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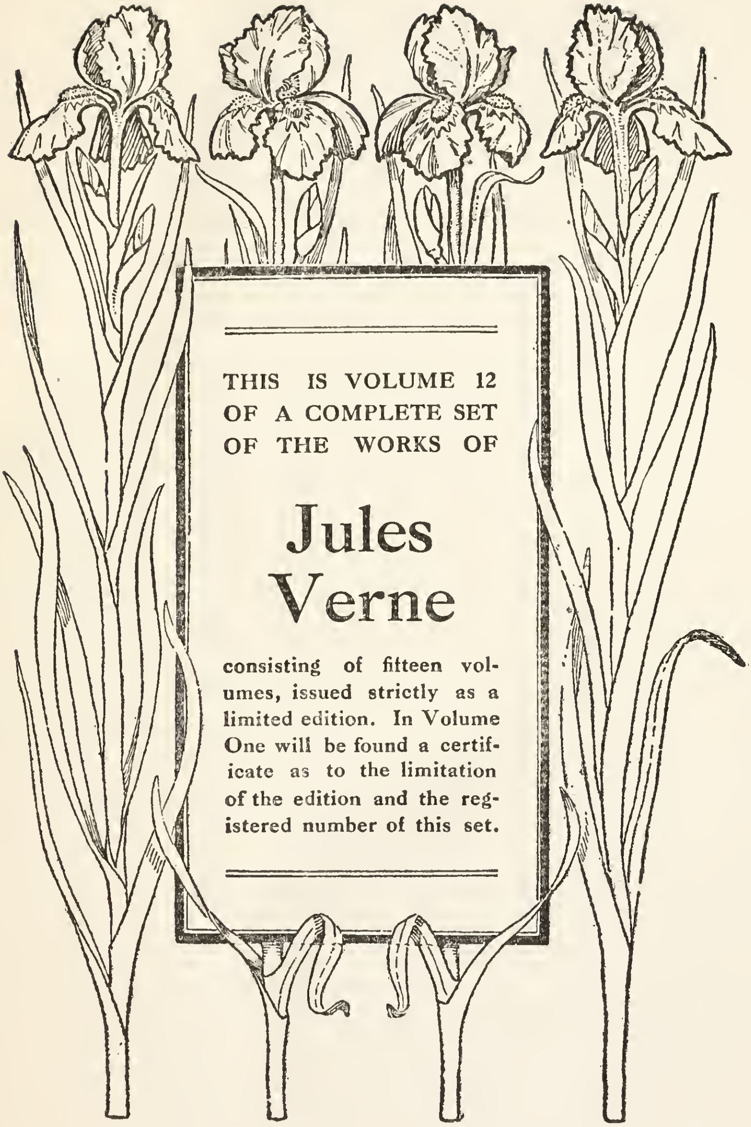

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Jules Verne

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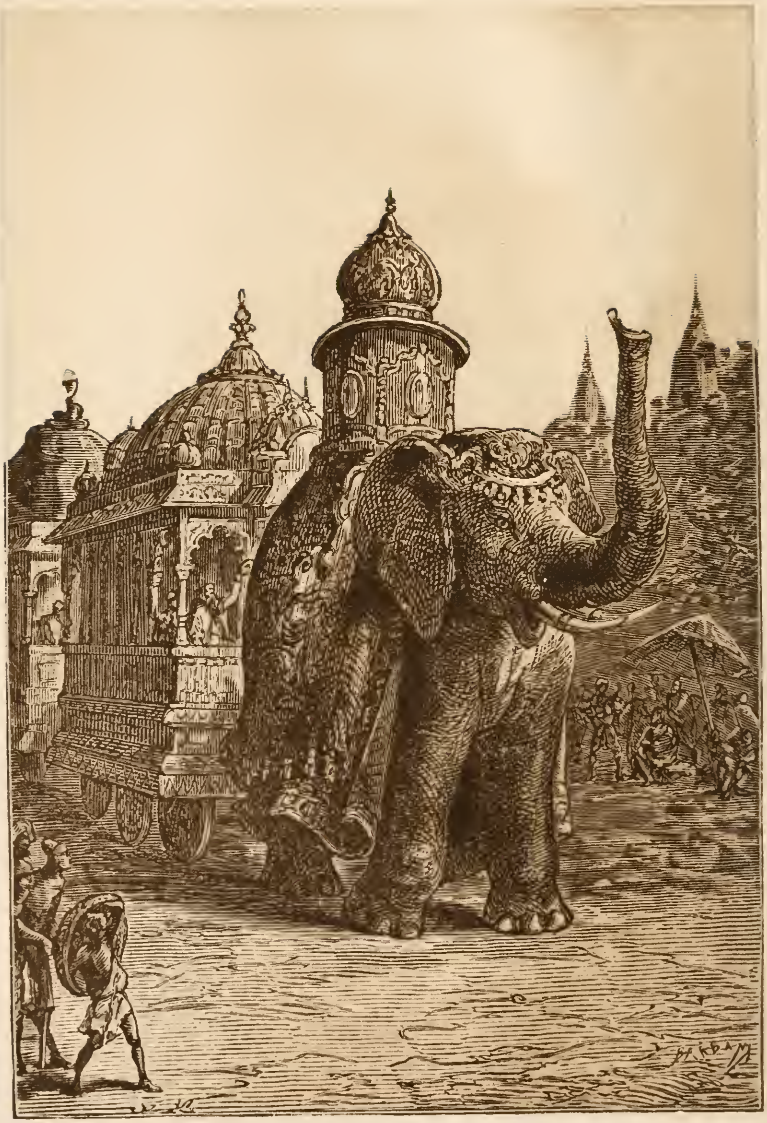

THE STEAM HOUSE.

At sunrise a strange and most remarkable equipage had been seen to issue from the suburbs of the Indian capital, attended by a dense crowd of people drawn by curiosity to watch its departure.

First, and apparently drawing the caravan, came a gigantic elephant. The monstrous animal, twenty feet in height, and thirty in length, advanced deliberately, steadily, and with a certain mystery of movement which struck the gazer with a thrill of awe. His trunk, curved like a cornucopia, was uplifted high in the air. His gilded tusks, projecting from behind the massive jaws, resembled a pair of huge scythes. On his back was a highly ornamented howdah, which looked like a tower surmounted, in Indian style, by a dome-shaped roof and furnished with lens-shaped glasses to serve for windows.

This elephant drew after him a train consisting of two enormous cars, or actual houses, moving bungalows in fact, each mounted on four wheels.—Page 152.

Vol. 12.

WORKS
of
JULES VERNE

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME TWELVE

"THE CRYPTOGRAM," published in 1881, is the second book dealing with "The Giant Raft." The first part, "Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon," had been, as its name suggests, mainly a geographical tale. Readers were this time conducted through the tropical forests and across the boundless prairies of Peru and Brazil.

In "The Cryptogram," however, the geographical interest is almost entirely subordinate to the story. The solving of the cryptogram becomes the central feature, in working out which our author shows a skill scarce inferior to that of Poe himself. Here, for the first time in the body of his works, Verne takes express care to state his fondness for and indebtedness to the work of Poe, whom he denominates "that great analytical genius." He points to Poe's "Gold Bug" as the source of his own tale, calling the earlier story a masterpiece "never to be forgotten." The handling and appreciation of cipher writings in "The Cryptogram" is as different from the superficial explanation of the cipher in Verne's earlier "Center of the Earth," as is the appreciation of a master from that of the most idle amateur.

In addition to his admiration of Poe, Verne in another book expresses equal admiration and indebtedness toward Dickens. He was also an enthusiastic devotee of Victor Hugo and of J. Fennimore Cooper. Surely a sufficiently cosmopolitan grouping of names! Yet it is worth noting that the four men whom Verne turned to, whom he thus perhaps unconsciously grouped together, are the four most extreme of romantic writers who hold yet a grasp on realism. It is to this group that Verne himself belongs.

"The Steam House" is again a two book story belonging among the "Voyages Extraordinaires." In this case the

country selected for depiction is India, and the characters, except for the French traveler Maucler, are once more Englishmen. Thus, in a way, Verne had gone back to his first love. His own practical qualities endeared to him this calmly practical race. He was a Breton, a race quite as much English as French in its characteristics. Indeed, Verne himself was called among his confrères "a half Englishman." Certainly the characters of "The Steam House" are appreciatively and even affectionately drawn, especially those of the hunter Captain Hood and his servant Fox.

The events of the great "Indian Mutiny" of 1857 which supply the story of the book, are described with impartiality toward both sides. This warm denunciation of the sufferings and wrongs of Hindoos as well as Englishmen, has brought forth more than one protest from British sources.

As for the selection of India as the seat of the story, Verne himself explained that his purpose was to cover, one by one, each of the countries of the globe, more especially those little known, so as to make of his completed works a sort of universal geography. Traveling under his guidance, he meant that we should travel everywhere.

The mechanical invention of the steam house itself is in no way impossible. Such a construction was rather beyond the skill of thirty years ago when the book was written; but almost any good engineering firm to-day would contract to build you such a "steam-house" if you cared to afford the expense. In fact our automobiles have already quite outdone this somewhat clumsy giant steam-engine, both in power and in speed.

Mainly then "The Steam House," and more especially its second book, "Tigers and Traitors," will be remembered as a thrilling hunting story. "Big game" incidents of the most exciting yet most natural character, such as the invasion of the naturalist's kraal, throng its busy pages.

The Giant Raft

BOOK TWO

The Cryptogram

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST MOMENTS

SCARCELY had the pirogue which bore off Joam Garral, or rather Joam Dacosta—for it is more convenient that he should resume his real name—disappeared, than Benito stepped up to Manoel.

"What is it you know?" he asked.

"I know that your father is innocent! Yes, innocent!" replied Manoel, "and that he was sentenced to death three-and-twenty years ago for a crime which he never committed!"

"He has told you all about it, Manoel?"

"All about it," replied the young man. "The noble fazender did not wish that any part of his past life should be hidden from him who, when he marries his daughter, is to be his second son."

"And the proof of his innocence my father can one day produce?"

"That proof, Benito, lies wholly in the three-and-twenty years of an honorable and honored life, lies entirely in the bearing of Joam Dacosta, who comes forward to say to justice, 'Here am I! I do not care for this false existence any more. I do not care to hide under a name which is not my true one! You have condemned an innocent man! Confess your error and set matters right.'"

"And when my father spoke like that, you did not hesitate for a moment to believe him?"

"Not for an instant," replied Manoel.

The hands of the two young fellows closed in a long and cordial grasp. Then Benito went up to Padre Passanha. "Padre," he said, "take my mother and sister away to their rooms. Do not leave them all day. No one here doubts my father's innocence—not one, you know that! To-morrow my mother and I will seek out the chief of police. They will not refuse us permission to visit the prison. No! that would be too cruel. We will see my father again, and decide what steps shall be taken to procure his vindication."

Yaquita was almost helpless, but the brave woman, though nearly crushed by the sudden blow, arose. With Yaquita Dacosta it was as with Yaquita Garral. She had not a doubt as to the innocence of her husband. The idea even never occurred to her that Joam Dacosta had been to blame in marrying her under a name which was not his own. She only thought of the life of happiness she had led with the noble man who had been injured so unjustly. Yes! On the morrow she would go to the gate of the prison, and never leave it until it was opened! Padre Passanha took her and her daughter, who could not restrain her tears, and the three entered the house.

The two young fellows found themselves alone. "And now," said Benito, "I ought to know all that my father has told you."

"I have nothing to hide from you."

"Why did Torres come on board the jangada?"

"To sell to Joam Dacosta the secret of his past life."

"And so, when we first met Torres in the forest of Iquitos, his plan had already been formed to enter into communication with my father?"

"There cannot be a doubt of it," replied Manoel. "The scoundrel was on his way to the fazenda with the idea of consummating a vile scheme of extortion which he had been preparing for a long time."

"And when he learned from us that my father and his whole family were about to pass the frontier, he suddenly changed his line of conduct?"

"Yes. Because Joam Dacosta once in Brazilian territory became more at his mercy than while within the frontiers of Peru. That is why we found Torres at Tabatinga, where he was waiting in expectation of our arrival."

"And it was I who offered him a passage on the raft!" exclaimed Benito, with a gesture of despair.

"Brother," said Manoel, "you need not reproach yourself. Torres would have joined us sooner or later. He was not the man to abandon such a trail. Had we lost him at Tabatinga, we should have found him at Manaos."

"Yes, Manoel, you are right. But we are not concerned with the past now. We must think of the present. An end to useless recriminations! Let us see!" And while speaking, Benito, passing his hand across his forehead, endeavored to grasp the details of this strange affair.

"How," he asked, "did Torres ascertain that my father had been sentenced three-and-twenty years back for this abominable crime at Tijuco?"

"I do not know," answered Manoel, "and everything leads me to think that your father did not know that."

"But Torres knew that Garral was the name under which Joam Dacosta was living?"

"Evidently."

"And he knew that it was in Peru, at Iquitos, that for so many years my father had taken refuge?"

"He knew it," said Manoel, "but how he came to know it I do not understand."

"One more question," continued Benito. "What was the proposition that Torres made to my father during the short interview which preceded his expulsion?"

"He threatened to denounce Joam Garral as being Joam Dacosta, if he declined to purchase his silence."

"And at what price?"

"At the price of his daughter's hand!" answered Manoel, unhesitatingly, but pale with anger.

"This scoundrel dared to do that!" exclaimed Benito.

"To this infamous request, Benito, you saw the reply that your father gave."

"Yes, Manoel, yes! The indignant reply of an honest man. He kicked Torres off the raft. But it is not enough to have kicked him out. No! That will not do for me. It was on Torres' information that they came here and arrested my father; is not that so?"

"Yes, on his denunciation."

"Very well," continued Benito, shaking his fist toward the left bank of the river, "I must find out Torres. I must know how he became master of the secret. He must tell me if he knows the real author of this crime. He shall speak out. And if he does not speak out, I know what I shall have to do."

"What you will have to do is for me to do as well!" added Manoel, more coolly, but not less resolutely.

"No, Manoel, no, to me alone!"

"We are brothers, Benito," replied Manoel. "The right of demanding an explanation belongs to us both."

Benito made no reply. Evidently on that subject his decision was irrevocable.

At this moment the pilot Araujo, who had been observing the state of the river, came up to them.

"Have you decided," he asked, "if the raft is to remain at her moorings at the Isle of Muras, or to go on to the port of Manaos?" The question had to be decided before nightfall, and the sooner it was settled the better.

In fact, the news of the arrest of Joam Dacosta ought already to have spread through the town. That it was of a nature to excite the interest of the population of Manaos could scarcely be doubted. But would it provoke more than curiosity against the condemned man, who was the principal author of the crime of Tijuco, which had formerly created such a sensation? Ought they not fear that some popular movement might be directed against the prisoner?

In the face of this hypothesis was it not better to leave the jangada moored near the Isle of Muras on the right bank of the river at a few miles from Manaos?

"No!" at length exclaimed Benito; "to remain here would look as though we were abandoning my father and doubting his innocence—as though we were afraid to make common cause with him. We must go to Manaos, and without delay!"

"You are right," replied Manoel. "Let us go!"

Araujo, with an approving nod, began his preparations for leaving the island. The maneuver necessitated a good deal of care. They had to work the raft slantingly across the current of the Amazon, here doubled in force by that of the Rio Negro, and to make for the embouchure of the tributary about a dozen miles down on the left bank.

The ropes were cast off from the island. The jangada, again started on the river, began to drift off diagonally.

Araujo, cleverly profiting by the bendings of the current, which were due to the projections of the banks, and assisted by the long poles of his crew, succeeded in working the immense raft in the desired direction.

In two hours the jangada was on the other side of the Amazon a little above the mouth of the Rio Negro, and fairly in the current which was to take it to the lower bank of the vast bay which opened on the left side of the stream.

At five o'clock in the evening it was strongly moored alongside this bank, not in the port of Manaos itself, which it could not enter without stemming a rather powerful current, but a short mile below it.

The raft was then in the black waters of the Rio Negro, near rather a high bluff covered with cecropias with buds of reddish brown, and palisaded with stiff-stalked reeds called *froxas,* of which the Indians made some of their weapons.

A few citizens were strolling along the bank. A feeling of curiosity had doubtless attracted them to the anchorage of the raft. The news of the arrest of Joam Dacosta had soon spread about, but the curiosity of the Manaens did not outrun their discretion, and they were very quiet.

Benito's intention had been to land that evening, but Manoel dissuaded him. "Wait till to-morrow," he said, "night is approaching, and there is no necessity for us to leave the raft."

"So be it! To-morrow," answered Benito.

And here Yaquita, followed by her daughter and Padre Passanha, came out of the house. Minha was still weeping, but her mother's face was tearless, and she had that look of calm resolution which showed that the wife was now ready for all things, either to do her duty or to insist on her rights.

Yaquita slowly advanced toward Manoel. "Manoel," she said, "listen to what I have to say, for my conscience commands me to speak as I am about to do."

"I am listening," replied Manoel.

Yaquita, looking him straight in the face, continued: "Yesterday, after the interview you had with Joam Dacosta, my husband, you came to me and called me—mother! You took Minha's hand, and called her—your wife! You then knew everything, and the past life of Joam Dacosta had been then disclosed to you."

"Yes," answered Manoel, "and Heaven forbid I should have any hesitation in doing so!"

"Perhaps so," replied Yaquita; "but then Joam Dacosta had not been arrested. The position is not now the same. However innocent he may be, my husband is in the hands of justice; his past life has been publicly proclaimed. Minha is a convict's daughter."

"Minha Dacosta or Minha Garral, what matters it to me?" exclaimed Manoel, who could keep silent no longer.

"Manoel!" murmured Minha.

And she would certainly have fallen, had not Lina's arm supported her.

"Mother, if you do not wish to kill her," said Manoel, "call me your son!"

"My son! my child!"

It was all Yaquita could say, and the tears, which she restrained with difficulty, filled her eyes.

And then they all entered the house. But during the long night not an hour's sleep fell to the lot of the unfortunate family who were so cruelly tried.

CHAPTER II

RETROSPECTIVE

Joam Dacosta had relied entirely on Judge Ribeiro, and his death was most unfortunate.

Before he was judge at Manaos, and chief magistrate in the province, Ribeiro had known the young clerk at the time he was being prosecuted for the murder in the diamond arrayal. He was then an advocate at Villa Rica, and he it was who defended the prisoner at the trial. He took the cause to heart and made it his own, and from an examination of the papers and detailed information, and not from the simple fact of his position in the matter, he came to the conclusion that his client was wrongfully accused, and that he had taken not the slightest part in the murder of the escort of the diamonds—in a word, that Joam Dacosta was innocent.

But, notwithstanding this conviction, notwithstanding his talent and zeal, Ribeiro was unable to persuade the jury to take the same view of the matter. How could he remove so strong a presumption? If it was not Joam Dacosta, who had every facility for informing the scoundrels of the convoy's departure, who was it? The official who accompanied the escort had perished with the greater part of the soldiers, and suspicion could not point against him. Everything agreed in distinguishing Dacosta as the true and only author of the crime.

Ribeiro defended him with great warmth and with all his powers, but he could not succeed in saving him. The verdict of the jury was affirmative on all the questions. Joam Dacosta, convicted of aggravated and premeditated murder, did not even obtain the benefit of extenuating circumstances, and heard himself condemned to death.

There was no hope left for the accused. No commutation of the sentence was possible, for the crime was committed in the diamond arrayal. The condemned man was lost. But during the night which preceded his execution, and when the gallows was already erected, Joam Dacosta managed to escape from the prison at Villa Rica. We know the rest.

Twenty years later Ribeiro the advocate became the chief justice of Manaos. In the depths of his retreat the fazender of Iquitos heard of the change, and in it saw a favorable opportunity for bringing forward the revision of the former proceedings against him, with some chance of success. He knew that the old convictions of the advocate would be still unshaken in the mind of the judge. He therefore resolved to try and rehabilitate himself. Had it not been for Ribeiro's nomination to the chief justiceship in the province of Amazones, he might perhaps have hesitated, for he had no new material proof of his innocence to bring forward. Although the honest man suffered acutely, he might still have remained hidden in exile at Iquitos, and still have asked for time to smother the remembrances of the horrible occurrence, but something was urging him to act in the matter without delay.

In fact, before Yaquita had spoken to him, Joam Dacosta had noticed that Manoel was in love with his daughter.

The union of the young army doctor and his daughter was in every respect a suitable one. It was evident to Joam that some day or other he would be asked for her hand in marriage, and he did not wish to be obliged to refuse.

But then the thought that his daughter would have to marry under a name which did not belong to her, that Manoel Valdez, thinking he was entering the family of Garral, would enter that of Dacosta, the head of which was under sentence of death, was intolerable to him. No! The wedding should not take place unless under proper conditions! Never!

Let us recall what had happened up to this time. Four years after the young clerk who eventually became the partner of Magalhaes, had arrived at Iquitos, the old Portuguese had been taken back to the farm mortally injured. A few days only were left for him to live. He was alarmed at the thought that his daughter would be left alone and unprotected; but knowing that Joam and Yaquita were in love with each other, he desired their union without delay.

Joam at first refused. He offered to remain the protector or the servant of Yaquita without becoming her husband. The wish of the dying Magalhaes was so urgent that resistance became impossible. Yaquita put her hand into the hand of Joam, and Joam did not withdraw it.

Yes! It was a serious matter! Joam Dacosta ought to have confessed all, or to have fled forever from the house in which he had been so hospitably received, from the establishment of which he had built up the prosperity! Yes! To confess everything rather than to give to the daughter of his benefactor a name which was not his, instead of the name of a felon condemned to death for murder, innocent though he might be!

But the case was pressing, the old fazender was on the point of death, his hands were stretched out toward the young people! Joam was silent, the marriage took place, and the remainder of his life was devoted to the happiness of the girl he had made his wife.

"The day when I confess everything," Joam repeated, "Yaquita will pardon everything! She will not doubt me for an instant! But if I ought not to have deceived her, I certainly will not deceive the honest fellow who wishes to enter our family by marrying Minha! No! I would rather give myself up and have done with this life!"

Many times had Joam thought of telling his wife about his past life. Yes! the avowal was on his lips whenever she asked him to take her into Brazil, and with her and her daughter descend the beautiful Amazon River. He knew sufficient of Yaquita to be sure that her affection for him would not thereby be diminished in the least. But courage failed him!

And this is easily intelligible in the face of the happiness of the family which increased on every side. This happiness was his work. and it might be destroyed forever by his return.

Such had been his life for those long years; such had been the continuous source of his sufferings, of which he had kept the secret so well; such had been the existence of this man, who had no action to be ashamed of, and whom a great injustice compelled to hide!

But at length the day arrived when there could no longer remain a doubt as to the affection which Manoel bore to Minha, when he could see that a year would not go by before he was asked to give his consent to her marriage, and after a short delay he no longer hesitated to proceed in the matter.

A letter from him, addressed to Judge Ribeiro, acquainted the chief justice with the secret of the existence of Joam Dacosta, with the name under which he was concealed, with the place where he lived with his family, and at the same time with his formal intention of delivering himself up to justice, and taking steps to procure the revision of the proceedings, which would either result in his rehabilitation or in the execution of the iniquitous judgment delivered at Villa Rica.

What were the feelings which agitated the heart of the worthy magistrate? We can easily divine them. It was no longer to the advocate that the accused applied, it was to the chief justice of the province that the convict appealed. Joam Dacosta gave himself over to him entirely, and did not even ask him to keep the secret.

Judge Ribeiro was at first troubled about this unexpected revelation, but he soon recovered himself, and scrupulously considered the duties which the position imposed on him. It was his place to pursue criminals, and here was one who delivered himself into his hands. This criminal, it was true, he had defended; he had never doubted but that he had been unjustly condemned; his joy had been extreme when he saw him escape by flight from the last penalty; he had even instigated and facilitated his flight! But what the advocate had done in the past could the magistrate do in the present?

"Well, yes!" had the judge said, "my conscience tells me not to abandon that just man. The step he is taking is a fresh proof of his innocence, a moral proof, even if he brings me others, which may be the most convincing of all. No! I will not abandon him!"

From this day forward a secret correspondence took place between the magistrate and Joam Dacosta. Ribeiro at the outset cautioned his client against compromising himself by his imprudence. He had again to work up the matter, again to read over the papers, again to look through the inquiries. He had to find out if any new facts had come to light in the diamond province referring to so serious a case. Had any of the accomplices of the crime, of the smugglers who had attacked the convoy, been arrested since the attempt? Had any confessions or half-confessions been brought forward? Joam Dacosta had done nothing but protest his innocence from the very first. But that was not enough, and Judge Ribeiro was desirous of finding in the case itself the clue to the real culprit.

Joam Dacosta had accordingly been prudent. He had promised to be so. But in all his trials it was an immense consolation for him to find his old advocate, though now a chief justice, so firmly convinced that he was not guilty. Yes! Joam Dacosta, in spite of his condemnation, was a victim, a martyr, an honest man to whom society owed a signal reparation! And when the magistrate knew the past career of the fazender of Iquitos since his sentence, the position of his family, all that life of devotion, of work, employed unceasingly for the happiness of those belonging to him, he was not only more convinced but more affected, and determined to do all he could to procure the rehabilitation of the felon of Tijuco.

For six months a correspondence had passed between these two men.

One day, the case being pressing, Joam Dacosta wrote to Judge Ribeiro:

"In two months I will be with you, in the power of the chief justice of the province!"

"Come, then," replied Ribeiro.

The jangada was then ready to go down the river. Joam Dacosta embarked on it with all his people. During the voyage, to the great astonishment of his wife and son, he landed but rarely, as we know. More often he remained shut up in his room, writing, working, not at his trade accounts, but, without saying anything about it, at a kind of memoir, which he called "The History of My Life," and which was meant to be used in the revision of the legal proceedings.

Eight days before his new arrest, made on account of information given by Torres, which forestalled and perhaps would ruin his prospects, he intrusted to an Indian on the Amazon a letter, in which he warned Judge Ribeiro of his approaching arrival.

The letter was sent and delivered as addressed, and the magistrate only waited for Joam Dacosta to commence on the serious undertaking which he hoped to bring to a successful issue.

During the night before the arrival of the raft at Manaos, Judge Ribeiro was seized with an attack of apoplexy. But the denunciation of Torres, whose scheme of extortion had collapsed in face of the noble anger of his victim, had produced its effect. Joam Dacosta was arrested in the bosom of his family, and his old advocate was no longer in this world to defend him.

Yes! the blow was terrible indeed. His lot was cast, whatever his fate might be; there was no going back for him! And Joam Dacosta rose from beneath the blow which had so unexpectedly struck him! It was not only his own honor which was in question, but the honor of all who belonged to him!

CHAPTER III

MORAL PROOFS

THE warrant against Joam Dacosta, alias Joam Garral, had been issued by the assistant of Judge Ribeiro, who filled the position of magistrate in the province of Amazones, until the nomination of the successor of the late justice.

This assistant bore the name of Vicente Jarriquez. He was a surly little fellow, whom forty years' practice in criminal procedure had not rendered particularly friendly toward those who came before him. He had had so many cases of this sort, and tried and sentenced so many rascals, that a prisoner's innocence seemed to him *a priori* inadmissible. To be sure, he did not come to a decision unconscientiously; but his conscience was strongly fortified, and was not easily affected by the circumstances of the examination or the arguments for the defense. Like a good many judges, he thought but little of the indulgence of the jury, and when a prisoner was brought before him, after having passed through the sieve of inquest, inquiry, and examination, there was every presumption in his eyes that the man was quite ten times guilty.

Jarriquez, however, was not a bad man. Nervous, fidgety, talkative, keen, crafty, he had a curious look about him, with his big head on his little body; his ruffled hair, which would not have disgraced the judge's wig of the past; his piercing, gimletlike eyes, with their expression of surprising acuteness; his prominent nose, with which he would assuredly have gesticulated had it been movable; his ears wide open, so as to better catch all that was said, even when it was out of range of ordinary auditory apparatus; his fingers unceasingly tapping the table in front of him, like those of a pianist practising on the mute; and his body so long and his legs so short, and his feet perpetually crossing and recrossing, as he sat in state in his magistrate's chair.

In private life, Jarriquez, who was a confirmed old bachelor, never left his law books but for the table, which he did not despise; for chess, of which he was a past master; and above all things for Chinese puzzles, enigmas, charades, rebuses, anagrams, riddles, and such things, with which, like more than one European justice—thorough sphinxes by taste as well as by profession—he principally passed his leisure.

It will be seen that he was an original, and it will be seen also how much Joam Dacosta had lost by the death of Judge Ribeiro, inasmuch as his case would come before this not very agreeable judge.

Moreover, the task of Jarriquez was in a way very simple. He had neither to inquire nor to rule; he had not even to regulate a discussion nor to obtain a verdict, neither to apply the articles of the penal code, nor to pronounce a sentence. Unfortunately for the fazender, such formalities were no longer necessary; Joam Dacosta had been arrested, convicted, and sentenced three-and-twenty years ago for the crime at Tijuco; no limitation had yet affected his sentence. No demand in commutation of the penalty could be introduced, and no appeal for mercy could be received. It was only necessary then to establish his identity, and as soon as the order arrived from Rio Janeiro justice would have taken its course.

But in the nature of things Joam Dacosta would protest his innocence; he would say he had been unjustly condemned. The magistrate's duty, notwithstanding the opinions he held, would be to listen to him. The question would be, what proofs could the convict offer to make good his assertions? And if he was not able to produce them when he appeared before his first judges, was he able to do so now?

Herein consisted all the interest of the examination. There would have to be admitted the fact of a defaulter, prosperous and safe in a foreign country, leaving his refuge of his own free will to face the justice which his past life should have taught him to dread, and herein would be one of those rare and curious cases which ought to interest even a magistrate hardened with all the surroundings of forensic strife. Was it impudent folly on the part of the doomed man of Tijuco, who was tired of his life, or was it the impulse of a conscience which would at all risks have wrong set right? The problem was a strange one, it must be acknowledged.

On the morrow of Joam Dacosta's arrest, Judge Jarriquez made his way to the prison in God-the-Son Street, where the convict had been placed. The prison was an old missionary convent, situated on the bank of one of the principal inguarapes of the town. To the voluntary prisoners of former times there had succeeded in this building, which was but little adapted for the purpose, the compulsory prisoners of to-day. The room occupied by Joam Dacosta was nothing like one of those sad little cells which form part of our modern penitentiary system; but an old monk's room, with a barred window without shutters, opening on to an uncultivated space, a bench in one corner, and a kind of pallet in the other.

It was from this apartment that Joam Dacosta, on this 25th of August, about eleven o'clock in the morning, was taken and brought into the judge's room, which was the old common hall of the convent.

Judge Jarriquez was there in front of his desk, perched on his high chair, his back turned toward the window, so that his face was in shadow while that of the accused remained in full daylight. His clerk, with the indifference which characterizes these legal folks, had taken his seat at the end of the table, his pen behind his ear, ready to record the questions and answers.

Joam Dacosta was introduced into the room, and at a sign from the judge the guards who had brought him withdrew.

Judge Jarriquez looked at the accused for some time. The latter, leaning slightly forward and maintaining a becoming attitude, neither careless nor humble, waited with dignity for the questions to which he was expected to reply.

"Your name?" said Judge Jarriquez.

"Joam Dacosta."

"Your age?"

"Fifty-two."

"Where do you live?"

"In Peru, at the village of Iquitos."

"Under what name?"

"Under that of Garral, which is that of my mother."

"And why do you bear that name?"

"Because for three-and-twenty years I wished to hide myself from the pursuit of Brazilian justice."

The answers were so exact, and seemed to show that Joam Dacosta had made up his mind to confess everything concerning his past life, that Judge Jarriquez, little accustomed to such a course, cocked up his nose more than was usual to him.

"And why," he continued, "should Brazilian justice pursue you?"

"Because I was sentenced to death in 1826 in the diamond affair at Tijuco."

"You confess then that you are Joam Dacosta?"

"I am Joam Dacosta."

All this was said with great calmness, and as simply as possible. The little eyes of Judge Jarriquez, hidden by their lids, seemed to say:

"Never came across anything like this before."

He had put the invariable question which had hitherto brought the invariable reply from culprits of every category protesting their innocence. The fingers of the judge began to beat a gentle tattoo on the table.

"Joam Dacosta," he asked, "what were you doing at Iquitos?"

"I was a fazender, and engaged in managing a farming establishment of considerable size."

"It was prospering?"

"Greatly prospering."

"How long ago did you leave your fazenda?"

"About nine weeks."

"Why?"

"As to that, sir," answered Dacosta, "I invented a pretext, but in reality I had a motive."

"What was the pretext?"

"The responsibility of taking into Para a large raft, and a cargo of different products of the Amazon."

"Ah! and what was the real motive of your departure?"

And in asking this question Jarriquez said to himself: "Now we shall get into denials and falsehoods."

"The real motive," replied Joam Dacosta, in a firm voice, "was the resolution I had taken to give myself up to the justice of my country."

"You give yourself up!" exclaimed the judge, rising from his stool. "You give yourself up of your own free will?"

"Of my own free will."

"And why?"

"Because I had had enough of this lying life, this obligation to live under a false name, of this impossibility to be able to restore to my wife and children that which belongs to them; in short, sir, because——"

"Because?"

"I was innocent!"

"That is what I was waiting for!" said Judge Jarriquez aside.

And while his fingers tattooed a slightly more audible march, he made a sign with his head to Dacosta, which signified as clearly as possible: "Go on! Tell me your history! I know it, but I do not wish to interrupt you in telling it in your own way."

Joam Dacosta, who did not disregard the magistrate's far from encouraging attitude, could not but see this, and he told the history of his whole life. He spoke quietly without departing from the calm he had imposed upon himself, without omitting any circumstances which had preceded or succeeded his condemnation. In the same tone he insisted on the honored and honorable life he had led since his escape, and his duties as head of his family, as husband and father, which he had so worthily fulfilled. He laid stress only on one circumstance—that which had brought him to Manaos to urge on the revision of the proceedings against him, to procure his rehabilitation—and that he was compelled to do.

Judge Jarriquez, who was naturally prepossessed against all criminals, did not interrupt him. He contented himself with opening and shutting his eyes like a man who heard the story told for the hundredth time; and when Joam Dacosta laid on the table the memoir which he had drawn up, he made no movement to take it.

"You have finished?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"And you persist in asserting that you only left Iquitos to procure the revision of the judgment against you?"

"I had no other intention."

"What is there to prove that? Who can prove, that without the denunciation which brought about your arrest, you would have given yourself up?"

"This memoir in the first place."

"That memoir was in your possession, and there is nothing to show that had you not been arrested you would have put it to the use you say you intended."

"At the least, sir, there was one thing that was not in my possession, and of the authenticity of which there can be no doubt."

"What?"

"The letter I wrote to your predecessor, Judge Ribeiro, the letter which gave him notice of my early arrival."

"Ah! you wrote?"

"Yes. And the letter which ought to have arrived at its destination should have been handed over to you."

"Really!" answered Judge Jarriquez, in a slightly incredulous tone. "You wrote to Judge Ribeiro."

"Before he was a judge in this province," answered Joam Dacosta, "he was an advocate at Villa Rica. He it was who defended me in the trial at Tijuco. He never doubted the justice of my cause. He did all he could to save me. Twenty years later, when he had become chief justice at Manaos, I let him know who I was, where I was, and what I wished to attempt. His opinion about me had not changed, and it was at his advice I left the fazenda, and came in person to proceed with my rehabilitation. But death unfortunately struck him, and maybe I shall be lost, sir, if in Judge Jarriquez I do not find another Judge Ribeiro."

The magistrate, appealed to so directly, was about to start up in defiance of all the traditions of the judicial bench, but he managed to restrain himself, and was contented with muttering, "Very strong, indeed; very strong!"

Judge Jarriquez was evidently hard of heart, and proof against all surprise.

At this moment a guard entered the room, and handed a sealed package to the magistrate.

He broke the seal and drew a letter from the envelope. He opened it and read it, not without a certain contraction of the eyebrows, and then said, "I have no reason for hiding from you, Joam Dacosta, that this is the letter you have been speaking about, addressed by you to Judge Ribeiro and sent on to me. I have, therefore, no reason to doubt what you have said on the subject."

"Not only on that subject," answered Dacosta, "but on the subject of all the circumstances of my life which I have brought to your knowledge, and which are none of them open to question."

"Eh! Joam Dacosta," quickly replied Judge Jarriquez. "You protest your innocence; but all prisoners do as much! After all, you only offer moral presumptions. Have you any material proof?"

"Perhaps I have," answered Joam Dacosta.

At these words, Judge Jarriquez left his chair. This was too much for him, and he had to take two or three circuits of the room to recover himself.

CHAPTER IV

MATERIAL PROOFS

When the magistrate had again taken his place, like a man who considered he was perfectly master of himself, he leaned back in his chair, and with his head raised and his eyes looking straight in front, as though not even noticing the accused, remarked in a tone of the most perfect indifference: "Go on."

Joam Dacosta reflected for a minute, as if hesitating to resume the order of his thoughts, and then answered as follows:

"Up to the present, sir, I have only given you moral presumptions of my innocence grounded on the dignity, propriety, and honesty of the whole of my life. I should have thought that such proofs were those most worthy of being brought forward in matters of justice."

Judge Jarriquez could not restrain a movement of his shoulders, showing that such was not his opinion.

"Since they are not enough, I proceed with the material proofs which I shall perhaps be able to produce," continued Dacosta; "I say perhaps, for I do not yet know what credit to attach to them. And, sir, I have never spoken of these things to my wife or children, not wishing to raise a hope which might be destroyed."

"To the point," answered Jarriquez.

"I have every reason to believe, sir, that my arrest on the eve of the arrival of the raft at Manaos is due to information given to the chief of the police?"

"You are not mistaken, Joam Dacosta, but I ought to tell you that the information is anonymous."

"It matters little, for I know that it could only come from a scoundrel called Torres."

"And what right have you to speak in such a way of this —informer?"

"A scoundrel! Yes, sir!" replied Joam, quickly. "This man, whom I received with hospitality, only came to me to propose that I should purchase his silence, to offer me an odious bargain that I shall never regret having refused, whatever may be the consequences of his denunciation!"

"Always this method!" thought Judge Jarriquez; "accusing others to clear himself."

But he none the less listened with extreme attention to Joam's recital of his relations with the adventurer up to the moment when Torres let him know that he knew and could reveal the name of the true author of the crime of Tijuco.

"And what is the name of the guilty man?" asked Jarriquez, shaken in his indifference.

"I do not know," answered Joam Dacosta. "Torres was too cautious to let it out."

"And the culprit is living?"

"He is dead."

The fingers of Judge Jarriquez tattooed more quickly, and he could not avoid exclaiming: "The man who can furnish the proof of a prisoner's innocence is always dead."

"If the real culprit is dead, sir," replied Dacosta, "Torres at least is living, and the proof, written throughout in the handwriting of the author of the crime, he has assured me is in his hands! He offered to sell it to me!"

"Eh! Joam Dacosta!" answered Judge Jarriquez, "that would not have been dear at the cost of your whole fortune!"

"If Torres had only asked my fortune, I would have given it to him, and not one of my people would have demurred! Yes, you are right, sir; a man cannot pay too dearly for the redemption of his honor! But this scoundrel, knowing that I was at his mercy, required more than my fortune!"

"How so?"

"My daughter's hand was to be the cost of the bargain!

I refused; he denounced me; and that is why I am now before you!"

"And if Torres had not informed against you," asked Judge Jarriquez—"if Torres had not met with you on your voyage, what would you have done on learning on your arrival of the death of Judge Ribeiro? Would you then have delivered yourself into the hands of justice?"

"Without the slightest hesitation," replied Joam, in a firm voice; "for, I repeat it, I had no other object in leaving Iquitos to come to Manaos."

This was said in such a tone of truthfulness, that Judge Jarriquez experienced a kind of feeling making its way to that corner of the heart where convictions are formed, but he did not give in.

He could scarcely help being astonished. A judge engaged merely in this examination, he knew nothing of what is known by those who have followed this history, and who cannot doubt but that Torres held in his hands the material proof of Joam Dacosta's innocence. They know that the document existed; that it contained this evidence; and perhaps they may be led to think that Judge Jarriquez was pitilessly incredulous. But they should remember that Judge Jarriquez was not in their position; that he was accustomed to the invariable protestations of the culprits who came before him. The document which Joam Dacosta appealed to was not produced; he did not really know if it actually existed; and to conclude, he had before him a man whose guilt had for him the certainty of a settled thing.

However, he wished, perhaps through curiosity, to drive Joam Dacosta behind his last entrenchments.

"And so," he said, "all your hope now rests on the declaration which has been made to you by Torres."

"Yes, sir, if my whole life does not plead for me."

"Where do you think Torres really is?"

"I think in Manaos."

"And you hope that he will speak—that he will consent good-naturedly to hand over to you the document for which you have declined to pay the price he asked?"

"I hope so, sir," replied Joam Dacosta; "the situation now is not the same for Torres; he has denounced me, and consequently he cannot retain any hope of resuming his bargaining under the previous conditions. But this document might still be worth a fortune if, supposing I am acquitted or executed, it should ever escape him. Hence his interest is to sell me the document, which cannot thus injure him in any way, and I think he will act according to his interest."

The reasoning of Joam Dacosta was unanswerable, and Judge Jarriquez felt it to be so. He made the only possible objection.

"The interest of Torres is doubtless to sell you the document—if the document exists."

"If it does not exist," answered Joam Dacosta, in a penetrating voice, "in trusting to the justice of men, I must put my trust only in God!"

At these words Judge Jarriquez rose, and, in not quite such an indifferent tone, said, "Joam Dacosta, in examining you here, in allowing you to relate the particulars of your past life and to protest your innocence, I have gone further than my instructions allow me. An information has already been laid in this affair, and you have appeared before the jury at Villa Rica, whose verdict was given unanimously and without even the addition of extenuating circumstances. You have been found guilty of the instigation of, and complicity in, the murder of the soldiers and the robbery of the diamonds at Tijuco, the capital sentence was pronounced on you, and it was only by flight that you escaped execution. But that you came here to deliver yourself over, or not, to the hands of justice three-and-twenty years afterward, you would never have been retaken. For the last time, you admit that you are Joam Dacosta, the condemned man of the diamond arrayal?"

"I am Joam Dacosta!"

"You are ready to sign this declaration?"

"I am ready."

And with a hand without a tremble Joam Dacosta put his name to the foot of the declaration and the report which Judge Jarriquez had made his clerk draw up.

"The report, addressed to the minister of justice, is to be sent off to Rio Janeiro," said the magistrate. "Many days will elapse before we receive orders to carry out your sentence. If then, as you say, Torres possesses the proof of your innocence, do all you can yourself—do all you can through your friends—do everything, so that that proof can be produced in time. Once the order arrives no delay will be possible, and justice must take its course."

Joam Dacosta bowed slightly.

"Shall I be allowed in the meantime to see my wife and children?" he asked.

"After to-day, if you wish," answered Judge Jarriquez; "you are no longer in close confinement, and they can be brought to you as soon as they apply."

The magistrate then rang the bell. The guards entered the room, and took away Joam Dacosta.

Judge Jarriquez watched him as he went out, and shook his head, and muttered, "Well, well! This is a much stranger affair than I ever thought it would be!"

CHAPTER V

THE LAST BLOW

While Joam Dacosta was undergoing this examination, Yaquita, from an inquiry made by Manoel, ascertained that she and her children would be permitted to see the prisoner that very day about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Yaquita had not left her room since the evening before. Minha and Lina kept near her, waiting for the time when she would be admitted to see her husband. Yaquita Garral or Yaquita Dacosta, he would still find her the devoted wife and brave companion he had ever known her to be.

About eleven o'clock in the morning Benito joined Manoel and Fragoso, who were talking in the bow of the jangada. "Manoel," said he, "I have a favor to ask you."

"What is it?"

"And you, too, Fragoso."

"I am at your service, Mr. Benito," answered the barber.

"What is the matter?" asked Manoel, looking at his friend, whose expression was that of a man who had come to some unalterable resolution.

"You never doubt my father's innocence? Is that so?" said Benito.

"Ah!" exclaimed Fragoso, "rather I think it was I who committed the crime."

"Well, we must now commence on the project I thought of yesterday."

"To find out Torres?" asked Manoel.

"Yes, and know from him how he found out my father's retreat. There is something inexplicable about it. Did he know it before? I cannot understand it, for my father never left Iquitos for more than twenty years, and this scoundrel is hardly thirty! But the day will not close before I know it; or, woe to Torres!"

Benito's resolution admitted of no discussion; and besides, neither Manoel nor Fragoso had the slightest thought of dissuading him.

"I will ask, then," continued Benito, "for both of you to accompany me. We shall start in a minute or two. It will not do to wait till Torres has left Manaos. He has no longer got his silence to sell, and the idea might occur to him. Let us be off!" And so all three of them landed on the bank of the Rio Negro and started for the town.

Manaos was not so considerable that it could not be searched in a few hours. They had made up their minds to go from house to house, if necessary, to look for Torres, but their better plan seemed to be to apply in the first instance to the keepers of the taverns and lojas, where the adventurer was likely to put up. There could hardly be a doubt that the ex-captain of the woods would not have given his name; he might have personal reasons for avoiding all communication with the police. Nevertheless, unless he had left Manaos it was almost impossible for him to escape the young fellows' search. In any case, there would be no use in applying to the police, for it was very probable—in fact, we know that it actually was so—that the information given to them had been anonymous.

For an hour Benito, Manoel, and Fragoso walked along the principal streets of the town, inquiring of tradesmen in their shops, the tavern-keepers in their cabarets, and even the bystanders, without any one being able to recognize the individual whose description they so accurately gave. Had Torres left Manaos? Would they have to give up all hope of coming across him?

In vain Manoel tried to calm Benito, whose head seemed on fire. Cost what it might, he must get at Torres!

Chance at last favored them, and it was Fragoso who put them on the right track. In a tavern in Holy Ghost Street, from the description which the people received of the adventurer, they replied that the individual in question had put up at the loja the evening before.

"Did he sleep here?" asked Fragoso.

"Yes," answered the tavern-keeper.

"Is he here now?"

"No. He has gone out."

"But he has settled his bill, as a man would who has gone for good?"

"By no means; he left his room about an hour ago, and he will doubtless come back to supper."

"Do you know what road he took when he went out?"

"We saw him turning toward the Amazon, going through the lower town, and you will probably meet him on that side."

Fragoso did not want any more. A few seconds afterward he rejoined the young fellows, and said, "I am on the track."

"He is there!" exclaimed Benito.

"No; he has just gone out, and they have seen him walking across to the bank of the Amazon."

"Come on!" replied Benito.

They had to go back toward the river, and the shortest way was for them to take the left bank of the Rio Negro, down to its mouth.

They soon left the last houses of the town behind, and followed the bank, making a slight detour so as not to be observed from the jangada. The plain was at this time deserted. Far away the view extended across the flat, where cultivated fields had replaced the former forests.

Benito did not speak; he could not utter a word. Manoel and Fragoso respected his silence. And so the three of them went along and looked about on all sides as they traversed the space between the bank of the Rio Negro and that of the Amazon. Three-quarters of an hour after leaving Manaos, and still they had seen nothing!

Once or twice Indians working in the fields were met with. Manoel questioned them, and one of them at length told him that a man, such as he described, had just passed in the direction of the angle formed by the two rivers at their confluence.

Without waiting for more, Benito, by an irresistible movement, strode to the front, and his two companions had to hurry on to avoid being left behind.

The left bank of the Amazon was then about a quarter of a mile off. A sort of cliff appeared ahead, hiding a part of the horizon, and bounding the view a few hundred paces in advance. Benito, hurrying on, soon disappeared behind one of the sandy knolls.

"Quicker! quicker!" said Manoel to Fragoso. "We must not leave him alone for an instant." And they were dashing along when a shot struck on their ears. Had Benito caught sight of Torres? What had he seen? Had Benito and Torres already met?

Manoel and Fragoso, fifty paces farther on, after swiftly running round the bank, saw two men standing face to face. They were Torres and Benito.

In an instant Manoel and Fragoso had hurried up to them. It might have been supposed that in Benito's state of excitement he would be unable to restrain himself when he found himself once again in the presence of the adventurer. It was not so.

As soon as the young man saw Torres, and was certain that he could not escape, a complete change took place in his manner, his coolness returned, and he became once more master of himself. The two men looked at one another for a few moments without a word. Torres first broke silence, and in the impudent tone habitual to him, remarked, "Ah! How goes it, Mr. Benito Garral?"

"No, Benito Dacosta!" answered the young man.

"Quite so," continued Torres. "Mr. Benito Dacosta, accompanied by Mr. Manoel Valdez and my friend Fragoso!"

At the irritating qualification thus accorded him by the adventurer, Fragoso, who was by no means loth to do him some damage, was about to rush to the attack, when Benito, quite unmoved, held him back.

"What is the matter with you, my lad?" exclaimed Torres, retreating for a few steps. "I think I had better put myself on guard."

And as he spoke he drew from beneath his poncho his manchetta, the weapon, adapted at will for offense or defense, which a Brazilian is never without. And then, slightly stooping, and planted firmly on his feet, he waited for what was to follow.

" I have come to look for you, Torres," said Benito, who had not stirred in the least at this threatening attitude.

" To look for me? " answered the adventurer. " It is not very difficult to find me. And why have you come to look for me? "

" To know from your own lips what you appear to know of the past life of my father."

" Really! "

" Yes. I want to know how you recognized him, why you were prowling about our fazenda in the forest of Iquitos, and why you were waiting for us at Tabatinga? "

" Well! it seems to me nothing could be clearer! " answered Torres, with a grin. " I was waiting to get a passage on the jangada, and I went on board with the intention of making him a very simple proposition—which possibly he was wrong in rejecting."

At these words Manoel could stand it no longer. With pale face and eye of fire he strode up to Torres.

Benito, wishing to exhaust every means of conciliation, thrust himself between them.

" Calm yourself, Manoel! " he said. " I am calm—even I! " And then continuing, " Quite so, Torres; I know the reason of your coming on board the raft. Possessed of a secret which was doubtless given to you, you wanted to make it a means of extortion. But that is not what I want to know at present."

" What is it, then? "

" I want to know how you recognized Joam Dacosta in the fazender of Iquitos? "

" How I recognized him? " replied Torres. " That is my business, and I see no reason why I should tell you. The important fact is, that I was not mistaken when I denounced in him the real author of the crime of Tijuco! "

" You say that to me! " exclaimed Benito, who began to lose his self-possession.

" I will tell you nothing," returned Torres; " Joam Dacosta declined my propositions! He refused to admit me into his family! Well! now that his secret is known, now that he is a prisoner, it is I who refuse to enter his family, the family of a thief, of a murderer, of a condemned felon, for whom the gallows now waits!"

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed Benito, who drew his manchetta from his belt and put himself in position.

Manoel and Fragoso, by a similar movement, quickly drew their weapons.

"Three against one!" said Torres.

"No! one against one!" answered Benito.

"Really! I should have thought an assassination would have better suited an assassin's son!"

"Torres!" exclaimed Benito, "defend yourself, or I will kill you like a mad dog!"

"Mad! so be it!" answered Torres, "but I bite, Benito Dacosta, and beware of the wounds!" And then again grasping his manchetta, he put himself on guard and ready to attack his enemy.

Benito had stepped back a few paces. "Torres," he said, regaining all his coolness, which for a moment he had lost, "you were the guest of my father, you threatened him, you betrayed him, you denounced him, you accused an innocent man, and with God's help I am going to kill you!"

Torres replied with the most insolent smile imaginable. Perhaps at the moment the scoundrel had an idea of stopping any struggle between Benito and him, and he could have done so. In fact, he had seen that Joam Dacosta had said nothing about the document which formed the material proof of his innocence.

Had he revealed to Benito that he, Torres, possessed this proof, Benito would have been that instant disarmed. But his desire to wait till the very last moment, so as to get the very best price for the document he possessed, the recollection of the young man's insulting words, and the hate which he bore to all that belonged to him, made him forget his own interest.

In addition to being thoroughly accustomed to the manchetta, which he often had had occasion to use, the adventurer was strong, active, and artful, so that against an adversary who was scarcely twenty, who could have neither his strength nor his dexterity, the chances were greatly in his favor.

Manoel by a last effort wished to insist on fighting him instead of Benito.

"No, Manoel," was the cool reply, "it is for me alone to avenge my father, and as everything here ought to be in order, you shall be my second."

"Benito!"

"As for you, Fragoso, you will not refuse if I ask you to act as second for that man?"

"So be it," answered Fragoso, "though it is not an office of honor! Without the least ceremony," he added, "I would have killed him like a wild beast!"

The place where the duel was about to take place was a level bank about fifty paces long, on the top of a cliff rising perpendicularly some fifty feet above the Amazon. The river slowly flowed at the foot, and bathed the clumps of reeds which bristled round its base.

There was, therefore, none too much room, and the combatant who was the first to give way would quickly be driven over into the abyss.

The signal was given by Manoel, and Torres and Benito stepped forward. Benito had complete command over himself. The defender of a sacred cause, his coolness was unruffled, much more so than that of Torres, whose conscience, insensible and hardened as it was, was bound at the moment to trouble him.

The two met, and the first blow came from Benito. Torres parried it. They then jumped back, but almost at the same instant they rushed together, and with their left hands seized each other by the shoulders—never to leave go again.

Torres, who was the strongest, struck a side blow with his manchetta which Benito could not quite parry. His left side was touched, and his poncho was reddened with his blood. But he quickly replied, and slightly wounded Torres in the hand.

Several blows were then interchanged, but nothing decisive was done. The ever silent gaze of Benito pierced the eyes of Torres like a sword-blade thrust to his very heart. Visibly, the scoundrel began to quail. He recoiled little by little, pressed back by his implacable foe, who was more determined on taking the life of his father's denouncer than in defending his own. To strike was all that Benito longed for; to parry was all that the other now attempted to do.

Soon Torres saw himself thrust to the very edge of the bank, at a spot where, slightly scooped away, it overhung the river. He perceived the danger; he tried to retake the offensive and regain the lost ground. His agitation increased, his looks grew livid. At length he was obliged to stoop beneath the arm which threatened him.

"Die, then!" exclaimed Benito.

The blow was struck full on the chest, but the point of the manchetta was stopped by a hard substance hidden beneath the poncho of the adventurer.

Benito renewed his attack, and Torres, whose return thrust did not touch his adversary, felt himself lost. He was again obliged to retreat. Then he would have shouted —shouted that the life of Joam Dacosta depended on his own! He had not time!

A second thrust of the manchetta pierced his heart. He fell backward, and the ground suddenly failing him, he was precipitated down the cliff. As a last effort his hands convulsively clutched at a clump of reeds, but they could not stop him, and he disappeared beneath the waters of the river.

Benito was supported on Manoel's shoulder; Fragoso grasped his hands. He would not even give his companions time to dress his wound, which was very silght.

"To the jangada!" he said, "to the jangada!"

Manoel and Fragoso with deep emotion followed him without speaking a word.

A quarter of an hour afterward the three reached the bank to which the raft was moored. Benito and Manoel rushed into the room where were Yaquita and Minha, and told them all that had passed.

"My son!" "My brother!"

The words were uttered at the same moment.

"To the prison!" said Benito.

"Yes! Come! come!" replied Yaquita.

Benito, followed by Manoel, hurried along his mother, and half an hour later they arrived before the prison.

Owing to the order previously given by Judge Jarriquez they were immediately admitted, and conducted to the chamber occupied by the prisoner. The door opened. Joam Dacosta saw his wife, his son, and Manoel enter the room.

"Ah! Joam, my Joam!" exclaimed Yaquita.

"Yaquita! my wife! my children!" replied the prisoner, who opened his arms and pressed them to his heart.

"My Joam, innocent!"

"Innocent and avenged!" said Benito.

"Avenged? What do you mean?"

"Torres is dead, father; killed by my hand!"

"Dead!—Torres!—Dead!" gasped Joam Dacosta. "My son! You have ruined me!"

CHAPTER VI

RESOLUTIONS

A FEW hours later the whole family had returned to the raft, and were assembled in the large room. All were there, except the prisoner, on whom the last blow had just fallen. Benito was quite overwhelmed, and accused himself of having destroyed his father, and had it not been for the entreaties of Yaquita, of his sister, or Padre Passanha, and of Manoel, the distracted youth would in the first moments of despair have probably made away with himself. But he was never allowed to get out of sight, he was never left alone. And besides, how could he have acted otherwise? Ah! why had not Joam Dacosta told him all before he left the jangada? Why had he refrained from speaking, except before a judge, of this material proof of his innocence? Why, in his interview with Manoel after the expulsion of Torres, had he been silent about the document which the adventurer pretended to hold in his hands? But, after all, what faith ought he to place in what Torres had said? Could he be certain that such a document was in the rascal's possession?

Whatever might be the reason, the family now knew everything, and that from the lips of Joam Dacosta himself. They knew that Torres had declared that the proof of the innocence of the convict of Tijuco actually existed; that the document had been written by the very hand of the author of the attack; that the criminal, seized by remorse at the moment of his death, had intrusted it to his companion, Torres; and that he, instead of fulfilling the wishes of the dying man, had made the handing over of the document an excuse for extortion. But they knew also that Torres had just been killed, and that his body was engulfed in the waters of the Amazon, and that he died without even mentioning the name of the guilty man.

Unless he was saved by a miracle, Joam Dacosta might now be considered as irrevocably lost. The death of Judge Ribeiro on the one hand, the death of Torres on the other, were blows from which he could not recover! It should here be said that public opinion at Manaos, unreasoning as it always is, was all against the prisoner. The unexpected arrest of Joam Dacosta had revived the memory of the terrible crime of Tijuco, which had lain forgotten for three-and-twenty years. The trial of the young clerk at the mines of the diamond arrayal, his capital sentence, his escape a few hours before his intended execution—all were remembered, analyzed, and commented on. An article which had just appeared in the *O Diario d'o Grand Para,* the most widely circulated journal in these parts, after giving a history of the circumstances of the crime, showed itself decidedly hostile to the prisoner. Why should these people believe in Joam Dacosta's innocence, when they were ignorant of all that his friends knew—of what they alone knew?

And so the people of Manaos became excited. A mob of Indians and negroes hurried, in their blind folly, to surround the prison and roar forth tumultuous shouts of death. In this part of the two Americas, where executions under Lynch law are of frequent occurrence, the mob soon surrenders itself to its cruel instincts, and it was feared that on this occasion it would do justice with its own hands.

What a night it was for the passengers from the jangada! Masters and servants had been affected by the blow! Were not the servants of the fazenda members of one family? Every one of them would watch over the safety of Yaquita and her people! On the bank of the Rio Negro there was a constant coming and going of the natives, evidently excited by the arrest of Joam Dacosta, and who could say to what excesses these half-barbarous men might be led?

The time, however, passed without any demonstration against the jangada.

On the morrow, the 26th of August, as soon as the sun rose, Manoel and Fragoso, who had never left Benito for an instant during this terrible night, attempted to distract his attention. After taking him aside they made him understand that there was no time to be lost—that they must make up their minds to act.

"Benito," said Manoel, "pull yourself together! Be a man again! Be a son again!"

"My father!" exclaimed Benito, "I have killed him!"

"No!" replied Manoel. "With heaven's help it is possible that all may not be lost!"

"Listen to us, Mr. Benito," said Fragoso.

The young man, passing his hands over his eyes, made a violent effort to collect himself.

"Benito," continued Manoel, "Torres never gave a hint to put us on the track of his past life. We therefore cannot tell who was the author of the crime of Tijuco, or under what conditions it was committed. To try in that direction is to lose our time!"

"And time presses!" added Fragoso.

"Besides," said Manoel, "suppose we do find out who this companion of Torres was, he is dead, and he could not testify in any way to the innocence of Joam Dacosta. But it is none the less certain that the proof of this innocence exists, and there is no room to doubt the existence of a document which Torres was anxious to make the subject of a bargain. He told us so himself. The document is a complete avowal written in the handwriting of the culprit, which relates the attack in its smallest detail, and which clears our father! Yes! a hundred times, yes! The document exists!"

"But Torres does not exist!" groaned Benito, "and the document has perished with him!"

"Wait, and don't despair yet!" answered Manoel. "You remember under what circumstances we made the acquaintance of Torres? It was in the depths of the forest of Iquitos. He was in pursuit of a monkey which had stolen a metal case, which it so strangely kept, and the chase had lasted a couple of hours when the monkey fell to our guns. Now, do you think it was for the few pieces of gold contained in the case that Torres was in such a fury to recover it? and do you not remember the extraordinary satisfaction which he displayed when we gave him back the case which he had taken out of the monkey's paw?"

"Yes! yes!" answered Benito. "This case which I held —which I gave back to him! Perhaps it contained——"

"It is more than probable! It is certain!" replied Manoel.

"And I beg to add," said Fragoso, "for now the fact recurs to my memory, that during the time you were at Ega I remained on board, at Lina's advice, to keep an eye on Torres, and I saw him—yes, I saw him—reading, and again reading, an old, faded paper, and muttering words which I could not understand!"

"That was the document!" exclaimed Benito, who snatched at the hope—the only one that was left. "But this document; had he not put it in some place of security?"

"No," answered Manoel, "no; it was too precious for Torres to dream of parting with it. He was bound to carry it always about with him, and doubtless in that very case!"

"Wait! wait, Manoel!" exclaimed Benito; "I remember—yes, I remember. During the struggle, at the first blow I struck Torres in his chest, my manchetta was stopped by some hard substance under his poncho, like a plate of metal——"

"That was the case!" said Fragoso.

"Yes," replied Manoel; "doubt is impossible! That was the case; it was in his breast-pocket."

"But the corpse of Torres?"

"We will recover it!"

"But the paper! The water will have stained it, perhaps destroyed it, or rendered it indecipherable!"

"Why," answered Manoel, "if the metal case which held it was water-tight?"

"Manoel," replied Benito, who seized on the last hope, "you are right! The corpse of Torres must be recovered! We will ransack the whole of this part of the river, if necessary, but we will recover it!"

The pilot Araujo was then summoned and informed of what they were going to do.

"Good!" replied he; "I know all the eddies and currents where the Rio Negro and the Amazon join, and we shall succeed in recovering the body. Let us take two pirogues, two ubas, a dozen of our Indians, and make a start."

Padre Passanha was then coming out of Yaquita's room. Benito went to him, and in a few words told him what they were going to do to get possession of the document. "Say nothing to my mother or my sister," he added; "if this last hope fails it will kill them!"

"Go, my lad, go," replied Passanha, "and may God help you in your search!"

Five minutes afterward the four boats started from the raft. After descending the Rio Negro they arrived near the bank of the Amazon, at the very place where Torres, mortally wounded, had disappeared beneath the waters of the stream.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST SEARCH

THE search had to commence at once, and that for two weighty reasons.

The first of these was—and this was a question of life or death—that this proof of Joam Dacosta's innocence must be produced before the arrival of the order from Rio Janeiro. Once the identity of the prisoner was established, it was impossible that such an order could be other than the order for his execution.

The second was that the body of Torres should be got out of the water as quickly as possible so as to regain undamaged the metal case and the paper it ought to contain.

At this juncture Araujo displayed not only zeal and intelligence, but also a perfect knowledge of the state of the river at its confluence with the Rio Negro.

"If Torres," he said to the young men, "had been from the first carried away by the current, we should have to drag the river throughout a large area, for we shall have a good many days to wait for his body to reappear on the surface through the effects of decomposition."

"We cannot do that," replied Manoel. "This very day we ought to succeed."

"If, on the contrary," continued the pilot, "the corpse has got stuck among the reeds and vegetation at the foot of the bank, we shall not be an hour before we find it."

"To work, then!" answered Benito.

There was but one way of working. The boats approached the bank, and the Indians, furnished with long poles, began to sound every part of the river at the base of the bluff which had served for the scene of combat.

The place had been easily recognized. A track of blood stained the declivity in its chalky part, and ran perpendicularly down it into the water; and there many a clot scattered on the reeds indicated the very spot where the corpse had disappeared.

About fifty feet down stream a point jutted out from the river-side and kept back the waters in a kind of eddy, as in a large basin. There was no current whatever near the shore, and the reeds shot up out of the river unbent. Every hope then existed that Torres' body had not been carried away by the main stream. Where the bed of the river showed sufficient slope, it was perhaps possible for the corpse to have rolled several feet along the ridge, and even there no effect of the current could be traced.

The ubas and the pirogues, dividing the work among them, limited the field of their researches to the extreme edge of the eddy, and from the circumference to the center the crew's long poles left not a single point unexplored. But no amount of sounding discovered the body of the adventurer, neither among the clumps of reeds nor on the bottom of the river, whose slope was then carefully examined.

Two hours after the work had begun they had been led to think that the body, having probably struck against the declivity, had fallen off obliquely and rolled beyond the limits of this eddy, where the action of the current commenced to be felt.

"But that is no reason why we should despair," said Manoel, "still less why we should give up our search."

"Will it be necessary," exclaimed Benito, "to search the river throughout its breadth and its length?"

"Throughout its breadth, perhaps," answered Araujo, "throughout its length, no, fortunately."

"And why?" asked Manoel.

"Because the Amazon, about a mile away from its junction with the Rio Negro, makes a sudden bend, and at the same time its bed rises, so that there is a kind of natural barrier, well known to sailors as the Bar of Frias, which things floating near the surface are alone able to clear. In short, the currents are ponded back, and they cannot possibly have any effect over this depression."

This was fortunate, it must be admitted. But was Araujo mistaken? The old pilot of the Amazon could be relied on. For the thirty years that he had followed his profession the crossing of the Bar of Frias, where the current was increased in force by its decrease in depth, had often given him trouble. The narrowness of the channel and the elevation of the bed made the passage exceedingly difficult, and many a raft had there come to grief.

And so Araujo was right in declaring that if the corpse of Torres was still retained by its weight on the sandy bed of the river, it could not have been dragged over the bar. It is true that, later on, when, on account of the expansion of the gases, it would again rise to the surface, the current would bear it away, and it would be irrecoverably lost down the stream, a long way beyond the obstruction. But this purely physical effect would not take place for several days.

They could not have applied to a man who was more skillful or more conversant with the locality than Araujo, and when he affirmed that the body could not have been borne out of the narrow channel for more than a mile or so, they were sure to recover it if they thoroughly sounded that portion of the river.

Not an island, not an inlet, checked the course of the Amazon in these parts. Hence, when the foot of the two banks had been visited up to the bar, it was in the bed itself, about five hundred feet in width, that more careful investigations had to be commenced.

The way the work was conducted was this: The boats taking the right and left of the Amazon lay alongside the banks. The reeds and vegetation were tried with the poles. Of the smallest ledges in the banks in which a body could rest, not one escaped the scrutiny of Araujo and his Indians.

But all this labor produced no result, and half the day had elapsed without the body being brought to the surface of the stream.

An hour's rest was given to the Indians. During this time they partook of some refreshment, and then they returned to their task.

Four of the boats, in charge of the pilot, Benito, Fragoso, and Manoel, divided the river between the Rio Negro and the Bar of Frias into four portions. They set to work to explore its very bed. In certain places the poles proved insufficient to thoroughly search among the deeps, and hence a few dredges—or rather harrows, made of stones and old iron, bound round with a solid bar—were taken on board, and when the boats had pushed off these rakes were thrown in and the river bottom stirred up in every direction.

It was in this difficult task that Benito and his companions were employed till the evening. The ubas and pirogues, worked by the oars, traversed the whole surface of the river up to the Bar of Frias.

There had been moments of excitement during this spell of work, when the harrows, catching in something at the bottom, offered some slight resistance. They were then hauled up, but in place of the body so eagerly searched for, there would appear only heavy stones or tufts of herbage which they had dragged from their sandy bed. No one, however, had an idea of giving up the enterprise. They none of them thought of themselves in this work of salvation. Benito, Manoel, Araujo had not even to stir up the Indians or to encourage them. The gallant fellows knew that they were working for the fazender of Iquitos—for the man whom they loved, for the chief of the excellent family who treated their servants so well.

Yes; and so they would have passed the night in dragging the river. Of every minute lost all knew the value.

A little before the sun disappeared, Araujo, finding it useless to continue his operations in the gloom, gave the signal for the boats to join company and return together to the confluence of the Rio Negro and regain the jangada.

The work so carefully and intelligently conducted was not, however, at an end.

Manoel and Fragoso, as they came back, dared not mention their ill-success before Benito. They feared that the disappointment would only force him to some act of despair.

But neither courage nor coolness deserted the young fellow; he was determined to follow to the end this supreme effort to save the honor and the life of his father, and he it was who addressed his companions, and said: "To-morrow we will try again, and under better conditions if possible."

"Yes," answered Manoel; "you are right, Benito. We can do better. We cannot pretend to have entirely explored the river along the whole of the banks and over the whole of its bed."

"No; we cannot have done that," replied Araujo; "and

I maintain what I said—that the body of Torres is there, and that it is there because it has not been carried away, because it will take many days before it rises to the surface and floats down the stream. Yes, it is there, and not a demijohn of tafia will pass my lips until I find it!"

This affirmation from the pilot was worth a good deal, and was of a hope-inspiring nature.

However, Benito, who did not care so much for words as he did for things, thought proper to reply: "Yes, Araujo; the body of Torres is in the river, and we shall find it if——"

"If?" said the pilot.

"If it has not become the prey of the alligators!"

Manoel and Fragoso waited anxiously for Araujo's reply.

The pilot was silent for a few moments; they felt that he was reflecting before he spoke. "Mr. Benito," he said, at length, "I am not in the habit of speaking lightly. I had the same idea as you; but listen. During the ten hours we have been at work have you seen a single cayman in the river?"

"Not one!" said Fragoso.

"If you have not seen one," continued the pilot, "it was because there were none to see, for these animals have nothing to keep them in the white waters when, a quarter of a mile off, there are large stretches of the black waters, which they so greatly prefer. When the raft was attacked by some of these creatures it was in a part where there was no place for them to flee to. Here it is quite different. Go to the Rio Negro, and there you will see caymans by the score. Had Torres' body fallen into that tributary there might be no chance of recovering it. But it was in the Amazon that it was lost, and in the Amazon it will be found!"

Benito, relieved from his fears, took the pilot's hand and shook it, and contented himself with the reply: "To-morrow, my friends!"

Ten minutes later they were all on board the jangada. During the day Yaquita had passed some hours with her husband. But before she started, and when she saw neither the pilot, nor Manoel, nor Benito, nor the boats, she had guessed the search on which they had gone, but she said nothing to Joam Dacosta, as she hoped that in the morning she would be able to inform him of their success.

But when Benito set foot on the raft she perceived that their search had been fruitless. However, she advanced toward him. "Nothing?" she asked.

"Nothing," replied Benito. "But the morrow is left to us."

The members of the family retired to their rooms, and nothing more was said as to what had passed.

Manoel tried to make Benito lie down so as to take a few hours' rest.

"What is the good of that?" asked Benito. "Do you think I could sleep?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND ATTEMPT

On the morrow, the 27th of August, Benito took Manoel apart, before the sun had risen, and said to him: "Our yesterday's search was vain. If we begin again under the same conditions, we may be just as unlucky."

"We must do so, however," replied Manoel.

"Yes," continued Benito; "but suppose we do not find the body, can you tell me how long it will be before it will rise to the surface?"

"If Torres," answered Manoel, "had fallen into the water living, and not mortally wounded, it would take five or six days; but if he had only disappeared after being so wounded, perhaps two or three days would be enough to bring him up again."

This answer of Manoel, which was quite correct, requires some explanation. Every human body which falls into the water will float if equilibrium is established between its density and that of its liquid bed. This is well known to be the fact, even when a person does not know how to swim. Under such circumstances, if you are entirely submerged, and only keep your mouth and nose away from the water, you are sure to float. But this is not generally done. The first movement of a drowning man is to try and hold as much as he can of himself above water; he holds up his head and lifts up his arms, and these parts of his body, being no longer supported by the liquid, do not lose that amount of weight which they would do if completely immersed. Hence an excess of weight, and eventually entire submersion, for the water makes its way to the lungs through the mouth, takes the place of the air which fills them, and the body sinks to the bottom.

On the other hand, when the man who falls into the water is already dead, the conditions are different, and more favorable for his floating, for then the movements of which we have spoken are checked, and the liquid does not make its way to the lungs so copiously, as there is no attempt to respire, and he is consequently more likely to promptly reappear. Manoel then was right in drawing the distinction between the man who falls into the water living and the man who falls into it dead. In the one case the return to the surface takes much longer than in the other.

The reappearance of the body after an immersion more or less prolonged, is always determined by the decomposition, which causes the gases to form. These bring about the expansion of the cellular tissues, the volume augments and the weight decreases, and then, weighing less than the water it displaces, the body attains the proper conditions for floating.

"And thus," continued Manoel, "supposing the conditions continue favorable, and Torres did not live after he fell into the water, if the decomposition is not modified by circumstances which we cannot foresee, he will not reappear before three days."

"We have not got three days," answered Benito. "We cannot wait, you know; we must try again, and in some new way."

"What can you do?" asked Manoel.

"Plunge down myself beneath the waters," replied Benito, "and search with my eyes—with my hands."

"Plunge in a hundred times—a thousand times!" exclaimed Manoel. "So be it. I think, like you, that we ought to go straight at what we want, and not struggle on with poles and drag like a blind man, who only works by touch. I also think that we cannot wait three days. But to jump in, come up again, and go down again will give only a short period for the exploration. No; it will never do and we shall only risk a second failure."

"Have you no other plan to propose, Manoel?" asked Benito, looking earnestly at his friend.

"Well, listen. There is what would seem to be a Providential circumstance that may be of use to us."

"What is that?"

"Yesterday, as we hurried through Manaos, I noticed that they were repairing one of the quays on the bank of the Rio Negro. The submarine works were being carried on with the aid of a diving-dress. Let us borrow, or hire, or buy, at any price, this apparatus, and then we may resume our researches under more favorable conditions."

"Tell Araujo, Fragoso, and our men, and let us be off," was the instant reply of Benito.

The pilot and the barber were informed of the decision with regard to Manoel's project. Both were ordered to go with the four boats and the Indians to the basin of Frias, and thence to wait for the two young men.

Manoel and Benito started off without losing a moment, and reached the quay at Manaos. There they offered the contractor such a price that he put the apparatus at their service for the whole day.

"Will you not have one of my men," he asked, "to help you?"

"Give us your foreman and one of his mates to work the air-pump," replied Manoel.

"But who is going to wear the diving-dress?"

"I am," answered Benito.

"You!" exclaimed Manoel.

"I intend to do so."

It was useless to resist.

An hour afterward the raft and all the instruments necessary for the enterprise had drifted down to the bank where the boats were waiting.

The diving-dress is well known. By its means men can descend beneath the waters and remain there a certain time without the action of the lungs being in any way injured. The diver is clothed in a waterproof suit of india rubber, and his feet are attached to leaden shoes, which allow him to retain his upright position beneath the surface. At the collar of the dress, and about the height of the neck, there is fitted a collar of copper, on which is screwed a metal globe with a glass front. In this globe the diver places his head, which he can move about at ease. To the globe are attached two pipes; one used for carrying off the air ejected from the lungs, and the other in communication with a pump worked on the raft, and bringing in the fresh air. When the diver is at work the raft remains immovable above him; when the diver moves about on the bottom of the river the raft follows his movements, or he follows those of the raft, according to his convenience.

These diving-dresses are now much improved, and are less dangerous than formerly. The man beneath the liquid mass can easily bear the additional pressure, and if anything was to be feared below the waters it was rather some cayman who might there be met with. But, as had been observed by Araujo, not one of these amphibians had been seen, and they are well known to prefer the black waters of the tributaries of the Amazon. Besides, in case of danger, the diver has always his check-string fastened to the raft, and at the least warning can be quickly hauled to the surface.

Benito, invariably very cool once his resolution was taken, commenced to put his idea into execution, and got into the diving-dress. His head disappeared in the metal globe, his hand grasped a sort of iron spar with which to stir up the vegetation and detritus accumulated in the river-bed, and on his giving the signal he was lowered into the stream.

The men on the raft immediately commenced to work the air pump, while four Indians from the jangada, under the orders of Araujo, gently propelled it with their long poles in the desired direction.

The two pirogues, commanded one by Fragoso, the other by Manoel, escorted the raft, and held themselves ready to start in any direction, should Benito find the corpse of Torres and again bring it to the surface of the Amazon.

CHAPTER IX

A CANNON SHOT

Benito then had disappeared beneath the vast sheet which still covered the corpse of the adventurer. Ah! if he had had the power to divert the waters of the river, to turn them into vapor, or to turn them off—if he could have made the Frias basin dry down stream, from the bar up to the influx of the Rio Negro, the case hidden in Torres' clothes would already have been in his hands! His father's innocence would have been recognized! Joam Dacosta, restored to liberty, would have again started on the descent of the river, and what terrible trials would have been avoided!

Benito had reached the bottom. His heavy shoes made the gravel on the beach crunch beneath them. He was in some ten or fifteen feet of water, at the base of the cliff, which was here very steep, and at the very spot where Torres had disappeared.

Near him was a tangled mass of reeds and twigs and aquatic plants, all laced together, which assuredly during the researches of the previous day no pole could have penetrated. It was consequently possible that the body was entangled among the submarine shrubs, and still in the place where it had originally fallen.

Hereabouts, thanks to the eddy produced by the prolongation of one of the spurs running out into the stream, the current was absolutely nil. Benito guided his movements by those of the raft, which the long poles of the Indians kept just over his head.

The light penetrated deep through the clear waters, and the magnificent sun, shining in a cloudless sky, shot its rays down into them unchecked. Under ordinary conditions, at a depth of some twenty feet in water, the view becomes exceedingly blurred, but here the waters seemed to be impregnated with a luminous fluid, and Benito was able to descend still lower without the darkness concealing the river bed.

The young man slowly made his way along the bank. With his iron-shod spear he probed the plants and rubbish accumulated along its foot. Flocks of fish, if we can use such an expression, escaped on all sides from the dense thickets like flocks of birds. It seemed as though the thousand pieces of a broken mirror glimmered through the waters. At the same time scores of crustaceans scampered over the sand, like huge ants hurrying from their hills.

Notwithstanding that Benito did not leave a single point of the river unexplored, he never caught sight of the object of his search. He noticed, however, that the slope of the river-bed was very abrupt, and he concluded that Torres had rolled beyond the eddy toward the centre of the stream. If so, he would probably still recover the body, for the current could hardly touch it at the depth which was already great, and seemed sensibly to increase. Benito then resolved to pursue his investigations on the side where he had begun to probe the vegetation. This was why he continued to advance in that direction, and the raft had to follow him during a quarter of an hour, as had been previously arranged.

The quarter of an hour had elapsed, and Benito had found nothing. He felt the need of ascending to the surface, so as to once more experience those physiological conditions in which he could recoup his strength. In certain spots, where the depth of the river necessitated it, he had had to descend about thirty feet. He had thus to support a pressure almost equal to an atmosphere, with the result of the physical fatigue and mental agitation which attack those who are not used to this kind of work. Benito then pulled the communication cord, and the men on the raft commenced to haul him in, but they worked slowly, taking a minute to draw him up two or three feet, so as not to produce in his internal organs the dreadful effects of decompression.

As soon as the young man had set foot on the raft, the metallic sphere of the diving-dress was raised, and he took a long breath and sat down to rest.

The pirogues immediately rowed alongside. Manoel, Fragoso and Araujo came close to him, waiting for him to speak.

"Well?" asked Manoel.

"Still nothing! Nothing!"

"Have you not seen a trace?"

"Not one!"

"Shall I go down now?"

"No, Manoel," answered Benito; "I have begun; I know where to go. Let me do it!"

Benito then explained to the pilot that his intention was to visit the lower part of the bank up to the Bar of Frias, for there the slope had perhaps stopped the corpse, if, floating between the two streams, it had in the least degree been affected by the current. But first he wanted to skirt the bank and carefully explore a sort of hole formed in the slope of the bed, to the bottom of which the poles had not been able to penetrate. Araujo approved of the plan, and made the necessary preparations.

Manoel gave Benito a little advice. "As you want to pursue your search on that side," he said, "the raft will have to go over there obliquely; but mind what you are doing, Benito. That is much deeper than where you have been yet: it may be fifty or sixty feet, and you will have to support a pressure of quite two atmospheres. Only venture with extreme caution, or you may lose your presence of mind, and no longer know where you are or what to do. If your head feels as if in a vise, and your ears tingle, do not hesitate to give us the signal, and we will at once haul you up. You can then begin again if you like, as you will have got accustomed to move about in the deeper parts of the river."

Benito promised to attend to these hints, of which he recognized the importance. He was particularly struck with the fact that his presence of mind might abandon him at the very moment he wanted it most.

Benito shook hands with Manoel; the sphere of the diving-dress was again screwed to his neck, the pump began to work, and the diver once more disappeared beneath the stream.

The raft was then taken about forty feet along the left bank, but as it moved toward the center of the river the current increased in strength, the ubas was moored, and the rowers kept it from drifting, so as only to allow it to advance with extreme slowness.

Benito descended very gently, and again found himself on the firm sand. When his heels touched the ground it could be seen, by the length of the haulage cord, that he was at a depth of some sixty-five or seventy feet. He was therefore in a considerable hole, excavated far below the ordinary level.

The liquid medium was more obscure, but the limpidity of these transparent waters still allowed the light to penetrate sufficiently for Benito to distinguish the objects scattered on the bed of the river, and to approach them with some safety. Besides, the sand, sprinkled with mica flakes, seemed to form a sort of reflector, and the very grains could be counted glittering like luminous dust.

Benito moved on, examining and sounding the smallest cavities with his spear. He continued to advance very slowly; the communication cord was paid out, and as the pipes which served for the inlet and outlet of the air were never tightened, the pump was worked under the proper conditions.

Benito turned off so as to reach the middle of the bed of the Amazon, where there was the greatest depression. Sometimes profound obscurity thickened around him, and then he could see nothing, so feeble was the light; but this was a purely passing phenomenon, and due to the raft, which, floating above his head, intercepted the solar rays, and made the night replace the day. An instant afterward the huge shadow would be dissipated, and the reflection of the sands appear again in full force.

All the time Benito was going deeper. He felt the increase of the pressure with which his body was wrapped by the liquid mass. His respiration became less easy; his organs no longer worked with as much ease as in the midst of an atmosphere more conveniently adapted for them. And so he found himself under the action of physiological effects to which he was unaccustomed. The rumbling grew louder in his ears, but as his thought was always lucid, as he felt that the action of his brain was quite clear—even a little more so than usual—he delayed giving the signal for return, and continued to go down deeper still.

Suddenly, in the subdued light which surrounded him, his attention was attracted by a confused mass. It seemed to take the form of a corpse, entangled beneath a clump of aquatic plants. Intense excitement seized him. He stepped toward the mass; with his spear he felt it. It was the carcass of a huge cayman, already reduced to a skeleton, and which the current of the Rio Negro had swept into the bed of the Amazon. Benito recoiled, and, in spite of the assertions of the pilot, the thought recurred to him that some living cayman might even then be met with in the deeps near the Bar of Frias!

But he repelled the idea, and continued his progress, so as to reach the very bottom of the depression.

And now he had arrived at a depth of from eighty to a hundred feet, and consequently was experiencing a pressure of three atmospheres. If, then, this cavity was also drawn blank, he would have to suspend his researches.

Experience has shown that the extreme limit for such submarine explorations lies between a hundred and twenty and a hundred and thirty feet, and that below this there is great danger, the human organism not only being hindered from performing its functions under such a pressure, but the apparatus failing to keep up a sufficient supply of air with the desirable regularity.

