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IDA CRAVEN.

BY

H. M. CADELL.

author of [illegible]

Jessie Allen

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IN TWO VOLUMES. *VOL. I.*

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IDA CRAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

IN A HAYFIELD.

It sounds like a truism to say that we only appreciate the enjoyments we have lost, but, like most truisms, it is only half a truth. In weary hot Indian days, or still more weary chill English winter nights, we accuse ourselves of not having properly appreciated the bright sunny days of childhood; but thought is so far misleading us, that we are remembering facts and not impressions, and what memory brings back is the sunshine and soft fresh air, and not our pleasure in them. One of these English summer days, bright and clear, with a fresh west wind, was very fully enjoyed by two girls in June of the year 1861. They were sitting in a hayfield, having pulled a haycock to pieces to make themselves more comfortable, and at their feet ran a narrow mill-stream, with a border of pollarded willows.

I have said girls, for they both looked young, though one was wife and mother, the other, our heroine, a child of sixteen. She, however, looked older than she was, and her friend rather younger. The former, the matron, was tall, fair, and slender, her features good, with perhaps more of strength and ableness than expression. She was only twenty-three, but had been for five years wife of Captain Henry Maxwell, of the Bengal Artillery. Her husband was in India at the time of which we write, but in the previous October she had been obliged to leave him, and hurry to England with a little four-year old son, whose life, the doctors said, was not worth many weeks purchase at Multān. She had already lost one little child, a baby girl, in that unwholesome place, and she left in haste to save the boy. The winter had done wonders for him; he ran about strongly, and chattered, and had much the look of a child with some hold on life, and he was now with his mother paying a visit to the Bygraves. Here a few days before a letter had reached her from her husband, saying he was ill, and might have to take leave; and that much as he wished to come to England, he could not afford it, and would go to the hills instead if he was any worse. This made her anxious; and well she might be, for she knew the detestable climate he was in, as well as the unthinking, work-loving, nature of the man. Thus she had thought much while speaking little, and, just now, as was natural to her unselfish nature, was seriously interested in the child beside her, whose life seemed to be taking shape without her having much knowledge or care about it herself.

"You know, Mary," Ida was saying, "it is very nice being at home again, though it does seem very tame after the Pyrenees, and a little slow after Paris," she yawned a little, and threw herself back upon the bank. "Very ungrateful I am," she went on. "It is pleasant to be in England again, and I should be very happy to dream and read here for the next five years; but mamma says she thinks she will let the place after the summer, and the boys have each another plan; and I believe it will end in our living in a little house in a row in London, and I shall go wild."

Mary Maxwell smiled at her excitement. "Well, dear," she said, "suppose it did, you would get on quite well. You have tastes enough I am sure. Work any one of them hard, and your life will be worth living. And then you have your mother's life to brighten, and you will be what they call a civilizing influence for those boy brothers of yours."

Ida thought a little, and then said gloomily, "I don't know which I shall hate most,—cultivating myself (I have done it till I am sick of it), or playing a civilizing influence. I wish I were not civilized myself! I don't think I am much. Oh, if I were only a boy! Nobody tells Jack to cultivate himself. He has work to do, and does it, on penalty of not making a living if he neglects it; and as for a civilizing influence, we are thankful if he has any manners at all, and there that matter ends. You see, his life is real, and mine all make-believe: doing things because something has got to be done, not because the thing, whatever it may be, matters one bit."

"Life is very real, child, to women as well as men," said Mary rather absently. The girl's talk had roused some personal reflections.

Ida went on: "Of course it is to you, with your child and things to do. It is all very well for you; but I have nothing to do that matters. Now, if mamma would only let me be a governess, it would be better than this wretched task of cultivating my sweet self. I hate children, as a tribe,—I don't mean Frankie, because he is not a tribe. I don't know that I could teach, but I might go to London to some training school, and try and learn; and then learning would be really worth while, and I should be as good as a boy;

at least I should have something to do that would matter when it was done. Do you think mamma would let me?"

"No; I do not think so," answered Mary; "and more than that, I don't think you are made for a governess. No, dear; I think that won't do;" and she patted the white hand that lay idly on her knee,—a hand with a good deal of character in it, not very small, and strong for a girl's hand; and as she did so her eye fell on her own wedding ring. "Perhaps there is something you are more fitted for," she went on, "and that you are really meant for. By the way, what has become of Hugh Linwood? I have heard nothing of him since I left India."

She looked at the girl as she spoke, thinking to get some revelation from her face. But Ida did not blush. She only looked a little provoked, and said hastily,—

"Oh Mary, Mary! You don't want me to marry somebody, do you? I thought you were not like everybody else. Why I am only sixteen. That would be worse than cultivation and civilization and the rest of it. Fancy! to be married, and to have no fun, and have to be really old and good, like you and mamma. Mary, Mary, women must be all alike, and I thought you were different! Oh dear, I wish I were a boy!" and she laid her head down upon the grass as if this were a real trouble, and sighed most piteously.

Mary could not help laughing, and said, "I really don't deserve all that. You are not a boy, and must accept it as a fact of which nothing can be made; but you are a child yet, and I am sure that I don't want you to marry for many years. I was two years older than you are when I married, and yet I married too young for everything but happiness. We will leave the subject. But what has become of Hugh?" And Ida now blushed a little at the thought that it was his name that had sent her off into this tirade about marriage, remembering that Mary could not know, and was not wanted to know, the connection that existed between the two in her mind. "When did you see him last," Mary continued, "and where?"

Ida steadied herself and said, "He was with us for three months at Bagnères in the autumn of '59. He had been very ill in India when the mutiny fighting was over."

"I have not seen him since 1856," said Mary. "He went out with us in the *Tangier* that spring, and used to talk a great deal about Sandford, Maple Bank, and you. He is a cousin of Harry's, you know; his mother was a Maxwell."

"He used to be a great deal here in holiday time, when he was at Addiscombe," said Ida.

"But what is he doing now?" persisted Mrs. Maxwell.

"I don't know at all," said Ida, with some hesitation in her manner. "You who come from India ought to be able to tell us."

"India is a very wide word, Ida. I know he was attached to Stanley's Horse as a subaltern, and I think the regiment was under orders for China, but I don't know if they have gone yet." And thinking it odd that Ida should remember so much, and know so little about Hugh, she added, "How did you like him at Bagnères?"

"Like him! oh yes, very much," said Ida hurriedly; and Mary felt sure that there must have been something in the rumour she had heard about Hugh being in love with Ida, child as she then was.

"There can't be much in it," she thought to herself, "for the girl is only just sixteen, and that was nearly two years ago; and even now she is not very much taken up with thoughts of lovers and husbands."

She did not trouble much further about Ida and her prospects. She liked her; thought her a girl with more character than usual—a little too much perhaps; but hoped that she would improve. She had a happy wife's confidence in all the nice pretty girls finding homes, and most of them happy ones; and believed the matter of choosing wife and husband was very much of a lottery where those most left alone had the best chance of prizes.

So Ida and her possible lovers passed from her mind, and much the more quickly that she was on the eve of a serious decision.

Ever since the receipt of the letter of which we have spoken, she had been carrying on in her own calm way, and to herself, a debate of pros and cons. Should she go to her husband, or ought she to stay where she was? As she sat talking in the sunshine, she had kept a corner of her mind for the question; and as she walked back to the house, she felt it was answered, saying to herself, "I suppose it is right and best, my poor wee boy."

In fact she had come to the determination to leave her boy, and go at once to India. She had a home for him with her parents, at Hastings, and go she would by the next mail.

She had so far not said anything to any one about it. She knew that she would act on her own judgment in the end, and shrank from being distracted by the counsels of kindly friends. Ida's talk about the miseries of having nothing to do, helped her to the thought that anxiety for her husband, with nothing to do, and the wide seas between them, was something she could not stand.

But still she was a mother too, and instead of going to her boy as she would have naturally done, she went to her own room, and, now the debate was over, broke down sorely. She felt very miserable, saying to herself more than once, "That silly child will learn soon enough how real life is. Then she took out of her pocket her husband's letter, and grew gradually calm and strong again, helped by the thought of him. She sat a while and prayed for strength, and then went to her little man before he had finished his tea, and felt, as she kissed him, a mother's thankfulness that there was no fear of the pain of parting being in any way comprehensible to him. She resolved that nothing of it should be said in his hearing till quite the last. It was a great relief this thought that she only would have the pain; and she managed to play quite happily with him for half an hour, only telling the nurse that they would return to Hastings the next day.

Before she dressed for dinner she wrote to her mother, saying that she would return, and why. "It will make it easier when I get there," she thought; and after dinner, in the drawing-room, she startled Mrs. Bygrave and Ida by announcing her decision.

"We shall be sorry to lose you," said the former; "but I think you are right. But is it not a dreadful time of year to be going to India."

"It would be," she answered, "if it were not that I shall go straight to the hills on my arrival. The Red Sea will not kill me.

I never felt heat yet; and there is no question of children."

"But you can't leave Frankie behind," Ida exclaimed. "It would be dreadful! you can't possibly."

"But I must," was all Mary was able to say; and though she kept her steady quiet tone, Ida felt that women's lives were more real than she had fancied.

The next morning Mary Maxwell with her child left for Hastings, rather sad, but with the satisfaction that a reasonable resolution always brings. Her life meant two things,—Harry and the boy; but there was a sense in which her love was not divided. Her husband was all to her,—interest, hope, affection,—her boy was simply herself; and as she would never have hesitated at any personal sacrifice for "Harry's" sake, so, naturally, when the choice came between father and son, she thought of the home that was open to their child, and feeling she was doing him no wrong, the point was decided.

We must leave her here. A month later she was half way to India, and Frankie had quite left off crying for "Mamma," which, to do him justice, he did for three nights after her departure.

CHAPTER II.

THE BYGRAVES.

IDA walked home from the station that morning very thoughtful and not a little sad. She was sorry to lose her friend so suddenly, but she felt almost frightened at what was before Mary. It did not seem possible for Mary to part with the child. The mere notion of such pain as that stung her. She admired the mere fact of decision as such, though she could not realize any possible distant husband being worth the present helpless child; and this, not that children were much to her, but that men were nothing.

She had lived rather an unusual life for a young girl. Her father had been rector of Sandford, but had died when she was a child of three years old, and she had never known any other parent than her mother. Mrs. Bygrave had moved from the rectory at her husband's death with her four children,—three sons, the youngest quite a baby, and this daughter,—to the house in which they were living at the time our story commences. Their means were sufficient, though they were not rich. The house, named Maple Bank, was their own, and there they had lived till Ida was eleven years old; there she had played her child games and begun her child dreams; these last were not even yet quite ended. At that time the home had been broken up, and Mrs. Bygrave had taken the whole party on the Continent.

She spoke vaguely of economizing and continental education. To speak the truth, the continual round of nursery and schoolroom duties had seemed to weigh her down, as it has done many a woman before and since; and having more than an average amount of energy, and no taste for martyrdom, she took herself and her children safe out of the atmosphere that demanded it. The next five years were among the happiest of her life. Her boys took in German at Heidelberg, and French at Pau, Bagnères, and lastly at Paris; and she found this freer life a very different and much brighter thing than that she had left behind her at Sandford, among her husband's old parishioners; and where, as she said, she had all the disagreeables of being the clergyman's wife without any of the good of it.

From this it will be gathered she had not been a very excellent clergyman's wife at any time. Well connected, clever, and handsome, she had always rather belonged to the neighbourhood than to the parish; and as the neighbourhood was a pleasant one, she had during her husband's lifetime had a life she had liked well enough. She had, however, always maintained all proper observances, as well as many of the real duties of the parson's wife. She had looked often into the schools, she had some knowledge of the parish poor, not a very easy task with the four thousand inhabitants of the little town.

But after her husband's death all was much changed for her. She was poorer, and therefore could enjoy the society of the neighbourhood less, and the townsfolk still insisted on treating her as the clergyman's wife, which provoked her. This had had much to do in deciding her to move; and now, after the five years' absence, she was again spending the summer at Maple Bank, not knowing whether she most enjoyed the rest of it, or disliked the tameness.

She was now obliged to come to England, she said, to see after her boys. Jack the eldest, now nineteen, had been supplementing his rather mongrel education, by a couple of years at one of the London colleges. He had a scientific turn, was clever and absent, much given to books, and wild about birds, beasts, and fishes. His knowledge of French and German stood him in good stead. He could read up his subjects in other languages than his own, and, better still, was able to make acquaintance with foreign savans. He was becoming known in the college as a boy who would do something, no one quite knew what, and was well thought of by the professors, who were glad of such a recruit for science, though they would have been better pleased with a little more definiteness of aim. He had at first lived with an old aunt of his mother's; but that was given up, as he worried her almost equally with his work and his play. His specimens and his musty books were only a degree less trying than his tobacco and his very miscellaneous acquaintance. Old Aunt Bridget was not a little thankful when at last he went into lodgings, though she did all in her power to prevent the step.

"How that boy is ever to make his living I cannot see," she would say. "This is what comes of bringing up children in outlandish foreign places. If he had been sent to Winchester, like his father, he would have been at Oxford by now, and in a fair way to make a worthy clergyman in the course of time."

But Jack would certainly not make a worthy clergyman, and was likely to be a trouble to his friends for some little time to come; and when his mother, on her arrival in London in the April of this year, had seen him for the first time, she felt her heart sink. He had left her a smart, bright schoolboy, with a half formed intention of becoming a doctor; she found him no longer smart, but tall and weedy; still bright enough, but woefully conceited. He seemed to have passed from her hand, never to return; and when the mother thought she was going to put him out into the world, with a very vague notion as to how it was to be done, she found that he had already entered into a world of his own, where she was nothing. Mrs. Bygrave was not to be easily daunted. She could not believe that one of her children could really have done anything without her, so she said to herself that Maple Bank should be let again, and she would go to London to settle Jack.

More within her power was the settling of her second son, Herbert, who was content to do something that had been heard of before, and was to cram for the army. He would require some months of English life before he would have sufficiently unlearnt his foreign manners and foreign ways to mix pleasantly with other boys of his own standing; but he was a comfort compared with Jack to Mrs. Bygrave, who had a floating dread that sooner or later her eldest son would be found keeping a menagerie.

The third boy, the youngest of the family, then nearly fourteen, was to go to Rugby, and become if possible an English boy again. After spending all these years making foreigners of her sons, she began to doubt if she had not better have left that undone. Jack's mind had become German, Herbert was very French, she was determined that this youngest boy should be English.

But we have left Ida too long. The foreign life had told on her, if not less, at least very differently from the others. It had seemed to break off her childhood, and make her unnaturally old. She had never played with children, or hardly thought herself a child, since leaving England in the spring of 1856, when she had not completed her eleventh year. She had been her mother's companion to a certain extent; she had been more especially her own companion, teacher, and judge. Mrs. Bygrave had paid no great heed to her daughter's education, and Ida had had very little of actual teaching. Mrs. Bygrave had a horror of all girls' schools, a very special prejudice against foreign girls' schools, and no very definite notion of what she did like; and as a result Ida went to no school at all, and escaped becoming, like the boys, foreign in feeling, to grow up a little Bohemian, and very solitary and unusual. Mrs. Bygrave saw that Ida was fond of books, was steady, quiet, and womanly, and left her much to herself. She gave her an occasional governess for the first two years, but it had been discontinued for a time owing to a change of residence; and Mrs. Bygrave, having discovered that Ida worked at least as much alone, was content that it should be so; and Ida, being free from schoolroom discipline, was tacitly admitted as "one of the big ones, and the same age as every one else," as Fred, the young brother, had described it. This feeling had grown on every one about her, both at home and in the society in which they moved.

They lived quietly, on the whole, and having some good introductions had seen a little of real German and French life. The last three years had been spent in France; so Ida, though she had gone everywhere with her mother, had, as a "*jeune fille*," been a great deal left alone; and this discipline of leaving alone had been, with her temperament, the education of her life. She saw a good many people, and knew very little of them; but there she was quite a child in years, leading far too much of a woman's life, and looking, too, some years older than she really was, though any one who looked below the surface would know her to be a very child at heart. But not many people did look below the surface, and Ida was very womanly in all that met the eye.

She was not pretty at that time: her face was a little heavy, a little ill-formed, with the puppy clumsiness of her age, though no one thought of that. Something, too, must be allowed for the fact that she lived her life so much alone to herself, therefore her face had not had much occasion for expression. She did not care about the outside world of people yet; a very rare one or two might interest her, and for a time make her a little watchful, but on the whole it was thoughts, scenery, and books only that could rouse her. Even then it was only to absorb them, think of them alone, and work them with her dreams. But she did not often produce either thoughts or dreams, and only a rare occasion, like her talk of the day before with Mary Maxwell, brought her out.

But in her face might be read, when once she was roused, a good deal of uncertain promise. She was intelligent in a dreamy way of her own, that might, if once that power that seemed now to be used purely to grasp and absorb could in any way be turned outwards, mean talent of the original productive sort. She was active minded, but her activity stopped short when required to move beyond its own self-chosen lines of thought. She was able just as long as she was free, and shrank into a kind of incapacity that was due half to timidity and half to pride when there was a question of subordination or even joint action with others.

She had been much knocked about, and had in her own way seen a good deal of the world; but it had all kept her from acquaintance with her girl contemporaries, and girls seem to rub the freshness off each other as no other contact can do. So when, as had actually happened at Pau two years before, this child of no particular age had found herself in possession of two real lovers, the fact had amused her—puzzled, bewildered, even vexed her a little; but of answering affection, real or affected, there was absolutely not a shadow. Of these, one was a middle-aged Frenchman, to whom Ida seemed the embodiment of all that was most admirable as a "*jeune fille anglaise*," and the other was the Hugh Linwood to whom reference has been made. He was a distant connection, a handsome young soldier fresh from India, with a certain halo round his head, as having had a share in real fighting, in which he was said to have distinguished himself. He was an old friend, too; the only boy except her brothers that she had ever known. He had been much about the old house at Sandford before they had gone abroad and he to India; and then, as a child of ten years of age, after an overdose of "Lalla Rookh," read among the branches of a pet oak-tree in the field (Mrs. Bygrave's belief in the good of books for children had always been a little indiscriminate), he had been quite the most prominent feature in her dream-world. Hence it resulted that loyalty to the past gave him an exceptional place in her thoughts. But even with that advantage, when he talked of love, she simply wished he had not.

Hugh had been passionate and imploring, and had pleaded hard to hold her at least to a half-made engagement; and though she had said very calmly, "I don't think it would do," Mrs. Bygrave, who liked Hugh very much, had chosen that moment to remember that her daughter was a child, and had rather put the matter off than negatived it. Hugh had soon gone back to India, and though there had been talk of a correspondence, it had come to nothing; for Ida had avoided writing, as she would not write to him as a lover, and had, she pleaded, no taste for letter-writing at all.

Her mind simply revolted at the thought of any kind of tie. Much as she liked Hugh, she knew she would not like him very long if tied to him. Marriage she thought of as a thing that would come by-and-by—must, indeed, for girls that did not marry were old maids, and the word at that age was enough. But oh, how much nicer really it would be never to marry, but to live free among charming clever people,—artists and authors, even poets perhaps!

A common sense vein caused her not to believe very much in this last dream; so she did settle that she would marry some day, do her duty, be a good wife, and make some one very happy—quite astonishingly so; but it never entered her mind that she would love and be happy too. She thought of society, position, of many outside things (for she had a way of dreaming very elaborately), but across that child's dreams, into which questions of love-making had been forced by outside circumstances, the thought of love never came. She was about as capable of understanding love as hate, and could as little realise the influence of the one passion as the other. "Lalla Rookh" she now considered only fit for children, and looked back on her past self with a considerable degree of contempt. She had missed the best part of her childhood, and the woman was not awake; and though in girls of her age there is often enough of schoolgirl sentimentalism to play odd pranks, from that Ida's solitary training had saved her.

When she reached home that morning, after saying good-bye to Mary Maxwell, she saw in the hall a hat and stick that she recognised; and instead of going to the dining-room, where she would be sure to find her mother at that hour of the day, she went quietly upstairs to her own little den.

"I shall have enough of that after lunch," she said to herself, as she closed the door, and sat down in a little low chair by the window, and thought she was going to study. This made her feel very good; for her solitary studies, though she cared for nothing else half so much, did seem to her more virtuous and excellent things than the lessons of other girls. Without changing this impression, she had begun this summer to doubt if her work was quite as well done as that of some of the girls she had lately become acquainted with. She was shrewd enough to see that they knew a great deal she did not, and did not understand that she, on her side, had learnt much of which they were utterly ignorant. So she felt very good, but rather burdened and out of heart, as she sat down on that particular morning, pulled her Greek Testament out of a heap of books, and laid it open on her lap. Her Greek was quite the least satisfactory of her studies, and therefore she chose it now. She had had her ambition fired by reading "Romola," then coming out in the *Cornhill*, and had, on coming to the country, seized on some old books of Jack's that had been made over to them by Aunt Bridget. It happened that these books were German and Greek; but this seemed only to her an additional attraction, as her German, she thought, "was getting rusty, and I can work them both together." But the rustiness of her German increased by about threefold the difficulty of her task; and after three months of rather intermittent but very resolute work, she had so far progressed that with constant reference to grammar and dictionary (both in German), she could work out five or six verses of an easy chapter in an hour or so. This was not very satisfactory, she knew; moreover, it was all eye work, for she had no notion of the pronunciation.

Her greatest consolation was, that when she set her mind very hard at it, she could, to some extent, compel the meaning out of the Greek sentences without her aids. This was always done best on bright mornings, before she had done anything else. She was not much helped by memory, for her religious teaching, like the rest, had been left very much to herself; and her own feeling had been that there was something low in reading the Bible when you did not want to,—a sort of external excellence that was in a way sacrilege; and though in one or two trials in her life she had actually gone to the Bible for teaching and comfort, and had studied the prophets, the Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, because they interested her and set her thinking, she really did not know the Gospels at all well. But this morning the meaning would not come out at all, and soon she found her eye was doing all the work, and her thoughts were far away. After pulling them back once or twice, they got too strong for her, and she gave in, telling herself that it was all nonsense working by scraps, especially when she knew her mother would wish her to be downstairs. Still she did not go downstairs but sat with her book on her lap, looking out to the meadows beyond the mill-stream, thinking of Mary's sudden departure, wondering how she would bear to leave her little boy, and what her life would be like in India.

Her ideas of India were of the vaguest, and, based upon talk she had heard some years back from an old school dowager friend of her mother's,—were entirely conventional: dark houses and waving fans (it seemed queer they should always wave, and she imagined a gigantic folding fan such as her mother used, fastened in a corner, and going up and down by some mysterious and black agency, perhaps a man at the top somewhere), white dresses and yellow faces, indolence and much journeying, all complicated by "tiffins," "griffins," and horse exercise, the only part of the whole affair that seemed tolerable. What her bright, able, active friend would do in such a life, unless she changed her character *en route*, she could not think.

Mary, like most women to whom India is home, never thought of describing it, it all seemed so much a matter of course: so from her Ida had not had her impressions in any way corrected. But she was just then in a little new doubt if these old traditions might not be overdrawn or belonging to very long ago; and then her thoughts turned to the visitor downstairs—from whom she had heard a few things that had made her suspect that behind the India of pale faces and languor, black servants and cross children, there was perhaps a real land with big rivers and mountains (these were a very special revelation to her, spite of the geography books), men, women, and a history, and, more than all, extinct tongues in which old books were written. So she dreamt on of India, making a fairy world of it, not much more like the facts than had been the old traditions, but more tolerable by a long way, and worth asking questions about. This made her glad when the luncheon bell rang, and she went downstairs to find, she knew, Colonel Craven with her mother.

CHAPTER III.

ARTHUR CRAVEN AND HIS FRIEND.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ARTHUR CRAVEN had been getting rather weary of his prolonged talk with Mrs. Bygrave, but as he had been asked to stay to luncheon, and luncheon would certainly bring the young daughter of the house, he stayed patiently. Nothing would have astonished Ida more than to hear that Colonel Craven's frequent visits were in any way connected with her. He had come to Sandford about a month before, and was staying with Mr. Garnett, an ex-Bengal civilian, and Mrs. Bygrave's only brother, at the Postern House about a mile out of the town. The Garnett household consisted of father and three daughters, of whom the youngest was a little Ida's senior. Mr. Garnett had been twenty-five years in India, and had left it for good on coming into the family property,—a small estate lying west of Sandford, with a quaint old fashioned manor-house, known from time immemorial as "the Postern." It was never very clearly proved what was the origin of the name, but there was a floating tradition, in which all the children at any rate believed very firmly, that from the old Norman castle, which stood in the heart of the town, there ran a subterranean passage under the town and fields, down below the river, which had its issue in the garden of the Postern House. Certainly under the castle keep there was a vault, ending in a passage, dark, damp, and unwholesome, to the end of which the most daring of the children had never ventured; the air was foul, and before their bits of candle were burnt out, the young nerves had had enough of it; and as certainly in the Postern garden, there was a passage mouth, hidden in a hawthorn thicket, blocked up with stones and rubbish.

Mr: Garnett had come to live at the old place, in the earlier days of his sister's widowhood; and the house had been at first some little outlet for her weariness at her anxious wearing surroundings. But she had never liked her sister-in-law, and a worse difference than usual between the two ladies had given a final impulse to Mrs. Bygrave when she was contemplating flight. Mrs. Garnett was now dead, and the intercourse between the two houses was of the most friendly description.

Mr. Garnett had left India, anticipating perfect happiness on getting out of that "detestable country," and had talked much of what he would do in the way of managing the place; but in truth the place did not need much managing, and Mr. Garnett had lost all the country tastes he had ever had. He fancied, too, that he hated London, to make matters worse, so lived on in the country in a chronic state of discontent.

Indian field-sports had spoilt him for the few partridges in his corn-fields; long days and years of steady work had utterly spoilt him for believing in busy idleness; farming was about equally vexatious and unprofitable; the county society in which Mrs. Bygrave delighted bored him most intensely; there were far too many women, and they talked too much; the men were scarcely to be seen, and talked too little, or at best discussed the crops and the weather; if by good fortune they got to talk politics, it was soon found that the squires were one and all old-fashioned tories, while Mr. Garnett, as an Anglo-Indian, was of course a liberal, with the odd despotic dash that makes Anglo-Indian liberalism such a very uncertain quantity.

The only time he was at all happy, was when he could persuade some old Indian friend to come and share his idleness. This was not very difficult, for men at home from India on furlough, in search of change and rest, were often glad enough to spend some time in what was after all a pleasant house.

So there was very often an Anglo-Indian idler at the Postern. The better set, the real workers of Indian life, of whom by the way Colonel Craven was one, were less easy to get. They had for the most part some form of real employment for their time of holiday; thus Mr. Garnett thought himself the more lucky in catching Arthur Craven, whom he had known first as a subaltern at Delhi, and afterwards as a military civilian in the Cis-Sutlej States after the first Sikh war, and he secretly wondered, much as the fact rejoiced him, what could possibly keep Craven in "this hole."

