

The Red Year

STORY OF THE INDIAN MUTINY

BY LOUIS TRACY

"Speak, sir," he said. "What of Fatehpore and Allahabad, and be sure thou hast spent thy last hour if thou hast."

"Sahib, God knoweth that I can tell thee the truth of Allahabad, but the budgerow at Fatehpore have risen, and Fatehpore is dead. They killed him, I have heard, after a fight on the roof of the chuttry."

Malcolm guessed rightly that Mr. Tucker was the judge at that station, but he must not betray ignorance.

"And the others—who who fled? What of them?" he said, knowing that the scenes enacted elsewhere must have had their counterpart at Fatehpore.

"Wow!" The kneeling man flinched as the sword pricked him again. "There are two men in a house near the ghat. They alone remain of those who crossed. And I saved them, sahib. I swear it, by the Kaaba, I saved them."

"They are young, doubtless, and good-looking?"

A new fear shone in the Mohammedan's eyes, and he did not answer. Frank's gorge rose with a deadly disgust, and it is hard to say that his sword would not have gone home in another instant had not Chumru intervened.

"Kill him not yet, sahib. He may be useful. Bind him and the other slave back to back. Then I shall help you to cross the river properly."

Chumru soon showed that he meant business. When he was free to replace the pistol in the holster, which he did all the more readily since he had never used a fire-arm in his life, he begged master and man with skill, he led them to a tree, and then unfolded the plan which the ekka-driver's story had suggested.

The fever of rebellion had spread along the whole of the left bank of the Ganges as far as Allahabad. A party of fugitives from Fatehpore who had taken to a boat were pursued, captured and slain. Two girls who had managed to cross the river unseen were now lodged in a go-down, or warehouse, belonging to the very man whom chance had made Malcolm's prisoner. He was keeping them to carry favor with a local rajah who headed the outbreak at Fatehpore. It was true that there were no boats left on this side of the river; they were all on the opposite bank, being loaded with loot, and the two Englishwomen were merely awaiting the return of the zemindar's budgerow to be sent to a safe place than death.

Chumru, a Mohammedan himself, was not greatly concerned about the fortunes of a couple of women, but he saw plainly that Malcolm could no more hope to escape under the present conditions than the poor creatures whose whereabouts had just become known. This was precisely the kind of intrigue and adventure that appealed to his alert intelligence. In wriggling through a mesh of difficulties he was like a snake, and the proposal he now made was certainly bold enough to commend itself to the most daring.

He drew Malcolm and the trembling ryot apart.

"Listen, friend," said he to the latter. "Thou art, indeed, lost if that fat hog sees thee again. He will harry thee and thy wife and all thy family

was a mosque—at the other a temple. In the centre, at a little distance from the bank, was a square modern building, evidently the warehouse in which the English ladies were pent.

With the ekka came a rissaldar of cavalry, riding one horse and leading two others. When he dismounted a scabbard clattered at his heels, for Malcolm now had the pistols between his knees as he sat behind the tightly drawn curtains of the vehicle.

"Mohammed Rasul!" shouted the rissaldar, loudly. "Where is Mohammed Rasul? I must discourse with him instantly!"

A man came running.

"Ohe, sirdar," he cried. "Behold, I come!"

A note was thrust into the runner's hands.

"Read, and quickly," was the imperative order. "I have affairs at Fatehpore and cannot wait here long. Is there a boat to be hired?"

"A budgerow is even now approaching, leader of the faithful."

"Good. There is some disposition to be made of the Feringhi women. Read that which Hossain Beg hath written, and make haste, I pray thee, brother."

Perhaps Mohammed Rasul wondered why his employer wrote in such imploring strain that he was to obey the worshipful "All Khan's" slightest word, and bestow him and his belongings, together with the two prisoners, on board a boat for Fatehpore with the utmost speed. However that may be, he lost no time. The budgerow was warped close to the bank, her contents, mostly European furniture, as Malcolm could see through a fold in the curtain, were promptly unloaded, and preparations made for the return journey. First the horses were led on board and secured. Then two pallid girls, only half clothed, their eyes red with weeping and their cheeks haggard with misery, were led from the go-down.

"All Khan" was about to guide the ekka along the rough gangway when Mohammed Rasul interferred.

"My master says nothing concerning the ekka and pony," said he. "He hath detained Copi, and this driver is unknown to me. Who will bring them back when they have served your needs, sirdar?"

"I will attend to that," replied Chumru, gruffly, and Hossain Beg's factotum had performed to be content with the undertaking.