But Benito was resolved to go as far as his mental powers and physical energies would let him. By some strange presentiment he was drawn toward this abyss; it seemed to him as though the corpse was very likely to have rolled to the bottom of the hole, and that Torres, if he had any heavy things about him, such as a belt containing either money or arms, would have sunk to the very lowest point. Of a sudden, in a deep hollow, he saw a body through the gloom! Yes! A corpse, still clothed, stretched out like a man asleep, with his arms folded under his head.

Was that Torres? In the obscurity, then very dense, he found it difficult to see; but it was a human body that lay there, less than ten paces off, and perfectly motionless.

A sharp pang shot through Benito. His heart, for an instant, ceased to beat. He thought he was going to lose consciousness. By a supreme effort he recovered himself. He stepped toward the corpse.

Suddenly a shock as violent as unexpected made his whole frame vibrate! A long whip seemed to twine round his body, and in spite of the thick diving-dress he felt himself lashed again and again.

"A gymnotus!" he said.

It was the only word that passed his lips.

In fact, it was a *puraque,* the name given by the Brazilians to the gymnotus, or electric snake, which had just attacked him.

It is well known that the gymnotus is a kind of eel, with a blackish, slimy skin, furnished along the back and tail with an apparatus composed of plates joined by vertical lamellæ, and acted on by nerves of considerable power. This apparatus is endowed with singular electrical properties, and is apt to produce very formidable results. Some of these gymnotuses are about the length of a common snake, others are about ten feet long, while others which however, are rare, even reach fifteen or twenty feet, and are from eight to ten inches in diameter.

Gymnotuses are plentiful enough both in the Amazon and its tributaries; and it was one of these living coils, about ten feet long, which, after uncurving itself like a bow, again attacked the diver.

Benito knew what he had to fear from this formidable animal. His clothes were powerless to protect him. The discharges of the gymnotus, at first somewhat weak, became more and more violent, and there would come a time when, exhausted by the shocks, he would be rendered powerless.

Benito, unable to resist the blows, half dropped upon the sand. His limbs were becoming paralyzed little by little under the electric influences of the gymnotus, which lightly touched his body as it wrapped him in its folds. His arms even he could not lift, and soon his spear escaped him, and his hand had not strength enough left to pull the cord and give the signal.

Benito felt that he was lost. Neither Manoel nor his companions could suspect the horrible combat which was going on beneath them between the formidable puraque and the unhappy diver, who only fought to suffer, without any power of defending himself.

And that at the moment when a body—the body of Torres without a doubt!—had just met his view.

By a supreme instinct of self-preservation Benito uttered a cry. His voice was lost in the metallic sphere from which not a sound could escape!

And now the puraque redoubled its attacks; it gave forth shock after shock, which made Benito writhe on the sand like the sections of a divided worm, and his muscles were wrenched again and again beneath the living lash!

Benito thought that all was over; his eyes grew dim, his limbs began to stiffen.

But before he quite lost his power of sight and reason he became the witness of a phenomenon, unexpected, inexplicable, and marvelous in the extreme.

A deadened roar resounded through the liquid depths. It was like a thunder-clap, the reverberations of which rolled along the river-bed, then violently agitated by the electrical discharges of the gymnotus. Benito felt himself bathed as it were in the dreadful booming which found an echo in the very deepest of the river deeps.

And then a last cry escaped him, for fearful was the vision which appeared before his eyes!

The corpse of the drowned man which had been stretched on the sand arose! The undulations of the water lifted up the arms, and they swayed about as if with some peculiar animation. Convulsive throbs made the movement of the corpse still more alarming.

It was indeed the body of Torres. One of the sun's rays shot down to it through the liquid mass, and Benito recognized the bloated, ashy features of the scoundrel who fell by his own hand, and whose last breath had left him beneath the waters.

And while Benito could not make a single movement with his paralyzed limbs, while his heavy shoes kept him down as if he had been nailed to the sand, the corpse straightened itself up, the head swayed to and fro, and disentangling itself from the hole in which it had been kept by a mass of aquatic weeds, it slowly ascended to the surface of the Amazon.

CHAPTER X

THE CONTENTS OF THE CASE

WHAT was it that had happened? A purely physical phenomenon, of which the following is an explanation.

The gunboat *Santa Ana,* bound for Manaos, had come up the river and passed the bar at Frias. Just before she reached the embouchure of the Rio Negro she hoisted her colors and saluted the Brazilian flag.

At the report vibrations were produced along the surface of the stream, and these vibrations making their way down to the bottom of the river, had been sufficient to raise the corpse of Torres, already lightened by the commencement of its decomposition and the distention of its cellular system. The body of the drowned man had in the ordinary course risen to the surface of the water.

This well-known phenomenon explains the reappearance of the corpse, but it must be admitted that the arrival of the *Santa Ana* was a fortunate coincidence.

By a shout from Manoel, repeated by all his companions, one of the pirogues was immediately steered for the body while the diver was at the same time hauled up to the raft.

Great was Manoel's emotion when Benito, drawn on to the platform, was laid there in a state of complete inertia, not a single exterior movement betraying that he still lived. Was not this a second corpse which the waters of the Amazon had given up?

As quickly as possible the diving-dress was taken off him. Benito had entirely lost consciousness beneath the violent shocks of the gymnotus.

Manoel, distracted, called to him, breathed into him, and endeavored to recover the heart's pulsation. "It beats! It beats!" he exclaimed.

Yes! Benito's heart did still beat, and in a few minutes Manoel's efforts restored him to life.

"The body! the body!" Such were the first words, the only ones which escaped from Benito's lips.

"There it is!" answered Fragoso, pointing to a pirogue then coming up to the raft with the corpse.

"But what has been the matter, Benito?" asked Manoel. "Has it been the want of air?"

"No!" said Benito; "a puraque attacked me! But the noise? the detonation?"

"A cannon shot!" replied Manoel. "It was the cannon shot which brought the corpse to the surface."

At this moment the pirogue came up to the raft with the body of Torres, which had been taken on board by the Indians. His sojourn in the water had not disfigured him very much. He was easily recognizable, and there was no doubt as to his identity.

Fragoso, kneeling down in the pirogue, had already begun to undo the clothes of the drowned man, which came away in fragments. At the moment, Torres' right arm, which was now left bare, attracted his attention. On it appeared the distinct scar of an old wound produced by a blow from a knife. "That scar!" exclaimed Fragoso. "But—that is good! I remember now——"

"What?" demanded Manoel.

"A quarrel! Yes! a quarrel I witnessed in the province of Madeira three years ago. How could I have forgotten it. This Torres was then a captain of the woods.

Ah! I know now where I had seen him, the scoundrel!"

"That does not matter to us now!" cried Benito. "The case! the case! Has he still got that?" and Benito was about to tear away the last coverings of the corpse to get at it.

Manoel stopped him. "One moment, Benito," he said; and then, turning to the men on the raft who did not belong to the jangada, and whose evidence could not be suspected at any future time, "Just take note, my friends," he said, "of what we are doing here, so that you can relate before the magistrate what has passed."

The men came up to the pirogue.

Fragoso undid the belt which encircled the body of Torres underneath the torn poncho, and feeling his breast-pocket, exclaimed, "The case!"

A cry of joy escaped from Benito. He stretched forward to seize the case, to make sure that it contained——

"No!" again interrupted Manoel, whose coolness did not forsake him. "It is necessary that not the slightest possible doubt should exist in the mind of the magistrate! It is better that disinterested witnesses should affirm that this case was really found on the corpse of Torres!"

"You are right," replied Benito.

"My friend," said Manoel to the foreman of the raft, "just feel in the pocket of the waistcoat."

The foreman obeyed. He drew forth a metal case, with the cover screwed on, and which seemed to have suffered in no way from its sojourn in the water.

"The paper! Is the paper still inside?" exclaimed Benito, who could not contain himself.

"It is for the magistrate to open this case!" answered Manoel. "To him belongs the duty of verifying that the document was found within it."

"Yes, yes. Again you are right, Manoel," said Benito. "To Manaos, my friends—to Manaos!"

Benito, Manoel, Fragoso, and the foreman, who held the case, immediately jumped into one of the pirogues, and were starting off, when Fragoso said, "And the corpse?"

The pirogue stopped. In fact, the Indians had already thrown back the body into the water, and it was drifting away down the river.

" Torres was only a scoundrel," said Benito. " If I had to fight him, it was God that struck him, and his body ought not to go unburied! " And so orders were given to the second pirogue to recover the corpse, and take it to the bank to await its burial.

But at the same moment a flock of birds of prey, which skimmed along the surface of the stream, pounced on the floating body. They were urubus, a kind of small vulture, with naked necks and long claws, and black as crows. In South America they are known as gallinazos, and their voracity is unparalleled. The body, torn open by their beaks, gave forth the gases which inflated it, its density increased, it sank down little by little, and for the last time what remained of Torres disappeared beneath the waters of the Amazon.

Ten minutes afterward the pirogue arrived at Manaos. Benito and his companions jumped ashore, and hurried through the streets of the town. In a few minutes they had reached the dwelling of Judge Jarriquez, and informed him, through one of his servants, that they wished to see him immediately. The judge ordered them to be shown into his study.

There Manoel recounted all that had passed, from the moment when Torres had been killed until the moment when the case had been found on his corpse, and taken from his breast-pocket by the foreman.

Although this recital was of a nature to corroborate all that Joam Dacosta had said on the subject of Torres, and of the bargain which he had endeavored to make, Judge Jarriquez could not restrain a smile of incredulity.

" There is the case, sir," said Manoel. " For not a single instant has it been in our hands, and the man who gives it to you is he who took it from the body of Torres."

The magistrate took the case and examined it with care, turning it over and over as though it were made of some precious material. Then he shook it, and a few coins inside sounded with a metallic ring. Did not, then, the case contain the document which had been so much sought after—the document written in the very hand of the true author of the crime of Tijuco, and which Torres had wished to sell at such an ignoble price to Joam Dacosta? Was this material proof of the convict's innocence irrecoverably lost?

We can easily imagine the violent agitation which had seized upon the spectators of this scene. Benito could scarcely utter a word; he felt his heart ready to burst. "Open it, sir! open the case!" he at last exclaimed, in a broken voice.

Judge Jarriquez began to unscrew the lid; then, when the cover was removed, he turned up the case, and from it a few pieces of gold dropped out and rolled on the table.

"But the paper! the paper!" again gasped Benito, who clutched hold of the table to save himself from falling.

The magistrate put his fingers into the case and drew out, not without difficulty, a faded paper, folded with care, and which the water did not seem to have touched.

"The document! that is the document!" shouted Fragoso; "that is the very paper I saw in the hands of Torres!"

Judge Jarriquez unfolded the paper and cast his eyes over it, and then he turned it over so as to examine it on the back and the front, which were both covered with writing. "A document it really is!" said he; "there is no doubt of that. It is indeed a document!"

"Yes," replied Benito; "and that is the document which proves my father's innocence!"

"I do not know that," replied Judge Jarriquez; "and I am afraid it will be very difficult to know it."

"Why?" exclaimed Benito, who became pale as death.

"Because this document is a cryptogram, and——"

"Well?"

"We have not got the key!"

CHAPTER XI

THE DOCUMENT

THIS was a contingency which neither Joam Dacosta nor his people could have anticipated. In fact, as those who have not forgotten the first scene in this story are aware, the document was written in a disguised form in one of the numerous systems used in cryptography.

But which of them? To discover this would require all the ingenuity of which the human brain was capable.

Before dismissing Benito and his companions, Judge Jarriquez had an exact copy made of the document, and, keeping the original, handed the copy to them after due comparison, so that they could communicate with the prisoner.

Then, making an appointment for the morrow, they retired, and, not wishing to lose an instant in seeing Joam Dacosta, they hastened on to the prison; and there, in a short interview, informed him of all that had passed.

Joam Dacosta took the document and carefully examined it. Shaking his head, he handed it back to his son. "Perhaps," he said, "there is therein written the proof I shall never be able to produce. But if that proof escapes me, if the whole tenor of my life does not plead for me, I have nothing more to expect from the justice of men, and my fate is in the hands of God!"

And all felt it to be so. If the document remained indecipherable, the position of the convict was a desperate one.

"We shall find it, father!" exclaimed Benito. "There never was a document of this sort yet which could stand examination. Have confidence—yes, confidence! Heaven has, so to speak, miraculously given us the paper which vindicates you, and, after guiding our hands to recover it, it will not refuse to direct our brains to unravel it."

Joam Dacosta shook hands wtih Benito and Manoel, and then the three young men, much agitated, retired to the jangada, where Yaquita was awaiting them.

Yaquita was soon informed of what had happened since the evening—the reappearance of the body of Torres, the discovery of the document, and the strange form under which the real culprit, the companion of the adventurer, had thought proper to write his confession—doubtless, so that it should not compromise him if it fell into strange hands.

Naturally, Lina was informed of this unexpected complication, and of the discovery made by Fragoso, that Torres was an old captain of the woods belonging to the gang who were employed about the mouths of the Madeira.

"But under what circumstances did you meet him?" asked the young mulatto.

"It was during one of my runs across the province of Amazones," replied Fragoso, "when I was going from village to village, working at my trade."

" And the scar? "

" What happened was this: One day I arrived at the mission of Aranas at the moment that Torres, whom I had never before seen, had picked a quarrel with one of his comrades—and a bad lot they are! and this quarrel ended with a stab from a knife, which entered the arm of the captain of the woods. There was no doctor there, and so I took charge of the wound, and that is how I made his acquaintance."

" What does it matter, after all," replied the young girl, " that we know what Torres had been? He was not the author of the crime, and it does not help us in the least."

" No, it does not," answered Fragoso; " for we shall end by reading this document, and then the innocence of Joam Dacosta will be palpable to the eyes of all."

This was likewise the hope of Yaquita, of Benito, of Manoel, and of Minha, and, shut up in the house, they passed long hours in endeavoring to decipher the writing.

But if it was their hope—and there is no need to insist on that point—it was none the less that of Judge Jarriquez. After having drawn up his report at the end of his examination establishing the identity of Joam Dacosta, the magistrate had sent it off to headquarters, and therewith he thought he had finished with the affair so far as he was concerned. It could not well be otherwise.

On the discovery of the document, Jarriquez suddenly found himself face to face with the study of which he was a master. He, the seeker after numerical combinations, the solver of amusing problems, the answerer of charades, rebuses, logogryphs, and such things, was at last in his true element.

At the thought that the document might perhaps contain the justification of Joam Dacosta, he felt all the instinct of an analyst aroused. Here, before his very eyes, was a cryptogram! And so from that moment he thought of nothing but how to discover its meaning, and it is scarcely necessary to say that he made up his mind to work at it continuously, even if he forgot to eat or to drink.

After the departure of the young people, Judge Jarriquez installed himself in his study. His door, barred against every one, assured him of several hours of perfect solitude.

His spectacles were on his nose, his snuff-box on the table. He took a good pinch so as to develop the *finesse* and sagacity of his mind. He picked up the document and became absorbed in meditation, which soon became materialized in the shape of a monologue. The worthy justice was one of those unreserved men who think more easily aloud than to himself. "Let us proceed with method," he said. "No method, no logic; no logic, no success."

Then, taking the document, he ran through it from beginning to end, without understanding it in the least.

The document contained a hundred lines, which were divided into half a dozen paragraphs.

"Hum!" said the judge, after a little reflection; "to try every paragraph, one after the other, would be to lose precious time, and be of no use. I had better select one of these paragraphs, and take the one which is likely to prove the most interesting. Which of them would do this better than the last, where the recital of the whole affair is probably summed up? Proper names might put me on the track, among others that of Joam Dacosta; and if he has anything to do with this document, his name will evidently not be absent from its concluding paragraph."

The magistrate's reasoning was logical, and he was decidedly right in bringing all his resources to bear in the first place on the gist of the cryptogram as contained in its last paragraph.

Here is the paragraph, for it is necessary to again bring it before the eyes of the reader so as to show how an analyst set to work to discover its meaning:

"*P h y j s l y d d q f d z x g a s g z z q q e h x g k f n*
d r x u j u g i o c y t d x v k s b x h h u y p o h d v y r y
m h u h p u y d k j o x p h e t o z s l e t n p m v ff o v p d p
a j x h y n o j y g g a y m e q y n f u q l n m v l y f g s u
z m q i z t l b q g y u g s q e u b v n r c r e d g r u z b l r
m x y u h q h p z d r r g c r o h e p q x u f i v v r p l p h
o n t h v d d q f h q s n t z h h h n f e p m q k y u u e x k
t o g z g k y u u m f v i j d q d p z j q s y k r p l x h x q
r y m v k l o h h h o t o z v d k s p p s u v j h d."

At the outset, Judge Jarriquez noticed that the lines of the document were not divided either into words or phrases, and that there was a complete absence of punctuation. This fact could but render the reading of the document more difficult.

"Let me see, however," he said, "if there is not some assemblage of the letters which appears to form a word—I mean a pronounceable word, whose number of consonants is in proportion to its vowels. And at the beginning I see the word *phy;* farther on the word *gas.* Hallo! *ujugi.* Does this mean the African town on the banks of Tanganyika! What has this got to do with all this? Farther on here is the word *ypo.* Is it Greek, then? Close by here is *rym* and *puy,* and *jox,* and *phetoz,* and *jyggay,* and *mv,* and *qruz.* And before that we had got *red* and *let.* That is good! those are two English words. Then *ohe—syk;* then *rym* once more, and then the word *oto.*"

Judge Jarriquez let the paper drop, and thought for a few minutes.

"All the words I see in this thing seem queer!" he said. "In fact, there is nothing to give a clue to their origin. Some look like Greek, some like Dutch; some have an English twist, and some look like nothing at all! To say nothing of these series of consonants which are not wanted in any human pronunciation. Most assuredly it would not be very easy to find the key to this cryptogram."

The magistrate's fingers commenced to beat a tattoo on his desk—a kind of reveille to arouse his dormant faculties.

"Let us see," he said, "how many letters there are in the paragraph."

He then counted them, pen in hand.

"Two hundred and seventy-six!" he said. "Well, now let us try what proportion these different letters bear to each other."

This occupied him for some time. The judge took up the document, and, with his pen in his hand, he noted each letter in alphabetical order.

In a quarter of an hour he had obtained the following table:—

a = 3 times.
b = 4 —
c = 3 —
d = 16 —
e = 9 —
f = 10 —
g = 13 —
h = 23 —
i = 4 —
j = 8 —
k = 9 —
l = 9 —
m = 9 —
n = 9 —
o = 12 —
p = 16 —
q = 16 —
r = 12 —
s = 10 —
t = 8 —
u = 17 —
v = 13 —
x = 12 —
y = 19 —
z = 12 —

Total . . 276 times.

"Ah, ah!" he exclaimed. "One thing strikes me at once, and that is that in this paragraph all the letters of the alphabet are used. This is very strange. If we take up a book and open it by chance it will be very seldom that we hit upon two hundred and seventy-six letters with all the signs of the alphabet figuring among them. After all, it may be chance," and then he passed to a different train of thought. "One important point is to see if the vowels and consonants are in their normal proportion."

And so he seized his pen, counted up the vowels, and obtained the following result:—

a = 3 times.
e = 9 —
i = 4 —
o = 12 —
u = 17 —
y = 19 —

Total . . . 64 vowels.

"And thus there are in this paragraph, after we have done our subtraction, sixty-four vowels and two hundred and twelve consonants. Good! that is the normal proportion. That is about a fifth, as in the alphabet, where there are six vowels among twenty-five letters. It is possible, therefore, that the document is written in the language of our country, and that only the signification of each letter is changed. If it has been modified in regular order, and a *b* is always represented by an *l*, an *o* by a *v*, a *g* by a *k*, an *u* by an *r*, etc., I will give up my judgeship if I do not read it. What can I do better than follow the method of that great analytical genius, Edgar Allan Poe?"

Judge Jarriquez herein alluded to a story by the great American romancer, which is a masterpiece. Who has not read the "Gold Bug?" In this novel a cryptogram, composed of ciphers, letters, algebraic signs, asterisks, full-stops, and commas, is submitted to a truly mathematical analysis, and is deciphered under extraordinary conditions, which the admirers of that strange genius can never forget. On the reading of the American document depended only a treasure, while on that of this one depended a man's life. Its solution was consequently all the more interesting.

The magistrate, who had often read and re-read his "Gold Bug," was perfectly acquainted with the steps in the analysis so minutely described by Edgar Poe, and he resolved to proceed in the same way on this occasion. In doing so he was certain, as he had said, that if the value or signification of each letter remained constant, he would, sooner or later, arrive at the solution of the document.

"What did Edgar Poe do?" he repeated. "First of all he began by finding out the sign—here there are only letters, let us say the letter—which was reproduced the oftenest. I see that that is *h*, for it is met with twenty-three times. This enormous proportion shows, to begin with, that *h* does not stand for *h,* but, on the contrary, that it represents the letter which recurs most frequently in our language, for I suppose the document is written in Portuguese. In English or French it would certainly be *e,* in Italian it would be *i* or *a,* in Portuguese it will be *a* or *o.* Now let us say that *h* signifies *a* or *o.*"

After this was done, the judge found out the letter which recurred most frequently after *h,* and so on, and he formed the following table:—

h = 23 times.
y = 19 —
u = 17 —
d p q = 16 —
g v = 13 —
o r x z = 12 —
f s = 10 —
e k l m n = 9 —
j t = 8 —
b i = 4 —
a c = 3 —

"Now the letter *a* only occurs thrice!" exclaimed the judge, "and it ought to occur the oftenest. Ah! that clearly proves that the meaning has been changed. And now, after *a* or *o,* what are the letters which figure oftenest in our language? Let us see," and Judge Jarriquez, with truly remarkable sagacity, which denoted a very observant mind, started on this new quest. In this he was only imitating the American romancer, who, great analyst as he was, had, by simple induction, been able to construct an alphabet corresponding to the signs of the cryptogram, and by means of it to eventually read the pirate's parchment note with ease.

The magistrate set to work in the same way, and we may affirm that he was no whit inferior to his illustrious master. Thanks to his previous work at logogryphs and squares, rectangular arrangements, and other enigmas, which depend only on an arbitrary disposition of the letters, he was already pretty strong in such mental pastimes. On this occasion he sought to establish the order in which the letters were reproduced—vowels first, consonants afterward.

Three hours had elapsed since he began. He had before his eyes an alphabet which, if his procedure were right, would give him the right meaning of the letters in the document. He had only to successively apply the letters of his alphabet to those of his paragraph. But before making this application some slight emotion seized upon the judge. He fully experienced the intellectual gratification—much greater than, perhaps, would be thought—of the man who, after hours of obstinate endeavor, saw the impatiently sought-for sense of the logogryph coming into view.

"Now let us try," he said; "and I shall be very much surprised if I have not got the solution of the enigma!"

Judge Jarriquez took off his spectacles and wiped the glasses; then he put them back again, and bent over the table. His special alphabet was in one hand, the cryptogram in the other. He commenced to write under the first line of the paragraph the true letters, which, according to him, ought to correspond exactly with each of the cryptographic letters. As with the first line so did he with the second, and the third, and the fourth, until he had reached the end of the paragraph.

Oddity as he was, he did not stop to see as he wrote if the assemblage of letters made intelligible words. No; during the first stage his mind refused all verification of that sort. What he desired was to give himself the ecstasy of reading it all straight off at once.

And now he had done.

"Let us read!" he exclaimed.

And he read. Good heavens! what cacophony! The lines he had formed with the letters of his alphabet had no more sense in them than those of the document! It was another series of letters, and that was all. They formed no word; they had no value. In short, they were just as hieroglyphic.

"Confound the thing!" exclaimed Judge Jarriquez.

CHAPTER XII

IS IT A MATTER OF FIGURES?

It was seven o'clock in the evening. Judge Jarriquez had all the time been absorbed in working at the puzzle—and was no farther advanced—and had forgotten the time of repast and the time of repose, when there came a knock at his study door.

It was time. An hour later, and all the cerebral substance of the vexed magistrate would certainly have evaporated under the intense heat into which he had worked his head.

At the order to enter—which was given in an impatient tone—the door opened and Manoel presented himself. The young doctor had left his friends on board the jangada at work on the indecipherable document, and had come to see Judge Jarriquez. He was anxious to know if he had been fortunate in his researches. He had come to ask if he had at length discovered the system on which the cryptogram had been written.

The magistrate was not sorry to see Manoel come in. He was in that state of excitement that solitude was exasperating to him. He wanted some one to speak to, some one as anxious to penetrate the mystery as he was. Manoel was just the man.

"Sir," said Manoel, as he entered, "one question! Have you succeeded better than we have?"

"Sit down first," exclaimed Judge Jarriquez, who got up and began to pace the room. "Sit down! If we are both of us standing, you will walk one way and I shall walk the other, and the room will be too narrow to hold us."

Manoel sat down and repeated his question.

"No! I have not had any success!" replied the magistrate; "I do not think I am any better off. I have got nothing to tell you; but I have found out a certainty."

"What is that, sir?"

"That the document is not based on conventional signs, but on what is known in cryptology as a cipher, that is to say, on a number."

"Well, sir," answered Manoel, "cannot a document of that kind always be read?"

"Yes," said Jarriquez, "if a letter is invariably represented by the same letter; if an *a,* for example, is always a *p,* and a *p* is always an *x;* if not, it cannot."

"And in this document?"

"In this document the value of the letter changes with the arbitrarily selected cipher which necessitates it. So a *b* which will in one place be represented by a *k* will later on become a *z,* later on a *u* or an *n* or an *f,* or any other letter."

"And then, I am sorry to say, the cryptogram is indecipherable."

"Indecipherable!" exclaimed Manoel. "No, sir; we shall end by finding the key of the document on which a man's life depends."

Manoel had risen, a prey to the excitement he could not control; the reply he had received was too hopeless, and he refused to accept it for good. At a gesture from the judge, however, he sat down again, and in a calmer voice asked, "And in the first place, sir, what makes you think that the basis of this document is a number, or, as you call it, a cipher?"

"Listen to me, young man," replied the judge, "and you will be forced to give in to the evidence."

The magistrate took the document and put it before the eyes of Manoel and showed him what he had done.

"I began," he said, "by treating this document in the proper way, that is to say, logically, leaving nothing to chance. I applied to it an alphabet based on the proportion the letters bear to one another which is usual in our language, and I sought to obtain the meaning by following the precepts of our immortal analyst, Edgar Poe. Well, what succeeded with him collapsed with me."

"Collapsed!" exclaimed Manoel.

"Yes, my dear young man, and I at once saw that success sought in that fashion was impossible. In truth, a stronger man than I might have been deceived."

"But I should like to understand," said Manoel, "and I do not——"

"Take the document," continued Judge Jarriquez; "first look at the disposition of the letters, and read it through."

Manoel obeyed.

"Do you not see that the combination of several of the letters is very strange?" asked the magistrate.

"I do not see anything," said Manoel, after having for perhaps the hundredth time read through the document.

"Well! study the last paragraph! There you understand the sense of the whole is bound to be summed up. Do you see anything abnormal?"

"Nothing."

"There is, however, one thing which absolutely proves that the language is subject to the laws of number."

"And that is?"

"That is that you see three *h's* coming together in two different places."

What Jarriquez said was correct, and it was of a nature to attract attention. The two hundred and fourth, two hundred and fifth, and two hundred and sixth letters of the paragraph, and the two hundred and fifty-eighth, two hundred and fifty-ninth, and two hundred and sixtieth letters of the paragraph, were consecutive *h's*. At first this peculiarity had not struck the magistrate.

"And that proves?" asked Manoel, without divining the deduction that could be drawn from the combination.

"That simply proves that the basis of the document is a number. It shows *a priori* that each letter is modified in virtue of the ciphers of the number and according to the place which it occupies."

"And why?"

"Because in no language will you find words with three consecutive repetitions of the letter *h*."

Manoel was struck with the argument; he thought about it, and, in short, had no reply to make.

"And had I made the observation sooner," continued the magistrate, "I might have spared myself a good deal of trouble and a headache which extends from my occiput to my sinciput."

"But, sir," asked Manoel, who felt the little hope vanishing on which he had hitherto rested, "what do you mean by a cipher?"

"Tell me a number."

"Any number you like."

"Give me an example and you will understand the explanation better."

Judge Jarriquez sat down at the table, took up a sheet of paper and a pencil, and said:

"Now, Mr. Manoel, let us choose a sentence by chance, the first that comes; for instance—

Judge Jarriquez has an ingenious mind.

I write this phrase so as to space the letters differently, and I get—

Judgejarriquezhasaningeniousmind.

That done," said the magistrate, to whom the phrase seemed to contain a proposition beyond dispute, looking Manoel straight in the face, "suppose I take a number by chance, so as to give a cryptographic form to this natural succession of words; suppose now this word is composed of three ciphers, and let these ciphers be 2, 3 and 4. Now on the line below I put the number 234, and repeat it as many times as are necessary to get to the end of the phrase, and so that every cipher comes underneath a letter. This is what we get—

J u d g e j a r r i q u e z h a s a n i n g e n i o u s m i n d.
2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3

And now, Mr. Manoel, replacing each letter by the letter in advance of it in alphabetical order according to the value of the cipher, we get—

j plus 2 equal *l*
u plus 3 equal *x*
d plus 4 equal *h*
g plus 2 equal *i*
e plus 3 equal *h*
j plus 4 equal *n*
a plus 2 equal *c*
r plus 3 equal *u*
r plus 4 equal *v*
i plus 2 equal *k*
q plus 3 equal *t*
u plus 4 equal *y*
e plus 2 equal *g*
z plus 3 equal *c*
h plus 4 equal *t*
a plus 2 equal *c*
s plus 3 equal *v*
a plus 4 equal *e*
n plus 2 equal *p*

i plus 3 equal *l*
n plus 4 equal *r*
g plus 2 equal *i*
e plus 3 equal *h*
n plus 4 equal *r*
i plus 2 equal *k*
o plus 3 equal *r*
u plus 4 equal *y*
s plus 2 equal *u*
and so on.

" If, on account of the value of the ciphers which compose the number, I come to the end of the alphabet without having enough complementary letters to deduct, I begin again at the beginning. That is what happens at the end of my name when the *z* is replaced by the 3. As after *z* the alphabet has no more letters, I commence to count from *a* and so get the *c*. That done, when I get to the end of this cryptographic system, made up of the 234—which was arbitrarily selected, do not forget!—the phrase which you recognize above is replaced by—

lxhihncuvktygclcveplrihrkryupmpg.

" And now, young man, just look at it, and do you not think it is very much like what is in the document? Well, what is the consequence? Why, that the signification of the letters depends on a cipher which chance put beneath them, and the cryptographic letter which answers to a true one is not always the same. So in this phrase the first *j* is represented by an *l,* the second by an *n;* the first *e* by an *h,* the second by a *g,* the third by an *h;* the first *d* is represented by an *h,* the last by a *g,* and so on. Now you see that if you do not know the cipher 234 you will never be able to read the lines, and consequently if we do not know the number of the document, it remains indecipherable! "

On hearing the magistrate reason with such careful logic, Manoel was at first overwhelmed, but, raising his head, he exclaimed:

" No, sir, I will not renounce the hope of finding the number! "

" We might have done so," answered Judge Jarriquez, " if the lines of the document had been divided into words."

" And why? "

"For this reason, young man. I think we can assume that in the last paragraph all that is written in these earlier paragraphs is summed up. Now I am convinced that in it will be found the name of Joam Dacosta. Well, if the lines had been divided into words, in trying the words one after the other—I mean the words composed of seven letters, as the name of Dacosta is—it would not have been impossible to evolve the number which is the key of the document."

"Will you explain to me how you ought to proceed to do that, sir?" asked Manoel, who probably caught a glimpse of one more hope.

"Nothing can be more simple," answered the judge. "Let us take, for example, one of the words in the sentence we have just written—my name, if you like. It is represented in the cryptogram by this queer succession of letters, *ncuvktygc*. Well, arranging these letters in a column, one under the other, and then placing them against the letters of my name, and deducting one from the other the numbers of their places in alphabetical order, I get the following result:—

Between *n* and *j* we have 4 letters
— *c* — *a* — 2 —
— *u* — *r* — 3 —
— *v* — *r* — 4 —
— *k* — *i* — 2 —
— *t* — *q* — 3 —
— *y* — *u* — 4 —
— *g* — *e* — 2 —
— *c* — *z* — 3 —

"Now what is the column of ciphers made up of that we have got by this simple operation? Look here! 423, 423, 423, that is to say, of repetitions of the numbers 423, or 234, or 342."

"Yes, that is it!" answered Manoel.

"You understand, then, by this means, that in calculating the true letter from the false, instead of the false from the true, I have been able to discover the number with ease; and the number I was in search of is really the 234 which I took as the key to my cryptogram."

"Well, sir!" exclaimed Manoel, "if that is so, the name of Dacosta is in the last paragraph; and taking successively each letter of these lines for the first of the seven letters which compose his name, we ought to get——"

"That would be impossible," interrupted the judge, "except on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That the first cipher of the number should happen to be the first letter of the word Dacosta, and I think you will agree with me that it is not probable."

"Quite so!" sighed Manoel, who, with this improbability, saw the last chance vanish.

"And so we must trust to chance alone," continued Jarriquez, who shook his head, "and chance does not often do much in things of this sort."

"But still," said Manoel, "chance might give us this number."

"This number," exclaimed the magistrate—"this number? But how many ciphers is it composed of? Of two, or three, or four, or nine, or ten? Is it made up of different ciphers only, or of ciphers in different order many times repeated? Do you not know, young man, that with the ordinary ten ciphers, using all at a time, but without any repetition, you can make 3,268,800 different numbers, and that if you use the same cipher more than once in the number, these millions of combinations will be enormously increased? And do you not know that if we employ every one of the 525,600 minutes of which the year is composed to try at each of these numbers, it would take you six years, and that you would want three centuries if each operation took you an hour? No! You ask the impossible!"

"Impossible, sir?" answered Manoel. "An innocent man has been branded as guilty, and Joam Dacosta is to lose his life and his honor while you hold in your hands the material proof of his innocence. That is what is impossible!"

"Ah, young man!" exclaimed Jarriquez, "who told you, after all, that Torres did not tell a lie? Who told you that he really did have in his hands a document written by the author of the crime? that this paper was the document, and that this document refers to Joam Dacosta?"

"Who told me so?" repeated Manoel, and his face was hidden in his hands.

In fact, nothing could prove for certain that the document had anything to do with the affair in the diamond province. There was, in fact, nothing to show that it was not utterly devoid of meaning, and that it had been imagined by Torres himself, who was as capable of selling a false thing as a true one!

"It does not matter, Manoel," continued the judge, rising; "it does not matter! Whatever it may be to which the document refers, I have not yet given up discovering the cipher. After all, it is worth more than a logogryph or a rebus!"

At these words Manoel rose, shook hands with the magistrate, and returned to the jangada, feeling more hopeless when he went back than when he set out.

CHAPTER XIII

CHANCE!

A COMPLETE change took place in public opinion on the subject of Joam Dacosta. To anger succeeded pity. The population no longer thronged to the prison of Manaos to roar out cries of death to the prisoner. On the contrary, the most forward of them in accusing him of being the principal author of the crime of Tijuco now averred that he was not guilty, and demanded his immediate restoration to liberty. Thus it always is with the mob—from one extreme they run to the other. But the change was intelligible.

The events which had happened in the last few days—the struggle between Benito and Torres; the search for the corpse, which had reappeared under such extraordinary circumstances; the finding of the "indecipherable" document, if we can so call it; the information it concealed, the assurance that it contained, or rather the wish that it contained, the material proof of the guiltlessness of Joam Dacosta; and the hope that it was written by the real culprit—all these things had contributed to work the change in public opinion. What the people had desired and impatiently demanded forty-eight hours before, they now feared, and that was the arrival of the instructions due from Rio de Janeiro.

These, however, were not likely to be delayed.

Joam Dacosta had been arrested on the 24th of August, and examined next day. The judge's report was sent off on the 26th. It was now the 28th. In three or four days more the Minister would have come to a decision regarding the convict, and it was only too certain that justice would take its course.

There was no doubt that such would be the case. On the other hand, that the assurance of Dacosta's innocence would appear from the document, was not doubted by anybody, neither by his family nor by the fickle population of Manaos, who excitedly followed the phases of this dramatic affair.

But, on the other hand, in the eyes of disinterested or indifferent persons who were not affected by the event, what value could be assigned to this document? and how could they even declare that it referred to the crime in the diamond arrayal? It existed, that was undeniable; it had been found on the corpse of Torres, nothing could be more certain. It could even be seen, by comparing it with the letter in which Torres gave the information about Joam Dacosta, that the document was not in the handwriting of the adventurer. But, as had been suggested by Judge Jarriquez, why should not the scoundrel have invented it for the sake of his bargain? And this was less unlikely to be the case, considering that Torres had declined to part with it until after his marriage with Dacosta's daughter—that is to say, when it would have been impossible to undo an accomplished fact.

All these views were held by some people in some form, and we can quite understand what interest the affair created. In any case, the situation of Joam Dacosta was most hazardous. If the document were not deciphered, it would be just the same as if it did not exist; and if the secret of the cryptogram were not miraculously divined or revealed before the end of the three days, the supreme sentence would inevitably be suffered by the doomed man of Tijuco. And this miracle a man attempted to perform! The man was Jarriquez, and he now really set to work more in the interest of Joam Dacosta than for the satisfaction of his analytical faculties. A complete change had also taken place in his opinion. Was not this man, who had voluntarily abandoned his retreat at Iquitos, who had come at the risk of his life to demand his rehabilitation at the hands of Brazilian justice, a moral enigma worth all the others put together? And so the judge had resolved never to leave the document until he had discovered the cipher. He set to work at it in a fury. He ate no more; he slept no more! All his time was passed in inventing combinations of numbers, in forging a key to force this lock!

This idea had taken possession of Judge Jarriquez's brain at the end of the first day. Suppressed frenzy consumed him, and kept him in a perpetual heat. His whole house trembled; his servants, black or white, dared not come near him. Fortunately he was a bachelor; had there been a Madame Jarriquez she would have had a very uncomfortable time of it. Never had a problem so taken possession of this oddity, and he had thoroughly made up his mind to get at the solution, even if his head exploded like an overheated boiler under the tension of its vapor.

It was perfectly clear to the mind of the worthy magistrate that the key to the document was a number, composed of two or more ciphers, but what this number was all investigation seemed powerless to discover.

This was the enterprise on which Jarriquez, in quite a fury, was engaged, and during this 28th of August he brought all his faculties to bear on it, and worked away almost superhumanly.

To arrive at the number by chance, he said, was to lose himself in millions of combinations, which would absorb the life of a first-rate calculator. But if he could in no respect reckon on chance, was it impossible to proceed by reasoning? Decidedly not! And so it was "to reason till he became unreasoning" that Judge Jarriquez gave himself up after vainly seeking repose in a few hours of sleep. He who ventured in upon him at this moment after braving the formal defenses which protected his solitude, would have found him, as on the day before, in his study, before his desk, with the document under his eyes, the thousands of letters of which seemed all jumbled together and flying about his head.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "why did not the scoundrel who wrote this separate the words in this paragraph? We might —we will try—but no! However, if there is anything here about the murder and the robbery, two or three words there must be in it—'arrayal,' 'diamond,' 'Tijuco,' 'Dacosta,' and others; and in putting down their cryptological equivalents the number could be arrived at. But there is nothing —not a break!—not one word by itself! One word of two hundred and seventy-six letters! I hope the wretch may be blessed two hundred and seventy-six times for complicating his system in this way! He ought to be hanged two hundred and seventy-six times!"

And a violent thump with his fist on the document emphasized this charitable wish.

"But," continued the magistrate, "if I cannot find one of the words in the body of the document, I might at least try my hand at the beginning and end of each paragraph. There may be a chance there that I ought not to miss."

And impressed with this idea Judge Jarriquez successively tried if the letters which commenced or finished the different paragraphs could be made to correspond with those which formed the most important word, which was sure to be found somewhere, that of *Dacosta.*

To take only the last paragraph with which he began, the formula was——

$P = D$
$h = a$
$y = c$
$j = o$
$s = s$
$l = t$
$y = a$

Now at the very first letter Jarriquez was stopped in his calculations, for the difference in alphabetical position between the *d* and *p* gave him not one cipher but two, namely: 12, and in this kind of cryptogram only one letter can take the place of another.

It was the same for the seven last letters of the paragraph, *p s u v j h d,* of which the series also commences with a *p,* and which could in no case stand for the *d* in *Dacosta,* because these letters were in like manner twelve spaces apart.

So it was not his name that figured here.

The same observation applied to the words *arrayal* and *Tijuco,* which were successively tried, but whose construction did not correspond with the cryptographic series.

After he had got so far, Judge Jarriquez, with his head nearly splitting, arose and paced his office, went for fresh air to the window, and gave utterance to a growl, at the noise of which a flock of humming-birds, murmuring among the foliage of a mimosa-tree, betook themselves to flight. Then he returned to the document.

He picked it up and turned it over.

"The humbug! the rascal!" he hissed; "it will end by driving me mad! But steady! Be calm! Don't let our spirits go down! This is not the time!"

And then having refreshed himself by giving his head a thorough sluicing with cold water:—

"Let us try another way," he said, "and as I cannot hit upon the number from the arrangement of the letters, let us see what number the author of the document would have chosen in confessing that he was the author of the crime at Tijuco."

This was another method for the magistrate to enter upon, and maybe he was right, for there was a certain amount of logic about it.

"And first let us try a date. Why should not the culprit have taken the date of the year in which Dacosta, the innocent man he allowed to be sentenced in his place, was born? Was he likely to forget a number which was so important to him? Then Joam Dacosta was born in 1804. Let us see what 1804 will give us as a cryptological number."

And Judge Jarriquez wrote the first letters of the paragraph, and putting over them the number 1804 repeated thrice, he obtained

1804 1804 1804
phyj *slyd* *aqfd*

Then in counting up the spaces in alphabetical order he obtained

o.yf *rdy.* *cif.*

And this was meaningless! And he wanted three letters which he had to replace by points because the ciphers, 8, 4, and 4, which command the three letters, *h*, *d*, and *d*, do not give corresponding letters in ascending the series.

"That is not it again!" exclaimed Jarriquez. "Let us try another number."

And he asked himself, if instead of this first date the author of the document had not rather selected the date of the year in which the crime was committed.

This was in 1826.

And so proceeding as above, he obtained

1826   1826   1826
phyj   slyd   dqfd

and that gave

o.vd   rdv.   cid.

the same meaningless series, the same absence of sense, as many letters wanting as in the former instance, and for the same reason.

"Bother the number!" exclaimed the magistrate. "We must give it up again. Let us have another one! Perhaps the rascal chose the number of contos representing the amount of the booty!"

Now the value of the stolen diamonds was estimated at eight hundred and thirty-four contos, or about 2,500,000 francs, and so the formula became

834   834   834   834
phy   jsl   ydd   qfd

and this gave a result as little gratifying as the others—

het   bph   pa.   ic.

"Confound the document and him who imagined it!" shouted Jarriquez, throwing down the paper, which was wafted to the other side of the room. "It would try the patience of a saint!"

But the short burst of anger passed away, and the magistrate, who had no idea of being beaten, picked up the paper. What he had done with the first letters of the different paragraphs he did with the last—and to no purpose. Then he tried everything his excited imagination could suggest.

He tried in succession the numbers which represented Dacosta's age, which should have been known to the author of the crime, the date of his arrest, the date of the sentence at the Villa Rica assizes, the date fixed for the execution, etc., etc., even the number of victims at the affray at Tijuco!

Nothing! All the time nothing!

Judge Jarriquez had worked himself into such a state of exasperation that there really was some fear that his mental faculties would lose their balance. He jumped about, and twisted about, and wrestled about as if he really had got hold of his enemy's body. Then suddenly he cried: "Now for chance! Heaven help me now, logic is powerless!"

His hand seized a bell-pull hanging near his table. The bell rang furiously, and the magistrate strode up to the door, which he opened. "Bobo!" he shouted.

A moment or two elapsed.

Bobo was a freed negro, who was the privileged servant of Jarriquez. He did not appear; it was evident that Bobo was afraid to come into his master's room.

Another ring at the bell; another call to Bobo, who, for his own safety, pretended to be deaf on this occasion. And now a third ring at the bell, which unhitched the crank and broke the cord.

This time Bobo came up. "What is it, sir?" asked Bobo, prudently waiting on the threshold.

"Advance, without uttering a single word!" replied the judge, whose flaming eyes made the negro quake again.

Bobo advanced.

"Bobo," said Jarriquez, "attend to what I say, and answer immediately; do not even take time to think, or I——"

Bobo, with fixed eyes and open mouth, brought his feet together like a soldier and stood at attention.

"Are you ready?" asked his master.

"I am."

"Now, then, tell me, without a moment's thought—you understand—the first number that comes into your head."

"76223," answered Bobo, all in a breath. Bobo thought he would please his master by giving him a pretty large one!

Judge Jarriquez had run to the table, and, pencil in hand, had made out a formula with the number given by Bobo, and which Bobo had in his way only given him at a venture.

It is obvious that it was most unlikely that a number such as 76223 was the key of the document, and it produced no other result than to bring to the lips of Jarriquez such a vigorous ejaculation that Bobo disappeared like a shot!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST EFFORT

THE magistrate, however, was not the only one who passed his time unprofitably. Benito, Manoel, Minha tried all they could together to extract the secret from the document on which depended their father's life and honor. On his part, Fragoso, aided by Lina, could not remain quiet, but all their ingenuity had failed, and the number still escaped them.

"Why don't you find it, Fragoso?" asked the young mulatto.

"I will find it," answered Fragoso.

And he did not find it!

Here we should say that Fragoso had an idea of a project of which he had not even spoken to Lina, but which had taken full possession of his mind. This was to go in search of the gang to which the ex-captain of the woods had belonged, and to find out who was the probable author of this cipher document, which was supposed to be the confession of the culprit of Tijuco. The part of the Amazon where these people were employed, the very place where Fragoso had met Torres a few years before, was not very far from Manaos. He would only have to descend the river for about fifty miles, to the mouth of the Madeira, a tributary coming in on the right, and there he was almost sure to meet the head of these "capitaes do mato," to which Torres belonged. In two days, or three days at the outside, Fragoso could get into communication with the old comrades of the adventurer.

"Yes! I could do that," he repeated to himself; "but what would be the good of it, supposing I succeeded? If we are sure that one of Torres' companions has recently died, would that prove him to be the author of this crime? Would that show that he gave Torres a document in which he announced himself the author of this crime, and exonerated Joam Dacosta? Would this give us the key of the document? No! Two men only knew the cipher—the culprit and Torres! And these two men are no more!"

So reasoned Fragoso. It was evident that his enterprise would do no good. But the thought of it was too much for him. An irresistible influence impelled him to set out, although he was not even sure of finding the band on the Madeira. In fact, it might be engaged in some other part of the province, and to come up with it might require more time than Fragoso had at his disposal! And what would be the result?

It is none the less true, however, that on the 29th of August, before sunrise, Fragoso, without saying anything to anybody, secretly left the jangada, arrived at Manaos, and embarked in one of the egariteas which daily descend the Amazon.

And great was the astonishment when he was not seen on board, and did not appear during the day. No one, not even Lina, could explain the absence of so devoted a servant at such a crisis. Some of them even asked, and not without reason, if the poor fellow, rendered desperate at having, when he met him on the frontier, personally contributed to bringing Torres on board the raft, had not made away with himself.

But if Fragoso could so reproach himself, how about Benito? In the first place, at Iquitos he had invited Torres to visit the fazenda; in the second place, he had brought him on board the jangada, to become a passenger on it; and in the third place, in killing him, he had annihilated the only witness whose evidence could save the condemned man. And so Benito considered himself responsible for everything—the arrest of his father, and the terrible events of which it had been the consequence.

In fact, had Torres been alive, Benito could not tell but that, in some way or another, from pity or for reward, he would have finished by handing over the document. Would not Torres, whom nothing could compromise, have been persuaded to speak, had money been brought to bear upon him? Would not the long-sought-for proof have been furnished to the judge? Yes, undoubtedly! And the only man who could have furnished this evidence had been killed through Benito!

Such was what the wretched man continually repeated to his mother, to Manoel, and to himself; were the cruel responsibilities which his conscience laid to his charge.

Between her husband, with whom she passed all the time that was allowed to her, and her son, a prey to despair which made her tremble for his reason, the brave Yaquita lost none of her moral energy. In her they found the valiant daughter of Magalhaes, the worthy wife of the fazender of Iquitos.

The attitude of Joam Dacosta was well adapted to sustain her in this ordeal. That gallant man, that rigid Puritan, that austere worker, whose whole life had been a battle, had not yet shown a moment of weakness.

The most terrible blow which had struck him without prostrating him had been the death of Judge Ribeiro, in whose mind his innocence did not admit of a doubt. Was it not with the help of his old defender that he had hoped to strive for his rehabilitation? The intervention of Torres he had regarded throughout as being quite secondary for him. And of this document he had no knowledge when he left Iquitos to hand himself over to the justice of his country. He only took with him moral proofs. When a material proof was unexpectedly produced in the course of the affair, before or after his arrest, he was certainly not the man to despise it. But, if, on account of regrettable circumstances, the proof disappeared, he would find himself once more in the same position as when he passed the Brazilian frontier—the position of a man who came to say: "Here is my past life; here is my present; here is an entirely honest existence of work and devotion which I bring you. You passed on me at first an erroneous judgment. After three-and-twenty years of exile I have come to give myself up! Here I am; judge me again!"

The death of Torres, the impossibility of reading the document found on him, had thus not produced on Joam Dacosta the impression which it had on his children, his friends, his household, and all who were interested in him.

"I have faith in my innocence," ne repeated to Yaquita, "as I have faith in God. If my life is still useful to my people, and a miracle is necessary to save me, that miracle will be performed; if not, I shall die! God alone is my judge!"

The excitement increased in Manaos as the time ran on; the affair was discussed with unexampled acerbity. In the midst of this enthrallment of public opinion, which evoked so much of the mysterious, the document was the principal object of conversation.

At the end of this fourth day not a single person doubted but that it contained the vindication of the doomed man. Every one had been given an opportunity of deciphering its incomprehensible contents, for the *Diario d'o Grand Para* had reproduced it in facsimile. Autograph copies were spread about in great numbers at the suggestion of Manoel, who neglected nothing that might lead to the penetration of the mystery—not even chance, that "nickname of providence," as some one has called it.

In addition, a reward of 100 contos (or 300,000 francs) was promised to any one who could discover the cipher so fruitlessly sought after—and read the document. This was quite a fortune, and so people of all classes forgot to eat, drink, or sleep to attack this unintelligible cryptogram.

Up to the present, however, all had been useless, and probably the most ingenious analysts in the world would have spent their time in vain. It had been advertised that any solution should be sent, without delay, to Judge Jarriquez, to his house in God-the-Son Street; but the evening of the 29th of August came and none had arrived, nor was any likely to arrive.

Of all those who took up the study of the puzzle, Judge Jarriquez was one of the most to be pitied. By a natural association of ideas, he also joined in the general opinion that the document referred to the affair at Tijuco, and that it had been written by the hand of the guilty man, and exonerated Joam Dacosta. And so he put even more ardor into his search for the key. It was not only the art for the art's sake which guided him, it was a sentiment of justice, of pity toward a man suffering under an unjust condemnation. If it is the fact that a certain quantity of phosphorus is expended in the work of the brain, it would be difficult to say how many milligrammes the judge had parted with to excite the network of his "sensorium," and after all, to find out nothing, absolutely nothing.

But Jarriquez had no idea of abandoning the inquiry. If he could only now trust to chance, he would work on for that chance. He tried to evoke it by all means possible and impossible. He had given himself over to fury and anger, and what was worse, to impotent anger!

During the latter part of this day he had been trying different numbers—numbers selected arbitrarily—and how many of them can scarcely be imagined. Had he had the time, he would not have shrunk from plunging into the millions of combinations of which the ten symbols of numeration are capable. He would have given his whole life to it at the risk of going mad before the year was out. Mad! was he not that already? He had had the idea that the document might be read through the paper, and so he turned it round and exposed it to the light, and tried it in that way.

Nothing! The numbers already thought of, and which he tried in this new way, gave no result. Perhaps the document read backward, and the last letter was really the first, for the author would have done this had he wished to make the reading more difficult.

Nothing! The new combination only furnished a series of letters just as enigmatic.

At eight o'clock in the evening Jarriquez, with his face in his hands, knocked up, worn out mentally and physically, had neither strength to move, to speak, to think, or to associate one idea with another.

Suddenly a noise was heard outside. Almost immediately, notwithstanding his formal orders, the door of his study was thrown open. Benito and Manoel were before him, Benito looking dreadfully pale, and Manoel supporting him, for the unfortunate young man had hardly strength to support himself.

The magistrate quickly arose.

"What is it, gentlemen? What do you want?" he asked.

"The cipher!—the cipher!" exclaimed Benito, mad with grief—"the cipher of the document."

"Do you know it, then?" shouted the judge.

"No, sir!" said Manoel. "But you?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"Nothing?" gasped Benito, and in a paroxysm of despair he took a knife from his belt, and would have plunged it into his breast had not the judge and Manoel jumped forward and managed to disarm him.

"Benito," said Jarriquez, in a voice which he tried to keep calm, "if your father cannot escape the expiation of a crime which is not his, you could do something better than kill yourself."

"What?" said Benito.

"Try and save his life!"

"How?"

"That is for you to discover," answered the magistrate, "and not for me to say."

CHAPTER XV

PREPARATIONS

On the following day, the 30th of August, Benito and Manoel talked matters over together. They had understood the thought to which the judge had not dared to give utterance in their presence, and were engaged in devising some means by which the condemned man could escape the penalty of the law.

Nothing else was left for them to do. It was only too certain that for the authorities at Rio Janeiro the undeciphered document would have no value whatever, that it would be a dead letter, that the first verdict which declared Joam Dacosta the perpetrator of the crime at Tijuco would not be set aside, and that, as in such cases no commutation was possible, the order for his execution would inevitably be received.

Once more, then, Joam Dacosta would have to escape by flight from an unjust punishment.

It was at the outset agreed by the two young men that the secret should be carefully kept, and that neither Yaquita nor Minha should be informed of preparations, which would probably only give rise to hopes destined never to be realized. Who could tell if, owing to some unforeseen circumstance, the attempt at escape would not prove a miserable failure?

The presence of Fragoso on such an occasion would have been most valuable. Discreet and devoted, his services would have been most welcome to the two young fellows; but Fragoso had not reappeared. Lina, when asked, could only say that she knew not what had become of him, nor why he had left the raft without telling her anything about it.

And assuredly, had Fragoso foreseen that things would have turned out as they were doing, he would never have left the Dacosta family on an expedition which appeared to promise no serious results. Far better for him to have assisted in the escape of the doomed man than to have hurried off in search of the former comrades of Torres! But Fragoso was away, and his assistance had to be dispensed with.

At daybreak Benito and Manoel left the raft and proceeded to Manaos. They soon reached the town, and passed through its narrow streets, which at that early hour were quite deserted. In a few minutes they arrived in front of the prison. The waste ground, amid which the old convent which served for a house of detention was built, was traversed by them in all directions, for they had come to study it with the utmost care.

Fifty-five feet from the ground, in an angle of the building, they recognized the window of the cell in which Joam Dacosta was confined. The window was secured with iron bars in a miserable state of repair, which it would be easy to tear down or cut through if they could only get near enough. The badly jointed stones in the wall, which were crumbled away every here and there, offered many a ledge for the feet to rest on, if only a rope could be fixed to climb up by. One of the bars had slipped out of its socket, and formed a hook over which it might be possible to throw a rope. That done, one or two of the bars could be removed so as to permit a man to get through. Benito and Manoel would then have to make their way into the prisoner's room, and without much difficulty the escape could be managed by means of the rope fastened to the projecting iron. During the night, if the sky were very cloudy, none of these operations would be noticed, and before the day dawned Joam Dacosta could get safely away.

Manoel and Benito spent an hour about the spot, taking care not to attract attention, but examining the locality with great exactness, particularly as regarded the position of the window, the arrangement of the iron bars, and the place from which it would be best to throw the line.

"That is agreed!" said Manoel, at length. "And now, ought Joam Dacosta to be told about this?"

"No, Manoel. Neither to him, any more than to my mother, ought we to impart the secret of an attempt in which there is such a risk of failure."

"We shall succeed, Benito!" continued Manoel. "However, we must prepare for everything; and in case the chief of the prison should discover us at the moment of escape——"

"We shall have money enough to purchase his silence," answered Benito.

"Good!" replied Manoel. "But once your father is out of prison he cannot remain hidden in the town or on the jangada. Where is he to find refuge?"

This was the second question to solve: and a very difficult one it was.

A hundred paces away from the prison, however, the waste land was crossed by one of those canals which flow through the town into the Rio Negro. This canal afforded an easy way of gaining the river if a pirogue were in waiting for the fugitive. From the foot of the wall to the canal side was hardly a hundred yards.

Benito and Manoel decided that about eight o'clock in the evening one of the pirogues, with two strong rowers, under the command of the pilot Araujo, should start from the jangada. They could ascend the Rio Negro, enter the canal, and, crossing the waste land, remain concealed throughout the night under the tall vegetation on the banks.

But once on board, where was Joam Dacosta to seek refuge? To return to Iquitos was to follow a road full of difficulties and peril, and a long one in any case, should the fugitive either travel across the country or by the river. Neither by horse nor pirogue could he be got out of danger quickly enough, and the fazenda was no longer a safe retreat. He would not return to it as the fazender, Joam Garral, but as the convict, Joam Dacosta, continually in fear of extradition. He could never dream of resuming his former life.

To get away by the Rio Negro into the north of the province, or even beyond the Brazilian territory, would require more time than he could spare, and his first care must be to escape from immediate pursuit.

To start again down the Amazon? But stations, villages, and towns abounded on both sides of the river. The description of the fugitive would be sent to all the police, and he would run the risk of being arrested long before he reached the Atlantic. And supposing he reached the coast, where and how was he to hide and wait for a passage to put the sea between himself and his pursuers?

On consideration of these various plans, Benito and Manoel agreed that neither of them was practicable. One, however, did offer some chance of safety, and that was to embark in a pirogue, follow the canal into the Rio Negro, descend this tributary under the guidance of the pilot, reach the confluence of the rivers, and run down the Amazon along its right bank for some sixty miles during the nights, resting during the daylight, and so gaining the embouchure of the Madeira.

This tributary, which, fed by a hundred affluents, descends from the waterheads of the Cordilleras, is a regular waterway opening into the very heart of Bolivia. A pirogue could pass up it and leave no trace of his passage, and a refuge could be found in some town or village beyond the Brazilian frontier. There Joam Dacosta would be comparatively safe, and there for several months he could wait for an opportunity of reaching the Pacific coast and taking passage in some vessel leaving one of its ports; and if the ship were bound for one of the States of North America he would be free. Once there, he could sell the fazenda, leave his country forever, and seek beyond the sea, in the Old World, a final retreat in which to end an existence so cruelly and unjustly disturbed. Anywhere he might go, his family—not excepting Manoel, who was bound to him by so many ties—would assuredly follow without the slightest hesitation.

"Let us go," said Benito; "we must have all ready before night, and we have no time to lose."

The young men returned on board by way of the canal bank, which led along the Rio Negro. They satisfied themselves that the passage of the pirogue would be quite possible, and that no obstacles such as locks or boats under repair were there to stop it. They then descended the left bank of the tributary, avoiding the slowly filling streets of the town, and reached the jangada.

Benito's first care was to see his mother. He felt sufficiently master of himself to dissemble the anxiety which consumed him. He wished to assure her that all hope was not lost, that the mystery of the document would be cleared up, that in any case public opinion was in favor of Joam, and that, in face of the agitation which was being made in his favor, justice would grant all the necessary time for the production of the material proof of his innocence. "Yes, mother," he added, "before to-morrow we shall be free from anxiety."

"May heaven grant it so!" replied Yaquita, and she looked at him so keenly that Benito could hardly meet her glance.

On his part, and as if by prearrangement, Manoel had tried to reassure Minha by telling her that Judge Jarriquez was convinced of the innocence of Joam, and would try to save him by every means in his power.

"I only wish he would, Manoel," answered she, endeavoring to restrain her tears.

And Manoel left her, for the tears were also welling up in his eyes and witnessing against the words of hope to which he had just given utterance.

And now the time had arrived for them to make their daily visit to the prisoner, and Yaquita and her daughter set off to Manaos.

For an hour the young men were in consultation with Araujo. They acquainted him with their plan in all its details, and they discussed not only the projected escape, but the measures which were necessary for the safety of the fugitive.

Araujo approved of everything; he undertook, during the approaching night, to take the pirogue up the canal without attracting any notice, and he knew its course thoroughly as far as the spot where he was to await the arrival of Joam Dacosta. To get back to the mouth of the Rio Negro was easy enough, and the pirogue would be able to pass unnoticed among the numerous craft continually descending the river.

Araujo had no objection to offer to the idea of following the Amazon down to its confluence with the Madeira. The course of the Madeira was familiar to him for quite two hundred miles up, and in the midst of these thinly peopled provinces, even if pursuit took place in their direction, all attempts at capture could be easily frustrated; they could reach the interior of Bolivia, and if Joam decided to leave his country he could procure a passage with less danger on the coast of the Pacific than on that of the Atlantic.

Araujo's approval was most welcome to the young fellows; they had great faith in the practical good sense of the pilot, and not without reason. His zeal was undoubted, and he would assuredly have risked both life and liberty to save the fazender of Iquitos.

With the utmost secrecy, Araujo at once set about his preparations. A considerable sum in gold was handed over to him by Benito to meet all eventualities during the voyage on the Madeira. In getting the pirogue ready, he announced his intention of going in search of Fragoso, whose fate excited a good deal of anxiety among his companions. He stowed away in the boat provisions for many days, and did not forget the ropes and tools which would be required by the young men when they reached the canal at the appointed time and place.

These preparations evoked no curiosity on the part of the crew of the jangada, and even the two stalwart negroes were not let into the secret. They, however, could be absolutely depended on. Whenever they learned what the work of safety was in which they were engaged—when Joam Dacosta, once more free, was confided to their charge—Araujo knew well that they would dare anything, even to the risk of their own lives, to save the life of their master.

By the afternoon all was ready, and they had only the night to wait for. But before making a start Manoel wished to call on Judge Jarriquez for the last time. The magistrate might perhaps have found out something new about the document. Benito preferred to remain on the raft and wait for the return of his mother and sister.

Manoel, then, presented himself at the abode of Judge Jarriquez, and was immediately admitted.

The magistrate, in the study which he never quitted, was still the victim of the same excitement. The document, crumpled by his impatient fingers, was still there, before his eyes, on the table.

"Sir," said Manoel, whose voice trembled as he asked the question, "have you received anything from Rio de Janeiro?"

"No," answered the judge; "the order has not yet come to hand, but it may at any moment."

"And the document?"

"Nothing yet!" exclaimed he. "Everything my imagination can suggest I have tried, and no result."

"None?"

" Nevertheless, I distinctly see one word in the document —only one! "

" What is that—what is the word? "

" ' Fly '! "

Manoel said nothing, but he pressed the hand which Jarriquez held out to him, and returned to the jangada to wait for the moment of action.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST NIGHT

The visit of Yaquita and her daughter had been like all such visits during the few hours which each day the husband and wife spent together. In the presence of the two beings whom Joam so dearly loved his heart nearly failed him. But the husband—the father—retained his self-command. It was he who comforted the two poor women and inspired them with a little of the hope of which so little now remained to him. They had come with the intention of cheering the prisoner. Alas! far more than he they themselves were in want of cheering! But when they found him still bearing himself unflinchingly in the midst of his terrible trial, they recovered a little of their hope.

Once more had Joam spoken encouraging words to them. His indomitable energy was due not only to the feeling of his innocence, but to his faith in that God, a portion of whose justice yet dwells in the hearts of men. No! Joam Dacosta would never lose his life for the crime of Tijuco!

Hardly ever did he mention the document. Whether it were apochryphal or no, whether it were in the handwriting of Torres or in that of the real perpetrator of the crime, whether it contained or did not contain the longed-for vindication, it was on no such doubtful hypotheses that Joam Dacosta presumed to trust. No; he reckoned on a better argument in his favor, and it was to his long life of toil and honor that he relegated the task of pleading for him.

This evening, then, his wife and daughter, strengthened by the manly words, which thrilled them to the core of their hearts, had left him more confident than they had ever been since his arrest. For the last time the prisoner had embraced them; and with redoubled tenderness. It seemed as though he had a presentiment that, whatever it might be, the *dénouement* was nigh.

Joam Dacosta, after they had left, remained for some time perfectly motionless. His arms rested on a small table and supported his head. Of what was he thinking? Had he at last been convinced that human justice, after failing the first time, would at length pronounce his acquittal?

Yes, he still hoped. With the report of Judge Jarriquez establishing his identity, he knew that his memoir, which he had penned with so much sincerity, would have been sent to Rio Janeiro, and was now in the hands of the Chief Justice. This memoir, as we know, was the history of his life from his entry into the offices of the diamond arrayal until the very moment when the jangada stopped before Manaos. Joam Dacosta was pondering over his whole career. He again lived his past life from the moment when, as an orphan, he had set foot in Tijuco. There his zeal had raised him high in the offices of the governor-general, into which he had been admitted when still very young. The future smiled on him; he would have filled some important position. Then this sudden catastrophe; the robbery of the diamond convoy, the massacre of the escort, the suspicion directed against him as the only official who could have divulged the secret of the expedition, his arrest, his appearance before the jury, his conviction in spite of all the efforts of his advocate, the last hours spent in the condemned cell at Villa Rica, his escape under conditions which betokened almost superhuman courage, his flight through the northern provinces, his arrival on the Peruvian frontier, and the reception which the starving fugitive had met with from the hospitable fazender Magalhaes.

The prisoner once more passed in review these events, which had so cruelly marred his life. And then, lost in his thoughts and recollections, he sat, regardless of a peculiar noise on the outer wall of the convent, of the jerkings of a rope hitched on to a bar of his window, and of grating steel as it cut through iron, which ought at once to have attracted the attention of a less absorbed man.

Joam Dacosta continued to live the years of his youth after his arrival in Peru. He again saw the fazender, the clerk, the partner of the old Portuguese, toiling hard for the prosperity of the establishment at Iquitos. Ah! why at the outset had he not told all to his benefactor? He would never have doubted him. It was the only error with which he could reproach himself. Why had he not confessed to him whence he had come, and who he was—above all, at the moment when Magalhaes had placed in his hand the hand of the daughter who would never have believed that he was the author of so frightful a crime.

And now the noise outside became loud enough to attract the prisoner's attention. For an instant Joam raised his head; his eyes sought the window, but with a vacant look, as though he were unconscious, and the next instant his head again sank into his hand. Again he was in thought back at Iquitos.

There the old fazender was dying; before his end he longed for the future of his daughter to be assured, for his partner to be the sole master of the settlement which had grown so prosperous under his management. Should Dacosta have spoken then? Perhaps; but he dared not do it. He again lived the happy days he had spent with Yaquita, and again he thought of the birth of his children, again he felt the happiness which had its only trouble in the remembrances of Tijuco and the remorse that he had not confessed his terrible secret.

The chain of events was reproduced in Joam's mind with a clearness and completeness quite remarkable.

And now he was thinking of the day when his daughter's marriage with Manoel had been decided. Could he allow that union to take place under a false name without acquainting the lad with the mystery of his life? No! And so at the advice of Judge Ribeiro he resolved to come and claim the revision of his sentence, to demand the rehabilitation which was his due! He was starting with his people, and then came the intervention of Torres, the detestable bargain proposed by the scoundrel, the indignant refusal of the father to hand over his daughter to save his honor and his life, and then the denunciation and the arrest?

Suddenly the window flew open with a violent push from without. Joam started up; the *souvenirs* of the past vanished like a shadow.

Benito leaped into the room; he was in the presence of his father, and the next moment Manoel, tearing down the remaining bars, appeared before him.

Joam Dacosta would have uttered a cry of surprise. Benito left him no time to do so.

"Father," he said, "the window grating is down. A rope leads to the ground. A pirogue is waiting for you on the canal not a hundred yards off. Araujo is there ready to take you away from Manaos, on the other bank of the Amazon, where your track will never be discovered! Father, you must escape this very moment! It was the judge's own suggestion!"

"It must be done!" added Manoel.

"Fly! I!—Fly a second time! Escape again?"

And with crossed arms, and head erect, Joam Dacosta stepped backward.

"Never!" he said, in a voice so firm that Benito and Manoel stood bewildered.

The young men had never thought of a difficulty like this. They had never reckoned on the hindrances to escape coming from the prisoner himself.

Benito advanced to his father, and looking him straight in the face, and taking both his hands in his, not to force him, but to try and convince him, said, "Never, did you say, father?"

"Never!"

"Father," said Manoel—"for I also have the right to call you father—listen to us! If we tell you that you ought to fly without losing an instant, it is because if you remain you will be guilty toward others, toward yourself!"

"To remain," continued Benito, "is to remain to die! The order for execution may come at any moment! If you imagine that the justice of men will nullify a wrong decision, if you think it will rehabilitate you whom it condemned twenty years since, you are mistaken! There is hope no longer! You must escape! Come!"

By an irresistible impulse Benito seized his father and drew him toward the window.

Joam Dacosta struggled from his son's grasp and recoiled a second time. "To fly," he answered, in the tone of a man whose resolution was unalterable, "is to dishonor myself, and you with me! It would be a confession of my guilt! Of my own free will I surrendered myself to my country's judges, and I will await their decision, whatever that decision may be!"

"But the presumptions on which you trusted are insufficient," replied Manoel, "and the material proof of your innocence is still wanting! If we tell you that you ought to fly, it is because Judge Jarriquez himself told us so. You have now only this one chance left to escape from death!"

"I will die, then," said Joam, in a calm voice. "I will die protesting against the decision which condemned me! The first time, a few hours before the execution—I fled! Yes! I was then young. I had all my life before me in which to struggle against man's injustice! But to save myself now, to begin again the miserable existence of a felon hiding under a false name, whose every effort is required to avoid the pursuit of the police, again to live the life of anxiety which I have led for three-and-twenty years, and oblige you to share it with me; to wait each day for a denunciation which sooner or later must come, to wait for the claim for extradition which would follow me to a foreign country! Am I to live for that? No! Never!"

"Father," interrupted Benito, whose mind threatened to give way before such obstinacy, "you shall fly! I will have it so!" And he caught hold of Joam Dacosta, and tried by force to drag him toward the window.

"No! no!"

"You wish to drive me mad!"

"My son," exclaimed Joam Dacosta, "listen to me! Once already I escaped from prison at Villa Rica, and people believed I fled from well-merited punishment. Yes, they had reason to think so. Well, for the honor of the name which you bear I shall not do so again."

Benito had fallen on his knees before his father. He held up his hands to him; he begged him—

"But this order, father," he repeated, "this order, which is due to-day—even now—it will contain your sentence of death."

"The order may come, but my determination will not change. No, my son! Joam Dacosta, guilty, might fly! Joam Dacosta, innocent, will not fly!"

The scene which followed these words was heart-rending. Benito struggled with his father. Manoel, distracted, kept near the window ready to carry off the prisoner—when the door of the room opened.

On the threshold appeared the chief of police, accompanied by the head warder of the prison and a few soldiers. The chief of the police understood at a glance that an attempt at escape was being made; but he also understood from the prisoner's attitude that he it was who had no wish to go! He said nothing. The sincerest pity was depicted on his face. Doubtless he also, like Judge Jarriquez, would have liked Dacosta to have escaped.

It was too late! The chief of the police, who held a paper in his hand, advanced toward the prisoner.

"Before all of you," said Joam Dacosta, "let me tell you, sir, that it only rested with me to get away and that I would not do so."

The chief of the police bowed his head, and then, in a voice which he vainly tried to control, "Joam Dacosta," he said, "the order has this moment arrived from the Chief Justice at Rio de Janeiro."

"Father!" exclaimed Manoel and Benito.

"This order," asked Joam Dacosta, who had crossed his arms, "this order requires the execution of my sentence?"

"Yes!"

"And that will take place?"

"To-morrow."

Benito threw himself on his father. Again would he have dragged him from his cell, but the soldiers came and drew away the prisoner from his grasp.

At a sign from the chief of the police Benito and Manoel were taken away. An end had to be put to this painful scene, which had already lasted too long.

"Sir," said the doomed man, "before to-morrow, before the hour of my execution, may I pass a few moments with Padre Passanha, whom I asked you to tell?"

"It will be forbidden."

"May I see my family, and embrace for the last time my wife and children?"

"You shall see them."

"Thank you, sir," answered Joam; "and now keep guard over that window: it will not do for them to take me out of here against my will."

The chief of the police, after a respectful bow, retired with the warder and the soldiers. The doomed man, who had but a few hours to live, was left alone.

CHAPTER XVII

FRAGOSO

And so the order had come, and, as Judge Jarriquez had foreseen, it was an order requiring the immediate execution of the sentence pronounced on Joam Dacosta. No proof had been produced; justice must take its course.

It was the very day—the 31st of August, at nine o'clock in the morning of which the condemned man was to perish on the gallows. The death penalty in Brazil is generally commuted except in the case of negroes, but this time it was to be suffered by a white man. Such are the penal arrangements relative to crimes in the diamond arrayal, for which, in the public interest, the law allows no appeal to mercy.

Nothing could now save Joam Dacosta. It was not only life, but honor that he was about to lose. But on the 31st of August a man was approaching Manaos with all the speed his horse was capable of, and such had been the pace at which he had come, that half a mile from the town, the gallant creature fell, incapable of carrying him any farther.

The rider did not even stop to raise his steed. Evidently he had asked and obtained from it all that was possible, and, despite the state of exhaustion in which he found himself, he rushed off in the direction of the city. The man came from the eastern provinces, and had followed the left bank of the river. All his means had gone in the purchase of this horse, which, swifter far than any pirogue on the Amazon, had brought him to Manaos. It was Fragoso!

Had, then, the brave fellow succeeded in the enterprise of which he had spoken to nobody? Had he found the party to which Torres belonged? Had he discovered some secret which would yet save Joam Dacosta?

He hardly knew. But in any case, he was in great haste to acquaint Judge Jarriquez with what he had ascertained during his short journey.

And this is what had happened. Fragoso had made no mistake when he recognized Torres as one of the captains of the party which was employed in the river provinces of the Madeira. He set out, and on reaching the mouth of that tributary he learned that the chief of these capitaes da mato was then in the neighborhood. Without losing a minute, Fragoso started on the search, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in meeting him.

To Fragoso's questions the chief of the party had no hesitation in replying; he had no interest in keeping silence with regard to the few simple matters on which he was interrogated. In fact, three questions only of importance were asked him by Fragoso, and these were: "Did not a captain of the woods named Torres belong to your party three months ago?"

"Yes."

"At that time had he not one intimate friend among his companions who has recently died?"

"Just so!"

"And the name of that friend was?"

"Ortega."

This was all that Fragoso had learned. Was this information of a kind to modify Dacosta's position? It was hardly likely. Fragoso saw this, and pressed the chief of the band to tell him what he knew of this Ortega, of the place where he came from, and of his antecedents generally. Such information would have been of great importance if Ortega, as Torres had declared, was the true author of the crime of Tijuco. But unfortunately the chief could give him no information whatever in the matter.

What was certain was that Ortega had been a member of the band for many years, that an intimate friendship existed between him and Torres, that they were always seen together, and that Torres had watched at his bedside when he died.

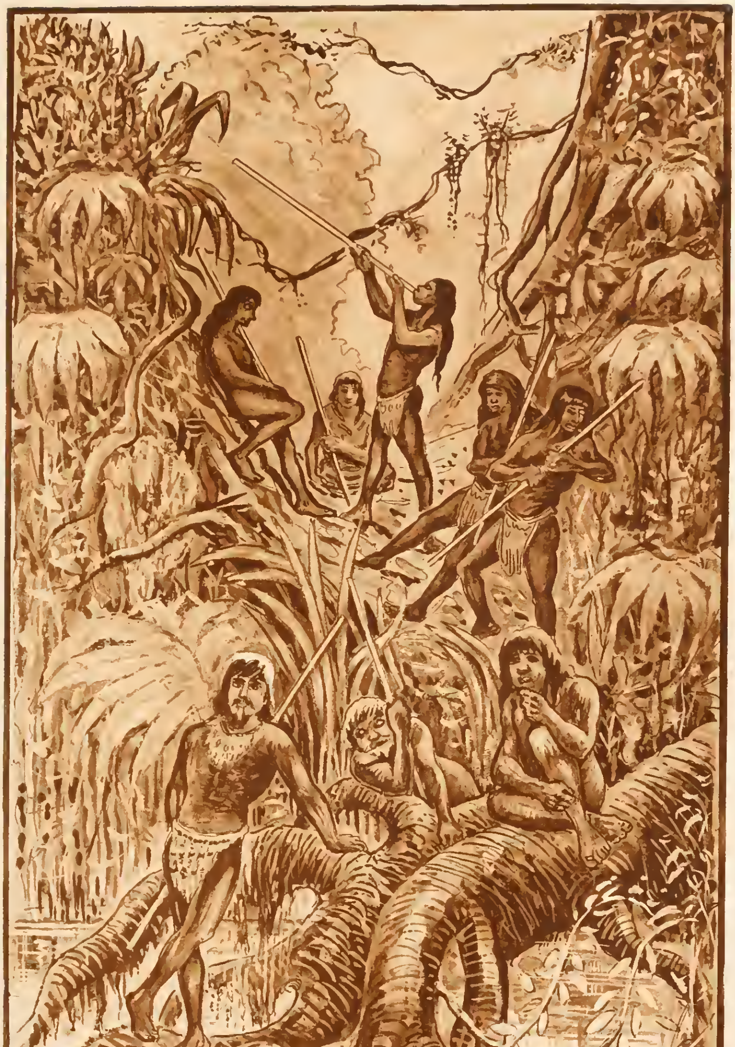
This was all the chief of the band knew, and he could tell no more. Fragoso, then, had to be contented with these insignificant details, and departed immediately.

But if the devoted fellow had not brought back the proof that Ortega was the author of the crime of Tijuco, he had gained one thing, and that was the knowledge that Torres had told the truth when he affirmed that one of his comrades in the band had died, and that he had been present during his last moments.

The hypothesis that Ortega had given him the document in question had now become admissible. Nothing was more probable than that this document had reference to the crime

THE AMAZONS.

The town of Villa Bella, which is the principal guarana market in the whole province, was soon left behind by the giant raft. And so was the village of Faro and its celebrated river of the Nhamundas, on which, in 1539, Orellana asserted he was attacked by female warriors, who have never been seen again since, and thus gave us the legend which justifies the immortal name of the river of the Amazons.—Page 106.



of which Ortega was really the author, and that it contained the confession of the culprit, accompanied by circumstances which permitted no doubt as to its truth.

And so, if the document could be read, if the key had been found, if the cipher on which the system hung were known, no doubt of its truth could be entertained.

But this cipher Fragoso did not know. A few more presumptions, a half-certainty that the adventurer had invented nothing, certain circumstances tending to prove that the secret of the matter was contained in the document—and that was all that the gallant fellow brought back from his visit to the chief of the gang of which Torres had been a member.

Nevertheless, little as it was, he was in all haste to relate it to Judge Jarriquez. He knew that he had not an hour to lose, and that was why on this very morning, at about eight o'clock, he arrived, exhausted with fatigue, within half a mile of Manaos. The distance between there and the town he traversed in a few minutes. A kind of irresistible presentiment urged him on, and he had almost come to believe that Joam Dacosta's safety rested in his hands.

Suddenly Fragoso stopped as if his feet had become rooted in the ground. He had reached the entrance to a small square, on to which opened one of the town gates. There, in the midst of a dense crowd, arose the gallows, towering up some twenty feet, and from it there hung the rope!

Fragoso felt his consciousness abandon him. He fell; his eyes involuntarily closed. He did not wish to look, and these words escaped his lips: "Too late! too late!" but by a superhuman effort he raised himself up. No: it was *not* too late, the corpse of Joam Dacosta was *not* dangling at the end of the rope.

"Judge Jarriquez—Judge Jarriquez!" shouted Fragoso, and, panting and bewildered, he rushed toward the city gate, dashed up the principal street of Manaos, and fell, half dead, on the threshold of the judge's house. The door was shut. Fragoso had still strength enough left to knock at it. One of the magistrate's servants came to open it; his master would see no one.

In spite of this denial, Fragoso pushed back the man who guarded the entrance, and with a bound threw himself into the judge's study.

"I come from the province where Torres pursued his calling as captain of the woods!" he gasped. "Mr. Judge, Torres told the truth. Stop—stop the execution!"

"You found the gang?"

"Yes."

"And you have brought me the cipher of the document?"

Fragoso did not reply.

"Come, leave me alone! leave me alone!" shouted Jarriquez, and, a prey to an outburst of rage, he grasped the document to tear it to atoms.

Fragoso seized his hands and stopped him. "The truth is there!" he said.

"I know," answered Jarriquez; "but it is a truth which will never see the light!"

"It will appear—it must! it must!"

"Once more, have you the cipher?"

"No," replied Fragoso; "but, I repeat, Torres has not lied. One of his companions, with whom he was very intimate, died a few months ago, and there can be no doubt but that this man gave him the document he came to sell to Joam Dacosta."

"No," answered Jarriquez—"no, there is no doubt about it—as far as we are concerned; but that is not enough for those who dispose of the doomed man's life. Leave me!"

Fragoso, repulsed, would not quit the spot. Again he threw himself at the judge's feet. "Joam Dacosta is innocent!" he cried; "you will not leave him to die? It was not he who committed the crime of Tijuco, it was the comrade of Torres, the author of that document! It was Ortega!"

As he uttered the name the judge bounded backward. A kind of calm swiftly succeeded to the tempest which raged within him. He dropped the document from his clenched hand, smoothed it out on the table, sat down, and, passing his hand over his eyes—"That name?" he said—"Ortega! Let us see," and then he proceeded with the new name brought back by Fragoso as he had done with the other names so vainly tried by himself.

After placing it above the first six letters of the paragraph, he obtained the following formula:

O r t e g a
P h y j s l

"Nothing!" he said. "That gives us—nothing!"

And in fact the *h* placed under the *r* could not be expressed by a cipher, for, in alphabetical order, this letter occupies an earlier position to that of the *r*.

The *p*, the *y*, the *j*, arranged beneath the letters *o*, *t*, *e*, disclosed the cipher 1, 4, 5, but as for the *s* and the *l* at the end of the word, the interval which separated them from the *g* and the *a* was a dozen letters, and hence impossible to express by a single cipher, so that they corresponded to neither *g* nor *a*.

And here appalling shouts arose in the streets; they were the cries of despair. Fragoso jumped to one of the windows, and opened it before the judge could hinder him.

The people filled the road. The hour had come at which the doomed man was to start from the prison, and the crowd was flocking back to the spot where the gallows had been erected.

Judge Jarriquez, quite frightful to look upon, devoured the lines of the document with a fixed stare. "The last letters!" he muttered. "Let us try once more the last letters!"

It was the last hope.

And then, with a hand whose agitation nearly prevented him from writing at all, he placed the name of Ortega over the six last letters of the paragraph, as he had done over the first.

An exclamation immediately escaped him. He saw, at first glance, that the six letters were inferior in alphabetical order to those which composed Ortega's name, and that consequently they might yield the number.

