

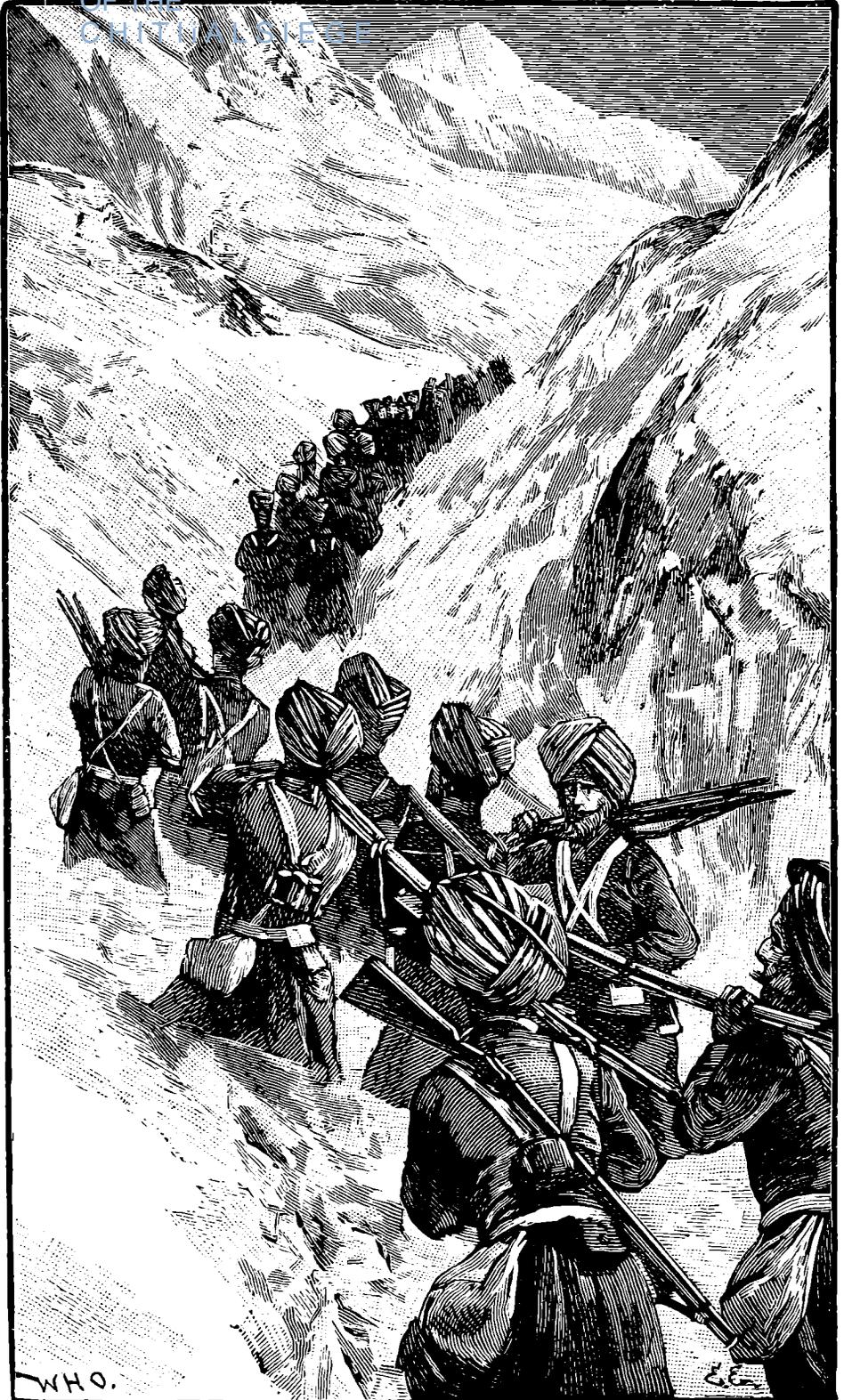
HEROES OF THE CHITRAL SIEGE.



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HEROES
OF THE
CHITRAL SIEGE.

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CHAPTER I.

HOW THE TROUBLE BEGAN.



OF the gallant band of heroes that held the fort at Chitral for those forty-six terrible days, the names of Robertson, Campbell, Townshend, Gurdon, Harley, and Whitchurch, must make the heart of every schoolboy thrill.

Up among the mountains, by which India is bounded on the north, reaching up to the range of the Hindu Kush, lies the Chitral territory, a country about the size of Wales.

The Chitralis are hardy hillmen, bold riders, strong swimmers. A light-hearted, merry people, they are devoted to games, and all of them love a dance. Every village has its polo ground. They play polo for hours together on their wiry little ponies, and the game always winds up with a dance.

It is a beautiful country, too, surrounded by

its great grand hills. And in the fertile valleys fruit and flowers abound. Plums, cherries, peaches, and grapes grow there. The climbing rose, the pomegranate, and the honeysuckle are found in rich profusion. And the golden oriole, with its black-barred wings, flits silently from tree to tree.

The king or ruler of Chitral is known by the title of Mehtar, and lives in the Chitral fort with his wives and their families. Chitral is the name of the capital town of the territory as well.

Shakespeare says, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." And an Afghan proverb says that "Kings sleep on an ant-hill." If that is so, the Mehtar of Chitral has been no exception to the rule. For the Mehtar is ever in danger of his life—the murderer's tulwar lurking in a son's or brother's hand ready at the first opportunity to strike the blow. So it is a common thing for the new Mehtar to kill or send into exile all relations that have a direct right to the Mehtarship, in order, as boys say, "to save his own skin."

The disputes of the late Mehtars, their treachery and murders, brought about the great Chitral Campaign.

This was how the quarrels began. In 1892 Aman-ul-Mulk, the great Mehtar of Chitral, died—died quietly in his bed. And that is such a wonderful thing for a Mehtar of Chitral, that the Chitralis believe he was secretly poisoned.

He was called the "Great Mehtar" on account of the conquests he made. He was, moreover, a powerful ruler—powerful in mind and in body.

No one had dared to lift a hand against him, and he had reigned many years. On his accession to the mehtarship he had murdered all his relations—his brother, Sher Afzul, alone escaping to Cabul, where he lived in exile all the time his brother reigned.

Well, Aman-ul-Mulk was dead. He left behind him sixteen or seventeen sons, and every one knew that a great strife would now take place between the brothers for the mehtarship.

The two eldest sons, Nizam-ul-Mulk and Afzul-ul-Mulk, had the strongest claims of all, on account of the rank of their mother. Then came their half-brothers, Amir-ul-Mulk, a youth of nineteen, and Shuja-ul-Mulk, a bright little lad of ten.

The other brothers were of lower grades, on account of the lower rank of their mothers—the Mehtar of Chitral having several wives. Nizam-ul-Mulk, the eldest son, was away when his father died ; so Afzul, then present at Chitral, seized the mehtarship, and Nizam fled for refuge to the British Agent at Gilgit, two hundred and twenty miles away. Afzul-ul-Mulk now thought he was quite safe. His rival, Nizam, was gone. Amir-ul-Mulk was a weak fellow, without much character, and little Shuja was a child. But he had forgotten his uncle, Sher Afzul, living in exile all this time.

Sher Afzul came secretly to Chitral with a few sturdy followers when his nephew had been on the throne about two months. He appeared suddenly outside the fort wall at midnight, and

effected an entrance at the gate. Afzul-ul-Mulk, hearing the noise and confusion, ran out and was shot down directly.

Sher Afzul seized the rifles and ammunition, and was proclaimed Mehtar at once by the Chitralis, who are a very changeable people. Besides, Sher Afzul was powerful—and the brother of the old powerful Mehtar. Moreover, he promised houses and lands and rich gifts to all, and became the idol of the people. Then suddenly Nizam-ul-Mulk, who had been away at Gilgit, thought of his rights, and made up his mind to have his own. He crossed the frontier, and was joined by a large number of his old friends. Sher Afzul, hearing of his coming, sent a force of over a thousand men to oppose him; but these, suddenly remembering their old love for their Mehtar's eldest son, went over to him in their versatility, and returned with him to fight his uncle, Sher Afzul.

“The game is up,” thought Sher Afzul, and fled back to his old place of exile.

Now Nizam-ul-Mulk was very friendly to the British Government. He was a cultivated man, with European tastes, and the Government of India was willing to support him. A mission, consisting of four or five English officers, was sent to Chitral to congratulate him, and to promise him the support that had been given to old Aman-ul-Mulk.

Nizam-ul-Mulk strengthened his position, and reigned as Mehtar about one year. If he had been more savage and less cultivated, he would

probably have put his half-brother Amir to death ; but, knowing that the British Government did not countenance treachery and murder, he let him live, and in one year reaped the reward of his leniency.

Nizam-ul-Mulk was out hawking—a sport that the Mehtars love—in a wood ten or twelve miles from Chitral, when his turban fell off his head, and as he stooped to pick it up one of the followers, at a sign from Amir, shot him in the back, so that he fell dead. The followers shouted “Victory!” flung their caps in the air, and loudly hailed Amir as Mehtar.

Amir-ul-Mulk was but a poor, weak youth, and it is supposed that the murder of his half-brother was suggested by Umra Khan, the Chief of Jandol, who made such a figure in the Chitral Campaign.

Umra Khan is the brother-in-law of Amir-ul-Mulk, having married Amir's sister. And Amir had lately been paying him a visit.

Umra Khan was a formidable chief. His territory lay south of Chitral, and he was always causing trouble by making inroads on the Chitral villages bordering his own territory.

He is a tall, powerful man, it is said, about thirty-six years old, with a long thin face and a big nose. He, too, got his chieftdom by murdering his eldest brother, and was so enterprising that he annexed much land all round to his own territory, and became a general terror.

Now it happened that the political officer,

Lieutenant Gurdon, was at the capital just then with an escort of eight Sikhs. Immediately after the murder of Nizam, Amir-ul-Mulk hurried back to the capital and went to Gurdon, who had taken up his quarters, for the time, at a large house not far from the fort, known as the political officer's house, and demanded to be recognized as Mehtar.

"I have no power to recognize you as Mehtar," said Gurdon, "until the Government of India gives me instructions."

Amir was wild with excitement. The thought of waiting for the decision of the Government was intolerable to him.

"Promise me that I shall be recognized," said he in a threatening way.

"I can but write and lay your claim before the British Agent in Gilgit," answered Gurdon. And he wrote the letter.

But Amir got hold of the letter. "It shall not go," he cried, bubbling over with excited rage, "until you give me your promise."

"My promise will not be binding on the Government," said Gurdon, quietly; "but in all probability you will be recognized, for the Government does not interfere with the private affairs of Chitral. But it will prejudice the Government against you if you show distrust of them by stopping my letters now."

Amir-ul-Mulk was in a frenzy. In his weakness and his great excitement, too, he could not look far ahead. He could not let the letter go. He would have Gurdon's promise.

It was a terrible moment for the young English soldier. He had only eight men with him. And they were alone amongst a band of men ruled by a rash, weak youth. A great number of the Chitralis hated English influence. What an easy thing it would have been for them to fall upon this handful of men in hundreds and murder them too!

Had Gurdon flinched or showed the slightest fear, they would have fallen upon him in a trice.

But he waited with the utmost coolness and spoke with the greatest tact, and the meeting for that time was at last dismissed.

Still the letter did not go.

To make his position stronger, Gurdon sent off for a reinforcement of fifty Sikhs belonging to his escort that he had left behind at Mastuj, sixty-five miles away from Chitral.

But they could not come to him in a moment. Nearly a week must elapse before they could reach him.

Durbars were held one after the other by Amir-ul-Mulk and his followers, which Gurdon had to attend, and, indeed, at the risk of his life.

It was a moment of peril when he boldly stood out and insisted that the letter should go. The Chitralis were maddened with excitement. Perhaps the cool, calm bearing of the gallant soldier, standing unarmed before them, made the least rash amongst them remember the stuff of which the English are made, and to whom they would have to answer for his life.

A noisy discussion followed, and at last, unwillingly, the letter was allowed to go.

Gurdon went back to his house. It was a large oblong building surrounded by walls, and there he quietly began to lay in stores, in case of any further trouble. And then his fifty Sikhs arrived at Chitral, having marched from Mastuj with their native officer, Gurmokh Singh. All this time Amir-ul-Mulk had been doing business on his own account. He had a treacherous heart himself, and thought that the British would deal treacherously with him. He wrote to his brother-in-law, Umra Khan, told him that Nizam's murder had been accomplished, but complained of Gurdon's hesitation in acknowledging him Mehtar.

"So come up and help me to lick the English, and place me on my throne," was the substance of his letter.

Up rose the Jandol Chief. His fingers always itched to meddle in a fighting pie, and all over the snowy mountains he made his way with a force, notwithstanding that the British Government had warned him not to interfere with Chitral affairs. The Government knew Umra Khan better than Amir-ul-Mulk did.

It was not love for his brother-in-law that made him take that long journey in such severe weather. Not a bit of it. The Chief of Jandol had an eye to the Mehtarship himself.

"My brother-in-law is a weak young fool," thought Umra Khan; "and Chitral is without leaders now."

There was no need to put the rest of his thought in words. It would not be the first time that the Jandol Chief had committed murder to gain a throne.

He wrote to Amir-ul-Mulk promising his help, and marched over the great passes white with snow with a force of three thousand men.





CHAPTER II.

MOVING INTO THE FORT.

IN the mean time Gurdon was waiting. There was nothing to do but wait. But it was an anxious time waiting for instructions from Gilgit.

As soon as Mr. Robertson, the British Agent, got the letter he started for Chitral at once, and after a long cold journey, arrived about the end of January to Gurdon's relief. He had with him an escort of two hundred and eighty men of the 4th Kashmir Rifles, and thirty-three men of the 14th Sikhs, under Lieutenant Harley.

Captain Campbell, Captain Baird, and Dr. Whitchurch also accompanied him.

One of Mr. Robertson's first acts was to write to Umra Khan, ordering him to proceed no further into Chitral territory, but to return immediately to Jandol.

The Government also warned Umra Khan that, if he did not clear out of Chitral territory by the 1st of April, they would compel him to do so by force of arms. The Chitralis also dreaded Umra Khan. They hated him and his Pathans, whom they had always looked

upon as their natural enemies, and they made preparations to prevent him from marching further into their territory.

Amir-ul-Mulk now found himself between two fires. He was not in favour with the English, and his own people despised him for his weakness; a large number could not forgive him for his murder of Nizam. So Amir, to curry favour with them, sent off hastily to Umra Khan, begging him to go back to Jandol and take his army with him.

“Not if I know it,” thought the Jandol Chief. “Having come thus far, I shall go a little further.”

He was an ambitious man. The beautiful Chitral territory lay before him, and he coveted it for his own.

Nobody wanted him there. Mr. Robertson had ordered him back. The Government threatened to compel him. The Chitralis hated him for his own sake. He looked round on his three thousand men, warriors every one of them from their very boyhood. And the Jandol Chief smiled.

“The Government will compel me! Will they? They’ll have to reach me first.” And Umra Khan looked back complacently on the snow-covered mountains, and thought grimly of the awful passes the British would have to cross.

“Forward!” was the order he gave his army, and snapped his fingers at the Government.

So on he marched, driving back those Chitralis who came to oppose him, and taking fort after

fort, some by strength of arms, some by the treachery of their governors, till he succeeded in capturing Kila Drosh, the principal fort on Chitral's southern frontier, only twenty-four miles from Chitral fort. The situation was getting grave.

The political officer's house, where Gurdon and his escort had been living, and where the other officers had joined him, was quite unsuitable for defence. Unfortunately, too, they had no guns with them, and Umra Khan's army was equipped with Martini-Henrys and Sniders. Excellent shots, too, were these born warriors.

"The best thing we can do is to move into the fort," said Mr. Robertson.

Captain Townshend quite agreed with him. "It would be impossible to make any sort of defence here," said he, running his eye over the rambling old place.

So on the 10th of February the officers and their men moved into the fort, to the great indignation of Amir-ul-Mulk.

"Such an insult has never before been offered to the ladies of the Mehtar's household," said he haughtily. For, as it has been said before, the wives and families of the Mehtars had their residence in the fort.

That could not be helped. The fort was the only place suitable for defence. It was impossible for the British to move out of Chitral till the difficulties had been settled and Umra Khan made to retire. Amir-ul-Mulk was

recognized as Mehtar provisionally only ; and, indeed, guarded as a sort of prisoner.

There had been living for many years at Chitral a native officer, Rab Nawaz Khan, the political news-writer in the pay of the Indian Government. He knew the Chitralis and their changeable character well. He was able to give the British Agent much information, and, of course, moved into the fort with the rest.

