

“Yes; all were brought here, native and English. Tens of thousands of boys and youths, swept up by Tippoo’s armies from the Malabar coast and the Carnatic, were brought up here and formed into battalions, and these English prisoners were forced to drill them. It was but a poor drill. I have seen them drilling their recruits at Conjeveram, and the difference between the quick sharp order there and the listless command here was great indeed. Consequently the Englishmen were punished by being heavily ironed, and kept at starvation point for the slackness with which they obeyed the tyrant’s orders. Sometimes they were set to sweep the streets, sometimes they were beaten till they well-nigh expired under the lash. Often would they have died of hunger, were it not that Tippoo’s own troops took pity on them and supplied them from their store. Some of the boys, drummer-boys, or ship’s-boys, or little ship’s officers, were kept in the Palace and trained as singers and dancers for Tippoo’s amusement. Very many of the white prisoners were handed over to Tippoo by Admiral Sufferin. Though how a Christian could have brought himself to hand over Christians to this tiger, I cannot imagine.

“Others were captured in forays, and there were till lately many survivors of the force that surrendered in Hyder’s time. There are certainly some in other towns, for it was the policy of Hyder, as it is of Tippoo, always to break up parties of prisoners. Many were sent to Bangalore, some to Burrampore, and very many to the fort of Chillembroom; but I heard that nearly all these died of famine and disease very quickly. While Tippoo at times considers himself strong enough to fight the English, and is said to aim at the conquest of all southern India, he has yet a fear of Englishmen, and he thus separates his captives, lest, if they were together, they should plot against him and bring about a rising. He knows that all the old Hindoo population are against him, and that even among the Mohammedans he is very unpopular. The

Chelah battalions, who numbered twelve or fourteen thousand, made up entirely of those he has dragged from their homes in districts devastated by him, would assuredly have joined against him, were there a prospect of success, just as they seized the opportunity to desert six months ago, when the English attacked the camp across the river.

“Now, if you will tell me in what way I can best serve you, I will do so. In the first place, sturdy young peasants are wanted for the army, and assuredly you will not be here many days before you will find yourselves in the ranks, whether you like it or not; for Tippoo is in no way particular how he gets recruits.”

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## CHAPTER XI

### A USEFUL FRIEND

“I AGREE with you that it would be a disadvantage to go as a soldier,” Dick said, after a pause; “but what disguise would you recommend us to choose?”

“That I must think over. You both look too straight and active to be employed as the assistants of a trader, or I could have got some of my friends to take you in that capacity. The best disguise will be a gayer attire, such as would be worn by the retainers of some of the chiefs; and were it not that, if questioned, you could not say who was your employer, that is what I should recommend.”

“I saw a number of men working at a battery they are erecting by the river side; could we not take service there until something better presents itself?”

“I should not advise that,” the native replied, “for the work is very hard and the pay poor; indeed, most of those employed on it are men driven in from the country round and forced to labour, getting only enough pay to furnish them



with the poorest food. There would also be the disadvantage that if you were so employed you would have no opportunity of seeing any English captives who may have been brought here of late. All that I can at present do myself, is to speak to some of my friends who have been here for a long time, and ask them whether they can remember an English captive being sent up here from Coorg, some eight years ago, and whether they ever heard what was his fate. I should say, of course, that I have received a message from friends at Conjeveram, that some of the man's relations have sent out to make inquiries concerning him, and asking me if I can find any news as to his fate. My friends may not know themselves, but they may be able to find out from others. Very many of our people were forced into the ranks of the army, and there is not a regiment which has not some men who, although regarded as Mohammedans, are still at heart, as we all are, as true to our faith as ever.

“It is from these that we are more likely to obtain information than in any other way. You will not be very long before you will be able to satisfy yourself as to whether or not he whom you seek is in this city; and if he should not be here, there remain but the two towns that I have named, and the hill-forts. As to these, it will be well-nigh impossible to obtain an entrance, so jealously are they all guarded. None save the garrisons are allowed to enter. The paths, which are often so steep and difficult that men and provisions have to be slung up in baskets, are guarded night and day, and none are allowed to approach the foot of the rocks within musket shot lest, I suppose, they might find some spot where an ascent could be made. The garrisons are seldom changed. The soldiers are allowed to take their wives and families up with them, but once there, they are as much prisoners as those in the dungeons. That is one reason why captives once sent up there never come down again, for were they to do so they might, if by chance they escaped, be able to give in-

formation as to the approaches that would assist an assailing force.

