

COLVILLE
OF THE
GUARDS



AUTHOR OF
THE ROMANCE OF WAR



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COLVILLE OF THE GUARDS.

VOL. II.

COLVILLE OF THE GUARDS

BY

JAMES GRANT

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“THE ROMANCE OF WAR,” “THE CAMERONIANS,”

“THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,”

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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COLVILLE OF THE GUARDS.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN'S SHILLING.

ROBERT WODROW, we have stated, had disappeared from his home.

Ellinor had apparently passed out of his life, and he felt as if he had nothing more to hope for in it; but the influence of her memory hung over him still.

Even the love he bore his poor old mother failed to restrain his wild impulse, his craving, to begone, he cared not where; thus her influence also failed in getting him to resume those medical studies which

he once pursued with enthusiasm, but now relinquished with indifference or disgust; and, under the disappointment and mental worry produced by Ellinor's falsehood to himself, he failed to graduate at the expected time.

'My poor boy!' his mother said again and again, while stroking his dark brown hair caressingly with her now shrivelled hand; 'that cold-blooded girl has come between you and your wits.'

'Don't call her so, mother. Perhaps I did not deserve her,' said he, humbly.

'I used to sit and watch you both when children many a time and oft, and think what a winsome couple you would be in the days to come. Ah me, Robert, your one ewe lamb, and that stranger took it from you, to be but a plaything for his idle hours too probably!'

'Mother, you torture me by all this kind of thing!' exclaimed Robert.

'It is perhaps but a sudden girlish fancy

hers for that man Sleath. It may pass away and all yet be well.'

'Never for me, mother. And you think so meanly of me as to take that view of the matter? I would not and could not with my knowledge of the present seek to have the past over again, and never more can I look upon Ellinor Wellwood or think of her save as I would of the dead. The charm is broken, the flower has lost its fragrance, and the peach its bloom.'

'Why should the weakness or falsehood of one person—one person only—wreck the whole life of another?' asked his father, with some asperity. 'It should not be so.'

'The old and the young view these matters differently, father,' said Robert, gently.

'True. I have read that "in youth grief is a tempest which makes you ill; in old age it is only like a cold wind which adds a wrinkle to your face and one more white

lock to the others. Yet there are people who can feed themselves on their grief till they grow fat on it.”’

But arguments proved unavailing. The vicinity of Birkwoodbrae had become intolerable to Robert now, and he resolved that he would go far away from them and the pleasant birks of Invermay; and he openly announced his intention of becoming a soldier, adding that nothing would make him swerve from his purpose, as by that means he would be taken to other scenes and be under other influences.

‘Most evil ones, I fear!’ exclaimed the doctor, striking his hands together.

‘Oh, my poor infatuated boy!’ added his mother, while her tears fell hotly and fast, and his father started from the table on which the untasted dinner was spread, tore open his waistcoat as if he was suffocating, and paced about the room with impatient strides, his whole form agitated with a kind of convulsive agony that cut Robert

to the soul, but did not make him swerve from his bitter purpose.

‘Consider the society and profligacy you have to encounter—yea, such as even our ancestor, in the third volume of his *Analecta*, details when describing the schools of profanity in 1726.’

Then, after a time, finding that all his opposition was vain, he said, in a very broken voice,

‘God bless and protect you, Robert, and may He forgive you for all the sorrow you are causing us, as by such a course you will be lost to us and to yourself, after all our care and affection, after all your painful anxieties at college, and after all your good training and religious education.’

‘In three years I shall be an officer,’ exclaimed Robert, confidently, ‘and won’t you and the dear old mother be proud of me then?’

But the minister shook his silver head.

‘Your future——’ he began, and paused.

‘Who can see the future?’

‘One above, Robert. And may He give you the grace to think over all this terrible purpose again.’

Robert did think again, as he had thought before, deeply and decidedly, and, to avoid more painful scenes and partings, he quitted his bed next morning while the sky was dark, and no ray of light gilded as yet the Ochil peaks. He dressed himself in haste, took a few necessaries in a handbag, and after kneeling softly and saying a prayer at the door of the room in which his parents were asleep, he tore himself as it were out of the house and set forth on his new path in life, the path by which there might be no returning.

In that time of supreme bitterness little could the poor fellow see all that was before him.

The morning was still dark, but the sky was clear and starry; the great hills and tall silver birches in the foreground stood

blackly up against it, and he could hear that sound so familiar to his ears—the rush of the May over its rocky bed.

He gave a lingering farewell glance at the roof of the old house which had been his home since first he saw the light there—the abode, with all its old-fashioned but substantial furniture, to which his mother had come a smiling and blushing bride in the past time—the abode, till now, of so much peace, frugality, and happiness—and with a bitter sigh he turned his eyes resolutely away.

Then, if aught was required to nerve him, it was the next feature in the still and sombre landscape; the smokeless chimneys and darkened windows of Birkwoodbrae—the now empty shrine where so long his idol had been.

‘Oh, all I have ever loved!’ he exclaimed, and, wringing his hands, set out with all speed upon his way, haunted, however, by the coming grief of those he

was leaving behind when his place was found empty; when his mother's eyes would have a vacant chair to contemplate and his father's reverend head was bent with sorrow, as it would be in the separation that was to come; and what is separation to the loving but a living death?

The next day found him among the wide and stately streets of the Modern Athens, willing to enlist in the first regiment any member of which came in his way, for he was drawing a chance in the lottery of life now, and to him all regiments were alike; so, as Fortune had it, he met a hussar, to whom he expressed his wishes, and from whom he soon received, with all due formality, that magic coin *the Queen's Shilling*, and became what is termed 'a Headquarter Recruit,' enlisting for 'short service'—*i.e.*, six years with the colours.

Six years! In these days of steam the progress of events is so rapid, what might not happen in that brief space?

He had answered all the usual questions by those entitled to make them as to his age, name, parish, and calling, with others that were less pleasant, as to whether he had ever served before, or been marked D. or B. C.; this formality over, and oath of attestation taken before a bailie of the city—the oath to ‘be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty, her heirs and successors; obey all orders of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors; and of all the generals and officers, &c.’ set over him—being concluded, a night intervening between enlistment and attestation, nothing remained, as his new friend, Sam Surcingle, said, ‘but to have a drink over it.’

This opinion was concurred in by several smart but long-legged fellows in braided trousers, and tight jackets, with caps like scarlet muffins, jangling jackspurs, and riding switches, who seemed all opportunely at hand, and suffering from chronic thirst, all the more so as the new

recruit seemed to have some loose cash ; and a suitable tavern (the ' Scots Grey ') being at hand, Robert Wodrow soon found himself acting as host to a military circle which made up in heedless jollity and noise what it might lack in rank and distinction.

Yet among the half-dozen or so of his new friends were, at least, two of those ill-starred fellows so frequently to be found in our cavalry regiments at all times, but more especially just now, those who by extravagance and dissipation or failing to achieve the insane ' cramming ' of the present day, had lost their chance of commissions, and taken ' the shilling ' from sheer love of the service, and the desperate hope of rising in it.

One of these was a mere youth, who, as Sam Surcingle said, ' had a long pedigree behind and a long minority before him ; ' the other, Toby Chase, the heir to an ancient baronetcy, was older, and

drank fast to drown care, shouting, with a laugh,

‘To-day—to-day is for me; to-morrow is the paradise of the fool! Your health and promotion, Wodrow, old fellow!’

Glass succeeded glass; toasts and anecdotes—some of the latter not very classical—followed each other fast, till the sharp trumpets blew ‘the last post’ in the adjoining barrack square of Piershill, and the hussars had to hurry to quarters, and we are sorry to admit that for perhaps the first time in his life—even during his college career—Robert Wodrow had contrived to get disreputably tipsy.

He had no care for the present and no anticipation of the headache and shame of the morrow, with the disgusts of the rough riding and ‘barrack fatigue,’ such as carrying coals or refilling mattresses with fresh straw; neither was he troubled with the natural reflection of what would be the emotions of his highly-principled

and purely-minded old father and mother could they have seen him then, when he had spent the last of his cash on his new comrades, and was voted the king of good fellows, and with one of the before-mentioned scarlet muffins on his head, but cocked very much over the right ear, he flourished a riding-whip, while joining, but with a somewhat 'feathery' voice, in the song,

'How happy's the soldier that lives on his pay,
And spends half-a-crown out of sixpence a day!
Little cares he for the bailiff or bum,
When he pays all his debts with a roll on the drum.'

And so, for a time, Robert Wodrow passes out of our story ; but a time only.

CHAPTER II.

IN LONDON.

ELLINOR was thinking of Redmond Sleath—when was she not thinking of him!—during all that long, long journey from the North to London, and Mary had been painfully struck by her alternate nervous anxiety and dull, mechanical acceptance of her own attentions and care during its progress. She seemed at times like a somnambulist—one moving in her sleep rather than one to whom the journey should have been an excitement and a novelty after the long years of quiet and seclusion at Birkwoodbrae, hence the strain

upon her overwrought nerves was ere long to bring a serious illness upon her.

A cab—a genuine London cab, one of those clumsy four-wheeled ‘growlers,’ peculiar to the modern Babylon and to no other place—cramped, damp, frowsy, far from sweet-smelling, and sorely perilous for ladies’ dresses—had conveyed the sisters, both feeling somewhat scared and disconsolate, from the Northern Railway to the classic region of Paddington by day, and luckily for them not by night.

The long drive westward by the Euston and Mary-le-Bone Roads had seemed apparently interminable, and most weary after a long journey by rail; and then the architecture, construction, and material of the houses—brick, always and for ever brick—looked strange and foreign to their eyes, and so ere long they reached the Terrace, which adjoins Paddington Church. They had read of and heard a deal about the famous old Court suburb of Kensing-

ton, and thought the locality to which a chance had taken them might prove something like it.

Mrs. Fubsby, their landlady, whose address had been given to them by her nephew, Joe Fubsby, guard of the northern train (the chance above referred to), and hence their selection of such a singular place, received the weary travellers kindly enough. She seemed a motherly, well-disposed woman, but soured in disposition by past wrongs or sorrows.

She was about forty years of age, had some remains of beauty, and had seen better days and had other hopes (as usual with her class), all of which she was not long in hinting.

The sitting-room into which she ushered them, though scrupulously clean, had a mouldy odour, suggestive of the adjacent hideous churchyard; it looked small, poor, and shabby. Gaudy artificial flowers in vases of Derby spar were on the little

mantelpiece, and some highly-coloured prints in Oxford frames were hung upon the walls.

The air felt close and heavy—oh, so heavy, the girls thought, after the fresh, pure breezes of Invermay! In fact, there seemed to be no air at all.

Their sweetness and gentleness of manner, together with their undeniable beauty, attracted and won the—at first suspicious—landlady, who bustled about and prepared tea for them. She, however, put great weight upon an introduction coming through her nephew Joe; and her confidence grew apace when she found Mary scrupulously correct in her weekly payments, and others of every kind, and thus she complacently tolerated the presence of Jack in her household. To have parted with him would have stricken Mary's heart.

Ere the first day of their residence with her was past, they were in full possession

of Mrs. Fubsby's personal history, which she thrust upon them with that loquacious communicativeness peculiar to the English lower orders—at least so much of it as she cared to tell—how her maiden name was Seraphina-Mary-Ann—how she had married a gentleman, who, however, did not behave as such in the end, as he had left her years ago, and she was now reduced to have lodgers or boarders, and so forth.

Coming from a secluded country place like their Perthshire parish, Mary and Ellinor had no real idea of the world or of life, as it is called—more than all, the bustling, busy, tearing, selfish, and suspicious life of London, or the mighty and close race for existence there. They knew not yet that without friends and introductions employments in teaching music or drawing were all but unattainable.

A few days passed on. Advertisements were studied daily and replied to sedu-

lously; but no answer came. They could not know that for each of these employments there might be two thousand applicants! So their poor hearts grew hopeless and weary—often sick with alarm as money dwindled away; and day by day they looked out, either on the frowsy churchyard, where not a blade of grass grew between the closely packed tombstones, or the equally frowsy canal, with its barges cleaving the muddy water and oozy slime; and as they were totally ignorant of London, for a time, the poor girls supposed it must be *all* like their then sordid surroundings.

Paddington, where Francois Thurot, the famous corsair, won the bride in whose arms he died in battle, and where in the last century the Guards coming from Hounslow were wont to halt for the night, prior to marching for the little London of George II., was, some fifty years ago, a kind of suburban village, a rural and

pretty place, with its grassy green and the old 'Wheatsheaf' Tavern, where Ben Jonson drank his beer, even after its quaint Gothic church, where the Sheldons were entombed by its solemn yew-tree, was replaced by the present hideous square edifice, with its pillared portico and trumpery cupola starting from amid that veritable stoneyard of graveslabs, among which lie the remains of the beautiful Mrs. Siddons and of the luckless painter Haydon—an odious and festering place, where, Dr. Ashburner tells us in his work on 'The Dynamics,' his nervous patients were wont to see nightly the pale and lam-bent dead-lights rising from the corrupted soil.

Whether it was the result of all she had undergone of late, or that the atmosphere of the place affected Ellinor, Mary never knew; but her colour faded out—the ruddy tint left her lips, and her dark hazel eyes grew dull as she became prostrated by a

nervous illness, which added sorely to the cares, the troubles, and expenses of the latter, for Ellinor required wine and many little luxuries.

Energy seemed to have left her. Ellinor was but twenty, but already her life seemed over and done with !

And now that her secret love affair was apparently a thing completely of the past, Ellinor showed Mary the gift of Sir Redmond, and bursting into a flood of hysterical tears told her all—of the baffled elopement ; and then Mary, catching up Jack, covered the dog with kisses.

There were at least two reasons why no letters ever reached Dr. Wodrow, and that, to him, the movements of the sisters seemed involved in painful mystery.

Two letters that Mary wrote to him had miscarried, and, as no answers came to them, with over-sensitiveness and doubt, she misconstrued the silence of her good old friend, and, believing that he resented

Ellinor's treatment of his son, would now ignore their existence.

'I shall write no more,' said Mary. 'Can it be that Lady Dunkeld has ruined us among those who knew us? If so, there is one use in adversity—we can tell our friends from our enemies.'

So in sorrowful doubt she did not write again; seeking for employment and nursing Ellinor occupied all the thoughts of Mary, who became almost distracted with a fear that the former might be sent by Mrs. Fubsky to a common hospital. Nothing, perhaps, was further from the good woman's thoughts; but Mary had heard, or read, of such things. Thus, fully occupied, she wrote no more; and, as time went past, the mystery grew at the manse of Kirkton-Mailler, and in the mind of Colville also. Everything painful, horrible, and disastrous was fancied, and advertisements put by the latter in the *Times*, however carefully yet pointedly worded,

were never seen by Mary. So in these our days of penny post and cheap telegrams, they remained lost, untraced, and undiscovered by those who loved them best.

She had both confidence and patience ; and patience is mental strength concentrated. Her religious education had also taught her resignation, and she felt that ‘let the sands drop through the glass ever so slowly, there is a time when they end ; there is a time for us all ; no matter the hour, for God thinks it the best.’

Yet often as she sat, busy with crewel work for sale, by Ellinor’s bedside, the notes of the passing bell in the cupola of the adjacent church—a toll unknown in Scotland—smote a gloom upon her heart with every measured stroke.

No pessimist was Mary Wellwood in temper or heart, and no manufacturer of artificial sorrow ; yet the idea occurred to her with terror—what if she should lose

Ellinor, and be left alone in this bitter world?

As petty trifles, like airs and scraps of frivolous songs, will haunt the mind in times of dire calamity, even of death, Mary's thoughts would run persistently on the feathered pets and flowers she had once at home—even on the sparrows for which she was daily wont to spread crumbs, where they would find none now; and she actually envied her old owl; he, at least, was at home in his ivied ruin, that looked down on Invermay.

Thinking thus, Mary would sit in the evening twilight by the open window, through which came the roar of mighty London; but not the flower-scented air that hovered over their lost home; and while the stars, dimly seen in the smoke-laden sky of London, stole into sight, she thought of the green Ochil peaks, over which the same stars were shining brightly, like vast diamonds set in azure.

Ellinor recovered and gained strength, but still able to do little with her pencil.

Evening walks, as among the green lanes and shady paths in the glen where the May flows, they could have no more now. They seldom saw the sun set; and when evening fell the streets in their vicinity became filled by people whose appearance appalled them. There were vicious-looking men and more vicious-looking women from the adjacent Edgware Road; vendors of carrion on wooden skewers, known as 'cat's-meat'; vendors of roasted potatoes and chestnuts; boiled oranges; of plums, the bloom of which was due to clothes-blue; vendors of milk, the component parts of which made one shudder; of queerly-painted pugs and yellow-painted sparrows; of red pots of earth, with rootless twigs of flowers stuck in them—another London dodge—yet declared by the vendors to be 'all a-growing—all a-blowing.'

With such plants as these Mrs. Fubsby was not to be 'took in,' and so preferred paper flowers.

Ellinor contrived to finish one of her best landscapes—a view on the May—and 'room' was given it by a kind of picture-dealer close by, but it remained in his window unsold, and apparently unnoticed by all—save the flies, who did not improve it.

Mary's confidence at times began to desert her when she felt how hard it would be for them, all unaided as they were, to win their daily bread and add to the little pittance they had, among that vast human tide of busy, cold, careless, and apparently unsympathising people who poured past her in the streets.

Her sweet face began to look anxious, sorrowful, and pale under the ripples of golden brown hair that fell softly over her broad low forehead; and ere long the two sisters began to want many things to which they had been accustomed.

‘What is to be the end of it all?’ Mary would think, as she came slowly back to tell Ellinor of some fresh disappointment, or that her picture was still unsold. Mary was growing paler, Ellinor could see—yes, she looked older; her figure seemed less round, though graceful as ever. Her street dress was beginning to look poor and even shabby. Oh, how sad and horrible it was!

Mrs. Fubsby pitied the girls for their want of success, while she admired their perseverance. A well-meaning woman, she had some suggestions to ‘hoffer,’ as she said, which made Mary’s blood run cold.

Among these were two—that, as she was ‘so ’andsome,’ she might get a situation in the mantle department of some great shop, or as a species of lay-figure to show off the goods, and who knew but one of the ‘walkers’ might take a fancy to her? or to work a sewing-machine in the window in the gaze of all those men and

boys who would be certain to crowd there-at, and flatten their noses against the glass while critically surveying her. Another suggestion was to sell poor Jack, whom Joe Fubsby said was well worth 'a ten pun' note ;' but Mary would rather have starved than parted with her dog.

With a burning cheek and a beating heart, and feeling certain that she would be viewed with suspicion, and perhaps insulted, she ventured into a shop in the Edgware Road, where an 'honest' dealer gave her less than the third of the value for Sir Redmond's chain and locket. This sum helped them on a little ; but again finances began to fall, and, clasping her slim white hands, Mary began to think it was useless attempting to struggle any more.

CHAPTER III.

NO. 60, PARK LANE.

IN a work of fiction, says a writer, 'the reader will find a hundred strange meetings and coincidences—old lovers coming face to face after years of separation, friends thought dead rising up at the corners of the streets, and the good characters appearing *ad libitum* to confound all the bad in the concluding chapters. Critics,' he adds, 'laugh at all these wires which pull the Minerva puppets, but *real life* has often, more than one imagines, its strange meetings and coincidences too—old lovers and friends do start as from Hades into our presence sometimes, and if a good

genius in the shape of a father, or big brother, or a policeman did not come to the rescue at times when the last hope was failing us, what a deal more misery there would be in the world.'

Thus it was, through this doctrine of strange chances, that Mary Wellwood was soon fated to meet Colville on two occasions, and they came to pass as follows.

Mary had clever little hands, and had frequently made up *such* caps for Mrs. Fubsby, and arranged her ribbons and laces so nicely, that she conceived the idea of obtaining some employment for her needle, as Ellinor still required many little things that were procured for her with difficulty.

With high beating heart she one day entered a millinery establishment, and timidly suggested that she was clever as a worker, at trimming, cap and bonnet-making, and entreated a trial to be given her. Her soft voice and pleading face

went for nothing. She was repelled coldly, even superciliously, and the door was pretty plainly indicated to her; so she issued forth into the bustle of the Edgware Road again with a heavy, bitter, and irrepressible sigh.

It was a dull and depressing day early in October, when what remains to us of foliage and sunshine are held on a precarious tenure indeed, and people become conscious of 'snow in the air;' when the gardener's work consists chiefly of 'sweeping up' the leaves that come rustling down and tidying borders after the blasts of wind. Frost, however, had not come, and the parterres of Hyde Park, the phloxes and the late gladioli, still continued to make a brave show, though the dahlias drooped heavily when the dews fell. Overhead the sky was dull and leaden, of the usual London tint, and no one could tell in what quarter of it the sun was hidden.

Mary peeped into the dealer's window,

and another sigh escaped her. Ellinor's landscape was still there, and, of course, unsold; so again she thought to herself, 'what was to be the end of it all?'

As a last effort she sought a music shop, where she had often given specimens of her accomplishments on the piano, and where she had frequently applied, without success, for pupils.

The proprietors liked her voice, but her pale face, with its rare charm of expression, and soft violet-blue eyes, was beginning to have a sad and hunted look. They also (for they were judges) liked her manner—who did not?—so faultless and graceful in its self-possession even yet, and her tones so sweetly modulated and pleasant; thus they were honestly anxious to help her if they could, and had hinted if she took to the stage she might make a fortune in 'the profession.'

They had heard of no pupils yet; but music—a musician—an accomplished pian-

ist was wanted for a dance, to be given on the morrow night—two guineas were the honorarium—would she accept it?

She thought what the sum might get for Ellinor, and accepted the proposal at once.

The money would be paid her at the house.

‘Where is it?’ she asked.

‘No. 60, Park Lane.’

And her informant added that she must go nicely—at least neatly—dressed; and she hurried home with a lighter heart. Distasteful though the position and occupation, it was at least a beginning, and no one knew aught of her or her antecedents.

Next night she attired herself with care, gracefully, and, perhaps, artistically, in a soft and clinging lace-trimmed dress of creamy Indian muslin. It was perhaps rather too much for the *rôle* she had to play; but it was one of her best costumes, with lace at her white slender throat,

and shading her bare and very lovely arms, while her only ornament was a single white rose in her breast. So, gloved, shawled, and with her roll of music, she drove away in a 'growler,' the last words she heard being expressions of admiration at her appearance from Ellinor and Mrs. Fubsby.

On past the Marble Arch, and into that aristocratic line of varied and strange-looking houses, Park Lane, which, in the time of Queen Anne, was generally known as 'the lane leading to Tyburn,' where the gallows bore its ghastly freight.

'Number sixty,' she again told her cabman, when he suddenly pulled up, and she now remembered that she had omitted to ask to *whose* house she was going. Though she ought to have been there among, or prior to, the first arrivals, the position was so new to her that she was a little late, and already several carriages were on the line before her, 'setting

down,' at a lighted portico, duly furnished with a striped canopy and carpeted steps. Thus, during the brief pause that ensued, she was enabled to see that it was a stately house she was bound for. Though October, the night was fine, and the windows were open. She obtained, through them, a glimpse of a splendidly-furnished double drawing-room, with blue silk curtains festooned within an arch; already several guests were gliding to and fro, and the fragrance of flowers and perfumes was wafted outward on the night air.

A painted and partially curtained verandah overhung the garden—a verandah made like a fairy abode by shrubs and flowers, by Chinese lanterns, ottomans, and couches; and she felt a strange, spasmodic tightening of the heart, for there was a figure that seemed familiar to her hanging over a lovely girl, who was flirting languidly with her fan.

As one in a dream, she found herself

deposited at the door, and ascending with her music-roll the fast crowding staircase that led to the dancing-room, attended by a footman as a guide; but the lady of the house, whoever she was, did not condescend to receive *her*. And her pretty bare arms were noticed as she seated herself at the piano-stool. She had too much dress 'for one in her position,' some matrons thought suspiciously, all the more so that many men remarked and admired her; but she adjusted her music and programme, bent her sweet face closely over the former, and played on, and on, and on, till her little fingers ached, oh, so wearily, into the hours of the night and the early hours of the morning.

But ere the latter came one or two episodes occurred.

She discovered, first, that she was in the house of Lord Dunkeld! Parliament was sitting, and his lordship, as one of the precious sixteen called 'Representa-

tive Peers,' was consequently in town; but for all the good he ever did Scotland or her interests he might as well have been at the North Pole.

To Mary Wellwood, with her sensitive pride and memories of the past, this was a sickening discovery to make! There was, however, no retreating now. She resolutely kept her face from the guests, and played on as one in a dream, with the soft patter of feet and whirling of skirts in her ear.

Once or twice she thought that the cold, calm eyes of Lady Dunkeld recognised her, and then, flushing deep to the nape of her delicate neck, she bent lower still over her music. If it was so, the pale and handsome peeress made no sign, and gave not the slightest evidence of recognition.

The longing to be gone in Mary's heart was intense, and to her the hours of that night seemed interminable.

Though 'town was empty,' as she heard, she was thankful that the rooms were crowded to excess; that the dancers had scarcely room to move, and thus she had the less chance of recognition.

Mouthing fools with lisping lips, parted hair, and a great display of shirt-front were there, and men of brilliant intellect too, with many stately women and lovely girls such as London alone can boast; and Blanche Galloway moved among them like a bewitching little queen, superbly dressed by all the care of Rosette.

Suddenly Mary had another shock and tightening of the heart when two familiar voices fell on her ear, and she discovered near her Colville—Colville and Sir Redmond Sleath, the latter, as usual in accurate evening costume, with his tawny moustache, *insouciant* air, and china-blue eyes.

The sense of Colville's presence suffocated her, and memory went back to that

last interview in which he suddenly drew her towards him and kissed her so tenderly and hurried away on their being interrupted, leaving unsaid what he was bound in honour to say, but urging her to do nothing rash until 'to-morrow'—the morrow that never came!

'Hah, when did you come to town?' asked Sir Redmond.

'More than a month ago,' replied Colville.

'From Craigmhor?'

'Yes; you left before I did, you remember?'

'Sudden business called me to town. When you left how were our fair friends at Birkwoodbrae?'

It was terrible for Mary to sit there helplessly and overhear this conversation; but there was a buzzing sound in her ears, and she failed to catch Colville's answer; and Sleath spoke again—

'I knew you were deuced spooney on the

eldest one. Got over it all now, of course — *pour passer le temps.*'

'Spooney? I do not choose to have this term applied either to myself or the lady referred to.'

'As you please. But surely you had no more intention of committing yourself seriously with her than I had with her younger sister?'

'What do you mean by talking of these young ladies in this style to me?' asked Colville, in a voice that seemed to have suppressed passion in it, for at that moment he was recalling some of Doctor Wodrow's communications regarding the speaker.

'Why, what on earth are they to you?' demanded Sleath, focussing him with his eyeglass.

