

them push off, the Rajah, his sons, and Dick returned to the palace. Here for a couple of hours he held a sort of audience, and gave his advice to the townspeople and others who came, in considerable numbers, to consult with him. When this was done they went into the courtyard, where all was ready for their departure.

The troop had, during the past week, been raised to two hundred men, many of the young cultivators coming eagerly forward as soon as they heard that the Rajah was going to increase his troop, being anxious to take a share in the adventures that might be looked for, and to avenge the sufferings that had been inflicted on their friends by Hyder's marauders. They were a somewhat motley troop, but this mattered little, as uniformity was unknown among the forces of the native princes. The majority were stout young fellows. All provided their own horses and arms, and although the former lacked the weight and bone of English cavalry horses, they were capable of performing long journeys and of existing on rations on which an English horse would starve.

All were well armed, for any deficiency had been made up from the Rajah's store, and from this a large number of guns had, three days before, been distributed among such of the ryots as intended to take to the hills on the approach of the enemy. Ammunition had also been distributed among them. Every man in the troop carried a shield and tulwar, and on his back was slung a musket or spear; and there were few without pistols in their girdles. They rode half-way to Conjeveram, and stopped for the night at a village—the men sleeping in the open air, while the Rajah, his sons, and Dick were entertained by the chief man of the place. The next afternoon they rode into Conjeveram, where, just at sunset, the boats also arrived.

The troop encamped outside the town, while the Rajah and his party occupied some rooms that had been secured beforehand for them. In the morning the ladies proceeded in a

native carriage with the troop, an officer and ten men following, in charge of the bullock-carts containing the baggage. On reaching Madras, they encamped on the Maidan—a large open space used as a drill-ground for the troops garrisoned there—and the Rajah and his party established themselves in the house occupied by him on the occasion of his last visit. The next day the Rajah went to the Government House and had an interview with the deputy-governor.

“I think,” the latter said, after some conversation, “that your troop of cavalry will be of little use to the Nabob. If Tippoo comes down from the hills, he will not be able to take the field against him, and will need all his forces to defend Arcot, Vellore, and his smaller forts, and cavalry would be of no real use to him. Your troop would be of much greater utility to the battalions from Bengal when they arrive; they will be here in three weeks or so, and as soon as they come I will attach you to them. I will write to the Nabob, saying that you were about to join him, but that, in the interest of the general defence, I have thought it better at present to attach you to the Bengal contingent. You see, they will be entirely new to the country, and it will be a great advantage to them to have a troop like yours, many of whom are well acquainted with the roads and general geography of the country. Your speaking English, too, will add to your usefulness.”

“I have a nephew with me who speaks English perfectly, and also Hindustani,” the Rajah said. “He is a smart young fellow, and I have no doubt that the officer in command would be able to make him very useful. He is eager to be of service. His father, who was an Englishman, was wrecked some years ago on the west coast, and sent up a prisoner to Mysore; he was not one of those handed over at the time of the peace, but whether he has been murdered, or is still a prisoner in Tippoo's hands, we do not know. My sister came out with the boy, three or four months ago, to endeavour to obtain some news of him.”

“ I will make a note of it, Rajah ; I have no doubt that he will be of great use to Colonel Cockerell.”

In the last week in July the Rajah moved with his troop to Conjeveram, and on the 1st of August the Bengal forces arrived there. They were joined at once by three regiments of Europeans, one of native cavalry, and a strong force of artillery, raising their numbers to nine thousand five hundred men. Colonel Kelly took command of the force, and begged the Rajah to advance with his horsemen at once to the foot of the ghauts, to break it up into half-troops, and to capture or destroy any small parties of horse Tippoo might send down by any of the passes to reconnoitre the country and ascertain the movements and strength of the British forces. He was also to endeavour to obtain as much information as he could of what was going on in Mysore, and to ascertain whether Tippoo was still with his army, watching General Meadows in the west, or was moving as if with the intention of taking advantage of the main force of the English being away south to descend into the Carnatic.

The order was a very acceptable one to the Rajah. His troop made a good appearance enough when in company with those of the Nabob of Arcot, but he could not but feel that they looked a motley body by the side of the trained native and European troops ; and he was frequently angered by hearing the jeering comments of English soldiers to each other when he rode past them with his troop, and had not a little astonished the speakers more than once by turning round on his horse and abusing them hotly in their own language. He was therefore glad to be off. For such work his men were far better fitted than were even the native cavalry in the Company's service. They were stout, active fellows, accustomed to the hills, and speaking the dialect used by the shepherds and villagers among the ghauts. Proceeding northward through Vellore, he there divided his force into four bodies ; he himself with fifty men took up a position at the mouth of

the pass of Amboor ; another fifty were sent to the pass of Moognee, to the west of Chittoor, under the command of Anwar, the captain of the troop. The rest were distributed among the minor passes.

