourself, Groves? What are you thinking of doing, and what can I do for you?"

"My uncle thought I might be of use, sir. I can speak Punjaubi well enough to pass as a native, and he thought that you might accept my services as a volunteer, and might find me useful in obtaining information, communicating with any of the Sikh nobles who might be friendly, or in any other way. I have two men with me, both of whom can be trusted thoroughly, either as messengers or to go into the Sikh camp if necessary to gather information. I started the moment the Sikhs moved away from before the fortress, and we had news that they were summoned to join the main army at Lahore as the maharanee had given way to the wishes of the war-party. The news was so important that my uncle sent me off at once, thinking that probably your agent at Lahore might be unable to send you news, as anyone known to be in communication with you would probably be arrested at once when war was finally determined on."

"You are the first bearer of the news," Mr. Fullarton said. "It is ten days since I had a message from Lahore. It was in that letter my agent sent me the news that the first assault on the fortress had failed. He said then that the war-party had completely gained the ascendency, and that he thought

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the final decision would shortly be taken. He warned me that he might be unable to send me further news at present as he was in very bad odour, it being known he was in communication with me, and that he was sure to be watched if not imprisoned.

"Not having heard, I felt no doubt whatever that war had been decided upon and wrote accordingly to the authorities, but I have had no absolute certainty until now, as other causes may have prevented my agent from writing. Take a seat out in the verandah for a few minutes. I must send off a despatch at once with the news, and also inform Brigadier Wheeler, who is in command here, that the reports that the Sikhs have determined on war are now confirmed. After I have sent the despatches off I will join you again and talk over what you were saying about volunteering."

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CHAPTER VIII

IN THE SERVICE

PERCY was not kept waiting long, for in twenty minutes Mr. Fullarton joined him in the verandah.

"Now about yourself, Groves. I have no doubt that you will be able to make yourself very useful, and I at once accept your services as a volunteer in the civil service. I do not know yet whether I myself shall accompany the troops if they march from here. If I do I will take you with me, if not I will introduce you to General Wheeler, and transfer your services to him. There is a great dearth of men who speak Punjaubi, and I am quite sure he will be very glad to have someone with him so well acquainted with the language as you are. I expect him here shortly; he is sure to come across to talk matters over with me as soon as he receives my note. I will introduce you to him then. Before he comes you had better change and get into English dress. He is a soldier of the old school, and might regard your present attire as a sort of masquerading, and receive an unpleasant impression of you."

Half an hour later General Wheeler and three or four officers of his staff rode up to the door and had a long interview with the Resident. At its conclusion a servant brought a message to Percy that Mr. Fullarton desired to see him. He had by this time changed his clothes.

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"This is the young gentleman of whom I have been speaking to you, general," the Resident said as Percy entered. "He is the nephew of the Colonel Groves who has been many years in the Sikh service. His father was an officer in our own army. He speaks Punjaubi like a native. He has volunteered, and will, I am sure, be very useful to us. I came out with him in the same ship from England, and formed a high idea of his intelligence. It is, I believe, his wish to enter the service of the Company later on. He is not without some little experience in war, for but a week ago he took part in the defence of his uncle's fortress when attacked by fifteen thousand Sikhs, whom they beat off handsomely. I have been telling General Wheeler, Groves, that you might be very useful in obtaining information or in communications with the natives, and that the fact that there might be some little peril in the work would not be any obstacle to your undertaking it. I said that I was going to keep you by me as a sort of civilian aide-de-camp, but the general has been good enough to say that he will attach you to his staff nominally as interpreter, but in fact as an extra aide-de-camp; and as my assistant and myself both speak the language well, while the general is short of officers who know it, I feel that you will be of more service to him than to me. But I consider you as lent only, and I shall be glad at any time if General Wheeler no longer requires your services to take you on in the capacity of an extra assistant."

"Can you ride?" General Wheeler asked. "But I suppose I need hardly ask that, as you have been living among the Sikhs."

"Yes, I can ride, sir, in the Sikh fashion or the English."

"Mr. Fullarton tells me that you could pass as a native."

"In anything like an ordinary conversation I could, sir; and as I have worn the native dress for the last ten months I am perfectly at home in it."

"Very well, then, you can consider yourself as from the

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present time attached to my staff. Major Clissold, will you see after him? I should think that you, as adjutant-general of the division, will find him even more useful than I should do as an aide-de-camp."

"You can leave us now, Groves," Mr. Fullarton said, "but wait outside and Major Clissold will speak to you presently."

Percy bowed and withdrew. The conversation still continued to turn upon him.

"I should think one might put him in general orders, Clissold, either as an extra aide-de-camp or as attached to your department. I don't know what the rules of the service are with regard to the uniform of volunteers attached to the army. It is so seldom done now that I really do not know, but in the old days they were dressed, I believe, as officers."

"No, that won't do," Mr. Fullarton laughed. "I am going to make a civilian of him. If he does well in the campaign he might perhaps get gazetted as an ensign, but it would be very much better for him to have a claim on the civil side. Therefore, I shall take upon myself to appoint him as my deputy-assistant. I shall write to Sir Henry Hardinge asking that the temporary appointment may be confirmed, seeing the urgent necessity for more officers up in the language and with a knowledge of the country. So we may consider the appointment made. Now I lend him to you, and you can put it in general orders that the temporary services of Deputy-assistant Groves have been placed by me at your disposal as interpreter, and that he is henceforth attached to the head-quarter staff of the division. That will give him an established position, and he can wear his civilian clothes, a white helmet, and so on."

"I think that will be a very good plan," the general said.

"He has two servants with him. They are Pathans, both first-rate fellows, whom he will employ when necessary to obtain information. I would suggest that they be put on rations as a matter of convenience to Groves, and they could

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be entered either as civilian servants or guides. It is no question of money, for although the lad's uncle has a reputation for moderation, very rare among the adventurers who served Runjeet Singh, he must be a rich man."

"I will make a note of it," Major Clissold said, and the conversation then turned to other matters.

Half an hour later the officers came out and rode away. Mr. Fullarton said as they did so, "I will myself ride over with Groves later on," and he then came into the verandah, where Percy was waiting. "I think I have done a good stroke of business for you, Groves."

"You have indeed, sir. I am awfully obliged to you, although I would rather have stayed with you."

