

The Red Year

STORY OF THE INDIAN MUTINY

BY LOUIS TRACY

Miss Harriet Keene, sadly, "I've remained at Calcutta four months with our mother, who died there, without having seen our dear father after a separation of five years. We came up country in March, and were going to Naini Tal when the Mutiny broke out. We only saw the Ganges three or four times before our ayah brought us across on that terrible night when father was murdered."

"How did you come to fall into the hands of Hossein Beg?"

"We were betrayed by some children," was the simple answer. "They saw our ayah's mother taking clothes, day after day, sufficient for parties, day after day, and I lived four people. My sister and I lived nearly three weeks in a cow-bye, never daring, of course, to approach the door. The children made even talk about the lavish food supplied in the old woman's hut, and the story reached the ears of their father. He, like all the other natives here, seems to hate Europeans as though they were his deadliest enemies. He was on us, discovered our whereabout, and yesterday morning we were dragged forth, while the poor creatures to whom we owed our lives were beaten to death before our very eyes."

The speaker was a fair English girl of twenty. Her sister was eighteen, and their previous experience of the storm and fret of existence was drawn from an uneventful childhood in India, four years in a Brighton school, and a twelvemonth in a Brussels convent! Malcolm choked back the hard words that rose to his lips, and sought such local information as the ryot could give. It was little. The tiller of the Indian fields lives and dies in his village and has no interests beyond the horizon. This man visited the Ganges once a year on a religious feast, and perhaps taking a religious period in connection with the shipping of grain on his brother's boat. To that extent, but no further, did his store of general knowledge pass beyond the narrower limits of those who dwell far from a river highway.

Yet it was he who first espied a new and most active peril.

"Look, huzoor," he cried suddenly. "They have made signs to the Fattehpore ghat. Two boats are following us."

And then Malcolm found that the real danger came from the opposite shore. It was a case of falling on Scylla when trying to avoid Charybdis. He learnt afterwards that the rebels had organized a code of signals from bank to bank, owing to the number of the craft with Europeans on board that sought safety in flight down the river. That some device must have drawn pursuit from the right bank was obvious. A couple of roamy budgerows with sails set were racing after him, and the long sweep on board each boat were being propelled by willing arms.

It must be confessed that a feeling of bitter resentment against this last stroke of ill-luck rose in Malcolm's breast for an instant. He conquered it. He recalled Lawrence's bold advice, "Never Surrender," and that inspiring memory brought strength.

At that point the Ganges was about a mile and a quarter in width. The budgerow was some six hundred yards distant from the left bank. Three miles ahead the river curved to the left round a steep promontory. The farther shore was marsh-land, so it might be assumed that a hidden barrier of rock flung off the deep current there, while the one chance of escape

being only partly decked fore and aft. A modification of his scheme flashed through his brain, and he decided to adapt it forthwith. First asking Miss Keene and her sister not to reveal their presence, no matter what happened, he told Chumru to stand by the horses and help him to make them leap into the water when he gave the order. With difficulty he induced the scared ryot to take the rudder while he explained the new project. It had that element of daring in it that is worthy of success, being nothing less than an attempt to draw the rebel's attention entirely to himself and Chumru by making a dash for the shore, while the ryot was to allow the boat to continue her course down stream with, apparently, no other tenant than himself.

Malcolm's theory was that, if he and Chumru made good their landing, they would hug the river until the budgerow was sufficiently ahead of pursuit to permit of her being run ashore. Though the plan savored of deserting the helpless girls, yet was he strong-minded enough to adopt it. It substituted a forlorn hope for imminent and unavoidable death or capture, and it gave one last avenue of achievement to the mission on which he had come from Lucknow.

At the final moment he communicated it to the two sisters. They agreed to abide by his decision, and the elder one said with a calm serenity that lent her words the symbolism of a prayer:

"We are all in God's hands, Mr. Malcolm. Whether we live or die we are assured that you have done and will do all that lies in the power of a Christian gentleman to save us."

"I don't like leaving you," he murmured, "but our only weapons are a sword and a brace of pistols. If we run on another half mile we shall be shot down where we stand without any means of defending ourselves. On the other hand—"

Then the budgerow struck a submerged rock with a violence that must have pitched him overboard were he not holding Nejd's headstall at the moment. She careened so badly that the girls shrieked and Malcolm himself thought she would turn turtle. But she swung clear, righted herself, and lay broadside to the current. Another crash, less violent but even more disastrous, tore away the rudder and wrenched the spar pulley out of the top of the mast. The heavy sail fell of course, but by some miracle left the occupants of the boat uninjured.

And now the maimed craft was carried along sluggishly, drifting back towards the centre of the river, while the men in the other boats set up a fiendish yell of delight at the catastrophe that had overtaken the doomed Feringhis. Their skilled boatmen evidently knew of this reef. They stood away towards the shore, but the triumphant jeering that came from the crowded decks showed that they meant to pass the dismantled quarry and wait in safer waters until it lumbered down upon them.

Malcolm suddenly became aware of his wounded arm. With a curious fatalism he began to dissect his emotions. He arrived at the conclusion that the drop from the nervous tension of hope to the relaxation of sheer despair had dulled his brain and weakened his physical powers. This, then, was the end. There could be no doubt about it. He quieted the startled horses with a word or two and spoke to the girls again.