Mary did not hear the response, but was aware that Sleath started and said,

'What new dodge is this?'

'I am thinking of going to India again,'

said Colville, bluntly, to change the subject.

‘Again—with all your wealth—what folly!’

‘I seem to have neither kith nor kin to care for, or aught to keep me here now.’

‘Ah—that red-coat business!’

‘What do you mean?’

‘As some one says, “We all know that half a man’s life is often spent in wanting to put on the red-coat, and the other half in wanting to put it off.”’

‘No part of *your* life is likely to be spent in either, Sir Redmond,’ said Colville, as he turned on his heel and left him.

‘To India again,’ whispered Mary in her heart; ‘he thinks of going to India! Well—what is he to me—what am I to him?’

Mary observed that he danced little, if at all, and that he certainly looked grave—even sad and preoccupied, as he had never done at Birkwoodbrae.

Colville had never enlightened the Dun-

keld family, even before leaving Craigmhor, of his relationship to the missing sisters, or of those views, intentions, and the little romantic plan between himself and Dr. Wodrow, which had proved the cause of so much distress and mischief.

Blanche Galloway, her rival, as Mary began to deem her again, was the gayest of the throng there, and, leaning on Colville's arm clingingly after a long swinging waltz, was fanning herself, and laughing at some remark that was, in her own parlance, 'quite too awfully funny.'

Intent on Colville and on others too, smiling her brightest upon them all, but on him in particular, and bestowing flowers with great *empressement* from her ample bouquet, as she sat with them in the dimly-lighted conservatory, and flirted with a science born of her partly French blood, she never bestowed a thought on the weary and silent musician, any more than

on the aiguletted valets who took about the jellies and ices, etc.

Mary saw that Colville sat out dances, often with pretty companions, over whom his handsome head was bent low in confidential conversation, while he fanned them with gallant assiduity.

‘You play most brilliantly, my dear!’ said a soft, sweet voice suddenly in Mary’s ear.

No one, as yet, had addressed her that night, and she looked up with a startled air to see a very handsome and motherly-looking woman regarding her with kindly interest.

‘You have a most exquisite touch,’ she continued; ‘how I should like my youngest girl to have some lessons from you—even as a permanent musical governess. May I speak to Lady Dunkeld about it?’

‘Do not—please do not!’ replied Mary, imploringly; ‘she knows nothing about

me; but I have another reason for declining——’

‘Indeed.’

‘Yes, madam.’

‘A serious one?’

‘Very—a sickly sister whom I cannot and would not leave to live alone.’

‘A most creditable reason to give,’ said the elderly lady, and was about to add something more, when Lady Dunkeld suddenly drew near, and in a hard, metallic voice said,

‘Dear Mrs. Deroubigne, a word with you before supper.’

So, as the lady left her side, Mary learned that Deroubigne was her name, and, with gratitude in her heart for the little bit of praise, recognition, and sympathy, Mary thought she would never forget her.

The guests filed off to the supper-room, whence ere long came the murmur of voices, the sounds of laughter, the clink

of plates and glasses, and looking round the empty drawing-room, strewn with fragments of flowers, lace, muslin, and so forth, Mary, like a hunted creature, thought only of escape, but was informed that refreshment for her was set apart from all the rest in a private apartment.

It was a pretty place, with carved oak furniture, valuable pictures, and the subdued light of a beautiful lamp was shed on the dainty napery, silver and quaint blue and gold service of the repast set before her; but Mary was incapable of eating—food would have choked her. She held a glass of wine to her tremulous and dry lips, but so tremulous too were her fingers by long playing that she had to set it down untasted.

She then told the valet who attended her that she was too ill to remain longer, to make her apologies to Lady Dunkeld, and to get her shawl and cloak from the women in charge of the cloak-room.

He did so with some surprise, that increased when, on proffering her two guineas on a silver salver as her fee, she said, sharply,

‘Thanks. Keep the money, or spend it in the servants’ hall,’ and hurried away.

‘Off her blessed chump, by jingo!’ muttered ‘Jeames,’ as he thrust the money into the pocket of his yellow-plush breeches.

Escaping recognition by Mademoiselle Rosette, who was having a flirtation in the hall with John Gaiters (Sir Redmond’s man), Mary, in a tumult of distracting thoughts, cabbied it back to St. Mary’s Terrace, so called, though it is a narrow *street*; but that matters nothing in London, where thoroughfares are called roads, that are streets or squares, terraces or crescents, and even hills, such as Ludgate, or vales, such as Maida, without being the slightest approach to anything of the kind; but such are some of the many idiosyn-

crasies of Babylon that puzzle the intelligent foreigner.

Mary was a wise girl; she knew that the wounded heart of Ellinor, suffering from certain remorse at her treatment of the loving Robert Wodrow, and mortification at the conduct of Sleath in never attempting to visit or seek an explanation, would not be healed by telling *all* that she had overheard, and more that she suspected, now only said that she had recognised him and Colville at the ball and nothing more.

But this reticence proved rather a mistake eventually.

CHAPTER IV.

‘SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR!’

AFTER that night at Number 60, Park Lane, a terrible sense of humiliation oppressed Mary, and she knew not what to do next. Such rencontres, she thought, were not likely to happen in the mighty world of London; yet the next meeting she had with Colville occurred very soon after, and gave her nearly as great a shock as that at the ball.

It was on a murky October Sunday afternoon when Mary, finding herself near Westminster Abbey, entered the vast building, lured alike by curiosity to see

it and hear the service, for which the bells were tolling.

For a moment she looked about her and saw how the mighty cruciform church towered skyward above the dingy houses, shops, and streets that lie so near it on one side, and the handsome, open space, with all its railings and statues, on the other, and, tripping lightly over the flat gravestones, she entered by the gloomy northern door, and, after a little timid doubt and hesitation, proceeded to an empty pew in the north transept.

The vast height of the shafted columns, the darkened roof that sprang from them, the dusky depths and ghostly uncertainties of the edifice, which was of a size and space beyond her conception; the faint, leaden light of the London afternoon that stole through its lancet windows, and the grim aspect of the tombs which crowd and disfigure the long drawn aisles, were all solemn and oppressive to

Mary, yet curiosity detained her, and she was glad to see a few persons—but how very few they seemed—gathering to hear the service, while the black-robed vergers glided about, imparting, she thought, something spectral to the vistas of the place; and to her unaccustomed eyes the white floating surplices of the officiating clergymen and of the choir-boys seemed something spectral too.

A great sense of awe came over her as she thought of all the mighty dead who lay there, the dead of ages, beneath her very feet—politicians, warriors, judges, princes, and nobles, philanthropists, actors, and physicians—the Pantheon of all the English great—who in fighting the battle of life have added to the renown of their country. For a time she was drawn from the constant sense of herself, of her own sorrows, and the contemplation of thinking how hard it was to win one’s daily bread in a vast city.

Her veil was up, and had any there regarded her face, they would have seen how pale and sad it looked under the edge of her little hat, and the ripples of her golden brown hair that fell over her forehead, and how pathetic was the expression of her long-lashed, violet blue eyes.

The bells had ceased to clash overhead, and a few people were seated or kneeling on hassocks in the chancel seats, while some gas jets began to flicker out as the afternoon light faded from the pointed windows; and then the deep swell of the organ, and the sweet voices of the choristers stirred Mary's heart, and moved her to tears, she knew not why, for the solemnity of the scene soothed, while the music comforted her, and to hide her emotion she drew down her veil closely.

While the psalm was being chanted three ladies entered the pew before her, and as there was not room in it for a gentleman who accompanied them he took his

seat behind them, in the pew occupied by Mary, and close to her side.

Her heart stood still, and again the sense of suffocation came with a spasm into her slender throat, for he who sat beside her was Colville, and the ladies were Blanche Galloway, Lady Dunkeld, and Mrs. Deroubigne!

She respired with difficulty, and then her heart beat fast; the service was forgotten—unheard, all save the swelling of the organ, which only seemed an element in the phantasmagoria around her now; and she strove—but that was impossible—to forget who was by her side, and almost touching her.

She wondered if he would recognise her figure; he could scarcely fail to do so, if he looked at her; but he never did so, and seemed wholly intent on looking into the dusky obscurities of the church, or was lost in his own thoughts. He had placed a hand ungloved, with a gold signet ring

thereon—a ring the crest of which Mary remembered well—on the edge of the pew in which Blanche was seated; and making a half turn round, with a bright and coquettish smile, she rested her back against his fingers, as much as to say, she felt them there caressingly.

Mary observed this, and also that after a time he withdrew his hand, with an air of unconsciousness, she thought.

Blanche wore a magnificent sealskin paletot, which contrasted powerfully with Mary's somewhat faded jacket and equally faded dress. How happy and bright and well nourished she looked. There was no care, no thought, no anxiety in her sparkling dark eyes. Unlike Mary, she had no dark or dubious future looming far away before her.

Mary remembered—when was she likely to forget?—that he said he had no one to care for, and was going away to India; and yet he seemed to be on remarkably intimate and

pleasant terms with these Dunkeld people. She fancied that Blanche had given him a conscious and disappointed glance, when he left her to take his seat behind her, as if she seemed to think his proper place was by her own side; and perhaps Mary might have seen a disappointed look in his face, had she seen it at the time.

They might only be friends, but somehow Blanche gave the silent watcher the bitter conviction that she was certainly something more.

Mary knew that Colville had denied being engaged to Blanche, and ridiculed the rumour as Mrs. Wodrow's gossip. True—but he might be engaged to her *now*.

'If he still cares for me,' she thought, 'what a different answer would I give him now. If not engaged, why are they thus together, and why does she give him these conscious and confident glances? Was he deceiving me at—at Birkwoodbrae?'

When Mary had taken her seat in that

pew, she felt a sense of awful loneliness ; but she felt many, many degrees more lonely now. She felt also far, far removed from him, and those whom he accompanied, in her homely life and sordid surroundings at Paddington. A vast gulf seemed thereby to have opened between her and Colville, such as did not exist at Birkwoodbrae ; and she thought of the day when they fished together in the May, and other days of delicious walks and rambles under the drooping birches by the sparkling linn, or among the scented pine woods that were overlooked by the lovely green hills, amid the bright sunshine and the odour of the purple heather—of thoughts that came and went—of hopes that dawned, and of words that were uttered, or left unuttered.

At last the service was over, and the few people who assembled to hear it—many of them strangers only come to view the church from curiosity—were hastening away.

As Mary rose, Colville did so too that she might pass him.

Still there was no recognition on his part; his eyes were on Blanche Galloway, and Mary quickly glided out of the church. The rain was beginning to fall in the chill October evening, and drawing her shawl close about her she set out on her way homeward, feeling that she would be thankful for a seat in an omnibus.

When she looked back, with an impulse she could not resist, she saw Colville come forth with Blanche, the other two ladies following, as if the arrangement was a tacit one. They all entered the stately Dunkeld carriage, the driver and servants of which wore ample fur tippets. The door was closed with a bang, and they drove off, passing Mary on the way, and bestowing on her a few spots of mud.

‘To be so near—and yet so far!’ she thought, with a greater bitterness of heart than she ever thought to feel—she was

usually so resigned and sweetly patient; but she seemed to know the worst now, and that all was over at last.

The very circumstance of her having to wander alone and unescorted through the streets of London on such an evening seemed to impress upon her still more the difference of position, and the gulf that lay between her and those she had seen whirling away, as she doubted not, to No. 60, Park Lane.

That she had been recognised by some one there on the night of the ball, she thought she had mortifying proof when next she presented herself before the hitherto friendly proprietors of the music-shop in quest of pupils or some employment.

She found their manner curt, changed, and cold.

‘You need return no more,’ she was told.

‘Why?’

'You failed to give satisfaction when we found you employment last.'

'In what way?' asked Mary, in a breathless voice.

'Lady Dunkeld informed us that you left the house abruptly and in a mysterious way.'

Lady Dunkeld! So she in the plentitude of her wealth, power, and position was following up with a vendetta poor Mary Wellwood.

CHAPTER V.

‘SOME DAY.’

THE sale of Ellinor’s landscape for a sum beyond what she had expected for it, came like a gleam of hope to the two lonely girls, and the place in the window where it had hung so long was now empty.

‘I wonder who bought it?’ said she.

‘That matters little,’ replied Mary; ‘his fancy, however, will give you encouragement, nevertheless.’

Ellinor blushed with pleasure. Her picture was sold, but she little knew to *whom*.

She was now convalescent, able to go abroad, and, like Mary, she had also the

coincidence of a strange and unexpected meeting.

One day, when the weather was clear and sunny for the season, she went to Hyde Park with her sketch-book, encouraged to fresh efforts by her success, to make another drawing. The subject was to be some quaint old trees she had noticed, and which she hoped might find a purchaser in some one who knew the locality.

October had given these old oaks its choicest tints, and, while some of their leaves were russet-green, others were like burnished bronze, and were red of many hues; and, all the better for artistic purposes, the chief of these venerable and gnarled trees had a story, for under it Horace Walpole, as he tells us, was robbed in the winter of 1749 by the fashionable footpad Maclean.

'One night in the beginning of November,' he writes, 'as I was returning from

Holland House by moonlight, about ten o'clock, I was attacked by two highwaymen in Hyde Park, and the pistol of one of them, going off accidentally, razed the skin under my eye, left some marks of shot on my face, and stunned me. The ball went through my hat, and, if I had sat an inch nearer to the left side, it must have gone through my head.'

This event occurred within half-a-mile of Piccadilly, and Ellinor, thinking how it would enhance the value of her little landscape, set to work in sketching the group of trees.

So intent was she with her pencil that for some time she was unaware that she was observed, or that anyone was near her in that part of the then usually deserted Park, till she suddenly saw a soldier—a hussar—standing before her.

'Robert—Robert Wodrow!' she exclaimed, in a strange voice all unlike her own, as the pencil dropped from her

nerveless hand. ‘What does this dress—what does all this mean?’

‘Ask yourself, Ellinor.’

Tears started to her eyes at the familiar voice, and so glad was she to see his familiar face that, but for his too probable misconception of her feelings and the eyes of passers-by, she would have thrown her arms round his neck and kissed him.

All unaware that he was so near her, Robert Wodrow had been strolling through the Park, thinking the while of a song that Ellinor had been wont to sing to him often in past days—

‘Some day, some day I shall meet you—

Love, I know not when or how—

Only this, only this, that once you loved me :

Only this, I love you now, I love you now !’

The tender and passionate refrain was in his mind, and actually hovering on his lips, when the face and form of Ellinor came suddenly before him.

‘So you can amuse yourself thus,’ said he, picking up her pencil, ‘and in spite of all the misery that has fallen on me.’

‘I am working thus for daily bread, Robert; and, oh, I knew not that you had taken this terrible step.’

‘Becoming a soldier?’

‘Yes.’

Robert Wodrow was again face to face with the girl he loved with a love so unselfish and passionate, and so ungrudgingly given in all its fulness and tenderness, yet he made no attempt to take her hand.

She thought that he never looked so handsome as he did then, in his smart hussar tunic—blue, faced with red and braided with yellow. Club drill and sword exercise had developed every muscle, while setting-up drill and the riding-school had given him that air and bearing our light cavalrymen alone possess.

‘Why cast away thus your prospects in life?’ she asked, sadly.

‘I have none—I lost them with you.’

‘What dear friends we might have been—nay, were, if with friendship you would have been content, Robert!’

‘A view you only adopted after Sir Redmond Sleath came.’

Her pale face coloured deeply, and perhaps guiltily, at this response, and he regarded her earnestly. She was pale certainly, and her lips had a pathetic little droop in them, though their wonderful sweetness of expression yet remained, but her cheeks had lost some of their girlish roundness and bloom.

The atmosphere of most unclassic Paddington, with its frowsy canal and foetid churchyard, was truly somewhat different from the breeze that swept the Ochil ranges and down through the Birks of Invermay.

Robert realised at that moment how dear, how inexpressibly dear to him, was the girl he had lost, and between whom

and himself he had now opened a complete social gulf, and how their past friendship and love had crept into his heart and settled there, making her still more precious to him than life itself.

When he spoke again his voice was strained and husky, and the tones of it were as those of a man in mortal pain.

‘How is dear Mary?’

‘Well—very well.’

‘From a remark you let fall about daily bread, Ellinor,’ said he, playing nervously with the lash of his riding-switch, ‘I can gather that you are not married to *that* man.’

‘Most certainly not. I have never seen him since we left home—for to us *home* is not here.’

‘Thank God for your assertion! I have heard a good deal about him among our fellows; he is a deuced bad lot, and may yet find you out. If he does, I beg of you to pause, however brilliant his offers of

marriage may be. He dare have no other view; if he had, if he had,' continued Robert Wodrow, with his teeth set under his dark moustache, 'and the grave had me, I would come back to have vengeance on him! Remember my words, I implore you, Ellinor, by memory of the pleasant past, when we were boy and girl together. It is the last favour I can ask of you, and too probably this is the last time we shall meet on earth!'

'What do you mean, Robert?' she said, in an agitated voice.

'I am only here for a day from Hounslow Barracks, and in about a week the regiment embarks for India—for Afghanistan, thank God!'

'How bitterly you speak!'

'I gave up father, mother, home, peace, and profession when I lost you; but, pardon me, I did not mean to upbraid.'

'Forgive me for all I have made you suffer,' said Ellinor, humbly; 'I feel how

unworthy I am of all this great regard,' she added, taking his hand caressingly between hers; and then, conscious of how her touch thrilled through him, she withdrew her clasp, and both seemed on the verge of tears, and might perhaps have indulged in them but for the vicinity of one or two observant and inquisitive nursemaids, who marvelled at the interest the young lady evidently took in the handsome hussar.

'And now I must go,' said the latter, but lingered still, and, cut to the heart with sorrow for him, Ellinor pressed her hands upon her breast, as she yielded to her better nature, but felt that now it was impossible to retrace or reverse the past.

'And you leave England for that far-away land so soon?'

'The sooner the better.'

'Won't you come and see Mary ere you go?'

'I should indeed like to see dear Mary

once again—she was always true to me,' said Robert.

'Do come, then,' urged Ellinor, heedless of the deduction.

'Not now, for I am almost due at Hounslow; but when I come, I must be—in uniform.'

'That matters nothing; no one here knows us or cares for us. Oh, how happy she will be to see you in one sense, and so sorry in another! The uniform is but a trifle in one way.'

'Moments make the year, and trifles life,' said Robert, with bitter smile, quoting Young's satire.

Ellinor gave him their address—they shook hands like friends, these two who might have been all in the world to each other, though in the world their paths in life would lie far apart now—there was a minute's pause, and in a moment more Ellinor was alone.

Her drawing was effectually marred for

the day; her head swam and her hand shook, and forgetting all about Horace Walpole's tree, she slowly quitted the park.

'Poor fellow!' she thought, as the hitherto restrained tears flowed under her veil, 'I have used him ill--and yet how soft and gentle he is with me!'

CHAPTER VI.

JACK SHOWS HIS TEETH.

FORTUNE seemed to be looking kindly on Mary and Ellinor now, when the former, through an advertisement, got a couple of pupils, little girls, in the neighbourhood of Portman Square, and the latter had actually sold her landscape, and started another.

‘The Linn on the May’ had caught the eye of Sir Redmond Sleath when passing the shop window, not that he particularly cared about pictures or art of any kind, save the culinary one, but he thought he recognised the subject—even the style and the landscape—and on looking more

closely, after adjusting his inevitable eyeglass, an exclamation of surprise or satisfaction, perhaps both, escaped him on discovering the initials 'E. W.' in one of the lower corners, and he entered the shop at once to inspect the landscape more closely.

'I think I know the artist,' said he to the bowing dealer, who was not much accustomed to visitors of Sleath's style and bearing. 'A young lady, is she not?'

'Yes, sir—yes—Miss Ellinor Wellwood.'

'I thought so. I'll take her work.'

'Thank you, sir. Shall I send it to your address, your club, or where, sir?'

'Neither. I'll take it with me.'

Cautious in his plans, Sleath was reluctant to give his address, but the price was soon agreed upon, and the money paid.

'I want a pair, and will order just such another,' said he. 'Perhaps you can give me Miss Ellinor Wellwood's address?'

'Certainly, sir. She lives very near this.'

'Near this! By Jove!'

He obtained the number and the street, and went off with the landscape, and with curious emotions of hope and evil blended exultantly in his heart.

‘Paddington?’ he muttered, as he walked off towards the Marble Arch. ‘D—nme, what a game! Are they so reduced, or so ignorant, as to hang out there? Courage, Redmond, my boy, and that charming bit of muslin may be your own yet.’

Sleath had been told plainly enough, and sternly too, by Colville, at Lady Dunkeld’s ball, that Mary and Ellinor were his cousins, who were ignorant of his identity; but the too-knowing baronet did not believe a word of his assertions, and, seeing the matter through the medium of his own evil mind, supposed the story was ‘only a red herring drawn across the scent’—a dodge for purposes of the Guardsman’s own—so he sought counsel of Mr. John Gaiters, while the latter prepared for him some brandy and seltzer-water.

‘I am awfully spoony on a girl, Gaiters,’ said he.

‘That is nothing new, Sir Redmond; but it won’t last.’

‘It never does, I fear.’

‘Certainly not with you, sir,’ was the flippant reply of the valet.

‘Here is her name and address. You will know her again when you see her, but she must not know you. Find out all about her—who she is living with, and all the rest of it—and you will do for me that which nothing can repay.’

‘By jingo, sir, I would rather do something that could be repaid.’

‘Here is a fiver, anyway, and now be off.’

Duly instructed, a couple of days afterwards, and disguised by a false beard and moustache, and clad in a tolerably accurate morning suit, Mr. John Gaiters, turning up his already tip-tilted nose at having to traverse so unaristocratic a locality as Paddington, soon found the

terrace and the number, and after an external survey of the house, by means of the knocker brought to the door a little maid-of-all-work, on whose cheeks was the black smudge so usual to her class.

‘Is your mistress at home?’ he inquired, blandly.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Ah, is she handsome? But I need not ask,’ he added, insinuatingly.

‘Why, sir?’

‘Because, unless her beauty were not of a more than ordinary character, she could not afford to have one so excelling as you by her side.’

This high-flown speech, which Gaiters copied from some of his master’s, caused the little housemaid to think he was mad or tipsy, and she was about to close the door with some precipitation, when Mrs. Fubsby appeared, and, on inquiring for Miss Ellinor Wellwood, he was informed she was at home.

The dealer had promptly informed Ellinor that a companion was wanted for her landscape, and while intent among the many in her portfolio, she was not surprised when Mrs. Fubsby announced a gentleman visitor, who knew her face instantly, though she failed to recognise the bearer of many gifts of flowers and game when at Birkwoodbrae.

With all his vulgar assurance, the valet felt himself for a little time daunted or abashed by the presence and bearing of Ellinor, to whom with some hesitation he told the object of his visit—he had bought her picture, and a friend of his wished one precisely like it; and while he was speaking, Jack, the terrier, with a dog's strange instincts, maintained a most unpleasant snarling under the sofa, and Gaiters, remembering the episode of his master, felt correspondingly uneasy. For 'though love be proverbially blind, hatred has a sharp sight,' and so had Jack, who showed his

white glittering teeth from time to time. 'Human beings have their instinctive likes and dislikes, and why not dogs?' asks a writer. 'We cannot tell what expression of countenance they consider malevolent, or menacing, or murderous; but certain it is that they often exhibit unaccountable antipathy to some individual, while most affectionate and amicable towards all the rest of the world.'

So Jack's antipathy to Sleath now extended to his emissary Gaiters.

The landscape was soon agreed about—money was no object to the visitor, who quickly selected a subject from a rough sketch, which Ellinor perceived with some surprise he held upside-down, a curious fancy in a connoisseur and patron of art, and, in the interests of his knavish master, Gaiters, anxious to learn the entire *carte du pays*, said,

'Do you live here alone, Miss Wellwood?'

‘I am not Miss Wellwood—my sister is,’ replied Ellinor, with a little hauteur of manner.

‘Is she, too, an artist?’

‘No.’

‘And you live together—so sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing her.’

Ellinor thought this evinced curiosity; but, thinking she might advance the interests of Mary, she said, as Mr. Gaiters took up his hat,

‘At this hour she is usually with her pupils at Portmore Square.’

‘Ah—at this hour; we must make a note of that,’ thought Mr. John Gaiters, and, forgetting again to refer to the landscape, he bowed himself out, hailed a hansom, and drove away, having obtained all the information his master wanted—to wit, that the sisters were living together, unprotected, in somewhat humble lodgings, and that Ellinor, at the particular time mentioned, was always alone.

‘Such a pleasant and haffable gentleman, and with such ’ansome whiskers,’ commented Mrs. Fubsby. ‘Drat that dog—why did it worrit so about him!’

The report made to Sir Redmond by his subservient emissary piqued and encouraged him in his nefarious schemes.

‘Every woman has her price,’ thought he, as he sipped his wine that evening after a cosy dinner at his club, and dreamily gazed down the gas-lighted vista of Pall Mall; ‘if not to me, this little one will become the prize—the prey of some other fellow; so, with the basis I have for future operations, why not to *me*? On some pretence or other I shall get her wheedled over to the Continent, and then the game is my own.’

In his instance it could not be said that

‘Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart,’

for he gave his whole thoughts, and his heart too—such as the latter was—to the

consideration and perfection of his schemes, and exulted in the idea of outwitting Colville, if he knew—as Sleath scarcely doubted he did—the residence of the sisters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DAUGHTER OF NOX.

‘AND you have actually found us out—here? How strange!’ exclaimed Ellinor, blushing deeply with pleasure and surprise.

‘Through my appreciative friend—appreciative in art, I mean—who bought your charming landscape, the view of that dear old—what is it?—Linn—Linn of the May—yes, darling,’ replied Sleath—Sleath the slimy, with the china-blue eyes and Mephistophelian smile, as he twirled out his tawny moustache, and regarded the girl with a passionate expression rippling over his face. ‘*Après moi le deluge!* you will think, perhaps; but now, darling

Ellinor, that I have found you at last, we must not part again.'

Ere leaving Birkwoodbrae Ellinor had felt mortified, even insulted, on finding that Sir Redmond, after the night of the frustrated elopement, made no sign that he remembered her existence; but the moment she saw him the barriers she had mentally raised between them fell at once, and she no more sought, as she had done of late, to erase him from her heart.

Poor foolish Ellinor!

'I had ever a hope,' said Sleath, caressing her, 'that I would come upon you suddenly again, and take you by surprise with the earnestness and passion of my love; and, Ellinor, the time has come—thank heaven, the time has come!'

And he cast his eyes upward and sighed sentimentally to the ceiling.

'An age seems to have elapsed since *that* night,' he added.

'I was at the appointed place,'

said Ellinor, softly, and colouring deeply:

‘So was I,’ said Sir Redmond.

‘And why—why——’

‘Did I not appear, you would ask?’