"And I should have been glad to have had you, but it is better as we have arranged it. You will have much greater opportunities for seeing service with the brigadier, and a report in your favour would come much better from him than it would from me, as I appointed you. It is probable that I shall remain at my post, and in that case there would be little for you to do here. While acting as an interpreter on the staff you will have abundant work, making bargains for the quartermaster's department, for waggons and transport, finding out about roads and fords for Major Clissold, and in general interpreting work. You must change your head-gear. That pithtopee you have got is really better, but we generally wear either the helmet or a cap like a forage cap, with a pugaree wrapt round it, and the ends falling down behind to keep the sun off the back of the neck and spine. I should advise you to adopt that, for there is no getting a helmet here. When you ride about always take one or both of your mounted servants behind you. They are soldierly-looking fellows, and it will give you weight with the natives. I need not tell you that now you will hardly be free to go about quite as you like, and that even when there is nothing for you to do you will be expected to be at hand if required. Major Clissold is a capi-

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tal fellow to serve under. He may work you hard, for there will be an immense deal of work to be done, but he is always pleasant and agreeable to his subordinates, and is very much liked in the force. I have some writing to finish, but in about an hour I shall be ready to start with you, so you may as well warn your two fellows to be ready. I have a forage cap that I have only worn once or twice, for it is too small for me. I will tell Ram Singh to put a pugaree on, and if necessary put some folded cotton inside the lining to make it fit you."

An hour later they rode into the head-quarter camp.

"I have brought you your interpreter, Clissold," Mr. Fullarton said as he entered that officer's tent, followed by Percy, their horses being held by the latter's men. "Where are you going to stow him? As there is no getting tent furniture here, I have told my man to send over what is necessary; but as I did not know whether Groves would have a tent to himself or not I told him to wait till I returned before he started."

"No, I have put him in a tent with Hunt. We can't afford a tent each for subalterns, so they are doubled up two together. But Hunt happens to be an odd man, which is lucky. Orderly," he called out, and as the soldier entered, "tell Mr. Hunt I shall be glad if he will step here."

A minute later a young officer entered. "Hunt, here is the young gentleman who, as I told you, will have to share your tent. He is a volunteer in the civil service. Mr. Fullarton has kindly lent him to us for a time as interpreter, which I am sure we want badly enough on the staff, for none of you young fellows are of the slightest use with the natives. He is the son of an officer late of our service and has been for the last six months with his uncle, who was one of Runjeet Singh's colonels, and still holds the fortress he was appointed to some time ago, although ordered by the Sikhs to leave. I am sure you will get on well together, and I hope that you will make him as comfortable as you can, and introduce him to the other aides. He will mess with you for the present."

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The young officer shook hands with Percy. "If you will come with me I will show you our tent."

"If you don't mind, Hunt, I will come with you," Mr. Fullarton said; "then I can see what is wanted in the way of furniture."

The tent was a square one with double canvas, the two walls being four feet apart, thus making a passage round it, one side being utilized as a bath-room and receptacle for luggage, the other being used by the servants as their living and sleeping apartment. There was a carpet spread over the floor, a native camp-bed, two folding chairs, a table, and a portable bath.

"All you want, as far as I can see," Mr. Fullarton said, "is another *charpoy* and a couple more chairs."

"That is all," Hunt agreed; "this is all the furniture one is allowed, which we think rather hard. Do you think the Sikhs are going to cross the Sutlej, sir?"

"Of course, they may do so, but the general impression is that it will not be in force; they may begin by making raids, but probably the real fighting will take place when we get across. Well, now, I shall leave you, Groves; I think you will get on very well, and I daresay we shall meet pretty nearly every day."

"Are those two fellows yours?" Hunt asked, as, going out of the tent with Mr. Fullarton, he saw the two natives sitting like statues on their horses in front of the tent, while one of them held the bridle of Percy's horse.

"Yes, they are my two servants; they are two of my uncle's soldiers. Both have been officers' servants, they are extremely useful fellows, and I can trust them thoroughly. One is a Pathan from the hill frontier of Afghanistan, the other is from Cashmere, therefore neither of them have any special leanings towards the Sikhs."

"That is a capital horse of yours?"

"Yes, he is very fast, and has much more endurance than the horses of the plains. My uncle bred him. He has a

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European sire, and his dam is considered as having some of the best blood in the Punjaub. What shall I tell my men to do with the horses?"

"They can picket yours over there; that line of horses all belong to the staff. Their own they can put with that line behind, those are the horses of the orderlies. I will go across with you and see about it, or some of the soldiers will be interfering."

The horses were soon picketed, and the men brought Percy's saddle and valises to his tent. By night he felt quite at home. The aides-de-camp were pleasant young men, and having already been spoken to by Major Clissold, received the new-comer cordially. Percy had inquired of Hunt as to the messing arrangements. "I am well supplied with money," he said, "and wish, of course, to pay my share of all expenses."

"That can easily be managed," Hunt replied. "The way it is arranged is this. There were five of us: Long and myself are the general's aides-de-camp; Humphreys and Lascelles, who are deputy-assistant-quartermaster-generals; and Egerton, who is an assistant-adjutant-general. They are all lieutenants. We brought up with us a certain amount of mess stores, principally liquor, which are all common property. I will see to-morrow what stock is left, and you can hand me over a sixth of the value, which will go to the fund for general expenses. However, these are not heavy, for being under canvas we draw rations—meat and bread—and I buy what I can get in the way of vegetables, game, and so on, from the country people. Of course, if you leave us before our store of liquor is exhausted, I shall, as it were, buy your share back again."

Percy found the society very agreeable. His experience of the junior officers' mess on board a ship had prepared him for the tone of light chaff and fun that prevailed. Although by some four years the youngest of the party, the fact that he was acquainted with the country they expected shortly to invade gave him a certain weight with the others, none of whom had

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been in that part of India before. He was asked innumerable questions as to the Sikhs, and what he thought of their fighting powers; and had to recount in full detail the story of the attempt to storm the fortress.

"That uncle of yours must be an uncommonly plucky fellow to hold on there in the face of the whole of the Sikhs, and he must be amazingly liked by his troops for them to stick to him against their own countrymen."

"That is not so wonderful," Percy said, "for the Sikhs are constantly fighting against each other. Most of his men have served under him for eight or ten years. The rest were recruited in his district, which was only conquered by the Sikhs in Runjeet's time, so they are still considered as interlopers by the natives. Still, of course, there is always the fear of treachery; and my uncle nearly lost his life while the attack was going on; the man who attempted it was one of those he trusted most thoroughly, being his steward and the head of his household."

"You did not tell us about that," Hunt said. "How was it?" and Percy had to tell the story.

"And you shot him? Well, I have never shot a man yet, and I don't know how I should feel. Were you very uncomfortable afterwards?"

"Not in the slightest. He was going to kill my uncle, and I fired and he went down, and I thought nothing more about it till I mentioned it to my uncle after it was all over."

"I suppose you are a good shot?"

"I am a fair shot," Percy said. "I have practised nearly every day since I left England, except when I was travelling up country. Mr. Fullarton advised me to do so on board ship, and my uncle kept me regularly at that and riding and sword exercise every day, partly because he said these things would be most useful to me, and partly because the Sikhs look up to anyone who can do things better than they can."