The stock of stores that Gurdon had been laying up at the political officer's house was all carried into the fort. And Fateh-Ali-Shah, a Chitrali noble who was favourable to British rule, helped them considerably by buying and sending to the fort great supplies of grain.

But for Fateh-Ali-Shah, the garrison would have been starved out before the siege was over. He also moved into the fort, with some thirty or forty of the faithful Chitralis.

Now the fort, for a fort, was not too grand a place for defence. In the first place, it is built in a hollow. Instead of commanding from a height the neighbouring country around, it lies low by the river bank with hills closing it round on every side ; the very houses near it, and the village, half a mile away, look down on the Chitral fort.

It is about eighty yards square, with thick walls rising twenty-five feet high, with a tower at each corner twenty feet higher still than the walls, and a fifth tower on the river side to guard the water-way.

“That will be the main object of attack, if

if we should be attacked," said Captain Townshend, pointing to the water-tower, which stood about thirty yards away from the river. "We shall have to fight our way to the river, every time we want water, across that open space."

"You would advise a covered way?" asked the British Agent.

"A covered way must be built right down into the water, and at once," said Captain Townshend.

And he superintended the building of a covered way then and there. It was a lucky precaution, for there was no well inside the fort, every drop of water having to be fetched up from the river.

"Those outhouses will be terribly in our way," suggested another officer, calling attention to a lot of outbuildings immediately outside the fort walls. "If the enemy get a lodgment there, they could annoy us not a little."

"They must come down, should things come to a serious pass. But we may not be attacked at all."

That was the general idea.

So far the greater number of the Chitralis were on the side of the British, and anxious to oppose Umra Khan, when all at once news came that Sher Afzul, the brother of the old Great Mehtar, had escaped from Cabul and joined the Jandol Chief at Kila Drosh. The Chitralis had never cared for Amir-ul-Mulk. Sher Afzul was a different man altogether. He was the old idol that had promised them land and houses,

and given rich gifts during the short month he had reigned. If Umra Khan was going to help Sher Afzul to the Mehtarship, the Chitralis would go over to his side.

Now the British Agent knew that Sher Afzul would be a better ruler than the characterless Amir-ul-Mulk, and at once entered into communication with him.

Sher Afzul took a high and mighty hand. He was willing to be friends with the Government on the same terms as the old Mehtars, on condition that the British Agent and his party should evacuate the fort and return at once to Mastuj, adding insolently—

“If these terms are not accepted, the Chief of Jandol will advance with his army.”

Now at this very time men were being sent secretly to break the road between Chitral and Mastuj, in the hopes that the British might be induced to retire, when they could be suddenly attacked at a dreadful place where the road breaks off into an awful precipice.

Amir-ul-Mulk was in the secret too, and did his best to persuade the British Agent to leave. As for the poor foolish youth himself, he was just a cat's-paw in the hands of his uncle and Umra Khan. The Jandol Chief, of course, pretended to uphold Sher Afzul, whom the Chitralis loved, but was quite prepared to get the Mehtarship for himself when the proper time should come.

Mr. Robertson replied with dignity that it was not in the power of the Jandol Chief to

impose a Mehtar on Chitral without the sanction of the Government ; that he would inform the Government of Sher Afzul's demands ; but if, while waiting the reply of the Government, Umra Khan chose to advance, the consequences would be on his own head.

Amir-ul-Mulk, for his treachery, was at once deposed from his temporary position as Mehtar ; and on the 2nd of March a durbar was held, and the younger brother, Shuja-ul-Mulk, was recognized as Mehtar.

With a quiet dignity the little lad received the homage of the nobles. But he was grave, it is said, and a little sad. Who could wonder at that ? He was only ten years of age, but old enough to realize, from the troubles around, that the Mehtarship was not a bed of roses.

In the evening the band played in his honour, salutes were fired, and the grandees of Chitral came to acknowledge him. Captain Townshend was responsible for the safety of the little Mehtar. And Amir-ul-Mulk was in the custody of a guard of six men.

The British Agent then sent to Sher Afzul that Amir-ul-Mulk was deposed and a prisoner, that Shuja-ul-Mulk had been declared Mehtar, and that he must at once leave the territory or come in and render homage to the new Mehtar.

Sher Afzul's answer was a gathering together for battle ; he advanced with a large force from Kila Drosh, and took up a strong position among the houses and behind the walls of a good-sized village, within a mile and a half of the fort.



CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST FIGHT.

THE news of Sher Afzul's whereabouts was brought to the fort late in the afternoon of the next day.

"What is your advice?" asked the British Agent of Captain Campbell, who was in command of the troops there.

"To reconnoitre with as strong a force as we can muster, and find out Sher Afzul's strength," was the prompt reply.

"It is half-past four o'clock," said Mr. Robertson, "and not a moment to lose."

Two hundred men of the Kashmir Rifles were ordered out, Captain Campbell taking the command. He was accompanied also by Townshend, Baird, Gurdon, and Dr. Whitchurch—the last with his native hospital assistants to bind up wounds if required; and bearers carrying stretchers to bring back the wounded, should there be a fight.

Harley and his Sikhs were left to guard the fort; for who could tell whether the wavering Chitralis inside and the wavering Chitralis outside, swarming in the little hamlets and

big detached houses round and about the fort, that make up the very irregular town of Chitral, might not suddenly turn and attack the place while the majority of the soldiers were away?

“Quick march!” The order rings out sharp. And tramp, tramp, off they go. How many to their death? And which? God knows. But every man of them there anxious to do his duty—to the very stretcher-bearers.

If England expects every man to do his duty, India does too. There are only half a dozen white faces among that little band, and those belong to its leaders, who can trust their Sepoys to the death.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! Uphill steadily, uphill all the way; the fort unfortunately lies behind them in a hollow. The first hamlet, barely half a mile away, is built on rising ground, and looks down on the fort.

“Halt!”

And now fifty men are left behind to guard the road to the fort.

“Quick march!”

Off again! A smaller band, smaller by fifty now, go tramp, tramp, along the path to the house where Gurdon and his escort first lived.

Now the place where Sher Afzul and his force had spread themselves shelved down into a ravine, and by the time they reached the political officer's house they saw a party of men, about one hundred and fifty in number, on the hillside on the right bank of the ravine.

They were carrying banners, which they waved above their heads.

“Halt!” again. And Campbell gives the order, and fifty men are detached, under the command of Captain Baird, to watch this little party.

The band was reduced to one hundred now; and they march steadily on, with Campbell at their head, accompanied by Townshend and their own native officers, General Baj Singh, Colonel Jagat Singh, and Major Bhikam Singh.

Only one hundred men of the Kashmir Rifles! They were raw troops. They had never heard a shot fired by the enemy up to this, their first battle! But they tramp off steadily at the word of command—every man determined to do his duty—steadily on to meet Sher Afzul’s force, and scatter them if possible.

Baird, with his fifty men, looked up at the party on the hill, three men to every one of his, shaking their flags as if in defiance at him.

“Sir, they wave their banners in bravado. They will not advance,” said Rab Nawaz Khan, the political news-writer, who had lived so many years in Chitral, and who was with Baird’s party.

“Fire a single shot over their heads,” was Baird’s order, “and we shall see.”

Whiz! Bang! Over their heads went the bullet.

In a moment the answer came. Bang! bang! bang! on all sides. The party on

the hill opened a heavy fire on Baird's handful at the mouth of the ravine.

"Advance!" was the order, and away the fifty marched across the mouth of the ravine.

"Charge!" was the command, and up the hillside they charged.

The enemy retreated before them, but kept on firing as they went.

Bang! bang! bang! such a hot fire all round.

The enemy can shoot, and shoot straight, too. Too straight! Good Heavens, they have shot the leader down!

Not Baird? Brave Baird?

But it is Baird. And Dr. Whitchurch, happily with this party, ran to his assistance, and almost echoed the dying leader's groan. For the wound was mortal. Shot in the abdomen!

Dying, but not dead. "Gurdon!"

Yes, Gurdon was there. Gurdon was there to take the lead. And gallant Gurdon, we have seen before, can keep a cool head on his shoulders.

Tenderly the doctor and the stretcher-bearers lifted the dying officer into the dhooly and carried him to the rear.

And how was Campbell faring, with his untried Kashmir troops?

They had reached a detached house in which they were told Sher Afzul had taken up his position, but had found it empty. So Townshend advanced lower down the valley, and five hundred yards further up they came in sight of a scattered hamlet, where moving forms

could be seen sheltering themselves behind walls and trees.

At them Townshend sent a volley. It was answered by a roar of musketry. Another volley, and back came another roar.

The enemy is strong. The enemy is well armed. Those bullets came from the mouths of Martini-Henrys and Sniders. And the enemy shoots straight.

There are hundreds of Pathans there, hidden behind the walls. Umra Khan's warriors—the Jandolis, skilled warriors from their youth.

A Sepoy drops down here and there, and the raw Kashmir Rifles begin to feel what a battle is like.

Another volley! It seemed to have no effect. The enemy were well under cover, and spread themselves all along the hamlet and got behind trees, and fired briskly from their shelter.

“Fix bayonets!” was Campbell's command. “Clear the hamlet! Charge!”

It was bravely led by Townshend and the native officers; but they had no cover, and the trees in front of the hamlet prevented them from seeing what an excellent cover the enemy had.

Now the Chief of Jandol's men had been trained by pensioners of the Indian army; and Townshend learned afterwards that some of these very men, pensioned by the Government, were there fighting with Sher Afzul's force.

The charge was gallantly led. The fire of the enemy never ceased. Major Bhikam Singh, one of the native officers, was shot dead, and

immediately after General Baj Singh, an old soldier noted for his bravery, was killed.

A cry from the Sepoys announced the death of their officers ; and many of their companions were found to have shared the fate of their leaders. They began to shrink from the hot continuous fire. And now they were close enough to see that beyond the trees the hamlet was protected by a long wall, behind which the enemy were cosily hidden, firing away through the loopholes they had made in it. Then Townshend knew it was impossible to carry the charge home with his handful of raw troops against such overwhelming odds. He ordered a retreat.

Campbell with a support now came forward, and fell, shot in the knee.

Townshend had him carried to the rear ; and while some of his party kept a hot fire on the loopholes of the wall, he got his men down in lots of threes and fours to the sheltered ground, amongst some tumble-down walls, from which they had started for the charge.

A hospital assistant came and examined Campbell's knee, whipped out the necessary articles, and quickly dressed the wound.

"Bring the dhooly !" cried he to the stretcher-bearers, and would have lifted the wounded officer in.

"No, no, Bhowani Dass ; I can stick on to my pony if you will put me on his back."

"The sahib will irritate the wound. The sahib will be better carried."

"I can't lie by ; the situation is too serious. My pony, Bhowani Dass !"

Bhowani Dass shook his head ; but he knew the sahib would have his way. Gently he helped him to the saddle. Campbell clenched his teeth, and stifled the groan that would have burst from his lips. The hospital assistant saw the spasm of pain that crossed the officer's face, and opened his mouth to remonstrate again.

"Sahib——" he began. It was the last word he uttered. A bullet came smashing through his head, and Bhowani Dass fell dead at the pony's feet.

The situation was serious, as Campbell had said, and was getting still more serious every minute. The light was fading too. It would be dark before long. The enemy, more than a thousand strong, elated at the retreat, came running out, overlapping the little band on both sides.

They were nearly two miles from the fort. Surely the little column will be surrounded and cut down? A few of the boldest Pathans came rushing down, brandishing their swords, mad with excitement at the turn of events.

But Townshend is ready for them.

Bang! bang! bang! Not quite so close, you mad fellows. Hah! they got it hot and strong that time. Remember the lesson for the future.

It was retiring against fearful odds. And still they retired with dignity.

While half the party kept the enemy at bay, the other half ran off to the rear. Then they in

their turn kept a hot fire on the advancing Pathans, while their fellows got to shelter; Campbell, on his pony, steadying and cheering the men, and helping to keep them in order, notwithstanding the fearful pain he was suffering from the wound in his knee.

And Townshend always with the last party, his voice rising above the din of battle, as it rang out orders sharp and true!

In the mean time Gurdon was also retreating, covering the little party of stretcher-bearers who, with Dr. Whitchurch at his side, were carrying their dying leader home.

But the darkness was falling, falling fast. Gurdon had seen that Townshend's party was retiring too, and retiring under fearful difficulties; so from the hillside he kept up a brisk fire on the enemy, to aid Townshend in his retreat.





CHAPTER IV.

MORE HEROES THAN ONE.

NOW just before the darkness fell, the British Agent rode out from the fort, anxious to see how things were going. About a mile off he came upon a handful of the Kashmir troops, who had lost heart at the fall of their native officers, and had been the first to retire.

“Never say die, my men,” cried Mr. Robertson, trying to rally them.

And then he heard that “Campbell Sahib” was severely wounded; that two of their own officers were killed.

Gathering them together, and speaking cheerfully, he peered out towards the ravine; but the darkness was coming on so fast that he could not see far ahead. But the sound of shots was plainly heard, and, by-and-by, the voice of Townshend ringing out his orders.

Mr. Robertson rode out to meet him, and in a little while the retreating party reached the shelter of a house, where they made a little stand.

And now the fickle Chitralis, with their heads

popping out from the doors and windows of their houses and over the walls of their gardens, saw how the battle was going. They had been neutral up to this. They would have liked Sher Afzul for their Mehtar, and a number of their fighting men had gone over days before to join him. Others didn't want to have anything to do with Umra Khan, and were willing to support the British.

And now, with their heads popping out of sheltered places from their premises, they saw the British retreating, and heard the triumphant yells and howls of the Sher Afzulites.

"The sahibs are being driven back," said one of them to a knot of eager, watching companions.

He spoke anxiously ; his tone was not triumphant. He, like his fellow-labourers, was a slave. Nearly all the working people of Chitral are slaves, the property of the nobles of Chitral. He had heard that wherever British rule exists, there slavery is gradually abolished. His fellows had heard that too. They would have liked the British to win.

But the Chitralis are about the most changeable people under the sun. The sahibs were being driven back. Sher Afzul, with his triumphant followers, would soon be in their midst. They must not be seen to be wanting in zeal for the conquering hero. Sher Afzul must see they are fighting for him too.

Thoughts like these were agitating the Chitralis —not the slaves only ; the better classes too.

All who possessed firearms posted themselves in good positions at their windows, and those that had no firearms provided themselves with clubs and stones, yelled defiance at the British, and shouted Sher Afzul's name.

Poor little brave band!

They have foes to the right of them, foes to the left of them; foes before, and foes behind them!

Like a knell the defiant yells of the Chitralis fell upon their ears.

"We're cut off from the fort!"

The murmur ran like wildfire through the little band. It was only through the presence of mind of Townshend and the dauntless courage of the British Agent that the raw Kashmir troops did not break away in a panic.

"If we had a handful of Harley's Sikhs to cover our retirement, we might check those yelling Pathans yet," said Townshend between his teeth.

"I will ride back to the fort and order out fifty," was Mr. Robertson's prompt answer. "Take heart, my men; I shall send you relief."

Not a word more. Into the gathering dusk he rode. Something like a cheer burst from the men's throats as the solitary horseman plunged, as it were, into the very jaws of the foe.

He had ridden past the houses unmolested an hour ago. But the tide of battle is turning, and every man's hand is against him now. One mile to the fort!

And now they hear his horse's hoofs upon the

road, and now they see the fire-sparks they are hammering out of the stones.

“Have at him!”

“He rides for aid to the fort!”

“Cut him down!”

“Put a bullet through his heart!”

Pop! pop! pop! They try their level best. The bullets whiz past his ears.

Sticks are flung at him. Stones are hurled. Never once struck; never once touched.

“So-ho, good lass! Show ’em a clean pair of heels!”

Pit, pat, patter, patter! The bridle is flecked with foam.

From every window, over every garden wall, some missile comes hurling along; but his life is charmed.

Never once struck; never once touched. And the fort is reached at last.

“Fifty Sikhs to cover the retirement! Not a moment to lose! Our column is surrounded by the foe! Townshend is making a stand at a house a mile away!”

Out at the main gate they march, with Harley at their head. No raw troops these! They are hardy veterans!

Tramp, tramp, tramp! They go as steady as if on parade, until they reach the entrance to the village, and there they keep the road, kneeling with fixed bayonets by the shelter of a wall.

That is Harley’s order. For it is so dark that to fire might be to injure their own party, for they can hardly tell friend from foe.

Meanwhile Townshend, and Gurdon, too, in the friendly darkness are steadily groping their way.

“Sahib! sahib!” cried a panting voice at Gurdon’s side.

“Who is it?”

“Sahib, I have brought your pony,” said the voice of Gurdon’s groom.