‘Yes—though perhaps it was as well not now.’

‘I was pinned by the leg by that accursed brute of your sister’s.’

‘Jack.’

‘D—n him—yes! Pardon me; but there was something grotesque, humiliating, and exasperating in the whole episode.’

‘I was certain it was thus; but—but why did you never write to me?’

‘Never write to you!’ exclaimed Sleath, with well-feigned surprise; ‘you left—what’s its name—Birkwoodbrae——’

‘Early in September.’

‘Exactly—that is the reason you did not get my letters.’

‘You wrote, then?’ exclaimed Ellinor, her soft face brightening with pleasure.

‘A score of letters, and they were all returned to me from the Post Office,’ replied Sleath, unblushingly.

So Ellinor thought, ‘I have wronged him; it was but a short time ago since this man loved me passionately, and so he must love me still. No love worthy of the name would die in a couple of months.’

‘I always wrote in fear, too, dearest Ellinor.’

‘Fear of whom?’

‘Of your sister—of that old devil-dodger Wodrow, that sly, spying fellow Colville—my uncle, too, who is ailing still, but whose wealth will all be ours—ours, Ellinor! In my heart of hearts I have ever looked forward to the time when—on finding one who loved me truly—I should settle down into a quiet life and be happy, in a cottage near a wood, and all that sort of thing if necessary, my wants are so few—so simple; but that is not required; we shall have a mansion in Belgravia, a moor

in the Highlands, a bog in Ireland for the snipe shooting, a place in the Midlands, and a yacht at Cowes, and heaven only knows all what more—when my uncle dies.'

And as he folded her caressingly to his heart and nestled her face in his neck, the poor little fool believed every word he uttered; and then Sleath began to talk to her of that dangerous and fascinating past—the days of their early meeting among the Birks of Invermay.

Even while caressing and fondling her, his practised eye took in the whole details of the room in which they were seated, with its furniture and appurtenances. There was an air of poverty—even meanness—he thought (for his eye was accustomed to luxury and splendour) within the place, and this, with the ugly and sordid prospect without, as seen through the windows, encouraged him greatly in his insolent and daring projects.

He would try again to carry off the girl somehow—anyhow and without delay. Who was to punish him, or who was there to protect her?

That 'cousin' story of Colville's was, of course, all bosh! The very circumstance of her residence in such a place as Paddington proved it to be so.

By a man of his address and past experience in all manner of worldly rascality, her timidity, coyness, or scruples must, he thought, be eventually overcome. He had entered stakes on the race; he would not readily drop out of the hunt—the pursuit of a helpless girl; if it did not redound to his credit, it would at least afford him pleasure, and if successful would flatter his vanity, for her beauty was undoubted.

Moreover, he strangely felt somewhat revengeful for the trouble she had already given him, and to this sentiment the downfall of her pride and the destruction, if possible, of her delicacy and purity of

nature would be soothing to his spirit.

Even amid his caresses and love-making there was an easy insolence in his manner, born of his innate and perverse vulgarity of race and nature, and encouraged by the girl's unprotected condition, without parents or brothers; but it was so veiled that poor Ellinor never suspected it till he said, with something of irritation in his manner,

‘As for the old devil-dodger, we do not require his consent now, I suppose?’

‘Who—what?’ asked Ellinor, with perplexity.

‘Doctor Wodrow—the psalm-singing old beggar.’

‘Do not speak of him so irreverently,’ said Ellinor, imploringly; ‘he made a pet of me from my infancy, and I love him as if he was my father.’

‘Oh,’ said Sir Redmond, jealously, ‘and his son, too, I suppose?’

‘How can you speak to me thus?’ asked

Ellinor, as the agonised face of the young hussar she had seen in the park came up-braidingly before her. How little Sleath knew or appreciated the depth of her pure, innocent, and dreamy nature, albeit that, through fanning her ambition, he had taught her to be false to Robert Wodrow.

After a pause, resuming his softest tone, he said, while holding her hands in his, and looking fondly and admiringly down into her soft hazel eyes,

‘Then, dearest, you will, as before, consent to a private marriage?’

‘If Mary will give me permission,’ replied Ellinor, slowly and with hesitation.

‘Mary—is she your keeper?’

‘She is my dear and only sister.’

‘But—but will she accord her permission?’

‘I can only hope so.’

‘If not?’

‘Then we can but wait.’

‘My uncle’s death, for he will never consent.’

‘It is a sad event to look forward to.’

‘Very,’ replied Sleath, with difficulty repressing a smile; ‘but I cannot wait.’

‘There must be no running away—no attempt at eloping again,’ said Ellinor, firmly.

Sir Redmond thought of Jack’s teeth, and looked nervously and furtively about him.

‘Jack is with Mary,’ said Ellinor, who detected the glance.

‘As you will—what you please, darling, so that you’ll be mine. I’ll see a sky-pilot—I mean a clergyman—on the subject,’ he added, thinking that, after a little coaching, Gaiters might officiate in that capacity; but then how about the registrar and a church? ‘Well, that is agreed upon, and we shall soon be one.’

To change the subject for a time, that he might consider the further development of his nefarious scheme,

‘How on earth did you come to select

such a queer locality as this to reside in?' asked Sleath, looking with genuine surprise at the humble but neat apartment, where, however, there were now many traces of ladies' hands and work.

'It was a chance. We were, and are, so ignorant of London.'

'And your landlady—you have one, I suppose?'

'Is the kindest, most attentive, and dearest old thing; not that she is very old either. And she has seen better days, it would seem.'

'Of course. I never knew a landlady who had not. And so she is kind to you?'

'And to Mary—unvaryingly so.'

'Ah, I must thank her for all this.'

'Here she comes to lay the tea things. Mrs. Fubsby,' said Ellinor, as the latter entered the room, 'this is the gentleman who bought——'

'Fubsby!' interrupted Sleath, in a dis-

mayed tone. 'What the devil—Seraphina Fubsby!'

'Gentleman!' shrieked Mrs. Fubsby, letting her tray fall crash with all its contents on the floor. 'Villain! double-dyed villain, do we meet again—again after all these years?'

'She is mad!' said he, starting to his feet and keeping the table between herself and him.

'This is Sir Redmond Sleath!' exclaimed Ellinor, in tones of terror and explanation.

'The same man who married me under the name of Redmond, and then deserted me in France. My husband at last, after all these years of cruel desertion.'

'Your husband?' said Ellinor, in a voice like a husky whisper.

'Yes; and look at the white-faced craven. He does not deny it. Listen, Miss Ellinor, though what has brought him here I know not. No good, you may be assured. I was waiting-maid to Lady Dunkeld in Paris

when he and I became acquainted on the Boulevards, and he married me under the name of Redmond.'

'You married me, you mean, or thought you did, you artful and accursed Jezebel,' exclaimed Sleath, choking with rage.

'Oh, what is all this I hear?' moaned Ellinor, overwhelmed with horror, dismay, and humiliation.

'The bitter truth, young lady,' said Mrs. Fubsby, beginning partly to take in the situation.

'You have no proofs now of what you say, you infernal Jezebel, who in your maturer years entrapped me in my boyhood!' thundered Sleath.

'No proofs!'

'No—the old devil-dodger—the curé who performed the ceremony, as I suppose you will call it, was shot in the days of the Commune.'

'True, but the records of his chapel still exist.'

‘What is all this to me?’

‘You will soon learn to your cost, now that I have discovered you under your true name.’

As related, Mrs. Fubsby (who had resumed her maiden name) was not without personal attraction; but she was wasted in aspect, though only about forty—perhaps forty-five—years of age; and now her dark eyes were ablaze with rage and grief. Thus she spoke the truth when she said,

‘I was a pretty young woman, Miss Ellinor, when I first met this wretch in human form; but disappointment, disgust, neglect, and shame, too, have all made me what I seem now—old-looking, wasted, and blasted!’

At this crisis Robert Wodrow came upon the scene. Entering abruptly and unannounced, he regarded the trio with extreme bewilderment. He saw Mrs. Fubsby, whom he knew not, convulsed with just indignation; Ellinor in tears on

a sofa, her bowed face hidden in her hands, her whole air that of one completely crushed, and sitting gathered in a heap, as it were; while Sleath, pale with rage, spite, and baffled knavery, was about to withdraw.

Robert Wodrow never stopped to make any inquiry. He could only conceive one thing—that Ellinor had been somehow insulted or wronged. All the jealousy, fury, and hatred that had so long swelled in his heart now gushed up in fiercer heat, and, endued with thrice his usual strength thereby, he sprang upon Sleath, grasped him by the collar behind, and, with many a kick and heavy lash of his riding-switch thrust him from the room, down the stair, and headlong into the street, where by one final impetus from his foot he flung him in a half breathless heap by the kerbstone, and then closed the house door.

Gathering himself up quickly, Sleath hastened away, registering a truly infernal

vow of vengeance—a vow all the deeper that it was unuttered.

Thus had light been suddenly and luridly thrown on the great secret of his life—the secret which prevented him from raising his eyes to Blanche Galloway, as stated in the fifth chapter of our first volume—which he dared not do as a married man.

He was decidedly unfortunate in his views regarding Ellinor Wellwood; and now the daughter of Nox—inevitable Nemesis—had overtaken him!

Panting with exertion, and with something of a grim laugh, Robert Wodrow returned to the room, muttering to himself,

‘He’ll not forget that last kick with my regulation boot, in the region of the *os coccygis*. By Jove, I haven’t forgotten my Quain and Turner! And now to find out what all this was about.’

We need scarcely say that Ellinor’s soul almost died within her at the contem-

plation of the two narrow escapes she had from ruin and despair!

Robert Wodrow literally ground his teeth when he heard of all that had just transpired.

He looked worn and haggard, and amid her own mortification Ellinor's heart bled for him, for she knew that his life had been crushed by her; while she was ever to him

‘His love that loved him so,
His love who loved him years ago.’

‘I don't think, Ellinor, said he, ‘that even in my dear old governor's “Analecta” would he find a quotation suitable to this fellow's rascality; but I agree with Calvin and Knox in their views of some men.’

‘How?’

‘That they are born to be damned, and this fellow Sleath is one of them.’

‘If men or women are bad they often become so through the faults of each other,’

said the landlady ; ‘ but I’ll bring my man to book if there is law to be had in London.’

And now Mary arrived, accompanied by her faithful four-footed friend, who recognised Robert Wodrow, despite his hussar uniform, and was profuse in his delight, leaping almost to his face at times.

The minutes of this farewell interview sped like lightning !

Robert Wodrow, without a thought of himself, had always loved Ellinor in the past, and he loved her still, ‘ for true love can live even in despair,’ says a writer ; but true love is scarce as the phœnix ; and he had for Ellinor, despite her ill-usage of him, all the reverence that went out with the age of chivalry.

‘ I am going far away,’ said he, while hot tears rolled over the cheeks of both girls, and his own too ; ‘ and when we meet again, if ever—if ever, Ellinor—we shall both be old and cold perhaps—old in

experience, and—thank God—cold in heart—old and cold, and feeling none of the bitterness of an hour like this!’

A few days after the public prints announced the departure of the Hussars for India, and the sisters thought sadly that, too probably, never would they see or hear of Robert Wodrow again.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. DEROUBIGNE.

THE advent of Sleath, and perhaps the influence she had upon the life of Robert Wodrow, had a crushing effect upon the overwrought nervous system of Ellinor. She was again ill—ailing with something mental rather than bodily—and many little comforts were necessary for her, thus taxing Mary's slender exchequer sorely, and adding to her anxieties.

Colville had passed out of the life of the latter, but not quite out of her thoughts. He was going to India—she had heard him say so.

Perhaps he was already gone. So far

as the newspapers were concerned, she had seen no notice of his marriage to Blanche Galloway, an engagement with whom he had so distinctly disavowed.

For a moment vanity whispered to Mary's heart, was he going far away that he might forget herself?

In this idea she was, perhaps, nearer the truth than she knew. Her first and only love affair—if such it really was—had been a dream, and she thought,

‘Life and the world and mine own self are changed
For a dream's sake.’

And Colville might, to a great extent, have applied the quotation to himself, as we may soon show.

Times there were when Mary thought bitterly, ‘Why did he teach me to love him, and then neglect me so? It was cruel, cruel! I was so happy and content till he came.’

And often did this idea haunt her while she taught her little pupils to play the

sweet, low ‘Birks of Invermay.’ But ere long a shock awaited her.

On leaving the house of these pupils one day near Portman Square, she incidentally saw, when taking her parasol off the hall table, the visiting-cards of Lady Dunkeld and the Hon. Blanche Galloway lying there, and a thrill, a presentiment of coming evil, filled her heart; this emotion was verified when, on calling next day, a brief note was handed to her, enclosing a little cheque, with the blunt information that her services were dispensed with.

Her name had by some means caught the ears of these malevolent ones, and this, she knew, was the result of their influence and enmity; and, gentle though her nature, a rush of anger and disgust, not unmingled with dismay, filled her heart.

How was she to break this new calamity to poor ailing Ellinor—the tidings of her rude dismissal? And, loth to return

to her home, she wandered through the streets for a time in aimless misery.

To add to the gloom of her spirit, it was a foggy November afternoon, and she felt the most intense depression, all the more so that she was as yet unaccustomed to the breathless atmosphere, or rather want of atmosphere—peculiar to London generally, and never so much as in that season—the month of death, as the French call it.

Walking onward in the aimless way described, she found herself at the end of Upper Brook Street, where it opens into Grosvenor Square, and there a lady was stepping from her carriage before one of the stately mansions. Mary, full of her own sad thoughts, nearly jostled her, and, pausing, apologised.

The lady, a tall and handsome woman, paused too, and Mary recognised Mrs. Deroubigne, who had complimented her upon her playing, and spoken so kindly to

her at Lady Dunkeld's dance; and something pleading and pathetic in Mary's whole air and face now made Mrs. Deroubigne regard her attentively for a moment.

'We have met before,' said she. 'You are the young lady I had the pleasure of hearing play at Number 60, Park Lane?'

'Yes, Mrs. Deroubigne,' replied Mary, in a low voice.

'You know my name!'

'I heard it mentioned incidentally, and the kindness of your manner made it dwell in my memory.'

'You look both pale and ill, my dear,' said the lady; 'come in, and let me give you a glass of wine—it will do you good.'

Mary thought of Lady Dunkeld, with whom she had last seen this lady, and, pausing, muttered her thanks, and accepted the invitation, but hesitatingly.

Little could she foresee that her whole future life hinged—if we may use the old parliamentary expression—upon that

chance meeting with Mrs. Deroubigne!

The latter would not, we may be assured—for she was very aristocratic in her tastes and proclivities—have noticed an ordinary ‘person,’ young or old, employed to furnish music for any dance she had been at; but there was something so sweet and pathetic, as stated, in Mary’s face and manner—more than all, something so perfectly ladylike in her bearing, that Mrs. Deroubigne felt attracted towards her.

Mary did not get the proffered wine a moment too late; so much was she overcome, mentally and bodily, by the bitter mortification to which she had that day been subjected, that the stately drawing-room in which she found herself seemed to be whirling round her.

‘As you know my name, my dear,’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, ‘may I inquire yours?’

‘Mary Wellwood.’

The lady’s colour changed a little.

‘Wellwood?’ she repeated; ‘that name was very familiar to me once. I knew a captain—latterly he was colonel—Wellwood, who left the Army, and went to reside near Invermay in Scotland. Perhaps he was a relation?’

‘He was my dear father,’ replied Mary, in a broken voice.

‘Indeed—your father! He was my dearest friend.’

How very dear he had been to her once, the old lady did not say then; but thereby hung a tale!

‘Your face seemed strangely familiar to me,’ she said, while regarding Mary with tender interest, and patting her hand as she held it between her two. ‘Your father is dead?’

‘And mamma too, otherwise I might not have been reduced to accept the occupation in which you found me.’

‘This is sad—very sad!’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, her eyes suffusing as she

spoke. 'Your father, I repeat, was the dearest friend of my girlhood—how long, long it seems ago now—my dear girl, I might have been your mother, and for his sake I should like to act as one to you now.'

Mary's heart went forth to the speaker, and then she thought of Ellinor. The words of Mrs. Deroubigne came as a kind of revelation to her; she had heard a rumour of some old and early love affair of her father's, which had led to the bitter family quarrel referred to in the first chapters of our story.

'And you knew mamma?' asked Mary, wistfully.

'Well, indeed; she was the queen of our regiment and the belle of every town where it was quartered. I can say so now, when I am old and widowed.'

'Ellinor is thought very like her.'

'Who is Ellinor?'

‘My only sister.’

‘If so, she must be very handsome. And are there only you two left in the world?’

‘Yes,’ replied Mary; and little by little Mrs. Deroubigne, with growing commiseration, elicited from her some information about herself and sister—their plans and hopes in coming to London; and on hearing them she muttered something about her own ‘two little girls,’ as if comparatively, and shook her head sorrowfully.

Mrs. Deroubigne was evidently a very charming woman, who had seen much of the world, and as a friend and companion was clever and delightful. After a little pause, she said, suddenly,

‘Of course you know your cousin, Captain Wellwood, of the Scots Guards?’

‘Only by name, and an unfortunate reputation.’

‘Oh, I forgot—there was a family quar-

rel. He is one of my dearest friends—Leslie Wellwood Colville, as he calls himself now.’

‘Wellwood—Colville!’ said Mary, inquiringly. ‘I beg your pardon, Mrs. Derou-bigne, but are there *two* officers of that name in the Scots Guards?’

‘No, only one—Wellwood, who added Colville to his name as successor to a large property—your cousin, in fact—and the peerage he claims, Lord Colville of Ochil-tree.’

A light seemed to break on Mary; she knew not what to think; she had no voice to reply. She felt that she changed colour, while a sudden dryness came over her lips and tongue.

She heard the door-bell ring, and knew that Mrs. Deroubigne was speaking again, yet scarcely understood what she said.

‘He starts for India in a day or two, and is to lunch with me this afternoon.’

To meet you—a cousin so charming—will be quite a little surprise for him ; and here he comes !' she added, as the door was opened, and Colville—the identical Colville of Birkwoodbrae—was ushered in !

CHAPTER IX.

WAS IT NOT A DREAM ?

HE came forward through the long drawing-room with his usual easy bearing, his head well set up, his military air, and calm, unflinching eyes, which dilated on seeing Mary Wellwood, and then he paused.

For fully a minute there was dead silence—the silence of dumb bewilderment, and Mary felt how loudly and painfully her heart was beating; while to both Colville and Mrs. Deroubigne it was apparent how much she was agitated, thereby involving a secret which the latter was yet to learn.

Mary had felt that she had cause to be indignant and to feign indifference. As the lover who had trifled with her, as she thought, and gone to the very verge of a declaration or proposal, and then paused, and he—the obnoxious cousin, the heir of entail, one and the same person—stood before her, in her eyes of deep violet blue there came for a brief space the light of a sudden determination, with something of a horrified stare; but ere Mrs. Deroubigne could approach an explanation or introduction, Colville sprang towards the pale and trembling girl, and took both her hands within his own.

‘Mary—Mary Wellwood!’ he exclaimed, in a voice full of passion and pathos; ‘you here!—and do we meet again after all? What mystery is this?’

‘Probably a portion of that which seems to have involved all your actions of late,’ replied Mary, with the slightest *souçon* of

hauteur in her manner, while with difficulty restraining her tears.

‘But are you not glad to see me again—you whom I loved, and love with all my heart?’

‘Captain Colville,’ said Mary, attempting, but in vain, to withdraw her hands, ‘this painful and degrading mode of treating me must not to be resumed!’

‘Painful and degrading? Mary, you know that I love you.’

‘You never told me so. I wish I had never seen you, or that I were dead!’ exclaimed Mary, a little incoherently, while averting her face, and feeling her determination giving way.

‘Never told you so—but you knew; and we were interrupted when we parted last; and then I met with that accident, the wound in my right hand, which prevented me from writing or going to Birkwoodbrae in time to prevent you and Ellinor from vanishing, without trace, as you did.’

By this time she had wrenched her hands away, and, thinking with alarm and dismay of how Mrs. Deroubigne might view this singular scene, she covered her face with them.

‘Captain Colville!’ she exclaimed, with a tone of expostulation, as he gently pulled them down, while triumph and joy sparkled in his eyes.

‘Now, don’t look vexed with me any more,’ said he, in a tone of tender entreaty, while kissing her hands. ‘My dear, dear cousin—dearer than all the world to me,’ he added, as the mingled expression of indignation, perplexity, and doubt passed out of her sweet, pale face; ‘let me explain all, and tell you how I love you!’

Mary was so shaken by all she had lately undergone that she could only weep now; thus for a moment or two she yielded to him; he pressed her to his heart, and covered her eyes and lips with fast-falling kisses, forgetful of the pres-

ence of Mrs. Deroubigne, who looked laughingly on. The good old lady seemed to like the romance of the situation, and of the episode she had so unwittingly brought about.

‘And how is Ellinor?’ he asked, as Mary drew blushing back towards their hostess.

‘Far from well. Of late she has suffered much——’

‘Through my folly?’

‘And other matters too.’

Mary felt her poor little head in a whirl, with some difficulty recognising the whole situation.

So the Colville she had learned to love and her cousin Wellwood were one and the same person! Thus, much which had puzzled her on many occasions in the bearing of Dr. Wodrow was accounted for now. They had been in the plot together. Many things that had seemed perplexing and strange were now clear as day. She recalled the initials, and the mystery he

made about the *W* that stood for the middle name, and remembered that she had seen the Wellwood crest—a demi-lion—on his signet ring; nay, it was on it now! She recalled, with some shame and bewilderment, all her sharp and antagonistic utterances about him and his father, and she cast down her long dark lashes as these things came to memory.

And so it was of himself he had spoken, and to himself he had referred, as having been the worse for wine in the cantonments at Lahore; himself he had referred to as being ‘not a half bad fellow,’ and being wounded in action with the hill tribes; himself on whose supposed coldness and selfishness he heard her descant; and it was regard for her as a beautiful and friendless girl, with the charming tie of cousinship hitherto unknown, that had inspired him as he stood with her side by side at her parents’ grave!

‘I knew not what love really was till I

knew you, Mary,' said he, caressing her again. 'In the world I live and move in, I never thought it would touch me as it did, for there money seeks money or rank. Out of novels and plays, I doubted its existence; but I have learned the sweet lesson at last, and you—the dear cousin who loathed my very name—were my preceptor, Mary!'

'But why—oh, why all this mystery—this concealment of your real position, name, and relationship?'

'Can you ask me, after what I have said? I wanted to know you thoroughly, after all Dr. Wodrow had told me about you and Ellinor. I then wanted you to love me, not as the owner of a landed estate—not as a lounging Guardsman—not for the pretty woods of Birkwoodbrae, that I could perhaps give to you, and would have done so had they not been entailed; but, like the hero of a romance, Mary, for myself alone.'

‘And now to lunch, dears,’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, as she laughingly kissed Mary. ‘I am tired of playing the part of Gooseberry.’

How much they had to talk about, to describe, to explain to each other, out of all the cross-purposes, confusion, and pain that had arisen from her cousin’s scheme, the little romance he had concocted, and the end of which he had not foreseen; while, worse than all, but for the doctrine of chances, they might never have met again!

He heard with astonishment of the two episodes of Lady Dunkeld’s dance and Westminster Abbey.

‘To think that I should be so near you, and have no consciousness of your presence!’ he exclaimed. ‘Where were my eyes—where was my heart? My poor little Mary, had you only thought of looking in the Army List, you would there have seen that your wicked cousin and

Leslie Colville were one and the same man !'

The astonishment of the latter, on hearing of the recent cruel conduct of Lady Dunkeld and her daughter, was only equalled by his just indignation.

'Oh, for the rarity of Christian charity!' he exclaimed.

'I can forgive them *now*,' said Mary, in a tremulous voice, and with a swift, bright glance at Leslie Colville.

'I cannot,' said he; 'forgiveness is indifference, or nearly so, but no one can quite forgive a wrong like this. But I see the origin of this hostility to one who was helpless against it. When I think how—as you know, my dear Mrs. Derouigne—how that half-French brat, Blanche Galloway, in her flirty, Continental way, has sung to me, played at me, talked to me, and made *œillades*, I am disgusted.'

'Come now, Captain Colville,' said Mrs.

Deroubigne, 'that is scarcely fair; did you not encourage her a little *à la soldat*?'

'Not at all! She was ever admiring the rose or flower I had in my button-hole, and when I begged her acceptance thereof, it duly figured in her bosom or hair afterwards, while she flattered herself, no doubt, in the depths of her French imaginings—but I shall teach these Dunkelds a sharp lesson ere I go.'

'Now that you talk of it—and *now* especially—I do not see why you should go to the East at all,' said Mrs. Deroubigne, while Mary grew paler than before, and felt as if roused from a startling dream.

'True, true, but needs must now. In sorrow for the loss of Mary, I volunteered for special service abroad; and so I find her but to lose her again,' exclaimed Colville.

'Special service!' she asked, in a strange voice. 'What is that?'

‘It means detached for staff work where —where operations are in progress,’ said he, evasively.

‘Speak to the point, Captain Colville,’ said Mrs. Deroubigne. ‘You go to the north-west frontier of India.’

‘India!’ repeated Mary, with whitening lips. ‘Has life so little joy for you?’

‘It had but little till within this hour, dearest Mary.’

‘Can you not withdraw your application?’ said Mrs. Deroubigne.

‘As a soldier’s widow, you should know that, unless overtaken by illness, I could not do so with honour.’

‘You are right. How unfortunate it is?’

‘So, my darling and I have met but to part again.’

Mary heard all this with more dismay than she dared exhibit just then, or trust herself to speak about, and it was with a mingled sense of joy she found herself

pledged, before Mrs. Deroubigne, to be Leslie Colville's future wife, and saw flashing on her engaged finger the same diamond ring he had brought for her acceptance on that eventful day at Birkwoodbrae, for then, as now, Mary Wellwood was the one woman in the world for him. 'Whether our passion be prudent,' says Hawley Smart, 'whether the woman we have asked to tread life's path with us is likely to be approved in our maturer years, we reckon little. She is the one woman, so far as we are concerned just now, and has she not pledged herself to be so always?'

But no doubt of himself or of his choice came into the heart of Colville. She had already been tried like gold in the fire; and he was yet to be further tried to an extent he little expected.

When the time came to depart, Mary left Mrs. Deroubigne with a heart too full of regard and gratitude for utterance in

words. She could only sob on her ample and motherly breast; and Colville, when conveying her in a cab to that home which he had resolved she must change for one more suitable, heard of its locality with sorrow and dismay, and with emotions very different from those of Sir Redmond Sleath when he obtained the address of Ellinor.

‘Paddington—Paddington Green! My Heaven, how came you to select such a place?’ he exclaimed.

‘Through the guard of the train. We asked his advice,’ replied Mary, simply.