“I do not say that all are killed, though undoubtedly most of them are put to death soon after they arrive; but it may be that some are retained in confinement, either from no orders being sent for their execution, or from their very existence being in time forgotten by the tyrant here. Some of these may languish in dungeons, others may have gained the good-will of the commanders of the fort—for even among the Mohammedans there are doubtless many good and merciful men. Now for the present: this house has but one storey in front, but there is a room over this, and that is at your service. Furniture it has none, but I will, this evening, get a couple of trusses of straw. It is but a loft, but you will not want to use it, save to sleep in. You need not fear interruption in this house. There is scarce a man here that is not, like myself, a Hindoo, for when we were brought here from Mysore the piece of ground on which the street stands was assigned to us, and we were directed to build houses here.

“Few besides ourselves ever enter it, for those who still carry on trade have booths in the market-place. There is one thing I will tell you at once. We, the persecuted, have means of recognising each other: outward signs there are none, neither caste mark nor peculiarity of dress; but we know each other by signs. When we salute we turn in the thumbs as we raise our hands to our turbans—so. If we have no occasion to salute, as we move our hands, either to stroke our faces, or to touch the handles of our daggers, or in other way, we keep the thumb turned in. If the man be one of ourselves, he replies in the same way; then, to prevent the possibility of error, the one asks the other a question—on what subject it matters not, providing that before he speaks, he coughs slightly. You must remember that such communication is not made lightly; were it to be so it would soon attract notice. It is used when you want to know whether



you can trust a man. It is as much as to say, Are you a friend? can I have confidence in you? will you help me?—and you can see that there are many occasions on which such knowledge may be most useful, even to the saving of life.”

“I do indeed see it,” Dick said, “and greatly are we indebted to you for telling us of it.”

They remained talking with their host, whose name was, he told them, Pertaub, until darkness came on. They had shared his rice with him, and had requested him to lay in such provision as was necessary for them; and as soon as it became dark they went out, leaving their guns behind them. Busy as the main streets were when they had before passed through them, they were very much more so now; the shops were all lighted up by lanterns or small lamps, and the streets were filled with troops, now dismissed from duty, and bent, some on amusement, some in purchasing small additions to their rations with the scanty pay allowed to them. In the open spaces the soldiers were crowded round performers of various kinds. Here was a juggler throwing balls and knives into the air; there was a snake-charmer—a Hindoo, doubtless, but too old and too poor to be worth persecuting; a short distance off was an acrobat turning and twisting himself into strange postures. Two sword-players, with bucklers and blunted tulwars, played occasionally against each other, and offered to engage any of the bystanders; occasionally the invitation would be accepted, but the sword-players always proved too skilful for the rough soldiers, who retired discomfited, amid the jeers of their comrades. More than one party of musicians played what seemed to Dick most discordant music, but which was appreciated by the soldiers, as was evident from the plaudits and the number of small coins thrown to the players. In the great open space by the side of the market the crowd was thickest. Here were large numbers of booths gay with lamps; in one were arranged, on tables, trays of cheap trinkets, calicoes, cloths, blankets,

shoes, and other articles of dress; in another were arms, matchlocks, pistols, tulwars, and daggers. On the ground were lines of baskets filled with grain of many kinds, the vendors squatting patiently behind them. Some of the traders volubly accosted passers-by; others maintained a dignified silence, as if they considered the excellence of their wares needed no advertisement. It was not new, but it was very amusing to Dick, and it was late before they returned to their lodging.

“I wish,” he said, as they strolled back, “that I were a good juggler or musician. It seems to me that it would be an excellent disguise, and we could go everywhere without question, and get admittance into all sorts of places we could not get a chance of entering into in any other way.”

“Yes, that would be a good thing,” Surajah agreed; “but I am sure that I could not do anything, even if you could.”

“No, I quite see that, and I am not thinking of trying; but it would have been a first-rate plan.”

“You are very good at sword-play,” Surajah suggested, although somewhat doubtfully.

Dick laughed. “The first really good swordsman that came along would make an exhibition of me. No; one would have to do something really well.”

The subject was renewed after they had seated themselves with Pertaub.

“It would be an excellent disguise,” he agreed; “a good juggler could gain admission to the Palace, and might even enter forts where no others could set foot; for life there is dull indeed, and any one who could amuse the soldiers would be certain of a welcome, and even a governor might be willing to see his feats.”

“Could one bribe a conjurer to let one pass as his assistant?”

“That would be impossible,” the Hindoo said, “for an assistant would have opportunities for learning the tricks, and no money would induce a really good juggler to divulge his



secrets, which have been passed down from father to son for centuries."