"It must be awfully jolly to be able to speak the language,

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Groves?" Lieutenant Egerton said, "and I hear you speak it like a native. You must have a wonderful knack of picking up languages to have learnt it so completely in six months."

"It was not exactly in six months. I had studied Hindustani before I left England; and luckily Mr. Fullarton had a Punjaubi servant with him, and I worked with him regularly five or six hours a day throughout the voyage, so that I was able to get on pretty fairly with the language by the time I got out here."

"I wish I had spent my voyage as well," Egerton laughed, "instead of spending it spooning with a young woman who was on her way out to be married, and who did marry the man a week after she landed."

"These things are very sad, Egerton," Lieutenant Lascelles laughed. "I suppose you were heart-broken for a time."

"Not quite. I will do her justice to say that she made no secret of her engagement, and never flattered me with the hope that she intended to break it. At the same time she had no objection to flirt with me, it being an understood thing on both sides that it was to end with the voyage. It was very pleasant while it lasted; but it would have been very much wiser to have done as Groves did, and spent the hot hours of the day in getting up a language. I should be a hundred a year better off if I had passed in one of the dialects, and besides, I should have had much better chance of getting a good appointment."

"Ah, well, you can console yourself, Egerton, by thinking that if you had you would now be in some small cantonment down in Bengal, instead of having a chance of seeing whatever fun may be going on here."

"That is a consolation certainly, Hunt; but I don't care how soon the fun begins, for I own that I am getting sick of bargaining for bullocks and working like a horse eight or ten hours a day. It is all very well for you aides-de-camp, whose work consists in writing a few letters for the chief and can-

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tering across with some message; but for us hard-worked quartermasters it is no holiday here. I do hope most heartily that the Sikhs will not be long before they begin their raids, and give us a decent excuse for fighting them."

"How strong do you think they are likely to turn out, Groves? They tell us a hundred thousand."

"I should say a good deal more than that," Percy replied. "There will be over a hundred thousand troops, for all who have passed through the ranks will be certain to rejoin them. Then the great sirdars can put almost as many fighting men into the field."

"That sounds serious, and I suppose there is no doubt they will fight bravely."

"That they are sure to do," Percy said. "What force do you think we shall be able to put in the field?"

"There are over ten thousand men at Ferozepore, with twenty-four guns. Here we have, by the field state to-day, seven thousand two hundred and thirty-five, and twelve guns. At Umballa there are about thirteen thousand men, with thirty-two guns. You see, ever since Hardinge came out he has seen this thing brewing, and has been quietly preparing for it. When he landed in India last year there were at these three stations only between thirteen and fourteen thousand men and forty-eight guns, and in the last eighteen months he has increased the force by seventeen thousand men and twenty guns.

"At Meerut there are about ten thousand men and twenty-six guns, but as that place is two hundred and fifty miles away, we can't count upon any assistance from there at first, if the Sikhs should take it into their head to cross the Sutlej. Of course if we invade we shall wait until the Meerut force is brought up before we advance. Sir Henry arrived at Umballa on the second, and was to leave yesterday. Ostensibly he is not here for any warlike purpose whatever, but is occupied in making an inspection of the protected district, inter-

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viewing the chiefs, and ascertaining what their feeling is towards us. These states voluntarily put themselves under our protection some five-and-thirty years ago, having no desire to fall under the sway of Lahore; and they have greatly benefited, for Runjeet Singh would assuredly have annexed the whole territory between the Sutlej and the Jumma, if he had not been warned that if he attacked these petty princes he would bring us into the field against him. It has always been a sore point with the Sikhs beyond the Sutlej that we prevented them from obtaining what they considered their natural boundaries. The protected states are indeed to a great extent Sikh, and even now, although they owe the continuance of their existence as separate states to our protection, and the chiefs are all with us, the sympathies of the great body of the people are entirely with the Sikhs across the Sutlej.

"Runjeet Singh was wise enough to know that he would have risked losing all he had were he to try to wrest them from us. Had he thought himself strong enough he would have risked a war for it, for the country south of the Sutlej is far more fertile than it is to the north, and it would largely increase the revenues of the Punjaub did it form part of it. This is the real cause of their hostility to us, and of their present threatening attitude. Sir Henry is going, as I said, among the chiefs here. Some of these are really friendly, others only pretend to be so. But there is one thing certain, if any misfortune happened to our arms the whole country would be up against us; and in any case we shall have to take every possible precaution to guard our depots and communications, for directly fighting begins it would be unsafe for small parties to travel about the country."

Percy's stay in camp was of very short duration, for on the following evening Major Clissold sent for him.

"The general has just received a despatch from headquarters, Groves; the news from the north is to the effect that

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the Sikhs are making great preparations there, and Major Broadfoot, the chief political agent at head-quarters, requests that you will at once proceed there to join him, as he wishes to question you as to your own personal observations of the state of feeling as you came down. I think it probable he will keep you with him for the present; and as you may have more important work to do there than buying bullocks and so on, I hope for your sake he will do so, though I shall be sorry to lose you, for I have already found by your work to-day that you would be a very valuable assistant. Still there is nothing like being at head-quarters and having the eye of the chief of your department upon you. You had better start this evening late."

"Very well, sir, I will be off in half an hour. I suppose I can ride round and say good-bye to Mr. Fullarton."

"Certainly. There is no absolute occasion to start until morning, but it is always well to show zeal, and it will no doubt please Broadfoot if you arrive there by daybreak. You needn't start till two o'clock; it is only a three hours' ride. The head-quarter camp is close to Basseean."

"I am sorry you are going," Hunt said when Percy returned to his tent and told him the news, "and I hope you will be back again in a day or two. If not, it will save me the trouble of taking stock of our liquors, which I was going to do to-morrow morning. We shall be glad at any rate to have had you as our guest for a day, and shall all be sorry at your leaving."

Percy at once rode over to the Residency.

"You are in luck, Groves," Mr. Fullarton said when he told him of the order he had received. "There is nothing like getting to head-quarters; it is there that honours and rewards fall thickest; and if Broadfoot keeps you with him you may be sure that any recommendation he makes in your favour will be attended to. I have heard this afternoon that the Sikhs are certainly marching down towards Ferozepore, and are within a few miles of the river. Of course they may not cross.

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Once or twice before they have come down, but without crossing. Still, if they are in earnest there is no doubt it means serious fighting, for the force at Ferozepore is quite isolated and will at once be cut off if the Sikhs cross near the town, and there will be no chance of relieving it until we get together a force sufficient to give battle. Sit down a moment and I will write a letter of introduction for you to Broadfoot; it will put you on a pleasanter footing with him."

