

CHAPTER VII.

THE Sabbatarian tendency of the English mind at home and abroad is proverbial, and if they are well-behaved on Sunday in London they are models of virtue in Simla on the same day. Whether they labour and are well-fed and gouty in their island home, or suffer themselves to be boiled for gain in the tropical kettles of Ceylon and Singapore; whether they risk their lives in hunting for the north pole or the northwest passage, or endanger their safety in the pursuit of tigers in the Terai, they will have their Sunday, come rain, come shine. On the deck of the steamer in the Red Sea, in the cabin of the inbound Arctic explorer, in the crowded Swiss hotel, or the straggling Indian hill station, there is always a parson of some description, in a surplice of no description at all, who produces a Bible and a couple of well-thumbed sermons from the recesses of his trunk or his lunch basket, or his gun-case, and goes at the work of weekly redemption with a will. And, what is more, he is listened to, and for the time being — though on week days he is styled a bore by the old and a prig by the young — he becomes temporarily invested with a dignity not his own, with an authority

he could not claim on any other day. It is the dignity of a people who with all their faults have the courage of their opinions, and it is the authority that they have been taught from their childhood to reverence, whenever their traditions give it the right to assert itself. Not otherwise. It is a fine trait of national character, though it is one which has brought upon the English much unmerited ridicule. One may differ from them in faith and in one's estimate of the real value of these services, which are often only saved from being irreverent in their performance by the perfect sincerity of parson and congregation. But no one who dispassionately judges them can deny that the custom inspires respect for English consistency and admiration for their supreme contempt of surroundings.

I presume that the periodical manifestations of religious belief to which I refer are intimately and indissolubly connected with the staid and funereal solemnity which marks an Englishman's dress, conversation, and conduct on Sunday. He is a different being for the nonce, and must sustain the entire character of his dual existence, or it will fall to the ground and forsake him altogether. He cannot take his religion in the morning and enjoy himself the rest of the day. He must abstain from everything that could remind him that he has a mind at all, besides a soul. No amusement will he tolerate, no reading of even the most harmless fiction can he suffer, while he is in the weekly devotional trance.

I cannot explain these things; they are race questions, problems for the ethnologist. Certain it is, however, that the partial decay of strict Sabbatarianism which seems to have set in during the last quarter of a century has not been attended by any notable development of power in English thought of that class. The first Republic tried the experiment of the decimal week, and it was a failure. The English who attempt to put off even a little of the quaint armour of righteousness, which they have been accustomed to buckle on every seventh day for so many generations, are not so successful in the attempt as to attract many to follow them. They are not graceful in their holiday gambols.

Meditating somewhat on this wise I lay in my long chair by the open door that Sunday morning in September. It was a little warmer again and the sun shone pleasantly across the lawn on the great branches and bright leaves of the rhododendron. The house was very quiet. All the inmates were gone to the church on the mall, and the servants were basking in the last few days of warmth they would enjoy before their masters returned to the plains. The Hindoo servant hates the cold. He fears it as he fears cobras, fever, and freemasons. His ideal life is nothing to do, nothing to wear, and plenty to eat, with the thermometer at 135 degrees in the verandah and 110 inside. Then he is happy. His body swells with much good rice and *dal*, and his heart with pride; he will wear as little as you will let him, and

whether you will let him or not, he will do less work in a given time than any living description of servant. So they basked in rows in the sunshine, and did not even quarrel or tell yarns among themselves; it was quiet and warm and sleepy. I dozed lazily, dropped my book in my lap, struggled once, and then fairly fell asleep.

I was roused by Kiramat Ali pulling at my foot, as natives will when they are afraid of the consequences of waking their master. When I opened my eyes he presented a card on a salver, and explained that the gentleman wanted to see me. I looked, and was rather surprised to see it was Kildare's card. "Lord Steepleton Kildare, 33d Lancers" — there was no word in pencil, or any message. I told Kiramat to show the sahib in, wondering why he should call on me. By Indian etiquette, if there was to be any calling, it was my duty to make the first visit. Before I had time to think more I heard the clanking of spurs and sabre on the verandah, and the young man walked in, clad in the full uniform of his regiment. I rose to greet him, and was struck by his soldierly bearing and straight figure, as I had been at our first meeting. He took off his bearskin — for he was in the fullest of full dress — and sat down.