And when he reduced the formula, reckoning each later letter from the earlier letter of the word, he obtained

O r t e g a
4 3 2 5 1 3
S u v j h d

The number thus disclosed was 432513.

But was this number that which had been used in the document? Was it not as erroneous as those he had previously tried?

At this moment the shouts below redoubled—shouts of pity which betrayed the sympathy of the excited crowd. A few minutes more were all that the doomed man had to live!

Fragoso, maddened with grief, darted from the room. He wished to see, for the last time, his benefactor who was on his road to death! He longed to throw himself before the mournful procession and stop it, shouting: "Do not kill this just man! do not kill him!"

But already Judge Jarriquez had placed the given number above the first letters of the paragraph, repeating them as often as was necessary, as follows:

4 3 2 5 1 3 4 3 2 5 1 3 4 3 2 5 1 3 4 3 2 5 1 3
P h y j s l y d d q f d z x g a s g z z q q e h

And then, reckoning the true letters according to their alphabetical order, he read:

"Le véritable auteur du vol de—"

A yell of delight escaped him! This number, 432513, was the number sought for so long! The name of Ortega had enabled him to discover it! At length he held the key of the document, which would incontestably prove the innocence of Joam Dacosta, and without reading any more he flew from his study into the street, shouting, "Halt! Halt!"

To cleave the crowd, which opened as he ran, to dash to the prison, whence the convict was coming at the moment, with his wife and children clinging to him with the violence of despair, was but the work of a minute for Judge Jarriquez.

Stopping before Joam Dacosta, he could not speak for a second, and then these words escaped his lips:

"Innocent! Innocent!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CRIME OF TIJUCO

On the arrival of the judge the mournful procession halted. A roaring echo had repeated after him and again repeated the cry which escaped from every mouth:

"Innocent! Innocent!"

Then complete silence fell on all. The people did not want to lose one syllable of what was about to be proclaimed.

Judge Jarriquez sat down on a stone seat, and then, while Minha, Benito, Manoel, and Fragoso stood round him, while Joam Dacosta clasped Yaquita to his heart, he first unraveled the last paragraph of the document by means of the number, and as the words appeared by the institution of the true letters for the cryptological ones, he divided and punctuated them, and then read it out in a loud voice. And this is what he read in the midst of profound silence:—

Le véritable auteur duvoldesdiamantset
43 251343251 343251 34325134325134325 1
Ph yjslyddqf dzxgas gz zqq ehx gkfndrxu ju

de l'assassinat des soldats qui escortaient le
34 3251343251 3 432 5134325 134 3251343251 3 43
gi ocytdxvksbx hhu ypohdvy rym huhpuydkjox ph

convoi, commis dans la nuit du vingt-deux jan-
251343 251343 2513 43 2513 43 251343251 343
etozsl etnpmv ffov pd pajx hy ynojyggay meq

vier mil huit cent vingt-six, n'est doncpas Joam
2513 432 5134 3251 34325134 3251 3432513 4325
ynfu qln mvly fgsu zmqis tlb qgyu gsqeubv nrcr

Dacosta, injustement condamné à mort, c'est
1343251 3432513432 5 13432513 4 3251 3432
edgruzb lrmxyuhqhpz drrgcroh e pqxu fivv

moi, le misérable employé de l'administration
513 43 251343251 3432513 43 251343251343251
rpl ph onthvddqf hqsntzh hh nfepmqkyuuexkto

du district diamantin, oui, moi seul, qui signe
34 32513432 513432513 432 513 4325 134 32513
gz gkyuumfv ijdqdpzjq syk rpl xhxq rym vkloh

de monvrai nom, Ortega.
43 2513432 513 432513
hh otozvdk spp suvjhd.

" The real author of the robbery of the diamonds and of the murder of the soldiers who escorted the convoy, committed during the night of the twenty-second of January, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, was thus not Joam Dacosta, unjustly condemned to death; it was I, the wretched servant of the Administration of the diamond district; yes, I alone, who sign this with my true name, Ortega."

The reading of this had hardly finished when the air was rent with prolonged hurrahs.

What could be more conclusive than this last paragraph, which summarized the whole of the document, and proclaimed so absolutely the innocence of the fazender of Iquitos, and which snatched from the gallows this victim of a frightful judicial mistake!

Joam Dacosta surrounded by his wife, his children, and his friends, was unable to shake the hands which were held out to him. Such was the strength of his character, that a reaction occurred, tears of joy escaped from his eyes, at the same instant his heart was lifted up to that Providence which had come to save him so miraculously at the moment he was about to offer the last expiation to that God who would not permit the accomplishment of that greatest of crimes, the death of an innocent man!

Yes! There could be no doubt as to the vindication of Joam Dacosta. The true author of the crime of Tijuco confessed of his own free will, and described the circumstances under which it had been perpetrated!

By means of the number Judge Jarriquez interpreted the whole of the cryptogram.

And this was what Ortega confessed:

He had been the colleague of Joam Dacosta, employed, like him, at Tijuco, in the offices of the governor of the diamond arrayal. He had been the official appointed to accompany the convoy to Rio de Janeiro, and, far from recoiling at the horrible idea of enriching himself by means of murder and robbery, he had informed the smugglers of the very day the convoy was to leave Tijuco.

During the attack of the scoundrels, who awaited the convoy just beyond Villa Rica, he pretended to defend himself with the soldiers of the escort, and then, falling among the dead, he was carried away by his accomplices. Hence it was that the solitary soldier who survived the massacre had reported that Ortega had perished in the struggle.

But the robbery did not profit the guilty man in the long run, for, a little time afterward, he was robbed by those whom he had helped to commit the crime.

Penniless, and unable to enter Tijuco again, Ortega fled away to the provinces in the north of Brazil, to those districts of the Upper Amazon where the capitaes da mato are to be found. He had to live somehow, and so he joined this not very honorable company; they neither asked him who he was nor whence he came, and so Ortega became a captain of the woods, and for many years he followed the trade of a chaser of men.

During this time, Torres, the adventurer, himself in absolute want, became his companion. Ortega and he became most intimate. But, as he had told Torres, remorse began gradually to trouble the scoundrel's life. The remembrance of his crime became horrible to him. He knew that another had been condemned in his place! He knew subsequently that the innocent man had escaped from the last penalty, but that he would never be free from the shadow of his capital sentence! And then, during an expedition of his party for several months beyond the Peruvian frontier, chance caused Ortega to visit the neighborhood of Iquitos, and there, in Joam Garral, who did not recognize him, he recognized Joam Dacosta.

Henceforth he resolved to make all the reparation he could for the injustice of which his old comrade had been the victim. He committed to the document all the facts relative to the crime of Tijuco, writing it first in French, which had been his mother's native tongue, and then putting it into the mysterious form we know, his intention being to transmit it to the fazender of Iquitos, with the cipher by which it could be read.

Death prevented his completing his work of reparation. Mortally wounded in a scuffle with some negroes on the Madeira, Ortega felt he was doomed. His comrade Torres was then with him. He thought he could intrust to his friend the secret which had so grievously darkened his life. He gave him the document, and made him swear to convey it to Joam Dacosta, whose name and address he gave him, and with his last breath he whispered the number

432513, without which the document would remain indecipherable.

Ortega dead, we know how the unworthy Torres acquitted himself of his mission, how he resolved to turn to his own profit the secret of which he was the possessor, and how he tried to make it the subject of an odious bargain.

Torres died without accomplishing his work, and carried his secret with him. But the name of Ortega, brought back by Fragoso, had afforded the means of unraveling the cryptogram, thanks to the sagacity of Judge Jarriquez. Yes, the material proof sought after for so long was the incontestable witness of the innocence of Joam Dacosta, returned to life, restored to honor.

The cheers redoubled when the worthy magistrate, in a loud voice, and for the edification of all, read from the document this terrible history.

From that moment Judge Jarriquez, who possessed this indubitable proof, arranged with the chief of police, and declined to allow Joam Dacosta, while waiting new instructions from Rio de Janeiro, to stay in any prison but his own house.

There could be no difficulty about this, and in the center of the crowd of the entire population of Manaos, Joam Dacosta, accompanied by all his family, beheld himself conducted like a conqueror to the magistrate's residence.

In that minute the honest fazender of Iquitos was well repaid for all that he had suffered during the long years of exile, and if he was happy for his family's sake more than for his own, he was none the less proud for his country's sake that this supreme injustice had not been consummated!

And in all this what had become of Fragoso? Well, the good-hearted fellow was covered with caresses! Benito, Manoel, and Minha, had overwhelmed him, and Lina had by no means spared him. He did not know what to do, he defended himself as best he could. He did not deserve anything like it. Chance alone had done it. Were any thanks due to him for having recognized Torres as the captain of the woods? No, certainly not. As for his idea of hurrying off in search of the band to which Torres belonged, he did not think it had been worth much, and as to the name of Ortega, he did not even know its value.

Gallant Fragoso! Whether he wished it or not he had none the less saved Joam Dacosta!

And herein what a strange succession of different events all tending to the same end. The deliverance of Fragoso at the time he was dying of exhaustion in the forest of Iquitos; the hospitable reception he had met with at the fazenda, the meeting with Torres on the Brazilian frontier, his embarkation on the jangada; and lastly, the fact that Fragoso had seen him somewhere before.

"Well, yes!" Fragoso ended by exclaiming; "but it is not to me that all this happiness is due, it is due to Lina!"

"To me?" replied the young mulatto.

"No doubt of it. Without the liana, without the idea of the liana, could I ever have been the cause of so much happiness?" So that Fragoso and Lina were praised and petted by all the family, and by all the new friends whom so many trials had procured them at Manaos.

But had not Judge Jarriquez also had his share in this rehabilitation of an innocent man? Though, in spite of all the shrewdness of his analytical talents, he had not been able to read the document, which was absolutely indecipherable to any one who had not got the key, had he not at any rate discovered the system on which the cryptogram was composed? Without him what could have been done with only the name of Ortega to reconstruct the number which the author of the crime and Torres, both of whom were dead, alone knew? And so he also received abundant thanks.

Needless to say that the same day there was sent to Rio de Janeiro a detailed report of the whole affair, and with it the original document and the cipher to enable it to be read. New instructions from the Minister of Justice had to be waited for, though there could be no doubt that they would order the immediate discharge of the prisoner. A few days would thus have to be passed at Manaos, and then Joam Dacosta and his people, free from all constraint, and released from all apprehension, would take leave of their host to go on board once more and continue their descent of the Amazon to Para, where the voyage was intended to terminate with the double marriage of Minha and Manoel and Lina and Fragoso.

Four days afterward, on the fourth of September, the order of discharge arrived. The document had been recognized as authentic. The handwriting was really that of Ortega, who had been formerly employed in the diamond district, and there could be no doubt that the confession of his crime, with the minutest details that were given, had been written entirely with his own hand.

The innocence of the convict of Villa Rica was at length admitted. The rehabilitation of Joam Dacosta was at last officially proclaimed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOWER AMAZON

LITTLE remains to tell of the second part of the voyage down the mighty river. It was but a series of days of joy. Joam Dacosta returned to a new life, which shed its happiness on all who belonged to him.

The giant raft glided along with greater rapidity on the waters now swollen by the floods. The town of Villa Bella, which is the principal guarana market in the whole province, was soon left behind by the giant raft. And so was the village of Faro and its celebrated river of the Nhamundas, on which, in 1539, Orellana asserted he was attacked by female warriors, who have never been seen again since, and thus gave us the legend which justifies the immortal name of the river of the Amazons.

Here it is that the province of Rio Negro terminates. The jurisdiction of Para then commences; and on the 22d of September the family, marveling much at a valley which has no equal in the world, entered that portion of the Brazilian empire which has no boundary to the east except the Atlantic.

"How magnificent!" remarked Minha over and over again.

"How long!" murmured Manoel.

"How beautiful!" repeated Lina.

"When shall we get there?" murmured Fragoso.

And this was what might have been expected of these folks from their different points of view, though time passed pleasantly enough with them all the same. Benito, who was neither patient nor impatient, had recovered all his former good humor.

Soon the jangada glided between interminable plantations of cocoa-trees, with their somber green flanked by the yellow thatch or ruddy tiles of the roofs of the huts of the settlers on both banks from Chidos up to the town of Monte Alegre.

Then there opened out the mouth of the Rio Trombetas, bathing with its black waters the houses of Obidos, situated at about one hundred and eighty miles from Belem, quite a small town, and even a *citade* with large streets bordered with handsome habitations, and a great center for cocoa produce. Then they saw another tributary, the Tapajoz, with its greenish-gray waters descending from the southwest; and then Santarem, a wealthy town of not less than five thousand inhabitants, Indians for the most part, whose nearest houses were built on the vast beach of white sand.

After its departure from Manaos the jangada did not stop anywhere as it passed down the much less encumbered course of the Amazon. Day and night it moved along under the vigilant care of its trusty pilot; no more stoppages either for the gratification of the passengers or for business purposes. Unceasingly it progressed, and the end rapidly grew nearer.

In this jurisdiction of Para Manoel was at home, and he could tell them the names of the double chain of mountains which gradually narrowed the valley of the huge river. "To the right," said he, "that is the Sierra de Paracuarta, which curves in a half circle to the south! To the left, that is the Sierra de Curuva, of which we have already passed the first outposts."

"Then they close in?" asked Fragoso.

"They close in!" replied Manoel.

And the two young men seemed to understand each other, for the same slight but significant nodding of the head accompanied the question and reply.

To what a superb size the Amazon had now developed, as already this monarch of rivers gave signs of opening out like a sea! Plants from eight to ten feet high clustered along the beach, and bordered it with a forest of reeds.

Then the river divided into two important branches, which flowed off toward the Atlantic, one going away northeastward, the other eastward, and between them appeared the beginning of the large Island of Marajo. This island is quite a province in itself. It measures no less than a hundred and eighty leagues in circumference. Cut up by marshes and rivers, all savannah to the east, all forest to the west, it offers most excellent advantages for the raising of cattle, which can here be seen in their thousands. This immense barricade of Marajo is the natural obstacle which has compelled the Amazon to divide before precipitating its torrents of water into the sea. Following the upper branch, the jangada, after passing the islands of Caviana and Mexiana, would have found an embouchure of some fifty leagues across, but it would also have met with the bar of the pororoca, that terrible eddy which, for the three days preceding the new or full moon, takes but two minutes instead of six hours to raise the river from twelve to fifteen feet above ordinary high water mark.

This is by far the most formidable of tide-races. Most fortunately the lower branch, known as the Canal of Breves, which is the natural arm of the Para, is not subject to the visitations of this terrible phenomenon, and its tides are of a more regular description. Araujo, the pilot, was quite aware of this. He steered, therefore, into the midst of magnificent forests, here and there gliding past islands covered with muritis palms; and the weather was so favorable that they did not experience any of the storms which so frequently rage along this Breves Canal.

At length there appeared on the left Santa Maria de Belem do Para—the " town " as they call it in that country—with its picturesque lines of white houses at many different levels, its convents nestled among the palm-trees, the steeples of its cathedral and of Nostra Señora de Merced, and the flotilla of its brigantines, brigs, and barks, which form its commercial communications with the Old World.

The hearts of the passengers of the giant raft beat high. At length they were coming to the end of the voyage which they had thought they would never reach. While the arrest of Joam detained them at Manaos, half-way on their journey, could they ever have hoped to see the capital of the province of Para?

It was in the course of this day, the 15th of October—four months and a half after leaving the fazenda of Iquitos—that, as they rounded a sharp bend in the river, Belem came in sight.

The arrival of the jangada had been signaled for some days. The whole town knew the story of Joam Dacosta. They came forth to welcome him, and to him and his people accorded a most sympathetic reception. Hundreds of craft of all sorts conveyed them to the wharf, and soon the jangada was invaded by all those who wished to welcome the return of their compatriot after his long exile. Thousands of sightseers—or more correctly speaking, thousands of friends—crowded on to the floating village as soon as it came to its moorings, and it was vast and solid enough to support the entire population. Among those who hurried on board one of the first pirogues had brought Madame Valdez. Manoel's mother was at last able to clasp to her arms the daughter whom her son had chosen. If the good lady had not been able to come to Iquitos, was it not as though a portion of the fazenda, with her new family, had come down the Amazon to her?

Before evening the pilot Araujo had securely moored the raft at the entrance of a creek behind the arsenal. That was to be its last resting-place, its last halt, after its voyage of eight hundred leagues on the great Brazilian artery. There the huts of the Indians, the cottages of the negroes, the storerooms which held the valuable cargo, would be gradually demolished; there the principal dwelling, nestled beneath its verdant tapestry of flowers and foliage, and the little chapel whose humble bell was then replying to the sounding clangor from the steeples of Belem, would each in its turn disappear.

But, ere this was done, a ceremony had to take place on the jangada—the marriage of Manoel and Minha, the marriage of Lina and Fragoso. To Father Passanha fell the duty of celebrating the double union which promised so happily. In that little chapel the two couples were to receive the nuptial benediction from his hands. If it happened to be so small as to be only capable of holding the members of Dacosta's family, was not the giant raft large enough to receive all those who wished to assist at the ceremony? and if not, and the crowd became so great, did not the ledges of the river banks afford sufficient room for as many others of the sympathizing crowd as were desirous of welcoming him whom so signal a reparation had made the hero of the day?

It was on the morrow, the 16th of October, that with great pomp the marriages were celebrated.

The Dacosta family came forth from their house and moved through the crowd toward the little chapel. Joam was received with absolutely frantic applause. He gave his arm to Madame Valdez; Yaquita was escorted by the Governor of Belem, who, accompanied by the friends of the young army surgeon, had expressed a wish to honor the ceremony with his presence. Manoel walked by the side of Minha, who looked most fascinating in her bride's costume, and then came Fragoso, holding the hand of Lina, who seemed quite radiant with joy. Then followed Benito, then old Cybele and the servants of the worthy family between the double ranks of the crew of the jangada.

Padre Passanha awaited the two couples at the entrance of the chapel. The ceremony was very simple, and the same hands which had formerly blessed Joam and Yaquita were again stretched forth to give the nuptial benediction to their child.

So much happiness was not likely to be interrupted by the sorrow of long separation. In fact, Manoel Valdez almost immediately sent in his resignation, so as to join the family at Iquitos, where he is still following his profession as a country doctor.

Naturally the Fragosos did not hesitate to go back with those who were to them friends rather than masters.

Madame Valdez had no desire to separate so happy a group, but she insisted on one thing, and that was that they should often come and see her at Belem. Nothing could be easier. Was not the mighty river a bond of communication between Belem and Iquitos? In a few days the first mail steamer was to begin a regular and rapid service, and it would then only take a week to ascend the Amazon, on which it had taken the giant raft so many months to drift. The important commercial negotiations, ably managed by Benito, were carried through under the best of conditions, and soon of what had formed this jangada—that is to say, the huge raft of timber constructed from an entire forest at Iquitos—there remained not a trace.

A month afterward the fazender, his wife, his son, Manoel and Minha Valdez, Lina and Fragoso, departed by one of the Amazon steamers for the immense establishment at Iquitos of which Benito was to take the management.

Joam Dacosta reëntered his home with his head erect, and it was indeed a family of happy hearts which he brought back with him from beyond the Brazilian frontier. As for Fragoso, twenty times a day at least was he heard to repeat, " What! without the liana? " and he wound up by bestowing the name on the young mulatto who, by her affection for the gallant fellow fully justified its appropriateness, " If it were not for the one letter," he said, " would not Lina and Liana be the same? "

THE END

The Steam House

BOOK ONE

The Demon of Cawnpore

The Demon of Cawnpore

CHAPTER I

"TWO THOUSAND POUNDS FOR A HEAD"

A REWARD of two thousand pounds will be paid to any one who will deliver up, dead or alive, one of the prime movers of the Sepoy revolt, at present known to be in the Bombay presidency, the Nabob Dandou Pant, commonly called . . . ."

Such was the fragmentary notice read by the inhabitants of Aurungabad, on the evening of the 6th of March, 1867.

A copy of the placard had been recently affixed to the wall of a lonely and ruined bungalow on the banks of the Doudhma, and already the corner of the paper bearing the second name—a name execrated by some, secretly admired by others—was gone.

The name had been there, printed in large letters, but it was torn off by the hand of a solitary fakir who passed by that desolate spot. The name of the Governor of the Bombay presidency, countersigning that of the Viceroy of India, had also disappeared. What could have been the fakir's motive in doing this?

By defacing the notice, did he hope that the rebel of 1857 would escape public prosecution, and the consequences of the steps taken to secure his arrest? Could he imagine that a notoriety so terrible as his would vanish with the fragments of this scrap of paper?

To suppose such a thing would have been madness. The notices were affixed in profusion to the walls of the houses, palaces, mosques, and hotels of Aurungabad. Besides which, a crier had gone through all the streets, reading in a loud voice the proclamation of the Viceroy. So that the inhabitants of the lowest quarters knew by this time that a sum, amounting to a fortune, was promised to whomsoever would deliver up this Dandou Pant. The name, annihilated in one solitary instance, would, before twelve hours were over, be proclaimed throughout the province.

If, indeed, the report was correct that the Nabob had taken refuge in this part of Hindoostan, there could be no doubt that he would shortly fall into the hands of those strongly interested in his capture. Under what impulse, then, had the fakir defaced a placard of which thousands of copies had been circulated?

The impulse was doubtless one of anger, mingled perhaps with contempt; for he turned from the place with a scornful gesture, and entering the city was soon lost to view amid the swarming populace of its more crowded and disreputable quarter.

That portion of the Indian peninsula which lies between the Western Ghauts, and the Ghauts of the Bay of Bengal, is called the Deccan. It is the name commonly given to the southern part of India below the Ganges. The Deccan, of which the name in Sanscrit signifies "south," contains a certain number of provinces in the presidencies of Bombay and Madras. Chief among these is the province of Aurungabad, the capital of which was, in former days, that of the entire Deccan.

In the seventeenth century the celebrated Mogul Emperor, Aurungzebe, established his court in the town of Aurungabad, known in the early history of India by the name of Kirkhi. It then contained one hundred thousand inhabitants. Now, in the hands of the English who rule it in the name of the Nizam of Hyderabad, there are not more than fifty thousand. Yet it is one of the most healthful cities of the peninsula, having hitherto escaped the scourge of Asiatic cholera, as well as the visitations of the fever epidemics so much to be dreaded in India.

Aurungabad possesses magnificent remains of its ancient splendor. Many artistic and richly ornamental buildings bear witness to the power and grandeur of the most illustrious of the conquerors of India, the renowned Aurungzebe, who raised this empire, increased by the addition of Cabul and Assam, to a marvelous height of prosperity.

The palace of the Great Mogul stands on the right bank of the Doudhma. The mausoleum of the favorite Sultana of the Shah Jahan, the father of Aurungzebe, is also a remarkable edifice; so likewise is the elegant mosque built in imitation of the Tadje at Agra, which rears its four minarets round a graceful swelling cupola.

Among the mixed and varied population of Aurungabad, such a man as the fakir above mentioned easily concealed himself from observation. Whether his character was real or assumed, he was in no respect to be distinguished from others of his class. Men like him abound in India, and form, with the *sayeds,* a body of religious mendicants, who, traveling through the country on foot or on horseback, ask alms, which, if not bestowed willingly, they demand as a right. They also play the part of voluntary martyrs, and are held in great reverence by the lower orders of the Hindoo people.

This particular fakir was a man of good height, being more than five feet nine inches. His age could not have been more than forty, and his countenance reminded one of the handsome Mahratta type, especially in the brilliancy of his keen black eyes; but it was difficult to trace the fine features of the race, disfigured and pitted as they were by the marks of smallpox. He was in the prime of life, and his figure was robust and supple. A close observer would have seen that he had lost one finger of his left hand. His hair was dyed a red color, and he went barefoot, wearing only a turban, and a scanty shirt or tunic of striped woolen stuff girded round his waist.

On his breast were represented in bright colors the emblems of the two principles of preservation and destruction taught by Hindoo mythology: the lion's head of the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, the three eyes and the symbolic trident of the ferocious Siva.

There was great stir and commotion that evening in the streets of Aurungabad, especially in the lower quarters, where the populace swarmed outside the hovels in which they lived. Men, women, children; English soldiers, sepoys, beggars of all descriptions; peasants from the villages, met, talked, gesticulated, discussed the proclamation, and calculated the chances of winning the enormous reward offered by Government.

The excitement was as great as it could have been before the wheel of a lottery where the prize was 2,000*l.* In this case the fortunate ticket was the head of Dandou Pant, and to obtain it a man must first have the good luck to fall in with the Nabob, and then the courage to seize him.

The fakir, apparently the only person unexcited by the hope of winning the prize, threaded his way among the eager groups, occasionally stopping and listening to what was said, as though he might hear something of use to him. He spoke to no one, but if his lips were silent his eyes and ears were on the alert.

"Two thousand pounds for finding the Nabob!" exclaimed one, raising his clenched hands to heaven.

"Not for finding him," replied another, "but for catching him, which is a very different thing!"

"Well, to be sure, he is not a man to let himself be taken without a resolute struggle."

"But surely it was said he died of fever in the jungles of Nepaul?"

"That story was quite untrue! The cunning fellow chose to pass for dead, that he might live in greater security!"

"The report was spread that he had been buried in the midst of his encampment on the frontier!"

"It was a false funeral, on purpose to deceive people."

The fakir did not change a muscle of his countenance on hearing this latter assertion, which was made in a tone admitting of no doubt. But when one of the more excited of the group near which he was standing began to relate the following circumstantial details, his brows knit involuntarily as he listened.

"It is very certain," said the speaker, "that in 1859 the Nabob took refuge with his brother, Balao Rao, and the ex-rajah of Gonda, Debi-Bux-Singh, in a camp at the foot of the mountains of Nepaul. There, finding themselves closely pressed by the British troops, they all three resolved to cross the Indo-Chinese frontier. Before doing so, they caused a report of their death to be circulated, in order to confirm which they went through the ceremony of actual funerals; but in fact only a finger from the left hand of each man had been really buried. These they cut off themselves when the rites were celebrated."

"How do you know all this?" demanded one of the crowd of listeners.

"I myself was present," answered the man. "The soldiers of Dandou Pant had taken me prisoner. I only effected my escape six months afterward."

While the Hindoo was speaking, the fakir never took his gaze off him. His eyes blazed like lightning. He kept his left hand under the ragged folds of his garment, and his lips quivered as they parted over his sharp-pointed teeth.

"So you have seen the Nabob?" inquired one of the audience.

"I have," replied the former prisoner of Dandou Pant.

"And would know him for certain if accident were to bring you face to face with him?"

"Assuredly I would: I know him as well as I know myself."

"Then you have a good chance of gaining the 2,000*l.*!" returned his questioner, not without a touch of envy in his tone.

"Perhaps so," replied the Hindoo, "if it be true that the Nabob has been so imprudent as to venture into the presidency of Bombay, which to me appears very unlikely."

"What would be the reason of his venturing so far? What reason would induce him to dare so much?"

"No doubt he might hope to instigate a fresh rebellion, either among the sepoys or among the country populations of Central India."

"Since Government asserts that he is known to be in the province," said one of the speakers, who belonged to that class which takes for gospel everything stated by authority, "of course Government has reliable information on the subject."

"Be it so!" responded the Hindoo; "only let it be the will of Brahma that Dandou Pant crosses my path, and my fortune is made!"

The fakir withdrew a few paces, but he did not lose sight of the ex-prisoner of the Nabob.

It was by this time dark night, but there was no diminution of the commotion in the streets of Aurungabad. Gossip about the Nabob circulated faster than ever. Here, people were saying that he had been seen in the town; there, that he was known to be at a great distance. A courier from the north was reported to have arrived, with news for the Governor, of his arrest. At nine o'clock the best informed asserted that he was already imprisoned in the town jail—in company with some Thugs who had been vegetating there for more than thirty years; that he was going to be hanged next day at sunrise without a trial, just like Tantia Topi, his celebrated comrade in revolt.

But by ten o'clock there was fresh news. The prisoner had escaped, and the hopes of those who coveted the reward revived. In reality all these reports were false. Those supposed to be the best informed knew no more than any one else. The Nabob's head was safe. The prize was still to be won.

It was evident that the Indian who was acquainted with the person of Dandou Pant had a better chance of gaining the reward than any one else. Very few people, especially in the presidency of Bombay, had had occasion to meet with the savage leader of the great insurrection.

Farther to the north, or more in the center of the country —in Scinde, in Bundelkund, in Oude, near Agra, Delhi, Cawnpore, Lucknow, on the principal theater of the atrocities committed by his order—the population would have risen in a body, and delivered him over to British justice. The relatives of his victims—husbands, brothers, children, wives—still wept for those whom he had caused to be massacred by hundreds. Ten years had passed, but had not extinguished the righteous sentiments of horror and vengeance. It seemed, therefore, impossible that Dandou Pant should be so imprudent as to trust himself in districts where his name was held in execration.

If, then, he really had, as was supposed, recrossed the Indo-Chinese frontier—if some hidden motive, whether projects for new revolt or otherwise, had induced him to quit the secret asylum which had hitherto remained unknown even to the Anglo-Indian police—it was only in the provinces of the Deccan that he could expect an open course and a species of security. And we have seen that the Governor had, in point of fact, got wind of his appearance in the presidency, and instantly a price had been set on his head. Still it must be remarked that men of the upper ranks at Aurungabad—magistrates, military officers, and public functionaries—considerably doubted the truth of the information received by the Governor.

It had so often been reported that this man had been seen, and even captured! So much false intelligence had been circulated respecting him, that there began to be a kind of legendary belief in a gift of ubiquity possessed by him, to account for the skill with which he eluded the most able and active agents of the police. The population, however, made no doubt that the intelligence as to his appearance was reliable.

Among those now most convinced that the Nabob was to be found was, of course, his ex-prisoner. The poor wretch, allured by the hope of gain, and likewise animated by a spirit of personal revenge, began to set about the undertaking at once, and regarded his success as almost certain.

His plan was very simple. He proposed next day to offer his services to the Governor; then, after having learned exactly all that was known of Dandou Pant—that is to say, the particulars on which was founded the information referred to in the proclamation, he intended to make his way at once to the locality in which the Nabob was reported to have been seen.

About eleven o'clock at night the Indian began to think of retiring to take some repose. His only resting-place was a small boat moored by the banks of the Doudhma; and thither he directed his steps, his mind full of the various reports he had heard, as, with half-closed eyes and thoughtful brow, he revolved the project he had resolved to carry out.

Quite unknown to him the fakir dogged his steps; he followed noiselessly, and, keeping in the shadow, never for an instant lost sight of him. Toward the outskirts of this quarter of Aurungabad the streets became gradually deserted. The chief thoroughfare opened upon bare, unoccupied ground, one circuit of which skirted the stream of the Doudhma. The place was a kind of desert beyond the town, though within its walls a few passengers were hastily traversing it, evidently anxious to reach more frequented paths. The footsteps of the last died away in the distance, the Hindoo was now alone on the river's bank.

The fakir was at no great distance, but concealed by trees, or beneath the somber walls of ruined habitations, which were scattered here and there. His precautions were needful. When the moon rose and shed uncertain rays athwart the gloom, the Hindoo might have seen that he was watched, and even very closely followed. As to hearing the sound of the fakir's tread, it was utterly impossible. Barefoot, he glided, rather than walked. Nothing revealed his presence on the banks of the Doudhma.

Five minutes passed. The Hindoo took his way mechanically toward his wretched boat, like a man accustomed to withdraw night after night to this desert place.

He was absorbed in the thought of the interview he meant to have next day with the Governor; while the hope of revenging himself on the Nabob—never remarkable for his tenderness toward his prisoners—united with a burning desire to obtain the reward, rendered him blind and deaf to everything around him; and though the fakir was gradually approaching him, he was totally unconscious of the danger in which his imprudent words had placed him.

Suddenly a man sprang upon him with a bound like that of a tiger! He seemed to grasp a lightning flash. It was the moonlight glancing on the blade of a Malay dagger!

The Hindoo, struck in the breast, fell heavily to the ground. The wound, inflicted by an unerring hand, was mortal; but a few inarticulate words escaped the unhappy man's lips, with a torrent of blood. The assassin stooped, raised his victim, and supported him while he turned his own face to the full light of the moon.

"Dost know me?" he asked.

"It is he!" murmured the Indian; and the dreaded name would have been his last choking utterance, but his head fell back, and he expired. In another instant the corpse had disappeared beneath the waters of the Doudhma.

The fakir waited until the noise of the plunge had passed away; then, turning swiftly, he traversed the open ground, and passing along the now deserted streets and lanes, approached one of the city gates.

This gate was closed for the night just as he reached it, and a military guard occupied the post, to prevent either ingress or egress. The fakir could not leave Aurungabad, as he had intended to do. "Yet depart this night I must, if ever I am to do it alive!" muttered he.

He turned away, and followed the inner line of fortifications for some little distance; then, ascending the slope, reached the upper part of the rampart. The crest towered fifty feet above the level of the fosse which lay between the scarp and counterscarp, and was devoid of any salient points or projections which could have afforded support. It seemed quite impossible that any man could descend without a rope, and the cord he wore as a girdle was but a few feet in length. He paused, glanced keenly round, and considered what was to be done.

Great trees rise within the walls of Aurungabad, which seems set in a verdant frame of foliage. The branches of these being long and flexible, it might be possible to cling to one, and at great risk, drop over the wall. No sooner did this idea occur to the fakir, than, without a moment's hesitation, he plunged among the boughs, and soon reappeared outside the wall, holding a long pliable branch, which he grasped midway, and which gradually bent beneath his weight.

When the branch rested on the edge of the wall, the fakir began to let himself slowly downward, as though he held a knotted rope in his hands. By this means he descended a considerable distance; but when close to the extremity of the bough, at least thirty feet still intervened between him and the ground. There he hung, swinging in the air by his outstretched arms, while his feet sought some crevice or rough stone for support.

A flash!—another! The report of musketry!

The sentries had perceived the fugitive and fired upon him. He was not hit, but a ball struck the branch which supported him, and splintered it.

In a few seconds it gave way, and down went the fakir into the fosse. Such a fearful fall would have killed another man—he was uninjured. To spring to his feet, dart up the slope of the counterscarp amid a storm of bullets—not one of which touched him—and vanish in the darkness, was mere play to the agile fugitive.

At a distance of two miles he passed the cantonments of the English troops, quartered outside Aurungabad.

A couple of hundred paces beyond that he stopped, turned round, and stretching his mutilated hand toward the city, fiercely uttered these words: "Woe betide those who fall now into the power of Dandou Pant! Englishmen have not seen the last of Nana Sahib!"

Nana Sahib! This name, the most formidable to which the revolt of 1857 had given a horrid notoriety, was there once more flung like a haughty challenge at the conquerors of India.

CHAPTER II

COLONEL MUNRO

"MAUCLER, my dear fellow, you tell us nothing about your journey!" said my friend Banks, the engineer, to me. "One would suppose you had never got beyond your native Paris! What do you think of India?"

"Think of India!" I replied. "I really must see it before I can answer that question!"

"Well, that is good!" returned Banks. "Why, you have just traversed the entire peninsula from Bombay to Calcutta, and unless you are downright blind——"

"I am not blind, my dear Banks; but during that journey you speak of I was blinded."

"Blinded?"

"Yes! quite blinded by smoke, steam, dust; and, above all, by the rapid motion. I don't want to speak evil of railroads, Banks, since it is your business to make them; but let me ask whether you call it traveling to be jammed up in the compartment of a carriage, see no farther than the glass of the windows on each side of you, tear along day and night, now over viaducts among the eagles and vultures, now through tunnels among moles and rats, stopping only at stations one exactly like another, seeing nothing of towns but the outside of their walls and the tops of their minarets, and all this amid an uproar of snorting engines, shrieking steam-whistles, grinding and grating of rails, varied by the mournful groans of the brake? Can you, I say, call this traveling so as to see a country?"

"Well done!" cried Captain Hood. "There, Banks! answer that if you can. What is your opinion, colonel?"

The colonel, thus addressed, bent his head slightly, and merely said, "I am curious to know what reply Banks can make to our guest, Monsieur Maucler."

"I reply without the slightest hesitation," said the engineer, "that I quite agree with Maucler."

" But then," cried Captain Hood, " why do you construct these railroads at all? "

" To enable you to go from Calcutta to Bombay in sixty hours when you are in a hurry."

" I am never in a hurry."

" Ah, well then, you had better take to the great trunk road and walk! "

" That is exactly what I intend doing."

" When? "

" When the colonel will agree to accompany me in a pretty little stroll of eight or nine hundred miles across the country! "

The colonel smiled, and without speaking again fell into one of the long reveries from which his most intimate friends, among whom were Captain Hood and Banks the engineer, found it difficult to rouse him.

I had arrived in India a month previously. Having journeyed by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, which runs from Bombay to Calcutta, *via* Allahabad. I knew literally nothing of the country. But it was my purpose to travel through its northern districts beyond the Ganges, to visit its great cities, to examine and study the principal monuments of antiquity, and to devote to my explorations sufficient time to render them complete.

I had become acquainted with the engineer Banks in Paris. For some years we had been united by a friendship which only increased with greater intimacy. I had promised to visit him at Calcutta as soon as the completion of that part of the Scinde, Punjab, and Delhi Railroad, of which he was engineer, should set him at liberty.

The works being now at an end, Banks had some months' leave, and I had come to propose that he should take rest by roaming over India with me! As a matter of course he had accepted my proposal with enthusiasm, and in a few weeks, when the season would be favorable, we were to set off.

On my arrival at Calcutta in the month of March, 1867, Banks had introduced me to one of his gallant comrades, Captain Hood, and afterward to his friend Colonel Munro, at whose house we were spending the evening. The colonel, at this time a man of about forty-seven, occupied a house in the European quarter; it stood somewhat apart, and consequently beyond the noise and stir of the great metropolis of India, which consists in fact of two cities, one native, the other foreign and commercial.

The colonel's house was evidently that of a man in easy circumstances. There was a large staff of servants, such as is required in Anglo-Indian families. The furniture and every household arrangement was in the very best taste and style. In everything about the establishment might be traced the hand of an intelligent woman, whose thoughtful care must have originally planned the comforts and conveniences of the home, but at the same time one felt that this woman was there no longer.

The management of the household was conducted entirely by an old soldier of the colonel's regiment, who acted as his steward or major-domo. Sergeant McNeil was a Scotchman, who had been with him in many campaigns, not merely in his military capacity, but as an attached and devoted personal attendant.

He was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts, of tall and vigorous frame, and manly, well-bearded countenance. Although he had retired from the service when his colonel did, he continued to wear the uniform; and this national costume, together with his martial bearing, bespoke him at once the Highlander and the soldier.

Both had left the army in 1860. But instead of returning to the hills and glens of their native land, both had remained in India, and lived at Calcutta in a species of retirement and solitude, which requires to be explained.

When my friend Banks was about to introduce me to Colonel Munro, he gave me one piece of advice. "Make no allusion to the sepoy revolt," he said: "and, above all, never mention the name of Nana Sahib."

Colonel Edward Munro belonged to an old Scottish family, whose members had made their mark in the history of former days.

He was descended from that Sir Hector Munro who in 1760 commanded the army in Bengal, when a serious insurrection had to be quelled. This he effected with a stern and pitiless energy. In one day twenty-eight rebels were blown from the cannon's mouth—a fearful sentence, many times afterward carried out during the mutiny of 1857.

At the period of that great revolt Colonel Munro was in command of the 93d Regiment of Highlanders, which he led during the campaign under Sir James Outram—one of the heroes of that war—of whom Sir Charles Napier spoke as " The Chevalier Bayard of the Indian Army." Colonel Munro was with him at Cawnpore; and also, in the second campaign, he was at the siege of Lucknow, and continued with Sir James until the latter was appointed a Member of the Council of India at Calcutta.

In 1858 Colonel Munro was made a Knight Commander of the Star of India, and was created a baronet. His beloved wife never bore the title of Lady Munro, for she perished at Cawnpore on the 27th of June, 1857, in the atrocious massacre perpetrated by the orders and before the eyes of Nana Sahib.

Lady Munro (her friends always called her so) had been perfectly adored by her husband. She was scarcely seven-and-twenty at the time of her terrible death. Mrs. Orr and Miss Jackson, after the taking of Lucknow, were miraculously saved and restored to their husband and father. But to Colonel Munro nothing remained of his wife. She had disappeared with the two hundred victims in the well of Cawnpore.

Sir Edward, now a desperate man, had but one object remaining in life; it was to quench a burning thirst for vengeance—for justice. The discovery of Nana Sahib, for whom, by order of Government, search was being made in all directions, was his one great desire, his sole aim.

It was in order to be free to prosecute this search that he had retired from the army. Sergeant McNeil got his discharge at the same time, and faithfully followed his master. The two men were animated by one hope, lived in one thought, had but one end in view; and eagerly starting in pursuit, followed up one track after another, only to fail as completely as the Anglo-Indian police had done. The Nana escaped all their efforts.

After three years spent in fruitless attempts, the colonel and Sergeant McNeil suspended their exertions for a time.

Just then the report of Nana Sahib's death was current in India, and this time it seemed to be so well attested as to admit of no reasonable doubt.

Sir Edward Munro and McNeil returned to Calcutta, and established themselves in the lonely bungalow which has been described. There the colonel lived in retirement, never left home, read nothing which could contain any reference to the sanguinary time of the mutiny, and seemed to live but for the cherished memory of his wife. Time in no way mitigated his grief.

I learned these particulars from my friend Banks, on our way to the house of mourning, as Sir Edward's bungalow might be called. It was very evident why he had warned me against making any allusion to the sepoy revolt and its cruel chief.

It must be noted that a report of Nana's reappearance in Bombay, which had for some days been circulating, had not reached him. Had it done so, he would have been on the move at once.

Banks and Captain Hood were tried friends of the colonel's, and they were his only constant visitors.

The former, as I have said, had recently completed the works he had in charge, on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. He was a man in the prime of life, and was now appointed to take an active part in constructing the Madras Railway, designed to connect the Arabian Sea with the Bay of Bengal, but which was not to be commenced for a year. He was just now on leave at Calcutta, occupied with many mechanical projects, for his mind was active and fertile, incessantly devising some novel invention. His spare time he devoted to the colonel, whose fast friend he had been for twenty years. Thus most of his evenings were spent in the veranda of the bungalow. There he usually met Captain Hood, who belonged to the first squadron of Carabineers, and had served in the campaign of 1857-58 first under Sir John Campbell in Oude and Rohilkund, and afterward in Central India, under Sir Hugh Rose, during the campaign which terminated in the taking of Gwalior.

Hood was not more than thirty; he had spent most of his life in India, and was a distinguished member of the Madras Club. His hair and beard were auburn, and he belonged to an English regiment; otherwise he was thoroughly "Indianized," and loved the country as if it had been his by birth. He thought India the only place worth living in. And there, certainly, all his tastes were gratified. A soldier by nature and temperament, opportunities for fighting were of constant recurrence. An enthusiastic sportsman, was he not in a land where nature had collected together all the wild animals in creation, all the furred and feathered game of either hemisphere? A determined mountaineer, the magnificent ranges of Thibet offered him the ascent of the loftiest summits on the globe.

An intrepid traveler, what debarred him from setting foot on the hitherto untrodden regions of the Himalayan frontier? Madly fond of horse-racing, the race-courses of India appeared to him fully as important as those of Newmarket or Epsom.

On this latter subject Banks and Hood were quite at variance. The engineer took very little interest in the turfy triumphs of "Gladiator" and Co.

One day, when Hood had been urging him to express some opinion on the point, Banks said that to his mind races could never be really exciting but on one condition.

"And what is that?" demanded Hood.

"It should be clearly understood," returned Banks quite seriously, "that the jockey last at the winning-post is to be shot in his saddle."

"Ah! not a bad idea!" exclaimed Hood, very simply. Nor would he have hesitated to run the chance himself.

Such were Sir Edward Munro's two constant visitors, and without joining in their conversations he liked to listen to them. Their perpetual discussions and disputes, on all sorts of subjects, often brought a smile to his lips.

One wish and desire these two brave fellows had in common. And that was to induce the colonel to join them in making a journey, and so to vary the melancholy tenor of his thoughts. Several times they had tried to persuade him to go to places frequented during the hot season by the rich dwellers in Calcutta.

The colonel was immovable.

He had heard of the journey which Banks and I proposed to take. This evening the subject was resumed. Captain Hood's idea was a vast walking-tour in the north of India. He objected to railroads, as Banks did to horses. The middle course proposed was to travel either in carriages or in palanquins—easy enough on the great thoroughfares of Hindoostan.

"Don't tell me about your bullock-wagons and your humped-zebu carriages!" cried Banks. "I believe if you had your way without us engineers, you would still go about in primitive vehicles such as were discarded in Europe five hundred years ago."

"I'm sure they are far more comfortable than some of your contrivances, Banks. And think of those splendid white bullocks! why, they keep up a gallop admirably, and you find relays at every two leagues——"

"Yes; and they drag a machine on four wheels after them, in which one is tossed and pitched worse than in a boat at sea in a storm."

"Well, I can't say much for these conveyances, certainly," answered Hood. "But have we not capital carriages for two, three, or four horses, which in speed can rival some of your trains? For my part, give me a palanquin rather than a train."

"A palanquin, Hood! Call it a coffin—a bier—where you are laid out like a corpse!"

"That's all very well, but at least you are not rattled and shaken about. In a palanquin you may write, read, or sleep at your ease, without being roused up for your ticket at every station. A palanquin carried by four or six Bengalee gamals (bearers) will take you at the rate of four-and-half miles an hour, and ever so much safer, too, than your merciless express trains!"

"The best plan of all," said I, "would certainly be to carry one's house with one."

"Oh, you snail!" cried Banks.

"My friend," replied I, "a snail who could leave his shell, and return to it at pleasure, would not be badly off. To travel in one's own house, a rolling house, will probably be the climax of inventions in the matter of journeying!"

"Perhaps it will," said Colonel Munro, who had not yet spoken. "If the scene could be changed without leaving home and all its associations, if the horizon, points of view, atmosphere, and climate could be varied while one's daily life went on as usual—yes, perhaps——"

"No more traveler's bungalows," said Hood, "where comfort is unknown, although for stopping there you require a leave from the local magistrate."

"No more detestable inns, in which one is fleeced morally and physically!" said I.

"What a vision of delight!" cried Captain Hood. "Fancy stopping when you please, setting off when you feel inclined, going at a foot's pace when disposed to linger, racing away at a gallop the instant the humor strikes you! Then to carry with you not only a bedroom, but drawing and dining and smoking rooms! and a kitchen! and a cook! That would be something like progress, indeed, Banks! and a hundred times better than railways. Contradict me if you dare!"

"Far from contradicting, I should entirely agree with you, if only you carried your notion of improvement far enough."

"What? do you mean to say better still might be done?"

"Listen, and judge for yourself. You consider that a moving house would be superior to a carriage—to a saloon-carriage—even to a sleeping-car on a railroad. And supposing one traveled for pleasure only, and not on business, you are right; I suppose we are agreed as to that?"

"Yes," said I, "we all think so;" and Colonel Munro made a sign of acquiescence.

"Well," continued Banks. "Now let us proceed. You give your orders to your coach-builder and architect combined, who turns you out a perfect realization of the idea, and there you have your rolling house, answering in every way to your requirements, replete with every convenience and comfort; not so high as to make one fear a somersault, not so broad as to suggest the possibility of sticking in a narrow road; well hung—in short, perfection. Let us suppose it has been built for our friend Colonel Munro; he invites us to share his hospitality, and proposes to visit the northern parts of India—like snails if you please, but snails who are not glued by the tail to their shells. All is prepared—nothing forgotten, not even the precious cook and kitchen so dear to our friend Hood. The day for starting comes! All right! Holloa! who is to draw your house, my good friend?"

"Draw it?" cried Hood; "why mules, asses, horses, bullocks!"

"In dozens?" said Banks.

"Ah! let's see; elephants, of course—elephants! It would be something superb, majestic, to see a house drawn by a team of elephants, well-matched, and with splendid action.

Can you conceive a more lordly and magnificent style of progression? Would it not be glorious?"

"Well—yes—but——"

"But! still another of your 'buts.'"

"And a very big 'but' it is."

"Bother you engineers! you are good for nothing but to discover difficulties."

"And to surmount them when not insurmountable," replied Banks quietly.

"Well then, surmount this one."

"I will—and in this way. My dear Munro, Captain Hood offers us a large choice of motive power, but none which is incapable of fatigue, none which will not on occasion prove restive or obstinate, and above all, require to eat. It follows that the traveling house we speak of is quite impracticable unless it can be a steam house."

"And run upon rails, of course! I thought so!" cried the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

"No, upon roads," returned Banks; "drawn by a first-rate traction engine."

"Bravo!" shouted Hood, "bravo! Provided the house need not follow your imperious lines of rails, I agree to the steam."

"But," said I to Banks, "an engine requires food as much as mules, asses, horses, bullocks, or elephants do, and for want of it will come to a standstill."

"A steam horse," replied he, "is equal in strength to several real horses, and the power may be indefinitely increased. The steam horse is subject neither to fatigue nor to sickness. In all latitudes, through all weathers, in sunshine, rain, or snow, he continues his unwearied course. He fears not the attack of wild beasts, the bite of serpents, nor the stings of venomous insects. Desiring neither rest nor sleep, he needs no whip, spur, or goad. The steam horse, provided only he is not required at last to be cooked for dinner, is superior to every draught animal which Providence has placed at the disposal of mankind. All he consumes is a little oil or grease, a little coal or wood; and you know, my friends, that forests are not scarce in our Indian Peninsula, and the wood belongs to everybody."

"Well said!" exclaimed Captain Hood. "Hurrah for the steam horse! I can almost fancy I see the traveling house, invented by Banks the great engineer, traveling the highways and byways of India, penetrating jungles, plunging through forests, venturing even into the haunts of lions, tigers, bears, panthers, and leopards, while we, safe within its walls, are dealing destruction on all and sundry! Ah, Banks, it makes my mouth water! I wish I wasn't going to be born for another fifty years!"

"Why not, my dear fellow?"

"Because fifty years hence your dream will come true; we shall have the steam house."

"It is ready now," said Banks simply.

"Ready! Who has made one? Have you?"

"I have; and to tell you the truth, I rather expect it will even surpass your visionary hopes."

"My dear Banks, let's be off at once!" cried Hood, as if he had received an electric shock.

The engineer begged him to be calm, and turning to Sir Edward Munro, addressed him in an earnest tone.

"Edward," said he, "if I place a steam house at your command—if a month hence, when the season will be suitable, I come and tell you that your rooms are prepared, and that you can occupy them and go wherever you like, while your friends Maucler, Hood, and I are ready and willing to accompany you on an excursion to the north of India—will you answer me, 'Let us start, Banks, let us start; and the God of the traveler be our speed'?"

"Yes, my friends," replied Colonel Munro, after a few moments' reflection. "Yes, I agree. I place at your disposal, Banks, the requisite funds. Keep your promise. Bring to us this ideal of a steam house, which is to surpass even Hood's imagination, and we will travel over all India."

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Captain Hood. "Now for wild sports on the frontiers of Nepaul!"

At this moment Sergeant McNeil, attracted by the captain's ringing cheers, appeared at the entrance to the veranda.

"McNeil," said Colonel Munro, "we start in a month for the north of India. Will you go?"

"Certainly, colonel, if you do," he replied.

CHAPTER III

THE SEPOY REVOLT

SOME account must now be given of the state of India at the period when the events of this story took place, and especially it will be necessary to relate the chief circumstances connected with the formidable revolt of the sepoys.

The Honorable East India Company, called sometimes by the nickname of "John Company," was founded in 1600, in the reign of Elizabeth, in the midst of a population of two hundred millions, inhabiting the sacred land of Aryavarta.

Their first title was merely "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies," and at their head was placed the Duke of Cumberland.

About this time the power of the Portuguese, which till then had been very great in the Indies, began to diminish. Of this the English immediately took advantage, and made their first attempt at a political and military administration in the presidency of Bengal, its capital, Calcutta, becoming the center of the new government.

A French Company was founded about the same period, under the patronage of Colbert, and the conflicting interests of the rival companies gave rise to endless contentions, in which, a century later, the names of Dupleix, Labourdonnais, and Count de Lally, are distinguished both in successes and reverses. The French were finally compelled to abandon the Carnatic, that portion of the peninsula which comprehends a part of its eastern coast.

Lord Clive's brilliant successes having assured the English power in Bengal, Warren Hastings consolidated the empire Clive had founded, and from that time war and conquest went on, till England became master of that vast empire which has been described as "not less splendid and more durable than that of Alexander."

The Company, however, till then all powerful, began to lose its authority, and in 1784 a bill was passed placing it under the control of Government. In 1813 it lost the monopoly of trading to India, and in 1833 the right of trading to China.

Since the establishment of a military force in India, the army had always been composed of two distinct contingents, European and native. The first consisted of British cavalry and infantry regiments, and European infantry in service of the Company; the second, of native regulars, commanded by English officers. There was also artillery, which belonged to the Company, and was European with the exception of a few batteries.

When Lord William Bentinck was made Governor of Madras, he introduced some reforms which highly offended the native troops. The sepoys were required to clip their mustaches, shave their chins, and were forbidden to wear their marks of caste. A new regulation turban was also ordered for them. Incited by the sons of Tippoo Sahib, this was made the excuse for an outbreak, in which the garrison at Vellore rose against and massacred their officers and about a hundred English soldiers, even the sick in the hospital being butchered.

The English troops quartered at Arcot fortunately arrived in time to stem that rebellion. This, however, showed that a slight cause would at any moment set the natives against their conquerors, and in 1857 imminent peril threatened this Eastern Empire.

The Mohammedans of both sects longed to set themselves free from the British yoke, but could not hope to do so while the Hindoo soldiery remained true to their salt. Unhappily the spark that was needed to inflame their passions was not long in being supplied. A suspicion had seized the Hindoo mind that their religion and caste were in danger; that the English had determined that all the natives should become Christians. They believed that the cartridges for their new Enfield rifles were purposely greased with pig's fat, so that when they bit off the ends they would be defiled, lose caste, and be compelled to embrace the Christian religion.

Now, in a country where the population renounces even the use of soap, because the fat of either a sacred or unclean animal may enter into its composition, it was found very difficult to enforce the use of cartridges prepared with this substance, especially as they had to be touched with the lips. The Government yielded in some degree to the outcry which was made; but it was quite in vain to modify the drill with the rifles, or to assert that the fats in question took no part in the manufacture of the cartridges. Not a sepoy in the army could be reassured or persuaded to the contrary.

At this time Lord Canning was at the head of the administration as governor-general. Perhaps this statesman deluded himself as to the extent of the movement. For some years past the star of the United Kingdom had been growing visibly dimmer in the Hindoo sky. In 1842 the retreat from Cabul had diminished the prestige of the European conquerors. The attitude of the English army during the Crimean war had not in some instances been such as to sustain its military reputation. The sepoys, therefore, who were well acquainted with all that was happening on the shores of the Black Sea, thought the time had come when a revolt of the native troops would probably be successful. Their minds, already well prepared, were inflamed and excited by the bards, brahmins, and moulvis, who stirred them up by songs and exhortations.

At the beginning of the year 1857, while the contingent of the British army was reduced owing to exterior complications, Nana Sahib, otherwise called Dandou Pant, who had been residing near Cawnpore, had gone to Delhi, and twice to Lucknow, no doubt with the object of provoking the rising, prepared so long ago, for, in fact, very shortly after the departure of the Nana, the insurrection was declared.

On the 24th of February, at Berampore, the 34th regiment refused the cartridges. In the middle of the month of March an adjutant was massacred, and the regiment being disbanded after the punishment of the assassins, carried into the neighboring provinces most active elements of revolt.

On the 10th of May, at Meerut, a little to the north of Delhi, the 3d, 11th, and 20th regiments mutinied, killed their colonels and several staff officers, gave up the town to pillage, and then fell back on Delhi. Here the rajah, a descendant of Timour, joined them. The arsenal fell into their power, and the officers of the 54th regiment were slaughtered. On the 11th of May, at Delhi, Major Fraser and his officers were pitilessly massacred by the mutineers of Meerut, in the very palace of the European commandant; and on the 16th of May forty-nine prisoners, men, women, and children, fell under the hatchets of the assassins. On the 20th of May, the 26th regiment, cantoned near Lahore, killed the commandant of the fort and the European sergeant-major.

The impulse once given to these frightful butcheries, it was impossible to stop them. On the 28th of May, at Nourabad, many Anglo-Indian officers fell victims. The brigadier commandant, with his aide-de-camp, and many other officers, were murdered in the cantonments of Lucknow on the 30th of May. On the 31st of May, at Bareilly, in the Rohilkund, several officers were surprised and massacred, without having time to defend themselves. At Shahjahanpore, on the same date, were assassinated the collector and a number of officers by the sepoys of the 38th regiment; and the next day, beyond Barwar, many officers, women, and children, who were *en route* for the station of Sivapore, a mile from Aurungabad, fell victims.

In the first days of June, at Bhopal, were massacred a part of the European population; and at Jansi, under the inspiration of the terrible dispossessed Rani, all the women and children who took refuge in the fort were slaughtered with unexampled refinement of cruelty. At Allahabad, on the 6th of June, eight young ensigns fell by the sepoys' hands. On the 14th of June, two native regiments revolted at Gwalior, and assassinated their officers.

On the 27th of June, at Cawnpore, expired the first hecatomb of victims, of every age and sex, all shot or drowned—a prelude to the fearful drama which was to take place there a few weeks later. On the 1st of July, at Holkar, thirty-four Europeans—officers, women, and children—were massacred, and the town pillaged and burned; and on the same day, at Ugow, the colonel and adjutant of the 23d regiment were slain.

The second massacre at Cawnpore was on the 15th of July. On that day several hundred women and children—among them Lady Munro—were butchered with unequaled cruelty by the order of Nana himself, who called to his aid the Mussulmen butchers from the slaughter-houses. This atrocious act, and how the bodies were afterward thrown down a well, is too well known to need further description.

On the 26th of September, in Lucknow, many were half cut to pieces, and then thrown still living into the flames. Besides these, in all the towns, and throughout the whole country, there were isolated murders, which altogether gave to this mutiny a horrible character of atrocity.

To these butcheries the English generals soon replied by reprisals—necessary, no doubt, since they did much to inspire terror of the British name among the insurgents—but which were truly frightful. At the beginning of the insurrection, at Lahore, Chief Justice Montgomery and Brigadier Corbett had managed to disarm, without bloodshed, the 8th, 16th, 26th, and 49th native regiments. At Moultan the 62d and 29th regiments were also forced to surrender their arms, without being able to attempt any serious resistance. The same thing was done at Peshawar to the 24th, 27th, and 51st regiments, who were disarmed by Brigadier S. Colton and Colonel Nicholson, just as the rebellion was about to burst. But the native officers of the 51st regiment having fled to the mountains, a price was set on their heads, and all were soon brought back by the hillmen. This was the beginning of the reprisals.

A column, commanded by Colonel Nicholson, attacked a native regiment, which was marching toward Delhi. The mutineers were soon defeated and dispersed, and one hundred and twenty prisoners brought to Peshawar. All were indiscriminately condemned to death; but one out of three only were really executed. Ten cannon were placed on the drilling-ground, a prisoner fastened to each of their mouths, and five times were the ten guns fired covering the plain with mutilated remains, in the midst of air tainted with the smell of burning flesh.

These men, as M. de Valbezen says in his book called "Nouvelles Etudes sur les Anglais et l'Inde," nearly all died with that heroic indifference which Indians know so well how to preserve even in the very face of death. "No need to bind me, captain," said a fine young sepoy, twenty years of age, to one of the officers present at the execution; and as he spoke he carelessly stroked the instrument of death. "No need to bind me; I have no wish to run away." Such was the first and horrible execution, which was to be followed by so many others.

At the same time Brigadier Chamberlain published the following order to the native troops at Lahore, after the execution of two sepoys of the 55th regiment: "You have just seen two of your comrades bound to the cannon's mouth and blown to pieces; this will be the punishment of all traitors. Your conscience will tell you what penalties they will undergo in the other world. These two soldiers have been shot rather than hung on the gallows, because I wished to spare them the pollution of the executioner's touch, and prove thus that the Government, even at this crisis, wishes to avoid everything that would do the least injury to your prejudices of religion and caste."

On the 30th of July, 1,237 prisoners fell successively before firing platoons, and fifty others only escaped to die of hunger and suffocation in the prisons in which they were shut up. On the 28th of August, of 870 sepoys who fled from Lahore, 659 were pitilessly massacred by the soldiers of the British army.

After the taking of Delhi, on the 23d of September, three princes of the king's family, the heir presumptive and his two cousins, surrendered unconditionally to Major Hodson, who brought them, with an escort of five men only, into the midst of a menacing crowd of 5,000 Hindoos—one against 1,000. And yet, halfway through, Hodson stopped the cart which contained his prisoners, got into it, ordered them to lay bare their breasts, and then shot them all three with his revolver. "This bloody execution, by the hand of an English officer," says M. de Valbezen, "excited the highest admiration throughout the Punjab."

After the capture of Delhi, 3,000 prisoners perished by shot or on the gallows, and with them twenty-nine members of the royal family. The siege of Delhi, it is true, had cost the besiegers 2,151 Europeans, and 1,686 natives. At Allahabad horrible slaughter was made, not among the sepoys, but in the ranks of the humble population, whom the fanatics had almost unconsciously enticed to pillage. At Lucknow, on the 16th of November, 2,000 sepoys were shot at the Sikander Bagh, and a space of 120 square yards was strewed with their dead bodies.

At Cawnpore, after the massacre, Colonel Neil obliged the condemned men, before giving them over to the gallows, to lick and clean with their tongues, in proportion to their rank of caste, each spot of blood remaining in the house in which the victims had perished. To the Hindoos this was preceding death with dishonor.

During the expedition into Central India executions were continual, and under the fire of musketry " walls of human flesh fell and perished on the earth!" On the 9th of March, 1858, during the attack on the Yellow House, at the time of the second siege of Lucknow, after the decimation of the sepoys, it appears certain that one of these unfortunate men was roasted alive by the Sikhs, under the very eyes of the English officers! On the 11th, the moats of the Begum's palace at Lucknow were filled with sepoys' bodies; for the English could not restrain the rage that possessed them. In twelve days 3,000 natives were slain, either hung or shot, including among them 380 fugitives on the island of Hydasspes, who were escaping into Cashmere.

In short, without counting the sepoys who were killed under arms during this merciless repression—in which no prisoners were made—in the Punjab only not less than 628 natives were shot or bound to the cannon's mouth by order of the military authorities, 1,370 by order of the civil authority, 386 hung by order of both.

At the beginning of the year 1859 it was estimated that more than 120,000 native officers and soldiers had perished, and more than 200,000 civilian natives, who paid with their lives for their participation—often doubtful—in this insurrection. Terrible reprisals these! and perhaps, on that occasion, Mr. Gladstone had some reason on his side when he protested so energetically against them in Parliament.

It was important, for the better understanding of our story, that the death-list on both sides should be given as above, to make the reader comprehend the unsatiated hatred which still remained in the hearts of the conquered, thirsting for vengeance, as well as in those of the conquerors, who, ten years afterward, were still mourning the victims of Cawnpore and Lucknow.

As to the purely military facts of the campaign against the rebels, they comprised the following expeditions, which may be summarily mentioned.

To begin with, Sir John Lawrence lost his life in the first Punjab campaign. Then came the siege of Delhi (that central point of the insurrection), reënforced by thousands of fugitives, and in which Mohammed Shah Bahadour was proclaimed Emperor of Hindoostan. "Finish up Delhi!" was the impatient order of the governor-general in his last dispatch to the commander-in-chief; and the siege, begun on the night of the 13th of June, was ended on the 19th of September, after costing the lives of Generals Sir Harry Barnard and John Nicholson.

At the same time, after Nana Sahib had had himself declared Peishwar, and been crowned at the castle fort of Bhitoor, General Havelock effected his march on Cawnpore. He entered it the 17th of July, though too late to prevent the second massacre, or to seize the Nana, who managed to escape with 5,000 men and forty pieces of cannon.

Havelock then undertook a first campaign in the kingdom of Oude, and on the 28th of July he crossed the Ganges with 1,700 men and ten cannon only, and proceeded toward Lucknow.

Sir Colin Campbell and Major-General Sir James Outram now appeared on the scene. The siege of Lucknow lasted eighty-seven days, and during it Sir Henry Lawrence and General Havelock lost their lives. Then Sir Colin Campbell, after having been obliged to retire on Cawnpore, of which he took definite possession, prepared for a second campaign.

During this time other troops captured Mohir, a town of Central India, and made an expedition across the Mulwa, which established the British authority in that kingdom.

At the commencement of the year 1858 Campbell and Outram again marched on Lucknow, with four divisions of infantry, commanded by Major-Generals Sir James Outram and Sir Edward Lugard, and Brigadiers Walpole and Franks. Sir Hope Grant led the cavalry, while Wilson and Robert Napier had other commands, the army consisting of about 25,000 men, which were joined by the Maharajah of Nepaul with 12,000 Ghoorkas. But the rebel army numbered not less than 120,000 men, and the town of Lucknow contained from 700,000 to 800,000 inhabitants. The first attack was made on the 6th of March.

On the 16th, after a series of combats the English got possession of that part of the town situated on the left bank of the Goomtee. Moos-a-bagh was cannonaded and captured by Sir James Outram and Sir Hope Grant on the 19th; and on the 21st, after a fierce struggle the English took final possession of the city.

In the month of April an expedition was made into Rohilkund, as a great number of the fugitive insurgents were there. Bareilly, the capital of that kingdom, was the first object of the English, who were not at the outset very fortunate, as they suffered a sort of defeat at Jugdespore. Here also Brigadier Adrian Hope was killed. But toward the end of the month Campbell arrived, retook Shahjahanpore, and on the 5th of May, attacking Bareilly, he seized it, without having been able to prevent the rebels evacuating it.

The Central India Field Force, under the command of Sir Hugh Rose, performed many gallant achievements. This general, in January, 1858, marched through the kingdom of Bhopal and relieved the town of Saugor on the 3d of February, which had been closely besieged since July, 1857.

Ten days after he took the fort of Gurakota, forced the defiles of the Vindhya chain, crossed the Betwa, and arrived before Jhansi, defended by 11,000 rebels, under the command of the savage Amazon Ranee; invested this place on the 22d of March, in the midst of intense heat, detached 2,000 men from the besieging army to meet 20,000 men from Gwalior, led by the famous Tantia Topee, put this chief to the rout, and then assaulted the town on the 22d of April, forced the walls, and seized the citadel, from which the Ranee managed to escape. On the 23d of May the British advanced on Calpee, and occupied it. The Ranee and Tantia Topee having taken possession of Gwalior, Sir Hugh Rose advanced upon that place; an action took place at Morar on the 16th of June, and on the 19th another fierce contest, in which the rebels were completely put to the rout, and the Central India Field Force returned to Bombay in triumph.

The Ranee was killed in a hand-to-hand fight before Gwalior. This famous queen, who was devoted to the Nabob, and was his most faithful companion during the insurrection, fell by the hand of Sir Edward Munro. Nana Sahib, by the dead body of Lady Munro at Cawnpore, the colonel, by the dead body of the Ranee at Gwalior, represent the revolt and the suppression, and were thus made enemies whose hatred would find terrible vent if they ever met face to face!

The insurrection might now be considered to be quelled, except in a few places in the kingdom of Oude. Campbell resumed the campaign on the 2d of November, seized the last of the rebel places, and compelled several important chiefs to submit themselves. One of them, however, Beni Madho, was not taken. In December it was learned that he had taken refuge in a neighboring district of Nepaul. It was said that Nana Sahib, Balao Rao his brother, and the Begum of Oude, were with him. Later it was reported that they had sought refuge across the Raptee, on the boundaries of the kingdoms of Nepaul and Oude. Campbell pressed rapidly on, but they had crossed the frontier. In the beginning of February, 1859, an English brigade, one of the regiments being under command of Colonel Munro, pursued them into Nepaul. Beni Madho was killed, the Begum of Oude and her son were made prisoners, and obtained permission to reside in the capital of Nepaul. As to Nana Sahib and Balao Rao, though for long they were thought to be dead, yet such was not the case.

Thus the terrible insurrection was crushed. Tantia Topee, betrayed by his lieutenant Man-Singh, and condemned to death, was executed on the 15th of April at Sipree. This rebel, "this truly remarkable actor in the great drama of the Indian insurrection," says M. de Valbezen, "one who gave proofs of a political genius full of resources and daring," died courageously on the scaffold.

This sepoy mutiny, which might perhaps have lost India to the English if it had extended all over the peninsula, and especially if the rising had been national, caused the downfall of the Honorable East India Company. On the 1st of November, 1858, a proclamation, published in twenty languages, announced that Victoria, Queen of England, would wield the scepter of India—that country of which, some years later, she was to be crowned Empress.

The governor, now called Viceroy, a Secretary of State, and fifteen members, composed the supreme government. The governors of the presidencies of Madras and Bombay were henceforward to be nominated by the Queen. The members of the Indian service and the commanders-in-chief to be chosen by the Secretary of State. Such were the principal arrangements of the new government.

As to the military force, the English army contained seventeen thousand more men than before the sepoy mutiny. The army in 1867 numbered 64,902 European officers and men, and 125,246 native. Such was the actual state of the peninsula from an administrative and military point of view; such the effective force which guarded a territory of 400,000 square miles.

"The English," says M. Grandidier, "have been fortunate in finding in this large and magnificent country a gentle, industrious, and civilized people, who for long have been accustomed to a yoke. But they must be careful; gentleness has its limits, and the yoke should not be allowed to bruise their necks, or they may one day rebel and cast it off."

CHAPTER IV

DEEP IN THE CAVES OF ELLORA

It was but too true. The Mahratta prince, Dandou Pant, adopted son of Baji Rao, Peishwar of Poona, known as Nana Sahib, and perhaps at this period the sole survivor of the leaders in the great insurrection, had dared to leave his inaccessible retreats amid the mountains of Nepaul. Full of courage and audacity, accustomed to face danger, crafty and skilled in the art of baffling and eluding pursuit in every form, he had ventured forth into the provinces of the Deccan, animated by hatred intensified a hundredfold since the terrible reprisals taken after the rebellion.

Yes; Nana Sahib had sworn deadly hate to the possessors of India. Was he not the heir of Baji Rao? and when the Peishwar died in 1851, had not the Company refused to continue to pay to him his pension of eight lacs of rupees? This had been one of the causes of an enmity from which resulted the greater excesses.

But what could Nana Sahib hope for now? The revolt had been completely quelled eight years before. The Honorable East India Company had gradually been superseded by the English Government, which now held the entire peninsula under an authority very much firmer and better established than that of the old mercantile associations.

Not a trace of the mutiny remained, for the ranks of the native regiments had been wholly reorganized. Could the Nana dream of success in an attempt to foment a national movement among the lowest classes of Hindoostan? We shall see.

He was aware that his presence in the province of Aurungabad had been observed that the governor and viceroy were informed of it, and that a price was set on his head. It was clear that precipitate flight was necessary, and that his place of refuge must be well concealed indeed if he hoped to baffle the search of the agents of Anglo-Indian police.

The Nana did not waste an hour of the night between the 6th and 7th of March. He perfectly knew the country, and resolved to gain Ellora, twenty-five miles from Aurungabad, and there join one of his accomplices.

The night was very dark. The pretended fakir, satisfied that no one was in pursuit, took his way toward the mausoleum, erected at some distance from the city, in honor of the Mohammedan Sha-Soufi, a saint whose relics have a high medicinal reputation. All within the mausoleum, priests and pilgrims, slept profoundly, and the Nana passed on without being subjected to inconvenient questioning.

Dark as it was, he soon discerned, four leagues farther northward, the block of granite on which is reared the impregnable fortress of Dowlatabad. Rising abruptly from the plain to the height of two hundred and forty feet, its vast outline could be traced against the sky. But Nana Sahib, with a glance of hatred, turned his gaze away from the place; for one of his ancestors, an emperor of the Deccan, had wished to establish his capital at the base of this stronghold. It would indeed have been an impregnable position, well suited to be the central point of an insurrectionary movement in this part of India.

Having traversed the plain, a region of more varied and broken ground succeeded; the undulations gave notice of mountains in the distance. But the Nana did not slacken his pace, although often making steep ascents. Twenty-five miles, the distance that is between Ellora and Aurungabad, had to be got over during the night; nothing therefore induced him to make a halt, although an open caravanserai lay near his path, and he passed a lonely and half-ruined bungalow among the hills, where he might have sought an hour's repose.

When the sun rose he was beyond the village of Ranzah, which possesses the tomb of Aurungzeeb, the most famous of Mogul emperors.

At length he had reached the celebrated group of excavations which take their name from the little neighboring village of Ellora.

The hill in which these caves, to the number of thirty, have been hollowed out, is crescent-shaped. The monuments consist of twenty-four Buddhist monasteries and some grottoes of less importance. The basaltic quarry has been extensively worked by the hand of man. But the native architects, who from the earliest ages extracted stones from it, had not for their main object the erection of the marvelous buildings here and there to be seen on the surface of the vast peninsula. No; they removed these stones in order to procure space within the living rock.

The arrival of Nana Sahib at Ellora was unobserved; he entered the caves and glided into one of several deep cracks or crevices which had opened in the basement, but were concealed behind the supporting elephants.

This opening admitted him into a gloomy passage or drain which ran beneath the temple, terminating in a sort of crypt or vaulted reservoir, now dry and empty.

Advancing a short way into the passage, the Nana uttered a peculiar whistle, to which a sound precisely similar immediately replied, and a light flashed through the darkness, proving that the answer was no mocking echo. Then an Indian appeared carrying a small lantern.

"Away with the light!" said the Nana.

"Dandou Pant!" said the Indian, extinguishing the lamp; "is it thou thyself?"

"My brother, it is I myself."

"Art thou——?"

"Let me eat first," returned the Nana; "we will converse afterward. But let both eating and speaking be in darkness. Take my hand and guide me."

The Indian took his hand and drew him into the crypt, and he assisted him to lie down on a heap of withered grass and leaves, where he himself had been sleeping when roused by the fakir's signal.

The man, accustomed to move in the obscurity of this dismal retreat, soon produced food, consisting of bread, the flesh of fowls prepared in a way common in India, and a gourd containing half a pint of the strong spirit known as *arrack,* distilled from the sap of the cocoanut-tree.

The Nana ate and drank, but spoke never a word. He was faint and sinking through hunger and fatigue, and his whole vitality seemed concentrated in his eyes, which burned and flashed in the darkness like those of a tiger. The Indian remained motionless, waiting till the Nabob chose to speak.

This man was Balao Rao, the brother of Nana Sahib. Balao Rao, a year older than Dandou Pant, resembled him physically, and might easily be mistaken for him. Morally the likeness was still more complete. In detestation of the English in craft to form plots, and in cruelty to execute them, they were as one soul, in two bodies. Throughout the rebellion these two brothers had kept together. After it was subdued, they shared together a refuge on the frontiers of Nepaul. And now, united by the single aim of resuming the struggle, they were both ready for action.

When the Nana had devoured the food set before him, he remained for some time leaning his head on his folded arms. Balao Rao kept silence, thinking he wished to sleep.

But Dandou Pant raised his head suddenly, and, grasping his brother's hand, said in a hollow voice, "I am denounced! There is a price set on my head! 2,000*l*. promised to the man who delivers up Nana Sahib!"

"Thy head is worth more than that, Dandou Pant!" cried Balao Rao; "2,000*l*. is hardly enough even for mine. They would be fortunate if they got the two for 20,000*l*."

"Yes," returned the Nana; "in three months, on the 23d of June, will be the anniversary of the battle of Plassy. Our prophets foretold that its hundredth anniversary, in 1857, should witness the downfall of British rule and the emancipation of the children of the sun. Nine years more than the hundred have now all but passed, and India still lies crushed and trodden beneath the invader's heel."

"That effort which failed in 1857 may and ought to succeed ten years afterward," replied Balao Rao. "In 1827, '37, and '47, there were risings in India. The fever of revolt has broken out every ten years. Well—this year it will be cured by a bath of European blood!"

"Let but Brahma be our stay," murmured the Nana, "and then—life for life! Woe to the leaders of our foe who yet survive! Lawrence is gone, Barnard, Hope, Napier, Hodson, Havelock—all are gone. But Campbell and Rose still live, and he whom, above all, I hate—that Colonel Munro, whose ancestor was the first to blow our men from the cannon's mouth, the man who with his own hand slew my friend the Ranee of Jhansi. Let but that man fall into my power, and he shall see whether I have forgotten the horrors of Colonel Neil, the massacres of Secunderabad, the slaughter in the Begum's palace, at Bareilly, Jhansi, Morar, the island of Hydaspes, and at Delhi. He shall discover that I have sworn his death, as he did mine."

"Has he not left the army?" inquired Balao Rao.

"He would re-enter the service the moment any disturbances broke out," replied Nana Sahib. "But even if our attempted rising were to fail, he should not escape, for I would stab him in his bungalow at Calcutta."

"So let it be—and now?"

"Now the work must begin. This time it shall be a national movement. Let but the Hindoos of towns, villages, and country places rise simultaneously, and very soon the sepoys will make common cause with them. I have traversed the center and north of the Deccan; everywhere I have found minds ripe for revolt. We have leaders ready to act in every town and straggling village. The Brahmins will fanaticize the people. Religion this time will carry along with us the votaries of Siva and Vishnu. At the appointed time, at the given signal, millions of natives will rise, and the royal army will be annihilated!"

"And Dandou Pant?" exclaimed Balao Rao, seizing his brother's hand.

"Dandou Pant," continued the Nana, "will not only be the Peishwar crowned in the hill-fort of Bithour. He will be the sovereign of the whole sacred land of Hindoostan!"

Nana Sahib folded his arms, his abstracted look was that of a man whose mental eye is bent on the distant future, and he remained silent.

Balao Rao was careful not to rouse him. He loved to see the working of that fierce soul, burning as it were with a hidden fire, which he knew he could at any moment fan into a flame.

The Nana could not have had an accomplice more devoted to his person, a counselor more eager to urge him forward to attain his ends. He was to him, as has been said, a second self.

After a silence of some duration, the Nana raised his head—his thoughts had returned to the present.

"Where are our comrades?"

"In the caverns of Adjuntah, where they were appointed to wait for us."

"And our horses?"

"I left them a gunshot from this place, on the road between Ellora and Boregami."

"Is Kâlagani with them?"

"He is, my brother. They are rested, refreshed, and perfectly ready for us."

"Then let us start. We must be at Adjuntah before daybreak."

"And after that what must be done? Has not this enforced flight disarranged our previous plans?"

"No," replied Nana Sahib. "We must gain the heights of Sautpourra, where every defile is known to me, and where I can assuredly defy the pursuit of the English bloodhounds of police. There we shall be in the territory of the Bheels and Goonds, who are faithful to our cause. There, in the midst of that mountainous region of the Vindhyas, where the standard of revolt may at any moment be raised, I shall await the favorable juncture!"

"Forward!" exclaimed Balao Rao, starting up, "and let those who want heads come and take them!"

"Yes—let them come," responded the Nana, grinding his teeth. "I am ready."

Balao Rao instantly made his way along the narrow passage which led to this dismal cell beneath the temple. On reaching the secret opening behind the colossal elephant, he cautiously emerged, looked anxiously on all sides, amid the shadowy gloom, to ascertain that the coast was clear. Then advancing some twenty paces, and being satisfied that all was safe, he gave notice by a shrill whistle that the Nana might follow him.

Shortly afterward the two brothers had quitted this artificial valley, the length of which is half a league, and which, sometimes to a great height, and in several stories, is pierced by galleries, vaulted chambers, and excavations. The distance between Ellora and Adjuntah is fifty miles, but the Nana was no longer the fugitive of Aurungabad, traveling painfully on foot. Three horses awaited him, as his brother had said, under the care of his faithful servant Kâlagani. They were concealed in a thick forest, about a mile from Ellora, and the three men were speedily mounted and galloping in the direction of Adjuntah. It was no strange thing to see a fakir on horseback. In point of fact, many of these impudent beggars demand alms from their seat in the saddle!

Although the time of the year was not that at which pilgrimages are usually made, yet the Nana avoided passing near the Mohammedan mausoleum frequented as a bungalow by pilgrims, travelers, and sightseers of all nations who often flock thither attracted by the wonders of Ellora, and pushed forward by a route as remote as possible from human habitations. He only halted occasionally to breathe the steeds and to partake of the simple provisions which Kâlagani carried at his saddle-bow.

The ground was flat and level. In all directions stretched expanses of heath, crossed by massive ridges of dense jungle. But as they approached Adjuntah the country became more varied.

The superb grottoes or caves of Adjuntah, which rival those of Ellora, and perhaps in general beauty surpass them, occupy the lower end of a small valley about half a mile from the town. Nana Sahib could reach them without passing through it, and therefore felt himself secure, although so near a place where the governor's proclamation was fixed to every building.

Fifteen hours after quitting Ellora he and his two companions plunged into a narrow defile which led them into the celebrated valley where twenty-seven temples, hewn in the rocky wall, looked down into the giddy depths beneath.

It was night, superb though moonless, for the heavens glittered with starry constellations, when the Nana, Balao Rao, and Kâlagani approached their destination. Lofty trees and giant flowering plants stood out in strong relief against the sparkling sky. Not a breath stirred the air, not a leaf moved, not the faintest sound could be heard, save the dull murmur of a torrent which rolled in the depths of a ravine hundreds of feet below.

This murmur grew on the ear, however, and became a hoarse roar as the riders advanced to the cataract of Satkound, where the water, torn by sharp projections of quartz and basalt, plunges over a fall of fifty fathoms. As the travelers passed the chasm, a cloud of liquid dust whirled and eddied over it, which moonlight would have tinted with soft rainbow hues.

Here the defile made a sharp turn like an elbow, and the valley, in all its wealth of Buddhist architecture, lay before them.

On the walls of these temples—profusely adorned with columns, rose-tracery, arabesques, and galleries peopled by colossal forms of grotesque animals, hollowed out into cells formerly occupied by the priests, who were the guardians of these sacred abodes—the artist may admire the bright colors of frescoes which seem as though painted but yesterday; frescoes which represent royal ceremonies, religious processions, and battles, exhibiting every weapon employed long before the Christian era in the great and glorious empire of India.

To Nana Sahib all the secrets of these mysterious temples were well known. Already, more than once, he had, when closely pressed, sought refuge among them. The subterranean galleries connecting the temples, the narrow tunnels bored through solid walls of quartz, the winding passages crossing and recrossing in every direction, all the thousand ramifications of a labyrinth the clue to which might be sought in vain by the most patient, were familiar to him. Even with no torch to illumine their profound gloom, he was perfectly at home there.

Like a man sure of what he was about, the Nana made straight for one of the excavations less important than the rest. The entrance to it was filled up by a curtain of foliage and a mass of huge stones piled up in some ancient landslip, and thickly overgrown by shrubs and creepers.

The Nana gave notice of his presence at this concealed entrance simply by scraping his nail on a flat surface of stone.

Instantly the heads of two or three natives appeared among the branches; then ten, then twenty, showed themselves; and then soon, creeping and winding out like serpents from between the stones, came a party of forty well-armed men.

"Forward!" said Nana Sahib.

And seeking no explanation, ignorant of whither he led them, these faithful followers were ready to obey; and, if needful, lay down their lives for Dandou Pant. They were on foot, but could vie with the speed of any horse.

The little party made its way across the defile which skirted the abyss, keeping in a northerly direction, and rounding the shoulder of the hill. In an hour they reached the road to Kandeish, which finally leads to the passes of the Sautpourra mountains.

