

A moment more and we were in the pass; the mist was lighter, and we could see our way. We rushed up the stony path fast and sure, till we reached the clear bright moonlight, blazing forth in silver splendour again. Far down below the velvet pall of mist lay thick and heavy, hiding the camp and its horses and men from our sight.

"Friend," said Isaacs, "you are as free as I. Praise Allah, and let us depart in peace."

The savage old warrior grasped the outstretched hand of the Persian and yelled aloud—

"Illallah-ho-ho-ho!" His throat was as brass.

"La illah ill-allah!" repeated Isaacs in tones as of a hundred clarions, echoing by tree and mountain and river, down the valley.

"Thank God!" I said to Ram Lal.

"Call Him as you please, friend Griggs," answered the pundit.

It was daylight when we reached the tent at the top of the pass.

CHAPTER XIII.

"ABDUL HAFIZ," said Ram Lal, as we sat round the fire we had made, preparing food, "if it is thy pleasure I will conduct thy friend to a place of safety and set his feet in the paths that lead to pleasant places. For thou art weary and wilt take thy rest until noon, but I am not weary and the limbs of the Afghan are as iron." He spoke in Persian, so that Shere Ali could understand what he said. The latter looked uneasy at first, but soon perceived that his best chance of safety lay in immediately leaving the neighbourhood, which was unpleasantly near Simla on the one side and the frontiers of Baithopoor on the other.

"I thank thee, Ram Lal," replied Isaacs, "and I gladly accept thy offer. Whither wilt thou conduct our friend the Amir?"

"I will lead him by a sure road into Thibet, and my brethren shall take care of him, and presently he shall journey safely northwards into the Tartar country, and thence to the Russ people, where the followers of your prophet are many, and if thou wilt give him the letters thou hast written, which he may present to the principal moolahs, he shall prosper. And

as for money, if thou hast gold, give him of it, and if not, give him silver; and if thou hast none, take no thought, for the freedom of the spirit is better than the obesity of the body."

"Bishmillah! Thou speakest with the tongue of wisdom, old man," said Shere Ali; "nevertheless a few rupees —"

"Fear nothing," broke in Isaacs. "I have for thee a store of a few rupees in silver, and there are two hundred gold mohurs in this bag. They are scarce in Hind and pass not as money, but the value of them whither thou goest shall buy thee food many days. Take also this diamond, which if thou be in want thou shalt sell and be rich.

Shere Ali, who had been suspicious of treachery, or at least was afraid to believe himself really free, was convinced by this generosity. The great rough warrior, the brave patriot who had shut the gates of Kabul in the face of Sir Neville Chamberlain, and who had faced every danger and defeat, rather than tamely suffer the advance of the all-devouring English into his dominions, was proud and unbending still, through all his captivity and poverty and trouble, and weariness of soul and suffering of body; he could bear his calamities like a man, the unrelenting chief of an unrelenting race. But when Isaacs stretched forth his hand and freed him, and bestowed upon him, moreover, a goodly stock of cash, and bid him go in peace, his gratitude got the better of him, and he fairly broke down. The big tears coursed down over

his rough cheeks, and his face sank between his hands, which trembled violently for a moment. Then his habitual calm of outward manner returned.

"Allah requite thee, my brother," he said, "I can never hope to."

"I have done nothing," said Isaacs. "Shall believers languish and perish in the hands of swine without faith? Verily it is Allah's doing, whose name is great and powerful. He will not suffer the followers of His prophet to be devoured of jackals and unclean beasts. Masallah! There is no God but God."

Therefore, when they had eaten some food, Ram Lal and Shere Ali departed, journeying north-east towards Thibet, and Isaacs and I remained sleeping in the tent until past noon. Then we arose and went our way, having packed up the little canvas house and the utensils and the pole into a neat bundle which we carried by turns along the steep rough paths, until we found the dooly-bearers squatting round the embers after their mid-day meal. As we journeyed we talked of the events of the night. It seemed to me that the whole thing might have been managed very much more simply. Isaacs did things in his own way, however, and, after all, he generally had a good reason for his actions.

"I think not," he said in reply to my question. "While you were throwing that ruffian, who would have overmatched me in an instant, Shere Ali and I disposed of the sowars who ran up at the captain's

signal. Shere Ali says he killed one of them with his hands, and my little knife here seems to have done some damage." He produced the vicious-looking dagger, stained above the hilt with dark blood, which he began to scrape off with a bit of stick.