Arthur Craven was the younger son of an old west country family, who had been sent to India at sixteen, and thought very little about before or since by his own people. He had been educated up to that time at a school near Exeter, and on a direct cadetship being offered to his father for him, he had then been sent adrift with his commission in the Bengal Native Infantry and £500 at a Calcutta agent's to buy him horse and tent. He had been a thorough country boy up to that time, his whole mind given to country sports, and the usual range of schoolboy pleasures. His horizon had been very bounded, and excepting his father, who was stern and distant to his sons, and the masters at school, he knew very little of men. For a long time it seemed doubtful what he would make of Indian life, and his little store of money only increased his temptations and his difficulties. He struggled through the rest of his boyhood, spent his money very soon, gambled a little, raced a good deal, generally played at being a man and succeeded in playing the fool, and at twenty, found himself at Delhi; still an ensign, deeply in debt and a prey to one of the fits of disgust, depression, and home-sickness that form part of the youthful experiences of so many of our best Indian soldiers and statesmen.

Poor boy! his lot seemed a very hopeless one; there was no way out of it. The home he was wearying for would never open to him if he went back a failure. He repeated the word very bitterly to himself, and in one sense it was true. His commanding officer, who liked him well enough, said, "We shall never make that boy Craven into a soldier." But by that he meant that Craven would not learn his drill, and after all this time could as little handle a company on parade as he had done at first. The adjutant was in still deeper despair: "Can't we get rid of Craven?" he would say to the commanding officer. "The way he appears on parade of a morning makes me perfectly sick, and he's a sharp enough fellow in some things."

This was in the hot season of 1845. Matters seemed at their very worst for Arthur Craven, when one evening he was riding dejectedly among some of the ruined tombs that make the ground round Delhi for miles alive with history for any one to read who cares, more utterly out of heart than usual. The sun went down, and as it went cast a sort of halo, or more exactly an edging, of prismatic colouring round all the objects in sight; making the feathery acacias with their golden balls look still more fairy-like than even nature had made them. There had been rain during the day, so all was looking its best, and Craven was forced into reluctant admiration.

"Queer fellows these niggers are. They can't or won't build houses fit to live in," he said to himself, "but really they make palaces for their dead. I wonder what old fellow lies buried here," as he came across a more graceful tomb than usual, in fair preservation. "It is a beautiful little thing," he thought, with unwilling admiration; "built for some horrid ruffian who has been dead for ages,—well, so much the better for him." And he fell to envying the dead men around him, when his pony shied vigorously at something close by the tomb he had been admiring. It was the body of a man. It must have been there all day, for the clothes were wet and clinging. He had on the long narrow drawers of a mussulman, an embroidered north country upper dress of a dust colour, and a turban of scarlet and gold. He was evidently a man above the common herd, "a rich native," as Arthur put it to himself. He was lying with his head thrown back, lips parted, and eyes half-closed; and as Arthur dismounted to lead his pony past, he saw from the man's face that he was quite young.

It seemed a sort of reproach to him. This corpse unburied made the death he had been wishing for appear a much more real thing than it had been in the case of the inhabitants of the long forgotten tombs. So a sort of shudder passed over him as he stood and gazed long at the figure before him. The face was fair for an Asiatic, but it wore that livid green tinge that Eastern faces only take.

"I wonder whether the fellow is dead or not," he said aloud, and he tied his pony to a tree, and returned to ascertain. He took up one of the native's hands;

it was clammy and deadly cold, but not stiff. He put his hand on his heart, and could feel no beating, but certainly that region seemed less cold than the hand. "I wonder whether he is alive," he thought in his ignorance. "Somehow he does not look as if he was dead. If he is not, he will be soon if he is left here."

He looked round for help, but not a human being could he see. He shouted "Koi hai," but there came no answer. Then a good English halloo, but his voice only came ringing back to him from the walls and minarets around. But as an answer came a sort of sigh from the young man at his feet.

"He's alive then," he said almost joyfully, and he sat down beside him really roused at last, and, not thinking that this occasion was the first time in all these four years he had voluntarily put his hand on a native except to thrash him, he carefully raised the man's head, rested it against his knee, and chafed his thin small hands between his own. "Handsome fellow he is too. I wonder if he wants to die," he thought, as he rubbed on, watching his patient with most unscientific eyes, but now with real good will. He suddenly remembered that his brandy flask was in his holster, left there from yesterday's shooting; and going for it, was rejoiced to find that it was not empty. He poured a little between the man's lips, clumsily enough, but happily it was not all lost, for there came a gurgle and a choking sound in his throat. He went on rubbing his hands, and now had no doubt but that he would do, for the hands took warmth from his own.

At last the eyes took life, and looked at him, though Arthur felt sure that the man had no notion where he was, nor had yet recognised him as an Englishman. The native said something that sounded like and unlike Hindustani, and Arthur, who knew that he had only the clumsy phraseology of an Anglo-Indian sub. at command, did not try to answer, but he raised the man's head still higher, and pointed to his pony, and then down the path along which he had come. He got at last some recognition. It was a look of irritated dislike. "Come with me, and ride my pony," said Arthur, in the best Hindustani he could muster, the man's independent bearing telling in his favour.

The native shook his head, and tried to stand, but he reeled and fell, and Arthur feared he was going to faint again; so being a strong fellow and the Mahomedan pitiably thin and light, he took him up in his arms like a child, and seated him on the back of the astonished pony.

The man gave in, and suffered Arthur to do as he chose, making no opposition either by word or sign; and the strange party moved off, Arthur holding his new friend or foe on to the pony, and leading it.

They went along slowly, and reached cantonments after dark, and Arthur, not knowing what else to do with him, landed his invalid on his own charpoy. Then came a moment of anxiety as to what he would eat, but he wisely concluded that it would be best to keep to the neutral ground of brandy; and after giving him some more, and, finding that he was too late for mess, regaling himself on brandy and soda, he curled himself up dressed on his sofa, and Asiatic and European, conqueror and conquered, slept under the same roof.

Before morning came Craven was conscious of some one watching him, and started up to find his invalid of last night seated on the ground beside the sofa, looking at him. The man was observing gravely and steadily, but there seemed now, as far as he could tell in the uncertain light, no dislike in his face.

"What is it? Oh, it is you," exclaimed Arthur in English, and then added in Hindustani, "Are you well?"

"No, sahib; but alive, thanks to you," answered the Mahomedan.

"This is very queer," thought Arthur. "This native, who is neither a servant or a sepoy or even a humbugging raja—what is one to do with him?" and he turned over in his mind the question of what could be the proper thing to do, and found no satisfactory answer. Then he looked again at the man, a very handsome fellow certainly, and, the conviction forced itself on him in spite of prejudices and foregone conclusions, every inch a gentleman. The strangeness of feeling on equal terms with a native struck him, but seemed in a sort a revelation. "I'm very glad," he said, and held out his hand. The dark hand closed on his, and the two men were friends.

This was the beginning of a new era for Arthur Craven. Saadut Khan, for such was the name of the man he had saved, became an interest to him of a very fresh kind. Their friendship only grew with mutual comprehensions; they shot together, they rode together, they read and talked together.

Arthur soon became, by his new friend's teaching, a Persian scholar, and adept at well bred Hindustani, and soon had learnt all the young man's history.

Saadut Khan was the son of a Rohilla chieftain, whose little fortress on the borders of the Terai had been levelled by the British in the war of 18—. He had received a good education at Delhi, in the Mahomedan view of the matter, including a good deal of religious lore which he had not heeded much, and more Persian poetry which he had taken in very eagerly. But his father had died, and at the age of eighteen he had been thrown on the world, and had sought service at Lahore, under the old lion of the Punjab. Runjeet Singh had seen him, and thought him a likely young fellow, and he had been sent to Peshawur to serve under General Avitabile, and taken full share in the constant border warfare that then prevailed. He became soon known as a promising soldier, but he was haughty and impatient, with a very perfect hatred and contempt of Sikhs, which he did not sufficiently conceal. So when the chances of soldier life drew him into the whirlpool of Umritsur politics after the death of Runjeet Singh, he was very soon in hot water. Shere Singh, who loved a soldier above all things, and was in no way a bigot, protected the young man, and advanced him as much as he dared, but when this his second patron also died, which he did in 1844, Saadut Khan had to fly for his life, and had since been living a listless, aimless life at Delhi, hating the conquering Feringees too heartily to seek service from them; and finding nothing to do got gradually poorer and poorer, till at last a little famine fever had brought him to the state in which Arthur had found him.

It was a strange friendship, but at that time less unlikely than it would be now. It had the result of saving them both. To Mr. Garnett, who held a civil post at Delhi at the time, Arthur applied in his puzzle as to how to help his friend without hurting him; and it was discovered that the city diaries for some past years had got into hopeless confusion, and a good Persian scholar with a good deal of time on his hands, was wanted to rearrange them.

Saadut was not very willing to accept the task, but when Arthur had pressed it, had yielded, and the work was done in the living-room of Arthur's house.

But when the late autumn came, it brought a great stir with it, and Craven's regiment was sent to join Sir H. Gough's force at Umballa, and all that was in Arthur of soldier woke up. Saadut Khan accompanied him as a volunteer in a native cavalry corps, but they were not content with the routine of regimental work. It chanced that Arthur and his native friend were the means of communicating some political facts of importance to the authorities. The service was recognised, and they were put in charge of an improvised intelligence department. The two worked hand in hand, and did their work most efficiently. For once in an Indian campaign there were no foolish surprises; weeks were not wasted in looking for an enemy in directions where no enemy was. Saadut Khan's part was the most important, as he managed and directed the spies. Arthur rode hard, and verified reports, and acted *vis-à-vis* the authorities the part of security.

Of course there were comments in plenty in his regiment. "Craven and his nigger" were a very favourite subject of mess-room chaff; but Arthur did not care, the new life was keenly interesting; his new friend was more to him than had ever been any one of his fellow-subs. The knowledge of having saved the man had very much to do in creating the feeling, and it did not lessen as he felt that Saadut had quite as really saved him.

At the end of the war the two young men were in a very different position to that in which they had been when it began. Saadut Khan was rewarded with an important frontier police post, where his trustworthiness would be invaluable, and his knowledge of the working of the Sikh government and of the men concerned would be of most material help. Arthur was also now considered by the authorities as a young man of promise, and his knowledge of "the languages" and friendliness to natives marked him out for civil work, and he was sent to learn his new duties as an assistant commissioner, under Garnett, who had been moved nearer the frontier, and began his life as military civilian.

He had since been rising steadily from post to post. As soon as the Punjab was annexed, he was sent to a district of the newly conquered country, and had always remained on that side of the Sutlej. And at the time that our story opens he was commissioner of a large district on the extreme northern frontier.

The friendship that had so changed his life was never forgotten. After a time Saadut Khan was allowed to exchange his police appointment for more directly civil work under Arthur, and the latter had the comfort and help of having at least one Asiatic he could trust.

Saadut never made any pretence of loving the English. "But for you," he would say, "I should have died helpless at Delhi, and for you, and because you wish it, I am working; but if there were any chance of driving your nation into the sea, I should take the side of God and the faith." For all this he was perfectly true and staunch, and at the time when Colonel Craven was wasting his time in Mrs. Bygrave's dining-room, waiting for Ida, and thinking of very little else, Saadut Khan was strengthening the hands of his *locum tenens*, and keeping a watchful eye on all native subordinates within his jurisdiction, that Arthur Craven might find all well on his return.

CHAPTER IV.

A SUMMER AFTERNOON.

As Ida entered the dining-room, her mother asked,—

"Have you only just come in, Ida?"

"No; I came in about twelve," she answered; "but I had some work to do," and she blushed a little as she thought of what she had been doing.

Mrs. Bygrave looked vexed, and Colonel Craven wondered what the work was that was so absorbing.

"I have come," he said, "to ask you and Mrs. Bygrave to spend the afternoon at the Postern; the Miss Ansons arrived at eleven, and it was not easy to know what to do, and I escaped, saying I would do all I could to bring you. There is to be some boating in the evening."

"We can't go," said Ida, just a little joyfully. "Those two old ladies are coming here."

"I cannot," said Mrs. Bygrave, "but you can. It will be but kind to your cousins, and I know you will like it."

"Yes, mother," said Ida, doubtfully.

"I am afraid you do not like it, Miss Bygrave," said Craven. "I will make your excuses if you wish, but we all want you much."

But there was no help for it, so when lunch was over, Ida walked away from Maple Banks demurely by Colonel Craven's side.

She liked him, and wanted him to think well of her, and therefore, as she had done ever since she could remember, when she wanted to be good, she played at being a woman.

She discussed the weather at much length, and with great elaboration, until Arthur wondered why she could not be as natural as she was at home. He had seen a good deal of her for the last month, and admired her very much; her bright fresh face and strong active step attracted him at first, and the more he saw of her the more she interested, puzzled, and attracted him. She was unlike any other girl he had seen. He had watched her a good deal, and thought her, spite of shy demure moments like the present, most reasonable and unaffected. She was uncertain, she was often absent and preoccupied, but, whatever else she was, always perfectly sincere and genuine.

He was a little puzzled by her visible indifference to him personally. He had sought her lately, as he had never sought any woman before, and he was not of the men who are apt to be unheeded. This he did not say to himself, but it formed part of his impressions about her.

He knew her age, but forgot it, as every one else did; or said to himself some of the common-places about the difference of men and women of equal ages, which are about equally plausible and misleading. He did not think much about her beauty: at that time there was not much to think of, though even as to looks she was puzzling and uncertain, and there were times, when anything really interested her, that her face seemed to take a marvellous light; and he found himself casting about for things to interest her, that he might sun himself in that light.

The lover instinct of talking of self was strong on him as he walked beside her, but he was not a man to whom such talk came easily; after a while he said,—

"I was surprised to find Mrs. Maxwell had left you. They did not know it at the Postern."

"No; they could not," she answered. "We did not till last night."

"It is very brave of her," said Arthur, "at the worst time of the whole year."

"Is it worse now than at other times?" said Ida. "She won't mind; but it is dreadful to think of her leaving the boy."

"That is a necessary feature of Indian life: it involves so many sad partings. Do you think you would like India, Miss Bygrave," he said.

"I don't know. I should like to see it," she said; but not caring to talk of herself, she went on quickly, "But, Colonel Craven, something there was I wanted to ask you. Oh, I know now; will Mrs. Maxwell know any real Indian people, gentlemen and ladies, out there—natives, I mean? Are there any to know? She never told me anything about it; but now she is gone I have been wondering what she is going to."

"I don't think she will," answered Craven. "There are very few natives who go into English society, and fewer than ever now since the mutiny. I hardly know why, but it does not happen. It is a great pity. A little more mutual comprehension would save us from a good many existing difficulties. I have one native friend a Mahomedan, who is very much to me, but it is sufficiently unusual for people to notice it; indeed they are hardly tired yet of talking about 'Craven's nigger,' who, by the way, is a perfect gentleman, and the finest fellow I ever met."

Ida was interested at once, "Oh tell me about him. Did he save your life in the mutiny, or how was it you became friends?"

"It was a much older story than that. He always says I saved his life, but I am sure he did more for me than I ever did for him," and he told her the outline of the story I have related in the last chapter, making light of it all except the help and almost salvation the friendship had been to him. It was very unlike the grave, reserved Arthur Craven, to be thus telling stories of his own life, and talking of his own feelings; but his desire to interest his companion overcame his reserve for the time, and very strong was the lover-need to speak of self which we have noticed. So of himself, unwonted as the subject was, did Arthur talk till they arrived at the Postern gate.

They were greeted with reproaches for

being late, and Arthur felt conscious, but Ida who had been really interested, and was quite unconscious that she had been favoured with a rare revelation, exclaimed, "We walked slowly. Colonel Craven has been telling me about an Indian friend of his."

The afternoon passed rather wearily for Ida. She had been wide awake and much interested in Craven's account of Saadut Khan, but now among the girls she was out of tune and awkward. The Ansons were rather fast, rather noisy, and desperately common-place. The three cousins were very different, but no nearer being comprehensible to Ida. They had been rather overtrained for their powers, and had seemed to become, as they grew, flatter year by year as the process continued. They were well mannered and well taught, with the making in them of nice steady women; but their girlhood had been drilled down by a combination of mother and governess, of whom the governess had represented cultivation minus will, and the mother will minus cultivation, and this will had been so prominent a feature in the family, that no other wills had much chance to grow under its shadow. The mother had died the previous summer, and the girls were now growing their characters as they had never done before, but it seemed as if they must be content to have missed their girlhood, and no doubt they would not make worse, but only flatter, women for it.

It was not a promising atmosphere for poor Ida. They all looked on her as not only a child, but a queer one. Ida's quick perceptions caught the impression and resented it. She made no sign, but heartily wished she had been left to her Greek Testament.

The afternoon wore on without much being done. They strolled in the hayfields, and sat talking under trees. At last it ended, and some nondescript summer meal was discussed, and the party walked down to the boats which were moored to the meadow bordering the river not far from the house.

This Ida liked; the more so that she was allowed to get away into the bow of one of the boats, and there, with her own thoughts for company, was very happy.

Colonel Craven was rowing, and as she sat there behind him, looking down into the water, and bathing her hands in it, she let her thoughts ramble away where they would. They soon got back to Colonel Craven's story of the morning, and she pictured Saadut Khan to herself as a perfect Saladin. It seemed to her very refreshing in this common-place world to hear of any one so suggestive of romantic models. She grew still more interested in India—was getting to feel that she knew all about it. Her thoughts ran on very fast indeed, making grand confusion, and adorning the facts she had heard with drapery from "The Talisman," and even some scraps brought in from the now despised "Lalla Rookh" as being so eminently suitable. It did not occur to her, that of all that made the real stuff of chivalry, and all the best elements of knightly character, she had a very noble specimen within a yard of her; inspired too with that single-hearted personal devotion to herself that might be essential to the filling in of any tale of romance.

But as he pulled along against the stream, doing his work lightly and well, it did occur to her that Colonel Craven was handsome: with his broad forehead marked with lines of thought, and deep-set dark grey eyes, so dark that at first sight you thought them black, whose expression, sometimes keenly penetrating, sometimes kindly, often sad, was always that of a soul perfectly frank and loyal. His nose was handsome, straight and high, with delicate nostrils, and below it a thick mass of soft dark brown hair in which many grey threads might be seen. Not that Ida saw much of this as she sat in the bows behind him, except when he turned to address her; but she knew the face well now, and could ponder on it none the worse for the fine view of close cropped brown grey hair in front of her. Arthur had come out to her in a new light that morning, and so long as his back was turned to her, and he could not notice it, she was watching him keenly. She was trying hard to grasp the man-side of his life, into which the story of the morning had been a glimpse. It had raised him much in her estimation. She had a profound contempt for the life of idling, which seemed to be the rule among the guests at the Postern House, and Arthur as one of them, did not attract her at all; but if, as a whole his life was something very different from this, and this was only a very temporary phase, then may be he was a man of a type she did not know, and therefore worth her looking at.

It was a beautiful June evening, and before they reached Oakshot, there came a lovely early summer sunset, which excited much and rather wordy admiration from the girls.

Ida felt moved and quieted by it, as she always was by natural beauty, and was thankful for her position in the bows, where she could enjoy, dream, and not be worried. It seemed to her she had made a new friend that day; and as friends were rare in her solitary life, she needed to think it over to very great length.

She walked home from the Postern late, with her uncle, though Colonel Craven would have liked to have been her escort, pleading fatigue to account for the silence she felt she must keep. A dreamless night prepared her for another of her pleasant dreamy days, which were, though she had no thought of it, drawing very fast to a close.

CHAPTER V.

SUMMER HILL LAKE.

THE boating party we have recorded was followed by a good deal more of this kind of thing, too much for Ida's taste. They had long evening rambles through the lanes and meadows; they rowed on Summer Hill Lake, and sat by a favourite moss-grown fountain in the park, that was one of Ida's pleasantest memories (for she had gone there as quite a little child with Hugh Linwood, and he had made her cowslip balls, and gathered horse-chestnut blossoms for her), and very often they drifted down the river on warm evenings.

Ida sometimes declined these expeditions, and then Colonel Craven always found some reason before the day was out for seeking her at home, and was always surprised to find her reading in the garden, seated on the grass, with her back against a low horseshoe of green turfed bank. This I think she rather liked, for she got on well with him now when alone, though it did seem to her that she needed to be very good to approach at all to his level. Then he gave her riding lessons. He had a couple of horses in the town, and Mrs. Bygrave had been very glad for Ida to ride at times with him, sometimes on a clever little black pony, which had been hired to do double work for her and for a pony chaise, but which got very little work in harness, and at times on one of Arthur's horses, which she liked much better.

It was strange how this sort of thing went on and seemed a matter of course. Maple Bank and the Postern had never been such good friends before, and the Postern guest was equally at home at Maple Bank. Ida, spite of a little impatience at having her time so eaten up, and a good deal of puzzled shyness at this intimacy with a man so much her senior, was a good deal interested in him. This Indian life he spoke about seemed a much more comprehensible thing than she could have supposed, and appeared really attractive to her, as contrasted with the tameness of English life. So it went on : he thinking more and more of her every day, and she quite bright and natural, but never for a moment thinking of him as a lover. That sort of thing, so she felt, though she did not say it, had passed out of her life, was now quite a thing of the past or of the far, dim future; for the present the men of her acquaintance had got over it. Colonel Craven was thirty-six, too, quite a life-time older than herself; so she enjoyed his society, and thought it most satisfactory. Had Craven been ten years younger, she would not have been quite so sure of it; as some part of her past experiences had made her think ill of what people called "flirting," though what was to be done to constitute flirting, or to be avoided to leave it alone, she had very little notion, and even wondered, but at any rate the offending word could not have any connection with Colonel Craven.

Arthur stayed more than a month at first, then went away for awhile, but only to return again, and when July was ended was still there, and no time fixed for his departure. He had to be in India early in December, but still he stayed. Mr. Garnett was aware of what was the matter, and wondered what Craven could see in Ida—such a child and an odd one too. He knew but little of her, and so thought more of her age than those who knew her well; though he acknowledged that there was something attractive about her, and that at times she looked almost pretty. He counselled his sister to send her to school to very little purpose. Mrs. Bygrave had no notion of opening again the question of education for a girl who could do so very well for herself without it. She saw that Arthur was ensnared, and wondered a little too, but was very content that it should be so.

She was quite as much convinced that Ida was "the same age as every one else" as ever her brothers had been; and believing her to be a woman, had missed any reasonable appreciation of what the girl's character really was, and had no notion of the strange medley of child, woman, and student, she had under her hand in this bright young plant of hers. She had an ideal in her mind of what a young lady should be, consisting for the most part of externals,—manners, appearance, acquirements. Her standard, as far as it went, was high, but there was not much of it; and Ida, though disappointing, was confusingly so, and both pleased and vexed her in unexpected directions; so being at this time much occupied with thoughts and plans for the welfare of her boys (matter so vastly more important), was quite glad not to think much at all about her girl.

The boys came home in the summer. Jack first, his work sparing him the earliest. He admired this young sister who had become quite a stranger to him. He said she had more in her than most girls; not that he knew anything of girls, but he had like every one else a prepared standard of his own by which he judged her, and to which she came up rather well, with a sufficiently puzzling amount of difference which he liked.

Whatever the sorcery was that she unconsciously used, it had worked on Arthur Craven. It was no one part of her, but something pervading all. It was not goodness; though honest, upright, and well-intentioned, she was hardly good. It was not talent, though she had some; or beauty, for half the people who saw her did not think her pretty. Still less was it manner (she had no manners rather than bad ones), accomplishment, or any grace of training, but it was a mysterious charm that made him think her the one woman of the world for him, and long that he could carry her off, to make, that he felt she could do, home and a new life for him in the East. There had grown on him a new discontent with the life that had hitherto been sufficient for him; and it all, as he thought of it, seemed very dreary and monotonous as considered without her.

She was to him a marvel of bright young freshness, life personified. He had not taken much heed of the student-side that made so much in her life, but put down all he could not understand (he was a little old-school in his notions about women, like most good men) to maiden dreams,—an idea of convenient vagueness that might include and account for a great deal, and which was so far correct that she was very thoughtful and dreamy, though she was also a good deal else that no one saw for the present. And on Craven the desire grew very strong to appropriate this bright young life to fill up and perfect his own, the natural result of such admiration if it grows keen enough. But how to ask her? What had been to Hugh Linwood no great difficulty two years before, seemed to him almost sacrilege. To break in on her child's dreams, to make her world real, and perhaps no longer charming, seemed to him almost a wrong. He reasoned with himself many times, saying that she was too young, that he was too old for her; that even if she would have him, she might not be happy; but he came at last to the usual end of such reasoning. After acknowledging the cogency of his arguments, he forgot them one by one. Feeling was too strong, so he stayed and let Ida's mother see what he felt and wished.

Mrs. Bygrave was heartily pleased, she liked him much, she liked even more the thought of the position for Ida. As for the breaking in on maiden dreams, that she did not understand; and thought to herself that they must, if they meant anything, have been broken two years ago. So she smiled approvingly, and on Ida brought an indirect influence to bear, that told her nothing, but made her feel that something was pending; and more, that her dear mother thought that something delightful. If the something meant another question of marriage, she did not see it; but it could not possibly, she thought. And putting the subject safe out of sight, she lived on her happy every-day summer life.

Not that at this time she would have agreed that her life was one of unclouded happiness. On the contrary, she was a good deal discontented with the present, and quite seriously afraid of the future. She said to herself that the present was foolishly empty, and she dreaded a future that would be empty without even being foolish. She believed very strongly in the grievance that she had expounded so impatiently to Mrs. Maxwell a little time before; and chafed quite gravely that she was not to have a profession, work to do, and a life of her own, as the boys had. It was this feeling, as well as her real love of study, that made her fly to her little den and her books at all possible and some unreasonable times, often when she knew that her mother expected her to be downstairs, which periods she found coincided with the times when Colonel Craven was in the house. Without putting the thing together very closely, she rather resented this; and liking Colonel Craven as much as she did, she nevertheless kept out of the way a good deal from sheer self-will. However, when anything really tempting was proposed, a ride, a row, anything not too much complicated by the presence of the other girls, beside whom she felt shy and awkward, she would agree, and enjoy it thoroughly; and if the word "flirt" came into her head, she felt quite righteously indignant, seeing that her mother would have scolded her if she had not entered into whatever the project might be; so flirt she did a good deal, but very innocently.

One early August day she had felt more than usually indignant that girls should be meant for nothing rational, but to idle about at every one's beck and call, and had seen this the more painfully for a taunt that Jack had thrown at her when she had pleaded her "work" in answer to some demand of his. He had said—"But what is the good of it?

If it were any use, child, no one would want you; but as Greek will be about as much good to you as it would be to Sparkie there," referring to a little sharp steel-grey Dandie, who was looking wise from a mat in the window, "you may just as well be a good girl, and help me to arrange these beetles."