"I am so glad to find you at home," he said: "I feared you might have gone to church, like everybody else in this place."

"No. I went early this morning. I belong to a

different persuasion. I suppose you are on your way to Peterhof?"

"Yes. There is some sort of official reception to somebody, — I forget who, — and we had notice to turn out. It is a detestable nuisance."

"I should think so."

"Mr. Griggs, I came to ask you about something. You heard of my proposal to get up a tiger-hunt? Mr. Ghyrkens was speaking of it."

"Yes. He wanted us to go, — Mr. Isaacs and me, — and suggested leaving his niece, Miss Westonhaugh, with Lady Smith-Tompkins."

"It would be so dull without a lady in the party. Nothing but tigers and shikarries and other native abominations to talk to. Do you not think so?"

"Why, yes. I told Mr. Ghyrkens that all the little Smith-Tompkins children had the measles, and the house was not safe. If they have not had them, they will, I have no doubt. Heaven is just, and will not leave you to the conversational mercies of the entertaining tiger and the engaging shikarry."

"By Jove, Mr. Griggs, that was a brilliant idea; and, as you say, they may all get the measles yet. The fact is, I have set my heart on this thing. Miss Westonhaugh said she had never seen a tiger, except in cages and that kind of thing, and so I made up my mind she should. Besides, it will be no end of a lark; just when nobody is thinking about tigers, you go off and kill a tremendous fellow, fifteen or sixteen feet long, and come back covered with glory

and mosquito bites, and tell everybody that Miss Westonhaugh shot him herself with a pocket pistol. That will be glorious!"

"I should like it very much too; and I really see no reason why it should not be done. Mr. Ghyrkens seemed in a very cheerful humour about tigers last night, and I have no doubt a little persuasion from you will bring him to a proper view of his obligations to Miss Westonhaugh." He looked pleased and bright and hopeful, thoroughly enthusiastic, as became his Irish blood. He evidently intended to have quite as "good" a "time" as Isaacs proposed to enjoy. I thought the spectacle of those rivals for the beautiful girl's favour would be extremely interesting. Lord Steepleton was doubtless a good shot and a brave man, and would risk anything to secure Miss Westonhaugh's approval; Isaacs, on the other hand, was the sort of man who is very much the same in danger as anywhere else.

"That is what I came to ask you about. We shall all meet there at dinner this evening, and I wanted to secure as many allies as possible."

"You may count on me, Lord Steepleton, at all events. There is nothing I should enjoy better than such a fortnight's holiday, in such good company."

"All right," said Lord Steepleton, rising, "I must be off now to Peterhof. It is an organised movement on Mr. Ghyrkens this evening, then. Is it understood?" He took his bearskin from the table, and prepared to go, pulling his straps and belts into place, and dusting a particle of ash from his sleeve.

"Perfectly," I answered. "We will drag him forth into the arena before three days are past." We shook hands, and he went out.

I was glad he had come, though I had been waked from a pleasant nap to receive him. He was so perfectly gay, and natural, and healthy, that one could not help liking him. You felt at once that he was honest and would do the right thing in spite of any one, according to his light; that he would stand by a friend in danger, and face any odds in fight, with as much honest determination to play fair and win, as he would bring to a cricket match or a steeple-chase. His Irish blood gave him a somewhat less formal manner than belongs to the Englishman; more enthusiasm and less regard for "form," while his good heart and natural courtesy would lead him right in the long-run. He seemed all sunshine, with his bright blue eyes and great fair moustache and brown face; the closely fitting uniform showed off his erect figure and elastic gait, and the whole impression was fresh and exhilarating in the extreme. I was sorry he had gone. I would have liked to talk with him about boating and fishing and shooting; about athletics and horses and tandem-driving, and many things I used to like years ago at college, before I began my wandering life. I watched him as he swung himself into the military saddle, and he threw up his hand in a parting salute as he rode away. Poor fellow! was he, too, going to be food for powder and Afghan knives in the avenging army

on its way to Kabul? I went back to my books and remained reading until the afternoon sun slanted in through the open door, and falling across my book warned me it was time to keep my appointment with Isaacs.