At daybreak they passed near the line of railway running from Bombay to Allahabad, above Nagpore.

On a sudden the Calcutta express dashed into sight, flinging masses of white vapor among the stately banyans, and startling with its shrieking whistle the wild inhabitants of the jungle.

The Nana drew bridle, and stretching his hand toward the flying train, exclaimed, in a strong, stern voice, " Speed on thy way, and tell the Viceroy of India that Nana Sahib lives! Tell him that this railroad, the accursed work of the invader's hands, shall ere long be drenched in their blood."

CHAPTER V

THE IRON GIANT

On the morning of the 5th of May, the passengers along the high road from Calcutta to Chandernagore, whether men, women, or children, English or native, were completely astounded by a sight which met their eyes. And certainly the surprise they testified was extremely natural.

At sunrise a strange and most remarkable equipage had been seen to issue from the suburbs of the Indian capital, attended by a dense crowd of people drawn by curiosity to watch its departure.

First, and apparently drawing the caravan, came a gigantic elephant. The monstrous animal, twenty feet in height, and thirty in length, advanced deliberately, steadily, and with a certain mystery of movement which struck the gazer with a thrill of awe. His trunk, curved like a cornucopia, was uplifted high in the air. His gilded tusks, projecting from behind the massive jaws, resembled a pair of huge scythes. On his back was a highly ornamented howdah, which looked like a tower surmounted, in Indian style, by a dome-shaped roof and furnished with lens-shaped glasses to serve for windows.

This elephant drew after him a train consisting of two enormous cars, or actual houses, moving bungalows in fact, each mounted on four wheels. The wheels, which, were prodigiously strong, were carved, or rather sculptured in every part. Their lowest portion only could be seen, as they moved inside a sort of case, like a paddle-box, which concealed the enormous locomotive apparatus. A flexible gangway connected the two carriages.

How could a single elephant, however strong, manage to drag these two enormous constructions, without any apparent effort? Yet this astonishing animal did so! His huge feet were raised and set down with mechanical regularity, and he changed his pace from a walk to a trot, without either the voice or a hand of a mahout being apparent.

The spectators were at first so astonished by all this, that they kept at a respectful distance; but when they ventured nearer, their surprise gave place to admiration. They could hear a roar, very similar to the cry uttered by these giants of the Indian forests. At intervals there issued from the trunk a jet of vapor. And yet, it was an elephant! The rugged greeny-black skin evidently covered the bony framework of one that must be called the king of the pachyderms. His eyes were lifelike; all his members were endowed with movement!

Ay! But if some inquisitive person had chanced to lay his hand on the animal, all would have been explained. It was but a marvelous deception, a gigantic imitation, having as nearly as possible every appearance of life. In fact, this elephant was really encased in steel, and an actual steam-engine was concealed within its sides.

The train, or Steam House, to give it its most suitable name, was the traveling dwelling promised by the engineer. The first carriage, or rather house, was the habitation of Colonel Munro, Captain Hood, Banks, and myself. In the second lodged Sergeant McNeil and the servants of the expedition. Banks had kept his promise, Colonel Munro had kept his; and that was the reason why, on this May morning, we were setting out in this extraordinary vehicle, with the intention of visiting the northern regions of the Indian peninsula.

But what was the good of this artificial elephant? Why have this fantastic apparatus, so unlike the usual practical inventions of the English? Till then, no one had ever thought of giving to a locomotive destined to travel either over macadam highways or iron rails, the shape and form of a quadruped.

I must say, the first time we were admitted to view the machine we were all lost in amazement. Questions about the why and wherefore fell thick and fast upon our friend Banks. We knew that this traction-engine had been constructed from his plans and under his directions. What, then, had given him the idea of hiding it within the iron sides of a mechanical elephant?

" My friends," answered Banks seriously, " do you know the Rajah of Bhootan? "

" I know him," replied Captain Hood, " or rather I did know him, for he died two months ago."

" Well, before dying," returned the engineer, " the Rajah of Bhootan not only lived, but lived differently to any one else. He loved pomp, and displayed it in every possible manner. He never denied himself anything—I mean anything that ever came into his head. His brain imagined the most impossible things, and had not his purse been inexhaustible, it would soon have been emptied in the process of gratifying all his desires. He was enormously rich, had coffers filled with lacs of rupees. Now one day an idea occurred to him, which took such possession of his mind as to keep him from sleeping—an idea which Solomon might have been proud of, and would certainly have realized, had he been acquainted with steam: this idea was to travel in a perfectly new fashion, and to have an equipage such as no one had before dreamed of. He knew me, and sent for me to his court, and himself drew the plan of his locomotive. If you imagine, my friends, that I burst into a laugh at the Rajah's proposition, you are mistaken. I perfectly understood that this grandiose idea sprang naturally from the brain of a Hindoo sovereign, and I had but one desire on the subject—to realize it as soon as possible, and in a way to satisfy both my poetic client and myself. A hardworking engineer hasn't an opportunity every day to exercise his talents in this fantastic way, and add an animal of this description to the creations of the "Arabian Nights." In short, I saw it was possible to realize the Rajah's whim. All that has been done, that can be done, will be done in machinery. I set to work, and in this iron-plated case, in the shape of an elephant, I managed to inclose the boiler, the machinery, and the tender of a traction-engine, with all its accessories. The flexible trunk, which can be raised and lowered at will, is the chimney; the legs of my animal are connected with the wheels of the apparatus; I arranged his eyes so as to dart out two jets of electric light, and the artificial elephant was complete. But as it was not my own spontaneous creation, I met with numerous difficulties which delayed me. The gigantic plaything, as you may call it, cost me many a sleepless night; so many indeed, that my rajah, who was wild with impatience, and passed the best part of his time in my workshops, died before the finishing touches were given that would allow the elephant to set forth on his travels. The poor fellow had no time even to make one trial of his invention. His heirs, however, less fanciful than he, viewed the apparatus with the terror of superstition, and as the work of a madman. They were only eager to get rid of it at any price. I therefore bought it up on the colonel's account. Now you know all the why and wherefore of the matter, and how it is that in all the world we alone are the proprietors of a steam elephant, with the strength of eighty horses, not to mention eighty elephants!"

"Bravo, Banks! well done!" exclaimed Captain Hood. "A first-class engineer who is an artist, a poet in iron and steel into the bargain, is a *rara avis* among us!"

"The rajah being dead," resumed Banks, "and his apparatus being in my possession, I had not the heart to destroy my elephant, and give the locomotive its ordinary form."

"And you did well!" replied the captain. "Our elephant is superb, there's no other word for it!" said the captain. "And what a fine effect we shall have, careering over the plains and through the jungles of Hindoostan! It is a regular rajah-like idea, isn't it? and one of which we shall reap the advantage, sha'n't we, colonel?"

Colonel Munro made a faint attempt at a smile, to show that he quite approved of the captain's speech.

The journey was resolved upon then and there; and now this unique and wonderful steam elephant was reduced to drag the traveling residence of four Englishmen, instead of stalking along in state with one of the most opulent rajahs of the Indian peninsula.

I quote the following description of the mechanism of this road engine, on which Banks had brought to bear all the improvements of modern science, from notes made at the time.

" Between the four wheels are all the machinery of cylinders, pistons, feed-pump, etc., covered by the body of the boiler. This tubular boiler is in the fore part of the elephant's body, and the tender, carrying fuel and water, in the hinder part. The boiler and tender, though both on the same truck, have a space between them, left for the use of the stoker. The engine-driver is stationed in the fireproof howdah on the animal's back, in which we all could take refuge in case of any serious attack. He has there everything in his power, safety-valves, regulating brakes, etc., so that he can steer or back his engine at will. He has also thick lens-shaped glass fixed in the narrow embrasures, through which he can see the road both before and behind him.

" The boiler and tender are fixed on springs of the best steel, so as to lessen the jolting caused by the inequalities of the ground. The wheels, constructed with vast solidity, are grooved so as to bite the earth, and prevent them from ' skating.'

" The nominal strength of the engine is equal to that of eighty horses, but its power can be increased to equal that of one hundred and fifty, without any danger of an explosion. A case, hermetically sealed, incloses all the machinery, so as to protect it from the dust of the roads, which would soon put the mechanism out of order. The machine has a double cylinder after the Field system, and its great perfection consists in this, that the expenditure is small and the results great. Nothing could be better arranged in that way, for in the furnace any kind of fuel may be burned, either wood or coal. The engineer estimates the ordinary speed at fifteen miles an hour, but on a good road it can reach twenty-five. There is no danger of the wheels skating, not only from the grooves, but because of the perfect poise of the apparatus, which is all so well balanced that not even the severest jolting could disturb it. The atmospheric brakes, with which the engine is provided, could in a moment produce either a slackening of speed or a sudden halt.

" The facility with which the machine can ascend slopes is remarkable. Banks has succeeded most happily in this, taking into consideration the weight and power of propulsion of the machine. It can easily ascend a slope at an inclination of from four to five inches in the yard, which is considerable."

There is a perfect network of magnificent roads made by the English all over India, which are excellently fitted for this mode of locomotion. The Great Trunk Road, for instance, stretches uninterruptedly for one thousand and two hundred miles.

I must now describe the Steam House.

Banks had not only bought from the Nabob's heirs the traction-engine, but the train which it had in tow. This had of course been constructed, according to the Oriental taste of the rajah, in the most gorgeous Hindoo fashion. I have already called it a traveling bungalow, and it merited the name, for the two cars composing it were simply a marvelous specimen of the architecture of the country.

Imagine two pagoda-shaped buildings without minarets, but with double-ridged roofs surmounted by a dome, the corbeling of the windows supported by sculptured pilasters, all the ornamentation in exquisitely carved and colored woods of rare kinds, a handsome veranda both back and front. You might suppose them a couple of pagodas torn from the sacred hill of Sonnaghur.

To complete the marvel of this prodigious locomotive I must add that it can float! In fact, the stomach, or that part of the elephant's body which contains the machinery, as well as the lower portion of the buildings, form boats of light steel. When a river is met with, the elephant marches straight into it, the train follows, and as the animal's feet can be moved by paddle-wheels, the Steam House moves gayly over the surface of the water. This is an indescribable advantage for such a vast country as India, where there are more rivers than bridges.

This was the train ordered by the capricious Rajah of

Bhootan. But though the carriages were like pagodas on the outside, Banks thought it best to furnish the interior to suit English tastes, with everything necessary for a long journey, and in this he was very successful.

The width of the two carriages was not less than eighteen feet; they therefore projected over the wheels, as the axles were not more than fifteen. Being well hung on splendid springs, any jolting would be as little felt as on a well-made railroad.

The first carriage was forty-five feet long. In front was an elegant veranda, in which a dozen people could sit comfortably. Two windows and a door led into the drawing-room, lighted besides by two side windows. This room, furnished with a table and book-case, and having luxurious divans all round it, was artistically decorated and hung with rich tapestry. A thick Turkey carpet covered the floor. "Tatties," or blinds, hung before the windows, and were kept moistened with perfumed water, so that a delightful freshness was constantly diffused throughout all the apartments. A punkah was suspended from the ceiling and kept continually in motion, for it was necessary to provide against the heat, which at certain times of the year is something frightful.

Opposite the veranda door was another of valuable wood, opening into the dining-room, which was lighted not only by side windows, but by a ceiling of ground glass.

Eight guests might have been comfortably seated round the table in the center, so as we were but four we had ample room. It was furnished with sideboards and buffets loaded with all the wealth of silver, glass, and china, which is necessary to English comfort. Of course all these fragile articles were put in specially made racks, as is done on board ship, so that even on the roughest roads they would be perfectly safe.

A door led out into the passage, which ended in another veranda at the back. From this passage opened four rooms, each containing a bed, dressing-table, wardrobe and sofa, and fitted up like the cabins of the best transatlantic steamers. The first of these rooms on the left was occupied by Colonel Munro, the second on the right by Banks. Captain Hood was established next to the engineer, and I next to Sir Edward.

The second carriage was thirty-six feet in length, and also possessed a veranda which opened into a large kitchen, flanked on each side with a pantry, and supplied with everything that could be wanted. This kitchen communicated with a passage which, widening into a square in the middle, and lighted by a skylight, formed a dining-room for the servants. In the four angles were four cabins, occupied by Sergeant McNeil, the engine driver, the stoker, and Colonel Munro's orderly; while at the back were two other rooms for the cook and Captain Hood's man; besides a gun-room, box-room and ice-house, all opening into the back veranda.

It could not be denied that Banks had intelligently and comfortably arranged and furnished Steam House. There was an apparatus for heating it in winter with hot air from the engine, besides two small fireplaces in the drawing and dining rooms. We were therefore quite prepared to brave the rigors of the cold season, even on the slopes of the mountains of Thibet.

The following is the itinerary of the journey which was agreed on, subject to any modifications which unforeseen circumstances might suggest. We proposed leaving Calcutta, to follow the valley of the Ganges up to Allahabad, to cross the kingdom of Oude, so as to reach the first slopes of Thibet, to remain there for some months, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, so as to give Captain Hood plenty of opportunity for hunting, and then to redescend to Bombay. We had thus 900 leagues, or 2,700 miles before us. But our house and servants traveled with us. Under these conditions, who would refuse even to make the tour of the world again and again?

CHAPTER VI

FIRST STAGES

Before dawn, on the morning of our start, I left the Spencer Hotel, one of the best in Calcutta, which I had made my residence ever since my arrival.

Our train awaited us at no great distance; we had only to enter and establish ourselves. Our luggage had of course been put "on board." Nothing unnecessary was allowed; but Captain Hood had large ideas in the matter of firearms, and considered an arsenal of four Enfield rifles, four fowling-pieces, two duck-guns, and several other guns, pistols, and revolvers, quite indispensable for such a party as ours. This armory appeared to threaten the lives of wild beasts rather than simply to supply game for our table, but the Nimrod of our expedition was very decided in his views on the subject.

Captain Hood was in the highest spirits. The triumph of having succeeded in persuading Colonel Munro to forsake his solitary retreat; the pleasure of setting out on such a tour, with an equipage so entirely novel; the prospect of unusual occupation, plenty of exercise, and grand Himalayan excursions; all combined to excite him to the greatest degree; and he gave vent to his feelings in perpetual exclamations, while he urged us to bestir ourselves.

The clock struck the hour of departure. Steam was up, the engine ready for action. Our engine-driver stood at his post, his hand on the regulator. The whistle sounded.

"Off with you, Behemoth!" shouted Captain Hood, waving his cap. And this name, so well suited to our wonderful traction-engine, was ever after bestowed upon it.

Now for a word as to our attendants, who occupied the second house—No. 2, as we used to call it.

The engine-driver, Storr, was an Englishman, and had been employed on "The Great Southern" line until a few months previously. Banks knew him to be an efficient and clever workman, thoroughly up to his business, and therefore engaged him for Colonel Munro's service. He was a man of forty years of age, and proved exceedingly useful to us.

The fireman's name was Kâlouth. He belonged to a tribe or class of Hindoos much sought after by railway companies, to be employed as stokers, because they endure with impunity the double heat of their tropical climate and that of the engine furnaces. They resemble, in this, the Arabs employed as firemen in the Red Sea steamers—good fellows who are content to be merely boiled where Europeans would be roasted in a few minutes.

Colonel Munro had a regimental servant named Goûmi, one of the tribe of Gourkas. He belonged to that regiment which, as an act of good discipline, had accepted the use of the Enfield rifles, the introduction of which into the service had been the reason, or at least the pretext, of the sepoy revolt. Small, active, supple, and of tried fidelity, Goûmi always wore the dark uniform of the rifle brigade, which was as dear to him as his own skin.

Sergeant McNeil and Goûmi were attached heart and soul to Colonel Munro. They had fought under his command all through the Indian campaign; they had accompanied him in his fruitless search for Nana Sahib; they had followed him into retirement, and would never dream of leaving him.

Captain Hood had also a faithful follower—a frank, lively young Englishman, whose name was Fox, and who would not have changed places with any officer's servant under the sun. He perfectly adored Captain Hood, and was quite as keen a sportsman as his master. Having accompanied him on numberless tiger-hunts, Fox had proved his skill, and reckoned the tigers which had fallen to his gun at thirty-seven, only three less than his master could boast of.

Our staff of attendants was completed by a negro cook, whose dominion lay in the forepart of the second house. He was of French origin, and having boiled, fried, and fricasseed in every possible latitude, Monsieur Parazard—for that was his name—had no small opinion of the importance of his noble profession; he would have scorned to call it his trade.

He presided over his saucepans with the air of a high priest, and distributed his condiments with the accuracy of a chemist. Monsieur Parazard was vain, it is true, but so clever that we readily pardoned his vanity.

Our expedition, then, was made up of ten persons; namely, Sir Edward Munro, Banks, Hood, and myself, who were accommodated in one house; McNeil, Storr, Kâlouth, Goûmi, Fox, and Monsieur Parazard, in the other.

I must not forget the two dogs, Fan and Niger, whose sporting qualities were to be put to the proof by Hood, in many a stirring episode of the chase.

"Arrange the route exactly as you please, my friends," said Colonel Munro. "Decide without reference to me. Whatever you do will be done well."

"Still, my dear Munro," replied Banks; "it would be satisfactory to have your opinion."

"No, Banks," returned the colonel; "I give myself up to you, and have no wish to visit one place rather than another. One single question, however, I will ask. After Benares, in what direction do you propose to travel?"

"Northward, most certainly!" exclaimed Hood impetuously. "Right across the kingdom of Oude, up to the lower ranges of the Himalayas!"

"Well then, my friends," began Colonel Munro, "perhaps when we get so far, I will propose—but it will be soon enough to speak of that when the time comes. Till then, go just where you choose."

I could not help feeling somewhat surprised by these words of Sir Edward Munro. What could he have in his mind? Had he only agreed to take this journey in the hope that chance might serve his purpose better than his own will and endeavor had done? Did it seem to him possible that, supposing Nana Sahib to be still alive, he might yet find trace of him in the extreme north of India? Was the hope of vengeance still strong within him?

I could not resist the conviction that our friend was influenced by this hidden motive, and that Sergeant McNeil shared his master's thoughts.

When we left Calcutta we were seated in the drawing-room of Steam House. The door and the windows of the veranda were open, and the measured beat of the punkah kept up an agreeable temperature. Storr drove the engine at a slow and steady rate of three miles an hour, for we travelers were just then in no haste, and desired to see at leisure the country we passed through.

For a long time we were followed by a number of Europeans who were astonished at our equipage, and by crowds of natives whose wonder and admiration was mingled with fear. We gradually distanced this attendant mob, but met people continually who lavished upon us admiring exclamations of *Wallah! wallah!* The huge elephant, vomiting clouds of steam, excited far more astonishment than the two superb cars which he drew after him.

At ten o'clock breakfast was served in the dining-room; and, seated at a table which was far less shaken than it would have been in a first-class railway carriage, we did ample justice to the culinary skill of Monsieur Parazard.

We were traveling along the left bank of the Hoogly, the most western of the numerous arms of the Ganges, which form together the labyrinthine network of the delta of the Sunderbunds, and is entirely an alluvial formation.

"What you see there, my dear Maucler," said Banks, "is a conquest won by the sacred river Ganges from the not less sacred Bay of Bengal. It has been a mere affair of time. There is probably not an atom of that soil which has not been transported hither, by the mighty current, from the Himalayan heights. Little by little the stream has robbed the mountains in order to form this province, through which it has worked its bed——"

"And changes incessantly!" broke in Captain Hood. "There never was such a whimsical, capricious, lunatic of a river as this same Ganges. People take the trouble to build a town on its banks, and behold, a few centuries later the town is in the midst of a plain, its harbors are dry, the river has changed its course! Thus Rajmahal, as well as Gaur, were both formerly situated on this faithless stream, and now there they are dying of thirst amidst the parched rice-fields of the plains."

"Then may not some such fate be in store for Calcutta?" inquired I.

"Ah, who knows."

"Come, come," said Banks; "you forget the engineers! It would only require skillful embankments. We could easily put a straight waistcoat on the Ganges, and restrain its vagaries."

"It is well for you, Banks," said I, "that no natives are within earshot when you speak so irreverently of their sacred stream! They would never forgive you."

"Well, really," returned Banks, "they look on their river as a son of God, if not God himself, and in their eyes it can do nothing amiss."

"Not even by maintaining, as it does, epidemics of the plague, fever, and cholera!" cried Captain Hood. "I must say, however, that the atmosphere it engenders agrees splendidly with the tigers and crocodiles which swarm in the Sunderbunds. Ah, the savages! Fox!" he added, turning to his servant, who was clearing away the breakfast things.

"Yes, captain."

"Wasn't it there you killed your thirty-seventh?"

"Yes, captain, two miles from Fort Canning. It was one evening——"

"There, Fox! that will do," interrupted the captain, as he tossed off a large glass of brandy and soda. "I know all about the thirty-seventh. The history of your thirty-eighth would interest me more."

"My thirty-eighth is not killed yet, captain."

"No, but you will bag him some day, Fox, as I shall my forty-first."

It is to be noted, that in the conversations of Captain Hood and his man, the word "tiger" was never mentioned. It was quite unnecessary. The two hunters perfectly understood one another.

As we proceeded to the Hoogly, its banks, which above Calcutta are rather low, gradually contracted, much reducing the width of the river. For some hours we kept near the railroad, which from Burdwan passes on to Rajmahal, in the valley of the Ganges, which it then follows till beyond Benares.

The Calcutta train passed us at great speed, and the shouts of the passengers showed that while they admired us, they mocked our slower pace. We did not return their defiance. More rapidly they certainly did travel than ourselves, but in comfort there was simply no comparison.

During these two days the scenery was invariably flat, and therefore monotonous. Here and there waved a few slender cocoanut-trees, the last of which we should leave behind after passing Burdwan. These trees, which belong to the great family of palms, are partial to the coast, and love to breathe salt air. Thus they are not found beyond a somewhat narrow belt along the sea coast, and it is vain to seek them in Central India. The flora of the interior is, however, extremely interesting and varied.

On each side of our route, the country in this part resembles an immense chess-board marked out in squares of rice-fields, and stretching as far as we could see. Shades of green predominated, and the harvest promised to be abundant in this moist, warm soil, the prodigious fertility of which is well known.

On the evening of the second day, with punctuality which an express might have envied, the engine gave its last snort and stopped at the gates of Burdwan. This city is the judicial headquarters of an English district; but properly speaking, the country belongs to a Maharajah, who pays taxes to Government amounting to not less than ten millions.

The town consists in a great part of low houses, standing in fine avenues of trees, such as cocoanuts and arequipas. These avenues being wide enough to admit our train, we proceeded to encamp in a charming spot, full of shade and freshness.

It seemed as though a large addition were suddenly made to the city, when our houses took up their position in it, and we would not have exchanged our residences for any in the splendid quarter where stands the magnificent palace of the sovereign of Burdwan.

It may well be supposed that our elephant produced all the terror and admiration which he usually excited among Bengalees. The people ran together from all sides, the men bare-headed, their hair cut short *à la* Titus, and wearing only loose cotton drawers, while the women were enveloped from head to foot in white.

"I begin to be afraid," said Captain Hood, "that the Maharajah will want to buy our Behemoth, and that he will offer such a vast sum, we shall be forced to let his highness have him."

"Never!" exclaimed Banks. "I will make another elephant for him if he likes, of power enough to draw his whole capital from one end of his dominion to the other. But we won't part with Behemoth at any price, will we, Munro?"

"Most certainly we will not," answered the colonel, in the tone of a man who was not to be tempted by millions.

And after all there was no question as to whether our colossal elephant was for sale or not. The Maharajah was not at Burdwan, and the only visit we received was from his *kamdar,* a sort of private secretary, who came to examine our equipage. Having done so, this personage offered us permission, which we very readily accepted, to examine the gardens of the palace.

We found them well worth a visit. They were beautifully laid out, filled with the finest specimens of tropical vegetation, and watered by sparkling rivulets flowing from miniature lakes. The park we also admired greatly: its verdant lawns were adorned by fanciful kiosks, and in superb menageries we found specimens of all the animals of the country, wild as well as domestic. Here were goats, stags, deer, elephants, tigers, lions, panthers, and bears, besides others too numerous to mention.

"Oh, captain!" cried Fox, "here are tigers in cages just like birds. Isn't it a pity?"

"Indeed, Fox, and so it is," replied the captain. "If the poor fellows had their choice, they certainly would far rather be prowling about in the jungle, even within *reach of our rifle-balls!*"

"That's just what I think, captain," sighed honest Fox.

Next morning, the 10th of May, having laid in a fresh stock of provisions, we quitted Burdwan. Our Steam House passed the line of railroad by a level crossing, and traveled in the direction of Ramghur, a town situated about seventy leagues from Calcutta.

During this part of the journey Behemoth was kept going at a gentle trot, which pace proved the excellent structure of our well-hung carriages; the roads being good also favored our experiment.

To the great surprise of Captain Hood, we passed through many jungles without seeing any wild animals. It seemed not unlikely that they were terrified, and fled at the approach of a gigantic elephant, vomiting steam and smoke; but as it was to the northern regions, and not to Bengal provinces, that our hunter looked for the sport he loved so well, he did not as yet begin to complain.

On the 15th of May we were near Ramghur, about fifty leagues from Burdwan. The rate of speed at which we had traveled was not more than fifteen leagues in twelve hours. Three days afterward, on the 18th, we stopped at the little town of Chittra. No incidents marked these stages of our journey. The heat was intense; but what could be more agreeable than a siesta beneath the cool shelter of the verandas! The burning hours passed away in luxurious repose.

In the evenings Storr and Kâlouth cleaned the furnace and oiled and thoroughly examined the engine, operations which were always carefully superintended by Banks himself. While he was so employed, Captain Hood and I, accompanied by Fox, Goûmi, and the two dogs, used to take our guns, and explore the neighborhood of our camp. We fell in with nothing move important in the way of game than birds and a few small animals; and although the captain turned up his nose at such poor sport, he was always highly delighted next day, when Monsieur Parazard regaled us with a variety of new and savory dishes.

Banks, when he could, made our halting-places near some wood, and on the banks of a stream or brook, because it was always necessary to replenish the tender with what was wanted for the next day's journey, and he attended personally to every detail.

Goûmi and Fox were frequently employed as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

When the day's work was done we lighted our cigars (excellent Manilla cheroots), and while we smoked we talked about this country with which Hood, as well as Banks, was so thoroughly well acquainted. The captain disdained cigars, and his vigorous lungs inhaled, through a pipe twenty feet long, the aromatic smoke of a *hookah,* carefully filled for him by the hand of Fox. It was our greatest wish that Colonel Munro should accompany us on our little shooting excursions round the camp. We invariably asked him to do so, but he as invariably declined, and remained with Sergeant McNeil, spending the time of our absence in pacing up and down a distance of not more than a hundred yards.

They spoke little, but so completely did they understand one another, that words were not needed for the interchange of thoughts.

Both were absorbed in tragic and indelible recollections. It was possible that, in approaching the theater of the bloody insurrection, these recollections would become more vivid.

Banks and Captain Hood shared with me the opinion that some fixed idea, which would be developed later, had induced Colonel Munro to join us in this expedition to the north of India.

In that case we might be on the verge of great events. Our steam Behemoth might be drawing us across these huge plains and mountains to the scene of a thrilling and unexpected drama.

CHAPTER VII

THE PILGRIMS OF THE PHALGOU RIVER

WHAT is now called Behar was in former days the empire of Magadha. In the time of the Buddhists it was sacred territory, and is still covered with temples and monasteries. But, for many centuries, the Brahmins have occupied the place of the priests of Buddha. They have taken possession of the *viharas* or temples, and, turning them to their own account, live on the produce of the worship they teach. The faithful flock thither from all parts, and in these sacred places the Brahmins compete with the holy waters of the Ganges, the pilgrimages to Benares, the ceremonies of Juggernaut; in fact, one may say the country belongs to them.

The soil is rich, there are immense rice-fields of emerald green, and vast plantations of poppies. There are numerous villages, buried in luxuriant verdure, and shaded by palms, mangoes, and date-trees, over which nature has thrown, like a net, a tangled web of creeping plants.

Steam House passed along roads which were embowered in foliage, and beneath the leafy arches the air was cool and fresh. We followed the chart of our route, and had no fear of losing our way.

The snorting and trumpeting of our elephant mingled with the deafening screams of the winged tribes and the discordant chatterings and scoldings of apes and monkeys, and the golden fruit of the bananas shone like stars through light clouds, as smoke and steam rolled in volumes among the trees. The delicate rice-birds rose in flocks as Behemoth passed along, their white plumage almost concealed as they flew through the spiral wreaths of steam.

But the heat! the moist air scarcely made its way through the tatties of our windows. The hot winds, charged with caloric as they passed over the surface of the great western plains, enveloped the land in their fiery embrace. One longs for the month of June, when this state of the atmosphere will be modified. Death threatens those who seek to brave the stroke of this flaming sun.

The fields are deserted. Even the *ryots* themselves, inured as they are to the burning heat, cannot continue their agricultural labors. The shady roadway alone is practicable, and even there we require the shelter of our traveling bungalow. Kâlouth the fireman must be made of pure carbon, or he would certainly dissolve before the grating of his furnace. But the brave Hindoo holds out nobly. It has become second nature with him, this existence on the platform of the locomotives which scour the railway lines of Central India!

During the daytime of May the 19th, the thermometer suspended on the wall of the dining-room registered 106° Fahrenheit. That evening we were unable to take our accustomed "constitutional" or *hawakana*. This word signifies literally "to eat air," and means that, after the stifling heat of the tropical day, people go out to inhale the cool pure air of evening. On this occasion we felt that, on the contrary, the air would eat us!

"Monsieur Maucler," said Sergeant McNeil to me, "this heat reminds me of one day in March, when Sir Hugh Rose, with just two pieces of artillery, tried to storm the walls at Lucknow. It was sixteen days since we had crossed the river Betwa, and during all that time our horses had not once been unsaddled. We were fighting between enormous walls of granite, and we might as well have been in a burning fiery furnace. The *chitsis* passed up and down our ranks, carrying water in their leathern bottles, which they poured on the men's heads as they stood to their guns, otherwise we should have dropped. Well do I remember how I felt! I was exhausted, my skull was ready to burst—I tottered. Colonel Munro saw me, and snatching the bottle from the hand of a chitsi, he emptied it over me—and it was the last water the carriers could procure. . . . A man can't forget that sort of thing, sir! No, no! When I have shed the last drop of my blood for my colonel, I shall still be in his debt."

"Sergeant McNeil," said I, "does it not seem to you that since we left Calcutta, Colonel Munro has become more absent and melancholy than ever? I think that every day——"

"Yes, sir," replied McNeil, hastily interrupting me, "but that is quite natural. My colonel is approaching Lucknow—Cawnpore—where Nana Sahib murdered. . . . Ah! it drives me mad to speak of it! Perhaps it would have been better if this journey had been planned in some different direction—if we had avoided the provinces ravaged by the insurrection! The recollection of these awful events is not yet softened by time."

"Why not even now change the route?" exclaimed I. "If you like, McNeil, I will speak about it to Mr. Banks and Captain Hood."

"It's too late now," replied the sergeant. "Besides, I have reason to think that my colonel wishes to revisit, perhaps for the last time, the theater of that horrible war; that he will once more go to the scene of Lady Munro's death."

"If you really think so, McNeil," said I, "it will be better to let things take their course, and not attempt to alter our plans. It is often felt to be a consolation to weep at the grave of those who are dear to us."

"Yes, at their grave!" cried McNeil. "But who can call the well of Cawnpore a grave? Could that fearful spot seem to anybody like a quiet grave in a Scotch churchyard, where, among flowers and under shady trees, they would stand on a spot, marked by a stone with one name, just one, upon it? Ah, sir, I fear the colonel's grief will be something terrible! But I tell you again, it is too late to change the route. If we did, who knows but he might refuse to follow it? No, no; let things be, and may God direct us!"

It was evident, from the way in which McNeil spoke, that he well knew what was certain to influence his master's plans, and I was by no means convinced that the opportunity of revisiting Cawnpore had not led the colonel to quit Calcutta. At all events, he now seemed attracted as by a magnet to the scene where that fatal tragedy had been enacted. To that force it would be necessary to yield.

I proceeded to ask the sergeant whether he himself had relinquished the idea of revenge—in other words, whether he believed Nana Sahib to be dead.

"No," replied McNeil frankly. "Although I have no ground whatever for my belief, I feel persuaded that Nana Sahib will not die unpunished for his many crimes. No; I have heard nothing, I know nothing about him, but I am inwardly convinced it is so. Ah, sir! righteous vengeance is something to live for! Heaven grant that my presentiment is true, and then—some day——"

The sergeant left his sentence unfinished, but his looks were sufficient. The servant and the master were of one mind.

When I reported this conversation to Banks and the captain, they were both of opinion that no change of route ought to be made. It had never been proposed to go to Cawnpore; and, once across the Ganges at Benares, we intended to push directly northwards, traversing the eastern portion of the kingdoms of Oude and Rohilkund. McNeil might after all be wrong in supposing that Sir Edward Munro would wish to revisit Cawnpore; but if he proposed to do so, we determined to offer no opposition.

As to Nana Sahib, if there had been any truth in the report of his reappearance in the Bombay presidency, we ought by this time to have heard something more of him. But, on the contrary, all the intelligence we could gain on our route led to the conclusion that the authorities had been in error.

If Colonel Munro really had any ulterior design in making this journey, it might have seemed more natural that he should have confided his intentions to Banks, who was his most intimate friend, rather than to Sergeant McNeil. But the latter was no doubt preferred, because he would urge his master to undertake what Banks would probably consider perilous and imprudent enterprises.

At noon, on the 19th of May, we left the small town of Chittra, 280 miles from Calcutta. Next day, at nightfall, we arrived, after a day of fearful heat, in the neighborhood of Gaya. The halt was made on the banks of a sacred river, the Phalgou, well known to pilgrims.

Our two houses were drawn up on a pretty bank, shaded by fine trees, within a couple of miles of the town. This place, being extremely curious and interesting, we intended to remain in it for thirty-six hours, that is to say for two nights and a day. Starting about four o'clock next morning, in order to avoid the midday heat, Banks, Captain Hood, and I, left Colonel Munro, and took our way to the town of Gaya.

It is stated that 150,000 devotees annually visit this center of Brahminical institutions; and we found every road to the place was swarming with men, women, old people, and children, who were advancing from all directions across the country, having braved the thousand fatigues of a long pilgrimage in order to fulfill their religious duties.

We could not have had a better guide than Banks, who knew the neighborhood well, having previously been on a survey in Behar, where a railroad was proposed, but not yet constructed.

Just before entering the place, which is appropriately called the Holy City, Banks stopped us near a sacred tree, round which pilgrims of every age and sex were bowed in the attitude of adoration. This tree was a peepul: the girth of the trunk was enormous; but although many of its branches were decayed and fallen, it was not more than two or three hundred years old. This fact was ascertained by M. Louis Rousselet, two years later, during his interesting journey across the India of the Rajahs.

The "Tree of Buddha," as it is called, is the last of a generation of sacred peepuls, which have for ages overshadowed the spot, the first having been planted there five centuries before the Christian era; and probably the fanatics kneeling before it believe this to be the original tree consecrated there by Buddha. It stands upon a ruined terrace close to a temple built of brick, and evidently of great antiquity.

The appearance of three Europeans, in the midst of these swarming thousands of natives, was not regarded favorably. Nothing was said, but we could not reach the terrace, nor penetrate within the old temple: certainly it would have been difficult to do so under any circumstances, on account of the dense masses of pilgrims by whom the way was blocked up.

"I wish we could fall in with a Brahmin," said Banks; "we might then inspect the temple, and feel we were doing the thing thoroughly."

"What!" cried I, "would a priest be less strict than his followers?"

"My dear Maucler," answered Banks, "the strictest rules will give way before the offer of a few rupees! The Brahmins must live."

"I don't see why they should," bluntly said Captain Hood, who never professed toleration toward the Hindoos, nor held in respect, as his countrymen generally do, their manners, customs, prejudices, and objects of veneration. In his eyes India was nothing but a vast hunting-ground, and he felt a far deeper interest in the wild inhabitants of the jungles than in the native population either of town or country.

After remaining for some time at the foot of the sacred tree, Banks led us on toward the town of Gaya, the crowd of pilgrims increasing as we advanced. Very soon, through a vista of verdure, the picturesque edifices of Gaya appeared on the summit of a rock.

It is the temple of Vishnu which attracts travelers to this place. The construction is modern, as it was rebuilt by the Queen of Holcar only a few years ago. The great curiosity of this temple are the marks left by Vishnu when he condescended to visit earth on purpose to contend with the demon Maya. The struggle between a god and a fiend could not long remain doubtful.

Maya succumbed, and a block of stone, visible within the inclosure of Vishnu-Pad, bears witness, by the deep impress of his adversary's footprints, that the demon had to deal with a formidable foe.

I said the block of stone was " visible "; I ought to have said " visible to Hindoo natives only." No European is permitted to gaze upon these divine relics.

Perhaps a more robust faith than is to be found in Western minds may be necessary in order to distinguish these traces on the miraculous stone. Be that as it may, Banks's offer of money failed this time. No priest would accept what would have been the price of a sacrilege; I dare not venture to suppose that the sum offered was unequal to the extent of the Brahminical conscience. Anyhow, we could not get into the temple.

Captain Hood was furious. He seemed disposed to deal summarily with the Brahmin who had turned us away.

Banks had to restrain him forcibly.

" Are you mad, Hood? " said he. " Don't you know that the Hindoos regard their priests, the Brahmins, not merely as a race of illustrious descent, but also as beings of altogether superior and supernatural origin? "

When we reached that part of the river Phalgou which bathes the rock of Gaya, the prodigious assemblage of pilgrims lay before us in its full extent. There, in indescribable confusion, was a heaving, huddling, jostling crowd of men and women, old men and children, citizens and peasants, rich babbos and poor ryots, of every imaginable degree. Some came in palanquins, others in carriages drawn by large-humped oxen. Some lie beside their camels, whose snake-like heads are stretched out on the ground, while many travel on foot from all parts of India. Here tents are set up; there carts and wagons are unyoked, and numerous huts made of branches are prepared as temporary shelter for the crowd.

"What a mob!" exclaimed Captain Hood.

"The water of the Phalgou will not be fit to drink this evening," observed Banks.

"Why not?" inquired I.

"Because its waters are sacred, and this unsavory crowd will go and bathe in them, as they do in the Ganges."

"Are we down stream?" cried Hood, pointing toward our encampment.

"No! don't be uneasy, captain!" answered Banks, laughing; "we are up the river."

"That's all right! It would never do to water Behemoth at an impure fountain!"

We passed on through thousands of natives massed together in comparatively small space. The ear was struck by a discordant noise of chains and small bells. It was thus that mendicants appealed to public charity. Infinitely varied specimens of this vagrant brotherhood swarmed in all directions. Most of them displayed false wounds and deformities, but although the professed beggars only pretend to be sufferers, it is very different with the religious fanatics. In fact it would be difficult to carry enthusiasm further than they do.

Some of the fakirs, nearly naked, were covered with ashes; one had his arm fixed in a painful position by prolonged tension; another had kept his hand closed until it was pierced by the nails of his own fingers.

Some had measured the whole distance of their journey by the length of their bodies. For hundreds of miles they had continued incessantly to lie down, rise up, and lie down again, as though acting the part of a surveyor's chain.

Here some of the faithful, stupefied with *bang* (which is liquid opium mixed with a decoction of hemp), were suspended on branches of trees, by iron hooks plunged into their shoulders. Hanging thus, they whirled round and round until the flesh gave way, and they fell into the waters of the Phalgou.

Others, in honor of Siva, had pierced their arms, legs, or tongues through and through with little darts, and made serpents lick the blood which flowed from the wounds.

Such a spectacle could not be otherwise than repugnant to a European eye. I was passing on in haste, when Banks suddenly stopped me, saying, "The hour of prayer!"

At the same instant a Brahmin appeared in the midst of the crowd. He raised his right hand, and pointed toward the rising sun, hitherto concealed behind the rocks of Gaya.

The first ray darted by the glorious luminary was the signal. The all but naked crowd entered the sacred waters. There were simple immersions, as in the early form of baptism, but these soon changed into water parties of which it was not easy to perceive the religious character. Perhaps the initiated, who recited *slocas* or texts, which for a given sum the priests dictated to them, thought no more of the cleansing of their bodies than their souls. The truth being that after having taken a little water in the hollow of the hand, and sprinkled it toward the four cardinal points, they merely threw up a few drops into their faces, like bathers who amuse themselves on the beach as they enter the shallow waves. I ought to add besides, that they never forgot to pull out at least one hair for every sin they had committed. A good many deserved to come forth bald from the waters of the Phalgou!

So vehement were the watery gambols of the faithful, as they plunged hither and thither, that the alligators in terror fled to the opposite bank. There they remained in a row, staring with their dull sea-green eyes at the noisy crowd which had invaded their domain, and making the air resound with the snapping of their formidable jaws. The pilgrims paid no more attention to them than if they had been harmless lizards.

It was time to leave these singular devotees, who were getting ready to enter Kaïlas, which is the paradise of Brahm; so we went up the river and returned to our encampment.

It might have been one o'clock the next morning when I was roused from uneasy slumber by a dull murmuring sound approaching along the banks of the Phalgou.

My first idea was, that the atmosphere being charged with electricity, a storm of wind was rising in the west, which would displace the strata of air, and perhaps make it more suitable for respiration. I was mistaken; the branches of the trees above us remained motionless; not a leaf stirred.

I put my head out at my window and listened. I plainly heard the distant murmur, but nothing was to be seen. The surface of the river was calm and placid, and the sound proceeded neither from the air nor from the water. Although puzzled, I could perceive no cause for alarm, and returning to bed, fatigue overcame my wakefulness, and I became drowsy. At intervals I was conscious of the inexplicable murmuring noise, but finally fell fast asleep.

In about two hours, just as the first rays of dawn broke through the darkness, I awoke with a start. Some one in the passage was calling the engineer. "Mr. Banks!"

"What is wanted?"

"Will you come here, sir?"

It was Storr the fireman who spoke to Banks. I rose immediately, and joined them in the front veranda. Colonel Munro was already there, and Captain Hood came soon after. "What's the matter?" I heard Banks say.

"Just you look, sir," replied Storr.

It was light enough for us to see the river banks and part of the road which stretched away before us; and to our great surprise these were encumbered by several hundred Hindoos, who were lying about in groups.

"Ah! those are some of the pilgrims we saw yesterday!" said Captain Hood.

"But what are they doing here?" said I.

"No doubt," replied the captain, "they are waiting for sunrise, that they may perform their ablutions."

"No such thing," said Banks; "why should they leave Gaya to do that? I suspect they have come here because——"

"Because Behemoth has produced his usual effect," interrupted Captain Hood. "They heard that a huge great elephant—a colossus—bigger than the biggest they ever saw, was in the neighborhood, and of course they came to admire him."

"If they keep to admiration, it will be all very well," returned the engineer, shaking his head.

"What do you fear, Banks?" asked Colonel Munro.

"Well, I am afraid these fanatics may get in the wav and impede our progress."

"Be prudent, whatever you do! One cannot act too cautiously in dealing with such devotees."

"Kâlouth!" cried Banks, calling the stoker, "are the fires ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, light up."

"Yes, light up by all means, Kâlouth," cried Captain Hood; "blaze away, Kâlouth; and let Behemoth puff smoke and steam into the ugly faces of all this rabble!"

It was then half-past three in the morning. It would take half an hour to get up steam. The fires were instantly lighted. The wood cracked in the furnaces, and dense smoke issued from the gigantic trunk of the elephant, which was uplifted high among the boughs of the great trees.

Several parties of natives approached; then a general movement took place in the crowd. The people pressed closer round us. Those in the foremost rank threw up their arms in the air, stretched them toward the elephant, bowed down, knelt, cast themselves prostrate on the ground, and distinctly manifested the most profound adoration.

There we stood beneath the veranda, very anxious to know what this display of fanaticism would lead to. McNeil joined us, and looked on in silence. Banks took his place with Storr in the howdah, from which he could direct every movement of Behemoth.

By four o'clock steam was up. The noise made by the engine was, of course, taken by the Hindoos for the angry trumpeting of an elephant belonging to a supernatural race. Storr allowed the steam to escape by the valves, and it appeared to issue from the sides and through the skin of the gigantic quadruped.

"We are at high pressure."

"Go ahead, Banks," returned the colonel; "but be careful; don't let us crush anybody."

It was almost day. The road along the river bank was occupied by this great crowd of devotees, who seemed to have no idea of making way for us, so that to go forward and crush no one was anything but easy. The steam-whistle gave forth two or three short piercing shrieks, to which the pilgrims replied by frantic howls.

"Clear the way there!" shouted the engineer, telling the stoker at the same time to open the regulator. The steam bellowed as it rushed into the cylinders, the wheels made half a revolution, and a huge jet of white smoke issued from the trunk.

For an instant the crowd swerved aside. The regulator was then half open; the trumpeting and snorting of Behemoth increased in vehemence, and our train began to advance between the serried ranks of the natives, who seemed loath to give place to it.

"Look out, Banks!" I suddenly exclaimed.

I was leaning over the veranda rails, and I beheld a dozen of these fanatics cast themselves on the road, with the evident wish to be crushed beneath the wheels of the monstrous machine.

"Stand back there! Attention!" shouted Colonel Munro, signing to them to rise.

"Oh, the idiots!" cried Captain Hood; "they take us for the car of Juggernaut! They want to get pounded beneath the feet of the sacred elephant!"

At a sign from Banks, the fireman shut off steam. The pilgrims, lying across the road, seemed desirous not to move. The fanatic crowd around them uttered loud cries, and appeared by their gestures to encourage them to persevere. The engine was at a standstill. Banks was excessively embarrassed.

All at once an idea struck him.

"Now we shall see!" he cried; and turning the tap of the clearance pipes under the boiler, strong jets of steam issued forth, and spread along the surface of the ground; while the air was filled by the shrill, harsh screams of the whistle.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Captain Hood. "Give it them, Banks! give it them well!"

The method proved successful. As the streams of vapor reached the fanatics, they sprang up with loud cries of pain. They were prepared and anxious to be run over, but not to be scalded.

The crowd drew back. The way was clear. Steam was put on in good earnest, and the wheels revolved steadily.

"Forward!" exclaimed Captain Hood, clapping his hands and laughing heartily.

And at a rapid rate Behemoth took his way along the road, vanishing in a cloud of vapor, like some mysterious visitant, from before the eyes of the wondering crowd.

CHAPTER VIII

A FEW HOURS AT BENARES

The high road now lay open before our Steam House, a road which, *via* Sasseram, would lead us along the right bank of the Ganges, up to Benares.

A mile beyond the encampment our engine slackened its speed, and we proceeded at the more moderate pace of about seven miles and a half an hour. It was Banks's intention to camp that evening seventy-five miles from Gaya, and to pass the night quietly in the neighborhood of the little town of Sasseram.

In general, Indian roads avoid watercourses as much as possible, for they necessitate bridges, which are very expensive affairs to erect on that alluvial soil. In many places where it was found impossible to prevent a river or stream from barring the path, there is no means of transit except an ancient and clumsy ferry-boat, of no use for the conveyance of our train. Fortunately, however, we were independent.

We had that very day to cross an important river, the Sone. This stream is fed above Rhotas by its affluents, the Coput and the Coyle, and flows into the Ganges just between Arrah and Dinapore.

Nothing could be easier than our passage. The elephant took to the water quite naturally. It descended the gentle slope of the bank straight into the river, rested on the surface, and with its huge feet beating the water like a paddle-wheel, it quietly drew our floating train to the opposite bank.

Captain Hood could not contain his delight.

"A traveling house!" he would exclaim, "a house which is both a carriage and a steamboat. Now we only need wings to enable us to fly through the air, and thus to cleave space."

"That will be done some day or other, Hood," rejoined the engineer, quite seriously.

" I believe it, Banks," answered the captain, no less seriously. " It will be done! But what can't be done, is that our life should be given back to us a couple of hundred years hence to enable us to see all these marvels! Life is not all sunshine, but yet I would willingly consent to live ten centuries out of pure curiosity! "

That evening, twelve hours after leaving Gaya, we passed under the magnificent tubular railway bridge, eighty feet above the bed of the Sone, and encamped in the environs of Sasseram. We merely wished to spend a night in this spot, to replenish our stock of wood and water, and start again at dawn of day.

This program we carried out, and next morning, before the burning midday heat began, we were far on our way.

The landscape was still much the same; that is, very rich and very cultivated. Such it appeared on approaching the marvelous valley of the Ganges. I will not stop to describe the numberless villages we passed lying in the midst of extensive rice-fields, nestling amid groves of palms, interspersed with mangoes and other trees of magnificent growth and foliage.

We never paused on our way; for even if the road was blocked by a cart drawn by slow-paced zebus, two or three shrieks from our whistle caused them to draw on one side, and we dashed past, to the great amazement of the ryots.

I was delighted and charmed at the sight of a great number of fields of roses. We were indeed not far distant from Ghazipore, the great center of production of the water, or rather essence, made from these flowers.

That evening, having traversed a tolerably level country between immense fields of poppies and tracts of rice marked out like a chess-board, we camped on the right bank of the Ganges, before the ancient Jerusalem of the Hindoos—the sacred city of Benares.

" Twenty-four hours' halt here," said Banks.

" At what distance from Calcutta are we now? " I asked the engineer.

" About three hundred and fifty miles," he replied; " and you acknowledge, my friend, do you not, that we have felt nothing of the length of the way or the fatigue of the journey? "

The Ganges! Is not that a name which calls up the most poetic legends, and does it not seem as if all India were summed up in that word? Is there in the world a valley to be compared to this, extending over a space of fifteen hundred miles, and containing not less than a hundred million inhabitants? Is there a spot on the globe where more wonders have been heaped up since the appearance of the Asiatic races?

When we looked out the next morning, the 23d of May, the rising sun was shining on the sheet of water spread out before our eyes. Several alligators of great size lay on the white sand, as if drinking in the early sunlight. Motionless, they were turned toward the radiant orb, as if they had been the most faithful votaries of Brahma. But the sight of several corpses floating by aroused them from their adoration.

It is said that these bodies float on the back when they are men, and on the chest when they are women, but from personal observation I can state that there is no truth in this statement. In a moment the monsters had darted on the prey, daily furnished to them on the waters of these rivers, and with it plunged into the depths.

The Calcutta Railway, before branching off at Allahabad to run toward Delhi, keeps close to the right bank of the Ganges, although it does not follow the river in all its numerous windings. At the Mogul-Serai station, from which we were but a few miles distant, a small branch line turns off, which passes Benares by crossing the river, and, passing through the valley of the Goumtie, reaches Jaunpore at a distance of about thirty-five miles.

Benares lies on the left bank. But it was at Allahabad, and not here, that we were to cross the Ganges. Our Behemoth stood therefore in the encampment we had chosen on the evening of the 22d of May. Several boats were moored to the bank, ready to take us across to the sacred town, which I was very desirous of exploring carefully.

These cities had been so often visited by Colonel Munro that there was really nothing new to him to learn or see in this one. He had, however, at first thought of accompanying us that day; but on reflection decided to make an excursion along the banks of the river instead, with Sergeant McNeil as his companion; so the two quitted Steam House before we ourselves had started. Captain Hood had at one time been quartered at Benares, and he was anxious to go and see a few of his old friends there. Banks and I, therefore—the engineer having expressed a wish to be my guide—were the only members of our party whom a feeling of curiosity attracted to the city.

"Benares," said Banks, "is the most holy city of India. It is the Hindoo Mecca, and whoever has lived in it, if only for four-and-twenty hours, is assured of eternal happiness. One can imagine, then, what an enormous crowd of pilgrims such a belief would attract thither, and what a great population must reside in a city for which Brahma has reserved blessings of such importance."

Benares is supposed to have existed for more than thirty centuries, and must therefore have been founded about the time when Troy disappeared. It always exercised a great influence—not political, but spiritual—over Hindoostan, and was the authorized center of the Buddhist religion until the ninth century. A religious revolution then occurred. Brahminism destroyed the ancient worship. Benares became the Brahmin capital, the center of attraction to the faithful, and it is said that 300,000 pilgrims visit it annually.

The Holy City still has its Rajah. Though he is a stipendiary of the British, and his salary is somewhat poor, he is still a prince, and inhabits a magnificent residence at Ramnagur, on the Ganges. He is a veritable descendant of the kings of Kaci, the ancient name of Benares, but has no real influence; though he would console himself for that if his pension had not been reduced to a lac of rupees, which is 100,000 rupees, or 10,000*l.*, only enough for the pocket-money of a Nabob in the old times.

Benares, like all towns in the valley of the Ganges, took part in the great insurrection of 1857. Its garrison was at this time composed of the 37th regiment of native infantry, a corps of irregular cavalry, and half a Sikh regiment. The English troops consisted merely of a half battery of artillery. This handful of men could not attempt to disarm the native soldiers. The authorities therefore waited with impatience for the arrival of Colonel Neil, who set out for Allahabad with the 10th regiment. Colonel Neil entered Benares with only two hundred and fifty men, and gave orders for a parade on the drill-ground.

When all were assembled, the sepoys were told to give up their arms. They refused. A fight then ensued between them and Colonel Neil's infantry. The irregular cavalry almost immediately joined the mutineers, as did the Sikhs, who believed themselves betrayed.

The half battery, however, opened fire on them, and, notwithstanding that they fought with valor and desperation, all were put to the rout.

This fight took place outside the town. Inside there was an attempt at insurrection on the part of the Mussulmans, who hoisted the green flag, but this was soon quelled. From that time, and throughout the rest of the revolt, Benares was troubled no more, even at the time when the insurrection appeared triumphant in the province of the west.

These details Banks gave me as our boat glided slowly over the water of the Ganges.

" My dear fellow," he remarked, " you are now going to pay your first visit to Benares. But although this city is so ancient, you must not expect to find in it any monument more than three hundred years old. Don't be astonished at this. It is the consequence of those religious contests in which fire and sword has played such a lamentable part. But all the same, Benares is a very remarkable and curious town, and you will not regret an excursion to it."

We now stopped our boat at a suitable distance to allow us to gaze across a bay as blue as that of Naples, at the picturesque amphitheater of terraced houses and palaces descending to the water's edge, some of them projecting over the river, so that the waves constantly washed their base and appeared likely some day to undermine them. A pagoda of Chinese architecture, consecrated to Buddha—a perfect forest of towers, spires, and minarets—beautified the city, studded as it is with mosques and temples, the latter surmounted by the Lingam, one of the symbols of Siva, while the lofty Mohammedan mosque built by Aurungzebe crowned the marvelous panorama.

Instead of disembarking at one of the *ghâts,* or flights of stone steps leading from the banks of the river up to the terraces, Banks directed the boatman to take us first past the quay.

Here I found the scene at Gaya reproduced, though with a different landscape. Instead of the green forests of the

Phalgou, we had this holy city for a background. But the life part of the picture was much the same. Thousands of pilgrims covered the banks, the terraces, the stairs, and devoutly plunged into the stream, in rows of three or four deep. It must not be imagined that this bath was free. Sentries in red turbans, with sabers at their sides, stood on the lower steps of the *ghâts,* and exacted tribute, in company with industrious Brahmins, who sold chaplets, amulets, charms, and other religious articles.

But besides the pilgrims who bathed on their own account, there were also traders whose only business was to draw this most sacred water, and transport it to the distant parts of the peninsula. As a security, each phial is marked with the seal of the Brahmins. But in spite of this, fraud is carried on to a great extent, as the exportation of this miraculous liquid is so considerable.

" Perhaps," as Banks said to me, " all the water of the Ganges would not be sufficient to supply the wants of the faithful."

I asked if these bathers did not often meet with accidents, for no one seemed to try to prevent such a thing. There were no swimmers to prevent imprudent people from venturing too far into the rapid current.

" Accidents are indeed frequent," answered Banks; " but if the body of the devotee is lost, his soul is saved; therefore they do not concern themselves much about it."

" And crocodiles? " I added.

" Crocodiles," replied Banks, " usually keep their distance. All this noise terrifies them. These monsters are not to be feared so much as villains who dive under the water, seize women and children, and tear off their jewels. There is even a story about one of these wretches, who, by means of an artificial head, played the part of a crocodile for a long time, and made quite a little fortune by this profitable though dangerous trade. Finally, this impertinent intruder was devoured one day by a real alligator, and nothing was found of him but his head of tanned skin, floating on the surface of the water.

" There are also desperate fanatics who voluntarily seek death in the depths of the Ganges; and this they do with a curious species of refinement. Round their body they tie a chaplet of open but empty urns; gradually the water fills these vessels, and the devotee gently sinks down, amid the applause of the crowd."

Our boat at last landed us at the Manmenka Ghât. Here were arranged in layers the funeral piles on which the corpses of all those who in their lifetime had had any care for their future existence, were burned. In this sacred spot, cremation is eagerly sought for by the faithful, and these funeral piles burn night and day. Rich baboos of distant territories cause themselves to be carried to Benares as soon as they are attacked by an illness which they feel will prove fatal. Benares is unquestionably the best starting point for a journey to the other world. If the deceased has only to reproach himself with venial faults, his soul is wafted on the smoke of the Manmenka straight to the regions of eternal bliss. If, on the contrary, he has been a great sinner, his soul must go and inhabit the body of a Brahmin yet to be born, for the purpose of being regenerated. It is to be hoped that his second life will be exemplary, or he will be exposed to a third trial before he is finally admitted to share the delights of Brahma's heaven.

The rest of the day we devoted to exploring the town, its principal monuments, and its bazaars, lined with dark shops after the Arab fashion. Here they sold principally fine muslin of beautiful texture, and *kinkob,* a rich silk material, brocaded with gold, which is one of the principal products of the Benares industry. The streets were clean, but so narrow as almost to prevent the sun's rays from penetrating to the pavement. But although it was shady, the heat was stifling. I pitied the bearers of our palanquin, who yet seemed to make no complaint themselves.

However, it being an opportunity for the poor wretches to earn a few rupees was sufficient to give them strength and spirit. But a certain Hindoo, or rather Bengalee, with a keen eye and cunning expression, had no such reason for following us, as he did, the whole day, and without much attempt at concealment. As we landed at the Manmenka Ghât, I had been speaking to Banks, and uttered aloud the name of Colonel Munro. The Bengalee, who was watching our boat put in, gave an evident start. I did not at the time pay much attention to this, but recalled the circumstance when I perceived the spy incessantly dogging our steps. He only left us to appear again, either before or behind, a few minutes later. Whether friend or foe I could not tell, but that he was a man to whom the name of Colonel Munro was not indifferent was perfectly evident.

Our palanquin soon stopped at the foot of a staircase of a hundred steps, leading from the quay to the mosque of Aurungzebe. Formerly the devotees only ascended these Santa Scala on their knees, after the manner of the faithful at Rome; but that was when a magnificent Hindoo temple dedicated to Vishnu was on the site now occupied by the mosque of the conqueror.

I should much have liked to survey Benares from the top of one of the minarets of this mosque, the construction of which is regarded as a perfect triumph of architecture. Although one hundred and thirty-two feet in height, they have scarcely the diameter of a manufactory chimney, and yet the cylindrical shaft contains a winding stair. No one is allowed to ascend, and there is a reason for this prohibition: the two minarets are already sensibly out of the perpendicular, and unless endowed with the vitality of the Tower of Pisa, they will end by coming down some day.

On leaving the mosque of Aurungzebe, I found the Bengalee waiting for us at the door. This time I looked fixedly at him, and he lowered his eyes. Before drawing Banks' attention to this incident, I wished to ascertain if this individual would persist in his suspicious behavior, and for the present I said nothing.

You may count pagodas and mosques by hundreds in this marvelous town of Benares. Also splendid palaces—the most beautiful of which is unquestionably that of the King of Nagpore. Few rajahs indeed neglect to secure a house in the Holy City, and always come to it at the time of the great religious festivals of Mela.

I could not attempt to visit all these buildings during the little time we had at our disposal. I contented myself, therefore, with making a visit to the temple of Bicheshwar, in which is set up the Lingam of Siva. This—a shapeless stone, looked upon as part of the body of this the most savage god of the Hindoo mythology—covers a well, the stagnant waters of which possess, they say, miraculous virtues. I saw also the Mankarnika, or sacred fountain, where devotees bathe, to the great profit of the Brahmins; then the Manmundir, an observatory built two hundred years ago by the Emperor Akbar.

I had heard of a palace of monkeys, which all tourists never failed to visit. A Parisian naturally imagined himself about to behold something like the celebrated monkey-house in the Jardin des Plantes. But there was nothing of the sort. I found that this palace was a temple, called the Dourga-Khound, situated a little beyond the outskirts. The monkeys were by no means shut up in cages. They roamed freely through the courts, leaping from wall to wall, climbing to the tops of enormous mango-trees, noisily disputing over the parched corn brought by their visitors, and to which they are very partial.

There, as everywhere else, the Brahmins, who keep the Dourga-Khound, levy a small contribution, which evidently makes this profession one of the most lucrative in India.

It is needless to say that we were rather done up by the heat, as toward evening we began to think of returning to Steam House. We had breakfasted and dined at Secrole, in one of the best hotels of that English town, and yet I must say that the cuisine made us regret that of Monsieur Parazard.

As we were stepping into our boat to return to the right bank of the Ganges, I again caught sight of the Bengalee a short distance from us. A skiff containing a Hindoo was waiting for him, into which he got. Did he mean to cross the river, and so follow us to our encampment? This looked suspicious.

" Banks," said I in a low tone, pointing to the Bengalee, " that fellow is a spy, who has followed us every step of the way."

" I have seen him," returned Banks; " and I also noticed that it was the colonel's name, uttered by you, which first put him on the alert."

" Isn't there any—? " I said.

" No; leave him alone," said Banks. " Better not to let him know that he is suspected—besides, he has gone now."

In fact, the Bengalee's canoe had already disappeared among the numerous vessels of all shapes and sizes covering the dark waters of the Ganges. Banks turned to our boatman. " Do you know that man? " he asked, in a tone of affected indifference.

"No; this is the first time I have seen him," replied the native.

On reaching our encampment, we found Colonel Munro and Sergeant McNeil already there. Banks asked the sergeant if anything had happened during our absence. "Nothing," was the reply.

"You haven't seen any suspicious-looking person prowling about?"

"No, Mr. Banks. Have you any reason for suspecting——?"

"We have been dogged during our excursion in Benares," answered the engineer, "and I did not like the look of the fellow who followed us."

"The spy was——?"

"A Bengalee, who was put on the alert by the mention of Colonel Munro's name."

"What could the man want with us?"

"I don't know, McNeil. We must keep a lookout."

"We will!" returned the sergeant emphatically.

CHAPTER IX

ALLAHABAD

The distance between Benares and Allahabad is about eighty miles, and the road lies on the right bank of the Ganges between the railway and the river. Storr had loaded the tender with a good supply of coal, so that the elephant would have no lack of nourishment for several days. Well cleaned—I had almost said well curry-combed—as bright as if he had just come out of the workshop, he impatiently waited the moment for starting. He didn't exactly paw the ground, but the quivering of the wheels betrayed the tension of the steam which filled his lungs of steel. Our train started early in the morning of the 24th, at a rate of three to four miles an hour.

The night passed quietly, and we saw nothing of the Bengalee.

I may as well mention here, once for all, that each day's program, of getting up, going to bed, breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and siestas, was carried out with military exactitude. Our life in the Steam House went on as regularly as in the bungalow at Calcutta. The landscape was constantly changing under our eyes, without any perceptible movement of our house. We soon grew accustomed to our life, as do passengers on board an ocean steamer, though we had nothing monotonous, for, unlike the sea, our horizon was ever changing.

Toward eleven o'clock we caught sight, on the plain, of a curious mausoleum, erected in honor of two holy personages of Islam, "Cassim-Soliman," father and son. Half an hour after this we passed the important fortress of Chunar, an impregnable rock crowned by picturesque ramparts, and rising perpendicularly one hundred and fifty feet above the river.

Of course we halted to pay this place a visit, as it is one of the most important fortresses in the valley of the Ganges.

It is a very economical place with regard to expenditure of powder and bullets, for when an assaulting column endeavors to scale the walls, it is immediately crushed by an avalanche of rocks and stones kept for the purpose.

At its foot lies the town which bears its name, the houses coquettishly peeping out from among the verdure.

In Benares, as we have seen, there exist many privileged places, which are considered by the Hindoos as the most sacred in the world. If one began to count, the number scattered over the peninsula would amount to hundreds. Chunar possesses one of these miraculous spots. Here you are shown a marble slab, to which some god or other comes regularly to take his daily siesta. It is true that he is invisible, so we did not stop see him.

About two o'clock next day we forded the little river Tonsa, at that time only containing a foot of water, and by the evening were encamped at the end of one of the suburbs of Allahabad.

On the next day Banks again wished to accompany me during the few hours I was able to spend in Allahabad. One might easily have spent three days in exploring the three towns of which it is composed, but it is less curious than Benares, although numbered among the holy cities.

There is really nothing to say about the Hindoo part of the town. It is simply a mass of low houses, separated by narrow streets, shaded by magnificent tamarind-trees.

Of the English town and cantonments, there is not much to be said either. The fine well-planted avenues, wealthy habitations, and wide squares, all look as if the town was destined to become a great capital.

Allahabad is situated in a vast plain, bounded on the north and south by the double course of the Jumna and Ganges. It is called the "Plain of Almsgiving," because the Hindoo princes have at all times come here to perform works of charity. M. Rousselet, quoting a passage from the "Life of Hionen Thsang," says, "It is more meritorious to give away one piece of money in this place, than a hundred thousand elsewhere."

The fort of Allahabad is well worth a visit. It is constructed to the west of the great Almsgiving Plain, from which its high granite walls stand boldly out. In the middle of the fort is a palace, now used as an arsenal, though formerly the favorite residence of the Sultan Akbar. In one of the corners is the Lat of Feroze Schachs, a superb monolith thirty-six feet in height, supporting a lion. Not far off is a little temple, which no Hindoo can visit, as they are refused admission into the fort, although it is one of the most sacred places in the world.

Banks told me that the fort of Allahabad also has its legend, which reminds one of the story relative to the reconstruction of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. When the Sultan wished to build this fort, it seems that the stones turned very refractory. Directly a wall was built, it tumbled itself down again. The oracle was consulted. The oracle replied, as usual, that a voluntary victim must be offered to remove this spell.

A Hindoo offered himself as a holocaust; he was sacrificed, and the fort was soon finished. This man was called Brog, and that is the reason why the town is still designated by the double name of Brog-Allahabad.

Banks took us to the deservedly celebrated gardens of Khousroo. Here numerous Mohammedan mausoleums stand under the shade of beautiful tamarinds. One of them is the last resting-place of the sultan from whom these gardens take their name. On one of the white marble walls is printed the palm of an enormous hand. This was pointed out to us with a complacency which was lacking in the exhibition of the sacred impressions at Gaya. It is true this was not the print of a god's foot, but that the hand of a simple mortal, the great nephew of Mahomet.

During the insurrection of 1857, blood flowed as freely in Allahabad as in the other towns of the Ganges valley. The fight between the English and the mutineers on the drill-ground at Benares caused the rising of the native troops, and in particular the revolt of the 6th regiment of the Bengal army. Eight ensigns were massacred to begin with; but thanks to the energetic conduct of some European artillerymen who were at Chunar, the sepoys ended by laying down their arms.

It was a more serious affair in the cantonments. The natives rose, threw open the prisons, pillaged the docks, and set fire to the European houses. In the midst of all this, Colonel Neil, who had re-established order at Benares, arrived with his own regiment and a hundred fusiliers belonging to a Madras regiment. He retook the bridge of boats, seized the suburbs of the town, dispersed the members of a provisional government installed by a Mussulman, and very soon again became master of the province.

During our short excursions in Allahabad, Banks and I carefully watched to see if we were followed there as we had been in Benares, but saw nothing to arouse our suspicions.

" Never mind," said the engineer, " we must all the same be on our guard. I should have liked to have traveled incognito, for Colonel Munro's name is too well known among the natives of this province."

At six o'clock we returned to dinner. Sir Edward, who had left the encampment for an hour or two, had also come back, and was waiting for us, as was Captain Hood, who had been visiting some of his old comrades in the cantonment.

I observed to Banks that Colonel Munro seemed not more sad, but more anxious than was his wont. There appeared in his eyes a latent fire that tears should surely long ago have extinguished.

" You are right," answered Banks; " there is something the matter. What can have happened? "

" Suppose you ask McNeil? " said I.

" Ah, yes, perhaps he will know."

And leaving the drawing-room, the engineer opened the door of the sergeant's cabin.

He was not there.

"Where is McNeil?" asked Banks of Goûmi, who was getting ready to wait at table.

"He has left the camp," replied Goûmi.

"How long?"

"He went nearly an hour ago, by Colonel Munro's orders."

"You do not know where he has gone?"

"No, sahib, and I cannot tell why he went."

"Nothing fresh has happened here since we left?"

"Nothing, sahib."

Banks returned, and telling me of the sergeant's absence for a reason that no one knew, he repeated, "I do not know what it is, but very certainly there is something up. We must wait and see."

Every one now sat down to table. Ordinarily, Colonel Munro took part in the conversation during meals. He liked to hear us relate our adventures and excursions, and was interested in all we had been doing during the day.

I always took care to avoid speaking of anything that could in the slightest degree remind him of the mutiny. I think that he perceived this; but whether he appreciated it or not, it was sometimes difficult enough to maintain this reserve, especially when we talked of towns such as Benares and Allahabad.

During dinner, on the evening of which I speak, I feared being obliged to speak of Allahabad. I need not have been afraid, however. Colonel Munro questioned neither Banks nor myself about the occupation of our day. He remained mute during the whole of dinner, and as time went on his preoccupation visibly increased. He cast frequent glances along the road which led to the cantonments, and several times was evidently on the point of rising from table, the better to see in that direction. It was plain that he was impatiently awaiting the return of Sergeant McNeil.

Our meal was dull enough. Hood looked interrogatively at Banks, as if to ask him what was the matter, but Banks knew no more than he did.

When dinner at last came to an end, Colonel Munro, instead of as usual lying down to take a nap, stepped down from the veranda, went a few paces along the road, gave one long look down it; then, returning toward us, "Banks, Hood, and you, too, Maucler," he said, "will you accompany me as far as the nearest houses of the cantonments?"

We all immediately rose and followed the colonel, who walked slowly on without uttering a word. After proceeding thus for about a hundred paces, Sir Edward stopped before a post standing on the right hand side of the road, and having a notice stuck on it. "Read that," he said.

It was the placard, already more than two months old, which put a price on the head of Nana Sahib, and gave notice of his presence in the presidency of Bombay.

Banks and Hood could scarcely conceal their disappointment. While still in Calcutta, and during the journey, they had so managed, up to the present time, that this notice had never come under the colonel's eyes. But now a vexatious chance had baffled all their precautions.

"Banks!" said Sir Edward, seizing the engineer's hand, "did you know of this notice?"

Banks made no reply.

"You knew two months ago," continued the colonel, "of this announcement that Nana Sahib was in the presidency of Bombay, and yet you said nothing to me."

Banks remained silent, not knowing what to say.

"Well, yes, colonel," exclaimed Captain Hood, "we did know of it, but what was the use of telling you? Who was to prove that the announcement is true, and what was the good of bringing to your mind those painful recollections which do you so much harm?"

"Banks," cried Colonel Munro, his face, as it were, transformed, "have you forgotten that it is my right, that I of all men must do justice on that wretch? Know this! when I consented to leave Calcutta, I did so, because this journey would take me to the north of India, because I never even for a single day believed in the death of Nana Sahib, and because I will never relinquish my purpose of vengeance. In setting out with you, I had but one idea, one hope. For the attainment of my purpose, on the chances of the journey, and the aid of heaven, I had relied. I was right in so doing. Heaven directed me to this notice. It is in the south, and not in the north, that Nana Sahib must be sought for. Be it so; I shall go south."

We had not been mistaken in our fears. It was but too true. A fancy—nay more, a fixed idea—still governed the mind of Colonel Munro. He had just disclosed it to us.

"Munro," returned Banks, "if I said nothing to you about this, it was because I did not believe in Nana Sahib's being in the Bombay Presidency. It is probable that the authorities have been once more mistaken. In fact, that notice is dated the 6th of March, and since that time nothing has been heard to corroborate the statement of the appearance of the nabob."

At first Colonel Munro made no answer to the engineer's observation. He took another look along the road, then said, "My friends, I am about to hear the latest news. McNeil has gone to Allahabad with a letter for the governor. In a few minutes I shall know whether Nana Sahib did indeed reappear in one of the western provinces; whether he is there still, or whether he has again been lost sight of."

"And if he has been seen, if the fact is indisputable, what shall you do, Munro?" asked Banks, grasping the colonel's hand.

"I shall go," replied Sir Edward, "as is my duty, where justice leads me."

"That is positively decided, Munro?"

"Yes, Banks, positively. You must continue your travels without me, my friends—I shall take the train to Bombay this evening."

"But not alone," responded the engineer, turning toward us. "We will accompany you, Munro."

"Yes, yes, colonel," exclaimed Captain Hood. "We shall certainly not let you go without us. Instead of hunting wild beasts, we will hunt villains."

"Colonel Munro," I added, "will you allow me to join the captain as one of your friends?"

"Yes, Maucler," replied Banks; "this very evening we will leave Allahabad."

"It is needless," said a grave voice behind us.

We all turned, and beheld Sergeant McNeil standing with a newspaper in his hand. "Read, colonel," said he. "This is what the governor desired me to show you."

Sir Edward took the paper, and read as follows:

"The Governor of the Bombay Presidency requests the public to take notice that the proclamation of the 6th of

March, respecting the nabob, Dandou Pant, must now be considered as canceled. Nana Sahib was yesterday attacked in the defiles of the Sautpourra mountains, where he had taken refuge with his band, and was killed in the skirmish. The body has been identified by the inhabitants of Cawnpore and Lucknow. A finger is wanting on the left hand, and it is known that Nana Sahib had one amputated at the time when his mock obsequies were celebrated to make people believe in his death. The kingdom of India has now nothing further to dread from the machinations of the cruel nabob who has cost her so much blood."

Colonel Munro read these lines in a hollow voice; then the paper fell from his hands.

We remained silent. Nana Sahib's death, now indisputable, delivered us from all fear as to the future.

Colonel Munro said nothing for some minutes, but stood with his hand pressed over his eyes, as if to efface all frightful recollections. Then, "When should we leave Allahabad?" he asked.

"To-morrow, at daybreak," replied the engineer.

"Banks," resumed Sir Edward, "could we not stop for a few hours at Cawnpore?"

"You wish it?"

"Yes, Banks, I should like it—I must see Cawnpore once again—for the last time."

"We shall be there in a couple of days," replied the engineer, quietly.

"And after that?" said the colonel.

"After that," answered Banks, "we shall continue our expedition to the north of India."

"Yes, to the north! to the north!" said the colonel, in a tone which stirred me to the depths of my heart.

In truth, it was likely that Sir Edward Munro still entertained some doubt as to the real result of that last skirmish between Nana Sahib and the English. Yet what reason could he have for disbelieving such evidence as this? The future alone could explain.

CHAPTER X

VIA DOLOROSA

The kingdom of Oude was formerly one of the most important, as it is still one of the richest, provinces in India. It had many sovereigns—some strong, some feeble. The weakness of one of them, named Wajid Ali Shah, brought about the annexation of his kingdom to the dominions of the Company, on the 6th of February, 1857.

This took place only a few months before the outbreak of this insurrection, and it was in Oude that the most frightful massacres were committed, and followed by the most terrible reprisals. The names of two cities remain in mournful celebrity ever since that time: Lucknow and Cawnpore.

Lucknow is the capital; Cawnpore one of the principal towns of the ancient kingdom. We reached the latter place on the morning of the 29th of May, having followed the right bank of the Ganges through a level plain covered with immense fields of indigo. For two days we had traveled at a speed of three leagues an hour, and were now nearly one thousand " kilometers " from Calcutta.

Cawnpore is a town of about 60,000 inhabitants. It occupies a strip of land about five miles in length, on the right bank of the Ganges. There is a military cantonment, in which are quartered 7,000 men. The traveler would vainly seek for anything worthy of his attention in this city, although it is of very ancient origin; anterior, they say, to the Christian era. No sentiment of curiosity, then, brought us to Cawnpore. The wishes of Sir Edward alone led us thither.

Early on the morning of the 30th May we quitted our encampment, and Banks, Captain Hood, and I, followed the colonel and Sergeant McNeil along that melancholy route on which the points of mournful interest were for the last time to be revisited.

I will here repeat the facts, as related to me by Banks, which it is necessary should be known. Cawnpore, which was garrisoned by reliable troops at the time of the annexation of the kingdom of Oude, contained at the outbreak of the mutiny no more than two hundred and fifty British soldiers to three regiments of native infantry (the 1st, 53d, and 56th), two regiments of cavalry, and a battery of Bengal artillery. There were in the place besides a considerable number of Europeans, workmen, clerks, merchants, etc., with 850 women and children of the 32d regiment, which garrisoned Lucknow.

Colonel Munro had been living at Cawnpore for several years. And it was there he met the lady who became his wife. Miss Hanlay was a charming young Englishwoman, high-spirited, intelligent, and noble-minded, worthy of the love of such a man as the colonel, who adored her. She and her mother resided in a bungalow near Cawnpore, and there, in 1855, she was married to Edward Munro.

Two years afterward, in 1857, when the first acts of rebellion occurred at Meerut, Colonel Munro had to rejoin his regiment at a day's notice. He was therefore obliged to leave his wife with his mother-in-law at Cawnpore, but thinking that place unsafe, he charged them to make immediate preparations for departure to Calcutta. Alas, his fears were but too surely justified by what followed. The departure of Mrs. Hanlay and Lady Munro was delayed, and the consequences were fatal. The unfortunate ladies were unable to leave Cawnpore.

Sir Hugh Wheeler was then in command of the division —an upright, honorable soldier, who was but too soon to fall a victim to the crafty designs of Nana Sahib. The nabob at that time occupied his castle of Bithour, ten miles from Cawnpore, and affected to be on the best possible terms with the Europeans.

"You are aware, my dear Maucler," continued Banks, "that the first outbreak of the insurrection took place at Meerut and Delhi. The news reached Cawnpore on the 4th of May. And on the same day the 1st regiment of sepoys exhibited symptoms of hostility. At this moment Nana Sahib came forward with an offer of his services to the Government. General Wheeler was so ill-advised as to place confidence in the good faith of this villain and knave, who immediately sent his own soldiers to occupy the Treasury Buildings.

"That same day an irregular regiment of sepoys, on its way to Cawnpore, mutinied and massacred its British officers at the very gates of the town. The danger then became evident in all its magnitude. General Wheeler gave orders that all Europeans should take refuge in the barracks, where were quartered the women and children of the 32d regiment, then at Lucknow. These barracks were situated at the point nearest the road from Allahabad, by which alone succor could arrive.

"It was there that Lady Munro and her mother were shut up; and throughout this imprisonment she manifested the utmost sympathy for her companions in misfortune, tending them with her own hands, assisting them with money, encouraging them by words and example; in short, showing herself to be, as I have told you she was, a noble, heroic woman.

"The arsenal was soon after confided to a guard of the soldiers of Nana Sahib. Then the traitor displayed the standard of rebellion; and, on the 7th of June, the sepoys, at their own desire, attacked the barracks, which was not defended by more than three hundred men who could be relied upon. They held out bravely, however, against the besiegers' fire, beneath showers of projectiles; suffering sickness of all sorts, dying of hunger and thirst, for the supply of provisions was insufficient, and they had no water, because the wells dried up.

"This resistance lasted until the 27th of June. Nana Sahib then proposed a capitulation, and General Wheeler committed the unpardonable mistake of signing it, notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of Lady Munro, who besought him to continue the contest.

"In consequence of this capitulation, about five hundred persons—men, women, and children—Lady Munro and her mother being of the number, were embarked in boats, which were to descend the Ganges, and convey them to Allahabad. Scarcely were these unmoored, than the sepoys opened fire; bullets and grape-shot fell upon them like hail. Some of the boats sank, others were burned; one alone succeeded in passing several miles down the river. In this boat were Lady Munro and her mother, and for an instant they could believe themselves saved. But the soldiers of the Nana pursued, overtook, captured, and brought them back to the cantonments.

"There the prisoners were divided. All the men were put to death at once. The women and children were added to the number of those who had not been massacred on the 27th of June. These two hundred victims, for whom protracted agony was reserved, were shut up in a bungalow, the name of which, Bibi-Ghar, will ever be held in sorrowful remembrance."

"How did these horrible details become known to you?" I inquired.

"They were related to me," replied Banks, "by an old sergeant of the 32d. This man escaped by a miracle, and was sheltered by the Rajah of Raïschwarah, a province of the kingdom of Oude, who received him as well as some other fugitives with the greatest humanity."

"And Lady Munro and her mother?—what became of them?"

"My dear friend," replied Banks, "we have no direct information of what happened, but it is only too easy to conjecture. In fact, the sepoys were masters of Cawnpore, and they were so until the 15th of July, during which period (nineteen days, which were like so many years!) the unhappy victims were in hourly expectation of succor, which only came too late. General Havelock was marching from Calcutta to the relief of Cawnpore, and, after repeatedly defeating the mutineers, he entered it on the 17th of July.

"But two days previously, upon hearing that the British troops had crossed the river Pandou-Naddi, Nana Sahib resolved to signalize the last hours of his occupation of Cawnpore by frightful massacres. No fate seemed to him too severe for the invaders of India. Some prisoners, who had shared the captivity of the prisoners at Bibi-Ghar, were brought, and murdered before his eyes.

"The crowd of women and children remained, and among them Lady Munro and her mother. A platoon of the 6th regiment of sepoys received orders to fire upon them through the windows of Bibi-Ghar. The execution began, but not being carried out quickly enough to please the Nana, who was about to be compelled to beat a retreat, this sanguinary prince sent for Mussulman butchers to assist the soldiery. It was the butchery of a slaughter-house.

"Next day, the children and women, dead or alive, were flung into a well; and when Havelock's soldiers came up, this well, charged to the brim with corpses, was still reeking!

"Then began the reprisals. A certain number of mutineers, accomplices of Nana Sahib, had fallen into the hands of General Havelock. And the following day he issued that terrible Order of the Day, the terms of which I shall never forget:—

" ' The well in which lie the mortal remains of the poor women and children massacred by order of the miscreant Nana Sahib, is to be filled up and carefully covered over in the form of a tomb. A detachment of European British soldiers, under an officer's command, will fulfill the pious duty this evening. But the house and rooms in which the massacre took place are not to be cleansed by the fellow-countrymen of the victims. The officer is to understand that every drop of innocent blood is to be removed by the tongues of the mutineers condemned to die. After having heard the sentence of death, each man is to be conducted to the place of the massacre, and forced to cleanse a portion of the floors. Care must be taken to render the task as repulsive as possible to the religious sentiments of the condemned men; and the lash, if necessary, must not be spared. This being accomplished, the sentence will be carried out on gallows erected near the house.' "

" This," continued Banks, with deep emotion, " was the order for the day. It was executed in all particulars. But it could not restore the lost! And when, two days afterward, Colonel Munro arrived and sought for tidings or traces of Lady Munro and her mother, he found nothing —nothing! "

All this was related to me by Banks before reaching Cawnpore. And now it was toward the scene of these horrors that the colonel directed his steps. But first he revisited the bungalow where Lady Munro had lived in her youth, and where he had seen her for the last time.