“My good fellow, I do not require it now. Take him back to the fort. You should not have risked leaving its shelter.”

“Sahib, it was to save your life. Mount, sahib, mount! It will give you a bigger chance.”

Gurdon shook his head. “Take it back to the fort.”

The syce took the pony by the bridle and turned away. If his master had jumped into the saddle and ridden off as hard as he could the poor fellow would have prayed for his safety and been content. He looked wistfully back. It was his last look. Suddenly he was seen to leap up in the air and fall, with his arms outspread, and then he lay quite still with a bullet through his heart.

It was not the *fighting men* only that did their duty that day.

And now the Pathans and Chitralis are mad with excitement. In truth, they had not expected, at the beginning of the fight, thus to beat back the British.

Their very women seized stones and flung them at the little column, now fighting its way through the village.

“Cut them off from the fort! Cut them off!” were the frenzied cries.

Ay, cut them off if you can. But none dared to make a rush upon those gleaming bayonets pointed by the unflinching Sikhs.

How calmly they kneel! Unmoved amidst the clamour and the din and noise, disdainful of the dropping shots that fall round them now and then.

They are the bravest of the native races conquered by the British; the best disciplined, and the most faithful, too.

Their motto is, “Purity, Chastity, and Charity.” A grand motto that. Great England’s noblest sons could not follow a better.

In all their frenzied excitement the foe would not make a stand between those gleaming bayonets and the slowly retreating band.

Hurl sticks; hurl stones; hurl anything they can lay hands on. It is their last chance.

Hurrah! the retreating troops have gained the wall where the bayonets gleam in the dark. Hurrah! the steel of the Sikhs is between them and the foe!

Harley and his veterans can keep the Pathans at bay while the Kashmir troops get safe within the walls of the fort.

And now slowly, inch by inch, the Sikhs themselves retire.

Safe in the fort! Well done! Shut the gates! Post the sentries!

And with baffled howls the enemy closes thickly round.



CHAPTER V.

HOW THE V.C. WAS WON.

“**W**HERE is Whitchurch?”

The doctor was called for on all sides. There were cuts and bruises waiting to be bandaged up.

“Campbell has swooned from the pain in his knee. The wound has burst out bleeding again. Can't any one say where Whitchurch is?”

Nobody could. And the doctor was not there to say for himself.

“But Whitchurch ought to be in,” cried Gurdon, hastily. “He was attending to poor Baird. I left him with a small escort; and they started with the dhooly for the fort.”

“Baird wounded too!” said an anxious voice.

Gurdon nodded gravely. “Badly too, I am afraid. But haven't they brought him in?”

He rushed off to make inquiries, and the officers gazed blankly at each other, then followed quickly in his train.

“Baird hasn't been brought in,” said Gurdon, thickly; “and Whitchurch is nowhere to be seen!”

“They’ve been cut down!” was the cry.

With sickening anxiety the officers separated, each to his allotted duty. This was no time to sit and bewail their loss. How the wounded would miss the doctor! And Baird? A choking sensation seized the throat when they thought of him. He was a great favourite. His genial, kindly ways attracted all. But the security of the living is the first thing to be planned for. No time to mourn for the dead.

When Baird had fallen, Whitchurch had hurried to his side.

“All up with me, doctor,” faintly murmured the wounded man.

Whitchurch had him carried away to the rear, and there bent over him; got one of the stretcher-bearers gently to support his head, while he tenderly bandaged the wound.

This took some time, and when he was ready to lift Baird into the dhooly, the daylight was fading fast; and the doctor saw with concern that our troops were retreating, the enemy pouring down on them from all sides, that their very retirement into the fort was likely to be cut off. He had with him about a dozen Sepoys of the Kashmir troops, and a few stretcher-bearers, so placing Baird in the dhooly without any more loss of time, they started for the fort by the shortest route.

But, hampered as they were with the dhooly, they could not get on as fast as the retreating party, and presently were left behind in the dark. They were coming down the hillside, it must

be remembered, and before they had got to the road leading to the fort, the bulk of the enemy, pressing down the ravine, reached it first, and spread themselves, a yelling, howling mob, between them and its shelter.

"Sahib, we're cut off. The enemy cumbers the road," said Bidrina Singh, the native officer in charge of the few Sepoys.

"Are you sure the road is blocked?" asked the doctor, anxiously peering into the gloom. He had been so watchful for the comfort of the dying officer, that their dangerous position had not yet occurred to him.

"They are on the road," answered the native officer. "They press our column close. The cries and shots come from there," and he pointed ahead of them.

"There's another route—a roundabout way to the fort, isn't there?—if we get along by the river bank?"

"A difficult road, sahib. And three miles quite."

"No help for it," said the doctor, cheerfully.

"Whitchurch!" called a feeble voice from the stretcher.

"Did you call, Baird?"

"I'm only hampering you. It's all up with me, I know. Leave me, and look after the safety of these brave fellows, and your own."

"What say you, my men?" cried the doctor, repeating the dying officer's request. "Shall we leave your wounded officer on the field, to look after our own skins?"

"We'll take the river bank, sahib," came the

quick, hoarse response of the stretcher-bearers. And not one dreamed of laying his burden down.

So in the dark they pressed steadily on, thankful to be hidden in the gloom ; but by-and-by a little detached band of the Sher Afzulites came near, and with a howl of delight recognized their isolated position.

Their yells and cries drew other little lots of twos and threes, who immediately opened fire on the party.

Then with one wild scream one of the stretcher-bearers dropped his end of the dhooly, and with his arms lifted over his head, leaped high up in the air and dropped down dead.

The other bearers echoed his cry ; but there was no confusion. The Sepoys closed round, and pop! pop! went their bullets at the dark forms hovering round, like birds of evil omen.

“That was a bad shake, Baird, my dear fellow,” whispered the doctor, feelingly ; but the dying officer closed his teeth and would not utter a groan.

But groans and howls of pain reached them from the other side. The dead stretcher-bearer was avenged.

Silently another stepped forward to take his place, and off they started again, the Sepoys keeping a hot fire on the foe. They followed—like birds of evil omen as they were—uttering their fiendish yells. God be thanked for the darkness! For they cannot shoot straight in the dark.

Whiz! whiz! whiz! go the bullets past their ears.

Ha! another stretcher-bearer goes down—quite silently; but he is dead. The next moment another bites the dust with a bullet through his heart.

Whitchurch takes his place. There is only one more stretcher-bearer left. And a Sepoy drops down here and there!

The foe, following as close as they dare, stumble over the fallen bodies in the dark. It makes them elated.

“Cut them down! We’ll have them all yet! Strike home!”

And then they charge.

Ah! but they won’t try that dodge again.

The doctor’s revolver comes into play. And of course they did not understand the short, sharp cry, “Fix bayonets!” that promptly greeted their charge.

Yes, they got a lesson then. It reduced their numbers too. They’ll not charge in a hurry again. The survivors fell back astonished.

But, ah! the last stretcher-bearer drops now; and the doctor lays his end of the dhooly gently on the ground.

It is impossible to carry the stretcher now; the Sepoys are required to fight.

Baird raised himself on his elbow, and as he did so felt the doctor’s arm swung firmly round his waist.

“Whitchurch, I protest against it! Whitchurch, are you mad? For God’s sake save yourself! Leave me! leave me!”

For answer the doctor lifts him up and carries him as best he can.

What an awful road it is! Stumbling into holes in the way; bumping against mounds; kicking against rocks.

And what is that looming dark before them? A wall?

Goodness! What fools those Pathans are to howl and yell like that! The little party might have got close up to the wall without being aware of their presence. And now their eyes are opened through their ears, and dimly they can see some dusky forms lurking by the wall they will have to climb. The enemy is ahead of them.

“Halt a bit.”

And then he lays his burden softly down. “We’re going to clear the wall, Baird,” he whispers. “I’ll come back for you in a minute.”

“Don’t, I beg of you. For God’s sake! It’s utter folly!”

But the wounded man gets for answer only the short, ringing cry, “Fix bayonets!” And then he hears them charging over the broken ground. And the Pathans are cursing the British with their dying breaths, and the wall is cleared of them.

Back comes the doctor and picks his burden up, and great drops of sweat are bursting from his brow.

“We’ve cleared the way,” he pants.

And then, God alone knows how, he gets his helpless comrade over the wall.

"Thank you, doctor. God bless you! Now lay me down; I can die by the shelter of this wall."

"I can't promise you life," gasps the doctor, struggling on; "but"—and he sets his teeth—"you'll die amongst friends—I swear it—unless I fall myself!"

On! on! Well done, brave band! The Sepoys might easily have left their officers behind; but they accommodated their steps to the doctor's heavy-weighted ones, and held their rifles ready at any moment for the foe.

And now—that dark mass looming before them? That's a grove of trees. The cedars growing in the garden on the east face of the fort. Steady, steady then! only a little further yet. Thank God, they came this way; for the howls of the enemy came in a roar from the direction of the main gate of the fort.

They are not clear of their foes, though. A few of the most daring follow them still, sending a bullet after them as often as they can.

Ha! the doctor staggered, and nearly fell. Something gave him a stinging blow on the foot. It was a spent bullet. Fortune favours the brave.

He stopped to take a breathing space, and raised the dying head upon his shoulder. As he did so another bullet struck poor Baird in the face.

The doctor set his teeth, took a firmer hold of his burden, and staggered on.

The sentries posted along the walls of the fort that looked the garden way saw a little party bearing down upon the gate. Their cry of recognition brought others to come and see; and they saw Dr. Whitchurch staggering along, half carrying, half dragging, another man.

“He’s carrying Captain Baird!” and the glad cry flew from mouth to mouth.

Fly to their succour! Fling open the gate! Bring them in! Thank God! Safe!

“Baird! Baird! My dear fellow, Baird!” cried the officers, pressing round.

The wounded man opened his eyes, and with a feeble hand raised towards his preserver, whispered faintly, “You see before you a brave man.” Then he swooned.

They looked on his preserver, and saw the big drops hanging on his brow, and heard his labouring breath. They pressed to him silently and gripped his hand.

That was how the V.C. was won.

Then somebody said in a hoarse voice, “Our sick and wounded would have been in a sorry plight without you, doctor.”

“And, thank God, I’m unhurt,” said the doctor, calmly.

There was need to be calm. The doctor’s work had only just begun.

Thirty-three wounded! He will have his hands full. And twenty-three of those who marched out this afternoon so bright and brave are lying stark and cold, with stiff eyes staring at the quiet stars.



CHAPTER VI

A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

SOMEBODY asked suddenly after Rab Nawaz Khan, the news-writer, who had lived in Chitral so long.

“Cut to pieces, sahib! I saw him attacked by a band of swordsmen. They left him dead upon the field.”

“A great loss!” said the British Agent, with a sigh.

Rab Nawaz Khan knew the Chitralis and their character well. His valuable information had been of great service to the British Agent.

Gradually the elated enemy about the main gate fell away: some to secure quarters for their officers close by, some to carry their wounded from the field, others to bury the dead.

The stars looked down on many a ghastly sight that night.

Amongst the Chitralis who had gone to succour the wounded were two of the seventeen sons of the old Great Mehtar, Asfandiar and Shahi. They were not rivals for the throne, as they held a lower position, on account, as has been explained before, of the inferior rank of their mother.

These two working together came upon the bleeding body of the news-writer.

“Rab Nawaz Khan, as I live!” cried Shahi to his brother in the Chitrali tongue.

“And cut to pieces!” replied Asfandiar, grimly. “The tulwar has done its work,” and he pushed the body over with his foot.

The light of his torch fell on the wounded man’s face. The mouth twitched. A faint groan burst from his lips.

“He moves; he groans; he lives!” cried Asfandiar, falling on his knees and bending over him.

And Shahi, putting his lips to the news-writer’s ear, called him by his name.

Again the mouth twitched. Again he groaned.

“His life is in him—a feeble spark at best,” said Shahi. “A blow from this hand would put it out.”

“Poor man!” returned Asfandiar. “We were good friends before the fight.”

“That is so,” said Shahi. “We’ve smoked with him in peace. And many a merry day we’ve hawked together.”

Asfandiar in particular was a great athlete—a strong swimmer, a fearless rider, a marvellous shot. Perhaps the suggestion of putting out the spark of life burning so feebly in this fallen man seemed cowardly to his powerful foe.

The brothers, bending over the prostrate man, met each other’s glance, and looked away towards the fort, as if the same thought had occurred to both.

"These sahibs know how to fight," said Shahi.
"That is so."

"They were one to eight. We beat them back, 'tis true; but they left a couple of handfuls only dead upon the field."

"They were one to eight! We should have cut them all to pieces! Heard you how one fought like a devil over his comrade's body? They say he had the strength of an ox. That he carried him like a child in his arms, still fighting all the way, and bore him in triumph to the fort!"

"'Tis true; so I heard. The British are strong, Asfandiar. And the arm of the Government reaches very far."

"By saving his life," said Asfandiar, "we would but serve a friend—he was always a good comrade, was Rab Nawaz Khan—and at the same time we would do an excellent service to ourselves."

The brothers understood each other. There was no need to say more.

Carefully they lifted the body of the news-writer and bore him away in the direction of the fort. If they met others, none knew their errand. Many like them were tenderly carrying their wounded away. And none stayed to question, or guessed whom they carried.

Under cover of the darkness they hovered near the walls, and when the coast was clear, Asfandiar crept secretly to the gate and boldly told his errand.

"Asfandiar and Shahi-ul-Mulk, sons of our

father the Great Mehtar, have here the body of the news-writer, Rab Nawaz Khan, wounded sorely ; but the spark of life still burns. Should the great sahibs win the day, they will remember the service done by us to one of theirs. For his life was in our hands."

The body of the news-writer was passed through the gate, and the brothers departed, well satisfied with their night's work. They had served a former friend. If the British won in the end, and they themselves had not fallen in the fight, why then the conquerors were bound to show them favour.

A 'cute dodge that.

They went back and joined Sher Afzul then ; and, it is said, made themselves prominent by the ardour with which they fought against the English all the time of the siege.

Poor Rab Nawaz Khan was in a dreadful state. They counted on him nineteen tulwar cuts. They carried him to the apartment that had been set aside as a hospital, and the doctor speedily bandaged up his wounds.

"The cuts are clean," said the doctor, cheerfully. "With care, we shall have Rab Nawaz Khan about again."

When he was able to see them, the officers came in turn and congratulated the news-writer on his wonderful escape.

The next day the enemy closed round the fort, and the siege that was to last forty-six days began.

With what sad hearts they looked each other

in the face! Not a man there but had lost a friend in the fight the day before.

The Kashmir Rifles had suffered heavily ; their native officers were dead. They had had their first taste of a battle, and now they were going to learn what a siege was like. If they were depressed, and their hearts failed them, who could wonder at it? And Baird was dying. The officers were going to lose their comrade too.

Tenderly had his faithful friend watched him that long night, doing all that his skill could do to lessen his sufferings. Baird's sweet fleeting smile, and his faintly uttered, "This is a kinder death than dying by the wall out there all alone," repaid Whitchurch for his arduous task of yesterday.

"A bad night's work. Baird, my dear fellow, it grieves me beyond measure," said Mr. Robertson, as he sat by his bed.

Baird had sent for the British Agent. He was anxious to let him hear from his own lips of the doctor's gallantry and daring.

"A soldier's death," answered the dying man with a sweet, bright smile. And then faintly, but quite collectedly, he told of the hair-breadth 'scapes, the imminent peril Whitchurch had undergone for his sake, the contempt he had displayed of his own life while trying to save that of his fellow.

"You will report it all—all I have told, Robertson?"

"I will, my dear fellow ; I will indeed."

“The V.C. was never earned more splendidly.”

“I am sure of that. Rest assured it will be all reported.”

“Thank you. He would never do himself justice, you know. I wanted to tell you myself.”

As the end was drawing near, the officers were sent for to bid him good-bye.

If their voices were husky, his was clear to the end.

“I do not regret my fate—a soldier’s death,” he said over and over again.

And then he left some messages for the dear ones far away.

“Good-bye. Good luck to you all. Success to all your plans.” And with a quiet smile he closed his eyes.

The last face that he saw was the doctor’s.

All day long the enemy kept firing into the fort from the breastworks of stone or wood which they had raised on the heights around.

The fort, as has been said before, lay unfortunately in a hollow. It was overlooked on all sides. From the shelter of these breastworks the Jandolis, who are excellent shots, fired away unceasingly. From their commanding positions they could see the people passing to and fro within the fort walls.

For instance, if anybody wanted to go from the mess-room to the hospital, he was plainly exposed while crossing. Or if he wished to go from the flag-tower to the gun-tower, there he was a mark for the Jandoli rifles.