"My dear fellow," I objected, "I am delighted to have served you, and I see that since Shere Ali could not be warned of the signal, I was the only person there who could tackle that Punjabi man; yet I am completely at a loss to explain why, if Ram Lal can command the forces of nature to the extent of calling down a thick mist under the cover of which we might escape, he could not have calmly destroyed the whole band by lightning, or indigestion, or some simple and efficacious means, so that we need not have risked our lives in supplementing what he only half did."

"There are plenty of answers to that question," Isaacs answered. "In the first place, how do you know that Ram Lal could do anything more than discover the preconcerted signal and bring down that fog? He pretends to no supernatural power; he only asserts that he understands the workings of nature better than you do. How do you know that the fog was his doing at all? Your excited imagination, developed suddenly by the tussle with the captain, which undoubtedly sent the blood to your head, made you think you saw Ram Lal's figure magnified beyond human proportion. If there had been no mist at all, we should most likely have got away unhurt all the same. Those fellows would not fight after their

leader was down. Again, I like to let Ram Lal feel that I am able to do something for myself, and that I have other friends as powerful. He aims at obtaining too much ascendancy over me. I do not like it."

"Oh—if you look at it in that light, I have nothing to say. It has been a very pleasant and interesting excursion to me, and I am rather glad I only broke that fellow's arm instead of killing him, as you and Shere Ali did your sowars."

"I don't know whether I killed him. I suppose I did. Poor fellow. However, he would certainly have killed me."

"Of course. No use crying over spilt milk," I answered.

So we got into the doolies and swung away. As we neared Simla my friend's spirits rose, and he chanted wild Persian and Arabic love-songs, and kept up a fire of conversation all day and all night, singing and talking alternately.

"Griggs," he said, as we approached the end of our journey, "did you have occasion to tell Miss Westonhaugh where I had gone?"

"Yes. She asked me, and I answered that you had gone to save a man's life. She looked very much pleased, I thought, but just then somebody came up, and we did not talk any more about it. I got your message the evening of the day you left."

"She looked pleased?"

"Very much. I remember the colour came into her cheeks."

"Was she so pale, then?" he asked anxiously.

"Why, yes. You remember how she looked the night before you left? She was even paler the next day, but when I said you had gone to do a good deed, the light came into her face for a moment."

"Do you think she was ill, Griggs?"

"She did not look well, but of course she was anxious about you, and a good deal cut up about your going."

"No; but did you really think she was ill?" he insisted.

"Oh no, nothing but your going."

His spirits were gone again, and he said very little more that day. As we were ascending the last hills, some eight or nine hours from Simla, the moon rose majestically behind us. It must have been ten o'clock, for she could not have been seen above the notch in the mountains to eastward until she had been risen an hour at least.

"I wonder where they are now, those two," said Isaacs.

"Shere Ali and Ram Lal?"

"Yes. They are probably across the borders into Thibet, watching the moon rise from the door of some Buddhist monastery. I am glad I am not there."

"Isaacs," I said, "I would really like to know why you took so much trouble about Shere Ali. It seems to me you might have procured his liberation in some simpler way, if it was merely an act of charity that you contemplated."

"Call it anything you like. I had read about the poor man until my imagination was wrought up, and I could not bear to think of a man so brave and patriotic and at the same time a true believer, lying in the clutches of that old beast of a maharajah. And as for the method of my procedure, do you realise the complete secrecy of the whole affair? Do you see that no one but you and I and the Baithopoor people know anything of the transaction? Do you suppose that I should be tolerated a day in the country if the matter were known? Above all, what do you imagine Mr. Currie Ghyrkens would think of me if he knew I had been liberating and enriching the worst foe of his little god, Lord Beaconsfield?"

There was truth in what he said. By no arrangement could the liberation of Shere Ali have been effected with such secrecy and despatch as by the simple plan of going ourselves. And now we toiled up the last hills, vainly attempting to keep our horses in a canter; long before the relay was reached they had relapsed into a dogged jog-trot.

So we reached Simla at sunrise, and crawled wearily up the steps of the hotel to our rooms, tired with the cramp of dooly and saddle for so many days, and longing for the luxury of the bath, the civilised meal, and the arm-chair. Of course I did not suppose Isaacs would go to bed. He expected that the Westonhaugh would have returned by this time, and he would doubtless go to them as soon as he had breakfasted. So we separated to dress and be shaved—

my beard was a week old at least — and to make ourselves as comfortable as we deserved to be after our manifold exertions. We had been three days and a half from Keitung to Simla.

At my door stood the faithful Kiramat Ali, salaaming and making a pretence of putting dust on his head according to his ideas of respectful greeting. On the table lay letters; one of these, a note, lay in a prominent position. I took it instinctively, though I did not know the hand. It was from Mr. Currie Ghyrkens.