The next morning before sunrise Percy with his two followers rode into the head-quarters camp. He had at Mr. Fullarton's recommendation bought a pony, or "tat" as it is called, to carry his valises and his dress as a young Sikh sirdar.

"I should stick to that, Groves; it may be of use to you. There is no saying what work Broadfoot may give you."

Percy was, on his arrival, directed to the tent of the political agent. When the orderly took in his name he was at once called in. "I did not expect you so soon, Mr. Groves," Major Broadfoot said looking up; "nor did I expect," he added smiling, "to see quite so young a man."

"I daresay not, sir," Percy replied. "This is a letter Mr. Fullarton has given me for you."

"Sit down while I read it," the major said as he opened it. He read it through. "Mr. Fullarton speaks of you in extremely high terms, Groves, and as I know him well I am sure he would not praise unduly. Now tell me what is the opinion of your uncle and the people about him as to the state of affairs. Does he think that the Sikhs will be mad enough to cross the Sutlej?"

"He has no doubt whatever about it, sir; he is convinced that the troops have for a long time made up their minds to conquer the protected states, and as they are completely masters of the situation in Lahore there is nothing to prevent them doing so. Such was also the opinion of all his native officers, and although we did not have much communication with the people on the way down, all whom we did speak to seemed to think that war was certain."

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"The news we received from Lahore has always been the other way," Major Broadfoot said. "I have received a message this morning to the same effect, but Captain Nicholson reported yesterday from Ferozepore that a considerable Sikh force had arrived within three miles of the river. Orders have been sent for a general forward movement of the troops. Sir Henry is going to ride over to Loodiana this morning to inspect the force there."

"I have two followers, sir, who can be trusted to obtain any news you may desire to get. If you like, one of them will cross the river and make his way to the Sikh force opposite Ferozepore and find out its strength and whether there is any intention of crossing; or if you prefer it, I will go myself. I have always been accustomed to wear the Sikh dress since I came out, and could, I think, pass without suspicion."

"It is most important that we should obtain some definite news," Major Broadfoot said, "and I am much obliged to you for your offer, but I do not think I can entertain it. It is too great a risk for you to run to go yourself, and the importance of the question is so great I should not dare to forward information, which would perhaps involve the movements of the whole army, merely upon the report of a native, however trustworthy he may be."

"I do not believe there is any danger whatever in my going, sir. I might take my two men with me, and should disguise myself in a dress similar to theirs. My own, which is that of a young sirdar, might so far attract attention that I might be questioned, while three of us in ordinary soldiers' dress could move about without being noticed in any way. That is just the sort of work that I came here to do, and my uncle thought that as a boy I could pass unquestioned where a man could not do so. One of my men is five- or six-and-thirty, so I could pass well enough as his son if any questions were asked, which I don't think would be the case."

"Well, Groves, if you are ready to go I do not think myself

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justified in refusing your offer, as it is of such extreme importance to find out the intentions of the Sikhs. When will you start?"

"I would give the horses an hour's rest, sir, and then I will be off, if I can get a disguise by that time."

"That I can manage for you. I have numbers of natives in my pay, and can get what you require, a native dress with shield, tulwar, and matchlock, in a quarter of an hour. Ferozepore is twenty miles from here, and the Sikh force some four miles farther; but, of course, you won't be able to cross the river there, and must do it ten or twelve miles higher up and then ride round. Are you well mounted?"

"Very well mounted, sir."

"Then I will get you a strong native 'tat.' Your being mounted on a good horse would attract attention. Here," he went on, pointing to a map, "is a point where the river is almost if not quite fordable for cavalry; at any rate you will not have to swim your horses far. I should advise you to make for that. It is as you see about ten miles above Ferozepore. It is not at all likely to be guarded; and should it be so, you could of course give out that you are natives of one of the protected states, say of Putiala, making your way to join the Sikh army that you hear is going to free you from the dominion of the English. As you have at present no tent of your own, you had better come across here in half an hour to make your change of clothes. I am myself going over to Sir Henry's, and may be detained there some time, but I will tell my servants to get breakfast ready for you. We must not send you off fasting."

Three hours later Percy and his two followers arrived at the bank of the Sutlej. They had been directed to the ford by a peasant in a village near, and crossed without difficulty, being only obliged to swim their horses for twenty or thirty yards in the middle of the stream. When they reached the opposite bank they rode up to a small party of armed Sikhs

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who were watching them. Percy had asked Bhop Lal to act as spokesman.

"We hear that the army is going to cross the river and to sweep the English away," he said, "and we have come over to join them. Our rajah is all in favour of the Feringhees, but most of us are the other way, and we were not going to stop quietly at home without taking a share in the good work, so my brother and son have come off with me without waiting to ask for leave. There are thousands of others who will do the same as soon as they are sure that the army is really in the field; but there has been so much talk about it for the last two years without anything coming of it, that they are waiting to see if it is true this time."

"It is quite true," one of the men replied. "There are ten thousand men now opposite Ferozepore, and the rest are on their way down from Lahore. There will be fifty thousand of them at least, with, they say, over a hundred and fifty guns. What can the English do against them? They have not ten thousand men they can put in the field, and these are scattered over the country, and will be crushed before they can assemble."

"That they assuredly will," Bhop Lal agreed confidently. "Fifty thousand men could sweep away every white soldier this side of the Jumna, and there will be nothing to prevent them marching on to Delhi if they choose."

"We shall see about that," the man replied. "Fifty thousand is only a beginning, and there will be another fifty after them in a very short time; and I for one don't see why we should not drive the Feringhees altogether out of India."

"That is the way to talk," Bhop Lal said cordially. "We shall always have trouble till the last of them have gone, and who so fit as the Sikhs to be masters in their place! How far is it to this camp you speak of?"

"About twelve miles. Ride two miles farther and you will come upon a broad road. Turn to the left, and it will bring you there."

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"What are you doing here?"

"We have been sent here to see that none of the English horsemen cross the river to gather news. There are two hundred of our cavalry a quarter of a mile behind, and if we saw any of the Feringhee cavalry coming they would be here to defend the ford before they could cross."

With a nod of farewell Bhop Lal and his two companions rode on. They passed within a couple of hundred yards of the body of Sikh horsemen, encamped in a grove. But there was no sign of movement among them, a few figures sat talking together here and there, the rest had evidently lain down to sleep the hours away in the shade.