A more unsheltered spot to build a fort in was never before conceived. One might have thought that the fort was secure at least from the river side. But not a bit of it. The village of Danin, on the other side of the river, and not more than seven hundred yards off, afforded the enemy a strong position ; for that, too, of course, lay above the fort.

Townshend might well have despaired at the thought of commanding such a miserable place ; but his ingenuity always came to the fore.

“Rout out all the carpets and curtains you can lay hands on,” was his order. “We can hang them across the doorways and open spaces, so that we cannot be seen passing from one place to another. Rout out all the tents ; we can cut them up too.”

It answered beautifully. Of course a bullet could go through these flimsy things, if they were fired upon ; but the Jandolis didn't care to waste their bullets by firing at random. They liked to see what they were aiming at. And they could no longer see the passer-by. The backs of our men were also exposed to the enemy on the opposite side as they fired from the parapets, so Townshend had doors, and planks, and saddles, and bags of earth piled up to protect them.

“It was a lucky precaution of yours to build that covered way to the river before hostilities began,” said one of the officers. “Every drop of water has to be fetched up from the river.

They've never stopped firing at the water-way all day long."

And now the buildings just outside the fort walls and the wall of the garden were very much in the way. It was feared that the enemy might steal up and get a firm footing inside these buildings. Once established there, they could annoy the besieged in many ways.

So, as the darkness came on and the firing became less heavy, a party of Punial levies stole out from the gate, and crawling on their stomachs up to the walls, pushed down the rotten old places with beams of wood. A few shots were fired by the watchful besiegers, but fortunately no one was hit.

And there, outside the main gate, they dug a grave in the dark; and in the dead of night another little band stole out and laid their brave comrade to rest.





CHAPTER VII.

A LETTER FROM UMRA KIIAN.

UP to the day of the fight—March 3rd—Mr. Robertson had despatched letters regularly to head-quarters, giving information of their position at Chitral. Now, of course, all communication with the outside world was stopped.

“How long can we hold out?” was the first question.

That, of course, depended on the provisions they had stored in the fort.

“The siege is likely to be a long one,” was the grave acknowledgment.

“How many persons to provide for? How many mouths to feed?”

The officers? It didn't take long to count *them*. Half a dozen, all told; and one of them disabled! They could have done easily with half a dozen more.

Ninety-nine Sikhs; three hundred and one Kashnair Rifles; sixteen of the Punial levies. These were all the fighting men.

Then there were servants, and followers, and messengers, and native clerks, and the

commissariat ; and half a hundred Chitralis thrown in ! Amir-ul-Mulk amongst them ; and even him they couldn't starve !

“What is the total ?”

“Five hundred and forty-three persons.”

“How long can we feed five hundred and forty-three persons with the supplies we have stored in the fort ?”

Then the supplies were hauled over, and the stores counted out. And the answer came—

“Two months and a half on half rations. Half that time on full rations.”

“We must be prepared for two months and a half.”

What a cry there was from the non-fighting ones !—the clerks, the messengers, the servants, the followers.

“Two months and a half ! Oh, will not the Government send us aid before that time ?”

“The Government will send us aid,” said the British Agent in a clear, firm voice. “It will take time for help to reach us, for the passes are covered with snow. But help *will* be sent us. And in the meanwhile, every man will do his duty.”

A hoarse cheer fell from the lips of three or four, the others took it up and swelled the chorus.

On the next day the Jandol Chief sent a letter to the fort. Very peremptory were his demands.

“The British must evacuate the fort at once ; leave Chitral entirely. Sher Afzul is recognized as Mehtar,” was the gist of his letter. And he,

Umra Khan, would guarantee a safe journey as far as Gilgit.

The officers agreed that the letter should go unnoticed.

The day after that the Jandol Chief sent his prime minister, under a flag of truce, to speak with the British Agent.

“Umra Khan is a friend to the British,” said this untruthful gentleman. And he went on to explain how an escort of the Chief’s men would accompany the little band, not leaving them till it was placed in safety, if they would only get out of the fort.

But the English officers knew of a dreadful pass on the way, and what an easy thing it would be for the Chief’s escort to fall upon them there, with the help of their friends in hiding!

And putting that aside, the Chief of Jandol had treated the commands of the Government with contempt. Umra Khan was plainly told to clear out of Chitral territory, and return to his own State; that if he refused, the Government would *compel* him to do so.

The defeated prime minister took back a short but decisive answer, the gist of which was: “Shuja-ul-Mulk is Mehtar; none other will be recognized. The British refuse to evacuate the fort unless Umra Khan returns to his own country.”

The enemy attempted a revenge. The next night, as soon as it grew dark, a band of two hundred, carrying bundles of faggots with them, crept down by the river side and managed to

get into the narrow tunnel under the water-tower, and piling up the wood, succeeded in setting it on fire. The tunnel was raised over beams of wood, so the enemy knew what they were about.

They were driven out after a sharp fight, and the water-carriers ran about filling their great *mussacks*, or water skins, with water, which they threw upon the flames. Only in time—the wooden supports were just taking fire!

That was a lesson Townshend never forgot. To protect the water-way—for without water it would have been all up with the besieged—he had a special picquet of twenty-five men stationed in the water-tower, and another picquet of twenty-five *inside* the water-way.

Across the river, exactly opposite the spot where the men came to draw water, the cunning Jandolis built a stone breastwork, and day and night they kept a perpetual fire on this weak spot.

After that the water-carriers were ordered to keep their water skins always filled with water, especially the last thing at night.

The walls and towers of the fort being built of wood as well as stone, fires had to be carefully guarded against, so day and night patrols went the rounds to see that all was safe.

Townshend also established a fort police to watch the Chitralis, lest they should attempt to give news of the doings of the besieged to their friends outside.

The Chitralis in the fort of course appeared

to be perfectly loyal to the British; but their fickle nature could not be depended upon. It was known too that the one anxiety of the greater number was to be found at last on the winning side. All else might go, for what they cared. It was necessary, therefore, to keep a strict watch on their movements.

Amir-ul-Mulk alone had a guard of six men.

The safety of the little Mehtar was arranged for by Townshend. The little fellow kept a bright heart, and never showed the white feather. He was a plucky little chap, and kept a calm front all during that trying time; and he took a wonderful liking for Townshend.

As Campbell was laid up with his wounded knee, Townshend was made commandant of the fort, and two officers only were left to help him in the arduous task of defence. They were Gurdon and Harley. The doctor had his hands full with the wounded and the sick. The British Agent had his political duties to attend to.

The three first officers each took his turn on duty for four hours, when he would be relieved. Their rest was, however, constantly broken by alarms, real or false, as the case might be. At night time it was impossible to sleep on account of the fear of fire. If they snatched a little sleep in the day, they always lay down in their uniforms.

No one was allowed to be idle in the fort; and, indeed, to their credit be it said, every man was anxious to do his utmost and his best.

Some of the servants, and clerks, and messengers, and other non-fighting ones, were told off for fetching and carrying water—the water question being such a serious business, not only for cooking and washing purposes, an immense supply had also to be stored up in all the vessels the fort could supply, for extinguishing fires. Other non-fighting men were employed in grinding the grain that was stored up for food. All sorts of odd jobs—not light ones either—were given them to do to save the soldiers.

“And now, my men,” said Townshend, “a relieving force will come. Bear that in mind. The Government will not leave us in the lurch. All we have to do is to hold the fort.”

The men could rely on him. He was so energetic, so full of resources, so cheery and so cool, they felt they could trust their commander.

They learned that Sher Afzul had taken up his quarters in the political officer's house—the same place where Gurdon and his brave little escort had lived before they moved into the fort.

This house is built on a hill, and of course looks down on the fort, being distant only about twelve hundred yards away.

“He mustn't make himself too snug there,” said Townshend. “He must be kept alive.” And he gave an order for thirty rounds a day to be fired regularly at the house, to annoy the would-be Mehtar as much as possible.

The Sepoys obeyed that order with zest.

“He won't catch us napping,” said one to the other with a grim smile.

The enemy's plan was to keep up a brisk fire at the fort all day. It was at night, in the dark, that they made an attack.

These night attacks were so dangerous, especially as their chief object was to try and set fire to the fort, that it was necessary to light up the ground outside the fort walls to watch the movements of the Jandolis.

The besieged made chips of wood into balls and soaked them in oil, lighted them, and flung them over the walls, where they burned brightly, and showed up any one that might be prowling round.

This sort of thing went on for about twelve days. If the besieged were watchful, the besiegers were no less so. Umra Khan's men were adepts at besieging and taking forts. They were wonderful shots. Their bravery equalled their cunning. It was no mean enemy the British had to contend against.





CHAPTER VIII.

A LETTER FROM SHER AFZUL.

AND then Sher Afzul sent a letter to the British Agent. It contained alarming news. A party of Sepoys on their way to Chitral had been defeated, and their officers were prisoners in his hands. Another party—a much larger one—had been cut down at one of those dreadful places—a narrow defile. Their officer was killed, with forty-six men. This was the gist of his letter.

Mr. Robertson heard it gravely, and communicated the news to Townshend.

“What is your opinion?” asked the latter officer.

“A scare on Sher Afzul’s part. I don’t believe a word of it.”

“I quite agree with you.”

The other officers were of the same opinion. The next day, however, another letter was received, brought in by the same messenger. This man had been a Sepoy once in the Indian army. The Jandol Chief had many like him in his employ. This man’s duty was to bring messages from Umra Khan to the British Agent.

The letter was not from his master, neither was it from Sher Afzul. It was written in English, and the writing was that of an English officer.

And then Mr. Robertson knew that Sher Afzul's news was no scare. Alas! it was too true.

Now, before the British had been driven into the Chitral fort, rumours had reached Mastuj—a place between Gilgit and Chitral—that Sher Afzul had joined Umra Khan, and that they were already in Chitral territory, so Lieutenant Edwardes and Lieutenant Fowler were sent off, with twenty sappers and miners, and about forty Kashmir Rifles, carrying engineering stores, to Chitral, in case of further trouble.

On their way they learned that they were likely to be attacked at a place called Reshun, and on their communicating this intelligence to Mastuj, Captain Ross, with Lieutenant Jones and a party of Sepoys, were immediately sent off to strengthen them.

The letter brought by Umra Khan's messenger was from Lieutenant Edwardes.

He said that they had been besieged at a house at Reshun, and after nine days' hard fighting a truce had been arranged with the enemy.

While the officers were painfully wondering as to what lay behind all this, a messenger came from Sher Afzul desiring a truce for three days. It was eventually agreed upon. So for a short space the fire of the enemy ceased.

Then another letter came, this time from the Jandol Chief's lieutenant, saying that the two officers with nine Sepoys were being brought to Chitral, and would be with Sher Afzul the next day.

Captain Townshend, always on the alert, used up these quiet days in strengthening all weak places. And Mr. Robertson started some of the men on making a Union Jack. They cut up some of the Sepoy's turbans for this. The turbans being made of red cloth, it did splendidly; and other materials were fished up to complete the flag.

On the 20th news came that the officers had arrived at Chitral, and the old Indian Sepoy—Umra Khan's messenger—said that a messenger from the fort could return with him, if Mr. Robertson wished to speak with the Sahibs.

Mr. Robertson immediately arranged to send one of the native clerks, who left the fort with Umra Khan's man.

The clerk found the officers in a rather sorry plight. One of them had no boots and socks, these having been dragged off him when captured. They were also in great need of other articles of clothing.

They were allowed to talk to the clerk only in Hindustani, and their news was far from cheering.

Captain Ross had been attacked at an awful place called the Karagh Defile, and killed there, with forty-six men.

They themselves had succeeded in barricading a house at Reshun, and after defending themselves for nine days against overwhelming numbers, were taken prisoners by treachery; the leader, Mohamed Isa Khan, a foster-brother of Sher Afzul's, having invited them to a friendly parley under a flag of truce, when he and his friends had treacherously fallen upon them and made them prisoners.

The clerk was allowed to listen to them for only twenty minutes, and was now ordered by the bystanders to return to the fort with their news.

"Ask the sahibs if they can spare us a few clothes," hastily added one of the poor fellows in Hindustani.

"And a plate each, and a couple of forks and knives," begged the other. "We are obliged to eat with our fingers."

The clerk promised to do all they had asked, and returned to the fort, where an anxious committee were awaiting him.

"It is all true, sahib," said the native clerk, sadly. "I have spoken with the sahibs face to face." And he recounted the disastrous news faithfully.

If the brave leaders of the defence felt depressed at the terrible news, and spoke anxiously about it in private, they carried a cheerful front before their men.

Mr. Robertson wrote immediately to Umra Khan, protesting against the treachery by which the officers had been made prisoners; for they

had gone out to parley with the Jandol Chief's ally under a flag of truce.

"A man of honour," added the British Agent. "would release the officers at once."

The Jandol Chief snapped his fingers at that. "All is fair in love and war," said he, or whatever is equivalent to that saying of ours in the Jandol tongue.

The officers were not too well provided with clothing themselves, but they immediately got together the necessaries for their poorer brothers, and sent them to Fowler and Edwardes, with the plates, forks, and knives they had asked for.

Umra Khan then had his prisoners taken to Kila Drosh, where he himself was staying.

It was a cunning stroke on his part to have sent them to Chitral at first; for they delivered their disastrous news in person, the truth of which the garrison could no longer doubt.

"It will teach the sahibs a lesson," thought Umra Khan. "It will show them our strength, and that will dishearten them."

He was quite right, too. The garrison knew that Edwardes and Fowler were carrying ammunition stores to Chitral, and, of course, since these were defeated, the valuable stores had fallen into the enemy's hands, and would only serve to strengthen them. It was a gloomy look out for the besieged.

That a force would be sent to their relief they knew. They could have staked their lives on that fact.

The question was: "Would it come in time?" In time to save the ramshackle old fort, that would fall to pieces if once the beams of wood that supported the whole structure could be fired by the watchful, patient, and cunning Jandolis?

In time to save them from starvation? The ghee was nearly run out—ghee is a kind of butter. And ghee to the natives is as necessary as meat is to Englishmen.

What little ghee was left had to be husbanded for the sick soldiers.

Already the poor fellows looked pinched and hollow-eyed from insufficient food, as only half rations were served out.

The medicine for the hospital was getting low! For the sick list was getting longer!

"Can't we spare a little rum for the Sikhs?" asked one.

"We must. Brave fellows! They deserve it."

Yes, they did deserve it. Those disciplined, patient, uncomplaining Sikhs!

The officers said that when the Sikhs were on duty, they themselves could snatch a little sleep in full confidence. They were to be trusted as much as the officers themselves!

"The Sikhs must have a little rum. Without these splendid veterans it would be impossible to hold the fort."

And so a little rum was dealt out to them every fourth day. And for the Kashmir Rifles a little tea was served out every second day.

And the leaders themselves? How were

they faring? An Englishman is not up to much if he is deprived of his meat.

Fortunately a kind of meat was procurable for them. . Not beef or mutton. That was all gone.

The order went out, "We must kill the ponies and have them salted!"

They began the work that very day. Truce or no truce, the British couldn't afford to be idle. It was all their splendid management that saved themselves and their men.

The ponies were salted. A delicate appetite is out of place in a besieged fortress. The officers got used to salt pony. It was a pity the soldiers couldn't eat it. But of course the natives wouldn't touch it.

They never complained. They ate their cakes of flour and water as cheerfully as they could, and went back only half filled to their allotted posts.

Would relief come in time?

"You smile, friend," said a hollow-eyed non-combatant, pausing wistfully before a little group of Sikhs as they squatted on the ground, cleaning their rifles diligently. "The thoughts of the heart are reflected, it is said, in the face. Is it hope that makes you smile? As for me, my hope is dead. I can only be patient."

The Sikh addressed looked up with the same quiet smile that had attracted his questioner.

"Relief will come," answered the Sikh. "The force is now on its way."

"How know you that?" An eager light

flashed for a moment across the questioner's frightened face. "Ah! that is your hope. You do not pronounce it a fact!" and the old scared look took possession of the poor fellow again.

"It is a fact, friend," returned the smiling Sikh. "I know it here," and he laid his hand upon his breast. "The Government will never desert us."

And one of his comrades added, "The arm of the Government is slow, but it reaches very far."

"It is true," answered all the Sikhs together. And the same confident smile was on each starved face.

The thought of defeat held no place in their minds. The quiet dignity with which they spoke, their confident courage, sent a warm glow through the listener's timid heart.

In spite of his own assertion that with him hope was dead, hope was living now in his hollow eye. With lightened steps he hastened on and told his fellows what the Sikhs had said.

And the officers knew, too, of course, that the Government would not desert them. But the old question hovered tremblingly on their lips, "Would the relief come in time?" They knew of the great mountain passes that would have to be crossed. They knew these were almost blocked with snow.