It was situated a little outside the suburbs, not far from the line of military cantonments. Nothing of the house remained but ruins, blackened gables, fallen trees decaying on the ground; all was desolation, for the colonel had permitted nothing to be repaired. After the lapse of ten years the bungalow remained just as it had been left by the incendiaries.

We spent an hour in this desolate place. Sir Edward moved silently among ruins which awoke so many recollections, sometimes closing his eyes, as if in thought, he recalled the happy existence which nothing could ever restore to him. At length hastily, and as if doing violence to his feelings, he returned to us, and left the house.

We almost began to hope this visit would satisfy him. But no! Sir Edward Munro had resolved to drain to the dregs the bitterness of the sorrow which overwhelmed him in this fatal town. He wished to go to the barracks where his heroic wife had devoted herself so nobly to the care of those who endured there the horrors of a siege.

These barracks stood in the plain outside the town, and a church was being built on the spot. In order to reach it, we followed a macadamized road shaded by fine trees, and among the unfinished new buildings we could distinguish remains of the brick walls which had formed part of the works of defense raised by General Wheeler.

After Colonel Munro had long gazed motionless and in silence upon the ruins of the barracks, he turned to go toward Bibi-Ghar, but Banks, unable to restrain himself, seized his arm, as though to arrest his steps.

Sir Edward looked steadfastly in his face, and said in a terribly calm voice, "Let us proceed."

"Munro! I beseech of you!"

"Then I will go alone."

There was no resisting him. We went toward Bibi-Ghar, which is approached through gardens very well laid out, and planted with fine trees. The building is of octagonal form, and has a colonnade in Gothic style, which surrounds the place where was the well, now filled up and closed in by a casing of stone. This forms a kind of pedestal on which stands a white marble statue representing the Angel of Pity, one of the last works due to the chisel of the sculptor Marochetti.

It was Lord Canning, Governor-General of India during the fearful insurrection of 1857, who caused this monument to be erected. It was constructed from the design of Colonel Yule, of the engineers, who himself wished to have defrayed all the expenses. Here Sir Edward Munro could no longer restrain his tears. He fell on his knees beside the statue; while Sergeant McNeil, who was close beside him, wept in silence; and we, in the deepest pain, stood looking on, powerless to console this unfathomable grief.

At length Banks, aided by McNeil, succeeded in drawing our friend away from the spot, and I thought of the words traced with his bayonet by one of Havelock's soldiers on the stone brink of the well:

"Remember Cawnpore!"

CHAPTER XI

THE MONSOON

At eleven o'clock we returned to the encampment, anxious to leave Cawnpore as quickly as possible; but our engine required some trifling repairs, and it was impossible to do so before the following morning.

Part of a day, then, was at my disposal. I considered that I could not employ it better than by visiting Lucknow, as Banks did not intend to pass through that place, where Colonel Munro would again have been brought in contact with reminiscences of the war. He was right. These vivid recollections were already far too poignant.

At midday, then, quitting Steam House, I took the little branch railway which unites Cawnpore to Lucknow. The distance is not more than twenty leagues, and in a couple of hours I found myself in this important capital of the kingdom of Oude, of which I wished merely to obtain a glance, or, as I might say, an impression. I soon perceived the truth of what I had heard respecting the great buildings of Lucknow, built during the reigns of the Mohammedan emperors of the seventeenth century.

A Frenchman, named Martin, a native of Lyons, and a common soldier in the army of Lally-Tollendal, became, in 1730, a favorite with the king. He it was who designed, and in fact may be called the architect of, the so-called marvels of the capital of Oude.

The Kaiser Bagh, or official residence of the sovereigns, is a whimsical and fantastic medley of every style of architecture which could possibly emanate from the imagination of a corporal, and is a most superficial structure. The interior is nothing; all the labor has been lavished on the outside which is at once Hindoo, Chinese, Moorish, and—European. It is the same with regard to another smaller palace, called the Farid Bakch, which is likewise the work of Martin.

As to the Imâmbara, built in the midst of the fortress by

Kaifiatoulla, the greatest architect of India in the seventeenth century, it is really superb, and, bristling with its hundreds of bell-towers, has a grand and imposing effect!

I could not leave Lucknow without seeing the Constantine Palace, which is another of the original performances of the French corporal, and bears his name. I also wished to visit the adjacent garden, called Secunder Bagh, where hundreds of sepoys were executed for having violated the tomb of the humble soldier of fortune before they abandoned the town.

Another French name besides that of Martin is honored at Lucknow. A non-commissioned officer, formerly of the *Chasseurs d'Afrique,* named Duprat, so distinguished himself by his bravery during the mutiny, that the rebels offered to make him their leader. Duprat nobly refused, notwithstanding the promises of wealth held out to tempt him, and the threats with which he was menaced when he stood firm. He remained faithful to the English. But the sepoys, who had failed to make him a traitor, directed against him their special vengeance, and he was slain in an encounter. "Infidel dog!" they had said on his refusal to join them, "we will have thee in spite of thyself!" And they had him; but only when he was dead!

The names of these two French soldiers were united in the reprisals; for the sepoys who had insulted the tomb of the one, and prepared the grave of the other, were ruthlessly put to death!

At length—having admired the magnificent parks which encircle this great city of 500,000 inhabitants as with a belt of verdure and flowers, and having ridden on elephant-back through the principal streets, and the fine boulevard of Hazrat Gaudj—I took the train, and returned to Cawnpore.

Next morning, the 31st of May, we resumed our route.

"Now then!" cried Captain Hood; "we are done at last with your Allahabads, your Cawnpores, Lucknows, and the rest, for which I care about as much as I do for a blank cartridge!"

"Yes, Hood, we have got through all that," replied Banks; "and now for the north, toward which we are to travel almost in a direct line, to the base of the Himalayas."

"Bravo!" resumed the captain. "What I call real India is not the provinces, crammed with native towns and swarming with people, but the region where live in freedom my friends the elephants, lions, tigers, panthers, leopards, bears. bisons, and serpents. That is, in reality, the only habitable part of the whole peninsula! You will see that it is so, Maucler, and you will have no reason to regret the valley of the Ganges!"

"In your society I can regret nothing, my friend," replied I.

"There are, however," said Banks, "some very interesting towns in the northwest; such as Delhi, Agra, and Lahore. . . . "

"Oh! my dear fellow! who ever heard of those miserable little places!" cried Hood.

"Miserable, indeed!" replied Banks. "Let me tell you, Hood, they are magnificent cities! And," he continued, turning to me, "we must manage to let you see them, Maucler, without throwing out the captain's plans for a sporting campaign."

"All right, Banks," said Hood; "but it is only from to-day that I consider our journey to have fairly commenced."

Presently, in a loud voice, he shouted, "Fox!"

"Here, captain!" answered his servant.

"Fox! get all the guns, rifles, and revolvers in good order!"

"They are so, sir."

"Prepare the cartridges."

"They are prepared."

"Is everything ready?"

"Quite ready, sir."

"Make everything still more ready."

"I will, sir."

"It won't be long before the thirty-eighth takes his place on your glorious list, Fox!"

"The thirty-eighth!" cried the man, with sudden light in his eye; "he won't have to complain of the nice little ball I am keeping ready for him!"

"Get along with you, Fox!"

With a military salute Fox faced about, and re-entered the gun-room.

I will now give an outline of the plan for the second part of our journey—a plan which only unforeseen events were to induce us to alter.

By this route we were to ascend the course of the Ganges toward the northwest for a long way, and then, turning sharp to the north, continue our way between two rivers; one a tributary of the great river, the other of the Goûmi. By this means a considerable number of streams would be avoided; and, passing by Biswah, we should rise in an oblique direction to the lower ranges of the mountains of Nepaul across the western part of Oude and Rohilkund.

This route had been ingeniously planned by Banks so as to surmount all difficulties. If coal were to fail in the north of Hindoostan, we were sure of having abundance of wood, and Behemoth would easily keep up any rate of speed we wished, on good roads through the grandest forests of the Indian Peninsula.

It was agreed that we might easily reach Biswah in six days, allowing for stoppages at convenient places, and time for the sportsmen of the party to exhibit their prowess. Besides Captain Hood, with Fox and Goûmi, could easily explore the vicinity of the roads, while Behemoth moved slowly along.

I was permitted to join them, although I was far from being an experienced hunter, and I occasionally did so.

I ought to mention that from the moment our journey took this new aspect, Colonel Munro became more sociable. Once fairly among the plains and forests beyond the valley of the Ganges, he appeared to resume the calm and even tenor of the life he used to lead at Calcutta, although it was impossible to suppose he could forget that we were gradually approaching the north of India, the region whither he was attracted as by an irresistible fatality. His conversation became more animated, both at meals and during the pleasant evening hours when we halted. As for McNeil, he seemed more gloomy than usual. Had the sight of Bibi-Ghar revived his hatred and thirst for vengeance?

"Nana Sahib killed?" said he to me one day. "No, no, sir; they have not done that for us yet!"

The first day of our journey passed without any incident worth recording. Neither Captain Hood nor Fox had a chance of aiming at any sort of animal. It was quite distressing, and so extraordinary that we began to wonder whether the apparition of a steam elephant could be keeping the savage dwellers of the plains at a distance. We passed several jungles, known to be the resort of tigers and other carnivorous feline creatures. Not one showed himself, although the hunters kept away full two miles from us.

They were forced to devote their energies, with Niger and Fan, to shooting for Monsieur Parazard's larder. He expected to be supplied regularly, and considered game for the table of paramount importance, most unreasonably despising the tigers and other beasts Fox talked to him about.

Disdainfully shrugging his shoulders, he would ask, "Are they good to eat?"

In the evening we fixed our camp beneath the shelter of a group of enormous banyans. The night was as tranquil as the day had been calm. No roars or howlings of wild animals broke the silence. The snorting of Behemoth himself was stilled.

When the camp-fires were extinguished, Banks, to please the captain, refrained from connecting the electric current by which the elephant's eyes would have become two powerful lamps. But nothing came of it. It was the same the two following nights. Hood was getting desperate.

"What can have happened to my kingdom of Oude?" repeated the captain. "It has been translated! There are no more tigers here than in the lowlands of Scotland!"

"Perhaps there may have been *battues* here lately," suggested Colonel Munro. "The animals may have emigrated *en masse*. But cheer up, my friend, and wait till we reach the foot of the mountains of Nepaul. You will find scope for your hunting instincts there!"

"It is devoutly to be hoped it may be so, colonel," replied Hood, sadly shaking his head. "Otherwise we may as well recast our balls, and make small shot of them!"

The 3d of June was one of the hottest days which we had endured. There was not a breath of wind, and had not the road been shaded by huge trees, I think we must have been literally baked in our rooms. It seemed possible that, in heat like this, wild animals did not care to quit their dens even during the night.

Next morning, at sunrise, the horizon to the westward for the first time appeared somewhat misty. We then had presented to our eyes a magnificent spectacle—the phenomenon of the mirage, which is called in some parts of India *seekote,* or castles in the air; and in others, *dessasur,* or illusion.

What we saw was not a visionary sheet of water, with curious effects of refraction, but a complete chain of low hills, crowned by castles of the most fantastic form, resembling the rocky heights of some Rhenish valley with their ancient fastnesses of the Margraves. In a moment we seemed transported not only to that romantic part of Europe, but into the Middle Ages five or six centuries back. This phenomenon was surprisingly clear, and gave us a strange sensation of absolute reality. So much so, that the gigantic elephant-engine, with all its apparatus of modern machinery, advancing toward the habitations of men of Europe, in the eleventh century, struck us as far more out of place and unnatural than when traversing, beneath clouds of vapor, the country of Vishnu and Brahma.

"We thank you, fair Lady Nature!" cried Captain Hood; "instead of the minarets and cupolas, mosques and pagodas, we have been accustomed to, you are spreading before us charming old towns and castles of feudal times!"

"How poetical you are this morning, Hood!" returned Banks. "Pray have you been reading romantic ballads lately?"

"Laugh away, Banks; quiz me as much as you like, but just look there! See how objects in the foreground are growing in size! The bushes are turning into trees, the hills into mountains, the——"

"Why the very cats will be tigers soon, won't they, Hood?"

"Ah, Banks! how jolly that would be! . . . There!" continued the captain, "my Rhenish castles are melting away; the town is crumbling to ruins, and we return to realities, seeing only a landscape in the kingdom of Oude, which the very wild animals have deserted."

The sun, rising above the eastern horizon, quickly dissipated the magical effects of refraction. The fortresses, like castles built of cards, sank down with the hills, which were suddenly transformed into plains.

"Well, now that the mirage has vanished, and with it Hood's poetic vein, shall I tell you, my friends," said Banks, "what the phenomenon presages?"

" Say on, great engineer ! " quoth the captain.

" Nothing less than a great change of weather," replied Banks. " The early days of June are usually marked by climacteric changes. The turn of the monsoon will bring the periodical rainy season."

" My dear Banks," said I, " let it rain as it will, we are snug enough here. Under cover like this I should prefer a deluge to heat such as——"

" All right, my dear friend, you shall be satisfied," returned he ; " I believe the rain is not far off, and we shall soon see the first clouds in the southwest."

Banks was right. Toward evening the western horizon became obscured by vapors, showing that the monsoon, as frequently happens, would commence during the night. These mists, charged with electricity, came across the peninsula from the Indian Ocean, like so many vast leathern bottles out of the cellars of Æolus, filled full of storm, tempest, and hurricane.

Other signs, well known to Anglo-Indians, were observed during the day. Spiral columns of very fine dust whirled along the roads, in a manner quite unlike that which was raised by our heavy wheels. They resembled a number of those tufts of downy wool which can be set in motion by an electrical machine. The ground might, therefore, be compared to an immense receiver in which for several days electricity had been stored up. This dust was strangely tinted with yellow, and had a most curious effect, each atom seeming to shine from a little luminous center. At times we appeared to be traveling through flames, harmless flames, it is true, though neither in color nor vivacity resembling the *ignis fatuus*.

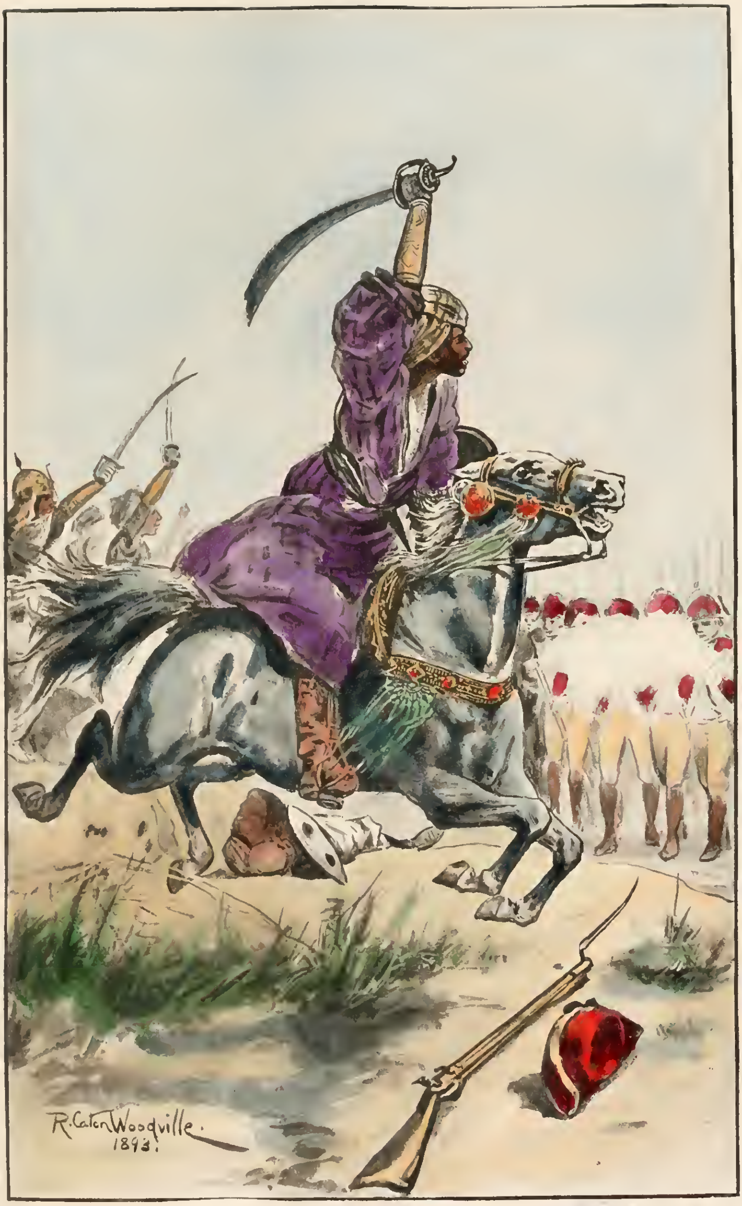
On this evening the encampment was arranged with greater care than usual, because, if the heat of the following day should prove equally overpowering, Banks proposed to prolong the halt, so as to pursue the journey during the night.

Colonel Munro was well pleased to think of spending some hours in this noble forest, so shady, so deeply calm. Everybody was satisfied with the arrangement ; some because they really required rest, others because they longed once more to endeavor to fall in with some animal worth firing at. It is easy to guess who those persons were.

NANA SAHIB'S DEFIANCE.

"The arsenal was soon after confided to a guard of the soldiers of Nana Sahib. Then the traitor displayed the standard of rebellion; and, on the 7th of June, the sepoys, at their own desire, attacked the barracks, which was not defended by more than three hundred men who could be relied upon. They held out bravely, however, against the besiegers' fire, beneath showers of projectiles; suffering sickness of all sorts, dying of hunger and thirst, for the supply of provisions was insufficient, and they had no water, because the wells dried up.

"This resistance lasted until the 27th of June. Nana Sahib then proposed a capitulation."—Page 198.


R. Caton Woodville.
1893.

"Fox! Goûmi! it is only seven o'clock!" cried Captain Hood, as soon as we came to a halt; "let's take a turn in the forest before it is quite dark. Will you come with us, Maucler?"

"My dear Hood," said Banks, before I had time to answer, "you had better not leave the encampment. The weather looks threatening. Should the storm burst, you would find some trouble in getting back to us. To-morrow, if we remain here, you can go."

"But to-morrow it will be daylight again," replied Hood. "The dark hours are what I want for adventure!"

"I know that, Hood; but the night which is coming on is very unpromising. Still, if you are resolved to go, do not wander to any distance. In an hour it will be very dark, and you might have great difficulty in making your way back to camp."

"Don't be uneasy, Banks; it is hardly seven o'clock, and I will only ask the colonel for leave of absence till ten."

"Go, if you wish it, my dear Hood," said Sir Edward, "but pray attend to the advice Banks has given you."

"All right, colonel." And the captain, with his followers, Fox and Goûmi, all well equipped for the chase, left the encampment, and quickly disappeared behind the thick trees.

Fatigued by the heat of the day, I remained in camp.

Banks gave orders that the engine fires should not, as they usually were, be completely extinguished. He wished to retain the power of quickly getting up steam, in case of an emergency.

Storr and Kâlouth betook themselves to their accustomed tasks, and attended to the supplies of wood and water; in doing so they found little difficulty, for a small stream flowed near our halting-place, and there was no lack of timber close at hand. M. Parazard diligently labored in his vocation, and, while putting aside the remains of one dinner, was busily planning the next.

As the evening continued pleasant, Sir Edward, Banks, McNeil, and I, went to rest by the borders of the rivulet, as the flow of its limpid waters refreshed the atmosphere, which even at this hour was suffocating.

The sinking sun shed a light which tinged with a color like dark-blue ink a mass of vapor which, through openings in the dense foliage, we could see accumulating in the zenith. These thick, heavily condensed clouds were stirred by no wind, but appeared to advance with a solemn motion of their own.

We remained chatting here till about eight o'clock. From time to time Banks rose to take a more extended view of the horizon, going toward the borders of the forest, which abruptly crossed the plain within a quarter of a mile of the camp. Each time on returning he looked uneasy, and only shook his head in reply to our questions.

At last we rose and accompanied him. Beneath the banyans it began to be dark already: I could see that an immense plain stretched westward up to a line of indistinct low hills, which were now almost enveloped in the clouds. The aspect of the heavens was terrible in its calm. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves of the highest trees. It was not the soft repose of slumbering nature, so often sung by poets, but the dull, heavy sleep of sickness. There was a restrained tension in the atmosphere, like condensed steam ready to explode.

And indeed the explosion was imminent. The storm-clouds were high, as is usually the case over plains, and presented wide curvilinear outlines, very strongly marked. They seemed to swell out, and, uniting together, diminished in number while they increased in size. Evidently, in a short time, there would be but one dense mass spread over the sky above us. Small detached clouds at a lower elevation hurried along, attracting, repelling, and crushing one against another, then, confusedly joining the general *mêlée,* were lost to view.

About half-past eight a sharp flash of forked lightning rent the gloom asunder. Sixty-five seconds afterward, a peal of thunder broke, and the hollow rumbling attendant to that species of lightning lasted about fifteen seconds.

" Sixteen miles," said Banks, looking at his watch. " That is almost the greatest distance at which thunder can be heard. But the storm, once unchained, will travel quickly; we must not wait for it. Let us go indoors, my friends."

"And what about Captain Hood? " said Sergeant McNeil.

" The thunder has sounded the recall," replied Banks. " It is to be hoped he will obey orders."

CHAPTER XII

THREE-FOLD LIGHT

HINDOOSTAN shares with certain parts of Brazil—among others with Rio Janeiro—the proud distinction of being more frequently visited by storms than any other country on the face of the globe.

I consulted the barometer as soon as we reëntered our apartments, and found that there had been a sudden fall of two inches in the mercurial column. This I pointed out to Colonel Munro.

"I am uneasy about Hood and his companions," he said. "A storm is imminent; night is coming on, and the darkness rapidly increases. Sportsmen are certain always to go farther than they say they will, and even than they intend. How are they to find their way back to us?"

"Madman that he is!" cried Banks; "it was impossible to make him listen to reason. They never ought to have gone!"

"That is true enough, Banks; but gone they are," replied Sir Edward; "all we can do now is to try and get them back."

"Can we signal to them, anyhow?" I asked.

"To be sure we can. I will light the electric lamps at once. That is a happy thought of yours, Maucler."

"Shall I go in search of Captain Hood, sir?" inquired McNeil.

"No, my old friend," replied the colonel. "You would not find him, and would be lost yourself."

Banks connected the electric current, and very soon Behemoth's eyes, like two blazing beacons, shot glaring light athwart the gloom of the banyan forest. It seemed certain that it would be visible to our sportsmen at a considerable distance.

At this moment a hurricane of great violence burst forth, rending the tree-tops, and sounding among the columns of banyan as though rushing through sonorous organ-pipes. It was indeed a sudden outburst. Showers of leaves and dead branches strewed the ground and rattled upon the roofs of our carriages.

We closed every window; but the rain did not yet fall.

"It is a species of typhoon," remarked Banks.

"Storr!" cried Banks to the engine-driver, "are the embrasures of the turret well closed?"

"Yes, Mr. Banks: there is nothing to fear there."

"Where is Kâlouth?"

"He is stowing away the last of the fuel in the tender."

"After this storm we shall only have to collect the wood. The wind is playing wood-cutter, and sparing us all the hard work," said the engineer. "Keep up the pressure, Storr, and get under shelter."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Are your tanks filled, Kâlouth?"

"Yes, sahib; the water-supply is made up."

"Well, come in, come in."

And the engine-driver and stoker hastened into the second carriage.

Flashes of lightning were now frequent, and thunder from the electric clouds kept up a sullen roar. The wind blew like scorching blasts from the mouth of a furnace. Occasionally we left the saloon, and went into the veranda. Gazing upward at the lofty summits of the stately banyans, the branches showed like fine black lace against the glowing background of the illumined sky. The incessant lightning was followed so rapidly by the peals of thunder, that the echoes had not time to die away; they were continually aroused by new and yet louder explosions. A deep, continuous roll was maintained, and only broken by those sharp detonations so well compared by Lucretius to the harsh screaming sound of paper when it is torn.

"I wonder the storm has not yet driven them in," said Colonel Munro.

"Perhaps Captain Hood has found some shelter in the forest," answered Sergeant McNeil. "He may be waiting in some cave or hollow tree, and will rejoin us in the morning. The camp will be here all right."

Banks shook his head somewhat doubtfully; he did not seem to share McNeil's opinion.

It was now about nine o'clock, and the rain began to fall with great force. It was mingled with enormous hailstones, and they pelted on the hollow roofs of Steam House with a noise like the roll of many drums. Even without the roar of the thunder, it was impossible to hear our own voices.

The air was full of the leaves of trees, whirling in all directions.

Banks did not attempt to speak, but pointed to the engine, directing our attention to the hailstones as they struck the metal sides of Behemoth. It was marvelous! Each stone struck fire in the contact, like flint and steel. It seemed as though showers of fiery metallic drops fell from the clouds, sending forth sparks as they struck the steel-plated engine. This proved how completely the atmosphere was saturated with electricity. Fulminating matter traversed it incessantly, till all space seemed to blaze with fire.

Banks signed to us to return to the saloon, and closed the veranda door. The darkness within the room contrasted strongly with the lightning which flashed without. We had presently a proof that we were ourselves strongly charged with the electric fluid, when, to our infinite astonishment, we perceived our saliva to be luminous. This phenomenon, rarely observed, and very alarming when it is so, has been described as "spitting fire."

The tumult of the heavens seemed every instant to increase, and the stoutest hearts beat thick and fast.

"And the others!" said Colonel Munro.

"Ah, yes, indeed—the others!" returned Banks.

We were horribly uneasy, yet could do nothing whatever to assist Captain Hood and his companions, who were of course in the utmost danger.

Even supposing they had found shelter, it could only be beneath trees, where accidents during storms are most imminent; and in the middle of a dense forest, how could they possibly maintain the distance of five or six yards from a vertical line, drawn from the extremity of the longest branches, which persons caught by storms in the neighborhood of trees are scientifically advised to do?

As these thoughts rushed through my mind, a peal of thunder, louder than any we had heard, burst directly over us. Steam House trembled throughout, and seemed to rise on its springs. I expected it to be overturned.

At the same time a strong odor filled the room—the penetrating smell of nitrous vapors.

"A thunderbolt has fallen!" said McNeil.

"Storr! Kâlouth! Parazard!" shouted Banks.

The three men came running into our apartment, while the engineer stepped out on the balcony.

"There!—look there!" he cried. An enormous banyan had been struck ten paces off, on the left of the road.

We could see everything distinctly by the glare of incessant lightning. The immense trunk had fallen across the neighboring trees, its sturdy saplings no longer able to sustain it. The whole length of its bark had been peeled off, and one long strip was waving about and lashing the air, as the force of the gale made it twist and twine like a serpent. It was seen that the bark must have been stripped off from base to summit, under the influence of electricity which had violently rushed upward.

"A narrow escape for Steam House," said the engineer. "We must remain here; we are safer than under those trees."

As he spoke we heard cries. Could it be our friends returning?

"It is Parazard's voice," said Storr.

It was indeed the cook, who, from the hinder balcony, was loudly calling to us. We hastened to join him.

What a sight met our eyes! Within a hundred yards of us, behind, and to the right of, the camp, the banyan forest was on fire!

Already the loftier tree-tops were disappearing behind a curtain of flame.

The conflagration advanced fiercely and with incredible velocity toward Steam House. The danger was imminent. The heat and long continuous drought had combined to make trees, grass, and bushes so dry and combustible that it was probable the entire forest would be devoured by the furious element.

As we witnessed its rapid spread and advance, we were convinced that, should it reach the place of our encampment, our entire equipage would, in a very few minutes, be destroyed.

We stood silent before this fearful danger.

Then, folding his arms, the colonel said quietly, "Banks, you must get us out of this scrape."

"Yes, I must, Munro," replied the engineer; "and since we cannot possibly put out this fire, we must run away from it."

"On foot?" exclaimed I.

"No; with our train all complete."

"And Captain Hood, sir?" said McNeil.

"We can do nothing for them. If they are not here immediately, we shall start without them."

"We must not abandon them," said the colonel.

"My dear Munro, let me get the train out of reach of the fire, and then we can search for them."

"Go on, then, Banks," replied Colonel Munro, who saw that the engineer was in the right.

"Storr!" cried Banks, "to your engine at once! Kâlouth! to your furnace—get the steam up! What pressure have we?"

"Two atmospheres," answered the engine-driver.

"Within ten minutes we must have four! Look sharp, my lads!"

The men did not lose a moment. Torrents of black smoke gushed from the elephant's trunk, meeting, and seeming to defy, the torrents of rain. Behemoth replied with whirling clouds of sparks to the vivid flashes which surrounded him; and draughts of air, whistling through the funnel, accelerated the combustion of the wood which Kâlouth heaped and piled on his furnace.

Sir Edward Munro, Banks, and I remained on the veranda in rear of the carriages, watching the progress of the forest-fire. Huge trees tottered and fell across this vast hearth; the branches cracked and crackled like musketry; the burning creepers twisted in all directions, and led the flames from tree to tree, thus spreading the devastation right and left.

Within five minutes the conflagration had advanced fifty yards, and the flames, torn and disheveled by the gale, shot upward to such a height that the lightning flashes pierced them in all directions.

"We must be off in five minutes," said Banks.

"At what a pace this fire goes!" I replied.

"We shall go faster!"

"If only Hood and his men were back!" said Sir Edward.

"The whistle!—sound the whistle!" cried Banks; "they may, perhaps, hear that."

And darting into the turret, he made the air resound with shrill screams, which were heard above the rumbling thunder, and must have sounded to an immense distance. The situation can better be imagined than described. Necessity urged to immediate flight, while it seemed impossible to forsake our absent friends.

Banks returned to the hinder balcony. The edge of the fire was less than fifty yards from Steam House. The heat became insufferable; we could scarcely breathe the burning air. Flakes of fire fell on the carriages, which seemed protected in a measure by the floods and torrents of rain; but these, we well knew, could not check the direct attack of the flames.

The engine continued to send forth piercing shrieks. It was all in vain. There were no signs of either Hood, Fox, or Goûmi.

The engine-driver came to Banks, "Steam is up, sir!"

"Go on, then, Storr!" replied Banks, "but not too fast. Just quick enough to keep up beyond the reach of the fire."

"Stop, Banks! wait a few minutes!" cried Colonel Munro, who could not bring himself to quit the spot.

"Three minutes, then, Munro," returned Banks coolly. "But in three minutes the back of the train will begin to burn."

Two minutes passed. It was impossible to stay in the veranda. The iron plating could not be touched, and began to burst open at the joints. It would be madness to stop another instant.

"Go on, Storr!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the sergeant.

"There they are! God be praised!" said the colonel.

To the right of the road appeared Captain Hood and Fox, supporting Goûmi in their arms as they approached the carriage door.

"Is he dead?"

"No; but struck by lightning, which smashed his gun, and has paralyzed his left leg."

"We should never have got back to camp but for your steam whistle, Banks!" said Hood.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the engineer.

Hood and Fox sprang on board the train, and Goûmi, who had not lost consciousness, was placed in his cabin.

It was half-past ten—Banks and Storr went into the turret, and the equipage moved steadily forward, amid the blaze of a three-fold light, produced by the burning forest, the electric lamps, and the vivid lightning flashing from the skies.

Then Captain Hood in a few words related what had happened during his excursion. They had seen no traces of any wild animals. As the storm approached, darkness overtook them much more rapidly than they expected. They were three miles from camp when they heard the first thunder-clap, and endeavored to return, but quickly found they had lost their way among the banyan trunks, all exactly alike, and without a path in any direction whatever.

The tempest increased in violence; they were far beyond the limits of the light diffused by our electric lamp, and had nothing to guide them as to our whereabouts, while the rain and hail fell in torrents, quickly penetrating the shelter of the leafy screen above them.

Suddenly, with a glare of intensely brilliant lightning, a burst of thunder broke over them, and Goûmi fell prostrate at Captain Hood's feet; the butt-end of his gun alone remained in his hand, for it was instantaneously stripped of every bit of metal. They believed him to be killed, but found that the electric fluid had not struck him directly, although his leg was paralyzed by the shock. Poor Goûmi could not walk a step, and had to be carried. His companions would not listen to his entreaties that they would leave him, escape themselves, and, if possible, return afterward to fetch him. They raised him between them, and, as best they could, pursued their doubtful way through the dark forest.

Thus for two hours they wandered about, hesitating, stopping, resuming their march, without the slightest clue to the direction in which to find the camp.

At last, to their infinite joy, they heard the shriek of the steam whistle. It was the welcome voice of Behemoth.

A quarter of an hour afterward they arrived, as we were on the point of quitting the halting-place, and only just in time!

And now, though the train ran rapidly along the broad, smooth forest-road, the fire kept pace with it, and the danger was rendered the more threatening by a change of wind, such as frequently occurs during these violent meteoric storms. Instead of blowing in flank, it now changed to the rear, and by its vehemence materially increased the advance of the flames, which perceptibly gained on the travelers. A cloud of hot ashes whirled upward from the ground, as from the mouth of some crater; and into this rained downward burning branches and flakes of fire. The conflagration really resembled, more than anything else, the advance of a stream of lava, rushing across the country, and destroying everything in its course.

Banks instantly perceived this, and, even if he had not, he would have felt the scorching blast as it swept by.

Our speed was increased, although some danger attended the doing so over an unknown path. The machine, however, would not proceed as fast as the engineer could have wished, owing to the road being so cut up and flooded by rain.

About half-past eleven another awful clap of thunder burst directly over our heads. A cry escaped us. We feared that Banks and Storr had both been struck in their howdah, from which they were guiding the train.

This calamity, however, had not befallen us. Our elephant only had been struck, the tip of one of his long, hanging ears having attracted the electric current. No damage resulted to the machine fortunately, and Behemoth seemed to try to reply to the peals of thunder by renewed and vigorous trumpetings.

"Hurrah!" cried Captain Hood. "Hurrah! An elephant of flesh and blood would have been done for by this time. But this old fellow braves thunder and lightning, and sticks at nothing. Go it, Behemoth; hurrah!"

For another half hour the train was still ahead. Banks, fearing to run it against some obstacle, only proceeded at a rate sufficient to keep us out of reach of the fire.

From the veranda, in which Colonel Munro, Hood, and I had placed ourselves, we could see passing, great shadows, bounding through the blaze of the fire and lightning. We soon discovered them to be those of wild animals.

As a precautionary measure, Captain Hood kept his gun ready, for it was possible that some terrified beast might leap on our train, in search of a shelter or refuge.

One huge tiger did indeed make the attempt, but in his prodigious spring he was caught by the neck between two branches of a banyan-tree, which, bending under the storm, acted like great cords, and strangled the animal. "Poor beast!" said Fox.

"These creatures," remarked Captain Hood, in an indignant manner, "are made to be killed by good, honest shot. You may well say poor beast."

Poor Captain Hood was indeed out of luck. When he wanted tigers, he couldn't find them; and now, when he was not looking for them, they passed within range, without his being able to get a shot at them, or were strangled before his eyes, like mice in a trap.

At one in the morning, our situation, dangerous as it had been before, became worse. The wind, which shifted about from one point of the compass to another, continually swept the fire across the road in front of us, so that now we were absolutely hemmed in.

The storm, however, had much diminished in violence, as is invariably the case when these pass above a forest, for there the trees gradually draw off and absorb the electric matter. But though the lightning and thunder were now less frequent, and though the rain fell with gentler force, yet the wind still roared with inconceivable fury.

At any cost it was absolutely necessary to hasten on, even at the risk of running into an obstacle, or of dashing over a precipice.

Banks directed our course with astonishing coolness, his eyes glued to the glass of the howdah, his hand ever on the regulator. Our way now led between two hedges of fire, and these we were forced to go through. On went Banks, resolutely and steadily, at the rate of five or six miles an hour.

I thought at last we should be obliged to stop, when before us lay a narrow passage, only fifty yards wide, with a roaring furnace on either side. Our wheels crunched over the glowing cinders, which strewed the soil, and a burning, stifling atmosphere enveloped us.

We were past!

At two in the morning a flash of lightning revealed to us the borders of the wood. Behind us lay a vast panorama of flames, which would spread on, and never stop until they had devoured the very last banyan of the immense forest.

At daybreak we halted at last; the storm had entirely ceased, and we arranged our camp. Our elephant, who was carefully examined, was found to have the tip of his right ear pierced by several holes running in diverse directions. If such a thing had happened to any other creature than an animal of steel, it would most certainly have at once sunk down, never again to rise, and our unfortunate train would then have been rapidly overwhelmed by the advancing flames.

At six that morning, after a very short rest, we again resumed our journey, and by twelve o'clock we were encamped in the neighborhood of Rewah.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN HOOD'S PROWESS

The remainder of the day and the next night were quietly spent in camp. After all our fatigue and danger, this rest was well earned.

We had no longer before us the rich plains of the kingdom of Oude. Steam House had now to pass through Rohilkund, a fertile territory, though much cut up by *nullahs,* or ravines. Bareilly is the capital of this province, which is one hundred and fifty-five miles square, well watered by the numerous affluents or tributaries of the Cogra; here and there are many groups of magnificent mango-trees, as well as thick jungles, which latter are gradually disappearing as cultivation advances.

After the taking of Delhi, this was the center of the insurrection; Sir Colin Campbell conducted one of his campaigns here. Here, too, Brigadier Walpole's column was not at the outset very fortunate, and here, also, fell a friend of Sir Edward Munro, the colonel of the 93d Highlanders, who had so distinguished himself in the two assaults on Lucknow, during the affair of the 14th of April.

We could not have had a country better suited for the advance of our train than this. Beautiful level roads, easily crossed streams, running from the two more important arteries, descending from the north, all united to render this part of our journey pleasant. In a short time we should come to the first rising ground which connected the plain with the mountains of Nepaul.

We had, however, to think seriously of the rainy season. The monsoon, which is prevalent from the northeast to the southwest during the first months of the year, is now reversed. The rainy season is more violent on the coast than in the interior of the peninsula, and also a little later; the reason being that the clouds are exhausted before reaching the center of India. Besides this, their direction is somewhat altered by the barrier of high mountains which form a sort of atmospheric eddy. On the coast of Malabar the monsoon begins in the month of May; in the central and northern provinces, it is felt some weeks later on, in June. We were now in June, and our journey was henceforward to be performed under new though well-foreseen circumstances.

I should have said before that honest Goûmi, who had been disarmed by the lightning in such an untoward manner, was nearly well again by the next day. The paralysis of his left leg was merely temporary. Soon not a trace of his accident remained, but it seemed to me he always bore rather a grudge against that storm.

On both the 6th and 7th of June, Captain Hood, aided by Fan and Niger, had better sport. He killed a couple of those antelopes called *nylghaus*. They are the blue oxen of the Hindoos, though it is certainly more correct to call them deer, since they have a greater resemblance to that animal.

These were not the wild beasts Captain Hood hoped for; but all the same, the nylghau, though not actually ferocious, is dangerous; for when slightly wounded, it turns on the hunter.

A shot from the captain, and a second from Fox, stopped short both of these superb creatures, killed, as it were, on the wing; and indeed Fox seemed to look on them as nothing higher than feathered game.

Monsieur Parazard, fortunately, was quite of another opinion, and the excellent haunch, cooked to a turn, which he served up to us that day at dinner, brought us all over to his side.

At daybreak on the 8th of June we left an encampment we had made near a little village in Rohilkund. We had arrived at it the evening before, after traversing the twenty-five miles which lay between it and Rewah. Our train could only go at a very moderate pace over the heavy ground caused by the rains. Besides this, the streams began to swell, and fording several delayed us some hours. After all we had not now so very far to go. We were sure of reaching the mountainous region before the end of June. There we intended to install Steam House for several of the summer months, as if in the midst of a sanitorium. We had nothing to make us uneasy in that respect.

On the 8th of June Captain Hood missed a fine opportunity for a shot. The road was bordered by a thick bamboo jungle, as is often the case near villages, which look as if built in a basket of flowers. This was not as yet the true jungle, for that, in the Hindoo sense, applies to the rugged, bare, and sterile plain, dotted with lines of gray bushes. We, on the contrary, were in a cultivated country, in the midst of a fertile territory, covered in most places with marshy rice-grounds.

Behemoth went quietly along, guided by Storr's hand, and emitting graceful, feathery clouds of vapor, which curled away and dispersed among the bamboos at the roadside.

All at once, out leaped an animal with the most wonderful agility, and fastened on our elephant's neck.

"A cheetah! a cheetah!" shouted the engine-driver.

At this cry, Captain Hood darted out to the balcony, and seized his gun, always ready and always at hand.

"A cheetah!" exclaimd he in his turn.

"Fire, then!" cried I.

"Time enough!" returned the captain, who contented himself with merely taking a good aim at the animal.

The cheetah is a species of leopard peculiar to India, not so large as the tiger, but almost as formidable, it is so active, supple, and strong.

Colonel Munro, Banks, and I stood out on the veranda, watching with interest for the captain to fire.

The leopard had evidently been deceived by the sight of our elephant. He had boldly sprung at him, expecting to bury his teeth and claws in living flesh, but instead of that, met with an iron skin, on which neither teeth nor claws could make any impression. Furious at his discomfiture, he clung to the long ears of the artificial animal, and was no doubt preparing to bound off again when he caught sight of us.

Captain Hood kept his gun pointed, after the manner of a hunter who is sure of his aim, but does not wish to fire until he is certain he can hit a vital part.

The cheetah drew itself up, roaring savagely. It no doubt knew of its danger, but did not attempt to escape. Perhaps it watchd for an opportunity to spring on to the veranda.

Indeed, we soon saw it climbing up the elephant's head, to the trunk or chimney, and almost to the opening out of which puffed jets of vapor.

"Now fire, Hood!" said I again.

"There's time enough," answered the captain. Then, without taking his eyes off the leopard, who still gazed at us, he addressed himself to me. "Did you ever kill a cheetah, Maucler?" he asked.

"Never."

"Would you like to kill one?"

"Captain," I replied, "I should not like to deprive you of this magnificent shot——"

"Pooh!" returned Hood, "it's nothing of a shot. Take a gun and aim just below the beast's shoulder! If you miss, I shall catch him as he springs."

"Be it so, then."

Fox, who had joined us, put a double-barreled gun into my hands. I took it, cocked it, aimed just below the leopard's shoulder, and fired.

The animal, wounded, though but slightly, took an enormous bound, right over the driver's howdah, and alighted on the first roof of Steam House.

Skilled sportsman as Captain Hood was, even he had not time to fire. "Here Fox, after me!" he shouted.

And the two, darting out of the veranda, hastened up into the howdah.

The leopard immediately sprang on to the second roof, clearing the foot-bridge at a bound.

The captain was on the point of firing, but another desperate leap carried the animal off the roof, and landed him at the side of the road, when he instantly disappeared in the jungle.

"Stop! stop!" cried Banks, to the engineer, who, applying the atmospheric brakes, brought the train to an instant standstill.

The captain and Fox leaped out and ran into the thicket, in hopes of finding the cheetah.

A few minutes passed. We listened somewhat impatiently. No shot was fired, and very soon the two hunters returned empty handed.

" Disappeared! Got clear off!" called out Captain Hood; " and not even a trace of blood on the grass!"

" It was my fault," said I. " It would have been better if you had fired at the cheetah yourself. You wouldn't have missed!"

" Nonsense," returned Hood, " you hit him, I'm certain, though not in a good place."

" The beast wasn't fated to be my thirty-ninth, nor your forty-first, captain," remarked Fox, much out of countenance.

" Rubbish," said Hood, in a somewhat affected tone of indifference, " a cheetah isn't a tiger? If it had been, my dear Maucler, I couldn't have made up my mind to yield that shot to you!"

" Come to table, my friends," said Colonel Munro. " Breakfast is ready, and will console you——"

" I hope it may," put in McNeil; " but it was all Fox's fault!"

" My fault?" said the man, quite nonplussed by this unexpected observation.

" Certainly, Fox," returned the sergeant. " The gun you handed to Mr. Maucler was only loaded with number six!" And McNeil held out the second cartridge which he had just withdrawn, to prove his words.

" Fox!" said Captain Hood.

" Yes, sir."

" A couple of days under arrest!"

" Yes, captain." And Fox retired into his cabin, resolved not to appear again for forty-eight hours. He was quite ashamed of himself, and wished to hide his disgraced head.

The next day Captain Hood, Goûmi, and I went off to beat about the plain at the side of the road, and thus to spend the half day's halt which Banks allowed us. It rained all the morning, but about midday the sky cleared, and we hoped for a few hours of fine weather.

I must mention that it was not Hood, the hunter of wild beasts, who took me out this time, but the sportsman in search of game. In the interests of the table, he intended to stroll quietly about the rice-fields, accompanied by Fan and Niger.

Monsieur Parazard had hinted to the captain that his larder was empty, and that he expected his honor to take the necessary measures to fill it again. Captain Hood resigned himself, and we set out. For two hours our battue had no other result than to put up a few partridges, or scare away a few hares; but all at such a distance that, notwithstanding our good dogs, we had no chance of hitting them.

Captain Hood became utterly disgusted. In this vast plain, without jungles, or thickets, and dotted with villages and farms, he had no great hopes of meeting with any sort of wild beast, which would make amends for the loss of the leopard the preceding day. He had only come out now in the character of a purveyor, and thought of the reception Monsieur Parazard would give him if he returned with an empty bag. It was not our fault that even by four o'clock we had not had occasion to fire a single shot. A dry wind blew, and, as I said, all the game rose out of range.

"My dear fellow," said Hood, "this won't do at all. When we left Calcutta, I promised you such grand sport; and all this time, bad luck, fatality, I don't know what to call it, nor how to understand it, has prevented me from keeping my promise!"

"Come, captain," I replied, "you mustn't despair. Though I do regret it, it is more on your account than my own! We shall have better luck, no doubt, on the hills!"

"Yes," said Hood, "on the Himalayan slopes we shall set to work under more favorable conditions. You see, Maucler, I'd wager anything that our train, with all its apparatus, its steam and its roaring, and especially the gigantic elephant, terrifies the confounded brutes much more than a railway train would do, and that's the reason we don't see anything of them when traveling! When we halt, we must hope to be more lucky. That leopard was a fool! He must have been starving when he sprang on Behemoth, and he was worthy of being killed outright by a good shot! Hang that fellow Fox! I sha'n't forget that little job of his in a hurry! What time is it now?"

"Nearly five o'clock!"

"Five already, and we haven't bagged a thing!"

"They won't expect us back in camp till seven. Perhaps by that time——"

"No; luck is against us!" exclaimed the captain; "and, look you, luck is the half of success!"

"Perseverance, too," I answered. "Suppose we agree that we won't go back empty-handed! Will that suit you?"

"Suit me? of course it will!"

"Agreed, then."

"Look here, Maucler, I shall carry back a mouse or a squirrel, rather than be foresworn."

Hood, Goûmi, and I were now in a frame of mind to attack anything. The chase was continued with a perseverance worthy of a better cause; but it seemed as if even the most inoffensive birds had become aware of our hostile intentions. We couldn't get near a single one.

We roamed about thus among the rice-fields, beating first one side of the road and then the other, and turning back again, so as not to get too far from the camp. All was useless. Half past six, and we had not had to reload our guns. We might as well have had walking-sticks in our hands, the results would have been all the same.

I glanced at Captain Hood. He was marching along with his teeth set, while a deep frown on his brow betrayed his angry feelings. Between his compressed lips he muttered I don't know what vain menaces against every living creature whether feathered or furred of which there was not a specimen on the plain. He probably would soon fire his gun at the first object which met his eye, a tree or rock, may be—rather a cynical way of getting rid of his anger. It was easy to see his weapon burned his fingers, as it were, from the way he shifted it about, now to his shoulder, then to his arm, now again carrying it in his hand.

Goûmi looked at him. "The captain will be in a passion if this goes on!" he said to me, shaking his head.

"Yes," I replied, "I'd willingly give thirty shillings for the most modest little tame pigeon, if some charitable hand would let it go within range! It would appease him!"

But neither for thirty shillings, nor for double, or triple that amount, could we procure even the cheapest or the most common of fowl. The country seemed deserted, and we saw neither farm nor village. Indeed if it had been possible, I believe I should have sent Goûmi to buy at any price some bird or other, if only a plucked chicken; anything to set our fretful captain free from his vow.

Night was coming on. In an hour's time there would not be light enough for us to continue our fruitless expedition. Although we had agreed not to return to camp without something, yet we should be forced to do so, unless we meant to stay out all night. Not only did it threaten rain, but Colonel Munro and Banks would be seriously alarmed if we did not reappear.

Captain Hood, with straining eyeballs, glancing from right to left with birdlike quickness, walked ten paces ahead in an opposite direction to that of Steam House.

I was thinking of hastening my steps so as to rejoin him and beg him not to continue this struggle against ill-luck, when a whirr of wings was heard on my right. I looked toward the spot.

A dark mass was rising slowly above a thicket.

Instantly, without giving Captain Hood time to turn round, I leveled my gun, and fired both barrels successively. The unknown bird fell heavily.

Fan sprang forward, seized and brought it to the captain.

"At last!" exclaimed Hood. "If Monsieur Parazard isn't contented with this, he must be shoved into his pot himself, head first."

"But is it an edible bird?" I asked.

"Certainly, for want of anything better!" answered the captain.

"It was lucky nobody saw you, Mr. Maucler!" said Goûmi.

"What have I done wrong?"

"Why, you have killed a peacock, and that is forbidden, for they are sacred birds all over India."

"The fiend fly away with sacred birds and those who made them sacred, too!" exclaimed Captain Hood impatiently. "This one is killed at all events, and we shall eat him—devoutly if you like, but devour him somehow!"

Since the expedition of Alexander into this peninsula, the peacock has been a sacred animal in the Brahmins' country. The Hindoos make it the emblem of the goddess Saravasti, who presides over births and marriages. To destroy this bird is forbidden under pain of punishment, which the English law has confirmed.

This one, which so rejoiced Captain Hood's heart, was a magnificent specimen, with green metallic gleaming wings, edged with gold. His beautifully marked tail formed a superb fan of silky feathers.

"All right; forward!" said the captain.

"To-morrow, Monsieur Parazard will give us peacock for dinner, in spite of what all the Brahmins in India may think! Although, when cooked, this bird will indeed only look like a somewhat pretentious chicken, yet with its feathers artistically arranged, it will have a fine effect on our table!"

"Then you are satisfied, captain?"

"Satisfied—with you, yes, my dear fellow, but not pleased with myself at all! My bad luck isn't over yet, and I must do away with it. Come along!"

Off we started to retrace our steps to the camp, now about three miles distant. Captain Hood and I walked close together along a winding path through thick bamboo jungles; Goûmi, carrying our game, bringing up the rear. The sun had not yet disappeared, but it was shrouded in great clouds, so that we had to find our way through semi-obscurity.

All at once a terrific roar burst from a thicket on our right. The sound was to me so awful that I stopped short, almost in spite of myself.

Captain Hood grasped my hand. "A tiger!" he said.

Then an oath escaped him. "Thunder and lightning!" he exclaimed, "there is only small shot in our guns!"

It was too true; neither Hood, Goûmi, nor I, had any ball cartridges.

Besides, if we had, we should not have had time to reload. Ten seconds after uttering his first roar, the animal leaped from the covert with a single bound, and landed on the road twenty paces from us. It was a magnificent tiger, what the Hindoos would have called a man-eater, his annual victims might no doubt be counted by hundreds.

The situation was terrible. I gazed at the tiger, and must confess that my gun trembled in my hand. He measured from nine to ten feet in length, and was of a tawny color, striped with black and white.

He stared back at us, his catlike eyes blazing in the shadow. His tail feverishly lashed his sides. He crouched as if about to spring.

Hood had not lost his presence of mind. He took a careful aim at the animal, muttering in a tone which it is impossible to describe, "Number six! To fire at a tiger with number six! If I don't hit him right in the eyes, we are——"

The captain had not time to finish. The tiger advanced not by leaps, but slow steps.

Goûmi crouched behind us, and also took aim, though his gun, too, only contained small shot. As to mine, it was not even loaded. I prepared to do this now.

"Not a movement, not a sound!" muttered the captain. "The tiger will spring, and that will never do!"

We all three remained motionless. The tiger advanced slowly, his eyes glaring fixedly, and his great jaws held almost level with the ground. The brute was now only ten paces from the captain.

Hood stood firm, steady as a statue, concentrating his whole life in his gaze. The terrible struggle which was about to take place, and which might leave none of us alive, did not even make his heart beat more rapidly than usual. I thought the tiger was about to make his spring. He took five steps. I had need of all my self-control to keep from calling out, "Fire, Hood! now fire!"

No! The captain had said—and it was evidently his only chance—that he meant to blind the animal; and to do that he must be very close before he fired. The tiger came three paces nearer, and prepared to spring—

A loud report was heard, almost immediately followed by a second. The second explosion seemed to have taken place in the very body of the animal, which, after two or three starts and roars of pain, fell dead on the ground.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Captain Hood, "my gun was loaded with ball after all, and what's more, with an explosive ball! Ah, thanks, Fox, this time many thanks!"

"Is it possible?" I cried.

"Look for yourself." And as he spoke the captain drew out the cartridge from the other barrel. There was the ball.

All was explained. Captain Hood possessed a double-barrelled rifle and a double-barrelled gun, both of the same caliber. Now, when Fox made the mistake of loading the rifle with small shot, he at the same time put explosive ball cartridges into the other. The day before, this mistake saved the life of the leopard, to-day it saved ours!

"Yes," remarked Hood, "and never in my life have I been nearer death!"

Half an hour afterward, when we were safe back in camp, Hood called up Fox and told him what had happened.

"Captain," returned the man, "that proves that instead of two days in confinement, I deserved four, because I made a mistake twice!"

"That is my opinion," replied his master; "but since through your mistake I have bagged my forty-first, it is also my opinion that I should offer you this sovereign——"

"And mine that I should take it," answered Fox, pocketing the piece of gold.

Such were the incidents which marked Captain Hood's encounter with his forty-first tiger.

In the evening of the 12th of June, our train came to a halt near a small village of no importance, and the next day we set out to begin the ninety miles which still lay between us and the mountains of Nepaul.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE AGAINST THREE

Some days passed away, and we had at last commenced to ascend the first slopes of those northern regions of India, which, from rising ground to rising ground, from hill to hill, from mountain to mountain, at last attain to the highest altitude on the globe. Till then we had been rising, but so imperceptibly that Behemoth did not even appear to perceive it.

The weather was stormy and rainy, but the temperature was supportable. The roads were not yet bad, and heavy as the train was, it passed easily over them.

When too large a rut opened before us, Storr just touched the regulator, and a stronger press of the obedient fluid was enough to take us over the obstacle. The machine, as I said, had plenty of power, and a quarter of a turn given to the supply valves instantly added immensely to its strength.

As yet, we never had reason but to congratulate ourselves on this species of locomotion, as well as on the engine Banks had invented. Our rolling house was perfectly comfortable, and before our eyes we had always a fresh and ever-changing landscape.

The vast plain which extends from the valley of the Ganges into the territories of Oude and Rohilkund was ended. The north was framed in by the summits of the Himalayas, against which were swept the clouds driven by the southwest wind. It was impossible as yet to get a good view of the picturesque outline of this lofty chain; but on approaching the Thibetian frontier, the aspect of the country became more wild, and the jungle increased at the expense of cultivated ground.

On the 17th of June our camp was made near a serai—or traveler's bungalow. The weather was rather brighter, and Behemoth, who had been worked hard for the last four days, required, if not rest, at any rate some attention. It was therefore agreed that the rest of the day and the following night should be passed in this spot.

The serai or caravanserai, the inn to be found on all the high roads, is a quadrangle of low buildings, surrounding an inner court, and usually surmounted by a tower at each corner, giving it quite an oriental appearance. The attendants in the serai consist of the *bhisti,* or water-carrier, the cook, who does well enough for travelers who can content themselves with eggs and chickens, and the *khansama,* or provider of provisions, with whom you must treat, and whose prices are low enough generally.

The keeper of the serai is simply an agent of the Honorable Company, to whom the greater number of these establishments belong, and they are inspected occasionally by the engineer-in-chief of the district.

A strange but strictly kept rule is in force in these bungalows: a traveler may occupy the serai for four-and-twenty hours, unquestioned, but in the event of his wishing to stay longer, he must get a permit from the inspector. Without this authorization the next comer, whether English or Hindoo, may turn him out.

It is needless to say that on our arrival at our halting-place Behemoth produced the usual sensation, that is to say, he was very much stared at, and perhaps very much coveted. I must say, though, that the actual guests in the serai looked at him with somewhat of disdain, disdain too affected to be real.

These people, however, were not simple mortals, traveling on business or pleasure. Here was nothing less than the Prince Gourou Singh, in person, son of an independent rajah of Guzarate, and a rajah himself, traveling with great pomp in the north of the Indian peninsula.

This prince not only occupied the three or four rooms in the bungalow, but also all the neighborhood, which had been arranged so as to lodge the people of his suite.

I had never before seen a traveling rajah; so as soon as our camp had been settled at about a quarter of a mile from the serai, in a charming spot beside a stream and under magnificent trees, I went, in company with Captain Hood and Banks, to visit the encampment of Prince Gourou Singh. The son of a rajah who wishes to travel, cannot travel alone, that is evident! If there are any people in the world whom I have not the slightest inclination to envy, they are those who can't move hand or foot, without putting in motion at least a hundred people! Far better to be the simplest pedestrian, with knapsack on back, stick in hand, and gun on shoulder, than an Indian prince traveling with all the ceremonial which his rank requires.

" You can't call it a man going from one town to another," said Banks to me; " it's a whole village altering its geographical relations! "

" I like Steam House far better," I answered, " and I would not change with this rajah's son for anything! "

" Who knows," said Captain Hood, " whether this prince may not prefer our rolling house to all his large and cumbersome equipage! "

" There will be only one answer to make to that," cried Banks, " though I shall have no objection to build him a steam palace, provided he gives a good price! But while awaiting his summons, let us look around the camp, it is worth the trouble."

The prince's suite consisted of not less than five hundred persons. Under the great trees stood two hundred chariots, symmetrically arranged, like the tents of a vast camp. Some had zebras to draw them, others buffaloes, and besides these, there were three magnificent elephants, bearing on their backs richly ornamented palanquins, and twenty camels, from the country to the west of the Indus. Nothing was wanting in the caravan, neither musicians to charm the ears of his Highness, nor dancing-girls to delight his eyes, nor jugglers to amuse his idle hours. Three hundred bearers and two hundred guards completed the company, the payment of whose wages would soon have exhausted any other purse than that of an independent Indian rajah.

Directly we appeared, the Hindoos started up and salaamed to us, bending down to the earth. A number also shouted, "Sahib! sahib!" and we answered with friendly gestures.

It occurred to me that perhaps Prince Gourou Singh might give in our honor one of those fêtes of which rajahs are so lavish. The wide court of the bungalow was there all ready for any ceremony of this kind, and seemed to me admirably suited for the dances of the nautch-girls, the incantations of the charmers, or the tricks of the acrobats.

It would have delighted me, I acknowledge, to be present at such a spectacle in the middle of a serai, beneath the shade of magnificent trees, and with the natural get-up of the attendants. It would all have been worth far more than the boards of a narrow theater, with its scenery of painted canvas, and its imitation trees. I spoke my thoughts to my companions, who, while sharing my desire, did not think it would be realized.

"The Rajah of Guzarate," said Banks, "is an independent man, who was with difficulty induced to submit, after the sepoy revolt, during which his conduct was at least suspicious. He does not at all like the English, and his son is not likely to make himself agreeable."

"Well, well, we can do without his nautchs," responded Captain Hood, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully.

Banks's idea was probably correct, for we were not even admitted to the interior of the serai. Perhaps Prince Gourou Singh expected an official visit from the colonel; but as Sir Edward Munro had nothing to ask from this personage, he expected nothing, and did not trouble himself.

We now all returned to our own camp, where we did justice to the excellent dinner Monsieur Parazard served up. Preserved meats now formed the staple of our food. For several days the bad weather had prevented our hunting; but our cook was a clever man, and, under his knowing hands, preserved vegetables and meat resumed all their natural flavor and freshness.

In spite of what Banks had said, a feeling of curiosity led me to wait all that evening for an invitation which never came. Captain Hood joked about my taste for ballets in the open air, and even assured me that it was " no end better " than the opera; but of this, unless the prince showed himself a little amiable, I should have no opportunity of judging. It was settled that our departure should take place at break of day the next morning, the 18th of June.

At five o'clock, Kâlouth began to make up the fires. Our elephant, which had been detached from the rest of the train, stood about fifty paces off, and the engine-driver was busy taking in water. While this was going on, we strolled about beside the stream.

Forty minutes later the boiler was sufficiently under pressure, and Storr had begun to back, when a party of Hindoos approached. These were five or six richly dressed men, in white robes, silk tunics, and gold-embroidered turbans. A dozen guards armed with muskets and sabers accompanied them, one of the soldiers bearing a crown of green leaves, which showed the presence of some important person.

This important person was no other than Prince Gourou Singh himself, a man of some thirty-five years, with a very haughty expression, of a type common among the rajahs, in whose features are often found traces of the Mahratta character.

The prince did not deign to take notice of our presence. He walked forward a few paces and approached the gigantic elephant, which Storr's hand was now causing to move. Then after gazing at it, not without some feeling of curiosity, though that he did not wish to betray, " Who made that machine? " he demanded of Storr.

The engine-driver pointed to the engineer, who had joined us, and was standing a short distance off.

Prince Gourou Singh expressed himself very easily in English, and turning toward Banks, " Did you make—? " he forced himself to say.

" I did," replied Banks.

"Did not some one tell me that it was a fancy of the late Rajah of Bhootan?"

Banks signed an affirmative.

"What is the good," returned his highness, rudely shrugging his shoulders, "what is the good of being dragged about by a machine, when one has elephants of flesh and blood at one's command?"

"Probably," said Banks, "because this elephant is more powerful than all those of which the late rajah made use."

"Oh!" said Gourou Singh contemptuously, "more powerful!"

"Infinitely more so!" returned Banks.

"Not one of yours," put in Captain Hood, who much disliked these manners, "not one of yours would be capable of making that elephant stir an inch, if he did not wish it."

"You say—?" said the prince.

"My friend asserts," replied the engineer, "and I also assert it, that this artificial animal could resist ten pair of horses, and that your three elephants harnessed together, could not make him move a foot!"

"I don't believe a word of it," replied the prince.

"Then you are quite wrong not to believe a word of it," replied Captain Hood.

"And if your highness chooses to name a price," added Banks, "I will engage to supply you with one that will have the strength of twenty of the best elephants in your stables!"

"It is easy to say so," replied Gourou Singh dryly.

"And it is easy to do so," returned Banks.

The prince began to get exasperated. It was plain to see that he could not stand contradiction.

"Can the experiment be made here?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"It can," replied the engineer.

"I should like," added Prince Gourou Singh, "to make this experiment the subject of a considerable wager, unless you draw back at the fear of losing it, as no doubt your elephant will draw back, when he has to struggle with mine."

"Behemoth draw back?" exclaimed Captain Hood. "Who dares to say Behemoth will draw back?"

"I do," returned Gourou Singh.

"And what sum will your highness wager?" asked the engineer, folding his arms.

"Four thousand rupees," replied the prince, "if you have got four thousand rupees to lose."

This would amount to nearly 400*l.* The stake was considerable, and I could see that Banks, confident as he was, did not much care to risk such a sum.

As for Captain Hood, he would have betted double that, if his modest pay would have allowed such a proceeding.

"You refuse?" at last said his highness, to whom 4,000 rupees merely represented the price of a passing fancy, "you are afraid to risk it?"

"Done!" exclaimed Colonel Munro, who had just approached, and now uttered this single word which was of much consequence to us.

"Will Colonel Munro wager 4,000 rupees?" inquired Prince Gourou Singh.

"Or even ten thousand," answered Sir Edward, "if that would suit your highness better."

"Be it so!" replied Gourou Singh.

This was becoming interesting. The engineer grasped the colonel's hand, as if to thank him for saving him from the affront offered by the haughty rajah; but his brows knit for a moment, and I wondered whether he might not have presumed too much on the mechanical power of his apparatus.

Captain Hood had no such fears, he beamed all over, rubbed his hands, and advancing toward the elephant, "Attention, Behemoth," he cried, "you have to work for the honor of old England, remember."

All our party stood together, at the side of the road. About a hundred Hindoos left their own camp, and ran to be present at the forthcoming trial.

Banks left us and mounted into the howdah beside Storr, who by means of an artificial draught, was blowing up the furnaces so as to send a jet of vapor through Behemoth's trunk.

While this was going on, at a sign from the prince, several of his servants went to the serai, and brought back the three elephants, freed from all their traveling harness. They were magnificent beasts, natives of Bengal, and much taller than their brethren of Southern India. The sight of these superb animals, in all their pride of strength, caused me a qualm of uneasiness. The mahouts, perched on their great necks, guided them by hand and voice.

As these elephants passed before his highness, the biggest of the three—a regular giant—stopped, bent his knees, raised his trunk, and saluted the prince like the well-trained courtier that he was. He with his two companions then approached Behemoth, whom they apparently regarded with astonishment, mingled with some fear.

Strong iron chains were fixed to the tender of our elephant. I confess my heart beat quick. Captain Hood gnawed his mustache and fidgeted about with anxiety. Colonel Munro was calm enough, far calmer indeed than Prince Gourou Singh.

" We are ready," said the engineer. " When your highness pleases——"

" It pleases me now," returned the prince. Gourou Singh made a sign, the mahouts uttered a peculiar whistle, and the three elephants, planting their huge feet firmly on the ground, drew all together. The machine began to move.

A cry escaped me. Hood stamped.

" Put on the brakes! " said the engineer quietly, turning to the driver. And with a quick turn, followed by a rush of steam, the atmospheric brake was instantly brought to bear.

Behemoth stopped, immovable.

The mahouts excited the three elephants, who with straining muscles renewed their efforts. All was in vain. Our elephant appeared rooted to the ground.

Prince Gourou Singh bit his lip till the blood came.

Captain Hood clapped his hands.

" Forward! " cried Banks.

" Yes, forward," repeated the captain, " forward! "

The regulator was opened wide, great puffs of vapor issued from the trunk, the wheels turned slowly round, and the three elephants, notwithstanding their struggles, were drawn backward, making deep ruts in the ground as they went.

" Go ahead! go ahead! " yelled Captain Hood.

And as Behemoth still moved forward, the enormous animals fell over on their sides, and were thus dragged some twenty feet, without apparently making any difference to our elephant.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the captain, who could not contain himself. "They might fasten the whole serai on to his highness's elephants! It wouldn't weigh more than a cherry to our Behemoth!"

Colonel Munro made a sign. Banks closed the regulator, and the machine stopped. Anything more piteous to behold than the prince's three elephants now, could not be seen. There they lay, their trunks covered with mud, their great feet waving helplessly in the air, like gigantic beetles turned on their backs!

The prince, both irritated and ashamed, had by this time departed, without waiting for the end of the experiment.

The three elephants were now unharnessed. They rose, visibly humiliated by their defeat. As they repassed Behemoth, the largest, in spite of his driver, could not help bowing his knees and saluting with his trunk, just as he had done to Prince Gourou Singh.

In a quarter of an hour, a Hindoo, the *kâmdar,* or secretary of his highness, appeared in our camp and handed to the colonel a bag containing the lost wager of ten thousand rupees.

Sir Edward took the bag, but tossed it scornfully back, saying, "For the people of his highness!"

Then turning on his heel, he walked quietly into Steam House. No better way could have been devised for putting down this arrogant prince who had so contemptuously provoked us.

Behemoth being now in his place, Banks gave the signal and we started off at full speed, in the midst of an enormous crowd of amazed and wondering Hindoos.

Shouts and cries saluted us, and soon a turn of the road hid Prince Gourou Singh's camp and serai from our sight.

The next day, Steam House began to ascend an acclivity which connects the level country with the base of the Himalayan frontier. This was mere child's play to our Behemoth, whose twenty-four horse power had enabled him successfully to cope with Prince Gourou Singh's three elephants. He pressed easily up the steep roads of this region, without its being found necessary to increase the regular pressure of steam.

It was indeed a strange sight, to see our colossal animal breasting the hill, giving vent to snorts and shrieks as he dragged our train up after him. Our heavy wheels crashed and ground along, not, it must be confessed, to the improvement of the roads; in which, already softened by torrents of rain, they made deep ruts. In spite of it all, Steam House gradually rose, the panorama widened, the plain subsided, and toward the south the horizon stretched at last farther than the eye could reach.

We were more sensible of the effect produced, when for some hours the road lay under the trees of a thick forest. Now and then a wide glade opened before us, like an immense window on the mountain ridge, when we would stop our train, for a minute or two if the landscape was misty, or for half a day, if the view was clear. All four then leaning out of the back veranda would take our fill of gazing at the magnificent panorama extended before our eyes.

This ascent, interrupted by more or less prolonged halts —for the view as well as for night encampments—continued for no less than seven days, from the 19th to the 25th of June.

With a little patience," remarked Captain Hood, " our train will mount to the very highest summits of the Himalayas! "

" Don't be too ambitious, captain," responded the engineer.

" It could do it, Banks! "

" Yes, Hood, it could if the practicable road did not soon come to an end, and provided we carried fuel, for that we should no longer find among the glaciers, besides respirable air, which would be wanting up there. But there is no need for us to do more than just pass the habitable zone of the Himalayas. When Behemoth has attained a medium altitude, he will stop in some pleasant spot, on the border of an Alpine-like forest, in delicious air refreshed by the breezes from above. Our friend Munro will have transported his Calcutta bungalow on to the mountains of Nepaul, that is all, and there we can stay as long as we like."

On the 25th of June, we found the halting-place in which we were to camp for several months. For forty-eight hours the road had been becoming less and less practicable, being either half made or deeply cut up by the rain. It was a regular tug for Behemoth, but he managed it by devouring a little more fuel than usual. A few pieces of wood, added to Kâlouth's furnace, served to increase the steam pressure.

For this last forty-eight hours our train had been traveling through an almost deserted country. Settlements or villages were no longer to be met with. Only here and there a farm, or isolated dwelling, buried in the great pine-forests, with which the southern ridges bristled. Three or four times a solitary mountaineer greeted us with admiring exclamations. No doubt, on seeing the marvelous apparatus ascending the mountain, they imagined that Brahma had taken it into his head to transport an entire pagoda to some inaccessible and lofty height.

At last, on the 25th of June, Banks gave the word to "Halt!" and thus ended the first part of our journey into Northern India.

The train came to a standstill in the middle of a wide glade, near a torrent, the limpid waters of which would supply the wants of our camp for several months. Our outlook, too, extended for fifty or sixty miles over the plain.

Steam House was now 975 miles from its starting-place, 6,000 feet above the level of the sea, and resting at the foot of the Dhawalagiri, whose summit rises 27,000 feet into the air.

CHAPTER XV

THE PÂL OF TANDÎT

HAVING followed thus far the travels of Colonel Munro and his companions, from Calcutta to the Indo-Chinese frontier, and seen them safely encamped at the base of the mountains of Thibet, we will leave them for a time in their winter-quarters and devote a few pages to some other characters who have appeared in our story.

Our readers may remember the incident which marked the arrival of Steam House at Allahabad. From a newspaper of that town, dated the 25th of May, Colonel Munro learned the news of the death of Nana Sahib. Was this report so often spread before, and again so often contradicted, this time indeed true? After reading such minute details, could Sir Edward Munro still doubt, and was he not justified in renouncing all expectation of being able finally to do justice on the rebel of 1857?

We shall be enabled to judge of this, when we hear of all that occurred after the night of the 7th of March, during which Nana Sahib, accompanied by Balao Rao, his brother, and escorted by most faithful companions, the Hindoo Kalagani among the number, left the caves of Adjuntah.

Sixty hours later, the nabob reached the narrow defiles of the Sautpoora Mountains, after crossing the Taptee, which flows into the sea on the west coast, near Surat. He was then a hundred miles from Adjuntah, in a part of the province little frequented, and thus tolerably secure for a time. The place was well chosen.

Here Nana Sahib was near the country of the Ghoonds, an aboriginal tribe, only half subdued, whom he hoped to induce to revolt. Ghoondwana is a territory of two hundred square miles containing a population of more than three millions. M. Rousselet considers the inhabitants to be always ripe for rebellion. It is quite an important part of Hindoostan, and truth to say, is only nominally under English rule. The railway from Bombay to Allahabad traverses this district from southwest to northeast, and even has a branch into the center of the province of Nagpore; but the tribes remain as savage as ever, become refractory at any proposal of civilization, are very impatient of the European yoke, and in fact, as they can any moment retreat into their mountain fastnesses, are extremely difficult to keep in order, and this Nana Sahib well knew.

Here then he determined to seek shelter, so as to escape the search of the English police, and there to await a fit time to provoke an insurrectional movement.

If the nabob should succeed in his enterprise, if at his summons the Ghoonds should rise and follow where he led, the revolt would doubtless spread rapidly and widely.

To the north of Ghoondwana lies Bundelcund, which comprises the mountainous region, situated between the higher plateau of the Vindhyas and the important river the Jumna. In this country, covered with beautiful virgin forests, live a deceitful and cruel people, among whom all criminals, political or otherwise, seek and easily find a refuge. These provinces still remain barbarous, and here still live the descendants of those who fought under Tippoo Sahib against the invaders. Here, too, are the headquarters of the celebrated stranglers, the Thugs, so long the terror of India, fanatical assassins, who destroy innumerable victims, though without shedding blood; as well as bands of Pindarris, who perpetrate the most odious massacres, almost with impunity. In every part are swarms of the terrible Dacoits, a sect of poisoners, who follow in the footsteps of the Thugs; and finally Nana Sahib himself had taken refuge here, after escaping the royal troops, now masters of Jansi. He having thus thrown them off the scent, intended soon to go and seek a more secure asylum in the inaccessible retreats of the Indo-Chinese frontier.

To the east of Ghoondwana is Kondistan or the country of the Konds. These people are the fierce votaries of Tado Pennor, the god of the earth, and Maunek Soro, the red god of battles. They are much given to those *meriahs* or human sacrifices, which the English have so long endeavored to abolish; and can only be compared to the savage natives of the most barbarous Polynesian islands. In 1840 and 1854, Major-General John Campbell with Captains Macpherson, Macvicar, and Fry, engaged in long and troublesome expeditions against these daring fanatics, who will do anything under a religious pretext, if an unscrupulous leader can be found.

To the west of Ghoondwana lies a state containing from 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 souls, occupied by the Bheels, formerly so powerful in Malwa and Rajpootana, now divided into clans, and spread all about the Vindhyas. They are almost always intoxicated with the spirit they obtain from the *mikowah* tree, but are brave, daring, hardy, and active, and constantly prepared to answer to the *kisri* their cry for war or pillage.

From this description it will be seen that Nana Sahib had chosen well. In this central region of the peninsula, he hoped this time, instead of a mere military insurrection, to provoke a national movement, in which Hindoos of every caste would take part.

But before taking any decided step, it was necessary to settle in the country, so as to obtain as much influence, and act as effectively as was possible under the circumstances.

This, of course, necessitated the discovery of a safe retreat, for a time at any rate, which he could be free to abandon, directly it was suspected.

This was Nana Sahib's first care. The Hindoos who had followed him from Adjuntah, could go and come as they liked throughout the presidency. Balao Rao, who was not included in the governor's notice, might also have enjoyed the same immunity, had it not been for his likeness to his brother. Since his flight to the frontiers of Nepaul, attention had not been drawn to his person, and there was every reason to believe him dead. But, taken for Nana Sahib, he would have been at once arrested, and this at any cost must be avoided.

A single asylum then was needed for these two brothers, one in thought and aim, and in the defiles of the Sautpoora Mountains, this would neither take long nor be difficult to find.

A suitable place was at last pointed out by one of the natives of the band, a Ghoond, who knew every inch of the valley, even to its innermost retreats.

On the right bank of a little tributary of the Nerbudda was a deserted pâl, called the Pâl of Tandît.

A pâl is something less than a village and scarcely a hamlet, merely a collection of huts, or sometimes even a solitary habitation. The wanderers who inhabit it take up their abode there only for a time. After burning a few trees, the cinders of which improve the ground for a time, the Ghoond and his friends construct a dwelling. As the country is anything but safe, the house has all the appearance of a little fort. It is surrounded by palisades, and is capable of being defended against a surprise. Besides which, hidden in some thick clump of trees, or buried, so to speak, in a bower of cactus and brushwood, it is no easy matter to discover it at all.

Usually, the pâl crowns some hillock with a narrow valley on one side, between two steep spurs of the mountains, in the midst of an impenetrable forest. It does not seem that any human creature could live there. There is no road to it, nor even the vestige of a path. To reach one, it is sometimes necessary to ascend the bed of a torrent, so that the water may wash away all traces of any one having passed that way. Besides this, a perfect avalanche of stones and rocks is kept ready at the top, arranged so that even a child's hand would be sufficient to push them over, and crush any one who attempted to reach the pâl against the wish of the inhabitants.

Isolated as they are in their inaccessible eyries, the Ghoonds can yet communicate most rapidly from pâl to pâl. From the unequal ridges of the Sautpooras, signals are in a few minutes sent over sixty miles of country. A fire lighted on the summit of a pointed rock, a tree changed into a gigantic torch, a column of smoke on the top of a spur of the hills: the inhabitants all know what these signify. The enemy, that is to say, a detachment of English soldiers, or a squad of police, has penetrated into the valley, ascended the course of the Nerbudda, is searching the gorges, in quest of some criminal, to whom the district offers a willing refuge. The war-cry, so familiar to the ear of the mountaineers, becomes a cry of alarm. A stranger might mistake it for the call of night-birds, or the hissing of serpents.

The Ghoond does not so mistake it, however: it is a warning that he must fly, and so he does. The suspected pâls are abandoned, or even burned. The nomads escape to other retreats, to be in their turn deserted if close pressed, so that when the agents of the authorities at last make their way to them, they find nothing but ruins.

It was to one of these places, the Pâl of Tandît, that Nana Sahib and his friends came to take refuge. The faithful Ghoond, so devoted to the person of the nabob, brought them to it, and there, on the 12th of March, they stationed themselves.

The brothers' first care, after taking possession of the Pâl of Tandît, was diligently to reconnoiter the neighborhood. They observed in what directions they could see, and how far. They found out what were the nearest habitations, and who were their occupants. The position of this lonely peak, on which in the midst of a group of trees, was the Pâl of Tandît, was minutely studied, until they finally came to the conclusion that it was utterly impossible to obtain access to it without following the bed of the Nazzur torrent, up which they had themselves ascended.

The security this Pâl offered was undoubted, more especially as below it was a cave or tunnel, from which secret passages led out from the spur of the mountain, and afforded another way of escape when necessary.

It was not enough, however, for Balao Rao to know only what the Pâl of Tandît was at the present time; he wished to know what it had been, and while the nabob was examining the interior he continued to interrogate the Ghoond.

"A few questions more," he said. "For how long has this pâl been deserted?"

"For more than a year," replied the Ghoond.

"Who last inhabited it?"

"A wandering family, who only stayed there a few months."

"Why did they leave it?"

"Because the soil did not supply them with sufficient nourishment on which to subsist."

"And since their departure, no one to your knowledge has taken refuge there?"

"No one."

"A soldier or emissary of the police has never set foot in this pâl?"

"Never."

"It has been visited by no stranger?"

"By none," answered the Ghoond, "unless it was a woman."

"A woman?" exclaimed Balao Rao.

"Yes, a woman, who has been wandering about in the valley of the Nerbudda for the last three years."

"Who is she?"

"I have no idea who she is," replied the man. "Where she comes from I cannot tell, and not a person in the valley knows more than I do about the matter. Whether she is a foreigner, or a native, no one has ever been able to find out."

Balao Rao reflected for a moment, then resumed, "What does this woman do?" he asked.

"She goes to and fro," replied the Ghoond, "and lives entirely on alms. Every one in the valley has a kind of superstitious veneration for her. I have several times myself received her in my own pâl. She never speaks, and is generally supposed to be dumb, and I should not be surprised if she were. At night she may be seen straying about, holding a lighted torch in her hand. For this reason she is always known by the name of the 'Roving Flame.'"

"But," said Balao Rao, "if this woman knows the Pâl of Tandît, is she not likely to return to it while we are here, and so cause us some danger?"

"Not at all," replied the Ghoond. "She is mad. Her senses have fled; her eyes gaze without seeing; her ears listen without hearing, her tongue cannot utter a word. It is as though she were blind, deaf, and dumb to all that goes on around her. She is quite mad, and madness is a living death!"

The Ghoond, in the language of the hillmen, thus traced the portrait of a strange creature, well known in the valley under the name of the "Roving Flame" of the Nerbudda. This was a woman whose pale, still beautiful, countenance, worn, though not with years, and quite devoid of expression, betrayed neither her origin nor age. The wild eyes looked as though they had closed to all intellectual life on some terrific scene, the horror of which still lingered in them.

The hillmen always received this poor inoffensive creature kindly. Like all savage people, the Ghoonds hold persons who have been deprived of reason in a sort of superstitious reverence. Roving Flame was hospitably welcomed wherever she appeared. No pâl was closed to her. They fed her when she was hungry, gave her a bed when she was weary, without expecting a word of thanks from the poor speechless mouth.

For how long had this woman led this existence? Where had she come from? When did she first appear in Ghoondwana? Why did she rove about with a torch in her hand? Was it to light her path or to scare away wild beasts? It was impossible to find out. Sometimes she disappeared for whole months together. What became of her then? Did she leave the defiles of the Sautpooras for the gorges of the Vindhyas? Did she wander beyond the Nerbudda into Malwa or Bundelcund? No one knew. More than once, when her absence was prolonged, it was thought that her melancholy life had ended. But no! She always came back, still looking the same: for neither fatigue, nor illness, nor privation had any visible effect on her apparently frail body.

Balao Rao heard the native with extreme attention. He considered whether there might not be some danger in the circumstance that Roving Flame knew the Pâl of Tandît, for, as she had already before sought refuge there, her instinct might lead her back to it. He therefore questioned the Ghoond as to whether he or his friends knew where the mad woman actually was at the present time.

" I cannot tell at all," answered the Ghoond. " For more than six months no one has seen her in the valley. Possibly she may be dead; but even should she reappear and come to this pâl, there is nothing to fear from her. She is but a moving statue. She will not see you, nor hear you, nor know in the least who you are! She will just enter, sit by your hearth for a day or even two, then light her torch, and begin again to wander from house to house. That is the way her life is spent. But since her absence this time has been so prolonged, most likely she will not return again. The mind died long ago, and now the body must be dead also! "

Balao Rao did not attach sufficient importance to this incident to think it worth mentioning to Nana Sahib.

The fugitives spent a month in the Pâl of Tandît, and as yet Roving Flame had not returned to the Nerbudda valley.

CHAPTER XVI

ROVING FLAME

For a whole month, from the 12th of March to the 12th of April, Nana Sahib remained concealed in the pâl. He wished to give the English authorities time either to make some mistake by thinking he was dead, and so give up the search, or to go on a false scent in quite another direction.

The two brothers did not go out in the daytime themselves, but their faithful followers went forth throughout the valley, visiting the villages and hamlets, announcing in ambiguous words the approaching apparition of a great *moulti,* half god, half man, and thus preparing their minds for a national rising.

When night fell, Nana Sahib and Balao Rao ventured to quit their retreat. Following the banks of the Nerbudda, they went from village to village, from pâl to pâl, awaiting the time when, with some security, they might attempt the domains of the rajahs under British rule. Nana Sahib knew, besides, that there were many semi-independent tribes, who were impatient of the foreign yoke, and would rally round him at his summons. But in the first instance he must only deal with the savage populations of Ghoondwana.