‘This is intolerable! Such a hole—such a den—such a locality! You must quit it without delay,’ he added, as the only homes he knew were in Mayfair, Tyburnia, and Belgravia; and though his heart was full of joy the first genuine laugh that escaped him was when he heard the address he was to inquire for.

‘Mrs. Seraphina Fubsby! Good hea-

vens, where did she pick up such a name?’

Mary had no time then to inform him that the good woman was fully entitled to another. She was too full of her own thoughts, and, though the fog of that horrible London November day had deepened and darkened all around her, in her heart there seemed sunshine now!

Could it be that so much had passed—that events to her so momentous had occurred—since she had turned away in gloom and almost in despair from the great door of that house near Portman Square, afraid even to tell and crush poor Ellinor’s heart by tidings of the new misfortune that had overtaken them?

Was it not all a dream, from which she would awake to a world of bitterness?

But, no. Leslie Colville’s betrothal ring was on her finger; his strong, firm and loving hand was clasping hers; and all about her was truth and reality.

‘What tidings I bring, dear Ellinor!’ she

thought, as the cab stopped at the door of their humble abode, and Leslie Colville sprang out to assist her to alight as they heard Jack's bark of welcome.

CHAPTER X.

GOING TO THE FRONT.

So they were solemnly engaged at last, plighted to each other, these cousins, and to be married; but when? For Colville had now to face the perils of the war in Afghanistan ere that event could come to pass.

He was going straight and almost immediately to the scene of strife among the savage passes there, and for Mary to accompany him was impossible just then, and as Ellinor could not be left alone she would have to go too; so the idea was not considered for a moment.

They could but wait the future in trust

and hope, and amid the brief joy of the present time was a dread of that future, for he who was departing might never—*return.*

‘All is unchanged at Birkwoodbrae, and old Elspat is there in charge, dearest Mary,’ said Colville, ‘so you and Ellinor may return if you will, and live there till I come back from the East.’

The temptation to do so was strong—the crave to be at home again, to see the faces of old friends, the dear familiar hills, the silver birks, and the fast-flowing May. But though understanding each other fully as the cousins did now, and though their positions as such were changed and strengthened, Mary in her independence of spirit and character thought she would prefer to struggle on as they were, till he could take her there as his wife.

For her kindness to the sisters, Colville slipped quietly into Mrs. Fubsby’s hand a cheque for an ample sum, saying, after he

had heard her story, that it would help her in her plans to prove herself Lady Sleath and punish her wrong-doer.

This was on the following day, when Mary told him the simple story of all their recent troubles, while he gazed down upon her with eyes full of truth and tenderness, and her heart was beating tumultuously with its new-found joy. She knew that he loved her now, he whom she felt inclined to adore.

Yet the future seemed to loom darkly before her. There was this terrible campaign in Afghanistan, with its certain and far separation, its remote and fearful contingencies to be faced, endured, and undergone; so Fate seemed still to be cruel to her.

When, in broken accents and with mingled emotions of anger and shame, while her head reclined upon his breast, Mary told Colville of Sir Redmond Sleath's systematic attempts, though secretly mar-

ried, to lure away her unsuspecting sister Ellinor, great was the wrath and fury of her lover.

Whip in hand, he would assuredly have taken condign vengeance on the back and limbs of the parvenu baronet, but that the latter had to quit London—even England—just about that time, in some haste and in dire disgrace.

At his club he had gambled deeply with Lord Dunkeld and others, from whom he had won great sums of money—more than the peer especially could well afford—and before it was discovered that his wonderful success was due to the use of *marked* cards.

During a game of *quinze* one of the players—a brother-Guardsman of Colville's—noticed that several of the cards were in some way indicated, and, after a careful examination, it was found that all the fives and the court cards were marked by the prick of a needle at the corners, and some in the centre, too.

These marks, though almost invisible to the eye, were recognisable by the sense of touch. A storm of indignation burst over Sleath. He was flung down the club stairs, had to eat very 'humble pie' indeed, and was now gone to the Continent, none knew or cared precisely where, with a congenial friend, Mr. Adolphus Dewsnap (of whom more anon); so whatever legal plans Mrs. Fubsby meant to adopt to relinquish her maiden name and insist upon the adoption of that of Lady Sleath, were partially frustrated or delayed for a time by the baronet's disappearance.

On the very day after the engagement, Mary and Ellinor bade her farewell—it could scarcely be said with regret, though the good woman shed abundance of tears on the occasion.

Colville, who resented as absurd and *infra dig.* Mary's desire of maintaining herself and adding to the slender patrimony their father had left them, brought

an invitation from Mrs. Deroubigne, in whose care they were to be left for the future—certainly for a time at least; and she received them with open arms, and a welcome all the more warm that she was just then alone, her two little daughters being absent at a boarding establishment; and, amid the new comforts and ease that surrounded her in Grosvenor Square, Mary forgot for a time the old wish of her heart to go ‘home,’ as she ever considered Birkwoodbrae her home.

At the commencement of the present century, Malcolm says ‘that this square is the very *focus* of feudal grandeur, religion, fashion, taste, and hospitality, and that the novel-reader must be intimately acquainted with the description of residents within it, when the words “Grosvenor Square” are to be found in almost every work of that species written in the compass of fifty years past.’

Before the house of Mrs. Deroubigne

were still to be seen iron link-extinguishers, a remnant of the past, when links were carried before carriages at the West-End till 1807. Though old-fashioned, the mansion was a lofty and stately one; and Mary, when she gazed upon the tall windows on the spacious square and the landscape garden in the centre, with its old trees planted by Kent, wondered if she was the same Mary Wellwood who for so many weeks past had contemplated the frowsy view from the windows of her late abode.

In her regard for Colville, and inspired no doubt by memories of the past and the dead, Mrs. Deroubigne, to do her justice, was unwavering in her kindness and hospitality to her new friends; and times there were when she actually, amid her dream-thoughts, seemed to forget her own married life, and her heart yearned, warmly and strangely, to the two orphan girls of her old lover—the girls who might, she

averred laughingly, have been her own daughters, had fate so arranged it.

‘Your face, Mary, always reminds me of your father,’ she would say, taking the girl’s dimpled cheeks caressingly between her hands; ‘but yours, Ellinor, suggests to me more of your mamma—you have the same dreamy hazel eyes. And you are romantic, no doubt?’ she added, with a fond smile.

‘Perhaps; every girl has, it is said, at least one romance in the course of her life,’ said Ellinor, thinking of poor Robert Wodrow and the wretched Sleath.

‘And, certainly, I have had mine!’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, kissing Mary, while old memories floated through her mind, known and clear to herself alone.

Mary thought that though it might be delightful in summer to visit Birkwoodbrae, with Mrs. Deroubigne as a chaperone, she would never go back to it as a home on sufferance—on that she was re-

solved; and until she was a wedded wife she could but wait in hope, love, and confidence; besides, Mrs. Deroubigne, at Colville's suggestion, had a plan for a little tour on the Continent to occupy some of the time of his absence, and to make the sisters forget some of the mortifications they had recently undergone.

Though the temporary loss of Mary and the mystery involving her movements—her very fate after leaving Perthshire—had so tortured the heart of Colville that he had resolved to seek for change amid the stirring scenes of Eastern war once more, he felt that he could now leave England with emotions of comparative happiness and content.

He knew that she was in safety—surrounded by every comfort, even by splendour—and had been saved from much he could not quite foresee, by the slender but blessed chance of her meeting with Mrs. Deroubigne!

To him and Mary the few meetings before his departure seemed heaven-sent—though a sorrowful separation was at hand—the happiest of all their past existence.

Neither seemed to question, as yet, how they would feel or could exist during the months—perhaps the more than year—of separation that had to come.

Never, never would she forget the time when he placed the engagement-ring upon her engaged finger, and when their eyes met in one long and deep glance—a glance that, though no word was uttered, proved the silent compact of his avowed and her accepted love.

So the fatal day came inexorably at last ; after a farewell dinner to him at the Guards' Club in Pall Mall.

' Good-bye, dear girls,' said he, cheerily ; ' good-bye, love Mary—another kiss and another. I'll bring you back such wonderful things from India—tiger-skins, and

tiger claws set in gold; Delhi jewellery from Chandney Chowk; ivory carvings, and I know not what more,' he added, and, in spite of himself, strove to be cheerful; 'and when I do come back, Mary, you will be my own darling little wife till death parts us.'

So the hour, the supreme moment, had come at last, and Leslie Colville was gone!

His letters were Mary's only solace after that; long letters full of loving and passionate expression, to be read and re-read again; from Suez, burning Aden, and beautiful Bombay; they came regularly, but became fewer and further between as he proceeded up country by railway, and his last, before they left London for the Continent, informed her that he had been appointed to the staff at Jellalabad, where Sir Samuel Browne was concentrating his forces prior to an advance on Cabul. Thus he would soon be going to the front.

CHAPTER XI.

AT JELLALABAD.

‘WELL, Colville, how do you like India from what you have seen of it?’ asked Colonel Spatterdash, as he sat smoking in his shirt and pyjamas, for, though the month was March, the solar heat was already considerable in that part of Afghanistan, and quite disagreeable by eight in the morning.

‘I don’t like it at all,’ replied Colville; ‘besides, I have been in India before, and you forget, colonel, that this is not India, but rather beyond it.’

‘True, I am not likely to forget that, when the rocks are bristling with Afghan

juzails! But, if you don't like it, what the deuce brought you out now?'

'To have a new sensation, to see a little more of the world again,' said Colville, evasively, as he was not disposed to tell his thoughtless listeners—some four or five officers—assembled for tiffin (*i.e.*, lunch) about his romance, and the temporary loss of Mary Wellwood.

'A new sensation!' exclaimed Algy Redhaven, a handsome young captain of the 10th Hussars, who had just entered the bungalow; 'you are likely to have it soon enough. Have you heard the news that has just come in from the front, colonel?' he added to Spatterdash.

'No—what the devil is up?' growled the old field-officer.

'Fresh complications are likely at Cabul—the Ameer Shere Ali has gone to visit the Russian general at Tashkend.'

'Whew!' whistled old Spatterdash; 'that will likely precipitate matters. I

always thought the invasion of British India by Russia would be as practicable a few years hence as that of Italy by Austria, and now, by Jove, we seem close upon it.'

And since the date we write of the Russians have pushed on to Merv in Turkomania!

The group of officers who were invited to the colonel's table were all happy and heedless young fellows belonging to Sir Samuel Browne's column, and high in anticipation of a protracted 'shindy' with the Afghans, as a force was being concentrated at Jellalabad.

A couple were on the staff, like Colville; one—Redhaven—belonged to the Royal Hussars; two others to a native infantry regiment; all were somewhat airily attired, and, till tiffin made its appearance, all were smoking cheroots so industriously that clouds of their pale smoke curled among the rough rafters and straw roof of the bungalow.

Jellalabad, where the fortune of war had then cast them, the winter residence of the Cabul monarchs since the consolidation of the Dooranee Empire, is situated in an extensive valley of considerable beauty and fertility, eight-and-twenty miles long by about four broad, and the town had before this been rendered memorable by the heroic stand which Sir Robert Sale, with a handful of British soldiers, made in it against the Afghans some forty years before.

In importance it was originally only next to Cabul and Candahar, but its fortifications had been completely destroyed by General Pollock after the war that ended in 1842. Like all Afghan cities of note, it had its Balla Hissar, half palace and half citadel, with a poor population estimated at from three to ten thousand.

Many streams fertilise its valley—namely, the Cabul River, which flows near the walls; the Surkh Rud, or Red River, and

the Kara Su, or Black River, while around it are numerous castles, and picturesque villages, and groups of forest trees, though an arid desert spreads in its immediate vicinity.

Nearly four months had elapsed since Leslie Colville had parted from Mary Wellwood, and already as many ages seemed to have elapsed since the few brief days of reunion they had spent together at Grosvenor Square; and now he knew that many more months must elapse, must be faced and endured, ere he could hope to turn his steps towards Europe; and even while sitting there, among these bantering and somewhat noisy fellows, he looked around him as one in a dream, whose thoughts were far away, while Mary's soft, sad features came vividly before him in memory and in their beauty, though the latter, as some old poet says,

‘Is in no face, but in the lover's *mind*.’

‘How silent you are, Colville!’ exclaimed

old Spatterdash, relinquishing the mouth-piece of his hookah for a moment. ‘Gad, I believe the fellow’s in love.’

So full were his thoughts of Mary at that precise moment that he almost coloured as if they had been read by the colonel, who continued, in a tone of banter,

‘With you, I suppose, it is,

“——to bid me not to love
Is to forbid my pulse to move,
My beard to grow, my ears to prick up;
Or, when I’m in the mood, to hiccup.”

Is it so? Well, anyway, stick to the *brandy pawnee* till tiffin comes.’

Again the old familiar sound of the cantonment *ghurries*, or gong-bells, as they were clanged for the change of sentries, was in his ear, and the view from the open windows of the bungalow was strange and striking.

Far away above the misty horizon rose amid the clouds—and cloudlike themselves, so bright and varied were their tints—the majestic mountains that tower between

the shallow valley of Jellalabad and the ramparts of Cabul, and chief of them is the stupendous Suffaidh Koh, fourteen thousand feet in height, then covered with dazzling white snow; and if wondrously beautiful by day, it was perhaps still more so by night, when the full moon lit up its chasms and peaks with its Asiatic splendour.

In the immediate foreground, just before the windows of the bungalow, a curious scene—one illustrative of the distant region and the manners of our Indian fellow-subjects—was in progress.

The *Poojah* of a battalion of H.M. Native Infantry, a Hindoo regiment, was being celebrated towards evening.

The battalion, in full marching order, with its colours, was drawn up in a circle. At each cardinal point of the compass was a small clod of earth, with barley and rice on it; and in the centre were the attendant Brahmins with a beautiful young goat,

which had been sprinkled with pure water, barley, and rice. Then the sacrificer drew a huge Ghoorkali knife, and, after muttering some prayers, by one trenchant slash severed the head of the goat from its body. At the moment of immolation twelve guns boomed through the air and drums were beaten, after which the battalion was wheeled back into line, and marched by fours into its lines, with band playing and colours flying.

Colonel Spatterdash, Colville's host, was a thorough Indian officer of the old school, who had broiled for so many years in Bengal that he had lost much of his European identity, all memory of home nearly, and religion too, and had become so bronzed that evil-disposed fellows used to hint—but *not* in his presence—that he had 'a dash of the tar-brush in him—was fourteen annas to the rupee,' and so forth.

The wags of the station at Chutney-pore declared that he wore a gold bangle

given to him by the orange-visaged Rani of that place, who liked him as 'a wicked old man,' that squeezed her brown paws when he assisted her into the silk-curtained howdah of her great tusker elephant, which had carried 'Colonel Wellesley's' baggage at the battle of Assaye.

He was full of old Indian memories of the Rangoon Rangers and Bhurtpore Bulldogs, as he had heard of them when he came out from Addiscombe a cadet and griffin; and had many a story to tell of the pre-railway times, when, if not marching, people travelled by *dâk*, night and day, in palanquins; when the old Bengal colonel was a father to his regiment, the guide of his subalterns, and was never so happy as when he had a dozen or so at his table, all eager for *Kowab*, fresh eggs, with Phillibut rice, kedgere, &c., and *Bhola* in plenty.

He was a captain when the mutiny occurred; and its horrors, with the dismay

that his beloved Sepoys—the *Spatterdashka-Pultan*, so-called from his father—should prove untrue to their salt, nearly broke his heart; and he thought the end of the world had come when they flung him down a well at Gungawallah; but he was hard to kill. A banyan-tree that grew half way down broke his fall, and to that he clung till rescued by some Highlanders, after which he solaced himself mightily by blowing whole batches of ‘pandies’ from his guns.

And now tiffin came, curried chickens, rice, green chillis, mutton and chutney, &c.; &c., with plenty of wine and brandy, all laid out by his faithful old *Kitmutgar*, wearing an enormous white turban.

‘Anything,’ said the colonel, ‘is better than bitter beer that has been boiling on the dusty road between Peshawur and Jellalabad, till the cask hoops grow hot in the sun.’

So he took a huge beaker of *brandy*

pawnee, as he reclined in the cane easy-chair in his well tattied bungalow, with punkah wallahs crouching in the verandah outside, and smoked his hookah, for he preferred such a residence to a double-poled tent or a tumble-down brick house in that city of earthquakes, till the troops marched.

‘I knew your uncle, Wellwood, thoroughly,’ said the colonel to Colville. ‘He and I were great chums, and I once saw him do a plucky thing—a very plucky thing, by Jove!—when we were giving a fellow a tight flogging under fire.’

‘A flogging under fire—that was remarkable, surely?’

‘Not so in those days; we were never squeamish about anything then.’

‘And this plucky thing?’ said Redhaven, the hussar.

‘Convinced me that Wellwood was pretty reckless of life. He had been soured by some disappointment in love,

we heard—the idea of such a thing!

And, while old Splatterdash laughed a little contemptuously at the thought of a tender passion, Colville, remembering the secret episode of Mrs. Deroubigne's life, listened with some interest.

‘It came about in this way, you see,’ said the colonel, after taking a long pull at his hookah. ‘After we advanced upon Jhansi under Sir Hugh Rose to crush the rebellious Sepoys who held the place (which was a town and fortress of the Mahrattas of old), we bombarded it heavily for four days, but not without resistance, for the shattered remains of the Gwalior contingent, augmented to twenty-five thousand bayonets and sabres, and eighteen pieces of cannon from Kalpee, came marching along the right bank of the Jumna, hoping to raise the siege, d—n them!

‘In that, however, the Pandies were disappointed. During the bombardment,

when we were pitching shot and shell into each other, a great thirteen-inch bomb from an old mortar happened to fall close by where the soldier of a European regiment was tied up to "the halberts," as we still called the triangles, to receive a hundred and fifty lashes for insubordination when mad with drink and heat. The sudden appearance of this great missile, with its fuse burning and hissing, caused such confusion and consternation that the companies, formed in hollow square, fell back on all sides, even breaking their ranks, for none could composedly await such an explosion under their noses.

‘Instead of yielding to this natural impulse, Wellwood took from his pocket a penknife, and, walking up to the helpless and terrified creature who was bound to the triangles, he cut the cords that bound his wrists and ankles, setting him free, and both had barely time to retire a little way and throw themselves flat on the

ground, when the great shell burst, and a hurricane of iron swept over them and all around. Thus did he save this poor fellow, who must inevitably have perished from his inability to save himself; and Wellwood did more, for, in consideration of the mental agony the man had undergone, he remitted the remainder of the punishment; and, by a curious coincidence, the culprit perished a few days after in the action of Roohea when saving the life of Wellwood, whom some rebels were about to bayonet as he lay wounded and helpless on the ground.'

'This will be an episode in her father's life to tell Mary of when next I write to her,' thought Colville. And now the conversation drifted into the subject then uppermost in the minds of all—the probability of serious complications if Russian intrigues proved successful at Cabul, and none could expect them to be otherwise when the Ameer Shere Ali had departed

openly to visit General Kauffmann at Tashkend, in Central Asia, which place, however, he was fated not to reach.

The subject that caused our dispute with him, and brought our troops to Jellalabad and elsewhere upon his frontier, was the dispute known then as the "Resident" question, because he rather favoured the Russians, and thus refused to have any such British official at his court for three reasons—firstly, the person of a Briton would not be safe there; secondly, that European officers might make demands that would occasion quarrels; and thirdly, that if Britain was represented, Russia would expect to be represented also. But it was known that he was in close correspondence with General Kauffman, and only feared that a British Resident might, if present, throw some light upon it; and in the end a convention was signed, by which Russia bound herself to

give at least moral support to the existing Afghan dynasty.

An envoy sent by our government to Cabul never reached it, being forced back at a place called Ali Musjid. For this an apology was demanded, and Afghanistan was entered by a British army in three columns that won several victories, and the Ameer finding his case hopeless started for Tashkend, but died on the way, and was succeeded by his son, Yakoub Khan, who eventually showed a disposition to come to terms with us ; but in this we are a little anticipating the events of our story, for, at the time Leslie Colville joined the staff at Jellalabad, Sir Samuel Browne was, as stated, collecting a force there, while General Maude relieved his post between that place and Dakka, and the gallant Roberts, posted further forward at the Peiwar Pass, was improving the difficult mountain road between that place and

Cabul for the passage of guns and baggage.

So thus it was that our troops were now engaged in what was known as the second Afghan War—to counteract Russian influences.

As the evening advanced and darkness closed in, some yells and oaths in Hindostanee and Pushtoo were heard at a little distance outside the hedge of the colonel's compound, and Colville, who had been looking from a window, now started to his feet.

‘I can't look on and permit that!’ he exclaimed.

‘Can't permit what?’ asked Spatterdash, tartly.

‘A lot of fellows——’

‘Budmashes, no doubt, by the row they make.’

‘Ill-using one man; and now, as it is time for me to go, colonel, I shall interfere *en passant*.’

‘Don’t think of it—don’t bother!’

‘But they may kill him.’

‘What the devil does it matter? A nigger less in the world won’t be missed,’ growled Spatterdash, who had lost all sympathy with the natives since the Mutiny.

‘Call the nearest guard—the picket—or some chowkeydars,’ said Redhaven and others; ‘but don’t interfere in a row of this kind.’

Colville, however, buckled on his sword and revolver, lit a fresh cheroot, laughingly bowed himself out, and hurried away; for, sooth to say, he was a little tired of old Spatterdash, and as no one actually thought he would interfere in a native row, no one followed or accompanied him.

‘The inlying pickets have been doubled to-night by order of the general,’ said the colonel.

‘Why?’ asked some one.

‘Because rumour says that the Sirdir Mahmoud Shah, a tearing Afghan devil,

has come to lead the Mohmunds against us.'

'With what object?' asked Redhaven of the Hussars.

'A row, of course.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE HADJI.

‘THE world is a small place, after all!’ thought Colville, as he left the Colonel’s bungalow behind him. ‘Think of hearing here that anecdote of dear Mary’s father from that old subadar! Well, well, “life,” as some one says, “is a perpetual enigma, to which no theological system offers a satisfactory solution—against the reefs of which all philosophies break into foam and empty bubbles.” But here are more than bubbles, by Jove! Now what is all this deuced row about?’ he added, drawing his sword, on seeing before him the authors

of the noise he had heard, engaged still in a wild and fierce *mêlée*.

This was in a sequestered part of the town, and near some of the ruins of houses shaken down by the earthquakes some forty years ago. One man was contending single-handed against no less than five, and in the clear starlight Colville could see the flash of their gleaming eyes, their set teeth, their dark and infuriated faces. The man assaulted wore an Afghan costume, a cloak, a kind of blouse with loose sleeves, and on his head a *loonjee*. The others had flowing garments and large turbans, and were armed with heavily-loaded clubs, against which the stranger was defending himself with no small dexterity with only a pilgrim's staff; for, by his wallet, gourd, and beads, he was evidently a hadji, who had become involved in a quarrel with some Wahabis, who, it seemed afterwards, had been mocking him for praying at the tomb of a Santon, and

told him he should call on God, and on no imaginary saint, on which he had proceeded at once to lay about him with his pilgrim's staff.

'To call a man a Wahabi,' says Sterndale, 'is, to nine-tenths of Englishmen in India, to call him a fanatic, a rebel, a sort of Mahometan fenian, one whom the police should take under special surveillance, and whose every action is open to suspicion.'

Like the English Puritans, they—in addition to deriding the intercession of saints—despoiled the mosques of their lamps and decorations, broke down all shrines, prohibited music and dancing, and smoking was denounced as a mortal sin; and now those whom Colville found himself opposed to would undoubtedly—but for his sword and revolver—have made short work of it with the unfortunate hadji.

He drove them back a few paces, and the hadji, while panting for breath, and

streaming with blood from more than one contused wound, continued to revile them bitterly.

‘Wahabis—accursed Wahabis!’ he exclaimed, ‘dare they speak to me? I am a Soonee, not a dog! I am not a Shiah, the follower of Ali, but an orthodox Soonee, like my forefathers, blessed be God and His Prophet! Wretches,’ he added, with all the ferocious rancour of religion and race, ‘your souls will yet defile hell!’

‘Begone, and leave the man to go on his way,’ said Colville, authoritatively, as he waved his sword, for he knew enough of Arabic and Hindostanee to understand what was said and the nature of the brawl.

‘Dogs!’ resumed the irate hadji, encouraged by his presence and succour; ‘know ye not that the time is coming when the Wahabis shall be judged according to their deserts, and each in passing a

dead man's grave shall say, "Would to God that I lay there!"'

'Dog of a Soonee, when will that time come to pass?' asked one, jeeringly.

'When the sun rises in the west,' shrieked the hadji, frantic with rage; 'when the beast shall rise out of the earth near Mecca; when a smoke shall cover the earth, and the Mahdi shall come to everyone and fill the earth with righteousness.'

And much more to this effect did he vow with singular force and fluency, for the hadji was an Afghan, and, so far as regards the external forms of their religion, the Afghans are wonderfully devout, and so much of their conversation, whatever the subject, is so tinged with their religion and the Koran that one would imagine the whole people, from the Ameer to the humblest camel-driver, were engaged in holy reflections, and scarcely is a sentence uttered by them without some reference to the Deity.

One of the Wahabis now seemed to lose what little remains of sense or temper he had left, and, uttering a savage yell, swung aloft his ponderous *lohbunda* or staff, which was heavily shod with iron—a weapon one well-directed stroke from which would have spattered the brains of the hadji on the street—but Colville, quick as lightning, warded off the blow with his sword, in the process of which his right arm tingled to the shoulder; and as at that moment the tramp of a patrol from an inlying picquet was heard approaching, the brawlers took to flight, and Colville was left face to face with the man whose life he had saved.

‘Sahib, I have to thank you gratefully for this prompt and courageous succour, but for which these dogs would no doubt have slain me,’ said the pilgrim in English; ‘as it is, they have handled me so roughly that I am barely able to stand.’

‘You speak English very fluently,’ said

Colville, with genuine surprise. ‘How is this?’

‘My uncle was a *muhafez dufter*, or keeper of the records, in the office of the district magistrate, near Peshawur, who educated me to work in his office; but at his death I went back to the hills and became an Afghan soldier under Shere Ali.’

‘And now——’

‘I am a poor harmless hadji, Mahommed Shah, seeking but to save his soul,’ said he, lowering his keen and glittering eyes, as he looked steadily around him. ‘In saving me you have done a good action, and what says the fourth chapter of the Koran? “Verily, God will not wrong anyone, even the weight of an ant, and, if it be a good action, He will double it, and recompense it in His sight with a great and just reward.” But these thrice accursed Wahabis,’ he added, grinding his teeth with rage, and making thereby a very unpleasant sound, ‘may be swallowed

up by the earth as the accuser of Moses was.'