Now Ida hated beetles, and to hold them straight while Jack transfixed them with pins, even though they had been never so scientifically killed with chloroform beforehand, made her both sick and cross.

Thus when Arthur Craven came (it was late in the afternoon), and asked leave to take Miss Bygrave for a ride, she welcomed the suggestion warmly, and they started without waiting for dinner, being promised one of the composite meals of country life on their return.

Ida felt a little reckless and wilful, and withal very grateful to Arthur, as they trotted along the road to get clear of the houses as soon as possible.

They soon left the road, and turned into a shady green lane, where they went at foot-pace, fully penetrated with the exceeding glory of these late hours of the full summer day. It was half-past five. The sun had lost its power to gain a double share of beauty, sending long shadows across their path and into the meadow beside them, and bathing everything in floods of yellow light. The air had a special tone, was soft and rather heavy.

Though grateful, Ida was not very good-tempered, and answered shortly some remarks of Arthur's. They decided on making a round of some miles to come back across Summer Hill Park.

"Let us go on," she said at last; "the air is stifling here."

She touched her horse's side smartly with her little whip, and set off at a rapid pace along the lane; and Arthur followed, half beside himself between the love that was so strong and sweet, and the doubt caused by her waywardness. He knew that he must one of these days put the whole question of happiness or loss, life or emptiness, in the balance, to be given or withheld by that pair of fearless brown eyes, that would certainly not lie to him, but might be most calmly indifferent. He was more afraid of her than she was worth. He called her childish waywardness by a more respectful name, and felt for the time rather crushed by it. But he soon reached her side again, and she turned to him a bright kind look as if to make up for her pettishness, and he went down on his mental knees, and in spirit asked her pardon, and also a little his own, for having dreamt that she was not appreciating the devotion she was so certainly getting.

So on they went, talking very little. Arthur was certainly preoccupied. Ida was fairly fascinated by the evening, and felt languid and excited by turns, as roused by the stimulus of pace, or quieted by the marvellous stillness of the air as they walked their horses side by side.

Something was wrong, she thought. Why was Colonel Craven so absent? Had she been rude? So she felt penitent, and was quiet and gentle when he spoke, but did not take the lead, and rattle on as she often now did to him.

Thus it happened that they rode faster than usual, and the round they had planned was more quickly made than they had expected; and after cantering over the short grass of the park, they found themselves by the side of Summer Hill Lake a little after seven o'clock just as the sun was drawing to the horizon. The western sky was very rich with colour. They stopped on the bank, both silent. The beauty of the evening had got past speaking about.

At last Ida's feelings effervesced into a common-place, "What a lovely evening for a row!"

"We had better have one," he said very quietly. "It is not late; we shall never get such a chance again."

"But the horses?" protested Ida, rather

staggered. She had felt really moved, and, like the child she was, said the first nonsense that came into her head, and now she did not know what to do. The small Mrs. Grundy safely enshrined in her young breast felt rather shocked at the thought of rowing about *tête-à-tête* with Colonel Craven on the lake at this time of the evening.

But Arthur had answered, "The horses will be all right," and had secured his own, and stood beside her ready to help her to dismount, before she had found any words with which to object.

Once in the boat, it was really very charming. She sat silent in the stern, and Arthur rowed about, getting into what was left of the sunshine and the evening glow, and avoiding the willows and the shadows, till helped by the stillness and the soft red light, and Ida there, quiet, with an awed look in her clear eyes, and the rich glory of air and sky behind her, he, Arthur Craven, was fairly intoxicated with love and beauty. The only thing he could not do was to speak to her so far away, so he pulled the oars into the boat, and came and sat down in the bottom of it, resting his arm on the seat beside her.

Ida absolutely trembled. She had not a woman's instincts for nothing, and she knew she was in the presence of that awful thing, human passion, and felt too, startled, touched, influenced,—everything but a sharer in it. Then Arthur told her that he loved her very dearly, that she was to him what no woman had ever been, that he could think of nothing else, that he was nearly mad for love and thought of her.

"But Colonel Craven——" she said, and then he broke in again.

"Ida, wait a while. Don't answer me yet. You can say nothing that I have not said to myself, unless you mean to tell me to go away for ever." And his voice grew so sad and tender that Ida held her breath for sympathy. He went on, "I am a whole lifetime older than you are; and it has sometimes seemed to me that I ought to go away at once, and not speak and vex you with all this. But I can't, Ida; I love you so. Could you not love me even a little?"

And Ida who liked him most sincerely, knew her mother liked him, and did not know what love meant, save as a strange and touching performance of other people, put her hand in his, and said "I will try."

But in Ida's mind as she spoke (she was cool enough for that) the only feeling that was her own, was the fun of change, the excitement of taking her life in her hand, and giving it a bold throw.

How the strong trembling hand closed over the little cold one, and how he drew her to him, and their lips met in a kiss that neither of them could ever forget, and which was to one at least the outcome of what must ever be inexpressible—of feeling deeper than any words, stronger than any human death or life. This cannot be put into words, and there is a sort of wrong in attempting it. They certainly got to the shore, and on horseback again somehow, and rode home very silently in the twilight.

"Shall I come in?" he said at the gate.

"No, don't," Ida answered. "I would rather tell mamma myself. Come to-morrow morning."

He just took her in his arms from her horse, and put her down on the doorstep, to the astonishment of the groom, who was used to more independent ways from his young mistress; and then mounted again, and went off at a pelting pace, urged by some sort of physical need of movement and fresh air.

Ida went in, said that as it was late Colonel Craven had gone home, adding that they had been delayed in Summer Hill Park, ate her supper, and read her books with a steadiness that did her credit; and only when bedtime came, did she sit down on the floor at her mother's feet, and tell her of this new fact,—not the details, those she never told. There had sprung up in her, if nothing else, at least so much reticent loyalty to the man who loved her.

In so short a time it was all done,—the great step made. She had pledged herself to marry a man she knew very little, and did not love, for what? She could not have told if she had tried, she was such a child at heart. I think it was as she might have leapt a five-barred gate, or taught herself Sanskrit, for fun.

There is of course no defending the morality of this, but it is but fair to Ida to remark that many marriages are made for baser motives. She was very young, and did not know what love meant; and even in the long past days of Lalla Rookh and Hugh, she had never connected love and marriage in her life.

Never, though, did a girl marry longing more thoroughly to do her duty, and to make her husband happy. Her mind only grasped the externals, the outer shell of the matter, and she never thought of being happy herself, or perhaps some instinct might have warned her of danger.

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY DAYS.

THE engagement caused a great deal of talk between the people who were very much surprised and those who had expected it all along. Of the latter was Mr. Garnett. He was, now it was settled, both pleased and displeased: pleased that Ida, his niece, should get so good a husband, but was rather doubtful if she was fit to be wife to Craven.

"Such a child as she is, after all!" he said. "I hope he has not gone and made a fool of himself. He always was a queer fellow, just taken up with the last people you would expect." And the remembrance of the time when "Craven's nigger" was an excellent station joke at Delhi, seemed very dire confirmation of this.

He did not stop to consider that much good and no harm had come of that strange friendship, nor did he see that there was, after all, not very much resemblance between the two facts. But to tell the truth, to Mr. Garnett, accustomed to the barndoor neatness and tameness of his own girls, Ida, with her brighter plumage, her command of foreign tongues, and her solitary, independent ways, was, in the world of girls, almost as strange a choice as Saadut Khan had been as a man friend; and Arthur was not a man who vouchsafed much by way of explanation to any one, on any matter that closely touched himself.

"I hope he has not made a fool of himself," he said again, when Arthur had gone off to Maple Bank after breakfast, and the great news had been told to the girls. He had heard it from Craven over their cigars late the previous evening, and now, he added, "I suppose he knows what he wants," and like the really good-natured fellow he was, said no further doubtful words on the subject.

We know what Mrs. Bygrave thought of the matter; she was quite pleased, and not the least alarmed. Jack, with more insight, and a more unworldly standard, did feel very considerable alarm, and expressed himself very strongly in private to his mother.

"Do you know, mother," he said, "I think it is a crying shame to marry Ida to Craven. Not that I have any fault to find with him; he's a good fellow I don't doubt; but Ida does not care a straw about him. She did not quite know how to say No, that is the whole truth of it. The girl is barely sixteen. It is an awful risk. What if she meets some one else, by-and-by, that she does care about?"

Mrs. Bygrave did not like criticism, and had before now, with Jack, found quite the most convenient way of meeting his comments was to be offended with them, irritation doing nearly as well as argument.

"If you will talk in that way, Jack," she said, "it is of no use speaking to you; Ida will have an excellent husband, and the rest will come."

"It may or it may not," he answered, declining to be silenced by her tone; "and if it does not, Heaven help the child. Why Colonel Craven is old enough to be her father; and I say again it is an awful risk and a shame."

The mother quite easily lost sight of the argument, of which there was not much to be made, in her vexation at this boy, who, not content with managing his own affairs in such eccentric sort, must needs wish to interfere with Ida; so she said very severely—

"Now, Jack, I must ask to be treated with proper respect. I am more than satisfied with this match."

There seemed no silencing Jack, for he hurried on still more eagerly—

"That's the word! You lose sight of

the fact that there is a man and a woman (save the mark, a child!) in the case when you call it a match. If it were flower-beds or ponies, well and good. But there is that poor little Ida, who would be as happy as a bird for years with her books, and who is essentially a child, spite of her womanly ways, to be sent to India straight off with that fellow, and the chances are she won't like him when she gets there. I daresay you like him, and so do I; but he is not the husband for such a child as that. He is reserved, and so is she; and if, by any chance, they don't pull together, it will be a wretched life for the pair of them. Let him wait for her; there's lots of time; and then, if she cares for him, all right."

"It is no use your talking about what you don't understand, Jack," said Mrs. Bygrave. "Your sister has accepted him, I most heartily approve, and I have every reason to believe she quite knows her own mind in the matter. Let me hear no more about it," and she went out of the room to make that, at least, certain.

He muttered to himself, "Poor little mind! If Craven was not eligible, I wonder how much she would be supposed to know about it."

Perhaps Ida herself was the most startled of all when she woke that next morning, and thought of the great change that had come in her life. Her first impression was that Colonel Craven, that Arthur—she said the name under her breath to get used to it—as her betrothed, seemed a greater stranger than the Colonel Craven she had chattered to and ridden with so much of late. The new tie brought out in relief how little there really was to bind them together. She tried to realize that for henceforth their lives would go together, and in this failed utterly; and then fell back to thinking of yesterday evening, and then it seemed much more tolerable, though so very strange. Touching and winning he had been; she felt that it had not been in her to give any other answer. So she supposed it was all right, spite of something that was not far off a wish that he had left it all alone.

Her feelings, as far as they went, were genuine, but so sorely puzzled. Genuine but puzzled, was, I am afraid, the keynote of her life for long after this.

There was much to help her to believe that all was right and well. There had sprung up, partly out of reverence for the deep feeling she comprehended but did not share, partly that she had womanly instincts before having womanly feelings, a sort of loyalty to Arthur as her lover, that was quite new in her experience, and which would have quieted her had she asked herself if she loved him, which she did not do, but it stood her in good stead with other people. She quite declined to give any account of herself and her feelings to any one;

and as no one was opposing her, there was no need to do so.

Mrs. Bygrave wondered a little, this being so eminently suitable a moment for display of feeling in her scheme of things. But then, Ida had never fitted very well into any schemes of other people, and had fallen much on her feet thus far with her own, so the mother was content, and leaving Ida with a sigh of satisfaction, turned to the more comprehensible, though not equally satisfactory, boys.

It was to be only a short engagement, that Ida might sail for India with her husband early in November, on his return to his post: In early October they were married in the old parish church of Sandford, where Ida's father had preached, where she had been christened, and only a few months before been confirmed. There all her earliest puzzles on religious subjects had come to her, as she sat in the corner of the big square pew, on the Sunday mornings of her young life,—the young life that as far as her own feelings about it were concerned, had ended when the family had gone abroad, and she had become a woman as to externals, remaining as we have seen, too long for her, a child at heart. The period of her engagement had been very pleasant to her; she had liked her lover more than she could ever have believed it possible she would any one who had a right to her. Arthur's age, and grave manliness, plus his love for her, had an absolute fascination for her, though she was quite as far as ever from being in love with him.

It had been very pleasant to be talked to as a woman by such a man; she had felt better, more intelligent, more reasonable, than she had ever done before in all her life. She had been perfectly astonished by the good opinion Arthur seemed to have of her, and withal a little frightened, for she had an inner conviction of the impossibility of being anything like as good as that for more than a while at a time. One thing struck her much in the new pleasantness of the double life, not so much as a regret, but rather a puzzled sense of something lacking: it was that she seemed to have to leave behind so utterly her old life of books and dreams, and she felt an indefinite want as of something vague and delightful to which the plain, above-board pleasantness of now was not to be compared. During the time of her engagement she seemed never alone, even in her little den at midnight, or in fresh breezy September mornings on the balcony; no physical solitude made any difference. She was not her own now. Arthur who thought her so much that she was not, and missed so much that she really was, had nevertheless a right to her, even to all her thoughts. She had given him all confidence as far as was compatible with shyness and natural reserve; but the confidence she gave was of a deep unpractical kind, worthy of a dreamy sham woman of sixteen. She thought no thought, she wished no wish, without reporting it in spirit to him, and fitting it as well as she could to his standard and the new life. She strove to live his life, and was silent, and did not do what would have been much more useful,—live her own life and talk about it. Besides this strange confidence, she gave very absolute loyalty. She could stand no criticisms of Arthur from any one; she entirely declined to talk of him; she was proudly submissive, and absolutely devoted. She gave herself, body, soul, and spirit, all but heart, which, poor child! she had not got to give.

Arthur Craven was quite pleased with what he got, which proved that of the half-grown character he had only succeeded in understanding the womanly half, and thought that was all; ignorant that what had had most to do in giving him his bright young wife, was the half that was spoilt child, wilful, and self-reliant, and who had felt impelled that night on the lake to take her life in her hands and give it a good throw.

They were to sail from Marseilles a month after their marriage, and spent that month in visiting Arthur's relations in the west. He had so much neglected them during his courtship that it was the more necessary.

To the west they went, and there Ida cannot be said to have flourished. Several things made it difficult. As a general rule no woman is ever satisfied with the wife chosen by any of her own especial mankind, and the Cravens were no exception to the rule. The young people looked at her and said very little, the elders treated her as the child she was. It was no doubt a trial after being treated as a woman all her childhood, to be thus put to her level in the first flush of her new wifehood, and while still impressed by her own excellence.

So at times her excellence failed her, and she behaved pettishly and foolishly. She became unnaturally acute, and took it all very much to heart. Arthur, who was about the last man under any circumstances to have lived his honeymoon in public, became silent and watchful, which made it all harder for her. He felt something was wrong in the moral atmosphere; that somehow Ida did not thrive; but he decided that it was great folly, anything being wrong with a moral atmosphere.

Arthur Craven, though he thought himself fortunate in his fair young wife, was further now from comprehending her than he had ever been. In this he merely followed the traditions of his kind. Men do not understand women; they either estimate them too highly, or they are absurdly suspicious of them. If they would judge us a little more by themselves, or any human model that they have really observed, and less by some fancied standard of womanhood in the air, it would be a saving of very much suffering to young wives, if to no other sections of the community.

Matters, however, mended for Ida when the confinement of living in public was changed for the comparative freedom of being alone with Arthur on the voyage to India. There we must leave them for a time. Arthur quite recovered from his irritability, and forgot its cause; and Ida feeling rather humbled, strove the more earnestly after this standard of Arthur's, whose existence she had penetrated, but of which she could form no distinct conception. She was very genuine and well-intentioned, but sorely puzzled.

CHAPTER VII.

INDIA.

We have no intention of following Ida through the details of the first year and a half of her Indian life. The limits of our story would not admit of it, and we do not think there would be very much of interest to record. She was getting her growth in a good many ways and will interest us more when the process is more advanced, but we must just indicate the direction it look.

When they reached India in the autumn of 1861, the cloud that had fallen upon Ida in the days of her honeymoon had passed away, and she was again good and happy—we use the word good advisedly, for it was rather the goodness of a child who vexes no one and does as she is bid, than any more independent excellence. She had certainly become more childish and less bright through the early experiences of her married life. Arthur was less content with this quiet goodness of hers than he ought to have been,—not that he loved her less, but that it struck him as strange how much more childish she now was as a wife, than she had seemed to be a few months before as a maiden. Then she had appeared to him the impersonation of bright young freshness, and her wilfulness and her independent ways had seemed to him to be indices to point out to him what manner of woman she would make. It is true that at times nature would show itself in flashes, in which he could recognise the girl he had tried to win, and who in the winning seemed to have so much altered. After these flashes one of two things happened: either she became reserved, took to her books, and seemed to think a good deal, and was certainly out of heart; or with an effort that he could see, she took up the attitude of a penitent child, was good and simple and rather colourless for a while.

Certainly such flashes became less and less frequent, giving to Arthur a mingled feeling of contentment and hopelessness about her. Did she love him? he would sometimes ask himself, never to find a very satisfactory answer. If he was vexed with her she was miserable, if he was kind she was happy—equally clear; but he looked in vain for any sign of feeling to match his own.

He remembered that the twenty years of difference in their ages must go for something,—felt it indeed much more now than he had done at first; and hoped that it would matter less as time passed. But in the meanwhile, instead of the companion and friend he was dimly learning that he wanted during this year and a half,—learning it because he wanted love, not because he wanted character,—he had an affectionate simple girl, whose one effort seemed to be to keep herself in tune to him, and who did it so simply and yet withal with such determination refused what she liked, and chose what she knew he liked, till he, bewildered, asked himself, "Am I a tyrant? What does this mean?"

When in India he had his work to do. His post gave him incessant occupation, and left him but little time for home; so these reflections only dawned on him by degrees as Ida grew, or did not grow, beside him out of child into woman. Physically the year and a half had made a considerable difference. She grew two good inches, and felt rather humbled by the fact that all her best dresses were definitely too short for her.

The change of country, the peculiarities of Indian society, were only a little additional bewilderment where all was new and strange. Had she been able to see her way in her married life, had she not been crushed by the difficulties of her task,—namely to make Arthur happy and be a good wife, as a sheer effort of will, and matter of outside behaviour,—I am sure she would have been quite content to face Iceland snows or to penetrate Central Africa.

Peshawur was a large station, with a permanent garrison of eight or nine thousand troops of all arms, and some twenty-four guns; but there was not much that could be called society. The fever that devastated the place in autumn caused a general flight of women and children to the nearest hill station, Murree, and almost emptied it of ladies from April to October. The troops were very frequently changed owing to this same fever, so that in the hot season there were not many people there, and when the cold season brought them back again, it was generally to make hurried preparation for some coming move.

The civil society, which was more permanent, was very small. Colonel Craven's next subordinate, another military civilian, Captain Stevens, was married, but his wife was in

England; and of the two assistants, one was a pleasant young competition-wallah named Johnson, who, to the disappointment of the admirers of the old regime, was neither a bookworm nor a snob, and the other our old acquaintance Saadut Khan, who, though called an extra assistant, and looked upon as of inferior rank to Johnson, was in a very great degree Colonel Craven's right-hand man. So in her own set Ida had no ladies. Johnson was unmarried, and though doubtless in Saadut Khan's case there was a wife in the background, of her Ida heard nothing; and though among the outsiders she made a great many passing acquaintanceships, she knew no one woman at all well. This she did not regret, for she had never got on well with girls, or ever, but in Mary Maxwell, known any woman that she cared to get on with. Moreover she felt that any special friendships might interfere with her home somehow, and she did not even regret that

Mary was three hundred miles away, at Lahore, though some friendly correspondence passed between them.

There were plenty of men about the house with whom Ida got on perfectly well, while taking very little notice of them. And nothing about this puzzling young wife of his pleased Arthur so much as the frank, friendly, calm way she treated these men, one and all alike. A few were Arthur's friends, the rest were the idlers, who in India, more even than most places, are too glad to bestow themselves and their idleness on a pretty woman. Ida's talk of them to her husband amused him by the shrewdness with which she took the idlers for what they were worth, and her ready appreciation of the rarer men who were worth it, and who were his friends.

No one of them could flatter himself that he was a friend of Mrs. Craven's. Ida's scheme of wifely duties quite ignored men friends. She did not even want women, much less men. As to the idlers, any attempt at establishing the shadow of a flirtation was met by a blank look of non-comprehension, and her clear brown eyes could look very straightly and steadily at the offender.

She was much alone, and she was growing very pretty (what her face had lost in brightness it had gained in depth, or at least in a sort of wistful inquiring expression that was very like depth), so once or twice she had to take more vigorous measures and treat complimentary nonsense as it deserved. And then the girl of the Sandford hay-field would flash out in the simplest of direct answers, calm and matter-of-fact, but applied so fearlessly and adroitly that the would-be admirer retired in terror of what might come next, convinced, at least, of one thing,—that under no possible circumstances would Mrs. Craven play the fool or allow any one else to do so. Then, acting in Arthur's service, she could allow herself to be natural; though the feeling that the resenting of that sort of impertinence was an act in Arthur's service, was a curious indication of the oddly impersonal groove in which her mind was then running. All her wish seemed to be to make herself the something that he wanted, and had not got. She knew he wanted something that he had not got, but could not divest herself of the belief that that something might be produced by mere trying: and so she set to work to crush nature into some shape that would suit Arthur better than her real self.

In her housekeeping, as another branch of Arthur's service, a little individuality was allowed to appear. She had blundered a good deal at first, and felt ashamed, and had put much will into her effort to improve; and this, being a matter within the reach of will, with considerable success.

The establishment was a large one, and Ida on taking charge of it found many old servants who had domineered over Arthur in his bachelor days. They had come back to him on his return, and had been engaged as a matter of course. They of course disapproved of the lady, but finding her so young, thought it might be possible to have their own way nearly as much as in the more favourable "old times." Ida had often a very heavy handful with them, but nothing was further from her thoughts than to urge Arthur to get rid of them. The wish to efface herself, and work for him, which was the outward rendering of that strange loyalty and confidence of which I have spoken, came out in matters small as well as great, and made her take a pride in working her household her own way through, and in spite of, these old servants.

When the first hot season had come, and Colonel Craven had hesitated whether he should risk his young wife among the feverish swamps and rivulets when the autumn sun turned their exhalations to poison, she had again felt like herself and active, and resisted Arthur's suggestions that she should go to Murree, begged and implored him not to send her away, saying,—"You don't want me to leave you, Arthur. What could I possibly do up there by myself?" until he yielded, thinking that she was rather young to live alone, hoping that this might mean that she loved him. She stayed, and was none the worse of it; tended Arthur, when a short, sharp turn of fever knocked him down; was bright, capable, and tender, a ministering angel of a most practical type. Her watchful anxiety and womanly tenderness made this week of fever a very happy time to him; and it was with something like pain when this illness was past, that he noticed her again become childish and submissive, repressing herself, and losing much by it.

As far as there was any secret in this, it was that Ida was vaguely conscious of a want of union and mutual comprehension between Arthur and herself; and, haunted above all things by a dread of losing his love, which seemed to her to be all that her world was built on, and losing that, life would as a matter of course. They of course disapproved of the lady, but finding her so young, thought it might be possible to have their own way nearly as much as in the more favourable "old times." Ida had often a very heavy handful with them, but nothing was further from her thoughts than to urge Arthur to get rid of them. The wish to efface herself, and work for him, which was the outward rendering of that strange loyalty and confidence of which I have spoken, came out in matters small as well as great, and made her take a pride in working her household her own way through, and in spite of, these old servants.

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CHAPTER VIII.

IDA'S GARDEN.

It was an early April morning, 1863. The heat in the Peshawur valley had not yet become oppressive, but the Europeans at the station were fast getting into hot-weather habits, and many of the ladies had already gone off to the hills. It was about seven o'clock, and Ida was sitting in a low cane-chair, in a verandah of her home, with "chota hazri," the early, small breakfast of Indian life on a table beside her. She was in her riding-habit, having only just returned from a refreshing scamper among the peach-gardens, which were at that season luxuriant, though the blossoms had fallen, and given place to miserable little hard green balls, later to ripen to the famous peaches of the Peshawur valley. It had been refreshing and pleasant, but she was a little weary now. She had been alone. Arthur had ridden off very early to a conference with the general commanding the division about some official matters, looking somewhat grave over a letter that had been brought him from military head quarters, before he was awake; and Ida had had her exercise by herself, enjoying it and the peach-gardens after a sort, but with a certain listlessness that was becoming not uncommon with her now. She had lost her love for being alone with her contentment with herself and her own thoughts, and had got nothing in its place that was any help to her. She was contemptuous of her past, and dissatisfied with her present. If life was to be always like this, was it quite worth while to live? Yet she lacked nothing that any one could give her, hoped for nothing tangible, feared nothing that she had words to express. At the moment she was a little vaguely uneasy as to what this new political trouble might mean: though deeper under the disease ran a current in a different direction.

She would be glad if it meant something if only it would make life wake up.

She had a very pleasant corner for her *al fresco* breakfast-room. All along the front of the house, and extending half way down one side of it, ran a very deep verandah, raised a couple of feet from the level of the garden, and the roof supported on pairs of thick square white-washed pillars. There was nothing elegant about them, but they enclosed the verandah well. Between them hung heavy blinds of split bamboo, which still farther enclosed it, and helped to keep out sun, flies, and even dust. These were let down all along the front of the house; but at the side where Ida had established her breakfast corner, they were rolled half way up, that she might look out on to the garden as she sat. This view down the garden was one of the pleasant things of Ida's daily life. The garden was well kept, and was at that time in very great beauty. There was plenty of rich green grass, there were luxuriant oleanders had ridden off very early to a conference with the general commanding the division about some official matters, looking somewhat grave over a letter that had been brought him from military head quarters, before he was awake; and Ida had had her exercise by herself, enjoying it and the peach-gardens after a sort, but with a certain listlessness that was becoming not uncommon with her now. She had lost her love for being alone with her contentment with herself and her own thoughts, and had got nothing in its place that was any help to her. She was contemptuous of her past, and dissatisfied with her present. If life was to be always like this, was it quite worth while to live? Yet she lacked nothing that any one could give her, hoped for nothing tangible, feared nothing that she had words to express. At the moment she was a little vaguely uneasy as to what this new political trouble might mean: though deeper under the disease ran a current in a different direction.

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But Ida had not had fever, and seemed in no way like to get it, and was looking out with lazy pleasure on the luxuriant greenery before her, when a tramp of horses' feet told her that Arthur was come; and as she bent forward she saw through the blinds her gallant soldier husband followed by a couple of mounted police. He stayed to talk to some native officials, but after a little he came to her.

She looked up inquiringly with a doubt if she should ask questions.

"I hope there is not very much wrong," she said.

"Oh, nothing much," he answered, with a look of care that rather belied his words.

Ida noticed it, and felt interested.

"Is it a political trouble or only a soldiering one," she asked again.