These barbarous Bheels, nomad Konds, and Ghoonds, as little civilized as the natives of the Pacific isles, the Nana found all ready to rise and follow where he would. Although he prudently only made himself known to two or three powerful chiefs, that was sufficient to prove to him that his name alone would attract millions of natives from the central plateau of Hindoostan.

When the two brothers met again in their pâl, they compared notes of all that they had seen, heard, and done. Their companions then joined them, bringing from all parts word that the spirit of revolt was blowing like a tempest through the Nerbudda valley. The Ghoonds only longed to be allowed to yell the "kisri," or war-cry of the hillmen, and hurl themselves like a cataract on the military cantonments of the residency.

The time for that had not yet come.

It was in truth not enough that in the province lying between the Sautpooras and Vindhyas alone the spirit of revolt should be smouldering. That the fire might gradually gain on the country, it was necessary to carry the combustible elements into the neighboring states, which were more directly under English authority.

The whole of the vast kingdom of Scindia, as well as the states of Bhopal, Malwa, and Bundelcund were to be made to resemble a huge bonfire, ready and prepared for lighting. But Nana Sahib, wisely enough, did not intend to delegate to others the task of visiting his partisans in the insurrection of 1857; those natives who remained faithful to his cause, and never had believed in his death, were constantly expecting his reappearance.

A month after his arrival in the Pâl of Tandît, the Nana began to consider he might act in safety. He thought that by this time the story of his having been seen in the province would be contradicted. Trusty spies kept him informed as to all that the governor of the Bombay Presidency had done to effect his capture. He knew that at first the authorities had instituted a most active search, but without result. The fisherman of Aurungabad, once the Nana's prisoner, had fallen by his dagger, and no one had suspected that the fugitive fakir was the Nabob Dandoo Pant, on whose head a price had been set. In a week the reports grew fewer, the aspirants to the prize of 2,000*l.* lost hope, and the name of Nana Sahib began to be forgotten.

Without much fear of being recognized, the nabob now began his insurrectionary campaign. Now in the costume of a parsee, and now in that of a humble ryot, one day alone, and another accompanied by his brother, he went long distances from the Pâl of Tandît, northward, to the other side of the Nerbudda, and even beyond the Vindhyas.

If a spy had followed him in his wanderings he would, soon after the 12th of April, have found him at Indore.

There, Nana Sahib, while preserving the strictest incognito, put himself in communication with the extensive rural population employed in the culture of poppy fields. These were Rihillas, Mekranis, Valayalis, eager, courageous, and fanatical, chiefly sepoy deserters, concealed by the dress of native peasants.

Nana Sahib, on the 19th of April, passing through a magnificent valley in which dates and mango-trees grew in profusion, arrived at Suari.

Here rise numerous curious constructions, of very great antiquity. They are called "topes," and resemble tumuli, crowned with hemispheric domes, the principal group being that of Saldhara, at the north of the valley. From these funeral monuments—these dwellings of the dead—the altars of which, dedicated to Buddhist rites, are shaded by stone parasols—issued, at the voice of Nana Sahib, hundreds of fugitives. Buried in these ruins to escape the retaliations of the English, one word was sufficient to make them understand what the nabob expected of them; when the hour came, a signal would be enough to excite them to throw themselves *en masse* on the invaders.

On the 24th of April the Nana reached Bhilsa, the chief town of an important district of Malwa, and in the ruins of that ancient place he collected men ripe for revolt, to whom he gave the news.

On the 27th he entered Rajghur, and on the 30th the old city of Saugor, not far from the spot where General Sir Hugh Rose fought a bloody battle with the insurgents, and with the hill of Maudanpoor, gained the key of the defiles of the Vindhyas.

There the nabob was joined by his brother and Kâlagani, and the two then made themselves known to the chiefs of the principal tribes of which they were sure. In these councils the preliminaries of a general insurrection were discussed and agreed upon. While Nana Sahib and Balao Rao were pursuing their operations in these parts, their allies were no less busy on the northern side of the Vindhyas.

Before returning to the Nerbudda valley, the two brothers wished to visit Punnah. They ventured up the Keyne, under the shade of giant teaks and colossal bamboos. Here they enrolled many wild fellows from among the miserable people who work for the rajah in the valuable diamond-mines of the territory. "This rajah," says M. Rousselet, "understanding the position which English protection gives to the princes of Bundelcund, prefers the rôle of a rich land-holder to that of an insignificant prince." A rich land-holder indeed! The region he possesses extends for twenty miles north of Punnah, and the working of his mines, the products of which are most esteemed in the markets of Benares and Allahabad, employs a large number of Hindoos. They are very hardly treated, condemned to the severest labor, and running a great chance of being decapitated as soon as their work is no longer required: so it is not to be wondered at that the Nana found many among them ready to fight for the independence of their country.

Leaving this place, the brothers came southward again, intending to return to the Pâl of Tandît. However, before provoking the southern rising which should coincide with that of the north, they determined to stop at Bhopal.

This is an important Mussulman town, and the capital of Islamism in India. Its begum remained faithful to the English during the time of the rebellion.

Nana Sahib and Balao Rao, accompanied by a dozen Ghoonds, arrived at Bhopal on the 24th of May, the last day of the Moharum festival, instituted to celebrate the revival of the Mussulman army. Both had assumed the dress of *joguis,* religious mendicants armed with long daggers with rounded blades, which they dig into their bodies in a fanatical manner, though without doing any great harm. Being unrecognizable in this disguise, the two brothers followed the procession through the streets of the town, in the midst of numerous elephants, bearing on their back *tadzias,* or little temples, twenty feet high; they mingled with the Mussulmen, who were richly clothed in gold-embroidered tunics and muslin turbans; they joined with the musicians, soldiers, dancing-girls, young men disguised as women—a strange agglomeration which gave to the ceremony quite the look of a carnival. In this mob of natives were many of their friends, with whom the conspirators could easily manage to exchange a masonic sign, well known to the rebels of 1857.

When evening came, the crowd surged toward the lake which bathes the eastern suburb of the town.

There, in the midst of deafening cries, reports of firearms, popping of crackers, and by the light of innumerable torches, the fanatics seized the tadzias, and cast them into the waters of the lake. The Moharum festival was ended.

Just then Nana Sahib felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned and saw a Bengalee standing beside him.

The Nana recognized in this man one of his former followers. He gave him a questioning look.

The Bengalee thereupon murmured the following words, all of which were heard by the Nana without his betraying emotion by a single word or look.

" Colonel Munro has left Calcutta."

" Where is he? "

" He was at Benares yesterday."

" Where is he going? "

" To the Nepaulese frontier."

" With what object? "

" To stay there a few months."

" And then——? "

" Return to Bombay."

A whistle was heard. At the signal a native glided through the crowd and stood before them.

It was Kâlagnani.

" Go this instant," said the nabob, " join Munro on his way to the north. Attach yourself to him. Render him some service, and risk your life if necessary. Never leave him until he is beyond the Vindhyas in the Nerbudda valley. Then—and then only—come and give me notice of his presence."

Kâlagnani signed an affirmative and disappeared. An order from the nabob was enough. In ten minutes he had left Bhopal.

At that moment Balao Rao approached his brother.

" It is time to set out," he said.

" Yes," replied the Nana; " and before daybreak we must be at the Pâl of Tandît."

" Forward, then! "

Followed by their Ghoonds, the two men skirted the northern side of the lake until they reached an isolated farm, where horses awaited them and their escort. They were swift animals, fed upon spiced food, and capable of doing fifty miles in a single night. By eight o'clock they were galloping along the road from Bhopal to the Vindhyas.

The Nana prudently wished his return to the pâl to pass unnoticed; so in order to reach their destination before daybreak, they pushed on at their utmost speed.

The brothers barely exchanged a word, but their minds were occupied with the same thoughts. During their excursion they had gathered more than hope—the absolute certainty that numberless followers would rally around them. The center of India was entirely in their hands. The military cantonments scattered over this vast territory could not resist the first assault of the insurgents. Their annihilation would leave the way open for the revolt, which, spreading from coast to coast, would call up a wall of determined natives, against which the English army would dash themselves in vain.

The Nana's thoughts were divided between this and the fortunate chance, which would soon put Munro into his power. The colonel had at last quitted Calcutta, where he was so difficult to get at. Henceforth, none of his movements would be unknown to the nabob. Without his suspecting it, the hand of Kâlagnani would guide him into the wild country of the Vindhyas, and once there, none could protect him from the punishment Nana Sahib's hate reserved for him.

Balao Rao knew nothing of what had passed between the Bengalee and his brother. It was not until they were approaching the pâl, when stopping to breathe their horses for an instant, that Nana Sahib mentioned the subject.

" Munro has left Calcutta and is going to Bombay."

"The road to Bombay," exclaimed Balao Rao, "leads to the shores of the Indian Ocean."

"The road to Bombay, this time," returned the Nana, "will end in the Vindhyas."

The horses set off again at a gallop through the thick forest which covered the borders of the Nerbudda valley.

It was five in the morning, and day was dawning, as Nana Sahib, Balao Rao, and their companions drew rein at the foot of the Nazzur torrent. The party here dismounted and left their horses in charge of a couple of Ghoonds, with orders to take them to the nearest village. The rest then followed the brothers, who were already ascending the torrent.

All was still. The noise of day had not yet succeeded to the silence of night. Suddenly a shot was heard, followed by many others; then shouts arose. "Hurrah! hurrah! forward!"

An officer, with fifty British soldiers, appeared on the crest of the pâl. "Fire! let none escape!" he exclaimed.

Another volley was fired straight at the group of Ghoonds which surrounded the Nana and his brother. Five or six natives fell, the others throwing themselves into the stream disappeared among the trees.

"Nana Sahib! Nana Sahib!" shouted the English, as they penetrated the narrow ravine.

All at once, one of those who had been mortally wounded, rose, his hand extended. "Death to the invaders!" he cried, in a hoarse voice, then fell back dead.

The officer approached the body. "Is this indeed Nana Sahib?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it is," answered two of his men, who had been at Cawnpore, and were well acquainted with the person of the nabob.

"After the others now," called out the officer.

And he with all his detachment hastened off into the forest in pursuit.

Scarcely had they disappeared, when a dark figure glided out of the dim recesses of the pâl. It was Roving Flame.

The evening before, the mad woman had been the unconscious guide of the officer and his men. She had entered the valley and was mechanically bending her step toward the Pâl of Tandît, when she happened to pass a bivouac of these soldiers who were engaged in the search for the Nana. As the strange being glided by, the tongue which was supposed to be speechless, uttered a word, a name, that of the slaughterer of Cawnpore.

" Nana Sahib! Nana Sahib! " she repeated, as if some unaccountable presentiment had called up the image in her mind.

The officer heard and started. He instantly ordered up his men and followed in her steps, she appearing neither to see nor hear them. They reached the pâl. Was this indeed the place in which the miscreant had hidden himself? The officer took the necessary measures for guarding the bed of the Nazzur and waited for day.

Directly Nana Sahib and his Ghoonds appeared on the scene, they were met with a volley, which laid many low, and among them, the chief of the Sepoy Mutiny.

Such was the account of the skirmish sent by telegraph to the Governor of the Bombay Presidency. The telegram soon spread all over the peninsula, the papers copied it, and thus Colonel Munro read it on the 26th of May in the *Allahabad Gazette.*

No one could any longer have doubts about the death of Nana Sahib. His identity had been proved, and as the paragraph stated, " India has now nothing further to dread from the machinations of the cruel nabob who has cost her so much blood! "

The madwoman left the pâl and descended the bed of the Nazzur. Her hollow eyes were burning with a strange light, which was not there a short time before, and she still muttered at intervals the name of the Nana.

She reached the spot where the dead bodies lay, and stopped before the one recognized by the soldiers. The horrid scowl with which he died was fixed on his features. Having lived but for vengeance, his hate still survived.

The madwoman knelt down, laid her clasped hands on the body, from which the blood flowed and stained the folds of her dress and looked long and fixedly at the face. Then she arose, and shaking her head, glided slowly away.

By the time she had gone a few yards, Roving Flame had relapsed into her wonted indifference, and her lips no longer uttered the cursed name of Nana Sahib.

END OF BOOK ONE

The Steam House

BOOK TWO

Tigers and Traitors

Tigers and Traitors

CHAPTER I

OUR SANITARIUM

SPEAKING of the great American Andes, the mineralogist Haüy uses a grand expression when he calls them "The incommensurable parts of Creation."

These proud words may justly be applied to the Himalayan chain, whose heights no man can measure with any mathematical precision. They occurred to my mind when I first viewed this incomparable region, in the midst of which Colonel Munro, Captain Hood, Banks, and myself were to sojourn for several weeks.

"Not only are these mountains immeasurable," said the engineer, "but their summit must be regarded as inaccessible; for human organs cannot work at such a height, where the air is not dense enough for breathing!"

This chain may be best described as a barrier of primitive granite, gneiss, and schist rocks, 1,560 miles in length, extending from the seventy-second meridian to the ninety-fifth, through two presidencies, Agra and Calcutta, and two kingdoms, Bhootan and Nepaul. It comprehends three distinct zones; the first 5,000 feet high, being more temperate than the lower plain, and yielding a harvest of corn in the winter, and rice in the summer; the second, increasing from 5,000 to 9,000 feet, on which the snow melts in the spring time, and the third, rising to 25,000, covered with ice and snow, which even in the hot season defies the solar rays.

At an elevation of 20,000 feet the mountains are pierced by eleven passes, which, incessantly threatened by avalanches, swept by torrents, and encumbered by glaciers, yet make it possible, though dangerous and difficult, to go from India to Thibet. Above this ridge, which is sometimes rounded and then again as flat as Table Mountain at the Cape of Good Hope, rise seven or eight peaks, some volcanic, commanding the sources of the Gogra, the Jumna, and the Ganges. The chief are Mounts Dookia and Kinchinjinga, rising to 28,000 feet; Diodhoonga, 24,000; Dhawalagiri, 27,000; Chumalari, 28,000; and the highest in the world, Mount Everest, 29,000 feet. Such is this magnificent pile of mountains, which neither Alps, Pyrenees, nor Andes can excel in loftiness.

The first slopes are extensively and thickly wooded. Here may be found different representatives of the palm family, which, in a higher zone, give place to vast forests of oaks, cypress, and pines, to rich masses of bamboos and herbaceous plants.

Banks, who gave us this information, told us also that the snow-line is 6,000 feet lower on the Indian side of the chain than on the Thibetian; the reason being that the vapors brought by the south winds are arrested by the enormous barrier. On the other side, therefore, villages have been established at an altitude of 15,000 feet in the midst of fields of barley and beautiful meadows. If you believe the natives, one night is sufficient for a crop of grass to carpet these pastures!

In the middle zone, peacocks, partridges, pheasants, bustards, and quails, represent the winged tribe. Goats and sheep abound. In the highest zone we only find the wild boar, the chamois, the wild cat; and the eagle soars above the scanty vegetation, mere humble specimens of an arctic flora.

But there was nothing there to tempt Captain Hood. Was it likely that this Nimrod would have come into the Himalayan region merely to continue his trade of domestic provider? Fortunately for him, there was no chance that game worthy of his Enfield-rifle, and his explosive balls, would be scarce.

At the foot of the first slopes of the chain extends a zone, called by the natives the belt of Terrai. It is a long declivitous stretch of land, four or five miles wide, damp, warm, covered with vegetation and dense forests forming favorite resorts for wild beasts. This Eden of the hunter who loves the stirring features of the chase lay but 1,500 yards below us. It was therefore easy to enter into these preserves, which seemed as it were quite distinct grounds.

It was more than probable that Captain Hood would have greater pleasure in visiting the lower than the upper zones of the Himalayas, although, even after the explorations of that most ill-humored of travelers, Victor Jacquemont, many important geographical discoveries remain yet to be made.

"So this important chain is only very imperfectly known?" I remarked to Banks.

"Very imperfectly indeed," answered the engineer. "The Himalayan chain may be likened to a little planet, stuck on to our globe, and keeping its own secrets."

"They have been surveyed though," said I, "they have been explored as much as is possible!"

"Oh, yes! There has been no lack of Himalayan travelers," replied Banks. "Messrs. Gerard and Webb, the officers Kirkpatrick, Fraser, Hodgson, Herbert, Lloyd, Hooker, Cunningham, Strabing, Skinner, Johnson, Moorcroft, Thomson, Griffith, Vigne, Hügel, the missionaries Huc and Gabet, and more recently the brothers Schlagentweit, Colonel Waugh, Lieutenants Reuillier and Montgomery, have, by dint of great labor, made known in large measure their orological arrangements. Nevertheless, my friends, much remains to be learned.

"The exact heights of the principal peaks have given rise to numberless rectifications. Formerly, Dhawalagiri was the king of the whole chain; then after new measurements, he was forced to yield the throne to Kinchinjinga, who again has abdicated in favor of Mount Everest. At the present time, the latter surpasses all its rivals. However, the Chinese now say that the Kuen-Lun Mountains, to which it is true European measurements have not been applied, surpass Mount Everest in a slight degree, and that we must no longer look to the Himalayas as possessing the highest point of our globe.

"But in reality these measurements must not be considered mathematical until they have been barometrically obtained, and with every precaution that a direct determination will admit of. And how is this to be done without carrying a barometer to the very top of one of these inaccessible peaks? Of course no one has yet accomplished this."

"It will be done," answered Captain Hood, "just as some day voyages will be made to both the north and south pole!"

"Evidently!"

"Or an exploring party to the lowest depths of old Ocean."

"Doubtless."

"Or a journey to the center of the earth?"

"Bravo, Hood!"

"As everything will be done!" I added.

"Even an aërial voyage to each of the planets of the solar system!" rejoined Hood, whom nothing daunted.

"No, captain," I replied. "Man, a mere inhabitant of the earth, cannot overstep its boundaries! But though he is confined to its crust, he may penetrate into all its secrets."

"He can, he must!" cried Banks. "All that is within the limits of possibility may and shall be accomplished. Then when man has nothing more to discover in the globe which he inhabits——"

"He will disappear with the spheroid which has no longer any mysteries concealed from him," put in Captain Hood.

"Not so!" returned Banks. "He will enjoy it as a master, and will derive far greater advantages from it. But friend Hood, now that we are in the Himalayan country, I wish to tell you of a curious discovery which you may make, among others, and which will certainly interest you."

"What is it about, Banks?"

"In the account of his travels, the missionary Huc speaks of a singular tree which is called in Thibet 'the tree of ten thousand pictures.' According to the Hindoo legend, Tong Kabac, the reformer of the Buddhist religion, was changed into a tree, some thousand years after the same adventure happened to Philemon, Baucis, and Daphne, those curious vegetable beings of the mythological flora. The hair of Tong Kabac became the foliage of this sacred tree, and on the leaves are—the missionary declares he saw it with his own eyes—Thibetian characters, distinctly to be traced in the veins."

"A tree producing printed leaves!" I exclaimed.

"And, moreover, on which you may read the purest and most moral sentences," continued the engineer.

"That would be well worth the trouble of proving," said I, laughing.

"Prove it, then, my friends," answered Banks. "If these trees exist in the southern part of Thibet, they surely are to be found in the upper zone, on the southern slopes of the Himalayas. During your excursions, then, you can be on the look out for this—what shall I call it?—this maxim-tree."

"No, by Jove!" returned Captain Hood. "I came here to hunt, and have not the smallest intention of doing anything in the climbing line."

"Well, my dear fellow," resumed Banks, "a daring climber like you ought to make some ascent in all this great chain."

"Never!" exclaimed the captain.

"Why not?"

"I have renounced ascents!"

"Since when?"

"Since the day when, after having risked my life twenty times," answered Captain Hood, "I managed to reach the summit of Vrigel, in the kingdom of Bhootan. It was said that no human being had ever set foot on the top of that peak! There was glory to be gained! my honor was at stake! Well, after no end of narrow squeaks for it, I got to the top, and what did I see but these words cut on a rock: 'Durand, dentist, 14, Rue Caumartin, Paris!' I climb no more!"

The honest captain! I must confess that, while telling us of his discomfiture, Hood looked so comical, that it was impossible to help joining him in a hearty laugh.

I have several times spoken of the "sanatariums" of the peninsula. These resorts in the mountains are much frequented during the summer by landowners, officers, and merchants, who are scorched by the glowing heat of the plains. In the first rank we must name Simla. It is like a little bit of Switzerland, with its torrents, its streams, its châlets, pleasantly situated under the shade of cedars and pines, 6,000 feet above the level of the sea.

After Simla, I must mention Darjeeling, with its pretty white houses, overlooked by Mount Kinchinjinga, 312 miles to the north of Calcutta, 6,900 feet above the level of the sea—a charming situation, in the most beautiful country in the world.

And now to these fresh and healthy stations, rendered indispensable by the burning climate of India, was added our Steam House. But it belonged to ourselves alone. It offered all the comforts of the most luxurious dwellings on the peninsula. Here, in this delicious climate, surrounded by all the necessaries and appliances of modern life, we dwelt in an atmosphere of quietness which we might have sought for in vain at Simla or Darjeeling, where there are swarms of Anglo-Indians.

The site for our sanitarium was judiciously chosen. The road, leaving the lower part of the mountain, diverged at this point both to the east and to the west, so as to connect several scattered villages. The nearest of these hamlets was five miles from Steam House. It was occupied by a hospitable race of mountaineers, who rear goats and sheep, and cultivate rich fields of wheat and barley.

One of the spurs supporting the great framework of the Himalayas formed a gently undulating plateau, nearly a mile in length, and half a mile in width. This was covered with a thick carpet of short, close, velvety grass, dotted all over with violets. Clusters of beautiful rhododendrons, as large as small oaks, and natural arbors of camellias, gave a gay and gardenlike aspect to the scene. Nature had had no need to call in the aid of workmen from Ispahan or Smyrna, to manufacture this vegetable carpet. Several million seeds, brought by the sweet South breezes to the fertile ground, a little rain, a little sunshine, and there lay the green, soft fabric!

In the background roared a torrent, whose course could be traced by its silvery gleam many hundred feet, as it descended the mountainside. It flowed down the right slope of the spur, and plunged, at no great distance from us, into a natural basin, overhung by splendid trees.

The overflow from this basin formed a stream, which, running across our plateau, ended in a noisy cascade, which dashed itself finally into a bottomless gulf.

From this description it may be seen how favorably Steam House was situated, both for comfort for the body and pleasure for the eye. Below us lay other and lesser crests, descending in gigantic steps to the plain. All this we could see from our high place of observation.

Number One of Steam House was placed so that the view to the south might be seen from the veranda as well as from the side windows of the drawing and dining rooms. Over us " a cedar spread his dark-green layers of shade," contrasting with the eternal snow which glittered on the distant mountain peaks.

On the left, Number Two stood close to an enormous granite rock, gilded by the sun. This, our attendants' house, was placed about twenty feet from the principal dwelling. From the end of one of its roofs curled upward a little stream of blue-gray smoke, showing the position of Monsieur Parazard's culinary laboratory.

In the midst of the trees which lay between the two habitations might be seen a huge mastodon. It was Behemoth, standing under a great beech-tree, with his trunk upraised, as if browsing on the branches. He, too, was stationary now; resting, albeit he had no need of rest. However, there he stood, resolute defender of Steam House, like some enormous antediluvian animal, guarding the way.

Colossal as we had always thought our elephant, now that he stood before the everlasting hills, he, the handiwork of puny man, faded into insignificance. "Like a fly on the façade of a cathedral!" remarked Captain Hood contemptuously.

The comparison was good. Here, behind us, was a block of granite, from which a thousand elephants the size of ours might have been carved, and this block was but a simple step in the stair which leads up and up to the topmost crest crowned by the peak of Dhawalagiri.

At times, when the sky lowers, not only the highest summits, but the lower crests, disappear. This is caused by thick vapors sweeping across the middle zone, and veiling all the upper part. The landscape shrinks, and then, by an optical effect, it is as if the houses, the trees, the rocks, and Behemoth himself, resumed their natural size.

When certain moist winds blow, the clouds often roll below the plateau. The eye then rests on nothing but a sea of clouds, illumined here and there by the sun's rays. All land both above and beneath vanishes, and we feel as if transported into some aërial region, beyond the earth.

Suddenly the wind changes. A northern breeze blows through the mountain gulleys, the fog is swept away, the cloudy sea disappears as if by magic, the grand rocks and peaks stand out again, and once more our view extends over a panorama of sixty miles.

CHAPTER II

MATHIAS VAN GUITT

At daybreak on the 26th of June, the jovial tones of a well-known voice aroused me from my slumbers. Captain Hood and his man Fox were engaged in lively conversation in the dining-room, where I soon joined them.

At the same moment Banks made his appearance, upon which the captain greeted him with, "Well, Banks, here we are at last, arrived in safety. It's a positive halt this time. Not a mere stoppage for an hour or two, but a stay of some months."

"Very true, my dear Hood," replied the engineer, "now you can arrange your hunting excursions as you please. Behemoth's whistle won't hurry you back to camp."

"Do you hear, Fox?"

"Ay, ay, captain," answered the man.

"St. Hubert be my speed!" cried Hood. "I vow I won't leave this sanitarium, as you call it, until the fiftieth is added to my list! The fiftieth, Fox! I have an idea that fellow will be particularly hard to get hold of."

"He will be got, though," put in Fox.

"What has put that idea into your head, captain?" I asked.

"Oh, Maucler, it is merely a presentiment—a sportsman's presentiment, nothing more."

"Well, then," said Banks, "from to-day, I suppose, you will commence the campaign?"

"From to-day," answered Captain Hood, "we shall begin by reconnoitering the ground, so as to explore the lower zone, by descending into the Terrai. Provided the tigers have not abandoned their residences."

"Can you imagine such a thing?"

"Remember! my bad luck!"

"Bad luck!—in the Himalayas!" returned the engineer. "Would that be possible?"

"Well, we shall see! You will accompany us, Maucler?" asked Captain Hood, turning to me.

"Yes, certainly."

"And you, Banks?"

"I also," replied the engineer; "and I fancy too that Munro will join you, like myself—as an amateur."

"Oh," returned Hood, "come as amateurs if you like, but you must be amateurs well armed. It would never do to walk about with nothing but sticks in your hands. The very wild beasts would hide themselves for shame."

"Agreed, then," said the engineer.

"Now, Fox," continued the captain, addressing his servant, "no mistakes this time, please. We are in the tiger country. Four Enfield rifles for the colonel, Mr. Banks, Monsieur Maucler, and myself; two guns loaded with explosive ball for yourself and Goûmi."

"Don't be afraid, captain," replied Fox. "The game sha'n't have any reason to complain, I warrant you."

About eleven o'clock, therefore, Sir Edward Munro, Banks, Hood, Fox, Goûmi, and myself, all well armed, descended the road which slanted toward the plain, taking care to leave behind our two dogs, whose services were not required in an expedition of this sort.

Sergeant McNeil remained in camp with Storr, Kâlouth, and the cook, to complete the arrangements. After his two months' journey, Behemoth required to be examined both inside and out, cleaned, and put in order. This was, of course, a long, minute, and delicate operation, which would give his usual keepers, the driver and stoker, occupation for some time.

Soon after leaving our camp, a turn of the road quite hid Steam House, which disappeared from our sight, behind a thick curtain of trees. It no longer rained. A fresh wind blew from the northeast, driving the hurrying clouds before it. The sky was overcast, and the temperature consequently suitable for pedestrians, but we missed the pretty variations of light and shade which add such a charm to woodland scenery.

The six thousand feet down a direct road would have been but an affair of five-and-twenty or thirty minutes, but it was lengthened by the windings it took to avoid steep places. It took us not less than an hour and a half to reach the outskirts of the forest, but we all enjoyed the walk.

"Attention!" exclaimed Captain Hood. "We are now entering the domain of tigers, lions, panthers, leopards, and other interesting inhabitants of the Himalayan region. It is very exciting to destroy wild beasts, but it wouldn't be quite so pleasant to be destroyed by them! Therefore, do not stray away from each other, and be prudent."

Such advice from the lips of so bold a hunter was of considerable value, and we respected it accordingly. We all looked to the loading of our guns, and kept our eyes open. I may add that we not only had to be on our guard against wild beasts, but against serpents also, as the most dangerous of their species infest the Indian forests. Belongas, green serpents, whip snakes are frightfully venomous. The number of victims who succumb annually to the bite of these reptiles is five or six times greater than that of domestic animals or human beings who are killed by wild beasts.

In this region it was no more than the commonest prudence required, to look where you set your foot, or placed your hand, to keep your ears open for the slightest rustle in the grass or bushes, and your eyes, as much as possible, everywhere at once.

At half-past twelve we were well into the forest. The great trees formed wide alleys through which even Behemoth and his train might have passed with ease. Indeed, this part of the forest had been partially cleared by the hill-men, as we ascertained from the marks their carts had left in the soft clay ground. The principal alleys ran parallel with the mountain chain, along the greatest length of the Terrai, connecting the glades formed by the woodman's ax, with more narrow paths which led off from them, and ended in impenetrable thickets.

We followed these avenues, more like surveyors than sportsmen, so as to ascertain their general direction. No roar or scream broke the silence of the woods; but great footprints, plainly recent, showed that wild beasts had not deserted the Terrai.

Suddenly, just as we were turning an angle formed by the hill, an exclamation from Captain Hood brought us all to a standstill.

Twenty paces from us was a construction most peculiar in its shape. It was not a house, for it had neither chimney nor windows. It was not a hunter's lodge, for it had neither loopholes nor embrasures. It might rather have been taken for a native tomb, lost in the depths of the forest.

Imagine a sort of long cube, formed of trunks placed vertically side by side, fixed firmly in the ground, and connected with the upper part by a thick border of boughs. For a roof, other transverse trunks were strongly mortised into the walls. Evidently the builder of this edifice had determined to make it proof against anything. It was nearly six feet high, and twelve feet by five in length and width. There was no sign of any opening, unless one was hidden by a thick beam, of which the rounded top rose a little above the rest of the building. Above the roof were several long flexible tendrils, curiously arranged and tied together. At the extremity of a horizontal lever, which supported all this, hung a running knot, or rather noose, made of a thick twist of creepers.

"Hallo, what's that?" I exclaimed.

"That," answered Banks, after examining it well, "is simply a mouse-trap, and I leave you, my friends, to guess what sort of mice it is destined to catch."

"A tiger-trap?" asked Hood.

"Yes," replied Banks, "a tiger-trap. You see the door is closed by that beam, which was kept up by those tendrils, and which must have dropped when the inner weight was touched by some animal."

"It is the first time," said Hood, "that I ever saw a snare of that kind in an Indian forest. A mouse-trap, indeed! But it isn't worthy of a sportsman."

"Nor of a tiger," added Fox.

"No doubt," said Banks, "but when it is a question of destroying these ferocious animals, and not merely hunting them for pleasure, the best trap is the one which catches most. Now this appears to me most ingeniously arranged to attract and detain wild creatures, however sly and strong they may be."

"Allow me to remark, my friends," said Colonel Munro, "that since the equilibrium of the weight which holds back the door of the trap has been disturbed, the probability is that some animal is taken in it."

"We shall soon know that," cried Captain Hood, "and if the mouse is not dead——"

The captain, giving force to his words, put his gun at full cock. All followed his example.

We had no doubt now that the erection before us was a trap, which, if it was not the work of a native, at any rate was a very practical engine of destruction, being extremely sensitive and uncommonly strong.

Our arrangements made, Captain Hood, Fox, and Goûmi approached and marched round the snare, examining it minutely.

Not the smallest chink, however, gave them the least glimpse into the interior.

They listened attentively. Not a sound betrayed the presence of any living creature. All was silent as the grave.

Hood and his companions came round again to the front. They ascertained that the beam slid up and down in two wide vertical grooves. It was only necessary, therefore, to raise this, and the entrance would be open.

"There's not the slightest sound," said Captain Hood, with his ear close against the door, "not even a breath. The mouse-trap is empty!"

"Never mind that, you must be careful," and saying this, Colonel Munro seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree to the left of the clearing. I placed myself beside him.

"Come, Goûmi," said the captain.

Goûmi, with his supple, well-knit frame, active as a monkey, lithe as a leopard, a regular native acrobat, understood directly what was required of him. His natural adroitness designed him for the service the captain wished done. One spring, and he was on the roof, and grasping one of the rods. Then he crept along the lever till he reached the rope of creepers, and by his weight brought it down to the beam which closed the opening.

The loop was then passed over the head of the beam in a notch made for the purpose. All that now remained to be done was to move it by weighing down the other end of the lever.

The united strength of our little party was required for this, so Colonel Munro, Banks, Fox, and I proceeded to the back of the trap. Goûmi remained on the roof to look after the lever, in case anything prevented it from working freely.

"I say, you fellows," shouted Captain Hood, "if you want me, I will come; but if you can do without me, I would prefer to stop where I am, near the opening. If a tiger pops out, he shall be saluted with one shot, at any rate!"

"And will that count for your forty-second?" asked I.

"Why not?" answered Hood. "If I shoot him, he will have fallen in freedom."

"Don't count your chickens before they are hatched," said the engineer.

"Especially when the chicken may turn out to be a tiger," added the colonel.

"Now, my friends," cried Banks, "all together."

The beam was heavy, and did not run easily in the grooves; we managed, however, to move it just a foot from the ground, but then it stuck.

Captain Hood, with his gun at full cock, bent down, expecting to see some huge paw or nose poking out. Nothing was to be seen.

"Once more!" cried Banks. Goûmi now gave a jerk or two to the lever, and the beam again moved up. Gradually the opening became large enough to give passage even to an animal of great size. But no creature of any description appeared.

It was possible, after all, that owing to the noise made around the trap, the prisoner might have retreated into the farthest corner of his prison. He might perhaps be waiting for a favorable opportunity to spring out, overturn anything that opposed him, and disappear in the depths of the forest. It was very exciting.

At last I saw Captain Hood step forward, his finger on the trigger, and cast a keen glance into the interior of the snare. The beam was by this time completely raised, and the sunlight streamed freely into the building.

At that moment, a slight rustle was heard inside, then a great snore, or rather a tremendous yawn which had a very suspicious sound. Evidently an animal was in there, which had been fast asleep and was now awakening.

Captain Hood advanced still nearer, and pointed his gun at a dark object which he now saw moving in a corner.

Suddenly a cry of terror burst forth, followed immediately by these words, spoken in good English, "Don't fire! For heaven's sake, don't fire!"

The man who uttered them ran out. Our astonishment was such that our hands left their grasp of the lever, and the beam fell again with a dull sound before the opening.

In the meantime, the personage who had so unexpectedly made his appearance, came up to Captain Hood, whose gun was aimed full at the stranger's breast, and in a somewhat affected tone, accompanied by an emphatic gesture, "I beg you will lower your weapon, sir," he said. "It is no tiger that you have to deal with."

Captain Hood, after some hesitation, returned his rifle to a less threatening position.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" asked Banks, advancing in his turn.

"The naturalist Mathias van Guitt, purveyor of pachydermata, tardigrades, plantigrades, proboscidate animals, carnivora, and other mammalia for the house of Mr. Charles Rice of London, and Messrs. Hagenback of Hamburg."

Then indicating us by a comprehensive wave of the arm—"These gentlemen——?"

"Are Colonel Munro and his traveling companions," answered Banks.

"Taking a walk in the Himalayan forest," resumed the purveyor. "A charming excursion indeed. I am happy to pay my respects to you, gentlemen."

Who could this original be, whom we had met in such a strange way? He looked rather as if his wits had gone astray during his imprisonment in the tiger-trap. Was he mad, or was he in possession of his senses? Lastly, to what order of bimana did this individual belong?

We were about to ascertain all this, and we were destined eventually to learn to know well this singular person, who with perfect truth termed himself a naturalist. Mathias van Guitt, menagerie purveyor, was a spectacled man of about fifty. His smooth face, his twinkling eyes, his turned-up nose, the perpetual stir of his whole person, his exaggerated gestures, suited to each of the sentences which issued from his wide mouth, all combined to make him a perfect type of the old provincial comedian. Who has not, at some time or another, met one of these ancient actors, whose whole existence, limited by a horizon of foot-lamps and drop-scene, has been passed between the green-room and stage of a theater? Indefatigable talkers, worrying gesticulators, always striking some theatrical attitude or other, and the head, which is too empty at old age to have ever had much in it, carried high in air, and thrown a little back. There was certainly something of the old actor in Mathias van Guitt.

I have heard an amusing anecdote about a poor wretch of a singer, who prided himself on always suiting his actions to the words of his part. Thus, in the opera of "Masaniello," when he sung,—

> "If of a Neapolitan fisher . . ."

his right arm, extended toward the audience, would shake as if he held at the end of a line the fish which had just swallowed his hook. Then continuing,—

> "Heaven wish'd to make a monarch,"

while one hand was raised toward the roof to indicate Heaven, the other, tracing a circle around his proudly-set head, denoted a royal crown.

> "Rebelling against the decrees of destiny,"

his whole body seemed strongly to resist some unseen agency which almost threw him backward.

> "He would say as he steer'd his bark . . . ."

Then his two arms, quickly brought from left to right, and from right to left, as if moving the scull, showed his skill in guiding a boat.

Well, these gestures, customary with the singer in question, were very similar to those used by Mathias van Guitt. His language was always composed of the choicest terms, and he was sometimes rather annoying to his interlocutors if they could not keep beyond the radius of his gestures.

As we learned later, from his own mouth, Mathias van Guitt was formerly Professor of Natural History in the Rotterdam Museum, but did not succeed in his teaching. The worthy man was doubtless a subject for much laughter, and though pupils flocked to his chair, it was to amuse themselves, not to learn. In short, circumstances induced him to leave his wearisome, unsuccessful teaching of theoretical zoölogy and take to practical zoölogy in the East Indies. This sort of trade suited him better, and he became the agent of important firms in London and Hamburg, who provide both public and private menageries in the two worlds. A large order from Europe for wild beasts had now brought him into the Terrai. Indeed, his camp was not more than a couple of miles from the trap out of which we had just extricated him.

But how had the purveyor got into the snare? This Banks soon asked, and the reply was made in high-flown language, adorned with various gestures.

"It was yesterday. Already had the sun completed half his daily round, when the thought occurred to me that I would go and visit one of the tiger-traps erected in the forest. I therefore quitted my kraal, which I trust you will honor with a visit, gentlemen, and soon reached this clearing. My servants were attending to some urgent work, and I did not wish to disturb them. It was imprudent, I confess. When I arrived before this snare, I observed that the movable beam was raised. From this I drew the logical conclusion that no wild animal had allowed itself to be taken in it. However, wishing to ascertain if the bait was still in its place, and if the working of the weight was in good order, I, with a quick movement, insinuated my body through the narrow aperture." Here the hand of Mathias van Guitt imitated the graceful undulations of a serpent as it glides through the long grass.

"When I reached the other side of the trap," he continued, "I examined the quarter of a goat, the emanations from which were to attract guests to partake of it from this part of the forest. The bait was intact. I was about to withdraw, when an involuntary blow from my arm displaced the weight, the rope became loose, the beam fell, and I found myself taken in my own snare, without any possible means of escape." Mathias van Guitt paused a moment to allow us to take in all the gravity of the situation.

"Yet, gentlemen," he resumed, "I will not conceal from you, that I was first of all struck by the comic view of the matter. I was imprisoned, well! There was no jailer to open the door of my dungeon, granted! But I thought indeed, that my people, finding that I did not reappear at the kraal, would become uneasy at my prolonged absence and commence a search which sooner or later would end in my being discovered. It was but an affair of time.

'Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.'

I consoled myself with these thoughts, and the hours passed away without anything occurring to modify my situation. The shades of evening fell, and pangs of hunger made themselves felt. I imagined the best thing I could do would be to cheat time by sleeping. I resigned myself then philosophically, and was soon in the arms of Morpheus. The night was calm, and silence reigned throughout the forest. Nothing troubled my slumber, and perhaps I should even now be oblivious, if it had not been that I was awakened by an unusual noise. The door of the trap rose slowly, the blessed light of day streamed into my darksome retreat, the way of escape was open before me! What was my dismay, when I perceived the instrument of death aimed full at my heart! A moment more, and I should have been stretched lifeless on the ground! The hour of my deliverance would have been the last of my life! But the gallant captain soon recognized in me a creature of his own species. And I have still to thank you, gentlemen, for having restored to me my liberty."

Such was our new friend's account of himself. It must be acknowledged that we had some difficulty in keeping our gravity, so absurd were his tone and gestures.

"So, sir," said Banks, "your camp is established in this part of the Terrai?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mathias van Guitt. "As I had the pleasure of informing you, my kraal is not more than two miles from here, and if you will honor it with your presence, I shall be happy to receive you there."

"Certainly, Mr. van Guitt," answered Colonel Munro, "we will come and pay you a visit."

"We are hunters," added Captain Hood, "and the arrangements of a kraal will interest us."

"Hunters!" cried Mathias van Guitt, "hunters!" And his countenance betrayed that he held the sons of Nimrod in very moderate estimation. "You hunt wild beasts—for the sake of killing them doubtless?" he resumed, addressing the captain.

"Only to kill them," replied Hood.

"And I only to catch them," answered the purveyor, with evident pride.

"Well, Mr. van Guitt, we sha'n't agree upon that point," said Captain Hood.

The purveyor shook his head. The discovery of our hunting propensities was not, however, of importance enough to make him withdraw his invitation. "When you are ready to follow me, gentlemen," said he, bowing gracefully.

As he spoke, voices were heard in the distance, and very soon half a dozen natives appeared at the other end of the glade. "Ah! here are my people," said Van Guitt.

Then approaching us closer, and placing his finger on his lips, "Not a word of my adventure!" he whispered. "The attendants and servants of the kraal must not know that I have been caught in my own trap like some common animal! It would lessen the reputation for wisdom which I endeavor to preserve in their eyes."

Our sign of acquiescence reassured the purveyor.

"Master," said one of the natives, whose impassible and intelligent countenance attracted my attention; "master, we have been searching for you for more than an hour, without——"

"I was with these gentlemen, who wish to accompany me to the kraal," answered Van Guitt. "But before quitting the clearing, the trap must be put in order."

While the natives were proceeding to obey their master's orders, Mathias van Guitt invited us to visit the interior of the trap. Captain Hood entered with alacrity, and I followed. The space was somewhat limited for the display of our host's gestures, but he nevertheless did the honors as though it were a drawing-room.

"I congratulate you," said Hood, after examining the apparatus. "It is exceedingly well contrived."

"I do not hesitate to say that it is, captain," replied Van Guitt. "This description of snare is infinitely preferable to the ditches set with stakes of hardened wood, or the flexible branches of trees bent together so as to form a running knot. In the first case, the animal is impaled on the sharp points; in the second, it is strangled. That, of course, matters little when the object is merely to kill and destroy. But I who now speak to you must procure the living creature intact, with not the slightest blemish."

"Certainly," said Captain Hood; "we do not proceed in the same way."

"Mine is perhaps the best," said the purveyor. "If you were to consult the animals themselves——"

"But I have no intention of consulting them," replied the captain.

Mathias van Guitt and Captain Hood would have some trouble in getting on together, most decidedly.

"Now when the animals are caught in the trap," I asked, "what do you do next?"

"A rolling cage is brought close to the trap," replied Van Guitt, "the prisoners run into it of their own accord, and then all I have to do is to convey them to the kraal, drawn at a slow and steady pace by my domestic buffaloes."

Scarcely were these words uttered when cries arose outside. Captain Hood and I immediately hastened out of the building. What had happened?

A whip-snake, of the most venomous species, lay on the ground, cut in two pieces by a rod which one of the natives held in his hand, just as it was darting at the colonel. The man was the one I had at first remarked, and his rapid intervention had certainly saved Sir Edward from immediate death.

The cry we had heard was uttered by another of the servants, who now lay on the grass in the agonies of death. By a deplorable fatality, the head of the snake, as it was severed from the body, had bounded against the unfortunate man's chest, its fangs had entered him, and penetrated by the subtle poison, in less than a minute he was dead, all help proving unavailing.

Rousing ourselves from the horror caused by this dreadful sight, we ran up to Colonel Munro. "You are not hurt?" exclaimed Banks, grasping his hand.

"No, Banks, no, make yourself easy," answered Sir Edward.

Then advancing toward the native, to whom he owed his life. "I thank you, friend," he said.

The native made a sign as if to say that no thanks were necessary, for that.

"What is your name?" asked the colonel.

"Kâlagani," answered the Hindoo.

CHAPTER III

THE KRAAL

The death of this unfortunate man made a deep impression upon us, both from the fact itself and from the cause, though it was anything but an unusual occurrence. It was but one more added to the thousands who annually fall victims in India to the formidable reptiles.

It has been said—jestingly I presume—that formerly there were no snakes in Martinique, but that the English imported them when they were obliged to give up the island to France. The French had no occasion to retaliate in this manner when they yielded their conquest in India, for Nature had shown herself only too prodigal in that respect.

Under the influence of the venom, the body of the Hindoo began to exhibit signs of rapid decomposition. A speedy burial was necessary. His companions, therefore, set to work, and soon laid him in a grave deep enough to protect the body from wild beasts. When this sad ceremony was ended, Mathias van Guitt invited us to accompany him to his kraal, and we readily did so.

Half an hour's walk brought us to the place, which deserved its name of *kraal,* though it is a word more especially used by the settlers of South Africa.

It was a wide inclosure, standing in a glade in the depths of the forest. Mathias van Guitt had arranged it with a perfect understanding of the requirements of his trade. A row of high palisades, having a gate wide enough to admit carts, surrounded it on the four sides. Inside was a long hut, made of trunks of trees and planks, which was the dwelling-place.

Six cages, divided into several compartments, and each mounted on four wheels, were drawn up in the left end of the inclosure. From the roars which issued from them, we concluded they were not untenanted.

To the left were penned a dozen buffaloes, which were fed on the mountain grass. These were the animals used to draw the traveling menagerie. Six men, who attended to these creatures and drove the carts, and ten others who were especially skillful in the chase, completed the staff of attendants in the kraal.

The carters were hired only for the duration of the campaign. Their services ended by driving the carts to the nearest railway station. There the cages were placed on trucks, and wheeled off, *via* Allahabad, to Bombay or Calcutta. The hunters, who were Hindoos, are called *shikarries*. They were employed to discover and follow up the traces of animals, dislodge them, and then assist in their capture.

Mathias van Guitt and his men had lived for some months in this kraal. They were there exposed, not only to the attacks of ferocious beasts, but also to the fevers with which the *Terrai* is infested. The damp nights, the pernicious evaporations from the ground, the moist heat hanging about under the thick-growing trees, through which the sun never penetrates, all combine to make this lower zone of the Himalayas a most unhealthy region. The purveyor and his men were, however, so well acclimatized, that the malaria affected them no more than it did the tigers or other inhabitants of the Terrai.

It would not have been wise for us to live in the kraal, nor did this enter into Captain Hood's plan. Except for a night or two passed on the watch, we intended living in Steam House, which was too high up for any baleful vapors to reach us there.

Here were we, then, arrived at Van Guitt's encampment. The door opened for us to enter. Mathias van Guitt appeared particularly flattered by our visit. "Now, gentlemen," he said, "permit me to do the honors of my kraal. This establishment is replete with every necessary for the pursuit of my vocation. In reality, it is but a hut on a large scale, which, in this country, hunters call a *houddi*."

Saying this, our host opened the door of the dwelling which he and his people occupied together. Nothing could have been more simple. One room for the master, another for the carters, and another for the shikarries. A fourth, rather larger, serving for both kitchen and dining-room.

After visiting the habitation of "these bimana, belonging to the highest order of mammalia," we were requested to look at the nearest of the quadruped's dwellings. This was the most interesting part of the kraal. The cages were not like the comfortable dens of a zoölogical garden, but recalled rather the appearance of a traveling show. All that was required to complete them was a gaudily-painted canvas hung above a stage, and representing in startling colors a tamer, in pink tights and velvet jacket, striking an attitude in the midst of a bounding herd of wild beasts, who, with bloody jaws and claws outspread, were cowering under the lash of some heroic Van Amburgh.

A few paces farther on were the buffaloes. They occupied a portion of the kraal on the right, and their daily rations of fresh grass were brought to them there. It would have been impossible to allow these animals to stray in the neighboring pastures. As Mathias van Guitt elegantly remarked, " the freedom of pasture, allowable in the United Kingdom, is incompatible with the dangers presented by the Himalayan forests."

The menagerie, properly so called, comprised six cages on wheels. Each cage, with a barred front, was divided into three compartments. Doors, or rather partitions, moved from the top, made it easy for the animals in one compartment to be driven into another when necessary.

The cages at the present time contained seven tigers, two lions, three panthers, and a couple of leopards.

Van Guitt informed us that his stock would not be complete until he had captured two leopards, three tigers, and one lion more. Then he intended leaving this camp, proceeding to the nearest railway station, and thence traveling to Bombay.

The wild beasts were easily watched in their cages, and proved to be magnificent creatures, but particularly ferocious. They had been too recently caught to have yet become accustomed to a state of captivity. This was plain from their constant roars, their restless pacings up and down, and the blows they gave the bars, straining them in many places.

On seeing us, their rage was redoubled; but Van Guitt was not in the least disturbed.

" Poor beasts! " remarked Captain Hood.

" Poor beasts! " echoed Fox.

" Do you believe, then, that they are more to be pitied than those which you kill? " asked our host, somewhat sharply.

"Less to be pitied than blamed . . . for allowing themselves to be caught!" returned Hood.

If it is true that the wild beasts of a country such as Africa are sometimes compelled to undergo a long fast, because the animals upon which they feed are scarce, such could never be the case in the Terrai zone. Here abound bisons, buffaloes, zebras, boars, antelopes, to which the lions, tigers, and panthers are constantly giving chase. Besides goats and flocks of sheep, not to mention the poor ryots who are their shepherds, offer a certain and easy prey. They always find abundance in the Himalayan forests to satisfy their hunger. The purveyor fed his menagerie chiefly on the flesh of bison and zebras, and it was the shikarries' duty to procure this meat.

It is a mistake to imagine that this species of hunting is without danger. Quite the contrary. The tiger himself has much to fear from the savage buffalo, who is a terrible animal when wounded. Many a hunter has, to his horror, found his antagonist rooting up, with its horns, the tree in which he has taken refuge.

It is said that the eye of a ruminant is a regular magnifying lens, increasing the size of an object threefold, and that man, in this gigantic aspect, awes him. It is also asserted that the upright position of a human being walking is of a nature to terrify ferocious animals, and, therefore, that it is far better to face them standing than lying or crouching down. I cannot tell how much truth there may be in these statements; but it is very certain that a man, even when drawn up to his full height, produces no effect whatever on the savage buffalo; and if his shot misses, he is almost certainly lost.

The buffalo of India has a short, square head, smooth horns, flattened at the base, a humped back—like its American congener—its legs, from the foot to the knee, being white, and its size, from the root of the tail to the end of its muzzle, measuring sometimes twelve feet. Although it is not particularly ferocious when feeding in herds on the plain, it yet is very formidable to any hunter who rashly attacks it.

The purveyor, who knew his business, was very sparing as to his captives' food. Once a day, at twelve o'clock, four or five pounds of meat were given them, and nothing more.

He even, though not from any religious motive, allowed them to fast from Saturday to Monday. They must have passed a dismal Sunday! Then, when forty-eight hours had elapsed, and their modest pittance appeared, the excitement and the roaring may be imagined, the cages actually swaying backward and forward with the movement of the springing, bounding creatures inside.

Yes, poor beasts! we may be tempted to say with Captain Hood. But Mathias van Guitt did not act thus without a motive; and this enforced abstinence was good for the animals, and heightened their price in the European market.

It may easily be imagined that while Van Guitt was exhibiting his collection, more as a naturalist than a showman, his tongue was not allowed to stand still. On the contrary. He talked, he described, he related; and as wild beasts were the principal subjects of his redundant periods, it was all tolerably interesting to us.

"But, Mr. van Guitt," said Banks, "can you tell me if the profits of the trade are in proportion to the risks that are run?"

"Sir," answered the purveyor, "it was formerly extremely remunerative. However, for the last few years, I have been forced to perceive that ferocious animals have declined. You may judge of this by the current prices of the last quotation. Our principal market is the Zoölogical Garden in Antwerp. Volatiles, ophidians, specimens of the simian and saurian family, representatives of the carnivora of both hemispheres, such is the consuetudinal——"

At this word Captain Hood bowed.

"—produce of our adventurous battues in the forests of the peninsula. From one cause or another the public taste seems to have altered, and the sale price is sometimes less than what was expended on the capture! For instance, a male ostrich is now sold but for 44*l.*, and the female for 32*l.* A black panther found a purchaser for only 60*l.*, a Java tigress for 96*l.*, and a family of lions—father, mother, uncle, and two healthy cubs—were sold in a lump for 280*l.*"

"They really went for nothing," said Banks.

"As to proboscidate animals—" resumed Van Guitt.

"Proboscidate?" said Captain Hood.

"We call by that scientific name those pachydermata which nature has furnished with a trunk."

"Such as elephants!"

"Yes, elephants since the quaternary period. They were 'mastodons' in the prehistoric times."

"Thank you," replied Hood.

"As to proboscidate animals," resumed Van Guitt, "we must soon renounce even their capture, unless it is for the sake of their tusks; for the consumption of ivory has in no way diminished. But since the authors of dramatic pieces, at their wit's end for some novelty, have conceived the idea of introducing these creatures on the stage, they are taken about from one town to another; so that the same elephant, parading the country with a strolling company, satisfies the curiosity of a whole province. From this cause, elephants are in less request than formerly."

"But," I asked, "do you only supply European menageries with these specimens of the Indian fauna?"

"You will pardon me," replied Mathias van Guitt, "if on this subject, sir, I allow myself, without being too curious, to put to you a simple question?"

I bowed in token of acquiescence.

"You are French, sir," said the purveyor. "That is plainly seen, not only by your accent, but by your type, which is an agreeable combination of the Gallo-Roman and the Celt. Now, as a Frenchman, you cannot have any propensity for distant journeys, and probably have not made the tour of the world?" Here Van Guitt's hand described one of the great circles of the sphere.

"I have not yet had that pleasure," I replied.

"I will ask you, then, sir," continued our friend, "not if you have been to the Indies, as you are already here, but if you are thoroughly acquainted with the Indian peninsula?"

"Imperfectly as yet," I answered. "However, I have already visited Bombay, Calcutta, Benares, Allahabad, and the valley of the Ganges. I have seen their monuments, I have admired——"

"Ah! what is that, sir, what is all that?" interrupted Mathias van Guitt, turning away his head, and shaking his hand, in a manner to express supreme disdain.

Then launching out into an animated description, "Yes, what is all that, if you have not visited the menageries of those powerful rajahs, who maintain the worship of the superb animals, on which the sacred territory of India prides itself? Resume your tourist's staff, sir. Go into Guicowar, and render homage to the King of Baroda. Inspect his menageries, which owe the greater number of their tenants, lions from Kattiwar, bears, panthers, cheetahs, lynx, and tigers, to me. Be present at the celebration of the marriage of his sixty thousand pigeons, which takes place every year, with great pomp! Admire his five hundred bulbuls, the nightingales of the peninsula, whose education is attended to as carefully as if they were heirs to the throne! Contemplate the elephants; one of them is the executioner, and his business it is to dash the head of the condemned man on the stone of punishment! Then transfer yourself to the establishments of the Rajah of Maissour, the richest of Asiatic sovereigns. Enter his palace, where you may count hundreds of rhinoceri, elephants, tigers, and every creature of high rank which belongs to the animal aristocracy of India! And when you have seen all this, sir, perhaps you need no longer be accused of ignorance of the marvels of this incomparable country!"

I could do no more than bow before these remarks. Van Guitt's impassioned style of representing things admitted of no discussion.

Captain Hood, however, pressed him more directly about the particular fauna of this region of the Terrai.

"A little information, if you please," he said, "about the wild beasts which I have come to this part of India to hunt. Although I am only a sportsman, and I repeat, I do not compete with you, Mr. van Guitt, yet if I could be of any use in capturing the tigers which you still want for your collection, I shall only be too pleased to do so. But, when your menagerie is completed, you must not take it ill if I, in my turn, shoot a few for my own personal amusement."

Mathias van Guitt put himself into the attitude of a man who has resigned himself to submit to what he disapproves of, but does not know how to prevent. He admitted, however, that the Terrai contains a considerable number of troublesome animals, in no great request in the European markets, so that their sacrifice might be permitted.

"Kill the boars, I consent to that," said he. "Although these swine of the order of pachydermata, are not carnivorous——"

" Carnivorous? " said Captain Hood.

" I mean by that, that they are herbivorous; their ferocity is so great, that hunters who are rash enough to attack them run the greatest danger."

" And wolves? "

" Wolves are numerous all over the peninsula, and are much to be dreaded when they advance in herds on some solitary farm. These animals slightly resemble the wolf of Poland, and I certainly have not much esteem either for jackals or wild dogs. I do not deny the ravages they commit, and as they have not the smallest marketable value, and are unworthy to figure among the higher classes of zoo-ocracy, I will abandon them also to you, Captain Hood."

" And bears? " I next asked.

" Bears are good, sir," answered the zoölogist with a nod of approval. " Although those of India are not sought for quite as eagerly as others of the family Ursidæ, they nevertheless possess a certain commercial value which recommends them to the benevolent attention of connoisseurs. Your taste might hesitate between the two species which we find in the valleys of Cashmere and the hills of Rajmahal. But, except perhaps in the hibernating period, these creatures are almost inoffensive, and, in short, would not tempt the cynegetic instincts of a true sportsman, such as I hold Captain Hood to be."

The captain smiled in a significant manner, showing well that with or without the permission of Mathias van Guitt, he meant only to refer to himself on these special questions.

" These animals," continued Van Guitt, " feed only on vegetables, and have nothing in common with the ferocious species, on which the peninsula so justly plumes itself."

" Do you include the leopard in your list of wild beasts? " asked Captain Hood.

" Most certainly, sir. This creature is active, bold, full of courage, and he can climb trees, so for that reason he is sometimes more formidable than the tiger."

" Oh! " ejaculated the captain.

" Sir," answered Mathias van Guitt in a dignified tone, " when a hunter is no longer sure of finding a refuge in trees, he is very near being hunted in his turn! "

" And the panther? " asked Captain Hood, willing to cut short this discussion.

"The panther is superb," answered Mathias van Guitt; "and you may observe, gentlemen, that I have some magnificent specimens. Astonishing animals, which by a singular contradiction, an antilogy, to use an uncommon word, may be trained for the chase. Yes, gentlemen, in Guicowar especially, the rajahs use panthers in this noble exercise. They are taken out in a palanquin, with their heads muffled like a falcon or a merlin! Indeed, they are regular four-footed hawks! No sooner do the hunters come in sight of a herd of antelopes, than the panther is unhooded, and flies upon the timid ruminants, whose feet, swift as they are, cannot carry them beyond the reach of those terrible claws! Yes, captain, yes! You will find panthers in the Terrai! You may perhaps find more than you care for, but I warn you charitably that they are by no means tame!"

"I should hope not," was Captain Hood's reply.

"Nor the lions either," added the zoölogist, somewhat vexed at this answer.

"Ah! lions!" said Hood. "Let us speak a little about lions, please!"

"Well, sir," resumed Mathias van Guitt, "I regard the so-called king of beasts as inferior to his congeners of ancient Libya. Here the males do not wear that mane which is the appendage of the African lion, and in my opinion, they are, therefore, but shorn Sampsons! They have, besides, almost entirely disappeared from Central India to seek a refuge in the Kattiwar peninsula, the desert of Theil, and the Terrai forest. These degenerate felines, living solitary, like hermits, do not gain strength by frequenting the company of their fellows. Therefore, I do not give them the first place in the scale of quadrupeds. Indeed, gentlemen, you may escape from a lion, from a tiger, never!"

"Ah! tigers!" cried Captain Hood.

"Yes, tigers!" echoed Fox.

"The tiger," replied Van Guitt, growing animated, "to him belongs the crown. We speak of the royal tiger, not the royal lion, and that is but justice. India belongs entirely to him, and may be summed up in him. Was he not the first occupant of the soil? Was it not his right to look upon as invaders, not only the representatives of the Anglo-Saxon race, but also the polar race? Is he not indeed the true child of this sacred land of Aryvarta? These magnificent animals are spread over the whole surface of the peninsula, and they have not abandoned a single district of their ancestors, from Cape Comerin to the Himalayan barrier!"

And Mathias van Guitt's arm, stretched out to denote the southern promontory, was now waved northward toward the mountain peaks.

"In the Sunderbunds," he continued, "they are at home! There they reign as masters, and woe to all who attempt to dispute with them their territory! In the Neilgherry Hills they roam about in a body, like wild cats.

"'Si parva licet componere magnis!'

You can understand from this why these superb felidæ are in such demand in all European markets, and are the pride of menageries! What is the great attraction in the public or private wild beast show? The tiger! When do you most fear for the life of the tamer? When he is in the tiger's cage! For what animals do the rajahs pay their weight in gold to obtain them to ornament their royal gardens? The tiger! What creature is always at a premium in the wild animal market exchange of London, Antwerp, and Hamburg? The tiger! In what chase do British officers in India so distinguish themselves? In the tiger hunt! Do you know, gentlemen, what entertainment the independent sovereigns of India provide for their guests? A royal tiger in a cage is brought. The cage is placed in the midst of a wide plain. The rajah, his guests, his officers, his guards, are armed with lances, revolvers, and rifles, and are, for the most part, mounted on gallant solipeds——"

"Solipeds?" said Captain Hood.

"Their horses, if you prefer the more vulgar word. Already the solipeds, terrified by the near neighborhood of the tiger, his scent, and the light which gleams from his eyes, rear, so that it requires all their rider's skill to manage them. Suddenly the door of the cage is thrown open. The monster springs forth; with wild leaps he flies on the scattered groups; in his fury he immolates a hecatomb of victims. Although sometimes he contrives to break through the circle of fire and sword with which he is surrounded, more often he is overcome and falls, one against a hundred.

But, at least, his death is a glorious one, it is avenged beforehand."

"Bravo, Mr. van Guitt," cried Captain Hood, in his turn becoming quite excited. "Yes, that must be a fine sight. Truly the tiger is the king of beasts."

"A royalty, too, which defies revolution," added the zoölogist.

"You have caught many, Mr. van Guitt," said Hood, "I have killed many, and I hope not to leave the Terrai until the fiftieth has fallen by my shot."

"Captain," said the purveyor with a frown, "I have delivered up to you boars, wolves, bears, and buffaloes, will not those suffice to gratify your sporting mania?"

I saw that our friend Hood would burst forth with as much animation as Mathias van Guitt on this exciting question. Had the one captured more tigers than the other had killed? Was it better to catch or shoot them? This was the matter and theme of discussion! The captain and the zoölogist commenced to exchange rapid sentences, both speaking at once, and apparently not in the least comprehending what the other said.

Banks interposed. "That tigers are the kings of creation is understood, gentlemen, but I must be permitted to add that they are very dangerous to their subjects. In 1862, if I am not mistaken, these excellent felidæ devoured all the telegraph clerks in the Island of Sangor. We are also told of a tigress who, in three years, made no less than a hundred and eighteen victims, and another, who in the same space of time destroyed a hundred and twenty-seven persons. That is rather too much, even for a queen! Lastly, since the mutiny, in an interval of three years, twelve thousand five hundred and fifty-four individuals have perished by tigers teeth or claws."

"But, sir," replied Van Guitt, "you seem to forget that these animals are omophagæ."

"Omophagæ?" said Captain Hood.

"Yes, eaters of raw flesh, and the natives say that when they have once tasted human flesh, they never care for any other!"

"Well, sir?" said Banks.

"Well, sir," answered Mathias van Guitt, smiling, "they obey their nature! . . . They certainly must eat!"

CHAPTER IV

A QUEEN OF THE TERRAI

THIS remark of the zoölogist ended our visit to the kraal, as it was time to return to Steam House.

I must say that Captain Hood and Mathias van Guitt did not part the best friends in the world. One wished to destroy the wild beasts of the Terrai, the other wished to catch them; yet there were plenty to satisfy both.

It was, however, agreed that intercourse between the kraal and the sanitarium should be frequent. Each was to give information to the other. Van Guitt's shikarries, who were well acquainted with this sort of expedition, and knew every turn of the forest, were to render a service to Captain Hood by showing him the tracks of animals. The zoölogist most obligingly placed all his men, and especially Kâlagani, at his disposal. This native, although but recently engaged at the kraal, showed himself very intelligent, and completely to be depended on.

In return, Captain Hood promised, as far as lay in his power, to aid in the capture of the animals which were yet wanting to complete the stock of Mathias van Guitt.

Before leaving the kraal, Sir Edward Munro, who probably did not purpose making many visits there, again thanked Kâlagani, whose intervention had saved him. He told him that he should always be welcome at Steam House.

The native saluted coldly. Although he must have felt some sentiment of satisfaction at hearing the man whose life he had preserved speak thus, he allowed no trace of it to appear on his countenance.

We returned in time for dinner. As may be imagined, Mathias van Guitt was our chief subject of conversation. "By Jove! what an absurd fellow he is," said the captain. "What with his gestures, his fine choice of words, and his grand expression, he is a caution! Only, if he fancies that wild beasts are mere subjects for exhibition, he is greatly mistaken!"

On the three following days, the 27th, 28th, and 29th of June, rain fell with such violence, that our hunters, to their great annoyance, could not dream of leaving Steam House. In such dreadful weather it would be impossible to find a track, and the carnivora, who are no fonder of water than are cats, would not willingly leave their dens. At last the weather showed signs of clearing, and Hood, Fox, Goûmi, and I made preparations for descending to the kraal.

During the morning, some mountaineers came to pay us a visit. They had heard that a miraculous pagoda had been transported to the Himalayas, and a lively feeling of curiosity had brought them to Steam House.

They were fine types of the Thibetian frontier race. Full of warlike virtues, of tried loyalty, practising liberal hospitality, and far superior, both morally and physically, to the natives of the plains. The supposed pagoda astonished them; but Behemoth so impressed them as to draw from them marks of adoration. He was now at rest, what would not these good people have felt if they had seen him, vomiting forth flame and smoke, and ascending with a steady step the rough slopes of their mountains!

Colonel Munro gave a kind reception to these men, who usually frequented the territories of Nepaul, on the Indo Chinese boundary. The conversation turned for a time on that part of the frontier where Nana Sahib had taken refuge, after the defeat of the sepoys.

These hillmen knew scarcely so much as we did ourselves on this matter. The rumors of the nabob's death had reached them, and they cast no doubt upon it. As to those of his companions who had survived, perhaps they had sought a more secure refuge in the depths of Thibet; but to find them in that country would have been difficult. Indeed, if Colonel Munro, in coming to the north of the peninsula, had had any idea of throwing light on Nana Sahib's history, this reply should have satisfied him. In listening to our visitors he remained thoughtful, and took no more part in the conversation.

Captain Hood put some questions to them, but on quite another point. He learned that wild beasts, more particularly tigers, had made frightful ravages in the lower zone of the Himalayas. Farms, and even whole villages, had been deserted by their inhabitants. Many flocks of goats and sheep had been already destroyed, besides numerous victims among the natives. Notwithstanding the considerable sum offered by the government—three hundred rupees for every tiger's head—the number of these creatures did not appear to diminish, and people were asking themselves whether they would not soon be obliged to leave the country to them entirely.

The hillmen also added this information, that the tigers did not confine themselves entirely to the Terrai. Whenever the plain offered them tall grass, jungle, and trees among which they could crouch, there they might be met with in great numbers. "The evil beasts!" was their expression.

These honest people had very good cause not to profess the same opinions on the subject of tigers as the zoölogist Mathias van Guitt and our friend Captain Hood.

The mountaineers retired, enchanted with the reception they had met with, and promising to repeat their visit to Steam House. After their departure our preparations were completed, and Captain Hood, our two companions, and I, all well armed ready for any encounter, descended to the Terrai.

On arriving at the trap from which we had so fortunately extracted Mathias van Guitt, that gentleman presented himself before our eyes, not without some ceremony.

Five or six of his people, Kâlagani among the number, were occupied in getting a tiger, which had been caught during the night, from the snare into a traveling-cage. It was a magnificent animal indeed, and, as a matter of course, caused Captain Hood to feel corresponding envy!

"One less in the Terrai!" he murmured, between two sighs which found their echo in Fox's manly breast.

"One more in the menagerie," replied the zoölogist. "Still two tigers, a lion, and two leopards, and I shall be in a position to honor my engagements before the end of the season. Will you come with me to the kraal, gentlemen?"

"Thank you," said Captain Hood; "to-day, however, we are out on our own account."

"Kâlagani is at your disposal, Captain Hood," replied the purveyor. "He is well acquainted with the forest, and may be useful to you."

"We will gladly take him as a guide."

"Farewell, gentlemen," said Van Guitt; "I wish you good sport! But promise me not to massacre them all!"

"We will leave you a few," returned Hood.

And Mathias van Guitt, saluting us with a superb bow, followed his cage, and soon disappeared among the trees.

" Forward! " said Hood, " forward, my men. Hurrah for my forty-second! "

" And my thirty-eighth! " responded Fox.

" And my first! " I added. But the quiet way in which I uttered the words, made the captain laugh. Evidently, I did not feel the sacred fire.

Hood turned to Kâlagani. " So you know the forest well? " he asked.

" I have been over it twenty times, day and night, in every direction," replied the man.

" Have you heard that a particular tiger has been lately noticed near the kraal? "

" Yes; but this tiger is a tigress. She has been seen two miles from here, in the upper part of the forest, and they have been trying to get hold of her for several days. Should you like——"

" That's just what we want! " answered Captain Hood, without giving the native time to finish the sentence.

To follow Kâlagani was the best thing we could do, so we did it. Wild beasts were apparently very plentiful in the Terrai, but here, as everywhere else, each required two bullocks a week for their own particular consumption! Just calculate what the cost of such a " keep " would be to the entire peninsula.

It must not be imagined that the numerous tigers visit inhabited country unless impelled by necessity. Till urged by hunger, they remain hidden in their lairs. Very many travelers have journeyed through these forests without even catching a glimpse of one. When a hunt is organized, the first thing to be done is to reconnoiter the places most frequented by the animal, and especially to find out the stream or spring to which he comes to slake his thirst.

Sometimes this is not sufficient, and he has to be attracted to the spot. This is done easily enough by putting a quarter of beef tied to a stake in some place surrounded by trees and rocks to shelter the hunters. This at least, is the way they proceed in the forest.

In the plains, it is another thing, and there the elephant becomes the most useful auxiliary to man in his dangerous sport. These animals have, however, to be trained to the work, though even then, they are sometimes seized with a panic which renders the position of the men perched on their backs dangerous in the extreme. It must also be said that sometimes the tiger does not hesitate to spring on the elephant. The struggle between the man and beast then takes place on the very back of the gigantic steed, and it is rarely indeed that it does not end in favor of the tiger.

In this way the grand hunts of the rajahs and great sportsmen of India are conducted, but it was by no means Captain Hood's manner of proceeding. He was going to search for tigers on foot, and it was on foot that he was accustomed to fight them.

In the meantime, we were following Kâlagani, who was walking on at a round pace. Reserved as all Hindoos are, he spoke little, and contented himself with replying briefly to the questions which we put to him.

After walking for an hour, we halted by a rapid stream, and on its banks were the still fresh tracks of animals. In a little glade was a stake, to which was fastened a quarter of beef. The bait had not been entirely untouched. It had been recently gnawed by the teeth of jackals, those thieves of the Indian fauna, always in quest of prey, but this was not intended for them. A dozen or so of these creatures fled at our approach, and left the place clear.

"Captain," said Kâlagani, "we must wait for the tigress here. You see that it is a good place for an ambush."

It was, indeed, easy to post ourselves in trees or behind rocks, so as to have a cross-fire over the post in the center of the glade. This was immediately done. Goûmi and I took our places in the same tree. Hood and Fox perched themselves in two magnificent oaks opposite each other. Kâlagani hid behind a high rock, which he could climb if the danger became imminent.

The animal would be thus enclosed in a circle. All the chances were against it, although we were as yet reckoning on the unforeseen. We had now to wait.

We could still hear the hoarse bark of the dispersed jackals in the neighboring thickets, but they did not dare to return. Nearly an hour had thus passed, when the yelps suddenly ceased. Almost immediately two or three jackals bounded out of the wood, and darting across the glade, disappeared in the thicker part of the forest.

A sign from Kâlagani, who was ready to climb his rock, told us to be on our guard. We guessed that the precipitate flight of the jackals must have been caused by the approach of some savage animal—the tigress no doubt—so that we were ready to see her at any moment appear on one side or other of the glade.

Our guns were all ready. Captain Hood and his man held their weapons pointed at the place from which the jackals had issued.

Very soon I saw a slight agitation among the upper branches of the thicket. The snapping of dry wood was also heard. Some animal was approaching, but slowly and warily. Though evidently seeing nothing of the hunters in wait among the branches, its instinct warned it that the place was not quite safe. Certainly, unless urged by hunger, and attracted by the smell of the beef, it would not have ventured farther.

At last we could see it through the branches, where it stopped, probably mistrustful. It was a huge tigress, powerful and active. She began to advance, crouching, and with an undulatory movement.

With one consent, we allowed her to approach the post. She smelt the ground, she drew herself up and arched her back, like a gigantic cat, prepared to spring.

Suddenly two sharp reports rang out.

"Forty-two!" cried Captain Hood.

"Thirty-eight!" shouted Fox.

The captain and his man had fired at the same moment, and with such true aim, that the animal, shot through the heart, fell dead on the ground.

Kâlagani ran up. We all quickly descended from our various trees. The tigress did not stir.

But to whom belonged the honor of having killed her? To the captain or to Fox? This was an important question, as may be imagined. The beast was examined. Two balls were found in the heart!

"Come," said Hood, not without a slight touch of regret in his voice, "we've got half a tiger apiece."

"So we have, captain; half a tiger apiece," answered Fox, in the same tone.

And I verily believe neither of the two would, on any account have given up the share he reckoned to his own account.

Such was this wonderful shot, of which the clearest result was that the animal had fallen without a struggle, and consequently without danger to the assailants—a very rare occurrence. Fox and Goûmi remained on the field of battle, in order to despoil the animal of her magnificent skin, while Captain Hood and I returned to Steam House.

It is not my intention to note every incident of our expeditions into the Terrai forest, but only those which present some particular characteristic. I shall content myself with saying that, so far, Captain Hood and Fox found no reason to complain.

On the 10th of July, during a houddi hunt, a happy chance again favored them, without their running any real danger. The houddi, or hut, its walls pierced with loopholes, is built on the borders of a stream at which animals are accustomed to come and drink. Used to the sight of these erections, they are not alarmed, and carelessly expose themselves to be shot at. But, to be safe, it is necessary to mortally wound the creature at the first, or he becomes dangerous, and the hut does not always protect the hunter from his infuriated spring.

This is exactly what occurred on the occasion of which I am about to speak. Mathias van Guitt accompanied us. Perhaps he hoped that some tiger, slightly wounded, might fall to his share, to take home to his kraal and be cured.

This time our sportsmen had three tigers to deal with. The first discharge was not sufficient to prevent them from springing on to the walls of the houddi. The two first, to the zoölogist's great disgust, were each killed by a second ball, but the third leaped right in, his shoulder covered with blood, but not mortally wounded.

"We must have that fellow!" cried Van Guitt, who risked not a little in speaking thus. "We must take him alive!"

Scarcely had he uttered the words when, with a bound, the animal was upon him. He was overthrown in an instant, and it would have been all up with our friend had not Captain Hood sent a ball through the tiger's head, and thus saved the Dutchman, who sprang up, exclaiming, "Well, captain, you might just as well have waited——"

"Waited—what for?" answered Captain Hood; "until that brute had torn you to bits with his claws?"

"A wound with a claw needn't be mortal!"

"All right," returned Captain Hood quietly. "Another time I will wait!"

This tiger, however, instead of figuring in a menagerie, was fated only to be used as a hearthrug; but it brought up the list to forty-two for the captain, and thirty-eight for his man, without counting the half-tigress.

It must not be imagined that these grand hunts made us neglect smaller ones. Monsieur Parazard could not allow that. Antelopes, chamois, great bustards, of which there were numbers around Steam House, partridges and hares supplied our table with a great variety of game.

When we went into the Terrai, it was very rarely that Banks accompanied us. Although these expeditions began to interest me, he did not seem to care for them. The upper zones of the Himalayas evidently offered him greater attractions, and he took pleasure in these excursions, especially when Colonel Munro consented to join him.

But it was only once or twice that the engineer could persuade his friend to do so. We observed that since our installation in the sanitarium, Sir Edward Munro had again become anxious. He spoke less, he kept aloof from us, but held long conferences with Sergeant McNeil. Were these two men meditating some new project which they wished to keep concealed even from Banks?

On the 13th of July Mathias van Guitt came to pay us a visit. Less favored than the captain, he had not added a single fresh tenant to his menagerie. Neither tigers, lions, nor leopards seemed disposed to be caught. The idea of going to exhibit themselves in the countries of the West apparently did not allure them. Consequently the zoölogist was in a very bad humor, and did not seek to hide it. Kâlagani and two shikarries accompanied him on this visit.

The situation of our house pleased him much. Colonel Munro begged him to remain and dine. He consented with pleasure to honor our table. While waiting for dinner, Van Guitt wished to go over Steam House, the comfort of which was a contrast to the modest arrangements of the kraal. Our dwellings drew forth many compliments from him, but I must confess that Behemoth did not excite his admiration in the least. A naturalist, such as he was, could not but be indifferent to this masterpiece of mechanics. Remarkable as it was, how could he admire a mere imitation—a mechanical creation?

"Do not think badly of our elephant, Mr. van Guitt!" said Banks. "He is a powerful animal, who would make nothing of drawing all your menagerie cages and our cars as well."

"I have my buffaloes," answered the naturalist, "and I prefer their slow and steady pace."

"Behemoth fears neither the claws nor teeth of tigers!" cried Hood.

"No doubt, gentlemen," replied Mathias van Guitt, "but why should wild beasts attack him? They would not care for iron flesh!"

Though the zoölogist did not conceal his indifference to our elephant, his men and Kâlagani in particular were never tired of staring at it. Mingled with their admiration for the gigantic animal, there was evidently some superstitious respect. Kâlagani appeared very much surprised when the engineer repeated that our iron elephant was more powerful than all the teams at the kraal put together. This was an opportunity for Captain Hood to describe, not without pride, our adventure with the three "proboscidate animals" belonging to Prince Gourou Singh. A slight incredulous smile curled the lip of the naturalist, but he said nothing.

On the 16th of July something occurred which made a regular quarrel between the zoölogist and the captain. Hood shot a tiger just as it was about to enter one of the traps; and though this made his forty-third, it was not the eighth which the purveyor wished for.

However, after a lively interchange of epithets, harmony was once more restored, thanks to Colonel Munro's intervention, and Captain Hood promised to respect any animal who "had intentions" of being caught in Van Guitt's traps.

For the ensuing days the weather was detestable. We were obliged to stay indoors *nolens volens*. We were anxious that the rainy season should come to an end, and that could not now be long, for it had already lasted for more than three months. If the program of our journey was carried out as Banks had arranged, we had only six weeks to pass in our sanitarium.

On the 23d of July some hillmen came to pay a second visit to Colonel Munro. Their village, called Souari, lay but five miles from our encampment on the upper limit of the Terrai. One of them told us, that for several weeks past, a tigress had been making frightful ravages on this part of the territory. The flocks were being carried off, and they even talked of abandoning Souari as uninhabitable. There was no safety in it, either for man or beast. Snares and traps had been tried without any success on the ravenous beast, which already was spoken of as one of the most formidable ever known among even the oldest mountaineers.

It may be guessed that the story excited Captain Hood at once. He immediately offered to accompany the men back to their village, ready to put his hunting experience and his accurate aim at the service of these honest people, who, I imagine, counted not a little on such an offer.

"Shall you come, Maucler?" asked the captain, in the tone of a man who did not wish to influence a determination.

"Certainly," I replied. "I should not like to miss such an interesting expedition."

"I will join you, this time," said the engineer.

"That's capital, Banks."

"Yes, Hood. I have a great wish to see you at work!"

"Am I not to go, captain?" asked Fox.

"Ah, you rascal!" laughed his master. "You won't be sorry for an opportunity to make up your half-tigress! Yes, Fox, yes, you shall go!"

As we should probably be absent from Steam House for three or four days, Banks asked the colonel whether he would not like to go with us to the village of Souari. Sir Edward thanked him, but said he proposed to profit by our absence to visit the middle zone of the Himalayas above the belt of forest, with Goûmi and Sergeant McNeil. Banks did not urge the matter.

It was decided that we should set out directly for the kraal, in order to borrow from Mathias van Guitt a few of his shikarries, who might be useful to us. About midday we arrived there, and acquainted the naturalist with our intentions. He could not conceal his secret satisfaction in hearing of the exploits of this tigress, "well calculated," said he, "to heighten the reputation of these felidæ of the peninsula in the minds of connoisseurs." He then placed at our disposal three of his men, besides Kâlagani, always ready for any danger.

It was settled with Captain Hood that, if by any possibility the tigress should be taken living, it was to belong to Van Guitt's menagerie. What an attraction it would be to have a placard hung in front of its cage, stating in eloquent terms the great deeds of "one of the Queens of the Terrai, who has devoured no less than a hundred and thirty-eight persons of both sexes!"

Our little band left the kraal about two o'clock in the afternoon. Before four o'clock, after ascending in an easterly direction, we arrived without adventure at Souari.

The panic here was at its height. That very morning a native had been surprised by the tigress near a stream and carried off into the forest.

We were received most hospitably in the house of a well-to-do-farmer, an Englishman. Our host had had more reason than any one else to complain of the savage beast, and would willingly pay several thousand rupees for its skin. "Several years ago, Captain Hood," he said, "a tigress obliged the inhabitants of thirteen villages of the central provinces to take to flight, and in consequence a hundred and fifty miles were forced to lie fallow! Well, if that sort of thing takes place here the whole province will have to be deserted!"

"Have you employed every possible means to get rid of this tigress?" asked Banks.

"Yes, indeed, everything: traps, pitfalls, and even baits prepared with strychnine! Nothing has succeeded!"

"Well, my friend," said Captain Hood, "I can't promise for certain to give satisfaction, but I assure you we will do our very best."

Thereupon a battue was organized for that same day. Our party and the shikarries were joined by about twenty mountaineers, who were well acquainted with the country. Although Banks was so little of a sportsman he accompanied our expedition with the most lively interest.

For three days we searched about all round the neighborhood, but with no result, except that a couple of tigers, which no one thought much of, fell by the captain's gun. "Forty-five!" was all the remark he made.

At last the tigress signalized herself by a fresh misdeed. A buffalo, belonging to our host, disappeared from its pasture, and its remains were found about a quarter of a mile from the village. The assassination—premeditated murder, as a lawyer would say—had been accomplished before daybreak. The assassin could not be far off.

But was the principal author of this crime indeed the tigress so long sought in vain? The natives of Souari had no doubt of it. "I know it was my uncle, he did the mischief!" said one of the villagers to us.

"My uncle" is the natives' usual name for the tiger, they believing that the soul of each of their ancestors is lodged for eternity in the body of some member of the cat tribe. On this occasion it would certainly have been more correct to say "My aunt!"

It was immediately decided that we should set out in quest of the animal without waiting for night, as the darkness would conceal it more effectually than ever. We knew it must be gorged, and would probably not leave its den for two or three days.