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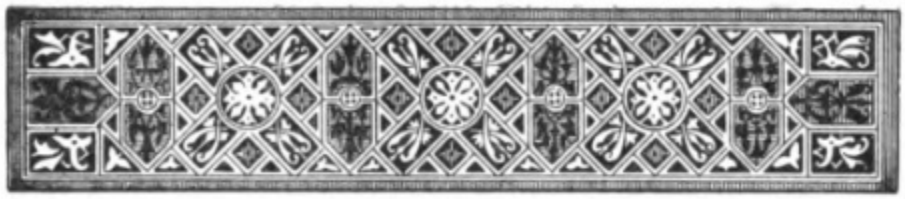

CHAPTER IX

MOODKEE AND FEROZESHAH

TWO hours after crossing the river, Percy with his two companions saw on the plain the camp of the Sikhs. As they did not wish to enter until evening, they turned off from the road and rode into a clump of thick bush a quarter of a mile away, and there waited until sunset. Then they mounted again and rode boldly into camp. With the exception of the tents of a few of the military chiefs and sirdars, the troops were not under canvas, although many had erected shelters of bushes or blankets. Here and there some attempt at regularity marked the places where regiments of the regular troops had established themselves. Here the horses were picketed in line, but among the followers of the sirdars every man had fastened up his horse just where it pleased him, without the smallest attempt at order.

The new-comers chose a vacant spot at the edge of the encampment, picketing their three horses together, and raised in front of them a rough tent consisting of a couple of blankets supported by some sticks they had cut in the bush. Here they lighted a fire and cooked a meal. One or two of the Sikhs strolled across to question them, and Bhop Lal and his comrades repeated the story that had been told at the ford, which was accepted as perfectly satisfactory. They in turn asked a few questions as to the various sirdars present, and as

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to which body they had better attach themselves. When they had finished their meal they sauntered off into the camp.

There was but one topic of conversation among the troops. They were to cross the Sutlej, if not on the next day, on the one following. A portion of the army was to besiege Ferozepore, while the rest marched forward to sweep away the British forces at Loodiana and Umballa. It was evident from their conversation that they greatly under-estimated the British strength at each of these cantonments, and that the gradual arrival of reinforcements had passed entirely unnoticed by the Sikhs on the northern side of the Sutlej. They anticipated no difficulty whatever in destroying the British forces at the first onset. Their statement as to the number of troops who would take the field at once, agreed with those of the soldiers at the ford, and they deemed that this fifty thousand men would amply suffice to conquer the whole country north of the Jumna, and that with their full fighting power they should be able to overrun the whole of India.

"We have heard all that we want," Percy said to the men after they had strolled for an hour in the Sikh camp. "We had best move quietly off at once before the camp begins to get quiet. Our fire will have burnt out by this time, and even if they should notice us moving, the men near will suppose that we are merely shifting our quarters, and are moving over to the sirdar we have decided to follow."

They had some difficulty in finding their tent again in the darkness, and as soon as they did so the blankets were taken down, rolled up, and strapped behind the saddles. The picket pegs were pulled up, and leading their horses they moved off, skirting for a time the line of the camp, but gradually increasing their distance until two hundred yards away from it, when they thought it quite safe to mount and ride off in the darkness. They had some trouble in striking the road again; when they did so they halted for a consultation. It was decided to turn off and encamp again for three or four

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hours in order to rest the horses, and then to make for the river bank and wait there until the first light of morning showed them a point where they could swim their horses across, for the presence of the guard at the ford rendered it impossible for them to use that passage again. This plan was carried out, and they arrived at the bank, some three or four miles below the ford, just as daylight began to appear. The bed of the river was wide, and the stream, broken by sand-banks, flowed in several channels.

"There will be no great difficulty in crossing anywhere here," Percy said; "the channels are nowhere very wide, and even if we are swept down the stream it will not matter, as we can rest after each swim. We had better start at once. Should there be any Sikhs about they will hardly make us out till it gets lighter, and we may hope to be pretty well beyond musket-shot before they can come down to the water's edge. They will not be likely to try to follow us across, and if they do so, with the start of a quarter of an hour we ought to be able to throw them off our track."

They were not disturbed while making the passage. This was, however, more difficult than Percy had anticipated, for the current in two of the channels was very strong and swept them down some distance before they could obtain a footing on the sand-bank. Apparently no watch whatever was kept by the Sikhs excepting at the fords, and nothing was seen of the enemy. On reaching the opposite bank they gave the horses a short rest to recover their breath, and then rode on to Basseean.

"What! are you back already?" Major Broadfoot said when Percy was shown into his tent. "I did not expect you back until to-morrow at the earliest. Have you really been in the Sikh camp?"

"Yes, sir; we were there about three hours, which was quite sufficient to learn everything that we required;" and he then gave the officer the news that they had gathered.

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"This is most important," Major Broadfoot said. "Sir Henry returned half an hour ago from Loodiana. I will take you with me to his tent. He may want to ask you further questions."

The commander-in-chief after hearing Percy's report asked him several questions in order to find out whether the statements had been made by one native only; but Percy replied that they had spoken to a score of soldiers, and that all were in perfect agreement as to the force that would cross the river, and the division that would be made of the forces and their object in so doing.

"I thank you, sir," Sir Henry said when he had finished. "Your information is most important, and you have carried out your mission with great ability and intelligence. Major Broadfoot will take notice and bring it to my attention later on."

Half an hour later despatches were sent off to the commander-in-chief at Umballa, ordering him to move forward at once with his whole force; and to Loodiana, ordering General Wheeler to carry out the measures that had been agreed on between him and the governor-general on the preceding day, namely, to abandon the cantonments, to place all stores in the fort, to move there all the sick and others unfit to take the field, with a force sufficient to hold the place for a time against any attack that might be made upon it, and to march with his main body to Basseean so as to protect the vast amount of stores accumulated there, from any sudden dash by the enemy. In the evening a messenger came in from Ferozepore, saying that a large body of Sikhs had during the day crossed the river.

The next morning, the 13th of December, the governor-general issued a proclamation to the chiefs and people of the protected states, pointing out that since 1809 the British government had scrupulously fulfilled the terms made with Runjeet Singh, and that notwithstanding the disorganized state of the

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THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THANKS PERCY FOR HIS REPORT.

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Lahore government during the last two years, and several most unfriendly proceedings on the part of the durbar, the governor-general had continued to evince his desire to maintain the relations of amity and concord which had so long existed between the two states.

The attitude of the Sikhs, however, had continued to be more and more unfriendly, and the army had now, without a shadow of provocation, invaded British territory. The governor-general therefore declared the possessions of Maharajah Dhuleep Singh, on the left or British bank of the Sutlej, confiscated and annexed to the British territory. The ranks of all sirdars, zemindars, and tenants in the said possessions who should evince their fidelity to the British government should be respected. The governor-general called upon all chiefs and sirdars to co-operate cordially with the British government. Those who did so would find their interest promoted thereby, while those who took the opposite course would be considered as enemies and treated accordingly. The inhabitants of all the territories on the left bank of the Sutlej were requested to abide peacefully in their respective villages, and all parties of men found in arms would be treated as disturbers of the public peace.