Dick remained with his uncle, who established himself in a village seven miles up the pass. He was well satisfied with the arrangement, for he was anxious to learn to go about among the hills as a spy, and was much more likely to get leave from his uncle to do so than he would have been from any of the officers of the troop, who would not have ventured to allow the Rajah's nephew to run into danger ; in the second place, his especial friend among the officers, a youth named Surajah, son of Rajbullub, was with the detachment. Surajah had been especially picked out by the Rajah as Dick's companion ; he generally joined him in his rides, and they had often gone on shooting excursions among the hills. He was about three years Dick's senior, but in point of height there was but little difference between them.

Every day half the troop, under an officer, rode up the pass until within a mile of the fort near the summit, garrisoned by Mysorean troops. They were able to obtain but little information, for the villages towards the upper end of the pass were all deserted and in ruins, the inhabitants never having ventured back since Hyder's invasion. The Rajah was vexed at being able to learn nothing of what was passing on the plateau, and was therefore more disposed than he might otherwise have been to listen to Dick's proposal.

“ Don't you think, uncle,” the latter said one evening, “ that I might try to learn something by going up with Surajah alone ? We could strike off into the hills as if on a shooting expedition, just as we used to do from Tripataly, except that I should stain my face and hands. The people in the villages on the top of the ghauts are, every one says, simple and quiet ; they have no love for Tippoo or Mysore, but are content to pay their taxes and to work quietly in their

fields. There will be little fear of our being interfered with by them."

"You might find a party of Tippoo's troops in one of the villages, Dick, and get into trouble."

"I don't see why we should, uncle. Of course we should not go up dressed as we are, but as shikarees, and when we went into a village, should begin by asking whether the people are troubled with any tigers in the neighbourhood. You see, I specially came out here to go into Mysore in disguise, and I should be getting a little practice in this way, besides obtaining news for you."

"I am certainly anxious to get news, Dick. So far, I have had nothing to send down, except that the reports from all the passes agree in saying that they have learned nothing of any movement on the part of Tippoo, and that no spies have come down the passes, or any armed party whatever. This is good so far as it goes, but it only shows that the other passes are, like this, entirely deserted. Therefore we really know nothing whatever. Even at this moment Tippoo may have fifty thousand men gathered on the crest of the hills, ready to pour down to-morrow through one of the passes; and therefore, as I do not think you would be running any great danger, I consent to your going with Surajah on a scouting expedition on foot among the hills. As you say, you must, of course, disguise yourselves as peasants; you had better, in addition to your guns, each take a brace of pistols, and so armed, even if any of the villagers were inclined to be hostile, they would not care about interfering with you."

"Thank you, uncle. When would you expect us back, if we start to-morrow morning?"

"That must be entirely in your hands, Dick; you would hardly climb the ghauts and light upon a village in one day, and it might be necessary to go farther before you could obtain any news. It is a broken country, with much jungle for some distance beyond the hills, and the villages lying off the roads

will have but little communication with each other, and might know nothing whatever of what was happening in the cultivated plains beyond. At any rate, you must not go into any villages on the roads leading to the heads of the passes; for there are forts everywhere and you would be certain to find parties of troops stationed in them. Even before war broke out, I know that this was the case, as they were stationed there to prevent any captives, native or European, escaping from Mysore. You must, therefore, strictly avoid all the main roads, even though it may be necessary to proceed much farther before you can get news. I should think if we say three days going and as many returning, it will be as little as we can count upon, and I shall not begin to feel at all uneasy if you do not reappear for a week. It is of no use your returning without some information as to what is going on in Mysore, and it would be folly to throw away your work and trouble, when in another day or two you might get the news you want. I shall therefore leave it entirely to your discretion."

Greatly pleased at having succeeded beyond his expectations, Dick at once sought out Surajah. The latter was very gratified when he heard that he was to accompany the young Sahib on such an expedition, and at once set about the necessary preparations. There was no difficulty in obtaining in the village the clothes required for their disguises, and one of the sheep intended for the following day's rations was killed, and a leg boiled.

"If we take, in addition to this, ten pounds of flour, a gourd of ghee, and a little pan for frying the cakes in, we shall be able to get on, without having to buy food, for four or five days; and of course, when we are once among the villages, we shall have no difficulty in getting more. You had better cut the meat off the bone and divide it in two portions, and divide the flour too; then we can each carry our share."