We took the field. Starting from the place where the buffalo had been seized, traces of blood showed the direction the tigress had taken. These marks led us toward a thicket, which had been beaten many times already, without discovering anything. It was resolved to surround this spot so as to form a circle through which the animal could not escape, at least without being seen.

The villagers dispersed themselves around, so as to gradually narrow the circle. Captain Hood, Kâlagani, and I were on one side, Banks and Fox on the other, but in constant communication with the rest of the people. Each point of the ring was dangerous, since the tigress might try to break through anywhere.

There was no doubt that the animal was in this thicket, for the traces which entered one side did not reappear on the other. This did not prove though that it was its habitual retreat, for it had been searched before. It was early, only eight o'clock. When all arrangements were made, we began to advance noiselessly, contracting the investing circle. In half an hour we were at the limit of the first trees.

Nothing had occurred, nothing had announced the presence of any creature, and for my own part I began to question whether we were not wasting our time. Each could now only see the men next him, and yet it was important that we should advance with perfect unanimity.

It had been previously agreed that the man who first entered the wood should fire a shot. The signal was given by Captain Hood, who was always first in everything, and the border was crossed. I looked at my watch; it was thirty-five minutes past eight.

In a quarter of an hour the circle had so drawn in that our elbows touched, but we still had seen nothing.

Till now the silence had been unbroken, except by the snapping of dry branches under our feet. Suddenly a roar was heard.

"The beast is in there!" cried Captain Hood, pointing to the mouth of a cavern in a mass of rocks and trees. He was not mistaken. If it was not the usual haunt of the tigress, it was evidently her refuge now.

Hood, Banks, Fox, Kâlagani, and several other men approached the narrow opening to which the bloody traces led.

"We shall have to go in there," said the captain.

"A dangerous job!" remarked Banks. "It will be a serious matter for the first who enters!"

"I shall go in though," returned Hood, looking carefully to his rifle.

"After me, captain!" put in Fox, who was already stooping to enter the cave.

"No, no, Fox!" cried Hood. "This is my affair!"

"Ah, captain!" said Fox, in most persuasive yet reproachful accents, "I am six behind you!" Just imagine their reckoning up their tigers at such a moment!

"Neither one nor the other shall enter!" exclaimed Banks. "No! I can't allow it."

"There is another way," interrupted Kâlagani.

"What is that?"

"To smoke her out," replied the native. "She will be forced to appear then. It will be easier and less risky to kill her outside."

"Kâlagani is right," said Banks. "Come, my men, dead wood, dry grass! Stop up the opening partly, so that the wind may drive the smoke and flame inside. The beast must either be roasted or run away!"

"It will run away," said the native.

"So much the better!" remarked Captain Hood. "We shall be ready to give her a salute on her way."

In a few minutes branches, grass, and dead wood, of which there was plenty lying near, were piled in a heap before the entrance to the den. Nothing had stirred inside. Nothing could be seen in the gloomy depths. Yet our ears could not have deceived us, the roar certainly came from that place.

A light was set to the heap, and soon the whole was in a blaze. From this bonfire issued a thick, choking smoke, blowing right into the interior. A second roar, more furious than the first, burst forth. The creature was being driven to extremities, and would make a rush.

We all waited anxiously, our faces toward the rocks, and partially sheltered by the trees, so as to avoid the first infuriated spring. The captain had chosen another position, which, to suit him, must, of course, be the most perilous. This was in a gap between the brushwood, the only one which offered a passage from the den. There Hood knelt on one knee, so as to steady his aim, his rifle at his shoulder, and looking as if carved in marble.

Three minutes had passed since the fire was first lighted, when a third roar, a stifled, suffocated roar, was heard. A huge monster dashed through the fire and smoke!

"Fire!" shouted Banks. Ten shots rang out, though we found afterward that not one had touched the animal.

Amid volumes of smoke, a second and yet longer bound carried the animal toward the thicket. Captain Hood, who waited with the greatest coolness, fired, hitting her below the shoulder.

Like a lightning flash the tigress was upon him, over he went, and in another moment her terrible claws would have torn open his head.

But Kâlagani sprang forward, knife in hand. In an instant the brave fellow had seized the tigress by the throat.

The animal on this sudden attack shook off the native, and turned upon him.

Feeling himself free, the captain leaped up, and grasping the knife which had fallen from Kâlagani's hand, plunged it into the creature's very heart. The tigress rolled over.

This exciting scene had taken place in less time than it takes to write it.

"*Bag mahryaga! Bag mahryaga!*" shouted the natives —meaning, "the tigress is dead!"

Yes, quite dead! But what a magnificent animal! Ten feet from muzzle to tail, tall in proportion, and its enormous paws armed with long claws, which looked as if they had been sharpened up on a grindstone!

While we were admiring the creature the natives, who had good reason for the grudge they bore against it, overwhelmed it with invectives.

Kâlagani approached Captain Hood. "I thank you, sahib!" he said.

"What are you thanking me for?" cried Hood. "It's I who owe you thanks, my brave fellow! If it hadn't been for you, I should have been done for!"

"I should have been killed without your help!" replied the man coldly.

"What! By Jove—didn't you rush forward, knife in hand, to stab the tigress just as she was going to tear my skull open?"

"You killed him though, sahib, and that makes your forty-sixth!"

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the natives. "Hurrah for Captain Hood!"

The captain had certainly every right to add this tigress to his list, but he gave Kâlagani a grateful shake of the hand.

"Come to Steam House," said Banks to the man. "Your shoulder has been torn, and is bleeding; but we will find something in our medicine-chest to heal the wound.

Kâlagani acquiesced, and so, having taken leave of the inhabitants of Souari, who loaded us with thanks, we all proceeded in the direction of our sanitarium.

The shikarries now left us, to return to the kraal. Again they went back empty-handed, and if Mathias van Guitt had counted on this "Queen of the Terrai," he must mourn for her; under the circumstances it was utterly impossible to take her alive.

We reached Steam House about midday. Here unexpected news awaited us. To our extreme disappointment Colonel Munro, Sergeant McNeil, and Goûmi had gone away.

A note addressed to Banks told us not to be uneasy at their absence; that Sir Edward was desirous of reconnoitering the Nepaulese frontier, so as to clear up certain suspicions relating to the companions of Nana Sahib, but that he would return before the time at which we had arranged to leave the Himalayas.

On hearing this note read, I fancied that an involuntary movement denoting vexation escaped Kâlagani.

What could have occasioned this? I wondered.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT ATTACK

The colonel's unexpected departure made us seriously uneasy. He was evidently still brooding over past events. But what could we do? Follow Sir Edward? We were ignorant of the direction he had taken, or even what point of the Nepaulese frontier he wished to reach.

On the other hand, we could not conceal from ourselves that as he had said nothing to Banks about this plan, it was because he dreaded his friend's expostulations had wished to avoid hearing them. Banks much regretted having followed us on our expedition.

All we could do now was to resign ourselves and wait. Colonel Munro would certainly return before the end of August, that month being the last we were to pass here before proceeding southwest by the road to Bombay.

Kâlagani, who was well doctored by Banks, only remained four-and-twenty hours in Steam House. His wound began to heal rapidly, and he left us, to return to his duties at the kraal.

The month of August was ushered in by violent rains—weather bad enough to give a frog a cold in its head, as Captain Hood remarked; but as there was less wet than in July, it was consequently more propitious for our excursions into the Terrai. Intercourse with the kraal was frequent. Mathias van Guitt continued dissatisfied. He, too, hoped to leave his camp in the beginning of September; but a lion, two tigers, and two leopards were still wanting, and he needed them to complete his troupe.

By way of retaliation, instead of the actors which he wished to engage on his employers' account, others came and presented themselves at his agency, for whom he had no occasion. Thus, on the 4th of August, a fine bear was caught in one of his traps. We happened to be in the kraal when the shikarries brought back a cage containing a prisoner of great size, with black fur, sharp claws, and long hairy ears, which is a specialty of the ursine family in India.

" Now what do I want with this useless tardigrade? " exclaimed the naturalist, shrugging his shoulders.

" Brother Ballon! Brother Ballon! " repeated the shikarries. Apparently though the natives are only nephews of tigers, they are the brothers of bears.

But Mathias van Guitt, notwithstanding this degree of relationship, received brother Ballon with a very evident show of ill-humor. It certainly did not please him to catch bears when he wanted tigers. What was he to do with this inconvenient beast? It did not suit him to feed the animal without hopes of making anything by it. The Indian bear is little in request in the European market. It has not the mercantile value of the American grizzily, nor the Polar bear. Therefore Mathias van Guitt, being a good business man, did not care to possess a cumbersome brute, which he might find it very difficult to get rid of!

" Will you have him? " asked he of Captain Hood.

" What on earth do you expect me to do with him? " returned the captain.

" You can make him into beefsteaks," replied the zoölogist, " if I may make use of the catachresis! "

" Mr. van Guitt," said Banks gravely, " the catachresis is allowable, when for lack of any other expression, it renders the thought properly."

" That is quite my opinion," replied the zoölogist.

" Well, Hood," said Banks, " will you or will you not take Mr. van Guitt's bear? "

" Of course not," replied the captain. " To eat bear steaks when once the bear is killed is all very well; but to kill a bear on purpose to make steaks of him isn't an appetizing job! "

" Then you may give that plantigrade his liberty," said Van Guitt, turning to his shikarries.

They obeyed. The cage was brought out of the kraal. One of the men opened the door. Brother Ballon, who seemed rather ashamed of the situation, did not require to be asked twice. He walked calmly out of the cage, shook his head, which might be interpreted as meaning thanks, and marched off uttering a grunt of satisfaction.

" That is a good deed you have performed," said Banks. " It will bring you luck, Mr. van Guitt! "

Banks was right enough. On the 6th of August the zoölogist was rewarded by procuring one of the animals he wished for. These were the circumstances of the capture: Mathias van Guitt, Captain Hood, and I, accompanied by Fox, Storr, and Kâlagani, had been beating a thicket of cactus and lentisks since daybreak, when a half-stifled roar was heard.

With our guns ready cocked, and walking near together so as to guard against an isolated attack, we proceeded immediately to the suspected spot. Fifty paces off the naturalist made us halt. He appeared to recognize the animal by the nature of the roar, and addressing himself more particularly to Captain Hood, " No useless firing, I beg," he whispered.

Then advancing a few steps, while we, obeying his sign, remained behind, " A lion! " he cried.

There, indeed, at the end of a strong rope fastened to the forked branch of a tree, an animal was struggling. The fierce beast, hanging by one of its forepaws, which was tight in the slip-knot of the rope, gave terrible jerks without managing to free itself.

Captain Hood's first impulse, in spite of Van Guitt's request, was to make ready to fire.

" Do not fire, captain! " exclaimed the naturalist. " I conjure you not to fire! "

" But——"

" No, no; I tell you! That lion is caught in one of my own snares, and he belongs to me! "

It was indeed a gallows-snare, at once simple and very ingenious. A very strong rope is fixed to the branch of a tree which is both tough and flexible. This branch is then bent down to the ground, so that the lower end of the cord, terminating in a running loop, hangs in a notch cut in a stake fixed firmly in the ground. On this stake is placed a bait in such a position that if any animal wishes to get at it, he must put either his head or one of his paws in the noose. But as soon as he does this, and moves the bait ever so slightly, the cord is disengaged from the stake, the branch flies up, the animal is raised, and at the same moment a heavy cylinder of wood, sliding along the rope, falls on the knot, fixing it tightly and rendering vain all the efforts of the suspended animal to get free.

This species of snare is frequently set in the Indian forests, and wild animals allow themselves to be caught in them far more frequently than one would be tempted to believe. It usually happens that the beast is seized by the neck, causing almost immediate strangulation, while at the same time the skull is half fractured by the heavy wooden cylinder. But the lion which was now struggling before our eyes had only been caught by the paw. He was decidedly "all alive and kicking," as Captain Hood remarked, and well worthy to figure among the zoölogist's guests.

Mathias van Guitt, in high delight, at once dispatched Kâlagani to the kraal, with orders to bring a cage in charge of a driver. While he was gone we had ample leisure and opportunity to observe the captive, whose fury was redoubled by our presence.

The naturalist never took his eyes off him. He walked round and round the tree, taking good care, however, to keep out of reach of the claws which the poor lion struck out in every direction.

In half an hour's time the cage appeared, drawn by two buffaloes. The suspended animal was cut down, not without some trouble, and we took the road to the kraal.

"Truly I was beginning to despair," said Van Guitt. "Lions do not figure in great numbers among the nemoral beasts of India——"

"Nemoral?" said Captain Hood.

"Yes, beasts which haunt forests, and I have reason to congratulate myself on capturing this animal, which will do honor to my menagerie."

Dating from this day, Mathias van Guitt had no further reason to complain of ill-luck. On the 11th of August two leopards were taken together in that first trap from which we liberated the naturalist. These creatures were cheetahs, similar to the one which so audaciously attacked Behemoth on the plains of Rohilkund, and which we were not able to shoot. Two tigers only were now required to complete Van Guitt's stock.

It was now the 15th of August. Colonel Munro had not yet reappeared, and we had not received any news of him. Banks was more uneasy than he cared to show. He interrogated Kâlagani, who knew the Nepaul frontier, as to the danger Sir Edward might run by venturing into these independent territories.

The native assured him that not one of Nana Sahib's partisans remained within the confines of Thibet. However, he seemed to regret that the colonel had not chosen him for a guide. His services would have been very useful in a country, with every path of which he was well acquainted. But there was no use now in thinking of joining him.

In the meanwhile, Captain Hood and Fox more especially continued their excursions in the Terrai. Aided by the shikarries, they contrived to kill three more tigers of medium size, not without great risk. Two of the animals went to the captain's account, the third to his man.

"Forty-eight!" said Hood, who greatly longed to make up the round number of fifty before quitting the Himalayas.

"Thirty-nine!" said Fox, without counting a formidable panther which had fallen by his gun.

On the 20th of August the last but one of the tigers wanted by Van Guitt was found in one of the pits, which either by instinct or chance the creatures had till then escaped. As is usually the case, the animal was hurt in its fall, but the injury was not serious. A few days' rest was sufficient to effect a cure, so that there would be nothing visible when delivery was made to Messrs. Hagenbeck, of Hamburg.

The use of this pit is regarded by connoisseurs as a barbarous method. When it is merely a question of destroying the animals, any way is good; but when it is necessary to take them alive, death is too often the consequence of their fall, especially when they are precipitated into a pit fifteen or twenty feet deep, destined for the capture of elephants. Out of ten there may be only one without some mortal injury. Therefore, even in Mysore, the naturalist told us, where the plan was at first so highly extolled, they are now beginning to give it up.

Mathias van Guitt being anxious to set out for Bombay, did all in his power to obtain his last tiger. It was not long before he had it in his possession, but at what a price! This incident deserves a detailed account, for the animal was dearly—too dearly—bought.

An expedition had been arranged by Captain Hood, for the evening of the 26th of August. Circumstances combined to render it a favorable opportunity—a cloudless sky, a calm, still night, and a waning moon. When the darkness is very profound, wild beasts do not care to quit their lairs, but a half light attracts them. Thus the meniscus—a word which Mathias van Guitt applied to the crescent moon—shed a few faint beams after midnight.

Captain Hood and I, Fox and Storr, who had taken a liking for the chase, formed the nucleus of this expedition, which was joined by the zoölogist, Kâlagani, and a few of the natives. Dinner ended, after taking leave of Banks, who had declined accompanying us, we left Steam House about seven in the evening, and at eight reached the kraal, without having met with any misadventure. Mathias van Guitt was just finishing his supper. He received us in his usual demonstrative style. A council of war was held, and a plan agreed upon.

It was thought advisable to lie in wait at the edge of a stream, falling down one of those ravines called *nullahs*, a couple of miles from the kraal, at a place which a pair of tigers visited every night. No bait had been placed at this spot, as the natives pronounced it useless. A battue recently made in that part of the Terrai proved that the need to quench their thirst was sufficient to attract the tigers to the bottom of that nullah. They also said that it would be easy for us to post ourselves advantageously there.

As we were not to leave the kraal before midnight, and it was then but eight o'clock, we had to wait with what patience we might until the hour for departure. "Gentlemen," said Mathias van Guitt, "my habitation is entirely at your disposal. I invite you to do as I intend doing, lie down and endeavor to obtain some sleep. We shall have to rise more than early, and a few hours slumber will do much to fit us for our exertions."

"Do you care to have a snooze, Maucler?" asked Captain Hood.

"No, thanks," I answered, "and I would rather keep myself awake by walking about than be roused out of my first sleep."

"Just as you please, gentlemen," answered the zoölogist. "As for myself, I already feel that spasmodic winking of the eyelid which is caused by the need of sleep. You see I have already the pendulum movement!" And Mathias van Guitt, raising his arms and throwing back his head and body, gave vent to several portentous yawns. Then making us a profound bow, he retired into his hut, and was doubtless soon fast asleep.

"Now what are we going to do?" asked I.

"Let us walk about, Maucler," answered Captain Hood, "up and down in the kraal. It is a fine night, and I shall feel much more fit for a start than if I had three or four hour's nap first. Besides, though sleep is called our best friend, it is a friend who often keeps us waiting!"

We were now strolling up and down in the inclosure, thinking or chatting as we chose. Storr, "whose best friend was not likely to keep him waiting," was already asleep, lying at the foot of a tree. The shikarries and the rest were all crouched in their several corners, and no one in the place was awake but ourselves.

Keeping a watch would have been useless, as the kraal was entirely surrounded by a close and solid palisade. Kâlagani himself made sure that the door was securely fastened; then, that duty performed, he wished us good night as he passed and joined his companions.

Our stroll took us first to the place occupied by the buffaloes. These magnificent ruminants, quiet and docile, were not even tethered. Accustomed to repose under the shade of gigantic maples, there they lay, their great horns entangled, their feet folded beneath them, and deep, sonorous breathing issuing from their enormous bodies. Even our approach did not arouse them. One only lifted his huge head for a moment, and looked sleepily at us, but soon put it down again.

"See to what a state tameness, or rather domestication, has reduced them," I remarked.

"Yes," replied Hood; "and yet buffaloes are terrible animals when in a savage state. But though they are so strong, they have not agility, and what can their horns do against the teeth and claws of lions and tigers? The advantage is decidedly on the side of the latter."

Talking thus, we approached the cages. There, too, all was still. Tigers, lions, panthers, leopards, all were asleep in their various compartments. Mathias van Guitt wisely did not put them together until they were somewhat tamed by a few weeks of captivity. Otherwise, the brutes would most certainly have eaten each other up the very first day.

The three lions crouched motionless in a half circle like huge cats. Nothing of their heads could be seen, so buried were they in a thick muff of black fur, and they slept the sleep of the just.

Slumber was less profound in the tigers' apartment. Their glowing eyes flamed through the dusk. Now and again a great paw would be stretched out, clawing at the iron bars. This was the sleep of fretful and impatient carnivora.

"They are having bad dreams, and I feel for them!" said the compassionate captain.

Some remorse, no doubt, troubled the three panthers, or at least some regret. At this hour, in their free life, they would have been roaming through the forest! They would have prowled around the pastures in quest of living flesh.

As to the four leopards, no nightmare disturbed their rest. They reposed peacefully. Two of these felines, a male and female, occupied the same room, being to all appearance as comfortable as if they were in their own den.

A single compartment was still empty—the one destined for the sixth and impracticable tiger, for whose capture Mathias van Guitt yet lingered in the Terrai.

Our promenade had lasted for nearly an hour. After once more making the tour of the kraal, we seated ourselves at the foot of an enormous mimosa. Absolute silence reigned over the entire forest. The wind, which whistled through the trees as night fell, had now died away. Not a leaf rustled.

Captain Hood and I, now seated near each other, no longer chatted. Not that we were becoming drowsy. It was rather that sort of absorption, more moral than physical, which is the effect produced by the perfect repose of nature. One thinks without forming the thought. One dreams as a man dreams without sleeping, when the wide open eyes gaze far away, seeing only some vision of the fancy.

One peculiarity surprised the captain, and unconsciously speaking in an undertone, as if fearing to break the silence, he said, "Maucler, this stillness astonishes me! Generally there are wild beasts roaring all night and making the forest a most noisy place. If not tigers or panthers, at any rate the jackals never rest. This kraal, full of living beings, ought to attract hundreds of them, and yet we hear nothing, not a snap of dry wood, or even a howl. If Mathias van Guitt was awake he would wonder as much as I do, no doubt, and would find some long break-jaw word by which to express his surprise!"

"Your observation is correct, my dear Hood," I replied; "and I do not know to what cause to attribute the absence of these night prowlers. But we must take care, or we shall end by going to sleep ourselves!"

"No, no, fight against it!" returned the captain, stretching himself. "It will soon be time for us to start."

And we continued to interchange sentences at somewhat long intervals. How long this lasted I cannot say, but suddenly a noise was heard which quickly aroused me from my drowsy state.

There was no doubt about it, the noise issued from the wild beasts' cage. Lions, tigers, panthers, leopards, till now so peaceful, were uttering sullen growls of anger. Pacing up and down their narrow dens, they seemed to scent something afar off, and stopped every now and again to rear themselves up against the bars and sniff the air.

"What's the matter with them?" asked I.

"I don't know," answered Hood, "but I fear they scent the approach of——"

At that moment tremendous roars were heard outside the inclosure.

"Tigers!" exclaimed Hood, running toward Van Guitt's hut. But such was the violence of the roaring that all the inhabitants of the kraal were already on foot, and the zoölogist met him at the door.

"An attack!" he cried.

"I believe so," replied the captain.

"Stop! I will see!"

And without taking time to finish his phrase, Mathias van Guitt, seizing a ladder, placed it against the palisade. In a moment he was at the top.

"Ten tigers and a dozen panthers!" he cried.

"That's serious," answered Captain Hood. "We intended hunting them, and now they have come hunting us!"

"Your guns—get your guns!" cried the zoölogist. Obeying his orders, in half a minute we were ready to fire.

Attacks by a band of wild beasts are not rare in India. The inhabitants of districts infested by tigers, particularly the Sunderbunds, have often been besieged in their dwellings. This is a dreadful event, and too often the victory rests with the assailants.

In the meanwhile to the roars outside were joined howls and growls from the inside. The kraal was answering the forest. We could scarcely hear ourselves speak.

"To the palisades!" shouted Van Guitt, making us understand what he wanted more by his gestures than his voice. We all hastened forward.

At that moment, the buffaloes, a prey to the wildest terror, endeavored to force their way out from their inclosure, while the men vainly tried to keep them back.

Suddenly, the gate, having no doubt been insecurely fastened, was burst violently open, and a whole troop of wild beasts rushed in.

And yet Kâlagani was supposed to have closed that gate carefully; he did so every evening!

"To the hut! to the hut!" shouted Van Guitt, running toward his house, which alone offered a refuge.

But should we have time to reach it? Already two shikarries lay stretched on the earth. The others fled across the inclosure seeking a shelter. The zoölogist, Storr, and six natives were already in the house, and closed the door just in time, as a couple of tigers were about to spring in.

Kâlagani, Fox, and the rest had caught hold of trees, and hoisted themselves up among the branches. As for the captain and myself we had no time nor opportunity for joining Van Guitt.

"Maucler! Maucler!" shouted Hood, whose right arm had just received a wound.

With a blow of his tail a huge tiger had thrown me to the ground. Before he had time to turn upon me, I rose and hastened to Captain Hood's assistance.

One refuge still remained to us; the empty compartment of the sixth cage. We sprung in, and in a moment we had closed the door, and were for a time safe from the brutes who threw themselves, growling savagely, against the iron bars.

Such was the fierceness of the furious beasts, joined to the anger of the tigers imprisoned in the neighboring compartments, that the cage, oscillating on its wheels, seemed on the point of being capsized.

The tigers, however, soon abandoned it to attack some more certain prey. What a scene it was! not a detail of it was lost to us, looking through the bars of our cage!

"The world is turned upside down!" cried Hood, who was almost mad with vexation.

"Those brutes to be out and we shut up!"

"Your wound?" I asked.

"That's nothing!"

Five or six shots were at this moment heard. The firing was from the hut, around which two tigers and three panthers were raging. One of the animals was killed by an explosive ball from Storr's rifle.

The others retreated and fell upon the herd of buffaloes, who were utterly defenceless against such adversaries. Fox, Kâlagani, and the natives, who had dropped their weapons in their haste to climb the trees, could give no assistance.

However, Captain Hood, taking aim between the bars of our cage, fired. Although his right arm being almost paralyzed by his wound prevented him from taking his usual unerring aim, he was lucky enough to "pot his forty-ninth tiger."

The buffaloes leaped from their inclosure and rushed bellowing through the kraal. They vainly endeavored to gore the tigers, who, however, easily kept out of reach of their horns. One of them, mounted by a panther, his claws tearing its neck, rushed out and away through the forest.

Five or six others, pursued closely by the beasts, also disappeared. A few of the tigers followed; but the buffaloes who had not been able to escape, lay slaughtered and torn on the ground.

Other shots were fired through the windows of the hut. But while Hood and I were doing our part, a new danger menaced us. The animals shut up in the cages, excited by the rage of the struggle, the smell of blood, the roars of their brethren, rampaged about with indescribable violence.

Would they end by breaking their bars? This seemed really likely.

In fact, one of the tigers' cages was turned over. I thought for a moment that it would burst open and let them loose!

Fortunately nothing like this happened, and the prisoners could not even see what was passing outside, since it was the barred side of the cage which was downwards.

"Decidedly there are too many of them!" muttered the captain, as he reloaded.

At that moment, a tiger made a prodigious spring, and clung to the fork of a tree, on which two or three shikarries had sought refuge. One of the unfortunate men was seized and dragged down to the ground.

There a panther disputed with the tiger for the possession of the dead body, crunching the bones in the midst of a sea of blood.

"Fire now! Why don't you fire!" shouted the captain, as if Van Guitt and his companions could hear him.

As to us, we could do nothing more. Our cartridges were exhausted, and we could only remain powerless spectators of the scene. Even this did not last long, a tiger in the next compartment to ours who had been endeavoring to break out, managed by giving a violent shake to destroy the equilibrium of the cage. It oscillated for a moment, and then over it went.

Slightly bruised by the fall, we soon scrambled again to our knees. The sides bore the shock, but now we could no longer see what was going on outside. Though we could not see, we could at least hear! What a hideous din! What a horrid odor of blood! The fight seemed to have taken a still more violent character. What had happened? Had the prisoners in the other cages escaped? Where they attacking Van Guitt's hut? Were the tigers and panthers springing into the trees and tearing down the natives?

"And we all the time shut up in this abominable box!" exclaimed Captain Hood, wild with excitement and rage.

Nearly a quarter of an hour—which appeared whole hours to us—passed in this way. Then the uproar began to calm down. The roaring and howling diminished. The bounds of the tigers which occupied the compartments in one cage were less frequent. Had the massacre come to an end?

All at once, I heard the gate of the kraal slammed to with great noise; and Kâlagani's voice calling to us loudly, then Fox shouting, "Captain! captain!"

"This way!" cried Hood.

He was heard, and we soon felt the cage being lifted. A moment more and we were free.

"Fox! Storr!" called the captain, whose first thought was for his companions.

Here, sir!" answered both the men.

They were not even wounded. Mathias van Guitt and Kâlagani were equally safe and sound. Two tigers and a panther lay lifeless on the ground. The others had left the kraal, and Kâlagani had shut them out. We were all in safety. None of the beasts of the menagerie had effected an escape during the combat, and besides that the zoölogist now counted one prisoner more. This was a young tiger imprisoned in the small traveling cage, which had upset over him, and under which he was caught as in a snare.

The stock of Mathias van Guitt was thus completed; but it had cost him dear! Five of his buffaloes were killed, and three of his natives, horribly mutilated, weltered in their blood on the grass of the inclosure!

CHAPTER VI

MATHIAS VAN GUITT'S FAREWELL

During the rest of the night no other incident occurred either in or outside the kraal. The gate was securely fastened this time. How was it that at the very time the wild beasts surrounded the palisade it should have been open? This was truly most unaccountable, for Kâlagani had himself placed the strong bars which fastened it.

Captain Hood's wound gave him considerable pain, although it was but skin-deep. A little more though would have caused him to lose the use of his right arm.

For my part, I felt nothing of the violent blow which had thrown me to the ground. We resolved to return to Steam House as soon as day began to dawn.

As to Mathias van Guitt, except for regretting the loss of three of his people, he was not at all disheartened, although the being deprived of his buffaloes must put him to some inconvenience when the time for his departure came.

" It is but the chances of the trade," he said, " and I have for long had a presentiment that an adventure of this kind would befall me."

He then proceeded to arrange for the interment of the three natives, whose remains were laid in a corner of the kraal in a grave deep enough to prevent any wild animals disturbing them.

Soon, however, the dawn began to light up the dark avenues of the Terrai, and after many shakes of the hand, we took leave of Mathias van Guitt. To accompany us on our walk through the forest the zoölogist put at our disposal Kâlagani and two natives. His offer was accepted, and at six o'clock we left the kraal.

No untoward incident marked our return journey. Of tigers and panthers there was not a trace. The animals having been so severely repulsed had no doubt retreated to their dens, and this was not the time to go and rouse them up. As to the buffaloes which had escaped from the kraal, they had either been slain and devoured in the depths of the forest, or, if still alive, having fled to a great distance, it was not to be expected that their instinct would lead them back to the encampment. They must therefore be considered as positively lost to the naturalist.

At the border of the forest, Kâlagani and the other men left us, and not long after Fan and Niger welcomed us back with joyful barks to Steam House.

I recounted our adventures to Banks, and it is needless to say that he congratulated us heartily on having got off so well! Too often in attacks of this nature not one of the assailed party escapes to tell the tale of the exploits of the assailants!

As to Captain Hood, he was obliged, whether he liked it or not, to keep his arm in a sling; but the engineer, who was the doctor of the expedition, found his wound not serious, and declared that in a few days no trace of it would remain. At heart Captain Hood was much mortified at having received a wound without having returned it. And yet, he had added another tiger to the forty-eight already on his list.

On the afternoon of the 27th our attention was aroused by the joyful and excited barking of the dogs. We hastened out and saw Colonel Munro, McNeil, and Goûmi. Their return was a real relief to us. Had Sir Edward succeeded in his expedition? This we did not yet know. He was there, however, safe and sound, and that was the most important thing after all.

Banks immediately hurried up to him, grasped his hand, and gave him a questioning look.

"Nothing!" was all the reply he received, accompanied by a shake of the head.

This word signified not only that the search of the Nepaulese frontier had resulted in nothing, but that any conversation on this subject would be useless. It appeared to mean that there was nothing to speak about.

McNeil and Goûmi, whom Banks interrogated in the evening, were more explicit. They told him that Colonel Munro had indeed wished to survey that portion of Hindoostan in which Nana Sahib had taken refuge before his reappearance in the Bombay Presidency; to ascertain what had become of the nabob's companions; to search for any traces which might remain of their passage over that part of the frontier; to endeavor to learn whether, instead of Nana Sahib, his brother, Balao Rao, was hiding in that country. Such had been Sir Edward's object.

The result of this search was that there could no longer be any doubt that the rebels had left the country. There was not a vestige of that camp in which the false obsequies of Nana Sahib had been celebrated. No news was heard of Balao Rao. Of his companions, nothing that could urge them to set off on the track. The nabob killed in the defiles of the Sautpoora Mountains, his friends probably dispersed beyond the limits of the peninsula, the work of the avenger seemed already performed. To quit the Himalayas, continue southward, and thus finish our journey from Calcutta to Bombay, was all we had now to think of.

The departure was fixed for a week from that time, for the 3d of September. That time was necessary to complete the healing of Captain Hood's wound. Colonel Munro, too, who was plainly fatigued by his excursion through that rough country, was also glad of a few days' rest.

During this time Banks began his preparations by getting our train in order, and in a state for the journey from the Himalayas to Bombay. To begin with it was agreed that the route should be a second time altered so as to avoid the great towns of the northwest, Mirat, Delhi, Agra, Gwalior, Jansi, and others, in which so many disasters of the mutiny of 1857 had taken place. With the last rebels of the insurrection had disappeared all that could arouse the recollections of Colonel Munro.

Our traveling dwelling would thus go straight through the provinces without stopping at the principal cities, but the country was well worth a visit, if only for its natural beauties. The immense kingdom of Scindia is unequalled in this respect. The most picturesque roads in the peninsula now lay before Behemoth.

The season of the monsoons had ended with the rainy season, which is not prolonged beyond the month of August. The first days of September promised a most agreeable temperature, which would render the second part of our journey far pleasanter than the first.

During the last week of our stay in the sanitarium, Fox and Goûmi purveyed daily for the pantry. Accompanied by the two dogs they found swarms of partridges, pheasants, and bustards. These birds, preserved in the ice-house, were to supply us with game during the journey.

We paid two or three more visits to the kraal. There Mathias van Guitt was also preparing for his departure for Bombay, bearing his troubles with the philosophy which carried him calmly through all the miseries of existence both great and small.

The capture of the tenth tiger had completed his stock. It was now only necessary to make up the number of his buffaloes. Not one of those which fled during the night attack had been recaptured. The chances were that all, dispersed in the forest, had met with violent deaths. The difficulty was how to make up the teams. In hopes of obtaining animals among the scattered farms and villages of the neighborhood, Van Guitt had sent Kâlagani to inquire, and awaited his return with some impatience.

The last week of our abode at the sanitarium passed without incident. Captain Hood's wound gradually healed, and he seemed to hope for one more expedition before closing the campaign. But this idea Colonel Munro would not encourage.

Why risk himself needlessly while his arm was weak? During the rest of our journey he would be very likely to meet with sport *en route*.

" Besides," observed Banks, " you surely ought to be satisfied to find yourself alive and well, with a score of forty-nine tigers fallen to your gun. The balance is all in your favor."

" Forty-nine—yes," returned the captain with a sigh; " but I wanted fifty."

He was evidently dissatisfied.

The 2d of September arrived, and we were on the eve of departure. In the morning Goûmi came in to announce a visit from the purveyor. Van Guitt, accompanied by Kâlagani, came to Steam House; no doubt he wished to take formal leave at the last moment.

Colonel Munro received him cordially, and the Dutchman plunged into a course of speechifying more astonishing than ever. It struck me that his high-flown compliments concealed something which he hesitated to propose. Banks brought him to the point by inquiring whether he had succeeded in making up his buffalo teams.

" No, indeed, Mr. Banks," he replied, " Kâlagani has been unsuccessful. Although I gave him *carte blanche* as to price, he failed to procure a single pair of these useful animals. I am forced to admit myself wholly at a loss how to convey my menagerie to the nearest railway station. This loss of my buffaloes, by the sudden attack on the night between the 25th and 26th of August, embarrasses me exceedingly. My cages with their four-footed prisoners are heavy, and——"

" Well, how are you going to manage? " demanded the engineer.

" I can't exactly say," returned Mathias. " I plan—I contrive—I hesitate—but the fact is that on the 20th of September, that is to say eighteen days hence, I am bound to deliver the animals at Bombay."

" In eighteen days! " echoed Banks. " Why you have not an hour to lose."

" I know it, sir, and I have but one resource, just one."

" What may that be? "

" It is to entreat the colonel to do me a very great favor."

" Speak freely, Mr. van Guitt," said Colonel Munro; " if I can oblige you, I will do so with pleasure."

Mathias bowed, placed his right hand on his lips, swayed himself from side to side, and in every gesture betokened himself overwhelmed by unexpected kindness. He then explained that understanding our giant engine to be of immense power, he wished to know if it would be possible to attach his caravan of cages to our train, and so to drag them to Etawah, the nearest station on the line between Delhi and Allahabad.

The colonel turned to the engineer, saying, " Can we do what Mr. van Guitt requires? "

" I see no difficulty," replied Banks. " Behemoth will never know that he draws a heavier weight."

" It shall be done, Mr. van Guitt," said Colonel Munro. " We will take your goods to Etawah. People ought to be neighborly and help one another even in the Himalayas."

" I am aware of your goodness, colonel," replied Van Guitt, " and indeed felt I might reckon on it."

" You were right," said Colonel Munro.

Everything being thus arranged, the Dutchman prepared to return to his kraal, in order to dismiss such of his attendants as were no longer required, retaining only four shikarries who were wanted to tend the animals.

" We meet to-morrow, then," said Colonel Munro.

" To-morrow, gentlemen, I shall be ready, and waiting for you and your steam monster at my kraal." And the purveyor, delighted with the success of his visit, retired with all the airs of an actor leaving the stage.

Kâlagani, after fixedly regarding Colonel Munro, whose journey to the frontiers of Nepaul appeared to interest him deeply, followed his master.

The last arrangements were completed. Everything was in traveling order, and of the Steam House sanitarium nothing remained. We were ready to descend to the plains, where our elephant was to leave us and fetch the Dutchman's caravan to join our train, which then was to start across Rohilkund.

At seven o'clock on the morning of the 3d of September, Behemoth stood ready to resume the duties he had hitherto so well fulfilled. But a very unexpected occurrence now excited the surprise of every one.

After lighting the furnace to heat the boiler, Kâlouth opened the different flues and the soot doors, in order to be sure that nothing impeded the draught of air, but started back when, with a strange sound of hissing, a score of what seemed like leathern thongs darted toward him from the tubes.

"Hallo, Kâlouth! What's the matter?" said Banks.

"A swarm of serpents, sahib," cried the stoker.

In fact, what appeared like straps were snakes which had chosen to make themselves at home in the furnace chimneys, whence the heat now dislodged them. Some were scorched, and fell to the ground; had not Kâlouth opened the valves, all would speedily have been roasted.

"What!" cried Captain Hood, running forward, "has Behemoth been cherishing a brood of serpents in his bosom?"

Yes, of the most dangerous and numerous description and a superb tiger-python now showed his pointed head from the tip of the elephant's trunk, and began to unfold his coils, amid spiral volumes of smoke. The other serpents, which were so lucky as to escape with their lives, quickly vanished among the bushes.

But the python could not easily ascend the cast iron cylinder, and Captain Hood had time to get his rifle and send a bullet through its head.

Then Goûmi mounted the elephant, and scrambling up the trunk, succeeded, with the help of Kâlouth and Storr, in hoisting out the huge reptile. It was a most magnificent boa, in a vesture of gorgeous green and purple, adorned with regular rings, which seemed as though cut out of splendid tiger skin. It was as thick as a man's arm, and measured quite five yards in length.

Truly it was a superb specimen, and would have made an advantageous addition to Van Guitt's collection could it have been secured alive.

The excitement of this incident having subsided, Kâlouth rearranged his furnace, the boiler soon began to do its part, and steam being fairly got up, we were ready to be off. One last glance over the marvelous panorama spread before us to the south, one last lingering look toward the indented outlines of the mighty mountain peaks which stood forth sharply against the northern sky, and then the shriek of the whistle gave notice of departure.

We descended the winding road without difficulty, the atmospheric brake acting admirably on the steep pitches, and in an hour we halted on the lower limit of the Terrai, at the edge of the plain. Here Behemoth, under charge of Banks and the fireman, left us, and at a dignified pace entered one of the broad roads through the forest.

A couple of hours later we heard the snorting and puffing of the steam giant, and he issued from the thicket of trees with the Dutchman's caravan menagerie in tow.

Mathias van Guitt made his appearance, and renewed his thanks to the colonel. The wild beast cages, with a van in front for the purveyor and his men, were attached to our train, now composed of eight carriages.

Banks gave the signal, the regulation whistle sounded, and Behemoth, with stately motion, began to advance along the magnificent road leading to the south. The addition of Van Guitt and his wild beast vans made no difference to him.

"Well, Van Guitt, what do you think of it?" inquired Captain Hood.

"I think, captain," replied Mathias, with some reason, "that this elephant would be much more wonderful if he were made of flesh and blood."

We did not follow the route by which we had reached the foot of the Himalayas, but traveled southwest toward the little town of Philibit. We went at a moderate and easy pace, and met with no hindrance or discomfort.

The Dutchman daily took his seat at our table, when his splendid appetite never failed to do honor to the culinary talents of Monsieur Parazard. It speedily became necessary to call upon our sportsmen to do their duty, and Captain Hood resumed his labors for the larder. Food was required for our four-footed passengers, as well as for ourselves, and the shikarries took care to provide it. They were clever hunters; and led by Kâlagani, himself a first-rate shot, kept up a supply of bison and antelope meat.

Kâlagani maintained his peculiar and reserved manners, although very kindly treated by Colonel Munro, who was not a man to forget a good service done him.

On the 10th of September our train skirted the town of

Philibit without making a halt, but a considerable number of natives came to see us. Van Guitt's wild beast show attracted little attention in comparison with Behemoth, and without more than a passing glance at the splendid creatures within their cages, all hastened to admire the Steam Elephant.

We traversed the great plains of Northern India, passing, at a distance of some leagues, Bareilly, one of the chief cities of Rohilkund. Sometimes we were surrounded by forests filled with birds of brilliant plumage, sometimes by dense thickets of the thorny acacia two or three yards high, which is called by the English " Wait-a-bit."

There we met with many wild boars, whose flesh was of a remarkably fine flavor, from the fact of their feeding on the yellowish berry of these plants. These boars are extremely savage animals, and on several occasions they were killed by Captain Hood and Kâlagani, under circumstances which displayed to advantage all the courage and skill possessed by our mighty hunters.

Between Philibit, and Etawah railway station our train had to cross the Upper Ganges, and shortly after an important tributary, the Kali-Nacli.

The menagerie vans were detached, and Steam House, assuming its nautical character, easily floated from one bank to the other. It was different with the Dutchman's vans. They had to be transported singly by a ferry boat, and though tedious, the passage was effected without much difficulty, as both he and his men knew exactly what to do.

At length without any adventure worthy of notice we reached the line of rail between Delhi and Allahabad. Here the two parts of our train were to separate, the first continuing to descend southward across the vast territories of Scind, in order to reach the Vindhyas and the presidency of Bombay. The second, was to be placed on railway trucks to travel to Bombay, and so by ship to Europe.

We encamped together for one night, and the respective starts were to be made at daybreak. Mathias van Guitt was about to dismiss such of his attendants as were no longer necessary to him, retaining the natives only until he should reach the ship.

Among the men now paid off was Kâlagani, the hunter.

We had become attached to this native since he had rendered good service both to Colonel Munro and Captain Hood; and Banks, perceiving him to be at a loss for employment, asked if it would suit him to accompany us as far as Bombay.

After some moments consideration, Kâlagani accepted the proposal, which seemed to please Colonel Munro very much. He was well acquainted with all this part of India, and attached to the staff of Steam House was likely to be extremely useful to us.

The next morning the camp was struck. Steam was up, and Storr only awaited final orders.

The ceremony of leave-taking was very simple on our part, highly theatrical on that of Van Guitt, who amplified his expressions of thanks, and specially distinguished himself in the final scene, when, as he disappeared from our sight he indicated by pantomimic gestures that never, either here below or in life hereafter, should our kindness fade from his memory.

CHAPTER VII

PASSAGE CF THE BETTWA

OUR position on the 18th of September stood thus,

Distance from Calcutta . . .	812	miles.
From Sanitarium on the Himalayas	236	"
From Bombay	1,000	"

With regard to distance, not half of our proposed journey had been accomplished, but reckoning the seven weeks spent on the Himalayan frontier above half the time allotted to it had elapsed. We left Calcutta on the 6th of March, and in two months we hoped to reach the western shores of Hindostan. Avoiding the great towns concerned in the revolt of 1857, we should travel nearly due south. There being excellent roads through Scind, we should meet no difficulties until we came to the mountains of Central India.

The presence of an experienced man like Kâlagani would give additional security as well as facility to our progress, as he seemed so thoroughly well acquainted with this part of Hindostan. Banks called him the first day, while Colonel Munro was taking his siesta, and asked in what capacity he had so frequently traversed these provinces.

" I belonged," replied the man, " to one of the numerous caravans of Brinjarees, who convey to the interior, on the backs of oxen, supplies of grain, either ordered by the government or private persons. In this capacity I have passed a score of times across the territories of North and Central India."

" Do such caravans still cross this part of the peninsula? "

" Yes, sir, they do, and at this season of the year I should expect to meet Brinjarees on their way north."

" Well, Kâlagani, you are likely to be very useful to us. We wish to avoid the great cities, and to pass through the open country. You shall be our guide."

" Certainly, sir," answered the Hindoo, in the cold tone which was habitual to him, and to which I could never get quite reconciled. Then, he added, " Shall I state in a general way the direction we shall have to take? "

" Do so, Kâlagani," said Banks, spreading a large map on the table, and preparing to verify by observation the information about to be given him.

" It is very simple," said the Indian. " A direct line takes us from the Delhi railroad to that of Bombay. The junction is at Allahabad. Between Etawah and the frontier of Bundelkund, there is but one important river to cross, the Jumna; between that and the Vindhyas Mountains there is another, the Bettwa. These two rivers may have overflowed their banks, but I think your train would be able to cross them even if it were so."

" There would be no serious difficulty," replied the engineer. " And having reached the Vindhyas——? "

" We should turn slightly to the southeast, in order to reach a practicable pass. There will be no difficulty there either, for I know a spot where the ascents are easy. Wheel carriages prefer that way; it is the pass of Sirgour."

" That ought to suit us," returned Banks, " but I perceive that beyond the pass of Sirgour the country is very hilly. Could we not approach the Vindhyas by crossing Bhopal? "

" There are a great many towns in that direction," answered Kâlagani; " it would be difficult to avoid them. The sepoys distinguished themselves particularly there during the war of independence."

I was struck by this expression, " the war of independence," which Kâlagani applied to the Mutiny. However, I reflected that it was a native, not an Englishman, who used it. Besides, we had no reason to suppose that Kâlagani had taken part in the revolt.

"Well," resumed Banks, "leaving the cities of Bhopal to the west, are you certain that the pass of Sirgour will give us access to a practicable road?"

"To a road I have often traveled, sir, which, after making the circuit of Lake Puturia, will bring you near Jubbulpore, on the Bombay railway."

"I see," said Banks, who followed on the map all that the man said; "and after that——?"

"After that the road turns to the southwest, and, more or less, runs alongside the line as far as Bombay."

"Of course—so it does," returned Banks. "I see no particular difficulty anywhere, and the route suits us. We shall not forget your services, Kâlagani."

Kâlagani made his salaam, and was about to retire, when changing his mind, he again approached the engineer.

"Have you any question to put to me?" said Banks.

"I have, sir; may I be permitted to ask why you especially want to avoid the great towns of the Bundelkund?"

Banks looked at me. There seemed no reason for concealing the facts of the case from this man, and after a little consideration, Colonel Munro's position was explained to him.

He listened attentively to what the engineer related to him, and then he said in a tone denoting surprise, "Colonel Munro has nothing more to fear from Nana Sahib—at least not in these provinces."

"Neither in these provinces nor anywhere else," returned Banks. "Why do you say 'in these provinces?'"

"Because it was reported several months ago that the nabob had reappeared in the Bombay Presidency, but by no research could his retreat be discovered, and supposing him ever to have been there, it is probable that he has now again passed beyond the Indo-Chinese frontier."

This answer seemed to prove that Kâlagani was ignorant of what had taken place in the Sautpourra Mountains, and that in the month of May, Nana Sahib had been slain by British soldiers at the Pâl of Tandît.

"It seems that news takes a long time to reach the Himalayan forests!" exclaimed Banks.

Kâlagani looked at him fixedly, like one not in the least comprehending his words.

"You do not seem to know that Nana Sahib is dead," continued the engineer.

"Nana Sahib dead!" cried the native.

"Certainly," replied Banks, "government announced the fact that he had been killed, with all the details."

"Killed?" said Kâlagani, shaking his head, "where do they say Nana Sahib was killed?"

"At the Pâl of Tandît, in the Sautpourra Mountains."

"And when?"

"Nearly four months ago, on the 25th of last May."

I noticed a peculiar look flit over Kâlagani's face as he folded his arms and remained silent.

"Have you any reason," inquired I, "for discrediting the account of Nana Sahib's death?"

"None, sir; I believe what you tell me."

In another instant Banks and I were alone, and he exclaimed, "You see what these fellows are! They regard the chief of the rebel sepoys as something more than mortal, and because they have not seen him hanged, they never will believe he is dead."

"Why," replied I, "that is just like the old soldiers of the empire, who for twenty years after Napoleon's death stoutly maintained that he was still alive."

Since passing across the Upper Ganges fifteen days previous to this, a fertile country had opened before us, called the Doâb, a district lying in the angle formed by the Ganges and the Jumna, which two rivers unite near Allahabad.

My impressions of the Doâb are of alluvial plains cleared by the Brahmins twenty centuries before the Christian era, farming operations of the rudest description carried on by the peasantry, vast canal works due to English engineers, fields of the cotton plant, which especially thrives in this part of the country, the groans of the cotton mill machinery at work near every village, mingled with the songs of the men who are employed about it.

We went on our way very comfortably. Scenery and situations changed before our eyes, while we enjoyed in luxury the climax of the art of locomotion.

What mode of progression could be superior to this?

We reached the left bank of the Jumna. This important stream forms the boundary of Rajasthan, the country of the Rajahs, dividing it from Hindostan, or the country of the Hindoos.

We found that an early flood had already raised the waters of the Jumna. The current was rapid, but although this made our transit somewhat less easy, it did not hinder it at all. Banks took some few precautions, found a suitable landing-place, and within half an hour, Steam House was mounting the opposite bank of the river.

Railway trains require massive bridges to be built at great expense; one of these, of tubular construction, spans the Jumna at the fortress of Pelimghur near Delhi.

But our Behemoth drew his double cars over the surface of the current with as much ease as along the best macadamized high road.

Beyond the Jumna lay several of the towns which our engineer intended to pass by unvisited.

Among these was Gwalior, situated near the river Sawunrika, built on a basaltic rock, with its superb mosque of Musjid, its palace of Pâl, its curious Gate of Elephants, its famous fortress, and the Vihura erected by Buddhists. The modern town of Lashkar, built at a little distance, forms a singular contrast to this ancient city, and competes in trade with it vigorously.

It was at Gwalior that the Ranee of Jansi, the devoted friend of Nana Sahib, defended herself heroically to the last. There, as we have already said, she fell by the hand of Colonel Munro during an engagement with two squadrons of the British troops, where he was in command of a battalion of his regiment, and from that moment dated the mortal hatred borne toward him by the Nabob, who sought till death to gratify it by revenge.

Yes! it certainly was desirable that Sir Edward Munro should not renew his recollections of the scenes which took place before the gates of Gwalior!

After Gwalior we passed Antri, and its vast plain broken by numerous peaks, like islands in an archipelago.

Then Duttiah, which has not been in existence for more than five centuries. It possesses a central fortress, elegant houses, temples of various forms, the deserted palace of Birsing-Deo, and the arsenal of Tope-Kana, the whole forming the capital of the province of Duttiah, which lies in the northern angle of Bundelkund, and is under British protection. Antri and Duttiah, as well as Gwalior, were seriously compromised by the insurrectional disturbances of 1857.

On the 22d of September, Jansi was passed at a considerable distance. This city is the most important military station in the Bundelkund, and the spirit of revolt is strong in the lower classes of its population. The town is comparatively modern, and has a great trade in Indian muslins, and blue cotton cloths. There are no ancient remains in this place, but it is interesting to visit its citadel, whose walls the English artillery and projectiles failed to destroy, also the Necropolis of the rajahs, which is remarkably picturesque.

This was the chief stronghold of the sepoy mutineers in Central India. There the intrepid Ranee instigated the first rising, which speedily spread throughout the Bundelkund.

There Sir Hugh Rose maintained an engagement which lasted no less than six days, during which time he lost fifteen per cent. of his force.

There, in spite of the obstinate resistance of a garrison of twelve thousand sepoys, and backed by an army of twenty thousand, Tantia Topi, Balao Rao (brother of the Nana), and last not least, the Ranee herself, were compelled to yield to the superiority of British arms.

It was there, at Jansi, that Colonel Munro had saved the life of his sergeant, McNeil, and given up to him his last drop of water. Yes! Jansi of all places must be avoided in a journey where the route was planned and marked out by Sir Edward's warmest friends!

After passing Jansi, we were detained for several hours by an encounter with travelers of whom Kâlagani had previously spoken.

It was about eleven o'clock. Breakfast was over, and we were lounging under the veranda, or in the saloon, while Behemoth plodded steadily on at a moderate speed. The road was magnificent. Shaded by lofty trees it passed through fields of cotton and grain. The weather was fine, the sun very hot. All we could wish for was a metropolitan water-cart, to keep down the puffs of fine white dust which occasionally rose round our equipage.

But after a while the atmosphere appeared to become absolutely darkened with clouds of dust as dense as any ever blown up by the simoom of the Libyan Desert.

"I cannot imagine the cause of such a phenomenon," said Banks, "for the wind blows quite a light breeze."

"Probably Kâlagani can explain it," said Colonel Munro.

He was called, and entering the veranda, looked along the road, and at once said, "It is a long caravan going northward, and is most likely a party of the Brinjarees I spoke of to you, Mr. Banks."

"Ah! and no doubt you will find some old friends among them."

"Possibly, sahib; I lived a long time among those wandering tribes."

"Perhaps you will want to leave us and join them again," remarked Captain Hood.

"Not at all," answered Kâlagani.

Half an hour later, it was proved that his opinion was correct. A moving wall of oxen advanced, and our mighty elephant himself was brought to a standstill. There was nothing to regret in this enforced halt, however, for a most curious spectacle was presented to our observations.

A drove of four or five thousand oxen encumbered the road, and, as our guide had supposed, they belonged to a caravan of Brinjarees.

"These people," said Banks, "are the Zingaris of Hindostan. They are a people rather than a tribe, and have no fixed abode, dwelling under tents in summer, in huts during the winter or rainy season. They are the porters and carriers of India, and I saw how they worked during the insurrection of 1857. By a sort of tacit agreement between the belligerents, their convoys were permitted to pass through the disturbed provinces. In fact, they kept up the supply of provisions to both armies. If these Brinjarees belong to one part of India more than to another, I should say it was Rajpootana, and perhaps more particularly the kingdom of Milwar. Pray examine them attentively, my dear Maucler, as they pass before you in defile."

Our equipage was prudently drawn up on one side of the great highway. Nothing could have withstood this avalanche of horned cattle, even wild beasts hasten out of their way.

Following Banks' advice, I set myself to observe closely the enormous procession as it passed by, and the first thing I noticed was that our Steam Elephant, so accustomed to create surprise and admiration, seemed scarcely to attract the attention of these people at all; they looked as if nothing ever could astonish them.

Both men and women of the race were extremely handsome; the former tall and strong, with fine features, curly hair, and a clear bronze complexion. They wore long tunics and turbans, and carried lances, bucklers, or round shields, and large swords slung across their shoulders, the latter, also very tall and well formed, were dressed in becoming bodices with full skirts, a loose mantle enveloping the whole form in graceful drapery. They wore jewels in their ears, and necklaces, bracelets, bangles, and anklets, made of gold, ivory, or shells.

Thousands of oxen paced quietly along with these men, women, old men, and children. They had neither harness nor halter, only bells or red tassels on their heads, and double packs thrown across their backs, which contained wheat and other grains.

A whole tribe journeyed in this manner, under the directions of an elected chief, called the *naik,* whose power is despotic while it lasts. He controls the movements of the caravan, fixes the hours for the start and the halt, and arranges the dispositions of the camp.

I was struck by the magnificent appearance of a large bull, who with superb and imperial step led the van. He was covered with a bright colored cloth, ornamented with bells and shell embroidery, and I asked Banks if he knew what was the special office of this splendid animal.

" Kâlagani will of course be able to tell us," answered he. " Where is the fellow? "

He was called, but did not make his appearance, and search being made, it was found he had left Steam House.

" No doubt he has gone to renew acquaintance with some old comrade," said Colonel Munro. " He will return before we resume our journey."

This seemed very natural. There was nothing in the temporary absence of the man to occasion uneasiness, but somehow it haunted me uncomfortably.

"Well," said Banks, "to the best of my belief this bull represents, or is an emblem of, their deity. Where he goes they follow; where he stops, there they encamp; but of course we are to suppose he is in reality under the secret control of the *naik*. Anyhow, he is to these wanderers an embodiment of their religion."

The *cortège* seemed interminable, and for two hours there was no sign of an approaching end. Soon afterward, however, the rear guard came in sight, and at last I perceived Kâlagani accompanied by a native who was not of the Brinjaree type. They were conversing together very coolly, and he was no doubt one who, as Kâlagani had frequently done, had joined the caravan for a time only. Probably they were talking of the country which the caravan had just passed through, and across which lay the route by which our new guide had undertaken to lead us.

This man, who was the last of all the procession to pass us, paused for a moment before Steam House. He looked at the equipage with some interest, and I thought his eye rested particularly on Sir Edward Munro; but without uttering a word, he made a parting sign to Kâlagani, rejoined the troop, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Kâlagani then came up, and before any questions were asked, addressed himself to Colonel Munro, and simply saying, "One of my old comrades, who has been with the caravan for the last two months," he resumed his place in our train, and we were speedily moving along a road now deeply marked by the footprints of thousands of men and oxen.

Next day, the 24th of September, we halted to pass the night a little to the east of Ourtcha on the left bank of the Bettwa, which is one of the chief tributaries of the Jumna.

There is nothing to see or say about Ourtcha. It is the old capital of Bundelkund, and was a flourishing town during the earlier part of the seventeenth century. But hard blows from the Mahrattas on one side, and the Mongols on the other, reduced it to a low condition, from which it has never recovered, so that, at the present time, one of the great cities of Central India is nothing more than a large village, miserably housing a few hundred peasants.

I said we encamped on the banks of the Bettwa, but the halt was made at some distance from the river, which, we learned, had considerably overflowed its banks. Night was coming on and it would be necessary next day to examine carefully the nature of the ground before attempting a passage. We therefore spent our evening in the usual way and retired to rest.

Except under very peculiar circumstances, we never kept watch by night. There seemed to be no occasion for it. Could anybody run away with our houses? No! Could they steal our elephant? Rather not! Nothing was more unlikely than an attack of thieves; but at all times our two dogs, Fan and Niger, were on the alert, and ready to give notice of approaching footsteps.

This very thing happened that night. Their violent barking aroused us about two in the morning. When I opened the door of my room, I found all my companions on foot.

"Is anything the matter?" inquired Colonel Munro.

"The dogs seem to think so," replied Banks. "I don't believe they would bark like that for nothing."

"I should not wonder if a panther had coughed in the jungle," said Hood. "Let's take our guns and make a search."

McNeil, Kâlagani, and Goûmi were all out listening and trying to find out what was going on. We joined them.

"Well," said the captain, "I suppose a few wild animals have passed on their way to the drinking-place?"

"Kâlagani thinks this is something very different," replied Sergeant McNeil.

"What then, Kâlagani?"

"I don't know yet, colonel," said the Indian; "but certainly neither panthers, tigers, nor jackals. I fancy I can discern a confused mass among the trees——"

"Let's have at them at once!" exclaimed the captain, with eager hopes of his fiftieth tiger.

"Wait, Hood, wait," said Banks; "caution is desirable in this case."

"But we are in force, and well armed! I want to be at the bottom of this disturbance," persisted the captain.

"All right then," cried Banks. "Munro, you must remain in camp with McNeil and the other men, while Hood, Maucler, Kâlagani, and I go to reconnoiter."

All this time the dogs continued to bark, but without any symptoms of the fury which they always displayed on the approach of wild beasts.

"Come along, Fox!" cried Captain Hood, beckoning to his servant.

Fan and Niger darted into the thicket. We followed them, and presently distinguished the sound of footsteps. It seemed as though the scouts of a large party were prowling round our camp. A few figures vanished silently among the bushes. The two dogs, barking loudly, ran backward and forward some paces in advance of us.

"Who goes there?" shouted Captain Hood.

No answer.

"These people either do not choose to speak or else understand no English," said Banks.

"Well—give it them in Hindoostanee! Tell them we will fire if they don't answer."

In the dialect of Central India, Kâlagani summoned the invisible rovers to advance and show themselves. Still no answer.

A rifle shot broke the silence. The impetuous captain could stand it no longer, and had taken aim apparently at a shadow flitting through the trees. The report was followed by a confused rushing sound, as if a multitude of people were dispersing right and left. Fan and Niger ran forward, and then returning to us quietly, showed no further uneasiness.

"Well, they beat a retreat double quick, these fellows, whoever they were," exclaimed Hood.

"That is very certain," returned Banks, "and now, whether they were robbers or rovers, all we have to do is to get back to Steam House. But we must set a watch till daybreak."

In a very few minutes we had rejoined our party. McNeil, Goûmi, and Fox arranged to take turns as sentries, and we once more retired to our cabins. The night passed without disturbance; it was clear, that seeing we were on our guard, the visitors had decamped.

Next day, the 25th of September, while preparation was being made for a start, Colonel Munro, Hood, McNeil, Kâlagani, and I set out to explore the borders of the forest. We saw no trace whatever of the nocturnal adventurers, and on our return found Banks busily arranging for the passage of the river Bettwa, whose tawny waters were flowing far beyond their accustomed bed. The current was running at so rapid a rate, that Behemoth would have to make head against it to avoid being carried down stream.

The engineer, field-glass in hand, was endeavoring to determine our landing-place on the opposite bank. The Bettwa was at this point about a mile in width. Our train had as yet crossed no river so broad.

" What," said I, " becomes of travelers and traders when they are stopped by floods like this? These currents resemble rapids; ordinary ferry-boats could not resist them."

" Why! it is quite simple," replied Captain Hood, " they stay where they are."

" They can always cross if they have elephants," said Banks.

" You don't mean to say elephants can swim such distances? "

" Of course they can, and the thing is managed thus," answered the engineer. " All the baggage is placed on the back of these——"

" Proboscidians," suggested Hood, recollecting his friend the Dutchman's fine words.

" And the mahouts force them, at first reluctantly, to enter the stream. The animals hesitate, draw back, trumpet loudly; but finally make up their minds to face the difficulty, and beginning to swim, gallantly effect the passage. It must be admitted that some are occasionally swept away by the current and drowned, but that rarely happens if any experienced person is in charge."

" Well," said Hood, " Behemoth is thoroughly amphibious, and no doubt will make a fine passage."

We all took our places; Kâlouth by his furnace, Storr in the howdah, Banks acting as steersman. With gentle pace the elephant began his march. His great feet were covered, but the water was for about fifty feet too shallow to float him. Great caution was requisite, and the train moved slowly from *terra firma*.

All of a sudden we became aware that the sounds we had heard in the night were renewed and drawing near us.

About a hundred creatures, gesticulating and grimacing, issued from the woods.

"Monkeys, by Jove!" exclaimed Hood, with a burst of laughter, as a whole regiment of apes advanced in close order toward Steam House.

"What on earth do they want?" inquired McNeil.

"Of course they are going to attack us," answered the belligerent captain.

"No, you have nothing to fear," said Kâlagani, who was watching them.

"Well, but what are they up to?" repeated McNeil.

"They only want to cross the river with us," said the Indian.

And Kâlagani was right. These were not insolent gibbons, with long hairy arms and importunate manners, nor were they members of the aristocratic family which inhabit the palace at Benares; but black monkeys, the largest in India, very active, and with white whiskers round their smooth faces, which make them look like old lawyers. In fantastic airs and attitudes they almost rivaled our friend Mathias van Guitt himself.

I then learned that these apes are sacred throughout India. One legend asserts that they are the descendants of Rama, who conquered the island of Ceylon. At Amber they occupy the Zenana palace, and do the honors to visitors. It is expressly forbidden to kill them, several English officers have lost their lives through disregard of this law.

These monkeys are usually very gentle, and easily domesticated, but are dangerous if attacked, and when only slightly wounded, become, according to the statement of M. Louis Rousselet, quite as formidable as hyenas or panthers. But we had no intention of attacking them, and Captain Hood's gun was not called into requisition. Could Kâlagani be right in saying that these creatures, unable otherwise to cross the river, intended to avail themselves of our floating equipage?

We were speedily to see that it was so. When, after passing through the shallows, Behemoth reached the bed of the river, our train floated after him, and encountering a kind of eddy from a turn in the bank, remained at first almost stationary.

Just then the troop of monkeys approached, wading and dabbling in the shallow water. They made no demonstration of hostility; but suddenly the whole party, males, females, old and young, began to gambol and spring toward us, and, finally seizing each other by the hand, they fairly bounded up on our train, which actually seemed to be waiting for them.

In a few seconds there were a dozen on Behemoth's back, thirty on the top of each carriage, and soon we had quite a hundred passengers, gay, familiar, even talkative (at least among themselves), no doubt congratulating one another on the fortunate chance by which they had secured their passage across the river.

Behemoth now fairly entered the current, and boldly facing it, proceeded on his way.

For an instant Banks looked anxiously at the apes, but they disposed themselves judiciously, so as to trim the flotilla. They sat or clung in all directions over the back of the elephant, on his neck, on his tusks, even on his upraised trunk, caring nothing for the jets of steam which it cast forth.

They clustered on the arched roofs of our carriages, some squatting down, some standing upright, some on all fours, others dangling by the tail from the veranda roofs. Steam House maintained its equilibrium, and the excess of cargo proved to be quite immaterial.

Captain Hood was immensely amused, and his man Fox excessively astonished. He soon made friends with the free and easy creatures, who were grimacing on all sides of him, and began to do the honors of the house. He talked to them, shook hands, made his best bows, offered lumps of sugar, and would willingly have handed sweetmeats all round if Monsieur Parazard would have allowed it.

Behemoth worked his four feet strenuously; they beat the water, and acted like paddles.

Drifting downward in the current, he followed the direction which took us toward the landing-place. This we safely reached in about half an hour; and the moment our train touched the shore, the whole troop of monkeys sprang down, and with numberless absurd antics and capers, scampered off as hard as they could go.

"They might as well have said 'Thank'ee!'" cried Fox, quite disgusted with the bad manners of his fellow passengers.

CHAPTER VIII

HOOD VERSUS BANKS

HAVING passed the Bettwa, we found ourselves already sixty-two miles from the station of Etawah, where we had left the Dutchman, Van Guitt.

Four days passed without incident—without even any sport for Captain Hood, wild animals being scarce in that part of Scind. "Upon my word," he kept repeating in tones of great annoyance, "I begin to fear I shall arrive at Bombay without having bagged my fiftieth!"

Kâlagani evidently knew this thinly-peopled region perfectly, and guided us across it most admirably. On the 29th of September our train began to ascend the northern slope of the Vindhyas, in order to reach the pass of Sirgour.

Hitherto we had met with no obstacle or difficulty, although this country is one of the worst in repute of all India, because it is a favorite retreat of criminals. Robbers haunt the highways, and it is here that the Dacoits carry on their double trade of thieves and poisoners. Great caution is desirable when traveling in this district.

Steam House was now about to penetrate the very worst part of the Bundelkund, namely, the mountainous region of the Vindhyas. We were within about sixty miles of Jubbulpore, the nearest station on the railway between Bombay and Allahabad; it was no great distance, but we could not expect to get over the ground as quickly as we had done on the plains of Scind. Steep ascents, bad roads, rocky ground, sharp turnings, and narrow defiles. All these must be looked for, and would reduce the rate of our speed. It would be necessary to reconnoiter carefully our line of march, as well as the halting-places, and during both day and night keep a very sharp lookout.

Kâlagani was the first to urge these precautions. It was certainly wise to be prepared for every contingency; prudence is always a virtue.

Nevertheless, we had little to fear, being a numerous party, thoroughly armed, and, as it were, garrisoning two strong houses and a castle, which it was hardly likely marauders of any sort, Dacoits or even Thugs, supposing any still lurked in this wild part of the Bundelkund, would venture to assault.

The pass of Sirgour was attained with no great difficulty. In some places it was necessary to put on steam, when Behemoth instantly displayed power amply sufficient for the occasion.

Kâlagani appeared so well acquainted with the winding passes among which we found ourselves, that we ceased to feel anxiety as to the route we were on. He never showed the smallest hesitation, but led the way confidently among deep gorges, lofty precipices, and dense forests of pines and other alpine trees, even where cross-roads would have puzzled many guides.

At times he stopped the train, and went forward to survey the road, but it was to ascertain its condition, which after the rainy season was often torn up by torrents, and retreat being difficult, it was awkward to come upon such chasms unawares.

The weather was perfect. The rains were over, and the burning sky was veiled by light mists, which tempered the solar rays, so that the heat we experienced was temperate, very endurable for travelers so well sheltered as we were. It was easy for our sportsmen to shoot what game we needed for the table without going any great distance from Steam House.

Captain Hood, however, and doubtless Fox also, regretted the absence of the wild beasts which abounded in the Terrai. But how could they hope to find lions, tigers, and panthers, where there was nothing for them to eat?

If, however, there was a lack of carnivora, we found occasion to make better acquaintance with Indian elephants—I mean wild elephants, of whom hitherto we had seen but rare examples.

It was about noon on the 30th of September that we perceived a pair of these superb animals in front of our train. On our approach, they left the road to let us pass, as though alarmed by the novel appearance of our equipage.

Even Captain Hood never thought of firing at the magnificent creatures unnecessarily. We all stood admiring them thus roaming at liberty their native wilds, where streams, torrents, and pastures afforded all they required.

"What a fine opportunity now for our friend Van Guitt to deliver a lecture on zoölogy!" cried the captain.

Everybody knows that India is, *par excellence*, the country for elephants; the species is rather smaller than the African elephant; it abounds in the various provinces of the peninsula, and is sought after also in Burmah, Siam, in the territories east of the Bay of Bengal.

They are usually captured by means of a *keddah*, which is an enclosure surrounded by palisades. Sometimes it is intended to secure a whole herd at once, and then the hunters assemble to the number of three or four hundred, under command of a *jemidar*, that is, a native sergeant, or headman, and drive them gradually toward the keddah.

This they are enticed to enter by the aid of tame elephants trained to the business; they are then separated, and have their hind legs shackled. The capture is then complete. But this method, besides being tedious, and troublesome, is generally unsuccesful with the large male elephants, who are bolder, and cunning enough to burst through the circle of beaters, thus escaping imprisonment in the keddah. The tame female elephants are appointed to follow these males for several days, the mahouts, wrapped in dark clothes, remain on their backs, and at last the unsuspecting elephants, when peacefully slumbering, are seized, chained, and led away captive before they recover from their first surprise.

In former times, as I have already had occasion to mention, elephants were taken in deep pits dug near their haunts, but by falling into these, which were about fifteen feet deep, the animals were often hurt or even killed, and the barbarous practice is now almost given up.

In Bengal and Nepaul, where the lasso is still in use, the chase becomes highly exciting and replete with adventure. Well-trained elephants are mounted by three men; one, the mahout, rides on the neck, and directs the animal's movements; another behind, whose duty it is to spur and goad him, while the hunter is seated on his back, armed with a lasso, the noose ready prepared to fling. Thus equipped, the pursuit may last for hours, over plains and through forests, the hunters running great danger in the chase, but at length the huge quarry is lassoed, falls heavily, and is at the mercy of his captors.

By these different methods a vast number of elephants is annually caught in India. It is not a bad speculation. The price of a female elephant is sometimes *280l.*, of a male *800l.*, or even *2,000l.*, if he is of noble race.

But are the animals which cost such sums really so useful as to be worth it?

Yes, provided they are well fed. They must have six or seven hundred pounds' weight of green fodder in every eighteen hours, that is about the amount allowed for average rations, and are then fit for active service; for the transport of troops and military stores, transport of artillery and wagons in mountainous countries, or through jungle impassable for horses; also in many great works of civil engineering, and other undertakings, where they are employed as beasts of burden.

These strong and docile giants are easily and quickly trained, seeming by instinct to be disposed to obedience; they are universally employed in Hindoostan, and as they do not multiply in captivity, it is necessary to keep up the supply for the country and for exportation, by continually hunting those which roam the forests. Notwithstanding this the herds of wild elephants appear in no way diminished. Numbers are still to be found in the different kingdoms of India.

Indeed, as far as we were concerned, far too many were at liberty, and this I shall presently show.

The two elephants in advance of us drew aside as I described, so as to allow our train to pass by them, immediately afterward resuming their march in the rear.

Presently several other elephants came in sight, and quickening their pace, overtook and joined the pair we had just passed. In a quarter of an hour as many as a dozen were behind us. They were evidently watching our equipage, and followed us at a distance of fifty yards. They did not try to overtake us, still less did they show any intention of leaving our company. They might easily have done so, for an elephant's pace can be much more rapid than at first sight one would suppose, and among the rugged steeps of the Vindhyas, Behemoth could travel but slowly.

But their object evidently was to assemble in greater numbers. As they advanced they uttered peremptory calls, which appeared to be a summons to companions lingering behind, for cries, unmistakably in answer, sounded in the distance.

By one o'clock a troop of full thirty elephants followed us closely, and it was quite likely the number would increase.

Herds of these animals, consisting of thirty individuals, and forming a family party more or less nearly related, are frequently seen together; at times a formidable assemblage of at least a hundred are encountered with no great pleasure by travelers.

We all stood in the veranda behind our second carriage, and watched proceedings with some anxiety.

"The numbers continue to increase," remarked Banks. "I suppose they mean to bring all the elephants in the district about us?"

"But," said I, "they cannot call to each other at any great distance."

"No," replied the engineer; "but they have a very acute sense of smell, and we know it, because tame elephants detect the presence of wild ones three or four miles off."

"Why it is like a migration—an exodus!" said Colonel Munro. "We ought to increase our speed, Banks."

"Behemoth is doing his best, Munro. He has heavy work on this steep and rugged way."

"What's the use of hurrying?" cried Hood, always delighted with fresh adventure. "Let them come along with us, the jolly beasts! They form an escort just suited to us! The country, which seemed so desolate and deserted, is much more interesting now, and we go along with a retinue fit for a rajah!"

"We shall have to submit to their presence certainly," said Banks. "I don't see how we are to prevent it."

"Why, what in the world are you afraid of?" asked the captain. "You know very well that a herd is always less dangerous than a solitary elephant. These are good, quiet beasts! Sheep, big sheep, with trunks—that's all!"

"Hood's enthusiasm is rising fast," said Colonel Munro. "I am willing to believe that if these animals remain in the rear and keep their distance, we have nothing to fear;

but if they take it into their heads to try to pass us on this narrow road, the consequences might be serious!"

"Besides," I added, "what sort of reception will they give Behemoth, if they find themselves face to face with him?"

"Oh, nonsense! They will only salute him!" cried Hood. "They will make grand salaams to him as Prince Gourou Singh's elephants did!"

"But those were tame elephants, sir, and well trained," remarked Sergeant McNeil very sensibly.

"Well, those fellows behind there will become tame too. Their astonishment at meeting our giant will produce the deepest respect."

Our friend's admiration for the artificial elephant continued unabated; the chef-d'œuvre of mechanism, created by the hand of an English engineer.

"Besides," he continued, "these animals are intelligent; they reason, compare, and judge. They can associate ideas like human beings."

"I question that," said Banks.

"Question that, do you?" cried the captain. "One would almost think you had never lived in India! Are not these excellent fellows put to all manner of domestic service? Have we any servant to equal them? Is not the elephant always ready to be useful? Don't you know, Maucler, what accounts of him are given by the best informed authors? According to them, the elephant is devoted to those he loves, carries their parcels, gathers flowers for them, goes out to shop in the bazaars, buys his own sugar-cane, bananas, and mangoes, and pays for them himself, guards the house from wild beasts, and takes the children out walking more carefully than the best nurse in all England. He is kind, grateful, has a prodigious memory; and never forgets either a benefit or an injury. And then so tender-hearted! Why, an elephant won't hurt a fly, if he can help it! Look here! a friend of mine told me this himself. He saw a ladybird placed on a big stone, and the elephant was ordered to crush the little insect. Not a bit of it! The good beast would not put his foot on the creature; neither commands nor blows could drive him to the cruel deed! But directly he was told to lift it, he picked it up most tenderly with the delicate tip of his trunk, and let it fly away! Now then, Banks, I hope you will admit that the elephant is good and generous, superior to every other animal in creation, even to the ape and the dog. Are not the natives in the right when they attribute to him almost human intelligence?"

And the captain wound up his tirade by taking off his hat, and making a flourishing bow to the formidable army, which, with measured pace, came marching after us.

"Well spoken, Hood!" exclaimed Colonel Munro, with a smile. "Elephants have in you a very warm advocate."

"Don't you think I am in the right, colonel?"

"Hood may possibly be right," said Banks; "but I am disposed to agree with the opinion of Sanderson, a great hunter, and the best authority in such matters."

"Well; and what may this Sanderson say?" cried the captain in a tone of contempt.

"He maintains that the elephant possesses no unusual amount of intelligence, and that his most wonderful performances are simply the result of absolute obedience to orders given more or less secretly by their drivers."

"Oh! indeed!" exclaimed Hood with some warmth.

"And he points to the fact," continued Banks, "that the Hindoos have never chosen the elephant to symbolize wisdom; but in their sculptures, and sacred carvings have given in this respect the preference to the fox, the crow, and the ape."

"Oh! oh! I protest!" cried the captain vehemently.

"Protest as much as you like, but listen to me. Sanderson adds that in the elephant the organ of obedience is phrenologically developed to an extraordinary degree—any one may see the protuberance of his skull. Besides he lets himself be taken in traps which are perfectly childish in their simplicity, such as holes covered over with sticks and branches, from which he never contrives to escape. He is easily decoyed into enclosures which no other wild animal would go near. And if he escapes from captivity he is retaken with a facility which is very little credit to his good sense. Even experience does not teach him prudence."

"Poor beggars!" interposed Hood in a comic tone, "what a character this engineer is giving you, to be sure!"

"I will add as my final argument," continued Banks, "that it is often extremely difficult to domesticate and train these creatures, especially while they are young, and when they belong to the weaker sex."

"Why that only proves more than ever that they resemble human beings!" exclaimed Hood joyfully. "Isn't it much easier to manage men than children and women?"

"My dear fellow, I do not see that either you or I, as bachelors, can be competent to decide such a question as that."

"Ha! ha! well answered!"

"In short," added Banks, "I do not think we ought to place too much reliance on the amiability of the elephant; if anything were to excite a troop of them to fury, it would be impossible to resist them, and as for those who are at this moment escorting us to the south, I heartily wish that they had urgent business in the opposite direction!"

"While you and Hood have been disputing about them, my dear Banks, their number has increased to an alarming extent," remarked Colonel Munro.

CHAPTER IX

A HUNDRED AGAINST ONE

Sir Edward was not mistaken. A herd of from fifty to sixty elephants was now behind our train. They advanced in close ranks and were already so near to Steam House—within ten yards—that it was possible to survey them minutely.

At their head marched one of the largest in the herd, although its height, measured from the shoulder, was certainly not more than nine feet. As I remarked before, the Asiatic elephant is smaller than the African, which is frequently twelve feet high, and its tusks are in proportion. In the island of Ceylon a certain number of animals are found deprived of these appendages, but *mucknas,* which is the name given them, are rare on the mainland of India.

Behind the first elephant came several females, who in general are the leaders, while the males remain in the rear. Apparently on this occasion the usual order was changed, because of our presence on the line of march. The males in fact have nothing to do with the guidance of the herd. They have not the charge of their young ones; they cannot know when the babies ought to have a rest, nor can they tell what sort of camping-place is most fit for them. It is the females who, figuratively, "carry the tusks" of the household and direct the great migrations.

It was really difficult to answer the question of why they were now on the move, whether it was to seek more abundant pasture or to escape the sting of certain venomous insects, or a mere fancy to follow our strange equipage, the country was open enough, and according to their usual custom when they are not in wooded regions, these elephants journey by daylight. Before long we should see whether they would stop at nightfall, as we should ourselves be obliged to do.

"Hood," said I, "see how our rearguard has increased! Do you still persist in thinking there is no danger?"

"Pooh!" said the captain. "Why should those animals want to do us any harm? They are not like tigers, are they, Fox?"

"Nor even panthers!" was the answer of the servant, who always chimed in with his master's ideas.

But at this reply I perceived Kâlagani shake his head disapprovingly. He evidently did not share in the perfect equanimity of the two hunters.

"You seem to be uneasy, Kâlagani," said Banks, looking at him.

"Cannot the speed of the train be increased?" was the man's only reply.

"It will be rather difficult," returned the engineer, "but we will try."

So saying, Banks left the veranda, and ascended to the howdah in which Storr was standing. Almost immediately the snorts of Behemoth increased, as well as the speed of the train.

Very little, though, for the road was rough. But even if our rate had been redoubled, the state of things would have remained the same. The herd of elephants also advanced more rapidly, and the distance between them and Steam House did not diminish.

Several hours passed thus without any important alteration taking place. After dinner we resumed our places on the veranda of the second carriage.

The road now stretched away behind us for two miles or so in a straight line. Our view of it was no longer intercepted by sudden turnings.

To our extreme uneasiness we perceived that the number of elephants had increased within the last hour! We now counted at least a hundred.

The creatures marched in double or treble file, according to the width of the road, silently, at an even step, with their trunks in the air. It was like the advance of the tide flowing quietly in. All was calm now, to continue the metaphor, but if a tempest lashed into fury this moving mass, to what danger might we not be exposed?

In the meantime evening came on. There would be no moon, nor would the stars give any light, for a sort of fog or haze shrouded the heavens.

As Banks said, it would be impossible to follow such a difficult road in the dark. He resolved, therefore, to halt as soon as the valley widened, or we met with some gorge into which we could go, and allow the alarming-looking herd to pass us, and continue their migration to the south.

But would they do so? Might they not halt in or near our encampment?

This was the great question.

With nightfall came a sort of agitation among the elephants which we had not observed during the day. A sort of roar, powerful but dull, escaped from their mighty lungs. To this uproar succeeded another peculiar noise.

" What does that mean? " asked the colonel.

" That is the sound they make," replied Kâlagani, " when they are in presence of an enemy."

" And it is we, it can only be we whom they consider as such," said Banks.

" I fear so," replied the native.

The sound now resembled distant thunder. It recalled that which is produced in the side-scenes of a theater by the vibration of sheets of iron. Rubbing the extremity of their trunks on the ground, the elephants sent forth prolonged breaths with a deep and sullen roar.

It was now nine in the evening.

We had reached a sort of little plain, almost circular, and half a mile in width, from which debouched the road to the lake Puturia, near which Kâlagani had proposed our halting. But this lake being still ten miles off, it was hopeless to think of reaching it that night.

Banks now gave the signal to stop. Behemoth became stationary, but he was not unharnessed. The fires were not even raked out. Storr received orders to keep up the pressure so that the train might move on again at a moment's notice. We were thus ready for any emergency.

Colonel Munro retired to his room. Banks and Hood did not care to go to bed, and I preferred sitting up with them. All our servants were also afoot. But what could we possibly do, if the elephants took it into their heads to attack Steam House?

For the first hour a dull murmur continued around our encampment. The herd was evidently spreading over the little plain. Were they merely crossing it, and pursuing their way southward?

" That's possible, after all," said Banks.

" It is even more than probable," added Captain Hood, whose optimism was never at fault.

Toward eleven o'clock the sounds began to diminish and at ten minutes past it had totally ceased.

It was a perfectly calm night, so that the slightest noise would have reached our ears. Nothing was to be heard but the panting of Behemoth, and nothing was to be seen but the sparks which flew occasionally from his trunk.

" Well!" remarked Hood, " wasn't I right? Those fine fellows have taken their departure."

" And a pleasant journey to them," I rejoined.

" I am not at all sure they are gone," said Banks, shaking his head. " But we must find out."

Then calling to the engine-driver,—

" Storr," he said, " the signal lamps."