Fortunately the Sikhs after crossing on the 12th, instead of marching at once upon Basseean, halted until their heavy guns were taken across on the 16th. On the afternoon of the 14th General Wheeler, who had marched at daybreak, arrived in front of Basseean; and on the 16th General Gough, the commander-in-chief, arrived there with the force from Umballa. Had the Sikhs pushed forward at once after crossing, Basseean with its great stores of provisions must have fallen into their hands, and a week or ten days must have elapsed before arrangements for provisioning the Umballa force could have been made. In that case the whole Sikh army would have been able to concentrate its efforts upon the capture of Ferozepore, which, in the absence of any fortifications capable of

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withstanding powerful artillery, could scarcely have been defended successfully.

Percy had been kept actively employed during the three days that intervened between his return to Basseean and the arrival of the column from Umballa, in the work of carrying copies of the general's proclamation over the country, and delivering them to the head men of the villages. He acted as interpreter to the officers who, attended by small escorts of cavalry, performed this work, and was on horseback from daylight to dark each day. After the arrival of General Wheeler's division he spent his evenings with his acquaintances there. The troops were all in high spirits because the long uncertainty was at an end, and that at last they were to meet the men who had so insolently been threatening an invasion. The fact that the odds would be enormously against them was considered a matter of no importance whatever, for the British troops had so long been accustomed to victory in India that the idea of a reverse was not entertained for a moment among the soldiers, although among the officers, who were aware of the bravery and fighting power of the Sikhs, the prospect was regarded with a good deal of anxiety.

All the accounts received bore out the correctness of the information that Percy had obtained. Twenty-five thousand Sikhs, all regular soldiers, had taken possession of the wells round the village of Ferozeshah, half-way between Basseean and Ferozepore, and entirely cut the communication between the two places; for owing to scarcity of water no other road could be used for the advance of an army except that passing through Ferozeshah. The Sikhs were well aware of this fact, and on their arrival they had at once begun to throw up strong intrenchments. Another Sikh army of twenty-three thousand, and sixty-seven guns, under Tej Singh, remained watching the British force at Ferozepore.

The British force at Basseean consisted of three thousand eight hundred and fifty Europeans and eight thousand natives,

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with forty-two guns, and on the morning of the 18th of December marched for Ferozepore. They reached their camping ground round the village of Moodkee at one o'clock in the day, and as soon as arms were piled began to cook their dinner. A few Sikh horsemen had retired from the village on their approach, and some scouts were sent out to ascertain if there was any considerable body of the enemy near at hand; these returned in a short time, saying that a large force had taken up a position three miles away. There were, indeed, twelve thousand of them, principally cavalry, with twenty guns. From friends at Basseean they had learnt that an advance was to be made by the British, and thinking that it would be but an advance-guard, Lal Singh had with this body of troops left the camp at Ferozeshah early in the morning and had taken up his position before the arrival of the British army at Moodkee. As soon as the news was received the troops got under arms and moved forward, the artillery and cavalry leading the way and the infantry following in support. When they had gone two miles the enemy was seen ahead of them.

The country was a dead flat, covered at short intervals with a low thick jungle and dotted with sandy hillocks. It was difficult to judge of the strength of the Sikh force, but in order to oblige them to display it, the cavalry, with five troops of horse-artillery, moved forward, and as the infantry formed into line opened fire. This was answered by a very heavy cannonade on the part of the enemy; but in a very short time the rapid fire of the horse-artillery, aided by two field batteries, so discomfited the enemy's gunners that their fire gradually subsided.

In order to allow the infantry to advance without the artillery in front of them being pushed forward too closely to the jungle, Sir Hugh Gough ordered a portion of the cavalry to make a movement on the enemy's flanks. The 3d Light Dragoons, the Governor-general's Body-guard, the 5th Light Cavalry, and a portion of the 4th Lancers dashed round the

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left of the Sikh army, and sweeping along the whole of its rear, forced the artillerymen to leave their guns, and put their cavalry to flight. At the same time the remainder of the 4th Lancers and the 9th Irregular Cavalry, with the Light Field Battery, performed a brilliant charge round the enemy's right. Successful as these operations were, they would have been much more so had not the enemy been so hidden in the jungle that their position could scarcely be made out.

The British guns again opened fire and the infantry advanced. Evening was now falling, and the increasing darkness added to the difficulty of the attack through the thick jungle.

The Sikhs fought stoutly, and several times clung to their positions until driven from them at the point of the bayonet; but they were not able to withstand the steady pressure of the British advance, and, astounded and discomfited at the unexpected valour of a foe whom they professed to despise, they fell back from point to point, and finally made off in the darkness. Had the battle commenced at an early hour the cavalry would have converted the defeat of the enemy into a rout. As it was, seventeen of their twenty guns were captured, and their losses in killed and wounded were very severe. Lal Singh himself was wounded, and had a narrow escape of being taken prisoner.

The British loss was sixteen officers and two hundred men killed, and forty-eight officers and six hundred and nine men wounded. Sir Robert Sale, the hero of Jellalabad, was among those mortally wounded. The defeated Sikhs made their way back to Ferozeshah, while the British returned to Moodkee, which they reached at midnight. The next morning two heavy guns, escorted by the 6th Light Infantry, and the 41st, reached Moodkee. Their march had been a long and fatiguing one, as they had made twenty-seven miles through an arid desert, and were overcome with thirst and fatigue, when some elephants sent out with water to meet them brought them

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relief. It was late in the evening before the column came in, and in order to give the men time to recover from their fatigue it was decided to halt for another day.

It was settled that the sick, wounded, and baggage should be left in the little fort at Moodkee, with a regiment and a half of infantry to protect them should the enemy's cavalry work round to the rear of the army. Messengers were sent off to Ferozepore to inform Sir John Littler, who commanded there, of the victory at Moodkee, and to order him to leave five thousand men to hold the town and watch Tej Singh, and to march with his five thousand remaining men and twenty-one guns to join the commander-in-chief, both forces to march at three o'clock on the morning of the 21st. Sir Henry Hardinge offered to serve as a military man under Sir Hugh Gough, and was appointed second in command of the army.

The marches were well timed, and the junction with Sir John Littler's force was effected at the village of Misriwala, within sight of the Sikh camp, at one o'clock.