From the fort in the hollow they could see the tops of big mountains round them dazzling and white with snow.

Steep precipices would have to be climbed; awful gorges would have to be crossed. The relieving force would not have to fight with nature alone. A human enemy, strong, cunning and numerous, would have to be beaten back.

The little garrison seemed dead to the outside world. Since the first day of March no communication of any kind had reached them, nor had they been able to send a message of their pressing need. They heard nothing, knew nothing, but the cutting down of Ross's party and the defeat of Fowler and Edwardes, and for this last bit of news they had to thank Umra Khan. If they could only hear!—but they heard nothing.

They did not know that Ross's lieutenant, Jones, had escaped to Mastuj with thirteen or fourteen men, all more or less wounded, with the news of the disaster to their party. They did not know that the news had flown to Gilgit, and from Gilgit to head-quarters. That news of their imprisonment in Chitral fort was even now flying on wires to all parts of the civilized world. That a force fourteen thousand strong was mustering at Nowshera, one hundred and eighty miles away. That from Gilgit the gallant Kelly and his magnificent pioneers were starting to their relief.

If they could only have known it!—but they knew nothing. They set their faces stubbornly for a long siege, and trusted the Government.

On the sixth day of the truce the Jandol Chief's Prime Minister again appeared before

the fort walls under the white flag, and asked an audience.

For the last time Umra Khan offers the British Agent a safe journey through his own territory, Jandol, if he will evacuate the fort with his troops and let Sher Afzul in.

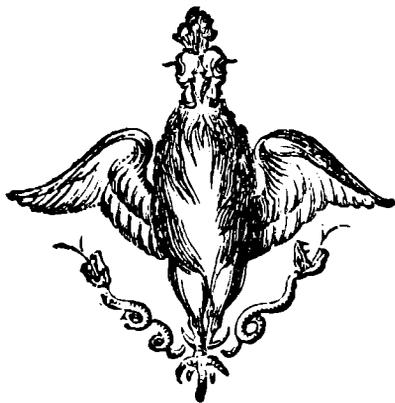
No. The sahibs will not leave the fort. Shuja-ul-Mulk is Mehtar. They will hold the fort till relief comes.

If that is the British Agent's final decision, the truce is at an end.

So be it.

And pop! pop! pop! go the rifles again, all the harder for the six days' rest.

"It will be a long fight and a hard fight," they say, looking straight into each other's eyes. "But we'll hold the fort to the bitter end."





CHAPTER IX.

KELLY'S MARCH.

IT was on that very day—the last day of the truce—the 23rd, that Kelly, with his advance party, started for the relief of Chitral.

He was the Colonel of the 32nd Pioneers, a regiment composed of that splendid race, the Sikhs ; and was also the officer in command of the troops on the Gilgit frontier ; and had arrived with his men a few months ago, for the purpose of making roads and fortifying posts.

The work of the Pioneer regiments is to go before the army and clear the way, to make the roads passable ; and for this purpose each man carries a pickaxe and shovel. But their work is not limited to constructing roads, for the men are drilled and armed with rifles, and on service they fight as ordinary foot soldiers.

The total strength of the troops on the Gilgit frontier numbered about three thousand men, made up of the 32nd Pioneers, part of the 14th Sikhs, three battalions of Kashmir Infantry, and a battery of Kashmir Mountain Artillery ; but at the beginning of the trouble, this force was

distributed in detachments of 100, 200, 400, and 800 men, to keep in check the various tribes ready to take up arms at the slightest provocation, excited as they were at the revolt of the Chitralis.

Gilgit itself had to be strongly guarded, for several small states had proved troublesome only very recently, and it was a "toss up" whether now they would go with the Government or against it.

The neighbouring state of Hunza-Nagar had been subdued only three years ago; and though they had fought desperately against the English at that time, they had since then appeared loyal. But their loyalty was now to be proved.

Inquiries were made through the political officer of Hunza whether any of the men would be willing to enlist as levies and fight under the British flag.

In answer to this invitation Wazir Humayun, the Prime Minister of Hunza, marched into Gilgit with nearly a thousand men, ready to serve the Government. Not only this, they also brought with them a fortnight's rations for each man—a welcome supply, for the Gilgit district is a bleak, barren waste of mountains, where scarcely anything grows; and all the food for both man and beast is brought up from Kashmir during the short summer months, when the passes are free of snow.

The majority of these loyal fellows were employed in guarding passes around Gilgit, while fifty, under the Prime Minister—a fine-looking

native warrior—were picked out to go with Kelly's force.

The Hunzas, it is said, claim descent from the armies of Alexander the Great. They are generally fair-complexioned, with rosy cheeks, and look more like what the Scotch Highlanders must have been in the old barbarous days than like Asiatics.

Notwithstanding the loyal response of the Hunza men, it was thought unwise to take away from Gilgit more than four hundred pioneers and two guns of the Kashmir Mountain Battery, the fifty Hunza levies, and fifty levies from Punial—a little semi-independent state in the Upper Gilgit valley, under their own Rajah, Akbar Khan, who, at the head of his own levies, had helped the British to subdue the Hunzas three years ago.

The Punialis are splendid mountaineers, as agile as cats and as sure-footed as goats—just the sort of men for climbing the dangerous ascents of the rugged country through which they would have to pass.

There were a few of the Punial levies, it may be remembered, with the besieged garrison at Chitral fort, who had gone good service by crawling on their stomachs out of the fort in the dead of night, to knock down some out-buildings that were very much in the way.

The news from Mastuj of the disaster to Ross's party at the awful Karagh defile, and that Mastuj itself was besieged, reached Gilgit on the 21st March. And on the 23rd Kelly

started on his venturesome journey to Chitral, with his advance party of but two hundred Sikhs of his regiment, under Captain Borradaile and Lieutenants Bethune, Cobbe, and Surgeon-Captain Browning Smith.

The second detachment had to wait for the guns, and could not start till the day after. It consisted of two hundred more men of the 32nd Pioneers under Lieutenants Peterson and Cooke ; the two guns of the Kashmir Mountain Battery ; fifty Hunza levies under Wazir Humayun ; and fifty Punial levies under the Rajah, Akbar Khan.

For the first forty-six miles of the road the little forces would meet with no obstacle, as they were marching through the friendly territory of Punial along the winding river-side to Gakuch, the chief village of that State ; but it was very cold, and the men were travelling without tents, because it was so difficult in the winter time to get coolies or animals to carry them. Mules, of course, had been secured to carry the two guns coming along with the second detachment ; and as each man took eighty rounds of ammunition, and was allowed fifteen pounds of baggage besides a great-coat, it was impossible for the Sepoys to carry tents as well, especially as the order to march was coupled with directions to proceed as rapidly as possible.

Another twenty-four miles over a good road brought the first detachment to Gupis, sixty-five miles from Gilgit, where only a year ago Townshend had built a small stone fort as a post in the Chitral direction.

Here Lieutenant Stewart of the Royal Artillery was ready to take charge of the guns when they arrived. Lieutenant Oldham was also waiting for the second detachment with forty Kashmir Sappers, and Lieutenant Gough with a hundred Kashmir Rifles.

But for these Kelly would not wait. The order was to march rapidly, so on he went. And now the difficulties began. The good road ended at Gupis, and fell away into a narrow path up one side of a steep hill to scramble down the other; and so on, up and down, up and down, higher and higher; here a dangerous gorge to pass, and now a fearful precipice, known in this rugged country as a *pari*, and described as "a place where the road comes to a sheer precipice overhanging the river, across which a road has to be built out on piles driven into the face of the cliff."

Now, too, a look-out had to be kept for a human enemy—unsettled tribes that might attempt to retard their progress. But they climbed up to the little village of Ghizar, ten thousand feet above the sea level, without molestation, to find snow lying deep on the ground.

"It's been snowing hard for five days," said the political officer, coming out to meet the little band.

"We must push on, though," said Kelly. "The garrison at Chitral has been shut up four weeks already."

"The road is awful further up, Colonel. The Shandur Pass must be impassable now."

The Shandur Pass was two marches ahead. At the foot of the Pass on this side is the bare plateau of Langar, and from here it slopes up a narrow track to the height of three thousand feet. At the top of the hill is a pretty level plain about five miles long, shut in by big mountains on either side. Then comes the scramble down to Laspur, a little village nestling at its foot.

"It would be a bad look out," said Kelly, "if we got snowed up on the Pass."

"A likely catastrophe, Colonel," replied the officer, looking anxiously up at the gleaming mountains ahead.

Kelly looked round on his small band of Sikhs, and remembered that on the other side of the Pass the country had been up in arms against the Government ever since Sher Afzul had driven the British back into the fort.

What if the enemy were waiting for them on the Pass?

After a short consultation with his officers he found it impossible to get on—first of all on account of the snow, and he added, "We may want the guns."

It was decided then that they should wait for the rear guard.

It came up the next day, toiling up to Ghizar on the 31st of March, having been joined by the Kashmir Sappers and Rifles under their respective officers at Gupis.

The colonel's orders were to rest that day at Ghizar, so that the whole force could press on together next morning, starting at seven o'clock.

They succeeded in hiring a number of villagers to help to carry the provisions that would be required while crossing the Pass, and to assist with the baggage, to make things easier for the Sepoys.

With brave hearts all were up early next morning, April 1st, when a cry of dismay was heard.

“The coolies have bolted!”

“Bolted?”

“Absconded during the night!”

“Cowardly brutes!” added a hot-headed young soldier.

It was quite true. Not a coolie that had been impressed the day before was to be found.

“I’ll find them,” cried Stewart, grimly. (He had the charge of the guns.) “Only let me catch them, and I promise you they’ll stick to their bargain.”

And in another moment he was galloping off in the direction they were supposed to have taken.

This caused a delay of nearly three hours. There was no sign of Stewart or the coolies. The baggage was distributed as best as they could; and at ten o’clock, notwithstanding the unpromising outlook of things, the whole force left Ghizar, plodding steadily through the snow. The first mile or two was got over fairly well, and then the mules began to flag. The snow became deeper and deeper. Their drivers urged them on with kindly pats and cheering cries. They crawled on inch by inch. Now

the snow reached up to their bodies, and laden as they were the poor creatures could hardly stagger along.

"It's impossible to get them on," cried one of the officers hopelessly. "They'll never do it!"

"Sir, they cannot," answered one of the drivers, patting the head of his panting mule.

"Colonel, what's to be done now? How shall we carry the guns?"

The guns! It was impossible to get on without the guns. The guns were required above everything to drive back the enemy that, on the other side of the Pass, would swarm in thousands on the heights, and to shell the sangars, or breastworks, behind which they would lie snugly sheltered.

They had already cut up Ross's detachment, and destroyed Edwardes's and Fowler's party: these had had no guns.

To advance without the guns would be worse than folly. So the colonel thought; and so he said.

While a discussion was going on as to what should be done, a little party was seen plodding on in the rear.

"Stewart and the runaway coolies! Hurrah!" cried a triumphant voice.

And despondent as they felt at that trying moment, some could not help raising a cheer. It was Stewart indeed. He had overtaken about thirty of the runaway coolies, and had compelled them to follow the force. He rode up to them jaded and weary, for he had had a

tiring ride ; but the pony he rode was so exhausted, poor creature ! that it fell and died in the snow.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. They had left Ghizar at ten in the morning, and had got over only four miles. Well might Umra Khan have snapped his fingers at the Government when he remembered the snow-covered hills !

To take on the guns was impossible, and for the men to advance without them was folly.

Would the enterprise have to be given up ? It seemed like it.

Three miles further on was a little hamlet called Teeru. It was not big enough to shelter the whole force ; and as it was impossible to get the mules forward, the colonel decided that they should return to Ghizar over the track they had made in coming. So the force was divided, the colonel himself going back with the guns, two hundred of the pioneers, and the fifty Punial levies ; while Borrodaile, with his officers, and the other two hundred pioneers, with the Kashmir Sappers and Miners, and the Hunza levies, and the coolies, got on to Teeru, to wait there as patiently as they could.

All next day it snowed. The men sat and shivered in their great-coats, and looked up doggedly at the great white Pass, so beautiful, so ominous !



CHAPTER X.

KELLY'S MARCH (*continued*).

IT was snowing at Ghizar too, and the anxious colonel, impatient at the delay, felt that his hands were tied. The mules *could* not carry the guns. And without the guns—— And the garrison was starving, perhaps.

But his pioneers knew their colonel's face. His anxiety was their anxiety; his impatience theirs as well. And they were *Sikhs*.

Said one to his fellows, "We must not march without the guns."

"Impossible," answered a chorus.

"The mules are helpless in the snow."

"There is no doubt of that."

"The Commanding Sahib is troubled about the guns."

"And our brothers at Chitral are starving, perhaps."

There was a pause. "Purity, chastity, and charity"—their motto, when lived up to, must make men brave to endure.

"Brothers, could not *we* carry the guns?"

Another breathless pause. Then came the

hoarse determined chorus: "If the Commanding Sahib permits *we shall*." Not idle words. No sooner said than acted on. They seek their native officers. The case is laid before them; and the spokesman adds, "Beg the Commanding Sahib that we may carry the guns." The native officers, proud of the message they carried, delivered it to Colonel Kelly.

And while they spoke, a native officer of the Kashmir rifles that Gough had brought from Gupis, came up with the information that the men, inspired by the brave determination of the Sikhs, had also volunteered to help in this arduous task.

Just as the Sikhs at Chitral fort, by their brave example, kept hope alive in the breasts of their weaker fellows, so here again we find this splendid race inspiring the Kashmir Rifles with their own valour. The colonel was moved. His eye kindled as he gave his answer: "Tell my men I thank them."

And now bustle, bustle! Not a moment need be lost. With cheerful faces and determined mien the men equipped themselves for their heavy march under Stewart and Gough.

The mountain guns and their carriages are so constructed that they can be divided into loads of about two hundred pounds each.

The gun itself is divided into two portions, which are screwed together when required for action. The body of the carriage is considered a load in itself for a mule; and the two wheels weigh about one hundred pounds each.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of April 2nd Borrodaile's advance party lifted up their eyes, and saw these brave fellows bowed under their loads, struggling through the snow.

"They're carrying the guns!"

"Impossible! Impossible!"

But it is true.

By threes and fours they come straggling into the camp, bent under some portion of the guns.

Well might they cheer as they help them to unload, exclaiming at the splendid achievement!

Resting that afternoon and night at Teeru, the whole force was astir next morning, and started for Langar, five miles ahead.

A more arduous five miles was surely never before marched. They tried to push the guns on sledges over the snow; but the track was so narrow and so broken, that they gave up the attempt in despair, and the men took up their burdens again, and struggled bravely on.

The snow was awful. They could only crawl on step by step. Only five miles to Langar, but the night was coming on, and they had not reached it yet. All day long they had been struggling through the snow, and now the darkness was falling so fast they could hardly see the track.

"If the men are to get into camp to-night they must drop their loads," cried Stewart.

"They might stack them in the snow," answered Gough, wearily, "and return for them to-morrow. Heaven only knows how they've

struggled on so far." This plan was at once decided on. The order was shouted out and passed along the line; and the guns, the carriages, the wheels, the ammunition boxes were gladly dropped and stowed away in the snow, and the men marched on to Langar, reaching it only at eleven that night.

Here the tired men found no shelter, not even a rock behind which to shelter themselves from the bitter wind. One solitary hut stood there, and this was given up to the most exhausted of the poor fellows.

The rest of the men camped out in the open night, huddling together round miserable fires lighted from bits of brushwood.

If they dozed from sheer fatigue, it was to start up again shivering in the biting blast.

Unrefreshed, cramped from cold, the dawn of another day found them doggedly determined to continue their heart-breaking march.

"They must not attempt to carry the guns over the Pass to-day," said Borrodaile, decidedly. "They're not fit for it. They would only break down halfway. If a party of us can manage to cross over to-day, they might not find it quite so arduous to follow in our track to-morrow."

And after a consultation with his officers they at length arranged that Stewart and Gough should stop on at Langar, and employ their men in fetching up the loads they had dropped in the snow, to store them in the camp till Borrodaile could send help from the other side

of the Pass, the pioneers and levies going with him to carry only their ordinary kit.

On the Pass the snow, of course, was deeper still ; in some places as deep as five feet.

The Hunza levies marched in front beating down a sort of track. Sometimes they fell up to their armpits in snow, and had to be pulled out by their comrades. If those following got the least bit out of the track, down they would go.

Their ears tingled from the cold, and the glare dazzled their eyes. The Sepoys had been provided with blue spectacles, which they all wore before starting ; but many suffered from snow-blindness ; their toes and fingers ached till they became numbed ; and numbers suffered from frostbite.