"They are apt to go together in this part of the world," he said. "It is not easy to say what the matter is; the district is certainly in a queer state, and we can hardly tell what outside influence is working. The general's trouble was nothing very bad, but it may easily be a sign of worse mischief."

He threw himself back in his chair, looking thoughtful and worried.

"Give me some tea, Ida."

"I beg your pardon," she answered timidly, feeling that she ought to have thought of that first.

Arthur busied himself for some time with some papers he held in his hand, and at last raised his head and called "Hunāman!"

A handsome, indolent-looking, down-country bearer appeared. He was a man about thirty years old, with a thoughtful refined face and a delicate frame. He was an Oude man, belonging to a family that had furnished many sepoys to the old Bengal army; but lacking two inches of the standard height, he had been obliged to look out for some other means of livelihood. Ten years before, he had been a tent-pitcher in the small Attock Arsenal, where Craven had seen him. He liked his face, and, wanting a bearer at the time, had offered him service. It had been a fortunate chance, for the man had made a good servant, and was most loyally attached to his master. He was now sirdar bearer, with an indefinite authority over all the Hindus in the establishment. He was one of Ida's trials, being very fond of his own way, though she half-liked the man for the quiet steady fashion in which he opposed her; as it was part of a character where pride, fidelity, and a sense of honour, had a very considerable share.

"Hunāman," said Colonel Craven again, looking up at the handsome bronze statue, who had stood there motionless at least as long as we have taken to describe him, "give my 'salaam' to the Mir Sahib, and ask him if he can come to me for a short time;" and the man went rapidly off on his errand.

This Mir Sahib was our friend Saadut Khan, who had somehow in the course of years gained this further title.

Ida felt rather sad at this, for Saadut Khan's presence put an end for the time to any hope of talk to Arthur. He did not speak English very easily, though he had read a good deal of it, and understood it perfectly; so his talk was generally carried on in Persian, which had the advantage of being understood neither by Ida nor the servants.

As to Ida, he did not like her, without having any very tangible reason for it. What he lacked in sympathy he made up in very keen observation and affectionate loyalty to Arthur. He soon formed an opinion that the new English wife was something she should not be, or was not something she should be, and very keenly appreciated the misfit, and, even with his oriental views on such matters, exaggerated it. Out of respect for his friend, he did not look much at her; out of love for him, he was very keenly critical when he did.

The feeling that she was going to be turned out gave Ida a little more courage. If he was to have all of it, might she not have some.

"You have not told me the news yet Arthur," she said. "Will you, if it is not State secrets?"

Arthur looked up a little astonished. Ida was not given to show interest in public matters, and he never talked much to her about them.

"Well, darling," he said, "there is not much that I could tell if I wanted to. There are a few robberies in the cantonments, plenty of sedition and nasty feeling in the city, and many rumours of what is to be done beyond the frontier in various directions hostile to us. The garrison is to be reinforced, and Maxwell's battery is coming up from Lahore by forced marches; you will be glad of that. Write, and ask them to put up with us till they get a house. They have a child have they not?"

"Yes; a baby born last hot season," answered Ida.

"You had best write this morning. Your letter will catch them at Pindee. I must get all the information I can out of Saadut. He is the only man in the district who has both will and power to be any good."

CHAPTER IX.

THE STATE OF THE DISTRICT.

IDA shook hands quite naturally with Saadut Khan, who would gladly have been excused the ceremony, though the cordial grasp he gave to Arthur's hand showed that it was not the institution of hand-shaking in itself that he disliked. His devotion to Arthur, and the close friendship that had existed between them for years, had not changed very much the general direction of his thoughts and opinions. As far as his mind had become Anglicised, it was from the inside outwards; not, as may be seen any day in young Indians who have received an English training, a process beginning at the outside and going or not going inwards.

Saadut was as thoroughly Mahomedan in creed, in dress, and modes of thought, as when Craven had found him lying by the little tomb in Old Delhi. But the personal attachment to the Englishman who had saved him then, and had since always treated him as equal and friend, was a mighty influence in his life. To say he would be ready at any time to die for him, would, seeing we are speaking of an Oriental and a Mahomedan, be saying very little, and much less than the truth; but it would be true to say that under any circumstances and under any pressure he was prepared to live for him and spend his life in his service, and that no possible call that Arthur could make on his devotion would be unresponded to. In some ways his state of mind was a strange one. What he had learnt from Craven was not British opinions and foreign modes of thought, but a certain British frankness in expressing, and tenacity in holding, his own. So he not unfrequently found himself in direct opposition to his chief; but the opposition was apt to end where it began—in words; for there seemed a lack of motive to work it out, and whenever it was a question of action, the loyal affection of the man came out; and the one thing he could not deny himself, was the pleasure of working for his friend.

After some little commonplace talk in English, Ida soon went away to write her letter, and that done she took a thick parasol, and retired to the contemplation of a brood of black and yellow ducklings, that rather delighted her at the time,—pleasant little puffy balls they were, fighting over the rice and bread-crumbs she took to them.

Arthur and his friend at once plunged into politics, and after discussing at some length the news of the morning, Craven asked:—

"What are they saying in the city about these rumours?"

"They are not saying very much to me," answered the other, "or in my hearing, which looks bad; but I have information which I think is good, and it seems that there is very considerable difference of opinion. The fanatics up in the hill-country have a sort of hold over the Mahomedans, but rather in theory than practice. There is hardly a man who would not swear in secret to join the Jehad; but that does not mean very much, for when it is a question of any practical result, they will nearly all remember that the Mulka fanatics are few, and have only standing ground on the bank of an inaccessible mountain, and will not easily make their way anywhere else. These Peshaweris are both liars and cowards. Any one of them who commits a crime will fly to the Mahabun, and talk like a hero about the faith and the holy war. Every man of them who can do so, will stay quiet at home wishing you much ill, but making, for fear's sake, none of it."

"I have no doubt you are right," said Arthur, "and that it is a seething mass of nasty feeling ready to boil over if any reverses come to us. But I don't much care about them; they are not cultivated enough to lead intellectually, and as for force at least we can keep them quiet. How do you think we stand with the villagers?"

"The villagers are wavering, I believe," Saadut said slowly, as if thinking. "You have given them for the past fifteen years quieter and more prosperous times than they ever had before. The land is rich enough in parts, and some of them are now comparatively wealthy. But as you English always do, you have gone too far, and not made sufficient allowance for the character of the people you set yourselves to rule; you love peace and order, tranquillity and even laws, and hate bloodshed and violence. Well and good for yourselves, but these men have grown up, and will grow up for a generation or two still, feeling that no obligation, human or divine, is as binding as the pursuit of a family feud, blood for blood, life for life, to the last man among them; and you go on calmly as if there was nobody but yourselves and your like in creation, punishing these men for the little fights that make life worth having; and when a man has attained to the height of his ambition and the admiration of his house and tribe by following to the death the family feud, you just hang him, or, worse still, make him a prisoner and slave for life in some vile island in the Bay of Bengal, as if he was a rascally dacoit who had killed a child for its bangles."

"It would be hard on the dacoit," said Arthur, "if we hung him, and let your Eusufzai villager off because he happens to think it praiseworthy to kill his enemies. He is wrong and we are right; and you may be sure that the English government will go on protecting life by every means in its power."

"I have no doubt of that, for when did you ever confess yourselves to be wrong. But why not kill them all instead of making some absurd distinctions, and sending an uncertain proportion of these noble fellows to rot in your prisons. The fault is the same, why give in some cases double punishment. You call it mercy; but you will not find a man of them who would not immensely rather die and have done with it, and who does not look on the fuss you make about human life as so much incomprehensible folly, and useless cruelty into the bargain. You make a perfectly absurd point of making a man live a few years more, when he has got to die in the end; as if he ever could live when the drum of fate had beaten, or die when it had not."

"I agree with you in part there, Saadut. I daresay there are many cases where our mercy is more cruel than our severity; but I must carry out the laws as I find them, whatever I think. But you have not told me yet what you think these villagers will do if there should be, as is very probable, a disturbance by-and-by on the frontier?"

"Well, I hope there may not be," answered the other. "There has been enough ill-feeling arising from the mutiny. True, we don't want any more; but if there should be a war, I am sure these men, especially in the villages along the frontier, will need very careful handling. They will not be in a hurry to go over to the enemy; they have all to lose and little to gain by so doing; and they are grateful for the good they see; but they will act in tribes, and if the chief man of the tribe gives the signal for the holy war, you will have to do with men moved by love of religion beyond anything you are used to in the Hinduised Muslems of the south country, and, more, loving fighting, as you loved it, Arthur, at Sobraon, just for its own sake. You have done something to tame these men, but very little. Once let nature out, and each man's highest hope will be to kill one of you, his least thought his own life."

"You think, then," said Craven gravely, "that they won't be in any hurry to rise?"

"I am sure of it," said Saadut Khan quickly. "They don't think much of the Mulka refugees at present,—indeed rather despise them as a pack of runaway Hindustani soldiers, whose faithlessness to their salt is a sin they quite understand; but if they should be strengthened by alliances with the tribes around them,—if for instance the Bonairs should join, and the Akhund of Swat should recognise them, and send them aid,—then take care of yourselves; you will be living on shifting sand, within reach of the scorching desert winds."

"But are there not religious reasons why the Akhund should not join the Mulka people."

"Yes; but hardly such forcible ones as those that make the whole party hate you. In times of peace, they would of course quarrel furiously among themselves; but if matters looked ever so little hopeful, they might easily patch up a reconciliation for long enough to be very disagreeable to you. I suppose you will increase your garrison here?"

"Yes," said Craven; "by degrees; but we don't want it spoken of till the turn actually comes."

"Very well," said the other.

"But when they do come, it will be very useful to hear what degree of excitement it causes."

"With seeing we shall know," said the Rohilla. "I don't much like the task. But for you, Arthur, I think I should be up on the black mountain helping to organize this foolish opposition; for it is foolish, and will come to no good. When I think that as a boy my one ambition was to fight the battles of the faith against the Feringees, I rather hate myself for being a spy among my own people, and a worker for you; and I like it none the better that yours is the safe side. But I am only half-hearted any way now, since the days we fought and worked together against the Sikhs. I have more love for my friend than for my country, my people, or my faith; God forgive me!" He rose and walked hurriedly away, and only when he had got to the end of the verandah, did he resume the air of grave composure habitual to him.

Colonel Craven looked thoughtfully after him. The breach of good manners in going away without leave-taking, did not excite his surprise. Saadut Khan had lost most of the formality of an Asiatic with him, though he kept it quite rigorously with other people; but he had noted the tone that showed him that his friend was deeply moved. There was conflict in it, and the Englishman, who would have been loyal to the death to his country and creed, under any circumstances of depression, could sympathize with him, and determined that if Saadut would work for them, as of course he must unless he resigned his appointment, it should be in the most open and manifest affairs, so that he might not feel himself a spy; and that in future he would let Saadut volunteer information if he liked, but that he would not ask for it.

"It is odd," he thought, "that after all these years he should feel so much the shame of siding with the enemy. He began with Sikhs, they were Hindus and enemies; these men around us are co-religionists; though a descendant of the Afghan followers of those old Afghan kings, cannot have much in common with these border tribes, who may as likely be Israelites as anything else."

However there was not much time for thinking. Arthur soon gathered his papers together, and went to dress for the later breakfast which appeared at ten o'clock. Ida was there of course, looking rather weary. There was little said, and directly after the meal Arthur drove off to kutcherry to work there all day, and Ida, after ordering dinner, took some worsted work into the drawing-room to begin her long day alone. The worsted work was very oddly unlike her old self, but Arthur liked it, and noticed it; and so she did it industriously, with a floating impression that it had something to do with duty. To Ida duty was becoming a fetish which she unceasingly worshipped. It would seem that she had not judgment enough left to know that it would be better done with less thought and effort.

CHAPTER X.

A "COFFEE SHOP."

A FEW days passed quietly after the conversation we have related in the last chapter. Some rain fell, making the fresh green things look greener, and promising plenty of miasma later on in the season; but for the time it was healthy enough and very beautiful. The official world was much excited, and alive with orders and counter-orders; no one knew quite what was wanted, yet it was a consolation to be doing something. Outside the principal offices no one knew what was coming, or even what was threatening, and conjecture was rife. Young soldiers looked longingly up the Khyber Pass, hoping above all things for a march that way. Unprincipled as it was, not a man among these young soldiers, and few of the older ones, but longed above all things for a war of aggression, and pictured, in his dreams of unmixed happiness, a march through the Khyber, and a tussle with the hardy warriors of the land that is so decidedly the promised land to all our border soldiers. In absolute default of any known quarrel with the old Dost, then reigning in Afghanistan, the more imaginative spirits talked of Bokhara, Badakshan, and Samarkand, evincing perfectly awful geographical ignorance, coupled with much military ardour.

A few of the more desponding threw cold water on these dreams of bliss, and pooh-poohed the whole affair.

It was discussed at all the "coffee-shops" of the various regimental messes with great eagerness. The term coffee-shop had best be explained here :—there is no shop in the case, and there is not necessarily coffee, but it means the early morning breakfast, which is always in India a social meal, and for which "chota hazri," or "coffee shop," are the most common names.

At the "coffee-shop" of the 5th Punjāb Native Infantry, Major MacPherson, the commanding officer of that corps, was expressing his opinions very strongly between the puffs of his cheroot,—"My dear fellows, don't be sanguine. Take my word for it, it will be nothing but a frontier row, than which I I don't know a greater nuisance. We shall be put under canvas at the nastiest time of the whole year, stuck there for two or three months with nothing to do, constantly under orders for places we are never meant to go to, worried with dispatches and telegrams from morning to night, and probably taught a brand new drill, from the Horse Guards there and then; and when we have two-thirds of the force down with fever, and cholera popping in and out among us, we shall be marched back to cantonments, and the civilians will settle the affair."

"That's overdrawn, Major," said a smart young irregular-cavalry man. "A frontier row is better sport than that, and they say these Sitana fanatics, if it's them we are to be after, will fight like blazes."

"They are a deal more likely to run away like blazes," answered MacPherson. "Don't delude yourself, boy. I've seen no end of this sort of thing; and I'll tell you what it is at best,—say the enemy stands; well, they'll be on the top of a hill, behind walls, or rocks, or something; we shall plant three guns opposite on another hill, and pound away for hours,—about as much use as if we did it from here. Then we shall be told to storm it at the point of the bayonet. It! what? We swear a little, but down we go, and with the impetus will get a little way up the opposite slope at a double; but the Europeans having eaten too much for years, and the natives too little, none of us will have any wind. And when we are all puffing frightfully, there'll come howls as if Bedlam had broken loose, and like what's-his-name in Walter Scott, all the stones will be alive with men,—not bad soldiers, and splendid marksmen, some of those fellows are,—and we shall go rolling over like ninepins. The men will waver —men always do on a hill when they are not used to it,—and the officers will have to go to the front, and so we shall, puffing like so many grampuses, and feeling excessively unlike heroes. The musket and matchlock balls will come in thick showers, like hail; the men will get horridly unsteady, —the natives standing a little better than the Europeans, for they get their wind sooner, but at any rate we shall have ten minutes of touch and go, when it is just all we can do to keep the men from bolting. At last the sight of his comrades falling will spur the British soldier, and we shall set our teeth and advance, and we shall not have got within three yards of the nearest man before the whole lot are scampering away round the side of the hill like so many mountain goats; and we shall walk to the top of the hill, and then down again, and the next day send in reports to the effect that we have 'captured the enemy's stronghold, and restored tranquillity to the district.' It's awful bosh, and head-quarters know it. You never get anything for these affairs, medals or promotion. Lucky if you're not brought before a court of inquiry to account for the unsteadiness observed in the ranks of the —th, on the occasion of ——. Bah! it makes me sick to think of it. I'll go to Cabul or Bukhara, Bagdad or Krim Tartary, if they like, but defend me from a frontier row!"

MacPherson's imagination had carried him on for long, but as conversation was at rather a low ebb in these mess groups, the rest of the men were rather thankful, and puffed their cheroots, and listened with much satisfaction; and most of them agreed; and they went on to the question, if they were fated to take part in a frontier fight, who their enemies were to be. There was a general impression that the Hindustani colony on the Mahabun would be destroyed; but no one knew much of the politics of the district.

"But did not we destroy them some years ago?" asked a young sub.

"We tried to do so in '58, I know by sad experience," said MacPherson. "We turned them out of the village of Sittana, and insisted that no one should receive them; but that soon became a dead letter, Of course they had to be somewhere; but I fancy there has been ever since a chronic squabble with every one concerned with them, and they remain a specimen of the blundering way we do our work."

"Let's hope we shall do it better this time," said the young lancer, who had spoken before, and who was not going to give up his dream of tough fighting with the splendid frontier men, for the words of any old croaker like MacPherson.

Hugh Linwood, for it was he, had now been in India seven years, and had seen most of the fighting of his time; very nasty, deadly, wearing work many ways, but, there was no denying it, lacking the excitement of equal foes and a doubt of victory.

True that through the summer months of 1857, there had been many moments of of doubt of the possible result of the whole thing. When Hugh had ridden up from Central India to Delhi, with a few Mahratta horsemen, across the Saugor country and Bundelkund, and into the blazing north-west, he had felt the whole land hot under his feet, and, boylike, had trembled a little, and, soldier-like, had resolved to die very hard. And, when through the weary months before Delhi, the thought "If we don't get in soon, God knows what will come next," had made him strive his hardest, working nobly as far as one man could, till his seniors remarked that there was very fine soldier stuff in him. But even at that blackest time of all, if ever British soldiers got face to face with Indians in open field, it might be in the proportion of 50 to 5000, there was never a question of result. "Go straight at them anyhow, and they will run," was a bye-word; and Hugh had sufficient respect for his soldier-craft to feel that this was not war. He had had some hard riding in Central India after the fall of Delhi, and when the mutiny campaigns were over had been home for six months, after that had gone on the China expedition, 1861-2, attached to a celebrated calvary corps, whose colonel, Stanley, had asked for him as the best rider and one of the finest soldiers he knew. There he had still been disappointed in his aspiration for tough fighting, but he had seen the wonderful land, and had picked up a good deal of military knowledge by looking on at the French troops employed in the expedition.

Sent then to dazzle the French officers as a specimen native corps, and splendidly mounted at government expense for the purpose, "Stanley's Horse" had performed their task of being objects of beauty quite well, and, with no inconvenience to themselves, had had indeed much pleasure, and had, which government had not contemplated, come back in some matters rather humbled, but with hope of being better soldiers for that. Young Linwood was now working hard at the art of war as far as it was to be learnt by books, but wearying above all things for the excitement of hard fighting and worthy foes. His regiment had not long been back from China, and had just come up from Calcutta, marching most of the way; and the officers were for the time living a good deal at the Fifth mess till they could find a house for their own, or could make sure that they would not want a house.

After a little more chatter Hugh Linwood left, and rode slowly along the Mall to the city end of the station, where his men were still in camp, when he saw a lady riding alone a short distance in front of him. Something struck him as familiar. Could it be the horse? And he followed her for some distance in doubt if he should pass her and satisfy his curiosity. She turned down another road near the end of the Mall, and he saw the pair better,—the horse it certainly was not, but the lady was Ida Bygrave. Ida Bygrave here; she of all women in this of all places! He knew she was married, but that was all; he did not know whom she had married, or even that she had come to India. The news of her marriage had been sent to him in China, but he had chosen to feel himself so sorely injured in the matter, that he had turned from the details as something that he could not stand. He had been very much in earnest at Bagnères, and could not believe that Ida was indifferent; and now to have married without so much as a word to him! The blow had been a very hard one; he had staggered under it, and though he had righted himself again, it had marked him, and he had had a good many hard words ever since at the service of the sex. He had worked harder as an officer, but had been somewhat altered for the worse as a man. From a bright kindly fellow, he had become silent and reserved, with a dash of bitterness, and this all for a girl of fourteen.

It was now nearly four years since he had last seen her, and they had parted something very like lovers. She seemed not at all altered. He felt he would have known her anywhere. But to come upon her thus suddenly took away his breath, and a little turned his head. In a moment he was beside her.

"You here, Ida!" he said, holding out his hand.

"You here, Hugh!" was all she could answer, taking it.

"Fancy meeting you at this end of the earth," he said. "I did not know you were in India."

"I—I am married," she said, somewhat hesitatingly.

"Yes, I know that well enough," he said; "I heard that when I was in China, through the Maxwells. Maxwell is a cousin of mine, but he did not know how well I had known you, and I just heard the fact; and now I," it was his turn to look awkward, "I don't know what your name is, Ida."

This brought her back to her herself.

"I am Mrs. Arthur Craven," she said. "My husband is commissioner here; have you ever met him?"

"No," he answered; "but I know him well by name. Our commanding officer, Stanley, was talking about him the other night. But I never dreamt of your being his wife, Ida. Why he's—" he checked himself. "Is he not a great deal older than you are?"

Ida drew herself up: this would not do.

"Yes," she said very gravely; she always became grave when she was embarrassed. "He is older than I am; but I was always old for my age."

"You don't look an hour older than when I saw you last at Bagnères, Ida." His voice sank a little, and he looked at her, and found her eyes turned to him with a sort of wonder in them. It seemed difficult to realize that this was actually her old friend and playmate; he was somewhat altered,—older, graver, more of a man, and more of a soldier. And it struck her too, what had never before occurred to her in all their intimacy of boy and girl, what a handsome face he had; but when after a moment she spoke, it was quite calmly.

"I think you had better call me Mrs. Craven. It was all right at Bagnères, when I was a girl, but here it is different, and I am different; and I think Arthur," she said, stumbling a little, with a new feeling of puzzle, "would like it best. We shall be just as good friends," she added, feeling that he did not like it somehow.

"Shall we? I hope so. But I shall not believe it is you," he said.

"But it is not quite the same me," was the answer, and she checked her horse at the gate of a compound.

"This is my home. Will you come in, and be introduced to my husband?"

"No, thank you;" said he, feeling that all this that he had dimly known was being brought very uncomfortably close. "Not to-day; I have to go to our camp now. May I come and see you soon?"

"Yes, do," she said, and held out her hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Linwood." The name seemed absurd, but she was glad she had said it.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Craven." And he put spurs to his horse, and galloped off.

She rode round to the coffee-shop corner of the verandah, and then dismounted. Arthur was not there. She did not really expect him home so early; but still she wanted to see him, to look at him, and feel it was quite the same world as before the unexpected apparition of Hugh Linwood.

She made tea, and arranged all the little matters of the breakfast table in a very methodical fashion; petted the noisy, friendly dogs who came fussing round her as soon as she was off her horse; and then sat down in her favourite low chair to get her thoughts into shape, and to ask herself why they seemed to need so much shaping. She had surely lived through all the bewilderment of which she was capable, and yet this was a new phase. Why did Hugh's presence trouble her? He had never been anything to her, and certainly he was not much now. If ever the thought of him had crossed her mind since she had been in India, it was as a hope that she might not come across him; and now that he had thus unexpectedly appeared, her strongest feeling about him was the wish that he had stayed away.

He upset her in many ways; principally that the sight of him had brought back so much, made her realize the old life of the past, and in doing so shook the artificial self she had been building up all this time for Arthur's good.

Whatever was the good and the ill of

the present, she wanted least of all things to feel like the girl of two years ago, and to be again independent, self-asserting, and ambitious. What could she do now with such a character? How could she either satisfy or suppress the young strong nature, if so be it turned up wild as of old.

In those old days there had been times when she had felt that she must mould her life her own way,—that she could submit to no rule but her own. Now she felt that that old self was still in her, deep down, though so carefully hidden; and that it might be roused by something stronger than itself, or the well-intentioned Ida Craven she was drilling herself to become.

She felt thoroughly uncomfortable. This consciousness of power and life that was no use to her, and would never, if this present was to be her future, have any part in her existence, frightened her. It seemed a dangerous thing; something of a tame tiger, which might any day leap up and destroy her.

What did it all mean? Certainly Hugh was nothing to her. But he had as certainly roused much that she thought put safe to sleep for ever,—her own real self, which she had chosen to ignore in her fancy of being above all things—wife.

To put all this into words is to give it much more definiteness than it had as it flitted through Ida's brain. But she was roused and strangely alive, and vexed, too, that the meeting with Hugh Linwood should have brought it about.

After nearly an hour of waiting and pondering, Arthur came up to the edge of the verandah and dismounted. In her new excitement, she did not notice that he was looking worn, but she was heartily glad to see him.

She rose to meet him; and when his

horse had been led away, he stooped to kiss her, and she rested her head for one moment against his shoulder, just to feel that that was what life meant. She felt better, more like Ida Craven, and said—

"Oh Arthur, Hugh Linwood 's here."

"Who 's Hugh Linwood?" he asked rather savagely. He was weary, at any rate; and this man with a Christian name, thrown at him by his wife, was just too much.

"He was at Bagnères with us; he is a cousin of the Maxwells; I have known him well all my life," she answered awkwardly, it seemed so odd to give an account of Hugh to any one.

"Oh," said Arthur shortly. "Where does he come from now, and what does he belong to?"

"I don't know; I did not ask him." And she blushed with the consciousness that she had been very foolish to be so much dazed by the sight of him as not to ask the common-place questions of where and when.

Arthur saw the blush, and did not know what to make of it, and said—

"It is surely odd, if you know so much about this fellow that you don't know what he belongs to. What's his name? Hugh something?"

"Linwood—Mr. Linwood," she answered timidly. "He said something about his colonel knowing you (Stanley), and they can't have been here very long."

"Oh, Stanley—Stanley's Horse! One of his officers is he?"—and he poured himself out some tea, and stood by the table to drink it. And after a little he went on, as if talking to himself, "I am glad they are here; we shall want them soon for mounted orderlies, the police are losing their heads."

"How are frontier affairs going on?" asked Ida, glad to get off the question of Hugh.

"There is really no knowing," answered

Craven, "except that there may be any amount of mischief before us, and that the Mulka people have certainly been receiving large sums of money across the frontier; and that must mean people to pay it, hands to carry it, and something to be done with it when there. Can you get breakfast early to-day? I have much to do, and shall go down to kutcherry before the courts open, to see some people."

"Very well, Arthur," she said. "I'll have breakfast on table by nine. Will that do?"

"Yes, darling; and," he said, as she rose to go into the house, "don't call that fellow, whoever he is, Hugh again. You are not a girl now; and I think I should feel tempted to knock him down if I heard him call you Ida."

"Very well, Arthur," she said again, and went away, choking much at the time, and feeling that he might have left that to her. She had known it as well as he could; and even amid her surprise and bewilderment of the meeting had thought of it, and acted on her thought at once.

"He might have left it to me," she said to herself more than once; and it was only after she was again alone for the day that she remembered that there was something to be said on the other side. She had been very foolishly disturbed by the sight of Hugh; and then, he—he had been her lover. This Arthur did not know. It seemed so foolish, that story of long ago, that she had shrunk from telling it; and really there seemed so little to tell; and though she would have been glad now that Arthur should know it, she did not see her way to speaking after this warning about the Christian name, which had hurt her a good deal. And so the day passed, and nothing was said; Ida acting unconsciously on the clumsy fallacy that two wrongs make one right.