The British force after the junction had been effected consisted of five thousand six hundred and seventy-four Europeans and twelve thousand and fifty-three natives, with sixty-five guns; the Sikhs numbered twenty-five thousand regular troops and ten thousand irregulars, with eighty-eight guns; while Tej Singh with his twenty-three thousand regulars and twenty-seven guns was only ten miles distant. The country was a dead flat studded with trees and jungle, and the clouds of dust that rose beneath the feet of the troops rendered it extremely difficult to direct their movements in such a country. Skirmishers were sent forward to ascertain the exact position of the enemy, but the troops were allowed to rest for some time after their hot and dusty march. The commander-in-chief would gladly have waited until next morning before calling upon them for the efforts that would be necessary to carry a position so strong as that occupied by the Sikhs. It was, however, impossible to wait, for there was no water, and

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moreover Tej Singh with his army would certainly be up before morning.

At Moodkee Percy had seen but little of the fighting, although for some hours he had been under fire. His place was behind Major Broadfoot, who was with the commander-in-chief's staff. The jungle at first and the darkness afterwards shut out the absolute conflict from view; and as the enemy's cannon-balls flew overhead or ploughed up the sand, and the air resounded with the sharp short ping of their musket-balls, his feeling as he sat inactive on horseback was one of far greater discomfort than he had felt when exposed to an even heavier fire at the attack on his uncle's fortress. That the British were winning he knew by the advance that was from time to time made by the party, and by the fact that the firing gradually receded.

"You have been under fire before, Groves," Major Broadfoot said to him, "so I suppose you don't mind it."

"I certainly don't like it, sir. Before, I had something to do and did not think much of the danger, and I should not at all mind if you were to send me with a message into the thick of it, but to sit here doing nothing with balls buzzing about is certainly very unpleasant."

"It is unpleasant; I find it so myself," the major said; "but as my post is here with the commander-in-chief, and there is no errand on which I can send you, we must sit it out. If the general wants to send a message and his aides-de-camp are all away, I will tell him that you will carry it for him."

There was, however, no message to be sent. Beyond the fact that the troops were steadily advancing, the commander-in-chief himself knew but little of what was going on. It was a soldier's battle. Except for the flank movements of the cavalry there was no manœuvring. Each regiment pressed straight forward, pushing the enemy back wherever it found him.

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"We shall see more of it to-day, Groves," the major said as they were waiting for the orders for the troops to advance against the Sikh intrenchments. "There is daylight, and as the task of carrying that position will certainly be a severe one, Sir Hugh will move forward with the men, and is likely to be in the thick of it."

The Sikh intrenchment was about a mile in length and half a mile in breadth, including within its area the strong village of Ferozeshah. The Sikhs had the advantage of being thoroughly acquainted with the country, and as they were prepared for an attack upon either side of their position, it was decided that the effort should be made against the long front. The British were formed in three divisions, commanded respectively by Major-general Gilbert, Sir John Littler, and Brigadier-general Wallace. They were formed in line, with the whole of the artillery in the centre, with the exception of a troop of horse-artillery on each flank and one in support. The second line was composed of the cavalry and the reserve under Sir Harry Smith. The artillery were first moved to the front, and the battle began by a discharge from a mortar battery. The Sikhs did not reply, and the whole of the artillery then opened fire to ascertain the position of the enemy's batteries, when the Sikhs at once responded.

'The whole line then advanced and again the artillery opened fire. This movement was repeated until the guns were within three hundred yards of the enemy's intrenchments. In spite of the much more rapid fire of their guns, our artillery were unable to silence that of the enemy, whose pieces were protected to a great extent by the earthworks. Seeing this, the general gave the order for the infantry to advance to storm the intrenchments. General Littler's division directed its march against the village, and by so doing caused an opening in the line between it and Brigadier Wallace's division.

In spite of the terrible storm of grape from the enemy's batteries and the heavy Sikh musketry fire, Littler's men held

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on their way until close up to the works. Then they were unable longer to withstand the storm of fire, and fell back.

The left brigade of the reserve under Sir Harry Smith was at once ordered forward to fill up the opening left in the line, and advanced against the village with splendid bravery. Wallace's and Gilbert's divisions on the right and centre were more successful than that of Littler, and gallantly stormed the intrenchments in front of them in spite of the desperate bravery of the Sikhs; but just as they had achieved this feat night fell suddenly, as it does in India. The air was obscured by dust and smoke; none knew the position of the troops to the right or left of them. Great piles of dry forage were alight in the Sikh camp, and frequent explosions of loose powder took place.

Sir Harry Smith's brigade had stormed the village and held it, but were in complete ignorance of what was taking place elsewhere; while Littler's division, which had suffered terribly in its advance, had retired, but no one knew in which direction. Just before dark the 3d Dragoons, on the extreme right, were ordered to charge, and dashed headlong into the Sikh camp, adding to the utter confusion that prevailed there, and cutting down numbers of the enemy, but losing themselves ten officers and a hundred and twenty men out of four hundred.

To advance further was hopeless. There was no saying what obstacles might be encountered in the darkness—friends might fire into each other, regiments lose their way and be destroyed, and all order and regularity be lost. Consequently Sir Hugh Gough, fearing to keep his men in a position in which they would be exposed to be overthrown piecemeal by rushes of the enemy, told the officers about him to ride off and order all the troops to abandon the positions they had won, and retire outside the intrenchments, and there to lie down in readiness for a renewed attack in the early morning. Wallace's and Gilbert's divisions obeyed the orders, Sir Harry Smith's received none, but after holding the village until about ten

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o'clock at night, and knowing nothing of the position of the troops on his right, he abandoned it and also fell back.

The position of the British was most serious; the whereabouts of the divisions of Sir Harry Smith and General Littler could not be discovered, and the other two divisions, thinned by their losses, might be attacked in the morning by a vastly superior force, for it was probable that Tej Singh with his army would arrive during the night. The Sikhs had withdrawn their guns as the British rushed forward to the assault, so that their artillery was still intact, and as soon as they found that their intrenchments were evacuated they advanced and kept up a continuous fire of cannon and musketry at the unseen foe, who were lying but a hundred and fifty yards away. The fire of one of the batteries was so destructive that Sir Henry Hardinge mounted his horse and called to the 80th Regiment:

"My lads, we shall have no sleep until we take those guns." The regiment leapt to its feet and at once advanced, and, supported by the 1st Bengal Europeans, again stormed the intrenchments, drove the Sikhs from their guns, spiked them, and retired.

Percy had had nothing to do during the advance, but when the orders were given for the troops to retire he had assisted to carry them to the different regiments, as the whole of Sir Henry Hardinge's staff, with the exception of his son, had been killed or wounded, as had most of those of Sir Hugh Gough. Major Broadfoot had fallen. Captain Nicholson, assistant political agent, was also killed, and indeed all the political agents with one exception were either killed or wounded. Percy had felt almost bewildered with the roar and din of the battle; but the feeling of excitement was so great, that although officer after officer fell round him the thought of danger to himself scarcely entered his mind. He mechanically followed with the rest of the staff as the general had ridden hither and thither along the line, but he felt almost as one

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in a dream until he was called upon with all the rest of the officers round the general to carry orders to the troops to retire.