" Ay, ay, sir!"

In twenty seconds' time the two electric lights blazed from Behemoth's eyes, and by automatic mechanism were directed in turn to every point of the horizon.

There lay the elephants in a great circle round Steam House motionless, perhaps asleep. The brilliant light turned upon their dark bodies seemed to animate them with supernatural life. By a natural optical illusion the monsters assumed gigantic proportions, rivaling our Behemoth. Aroused by the glare they started as if touched by a fiery sting. Trunks were raised and tusks pointed as if the creatures were making ready for a rush at the train. Roars issued from each vast throat. This sudden fury communicated itself to all, and round our encampment soon arose a deafening concert as if a hundred clarions at once were sounding a startling call.

"Out with the light!" called Banks.

The electric current was suddenly interrupted, and as suddenly the commotion ceased.

"They are there, you see, camped in a circle," said the engineer; "and there they will still be at daybreak."

"Hum!" observed Captain Hood, whose confidence appeared to be somewhat shaken.

What was to be done next? Kâlagani was consulted. He did not attempt to conceal the anxiety he felt.

Could we leave the encampment under cover of the darkness? That was impossible. Besides, what use would it be? The herd of elephants would certainly follow us, and the difficulties of the road would be far greater than by day.

It was therefore agreed that the departure should not be attempted until dawn. We would then proceed with all possible prudence and celerity, but without startling or offending our formidable retinue.

"And suppose these animals persist in escorting us?" I asked.

"We will endeavor to reach some spot where Steam House can be put out of their reach," answered Banks.

"Shall we find such a spot, before we get beyond the Vindhyas?" asked the captain.

"There is one," said the Hindoo.

"What is it?" demanded Banks.

"Lake Puturia."

"At what distance is it?"

"About nine miles."

"But elephants swim," replied Banks, "perhaps better than any other quadruped. They have been seen to keep themselves on the surface of the water for more than half a day! Now, is it not to be feared that they might follow us into Lake Puturia, and thus the situation of Steam House be made still more serious?"

"I cannot see any other way of escaping their attack!" said the native.

"Then we will try it!" said the engineer.

It was indeed the only thing to be done. The elephants might perhaps not venture to swim after us, and if they did, we might outstrip them.

We waited impatiently for day, which was not long in appearing. No hostile demonstration was made during the night, but at sunrise not an elephant had stirred, and Steam House was surrounded on all sides.

All at once a general move was made, as if the creatures were obeying a word of command. They shook their trunks, rubbed their tusks on the ground, made their toilet by squirting water all over their bodies, gathered several mouthfuls of the thick grass with which the ground was covered, and finally approached so near to Steam House that we could have touched them through the windows.

Banks, however, expressly forbade us to provoke them. It was important that no pretext should be given for a sudden attack.

In the meantime, several elephants pressed up close to Behemoth. They evidently wished to ascertain what the enormous animal, now standing so motionless, could be. Did they consider him as a relation? Did they suspect that he was endowed with marvelous power?

On the day before they had had no opportunity for seeing him at work, for their first ranks had always kept a certain distance from the rear of the train. But what would they do when they heard him snort and bellow, when his trunk ejected torrents of vapor, when they saw him raise and set down his great feet and begin to march, dragging the two great vans after him?

Colonel Munro, Captain Hood, Kâlagani, and I took our places in the forepart of the train. Sergeant McNeil and his companions were at the back. Kâlouth, at the furnaces, kept up the supply of fuel, so that the pressure of vapor had already reached five atmospheres. Banks was in the howdah with Storr, and kept his hand on the regulator.

The moment for departure came. At a sign from Banks, the driver touched the spring, and an ear-piercing whistle resounded through the air.

The elephants raised their heads, then drawing back a little, they left the way open for a few feet.

A jet of vapor started from the trunk, the wheels of the machine were put in motion, Behemoth and the train advanced together. None of my companions will contradict me when I assert that there was at first a lively movement of surprise among the foremost animals. A wider passage opened, and the road appeared free enough to allow the train to proceed at a pace equal to a horse's trot.

But at the same moment all the "proboscidian herd," to use an expression of the captain's, moved too, both in front and rear. The first took the lead of the procession, the rest followed the train. All seemed quite determined not to abandon it.

At the same time, as the road was here wider, others walked at the sides, like horsemen accompanying a carriage. Male and female mingled, of all sizes, of all ages, adults of five-and-twenty years, and "grown men" of sixty, old fellows of more than a hundred, and little ones who had not yet left their mother's side, but sucking with their lips and not with their trunks—as is sometimes supposed—got their breakfasts as they trotted along.

The entire troop kept a certain order, not hurrying, but regulating their pace to that of Behemoth.

"If they escort us like this to the lake," said Colonel Munro, "I shall make no objection."

"Yes," replied Kâlagani, "but what will happen when the road narrows?"

In this lay the danger.

No incident occurred during the three hours which were employed in traveling eight out of the ten miles to Lake Puturia. Two or three times only a few elephants stood across the road, as if it was their intention to bar it; but Behemoth pointed his tusks straight at them, sputtered out smoke in their faces, advancing all the time, so that they thought better of it, and started out of his way.

At ten o'clock two miles only lay between us and the lake. There—at least, so we hoped—we should be in comparative safety.

Of course, if no hostile demonstration was made before we reached the lake, Banks intended to leave Puturia on the west without stopping there, so as to quit the region of the Vindhyas the next day. From thence to the station of Jubbulpore was but a few hours' journey.

I may here add that the country was not only very wild, but absolutely a desert. Not a village, not a farm—the insufficiency of pasture accounting for this—not a caravan, or even a solitary traveler. Since our entry into this mountainous part of Bundelkund, we had not met a single human being.

About eleven o'clock the valley through which Steam House was passing, between two great spurs of the chain, began to narrow.

The danger of our situation, already fraught with so much to cause uneasiness, was now aggravated.

If the elephants had simply gone on in front or followed the train, the difficulty would not have occurred. But those marching alongside could not remain there. We should either crush them against the rocky sides of the road, or tumble them over the precipices which bordered it in some places. Instinctively they tried to get either forward or back, the consequence being that it was no longer possible either to advance or retreat.

"This complicates matters," remarked the colonel.

"Yes," said Banks; "we are now under the necessity of breaking through the herd."

"Well, break through, dash into them!" exclaimed Captain Hood. "By Jove! Behemoth's iron tusks are worth much more than the ivory tusks of those idiotic brutes!"

The "proboscidians" were now only "idiotic brutes" in the eyes of our lively and changeable captain.

"No doubt," said McNeil," "but we are one against a hundred."

"Forward, whatever happens!" cried Banks, "or the herd will trample us under foot!"

Several puffs of steam now gave notice of more rapid movement on Behemoth's part. His tusks ran into the elephant nearest him.

A cry of pain burst from the animal, which was answered by the furious clamor of the whole herd. A struggle, the issue of which we could not foresee, was imminent.

We had our weapons already in our hands, the rifles loaded with explosive ball and the revolvers charged. We were thus prepared to repel any aggression.

The first attack was made by a gigantic male, of ferocious aspect, who, planting his hind feet firmly on the ground, turned against Behemoth.

"A *gunesh!*" cried Kâlagani.

"Pooh! he has only one tusk!" replied Hood, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully.

"He is the more terrible!" answered the native.

Kâlagani had given to this elephant a name which hunters used to designate the males which have only one tusk. These are animals particularly reverenced by the natives, especially when it is the right tusk which is wanting. Such was the case with this one, and, as Kâlagani said, it was, like all its species, uncommonly fierce.

This was soon proved.

The gunesh uttered a trumpet-note of defiance, turned back his trunk, which elephants never use for fighting, and rushed against Behemoth.

His tusk struck the iron side with such violence as to pierce through, but meeting with the thick armor of the inner plating, it broke against it.

The whole train felt the shock.

However, it continued to advance and drove back the gunesh, which boldly, but vainly, endeavored to resist it.

His call had been heard and understood.

The whole mass of animals stopped, presenting an insurmountable obstacle of living flesh.

At the same moment the hinder troops, continuing their march, pressed violently against the veranda. How could we resist such a crushing force.

Those which still remained at the side, raised their trunks, and twining them round the uprights of the carriages, shook them violently.

It would not do to stop, or it would soon be all up with the train, but we had to defend ourselves. No hesitation was possible. Guns and rifles were instantly aimed at our assailants.

"Don't waste a single shot!" cried the captain. "Aim at the root of the trunk, or the hollow below the eye. Those are the vital parts!"

Captain Hood was obeyed. Several reports rang out, followed by yells of pain.

Three or four elephants, hit in a vital spot, had fallen behind us and at the side—a fortunate circumstance, since their corpses did not obstruct our road. Those in front drew to one side, and the train continued its advance.

"Reload and wait!" cried Hood.

If what he ordered us to wait for was the attack of the entire herd, there was no long delay. It was made with such violence that we almost gave ourselves up for lost.

A perfect chorus of hoarse and furious trumpeting suddenly burst forth. One might have supposed them to be an army of those fighting elephants, which, when possessed by the excitement called " must," are treated by the natives so as to increase their rage.

Nothing can be more terrible, and the boldest *elephantador,* trained in Guicowar for the express purpose of fighting these formidable animals, would certainly have quailed before the assailants of Steam House.

" Forward! " cried Banks.

" Fire! " shouted Hood.

And with the snorts and shrieks of the engine were mingled the crack of our rifles. It was next to impossible to aim carefully, as the captain had advised, in such confusion. Every ball found a mark in the mass of flesh, but few hit a mortal part. The wounded animals, therefore, redoubled their fury, and to our shots they answered with blows of their tusks, which seriously damaged the walls.

To the reports of the guns, discharged both in front and rear of the train, and the bursting of the explosive balls in the bodies of the animals, was joined the hissing and whistling of the steam. Pressure rapidly increased.

Behemoth dashed into the bellowing crowd, dividing and repelling it. At the same time, his movable trunk, rising and falling like a formidable club, dealt repeated blows on the quivering bodies which he pierced with his tusks.

Thus we advanced along the narrow road.

Sometimes the wheels seemed about to stick fast, but on we struggled, till we were within a short distance of the lake.

" Hurrah! " shouted Captain Hood, like a soldier who is about to dash into the thick of the fight.

" Hurrah! hurrah! " we echoed.

All at once I caught sight of a huge trunk darting across the front veranda. In another minute Colonel Munro would be seized by this living lasso and be dashed under the monster's feet. Just in time, however, Kâlagani bounded forward and severed the trunk by a vigorous blow from a hatchet.

After this, while all were taking part in the common defence, the Hindoo never lost sight of Sir Edward. In his unfailing devotion and exposure of his own person to shield the colonel, he showed how sincere was his desire to protect him.

Behemoth's power and strength of endurance were now put to the proof. How he worked his way, like a wedge, penetrating through the mass! And as at the same time the hindermost elephants butted at us with their heads the train advanced, not only without stopping, although with many a jolt and shock, but even faster than we could have hoped.

All at once a fresh noise arose amid the general din and clamor.

A party of elephants were crushing the second carriage against the rocks!

"Join us! join us!" shouted Banks to those of our friends who were defending the back of Steam House.

Already Fox, Goûmi, and the sergeant had darted into our house.

"Where is Parazard?" asked Captain Hood.

"He won't leave his kitchen," answered Fox.

"He must come!—haul him along!"

Doubtless our cook considered it a point of honor not to leave the post which had been confided to him. But to attempt to resist Goûmi's powerful arms, when those arms had once grasped him, would have been of as much use as to endeavor to escape from the jaws of a crocodile.

Monsieur Parazard was soon deposited in the drawing-room.

"Are you all there?" cried Banks.

"Yes, sahib," returned Goûmi.

"Cut through the connecting bar!"

"What, and leave half of our train behind!" cried Captain Hood.

"It must be done!" answered Banks.

The bar was cut through, the gangway hacked to pieces, and our second carriage was detached.

Not too soon! The carriage was crushed, heaved up, capsized, the elephants ending by pounding it beneath their feet. Nothing but a shapeless ruin was left, obstructing the road.

"Hum!" uttered Hood in a tone which would have made us laugh had the occasion allowed of it, "and those animals wouldn't crush a ladybird!"

If the maddened elephants treated the first carriage as they had treated the last, we now knew the fate which awaited us.

"Pile up the fires, Kâlouth!" called the engineer.

A few more yards—a last effort, and Lake Puturia might be reached.

Storr opened wide the regulator, thus showing Behemoth what was expected of him. He made a regular break through the rampart of elephants, and not contenting himself with merely thrusting them with his tusks, he squirted at them jets of burning steam, as he had done to the pilgrims of the Phalgou, scalded them with boiling water! It was magnificent!

The lake lay before us.

Ten minutes would put us in comparative safety.

The elephants no doubt knew this—which was a proof in favor of the intelligence Captain Hood had argued for. For the last time they bent all their efforts to capsize our train.

Still we used our firearms. The balls fell on the animals like hail. Only five or six elephants now barred our passage. Many fell, and the wheels ground over earth red with blood. These last remaining brutes had now to be got out of our way.

"Again! again!" shouted Banks to the driver.

At this Behemoth roared as if his inside was a workshop full of spinning-jennies. Steam rushed through the valves under the pressure of eight atmospheres. To increase this would have burst the boiler, which already vibrated. Happily this was needless.

Behemoth's power was now irresistible. We could actually feel him bounding forward with the throbbing of the piston. The remains of the train followed him, jolting over the legs of the elephants which covered the ground, at the risk of being overset. If such an accident had happened, Steam House and its inhabitants would most certainly have come to an untimely end.

Mercifully this we were saved from; the edge of the lake was safely reached, into it dashed our brave Behemoth, and the train floated on the surface of its tranquil waters!

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the colonel.

Two or three elephants, blind with fury, rushed after us into the lake, attempting to pursue on its surface those whom they had vainly endeavored to annihilate on dry land. But Behemoth's feet did their work well.

The train drew gradually from the shore, and a few well-directed shots soon freed us from the "marine monsters," just as their trunks were getting closer than was pleasant to our back veranda.

"Well, captain," remarked Banks, "what do you think of the gentleness of Indian elephants?"

"Pooh!" said Hood, "they aren't worth being called wild beasts! Just suppose thirty tigers or so in the place of those hundred pachydermata, and I wager my commission that by this time not one of us would be alive to tell the tale!"

CHAPTER X

LAKE PUTURIA

Lake Puturia, on which Steam House had found a temporary refuge, is situated twenty-five miles to the east of Dumoh. This town, the chief place in the English province to which it has given its name, is in a fair way of prosperity, and with its twelve hundred inhabitants reënforced by a small garrison, commands this dangerous portion of Bundelkund. Beyond its walls, however, especially toward the east, in the uncultivated region of the Vindhyas partly occupied by the lake, its influence can only slightly make itself felt.

But after all, what could happen to us worse than the adventure with the elephants from which we had come out safe and sound?

Our situation was still, however, somewhat critical, since the greater part of our stores had disappeared with "No. 2." It was hopeless, even to think of patching up our ill-fated carriage. Turned over and crushed among the rocks, we knew that the mass of elephants must have passed over its remains, and that only shapeless *débris* could be left.

And yet, besides being the lodging of our attendants, that house contained not only the kitchen and pantry, but our store of provisions and ammunition. Of the latter we now had but a dozen cartridges; it was not probable, however, that we should wish to use firearms before our arrival at Jubbulpore. As to food, that was another question, and one more difficult to answer.

We had indeed nothing to eat of any description.

Even supposing that we reached the town, forty-three miles distant, by the next evening, we must resign ourselves to passing four-and-twenty hours without food.

There was no help for it!

Under these circumstances the most melancholy among us was naturally Monsieur Parazard. The loss of his pantry, the destruction of his apparatus, the scattering of his stores, had pierced him to the heart. He could not conceal his despair, and forgetful of the dangers through which we had been so miraculously preserved, regarded the disaster as an entirely personal misfortune. While we were all assembled in the saloon, discussing what was best to be done, Monsieur Parazard, with a most solemn face, appeared at the door, and begged to " make a communication of the utmost importance."

" Speak, Monsieur Parazard," replied Colonel Munro, signing to him to enter.

"Gentlemen," gravely said our dismal cook, " you cannot but know that all the stores contained in the second carriage of Steam House have been destroyed in the late catastrophe! Had a few provisions remained, I should have had some difficulty in preparing you even the most modest repast without a kitchen."

" We know it, Monsieur Parazard," answered the colonel. " It is to be regretted, but if we are compelled to fast, we must fast, and make the best of it."

" It is the more to be regretted indeed, gentlemen," resumed our cook, " when we are actually within sight of the herd of elephants which assailed us, of which more than one fell under your murderous fire——"

" That's a fine sentence, Monsieur Parazard," interrupted Captain Hood. " With a few lessons you would soon learn to express yourself with as much elegance as our friend Mathias van Guitt."

At this compliment Monsieur Parazard bowed, taking it all seriously, then with a sigh continued,—

" I say then, gentlemen, that a unique occasion for distinguishing myself in my business has offered itself. The flesh of the elephant, as may be supposed, is not all good, most of the parts being unquestionably hard and tough; but it appears that the Author of all Things has placed in the huge mass of flesh two choice morsels, worthy to be served at the table of the Viceroy of India. I mean the tongue of the animal, which is extraordinarily savory when it is prepared by a recipe which is exclusively my own, and also the feet of the pachyderm——"

" Pachyderm—? Very good, although proboscidian may be more elegant," put in Hood, with an approving gesture.

" With the feet," resumed Parazard, " may be made one of the best soups known in the culinary art, of which I am the representative in Steam House."

" You make our mouths water, Monsieur Parazard," answered Banks. " Unfortunately on one account, and fortunately on another, the elephants have not followed us into the lake, and I fear much that we must renounce, for some time at least, any idea of foot soup or a tongue *ragôut* made from this savory but formidable animal."

" Would it not be possible," said the cook, " to return to land and procure——"

" Out of the question, Monsieur Parazard. However dainty and perfect your preparations would be, it would not do to run such a risk."

" Well, gentlemen," returned our cook, " pray accept my expression of the great regret I feel on the subject of this deplorable adventure."

" Your regrets are well expressed, Monsieur Parazard," replied Colonel Munro, " and we give you credit for them. As to dinner and breakfast, don't think about such a thing until we reach Jubbulpore."

" I must then withdraw," said Parazard, bowing without losing any of the gravity which was habitual to him.

We could have laughed heartily at our cook's speeches and appearance had we not been so occupied with other matters.

In fact, another complication had arisen. Banks informed us that the thing most to be regretted was not the want of provisions, not the want of ammunition, but the lack of fuel. There was nothing wonderful in this, since for forty-eight hours it had not been possible to renew the supply of wood necessary for the feeding of the machine. The last of our store was thrown into the furnaces as we reached the lake. It would have been impossible to go on for another hour, so if we had not found a refuge then, the first carriage of Steam House would have shared the fate of the second.

"Now," added Banks, "we have nothing more to burn, pressure is becoming lower, it has already fallen to two atmospheres, and there is no means of raising it."

"Is our situation really as serious as you seem to think, Banks?" asked the colonel.

"If we only wanted to get back to the shore from which we are now but a little distant, that would be practicable," said Banks. "A quarter of an hour would do it. But to return to a spot where doubtless the elephants are still collected, would be highly imprudent. No, we must, on the contrary, cross this lake, and seek a landing place on its southern shore."

"How wide may it be at this part?" asked Colonel Munro.

"Kâlagani reckons it to be about seven or eight miles. Now, under present circumstances it would take several hours to cross, and as I say, in forty minutes the engine will cease working."

"Well," answered Sir Edward, "to begin with, we must pass the night quietly on the lake. We are safe here. To-morrow we shall see what is to be done."

This was decidedly the best thing to be done. We were all in great need of rest. At our last halting place in the middle of the circle of elephants, no one in Steam House had been able to sleep. But if that was a "white night," as we say in French, meaning sleepless night, this one was black, and much blacker than we liked.

In fact, toward seven o'clock, a slight mist began to rise over the surface of the lake. There had been a great deal of fog the preceding night in the higher regions of the atmosphere, but owing to the difference of locality and evaporation of the water, it was here low. After a hot day there was confusion between the higher and lower layers of the air, and the lake soon began to disappear in a fog, slight at first, but every moment increasing in density. This, as Banks said, was a complication which we had to take into consideration.

As we had foreseen, about half-past seven, the panting of Behemoth grew fainter, the throbbing of the piston became weaker, his feet at last ceased to beat the water, and the mighty beast and our single house floated peacefully on the bosom of the lake. We no longer moved; there was no fuel, and no means of procuring any!

Under the circumstances, it was difficult to make out our situation exactly. During the short time the machine was working, we steered toward the southeastern shore, there to seek a landing place. Puturia being in form a long oval, it was possible that Steam House was not so very far from one or other of its banks.

It is needless to say that the trumpetings of the elephants, which we had heard for quite an hour after leaving the shore, had now died away in the distance.

While talking of the different eventualities which might occur in this new situation, Banks summoned Kâlagani to share in our consultation. The native soon appeared, and was invited to give his opinion.

We were all assembled in the dining-room, which had a skylight but no side windows. The light from the lamps could not, therefore, be seen outside.

This was a wise precaution, it being just as well that the situation of Steam House should not be known by any prowlers who might happen to be on the shore.

In answering the questions put to him, Kâlagani—at least, so it appeared to me—hesitated somewhat. We wished to know the position which the train now occupied, and that, I confess, was rather embarrassing to answer; perhaps a slight breeze from the northwest had had an effect upon Steam House, or perhaps a current was insensibly drifting us to the lower point of the lake.

"Look here, Kâlagani," said Banks, "do you know the exact extent of the Puturia?"

"Doubtless, sahib," replied the man, "but in such a fog it is difficult——"

"Can you make a rough guess at the distance which we now are from the nearest bank?"

"Yes," answered the native, after some thought. "The distance cannot be more than a mile and a half."

"To the east?" asked Banks.

"To the east."

"So then, if we land there, we shall be nearer Jubbulpore than Dumoh?"

"Certainly."

"At Jubbulpore then we must refit," said Banks. "But now who knows when or how we can reach the shore? It may be a day or a couple of days before we can do so, and our provisions are exhausted!"

"But," said Kâlagani, "could we not try, or at any rate one of us try, to land this very night?"

"How?"

"By swimming to shore."

"A mile and a half in such a dense fog?" returned Banks. "A man would risk his life——"

"That is no reason for not making the attempt," replied Kâlagani. I cannot tell why, but again it appeared to me that the man's voice had not its accustomed frankness.

"Would you attempt this swim?" asked Colonel Munro, fixing his steady gaze on the countenance of the native.

"Yes, colonel, and I have every reason to believe I should succeed."

"Well, my man," resumed Banks, "in doing this you would render us a great service! Once on shore you will easily reach Jubbulpore, and from that place send us the help we need."

"I am ready to start at once!" was Kâlagani's quiet response.

I expected Colonel Munro to thank our guide for having consented to perform such a perilous task; but after giving him another long and attentive look, he summoned Goûmi. The servant appeared.

"Goûmi," said his master, "are you not an excellent swimmer?"

"Yes, sahib."

"A mile and a half on a night like this, through the calm waters of the lake, would not be too much for you?"

"Not one mile nor even two."

"Well," resumed the colonel, "here is Kâlagani offering to swim across to the shore nearest to Jubbulpore. Now in the water, as well as on the land, in this part of Bundelkund, two bold and intelligent men being able to assist each other, have a better chance of succeeding. Will you accompany Kâlagani?"

"Directly, sahib," answered Goûmi.

"I do not need any one," said Kâlagani, "but if Colonel Munro insists, I willingly accept Goûmi as a companion."

"Go then, my men," said Banks, "and be as prudent as you are brave!"

This settled, Colonel Munro called Goûmi aside, and gave him a few brief directions. Five minutes after, the two natives, each with a parcel of clothes on his head, slipped over the side into the water. The fog being now very dense, a few strokes carried them out of sight.

I asked Colonel Munro why he had been so anxious to send a companion with Kâlagani.

"My friends," returned Sir Edward, "that man's replies, although till now I have never suspected his fidelity, did not appear frank to me!"

"The same thing struck me," said I.

"I cannot say I noticed anything of the kind," observed the engineer.

"Listen, Banks," resumed the colonel. "In offering to swim ashore, Kâlagani had some ulterior motive."

"What?"

"I do not know, but though he wished to land, it was not to bring us help from Jubbulpore."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Hood.

Banks knit his brows as he looked at the colonel. Then—

"Munro," he said, "till now that native has been most devoted to us all, and more particularly to you! And now you imagine that Kâlagani would betray us! What possible reason can you have for thinking such a thing?"

"While Kâlagani was speaking," answered Sir Edward, "I noticed that his skin darkened, and when a copper-colored complexion becomes darker, it means that the man is lying! Scores of times, I have, by knowing this, been able to convict of falsehood both Hindoos and Bengalees, and have never been mistaken. I repeat, then, that Kâlagani, notwithstanding all the presumptions in his favor, has not told the truth."

This observation of the colonel's, which I have often since seen verified, was quite correct. When they lie, the natives of India turn a shade darker, just as white people turn red.

This symptom had not escaped the colonel's penetration, and he had therefore acted upon it.

" But what could Kâlagani's plans be," questioned Banks, " and why should he betray us? "

" That remains to be seen," answered Colonel Munro, " we shall know later, perhaps too late."

" Too late, colonel! " cried the captain. " Why what do you expect? We aren't going quite to destruction, I should hope! "

" At any rate, Munro," said the engineer, " you did very right in sending Goûmi as well. That fellow would serve us till his last breath. Active, intelligent, as he is, if he suspects any danger, he will know——"

" So much the more," observed the colonel, " that he has been warned beforehand, and mistrusts his companion."

" Good," said Banks. " Now we can wait for day. The mist will doubtless disperse as the sun rises, and then we shall better know where we are."

The fog was dense, but nothing denoted the approach of bad weather. This was fortunate, for though our train could float, it was not built for a sea voyage!

Our attendants took up their abode for the night in the dining-room, we ourselves lying down on the sofas in the saloon, talking little, but listening to every sound from the outside.

About two in the morning, a perfect concert of wild beasts suddenly broke the stillness.

This showed the direction of the southwest shore, but it was evidently at some distance, from the sounds, and Banks guessed it to be a good mile from us. A band of wild animals had doubtless come to drink at the extreme point of the lake.

Very soon we became sure that, urged by a slight breeze, our train was drifting in a slow but steady manner toward the shore. In fact, by degrees the sounds not only came more distinctly to our ears, but we could already distinguish the deep roar of the tiger from the hoarse howl of the panther.

" By Jove! " Hood could not refrain from saying, " what a splendid opportunity for potting my fiftieth! "

"Another time for that, captain," observed Banks. "When day breaks, I prefer to think that when we touch the shore that band of wild beasts will have left the place free for us!"

"Would it be at all dangerous," I asked, "to light the electric lamps?"

"I do not think so," replied Banks. "That part of the shore is probably only occupied by those animals who have come to drink. There can be no danger in trying to get a look at them."

By Banks's orders the brilliant light was thrown in a southwesterly direction. But powerless to pierce the thick mist, it only illuminated a short space before Steam House, and the shore remained totally invisible.

However, the sounds becoming more and more clear showed that the train had not ceased to drift. The wild beasts were evidently very numerous, though there was nothing astonishing in this, since Lake Puturia is the natural watering place for all the animals in that part of Bundelkund.

"I only hope Goûmi and Kâlagani won't fall into the clutches of those brutes," observed Captain Hood.

"It is not tigers that I dread for Goûmi," responded the colonel.

Colonel Munro's suspicions had evidently increased, and for my part I began to share them. Yet the good offices of Kâlagani since our arrival in the Himalayan regions, his unquestionably useful services, his devotion on both occasions that he had risked his life for Sir Edward and Captain Hood, all told in his favor. But when the mind once allows a doubt to gain an entrance, the value of deeds performed grow less, their character changes, we forget the past and dread the future.

And yet what motive could the man possibly have for betraying us? Had he any reason for personal hatred against the inhabitants of Steam House? Assuredly not. Why then should he lead them into an ambush? It was most inexplicable. All felt quite bewildered on the subject and longed impatiently for the *dénouement.*

About four o'clock the roaring of the wild beasts abruptly ceased. What struck us as curious in this was that they did not grow gradually distant and drop off, one after another, as each took a last bumper and roared a farewell to his fellows. No, this was instantaneous. It was just as if some chance disturbed them in their carouse and caused their flight. Evidently they returned to their dens and lairs, not like beasts going quietly homeward, but like beasts running away.

Silence succeeded. The cause was not apparent to us now, but nevertheless it increased our anxiety.

As a precautionary measure, Banks ordered the lamps to be extinguished. If the animals had fled on the approach of a band of those highway rovers who frequent Bundelkund and the Vindhyas, it was most necessary carefully to conceal the situation of Steam House.

The stillness was not even broken by the ripple of the water, for the breeze had fallen. Whether or not the train was continuing to drift in a current, it was impossible to know, but with the day we hoped the fog would disperse.

I looked at my watch; it was five o'clock. Without the mist there should have been light enough to allow us to see some miles round. But the veil was not lifted; we were compelled to wait.

Colonel Munro, McNeil, and I in front; Fox, Kâlouth, and Monsieur Parazard at the back; Banks and Storr in the howdah; and Captain Hood perched on the neck of the gigantic animal near the trunk, like a sailor on the topmast of a ship, all watched and waited for the first shout of "Land!"

Toward six o'clock a breeze sprang up which gradually freshened. The first rays of the sun pierced the fog; it cleared, and the horizon lay before us.

"Land!" shouted Captain Hood.

There to the southeast was the shore. It formed at the extremity of the lake a sort of narrow creek with a well-wooded background. The mist rose and left exposed to view the distant mountains. The train was now floating not more than two hundred yards from the other end of the creek, and it was still drifting on under the influence of the northwest breeze.

Nothing was to be seen on the shore. Not an animal nor a human being. It seemed a perfect desert. We could not even perceive a cottage or farm under the trees. A landing might surely be effected here without danger.

The wind sent us slowly onward. We neared the shore. At last we touched! A better place for landing could not have been chosen, for here the bank was low, sandy, and shelving. But now it was impossible to move another inch. Without steam we could not advance a step on the road which the compass told us must be the way to Jubbulpore.

Without losing a moment, therefore, we all followed Hood, who was, of course, the first to leap on to the beach.

"Fuel, fuel!" cried Banks. "In an hour we shall be under pressure, and then forward!"

This was easy work. The ground all around was strewn with dead wood, fortunately dry enough to be used at once. We had only to fill the furnaces and load the tender.

All hands were soon hard at it. Kâlouth alone remaining on the engine to receive and stow away what we collected. This was amply sufficient to take us to Jubbulpore, and at that place we could take in a supply of coal. As to food, the want of which speedily made itself felt, why, the hunters belonging to the expedition were not forbidden to shoot any game they might come across! Monsieur Parazard could borrow Kâlouth's fire, and we must satisfy our hunger as well as we could.

In an hour's time the steam had reached a sufficient pressure, Behemoth began to move, ascended the slope, and set foot on the road.

"Now for Jubbulpore!" cried Banks.

But before Storr had time to give even a half turn to the regulator, furious shouts burst from the neighboring forest. A band of at least one hundred and fifty natives rushed out, and made directly at Steam House. In a moment the howdah, the carriage, both front and rear were invaded.

Before we knew where we were, we found ourselves seized, dragged fifty paces from our train, and held so firmly that it was impossible to free ourselves.

Judge of our wrath and fury when we were compelled to behold the scene of destruction and pillage which ensued. The natives, hatchet in hand, fell to the work of devastation and ruin. Of the interior furniture soon nothing was left! Then fire finished what the ax began, and in a few minutes all that could burn in our second carriage was in flames!

"The blackguards! the scoundrels!" yelled Captain Hood, struggling in the grasp of several natives.

All abuse was in vain, for the robbers could not even understand what was said. As to escaping from those who held us, it was not to be thought of.

The flames died down, leaving only the bare skeleton of our traveling house, which had journeyed half over the peninsula.

The natives next applied themselves to Behemoth, eager to destroy him also! But here they were impotent. Neither ax nor fire could make the smallest impression on the thick iron skin of the creature, nor on the engine which he bore within. In spite of all their efforts, he remained unhurt, to the triumph of Captain Hood, who uttered shouts of mingled joy and rage.

At this moment a man came forward. Evidently the chief of the band. The men immediately drew up in order before him. Another man accompanied him. All was explained, for in him we recognized our guide, Kâlagani.

Of Goûmi there was not a trace. The faithful servant had disappeared, and the traitor only remained. No doubt the devotion of the brave man had cost him his life, and we should never see him again!

Kâlagani advanced straight to Colonel Munro, and quite coolly, without the faintest sign of shame, pointed him out. "This one!" said he.

Instantly Colonel Munro was seized, and dragged away soon disappearing in the midst of the band, who at once set off in a southerly direction, without allowing us to give him one grasp of the hand, or exchange a last farewell!

Hood, Banks, and the rest of us struggled in vain to free ourselves, and fly to our friend's assistance. Fifty rough hands threw us to the ground. Another movement and we would have been strangled.

"Don't resist! It's useless!" said Banks.

The engineer was right. We could do absolutely nothing to save the colonel. It was better to reserve all our energies for another attempt.

When a quarter of an hour had elapsed, the natives who detained us suddenly let go their hold, and darted off in the track of the first band. To follow them would have caused a catastrophe of no advantage to Sir Edward, and yet we would have done anything to be with him once more.

"Not another step," said Banks.

We obeyed.

It was very evident that Colonel Munro, and he alone, was the object of this attack of the natives led by Kâlagani.

What were the intentions of the traitor? He surely was not acting on his own account. Who then could he be obeying? The name of Nana Sahib came with ominous meaning into my mind!

* * * * * *

Here ends the manuscript written by Maucler. The young Frenchman did not witness the events which occurred after this, and hastened the *dénouement* of the drama, but on their becoming known later, they were put together in a narrative form, thus completing the account of this journey across Northern India.

CHAPTER XI

FACE TO FACE

The murderous "Thugs," from whom India appears now to be delivered, have left worthy successors behind them.

These are the "Dacoits," who are really only Thugs, with a difference. These assassins have not the same object in view, and they carry it out in another way, but the result is identical: it is premeditated murder—assassination.

The Thugs devoted their victims to the ferocious Kali, goddess of Death, and effected murder by strangulation. The Dacoits practise poisoining for the purpose of robbery. They are more commonplace criminals than the fanatical Thugs, but quite as formidable.

Certain territories of the peninsula are infested with bands of Dacoits, recruited ever and anon by such evil-doers as manage to slip through the fingers of Anglo-Indian justice. Day and night they haunt the highways of the wilder and more uncultivated regions, the Bundelkund, in particular, affording them favorable localities for their deeds of violence and pillage. At times the bandits unite in numbers to attack a lonely and defenceless village.

The wretched population has no safety but in flight; torture awaits all who remain in the hands of the Dacoits.

Their cruelties, according to M. Louis Rousselet, surpass all that imagination can conceive.

Colonel Munro had fallen into the power of a band of Dacoits, conducted by Kâlagani. Rudely torn from his companions, he found himself hurried along the road to Jubbulpore, before he had time to collect his thoughts.

The conduct of Kâlagani, from the day he joined our party, had been that of a traitor. He was the emissary of Nana Sahib: the instrument chosen by him to procure his revenge.

It will be recollected that on the 24th of May, at Bhopal, during the festivals of the Moharum, which the Nabob had audaciously attended, he had become aware of Sir Edward Munro's departure on a journey to the northern provinces of India. Kâlagani, one of the followers most absolutely devoted to his cause and to his person, had then instantly quitted Bhopal. His orders were to throw himself on the track of the colonel; to find and to follow him, and at all hazards to obtain confidential employment about the person of the enemy of Nana Sahib.

Without an hour's delay, Kâlagani had pushed northward. He overtook the Steam House train at Cawnpore, and from that moment never lost sight of it, but failed to find opportunity to do more. Therefore, when Colonel Munro and his party were installed in the sanitarium on the Himalayas, he determined to enter the service of Mathias van Guitt.

Kâlagani foresaw that almost daily intercourse would infallibly take place between the kraal and the sanitarium. He was right, and immediately succeeded, not only in attracting the notice of Colonel Munro, but in securing a claim upon his gratitude.

The most difficult part of his mission was thus accomplished. We know the sequel. The Indian often came to Steam House; he became acquainted with our future plans, he heard what route Banks proposed to take when the journey was resumed. Thenceforth one single idea and design possessed him, that of securing the office of guide to the expedition.

For the attainment of his purpose, Kâlagani left no stone unturned. He risked his own life, and that of others, under what circumstances the reader will not have forgotten, but they demand explanation.

He wished to disarm suspicion by accompanying the expedition at first starting without leaving the service of Van Guitt, hoping that something might afterward lead to the very post being offered to him which it was his sole object to obtain.

But the union of the two parties could not be effected, while the Dutchman had his full complement of draught oxen, or rather buffaloes. Deprived of them, he would be obliged to seek the aid of Behemoth. That the buffaloes might leave the inclosure and wander away during the night, Kâlagani, at the risk of such disaster as actually occurred, withdrew the bolts, and left the gate open. Tigers, panthers, and what not, rushed into the kraal, the buffaloes were killed or dispersed, several natives lost their lives—what matter? the plan had succeeded, and Mathias van Guitt was forced to entreat Colonel Munro to help his menagerie along the road to Bombay.

He did not do this without an attempt to make up his teams, but this was naturally a matter of great difficulty in the desert regions of the Himalaya, and the business being intrusted to Kâlagani, had not the slightest chance of success. The result was, that Mathias van Guitt, with his whole menagerie and personal goods, traveled in tow of Behemoth to Etawah Station. There, availing himself of the railway, Kâlagani and the other shikarries became of no further use to him, and were consequently dismissed.

Banks, observing the embarrassment evinced by Kâlagani, and well aware of his intelligence, and perfect acquaintance with this part of India, concluded that he would render important service as a guide, offered him the situation. It was accepted, and from that moment Kâlagani held the fate of the expedition in his hands.

Who could suspect treason in a man always ready to venture his life?

Once only was Kâlagani on the point of betraying himself. It was when Banks spoke of the death of Nana Sahib. An incredulous gesture escaped him; he shook his head like one who knows better than to believe what is stated. To us, however, it seemed only natural that he, in common with his race, should regard that fiendish man with superstitious veneration, and believe he bore a charmed life.

Kâlagani may have had our news confirmed, when—certainly not by accident—he met an old comrade in the caravan of the Brinjarees. Whatever he may then have heard, he in no way changed his tactics; but led us on through the defiles of the Vindhyas, and finally, after the various adventures which have been related, to the banks of Lake Puturia, amid whose waters we were forced to take refuge.

Then, under pretext that he would seek help at Jubbulpore, the traitor proposed to leave us. Colonel Munro ordered Goûmi to accompany him. The two men plunged into the lake, and within the hour reached its southwestern bank.

They proceeded together through the darkness of the night, one full of suspicion, the other ignorant that he was suspected. Goûmi, therefore, as faithful to his colonel as McNeil could be, had the advantage.

During three hours they journeyed side by side along the road which leads across the southern slopes of the Vindhyas to the station of Jubbulpore. The fog became less dense, and Goûmi closely surveyed his companion. A strong knife hung at his girdle. Goûmi, rapid in all he did, was prepared to spring on his campanion and disarm him on the slightest suspicious movement.

Unfortunately the faithful fellow had no time to act as he intended. The night was pitchy dark, even a moving figure could not be discerned a few paces distant. Thus it happened that at a turning in the path, a voice suddenly called, "Kâlagani!"

"Here am I, Nassim," replied the Hindoo.

At the same instant a strange, shrill cry sounded to the left of the way. This sound was the *kisri* of the fierce tribes of the Gondwana, well known to Goûmi. He was taken by surprise and attempted nothing. The cry was a summons to a whole band, and even had he struck down Kâlagani, of what use would that have been? Escape!—he must escape—he must fly at once, and strive to rejoin his friends so as to warn them of their danger. Once more by the lake, he would endeavor to swim back to them, and prevent any attempt to reach the shore.

Without an instant's hesitation he moved aside, and, while Kâlagani joined Nassim, who had spoken, sprang into the jungle and disappeared.

Presently Kâlagani turned back with his accomplice, intending to rid himself of the companion thrust upon him by Colonel Munro—but Goûmi was gone!

Nassim was the chief of a band of Dacoits devoted to the cause of Nana Sahib. When he heard of Goûmi and that he had fled, he dispersed his men on all sides in pursuit. It was important to secure at any price so brave an adherent of Sir Edward Munro. But search was useless. Goûmi made good his escape!

What, after all, had these Dacoits to fear from him? He was thrown on his own resources in a wild and unknown country, already three hours' march from Lake Puturia; make what speed he might, he could not reach it before they did!

Kâlagani took his measures. He conferred for a few moments with the chief of the Dacoits, who appeared to await his orders, and the whole band was speedily in hasty march toward the lake.

Now, by what means had this troop been summoned from the gorges of the Vindhyas? How were they made aware of the approach of Colonel Munro to the neighborhood of Puturia? By Nassim himself, who was none other than the Indian who followed the caravan of Brinjarees!

In fact, everything that happened was the result of a well-laid plan, in which Colonel Munro and his companions merely acted the parts prepared for them. And thus, at the moment when the train touched the southern border of the lake, the Dacoits were ready to attack it, under command of Nassim and Kâlagani.

It was their object to seize Colonel Munro alone. His companions, abandoned to their fate in this wild region, their last house destroyed, were powerless. He only therefore was made prisoner, and hurried away, so that by seven o'clock in the morning Lake Puturia lay six miles behind them.

Sir Edward at once concluded that his enemies, having secured him in this desolate place, would never let him leave the Vindhya region alive. Yet the brave man maintained his calm and dignified aspect. He walked with the utmost coolness in the midst of his savage captors, ready for anything that might occur, and by no sign or look showing that he perceived Kâlagani. Flight was, of course, impossible, for although unbound, he was so closely surrounded, that no gap in the crowd was available. Besides, instant recapture must have ensued.

All the circumstances of the case passed in review before the colonel's mind. Was it credible that this seizure was brought about by Nana Sahib? Impossible! Was not that terrible man dead? Yet it might be that to some devoted follower—perhaps to Balao Rao—he had bequeathed the fulfillment of his long-cherished revenge. Thus only could Sir Edward account for his misfortune.

Then he thought of poor Goûmi. He was not apparently a prisoner of these Dacoits. Could he have escaped from them? It was possible. Had he not rather been slain at once? That was much more likely. But supposing him to be safe and at liberty, might his assistance be reckoned upon? It was hard to say.

If he had pressed forward to demand help at Jubbulpore, he would arrive too late.

If, on the other hand, he had gone to rejoin Banks and the rest at the lake, what could be done, destitute as they were of all stores and supplies? They might endeavor to reach Jubbulpore, but long ere they could do so, the unhappy captive would be dragged into the inaccessible retreats of the robbers among the mountains!

The case appeared hopeless, as Colonel Munro carefully and deliberately examined its bearings. He would not despair, neither would he indulge in groundless visions of deliverance.

The Dacoits marched with extreme rapidity. Nassim and Kâlagani seemed anxious to reach, before sunset, an appointed rendezvous, where their prisoner's fate would probably be decided. Colonel Munro was equally anxious to advance and end his suspense.

Once only, for half an hour at midday, Kâlagani called a halt. The Dacoits carried provisions, which were eaten by the margin of a little brook. A morsel of bread and dried meat was given to the colonel, who ate it readily, not wishing to refuse what was necessary to sustain his powers at this dreadful crisis.

By this time they had traveled nearly sixteen miles. When Kâlagani gave orders to resume the march, they still proceeded in the direction of Jubbulpore.

It was not until five o'clock in the afternoon that the

Dacoits abandoned the highway, and turned off to the left. Then indeed did Sir Edward Munro feel that he was beyond human help. God alone could save him now.

In a short time Kâlagani and his followers were passing through a narrow defile at the extreme limit of the valley of the Nerbudda, and approaching the wildest and most savage part of Bundelkund.

The place is two hundred and sixteen miles from the Pâl of Tandît, at the east end of the Sautpoora Mountains, which may be called the western point of the Vindhyas, on one of the spurs of which stood the ancient fortress of Ripore, now long abandoned, because when the defiles were occupied by the enemy, even in small numbers, it was impossible to obtain supplies.

This fort occupied a commanding position, which formed a kind of natural redan, five hundred feet in height, and overhanging a wide gorge amid adjacent precipices. The only access to it was by a narrow winding path, cut in the solid rock, and extremely difficult even for foot soldiers.

Dismantled walls, ruined bastions, crowned the summit; a stone parapet guarded the esplanade from the abyss beneath, and part remained of the building which had served as barracks for the little garrison of Ripore.

One alone was left of all the guns which had formerly defended the fort. This was an enormous cannon, pointed from the front of the esplanade. Too heavy for removal, too much impaired to be of any value, it had been left there a prey to devouring rust. This piece of artillery, in size and length, was a match for the famous bronze cannon of Bhilsa; which was cast in the time of Jehanghir, and is an enormous gun, six yards in length, with a caliber of forty-four. It might also bear comparison with the equally celebrated cannon of Bidjapoor, whose detonation, according to the natives, was enough to overthrow every building in the city.

Such was the hill-fort of Ripore, to which Kâlagani led his prisoner.

It was late when they reached it, after a fatiguing march of more than five-and-twenty miles. In whose presence was Colonel Munro about to find himself? He was soon to know.

At the farther end of the esplanade, a group of natives could be seen within the ruined barracks. They left it, and advanced, while along the opposite parapet the Dacoits ranged themselves in a half circle, of which Colonel Munro occupied the center.

He stood, with folded arms, awaiting his fate. Kâlagani, quitting his place in the ranks, advanced a few paces to meet the party.

A native, simply dressed, walked in front. Before him Kâlagani bent respectfully, and kissed his extended hand, receiving a sign of approbation for good service rendered.

His leader then approached the prisoner; deliberately, but with flaming eyes, and in every feature showing symptoms of rage—intense, although restrained.

He was like a wild beast drawing near his prey. Colonel Munro let him come; he drew not back an inch, but regarded the man as fixedly as he was himself regarded. When but five paces apart,—

" 'Tis only Balao Rao," said the colonel, in a tone of profound contempt.

" Look again! " returned the Hindoo.

" Nana Sahib! " cried Colonel Munro; and now indeed he started back. " Nana Sahib alive! "

It was indeed the nabob himself, the notorious leader of the sepoy revolt, the deadly enemy of Sir Edward Munro.

Who then fell at the Pâl of Tandît?

His brother, Balao Rao.

The extraordinary resemblance of these two men, both marked with smallpox, both having lost the same finger of the same hand, had deceived the soldiers of Lucknow and Cawnpore; they had not hesitated to express absolute certainty that that man was the nabob, who in fact was his brother. The mistake was inevitable, and thus Government was informed of the death of Nana Sahib, while he yet lived, and Balao Rao was no more.

He failed not to take advantage of this new aspect of affairs, by which almost absolute security was afforded him. No such indefatigable search would be made for his brother as for himself, because neither had he taken a leading part in the Cawnpore massacres, nor had he the pernicious influence possessed by the Nana over his countrymen.

Nana Sahib therefore resolved to maintain the idea of his death, and renounce for the present his insurrectionary schemes, devoting himself wholly to private revenge.

Never had circumstances in this respect so favored him. Colonel Munro had left Calcutta on a long journey, by which he meant to reach Bombay.

Believing it possible to decoy him across the Bundelkund into the lonely region of the Vindhyas, Nana Sahib had previously put that mission into the hands of the crafty Kâlagani.

After the affair at the Pâl of Tandît, he himself of course quitted what was no longer a safe retreat, and plunging into the Nerbudda valleys, concealed himself among the deep gorges of the Vindhyas.

There, with a band of followers devoted to his person, he established himself in the deserted fort of Ripore, where he was soon reënforced by a party of Dacoits, worthy allies of such a chief, and month after month he waited.

Four months he waited, until, having done his part, Kâlagani should inform him of the near approach of his enemy.

One fear possessed Nana Sahib. It was lest news of his death should reach the ears of Kâlagani; for if he had reason to believe it, would he not abandon his treacherous design?

In order to prevent any such mistake, Nassim had been dispatched to meet the Steam House train on the road from Scind, communicate with Kâlagani, and acquaint him with the exact state of the case.

Immediately after doing so in the crowded caravan of the Brinjarees, Nassim hastened back to the Fort of Ripore, and gave him the latest intelligence of the progress of his victim. Kâlagani was bringing him by short journeys toward the Vindhyas, and he was to be taken prisoner on the banks of Lake Puturia.

All had succeeded to a wish. This time revenge was certain.

And now! Now Colonel Munro stood before Nana Sahib, disarmed, alone, at his mercy.

After the first few words, these two men continued to gaze in silence one upon another. On a sudden the image of Lady Munro rose so vividly before his eyes, that the blood rushed from her husband's heart to his head. He sprang at the murderer of the prisoners of Cawnpore! Nana

Sahib merely stepped back two paces, while several men flung themselves upon the colonel, whom they overpowered, though not without difficulty.

Sir Edward Munro resumed his self-possession, which, no doubt, the nabob perceived, for by a sign he made his men retire.

Once more the foes stood face to face.

At length the Nana spoke.

"Munro," he said, "by your people a hundred and twenty prisoners were blown from the cannon's mouth at Peshawur; since then more than twelve hundred sepoys have perished by that frightful death. Your people ruthlessly massacred the fugitives of Lahore; after the siege of Delhi they slaughtered three princes and twenty-nine members of the royal family; at Lucknow they slew six thousand of our race, and three thousand after the campaign of the Punjaub. In all, by cannon, musketry, by the gallows and the sword, a hundred and twenty thousand sepoys and two hundred thousand natives have paid with their lives for the rising in defence of national independence."

"Death! death!" cried the Dacoits and all the followers of Nana Sahib.

He silenced them by a gesture, and waited for Colonel Munro to speak. The colonel gave no answer.

"As for thee, Munro," resumed the nabob, "my faithful friend the Ranee of Jansi was slain by thy hand. She is not yet avenged."

Still no reply.

"Four months ago," said Nana Sahib, "my brother Balao Rao fell under English balls aimed at me, and my brother is not yet avenged."

"Death! death!"

This time these words were uttered more furiously, and the whole band made a movement as though to fall upon the prisoner.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Nana. "Await the hour of justice!"

All drew back.

"Munro," once more continued the nabob, "an ancestor of yours, one Hector Munro, first invented the punishment, of which fearful use was made during the war of 1857. He gave the first order to tie the living bodies of our people, our parents, our brothers to the cannon's mouth——"

These words excited a fresh outburst of rage among his followers; once more he calmed them, and said,—

"Munro, as they perished so shalt thou perish! Behold this gun!" and turning round, he pointed to the enormous cannon which occupied the center of the esplanade.

"It is already loaded. You are about to be bound to its mouth; and to-morrow morning, when the sun rises, that cannon's roar shall announce throughout the depths of the Vindhyas that the vengeance of Nana Sahib is at last complete!"

Colonel Munro fixed his eyes on the nabob with a composure which proved that death, even such a death, had no terrors for him.

"It is well," he said. "You do as I should have done had you fallen into my hands." And walking up to the gun, he placed himself before it; his hands were tied behind his back, and by strong cords he was bound across its deadly mouth.

There, for more than an hour, he was subjected to the base insults of all these savage men.

The brave colonel remained unmoved before their outrages, as before death itself.

Night fell. Nana Sahib, Kâlagani, and Nassim withdrew into the old barracks. Their men, at length weary of tormenting the captive, followed their leaders.

Sir Edward Munro was alone in the presence of Death, and of his God.

CHAPTER XII

AT THE CANNON'S MOUTH

THE silence was not long unbroken.

An ample supply of provisions and abundance of *arrack* quickly excited the Dacoits, who ate and drank immoderately, to noisy and vociferous clamor.

By degrees, however, the uproar subsided. Sleep overtook the ruffians, who were wearied by days spent on the watch, before capturing their prisoner.

Was it possible he would be left thus alone until the hour of execution? Even though secured by triple cords round breast and arms, incapable of the least movement, would not Nana Sahib place a guard over his victim?

While such thoughts passed through the colonel's mind a Dacoit left the barracks, and came across the esplanade.

This man was appointed to keep watch over the prisoner throughout the night.

He approached the gun, and after ascertaining that Colonel Munro's position remained unaltered, he tried the cords with no gentle hand, muttering,—

"Ten pounds of gunpowder! The old gun has not spoken for a long time. To-morrow she will say something worth hearing."

This remark brought a haughty smile to the lips of the gallant colonel. The most fearful death had no terrors for him.

The native then went round the cannon caressing it with his hand, and resting his finger for an instant on the touch-hole. There he stood, leaning on the breach of the gun, apparently losing all recollection of the prisoner, who remained like a culprit beneath the gibbet, waiting till the fatal bolt be withdrawn.

Somewhat affected by the powerful spirit he had been drinking, and utterly indifferent to the awful position of the unhappy prisoner, the Hindoo indistinctly hummed the air of an old Hindostanee song, breaking off and resuming the tune as a man does when, under the influence of liquor, his thoughts gradually escape control.

Presently he stood erect. Again passing his hand all over the gun, he came round it and stopped in front of the colonel, gazing stupidly as he muttered incoherent words. He touched the cords and seemed about to draw them tighter, then nodding his head as if reassured, sauntered up to the parapet about a dozen paces off.

For ten minutes he remained there, resting his arms on the top, sometimes glancing round, and then again gazing far down into the abyss at the foot of the fortress.

It was plain he was making a last effort against the drowsiness which threatened to overcome him. But at last he yielded, let himself drop to the ground and there lay stretched, the shadow of the parapet completely hiding him.

The night was intensely dark. Heavy clouds hung low and motionless. The atmosphere was still and oppressive.

No sound from the valley reached this height, perfect silence reigned around.

For the honor of brave Colonel Munro we must describe how he spent this terrible night. Not for a moment did he allow his thoughts to dwell on that last moment of his life, now fast approaching when with rude force his body would be blown to pieces and the atoms scattered far and wide. After all it would be instantaneous, and such a death had no terrors for a nature on which no moral or physical danger ever had effect. A few hours were still his, they belonged to this life which for the greater part had been spent so happily. His whole existence passed before him with wonderful exactitude. The image of Lady Munro arose. Once more he saw, he heard that dear one whom still he mourned as in the first days of his bereavement, no longer with tears but with an ever-aching heart! In his thoughts he returned to the beginning of his acquaintance with her, then a fair young girl living in the doomed town of Cawnpore, in the house where first he admired, knew, and loved her! He lived over again those few years of happiness, suddenly terminated by that most frightful catastrophe. He could recall every word, look, glance of hers, with such distinctness that the reality itself could hardly have been more real! Midnight passed without his being aware of it. The present was forgotten by him. Nothing could disturb him in his blissful recollections of his adored wife. In three hours he had gone over every day of the three years they had spent together. Yes! he was far away in imagination from the plateau and fortress of Ripore, far away from the mouth of that cannon, which the first rays of the sun were to fire!

But now came that horrible siege of Cawnpore, the imprisonment of Lady Munro and her mother in the Bibi-Ghar, the frightful massacre, and lastly the well, the tomb of two hundred victims on which four months ago he had wept for the last time.

And now that demon, Nana Sahib, was here, only a few yards from him, behind the walls of the ruined barrack. The leader of the massacres, the murderer of Lady Munro and of so many other unhappy beings! It was into this assassin's hands he had fallen, he who had hoped to do justice on the assassin who had hitherto escaped.

These thoughts roused Sir Edward. With an impulse of blind anger he made one desperate effort to free himself. The cords stretched, but the tightened knots cut into his flesh. He uttered a cry, not of pain, but of impotent rage. At the sound the native raised his head. His senses returned, he remembered that he was guarding the prisoner.

He got up and staggered to the colonel, laid his hand on his shoulder to make sure his prisoner was still there, and in a drowsy tone muttered,—

"To-morrow, at sunrise—Boom!"

Then he returned to the parapet as if for support, but no sooner did he touch it than he again lay down and was soon sound asleep.

After that one vain effort, calm fell upon Colonel Munro. The course of his thoughts was changed, though not directed to the fate which awaited him. By a natural association of ideas his mind reverted to his friends, his companions. He wondered whether they also had fallen into the hands of the Dacoits who swarm all over the Vindhyas, whether a fate similar to his own might not be reserved for them: the very idea sent a pang through his heart. But then he told himself that such a thing could not be. If the nabob had wished their death, would he not have united them together in the same punishment, to double his agony by the sight of his friends? No! it was on him, and on him alone—this he strove to believe—that Nana Sahib wished to wreak his hatred!

Then if Banks, Captain Hood, and Maucler were free what were they doing? Had they taken the road to Jubbulpore, mounted on Behemoth? The Dacoits had not been able to destroy him, and he could carry them quickly. Once there, they could soon get help. But what would be the use of it then? How could they find out where the colonel was? No one knew of the fortress of Ripore, the retreat of Nana Sahib. And besides, why should the name of the nabob come into their minds? Did they not believe that Nana Sahib was dead, that he fell in the attack on the Pâl of Tandît? No, they could do nothing for the prisoner!

Neither from Goûmi could help be expected. Kâlagani had had every reason for getting rid of this faithful servant; and since Goûmi was not there, it was because his death had preceded that of his master!

It was useless to count on even one chance of deliverance. Colonel Munro was not the sort of man who would delude himself with vain hopes. He saw his position in its true light, and he returned to his thoughts of the past, and all its happy days and hours.

How long a time was spent thus he would have found it difficult to determine. The night was still dark. No faint streak of light as yet appeared on the mountain peaks to herald the approach of dawn.

It must have been about four in the morning, when the attention of Colonel Munro was arrested by a most singular phenomenon. While living that past inner existence, he had no eyes for anything near him; scenes of other days were before him.

Exterior objects, indistinctly seen in the gloom, had no attraction for him, when suddenly his eyes became conscious of something which caused the vision called up by his imagination totally to vanish. In fact, the colonel was no longer alone on the esplanade of Ripore. A wavering light had all at once appeared toward the end of the path, near the postern of the fortress. It went to and fro, now dim, now bright, one moment almost extinguished, the next resuming its brilliancy, as if held in an insecure hand.

In the prisoner's position, every incident had its importance. He watched the light intently. Observing that a smoky vapor rose from it, he concluded it was not inclosed in a lantern.

" One of my companions," thought the colonel. " Goûmi, perhaps! But no! He would not be there with a light to betray his presence. Who can it be? "

The flame slowly advanced. It glided along the wall of the old barrack, so close, indeed, that Sir Edward feared it would be perceived by the natives sleeping within.

No notice was taken. The light passed unobserved. Every now and then, when the hand that bore it waved it wildly aloft, it blazed up afresh, and burned more brightly. By the time it reached the parapet, and moved along the crest, like St. Elmo's Fire in a stormy night, the colonel had begun to distinguish a phantom—no distinct outline, but a vague shadow flitting onward. The being, whoever it was, was clothed in a long garment, covering both arms and head.

The prisoner did not move. He scarcely dared to breathe. He feared to terrify this apparition, or see the flame disappear in the darkness. He kept as motionless as the weighty piece of metal which held him, as it were, in its enormous jaws.

In the meantime the phantom continued to glide along the parapet. Suppose it stumbled over the body of the sleeping Hindoo! No, that was not likely; for the man lay to the left of the cannon, while the apparition advanced from the right, stopping sometimes, but ever gradually drawing nearer.

It at last came so close that Colonel Munro could see it distinctly. What he saw was a being of medium height, entirely covered by a long mantle. One hand alone was visible, bearing a lighted torch.

"It is some madman," thought the colonel, "who is so accustomed to visit the Dacoits' encampment, that they take no notice of him! Why hasn't he a dagger in his hand instead of a torch? Perhaps I should be able——"

It was not a madman, and yet Sir Edward had nearly guessed aright.

This was the madwoman of the Nerbudda valley, the unconscious creature who for the last four months had strayed about the Vindhyas, always respected and hospitably received by the superstitious Ghoonds. Neither Nana Sahib nor any of his companions knew of the part "Roving Flame" had taken in the attack on the Pâl of Tandît. Many a time had they met her in this mountainous district of Bundelkund, but her presence had never caused them any anxiety. Often had her incessant wanderings led her to the fortress of Ripore, and no one ever dreamed of driving her away. It was only by chance that her nocturnal peregrinations had brought her there that night.

Colonel Munro knew nothing about this madwoman. He had never heard of Roving Flame; and yet as this unknown being approached, and was about to touch and perhaps speak to him, his heart beat with unaccountable violence.

Little by little the madwoman drew near the cannon. Her torch burned dimly; she did not appear to see the prisoner, although she was face to face with him, and her eyes were visible through openings like holes in the hood of a "penitent."

Sir Edward did not stir. Neither by word nor by gesture did he seek to attract the attention of this strange being.

At last she turned and flitted round the huge gun, the light she carried casting little wandering shadows over its surface.

Did the poor, bewildered brain know the use of this gun, standing there like a monster; that a man was bound to its mouth, and that, at the first morning beam of light, it would vomit forth a fearful burst of thunder and lightning?

Far from it. Roving Flame was there as she might be anywhere, quite unconscious. She wandered about to-night as she had done many a time before on the esplanade. Then she would probably leave the spot, glide down the winding path to the valley, and thence stray wherever her fancy took her.

As Colonel Munro could freely turn his head, he followed all her movements. He saw her pass round the gun and direct her steps in the direction of the postern.

Suddenly Roving Flame stopped only a few paces from the sleeping native, and turned. Some invisible power seemed to draw her forward, some unaccountable instinct brought her back to the colonel, and again she stood motionless before him.

Sir Edward's heart beat vehemently, as though it would burst from his bosom.

Roving Flame moved yet nearer. She raised her torch to a level with the prisoner's face, as though the better to see him. Nothing of her own face was visible except her eyes, and they were brilliant with a feverish fire.

Colonel Munro gazed intently, as if fascinated.

The left hand of this strange being gradually drew back the folds of its garment until her face was exposed to view, and at the same time she shook the torch until it blazed afresh, and threw a bright light around.

A half-stifled cry broke from the prisoner,—

"Laura! Laura!"

He thought he must be going mad himself.

He closed his eyes for a moment. Then again he looked at her. It was Lady Munro! It was his wife who stood before him!

"Laura!—you!—is it you?" he stammered.

Lady Munro answered not a word. She did not recognize him. She did not even appear to hear him.

"Laura! Mad!—yes, mad! but living!"

Sir Edward could not have been deceived by a mere resemblance. The image of his wife was too deeply graven on his heart. Sadly changed, but still beautiful, was Lady Munro, and even after nine years of a separation which her husband had deemed eternal, he knew her to be his wife.

This poor lady, after doing all in her power to defend her mother, slain before her eyes, had herself fallen wounded, but not mortally; she was one of the last thrown into the well of Cawnpore on the heap of victims already filling it. When night fell, the instinct of self-preservation caused her to struggle to the margin of the well—instinct alone, for reason had fled at the horror of these awful scenes. After all she had suffered from the commencement of the siege, in the prison of the Bibi-Ghar, and at the massacre, finally seeing her mother slain had driven away her senses. She was mad, quite mad, but living, just as Munro had said. Crazed, she had dragged herself out of the well, and had wandered away and left the town, as did Nana Sahib and his followers after the bloody execution. Mad, she had escaped in the darkness through the country; avoiding town and inhabited districts, received by the poor ryots, and respected by them as a being deprived of reason, the poor creature had roamed onward until she reached the Sautpoora Mountains, and then the Vindhyas. Dead to every one for nine years, crazed by the horrors she had witnessed, she wandered incessantly, unable ever to rest!

And this was she!

Colonel Munro called again. No answer.

Oh, what would he not have given for power to fold her in his arms, carry her, fly with her, and commence a new life at her side! With the care and the great love he would lavish on her, reason could surely be won back! But what vain fancies were these? Was he not powerless, bound to this mass of metal, his limbs cut and numb with the tightly drawn cords, utterly unable to stir, in spite of all his wild longing to tear her away from that accursed spot!

What torture, what agony was that! Far beyond even what Nana Sahib's cruel imagination could have conceived. Ah, if that demon had been there, if he had known that

Lady Munro was in his power, what horrible joy he would have felt. With what refinement of cruelty he could have increased the sufferings of his prisoner.

"Laura! Laura!" repeated Sir Edward, raising his voice even at the risk of arousing his guard, sleeping but a few steps distant, or the Dacoits in the old barrack, or Nana Sahib himself.

Neither comprehending him nor seeing who he was, Lady Munro kept her wild eyes fixed on the colonel's face. She understood nothing of the frightful torture inflicted on him, at thus finding his wife again, only when he himself had but an hour to live. She shook her head slightly, as though she had no wish to reply.

A few minutes passed like this; then her hand sunk down, her mantle fell again over her face, and she drew back a step or two.

She was leaving him!

"Laura!" cried once more the agonized husband, as though he were bidding her a last farewell.

But no, it was evidently not yet her intention to leave the esplanade. The situation, already so dreadful, was now to be aggravated in a terrible degree.

Lady Munro stopped. The cannon had attracted her attention. Perhaps it awoke in her darkened mind some shadowy recollection of the siege of Cawnpore. At any rate, she slowly returned. The hand which held the torch cast the light over every part of the gun. The smallest spark falling on the touch-hole would take instant effect!

Must he then die by that hand, the one in all the world most dear to him?

The thought was too awful to be endured. Far better were it to perish before the eyes of the Nana and his men. He must shout and arouse his executioners!

Suddenly from the interior of the cannon he felt a hand grasp his. Yes, it was true; a friendly hand was busy at the cords. Then he became aware that a sharp blade was carefully cutting between the knots and his wrists. By some miracle a liberator was near him, in the very heart of the instrument of death!

One by one the cords were severed.

In a second it was done, he took a step forward! He was free!

All his self-command was required to restrain himself. The least sound would be certain ruin.

From the mouth of the piece issued a hand. Munro grasped it; with his assistance a man struggled forth, and fell at his feet.

It was Goûmi!

After his escape from Kâlagani, this faithful servant had followed the road to Jubbulpore, instead of returning to the lake toward which Nassim's band was proceeding. On reaching the path to Ripore, he had been obliged to conceal himself a second time on meeting a party of natives. From his hiding-place he overheard them speaking of Colonel Munro, who was to be brought by the Dacoits, headed by Kâlagani, to the fortress, where Nana Sahib had determined his death should take place.

Unhesitatingly, Goûmi crept cautiously up the winding path, and reached the then deserted esplanade. There the heroic idea occurred to him that he would creep into the huge gun, hoping to save his master if it were possible, and if not, to die with him!

"Day is breaking!" whispered Goûmi. "We must fly."

"And Lady Munro?" murmured the colonel, pointing to the motionless figure, now standing with her hand resting on the breech of the gun.

"In our arms, master!" answered Goûmi, asking no explanation.

It was too late!

As the colonel and Goûmi approached to seize her, the poor lady to escape them leaned across the gun. A spark fell from her torch, and a terrific roar, echoing from cliff to cliff of the Vindhyas, filled the valley as with a burst of thunder.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEHEMOTH!

At this tremendous report, Lady Munro fell fainting into the arms of her husband. Without losing a moment the colonel darted across the esplanade, Goûmi, after giving his quietus to the astounded guard, following.

Scarcely had they passed through the postern before the esplanade was covered with the suddenly awakened men. A moment's hesitation ensued, which was favorable to the fugitives.

Nana Sahib rarely passed the night in the fortress; and the evening before, after binding Colonel Munro to the cannon's mouth, he had gone to meet some chiefs whom he did not dare to visit in open day. But this was the hour at which he usually returned, and he would not be long in appearing.

Kâlagani, Nassim, Hindoos, and Dacoits, more than a hundred men in all, would instantly have set off in pursuit of the prisoner. One thing alone delayed them. They were perfectly ignorant of what had occurred; and the dead body of the native who had been entrusted with the charge of the colonel completely mystified them.

Their natural thought was that in all probability, by some strange mischance, the gun had gone off before the hour fixed, and that now the body of the prisoner was blown to pieces.

The fury of Kâlagani and the others vented itself in a storm of oaths and abuse. Had Nana Sahib and the rest been after all deprived of the pleasure of witnessing the last moments of Colonel Munro? The nabob was at no great distance. He must have heard the report, and be even now returning in all haste to the fortress. What reply could they make when he required at their hands the prisoner whom he had left in their charge? This hesitation and delay, slight as it was, gave the fugitives time to get some little distance before being perceived.

Sir Edward and Goûmi, full of hope after their miraculous deliverance, rapidly descended the winding path, the strong arms of the colonel scarcely feeling their burden. His faithful servant kept close at his side, ready to defend or assist him.

Five minutes after leaving the postern, they were half way between the plateau and the valley. But day was breaking, and already a glimmering light penetrated to the bottom of the narrow gorge.

A yell burst from the heights above them.

As he leaned over the parapet, Kâlagani had caught sight of two fugitives. One of them must be the prisoner of the Nana.

"Munro! There is Munro!" shouted Kâlagani, mad with rage.

And with a bound he was through the postern, and in hot pursuit, followed by all his band.

"We are seen," said the colonel, increasing his speed.

"I will stop the first!" said Goûmi. "They will kill me, but it may give you time to reach the high road."

"They shall either kill us both, or we will escape together!" responded Munro.

The part of the way now reached was less rough, and they could therefore proceed faster. Forty feet farther and they would be in the Ripore road leading to the highway.

But though flight would be easier, so also would be the pursuit. To seek concealment was useless. Both would have been discovered immediately. The only chance of ultimate escape was to reach the open country.

Colonel Munro's resolve was taken. He would not again fall alive into the hands of Nana Sahib. Rather than leave her, who had just been restored to him, in the power of the nabob, he would plunge Goûmi's dagger into her heart, and then himself die by the same weapon.

"Courage, master!" said Goûmi, ready, if need were, to shield the colonel with his own body. "In five minutes we shall be on the Jubbulpore road!"

"God grant that we may find help there!" murmured the colonel.

The shouts of the natives were becoming more and more distinct.

On hurried the fugitives; they were at the road; they turned the corner. To their horror there, close to them, were two men, rapidly advancing from the opposite direction.

It was now light enough to distinguish faces clearly, and two names, uttered like a cry of hatred, burst forth at the same moment.

"Munro!"

"Nana Sahib!"

On hearing the report of the cannon, the nabob had hastened with all speed toward the fortress. He could not understand why his orders should have been executed before the hour he had named.

A Hindoo accompanied him; but before this man had time to make even a sign, he fell at Goûmi's feet, stabbed with the same knife which had severed the colonel's bonds.

"Help! here!" cried the Nana to the men who were dashing down the path.

"Yes, here!" returned Goûmi; and like a lightning flash he was upon the nabob.

His intention was—if he failed in killing him at the first blow—at least to struggle with him, so as to give Colonel Munro time to reach the high road; but the knife was struck from his grasp, and fell to the ground.

Furious at being disarmed, Goûmi seized his adversary round the body, and lifting him in his powerful arms, actually carried him off, determining to spring with him over the nearest precipice into the abyss beneath.

In the meanwhile, Kâlagani and his companions were rapidly approaching; in another minute they would be upon them, and then what hope of escape could there be?

"Another effort!" repeated Goûmi. "I can keep them at bay for a few minutes by using their nabob as a shield! Fly, master, fly without me!"

The pursuers were close behind. In a half-strangled voice the nabob called on Kâlagani. Suddenly, not twenty paces from them, other cries rose.

"Munro! Munro!"

There on the Ripore road was Banks, with him Captain Hood, Maucler, Sergeant McNeil, Fox, Parazard, and a little way behind them, on the high road, vomiting forth torrents of steam, Behemoth, in charge of Storr and Kâlouth.

After the destruction of the last car composing Steam House, the engineer and his companions had no alternative but to use as a vehicle the elephant, which the Dacoits had been unable to destroy. Perched on Behemoth, they soon left Lake Puturia, and advanced along the Jubbulpore road. But just as they were passing the turning which led to the fortress, the tremendous report bursting over their heads caused them to halt.

Some presentiment, instinct, call it what you will, made them spring to the ground, and hurry at full speed up the steep road. What they hoped or expected they could not have told.

A sudden turn brought them all at once in full view of the colonel, whose first cry was,—

"Save Lady Munro!"

"And keep fast hold of the true Nana Sahib!" gasped Goûmi, who with a last furious effort had thrown the half suffocated man to the ground.

Captain Hood, McNeil, and Fox quickly seized and made him prisoner, and without asking any other explanation the whole party hastened back to Behemoth.

By order of the colonel, who wished to give him up to English justice, Nana Sahib was bound to the elephant's neck. Lady Munro was placed in the howdah, her husband by her side; she was gradually recovering from her faint, and he anxiously watched for the least gleam of reason.

All were soon on the elephant's back.

"At full speed!" cried Banks.

It was time. Already the foremost natives were but a hundred yards distant. All would be well if Behemoth could only reach before them the advanced post of the military cantonment of Jubbulpore, commanding the last defile of the Vindhyas.

The engine was abundantly supplied with water and fuel, everything necessary to maintain pressure, and keep up the utmost speed. But the road being full of sudden turns and angles, careful steering was necessary, it was not safe to rush blindly on.

The natives gained visibly, and their shouts redoubled.

"We shall have to defend ourselves," said McNeil.

"And we will defend ourselves!" returned Captain Hood, with determination.

A dozen cartridges were all they had! Not a single shot must miss, for their pursuers were armed, and everything depended on their being kept at a distance.

Hood and Fox, rifle in hand, posted themselves in the rear, at the back of the howdah. Goûmi was forward, but still able to take good aim; McNeil was stationed near Nana Sahib, revolver in one hand, and dagger in the other, ready to stab him if the Hindoos seemed likely to overpower them. Kâlouth and Parazard supplied the furnaces. Banks and Storr drove the engine.

Already the pursuit had lasted ten minutes. Two hundred paces at most divided the parties. Though the natives went faster, the elephant could of course keep up his speed longer. The only tactics it was possible to employ were to keep the enemy from getting ahead.

At that moment a dozen shots rang out from the pursuers. The balls whistled harmlessly over Behemoth, except one which struck the end of his trunk.

"Don't fire yet! We mustn't fire till we are certain of hitting!" cried Captain Hood. "Save your fire! they are too far off yet!"

Banks, now seeing a straight line of road before him, opened wide the regulator; and Behemoth, dashing forward, left the enemy several hundred yards behind.

"Hurrah! hurrah for old Behemoth!" shouted the captain, wild with excitement. "Ha, ha! those scoundrels can't catch him!"

But at the end of this straight bit of road lay a steep and winding pass or defile, the last on this south side of the Vindhyas, which must necessarily delay the progress of Banks and his companions. Kâlagani and his party, knowing this, redoubled their efforts.

On went Behemoth, and now he was in the narrow road with a precipitous cliff on their side.

Speed was slackened, and Banks had to steer with the greatest care. Of course the natives soon regained all the ground they had lost. Though they had no hope of saving Nana Sahib, who was at the mercy of a dagger-thrust, at least they could avenge his death!

Another discharge was fired, but without touching any one on Behemoth's back.

"This is getting serious!" said the captain, leveling his gun. "Attention!"

He and Goûmi fired simultaneously. Two of the foremost natives were struck full in the chest and fell.

"Two less!" said Goûmi, reloading his weapon.

"Two out of a hundred!" returned Hood. "That is not nearly enough! We must make them pay more dearly than that!"

And three more natives fell dead.

It was impossible to go fast along this winding defile; and besides, as it narrowed, the way became steeper. However, another half mile and the last slope of the Vindhyas would be crossed, and Behemoth would find himself not a hundred yards from an outpost almost in sight of Jubbulpore.

These natives were not the sort of men to be terrified at the fire directed against them. They counted their lives as nothing when the duty of saving or avenging Nana Sahib was in question. Ten—twenty of them might fall; but eighty would still remain to rush on Behemoth, the moving citadel, and attack with murderous intent the little party it contained.

Kâlagani was well aware of the fact that Captain Hood and his friends had but a few cartridges left, and that consequently their guns would soon be but useless weapons in their hands. Half of their ammunition was indeed already gone.

However, four more shots were fired, and four more Hindoos fell. Hood and Fox had now but a bullet a piece.

At that moment Kâlagani, who had till now been very cautious, sprang forward nearer than was prudent.

"Ha! that's you, is it? I'll have you now!" remarked the captain, taking aim with the greatest coolness.

The shot struck the traitor in the very middle of the forehead. His hands clutched wildly at the air; he made one bound, and fell dead on the spot!

Suddenly the end of the pass appeared before them. Behemoth made one last effort. Once more Fox's rifle rang out, and one more native sank to the ground! The natives perceiving immediately that the firing had ceased, pressed forward to the assault.

"Jump off!" cried Banks.

Under the circumstances it was indeed best to abandon Behemoth, and hasten on foot to the outpost.

Colonel Munro, his wife in his arms, stepped down.

Hood, Maucler, the sergeant, and the rest speedily leaped off. Banks alone remained in the howdah!

"And that villain!" cried Captain Hood, pointing to Nana Sahib, who was still bound to the elephant's neck.

"Leave him to me, captain!" returned Banks, in a significant tone. Then, giving a last turn to the regulator, he also descended.

All hurried as fast as they could along the road, daggers in their hands, prepared to sell their lives dearly.

Behemoth, left to himself, continued to move, but having no one to guide him, soon ran against the cliff and there abruptly stopped, entirely barring the road.

On came the natives; with a rush they were upon him, eager to liberate the Nana. Suddenly a tremendous roar, like a most frightful crash of thunder, rent the air.

Before leaving the howdah, Banks had heavily charged the valves of the engine. The vapor reached extreme tension, and when Behemoth ran against the cliff, finding no way of escape through the cylinders, it burst the boiler, the fragments flying far and wide.

"Poor Behemoth!" cried Captain Hood. "He has died to save us!"

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTAIN HOOD'S FIFTIETH TIGER

Colonel Munro and his party had now nothing further to fear either from the nabob and the natives who followed his fortunes, or from the Dacoits who had so long troubled this part of Bundelkund.

At the sound of the explosion, soldiers issued from the guard-house in imposing numbers. Finding themselves without a leader, the Dacoits no sooner perceived this reënforcement than they instantly took to flight.

Colonel Munro made himself known. In half an hour's time they reached the station, where they were supplied with all they needed, and especially food, of which they were in great want.

Lady Munro was lodged in a comfortable hotel, until it was possible for her to be removed to Bombay. There Sir Edward trusted that his tender care would at last restore life to the soul of her whose body was at present the only living part, and who would be still dead to him unless her reason returned!

None of his friends despaired of the final recovery of Lady Munro. All confidently awaited it as the only thing which could entirely alter the colonel's existence.

It was settled that the next day they should start for Bombay by the first train. This time they would be carried away by a common locomotive, instead of the indefatigable Behemoth, who now, alas! lay in shapeless ruins.

But neither his ardent admirer, Captain Hood, nor Banks, his ingenious inventor, nor indeed any of the members of the expedition could ever forget the " faithful animal," to whom they all agreed in ascribing real life. Long did the noise of the explosion which annihilated him ring in their ears.

Before leaving Jubbulpore, Banks, Hood, Maucler, Fox, and Goûmi naturally wished to pay a visit to the scene of the catastrophe.

There was nothing to be feared from the band of Dacoits, yet as a precautionary measure, when the engineer and his companions reached the outpost, a detachment of soldiers joined them, and proceeded with them to the entrance of the defile.

On the ground lay five or six mutilated corpses, the bodies of those who had rushed on Behemoth for the purpose of freeing Nana Sahib.

Of the remainder of the band there was not a trace. Instead of returning to the ruined fortress, the last faithful followers of the Nana had dispersed through the Nerbudda Valley.

Poor Behemoth had been utterly destroyed by the bursting of his boiler. One of his huge feet was found at a great distance. A part of his trunk blown against the cliff, stuck fast, and now projected like a gigantic arm. To a great distance the ground was strewn with fragments of iron, screws, bolts, pins, remains of pipes, valves, and cylinders. At the moment of the explosion the tension of the force of steam must indeed have been terrific, perhaps exceeding twenty atmospheres.

And now, of that artificial elephant of which the dwellers in Steam House had been so proud, that colossal animal which had provoked the superstitious admiration of the natives, the mechanical masterpiece of Banks the engineer, the realized dream of the whimsical Rajah of Bhootan, what remained? Only a valueless and unrecognizable skeleton!

" Poor beast! " sighed Captain Hood as he gazed on the body of his beloved Behemoth.

" We can make another—another which shall be even still more powerful! " said Banks.

" No doubt," returned the captain, heaving another deep sigh, " but it won't be him! "

While pursuing their investigations, the engineer and his companions anxiously looked for the remains of Nana Sahib. Even if his face were not recognizable, the finding of a hand which had lost a finger would be sufficient to prove his identity. It would be satisfactory to have this unquestionable proof of the death of the man who could no longer be mistaken for his brother, Balao Rao.

But none of the bloody remains which strewed the ground appeared to belong to him who once was Nana Sahib. Had his followers carried away every trace and vestige of him? That was more than probable.

The result of this was, that there being no certain proof of the death of Nana Sahib, a legend sprang up among the population of Central India. To them their unseen nabob was still living; they regarded him as an immortal being.

Banks and his friends were, however, positive that Nana Sahib could not have survived the explosion.

They returned to the town, though not until Captain Hood had picked up a piece of one of Behemoth's tusks, which he ever afterward treasured as a remembrance.

The next day, the 4th of October, all left Jubbulpore by train. Four-and-twenty hours later, they crossed the Western Ghauts, the Andes of Hindostan, which stretch their immense length through dense forests of banyans, sycamores, teaks, mingled with palms, cocoa-trees, arecas, pepper-trees, sandalwood, and bamboos. In a few hours more, the railway deposited them on the island of Bombay, which with the islands of Salsette, Elephanta, and others, forms a magnificent roadstead and port, at the southeastern extremity of which stands the capital of the presidency.

Colonel Munro did not wish to remain in this great town, swarming with Arabs, Persians, Banyans, Abyssinians, Parsees or Guebres, Scindes, Europeans of every nationality, and also Hindoos.

The physicians whom he consulted on the state of Lady Munro, recommended him to take her to a villa in the neighborhood, where perfect quiet, combined with their great attention and the incessant care of her husband, could not fail to produce a salutary effect.

A month passed. Not one of the colonel's companions, not one of his servants, thought of leaving him; they wished to be near him on the not far-distant day which they hoped would witness the cure of the poor lady.

This joy came at last. Little by little Lady Munro's senses returned. The mind resumed its natural balance. Of her who had been Roving Flame there remained not a trace, she herself had no recollection of that sad time.

"Laura, Laura!" exclaimed the colonel, as Lady Munro at last fully recognizing him, was clasped in his arms.

A week after this, the inhabitants of Steam House were united once more in the bungalow at Calcutta. Another life was beginning in the beautiful dwelling very different to that which had formerly been passed within its walls. Banks was entreated to pass his leisure time there, Hood to return whenever he could get leave. As to McNeil and Goûmi, they belonged to the house, and could never be separated from Colonel Munro. About this time Maucler was obliged to leave Calcutta to return to Europe. He took leave at the same time as Hood, whom the devoted Fox was to follow to the military cantonments of Madras.

"Good-by, captain," said Colonel Munro; "I am glad to think that you have nothing to regret in your journey across Northern India, except not having shot your fiftieth tiger!"

"But I did shoot him, colonel."

"What! the fiftieth? When was that?"

"Why," returned the captain, with a flourish, "forty-nine tigers, and——Kâlagani. Does not that make fifty?"

THE END.

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