CHAPTER XI.

"NONSENSE."

The next morning Ida had plenty to do without going for her usual ride, making preparations for her guests, the Maxwells. There were three of them,—husband, wife, and child; the latter (not the bright flaxen haired Frankie who was thriving at Hastings) was a baby of ten months old, smaller and fairer, called Hugh, after the cousin whom we know.

Mary arrived early, as she had ridden in with the battery, and the child followed with his ayah in a doolie,—the rude covered litter common to all the less civilized parts of India. Mary, of course, arrived alone. Captain Maxwell, who commanded X Battery, L Brigade, R. H. A., having to see his men into the quarters assigned to them in the Artillery Barrack Square, sent word by his wife that he would come as soon as he was off duty.

The meeting of the two girls (they still hardly deserved a more dignified description) was characteristic of them. Mary was heartily and frankly glad to see Ida, who had interested her much at home, and who had seemed from her letters to be growing. She was affectionate and curious.

Ida felt strangely raised; the excitement of yesterday had not fairly worn off, and here was now another piece of her old life come to look at her and wake her up. She would certainly in her heart of hearts have preferred to be left to live out her new life without any complications of the past, and would have been content if Mary too had not come. But on the other hand she had liked Mary, she had spoken to her in the old times as she never had done to any one else. Mary was a woman friend; if not a very desirable, at least a tolerable thing; and there she was now beside her, looking kindly at her. And the old self rose up strong, and the artificial self crumbled (it was her fate that nature and will were both strong; she often put them in opposition, and both could not win), the child in her broke out, and she sat down at Mary's knee, put her head down and cried, not for any special reason, but just because she was greatly shaken.

Mary did not know what to make of this. She had a good deal of penetration, and saw that the girl was not crying for any immediate sorrow, but that it was in some way the overflow of pent-up feeling. She had nothing to tell her what the actual kind of strain was, and jumped hastily to the not unnatural conclusion, "Surely the husband can't be a success, if she breaks down in this fashion at the sight of one of her own people." She knew Colonel Craven but slightly, and had heard a great deal of good of him; but she knew that what a man is to the world does not prove very much as to what he may be to his wife; and it struck her, as it had done before at Sandford, that it would take very special treatment and comprehension to make the best of Ida, and that she would certainly need to grow into a woman before she would be anything but a rather uncomfortable wife. And now she was older looking, but still noticeably childlike, crying at her knee with a passionate wail that could be accounted for no other way than by abusing the husband, which she accordingly did to herself, and then proceeded to try and console the wife.

"Ida, dear Ida, what does all this mean?" she said. "There now, child," she put her arm round her, "talk, if it is any comfort to you, and be quiet if it is not. This is a very sad greeting, dear."

Ida raised her head, and said a little firmly, "I am very foolish. I don't know what I am crying about, really I don't," but she put it down again, very wearily.

"I daresay not," Mary answered, not shaken in her opinion that the husband was at fault, but like a reasonable woman determined not to hint at it. "You are just over-excited, and must rest and get quiet again, and look bright, or I shall be sorry that I came."

" Don't talk nonsense, Mary," said the old Ida we know. " I am dazed, so many new things are happening, and the sight of you brought up old times so clearly."

" Which does not account for its making you miserable," thought Mrs. Maxwell ; but she said ; " Yes; I understand it does not do to think too much of what one has left behind in our Indian life."

" No, I daresay," said Ida blankly ; but Mary did not need the tone to tell her that that sort of thing had nothing to do with Ida's trouble. It would be safest for the present to stick to facts, and she asked,—

" Tell me how, on the whole, you like India."

" On the whole I don't know," said Ida, roused by the feeling that she must talk some sort of nonsense to keep off more dangerous ground. " I certainly like bits of it very much. I like that picture under the blinds, the cactus, the oleanders, and the willows at the back. I like my horses, and the long rides. I love bits of the hills where I have never been, where one sees black cliffs and little wooded corners. I like my house, beasts, and birds; but I don't know when you talk about wholes."

"What have become of your books?" said Mary, determined to confess her friend on all safe topics, but, feeling the chatter was an effort, was in no way deluded by it.

"My books," answered Ida rather doubtfully. "Perhaps that is what I am not sure about. I don't do much with them; I still work a little by fits, but I don't think there is much purpose in it—there is not much there could be, you know," she added rather to herself, as in speaking she realized what a change in her life this absence of books had made, and yet feeling that it was a matter of course that she should leave the books alone, and that nothing could be made of the fact.

"Do you know that Hugh Linwood is

here?" Mary asked rather abruptly. She had by this time got the notion of a commonplace matrimonial misfit into her head, and had become unwary.

Ida blushed at the suddenness of the question. Hugh's name really meant to her much more of Arthur's gratuitous warning than himself; and that was a secret she really cared to keep. She answered quickly, "Yes; I saw him yesterday on the Mall for a few minutes. He is a good deal altered."

Mary noticed the blush, and was watchful again.

"I have not seen him," she said, "for some years, but am very glad of the chance. We shall be quite a group of old friends,—a rare thing in India; and we must have your husband in the group and mine, so there is a new friend for each of us."

"Yes," said Ida vaguely, feeling that it somehow did not sound like sense, and that what was wanted was to make no friends not new ones in her life.

But happily the coming of the small Hugh made it unnecessary to answer, and it was some time before he had been sufficiently welcomed and admired, and dismissed with Ida's ayah in charge of the strange ayah, to his bath, which he sorely needed.

And when he had gone, conversation became easier. They went back to the safer mutual friends who were beyond the sea. Mary was more than ever interested in the younger wife, because it struck her that her path lay among thorns.

Ida's tone seemed to her unwholesome; a queer calm above,—half childishness, half affectation; and below excitement, for which she did not see sufficient motive, without applying a few perfectly undeserved adjectives to Arthur Craven. Luckily being a wife herself, she knew that such a matter is best left untouched; but being a very happy one, she was the more frightened at what seemed to be the prospect before Ida.

At last Mary said, "I have a letter from your mother to answer, I shall write to her a grand report of you."

"No; don't, Mary," said Ida, rather excited again. "At least don't tell her of my being so—so foolish."

"Very well; but why not?" replied the other. "She must know that you are an excitable lassie, and maybe she would like to know that you cared to see old friends."

"I beg you to say nothing," insisted Ida. "I don't think mamma ever dreamt that I was excitable. I was a quiet wise sort of sham woman as a child, and now it seems to me that I am paying for it by being a child when it would be some good being a woman."

She sat with her head against Mary's knee, looking out into the greenery, silent for a while. Her eyes filled again with tears, caused by no definite pain, but by a vague feeling of dreariness, an impression of effort and failure. The effort to crush herself was only dwarfing her life, and doing no good to any one; and yet she could see no duty, but fighting that fight out to the death.

They were still silent and Ida tearful when Colonel Craven came round the corner of the house. He had walked home, so there had been no warning clatter of hoofs. Ida sprang to her feet, but he saw her face. "Why Ida!" Mary broke in; "I don't want an introduction. Colonel Craven, I am so glad to see you again."

They shook hands cordially, Mary unsaying some of her adjectives as she did so, and becoming yet the more puzzled for so much justice done.

"I hope my husband will not be much longer," said Mrs. Maxwell. "It is very kind of you to ask us here. It is a great comfort to be out of tents at this time of year, especially with a young child."

"It is a great pleasure to us," answered Craven. "I hope Maxwell won't be much troubled about settling his men, but I am doubtful. I have just come from the brigade office. The quartermaster-general's department have been fighting about where your men are to go, the commissariat having been keeping stores in one side of the Artillery Square; and now that the rooms are wanted, it has dawned upon the authorities that they will take long to empty and longer to clean, and the battery is to encamp on the parade ground in the meantime. I saw Maxwell, and told him our breakfast hour, and he will be here by that time at any rate."

It was already nearly nine o'clock, and Ida proposed to show Mary her rooms that she might dress. And the two went into the house together.

Arthur sat down again when they had gone and felt tired and worried, as he poured himself out some cold tea.

Public matters were very engrossing and vexatious. Besides the more important troubles threatening on the frontier, there were smaller worries close at hand. There was an epidemic of robberies in the place, and every one was howling at the police. Arthur had not many delusions about the efficiency of that body, but he knew at any rate how far their powers went, and where they ended; and he knew that in this special set of cases the disease had got beyond the police.

"If these had been ordinary times," he had argued at the brigade office that morning, "my police would be even with them; but I have no doubt that these robbers are fighting men from the hills; they steal little but arms and ammunition and military gear of various kinds; and you must really oppose them by measures of your own, patrols and doubled guards."

The brigadier, who liked his grievance against the police better than meeting the difficulty by practical measures, had been very obstructive; and Arthur had left him with many severe reflections as to old owls, who won't understand a subject. He had turned homewards half forgetting the coming guests, and had been greeted by Ida's tears, and they had been also vexatious to him. He did not like the thought of Ida talking and fretting to her friend. What could she find to fret about? He had the conviction common to man that all women's troubles, short of bereavement and poverty, are more or less fancies; and he did not like the thought of Ida who, with some peculiarities, had not so far been addicted to tears or melancholy moods, creating a sorrow the moment she had the luxury of a confidant.

He resolved to reason her out of it, resolved to put a stop to it, to show her at any rate that he was the person to come to if anything troubled her. He felt hurt, irritated, and provoked. He did not stop to analyse Ida's possible feelings. He was impatient for the moment of any feeling but his own. Ida's submission had had at least so much effect on him that he had got used to it, and partly to require it, while wishing at heart that she would be more independent. But none the less was he sorely vexed by this—this—*nonsense* was the word that manlike came to him for what he failed to understand.

CHAPTER XII.

X BATTERY, Z BRIGADE, R.H.A.

HOWEVER, the early part of the day passed away between social duties and official work, and no time was suitable for getting to the bottom of Ida's troubles. Maxwell came in just in time for the late breakfast, and all went on well.

He was good to look at: tall, with a slight active figure, fair waving hair, a skin rather too fair for a man, giving him, in spite of the red brown line which crossed his forehead at a slant, caused by the sun and his forage cap, something of a delicate look. The lower part of the face was lost in a splendid yellow beard, but above it there looked out the sharpest of blue grey eyes, that spoke of the man as ready, capable, and kindly; not a man to be weak in kindness by any means, but to be human and tender in his strength. He had a curious mixture of penetration and sympathy, that made those under his influence feel or fancy that he knew the best and the worst of them, and yet be more comfortable in that knowledge than they could have been with any other equally clear-sighted mortal. His influence over the men of his battery was enormous, mainly, I think, that they were all individuals to him; he knew them all by name, and most of them by character, and knew and cared for all the details of their lives. As keen a soldier when on service as any of his brethren of "the regiment," steady, dauntless, and always alert, he had the rarer power of making of the life of a soldier in time of peace, a life that was worth the living. This was in a great degree owing to his high estimate of and respect for the office of leader of men. He was a little, nay a good deal, contemptuous of those officers who spoke as if active service was all that mattered in a soldier's life; and believing that the value of an army is the value of its units, and that a man is what the level of ordinary life makes him, much more than what he may rise to on an emergency, he toiled hard to make the most of the individual men, and the routine of their daily lives.

He was obliged of course to use the traditional grooves of soldier-life, but he made the best of them, taking care that they should be realities and not shams. The workshops of X Battery Z Brigade were known all over India as models of their kind. There was very little in the way of clothes, boots, saddlery, barrack fittings, etc., that his indefatigable battery did not make for itself. They took to gardening seriously, and drove a brisk trade in fruit and vegetables. They worked at their various trades in a most business-like fashion, with very business-like results. Captain Maxwell had brought the full weight of his personal influence to bear on the starting of these things; had looked carefully into their working details, to be sure that they were on sound principles; and had then left them alone, remarking, "The British gunner is lazy and fairly stubborn, but he is no fool, and if the men see these things pay they will certainly be carried out;" and so they were, to the partial abolition of the vice of drunkenness. There was much else to be attended to before the big machine could be brought to the highest possible perfection; but all was worked at in the same spirit,—that what a man always is, that only can you trust him to be on an emergency, and very little idleness and its necessary fruits were to be found in the ranks of X Battery, R.H.A.

The men loved their commander with the love dashed with fear which is one of the best reins that can be found for communities or herds of men; and the fear was more a fear of his penetration than fear of consequences, though consequences fell at once, sharp and certain, on all serious offenders. He had held the command for about two years at the time we write of, and had been able to see some results from all his toil and anxiety.

He looked rather fagged at breakfast, at least so his wife thought, but he was bright enough to take a great interest in what Craven told him of the political position.

"I am really sorry," Craven said, when something brought the conversation round to X, "that your men are still in camp. The station is alive with thieves at night just now; not the slinking dacoit of down-country life, but plucky fellows, with long knives, who go about in parties of five or six, searching for arms or ammunition, and quite willing to carry off a horse if they see a chance."

"It is a good thing to know it is so," answered Maxwell coolly. "My men must just learn to take care of themselves. It is as good practice for them as anything else. I am always glad if extra work for them does not take the shape of night duty; but still if there are frontiers in this sort of state, I suppose some one must learn to guard them."

"I wish the brigadier was half so philosophical," observed Craven. "He just ranted steadily on for half an hour about the inefficiency of the police. They are not heroes certainly, but the work is beyond them; you can only oppose such bodies of well armed and daring men by trained soldiers, or, at any rate, by equal numbers, and we have not men enough for that sort of thing."

Thus they talked on. Mary joined in the conversation occasionally, and Ida was much surprised to find how perfectly at home she seemed to be in all the details of her husband's work. It was in no way the clap-trap of that most odious growth of soldier-life, the "military lady," but a real actual interest, that made definite mark in her life.

She had her own province in this empire of X, which she ruled as wisely and well as did Henry Maxwell the main body. We shall have occasion later to see it in working; just now it was a time of change. The two gentlemen went out soon after breakfast, Colonel Craven to kutcherry, and Maxwell back to the artillery lines to see how matters there were progressing, and Ida and Mary were left together. They spent the day very pleasantly between talk of the past and the little babe, who required a good deal of consolation, at least so his mother thought, after his late knocking about.

Ida was glad of his presence, which caused a good deal of interruption in their conversation, for she was not used now to much talk below the surface, and, as it happened just at that time, dreaded it. She listened eagerly to all that Mary told her of her life and her many interests. It made her feel again in a world of new things, to know that such a life was in the experience of any one so near to her. But for this soldiering vein, she would have thought that the secret of Mary's life lay in small Hugh's wondering smile and innumerable baby wants. But that certainly did not account for all the facts.

Hers was not the mind to expect the secret of anything so important to be an outside one, so she watched and waited, and when the solution came, it proved to mean more to her than she had ever dreamed of.

As the day wore on Ida wondered a little that Hugh did not call, though rejoicing much that he did not. She felt entirely unequal to meeting him after the shake she had had, and under Mrs. Maxwell's keen eyes. Just as she was getting weary of the long *tête-à-tête*, and was wondering if it would be rude to go away to her room and lie down and think a little, a horse trotted up the avenue, and Henry Maxwell soon came stumbling into the darkened room, over a little teapoy, a three-legged or rather three-footed table, that had been placed rashly near the door.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Craven," he said, as he picked up the piece of furniture, and looked blinking round. "It is a dazzling afternoon outside, and though it is very nice in this cool dark room, it is quite impossible to see at first."

"And you, Harry," said Mary, "have been out all day in your forage-cap. When shall I cure you of such follies?"

"You have of course had no rest after being awake all night with that bairn," he said, dropping into a chair beside her, and looking up at her half in mischief, but with a look of affection that seemed a revelation to Ida.

"My follies are as nothing to yours," she said with sham seriousness. "Don't think to escape that way;" and she added more gravely, "but do really for my sake be careful here. It is a pretty place, but it somehow looks unwholesome, and every one knows that it could not have a worse character."

"Yes; there is no doubt that it is a feverish hole," he said; "but I don't see what that has to do with my forage-cap. Is not my wife too hard on me, Mrs. Craven?" he added at last, suddenly remembering Ida's presence. "A hardworked soldier can't be expected to think of everything."

"No," said Ida vaguely, not knowing quite what was wanted of her.

"Don't take his part, Ida," said Mary; "he is the most vexatious of men. If he would only take reasonable care of himself, instead of making a divinity of X, it would be better for him most ways."

"You are as fond of X as I am, and take no more care of yourself," he retorted. "I at least am so far better than you, that I am thankful for my mercies, even though they do blow me up after a hard day's work. I am going to look for the boy," and the husband and wife left the room together, and Ida could hear the colloquy, half jest, half earnest, carried on till it was lost in a shout of impatient wrath from little Hugh, who could not stand his natives one single moment after father and mother came in sight. Ida went to the door that opened into her "chota hazri" verandah (windows, in the English sense, there were none all round the house), and looked out; then she went into the verandah, and walked up and down for a little, looking into the garden.

It was only a quarter past four o'clock, and still very hot; it would not be fit or safe for her to go out till nearly six; but she did not care. With so many new thoughts in her heart, a little new action was a relief. She walked down the centre walk; the sun blazed full upon her head, but only for a moment; she was soon under the sirus-trees, and stood looking round her at the rockery and the cacti. It all looked rather different in the strong glaring light from what it did in the early morning, when she usually saw it; but that was what she needed, and had come for.

She looked about for a place to sit down, and found it at last,—a bit of cool dark shade, and a little grass. The shadow of the acacias was high and light, but on the nook she had chosen there fell also the shadow of a sturdy little orange-tree, growing close by the more important trees. And there she sat down to think, within sight of her favourite willows. She was safe from sight from the house she knew, and she thought from the roadway also.

What she wanted then was to get her thoughts straight again, to find her place in this new world that had so gratuitously fallen down on her, or better still to reason herself out of the fancy that it was a new world.

So the best part of her took the upper hand, and she went straight at what mattered most. Arthur, well he had been right about Hugh Linwood, though he had not understood her. She had been very foolish. How was Arthur to know what sort of a disturbing element Hugh had been in her young life? and a man friend to be called by his Christian name in this circle consisting mainly of men, would not, of course, do. He, Arthur, ought perhaps—yes or no—ought he (she asked herself) to know that silly story that was not a story at all, but which had only escaped being one by her own instinct that it was too foolish?

Certainly nothing had seemed less necessary before the arrival of Hugh at Peshawur. She had had so little to do with it that it would have been simply telling tales of her mother. Now it did seem a sort of treason that Arthur should not know every scrap there was to know about any possible love-story. But how to tell it after the warning of yesterday, not having spoken then! After a little more thought she made up her mind to let Arthur see first that Hugh was to her as any one else, and then to tell the story some quiet morning or evening when they were alone, this tumult over and she cool again.

Thus Hugh was dismissed, and she felt happier, and her thoughts wandered on to Mary and her gunner husband. Mary Maxwell with her husband was a very different person to Mary without. Ida's impression of her had been of a quiet friendly woman, with a certain touch of anxiety, and a way of being rather absent, very devoted to her child, and capable of inspiring a good deal of admiration, without much visible reason why; but this Mary was a different creature: bright, busy, and keenly interested, life seemed so very full for her, and she so very much alive. The sort of conjugal chaff to which she had just listened, wishing that she was not there, was to Ida something of a revelation; not that it was anything in itself, but she felt it was natural effervescence, some sort of overflow and relief to the two who had been both a little overwrought by daily cares, and a rising again to buoyancy by the influence of what?—of each other, there was nothing else for it but to see that. In a French novel she had been reading a few days before, she had come across the phrase *la femme camarade;* she had stuck at it, and puzzled a little, and then passed it by as something only half respectable, as were many things else in the book, and now it flashed across her again as a ray of light. These two were living one life, were friends—comrades. The more she turned it over in her mind the more the difference she had noted in Mary was explained to her. In England she had been grave, self-contained, absent, and rather sad; now she was alive, bright, happy, and almost foolish in her display of wifely interest. This notion of two living one life, which she now even only guessed at, was a most startling revelation.

It was not surprising that with her solitary and thoughtful or rather dreamy girlhood she should have missed forming any theories of the relation of husband and wife; and we have seen that for lack of theory, and also for want of the strong feeling that would have served so much better, she had thrown herself with all her strength into the pursuit of the fetish she called duty, and which was landing her in many complications. She mused on, wondering why her life seemed to lack this perfectness, asking herself if it really did, or if such ideas were all nonsense; and then passed on to the question: If such was the fact, if she was really a failure as a wife, what could she do that Arthur should never know it? How, if she was not really wife and friend, should she act as to seem so? She still believed very foolishly in effort, and was far as ever from realizing what in essence love was. And her thoughts rambled on, confused by the heavy stifling air, to the spinning of threads of sand, and the weaving such into an impossible character for herself, that Arthur might never miss what she ought to have been; and while this was doing, there came a quick strong step behind her, and Arthur's voice said—

"What are you doing here, Ida?"

"Nothing," she answered flushing. "I came here to think."

"To think!" he said, with a note of puzzle in his voice. "It is odd you can't think in the house. It is really a great risk to be sitting bare-headed under a tree at this time of the day, and you must have come through the sun to get here. I saw you from the road, and could not make out what could possibly have brought you out. Is anything wrong, child?" he added in a gentler tone; and he sat down on the grass beside her, that he might see her face, and get more information than he would be likely to do from her words.

"No, Arthur; nothing," she answered a little wearily.

"But there must be something," he insisted, as the thought of her morning tears, and his resolution to put a stop to that came back to him. And he went on, "You have been unlike yourself for a day or two. You were crying this morning, and now I find you sitting out here in the sun at this time of day. It is not reasonable, Ida. Surely if there is anything the matter you had better come to me with it."

"There is nothing the matter really, Arthur. I was foolish." I don't know why. She kept steadier than she could have believed possible, and added, "It has seemed so strange these old friends turning up."

"That Linwood man again," thought Arthur savagely, and he said, "Look here, Ida; it seems to me you are fanciful. It may be pleasant to meet old friends, but it is nothing to make a great fuss about. One would think that you were not happy here; that—but there is really no manner of use conjecturing what that sort of nonsense might or might not mean. But, Ida, child—whatever happens"—he continued after a little pause, which had given him time for the thought that perhaps he, too, was making a fuss. "Come to me if anything seems wrong. Don't go to any stranger. Mrs. Maxwell is a nice woman doubtless, but to talk of our concerns to her is to talk to her husband. Come to me. We have got to live our lives together; and if we don't understand each other, no human being can help us."

"Yes, Arthur," she answered, liking this tone much better, but hurt at what had gone before; "but—really I never dreamed of talking of you or of my home affairs to Mary. You may trust me truly."

"I do, my child, yes, but——" and he hesitated, in utter ignorance of how to proceed, and with a strong conviction that he had not been wise in this matter. He had not got to the bottom of this mystery. But what if there should be no mystery at all? Ida did not look deplorable now; a little excited, but with a firm set look about the mouth, as if there was some sort of resolve behind. He liked the look; he loved her more in this very rare wilful mood than in any phase of the childlike submission of which she had given him so much since their marriage. Submission disappointed him, even coming from her, but spirit always won his admiration. She looked very beautiful then, he noticed, in the uncertain shade of the trees. When should he ever understand her? She changed so much: first, the brightest, ablest girl he had ever seen, then the most dutiful of wives, tremulously anxious for his approval, and now this calm little woman whose thoughts he could not reach.

It was so odd, too, to be out at this unheard-of time of day, sitting on the ground. What had become of dignity? and then,—insects, and his eye fell critically on the grass, and he sprang up with an exclamation "The whole place is alive with ants."

Ida was on her feet in an instant, shaking the creatures off her dress. "That comes of meditating in one's garden in India," she said, laughing, and they went back to the house quite merrily, Arthur forgetting his puzzle as she smiled. Ida quite determined to play out her part, but with a sickening consciousness that she had learnt some dreadful things that day which might make her life wear a different colour henceforth and for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUGH.

IDA'S discovery was some time in getting into shape. At first it was a surprise that merely frightened and saddened her; but it gradually became a conviction, and had to be recognised as one of the facts of life, for her, indeed, one of the most important. It was this: that there was something in Mrs. Maxwell's life that was wanting in her own, a sort of love that she had never felt nor seemed likely to feel, that made Mary to her husband true wife and friend, while lacking that, the utmost she could attain to was the position of loyal and faithful slave.

It was a terrible fall to Ida after her visions of being a perfect wife to Arthur; and like a stunning fall it sobered her.

It made her humble, more reasonable.

She had fretted under the feeling of vague discontent, but now that she knew what the mischief really was, the knowledge steadied her.

Mrs. Maxwell noticed a change and tried to draw her out, but Ida quietly baffled this. The consciousness of something that must not be said was strong upon her. It did a good deal to turn the child into a woman. She acknowledged to herself that this was a fact, and a sad one, and must be made the best of; but as to make any change in this fact by any effort of will, as well expect word or will to cause the acacias to produce bunches of lilac-blossom. To Arthur she was more womanly and self-contained than of old, watchful and dutiful as ever, but with a certain calm and steadiness which was as far as possible from the nonsense to which he had felt it his duty to put a stop, that he congratulated himself on the somewhat unsatisfactory interview in the garden, as a real success.

He had, he thought, been comprehended, though he had not been explanatory. He had not said what he wanted to say; indeed had blundered, and behaved, so he acknowledged, stupidly; yet here was before his eyes the very result he had contemplated.

Hence Arthur was most unduly puffed up at the brilliant success of his first serious effort at training his wife; while the merciful law of nature, without which no life on this earth would be tolerable, that gives power to each to guard their own thoughts, even from the nearest eye, was saving him from the sorest pain that could have reached him then.

He was very gracious, at first watching her closely with a certain air of approval that Ida felt to be thoroughly inappropriate to the occasion; but yet she took it, not knowing whether there was a better life before them, or a horrid break of some kind. This new knowledge seemed a heavy responsibility, but yet she felt it much better that it should be knowledge, not ignorance ; and feeling that there was danger in the air she was most steady. Arthur was desperately busy at the time, so that was a help to her.

What Hugh Linwood had to do with this discovery, it is not easy to say, but I am inclined to think little or nothing. Ida in her preoccupation forgot all about him, and when he called one morning when she and Mary were sitting with work and little Hugh playing at their feet, she welcomed him quite naturally, talked of past and present, called him Mr. Linwood unhesitatingly, and was so thoroughly unembarrassed that Mary, who had been on the watch, came to the conclusion that all was right there. She could not quite understand Ida, but she was most heartily glad to be convinced that her friend was standing on the brink of no such pitfall as *that* might have been.