Saturday morning.

MY DEAR MR. GRIGGS — If you have returned to Simla, I should be glad to see you for half an hour on a matter of urgent importance. I would come to you if I could. My niece, Miss Westonhaugh, is, I am sorry to say, dangerously ill. — Sincerely yours,

A. CURRIE GHYRKENS.

It was dated two days before, for to-day was Monday. I made every possible haste in my toilet and ordered a horse. I wondered whether Isaacs had received a similar missive. What could be the matter? What might not have happened in those two days since the note was written? I felt sure that the illness had begun before I left them in the Terai, hastened probably by the pain she had felt at Isaacs' departure; there is nothing like a little mental worry to hasten an illness, if it is to come at all. Poor Miss Westonhaugh! So, after all her gaiety and all

the enjoyment she had from the tiger-hunt on which she had set her heart, she had come back to be ill in Simla. Well, the air was fresh enough now — almost cold, in fact. She would soon be well. Still, it was a great pity. We might have had such a gay week before breaking up.

I was dressed, and I went down the steps, passing Isaacs' open door. He was calmly reading a newspaper and having a morning smoke, until it should be time to go out. Clearly he had not heard anything of Miss Westonhaugh's illness. I resolved I would say nothing until I knew the worst, so I merely put my head in and said I should be back in an hour to breakfast with him, and passed on. Once on horseback, I galloped as hard as I could, scattering chuprassies and children and marketers to right and left in the bazaar. It was not long before I left my horse at the corner of Mr. Currie Ghyrkens' lawn, and walking to the verandah, which looked suspiciously neat and unused, inquired for the master of the house. I was shown into his bedroom, for it was still very early and he was dressing.

I noticed a considerable change in the old gentleman's manner and appearance in the last ten days. His bright red colour was nearly faded, his eyes had grown larger and less bright, he had lost flesh, and his tone was subdued in the extreme. He came from his dressing-glass to greet me with a ghost of the old smile on his face, and his hand stretched eagerly out.

"My dear Mr. Griggs, I am sincerely glad to see you."

"I have not been in Simla two hours," I answered, "and I found your note. How is Miss Westonhaugh? I am so sorry to——"

"Don't talk about her, Griggs. I am afraid she's g—g—goin' to die." He nearly broke down, but he struggled bravely. I was terribly shocked, though a moment's reflection told me that so strong and healthy a person would not die so easily. I expressed my sympathy as best I could.

"What is it? What is the illness?" I asked when he was quieter.

"Jungle fever, my dear fellow, jungle fever; caught in that beastly tiger-hunt. Oh! I wish I had never taken her. I wish we had never gone. Why wasn't I firm? Damn it all, sir, why wasn't I firm, eh?" In his anger at himself something of the former jerky energy of the man showed itself. Then it faded away into the jaded sorrowful look that was on his face when I came in. He sat down with his elbows on his knees and his hands in his scanty gray hair, his suspenders hanging down at his sides—the picture of misery. I tried to console him, but I confess I felt very much like breaking down myself. I did not see what I could do, except break the bad news to Isaacs.

"Mr. Griggs," he said at last, "she has been asking for you all the time, and the doctor thought if you came she had best see you, as it might quiet her. Understand?" I understood better than he thought.

People who are dangerously ill have no morning

and no evening. Their hours are eternally the same, save for the alternation of suffering and rest. The nurse and the doctor are their sun and moon, relieving each other in the watches of day and night. As they are worse—as they draw nearer to eternity, they are less and less governed by ideas of time. A dying person will receive a visit at midnight or at mid-day with no thought but to see the face of friend—or foe—once more. So I was not surprised to find that Miss Westonhaugh would see me; in an interval of the fever she had been moved to a chair in her room, and her brother was with her. I might go in—indeed she sent a very urgent message imploring that I would go. I went.

The morning sun was beating brightly on the shutters, and the room looked cheerful as I entered. John Westonhaugh, paler than death, came quickly to the door and grasped my hand.

On a long cane-chair by the window, carefully covered from the possible danger of any insidious draught, with a mass of soft white wraps and shawls, lay Katharine Westonhaugh—the transparent phantasm of her brilliant self. The rich masses of pale hair were luxuriously nestled around her shoulders and the blazing eyes flamed, lambently, under the black brows—but that was all. Colour, beside the gold hair and the black eyes, there was hardly any. The strong clean-cut outline of the features was there, but absolutely startling in emaciation, so that there seemed to be no flesh at all; the pale lips