Each man had to carry his rifle and eighty rounds of ammunition, the pioneers being weighted with their tools as well. Rations also had to be carried.

When they got halfway over the Pass, the poor fellows kept falling out by twos and threes, dropping their loads as if they could not pick them up again.

"It looks as if we must camp out in the snow another night," said one of Borrodaile's officers.

"I'm afraid we'll have to," was the anxious reply. "The poor fellows are quite exhausted. It's half-past five already."

"They'll collapse if we can't get them under shelter to-night."

But suddenly from the advance guard a

triumphant shout was borne back to them on the air. They found that they had reached the end of the Pass and the descent was comparatively easy.

The glad news was shouted back along the line, and those that had fallen behind picked themselves up and made a fresh start.

The descent was indeed easy in comparison, but they were now getting into the enemy's country, and who could tell but that the foe was waiting for them at Laspur, the village at the foot of the Pass?

Umra Khan had put too much trust in the snow. He never dreamed that the British would, in such awful weather, even attempt to cross the Pass. How easily a few hundred of his Jandol warriors might have beaten back the exhausted troops had they been ready for them on the Pass! So much did he rely on the terrible weather, that no fighting men had been stationed at Laspur.

A few levies proceeding cautiously as scouts came back with the triumphant information that no armed men were about.

"Thank Heaven!" was the grateful cry. It came from their hearts.

They were in no condition to tackle a human enemy after their terrible twelve hours' march. It was half-past seven o'clock when Laspur was gained.

It was a straggling village, and the villagers, awed into cringing respect for the valiant men that could accomplish so stupendous a march,

hurried to offer their services, placing their houses at their disposal.

“Make yourselves snug!” cried the captain—an order no one was loth to avail himself of.

Oh! how thankful they were to get out of the cruel wind and snow! It was not so bleak at Laspur, and not nearly so cold; and then, too, they had the shelter of the houses.

Securing themselves in a rough way from any night attack, they slept the sleep they had earned.

They were only two marches from Mastuj. Next morning they impressed a number of villagers, sending them back to Langar to help to bring the guns over the Pass.

This splendid feat was accomplished by the Kashmir Infantry under Stewart and Gough—the most marvellous of all the marvellous deeds accomplished on Kelly's march.

On the 6th of April, Colonel Kelly, with his staff officer Beynon and the Punial levies, arrived at Laspur. That afternoon the scouts brought the information that a body of armed men were at a place called Gasht, twelve miles away; and the next day Borrodaile and Stewart, with a hundred and twenty pioneers, made a reconnaissance in that direction. But there was no fighting; they found the place almost deserted; they managed to seize a dozen ponies, and also thirty coolies to help with the transport, and with these welcome additions they returned to Laspur. Resting all the next day—the 7th—the whole force marched on the 8th to Gasht without opposition. Reconnoitring that evening, it was

found that the enemy had mustered in great numbers across the valley three miles away at a place called Chokalwat.

This valley lies between tremendous hills towering one above the other in jagged cliffs. A river runs through the valley. On these cliffs the enemy were posted in large numbers, cosily sheltered behind stone breastworks with loopholes to fire from.

The road to Mastuj leads along this valley at the foot of a stone shoot. A stone shoot is a terrible place. Imagine a steep hillside covered thick with loose stones that are apt to come rushing down like an avalanche if once set going. The defile where Ross's unhappy party was cut off lay along one of these terrible stone shoots.

At Chokalwat some of the enemy were posted on the heights at the top of this shoot, to set the stones rolling down to oppose Colonel Kelly.

The only other road to Mastuj was a zigzag track up the cliffs, where, on jutting crags, the enemy had raised breastworks, from which they could shoot or hurl stones at the party climbing up.

Mastuj, they knew, was besieged. They had known that before they left Gilgit. So on April 9th, at half-past ten in the morning, Colonel Kelly marched down the valley to attack this position with a hundred and ninety pioneers, the two guns, forty Kashmir sappers and miners, and a few levies.

The pioneers were divided into two companies, the first leading the way, followed by the sappers and miners, the two guns, and then the rear-guard of pioneers.

Meanwhile Beynon with fifty Hunza levies was sent to climb the hill on the left bank of the river; and the Punials under their Rajah up another on the right.

When Kelly's party reached the river they found the bridge broken. The sappers and miners patched it up, for the men to cross. The guns, which were now carried by ponies, were taken through the river by coolies; the guns, covered meanwhile by the Hunzas on the hill, were then placed in position to shell the first sangar.

The enemy were armed with Martini-Henry and Snider rifles, and they could shoot straight. Bang! bang! went their shots through the loopholes of their sangars. They fancied themselves nicely protected, and probably would not have cared for the rifle firing of the British—their natural position being so very strong; but when a well-aimed shell burst in their midst, wounding and killing in all directions, their surprise and consternation were great.

In twos and threes they left the first sangar to make another stand behind the second, till the first was entirely deserted.

Colonel Kelly then had the guns placed so as to attack the second sangar, while the levies cleared small parties on the hillsides.

The volley-firing from the pioneers, and a few more well-directed shells, drove the enemy from the second sangar. They did not wait to occupy their other breastworks, but fled helter-skelter in the direction of Mastuj. The action had lasted just one hour. One man of the pioneers was severely wounded, and three Kashmir sappers slightly. The enemy lost from fifty to sixty men. The little force then continued its march along the left bank of the river for another mile, when the river was again forded, and they crossed to the right bank, marching straight on towards Mastuj.

As they neared Mastuj a little band was seen coming towards them. It turned out to be Lieutenant Moberly, who was in command there with his men. At midday he had observed that the enemy were gradually moving away from Mastuj, so taking out a few men, he followed to see how the land lay, and came across Colonel Kelly.

It was Moberly who had marched to Buni, eighteen miles from Mastuj, to rescue Lieutenant Jones and the handful of men that had escaped from the fate that befell the rest of Ross's unfortunate party, and only in the nick of time, for the enemy arrived at Buni a few hours afterwards. A few days later, they closed round Mastuj fort, and occupying some houses three hundred yards away, kept up a perpetual fire on the fort.

The Chitralis also sent many polite messages to Moberly, assuring him that Sher Afzul was

the friend of the British, and offering to conduct him under an armed escort to Gilgit if he would only trust them, and not be so very suspicious.

“But I was more than suspicious,” laughed the young soldier, as he recounted his adventures to the officers with Kelly's force. “Once,” added he gleefully, “the Punial levies in the fort crawled out in the dead of night and white-washed the loopholes of the breastworks that the enemy had erected not far off. It made a splendid target to aim at next day; and we kept such an accurate fire on the loopholes that we drove the fellows clean away.”

The relief party on their part had their own adventures to relate, and both sides congratulated each other on their pleasant meeting. At Mastuj a halt of two days was made, to wait for the remainder of the force, and to get fresh supplies before starting for Chitral.





CHAPTER XI.

A LONG FIGHT AND A HARD FIGHT.

MEANWHILE, the prospect was a very gloomy one for our heroes at Chitral fort ; and, to add to the gloom, rain began to fall — heavy rain, pouring unceasingly for two long days. It soaked into the fort walls. Part of the parapet on one side was in danger of sinking. They had to build up some of it at night, and prop it up with beams.

The little Mehtar was distressed at the discomfort it brought on all. He asked a learned and very holy man who was with him in the fort, if he could write a prayer to Allah for the rain to stop.

So the holy man wrote a paper in Persian, and the little Mehtar asked that it might be fixed on the top of a lance and raised upon the wall. The soldiers said that soon after the rain ceased to fall.

Bang! bang! bang! came the Jandoli bullets with all their might and main. The enemy seemed enraged that their plan for

ousting the besiegers was received with contempt. They were determined to be revenged.

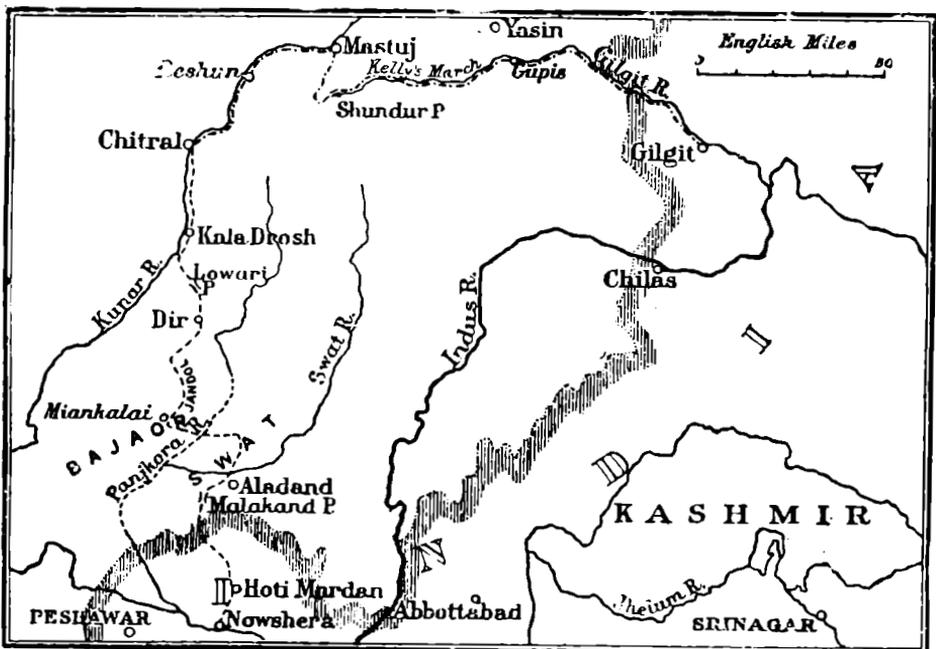
They shouted abuse at the Sepoys in the garrison, and asked derisively whether they thought this was the first fort besieged by their Chief?

“Not the first by a long way,” they jeered. “And the taking of this mud fort will not be the last!”

“Where is the Union Jack? Hoist it on the flag-tower!” cried the British Agent. “Let the Jandolis see that we defy them and their skill.”

So up flew the Union Jack with a hoarse cheer from the garrison, and flapped out in the face of the enemy as if it plainly said, “Here I am, and here I stay. Do your very worst!”

By the following rough outline the position of Chitral, and the way relief was coming from both sides, may be imagined.



From Gilgit the gallant Kelly and his pioneers are fighting their way. The terrible road alone is a formidable foe; and there are thousands of wily and powerful enemies prepared to hem them in and shoot them down as they climb the dangerous ascents.

From Nowshera General Low and his three brigades are advancing, forcing their way through unknown country, crossing swollen rivers, driving back the fierce wild tribes that harass them on the march.

“If Umra Khan does not clear out of Chitral territory, the Government will *compel* him to do so.”

The Chief of Jandol heard, but heeded not. He snapped his fingers at the threat.

“Nature,” thought he, “is on my side. The big grand mountains, and the cold of the dazzling snow. They’ve got to reach me first.”

Umra Khan did not know the power of the Government, nor the long, long arm that, as the Sikhs say, “reaches very far.”

And now disquieting rumours came floating on the air towards Kila Drosh, where Umra Khan had established himself, expecting complacently day by day the news of the fall of the fort.

One and another came in to tell the story of a powerful force marching, marching on, and sweeping all before it. Marching, marching on, and threatening Jandol itself. Nothing stopped their way. They shot their enemies a mile off with strange and wonderful guns. They crossed swollen rivers in the very face of the foe.

To Chitral they are marching, and to Chitral they will come. Ay, though to reach it they must pass through Jandol itself. Jandol was threatened—the Chief's own territory. Umra Khan could afford no longer to snap his fingers at the Government. The Government knew what it was about when it planned a march to Chitral through Jandol territory.

After an anxious council with his chiefs, he arranged to leave some hundreds of his most skilled warriors to carry on the siege with Sher Afzul and the Chitralis, while he himself hurried back with some thousands of picked men to stop the advance of the British, carrying Edwardes and Fowler with him.

It may as well be said here that the officers were well treated by Umra Khan ; fed with the best he had, and made as comfortable as possible. They have nothing but praise for the Jandol Chief, and speak of him as a fine fellow. Later on, just before his last battle was fought, Umra Khan released his prisoners, and had them conducted in safety to General Low's camp, hoping by this act of generosity to secure better terms for himself.

And now the Jandolis that were left behind fought harder than ever, and inspired the Chitralis, who would have accomplished nothing without them, with something of their own warlike spirit.

“I trust to your courage and your skill,” Umra Khan said to the chosen men he had left behind. He had great influence over them

because he was so strong and brave himself. "You will not be beaten."

The Jandolis swore a great oath that they would take the fort, and now, remembering the oath, they fought desperately, for they knew their time was getting short.

The imprisoned garrison knew nothing of the advance of the three brigades, nor of the gallant Kelly's wonderful march. How could they?

But the Jandolis knew. And their time was getting shorter every day.

They built new breastworks nearer and nearer the fort, and poured a deadly fire into it from behind their shelter. Again and again they attacked the water-way. They were bent on firing the gun-tower.

None of the garrison dreamed of sleeping at night. Each man was wanted at his post, for the night attacks were more and more frequent, and more and more skilfully planned.

Oh, the weary watching through the long, long night! The craving they had for sleep! Too little sleep; and too little food! They were growing all so gaunt and thin. But sleep could only be snatched in turns by day, lying down with their clothes on. And they dared not eat enough to satisfy their hunger, lest the food should not hold out. If they could only have heard!—but they heard nothing, save the shots of the Jandol rifles, and their fierce oaths that they would make a bonfire of the gun-tower.



CHAPTER XII.

“FIRE! FIRE!”

TO the east of the fort was the summer-house, at the end of a large garden. It had been built by a previous Mehtar, and was situated not fifty yards away from the gun-tower.

The garrison had not succeeded in pulling down this place when they knocked over the other outbuildings just outside the fort, and the enemy got possession of it.

From the shelter of its walls they kept up an endless fire at the holes of the gun-tower.

One morning, about a week after Umra Khan's retreat, the garrison saw in the dim early light a stone breastwork quite close to the main gate of the fort, which the enemy had raised in the dark, and behind that another, about thirty yards behind the first. From the shelter of these and the summer-house they battered away all day.

“Oh, for a heavy gun!” Townshend set his teeth as he looked out on the breastworks of stone, and smiled grimly to think how easily they could be shelled, and the Jandolis behind them scattered!

But if they had possessed a gun, the enemy would have been sent flying before this.

It was with these guns that Kelly was pushing his way, driving the enemy from their strongest positions ; these guns that carried all before them, and made a way for General Low's force.

As night time came on the fighting stopped, and all was quiet. The garrison guessed they were hatching some plot, and waited anxiously for the early morning hours, the officers going from post to post to see that each man was in his place.

Then suddenly in that dark hour—for it is always the darkest the hour before dawn—the silence was broken by horrible yells, and the enemy began a desperate assault, besieging the fort in greater numbers than ever. While some of them attacked from the garden side, where the summer-house was, others made a determined attack on the water-way ; and while the attention of the garrison was held in defending these places, a few of the Jandolis stole up in the darkness up to the gun-tower, and in the pluckiest way piled up faggots and bundles of wood against a corner, and succeeded in setting these alight.

Presently a great bonfire was blazing away. At first the majority in the garrison thought that the great light that suddenly burst out was owing to the fire-balls they were in the habit of throwing out to light up the ground round the fort when attacked like this in the dark. But Gurdon soon detected the mischief—terrible

mischievous—for it was not only a bonfire of faggots blazing away—the tower, which was built of wood as well as of stone, had caught fire as well.

This was the plot they had been hatching, and cleverly it had been accomplished.

“The gun-tower is on fire!” and Gurdon sent messages flying round the fort.

The Sepoys could not leave their places, for they were repelling the other attacks, and a fierce mob were battering away at the water-tower with exultant yells.

Mr. Robertson shouted for the servants, the water-carriers, the clerks—every available non-combatant—and up they tore, the British Agent leading the way, to help to put out the flames.

The water-carriers emptied their skins of water through the holes in the wall of the tower down on the flames beneath. While some rushed panting up the steps laden with water, others seized the buckets, or whatever vessels came to hand, and flung the contents on the flames.

“More water! Bring water! If the fire is not got under, the tower will fall! Hurry, hurry! not a moment to lose!”

The Sikhs heard the alarm of “Fire!” above the banging of the bullets, but not a man left his post. How calmly they stand! How steadily they fire! Volley after volley, with that quiet smile upon their lips, as if they scorned the thought of being beaten.

Volley after volley, till the enemy, cursing loud, are bound to retreat. Hurrah! they find such close quarters too hot for them, and

sullenly retreat amongst the sheltering walls of the bazaar.

Their retreat left some of the Sepoys at liberty.