"If one had thought of it," Dick said, "one could have bought in London very many things which would have seemed almost magical to the people here. I am afraid that we must go on, on our old line; it is a pity, for the other would have been first-rate."

"I have obtained for you this evening two suits of clothes such as we spoke of; in them you can pass as followers of some petty rajah, and are not likely to attract attention. I have inquired among some of my friends, and hear that the Rajah of Bohr left here to-day with his following; he is but a petty chief, and Bohr lies up north, close to the Nizam's frontier. Thus, if you should be asked in whose service you are, you will have a name to give, and there will be no fear of your being contradicted. If you are still further questioned by any one with a right to ask, you can say that you were told to remain here, in order to see how fast the drilling of the troops went on, and to send the Rajah a report when it is time for him to return here to accompany Tippoo on his march. You will, of course, account for your dialect by keeping to your present story that you came from a village on the ghauts in order to enter the service of one of our rajahs, and that your father having, years ago, been a soldier in the pay of the Rajah of Bohr, you made your way there direct, instead of coming to the capital."

"That will do excellently, Pertaub. It was a fortunate moment indeed that brought us to your door."

"I have done nothing as yet, Sahib; but I hope that in time I may be able to be of use to you. It was fortunate for me as well as for you, perhaps, that you stopped at my door. Of late I have had nothing to think of save my own grief and troubles, but now I have something to give an interest to my life, and already I feel that I need not merely drag it on until I am relieved of its burden. And now,

Sahibs, I am sure that rest must be needful for you, and would recommend that you seek your beds at once."

On the following morning Pertaub brought up the garments that he had bought for them. Nothing could be more irregular than the dress of the armed retainers of an Indian rajah. All attire themselves according to their fancy. Some carry spears and shields, others matchlocks; some wear turbans, others iron caps. The cut and colour of their garments are also varied in the extreme. Dick's dress consisted of a steel cap with a drooping plume of red horsehair, and a red tunic with a blue sash. Over it was worn a skirt of linked mail, which, with leggings fitting tightly, completed the costume. Surajah had a red turban, a jerkin of quilted leather with iron scales fastened on to protect the shoulders and chest. A scarlet kilt hung to his knees, and his legs were enclosed in putties or swathes of coarse cloth, wound round and round them. He wore a blue-and-gold girdle. Dick laughed as he surveyed the appearance of himself and Surajah.

"We are a rum-looking couple," he said, "but I have seen plenty of men just as gaudy in the train of some of the rajahs who visited the camp when we were up here. I think that it is a much better disguise than the one we wore yesterday. I sha'n't be afraid that the first officer we meet will ask us to what regiment we belong; there were scores of fellows lounging about in the streets last night, dressed as we are."

Sticking their swords and pistols into their girdles, they sallied out, and were pleased to find that no one paid the slightest attention to them. They remained in the town until some battalions of recruits poured out from the fort to drill on the grounds between it and the town. The first four that passed were, as Dick learnt from the remarks of some of the bystanders, composed entirely of boys—some of them Christians, thirty thousand of whom had been carried off by Tippoo in his raid on Travancore; and the young men were compelled to serve after being obliged to become, nominally,



Mohammedans. After the Chelah battalions came those of Tippoo's army.

"These fellows look as if they could fight," Dick said. "They are an irregular lot, and don't seem to have an idea of keeping line or marching in step, but they are an active-looking set of fellows, and carry themselves well. As to the Chelaha, I should say they would be no good whatever, even if they could be relied on, which we know they cannot be. They look dejected and miserable, and I suppose hate it all as much as their officers do. I should back half a regiment of English to lick the twelve battalions. I wonder Tippoo himself does not see that troops like these must be utterly useless."

"I don't expect he thinks they would be of much use," Surajah agreed. "He only turned them into soldiers to gratify his hatred of them."

Leaving the troops, they walked on and entered the great fort, which enclosed an area of nearly two square miles. In this were Tippoo's palace, his storehouses,—containing grain sufficient for the garrison for a siege of many months,—mosques, the residences of Tippoo's officials and officers, the arsenals, and the huts for the troops. There was also a street of shops similar to those in the town. Wandering about, unquestioned, they came presently upon a scene that filled Dick with indignation and fury. Two white officers, heavily ironed, were seated on the ground; another, similarly ironed, lay stretched beside them. He was naked from the waist up; his back was covered with blood, and he had evidently been recently flogged until he fell insensible. Half a dozen savage-looking men, evidently executioners of Tippoo's orders, were standing round, jeering at the prisoners and refusing their entreaties to bring some water for their comrade.