But fate, which had certainly favored Malcolm and his native comrade thus far, played them what looked like a jade's trick at the very moment when success was within their grasp. The ekka pony, frightened by the lap of the swift-flowing water against the steps beneath, shied, backed, and strove to reach the shore. Not all Chumru's wiry strength, aided by the alarmed ryot, could prevent the brute from turning. A wheel slipped off the staging, the narrow vehicle toppled over, and the amazed spectators saw a booted and spurred British officer of cavalry sprawling on the ghat instead of the veiled Mohammedan woman who ought to have made her appearance in this undignified manner.

Malcolm was on his feet in a second.

"Come on, Chumru!" he cried, as he leaped on board the budgerow. He saw one of the crew take an extra turn of a rope round a cat-head, and fired at him. Hit or miss, the fellow tumbled overboard, and his mates followed. Chumru, assisted by the ryot, who elected at this twelfth hour to throw in his lot with Malcolm, the sahib, began to cast off the cables. Even the two dazed girls helped, once they knew that an Englishman was fighting in their behalf.

To add to the excitement on shore, Malcolm fired the second pistol at the men nearest the boat, which was already beginning to slip away with the current. Then he rushed to the helm, unlashed it, and turned the boat's head toward the channel, while Chumru and the ryot, helped by the girls, hauled at the heavy mast sail.

Having lashed the helm again in order to keep the budgerow on the starboard tack, Malcolm was about to lend a hand, despite his wound, when a spurt of firing from the bank took him by surprise, because he had seen neither gun nor pistol in the hands of the loungers on the ghat, and the coolies were certainly unarmed.

Glancing back he saw a man whom he had last seen in the moulvi's company at Rai Bareilly gesticulating fiercely as he directed the target practice of a number of men. A group of lathered horses behind them showed that they had ridden far and fast, so the accident, which nearly led to his undoing, had really helped to save him and his companions, else the fusillade to which they were now subjected must have taken place while the boat was still tied to the wharf.

"Lie flat on the deck," he shouted in English, and repeated the words in Hindustani. He flung himself down by Chumru's side.

"Haul away!" he gasped. "We will soon be out of range."

Thus while the cumbersome sail creaked and groaned as it slowly climbed the mast, and bullets cut through the matting or were imbedded in the stout woodwork, the latest arsenal of Malcolm's fortunes thrust herself with ever-increasing speed into the ample breast of Mother Ganga. Soon the firing ceased. Malcolm raised his head. The excited mob on the shore was already a horde of Lilliputians, and the placid swish of the river around the roomy craft told him that he was actually free, and on the way to Allahabad once more.

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...ods on the deck of the budgerow. Rather than meet certain death in that way he would head boldly for the opposite shore, and trust again to his trusty horses for escape to the jungle and the night. Yet some plan must be devised to keep faith with that wretched zemindar. The man would not die if left where he was for another forty-eight hours, or even longer. But the word of a sahib was a sacred thing. Whatever the difficulty of communicating with Mohammed Rasul, he must overcome it somehow.

In his perplexity, his eyes fell on the two girls. Being ladies from Fyzabad, they might be able to help him with some knowledge of the locality. Summoning Chumru to take the helm he went forward and spoke to them.

Now it is an enduring fact that a woman's regard for her personal appearance will engross her mind when graver topics might well be to the fore. No sooner did these sorrow-laden daughters of Eve realize that they were in a position of comparative safety, and in the company of a good-looking young man of their own race, than they attempted to effect some change in their toilette. A handkerchief dipped in the river, a few twists and coils of refractory hair, a slight readjustment of disordered bodices and crumpled skirts—above all,

the gleam of the magic lamp of hope that illumined an abyss of despair—and the amazing result was that Malcolm found two pretty, shy, tremulous maidens awaiting him, instead of the disheveled, woe-begone women he had seen pushed down the steps of the ghat.

He introduced himself with the well-mannered courtesy of the period, and in response the elder of the pair raised her blue eyes to his and told him that since the 16th of June until the previous day they had been hiding in the hut of a native woman, mother of their ayah.

"My dear father was killed by Mr. Tucker's side," said she. "He was the deputy commissioner of Fatehpore. Keene is our name—I am Harriet, this is my sister Grace. We only came out from England last cold weather—"

A sudden recollection brought a cry of surprise from Frank.

"Why," he said, "you were fellow-passengers on the Assaye with Miss Winifred Mayne?"

"Yes, do you know her? What has become of her? We were told that everyone at Meerut was killed."

"Thank Heaven, she was alive and well when I last saw her three days ago."

"And her uncle? Is he living? She—"

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was very much attached to him. How did she escape from Meerut?" broke in Grace, eagerly.