“Carry up earth in your great-coats to the galleries!” shouted Townshend, for the flames were spreading and getting hold of the great beams that supported the tower.

Up flew the Sepoys, lugging their heavy earth-filled coats, passing the non-combatants hurrying down with empty vessels, toiling up with buckets full of water.

“The tower is in danger,” the ominous whisper spread from man to man, and one and all set their teeth, and with determined faces proceeded to conquer the fire foe.

It was pitch dark inside the tower. Outside the flames leaped up, and threw their ruddy glare on the excited workers in the galleries. And less than fifty yards off the Jandolis, well hidden themselves in the summer-house, sent volley after volley at the burning tower. As soon as a head appeared at one of the holes, it became a mark for the enemy, so that those employed in throwing water or flinging earth did so at the risk of their lives.

Bang! bang! bang! came the bullets at the tower with a deafening roar. Splinters from the woodwork flew in all directions, blinding and hitting the men as they rushed up and down.

The great tongues of flame, hissing and spluttering, added to the din.

“Save the tower! Save the tower!” was the universal cry. “All is lost if the tower falls!”

“More earth! More water!” was the greedy call shouted above the din.

It was a race amongst the most timid of the non-fighting ones to see which could work the fastest, regardless of the flying bullets popping through the tower-holes, and the falling splinters from the beams. Outside the din was deafening. From the summer-house came loud, exulting cries, the beating of tom-toms, cheers of fierce joy accompanied the bang, bang of their bullets; while not far off, behind the shelter of a wall, a number of priests were gathered, shouting out prayers to Allah that the tower might fall.

As soon as the flames were got under a bit, the wind, blowing hard at the time, fanned them into life again; and the prayers of the priests increased in vehemence.

The pluck of the clerks and messengers and servants was wonderful. The bullets whizzed and rattled through the tower-holes; they still worked steadily on. Sepoys fell down wounded at their feet; they did not flinch.

One of the Sikhs was shot dead at a hole, and Mr. Robertson was wounded in the arm.

If there was a panic for the moment, it soon quieted down.

“Save the tower! Save the tower at *any* cost!” was the brave cry, and still they worked with might and main.

Presently another Sepoy was shot dead, and

others were wounded at the holes from where they flung earth and water.

Gradually the darkness gave way to dawn, and the dawn to morning light. The fire had been discovered about five o'clock. Six, seven, eight, had passed, and still the flames, leaping up, defied both earth and water.

It was no joke tearing up steps, carrying buckets of water, or lugging up coats filled with earth.

Men sank down exhausted, and were compelled to stay to breathe. Others snatching the buckets from their idle hands, immediately took their places. And the priests behind the wall were getting hoarse over their prayers, and the tom-toms beat like mad in the summer-house.

"The hour of victory is coming!" shouted the Jandolis, and their expected triumph made their arms more steady and their aim more sure.

A happy thought came to one of the besieged. "If we had a water-spout, the men would not be so much exposed at the holes."

"Bravo! A water-spout! A water-pipe!" There was no time to be lost. This fire was the most serious affair that had overtaken them as yet.

As soon as possible a long spout was contrived, and this they pushed through one of the holes in the tower just over the raging bonfire. Inside, from a more sheltered place, they poured water into the spout, and tilting it, the water ran along the spout and flowed out in a regular stream on the fire at the foot of the tower.

Hurrah! It was a capital idea. The men that poured the water into the spout were not nearly so much exposed, and when they found the plan working so well, everybody fell to work with renewed zest, and ran up and down with their buckets faster than ever.

No more heads appeared at the holes, to the sorrow of the Jandolis. A water-spout was stuck out instead, and from it a never-ending stream poured steadily on the flames.

A tremendous hissing! A vast deal of spluttering! Big puffs of smoke and steam!

"Dash those Britishers!" or whatever is equivalent for that in the Jandol tongue. The hour of victory seemed not quite so close, for the flames were not leaping up so cheerily as before. Hissing took the place of crackling. More and more smoke.

The Jandolis were very, very much afraid that the fire was being put out. The Jandolis may be cunning, and the Jandolis may be clever, but British pluck and endurance are likely to beat them yet.

The prayers of the priests ascended in howls, and the cheers of the enemy were giving place to curses.

The fire was going out!

The beams that supported the gun-tower were scorched and blackened, but still stood up stolidly to weather the siege.

Thank God, the fire was going out!

The priests stopped their prayers and retired discomfited, and the Jandolis, after a good round

curse at the besieged, set their fertile wits to concoct some other plan.

It was past ten o'clock before the exhausted garrison could be sure that the fire was got under. Five hours they had battled with the flames. It was good to rest their aching arms and legs, and those whose turn it was to sleep, slept soundly then, indeed.

Nine wounded men were added to the hospital, where Dr. Whitchurch had his hands full, for day by day some of the weaker ones were falling sick, not being able to stand the strain of so much work and anxiety on such meagre food.

How the men scanned their officers' faces to read dejection or over-anxiety there! But they never got the chance.

"The faces of the sahibs show no fear," whispered the men to each other. "They are quite at ease. They look for the relieving force day by day. *They* are not afraid it will not come in time."

"We can trust the sahibs," was the confident answer. "When they show anxiety, it will be time for us to be afraid."

Good gallant hearts! The "sahibs" had made a compact with each other that, *whatever* happened, they should not let their anxiety be seen by the men, lest it might discourage them.

Good gallant fellows! Surely it made their task the heavier to hide under a pretended cheerfulness the awful anxieties of those days.

Of such stuff is the true-born Briton made. God bless every brave man of them!

The British Agent was severely wounded in the arm ; but the doctor could not persuade him to lie by.

“It may dishearten the men,” he said. “I cannot afford to lie by.” So, with his arm in a sling, he went about his usual duties.

After that fire scare Townshend got the men to collect heaps of earth on the parapets and on every storey of the tower, to be ready for fire another time. And none but Sikhs were placed as sentries at the most important posts, for these splendid Sepoys were to be implicitly trusted.

The cunning Jandolis were hatching their next plot, and in the mean time kept the besieged alive by a big attack again on the water-tower, and a few days later made another clever attempt to fire the fort ; but they failed in both, owing to the vigilance of the Sikhs. Next they took a violent fancy for the sound of their tom-toms, and kept up a perpetual tom-tomming in the summer-house.

And now, from their watch-places in the towers, the sentries on guard saw large bands of men leaving Chitral, and going off armed in the direction of Mastuj.

What did it mean? Had the besiegers got knowledge of a relieving force? And were these large bands of armed men sent to oppose them?

Hollow eyes flashed hope in the gaunt faces of the men as the news spread through the fort.

“If they’re going towards Mastuj, help may be coming from the Gilgit side,” was the idea of the officers.

“Help from Gilgit! A force from Gilgit!”
The Sepoys caught the hopeful whisper, and passed it from man to man.

Later in the day their hope grew surer, for those on watch sent down word that parties of the enemy were coming home, and carrying dead bodies with them.

“There has been fighting, then.”

“And the bodies must be those of big personages brought back for burial. And they seem to have lost a number of them, too.”

“If we could only get some idea of what is going on outside!”

They made an attempt to send out a spy to pick up any information, but he could not get away at all. The enemy were too watchful.

How it would have cheered the poor fellows could they have certainly known that it was Kelly and his gallant band already in possession of Mastuj!





CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT AT NISA GOL.

N April 12th Lieutenant Beynon, Kelly's Staff-officer, made a reconnaissance from Mastuj, and returned with the news that the enemy was mustered strong at a place known as Nisa Gol.

Nizum-ul-Mulk, the unfortunate Mehtar who had met his untimely death while out hawking, at the hands of his half-brother Amir-ul-Mulk, is said to have boasted, and not without reason, that Nisa Gol was one of the strongest positions for the defence of his country.

And it is thought by some that Alexander the Great, at the time of his conquests in India about 327 B.C., got as far as Nisa Gol, and turned another way, thinking the country on the other side could not be penetrated. Dr. Smith, in his "History of Greece," says that a vast number of Alexander's soldiers intermarried with Asiatic women, so who knows but that the boast of the Hunza men, who claim to be descended from Alexander's armies, may, indeed, have some foundation!

Early on the morning of the 13th, Colonel

Kelly, with his now increased force, for the garrison at Mastuj had joined him, advanced towards Nisa Gol. Here precipitous, rocky mountains rise on either side of the valley through which the Chitral river flows. The valley is a mile wide, and would not be at all difficult to get over if it were not suddenly cut in two by a yawning chasm about three hundred feet deep and two hundred yards across. There is only one path across this chasm, and of course the enemy had cut it away. Opposite this chasm a number of breastworks had been raised, built high of wood and stone, and on the jagged cliffs, all the way up the mountains, towering on the left side, more sangars were to be seen—up, up, up, right away into the snow that lay thick on the mountain tops and nearly halfway down. On the right side the sangars were fewer and not carried so high up.

And here at Nisa Gol the enemy mustered fifteen hundred under Mahomed Isa himself—Sher Afzul's half-brother. This redoubtable gentleman's motto must have been, "All is fair in love and war." For he it was that captured Edwardes and Fowler under a flag of truce, when they accepted his invitation to polo and a friendly tea.

Several of Umra Khan's Jandol warriors were among the enemy. The defeat at Chokalwat had more than perturbed them. Could it be that the oath they had sworn before their Chief was in danger of being broken? These born

warriors set their teeth and prepared for a fierce resistance.

While the pioneers marched in companies down the valley towards the chasm, the agile Punial levies were to swarm up the hill on the right where the sangars were not so numerous, and come down on the other side of the enemy's flank. The advance guard of pioneers kept firing in volleys on the sangar on the right till the guns could come into position. The shells from the latter soon knocked down the wall of the first sangar, scattering the men behind it.

The guns then were placed so as to attack the main breastwork.

About this time Lieutenant Beynon discovered a goat track across the right end of the ravine that the enemy had destroyed; so a party of Kashmir sappers under Moberly were directed to make an attempt to get across here. Ladders had been brought purposely for crossing the ravine, and the men lowered these ladders, with the help of ropes, to reach the bottom of the chasm. In this way about fifteen men succeeded in getting down and climbing up the opposite bank.

By this time the nimble Punial levies had scaled a stone shoot and appeared on the enemy's left just as the Kashmir sappers appeared on the other side of the ravine.

The enemy were so staggered at seeing these fifteen sappers with the levies about to take them in the flank, and so panic-stricken at the way the guns kept shelling their

breastworks, that they fled down the valley quite demoralized.

The action had lasted two hours. Eight men of Kelly's force were killed and sixteen wounded. Of the enemy fifty dead were left on the field; but they managed to carry away a number of both dead and wounded in their flight. Those behind the breastworks up on the mountain side on the left disappeared into the snow.

"I cannot speak too highly," said Colonel Kelly, in his report, "of the extreme steadiness and bravery of the troops during the course of the action which lasted two hours, and during which they were subjected to a very heavy and trying fire from the front and left bank."

A general advance was then made across the ravine, and they bivouacked that night opposite the village of Sanoghar, not far from the scene of action.

It is said that some curious old copies of the Koran—the Mohammedan Bible—were found in the village; and a copy of our own Bible, printed in Persian by a London firm, was picked up in one of the houses.

The next day, learning that Mahomed Isa had fled to Drasan, they marched in that direction, but the fort was deserted.

The next day's march would bring them past Karagh, the place where Ross's party had been cut up. Colonel Kelly, anxious to avoid this terrible defile, marched from Drasan high up along the hillsides, instead of taking the

usual road to Chitral down the valley; a tremendous "sell" for the enemy that were mustered at Karagh to arrest him.

The natives, it is said, look upon Kelly as a great commander, and speak of him with much admiration—and well they may!

On April 15th, they marched in heavy rain to Khusht, the next day to Loon.

On the 17th, they reached the Chitral river. It was running breast high. On the opposite bank the enemy could have taken up an impregnable position and perhaps outwitted the gallant band after all. But no enemy was to be seen.

Perhaps the beating at Nisa Gol had taken the spirit out of them. Perhaps they were mustered strong, waiting for the force at some spot where the river was not so deep, for here a rapid current was running, and the river is not considered fordable at this point.

The men were linked together in bands of ten or twelve to hold each other up; and the levies were formed in a line below the fort to help the coolies that were often washed off their legs, weighted as they were with baggage.

Thanks to the pluck of the levies not a man of them lost his life.

The river was crossed. The enemy's last position was turned. They were but two marches from Chitral!

But not one word had they heard of the beleaguered garrison. Had they come too late? Was their terrible journey accomplished in vain?



CHAPTER XIV.

A CUNNING PLOT.

“**W**HAT an awful din those fellows are kicking up in the summer-house!” said one of the officers in the besieged fort. “I’d give a good bit to shut them up with their tom-tomming!”

The beating of drums and the playing of pipes were going on merrily. The garrison failed to discover any music therein. It seemed, however, to tickle the ears of the Pathans, for they kept it up in fine style.

“Sahib,” suddenly suggested the news-writer—the same Rab Nawaz Khan who had been carried in by those two brothers all bleeding and covered with wounds, and who had recovered wonderfully under the good doctor’s care—“the noise, I think, is made for a purpose.”

“What purpose?” questioned the officer.

“The men of Umra Khan,” said the news-writer gravely, “are clever in the art of mining. It may be that they beat their tom-toms to drown the sounds of picking.”

The officer breathed hard. “Digging a mine to blow us up, eh?”

"Sir, it is quite possible."

A consultation of the officers was held immediately over this fresh grave situation.

"Yes, it is quite possible. Those Jandolis are clever enough for anything."

"They have blown up the walls of many forts," said Rab Nawaz Khan. "When everything else fails, they generally dig a mine right under to the walls, when they blow them up with gun-powder."

"And they are kicking up that row to cover the noise of their picks! It beats everything! What cute dogs those Pathans are!"

"If the news-writer is right, they have started the mine in the summer-house, where they are hidden from our sight."

"Quite so. And are working their way underground towards the gun-tower."

"How are we to prove it?"

"Listen," interrupted one. "If we listen hard, couldn't we distinguish the thud of the picks from that cursed shindy?"

"Caution the sentries to listen, and report if they hear the sound of picking. We must be on the watch ourselves. This is a serious business."

If there was a deafening din outside, those in the fort were unusually quiet. All night the tom-tomming went on. Once a messenger came running to Townshend saying that one of the sentries in the gun-tower was sure he heard the sound of picks.

Up went Townshend to the tower to hear for himself.

“Hearken, sahib!” whispered the sentry, himself in a listening attitude.

“I hear nothing,” said Townshend after straining his ears.

“There! and there again!” persisted the sentry.

“Your ears are better than mine,” returned Townshend. “I hear nothing but those awful tom-toms.”

The rest of the night was anxiously passed. The officers could not but admire the energy and resources of the Jandolis. It was no mean enemy they had to contend against.

“If it is true that they are digging a mine, they must be getting desperate,” suggested one.

“Quite so. Perhaps the fight—it was bound to have been a fight!—those were dead bodies they were carrying back.”

“I am more than ever confirmed that a fight took place in the Mastuj direction.”

“And the fight has gone against them! They are desperate because relief is near!—nearer, perhaps, than we think!” The hollow eye of the speaker glowed in his gaunt face.

The young officer was right. The enemy were indeed desperate. How desperate *they* alone knew. If, after all, relief should come, and their prey escape them!

The Jandolis muttered a few fierce oaths as they remembered that other oath they had sworn to their chief—“We’ll take the gun-tower or die.”

To them no doubt the night was short, for they had much work to do.

Inside the fort the dark hours dragged by, all intently on the alert, straining to distinguish the thud! thud! of the picks from the beating of drums and pipes and the ceaseless cries of the enemy.

On the morning of the next day a native officer in the gun-tower sent a request for Townshend to come and listen.

“Sahib, the sound of the picking is distinct. Stand where I stand, and listen.”

Townshend stood in the man's place and strained his ears.

He could hear the shrill squeak of the pipes, and the objectionable tom-tom! *They* were aloud enough; but now, amidst all the noise, a muffled thud! thud! breaks also on his ear.

“I hear it distinctly,” he says in a stern, quiet voice. “Beg the British Agent to come up here.”

“Rab Nawaz Khan is quite right,” said Townshend, as the British Agent hurried up the tower. “Listen for the picks, Robertson. You can hear them plain enough.”

Thud! thud! thud! No mistaking it now. The sound of picking was distinct.

The British Agent looked Townshend full in the face and said quietly—

“The sounds of picking are so plain, they must have dug to within a few yards of the tower.”

“Yes; they are so close to the tower, I fear we have no time to construct a counter-mine.”

And the gaunt, worn, wearied officers faced each other steadfastly.

“What is to be done, Townshend? We have no time to lose.”