On his return from this duty, Sir Henry Hardinge begged of him to ride off and to try and discover the whereabouts of the missing divisions; and, accompanied by his two men, who had kept a short distance behind him during the fight, and had both escaped unwounded, he rode about for some hours in the jungle, but without success. He was, indeed, himself lost, and at last threw himself off his horse to wait till morning should show him the bearings of the enemy's camp. But few words had been exchanged between him and his followers during the ride, for he was still dazed by the battle, and was parched with thirst and exhausted by fatigue and emotion.

"It has been a terrible day," he said, as he threw himself down on the ground after flinging the bridle over a bough of a low tree to prevent the horse from straying.

"It has, indeed, sahib," Akram Chunder replied. "Never did I hear so terrible a roar of fire. I thought that my time had come, for it seemed as if every man must be swept away. It looked like madness to attack such a position. I did not think that men could do it."

"It was wonderful," Bhop Lal joined in; "truly the British are marvellous fighters. The Sikhs are no cowards, and yet though they must have been two to one, and had strong intrenchments behind which their guns were sheltered, they could not withstand them. I have wondered often how it was that so many kingdoms have been conquered, so many armies defeated, by your countrymen. Now I wonder no longer. When you said that the English would certainly beat the Sikhs I thought you were wrong, thought it was not for me to contradict you. Now I see that you were right. The Sikhs have found their masters, and after all their boasting have been defeated on their own ground, and with numbers, position, and everything in their favour."

"They are not defeated yet," Percy said; "they have again

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entered their intrenchments, and if Tej Singh comes up during the night their numbers will be overwhelming."

"The English will win," Bhop Lal said carelessly; "they are not to be conquered. Besides, the Sikhs move slowly, and Tej Singh will not be up till morning."

They had some bread and cold meat in their valises. Percy had a flask of brandy and water, and his two followers' water-skins hung from their horses' saddles. Percy was only able to eat a few mouthfuls, and then fell asleep; but his followers ate a hearty meal, and remained smoking and talking until, when day began to break, they aroused their master. Bhop Lal climbed up into the highest tree he could find, and exclaimed:

"There are the intrenchments, sahib, two miles away at least."

They mounted and rode off with all speed, and found the troops already forming up. The commander-in-chief and Sir Henry Hardinge placed themselves in front of the troops in order to prevent them from firing. Moving round to the right, they entered the intrenchments with but slight opposition. The enemy's guns were taken in reverse, and wheeling round, past the village of Ferozeshah, the British line swept down through the Sikh encampment, and did not halt until they reached the works on the opposite side. Scarcely had they won the Sikh position and captured his guns, seventy-four in number, when the army of Tej Singh appeared in view, marching towards them.

The divisions of Smith and Littler, which had passed the night in the jungle, had joined the force just as they entered the enemy's works, and the troops now prepared to defend the position they had won.

No attack, however, was made. The crowd of Sikh fugitives made for the army they saw advancing to their assistance, and rushing down in confusion disordered its front line and communicated their panic to the newly-arrived troops.

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After opening fire for some time at a distance that rendered it perfectly innocuous, Tej Singh's troops turned and marched away to the river, which they crossed without a halt.

The British were too weak in cavalry to follow up the enemy. Several regiments had been sent off at daybreak to Ferozepore in order to water their horses, as they would have been useless against the Sikh intrenchments, while those that remained were unfit for active work, the animals having been twenty-four hours without food or water.

The delight of the army was immense at this unexpectedly easy termination of a fight that at one time had looked well-nigh lost, and as Sir Hugh Gough and the governor-general rode down their lines they saluted them with outbursts of cheers.

The loss, however, had been heavy, and had fallen chiefly upon the Europeans, who had four hundred and eighty-eight killed and eleven hundred and three wounded out of a total of six hundred and ninety-four killed and one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one wounded, of whom five hundred and ninety-five died subsequently or were permanently disabled.

As soon as the Sikhs retreated, every effort was made to succour the wounded, and by noon all were in quarters at Ferozepore and provided with cots and blankets.

Among the killed were Major Somerset, military secretary to the governor-general; Colonel Wallace; Major Baldwin, an old Peninsular officer; and many other officers distinguished for their bravery. The 62d, which went into the battle weak in numbers, had seven officers killed and ten wounded, and seventy-six rank and file killed, and one hundred and fifty-four wounded. This regiment belonged to General Littler's division, which had advanced against the strongest part of the Sikh position.

After the engagement was over Percy reported himself to Captain Mills, the only one of the political officers who had escaped unwounded.

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"I am glad that lad went through it uninjured," Sir Henry Hardinge said when Captain Mills reported that he was the only assistant available for service. "He is a very plucky young fellow, and I noticed him several times during the fight. He was always cool and collected even under the heaviest fire, and Major Broadfoot reported to me very strongly upon his conduct in going into the Sikh camp and obtaining for us a trustworthy report of their strength and intentions. He mentioned that he was only a volunteer serving without pay, and appointed temporarily by the Resident at Loodiana on the civil staff. I shall be glad if, when you send in a written report to me, you will specially mention his name."

Although the Sikh invasion had been repelled with such heavy loss of guns and men, the British were in no condition to follow up their advantage. Were they to cross the river they might expect to meet forces far larger than those they had defeated. They were without heavy guns with which to attack fortified towns, and their numbers were altogether insufficient for such an enterprise as the conquest of the Punjaub. They were therefore forced for a time to remain inactive, pending the arrival of reinforcements and siege-guns.

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CHAPTER X

ALIWAL AND SOBRAON

FINDING that the British army did not follow up its success at Ferozeshah, the Sikhs determined to maintain their position on the left bank, and proceeded to construct a bridge of boats at Sobraon, not far from the spot where they had crossed the river in their flight. In front of the head of this bridge an exceedingly strong work was thrown up. The position was very well chosen, the bridge being placed in a curve of the river, and the artillery posted on the bank, which on their side was high, was therefore able to sweep the ground across which a force must advance to attack the work. Ten thousand men under the Sirdar Runjoor Singh were also thrown across the river near Loodiana, in order not only to menace the place with its small garrison, but to cut off the passage of supplies for Ferozepore and to interrupt the communications between the two posts.

As soon as the force at Meerut, consisting of the 9th and 16th Lancers, the 10th and 53d Foot, and the 43d and 59th Native Regiments, arrived with the battering-train, steps were taken to reinforce Loodiana and Basseean with some heavy guns; additional troops were sent to each of these posts, and the sick, with the women and children, were removed thence and sent to Umballa.

Sir Harry Smith's division was increased to seven thousand

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