Colville looked around him warily. In the dark, unlighted, and tortuous streets of the city this poor man might easily be overtaken and murdered by these fanatics, if they were—as Colville did not doubt—still lurking watchfully about, so he said,

'Come with me to the Balla Hissar; I am quartered there, and can keep you in safety for the night; besides, your wounds must be dressed, and in the morning I would advise your instantly quitting Jellalabad.'

'As-taffur-ullah! that will I, sahib; and by the five keys of knowledge, I will never forget your kindness.'

The citadel was close by. There Colville took his new acquaintance past the sentries to the rooms assigned as his quarters, quaint and lofty apartments with marble floors, and walls covered with beautiful arabesques, splendid but com-

fortless, and, summoning the soldier who acted as his servant, with lights, some wine and bandages, he desired him to bathe and bind up the wounds of the old Afghan wanderer, who was on the point of sinking, and would have done so, but for some water which he took, dashed with brandy, despite the precepts of the Koran.

‘You *have* had a narrow escape!’ said Colville, looking at some of his bruises.

‘It is perhaps useless to bind these wounds.’

‘Why?’

‘Because if a man is to die he will die.’

‘But if a man is ailing surely he may be cured?’

‘Yes,’ replied the hadji, ‘through the Koran.’

‘Koran again!’ thought Colville. ‘You mean by faith in it?’

‘Yes; by writing therefrom some holy sentences on paper, and drinking the water wherein that paper has been washed clean.’

‘You have heard, I suppose, that the Ameer has gone over to the Russians?’ said Colville to change the subject.

‘Yes, sahib,’ replied the hadji, in whose eyes a strange light now appeared, ‘but he is dying of mortal disease, and will never reach Tashkend.’

‘Then Yakoub Khan will succeed.’

‘Yes; the man who has already aspired to sit on a *musnud* (throne) is little likely to content himself with a carpet, especially if supported by the bayonets of the *Ghoralogue*. By the Prophet, no!’ added the hadji, referring to what was well known—that Yakoub Khan had conspired against his father, who, in consequence, had kept him for years imprisoned in a dungeon without light.

The hadji seemed a genuine Afghan, and considerably past middle-age. He was tall, spare, and muscular, with aquiline—almost Jewish—features; high cheek bones, and strong, black, glittering eyes,

with an intensity and keenness in their expression that reminded Colville of those of a mountain eagle. He was fairer complexioned than most of his people, among whom even red hair is sometimes met with ; but his face had been cleft from temple to chin by a tulwar stroke in some past battle or brawl ; and now the livid mark of that terrible slash could be seen distinctly as altering, and in some measure distorting, features that were naturally very regular.

After partaking of a little food of the plainest kind, he performed the ablutions enjoined by his faith, spread a white cloth over his kneeling-carpet, and, turning his face in the direction of Mecca, said his *salat al Moghreb*, or evening prayer, while Colville took himself off to the mess-room ; and when he returned the hadji was lying on the verandah outside, fast asleep, and cosily muffled up in his dark-coloured *choga*, or camel-hair cloak.

In the morning he had left the Bala

Hissar, and gone, none knew where, save that he had been seen going towards Cabul by the way of the Ali Musjid Pass.

It never occurred to Leslie Colville, in performing the acts of kindness he had done to this stranger, whether there might be peril or evil evolved from them in the future; or whether the man was—as he ultimately proved to be—a keen and observant spy, come to watch and note the strength, preparations, and object of Sir Samuel Browne's column; and, poor though the hadji looked, Colville's servant—a more than usually sharp example of Private Thomas Atkins—had found him in the early morning reckoning over a quantity of gold in his wallet, and one of these which he dropped was found to be of the last Russian mintage.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIGHT WITH THE MOHMUNDS.

SAVE for flying rumours cantonment life at Jellalabad had been a little monotonous for some time past. Paper hunts had been resorted to, and polo was played every afternoon by officers of the 10th Hussars, riding Cabul ponies upon a piece of ground cleared for them by their men about two miles from the city.

Other officers exercised their skill in 'potting,' with the breechloader, quails, and the beautiful partridge, called the 'hill chuckore' by the Afghans, wild sheep, and antelopes, while some of the more adventurous brought down a wolf

or hyena, but, as these were chiefly to be found at a distance some personal risk was incurred, and one might be 'potted' in turn by the 'juzail' of some hill-man lurking unseen behind a rock or tree.

The counterbalance to these little amusements were visitations of wind and dust, or torrents of rain, that pattered like a storm of dry peas on the tents of the troops who were in camp near the city, so, when the weather had become settled, all hailed with considerable satisfaction the advent of the expedition under General Macpherson to look after a gathering of the Mohmunds—a tribe of about fifty thousand souls, whose fighting men were reported as mustering for mischief on the other side of the Cabul river, in the southwest corner of the Jellalabad Valley, opposite to Girdi Kas, where the stream flows away towards Chardeh.

The staff were in their saddles betimes, and on the ground in front of the city.

‘Good morning, gentlemen,’ said old Spatterdash, as he came cantering up on his Arab in the dark. ‘What is the hour?’

Colville adroitly caught a firefly, and placing it for a moment on the glass of his watch, saw the time.

‘Four o’clock, colonel.’

‘We have other work this morning than pig-sticking or potting jackals and foxes; but there is time yet for a cup of coffee dashed with brandy—a cheroot, and then away.’

‘The bugles are sounding, and there go the trumpets of the Hussars and Lancers blowing “boot and saddle.”’

Disdaining the use of a regulation sword, which he stigmatised as an ‘army tailor’s blunt knife,’ Colonel Spatterdash rode with an enormous tulwar by his side—a weapon once wielded by the great rebel Tantia Topee—one literally for slicing, and having such an edge that he might have shaved with it. He was

in high spirits, and being still practically under the influence of his potations overnight, was humming the song of 'The Sepoy Grenadiers'—

'The spirits of our sires,
 Who gathered such renown
 From clouds of battle fires,
 With stern delight look down,
 'To Delhi and to Deeg they point,
 Those stars of other years;
 And bid us still uphold the fame
 Of *the Sepoy Grenadiers!*'

'I'm not likely to die from "waste of nervous tissue," as the doctors call it, whatever the devil it may be,' he added, as he unsheathed his tulwar, that flashed in the paling starlight; 'we'll have a burra khana' (*i.e.*, big dinner) 'when we come back, after polishing off these Moh-mund fellows.'

'At least all who are able to partake of it.'

'Don't be gloomy, Colville; d—n it, I never am.'

The force for this expedition was made up of detachments from the column ; there were some of the Rifles, with some of the Ghoorkas, 1st Sikhs, and 20th Punjaub Infantry, one hundred of the 10th Hussars under Captain St. Quintin, and one hundred of the 11th Bengal Lancers, in blue uniforms faced with red, under Major Princep. De Latour's Hazara Mountain Battery came clattering up, and two Royal Horse Artillery guns, which latter, with a small force, proceeded at once on observation down the right bank of the Cabul river, in case any of the Mohmunds might have taken post in that direction.

At half-past four in the morning the whole force—not much over a thousand men—after forming in silence and as quickly as possible, without further sound of drum or bugle, moved off, and, with St. Quintin's hussars in the van, crossed the river by the new bridge erected by our Royal Engineers, and advanced into the

dark country beyond, where the only sounds heard were the wails of an occasional jackal, replied to by those of a pack of his fourfooted brethren.

In galloping from point to point, when the troops were forming under arms and then in columns of march, giving the general's last orders or directions, Colville had not much time for abstract reflection, yet a certain idea did occur to him, and he muttered, with a glow of the purest satisfaction,

‘If I fall to-day or any other day, thank God I have made all square for my dear girl and her sister, too.’

This referred to a secret visit paid by him to Lincoln's Inn ‘anent’ codicils to his will the day before he left London; and now he recalled with astonishment the time when he either disliked these unknown cousins or forgot that they existed.

Though Mohammed, Khan of Lalpura and chief of the Mohmunds, had made

complete submission apparently to Sir Louis Cavagnari at Dakka, in the preceding year, it did not prevent his people from opposing us now in arms, like many other mountain tribes.

After the hoofs of the cavalry and wheels of the artillery had made the planks of the trestle-bridge resound, silence again fell on the column; and when the moon came out in its oriental splendour, amid some weird, windy, and fast-flying clouds, there was light enough to see the column distinctly.

The sheeny bayonets of the infantry and the spearheads of the lancers (denuded *pro temp.* of their fluttering banneroles) glittered brightly, as did the sword-blades of all the officers; and our cavalry are generally so gaily appointed that, when the 10th Hussars went cantering to the front, the flashes of light reflected from their accoutrements, if they added to the picturesque, also added to the peril of the

occasion, if any scouting Mohmunds were about, as this alone would have revealed the advance of the force, which from its sombre costume would have been, otherwise, almost invisible—but the tropical white helmets were always prominent objects amid the gloom.

At this time, all our troops in Afghanistan wore Cashmere putties, or leg-bandages, made of strips of woollen cloth, two yards and a half long, with a tape stitched on at the end. They were worn round the calf of the leg from the ankle to the knee, where the tape secured them. For cavalry and infantry alike they were a useful and warm addition to the clothing in cold weather; and there was but one objection—the time necessary for binding them on.

Some natives acted as guides, and in the cold moonlight the cavalry and artillery went clattering over rough stones, and more than one of the former fell from his

horse, and of the latter off the limber-seats, as some sudden and deceitful ditch or water channel had to be crossed. The enemy was in front; no one knew precisely when or where he might be fallen on, and this added to the zest and excitement of the time and occasion.

The orders of the cavalry were to spur on in front; to get in between the Mohmunds and the hills, for the purpose of cutting off their retreat; and a picturesque sight were the Hussars and Lancers, as they dashed through the Kunar River (which joins the Cabul about five miles from Jellalabad), in its descent from Shigar, and flashes of light came from their glancing accoutrements as they vanished away from the sight of the infantry in the gloom ahead, when a cloud passed over the face of the moon.

Next came the infantry splashing through the Kunar, which rose to the men's waist-belts, and was broad at the point where

it was crossed; and a bath such as it gave was not a desirable beginning in a cold morning with the work they had in hand.

At one place the route lay over what seemed to have been an old Mohammedan burial-ground. Coffins are not used in the East, the body being simply rolled up in a sheet, and placed in the grave with only a foot or two of earth spread over it. Into these receptacles the wheels of the guns stuck fast in succession, compelling the gunners to quit the limber-seats and drag them out, crushing and grinding the human bones beneath, and causing an expression of much rough language unfitted for ears polite. If the superstition of the Afghans, who greatly venerate burial places, which they call 'Cities of the Silent,' be true, that the ghosts of the dead sit at the head of their own graves, invisible to mortal eyes, enjoying the odours of the flowers planted

there, the said ghosts must have been somewhat scared by the row Her Majesty's gunners made till they got their seven-pounders free from this succession of traps, and once more on solid ground; and also by old Spatterdash, who was impatient to get his Sepoys forward, and swore in English and Hindostanee.

Though the Kunar river, which takes its rise near the great Pamir Steppe and Bam-i-Duniab, or 'the Roof of the World,' was left in the rear, the troops had to splash through several tributaries of it ere they obtained higher ground, and then they began to look upon scenery wild and mighty, rugged and uncultured, where wolves peopled the forest, the elk and deer haunted the brook, and the crane and the stork hovered about the watercourses, and over all, desolate and savage, towered the mountains of Shigar, many thousands of feet in height.

Sometimes the route lay between groves

of dark poplars, of pale green willows, or dwarf palm, sunk amid which the tributaries of the Kunar flowed like streaks of silver; and sometimes between vegetation familiar to the British eye—the ash, the oak, the chestnut, and hawthorn, though mingling with the cedar, the olive, and fig.

Major Louis Cavagnari, a handsome dark-complexioned man, whom Colville now saw for the first time, came riding up and joined the staff, accompanied by a brilliantly attired and accoutred Afghan horseman, whom he introduced as the Khan of Besoot, from whom much useful information could be gathered, among others that a range of hills in front was full of the enemy under a fanatic named Moollah Khalil.

The Ghoorkas, who were leading, were now ordered to seek cover as soon as they had left in rear a village near these hills, while the cavalry swung round to take

these in flank or cut off the retreat of the enemy, and with that force went Colville with a message from the general.

While galloping on to overtake them he could see the files who were to skirmish dart out in extended order with unslung carbines, and soon the cracking of exchanged shots quickened every pulse as they were heard among the hills.

‘Push forward the mountain battery!’ was now the general’s order.

It was galloped to the south side of a projecting ridge, while old Spatterdash, with some of the Punjaub infantry, began to scale its rocky crest. There the Mohmunds were in position, but so dingily were they attired, or so much did the colour of their costume blend with that of the rocks and trees, that, though not a single man of them could as yet be separately distinguished, the existence of their masses was known by the flashing of their

arms in the sunshine, or by the fluttering out of a red or green village banner against the sky-line.

While measures were thus being taken to have them on the flank and an attack was delivered in front, De Latour got his mountain guns ready for action, and sent a shell at a thousand yards' range whistling through the air. Curving in its course, it fell and burst among them high up on the ridge, scattering death and mutilation. Another and another fell, and then, as the arms ceased to glitter, it was known that the Mohmunds were falling back.

Again the flashing of their weapons in the sunshine, and the jets of white smoke from their long juzails, levelled over bank and rock, but fired at long and almost useless distances, announced a rally or pause in their retreat, the line of which lay along a plain that extended away to the eastward, and onward through that space and clouds of rising dust swept the

cavalry, followed by the infantry at the double.

The skirmishers of Redhaven's troop having, in the ardour of pursuit, advanced too far into a dell, became suddenly exposed to a galling fire, which emptied more than one saddle; and Colville dashed forward with orders for their recall.

The trumpet sounded the 'retire,' and it was obeyed by all but one hussar, who continued to load and fire, while the juzail balls whistled about him, and knocked up jets of sand about his horse's hoofs.

'Sound again!' said Lieutenant Redhaven to the trumpeter, who sat with the bell of the trumpet planted on his thigh.

Again he blew, but in vain.

'He is too far—he does not hear it—the fellow will be lost!'

'Oh, he hears it well enough, sir,' replied the trumpeter; 'but just now he pretends to be deaf.'

‘Deaf!—what the devil does he mean? To throw his life away?’

‘Looks like it, from what I have seen of him more than once.’

‘He is a brave but reckless fool!’ exclaimed Redhaven, impetuously, as he was now seen engaged with four Afghan horsemen, after having slung his carbine, and drawn his sword; and by this time Colville, full of pity and admiration, inspired also by the passing remarks of the trumpeter, was already on the spur to succour him.

‘Allow me, sir, that officer can’t go alone; besides, the poor fellow is my own comrade,’ said a hussar, who, without waiting for Redhaven’s consent, dashed the spurs into his horse, settled himself well down on the saddle, and in less than a minute was among the cloud of dust, where Colville and the other hussar were in close *mêlée* with the four Afghans, one of whom was the Moollah Khalil, who was

armed, not with a tulwar, but an enormous maul, furnished with a round knob of gilt metal.

‘Allah Ackbar, Mohammed resool illa,’ he was shrieking, with blazing eyes, as he goaded his horse in the fray, and laid about him like a madman, and by one blow brained or stunned the horse of the skirmisher whose rashness had brought this combat about, and during which the juzailchees had ceased firing, lest they might hit their own leader.

Ere the hussar could free himself from his stirrups the maul was about to descend on his head, when a thrust from Colville’s sword, delivered under the right arm, pierced the lungs of Moollah Khalil, who fell to rise no more, and, protecting the hussar by a great circular sweep of his sword, Colville dragged him up by his bridle hand, and mounted him on the Moollah’s horse. His follower had now disposed of a second Afghan just as his

horse was shot under him, and the two others, terrified by the fall of the Moollah, fled at a gallop, on which the *juzailchees* resumed firing, and the shot whistled and whirred past Colville and his companions.

‘Quick—run as best you can,’ said he, putting his horse to a trot, but loth to leave the two soldiers behind.

A wailing cry escaped one as a shot evidently struck him, and Colville paused by checking his bridle. The man was mortally wounded and ghastly pale, yet he walked on for some thirty paces, erect and steadily, his eyes fixed on vacancy; then he paused, and fell dead on his face.

‘Poor Sam Surcingle!’ exclaimed the other, and at that moment Colville also dropped from his saddle, struck by a ball in the left ribs.

Luckily it was a spent one, and only knocked the breath out of him; but not a moment was to be lost, as a few of the Mohmund *juzailchees* were creeping back,

filled with the maddest rage at the death of their fanatic leader, who had believed his life to be charmed.

The hussar dragged Colville up, and almost lifted him into the saddle, and taking the bridle applied one spur to both horses, and brought the officer into the lines faint, worn, and with his mouth full of blood.

When safe out of fire Colville dismounted near a pool covered with crimson water-lilies—the sacred lotus of Brāhma—and then the hussar whose life he had saved, and who had succoured him in return, opened his blue patrol jacket and proceeded, after bathing his face and giving him a draught from the pool, to examine his hurts with a skilful hand.

‘Not a rib broken, sir, thank God!’ said he; ‘only a contusion, and the consequent discolouration will pass away in a few days. I haven’t forgotten my Quain and Turner.’

‘Robert Wodrow!’ exclaimed Colville, recognising for the first time the ex-medical student.

‘Yes, Captain Colville—Robert Wodrow it is,’ replied the other, with a sad smile, as he proffered his brandy-flask.

‘Thanks—I have my own,’ said Colville, struggling into a sitting position. ‘Mary and Ellinor Wellwood told me of the step you had taken—a very rash one I think it—when you failed in your studies through the mischief wrought you by that scoundrel Sleath.’

‘So you met them?’

‘Yes—and left them well and every way, I hope, happy.’

‘It is an unexpected pleasure to see *you* here, sir.’

‘My poor fellow, if I can befriend you, I shall, believe me,’ said Colville, shaking Robert’s hand.

‘Thank you, Captain Colville; my officers

and comrades like me already, thank God ; and I am now a corporal.'

'They are right who assert that there is nothing certain but the unexpected,' said Colville, laughing, yet wincing the while with pain ; 'and this meeting with you has been most unexpected by me.'

'But not by me, sir.'

'How so?'

'I have seen you in and about Jellalabad for days and weeks past.'

'And why did you not speak to me?'

'I am not now what I was—when hoping to be a graduate of the Edinburgh University, but a poor hussar—*un simple soldat*.'

'Simple, indeed, to throw your chances in life away thus—and even your life too, as you so nearly did a few minutes ago.'

'I had none left—none that I cared for,' said Robert, hoarsely.

While this conversation was taking

place, the infantry and artillery had halted, and the brigadier, with all the cavalry, had pushed on in pursuit of the fugitive Mohmunds as far as a place called Gurdao, in a gorge, where the Cabul river flows out of the valley of Jellalabad.

On an islet in the river there are the remains of an old Buddhist monastery, surrounded by a tope of hoary trees. For here had once been the worship of Buddha—a worship which, though now almost banished from India, has spread over countries of an almost wider area, and is usually ranked as the ninth avatar of Vishnu.

Here a few of the Mohmunds made their last stand, till the best cavalry marksmen picked them off with their carbines, and the whole troops began a retrograde movement towards Jellalabad.

Colville was once more in his saddle,

and, by Redhaven's permission, Robert Wodrow attended to him on the march.

'I wish I understood the law of crises,' says the author of *Altiora Peto*. 'I suppose it has an intimate connection with that other mysterious problem, the law of chances . . . I have always had a theory,' he adds, 'that from time to time our lives culminate to crises. Then the crisis bursts, and we begin again, and slowly or rapidly, as the case may be, culminate to another crisis.'

Well, here was a crisis and something more in connection with the law of chances. The two men who loved the two sisters, Mary and Ellinor Wellwood, under circumstances and with success so different, by the birks of Invermay, were now face to face and together in that far-away land of peril.

After hearing Colville's little narrative of what had transpired before he left Lon-

don, Robert Wodrow looked at him for a time in silence, and thought how different were their fates and probable future in the world.

Colville had hope and wealth, he (Wodrow) neither, and life seemed so valueless ; yet a couple of Afghan bullets might solve all difficulties for both of them !

While the artillery made a detour to avoid the pitfalls of the Mohammedan burial-place, Wodrow was remarking to the officer by whose side he rode,

‘ It would seem, Captain Colville, that, as some writer says of the romance of life, ours seems to be overtaking us pretty quickly.’

‘ Romance, do you call it ?’

‘ Bitterness, in my case, would be nearer the truth. I am a broken and ruined man,’ said the other, after a pause. ‘ Ellinor took the last ray of sunshine out of my life. She told me plainly that she could not marry a poor man for the world,

nor wait till he became rich—a knowledge that only came to her after Sir Redmond Sleath found his way to Birkwoodbrae. She was wiser, perhaps, but her wisdom, poor girl, brought her nothing—nothing! My love was only an ideal after all, Captain Colville; and though life does not seem to me worth living, it must be lived—till ended—after all.'

Colville made no reply, but proffered his cigar-case to the speaker, who accepted a cigar with a courteous bow and blush of pleasure; the very act was a kindly recognition that they had once been equals, and were still friends.

'You must quit this sort of thing, Wodrow, and go back to your studies at Edinburgh,' said Colville; 'back to Quain and Turner, to Balfour's Botany, Jackson's Materia Medica, and all the rest of it. If you want money for that or anything else, consider me your banker.'

But Robert Wodrow shook his head with

an air of decision. 'Sir, I thank you from my heart's core, but no, Captain Colville—never again.'

'Tuts; we'll talk about all this another time,' said Colville, kindly, hoping to bring him to a right way of thinking and acting.

Yet while he declined all proffers of assistance, Robert Wodrow's mind was full of thoughts—soft, subduing, and kindly thoughts—of his reverend father, his mother so sweet and meek, so abiding and confiding in the will and goodness of God, and the old sequestered manse embowered among the bonnie birks of Invermay—the manse of Kirktoun-Mailler.

By midnight the returned expedition marched into the lines of the camp at Jellalabad.

'You have acted bravely to-day, Captain Colville,' said the brigadier, shaking his hand as the troops were dismissed to their tents; 'and so sure as the stars look down on us you shall have your V.C. for saving

the rash hussar and killing the Moollah Khalil. I wish you had polished off Mohammed Shah, too, while you were about it.'

'Who is he?' asked Colville, to whom the name seemed somehow familiar.

'One of the sirdars of the Ameer, and a very distinguished one, now with the Mohmunds.'

'By Jove! that was the fellow who pretended to be a hadji, and whom I had for a night in the Bala Hissar—in the citadel actually.'

'A lesson for you to be more careful and less hospitable in future,' said the brigadier, laughing.

Colville was duly complimented in general orders, and weeks after the latter was read and duly appreciated by one who then was—far, far away!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE LUGHMAN VALLEY.

THE death of the Ameer, and succession of his son, Yakoub Khan, were now confirmed beyond all doubt at Jellalabad; but troubles and skirmishes seemed to be on the increase, and no man's life was safe.

In the country of the Shinwarris, a district on the Afghan frontier, a surveying party was attacked near Maidonak, though escorted by old Spatterdash and his Punjaub Infantry. To the natives it seemed that knocking little pegs into the ground, sticking up little flags, and taking the altitude of heights by a theodolite could only be the blackest sorcery. Other

instruments which were looked through in a mysterious manner, with the notes made on paper, were all deemed damnable charms, and indications of talismanic power, and the sirdar named Mahmoud Shah, who was roving in that quarter, together with Abdullah Mir, another adherent of Yakoub Khan, reminded the people—as all Muslims believe firmly in magic—of the evil wrought by the wicked genie Sacar, the inveterate foe of Solomon, of Eblis or Degial, who, according to the Koran, was that enemy of the human race who accomplished the downfall of Adam, and much more nonsense to the same purpose; so the surveying party were furiously attacked by a band of fanatics, armed with tulwar, dagger, and juzail, in a solitary place near the base of the Suffaidh Koh.

In the conflict that ensued a non-commissioned officer was killed, a captain of the Royal Engineers wounded perilously by the blade of a charah, a subaltern of

native infantry received a ball through his shoulder, and several Sikhs were killed ; but Spatterdash laid about him vigorously with his tulwar, split one or two heads through the long floating loongees like pumpkins, and brought the party off ; after which General Tytler, at Maidonak and Girda, burned the two villages, blew up seven fortified towers, and seized hostages, to be kept in irons till a heavy fine was paid.

In due time Colville got his V.C. for the affair with the Mohmunds, and Robert Wodrow was recommended for promotion, and, as the coming general war in the heart of Afghanistan was likely to make many a vacancy, if spared, he was sure to get it.

In consequence of the skirmish at Maidonak and threatened attacks by the hostile tribesmen in the vicinity of Jellalabad and the Lughman Valley, early in March an expedition was ordered into the latter

quarter, under Major-General Jenkins, and with it Colville went on the staff. It proved a very successful movement, with many important political consequences.

The first news he heard of it was after a supper in old Spatterdash's bungalow.

'Turn in if you can, lads,' said he, when the cantonment ghurries clanged midnight; 'and I must have a nap, too. We get under arms before daylight to-morrow.'

'For what?' asked Colville.

'To fight, of course. Have you not seen the general orders?'

'No—I was at polo all afternoon with the 10th. But to fight—where?'

'That depends upon where we find the enemy, who are gathering as usual for mischief; so let us have a nightcap of *brandy-pawnee*, and then to roost.'

Colville stretched himself in a corner of the bungalow, and was soon in the Land of Nod. 'The soldier off duty and the sailor when his watch is over have the

faculty for getting snatches of sleep at a moment's notice, which is denied to most other mortals, and a blessed gift it is.'

An hour before dawn the bugles sounded, and the troops detailed for the expedition fell in.

It was then known that the destination of the force was the Lughman Valley, where the sirdar Mahmoud Shah was the active and ruling spirit.

Considerable annoyance and mortification were felt by Colville at the frequently recurring mention of this personage's name, the Hadji spy in Jellalabad whom he had succoured and protected, a circumstance for which he had been much quizzed and 'chaffed,' for, as Lever has it, 'a little bit of fun goes a long way in the army.'

'A fine fellow to have fostered, Colville,' said Colonel Spatterdash, as he mounted; 'd—n him, he is worse than a Peshawur scorpion, and we all know what it is, for size and venom.'

While the infantry rolls were called, the companies proved, and the battalions formed, the battery of artillery were also getting in order; the horses were champing their bits, pawing the ground, and laying back their ears as if impatient for the trumpet call. The gunners stood by them—one examining the harness finally to see that all was right, another altering his stirrup-leathers by a hole or two, a third adjusting a comrade's accoutrements, a fourth grasping the bow of his saddle ready to mount at the blast of the trumpet, after which he knew his horse would no longer remain still; while the trumpeter stood near the commanding officer, breathing into the mouthpiece of his brass instrument, occasionally as if to keep it ready for sounding.