"I will willingly carry it all, Sahib."

"Not at all, Surajah; we will each take our fair share."

You see, we shall have a gun, pistols, ammunition, and a tulwar; and that, with seven or eight pounds of food each, and our water-bottles, will be quite enough to carry up the ghauts. The only thing we want now is some stain."

"I will get something that will do, and bring it with me in the morning, Sahib; it won't take you a minute to put on. I will come for you at the first gleam of daylight."

Dick returned to the cottage he occupied with his uncle, and told him what preparations they had made for their journey; and they sat talking over the details for another hour. The Rajah's last words as they lay down for the night were, "Don't forget to take a blanket each; you will want it for sleeping in the open, which you will probably have to do several times, although you may occasionally be able to find shelter in a village."

By the time the sun rose the next morning, they were well upon their way. They had a good deal of toilsome climbing, but by nightfall had surmounted the most difficult portions of the ascent, and encamped, when it became dark, in a small wood. Here they lighted a fire, cooked some cakes of flour, and, with these and the cold meat, made a hearty meal. They had during the day halted twice, and had breakfasted and lunched off some bread, of which they had brought sufficient for the day's journey.

"I suppose there is no occasion to watch, Surajah?"

"I don't know, Sahib; I do not think it will be safe for us both to sleep. There are, as you know, many tigers among these hills, and though they would not approach us as long as the fire is burning brightly, they might steal up and carry one of us off when the fire gets low. I will therefore watch."

"I certainly should not let you do that, without taking my turn," Dick said; "and I feel so tired with the day's work that I do not think I could keep awake for ten minutes. It would be better to sleep in a tree than that."

"You would not get much sleep in a tree, Sahib. I have

done it once or twice, when I have been hunting in a tiger-infested neighbourhood, but I got scarcely any sleep, and was so stiff in the morning that I could hardly walk. I would rather sit up all night and keep up a good fire, than do that."

Dick thought for a minute or two, and then got up and walked about under the trees, keeping his eyes fixed upon the branches overhead.

"This will do," he said at last. "Come here, Surajah. There; do you see those two branches coming out in the same direction. At one point they are but five or six feet apart. We might fasten our blankets side by side with the help of the straps of our water-bottles and the slings of the guns, so as to make what are called on board a ship hammocks, and lie there perfectly safe and comfortable."

Surajah nodded.

"I have a coil of leather thong, Sahib; I thought that it might be useful if we wanted to bind a prisoner, or for any other purpose, so I stuffed it into my waist-sash."

"That is good; let us lose no time, for I am quite ready for sleep. I will climb up first."

In ten minutes the blankets were securely fastened side by side, between the branches. Surajah descended, threw another armful of wood on to the fire, placed their meat in the crutch of a bough six feet above the ground, and then climbed the tree again; thus they were soon lying side by side in their blankets. These bagged rather inconveniently under their weight, but they were too tired to mind trifles, and were very soon fast asleep. Dick did not wake until Surajah called him. It was already broad daylight; his companion had slipped down quietly, stirred up the embers of the fire, thrown on more wood, and cooked some chupatties before waking him.

"It is too bad, Surajah," Dick said, as he looked down; "you ought to have woken me. I will unfasten these blankets before I get down; it will save time after breakfast."

Half-an-hour later they were again on their way, and short-

ly came upon a boy herding some goats; he looked doubtfully at them, but, seeing that they were not Mysorean soldiers, he did not attempt to fly.

"How far is it to the next village, lad?" Surajah asked, "and which is the way? We are shikarees. Are there any tigers about?"

"Plenty of them," the boy said. "I drive the goats to a strong, high stockade every evening, and would not come out before the sun rose for all the money they say the sultan has. Make for that tree, and close to it you will see a spring. Follow that down; it will take you to the village."

After walking for six hours they came to the village. It was a place of some little size, but there were few people about. Women came to the doors to look at Surajah and Dick as they came along.

"Where are you from?" an old man asked, as he came out from his cottage.

"From down the mountain-side. Tigers are getting scarce there, and we thought we would come over and see what we could do here."

"Here there are many tigers," the old man said. "For the last twenty years the wars have taken most of our young men away. Some are forced to go against their will, for when the order comes to the head man of the village, that the sultan requires so many soldiers, he is forced to pick out those best fitted for service. Others go of their own free will, thinking soldiering easier work than tilling the fields, besides the chance of getting rich booty. So there are but few shikarees, and the tigers multiply and are a curse to us. We are but poor people, but if you choose to stay here for a time we will pay something for every tiger you kill, and we will send round to the other villages within ten miles, and doubtless every one of them will contribute, so that you might get enough to pay you for your exertions."