"You brutes!" one of the captives exclaimed in English. "I would give all my hopes of liberty for ten minutes face to face with you, with swords in our hands."

"They would not be of much use to us," the other said quietly. "It is four days since we had a mouthful of food, and they would make very short work of us."

"All the better," the other exclaimed. "Death would be a thousand-fold preferable to this misery."

Dick felt that if he remained longer he would be unable to contain himself, and turning hastily away, walked off, accompanied by Surajah.

"It is awful!" he exclaimed, with tears running down his cheeks; "and to be able to do nothing! What must father have gone through! I think, Surajah, that if we were to come upon Tippoo I should go for him, even if he were surrounded by guards. Of course it would cost me my life. If I could kill him I think I should not mind it. Such a villain is not fit to live; and at any rate, whoever came after him, the prisoners could not be worse off than they are now. Let us go back; I have had enough for this morning."

When they returned Dick told Pertaub of the scene that he had witnessed.

"Many of them have been starved to death," the old man said. "Possibly one of their companions may have tried to escape. It is to prevent this that Tippoo's greatest cruelties are perpetrated. It is not so very difficult to get away and take to the jungle. Some have succeeded, but most of them are retaken, for a watch is vigilantly kept up at every village and every road leading on to the frontier, and if caught they are hung or forced to take poison. But whether they are caught or not, Tippoo's vengeance falls upon their companions. These are flogged, ironed, and kept without rations for weeks,—living, if they do live, upon the charity of their guards. This is why there are so few attempts at escape. A man knows that, whether he himself gets off or not, he dooms his companions to torture, perhaps death. One case I remember in which an English sailor, one out of nine, attempted to get away. He was captured and killed at once,



and his eight companions were all hung. So you see, even if one of the captives sees a chance of escape, he does not take it, because of the consequences that would fall upon his companions."

"It is horrible," Dick said, "and I can quite understand why so few escape. The question for me now is whether there are any prisoners kept in dungeons here."

"Not here, I think; Tippoo's policy is to make all his captives useful, and though one might be ironed and confined for a time, I do not think that any are so kept permanently here. There were, of course, some confined to the fort by illness, and some in irons. It may need some little search before you are quite sure that you have seen every one. However, I will try to find out how many there are there, and to get as many of the names as possible. Some of my friends who keep shops in the fort may be able to do this for me. This would shorten your task. But I cannot hold out any hopes that you will find him whom you seek in the city; it is among the hill-forts you will find him, if he be alive. I have been turning the matter over since you spoke to me last night, and the best plan I can think of is, that you should go as a travelling merchant, with Surajah as your assistant. You would want a good assortment of goods: fine muslins and silks, and a good selection of silver jewellery from different parts of India. All these I could purchase for you here. If by good luck you could obtain a sight of the commander of one of these forts, you might possibly obtain permission from him to go up and show your wares to the ladies of his establishment, and to those of other officers. The present of a handsome waist-sash, or a silver-mounted dagger, might incline him favourably to your petition."

"I think that the idea is an excellent one," Dick said warmly. "If we cannot get in in that way, there seems to me to be no chance, save by taking a careful survey of the fortress, to discover where the rocks can be most easily

climbed. There must surely be some spots, even among the steepest crags, where active fellows like Surajah and myself would be able to scale them. Of course, we should have to do it after dark; but once up there, one ought to be able to move about in the fort without difficulty, as we should, of course, be dressed as soldiers, and could take dark blankets to wrap round us. We ought then to be able to find where any prisoners who may be there are confined. There might be a sentry at the door, or, if there were no other way, one might pounce upon some one, force him by threats to tell us what prisoners there are, and where they are confined, and then bind and gag him and stow him away where there would be no chance of his being discovered before daylight."

"There would be a terrible risk in such a matter," Per-taub said, shaking his head gravely.

"No doubt there would be risk, but we came here prepared to encounter danger, and if it were well managed I don't see why we should be found out. Even if we were, we ought to be able to slip away in the darkness and make our way to the point where we went up. Once down on the plain we could renew our disguise as traders, and, however hotly they scoured the country, pass without suspicion through them. I think that there will be more chance in that way than in going in as traders, for we should, in that case, have little chance of walking about, still less of questioning any one. However, it is worth trying that first; we can always fall back upon the other if it fails. We might on our first visit obtain indications that would be very useful to us on our second."