"I wish they had never left Meerut. The Mutiny at that station collapsed in a couple of hours. Unfortunately, they are now both penned up in the Residency at Lucknow, which is surrounded by goodness only knows how many thousands of rebels. But I must give you Winifred's recent history at another time. I want you to tell me something about this neighborhood. What is the nearest town on the river, and what bank is it on?"

"Unfortunately, our acquaintance with this part of India is very slight."

(To Be Continued.)

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the Estate of Margaret Stone, late of the Town of Lindsay, deceased.

Notice is hereby given that all persons having any claims or demands against the late Margaret Stone, who died on or about the Twenty-sixth day of January, 1911, are required to send by post prepaid, or to deliver to the undersigned, solicitors herein for A. M. Fulton, Executor named in the will of the said deceased, their names and addresses and the full particulars in writing, of their claims and a statement of their accounts and the nature of the security if any held by them.

AND TAKE NOTICE that after the Twenty-ninth day of April, 1911, the said Executor will proceed to distribute the assets of the said estate among the persons entitled thereto, having regard only to the claims of which he shall then have had notice, and that the said Executor will not be liable for the said assets or any part thereof to any person of whose claim he shall not then have received notice.

Dated at Lindsay this Fifth day of April, A.D. 1911.

McLAUGHLIN, PEEL, FULTON & STINSON, Solicitors for the Executor, Lin' say, Ont.—w3

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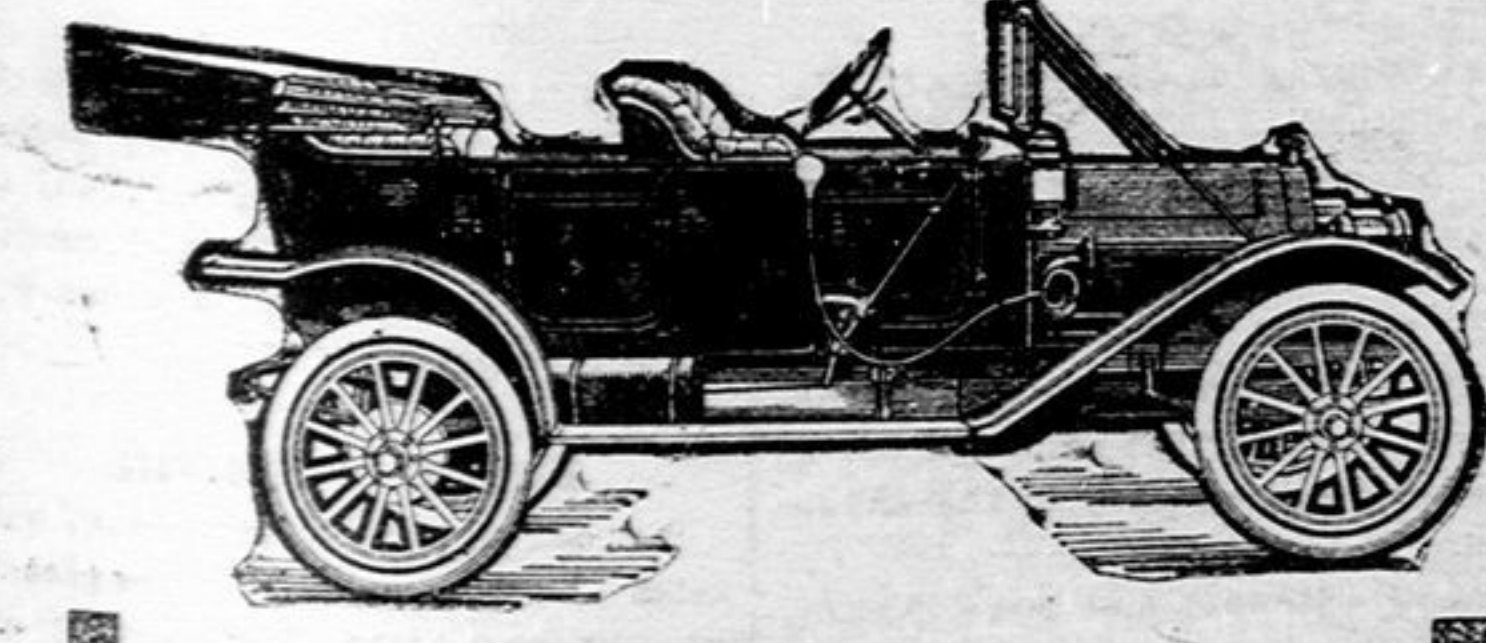
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