And Hugh,—what did he think? He had been very busy. He was adjutant of his corps, and had much to do. The regiment moved into the lines allotted to them, and there was much to do before they were comfortably settled. The officers had some difficulty in housing themselves in the already crowded state of the station. Linwood found a little house, not far from the Cravens, which he shared with the doctor of the regiment, a man named Woolett, and a special friend of his own. But though he was so busy, he did manage to think a good deal of Ida; and to be very sorry for himself that he should be thus brought in contact with the only woman he had ever cared for, and she another man's wife. It was nearly four years since the affair at Bagnères; he had then been most heartily in earnest and very hopeful for the future. Without any real reason, he had made up his mind that there was so much between them that Ida would at any rate wait for him; and had looked forward confidently to a time when he could go to England to woo again. It had been a very heavy blow to him to hear of Ida's marriage; it was the first serious grief in his life; and it was long before he rallied from it. At last he had set his teeth, taken on the fit of woman-hating that so often comes to a young man in like circumstances; and talked himself into a conviction that all women were alike and heartless, until, what with China, his duties, and the theory of war, he had nearly forgotten his trouble; while retaining, for its sheer convenience to a man who did not want to marry, some views about the similarity and general unsatisfactoriness of womankind.

It had been by no means unmixed pleasure to him when he had come upon Ida that morning on the Mall, and felt, spite of his philosophy, that women were not alike, and that this one woman could not be heartless. He was sorry for himself, and, the duties of his post aiding, had been disposed to keep out of Ida's way; as he could not take up his old ground of intimate friend, and had no wish to occupy any other to her.

He called as a matter of course; the old acquaintance and Colonel Craven's position made it almost a necessity, though he delayed and doubted. When he was there, he was pleased to find Ida so friendly and calm. The surname that had vexed him at first he saw to be necessary and advisable; and with an effort he said to himself that he would school himself to be just Mary's cousin to her; would forget or bury the old past when he had hoped for so much, and (why mince words?) loved her so dearly.

He noticed that she was a great deal changed, and had lost the brightness and the wilful independence that had been so much her charm to him; but he did not see enough of her to hunt for causes, and his mind had no natural tendency to seek for such.

We have said he was a fine soldier. As a man he was loyal and straightforward; a mind objective, rather than subjective; more prone to regard facts than to seek for causes; not very potent for any kind of insight; fairly selfish; with a fund of passionate energy that might easily prove a dangerous force, according to the direction in which it spent itself.

His was naturally an affectionate nature, though years of life, with himself as his only object, had rusted it a good deal; but he was goodnatured to every one, from the round-eyed washerman's boy who stole his shirt-collars, to the heaviest and most vexatious old Risaldar in the ranks of the 50th P.I.C. He admired and liked his commandant, Stanley, very greatly, was proud to serve under him; and the feeling between the men was a very pleasant one. Stanley thought he had never had a more likely young cavalry officer, and was much interested in the making of him.

Hugh was also very pleasant to look at, so both men and women thought; though but few of the latter said it. He had a bronzed face and red brown hair, a long drooping moustache, with the rest of his face clean shaven. The hair curling on a brow square and white, the form of his face good, and the lips close fitting. A figure tall and well knit, so that he hardly got full credit for his height. He was spare and strong, and was acknowledged by all to be the best rider in the regiment and in many regiments.

His visit to Ida had passed without anything worthy of record, and without his having formed much opinion about her; but a week or so later, when sitting with Mary Maxwell, after they had got into their own house, playing with his godson, the little Hugh, and she had asked him what he thought of Ida, he looked up abruptly and said, "Do you think, Mary, she cares for that fellow Craven?"

" I never asked her," Mary answered; "but

I suppose so. The fellow, as you call him, is a remarkably good fellow, and worthy of her; a thing I should not be disposed to say easily."

"Is he not ages older than she is?" he asked.

"Not ages certainly, but there must be a difference of about twenty years. If a girl is going to marry at sixteen, she can hardly escape marrying a man considerably her senior; though I don't quite understand Ida—I will say so much. I can't think the difference in age really matters if all else is well. I don't quite understand Ida," she repeated, half to herself. "She is flat and spiritless as compared with what I remember of her at Sandford two years ago, and she certainly is not becoming a woman as fast as would be convenient considering her husband's age. How long is it since you saw her?"

"It will be four years in autumn," he said. "She does not seem to me an hour older than when I saw her then. I saw a great deal of her when she was quite a child, you know; then she was hardly child enough, and four years ago she was not a child at all. But now you speak of it, she is not so bright as she used to be."

"You were at Bagnères with them," said Mary, moved to some extent by curiosity to make Hugh speak of the past if he would.

"Yes; for two or three months in the autumn of '59. She was very charming then. I stayed with them, and we rode and walked and rambled about the hills. I never had before nor since such a bright bit of idle life, or saw woman like her. She seemed quite a woman though she was only fourteen; and then—I know I am safe with you, Mary,—I fairly lost my head." He took up little Hugh, and allowed him to play with his moustache to hide the working of his face.

"I suspected as much from a letter you wrote at the time, my poor boy," she said, regardless of the fact that the boy was two years her senior. "Well, that is past and done with, and nothing can be made of it.

Do your work, and think no more about her. But it must have been sad for you, and I am sorry."

"No need, Mary," he said with an effort at gaiety. "It is one of the things a man has to live through, and is none the worse for it. Ida is no more to me now, no, not half so much, as you are; and there is nothing to be sorry for one way or the other."

"So much the better," said Mary, though she would have preferred something less of vehemence in the tone; the subject dropped, and after a little more play with the child, he left. Mary thought rather sadly of Hugh and Ida, and commented thereon in the evening to her husband without a thought that she was breaking faith.

"If Mrs. Bygrave was going to marry her as a child," she said, "she had far best have taken Hugh. They would have understood each other. That boy Hugh has lots of faults, but there is good in him; and a fight with the realities of life, and a wife to love, would do him no end of good. He would have been more comprehensible and to the purpose. It seems to me that Ida is too much on moral tiptoes to reach Colonel Craven's height."

"I think you are talking nonsense, Mary," Maxwell answered lightly, "led away by a handsome face. Hugh is awfully conceited and taken up with himself, though pleasant in some ways. But still it is absurd to compare him to Craven, who is worth two of him."

"I said as much," said Mary. "Can't you see, Harry, that he might be worth three of you, and yet be a very unsuitable husband for me. I grant you Hugh's faults, but it seems to me that Colonel Craven has not quite enough or quite the right ones for that poor child Ida, though I much like the man myself."

"So do I, and I decline to see that he is not good enough for any woman."

"Oh, obtuse one! don't you see that he is too good?" said Mary, bent upon having the last word.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOLDIERS' WIVES.

THE house that the Maxwells had found for themselves was not a very desirable one, but still it was "home," and could be made comfortable, and was not unreasonably far from the lines. Unlike Ida's house, which had been built by some provident missionaries when Peshawur was a larger mission station than it had since become, Mary and her menfolk, as she would call her husband and son, had to content themselves with a remarkably trashy ill-built one, such as are constantly run up in Indian stations in time of uncertain military occupation. It had been so much the practice to make and unmake military stations in the Punjāb, that no one could be found to risk much money in building.

A few weeks passed uneventfully; the weather got hotter and hotter, houses were shut up all day long as the only way to keep them cool; punkahs moved steadily first only at night, and then through night and day; the members of the English community rose earlier and earlier to escape the sun and catch the cool breeze from the hills, always to be got to some extent if you went early enough for it; and each house became from 8 a.m., to 6 or 7 p.m., a little oasis in the desert of burning sun and fiery hot air. But the little households looked very different according to the character and habits of their inmates.

The Anglo-Indian household is a less complex thing than most English ones. The fact is a patent one, to be realized by very little thought. In India, there are no old people, none of the kindly or acid old ladies who fill up the corners and provide half the criticism of society; no women unattached bent on good works or miscellaneous fussing; none of the idle men of no calling, whose talking powers, literary leanings, love of politics, art, or old china stands them in lieu of work to do; few young unmarried ladies, and no half-grown boys and girls. There is great lack of variety in the work to do and the doers; hence the sameness of colouring of Indian life, and the difficulty of telling any story of it that shall not be tiresome.

Ida's life as May wore on was rather a listless empty one. The awakening we have spoken of had in a great measure deprived her of the power of dreaming that had helped her through many long days before. She was wide awake and critical, and did her work with the feeling that there was not much in it, that she belonged to this round rather than to another by simple haphazard, that there was a want of root in it, that made all action simply acting.

In this of course she went too far, and was making too much of the real difficulty; but it had been ever her fate, or nature, which is much the same thing, to be high-strung; the good and bad of her life had led to it, grown out of it, in equal proportions; and she was, as Mary had said, an "uncomfortable wife to have."

Arthur fortunately saw not much of this. At that time, any matter of feeling, any evidence of state of mind, must have been very patent to have arrested his attention. The stir among the followers of the Syuds at Mulka (*ci-devant* Sittana fanatics) was on the increase; no very decided steps had been so far taken, but the air was charged with fitful gusts before the storm.

The epidemic of thieving in the stations had subsided, thanks to some vigorous military measures, and had given place to robberies at the outposts and at the forts in the district, especially those in the direction of the Eusufzai country. These affairs had almost the air of attacks, so determined were the assailants, and the parties so numerous. Then the frontier was unsafe beyond all average experience. Hardly a day passed without some report of violence. They took many shapes: at one time a party of daring Otmanzai borderers would cross the Indus, or even sometimes the Cabul River, and swoop down on any defenceless Hindu merchant who might be travelling peaceably along the roads with his goods on a pony, and perhaps a servant or two. The goods would be confiscated; but that would not be all,—a ransom might be got from the friends of the unlucky possessor. So he would be hurried off to the nearest point of the river bank, sewed up in an inflated bullock's hide, and thus imprisoned, passed over the Indus to their own shore, his captors riding on the skin themselves. At another time they would come down on a field of half-ripe grain, the property of a village in ill favour for its loyalty to the British government, and cut and carry away the crop before the eyes of its unhappy owners. Or the villagers on the English side of the border would catch the infection, and would rob and murder each other beyond all reasonable precedent; and on any attempt being made to bring the offenders to justice, they would be found to be safe across the border.

Affairs became daily more and more troublesome, and Arthur Craven was absorbed in his duties morning and night, writing, hearing, arranging, sometimes conferring with the military authorities, sometimes riding for days up into the Eusufzai country, to discuss things with his special subordinates there, whose zeal was more to be relied on than their discretion.

Saadut Khan had happily got over his fit of hesitation, and was again a most useful ally. His past experience of the valley under Avitabile was of essential service to his friend and chief. It threw much light upon men and motives. It was encouraging, too, to hear of so much worse a state of things in the past; but in a measure distracting, as General Avitabile's summary modes of procedure were neither to his, Colonel Craven's, taste or among the possibilities of his position. Hence at this emergency Saadut Khan's presence, always a pleasure to Craven, was useful, and even indispensable; and Ida, in the rare occasions when Arthur was at home, had to listen to long discussions in Persian. It sounded musical, stately, and graceful, with a few more guttural sounds than were absolutely pleasant. Arthur did not talk politics to her, less that he did not care her to know about them, than that he himself was weary of them; and that to speak of household details, or even station small-talk, was a relief after these eternal possibilities, nay, realities of danger, and questions of precaution.

Ida felt rather bitterly the being relegated to the trifling side of things; but made no sign.

In Mary's home, life moved very differently. To her the long days were too short for all she had to do. Her house was a pattern of the rough sort of homely comfort that may often be found in English homes in the far-away corners of India. Mary always kept about her, wherever she might be, an atmosphere of her own. On entering her house, though the furniture might be rough and scanty, you at once felt that you were in the domain of a lady, who was at the same time a cultivated woman. There were signs of varied employment: music books and flowers, a large writing table at one end of her drawing-room looked very much like work; and a basket ottoman near the part she most frequented of the room had a well in it, which was weekly filled with the mending of the house. This was rather an unheard-of institution, and was sometimes commented on by astonished lady friends.

"Do you mean to say you mend your own stockings?" was the remark. "Why don't you give them to the durzee." And she would laugh and say, "Oh, yes; I don't believe that any one can mend but myself. Anybody can make things—it is a vulgar art in comparison; but few people have any notion of mending. Besides, I don't keep a durzee, and do not intend to do so again."

Mary had all the energy of a happy healthy woman. The household was well looked after in all directions; little Hugh's domestic arrangements were of the best; perfect regularity was observed, and a very keen eye was over all. There were many finer drawing-rooms than Mary's even at Péshawur; many houses where there was more of luxury; but none where things could be equally trusted to be in good order all the way through. Fair seeming was rather despised; the young mistress had an impatient contempt of outward show, which she carried at times to extreme; but it was the exaggeration of a virtue, and Henry Maxwell was very content with his workman-like household, and his active wife, in her dark simple dress, which she changed for plain white in summer, the more that it was her taste, and part of her. It was curious how unlike the two were, and how perfectly they accorded. Henry Maxwell, with his bright yellow hair, and piercing blue eyes, and eager, impetuous, kindly nature, seemed oddly matched with this quiet able wife, whose gravity, with a dash of indifference, was the most noticeable part of her as shown to the outer world. Only those who saw her at home knew what her lighter, brighter side was like, when she could be almost foolish in her mirth.

All the men liked her, and some of the ladies, but not all: some were a little afraid of her, others spoke of her as conceited, blundering as the estimate was.

In truth the general society of Indian stations was to her rather a nuisance, and she avoided it; but she liked to have people about her with whom she had something to do, and spoke of "keeping the Artillery together;" and if Harry liked any outsiders personally, which he often enough did, such outsiders were treated as having a natural affinity to the Artillery.

Once a week Mary was at home to her inner circle, and very pleasant home-like evenings they were. Maxwell talked a good deal, and talked well. Mary could talk well too if she was interested, and she had also the gift of making others talk. On these evenings, "shop" was not tabooed. "You can't do it in India," she would say. "There are many days when there is really nothing else, unless you are to talk of your neighbours; and" (here she shrugged her shoulders with an air of extreme impatience) "I would much rather talk of time-fuzes, and X."

The three subalterns of the battery, or, as they loved to call it, troop, though the word was then obsolete, looked upon themselves as very fortunate in their commanding officer and his wife, and very gladly availed themselves of the pleasant house so often open to them. Mary was certainly a wholesome influence for all who had much to do with her. We have spoken of her special department in the realm of X, and must give an account of it. Besides the hundred and fifty men of the battery, there were some fourteen or fifteen women, and as many children, the frightful mortality among the children in barracks rarely allowing the number of them to exceed the number of the mothers; and to know, and if necessary to assist, this little world within a world, was one of Mary's main interests. It had been the result of no deliberate plan, but had grown up naturally. Soon after Maxwell had been appointed to the command of X, it happened that a widow woman belonging to the artillery division was anxious to enter the Normal School at Subbathu, to be trained as a regimental school-mistress, and Mrs. Maxwell was asked to superintend the examination.

Mary agreed, and darned her stockings and embroidered a tunic for Frankie (it was before the advent of little Hugh) for three successive mornings, while Mrs. Brown puzzled out the answers to the examination questions, and each day she had some talk with her when work was done. The result was a surprise both at the woman's ignorance and at her ability. She was intelligent and well mannered, a very likeable woman, thought Mary, with most astonishing ignorance on the simplest things.

So on the last day, she, fairly interested, drew from her an account of her life, and learnt how five months before she had been the happiest of wives and mothers, as wife of the farrier-sergeant of the Artillery division, living in a little house on the parade ground, never dreaming of sorrow to come, when one fatal May day down swooped cholera on the little home (one of the chance visitations that make the disease seem even more awful than it does at times of epidemic); and before the morrow's sun had risen, she had left the side of her dead child to watch the sufferings of her dying husband, and she was left alone in the world. A few days later she was obliged to leave her house, and was received into the Artillery barracks, on sufferance, to stay there till the birth of a little fatherless babe, who was only a few weeks old at the time of the examination. "How I lived I don't know," she said through her tears. "It ought to have killed me, and me carrying at the time; but it did not, perhaps because of the child. God wanted him to live, and now I must work for him. You see, mem, we widows get five rupees a month for six months, and then the allowance stops, and no one cares what becomes of us."

Mary did not like to mention the calculation on which the arrangement is made; namely, that the widow of a soldier is generally remarried before the six months expires. Mrs. Brown was less reticent, and went on,—

"I know, mem, they expect us to marry again, and I daresay I might if I liked; but I could not with his boy at my breast, thinking of them in the graveyard there. You could not, Mrs. Maxwell, if it was you, think of it. I would much rather go to them."

Mary was much touched by sympathy for the poor woman who had suffered so much, and could feel so strongly. "You have your child to live for. It is far best to work for him yourself. I hope you will get into the school," she said, feeling awkward with the new experience, and very doubtful that they would pass her if the examination meant anything at all.

The more Mrs. Maxwell thought of the case, the more interested she felt in Mrs. Brown and the class she came from, and vexed with herself that this should be her first knowledge of the woman whose loss she had often heard mentioned as a battery grievance, there being no other farrier as good as the late sergeant in the station.

She went, therefore, to see her several times in the barracks, and rejoiced very much when she could carry to her news of her appointment to the Normal School (the standard chanced to be very low, owing to the fewness of applicants), and with her own hands helped to get the little baby's wardrobe in good order for school, for he was of necessity admitted with his mother.

This was the beginning, but it was not the end. After this Mary had many barrack friends. From Mrs. Brown she heard a great deal, and soon came to see a great deal of what barrack-life really is in India, with its poverty, idleness, and too often bad health. She soon came to the conclusion that something might be done, and as no one else seemed disposed to begin she must. Her first step was a very gentle one. She was sufficiently diffident in the matter of interfering in other folks' concerns, and began by making acquaintance. She let it be known in the barracks that she would be glad to see any woman who liked to call on her. In the morning, when she came home from her ride, she went to see them in the hospital, but rarely intruded in the barrack-rooms, feeling sure that her schemes would never work if she came into any sort of collision with the men. Gradually she made the acquaintance of all of them; the women, astonished but curious, came to see what the captain's wife was like, and when they saw her they liked her.

She steered clear of patronising. "They are soldiers' wives, so am I," she would say. A feeling of real sympathy made her think of them and treat them simply as woman to woman, and she was rewarded by their confidence and the power of doing real good. She gave them nothing: that would have destroyed the feeling of independence; but after a time, in her dealing with the poorer ones, she found that she wanted first one thing then another in the shape of needlework; and though she had often enough to teach the worker, such things got done, and were liberally paid for. Then it gradually became known that dresses and children's clothes could be well made in the barracks, and work came in from all sides; and it was not generally known that Mrs. Maxwell cut out, planned, and arranged most of the earlier work. When once the thing was started, it went on well. There was a real demand for what the barracks could produce; the more able women taught each other, the less able were for long pupils of the captain's wife, and it was to them that Mary's own work went. They needed it most, she knew; they were her special care, and must be helped at any cost of time and trouble.

This sort of thing had been working well at Mean Mear, the last station of X, and Mary was anxious to make acquaintance with the poorer women of the other batteries at the station, and get it into working order again. Nothing very much could be done for a time, but Mary saw a good deal of her friends, and was full of plans and hopes for the future. So what with husband, child, friends, and a "mission," though she would have scouted the word, Mary Maxwell was a busy happy woman, as much unlike any of the conventional notions of an Anglo-Indian lady as can well be imagined.

CHAPTER XV.

A LONG JUNE DAY.

JUNE heat and the necessary solitude gave to Ida some excuse for the visible listlessness that was the outward sign of the inward sense of hopelessness that was now pervading her life. Two months had passed since she had woke up from her dream of being, whatever it might cost, a perfect wife, to the conviction that there was a spirit in such matters that she was quite powerless to create. The state of public affairs left her much more alone than she had ever been before, and she had now no life of her own that she cared to live.

She had neither heart nor energy for the society of indifferent people. Of Mrs. Maxwell she could see but little ; they met once or twice a week at most. Mary's time was so fully occupied that she did not often pay visits in the early mornings, and Ida did not very willingly seek her at home, partly through indolence, and more that there were things on her mind that could not be spoken of. Besides, Hugh Linwood was often to be found at Mary's "chota hazri," and she unconsciously shrank from meeting him.

Actually quite her happiest hours were the now rare ones when Arthur was at home. This was oftenest on Sundays, and sometimes they would have a long ride together. But this became more and more rare, as much of Arthur's morning work had to be done in concert with other people. Saadut Khan in particular was much with him in the morning, and his presence always meant that Ida must take care of herself.

It may seem strange that with her present knowledge of the real want of sympathy between them on the point that mattered most, that Ida should have wearied for Arthur's presence, and felt happiest in it, but so it was. Her listlessness showed least before him; all that was in her of the vigorous girl of two years back rallied under the pressure of interest. She felt rested when he was by; at ease when she looked at him, in a vague way that by no means meant easiness, but was as if some of the hunger went out of her life for the time. She longed to love him, and if he had sought her then, if it had occurred to him that his wife wanted wooing, he would have won very easily. But he had quite too much to do, and the idea never entered his head that the establishment of any new relations with his wife was a thing to be done or desired. He did feel sorry that he was obliged to leave her so much alone, and wondered that she was not more with Mrs. Maxwell. Could his warning (for which he acknowledged to himself there had been no great need) have had anything to do with the fact? He had forgotten Linwood, or nearly so.

On one of these June evenings, when

the thermometer had stood at 140° in the verandah, and not much under 100° in the house all day long, Ida, wearied of books, needlework, and small household matters, having been alone with them since breakfast, had gone about nine o'clock to get a little variety out of the dark and the stars, and was lying back in a long cane chair out in the garden.

She had been there some time when Arthur joined her. She looked very wan and still, and with her head thrown back in the dim light reminded him uncomfortably of a marble figure on a tomb.

He leant over the back of the chair, and said, "Ida, child, what are you dreaming of?"

"Nothing," she answered. "I am looking at the stars. They are very beautiful to-night."

"Nothing! It sounds dreary even with the stars," he said, as something in her tone made him think that she must have passed a dreary day. "I could not get home to dinner. There has been a double murder in the district, a semi-political business, and I had to ride down to the city dispensary as soon as kutcherry was done, to hear what one poor fellow could say before he died. It was a horrible business, and one felt rather a brute to be extracting information out of a poor wretch who could hardly breathe. I felt no inclination for dinner after it, and went to Saadut's house to talk over plans for to-morrow, and here I am at last, and find you star-gazing."

She raised her eyes to him as he bent over her, with an effort to smile, and it struck him that he had never seen them look so sad. He went on,—

"You have not been out then? I am vexed you should be so much alone. Could you not see more of Mrs. Maxwell?"

"I don't know," Ida answered. "She is always so terribly busy. She makes me feel ashamed of my idleness. I really do very well. I might have worse company than the stars." But she said the last words so wearily as to belie the "very well."

"That may be," he answered; "but you are looking very white this season. Are you sure you are standing the heat as well as you did last year?"

"Yes; oh yes. I am very well; a little tired just now may be; but then—" and she stopped; there was no complaint she could make that would not be a version of too much alone, and she ended it with "I am so absurdly idle."

"How is the Maxwell baby?" was Arthur's next remark after a little pause.

Ida wondered what journey his thoughts had taken to reach small Hugh; but she answered direct,—

"I don't think he is very well. Mary is anxious about him, and the doctor says that he must go to the hills, and I fancy it worries her a good deal. She says she won't go if she can help it."

"She had best be sensible in time.

Children die very quickly in this place sometimes. But, Ida, this reminds me of what I wanted to say. I don't think you are looking well. I wish you would go to Murree too."

"I would much rather not," she answered, not thinking the suggestion could be a serious one. "I am quite well."

"I don't feel satisfied about you. You had better let me write to Mr. Holden about a house."

"No, Arthur; don't please," she said, really alarmed. The suggestion about writing to the house agent made it seem really a possibility, and one she could not tolerate. "I am all right here. I should go wild up there by myself."

"But, darling," he said, "you would hardly be as much alone there as you are here. It is not like last year, when we could be so much together; but all these difficulties and rumours of wars make it absolutely impossible. You have been alone all day to-day, and to-morrow I shall have to be off by three in the morning to ride with the police-officer to the village to which these poor fellows belonged; then, as I shall be half way to Murdan, beyond Haishki, I shall ride in there in the evening, and get Franklin's views about things, and try to get him to take in a few of mine, which he won't do if he can help it. I shall be away at least two days and two nights, even if I manage to return here on Friday night, which I may not. You see, dear," and he looked at her with so much anxious affection, that Ida vowed to herself that she would not go; if she was anything to him she was some good here, "that is why I wish you were away. I can see so little of you. At any rate things will get worse instead of better. You should really go to a good climate out of this wretched heat."

"No, Arthur; no," she said, the thought of having quite everything taken out of her life rousing her at last. "There is no real reason for it. I suppose you won't send me against my will, and with it I will not go."

Her energy took away his breath a little, and somewhat shook his husbandly dignity. It was odd that his submissive wife should be so wilful on this point; but still, as the question was that of leaving him, and she did not want to go, it was in a way flattering too. He paused a moment before speaking, and noticed how her face lighted up. She was certainly in earnest; he liked her best so, whether she agreed with him or not; and as he looked down on the pale face and firm set mouth, he felt with her for the time. His nature was innately loyal and generous; but whether it was from lack of insight, or from long contact with Asiatics, it is not easy to say, but he was apt to rule with a very high hand matters that he did not clearly understand, and he did not often understand Ida; but when nature flashed out in this way he felt for the moment he was treading on known ground.

"No; I am not going to begin to play the tyrant now," he said. "I am glad enough to have you here; but I should be much vexed with myself if you were the worse of it."

"No; I think I shall do, Arthur," she said. "Let us have as many rides as we can, and I will fight this sort of flatness that comes over me at times." She rose and took his arm, and they went in together, and the rest of the evening she was very bright, and they sat talking late.

The next day Arthur was in his saddle by 3 a.m. Ida got up to see him off, and then idled about the garden in the fresh morning air, thinking a little over Arthur's suggestion of sending her to the hills. She hoped she should hear no more of it, and resolved to resist to the uttermost.

"I am nothing if I cannot do my work here, though I am not much anywhere," she said to herself rather sadly. She sat alone over her tea and fruit at six o'clock, and managed to pass an hour or two pleasantly enough in the verandah. She quietly forbade the later breakfast which seemed more than she could worry herself with alone; and after she was dressed for the day, and the house was shut up, went to the drawing-room as usual. She kept her mind bent upon the need of employment, something that would really take up her thoughts. There was nothing to be found but head-work. Should she take up some Eastern tongue? she asked herself, and rather liked the notion. It would bear upon the present life. But for to-day she could do nothing as she had no books, or none that were simple enough for a beginner, and she went for her old friends the Greek books at last. She had made very little progress since we last saw them, but her mind had grown, and she could certainly work better; and she toiled away very industriously for a couple of hours or more. Then she became rather restless, and at last thought she could work better with her books gathered round her on a sofa while she sat in front on the floor. This was arranged so that she could get the full breeze from the thermantidote as it puffed its damp scented air into the room. It took some time to arrange all this, so that the artificial current of air should not send her papers about the room; and then she sat down, but had not been there very long until,—whether it was the cool air, or the unusual strain, or simple want of sleep,—she found herself reading without understanding, repeating words with no meaning; at last she yawned, her head rested on her bare white arm, and she was asleep.