Anon the men are mounted or on the limber-seats; the trumpet rings out, the word *march* is given; the drivers ease the reins and close their legs to the riding

horses, throwing their whips gently over the necks of the off-horses so as to ensure their starting together ; and it is a rule in artillery that the spurs are for the ridden horse, the whip for the off one, and to be applied over the shoulder or neck, but never in the rear of the pad.

So the guns went clattering to the front, and the infantry broke into columns of march, with a cavalry advance-guard, just as the sun began to lighten the summit of the Suffaidh Koh and other snow-clad mountains.

The Lughman Valley lies north of Jellalabad, and is overlooked by the Himalayas, though extending to the lower ridges of the Hindoo Koosh, while Kaffiristan borders it on the east.

Colville, of course, rode with the staff, and the ill-fated Louis Cavagnari accompanied it.

Many narrow valleys, with torrents traversing their boulder-strewn beds, and

sides covered with beautiful vegetation, were passed in succession, with several villages, each marked by an enormous chunar or Oriental plane—perhaps by two or three placed near each other for shade, where the Moollah might bring forth his Koran, and recite it for the information of others.

As the troops proceeded the rocks around them seemed to grow darker and darker, owing to the lead ore among them, while enormous boulders of every kind of stone were strewn about far away from their original beds out of which the torrents of ages past had torn them.

Shaggy goats and broad-tailed doombas, or Persian sheep, were seen grazing near the villages, where at first the people came forth peacefully to gaze with wonder upon the Feringhees. No untoward event occurred, till a tribesman drew near where a party of hussars were halted, carrying a sharp axe concealed behind his back,

and evidently bent on mischief, as he was known by his white dress to be a Ghazi, or fanatic devoted to death.

With his weapon, he was about to aim a blow that must have proved a deadly one on an unsuspecting corporal, when, quick as thought, Robert Wodrow, who had his sword drawn, clove his head to the teeth.

This was a signal for strife. Alarm fires soon began to shoot up redly on several eminences; yells and shouts came upon the mountain wind from armed parties mustering fast among the rocks and eyries; and ere long a sputtering fire of juzails, or native rifles, was opened on the column, and men began to drop dead or limp about wounded.

Out of these lofty places the tribesmen were shelled, but not without difficulty, and ultimately driven by the rifle-fire of our skirmishers into a narrow, rocky defile, which proved a kind of natural *cul-de-*

sac, out of which there was little or no exit; and there into the wedged mass, shell after shell at a thousand yards went smoking and whistling till it plumped and exploded among them with terrible effect; but it was necessary to teach these treacherous people a lesson, and a severe one it proved.

Four days the expedition remained in the Lughman Valley, and on the fourth, when passing on the downward route the place where the conflict had ensued, and where rifle and shell fire had decimated the enemy, Colville, who for a considerable time past had been somewhat unused to strife and slaughter, looked with a kind of horror upon the scene around him.

Save the vultures and carrion crows no living creature had ventured to approach the gorge where the dead and dying yet lay—a picture of human anguish and human passions indescribable.

The bodies of the torn and mutilated lay thickly there, either stark and stiff in the refuge of death, or writhing and struggling, as if to escape the doom of those beside them.

If this scene seemed dreadful by day, more dreadful and ghastly did it seem to those in the rear of the column, who passed it after nightfall, and the moon shed its cold light over the Katcha mountains, and the rear-guard of Hussars, under Redhaven, had to pick their way amid bodies lying half-naked, in every conceivable position, with dark and bloody faces on the broad and ghastly grin, distorted and battered limbs, with clenched hands and staring open eyes; while some of the dead sat bolt upright against rocks and boulders, with jaws dropped, and stiffened fingers grimly pointing at vacancy.

The next expedition towards the Lughman Valley was marked by a terrible

disaster, the story of which went through the length and breadth of the British Isles.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FANCY BALL.

FROM such a scene as that in the Lughman Valley we gladly turn to one of a very different kind.

It was an evening of the early days of April, when the elms begin to show their half-developed foliage, the buds of the oak are red, and the sprays of the beech gleam like emeralds against the blue sky, and the laburnum is clothed in green and gold, that Mary and Ellinor Wellwood sat in a beautiful flower garden while idling over some 'crewel work,' and watching a glorious sunset as it shone on the broad waters of the Elbe.

We have said that for change of air and of scene Mrs. Deroubigne, who acted to them as a second mother, had taken them with her to the Continent, and, after wandering through France and Holland, they now found themselves installed in a pretty villa near Altona, about two miles from the gay, busy, and hospitable city of Hamburg, whose merchants are so famous for the excellence of their dinners, and the splendour of their entertainments.

It was a lovely spring evening; the Elbe, studded with shipping under sail or steam, was rolling in light, its blue blending into crimson; and beyond it lay the low, green hills of Hanover, now no longer a petty kingdom, but an integral portion of the great German empire.

The sun was setting, and such a sunset!

Separated from Hamburg only by a space called the Field of the Holy Ghost, where daily the spike-helmeted Prussian troops could be seen at drill, the wharves

and warehouses of Altona join those of the city, as they stretch along the waterside with stately rows of pale green poplars behind them.

Beyond the last of these, in a little wooded creek, and on the summit of a green bank overlooking the river, stood the charming little villa occupied temporarily by Mrs. Deroubigne, from the windows of which the great panorama of the Hansetown was visible, with the lofty red-brick tower of St. Michael's Kirk (a hundred feet higher than the dome of St. Paul's at London), bathed in ruddy gold, and casting its mighty shadow half-way to Altona; and, as the evening sky grew redder, the spires of St. Katharine and St. Nicholai grew redder too; and now, impressed by the beauty of the evening and of the scene, the influence of the season and the soft purity of the ambient air, the two girls, in the new happiness of their hearts, sang together a duet from 'Il

Flauto Magico,' of Mozart, all unaware that a young Prussian officer—a smart uhlan, in bright green uniform—was lingering admiringly near them.

We need scarcely mention, though Hamburg is famous for the beauty of its women, the officers of the garrison, the uhlans, and the Hanoverian infantry in the Dammthor Barracks always welcomed the appearance of the two 'charming English meeses' and their handsome chaperone at the consul's balls, the opera, the *fêtes* in the Botanischer Garten, or when the bands played in the fashionable Jungfernstieg (or Maiden's Walk), the beautiful tree-shaded promenade by the side of the Alster, which is always covered with gaily-painted pleasure-boats.

These amusements, with fancy work, music, and novels—Tauchnitz editions, of course—made the sweet spring days pass quickly with Mary and Ellinor in that gay city, where, it is said, that in summer the

inhabitants appear to work all day and amuse themselves all night.

Before their departure to the Continent, great had been the astonishment of Lady Dunkeld and the fair Blanche Galloway when they heard of the near relationship of Colville to the sisters, of his engagement to Mary, and that they were to be chaperoned by Mrs. Deroubigne till the marriage came to pass.

‘The marriage!’ How Blanche elevated her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders. It was bitter to lose thus the future Lord Colville of Ochiltree.

Both those aristocratic ladies would fain have extended their patronage and countenance to the sisters now; but, aware of their past malevolence, Mary and Ellinor, though far from revengeful, steadily declined all intercourse with them. Nor did Mrs. Deroubigne attempt to control their actions or wishes in the matter. Thus a coldness amounting almost to a ‘cut’ en-

sued between her and the Dunkeld family.

Leslie Colville's last letter to Mary from Jellalabad had narrated the episode of his meeting with Robert Wodrow, and the mutual good services they had done each other; and Mary, who had read of the personal conflict in the war correspondent's news, felt her heart sink within her at the contemplation of the many and incessant perils her lover—her affianced husband—had to encounter.

And how often did Mary recall their parting, when he had held her face tenderly and caressingly between his hands while he gazed down into her tear-blinded eyes, so sweetly and so passionately, posed as they both were like the pair in 'the Huguenot' of Millais's picture; while she looked up to him as sweetly and as passionately too.

His departure had seemed to Mary but the beginning of the end. Yet who could foresee amid the terrible contingencies of

war and climate what that end might be?

Thankful she felt as each day passed, and with it a portion of the time of separation; but who might know what that day had seen or brought forth far, far away among the wild mountains of Afghanistan? And so, with curious and persistent ingenuity, thoughtful and anxious fancy often tormented her.

Yet under different influences and happier auspices, and amid new scenes, both sisters regained the old glow of health and beauty they had possessed each in her own degree in former days at pleasant Birkwoodbrae.

Meanwhile with Ellinor, as the conviction of her own sudden selfishness and folly grew strong in her heart, and the now odious image of Sir Redmond Sleath faded out of it, the memory of Robert Wodrow and of other days took their place there; but what would that avail either of them now?

The sisters ceased their duet suddenly, when Jack the fox-terrier, who had been nestling against Mary's skirts, started up to greet with many a yelp of delight the young officer who fed him so often with biscuits and chocolate creams.

'Pardon my interrupting a song so sweet,' said he, in good English, 'but my purpose must be my excuse,' he added, with a military salute, for the Baron Rollandsburg—a visitor of Mrs. Deroubigne's—belonged to the Uhlans, and, like all Prussian officers, was seldom or never seen out of uniform, the green laced with gold of the dashing Lancers.

He was a fair-haired and handsome man, barely thirty years of age, and in his fifteenth year had the glory of being the first Prussian to enter Paris, for he it was who galloped his horse amid scowling and assembled thousands through the Arc de Triomphe after winning the iron cross at Sedan; and now he had brought 'for

Madame Deroubigne' and her two young ladies, tickets for a most exclusive fancy ball, to be given in the Theatre of Hamburg, which is one of the largest in Germany; for, though there are many public ball-rooms in that pleasure-loving city, they are never patronised by the upper classes.

The baron had been the sisters' escort to all 'the lions' of Hamburg—to the churches, the stately and crowded *Börse*, to Røedings Museum, the tomb of Klopstock, the great garden kept by a Scotsman at Wandsbeck, overlooked by the house of Tycho Brahe, and they had lingered again and again on the summit of the Stintfang, from whence there is such an extensive view of the harbour, the Elbe, and the opposite coast of Hanover, and his hand had often assisted Ellinor in her sketches of the Vierlanders in their picturesque costume and of their boats laden with glowing fruit, flowers, and vegetables.

Mrs. Deroubigne deemed there was no harm in all this. It amused the girls, drew them from their own sad thoughts, and so far as she could see the admiration and attention of the young baron were pretty equally divided between them, or if he had a preference it was for Mary, as it seemed ere long.

But the tickets for the fancy ball—a ball of a kind so peculiarly flattering to female vanity and taste in costume and so forth—seemed to crown all his previous good offices and kindness, and they accepted them with a genuine delight that quite flattered him.

Bouquets (selected by those pretty Vierlander flower girls, whose picturesque caps and embroidered bodices make them quite a feature in Hamburg), gloves, music, even a fan or two, had come from the Baron Rolandsburg, but always at appropriate times, with reference to a stall at the opera or an afternoon dance.

There was no reason why Mary should not accept such gifts ; yet she would rather that they did not come, as their acceptance seemed a kind of treason to him who was then so far, far away.

For some days their fancy dresses were an all engrossing source of thought and topic with the girls and their chaperone ; but, after many changes of mind, costumes of the reign of Mary Stuart were selected by them, Mary choosing blue, slashed and trimmed with white, as suited to her blonde complexion, and Ellinor rose colour, trimmed and slashed with black, as suited to her dark hair and hazel eyes, and wonderfully handsome and piquante they looked.

On the forenoon of the ball the baron arrived with three magnificent bouquets and two beautiful fans for the sisters—the best that could be obtained in the Neuer Wall.

‘How charming—how kind!’ exclaimed both, blushing with pleasure.

‘For our dance to-night,’ said Rolandsburg, in his most insinuating tone, to Mary, ‘how many waltzes are you to give me?’ he asked, in a lower voice.

‘How many do you want?’ asked Mary, coquettishly.

‘I would like them all of course—save those I may have with Miss Ellinor; but that is too much to expect.’

As all this implied more than words, Mary appeared not to hear, and addressed Mrs. Deroubigne.

In due time they were attired, and drove through the brilliantly lighted streets to the Stadt Theatre in the Dammthor Strasse, where the Burgher Guard, in quaint uniforms, were under arms to receive the burgomasters and four Syndics of the city, who wear on state occasions high-crowned hats and black

velvet cloaks, with ruffs and swords; and there, about the entrances, were a crowd of blooming Vierlander flower-girls, selling bouquets and button-holes, their quaint hats or gold-embroidered caps, their bodices of crimson or black, covered with gold-broidery, and their short blue skirts, making each a picture.

‘I shall dance with no one else but you to-night,’ said the uhlan, in his softest tone, to Mary.

‘No one else?’ said she.

‘Save your sister.’

‘Our poor uhlan is evidently playing with edged tools, Mary,’ said Mrs. Derou-bigne, with a smile, while the baron was intently pencilling on their programmes and his own.

The stage and floored pit of the theatre, which had been converted into one vast, brilliantly lighted and gaily decorated hall, was filling fast with guests in every real and fanciful costume that can be conceived,

and already the great orchestra in their places were playing a kind of overture; but their music was to be alternated by the great brass band of the uhlans; and, though many handsome, even rarely beautiful girls were present, Mary and Ellinor Wellwood were remarked amid them all.

‘Schön! schön!’ (beautiful, beautiful) muttered many, as they passed to their appointed place with Mrs. Deroubigne.

‘En vérité!’ exclaimed a gallant little French consul; ‘ces dames sont charmantes!’

But the ball itself has less to do with our story than what it precluded.

Many of the dresses were gorgeous in texture and decoration—silk, velvet, gold and silver jewellery, and the richest lace, fairy-like in delicacy of fashion and tint, and when the dancers in hundreds flew round in the waltz it seemed a glimpse of the land of Elphin.

The music was divine, and Mary felt

every nerve and fibre of her frame respond to it as she sped round with slippered feet over the well-waxed floor on the arm of Rolandsburg, whose step and time suited hers to perfection.

There were beautiful Jewish matrons from the fashionable mansions on the Alster Damm, with broods of black-eyed and equally beautiful daughters; for the Jewish ladies of Hamburg, in style, beauty, and delicacy of feature, excel all others of their race; but the blonde beauties of Holstein and North Germany far exceeded them in numbers and glow of complexion.

Off the dancing-hall were artificial conservatories and refreshment-rooms for ice-cream, jelly, and flirtation, where servants were in attendance clad like Turks, with turbans and slippers, pistols and yataghans, and where, with a sound like file-firing, the champagne corks flew up to the gilded ceilings.

Amid the dazzling scene, as Mary paused

in a waltz, panting, palpitating, and blushing to see her own reflection in a mirror, as she almost clung to the arm of the baron in his green uhlan uniform, and found herself the object of so much attention and admiration, her mind reverted with a kind of dull and painful wonder to the past days of their obscure abode in frowsy Paddington; to her struggles for employment, and her lonely wanderings in unfamiliar streets, where often her beauty subjected her to such observation and insolent annoyance that often she longed to be old and ugly; and when her chief hope had been to fill the place of governess to some one's children—well-bred or ill-bred, yet not without a faint vision of future good fortune, position, and admiration—perhaps even riches; she was too young to be without such fancies and hopes.

Ellinor thought she would never forget the splendours and enjoyments of the fancy dress ball; in all its features and

details it was so new to her, and from a subsequent event she was fated to remember it long.

The baron, always attentive and full of *empressement*, was enchanted to be the privileged cavalier to two such English belles.

Mary, in her piquant Mary Stuart cap, with a little ruff round her delicate neck, her sleeves puffed and slashed, her peaked bodice, all blue satin, with seed pearls, quite dazzled him, and matured the passion for her that was growing in his heart; and at last, in the intervals of the dances, though he yielded her with undisguised reluctance to other uhlans, dragoons, and gunners, who crowded about her, programme in hand, he ventured to speak on the subject—not to her, but to Mrs. Deroubigne, and thus spared her some pain and confusion.

‘Madame,’ said he, while conducting her to a refreshment-room, ‘you evidently love

these two young ladies as if they were your own daughters !’

‘I do indeed—and they might have been,’ was the somewhat enigmatical reply of Mrs. Deroubigne, with one of her bright sweet smiles.

‘Ah ! who would not love them, the blue-eyed one especially.’

‘Mary ?’

‘Yes, madame. I thought generally that love only existed in plays and novels.’

‘And when were you undeceived ?’

‘When first I knew *her*.’

‘Baron, you must dismiss such thoughts,’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, with some dismay.

‘Why, madame ?’ he asked, smiling.

‘The young lady is engaged.’

‘Engaged—is that betrothed ?’

‘Yes.’

His countenance changed instantly.

‘To an officer—a dear friend of mine—now in Afghanistan.’

‘In Afghanistan !’ he repeated, angrily ;

‘a *fiancé* there is next to no *fiancé* at all, for a bullet may—nay,’ said he, pausing, ‘this thought is ungenerous of me, and I would not like another to think thus of Rolandsburg. Gott in Himmel, how unlucky I am!’

‘I am so sorry to hear all this.’

‘So am I—so am I,’ exclaimed the baron, pulling his long fair moustaches, for a betrothal in Germany gives a young girl a kind of wife-like sanctity among the homely and domestic Teutonic people; and Mrs. Deroubigne, who dearly loved the romantic, felt for him; the young man’s hopes had been cruelly crushed at the very moment when he thought them brightest.

‘One cannot have everything they want—it is not given to anyone on earth to be perfectly happy, I suppose,’ said he, with a sigh, and there was a sadness, with a ring of sincerity, in his voice that certainly touched Mrs. Deroubigne.

‘Have you spoken of love to her?’ whisp-

ered she, behind her fan ; ‘but I hope not!’

‘No—I have never spoken—but she must have inferred what I felt,’ replied the baron, who, like most German officers, spoke English well.

‘Inferred it—I scarcely think so, with her mind so occupied with the thoughts of another.’

‘But, any way, I think it does a girl good to know that a man loves her ; and then, if the proverb be true about one love begetting another, she may incline her heart to him.’

‘Not in this instance, baron.’

For Rolandsburg now the charm of the ball was over ; the music sounded faint, the lights seemed dim, and he was glad when the great festivity ended, and he, after escorting the ladies to their carriage, took his way slowly through the streets to his barracks near the Dammthor Wall.

For his disappointment—and it was a sudden and sore one—he had no one but

himself to blame, he felt, as Mary Wellwood had never given him the least encouragement to fling his heart away as he had done.

And now for the sequel to the night's adventures.

Talking gaily, as girls will talk after a ball, criticising costumes and partners, and comparing notes, Mary, Ellinor, and Mrs. Deroubigne reached home when day was beginning to dawn, and the blue waters of the Elbe were beginning to brighten. Ellinor, teasing and quizzing Mary about the baron, had been singing to her—

‘ Ilka lassie has her laddie,
But ne'er a one have I ;’

and Mary, in hot haste, anxious to see the very latest news, threw open a London paper which had come over night, but, as she eagerly scanned it, a cry of dismay escaped her as she read a brief telegram :

‘ *Terrible disaster to the 10th Hussars.—A*

whole squadron drowned in the Cabul River, and two officers, when attempting to save the life of Corporal Wodrow.'

The hearts of the sisters stood still as they read and re-read this startling notice.

The attempt to save Robert Wodrow had evidently been a failure—so he was gone!

Who had made the attempt and perished with him? Mary's agitated mind at once suggested Colville. Both girls felt completely stunned.

The returning and growing love—a love blended with great pity—that had been developing itself in Ellinor's heart for poor Robert Wodrow was now absorbed and swallowed up in a gush of bitterness and intense remorse at being the cause of his sorrowful and untimely fate.

How true it is that 'suffering is our most faithful friend; it is always returning. Often has it changed its dress, and

even its face ; but we can easily recognise it by its cordial and intimate embrace.'

And how was it, then, at the old ivy-clad manse of Kirktown-Mailler, where the same terrible telegram had gone like the dart of death ?

There the blinds were drawn down, as if the hussar who had found his grave in the Cabul River was lying dead in the bed he had slept on in boyhood and manhood, and across which his mother now lay stretched in hopeless grief.

And a sad-eyed and sympathetic congregation watched the venerable minister when, with bent eyes, and slow, unsteady steps, he entered his pulpit next Sunday.

All knew the dire calamity that had befallen him, and one and all their kindly Scottish hearts bled for him, when his voice failed, his sermon escaped him, and stretching out his trembling hands on the pulpit cushion, he bent down his handsome

old head upon them—a head now white as the thistledown—and begged his people to excuse him, ‘as all night long he had been in the Valley of the Shadow of Death!’

Then his elders led him into the vestry, and those who saw him descending the stair of that pulpit, wherein he had ministered unto them faithfully for more than thirty years, never forgot the painful episode.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE 10TH HUSSARS.

AND now to detail how the catastrophe referred to came about.

The evening of Monday, the 31st of March, saw Leslie Colville in his saddle, and busy conveying orders in the camp and cantonments of Jellalabad, where drum and bugle gave the notes of preparation for the field.

This was between five and six o'clock, when two columns were suddenly ordered out for another expedition towards the Lughman Valley.

One, to be led by Brigadier Gough, was to consist of seven hundred men furnished

by the 17th and 27th regiments, three hundred native infantry, four Royal Horse Artillery guns under Major Stewart, and two squadrons of the dashing Guide Cavalry.

This column, according to the orders repeated by Colville, was to march out at one o'clock next morning.

'In what direction?' asked old Spatterdash and others.

'I know not,' replied Colville; 'but Lughman, I suppose, is the object in view with it, as well as the other column, under Brigadier Macpherson.'

The command of the latter consisted of three hundred Rifles, six hundred Ghoorkas and Punjaubees, with a mountain battery under Lieutenant E. J. de Lautour, of the Royal Artillery, who had served in the expedition of 1863 against the tribes on the North-West Frontier, some sappers, and a squadron each from the 10th Hussars and 11th Bengal Lancers, who, like the

former corps, wear blue uniforms faced with red and laced with gold.

The latter column was to be in readiness to march at nine that evening, with four days' provisions in the haversacks.

The moon, in a sky flecked with clouds, was gleaming brightly on the Balla Hissar, the domes and walls of Jellalabad, though it was little more than a quarter old, as Macpherson's column got under arms; and the rolls were called, the ammunition served out, the inspection of saddlery and accoutrements was proceeded with.

Our soldiers always muster merrily for work such as they had in hand that night; and, before they were called to attention, Redhaven had on more than one occasion to speak almost sharply to Robert Wodrow, who was—for him, at least—unusually noisy and jubilant.

'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die!' he heard him say.

'Can't make that countryman of yours

out, Colville,' said the hussar-officer, as he scraped a vesta and lit a cigar. 'He is usually the most silent and taciturn fellow in the troop, and to-night he makes as much noise as all the Ghoorkas put together.

'And that puzzles you?'

'Yes; he looks like a man with a past.'

'He has indeed a past history, poor fellow, a sorrowful and not a happy one.'

'Every broken-down fellow takes to the cavalry now,' grumbled Redhaven; 'but I was certain he has some secret by the expression of his eyes, and the inflections of his modulated voice at times.'

'Poor fellow!' said Colville again.

He knew, what Redhaven did not, that Robert Wodrow was often a prey to sad and bitter thoughts; that in the dreams of the night and of the day when asleep in the wet-flapping tent or the comfortless bivouac—when on solitary vidette duty, under the blazing Afghan sun, he saw oftener before him—not the fair face of

her for whom he had sacrificed everything, and whom, he doubted not, would soon become the bride of another—but the face of his loving mother—a kind and happy old face—that ever beamed with love for him; and opposite her fancy saw his silver-haired old father, reading some good or musty volume—Wodrow's *Analecta Scotica* perhaps; and often from such visions of home he was roused by the trumpet blowing 'boot and saddle,' or the yell of an Afghan scout armed with *juzail* and *charah*.

As a Scotsman, Colville was superstitious enough to regret that at such a time the young fellow should show such exuberance of spirits as the foreboding of evil, and was in the act of urging his horse forward to accost him kindly, when the brigadier came on the ground, the component parts of the column were called to 'attention,' and in a few minutes after, the whole force was on the march, and, with the glittering of sword and bayonet blades,

section after section quickly disappeared from the eyes of those who watched them in the cold wintry moonshine that had turned to diamonds the thick hoarfrost on every wall and tree; and the march began which was to prove the last to many in this life.

‘The line of ground between Jellalabad and Cabul, so far as it is connected with India,’ says a writer, ‘is a line of tragedy and misfortune. That line of tragedy and misfortune may now be extended a couple of miles further to the east, for that will give very nearly the point where forty-six lives were on that Monday evening suddenly swept out of existence.’

The troops moved westward, the cavalry leading. The squadron of the 10th Hussars was under Captain D’Esterre Spottiswoode, that of the Bengal Lancers was under its own captain, and Major E. A. Wood of the first-named corps commanded the whole.

Guided by an Afghan mountaineer who

had offered his services, and to whom Colville paid a high bribe therefor, the orders of the officers were to cross the Cabul river at a point where most unluckily a temporary bridge had shortly before been removed. On achieving that, they were to move up the left bank of the stream, to march through Besoot and Darunta, and enter the Lughman Valley, to which the infantry were moving by the Jellalabad side of the Cabul.

The guide, who was mounted on a powerful and wiry yabóo, or Cabul pony, was a singularly taciturn fellow, and Colville remarked a circumstance which soon became a painful memory, that by twisting the end of his loonghee, or head-dress, across the lower part of his face he effectually concealed his features, permitting little more than his keen, black, and glittering eyes to be seen, reminding him of the muffled men he had read of in old Scottish Border forays.

Macpherson's column had not been long gone when the troops at the camp of Jellalabad were roused and alarmed by numbers of cavalry horses, all riderless, galloping wildly among the tents, with their bridles trailing, and their saddles, valises, and trappings soaked in water.

'What has happened—what *can* have happened?' were the questions asked on every side.

No one could anticipate the catastrophe that had really occurred, as at that season the bed of the Cabul is not always full; but when the sun melts the accumulated snow in the Katcha range and other mountains it is not so. The water then rolls through many channels, and it was in anticipation of this that the wooden bridge had been removed to a point further up.

Where our cavalry were to cross at the Fort of Isaac, the stream now formed two branches; the first was thirty feet broad, with an average of only thirty inches of

water, and the crossing was to be made under the light of a dim and fitful moon, at a point where an irrigation channel diverged at right angles from the stream. Beyond that point stood a kind of sandy islet covered with great boulders, and again beyond it lay a hundred and fifty feet of water ; but as the line of this fatal ford was *not straight*, three hundred and fifty feet of water had to be traversed upon it, as the ford formed at one point an acute angle.

Led by the local guides, the squadron of Bengal Lancers crossed in safety, wheeling at the given point on the acute angle.