"We will think of it," Surajah replied. "We did not in-

tend to stop in one village, but proposed to travel about in the jungle-covered district; and wherever we hear complaints of a tiger committing depredations, we will stop and do our best to kill the evil beast. We mean first to find out where they are most troublesome, and then we shall work back again. We hear that the sultan gives good prices for those taken alive."

"I have heard so," the old man said, but none have been caught alive here or by any one in the villages round. The sultan generally gets them from the royal forests, where none are allowed to shoot save with his permission. Sometimes, when there is a lack of them there, his hunters come into these districts and catch them in pitfalls and have nets and ropes with which the tigers are bound and taken away."

A little crowd had by this time collected round them; and the women, when they heard that the strangers were shikarees who had come up with the intention of killing tigers, brought them bowls of milk, cakes, and other presents.

"I suppose now that the sultan is away at war," Dick said, "his hunters do not come here for tigers?"

"We know nothing of his wars," a woman said. "They take our sons from us, and we do not see them again. We did hear a report that he had gone with an army to conquer Travancore. But why he should want to do it, none of us can make out. His dominions are as wide as the heart of man can require. It is strange that he cannot rest contented, but, like his father, should be always taking our sons away to fight. However, these things are beyond the understanding of poor people like us; but we can't help thinking that it would be better if he were to send his armies to destroy all the tigers. If he would do that, we should not grudge the sums we have to pay when the tax-gatherers come round."

After pausing for an hour in the village, they continued on their way. Two or three other small collections of huts were passed, but it was not until the evening of the next day that

they issued from the jungle-covered country on to the cultivated plain. At none of the places they had passed was there anything known as to Tippoo or his army, but they were told that there were parties of troops in all the villages along the edge of the plain, as well as in the passes.

"We must be careful now, Surajah," Dick said, as, after a long day's march, they sat down to rest at a distance of half a mile from a large village. "Our tale that we are shikarees will not do here. Had that really been our object, we should have stopped at the first place we came to, and, at any rate, we should not have come beyond the jungle. We might still say that we are shikarees, but that tigers had become scarce on the other side of the hills, and hearing a talk that Tippoo and the English are going to war with each other, we made up our minds to go to Seringapatam and enlist in his army."

"That would do very well," Surajah agreed; "they would have no reason for doubting us, and even if the officer here were to suggest that we should enlist under him, we could do so, as there would be no difficulty in slipping away and making off into the jungle again."

They waited until the sun set, and then walked on into the village. They had scarcely entered when two armed men stopped them, and questioned them whence they came.

Surajah repeated the story they had agreed upon, and the men appeared quite satisfied.

"You will be just in time," one said. "We have news that the sultan has just moved with his army to Seringapatam. Officers came here only yesterday to buy up cattle and grain; these are to be retained here until orders are received where they are to be sent, so I should say that he is coming this way, and will be going down the passes, as Hyder did. We shall be very glad, for I suppose we shall join as he passes along; it has been dull work here, and we are looking forward to gaining our share of the loot. It would be just as well for you to join us here now, as to go on to Seringapatam."

"It would save us a long tramp," Surajah agreed. "We will think it over, and maybe we will have a talk with your officer to-morrow morning."

They sauntered along with the men, talking as they went, and so escaped being questioned by other soldiers. Presently they made the excuse that they wanted to buy some flour and ghee before the shops were closed, and, with a friendly nod to the two soldiers, stopped before the stall of a peasant who had, on a little stand in front of him, a large jar of ghee. Having purchased some, they went a little farther and laid in a fresh supply of flour.

"Things are very dear," Surajah remarked.

"There is very little left in the village," the man said. "All the flour was bought up yesterday for the sultan's army, which, they say, is coming in this direction, and I have only got what you see here; it has been pounded by my wife and some other women, since morning."

"That is good enough," Dick said, as they walked away. "Our work is done, Surajah, and it is not likely that we should learn anything more if we were to stop here for a week. Let us turn down between these houses, and make our way round behind; we might be questioned again by a fresh party of soldiers if we were to go along the street."

They kept along on the outskirts of the village, regained the road by which they had come, and walked on until they reached the edge of the jungle. Going a short distance among the trees, they collected some sticks, lit a fire, and sat down to cook their meal. At the last village or two they had heard but little of tigers, and now agreed that they could safely lie down, and that it would not be necessary for them to rig up their blankets as hammocks, as they had done on the first two nights.