* * * * *

We must look now into another house in the station. A bachelor home this time, where Hugh Linwood and Edward Woolett, the doctor of the 50th P. I. C., were living together. The house was tiny and most scantily furnished, but the absence of furniture was made up by an abundance of properties belonging to the two young men.

No less general term would describe the mass of boxes, books, and bottles, hog-spears, hunting boots, and horse furniture, instruments, weapons, and miscellaneous "Europe goods," that were arranged in a sort of mock order on the floor of the living room. They had actually two public rooms, but one was only a slip of enclosed verandah in which they breakfasted, and this large room at the back, with a deep bow and two doors leading on to an open verandah, was living-room and workshop for the two. On either side of it were the private rooms, bed-room and bath-room for each.

Hugh was very fortunate in his chum, though Woolett was in some ways a great contrast to the dashing young lancer, who was so very fair to look upon.

He was a small fragile-looking man, who looked younger than he actually was, his age being two or three and thirty; a pale face, irregular features, the nose in particular being of no definable shape;

but the whole was redeemed from plainness by a pair of liquid, thoughtful, sad-looking, brown eyes, which could on occasion light up with flashes of fire. Woolett was that rare thing among soldier doctors, an enthusiastic lover of his profession. He had a special genius for surgery, but used an exceptionally active brain in every direction that promised interest, real work, and the power the most of all valued—that of being of use. He was a keen and patient observer, an indefatigable student, and the most affectionate and unselfish of men.

He and Hugh were greatly attached to each other; they had served together in Central India and in China, and it was in the latter country that Hugh had nursed the doctor through a tedious and dangerous illness, out of which the patient, in his own professional judgment, considered that he ought never to have come alive. He had been between life and death for days, and Hugh, in spite of his strong dash of selfishness, and his dandy soldier ways, had made the very tenderest of nurses. He was thoroughly interested and anxious, and I doubt if he had ever experienced in all his independent life more genuine pleasure than when the medical officer in charge had said, "I think we shall pull Woolett through now."

Woolett was pulled through, to be a delicate man for a long time afterwards; but he could not be persuaded to leave work, and go to England to recruit. "England would be quite as likely to kill me outright as not. I will work my time out here, whatever it is to be," was his own judgment of his case; and the result seemed to prove him right, for though fragile-looking, he was now well enough, and able to undertake an enormous deal of work. His reputation for skill had preceded him to Peshawur, and much extra work at once poured in on him. He but slightly appreciated the confidence of the anxious mothers who sent begging him "to come and see my little boy, whose case I fear Dr. —— does not understand," and he declined such requests; but what pleased him most was being appointed to the charge of the city hospital. This, in the centre of the Peshawur valley, with the peculiar temper and practices of its inhabitants, meant unlimited surgery; and this he greatly enjoyed, both for the scientific interest of it, and for the still deeper pleasure that lies in the power of alleviating suffering and saving life.

All the previous day he had been in the city tending the victims of the murder of which Arthur had spoken. One man had died in the evening, but he had hopes of saving the second, and was searching a large camel trunk at the moment we looked in on them, for some very special bandaging to take down to the city with him.

Hugh was lying on his back on a charpoy (the ordinary bedstead, consisting of four legs, hence its name, a wooden framework, with a lacing of broad strong tape), which without bedding and with a pillow or two served very well as a sofa; smoking, with a book in his hand, and a pet bull-terrier at his feet. His side of the room was only a degree less untidy than Woolett's, but he meant to mend it if it should be settled that they were to remain at the station.

He looked lazily at Woolett, and said, "You are surely not going down to the city in this frightful heat, after those rascally Momunds, or whatever they are. Those fellows will kill each other; it's the course of nature, and should be left alone."

"I am very sorry for the course of nature," said Woolett, with a fiercer dig than ever into a far corner of the trunk. "I am going to interfere with it if I can. It vexed me very much last night that I could not interfere to better purpose in the case of the man who died. He was a fine fellow, and very plucky. More than once when I was doing little things for him, he just shook his head, and said, 'Don't trouble; it's God's will.

By the way I saw a great deal of the commissioner yesterday, and liked him. I should think him an able official, and a just man."

"Able, is he? How did he show it?" said Hugh somewhat eagerly.

"I think he did not show anything," answered Woolett. "It was mainly by what he did not do that I judged him. But I shall be greatly mistaken if he does not prove one of the best men we have. You should have seen him yesterday. They had got the wounded men on charpoys at one end of a tye-khana, a long low cavern of a place, about thirty feet long; and this, besides the patients and ourselves, was more than half full of their friends and kinsmen, who seemed to have some interest in keeping the dying man from speaking, though he seemed willing enough to give his evidence. And the way Craven kept this lot of ruffians, half mad with excitement as they were, in hand, and the gentle way he treated the poor fellow who was dying, encouraging him, never hurrying him, doing the best for the necessary purposes of information at the least possible suffering to the man, and then how he quietly, without letting in any police, or making any fuss, at last turned them all out of the place. As a small thing it was fine, and I think very well of him."

"I don't like the fellow myself," said Hugh.

"Do you know anything about him?" said Woolett, looking up.

"I know his wife well."

"Which is not the same thing by any means. But Mrs. Craven can't be fit for much herself if she does not see that she has got hold of a Carlylian king of men."

"I hate Carlyle, and I don't believe in your kings of men. Ten to one they are uncompromising prigs," said Hugh savagely.

"What's wrong with you, old fellow?" returned Woolett. "By all means don't believe in them if you don't like. I'm off now to the second ruffian. Craven seemed very anxious that he should be well looked after.

He has gone to Murdan to-day." And Woolett left the room and the house.

Hugh returned to his book, but could not read. He could not get his mind off the Cravens; and something, perhaps the devil, prompted him to go and see Ida, her husband being out of the way; not that he would not have been equally out of the way any other day at kutcherry, but it had caught his attention; and after resisting the inclination for a little, not for Ida's sake, but because he told himself he was a fool, he at last got up, dressed carefully, and went.

On arriving at the Cravens' house he found very certain trace of the master being, not only out of the house, but out of the station. It was too hot for the mistress to come out to the verandah, quite too hot for any reasonable visitor to call, so our acquaintance Hunamān had gone to spend the heat of the day in the society of some relatives of his own in the lines of the 5th

Native Infantry, a regiment that prided itself not a little upon being a chip of the old block; and composed of very nearly the same materials as in the days of the old Bengal Army, when it had been the crack of Loyals, the 77th B.L.I. In this congenial society time passed lightly, and the charge of the house devolved upon a chuprassee, and a younger brother of Hunamān's, named Neerhoo. But the chuprassee soon discovered that he had qualms of conscience about wearing his government badge in the service of a lady; and went away to his dinner, which meal he decided to eat at his own house, much at leisure.

Neerhoo, after feeling sorely the cruelty of circumstances that left him sole guardian of everything until such time as it should please his mistress to eat again and so summon the table servants (for he had no delusions as to the probable return of Hunamān and the chuprassee) equally decided that no one in their senses could want anything; and went away to a retired corner of the verandah, covered his face with a stray bit of his head gear, and slept the sleep of a—Hindu, heavy and calm, with a slight regular snore, that was enough to make any bystander despair of awakening him.

The two compounds were quite near, and Hugh had walked over, and on arriving at the outer verandah found this the state of things. He saw the sleeping bearer in the distance, and called more than once (there were no punkah pullers on that side), but there came no answer. Neerhoo slept quietly. Hugh put his hand on the door that he knew to be used as an entrance; it yielded, and he entered the dark cool house; he passed through a verandah room, then into the dining-room, and he knew that Ida's living room was beyond.

He felt rather like a thief, but still it was an immense relief to be out of the blazing sun again, and it was pleasant to be looking forward to a quiet talk to Ida. He would tell her of his efforts to awake Neerhoo, and she would excuse him; and I am afraid he rather liked the thought of coming on her unawares.

He paused a moment or two in the dining-room to get his sight after the blinding change from June glare to the cool dark house, and then he pushed aside the light dimity curtains that hung in the doorway between the two rooms, and saw Ida as fast asleep as every one else. It fairly startled him, the heap of white drapery on the floor, and the drooping head. Had she fainted? Was she ill? No; she was asleep. But she did look very much worn; she was very pale, with blue circles round her eyes; the long dark lashes resting on her thin cheeks, her lips parted, through which the breath came noiselessly; the bare white arm and long thin hand resting on her books, and her head fallen on it. Her whole attitude spoke of exhaustion, her surroundings as Hugh looked at them told of effort. A huge dictionary lay open before her, her finger still held a page of some smaller book to keep the punkah from turning it. The punkah was moving, but, pulled evidently by a sleeping coolie, just barely stirred. It was a very commonplace Anglo-Indian case of sleeping beauty; but how much more touching than the self-contented fair one in her magnificent robes, on her embroidered bed, was this white tired girl on the ground there among her books!

Hugh was greatly moved. He had come thinking of the past Ida, of the girl he had loved and tried to win; come too conscious that he was a fool for coming, and here was the present Ida Craven, who could never be anything to him. Had he been obliged to speak to her, common sense would have asserted itself, but as he stood there looking at her, notwithstanding the slowly creaking punkah almost hearing himself breathe, his head turned. Never had he loved her before as he did then. All his sham philosophy, his notion of women as all alike, went from him. This woman was like no other. In place of feeling himself a fool who was thinking of a girl who had jilted him, he knew he was a madman playing with fire.

All this time he had not thought of wakening her, indeed he had studiously avoided doing so. He thought of the sleeping beauty, but with no idea of playing the prince; the part that could be his was to watch her a few moments longer. He sat down at last in a low chair near her, and noticed how thin and white she looked. He felt fiercely savage as he saw how loosely her rings fitted the straight thin fingers, and that plain gold one worst of all. That fellow Craven away for most of his time, thinking of everything and anything but his lonely weary wife. But he was away at any rate, and Ida was his—for just so long as she might stay asleep. To Hugh life seemed very bitter. He had never gone through anything like this, not even at the time when he had first heard of her marriage; for no news from a distance could be real as this was real, no pang caused by the loss of a distant object could be compared to this pain, and the thought of the present reality, and of what might have been.

However, the storm of passion in the young man's heart did not long remain at boiling point; it could not well do so with nothing to stir it in that sleepy atmosphere. He knew too that Ida must remain as unconscious of it, as she now was of his presence; for to do Hugh justice the thought of making love to his neighbour's wife had no attraction to him in itself, and still less when he remembered Ida as the girl he had played with as a child.

Time passed, and Hugh lost his wild fancy of Ida being his when asleep, in a most practical wish that she would wake. He did not like to wake her. If he did, how should he account for himself and his presence? Perhaps he had best leave as he had come, and he got up from his seat. The movement so far roused Ida that she stirred a little, and drew a heavy breath that was almost a sob. This brought Hugh back from the question of getting out of it to the wish to hear her speak. A minute more and Ida slowly opened her eyes, and as she saw him, started to her feet, and stared wildly about.

"What is it, Hugh? where are we?"

It took all Linwood's resolution to take no advantage of her surprise, but he answered.

"I have to apologise, Mrs. Craven, for being here at all. I came to call. Your servants were asleep. I got in, and found you asleep, and did not like to wake you. You are in the right place; it is I who have to account for myself, and hope you will excuse my rudeness," he added, seeing she wanted time.

Ida still did not feel as if she could answer naturally, still less go to ordinary small talk; but with an effort to get fairly awake that was quite the best in her power, she walked to the side of the room where the punkah rope passed through the wall, and gave it a vigorous jerk.

The coolie woke up, and began to pull with great fury, and passed on the rebuke to the man who ought to have been turning the thermantidote who also woke at once with a start, and the stream of cool air and the splashing sound of the fresh water, brought them finally to their senses.

Hugh looked amused, and then laughed. His excitement needed some outlet. And Ida said,—

"I am ashamed of myself to have gone fast asleep over my books. It is a very stupid case of sleeping beauty. Every one else seems to have gone to sleep too."

"And the prince," said Hugh, "had thoughts of running away, and the princess had to stir up her palace with the punkah rope."

Ida laughed too. It was the best thing she could do unless she was going to be offended, which did not occur to her.

"I was up very early this morning," she said. "My husband had to go off into the Eusufzai district; and I got up to see him away."

"He has gone to Murdan," said Hugh, not knowing quite what to say.

"Yes. How did you know that?" she asked.

"From Woolett, our surgeon, who was doctoring an unfortunate Eusufzai man Colonel Craven took an interest in. He is my chum. We live together now, and have been together for a long time. He is a very good fellow."

"Yes; I seem to know something of him," she returned. They had got to talk of something; Woolett would do as well as anything else. "My husband was talking of him last night, and his kindness to these two men. Will the second one live? Arthur seemed very anxious about him."

Now this allusion to "Arthur" was to Ida a little expression of her gratitude to Hugh for being so like every one else.

She generally spoke of him as Colonel Craven to men, as my husband to women, and only when she felt quite at ease as Arthur; and for this moment she did feel much at ease. It was awkward waking up suddenly to find oneself *tête-à-tête* with a *ci-devant* lover. But Hugh having behaved quite reasonably, she was the more disposed to treat him as the old friend he really was, and to feel ashamed of herself for having avoided him. To Hugh, the mark of confidence was not specially palatable, and he did not feel grateful, though (as possible indication of the answer to the question he had put to Mary Maxwell, "Does she care for that fellow Craven?") he noted it, and watched her closely.

After a good deal of talk of his doings in China and elsewhere, he tried to make her talk of herself, and did not succeed very well. She liked India? Yes. She liked Peshawur? Yes. She did not mind heat? No. All that was so far satisfactory, but she quite clearly would not expatiate one way or the other. He was, as Mary had been, puzzled; and only when he said she must be very much alone during the day, did he feel with love's instinct that he had got on tender ground, though she answered calmly enough, "I fancy all Anglo-Indian wives are, and get used to it."

Had she got used to it? Something in her weary look and her tone made him conclude she had not, and he left quickly that she might not see what had struck him.

He left the house cursing himself, fate, most people, but above all Arthur Craven, who had got such a treasure and did not value it. He was not very sharp-sighted in matters that did not closely concern himself, and had somehow arrived at the faulty conclusion that Ida was a neglected wife, and suffering greatly from the fact. Helped by an almost absolute ignorance of the facts, and no acquaintance with the man, his judgment took a very firm root in his mind, and he thought more and more of Ida with the notion that he was in some way revenging her by doing so. A more noble side of his nature was really touched at finding the bright child-woman of four years ago still so young, with the brightness gone out of her. He vowed to himself that she should be none the worse of this love of his, and that may be the time might come when she would be the better of one man to whom she was the whole world.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOT-WEATHER SOCIETY.

A FEW days later came one of the weekly gatherings at the Maxwells'. Mary was "at home" on Wednesdays—the attractions were music, talk, and ice—from nine till eleven p.m.

These evenings were, in general, well attended, and were very bright and gay; but this special one partook of the general stagnation that had come over everything but frontier politics for a week or two past.

Almost every one who could get away had gone to the hills; and those who stayed, lived shut up at home, rising too early to have any energy left after nine p.m. So it was only a small gathering, some eight or nine; and they were talking in twos and threes near the open doorways, and seemed to have no heart for music. Mary herself looked worn, and well might do so, for she had had little rest and much watching for several days past. The little Hugh was ailing, with one of the uncertain, indefinite illnesses well known to mothers of teething babies in hot climates; and his mother was on the horns of a painful dilemma, between her anxiety for him, and her fear of being sent off to the hills with him, away from her husband.

The party consisted of Colonel Craven and Ida; of course the Maxwells; a Captain and Mrs. Mitford,—she a rather sleepy, stupid woman, lacking equally in waist and backbone, but with hidden depths of vigour, which appeared mainly in the discussion of other peoples' affairs; he, the old school commandant of a battery of heavy guns, a tough soldier in the field, but given to tiffins and domestic ease in times of peace, and the very despair of the adjutant of the division, Captain Hammond, who was also of the party. He was a quiet, soldierly looking man, close shaven, dark, almost oppressively neat, a great friend of Maxwell's, whose interest in their mutual profession he rivalled, but of whose eager, enthusiastic nature he in no way partook. They were discussing things regimental in an open doorway; in particular a sad case of suicide which had occurred in Maxwell's battery the previous night, and which had been investigated by a court of inquiry that day. A little farther in the room were Arthur Craven and Walter Stanley, Lieutenant-Colonel and Commandant of the 50th Punjāb Irregular Cavalry, commonly called, after him, "Stanley's Horse." Stanley and Craven had been subalterns together, they had liked each other well years before, and had met from time to time in their respective careers, and the acquaintance was always renewed with pleasure. Stanley had shown the qualities of a fine soldier from the very first, and now his was one of the best known names in the roll of Indian irregular horsemen. Personal courage that was almost recklessness, a firm hand, a keen eye, a perfect familiarity with two or three border tongues besides the essential Hindustani and Persian, a will of iron, and a power of graceful courtesy, were among his qualifications for the post he held. To these may be added, a thorough comprehension of and manly sympathy with his men, and a memory for names and faces. He did his own recruiting in a great measure, which gave the younger men a feeling that they were his personal followers. He would ride down the north-western frontier of the Punjāb, and down the Dera Jāt, for these were the localities he had chosen to draw his men from. He would spend two or three weeks about it; and of the boy warriors who would come flocking to him as soon as his presence was rumoured, would chose the most likely ones. Sometimes, on these expeditions, he would pass a day or two in the round tower of some petty chieftain, hunting and hawking with the father or uncle, while he observed the qualifications of the aspirants for military service, and would bring away the most promising young fellows to his ranks. These men were gentlemen, and Stanley and his officers always treated them as such.

Of all the means of swaying the hearts of these rough and wild but well-born soldiers, none stood Stanley in better stead than courtesy. It was nature in him, but the men valued it as they would not have valued riches.

In Hugh Linwood, Stanley had a follower after his own heart; and as adjutant he was invaluable. Hugh kept all matters of discipline and drill right, slaved away manfully at the paper work, and left his chief free for the more congenial task of keeping the men in hand, "the human side of the thing" as he called it. His second in command, Franks, was also a picked soldier, but rather too reserved and too indolent to be quite in tune with the other two.

With Woolett for surgeon, and a couple of promising young subalterns, full to the very eyes of *esprit du corps*, the regiment was complete as to English officers; though it was Stanley's pride to make the very most of the position of native commissioned officer. In his regiment the post was a reality, and an object of keen ambition, instead of being merely a name for useless superannuation.

Stanley had never married, and had, with the courtesy that was natural to him, a tone of reserve with all women which might easily hide a strong dash of indifference or even contempt; but whatever it was it was well hidden.

He liked both the Maxwells, hence his presence on this evening. He had seen Ida several times without being able to decide whether she was a child or a woman. He cared very little, but on the whole was disposed to think that Craven had better have left matrimony alone.

For the moment they were deep in frontier talk; but as they had little to say but conjecture, and some expressions of anxiety, it will not interest us. At last some reference came to old times, and Stanley asked—

"By the way, Craven, what has become of your 'nigger'?"

"You mean Saadut Khan, I suppose," replied Craven—there was just something in his tone to show he did not like the word. "He is here as an extra assistant, doing three men's work. He knows everything, and everybody, alliances, feuds, and family history, for more than fifty miles round. He began life here in some post under Avitabile, and has wonderful notions of the use of the steel hand in consequence of that early training, but can use the velvet glove too, in a style I sometimes envy. He is indefatigable and zealous, and more than ever a very valued friend to me."

"I know that well enough," said the other, "only I could not resist the use of the old phrase; 'Craven's nigger' was such a famous joke at Delhi. I have any number of native friends myself, though there are too many of them for me to be as devoted to any one as you are to Saadut."

"By the way," said Craven, "he is beyond Jumrood to-day, planning an interview for me with the two Khyberi chiefs, Faize Mahommed Khan, and his nephew and heir apparent, Ismael Yazid Khan. The older man is a very fine specimen of an Afghan. He was at the head of his tribe at the time of the Cabul business, and was most vexatious to us then. However, I think he was the only man who declined to treat at all; so, at worst, we can only charge him with rather barbarous patriotism;

while the chiefs higher up, one and all, took money to keep the pass open, and then closed it the moment they heard of our reverses."

"I think I remember something about the old fellow," Stanley answered. "He surely was present at a durbar John Laurence held up here some eight or ten years ago. Has he not a big, grey beard, and a wizened, sharp-set face?"

"Yes; he probably was there. The old fellow is wild about horses."

"The very same," said Stanley quickly. "I have a certain grudge against him; he tried to get me to sell him a little chestnut Gulf Arab I had at the time. He offered a good deal of money for it, but as I liked the beast, and besides it would have been against regulations to sell him to a native, I declined; and the camp had not broken up three days, when a hole was cut in my stable wall, and the little chestnut was led out under the nose of my chokeedar, and nothing more was ever heard of him; but I had little doubt at the time that your friend Mohammed had sent for him."

"Very like him," returned Craven laughing. "He would have it by fair means if he could, but he would most certainly get any piece of horseflesh he had set his heart upon, one way or other. They say it is quite wonderful the stud the old fellow has up the pass at Ummerkote. He makes a lot of money by taxing the horse-dealers as they come down from Cabul: taking colts from them for nothing, and selling them again later when ready for work."

"Do you think," said Stanley, "he would have any strong useful horses that would do for me? I am several under strength just now, and I had an official only this morning from the stud saying, that they had none for me, and that I might buy them here if I could."

"I can inquire," Craven said; "or, better still, come up the pass with me, and see yourself if the old fellow has anything that will do, though you will hardly see your chestnut again."

"I should like nothing better. When do you go?"

"One day at the end of the week. We shall be a party, for my wife wants to see Jumrood, and look up the pass, but she will have to stay in the fort during our interview with the Khyberi."

"I don't much like the thought of a lady outside cantonments at these times. Horrible things used to happen here," said Stanley, who peculiarly disliked ladies, as a complication to any kind of work.

"Oh that side of us is as quiet as it has ever been," returned Craven. "I want to make a picnic of it, and my guests will take care of each other;" and he turned to Maxwell. "Will you and Mrs. Maxwell join us? Mrs. Craven is going to Jumrood and I have something to do up the pass. You might like to see it, and we are planning a sort of pic-nic, breakfasting at the ruined fort."

"I should like it greatly," said Maxwell. "I have never crossed the frontier at all. I suppose it is reasonably safe—for ladies, I mean."

"I believe there is nothing whatever to fear our own side of the border. I should not take Mrs. Craven if there was."

Mary, Ida, and Mrs. Mitford, were discussing little Hugh at great length. The presence of the latter lady had kept the conversation to the well-worn topics of babies and housekeeping, Mary declining to discuss her neighbours, which was the only other point within Mrs. Mitford's range. They had before this entirely disposed of the question of keeping quails, of the general untrustworthiness of the table servants in the direction of eggs and butter, and had even gone deep into the problem of how to cook fowls and sheep, so as to resemble as little as might be mutton and chicken, of which articles of food every one was so heartily tired, and had even decided which of the country vegetables could best supply the absence of potatoes, and were now again back to little Hugh.

"Why don't you take him to the hills?" said Mrs. Mitford. "It is the only thing in this horrible place. I am going on Saturday, and should have gone long ago, only my husband declared that if I did, he would take six months' sick leave and go too; and we could not afford it."

"I would much rather not," said Mary rather dolefully; "but I am afraid it will come to that soon. Dr. Woolett very kindly came to see my boy to-day (our doctor is away), and he says that if he does not improve at once, he must go, and gives me very little hope that he will be better here."

"You had better not delay. The sooner you are both out of this the better."

"I certainly shall not go very soon," said Mary. "I would give anything to stay altogether, for it is doubtful if my husband will get away at all. You see so many officers have gone away sick, and we were short-handed when the hot season began. I have written about a house, and shall take anything I can hear of that won't cost too much, and shall then stay here as long as I dare, and run away the next time the poor wee boy looks as ill as he did on Sunday."

"I am sorry, Mary," said Ida, speaking for the first time after a long silence. "But I am sure you are right."

"You are surely going to Murree, Mrs. Craven," said Mrs. Mitford, with more interest, turning round and scanning Ida curiously.

"I am like Mrs. Maxwell. I particularly don't want to, and I have no sick child to make it necessary," she answered quietly.

Hugh Linwood and Woolett entered the room together as she spoke, and she felt thankful for the heat and fatigue that had at at last put down her habit of blushing at anything or nothing. The two young men joined the group of ladies, the knots broke up, and conversation became more general. Then came music,—Woolett, among his other accomplishments, played well,—Mary sang, and the evening wore to an end like other evenings. As they were leaving, Arthur said to the hostess, "We are planning a ride to the mouth of the Khyber some day this week, and want you to join."

"Yes, very gladly," she answered, "if my boy will spare me."

"Do come," said Ida. "We are going to make a little picnic of it."

Stanley broke in, "Had we not better have an extra man or two who can bring revolvers as a useless precaution. I confess I am nervous."

"Yes," said Arthur; "as many as you like. Only two or three can cross the frontier, but it will make it more pleasant for the ladies to have some one to look after them. Will you come?" he added to Linwood, who stood close by, and who accepted eagerly;

also a smart little horse artillery sub., named Hudson. Woolett declined, "I can never get off duty in the early morning, though I should like it above all things."

As Linwood and Woolett walked home together, they began to talk of the event of the day, the suicide we have spoken of. They had both been members of the court of inquiry, held in the morning at the Artillery Hospital.

"I can't get that fellow out of my head," said Linwood. "I wonder what he did it for!"

"Nor can I," answered the other; "I don't know what he did it for. Most likely his digestion got out of order, and he got disgusted. He had probably begun taking opium before,—there was evidence of that; and then, with the drug in his head, the temptation was just too strong to have done with the whole thing."

"You think he did it on purpose?" said Hugh thoughtfully.

"Yes; very few people handle poisons too carelessly, and though it is the charitable thing to suppose it was accidental, I feel pretty sure it was a fit of disgust."

"I wonder there are not more cases of the kind," said Hugh. "Those men must have such awfully slow lives in barracks. I dare say he was right from his point of view."

"That I don't," answered Woolett forcibly. "No man has any right to get out of this world before he is taken; and to put it on no higher ground, a man has no right to throw away such a splendid physique as he did. Just think of the number of men who are hanging on to life, feeling the whole thing a burden, though without any thought of throwing it off, just for lack of the broad chest and powerful limbs that that young fellow never appreciated as a blessing."

"You can't expect the British gunner to look on himself from a medical point of view," said Hugh lightly, though he noted and felt touched at his friend's allusion to the blessing of physical strength. He was morbid too, but from another point of view; and it appeared when, after walking a few paces in silence, he went on,—

"We had best leave him alone; suicide is a dangerous subject this hot weather. Really that man's calm peaceful face, all worry over, and life clean done with, has been before me all day. It would not take much to make me wish to be beside him."

"You had better have a cheroot," Woolett said. "What has come over you, Hugh? You are about the last man I should have suspected of that sort of unwholesome nonsense."