As we passed the church the people were coming out from the evening service, and I saw Kildare, once more in the garb of a civilian, standing near the door, apparently watching for some one to appear. I knew that, with his strict observance of Catholic rules—often depending more on pride of family than on religious conviction, in the house of Kildare—he would not have entered the English Church at such a time, and I was sure he was lying in wait for Miss Westonhaugh, probably intending to surprise her and join her on her homeward ride. The road winds down below the Church, so that for some minutes after passing the building you may get a glimpse of the mall above and of the people upon it—or at least of their heads—if they are moving near the edge of the path. I was unaccountably curious this evening, and I dropped a little behind Isaacs, craning my neck and turning back in the saddle as I watched the stream of heads and shoulders, strongly foreshortened against the blue sky above, moving ceaselessly along the parapet over my head. Before long I was rewarded; Miss Westonhaugh's fair hair and broad hat entered the field of my vision, and a moment later Lord Steepleton, who must have pushed through the crowd from the other side,

appeared struggling after her. She turned quickly, and I saw no more, but I did not think she had changed colour.

I began to be deeply interested in ascertaining whether she had any preference for one or the other of the two young men. Kildare's visit in the morning — though he had said very little — had given me a new impression of the man, and I felt that he was no contemptible rival. I saw from the little incident I had just witnessed that he neglected no opportunity of being with Miss Westonhaugh, and that he had the patience to wait and the boldness to find her in a crowd. I had seen very little of her myself; but I had been amply satisfied that Isaacs was capable of interesting her in a *tête-à-tête* conversation. "The talker has the best chance, if he is bold enough," I said to myself; but I was not satisfied, and I resolved that if I could manage it Isaacs should have another chance that very evening after the dinner. Meanwhile I would involve Isaacs in a conversation on some one of those subjects that seemed to interest him most. He had not seen the couple on the mall, and was carelessly ambling along with his head in the air and one hand in the pocket of his short coat, the picture of unconcern.

I was trying to make up my mind whether I would open fire upon the immortality of the soul, matrimony, or the differential calculus, when, as we passed from the narrow street into the road leading round Jako, Isaacs spoke.

"Look here, Griggs," said he, "there is something I want to impress upon your mind."

"Well, what is it?"

"It is all very well for Ram Lal to give advice about things he understands. I have a very sincere regard for him, but I do not believe he was ever in my position. I have set my heart on this tiger-hunt. Miss Westonhaugh said the other day that she had never seen a tiger, and I then and there made up my mind that she should."

I laughed. There seemed to be no essential difference of opinion between the Irishman and the Persian in regard to the pleasures of the chase. Miss Westonhaugh was evidently anxious to see tigers, and meant to do it, since she had expressed her wish to the two men most likely to procure her that innocent recreation. Lord Steepleton Kildare by his position, and Isaacs by his wealth, could, if they chose, get up such a tiger-hunt for her benefit as had never been seen. I thought she might have waited till the spring — but I had learned that she intended to return to England in April, and was to spend the early months of the year with her brother in Bombay.

"You want to see Miss Westonhaugh, and Miss Westonhaugh wants to see tigers! My dear fellow, go in and win; I will back you."

"Why do you laugh, Griggs?" asked Isaacs, who saw nothing particularly amusing in what he had said.

"Oh, I laughed because another young gentleman

expressed the same opinions to me, in identically the same words, this morning."

"Mr. Westonhaugh?"

"No. You know very well that Mr. Westonhaugh cares nothing about it, one way or the other. The little plan for 'amusing brother John' is a hoax. The thing cannot be done. You might as well try to amuse an undertaker as to make a man from Bombay laugh. The hollowness of life is ever upon them. No. It was Kildare; he called and said that Miss Westonhaugh had never seen a tiger, and he seemed anxious to impress upon me his determination that she should. Pshaw! what does Kildare care about brother John?"