The mules of the squadron followed next, our hussars, now riding at ease, waiting till their turn came to cross ; and to amuse the rest, one of them, the identical Toby Chace, who was one of Robert Wodrow's earliest comrades, and well known as a reckless fellow, began to sing a soldier's ditty, part of which ran thus :

- ‘ There’s Bill Muggins left our village,
Just as sound a man as I ;
Now he goes about on crutches,
With a single arm and eye.
- ‘ To be sure he’s got a medal
And some twenty pounds a year
For his health, and strength, and service,
Government can’t call that dear ;
Not to reckon one leg shattered,
Two ribs broken, one eye lost ;
’Fore I went in such a venture,
I should stop and count the cost.
- ‘ Lots o’ glory, lots o’ gammon——’

‘ Silence there—in front ! ’ cried the commanding officer, and Colville, who had some undefinable suspicion of the hussar guide, placed himself near that personage, with his revolver case loose and at hand.

‘ Do not lose the direction, men, ’ cried an officer, ‘ but keep well up against the stream, ’ he added, knowing that when crossing thus there is always a tendency to edge lower down with the current.

The leading sections began to enter the stream, the rippling eddies of which went past them, tipped with silver by the pale

moonlight; the rest followed closely, the guide directing, and ere long Colville and others found the water rising to their feet, then it rose as high as their knees, and was beginning to get higher, while the pony of the guide had quitted the angled line of the ford, and was swimming away to another point.

‘Treachery,’ thought Colville; at that moment the *loonghee* fell from the face of the guide, and he recognised Mahmoud Shah, the sirdir with the slashed cheek—Mahmoud, the hadji, whom he had saved from the Wahabees!

‘This is getting awkward!’ exclaimed Redhaven, ‘there must be some mistake.’

‘We are betrayed!’ cried Colville.

He put his hand to his pistol-case, but too late, for now his horse rolled over, and with an exulting shriek in English of

‘Pigs! dogs! Kaffirs!—drown and be damned! Eblis and hell await you! In vain will ye seek the Lord of the Day-

break!' cried the treacherous guide; then he reached the Jellalabad side in safety and vanished—pony and all.

All was confusion, consternation, and death now, for the water, flowing at the rate of nine miles an hour, had risen to the saddle bows and holsters of the Hussars, whose spirited horses, finding their footing gone, ignored the use of spur and bridle.

The line of the ford was lost now; the current pouring over it soon forced the horses downward into deeper water, sweeping the squadron away towards the swifter rapids, and in a mass of confusion our gallant Hussars, with their terrified horses, were struggling desperately and madly for existence, under the dim moonlight and amid the fiercely rushing waters, while the bewildered Bengal Lancers could only sit in their saddles and look helplessly on.

An officer whose horse had kicked Robert Wodrow, rendering him nearly insensible, failed to escape, and both were swept away,

so, nathless, his reckless quotation from St. Luke's Gospel, there was to be no 'to-morrow' for the latter.

Captain D'Esterre Spottiswoode—afterwards colonel—was mounted on a very splendid and powerful horse, which was able to swim well, and bore him to the other bank in safety, but not to the end of the ford.

In dangerous quicksands it sank twice to its girth, on the last occasion falling on its rider, whose head was thrust so far below water that he was nearly drowned ere he scrambled breathlessly to dry land.

Colville, who had been riding with the captain and three subalterns at the head of the troop, which mustered seventy-six sabres, felt his horse become restive when the water flowed over his holsters; the animal kicked and plunged till at last he was thrown off its back, and found himself floundering in deep water. Being a good swimmer he thought to get rid of

his sword and belt, but failed, as he sank each time in making the attempt, and each time he came to the surface with an invocation to heaven on his lips.

The men in the squadron were all in heavy marching order, fully accoutred and supplied with ammunition—circumstances sufficient to drag down a good swimmer even in smooth water. Nearly all were thrown by their terrified horses, which, as they rolled over and over, lashed out with their hoofs, maiming and stunning many of our poor fellows as they were swept into the dark rushing current of the rapids, and where these ceased lay a little pool of deep water, and there it was that all who had strength left to struggle succeeded in reaching the land, but many failed, alas!

As Colville was swept downward, while in the desperate agonies of seeking to save his own life, he could take in the terrible details of the tragedy, and saw how the

river was crowded with men, horses, and white helmets rolling past; how heads, hands, and spurred heels rose momentarily and vanished to rise again, and then sink for ever beneath the cruel and greedy current.

Amid all this scene of death and horror, there came not one cry from our perishing hussars; each battled with the waters of the hostile river as they would have battled with the Afghans.

Colville struck out to reach the bank, after he sank a third time; but, encumbered by his heavy boots and putties (or leg bandages), his sword, revolver, and ammunition, he was unable to keep himself afloat, and the agony of a helpless death was in his heart!

He knew that at the time all this was happening Mary Wellwood would probably be sleeping, sweetly and peacefully, on her pillow; and even in that moment of supreme anguish and terror, he wished

that if death came, his soul might flash home to her in a dream—a farewell dream!

He felt himself sinking at last, as he had only been getting occasional breaths of air; the last of his strength seemed going, and all hope with it, when suddenly his feet touched the bottom, and a prayer rose to his lips.

Rousing himself for a final effort, he pushed forward, and hope began again to dawn on him as he found the water getting shallower; but he was too weak to reach the river's bank, and, grasping some wild jasmine trailers that grew between two boulders, he propped himself up to rest and breathe.

At this point, seeing neither man nor horse near him, he thought that all must have perished—perished through the diabolical hatred and treachery of Mahmoud Shah!

Suddenly he heard a voice cry out,
'Is this you, Captain Colville?'

The questioner, whose grammar was not very choice, proved to be the hussar Toby Chace, who was sitting bareheaded, dripping, and disconsolate on the river bank.

Colville was almost voiceless, so Toby waded in, and assisted him to dry land, where he could scarcely stand from exhaustion, but was able ultimately, with the assistance of Chace, to reach the camp, where he found that his horse had arrived before him.

All the troop horses were heard to snort wildly as the current swept them away, and, being overweighted by their saddles, the slung carbines, and other trappings, they beat the air with their hoofs as they rolled about; but only twelve were drowned.

When the roll was called, forty-six hussars, who would never hear it again, were missing, with Lieutenant Harford and another officer. Many of their bodies, when found, showed broken limbs, the result

of kicks from iron-shod hoofs, and many of them had their hands raised to their heads, either for protection or through pain from blows, and in that position they had stiffened in death.

One poor fellow was swept a long way down the Cabul river, but clambered into a native boat, where he was found next day, dead from exhaustion and cold.

‘An awful calamity! A devil of a business!’

‘How did it happen? Whose fault was it?’

Such were a few of the exclamations heard on every hand in camp, from whence, on the first arrival of the riderless horses, soldiers had rushed to the river side with lanterns and ropes, and staff-surgeons with restoratives.

Ten rupees reward was offered for every body recovered from that fatal river, and some were buried severally near the places where they were found. Colville made

many inquiries about that of Robert Woodrow, as the one in whom he was personally most interested, but no trace of him could be discovered.

In one eddy of the river nineteen of our gallant hussars were found huddled together in one ghastly heap.

These and the bodies of others were all buried in one vast grave at the western end of the camp; and those who saw that solemn scene—that grim row of bodies, each rolled in a blanket, and lying side by side in close ranks, shoulder to shoulder—never forgot it.

Neither did they forget the funeral service of the following evening, when the body of Lieutenant Francis H. Harford and that of a private of the Leicestershire Regiment, who had been mortally wounded in action, were interred about dusk.

Solemn and strikingly impressive was the episode.

The red Afghan sun had set amid dun and sombre clouds beyond the snow-clad summits of the Ramkoond Mountains, but some ruddy light yet lingered on the awful peaks of the Suffaidh Koh. There had been rain and thunder all afternoon, and the clouds were gathered in sombre masses that were edged by the radiance of the now nearly full moon.

Athwart the clouds ever and anon shot gleams of ghastly lightning, producing strange and sudden effects of light and shade, adding to the weird effect of the funeral cortége—the coffins on gun-carriages, draped with the Union Jack, followed by officers and other mourners in long, spectral-like cloaks, preceded by the dark-clad band of the Rifle Brigade playing a low and wailing dirge-like piece of music.

So ended the tragedy of the 10th Hussars.

In the meantime, in perfect ignorance of

that event, our troops under Macpherson and Gough had proceeded to the scene of their services elsewhere, to fight the Khugianis and win the battle of Futteabad, which, as Leslie Colville was not present, lies somewhat apart from our story.

After the defeat of the Khugianis and the subsequent dispersal of the Afreedis, the summer of the year was drawing on, and as Yakoub Khan showed a disposition to come to terms with Great Britain, and the hostilities seemed to be drawing to a close, Leslie Colville began fondly to hope that he might with honour resign his appointment for 'special service,' and return home after the treaty of peace was signed.

The negotiations for the latter were placed in the hands of Major Louis Cavanaugh, and, after some hesitation on the part of the new Ameer, it was eventually signed in the British camp at Gundamack—that place of ill-omen, where the Red Hill of *Lal Teebah* marks the spot on

which the last men of Elphinston's army perished under Afghan steel in the year 1842.

Its chief objects were to place the foreign affairs of Afghanistan under British control, and to guarantee that country against Russian aggression by the aid of our money, arms, and troops, to provide for the maintenance of a British Embassy in the dominions of the Ameer, and other details.

Thus the war came to an end—as Mary Wellwood, with many more at home, read with joy, and our troops in the valley of Jellalabad were withdrawn within the new frontier, lest the prolonged presence of foreigners might inflame the ready susceptibilities of the fiery Afghans, and render them less amenable to the influence of Ayoub Khan.

For some reasons the latter was suffered to depart from Gundamack to Cabul alone, and the despatch thither of a

British resident was deferred for a time.

When the time came, Leslie Colville—afterwards to his own great regret—instead of resigning and returning home, suffered himself to be named in general orders as one of the staff to accompany the new Resident—Major, then Sir Louis Cavagnari—on that perilous and, as it proved, most fatal and calamitous mission, and when Mary heard of it she sighed bitterly with apprehension, she knew not of what.

‘He should not have allowed himself to be thus prevailed upon—surely he has done enough for honour, by winning his Victoria Cross!’ exclaimed Mrs. Derou-bigne, with surprise, and poor Mary quite agreed with her; but Colville was under certain military influences which they could not quite understand.

Thus he wrote to Mary, stating that, when once the Embassy was fairly estab-

lished, he would lose no time in returning home.

‘Does he not know how I am yearning for him,’ thought the girl in her heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST.

DAMPED and disconcerted by the sudden hopelessness of his regard for Mary Wellwood on learning that she was betrothed to another, the young baron—after leaving cards subsequent to the night of the ball—did not visit the villa so frequently as had been his wont; but the society there was so pleasant and attractivè, that he began to drop in during the afternoons and evenings for a little music and singing, in both of which, like most foreigners, he could bear his part very well.

That Ellinor had undergone some grief—he knew not precisely what it was

—he was perfectly aware, but her story was not one on which Mrs. Deroubigne cared to enlighten him fully. He could also see that she wore black or sombre dresses, with suites of jet ornaments, for Ellinor felt that to do so was at least all that she might indulge in, as a proper tribute to the memory of one who had loved her well.

The sisters were to have been photographed in their sixteenth century ball costumes for the delectation of Colville; but this frivolity they abandoned after hearing of Robert Wodrow's catastrophe.

Ellinor often recalled the night of that brilliant festivity, when she had waltzed and promenaded to and fro as one in a dream of delight, and spoke in a hushed tone as if she feared to waken from it to a real and commonplace life, for never before had she been in so gay and glittering a paradise; but now that was all over—gone like a dissolving view, and she could but

think of the poor heart that had loved her so well and so fondly now lying cold and stiff in the waters of the Cabul river.

Mrs. Deroubigne knew of Robert Wodrow only by name. Thus her natural equanimity on the subject of his fate, combined with her social qualities and equally natural brightness, helped much to calm, even to soothe, the equally natural grief, and also perhaps the remorse of Ellinor, who, of course, became in time composed and consoled over the inevitable, though she was still too terrified or too much pained to write to his parents—a task which she relegated to Mary.

And in her quiet and subdued grief, most generous, unvaryingly kind and sympathetic was young Rolandsburg, though he knew not quite the cause from which it sprang; and charmed by her sadness, softness, and beauty, finding that the elder sister was lost to him, it seemed to Mrs.

Deroubigne that he was already turning his attention to the younger.

Ellinor had—as she said to Mary—‘wept her eyes out for poor Bob Wodrow;’ and thus, after a time, the elasticity of her volatile nature began to reassert itself, to the delight of the baron.

Nature, we are told, abhors a vacuum; so did the heart of the handsome young Uhlan; hence he adopted a new *rôle* in his bearing to Ellinor, all the more easily and all the more readily that he had not committed himself with Mary.

Blooming as the German girls are, Ellinor’s softer beauty was a new experience to him; she was like a tea-rose, a seashell, a wonderfully delicate and tinted bit of feminine nature, and as before, he first made Mrs. Deroubigne his confidant.

‘Ah, madame!’ said he, clasping his hands melodramatically, while drooping his head on one side till it nearly touched his gilt shoulderstrap, ‘I suppose she could

not understand anyone dying of love—of love of her?’

‘I think not,’ replied Mrs. Deroubigne, laughing excessively at this leading remark when remembering that he had been in the mood of ‘dying for love’ of Mary but some weeks before.

Yet he was a pleasant, handsome fellow, with so much *bonhommie* about him that it was impossible not to be pleased with him, all the more that the iron cross on his breast showed that he had comported himself gallantly in the field.

‘The Fraulein Ellinor is very cold and very calm,’ said he; ‘she can take a man’s heart—take all his love and give him none in return.’

‘It is not so,’ replied Mrs. Deroubigne.

‘How, madame, then?’

‘You do not know her story; but why should I recur to it?’

‘Her story—she has had, then, an *affaire du cœur*?’

‘One at least, certainly,’ said Mrs. Deroubigne, laughing again at the baron’s expression of face and tone of pique.

‘Der Teufel! One at least? How sad it is to think of a young lady having a story! And this—or these—render her indifferent to me?’

‘Perhaps,’ replied Mrs. Deroubigne, who, much as she liked the young Prussian, did not wish to flatter his hopes, but he was not the less resolved to put the matter to the issue.

Calling one afternoon when Mrs. Deroubigne and Mary had driven into Hamburg, he intercepted Ellinor in the garden, with her little camp-stool, easel, and colour-box, about to go forth and sketch; and though he had but a few minutes to spare, as his horse was at the gate to take him back to barracks, he resolved to utilise them.

Shaded from the declining sun by a broad garden-hat, he thought Ellinor’s face never looked so charming before.

Her eyes were peculiarly her greatest beauty; they were of the clearest and most luminous hazel—not very dark, and sweetly trustful and straightforward in expression; but they drooped now and sought the flower-beds, for something she read in those of young Rolandsburg told her what was coming.

In the physical nature of some people who love keenly there is a mysterious sympathy that draws them together, and the baron, thinking that she was inspired by that now, put out his hand to touch hers, but she withdrew it.

This was not encouraging, but he drew nearer her half-averted ear, and whispered bluntly enough, but tremulously, nevertheless,

‘This is a great joy finding you alone—alone, that I may tell you what I have been longing—dying to tell you for weeks past—that I love you, Ellinor, and you only!’

In his foreign accent and half-broken English, the avowal sounded very pretty and simple, but did not touch Ellinor much, though she trembled and grew pale, for no woman can have such things said to her and remain quite unmoved.

‘Love *me*—how strange!’ said she, scarcely knowing what to say.

‘To you it may seem so,’ he continued, slowly and earnestly; ‘for I know or suspect that you cherish some dead—some mysterious memory, and that you cannot or may not care for me as I wish you to do; but that does not prevent me from loving you, and you may never understand, even dimly, how much I do love you, and I can keep this secret untold no longer.’

‘I respect you much, baron,’ replied Ellinor, for his declaration was more formal than impetuous; ‘but mere talking to me will not make me love you in return. I feel quite confused—most unhappy to

hear all this; and we shall have to go away from Altona.'

'Go from Altona?'

'Yes.'

'I only tell you because I can not control—can not help myself,' said he, humbly and sadly, and not without an emotion of pique at the ill-luck of his second venture.

'I thank you, baron, but it cannot be,' said Ellinor, shaking her pretty head decidedly.

'You cannot—love me.'

'No—not as you wish.'

'Well,' said he, after a pause, during which he had been eyeing her downcast face with an expression of disappointment and chagrin, 'be it so; but I trust you will pardon any unpleasantness my perhaps abrupt avowal has occasioned you; and I also trust that in the future you will always view me as your friend—as one who will ever be ready and eager to

hold out the hand of a brother to you, Miss Ellinor. Even with that conviction I shall be happy,' he added, with a voice that certainly broke a little with emotion.

She now gave her hand frankly, and he pressed it kindly, and then, proceeding to fill with tobacco his consolatory meerschau pipe (that dangled at his button-hole) prior to riding back to the Dammthor Wall, he said, with a sigh,

‘Ach—I will get over this, no doubt!’

‘As you must have got over others, no doubt,’ said Ellinor, laughing now, but piqued by his philosophy, and to see that he could so calmly canvass the prospect of ceasing to care for her already. But what does it matter? Robert Wodrow had loved her as no man had ever loved her, and what had been *his* reward?

‘Now leave me, please, baron,’ she said, a little bluntly; ‘the tide is far out, and I wish to sketch the creek and villa from yonder bank of dry sand ere the sun sets.’

‘I must go—for parade awaits me; but must I recur to this dear subject no more?’

‘Yes—no more,’ said Ellinor, with decision, yet with a smile nevertheless.

The baron felt that all was over when he saw that smile; indeed, when with Ellinor, he always felt that he was in the presence of some feeling deeper than he could fathom; and, bowing low, he turned sadly away. Then in a few minutes the clatter of his horse’s hoofs was heard as he cantered off towards the Millernthor, and so ended another little romance in Ellinor’s life—at least, she thought so. And the baron knew that now never again could they enjoy each other’s society as they had done so innocently till that afternoon.

Proceeding over the firm dry sand left by the far retreating tide, she selected a point upon a rough pebble-covered knoll, a quarter of a mile from the little wooded

creek, set her sketching-block upon her tiny easel, and, seating herself upon a little camp-stool, proceeded, with her back to the setting sun, to outline the creek, with the trees, the garden, and sandy beach in foreground, and the villa in the middle distance.

She was very full of her work, to have it as a souvenir of Altona, but it proceeded very, very slowly ; she was too full of the late episode to do much with her pencil—much successfully at least, and paused ever and anon to sink into deep thought over the past, the present, and the future.

When Mary and Mrs. Deroubigne returned home to a late dinner, Ellinor was not to be seen, she was not in the villa, and she was not in the garden, nor in the adjacent shrubberies, so the house-bell was rung for her in vain ; and to Mrs. Deroubigne, Ellinor, always dreamy, deli-

cate, and in temperament excitable, had been somewhat of a responsibility, more than her sister Mary.

Dinner was served up, but remained on the table untasted, while search after search was made without avail, and sunset was at hand.

She had last been seen in the garden, with Baron Rolandsburg, with her drawing materials and apparatus, going forth to sketch.

With the baron!

‘Could she have eloped with him?’ thought Mary, while her heart sank—recalling Ellinor’s former folly—the folly she had been on the brink of committing with Sir Redmond Sleath.

Oh, that was very unlikely! Ellinor was a changed girl, and less confiding, and the young baron was too confident in himself, his position, wealth, and resources to love mystery or mischief when neither were needed.

A presentiment of evil—an emotion that she could not have explained—came over Mary's mind. Vainly she sought to settle her thoughts to some fixity of purpose. A vague terror seized her, and she could scarcely even think.

She remembered when Ellinor was ill how the tolling of the Passing Bell in the adjacent church appalled her with the dread that she was about to lose her—her only relation in the world; and had she lost her now?

'Was she going far to sketch?' Mrs. Deroubigne suddenly inquired of her now scared domestics.

'No, madame! Only to the sands beside the river, when the tide was out.'

'The tide!' exclaimed Mrs. Deroubigne; and, accompanied by Mary, she rushed to the foot of the garden, to find the creek full and the Elbe at flood tide and more.

'My God—oh, what can have happened?' exclaimed Mrs. Deroubigne, who

was aware of a periodical event of which Mary knew nothing.

It was this. When the wind is from the west, and especially if violent, the waters of the Elbe become swollen to such a degree that the canals of Hamburg overflow their banks, the cellars, magazines and all channels, become gorged and inundated—that, in fact, the tide suddenly rises, sometimes to the height of twenty feet, with a rapidity that is alike dangerous and terrible. So the gorged tide, swollen by the incoming waves of the German Sea, was rolling inshore now, and Ellinor had been on the sands—the temporary dry sands, to sketch!

A wild waste of water was rolling and boiling there now, and where was she?

‘Ellinor—oh, Ellinor!’ cried Mary, again and again, in a voice of agony; but, save the sough of the waves, there was no response.

Soaked to pulp her sketch-book was found at the foot of the creek washed inshore, and, if other evidence of a tragedy was wanting, something was seen floating in the oozy waves about ten yards distant.

Jack, the terrier—that dog which had such amazing facility for getting into canine troubles—sprang in, and yapping and yelping laid that something at the feet of his mistress, who recognised at once her sister's garden-hat; and a low cry of despair escaped Mary as she turned it over in her trembling hands, and painfully and vividly it brought before her the face, figure, and whole individuality of the lost one.

A torrent of tears escaped Mrs. Derou-bigne, but Mary seemed to have lost the power to shed one.

Even as the angry waves came rolling into the creek, so did wave after wave of

sorrow seem to be coming upon her again, dark and sharp as ever.

‘Oh, Lord—how long—how long!’ she wailed in her heart.

She stretched out her hands as if clutching the air for support, she swayed a little, and then, her strength failing her, she would have fallen on her pallid face had not Mrs. Deroubigne caught her fast in her motherly arms.

Night drew on and day came again without a trace of the lost one, dead or alive.

Baron Rolandsburg, who was appalled by a catastrophe so sudden and unforeseen, corroborated the story that she had gone on the stretch of dry sand to sketch, and no doubt remained till the sudden tide had overtaken and overwhelmed her!

He now made himself invaluable in his exertions for intelligence. Rewards were offered to boatmen and river-pilots, and in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* and other journals ‘for her remains’ (how horrible did

this sound), but unknown to Mary, who was for several days and nights all but unconscious. He also put himself into communication with their *Herrschaften* (their Excellencies) the four Burgomasters and four Syndics, and the Gendermerie, but all in vain.

Other traces of Ellinor than those which the hungry waves had washed to Mary's feet were never found!

The latter was now a prey to two emotions, when a time came that she could consider calmly. One was an intense longing to get away from Altona as a place which had now become hateful to her, as the scene of so much sadness; and the other was an affectionate repugnance to leave it, until her sister's fate was made certain, and her remains found.

But the latter might have been washed out to sea, and never—never might be heard of more.

The inexorable had to be accepted, but

we fear that poor Mary Wellwood could not do so with the calmness of a disciple of Epictitus, the stoic.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SEQUEL.

ELLINOR'S sketching, as we have said, did not progress much.

She was full of thoughts, yet none of pride, of flattered vanity, or exultation were in her mind, but a dull and curious sense of fear and shame—a vague consciousness of doubt and wrong.

Could it be that she—unwittingly—had in any way given encouragement to this young baron, or done aught that led up to the sudden declaration he had made?

She could not tax herself with having done so. She liked him very much—who would not that knew him?—he was so

suave, so gentle, and so manly. But love, no—she had no heart for him; and how were they to meet now, after this?

She felt as if suddenly wakened from a dream; but a more terrible awakening was soon to come upon her.

‘Nonsense!’ she thought; ‘this silly young officer must evidently love or flirt with some one. Latterly it was Mary, now it is Ellinor.’

The Baron Rolandsburg was—as Sleath had been in her eyes apparently—the possessor of all she had wished for, and learned to worship—position, rank, riches, and luxury; but neither could love her as poor Bob had done! And now Ellinor was—when too late for the sake of the latter—changed from a somewhat selfish and frivolous girl into a woman of thought, and one capable of much endurance and self-sacrifice.

Through Sir Redmond Sleath her pride had received a severe shock; she had long

since come to loathe the very idea of him ; as for his name, it never escaped Mary or Mrs. Deroubigne, and her soul sickened when she thought of all she had sacrificed for his unworthy sake, and of the horrible pitfall he had prepared for her.

But why recall these things now, she thought, as she resumed her pencil.

The deep red tints of the golden sun, setting amid fiery haze beyond the Elbe and the tiny hills of Hanover, lay in all their richness on the creek, on the villa and its flowers and shrubs : on Altona in the background, with all its rows of poplars and pointed roofs ; and Ellinor often paused in her work, and, wooed by the lap, lap, lapping and murmur of the tide, sank into a kind of dream.

The present fled—the past returned.

She no longer saw the rows of lofty poplars, the long *Palmaille*, and the great church of Altona, or the house on the hill where Dumourier dwelt. She was back in

the old summer garden of Birkwoodbrae, with the fragrance of its roses and honeysuckle around her ; she heard the familiar hoot of Mary's pet owl—the owl that Robert Wodrow had risked his life to secure ; she heard again the murmur of the May and the song of the thrush mingling with the rustle of the silver birches that shadowed the roof under which her parents died.

So, lulled by the beauty of the evening, by the warmth of the sunshine, and the murmuring wavelets of the glorious river, she dropped asleep.

She could not have sat thus above twenty minutes when she was suddenly awakened by the flow of water over her ankles, and, starting up, found herself surrounded by water—water on all sides, and water between her and the shore, which was nearly a quarter of a mile distant, but seemed to be much further off, the once dry sands being now covered by

the incoming flood-tide—a tide that flowed with exceeding violence and fury.

A half-stifled shriek escaped her, and she started to her feet. Her easel had been swept away; she attempted to run shorewards; but as the water deepened and rose to her knees she uttered a despairing cry, and rushed back to the sandy knoll on which she had planted her chair, and over which the encroaching water was rising and deepening with every inward flow of the waves.

She was lost!

From the beach (that seemed now so awfully distant) not a soul seemed to observe her terrible predicament.

From being shrill and continuous, her despairing shrieks became hoarse and faint, and, worse than all, the wind seemed to sweep them seaward. Wild and black despair, with the terror of immediate death, filled her heart. What terrible retribution was this? Was she to perish

by drowning—to die the same death that Robert Wodrow had died—to perish and leave poor Mary alone in the world—all alone!

She parted the rich brown hair from her brow, and, casting her eyes upward to the flushed evening sky, prayed for strength to die, and for submission to the will of heaven; and, even as she prayed, a wave that rolled nearly to her knees made her stagger. The sandy knoll was completely covered, and the water was rising fast.

A very few minutes more and she would be swept off her feet, to sink and drown! Across the waters of the broad river, the red sun, now level with them and the flat horizon, shed his dazzling rays into her eyes, that were becoming half-blinded by the rising spoon drift torn from the waves by the storm.