They entered the house together, and Hugh smoked in silence, pacing up and down the verandah for half the night long after Woolett had gone to bed, with his head full of queer fancies, and two visions displacing each other in his mind's eye. The one, Ida's fair living face as she sat sleeping a few mornings back, with its look of pitiful weariness; and then the placid dead one of Gunner Thompson, who looked so happy in his escape from life and its cares.

CHAPTER XVII.

ACROSS THE FRONTIER.

THE third morning after Mrs. Maxwell's "at home," was at last fixed for the ride to Jumrood.

Ida had sent off over night a couple of table-servants, with a mule laden with the wherewithal for a solid breakfast, to be eaten in any available corner of the dismantled fort. She and her husband were early awake, and by half-past two in the morning were mounted. There was enough left of a waning moon to make the question of light no difficulty. Ida was quite wide awake, in spite of the early hour. Her summer riding-habit of dark blue merino, with a loose jacket held to her waist by a leathern belt, white straw hat, with drooping black feathers, suited her very well; and Arthur felt not a little proud of her as she sat waiting for him on her dark bay Arab. A very handsome creature was the horse, tall for an Arab, with black silky mane and forelock shaking over his exquisite head. Ida was well got up, and well mounted. She had a good seat, rode carelessly, but with the perfect ease of constant practice. She felt excited and much brighter than usual as they rode out of the compound together to find Stanley and Linwood outside the gate waiting for them.

After greetings, Ida said, "I wonder if Mrs. Maxwell will be ready."

"I will ride on and warn her," answered Hugh; and he went on before them, and by the time they reached Mrs. Maxwell's house, they were ready for them; Hudson and Saadut Khan had in the meantime joined, and the party was complete.

As Ida shook hands with Mary, she said, "I am so glad you are come. How is the boy?"

"Not very bright," was Mary's reply; "but he went to sleep about half an hour ago, and I think he will now rest for a time. I have charged his bearer to take special care of him, and here I am. I feel as if fresh air and exercise would do me more good than sleep."

"You don't look as if you had had much," Ida said.

"No, none, so far. But I think the ride will do as well for the present; and I will get some in the middle of the day to make up."

They moved off quickly; Mary, Ida, Hugh, and the young gunner taking the lead; while the two husbands, Stanley, and Saadut Khan fell behind to talk frontier politics. Behind were some mounted police, and two troopers of Stanley's.

They rode at foot pace through the silent station, where all was still fast asleep, but for a few chokeedars whose slumbers were disturbed by the tread of horses, and who gave vent to various unearthly noises in expression of their surprise and vigilance, as they came to the wall of their compounds to see what was up.

As soon as they got clear of the station they trotted along the broken road, content with the enjoyment of cool air and exercise. Hugh had got next to Ida, and feeling that was felicity enough, was satisfied to keep quiet. They slackened their pace after a time, and were getting perceptibly near the hills before they heard the morning gun, and then the bugles sounding all along the military front of the station. These sounded very faint but clear on the still, quiet air. The plain was waking up, and now and they would pass a couple of blue-clad villagers going to some agricultural work with a pair of buffaloes, and their matchlocks slung across their backs, who stared with undisguised wonder and amusement at the cavalcade, the sight of ladies being sufficiently rare at this distance from cantonments.

"There is something very charming," said Ida, "in Indian morning air. One feels specially alive in this sort of freshness, and a little wild too. I should like to ride through that village there," pointing to one a little distance up the high-road, "and look at the houses and the people. I should like to find out what those wild-looking cultivators thought of us; and above all, I should like to ride up that little glen there. Do you see it Mr. Linwood,—just beyond that wooded spur, where you see a round tower a little way up?"

"That, I think," said Linwood, in answer, thinking that Ida was not so much subdued after all, "is the most possible of your wishes for the time. It would, hardly do to go clattering through the village for nothing, besides it would smell you know. No earthly power would get any candid opinion of the 'burra sahib' and his belongings out of that unpromising villager; but I think we might, when our elders have gone to discuss politics with that arch ruffian and horse-jockey up the big pass, try our hand at the little one."

Mary was deep in some regimental matter with Hudson, and did not notice this.

While Ida had been chattering in this way many things had been discussed behind them, and Saadut Khan had said,—

"I have very little doubt that within a few days we shall have important news. I have a cousin in the Guides, who wrote me a couple of days back that the Syuds were certainly preparing for a change of quarters. To-day is the 5th of July, trust me the month won't be half over before we hear more of them."

"No one knows better what is up along the frontier than those men of Wylde's," observed Stanley. "Some of my fellows have got hold of a good many legends about the Syuds, and their possible doings. One struck me by the way, referring to Syud Mohammed Shah. I remember seeing the man quite well, charging very pluckily in an action near Lucknow, in '58. He was in some Central Indian levy at the time;

now it seems he says that the British government have given him leave to re-occupy his ancestral lands, by which he means some corner of the Mahabun."

"Not so very unlikely a story," said Craven. "The man is not a very bad soldier, but he is a useless gasconading ruffian, who will never come to any good unless he is under military discipline. I rather wish you had got him, Stanley."

"Thank you; but I don't want him," returned the other. "I have quite enough gunpowder in my lines, I assure you. I want no firebrands. But what makes that story a likely one? We can't give away bits of the Mahabun, and surely would not give them to him if we could?"

"The story is so far likely, that I know the plan was in the man's own head. In spring when he was turned out of the police, as an expensive and entirely useless luxury, he sent in a petition asking for a grant of Sittana. Of course he was answered that the British government could not give what did not belong to them; not content with that he sent a second, begging that he might be permitted to take possession himself without any interference from us. To this we did not deign to reply, except by a private hint that nothing of the kind could be listened to, and any further reference to it would be fatal to his hopes of employment. Upon this he decamped, and has not been heard of since; but there seems no manner of doubt that he went to join his relatives, Mobarik Shah and Syud Abdulla, at Mulka."

"He is an able man. The Lahore government would have done well to keep their hands on him, either by shutting him up, or giving him employment," said Saadut Khan.

Maxwell joined in, "No, Mir Sahib; I don't agree with you. If we had done either he would have taken it as a sign that we were afraid of him, and have intrigued all the same, and would have been really more mischievous in our service than he can be across the frontier."

"I think you are right, Maxwell," said Colonel Craven. "At the present juncture I am more content to have that man across the Indus in any corner of the Mahabun he likes, even if he should be hoisting the green standard at Sittana to-day, than in any of our departments."

"We shall hear something of the kind very soon," said Saadut.

It was a little after four o'clock, when they came upon Jumrood, standing on a slope close under the hills. It was a desolate-looking object: a square mud fort, dismantled and entirely uninhabited; the walls broken down in some places. The gateway, that had once had rather elaborate defences, was quite a heap of ruin and impassable with rubbish; but they rode in by a gap in the wall which had been worn into a passable breach by the passage in and out of cattle that probably had used the corners as shelter in winter nights.

They stood together in a group in the open space in the centre, and Colonel Craven said to his wife, "This is not very inviting for our picnic, Ida. I wonder what sort of spot the servants have found for breakfast."

"If there is a corner or a pinnacle fit to sit down in or on, Abdulla will have found it," she answered. "He is very sharp, and he quite took in my plan of an open-air breakfast. I am sure if the thing is possible we shall have a meal and a place to eat it. I sent a carpet with the other things," and she turned to her syce, who was now beside her horse. "Call the khansamah."

And in a moment the old walls rang with "Ai, khansamah! are, Abdulla!" in a strong nasal twang, and the two servants soon appeared from the farther end of the sort of open square where they were standing. The butler reported that he had found a pleasant place on the wall, and that breakfast should be ready whenever the master liked.

"We shall not be back before half-past six I am afraid," said Craven, looking at his watch. "And we must now be off at once. I saw some of Faize Mohammad's men hanging about us as we turned in here. You and Hudson will take care of the ladies," he added, turning to Linwood. "Have you any arms?"

"I have a little revolver in my pocket," said Hugh, producing it.

"And I a big one in my holsters," added Hudson.

"All right; not that you will want them," said Arthur, "but it is as well to have them."

And the four men trotted off together out at the gap again, while Ida, Mary, and the two young men dismounted, and followed Abdulla into a doorway at the side of the square, along a low vaulted passage, and up a very dirty breakneck winding stair, of no great height, which led them to the ramparts. A little watch-tower at the eastern angle promised them shade from the sun when it should rise and become troublesome; and at the foot of the tower, and near the parapet, was spread a blue and white striped cotton carpet, not far off some baskets were being unpacked, and snowy linen and bright plate promised a most civilized meal later in the day.

"This is very typical of Indian campaigning," said Hugh. "Here on the confines of barbarism, we shall have table-napkins and finger-glasses, salmon and Worcester sauce."

"Wrong as to the finger-glasses and Worcester sauce," said Ida merrily. "And you can avoid salmon and table-napkins, if they make you unhappy. The salmon struck me as about the only solid food that one could trust after a night's journey in July. I told the man that if he saw his way to getting eggs and grilled fowls on the spot, we would have them too, but there was a security about a big tin of salmon that fascinated me."

"I had no notion you were such a housekeeper, Ida," Mrs. Maxwell said, very pleased to see how bright and like her old self Ida seemed to be this morning.

"Don't compliment me till you have got your breakfast," Ida rattled on. "Six hungry men need to be fed. It is a golden rule: never starve men-folk: they can't stand it. They fail first in temper, then in general tone. Also I intend to be tired and hungry myself by six o'clock."

"How will you manage the fatigue? This eight miles' ride is nothing for you," asked Mary.

"I have no thought of staying here tranquilly for the next two hours. This corner under the tower does Abdulla credit, and will be charming by-and-by; but I decline to sit here two weary hours with those hills in sight. We must not go up the Khyber it seems; but I am going somewhere."

"Anywhere in reason, Mrs. Craven," said Hugh; not understanding her excitement, but to some extent catching the infection. "Have some regard for my position of responsibility; but of course wherever you go, without exception, I follow."

They walked along the rampart, and looked over the parapet, and paused at the western angle that looked up the Khyber. On one side they had sharp rocky hills that frowned close above them, and on the other rounder and more distant ones; and to the south there was the village, not in a much more prosperous state than the fort. As they stood looking towards the Khyber, some shots were heard.

"What is that?" said Ida, growing slightly pale.

"Only a case of *feu de joie,*" answered Hugh. "These people always burn powder as in courtesy."

"Very kind of them; but I would rather not keep quiet and listen. I am off some where. Are you coming Mary?"

Mrs. Maxwell made an effort to believe she wanted to go, but the weariness after her sleepless night was too great; and she said, "Well, Ida, I think you had better go without me. I have had so little rest for nights past, and such incessant exercise all last night with little Hugh, that I feel much more disposed to enjoy the hills quietly from here. But don't let me keep any of you," she added, hoping that both gentlemen would go with Ida.

Ida looked rueful, "I can't leave you here alone."

And Hudson broke in, "I will stay with Mrs. Maxwell of course. I have been all about here shooting, and should like best to stay, if you will have me," he added, seeing that Mrs. Maxwell still looked doubtful.

Mary assented knowing that he was speaking the truth, and would really like nothing better than an hour's chat with her; and she saw no reason why Ida should be deprived of the little pleasure she coveted.

Ida was so bright this morning as to be perfectly fit to go anywhere and do anything; she was quite to be trusted in such a wholesome frame of mind, to be nothing worse than childish. It was only in her dispirited and listless moods that Mary felt anxious for her.

However, for the moment Ida was in bright good humour, quite girlishly happy; and she ran down into the court, and sprang on her Arab with her foot in Hugh's hand; and as he looked at the expression on her face, so very different from the still sad one that had haunted him in company with the thought of Gunner Thompson, he went back to some of his platitudes about the lightness and changeability of woman to account for her, to recant again as she started at another musket-shot from up the pass. He seemed to read her so easily and was right in part. He saw that she was quite childishly excited at the new ground and the hills, and determined that she should have as much pleasure as he could procure her; and he read somewhat awry the signs of anxiety at the musket-shots by the light of his foregone conclusions, and he said to reassure her,—

"That firing is quite a matter of course, except for a tendency to his neighbours' horses, and some vagueness as to the laws of property generally, that old Faize Mohammed is quite the most honourable man about these hills."

This calmed Ida. She was only nervous. The past weariness and exhaustion had to come out somewhere. After a little pause, in which they were slowly nearing the hills, she said, rather more quietly, "I can hardly realize these hills being peopled. One rides about the valley near the station, with the impression that these hills are the end of all things. The pass here, I know, produces camels, ponies, and boxes of grapes, from time to time; but I have got to look on the rest as a wall to hedge me in. One gets fanciful riding about alone in hot weather. There is nothing I should like so much as to break bounds, and go up one of these little glens."

"There is the one," said Hugh (the word "alone," though she had used it lightly enough, making him feel perverse), "that you pointed out to me as we came along. I think there is some sort of track up it. We may have a look into the unknown land."

"You think we may go," she said, "I suppose there is no harm to fear."

"No, there is nothing to hinder us," he replied, ignoring the orders against crossing the frontier, bent as was his wont upon the present pleasure. They trotted over some sand, and quickly reached the track that went up the little glen, and proceeded some way along it in silence. It was evidently a path from the plain, leading up to a village or tower.

Ida was very greatly charmed with

the little gorge. To their left the hills rose abruptly, clothed as far as they could see, with holly, ilex, arbutus, and many shrubs that were quite strange to Ida's Indian experience, though she had seen them in Europe. To the right was rocky barrenness; a steep bank, too, but not quite as close as the left one, and strewn with big granite boulders, of which many had rolled into the narrow watercourse which formed their path. It was dry now, and for the most part sandy. They picked their way slowly between the stones.

Ida was again in high spirits, talking fast and merrily, and enjoying her little bit of pleasure with all the zest of a child on a holiday; Hugh wondering not a little at the degree of enjoyment, as a man who can command all the small enjoyments that he cares for, always does wonder at a woman's evident pleasure over her rarer ones, and puts it down to the excitability of the sex. But for the time he was determined that she should have this small pleasure to the full; and when the watercourse became steeper and more crowded with stones, he spied a footpath striking off to the left among the bushes.

"This will do for us, Mrs. Craven," he said. "It must lead to the open ground on the top of the spur there, if there is any, and we may get a grand view of Jumrood and the valley. Shall we try?"

"Is it passable?" said Ida. "By all means we must get a view somehow over into our prison."

"It will do well, I think. It has evidently been used for mules. I see hoof-marks in the dust," he said, "and your Arab seems very surefooted."

"Oh, yes, he is," she replied. "But he is also excitable, and sometimes dances on bad ground; but we must make for a point of view somehow, so I will lead the way, and we will hope not to come to grief."

The bay began the ascent coolly enough. The track was certainly a little dangerous, as every here and there the earth had been worn away, and the rock came out; and worse still, roots came across the path, and this on ground where a false step would involve a very serious fall. The noble brute was equal to his reputation, stepping carefully and bending down his pretty head to look closely at the dreadful and unusual things he was made to pass over, but now and then tossing it up with a little snort of fear. Two or three steps of unclothed and jagged stones at last came leading to a broad place, where the path turned in its zigzag course; these fairly bothered him, and he sprang up them with an effort, and gave a final bound at the edge of the precipice that took Hugh's breath away.

"This won't do," he said hurriedly. "You must dismount and let me lead him."

"What would become of your horse? They

would kick each other to a certainty on this path."

"Mine would follow, and this really is too dangerous," he said, anxiously.

"Oh, no! Leave me alone; I am safe enough," said Ida, who, fearless at all times, was quite reckless when excited.

"Please, Mrs. Craven," said Hugh, urging his horse as near her as he safely could, and using in his anxiety the strongest argument he could think of, "you really must dismount. Colonel Craven would not like such a risk for you."

Ida had forgotten Arthur in her pleasure, and it seemed a little hard that Hugh could not leave him alone, on this her only holiday. However, she did not disregard the appeal, and without saying a word, she jumped down from her saddle, tied up the curb, pulled the snaffle over her horse's head, and proceeded to gather up her skirts to walk.

"Will that do? Are you content now?" she said at last, a little petulantly, "It is odd one is always asked not to break one's neck for some one else's convenience."

Hugh was off his horse by this time, and stood near her. "Yes," he said; "that comes of being married. But you know I could not possibly face your husband, if any harm came to you."

"Then it is for your convenience primarily that I am to keep my neck intact," she went on lightly enough. "Excuse, me if I think it is mainly my own affair. However, I want for my own convenience to get to the top of the spur. Sālim, come on, dear!" she added to her horse; and she advanced up the path, leading him by the bridle, while Hugh followed with his, a bright chestnut, an Arab too, a comparatively new acquisition, as he had bought him at Lahore on their march up country.

The path made another abrupt turn before they reached the top of the spur, or rather the open ground on the ridge; but after a little more very rough walking in which Hugh had time to note Ida's light active step, and the exceeding care she took of her horse, they reached the point at which they had been aiming. The path led on to a little plateau, and then turned again to go up the face of the spur, lost often in the thick green brushwood; but they could see that it was leading to a little round tower, built of rough stones, a few hundred yards above. Hugh now took Sālim's bridle, Ida climbed to the top of a rock that commanded a good view of the plain, and after securing the horses he followed her.

"What a splendid view!" she said. "I am so glad we came. I shall always think of this when the hills provoke me. How green and bright it all is for an Indian July! It is really a fine valley, and Jumrood looks quite imposing. We are very near it after all this climbing."

"Yes; we have doubled back twice," said Hugh; "and I think the paths that ran this way were longer than the others."

Ida talked on in her delight. "There is

the city, and the fort. The station looks more like a little forest than anything else. And what a lot of villages! I know a great many of them." And she went over a lot of very unpronounceable names, which, having a good ear, she managed not very barbarously. "And there is the Bara," she continued. "How bright it looks! I don't envy the Khyber party a bit. They will have no view. Though Indian days are often enough a nuisance, there is a wonderful charm about the mornings and evenings."

"'Between the joints of night and day,' as one of their old Sanskrit poets says," remarked Hugh; "singing, without meaning it, the praise of his native land; for I don't think those old fellows had any real appreciation of natural beauty."

"Is that a quotation?" said Ida, looking at him curiously. Hugh had never seemed to her a man of books. "One likes the thought of those old Brahmans catching the charm of their own country, whether they did it consciously or not. When I first came to the country I was immensely interested in a book called 'Life in Ancient India:' do you know it? It gives a grand account of those old Brahmans and their words and writings; but it is difficult to realise Hindus as the main element in India, in this fanatical Mussulman country."

So Ida rattled on, first on one subject, and then on another; and Hugh listened and looked at her, as she sat perched on a point of rock, so very bright and merry, reminding him greatly of their expeditions of four years back, in the Pyrenees; though there was a difference too, and her talk sounded more than ever as of one who lived very much alone. It was such genuine pleasure to see and hear her, that though he answered sufficiently to keep up the conversation, he was too much taken up with her to notice very keenly what she said. They must have been up there more than a half an hour when he said,—

"This is certainly very nice; a pity we can't stay here all day."

"It would get uncomfortably hot after a little," she answered. "Besides—" but she was interrupted by a report, and Hugh heard the well known "ping" of a matchlock ball not far from his ears. "That's from the Bourj," he said, really alarmed for her. "We must get out of this. I ought not to have brought you here."

They were down from the rock in less time than it took to say the words, and at the side of the little plateau.

"Now, Ida," said Hugh coolly enough, though he had never been in such a fright in his life, "you climb down there straight among the bushes. You will get into the watercourse we came by. I must go down the zigzag with the horses. If they are going to attack, they will attack what they can find, which will be me. I will do the best I can, and you must make for Jumrood. You will be there in less than a half an hour.

I shall probably overtake you long before that."

"Let me go with you," she said.

"No; it is the least risk of the two. You will be safe even if these gentry do come."

"But let them—"

"Hush, Ida," said Hugh, even in this moment of anxiety fearing for a rash word. "It is best so, go;" and he snatched Sālim's bridle from her hand, and thrust his revolver into it. "I have another in my holsters," and hurried down the path, as soon as she began to descend among the bushes.

They were not fated to have anything more than a fright this time. Ida scrambled down among the bushes, more astonished than anything else, and in ten minutes, as she stood somewhat scratched and dishevelled on the path below, she heard the clattering of hoofs on the stones, and Hugh joined her. He assisted her to mount, saying, "it is all right now."

"A case of idleness," she said, with a

nervous laugh; and they trotted rapidly down the rest of the little gorge, taking much less heed to the stones than they had while ascending it, and soon reached Jumrood.

Ida joined Mary on the rampart, and told her of the little fright they had had. Mary and Hudson had heard the shot, but as they could not see the spur from where they sat, had put it down as one of the many they had been hearing from the pass. Ida was disposed now to laugh over her fear, though as she sat beside Mary on the carpet, the latter noticed that her hand shook.

"It is the proper form for frontier excitement to take, I fancy," she said.

"I am very much vexed with myself," Hugh said to Mary. "I ought not to have let Mrs. Craven run such a risk."

Mrs. Craven was not disposed to shelter herself behind Hugh.

"It was my suggestion first of all," she said; "and at any rate we are safe."

"Yes; thank God," he said earnestly.

He was looking very grave; the little adventure which would have been nothing had he been alone, seemed very serious now.

He had the odd impression all men have, that a violent death for a woman is so much more awful a thing than for one of themselves; and this young soldier, who had faced death in many shapes with very little thought at all, and for another man would have taken no more heed of it than for himself, was thoroughly shaken at the risk Ida had incurred, small as it comparatively was.

The Khyber party now came up to the rampart.

"We have been longer than we thought," said Colonel Stanley. "You ladies must be weary of waiting for us."

"I hope your interview has been satisfactory," said Mary, looking at Arthur, and wondering if Ida would give an account of her adventure, and how Craven would take it.

"Very fairly so," he answered. "Faize

Mahommed regretted the ladies had not come up to see the pass."

"I wish you had seen it, Mary," said Maxwell. "In its way, as a rugged, forbidding, gloomy mountain cleft, it is unique. What have you been doing here?"

"I was too tired to do anything. I have been resting. I should much have liked to see the Khyber."

The breakfast was now brought, an Indian camping meal, and as Hugh had said, very characteristic of the way Europeans, specially the British, take the small comforts and luxuries of life into the most unlikely places.

They had no table, but a table-cloth and table-napkins, plate, glass, and crockery in abundance. Ida's large piece of salmon at one end, and grilled fowls and eggs at the other, looked inviting, and the party fell to with great appetite. Ida had recovered external composure at any rate.

Something she said, it was rather purpose-less and foolish, drew Arthur's attention to her.

"You are not eating," he said. "You ought to be hungry after the ride."

"No, I am not hungry," she answered. And then, feeling that it would be pleasant to have this story told, she added, "I got a little fright. I dare say that has something to do with it."

"How?" asked Arthur.

"I," she said,—"Mr. Linwood and I,—broke bounds, and went climbing up the hills, and got shot at."

"Good God! Ida," Craven said, "you should not have done that."

"It was all my fault," said Linwood, feeling that Craven must be made to see that he was responsible. "I shall never forgive myself for having led Mrs. Craven into such danger."

Hugh said this with so much frankness, and such evident trouble, that Arthur, vexed as he was, thought better of him for it.

He might have spared himself the exaggeration by which he sought to take all the blame on his own shoulders, for it chafed Arthur greatly that Ida should be led into danger, though he was well aware it was not very unlike her to be reckless of it herself.

But she disclaimed this at once. "That is not fair to yourself, Mr. Linwood," she said. "You certainly had all the risk, and I the blame, what there was;" and then she told all the details of the adventure, and laughed over a long scratch on one of her hands that she had received in her scramble through the bushes.

"We did not expect when they were burning powder about our ears that you were to see a shot fired in anger," said Stanley kindly, breaking a pause that had lasted long enough to feel uncomfortable.

"It may not have been one after all," said Ida. "Perhaps it was only a charge of powder to frighten us."

Hugh knew the ping of a matchlock-ball too well to be able honestly to agree to this, but he kept silence, and all knew what he meant.

"That tower," said Saadut Khan, who had been along the rampart to look, "belongs to Wulee Afgun Khan, whose brother and cousin were involved in the attack on Miss —— some years back, not very far from this."

"I remember the case," said Stanley. "The gentleman who was with her ran away, did he not?"

"Yes: but some Mussulman sowars were within reach, and rescued her," said Saadut.

The narrative of Ida's adventure threw a gloom over the little party. None of the men could get it out of their heads that but for a chance, Craven's fair young wife might be lying dead at the fort gate, or worse, carried off into the hills. Mary was vexed that she had not interfered to prevent her starting, but, used to the quieter parts of India, she had never dreamt that there was any real danger.

Ida was the least concerned of all, and very glad that Arthur knew of the affair.

Breakfast was hastily finished, the gentlemen talking artificially over old stories of the Khyber, and all were relieved when the horses were led out into the fort square, and they descended to mount for their homeward ride.

As they went out through the gap towards the Peshawur road, Arthur placed himself beside his wife.

"It was really my fault, Arthur," said Ida, as they rode a little apart from the rest, "about going up the glen. I proposed it, and insisted on it. I had such a fancy to look at the valley from the high ground out of it."

"Linwood ought to have known it was against orders," he answered. "However, he seems to have done very well when you were in the scrape. He could hardly have given you a better chance, though the thought of your racing into Jumrood on foot alone is not pleasant."

It is probable that Colonel Craven would have preferred any other man than this old friend to have played the hero in Ida's service; but he was generous enough to make no outward sign, and when they had trotted along the Mall, and separated to go to their respective homes, he shook hands with Hugh Linwood, and muttered a few genuine words of thanks, which had the effect of making the latter feel somewhat ashamed of himself.

The sun was now blazing, and Ida was very glad to get home, for between fatigue and excitement, she was rather overdone; and as she rested alone during the day, the events of the morning occurred to her again and again. She was vexed with herself for her foolish excitement over the expedition, knowing that if she had only kept her head, she would have been wise enough not to go into the enemy's country. It was the old difficulty, — the young self turning up excitable and reckless, just at the moment it was not wanted. Then she went over

Hugh's words and deeds, and liked him better for them. He had been so simple, ready and calm enough, save for a beseeching anxious look when he gave her his revolver.

Hugh went home in a strange state of mind, not able to deny to himself that Craven had looked as if he cared.

As he gave Woolett an account of the doings of the morning, he could not help saying, "I think you may be right about that fellow Craven. I liked him better this morning."

"What did you expect of him?" replied the other, looking up rather curiously from his writing. "Did you think he would stamp about and swear at you?"

"No; but I did expect him to be civilly savage, and I rather wish he had been; but instead of that I think he forgot all about me in his trouble about his wife," said Hugh, more clear-sighted than his wont.

He, too, had been moved past himself, and so for once saw clearly through the mist of selfishness. He had seen that Arthur Craven was stirred very deeply as he himself had also been; and was, what he knew would have been beyond him under like circumstances, generous enough to be grateful.

END OF VOL. I.