"Brother John, as you call him, is a better fellow than he looks. I owe a great deal to brother John." Isaacs' olive skin flushed a little, and he emphasised the epithet by which I had designated Mr. John Westonhaugh as if he were offended by it.

"I mean nothing against Mr. Westonhaugh," said I half apologetically. "I remember when you met yesterday afternoon you said you had seen him in Bombay a long time ago."

"Do you remember the story I told you of myself the other night?"

"Perfectly."

"Westonhaugh was the young civil servant who paid my fine and gave me a rupee, when I was a ragged sailor from a Mocha craft, and could not speak a word of English. To that rupee I ultimately

owe my entire fortune. I never forget a face, and I am sure it is he—do you understand me now? I owe to his kindness everything I possess in the world."

"The unpardonable sin is ingratitude," I answered, "of which you will certainly not be accused. That is a very curious coincidence."

"I think it is something more. A man has always at least one opportunity of repaying a debt, and, besm Allah! I will repay what I can of it. By the beard of the apostle, whose name is blessed, I am not ungrateful!" Isaacs was excited as he said this. He was no longer the calm Mr. Isaacs; he was Abdul Hafiz the Persian, fiery and enthusiastic.

"You say well, my friend," he continued earnestly, "that the unpardonable sin is ingratitude. Doubtless, had the blessed prophet of Allah lived in our day, he would have spoken of the doom that hangs over the ungrateful. It is the curse of this age; for he who forgets or refuses to remember the kindness done to him by others sets himself apart, and worships his miserable self; and he makes an idol of himself, saying, 'I am of more importance than my fellows in the world, and it is meet and right that they should give and that I should receive.' Ingratitude is selfishness, and selfishness is the worship of oneself, the setting of oneself higher than man and goodness and God. And when man perishes and the angel Al Sijil, the recorder, rolls up his scroll, what is written therein is written; and Israfil shall call

men to judgment, and the scrolls shall be unfolded, and he that has taken of others and not given in return, but has ungratefully forgotten and put away the remembrance of the kindness received, shall be counted among the unbelievers and the extortioners and the unjust, and shall broil in raging flames. By the hairs of the prophet's beard, whose name is blessed."

I had not seen Isaacs so thoroughly roused before upon any subject. The flush had left his face and given place to a perfect paleness, and his eyes shone like coals of fire as he looked upward in pronouncing the last words. I said to myself that there was a strong element of religious exaltation in all Asiatics, and put his excitement down to this cause. His religion was a very beautiful and real thing to him, ever present in his life, and I mused on the future of the man, with his great endowments, his exquisite sensitiveness, and his high view of his obligations to his fellows. I am not a worshipper of heroes, but I felt that, for the first time in my life, I was intimate with a man who was ready to stand in the breach and to die for what he thought and believed to be right. After a pause of some minutes, during which we had ridden beyond the last straggling bungalows of the town, he spoke again, quietly, his temporary excitement having subsided.

"I feel very strongly about these things," he said, and then stopped short.

"I can see you do, and I honour you for it. I

think you are the first grateful person I have ever met; a rare and unique bird in the earth."

"Do not say that."

"I do say it. There is very little of the philosophy of the nineteenth century about you, Isaacs. Your belief in the obligations of gratitude and in the general capacity of the human race for redemption, savours little of 'transcendental analysis.'"

"You have too much of it," he answered seriously.

"I do not think you see how much your cynicism involves. You would very likely, if you are the man I take you for, be very much offended if I accused you of not believing any particular dogma of your religion. And yet, with all your faith, you do not believe in God."

"I cannot see how you get at that conclusion," I replied. "I must deny your hypothesis, at the risk of engaging you in an argument." I could not see what he was driving at.

"How can you believe in God, and yet condemn the noblest of His works as altogether bad? You are not consistent."

"What makes you think I am so cynical?" I inquired, harking back to gain time.

"A little cloud, a little sultriness in the air, is all that betrays the coming *khemsin*, that by and by shall overwhelm and destroy man and beast in its sandy darkness. You have made one or two remarks lately that show little faith in human nature, and if you do not believe in human nature what is there left for