“We must blow up the mine. And to get to the mine we must rush the summer-house,” was the bold answer.

The few remaining officers were summoned. All could hear the noise of picking, and the situation in all its gravity lay plain before them.

A sortie would have to be made, and the summer-house would have to be captured. For this dangerous piece of business Harley came forward—a young, brave soldier, ready for a soldier’s duty, perhaps a soldier’s death.

A daring thing to charge pell-mell into that summer-house, full of fierce and desperate foes.

Harley was ready. He was to make a sortie at the head of one hundred men, made up of forty Sikhs and sixty Kashmir Rifles. And Townshend began his instructions. They were to rush the summer-house with bayonets fixed, capture it, drive the enemy out, and while some held the place the rest were to destroy the mine. They were to carry three powder-bags with one hundred and ten pounds of powder, to blow it up.





CHAPTER XV.

A GALLANT SORTIE.

ABOUT four o'clock in the afternoon the brave band assembled within the gate on the east face of the fort. From this gate to the summer-house lay an open space of about eighty yards, over which they were to rush straight to the summer-house.

Brave little band! How many of them would return to the fort? Which of them would lie out there stiff and stark to-night? If they looked up wistfully at the grim grey walls of their prison-house, who could blame them?

One of his comrades pressed Harley's hand, and whispered, "God speed." Each knew that their hands might never meet again. Then softly the great gate was swung open on its hinges, and the gallant young leader sprang out at the head of his men.

With one mad rush they cleared the eighty yards, and gained the summer-house before the amazed Jandolis guessed what was going to happen.

The tom-tom beaters and the pipe players dropped their instruments with yells.

The hoarse short cry of panic was heard by those in the fort. Those that held loaded rifles let fly wildly at the new-comers. Down dropped a man on either side of Harley. But before the Jandolis had time to raise their rifles again, the gleaming bayonets were thrusting them through on every side, and the groans of the dying mingled with the cries of panic.

It was a hand-to-hand fight. Some were killed; some tore out of the house, escaping unhurt, and rushing down the long garden, concealed themselves behind a pile of faggots, and gathering their wits together, made a stand there, and from their shelter fired briskly on the invaders.

The summer-house was cleared. Harley and his men were in possession now. Quickly telling off a party to keep the Jandolis at bay and to return their fire, the leader with the rest of the men immediately looked for the mouth of the mine, and having found it, jumped into the mine with five of his Sepoys.

Of course there were men at the far end of the mine working underground. It was the thud! thud! of their picks, getting closer and closer to the gun-tower, that had at last reached the ears of the besieged.

“Hearken!” exclaimed one of these workers, suddenly throwing down his pick; for the voice he heard now was different from the beating of tom-toms and the playing of pipes. A sound of scuffling; the songs of their comrades changing to shouts of alarm and cries of agony!

With a chorus of "Something is wrong!" the workers, over thirty in number, flung away their tools and made a rush for the mouth of the mine, pushing and stumbling over each other in their frightened haste.

The cries of the first two that reached the opening struck a death knell into the hearts of the others.

Caught like rats in a trap!

Gleaming bayonets glistened at the mouth of the mine. Could their eyes deceive them? It was held by some of the besieged!

But these were brave men who would sell their lives dear. A fierce struggle took place, but they were thrust through as they came swarming out. Caught like rats in a trap!

Two of these men, Chitralis, who had been picking at the farthest end of the mine, and consequently the last to come out, suddenly slunk off, their hearts failing them as they saw the doom of their comrades, and hid themselves at the far end, trusting to some lucky chance for escape.

In the meanwhile the Jandolis, seeing that their mining plan had failed, for they knew quite well that Harley was making preparations to destroy their work, now gathered in large numbers and ran down to the river bank toward the water-way, intending to attack the fort while it was deprived of so large a number of its defenders; and others swarmed round the end of the garden, thinking to cut off Harley and his brave band.

Their movements were watched from the tower by Townshend with a beating heart.

“Good heavens! If Harley and his hundred should be cut off!”

He hurried up all the men he could muster to the parapets, bidding them fire incessantly on the swarming foe, and never to stop a moment.

And then he sent a messenger to the summer-house, telling Harley “to hurry up for God’s sake, for the enemy were preparing to cut him off from the fort!” and waited in a fever of anxiety for their safe return, watching the movements of the enemy with a sinking heart.

Harley was working his hardest. They had to clear the dead bodies of the foe away; the bags of gunpowder had to be carried into the mine and placed in position. It all took time. Above they could hear the sharp fire of their men as they held the summer-house against the enemy—bang! bang! bang! and the shrieks of the wounded!

At last all was in train, and it only wanted the light of a match to accomplish the work they had risked their lives to perform, when those two men lying hidden at the end of the mine, listening to the preparations with their hearts going like sledge-hammers, for well enough they knew the intentions of the besieged, made up their minds to make a dash for their lives, for, as one whispered to his fellow:

“To remain here is certain death, for we shall be blown to pieces in another moment. If we

make a dash for it, we *may* escape with a few wounds."

Imagine, then, the consternation of Harley and his Sepoys when suddenly two men burst upon them out of the mine they had supposed to be empty.

The Chitralis made one wild effort to escape. The startled Sepoys fell upon them, and in the struggle one of the Sikhs let his rifle go off.

The shot entered one of the powder-bags. With an awful explosion the ground under their feet rocked, rumbled, and was rent! The next moment the mine that the enemy had so laboriously constructed was blown up, and lay like an open trench from the summer-house to within a few yards of the gun-tower!

The shock threw Harley violently to the ground. Wonderful to tell, he escaped with a bruise or two. Wonderful, too, that none of the Sikhs were injured, though some of them had their clothes burned and their hair singed. Fortune had favoured the brave!

And now another messenger came flying from the fort with another urgent, "Hurry up!"

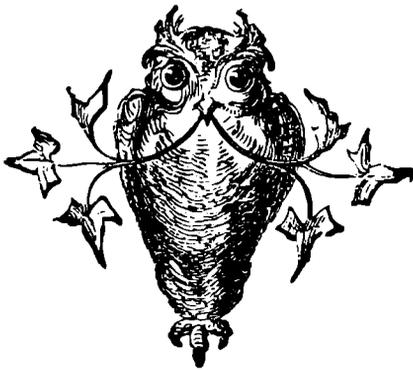
The work had taken them more than an hour—a terribly long and miserable hour to Townshend at the fort.

But, hurrah! the work was done, their object accomplished; and the gallant leader, gathering his men together—not a hundred, alas! nine of the brave fellows lay dead about the ruins of the summer-house, adding to the ghastly spectacle all around where the bloody

conflict had taken place—gave the order in a ringing voice, and rushed straight back to the fort under the wild fire and execrations of the baffled enemy, rendered desperate at the failure of their plot.

The gate was open to receive them, and as the last man hurried in it was swung back and closed again, while a grand cheer rent the air at the success of the gallant sortie, and every officer's hand was stretched out to grasp Harley's.

And the doctor hurried off the wounded to the hospital to examine their hurts. Of those that came back safe, twenty-two were wounded.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE GARRISON RELIEVED.

THE blowing up of the mine took place on the 17th of April—a memorable day, as it afterwards turned out. For on that same day Colonel Kelly crossed the river unopposed; the enemy fled for good and all, and the road to Chitral lay clear before him. On the 17th, also, Umra Khan fought his last fight on his own territory—his fair Jandol—where he had hurried to oppose the march of General Low.

If the besieged in the fort could have known it! But they knew nothing as yet. All they knew was that their rations were getting lower every day, that the men were sickening, that their outlook was very, very dark.

On the 18th of April the enemy were so quiet, it seemed as if the failure of their mining plan had dejected them. So cunning were the Jandolis, however, so brave, and so persevering—the Chitralis alone would have given up the struggle long ago—that the garrison were more than ever on the alert, fearing their very quietness meant some cunning dodge.

The daylight died away, and dark night stole on. Everything was ominously still. What was happening? What were they meditating now?

Sentries were posted everywhere, and warned to listen to other sounds of mining.

Haggard eyes exchanged anxious glances, and seemed to ask, "How much longer can we bear this strain?"

An ominous silence reigned. Silence within, silence without. What did it portend?

The besieged waited—prepared for anything. The enemy generally attacked before the morning dawned.

Anxiously the officers went from post to post to make sure that all was well, encouraging the patient sentries and each other.

After the tom-tomming and the din of yesterday, the silence seemed more impressive.

Nine o'clock, ten, eleven, dragged slowly by. And at midnight a loud cry just outside the walls of the fort made the blood of some of the bravest curdle.

Every one was on the alert in an instant; and after the first minute's consternation, the cry was found to be uttered by a single voice.

"News!" it shouted. "News! Important news!"

"What news?" was the surprised question from the fort.

And the answer came: "Sher Afzul is fled. The Jandol Chiefs are fled. A British force from Gilgit lies two marches away!"

Those that heard the voice looked in wonderment at each other.

Then one of the officers, drawing a deep breath, said almost bitterly to his fellows—

“The news is too good to be true. It’s some Jandoli dodge.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” said another, with a sort of gasp.

“They want to entrap us into leaving the fort,” said a third.

And all the while the voice kept shouting out through the black night:

“News! News! Important news!”

Then suddenly Fateh-Ali-Shah, the Chitrali noble who had helped the garrison to store up all the grain before the siege began, called out excitedly—

“I recognize the voice. It is the voice of my brother Rooshun!” And trembling with mingled hope and fear, he called out his brother’s name.

“It is I, brother,” answered the voice. “The besiegers are fled, indeed. Open to me.”

As soon as the sentries received the word of command, the gate was cautiously opened and the man let in, when some of the officers immediately recognized him as the brother of Fateh-Ali-Shah.

The wondering officers crowded round him, and heard the story from his lips again.

“The enemy,” he said, “knew that a relieving force was near. Large bands of them had gone to oppose it at Nisa Gol, but were driven back.”

“Just as we guessed!” was the excited exclamation.

“The force is said to be only two marches distant, and Sher Afzul, as soon as the news was confirmed, fled with the Jandol chiefs. And as the darkness came on the men all stole away. They have fled to the hills. The place is deserted. Believe me.”

The man was earnest enough, and sincere in all he said. Fateh-Ali-Shah embraced his brother, while the tears rolled down his thin starved face.

The officers had had such a taste of Jandol cunning, that they would not let themselves be too sure of the good news. They could only gaze wonderingly at each other, their voices faltering as they spoke, their hearts beating like sledge-hammers.

“The place *sounds* deserted,” cried one, and hope flashed in his sunken eye.

After an excited consultation, Townshend sent out patrols, with instructions to go just round about the fort very cautiously. They did so, and came back to report that no one had molested them. They had seen nothing of the enemy. The place, indeed, appeared deserted.

“So far, so good!” cried Townshend. “Now for the blessed daylight to prove the truth of this.”

They felt they had a right to hope. They talked with flushed faces, eagerly, happily.

“I feel desperately hungry!” suddenly exclaimed one of them.

Poor fellow, that was no new complaint!

"I suggest a good square meal," said another.

The suggestion was unanimously hailed, and the poor fellows sat down all together for a good feast of horse-flesh, revelling like schoolboys over their large platefuls!

How they talked and laughed! grew grave again, and looked wonderingly at each other out of their hollow eyes!

"I'm for a good sound sleep," said one, after he had eaten as much as he could. "A long blessed sleep. Heavens! how my eyes have ached for sleep!"

One and all became sleepy then, and lay down blissfully to rest till the daylight dawned; but the eventful news had driven sleep away.

They might lie down and close their eyes, but sleep they could not woo. The grim events of those forty-six days kept passing through their minds. It was impossible to sleep.

"I *can't* sleep!" an excited voice at length broke the silence. "But I believe I could eat again."

It was good to hear the laugh that greeted this speech. They had been strangers to laughter so long.

At last the daylight broke. It had seemed long in coming. And Gurdon with a little band went out to reconnoitre, and find out whether the blessed news was true. They passed the ruined summer-house, empty and desolate now, but still bearing traces of the bloody fight it had witnessed only the day before yesterday. Not a man of the enemy was in sight.

They reached the house where Sher Afzul had taken up his quarters—deserted too! The village was forsaken; even the women and children had fled!

The news that Rooshun had brought was quite true. Gurdon and his men carried back the glad tidings, and a tremendous noise of weeping and laughter greeted them. The fort was in a commotion.

The officers shook hands with the little Shuja-ul-Mulk, and the Chitralis there kneeled before him, calling him “Mehtar,” and shouting “Victory!”

The Sepoys congratulated each other with smiles and tears; some wept for their dead comrades who had not lived to see this day.

All in the fort ate hearty meals that day, and thanked God for their wonderful deliverance.





CHAPTER XVII.

HONOURS FOR THE BRAVE.



IN the afternoon of the next day the gallant Kelly and his splendid pioneers marched into Chitral.

What a meeting it was! With what emotion the relieving force looked into the gaunt thin faces streaming out of the fort to meet them! The British Agent, with his arm in a sling!

What heartfelt congratulations they exchanged! Both sides had fought a brave fight. The garrison that had endured so much, and resisted so stoutly under such overwhelming odds! The relieving force that had conquered not only human foes, but that had fought with cold and snow and frost-bite, awful precipices, great mountains, and dangerous gorges.

But the fight was over at last. The siege was ended. The garrison was safe. Thirty-nine men had been killed; sixty-two were wounded.

How much they had to talk about! Poor Baird's death, and the doctor's splendid courage! The devotion and noble endurance of the Sikhs!

"If it had not been for the Sikhs we could never have held out. The enemy never caught

a Sikh off guard. They saved the garrison," said Townshend.

And then the new-comers had to be taken over the fort. How interesting it all was now that the danger was over! Then they had to see the ruined summer-house, where the mine had been blown up with such wonderful success by the plucky young Harley.

Thank God, all was over at last!

And now the good news went flying on wires all over the civilized world: "The garrison at Chitral relieved!" And every brave man of every brave nation talked with emotion of the brave deeds done.

"Kelly's wonderful march!" was in everybody's mouth.

The next day the British Agent gave up his command to Colonel Kelly as senior officer, and gave an address to the troops. He said he desired "to place on record his appreciation of the admirable manner with which all ranks fought and worked, and cheerfully endured terrible hardships. Their bravery and fortitude were beyond all praise, while their discipline remained unimpaired. The soldiers of the Queen Empress and those of H.H. the Maharajah of Kashmir fought side by side with splendid devotion, and with admirable comradeship; and the British Agent will ever remember with gratitude and heartfelt emotion their heroic valour and resolution."

A few days later the British Agent heard from the political officer with Sir Robert Low's force—

who, with an advanced party under General Gatacre, had already arrived at Dir—that Sher Afzul, with fifteen hundred men, had been captured on the hills, and brought into Dir as prisoners.

Umra Khan, the chief cause of all the trouble, was never caught. He got away safely to Cabul, and fled for protection to the Amir. And now the Chitralis, humbled, abject, and dejected, came slinking back in timid groups to their old homes. Two officers from General Gatacre's brigade, who rode on ahead and arrived in Chitral a week after the relief of the garrison, said that the Chitralis they had passed on their ride slunk away at the sound of their horses' hoofs, crouching and hiding whenever they came in sight.

Poor creatures! If they had stuck to the British at the beginning, and had helped them to repulse Sher Afzul instead of going to his aid, how much misery they would have saved themselves and their families! A fortnight after Colonel Kelly's arrival, the advance brigade from Dir marched in; and one quiet day a little party stood bareheaded round the grave just outside the main gate of the fort, and General Gatacre read the Burial Service over the body of the brave comrade they had laid to rest that first memorable day of the siege.

Later on one of the officers erected a stone at its head, and with his own hands carved on it the name of Captain Baird, with the date and manner of his death.

A week after that Sir Robert Low and his staff arrived, and to him the British Agent introduced the little Mehtar, Shuja-ul-Mulk. It was a very grand scene, as all such scenes in India are. A salute of thirteen guns was fired in honour of the occasion, and then the General addressed the troops.

Our gracious Queen delights to honour all brave men who in her service have accomplished brave deeds. Many heroic deeds of valour were performed by brave men during the Chitral campaign.

Our interest at present is centred on those only that took part in the memorable siege, and the gallant band that arrived in time to save them.

All ranks in the garrison were given six months' pay.

Colonel Kelly was made Companion of the Bath and Aide-de-Camp to the Queen, and his officers members of the Distinguished Service Order.

The British Agent became Sir George Robertson, K.S.I.

Captain Townshend became Major Townshend, C.B.

Captain Campbell, Lieutenant Gurdon, and Lieutenant Harley were created Companions of the Distinguished Service Order.

And Dr. Whitchurch got the reward that every brave soldier covets most—the Victoria Cross.