It all seemed an unreality—a horrid nightmare.

She heard, or imagined she heard, a cry of encouragement—of coming succour; but, blinded by terror and despair, she knew not whence it came, whether from the land or the water.

A numbness seemed to creep fast over her—a sensation, or rather the want of it, that threatened speedily to paralyse alike thought and feeling.

Human endurance, in the weak and delicate form of the girl, could stand no more; an incoming wave, stronger than the rest, struck her above the waist, and she fell backwards into the water, and, as the latter rose over her head, her senses left her, and darkness closed around her.

Anon she breathed again, and the light flashed into her eyes. She found herself in a boat, encircled by the strong and protecting arm of a man, and closed her eyes with an invocation to heaven, believing that she was being rowed shoreward, for she could hear the regular dash

of the oar-blades, and the hard breathing of those who pulled them; but she remained passive and voiceless, with closed eyes, incapable of volition, almost of thought, and certainly of speech.

After a brief space the boat jarred against something. It was the side of a vessel, and she felt herself lifted upward—up—up—and placed in the arms of a man, whose exclamation gave her a species of electric shock.

It was the voice of Sir Redmond Sleath, and it was his astonished and certainly bewildered face that she found close to her own when she opened her eyes, only to shut them once more, as weakness and horror took away her senses again.

Sleath!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HAKIM ABOU AYOUB.

‘I AM on the eve of departing with Sir Louis Cavagnari to Cabul,’ Colville had written. ‘With his mission the chances of future war are over, and then I can come home with honour—home to you, love Mary.’

But while the British troops were now retiring from every point within the new frontier, Colville, to whom activity or action of any kind was a species of relief till he could once again see her whose varying expression of feature defied alike artist or photographer to fix or do justice to, gladly undertook to convey to the

viceroys at Simla that letter from the Ameer which brought the embassy into existence—the embassy which was doomed to have such a fatal end—and a portion of that fulsome, false, and deluding document ran as follows, after the usual solemn invocation which preludes every chapter of the Koran, and the words of which, when sent down from Heaven, caused, says Giaab, the clouds to fly eastward, the winds to lull, the sea to moan, all the animals of the earth to erect their ears and listen, while the devils fell headlong from the celestial spheres:—

‘Be it known unto your High Excellency that since the day of my arrival in Cabul from the British camp at Gundamuck I have been happy and pleased with the reception accorded me by the British officers. I had resolved to visit Simla and give myself the boundless pleasure of a joyous interview with your Excellency, for the purpose of strengthening our friendly

relations, but circumstances prevented me carrying my intention into effect After completing my tour through the country, during which I shall inspect the frontiers, I intend, God willing, to have a joyful meeting with your Excellency, for the purpose of making firmer the basis of our friendship and drawing closer the bonds of our amity and affection.

‘Further, what can I write, beyond expressions of friendship?’

So, encouraged by this letter, which was framed in the genuine Oriental spirit of fraud and treachery, a brilliant embassy was arranged.

After delivering to the viceroy, the letter with which he had been entrusted at head-quarters, Leslie Colville lingered for a few days at beautiful Simla, where the Court Sanatarium is in a deep and woody dell, called—doubtless by some old Scottish officer—Annandale, where the forests are thickly inhabited by grinning

baboons, having white bodies with black hands and feet, and where a savage tribe, named the Puharries, dwell among the hills, some of which are so vast—though mere vassals of the Himalayas—as to seem like the barriers of the world on the left bank of the Indus, from which they slope down to the steppes of Tartary, the deserts of Cobi, and the marshes of Siberia; and then he hastened again to the front to join Cavagnari.

The embassy and escort, the fate of which will never be forgotten in the history of British India, consisted of seventy-six men of the brilliant Guide Corps, twenty-six of whom were troopers, the rest infantry, under Lieutenant Hamilton, V.C. Their uniform was drab colour, piped and faced with scarlet. The ambassador was accompanied also by a staff of medical and other officers, including his secretary, Mr. William Jenkyns, of the Punjab Civil Service.

All set out on their perilous though apparently peaceful mission in high glee, while the master spirit of the whole was Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, then in his thirty-seventh year, a gallant officer who had served with the Bengal Europeans in the Oude campaign, was present at the capture of a brigade of guns at Shahelut-gunge, and served with the Kohat column at the capture and destruction of Gara.

He was popular personally with the natives, as he could speak several of their languages with fluency, while his bronzed features and dark hair enabled him to assume when he chose, any Oriental costume with facility, and thus he was invaluable in all cases where courage, promptitude, and adroit demeanour were necessary.

All our columns having, as stated, fallen back, the only British troops now beyond the new frontier of Afghanistan were his slender escort, with which he left Ali Mus-

jid on the 17th of June, and rode through the savage defiles of the Khyber Pass by Lalpura, Chardeh, and once more in sight of Jellalabad, pursuing the course and bank of the Cabul river.

They had now traversed about sixty miles of their journey amid some of the most stupendous scenery in the world, and the evening of the second day's march was closing in when, near the Surkab, a stream which joins the Cabul at the foot of the Siah Koh, a man was seen gesticulating violently and making signs to them, on which the whole party halted in obedience to command.

Was he the harbinger of danger, the announcer of an ambush ; had armed *sungahs* been formed across the path, or what ?

Carbines were unslung, revolver cases opened, sword-blades loosened in the sheath, and there were whispers of treachery on every hand, and every man's face darkened, and his brows were knit, in an-

icipation of a barbarous struggle and having to sell his life dearly, for they were all picked and tried soldiers, second to none in Her Majesty's Indian army for daring and discipline. All were splendid horsemen too—the mounted guides—and, like their infantry, picturesque-looking fellows in their uniform and bearing.

‘The man is not an Afghan, but a European, so far as one can judge by his face,’ said Colville, who, with his bridle reins dropped on his holsters, had been using his field-glasses intently.

‘He wears a scarlet *loonjee*,’ said another officer, ‘and his dress seems a uniform. Strange, is it not?’

‘By heaven, he is one of the 10th Hus-sars!’ exclaimed Colville.

‘What is he doing here? His regiment fell back with the rest of the army weeks—yes, two months—ago. Can he be a deserter?’ suggested Hamilton.

‘Scarcely, when making for us in this frantic fashion,’ replied Colville.

He came close up to the party, and, halting within ten paces, saluted. Then all could see that he was a hussar, but wan, pale, bearded, and with his braided uniform sorely worn and tattered.

‘Come on, my man,’ cried Sir Louis Cavagnari; ‘come on and tell us how you happen to be here?’

‘I am here through God’s mercy, sir,’ replied the hussar, coming forward, adding, ‘Captain Colville—Captain Colville, don’t you know me?’

‘Robert Wodrow—Heavens above!’ exclaimed the latter, holding out his hand, which the former grasped warmly and energetically; ‘so you did not perish in the river?’

‘It was a pretty close shave, sir,—I shall never be nearer death again, but once,’ replied Wodrow, who seemed so faint that he could scarcely stand, and received with

gratitude a pull from an officer's brandy flask.

'Have you been a prisoner?' asked Cavagnari.

'No, sir—I was long ill in the hands of the enemy, and was well treated.'

'Then you were not escaping?'

'No, sir—but making my way to your party when I saw it on the march, and I blessed God when I first heard of it, for I was told that the whole army had fallen back, and that I—alone—was left behind.'

'You are one of the Hussars who were swept away at the ford?' queried an officer, suspiciously.

'Yes, sir, and my story is rather a long one.'

'We shall hear it in a few minutes,' said Sir Louis, and, riding on slowly, the party reached the village of Balabagh, where it halted for the night, and where the party found quarters.

The story of Robert Wodrow, who was

full of joy to find himself among comrades again, was a very simple one, and, though made in the form of a species of report or explanation to Sir Louis Cavagnari as the senior officer present, was principally directed to Leslie Colville, whom, of course, he viewed as a friend, and from whom he heard, with no small dismay, of the actual extent of the catastrophe to the squadron.

Though kicked more than once by his own charger after he fell into the stream, he had, after a time, got his feet free from the stirrups; but was swept away like a cork by the current after he had passed through the rapids. Being a good swimmer, he contrived to keep his head above water, but was incapable of reaching the banks, as they were steep, rocky, and in many places rose sheer like walls from the bed of the Cabul. Thus he was borne for nearly three miles below the point where so many of his comrades perished; and, feeling that he could struggle with fate no

more, was about to relinquish further effort when suddenly voices caught his ear; he saw some strange white figures near the bank of the river—figures like those of witches or spectres as seen by the radiance of the stars (as the moon was under a cloud now), and by some strange and lambent lights that were floating on the surface of the water, and in the very midst of which he suddenly found himself, but with a current which shallowed so fast that he could make good his footing.

Among the Mahomedans and Hindoos there is a pretty custom—which the former have no doubt borrowed from the latter, as they both practise it—of going to a river or tank after the fulfilment of a vow, and setting afloat, as an offering, small, saucer-like lamps of earthenware, each containing oil, with a lighted wick.

After having said the *fatihar*, or necessary prayers, they watch their votive lamps

as they float down the stream, and girls often augur their success in love by the steadiness of the journeying down the darkening waters.

There are certain seasons of the year, such as the Shabibarat feast in the month of Shaban, when this ceremony is carried out on a vast and beautiful scale.

It was a fleet of votive lamps amid which Robert Wodrow now found himself, and for a moment or two he had a striking view of some groups of Indian girls clad in white floating drapery, their long black hair unbound, their arms bare to the elbow, their other limbs to the knee, half lost in shadow and half seen in light, upon the steps of a Temple-ghaut—we say for a moment or two only, as on beholding him rising, as it were, from the water, they fled with shrill cries of affright.

Worn and faint, and heedless of what became of him, he reached the marble

steps of the ghaut, and lay there for a time oblivious of everything.

When he recovered a little, though well-nigh dead with cold and exhaustion, he could see by the light of the moon, which now shone out clearly, a tall, thin, and venerable-looking Afghan bending over him.

His ample beard was snowy white, his eyes were keen and glittering, his features were of the Jewish type peculiar to the country, while his costume was that of the primitive Afghan—wide pantaloons of blue stuff, a brown camise with flowing sleeves, and a black fur cap.

Putting a hand on Wodrow's head, he told him in Afghani—which is the Pushtu language spoken by all the Afghans, and the origin of which is unknown—to take courage, as he would protect him; and Robert Wodrow, having picked up a little Sanscrit from his father, the old minister,

made a shift to understand him, and knew also that he quoted the fourth chapter of the Koran, which recommends charity and protection to all helpless strangers.

And between cold and exhaustion, added to more than one kick from his horse, poor Wodrow was helpless indeed, but he had fortunately fallen into excellent hands—those of Abou Ayoub, a good, pious, and intelligent hakim, or physician of the adjacent village, the inhabitants of which were friendly to the British, or to anyone who would protect them from the Afreedies on the one hand and the Khyberees of the Suffaidh Koh on the other, and for defence against these the village, which consisted of a mosque, a tank, and some sixty houses, was surrounded by a strong wall pierced with double rows of loopholes for musketry.

He conveyed him to his house, and there on a *charpoy*, or native truckle bed, Robert Wodrow lay for days and weeks in fever and delirium, attended by the hakim

and his three daughters and a Belooch slave. The former had skill enough to dose his patient with ipecacuanha, with infusions of manna, and food, including rice, tamarinds, and stewed prunes; but he and they believed much more in sentences of the Koran, written on paper, and washed off into the drink he imbibed, which was generally cool tamarind sherbet, that proved in times of feverish thirst a delicious draught, especially from the hands of Ayesha, the eldest and prettiest daughter of the three.

Among the Afghans women are not secluded from all male society, as they are strictly in other Mahommedan communities, for the women of the middle and lower orders share in all the domestic amusements of their husbands, who generally content themselves with one wife, and in the country the latter is unveiled.

Young unmarried women are distinguished by wearing their hair loose and by

their trousers being white. Thus Ayesha and her two sisters wore their long black hair loose, but interwoven with gold chains and strings of Venetian sequins. And the hakim, who never omitted an opportunity of quoting the Koran, duly informed Robert Wodrow that she was so named from Ayesha—one of the four perfect women, and a wife of Mahomet the Prophet—a lady who had a very terrible adventure in the sixth year of the Hejira.

After a few weeks of their care, Robert became convalescent. He was young, courageous, and buoyant with hope; he felt a trust in his own resources and exertions, and, encouraged by the praise he had won from Colville and other officers, had begun to take a new interest in life—to have some hope for the future, and a desire to grapple with any difficulties and dangers that lay before him; but certainly he felt something akin to consternation when informed by the hakim that the

Treaty of Gundamuck had been signed; that Great Britain had made peace with the Ameer; that all our troops had retired towards the Indus, and that he himself was left behind among the wild mountains by the Surkhab, some seventy miles from the frontier—a distance which he could scarcely hope to traverse alone on foot in safety, amid such perilous surroundings.

‘Death cometh to everyone—even though he be in a lofty tower, saith the Koran, but your time, Feringhee, is not come yet,’ said the Hakim Abou Ayoub to his guest, while smiling at the scared expression of his face.

The house of Abou Ayoub was a low but comfortable-looking building, surrounded by groves of tall palm-trees; it had a flat roof and a verandah, where Robert and the Hakim sat at times in the evening smoking, talking of the time when the former must make an effort to get away, or listening to the girls playing the saringa, or

native guitar, and singing monotonously the odes of Rebman, the Khan of the Khutticks.

In this verandah the Hakim received his poor patients, who gazed with wonder and awe when the door of his sanctum or surgery was open, though therein were only a few boxes of books and drugs—a great vase of rose-water, and a three-lipped brass lamp suspended from a tall iron rod—for with them the science of healing was associated with something of sorcery and witchcraft. Robert Wodrow, with all the Hakim's kindness, wearied of the routine of the daily life there—the perpetual prayers and ablutions of his host. At each meal the old man always poured water into a brass basin, in which Robert had to dip his hands ere he could plunge them into the pilao, which Ayesha had prepared; though, sooth to say, the Hakim, after uttering the invariable Bismillah, usually had his fingers in first,

selecting the most delicate morsels for his guest, as knives and forks are unknown in the land of Baber. Then would come little cups of savoury curries, chutnees, and sweetmeats; and, when evening fell, ablutions again; a white cloth was spread over the carpet, and, turning his bowed face in the direction of Mecca, old Abou Ayoub devoutly said his prayers for the night.

There is a language of the eye, and a freemasonry when hand touches hand that all women know or learn; and ere long Robert Wodrow discovered, to his alarm, that the eldest daughter of his host had eyes for him alone—we say to his alarm, for, if he did not respond, her heart might grow revengeful.

This made his situation perilous amid society so strange, and more intently did he long to be gone, though the girl was, in her own way, very pretty, very fair for an Afghan, and coquettishly wore the

brightest coloured camises, embroidered vests, and laced trousers of the finest muslin to attract him,

When the Hakim was absent, there was no mistaking her languishing demeanour, which sorely perplexed the hussar.

If she loved him, as he doubted not, he at least did not know how to fall in love again, and to what end could it be with *her*?

Too intensely had he passed through the passion not to know how it was crushed out of him by the agony of loss; and he had but one desire, to get well and strong, and at all risks evade this new peril.

One morning the Hakim came to him with a face expressive of excitement and pleasure; it was to announce that a *tchopper*, or Cabulee mounted courier, had ridden through the adjacent pass and seen British troops marching north-westward from Jellalabad.

‘British troops!’ exclaimed Wodrow, starting up, and at the moment in haste to be gone.

‘Bismillah, not so fast, my son,’ said the Hakim; ‘you must have food ere you go.’

In haste Ayesha prepared for him a *kafta kawab*, or dish of savoury meat balls, with her own hands, and, unseen by Wodrow, her tears dropped into the pipkin as she did so; but he could scarcely eat of it, he was in such haste to be gone.

From the loopholes in the village wall the Hakim showed him the gleam of arms as a party of troops came defiling into the narrow valley, through which the Surk-ab flows to the Cabul river, and then they wrung each other’s hands in farewell.

‘Peace be upon you!’ cried Wodrow, who knew enough of the language to say this.

‘And likewise on you be peace and the mercy of God!’ cried the Hakim, in his sonorous Afghani, and another moment

saw Robert Wodrow hurrying down the hillside, and leaving the walled *killa*, or village, fast behind him.

‘Things in this world wag strangely,’ said Robert Wodrow to Colville, and forgetting that others heard him. ‘As you may know, I didn’t care to live; but I pulled through—pulled through when those with a happier future and more hope might have succumbed.’

What followed has already been narrated.

‘After the kindness of that old Hakim to me, I shall ever think well of these Afghan fellows in future,’ said Robert.

‘Quite right too, Wodrow,’ responded Leslie Colville; ‘but we have yet to see how we get on with them at Cabul.’

He had his doubts, and, curiously enough, they were prophetic.

With a sigh of genuine thankfulness, Robert Wodrow accepted a few cigars from the proffered case of young Hamilton,

of the Guides (a gallant fellow who had already won the V.C.), as luxuries he had not known for many a day.

‘And now for the march towards Cabul—nearly eighty miles from the village of Balabagh. As I have a spare horse, you shall ride him, Wodrow,’ said Colville.

‘I shall never forget your kindness, sir.’

This was all Robert Wodrow said, but his heart was very full, for Colville’s manner and bearing to him were kind and considerate in the extreme; and he knew that—the latter’s generosity of nature apart—much of this sprang from their mutual regard for Mary and Ellinor Wellwood.

CHAPTER XX.

AT CABUL.

FOR Robert Wodrow to attempt to make his way alone to where his regiment was now quartered far in the rear, through passes filled by savage tribes, was not to be thought of; thus nothing was left for him but to proceed with the ambassadors' escort to Cabul.

He was safe now, and had escaped from that terrible catastrophe at the Ford of Isaac; but poor Robert was only a corporal, and the public papers barely recorded the circumstance. Now he was once more with Europeans; his whole bearing rapidly changed; his weakness and illness seemed

to leave him, his step resumed its buoyancy, his eyes their fire and, if sad, old devil-may-care expression.

Though Robert Wodrow, by enlisting in the hussars, had opened a considerable social gulf between himself and Captain Leslie Colville of the Guards, it was impossible for them both not to have many sympathies in common; thus oblivious of that gulf the two rode frequently together, talking of the Wellwoods and the Birks of Invermay, on the route by Gundamuck, Suffaidh Sang, and Hazardaracht.

On service the bonds of rank and even of discipline, so to say, are often loosened, for the experience of fighting side by side makes the finest qualities of the soldier, forming the true and loving link between the officer and his men. It fires the sense of *esprit-de-corps*, and blots out all the ignobler phases of garrison and barrack life, teaches self-reliance, inspires *cameraderie* and patriotism, and makes men

less coarse in speech and kindlier to each other in spirit, and more grave and earnest with the work in hand.

After halting for the night near Hazardaracht, or the 'Place of the Thousand Trees,' Sir Louis Cavagnari and his party pushed upwards to the famous Shutargardan Pass, which is eleven thousand five hundred feet in height, and from thence the road to Cabul lies through narrow and rock-bound defiles.

Immediately below this mighty mountain eminence lie lesser hills that diminish in height as they slope down into a vast plain in the richest state of cultivation, dotted by numberless villages, all of the most picturesque aspect.

At Shutargardan the embassy found themselves in the land of the powerful and most warlike Ghilzie tribe, whose fighting force was estimated at nearly two hundred thousand men; but there they were received with every outward honour

by an escort of the Ameer's regular troops, whose equipment caused some surprise and even merriment among the Europeans of the escort.

'By Jove, Colville, here are some countrymen of yours!' cried a staff officer, choking with laughter, as some of the Ameer's 'Highlanders' presented arms.

The Ameer had actually dressed a body of his troops in tartan kilts, in imitation of the Gordon Highlanders, whose costume had greatly impressed him, and these they wore over baggy cotton breeches; while the cavalry who accompanied them wore the same nether garments (minus the kilt) with red tunics, white belts, and helmets of soft grey felt, and in addition to tulwar and pistols, every man rode with a whip, the wooden handle of which, when not required, was stuck into his right boot.

They had smooth-bore carbines slung over the right thigh, muzzle downwards.

'A precious set of dark-looking duffers

they are,' was Robert Wodrow's off-hand comment, as he surveyed them.

Escorted by these troops, Sir Louis Cavagnari and his companions continued the remaining forty-five miles of the journey to Cabul, passing Kushi and other fortified villages, and it was not without emotions of interest and anxiety too, that they found themselves on the 24th of June, entering the gates and traversing the streets of that hitherto openly—perhaps yet secretly—hostile capital, which is surrounded by low, barren, and rocky hills, but amid a plain which time and human industry have made wondrously fertile and beautiful.

The dark-visaged and motley crowds in the streets—Afghans, Kuzzilbashes, Persians, Tajiks, and Jews—scowled very unmistakably at the Feringhees, whose presence they did not want, whose prowess in recent wars they feared, and whose race and religion they loathed.

The streets through which the visitors rode were all built of sun-dried bricks and wood, about two storeys high, with flat roofs, and low, square doorways, now and then a larger one, with a mulberry-tree overhanging a mud wall, indicating the residence of a great man.

The city is three miles in circuit, and is dominated by the Bala Hissar, in which the embassy took up their quarters, a place incapable of being defended, though the citadel, in consequence of the ruinous condition of its walls and ramparts. It has, however, a wide ditch, and stabling for a thousand horses.

It is half-a-mile long by a quarter of a mile broad, and presents externally a cluster of lofty, square, embattled towers, with its chief strength, or inner citadel, high up on the slope of a hill.

As they entered its arched gate between two circular towers, Colville heard a voice

amid the scowling crowds exclaim, with uplifted hands,

‘La Ilah illa Allah? Why does not He shrivel them all up by a flash of lightning, and cast them into hell for ever?’

The speaker mingled with the multitude, but not before Colville recognised his figure, and remembered Mahmoud Shah, the sham hadji of Jellalabad; but it would have been alike unwise to notice or pursue him at that crisis.

In the Bala Hissar there were assigned by the Ameer apartments for the use of the ambassador and his suite and escort—apartments having marble floors and walls covered with arabesques, old as the days of Tamerlane and Baber perhaps, certainly as old as those of Nadir Shah, and for a time the whole party were to all appearance well received by the Sovereign and his people; but after a little space the former, notwithstanding his hollow pro-

testations and fulsome letter to the Viceroy at Simla, grew cold and haughty, and daily saw less and less of Sir Louis Cavagnari, while the mobs without began to manifest alike turbulence and insolence, and the isolated embassy was doubtless involved in peril.

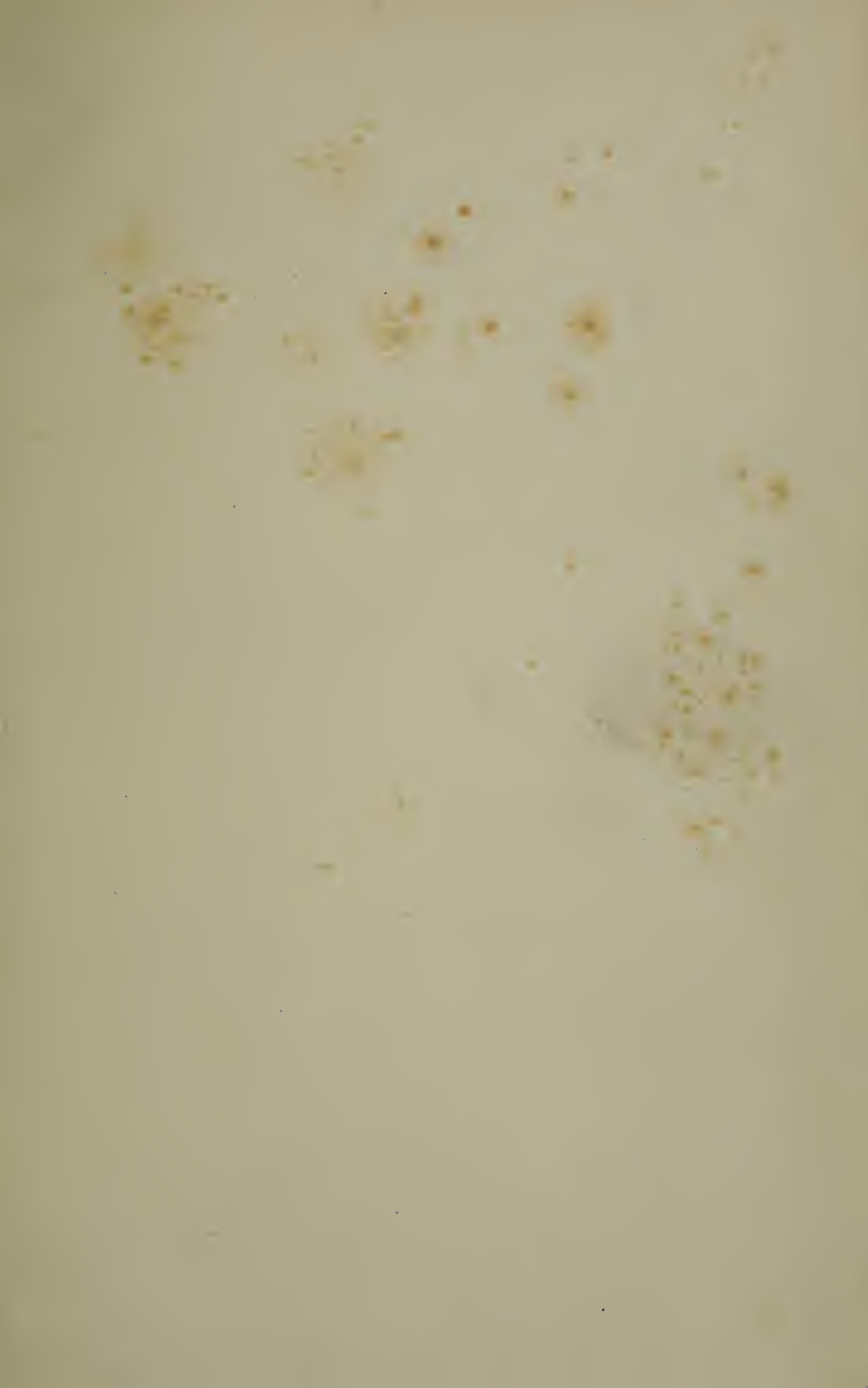
Roving brigands infested all the roads around the city, yet the months of July and August passed quietly enough, though some Afghan troops who had marched in from Herat used threatening language against Sir Louis and insulted the soldiers of his escort, on one occasion compelling Colville and two of the guides to draw their swords.

It has been said—but we know not upon what authority—that Cavagnari received distinct information that the lives of himself and all his companions were in imminent peril, but the letters which those gentlemen sent to India, and those which

Mary Wellwood received at long intervals from Colville, gave no indications of apprehension.

Yet a stormy cloud was gathering over the picturesque towers of the Bala Hissar.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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