"You may as well come on deck now," he said. "It is all up with us. If a friendly bullet puts us out of our misery, so much the better. Otherwise my advice to you both is to leap into the river rather than be recaptured."

Grace was sobbing hysterically, but Harriet, clasping her fondly in her arms, looked up at him.

"No," she said, "we must not do that. Our lives are not our own. The Lord gave and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Frank winced in his anguish. To a pious man there is nothing so galling as helplessness; what a game of battledore and shuttlecock had been played with him and those bound up with his fortunes since the movie's man-trap brought him headlong to the earth in the main street of Rai Bareilly!

"Huzoor!" yelled Chumru, excitedly. "Look! There below! A smoke ship! And see! Those sons of pigs are making for the bank!"

Malcolm could scarce believe his eyes when they rested on a small steamer with the British flag flying from the masthead, coming round the bend. Yet there could be no mistake about it. British officers in white uniforms were standing on her bridge, the muzzles of a couple of guns showing black and business-like over her bows, while her forward deck was packed with men in the uniform of the Madras Fusiliers. Her commander seemed to take in the exact position of affairs at a glance, and, indeed, the half-wrecked and almost empty boat in mid-stream, so eagerly followed by two thickly crowded craft now close hauled and putting forth desperate efforts to reach the bank, presented a riddle easy to read.

That twinge of pain quitted Frank's arm as speedily as it had made its presence felt. He helped the girls to the raised deck, so that the people on the steamer could see them. It was not necessary. An officer waved a hand to them as the sturdy little vessel dashed past, raising a mighty spume of white froth with her paddles, and soon her guns were busy. There was no question of quarter. Captain Spurgin had been with Neill at Allahabad. He knew the story of Massacre Ghat, of Delhi, of Sitapur, Maradabad, Bereilly, and a score of other stations in Oudh and the Northwest. His gunners pelted the unwieldy budgerows with round shot until they began to sink. Then he used grape and rifle fire, until five minutes after the Warren Hastings came on the scene, there was nought left of the Fattehpore navy save some shattered wreckage and a few wretches who strove to swim amidst a hail of lead and in a river infested with crocodiles.

When the steamer dropped down stream and picked up the fugitives, Malcolm learnt that Spurgin was co-operating with Renaud. The one cleared the river, the other was hanging men on nearly every tree that lined the Grand Trunk Road. And Havelock, nobly aided by Neill, was moving heaven and earth to equip a strong force at Allahabad to avenge Cawnpore and raise the expected siege of Lucknow.

Facts About Motherhood

The experience of Motherhood is a trying one to most women and marks distinctly an epoch in their lives. Not one woman in a hundred is prepared to understand how to properly care for herself. Of course nearly every woman nowadays has medical treatment at the time of child-birth, but many approach the experience with an organism unfitted for the trial of strength, and when the strain is over her system has received a shock from which it is hard to recover. Following right upon this comes the nervous strain of caring for the child, and a distinct change in the mother results. There is nothing more charming than a happy and healthy mother of children, and indeed child-birth under right conditions need be no hazard to health or beauty. The unexplainable thing is that, with all the evidence of shattered nerves and broken health resulting from an unprepared condition, women will persist in going blindly to the trial.

It isn't as though the experience came upon them unawares. They have ample time in which to prepare, but they, for the most part, trust to chance and pay the penalty.

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As Malcolm himself brought the earliest news of the investment, he and Chumru were put ashore with a small escort, in order that they might join Major Renaud's column, and hurry to Havelock with his thrilling tidings. Spurgin promised to visit the village on the east bank, release Hossein Beg, and make him a hostage for the ryot's welfare. As for Harriet and Grace Keene, they would be sent south as soon as a carriage could be procured.

The two girls bade Frank farewell with a gratitude which was embarrassing, but Grace, more mercurial than Harriet, ventured to say:

"I suppose you are longing to see Willfried again, Mr. Malcolm?"

"Yes," he replied, well knowing the thought that lay behind the words. "You are her friend, so there is no reason why I should not tell you that she is my promised wife."

"Then you are both to be congratulated," put in the elder sister, "for she is quite the most charming girl we know, and our opinion of you is not likely to be a poor one after to-day's experiences."

"What? After an hour's acquaintance?"

"An hour! There are some hours that are half a lifetime. Good-by, may heaven guard and watch over you!"

Renaud despatched Lawrence's messenger to the south in a dak-harry, or post-carriage. Chumru would have taken the servant's usual perch beside the driver, but Malcolm would not hear of it. His faithful attendant was almost as worn with fatigue as he himself; master and man shared the comfort of the roomy vehicle; and slept for many hours while it rumbled along the road.

At dawn on the 4th of July they entered Allahabad. But the driver had his orders and did not stop in the city. They passed through a sullen bazaar, and were gazed at by a mob that wore the aspect of a careful of tigers in which order has just been induced by the liberal use of red-hot irons. The travelers were nodding asleep again when the sharp summons of a British sentry gladdened Malcolm's ears.

"Who goes there?"

How alert it sounded! How reminiscent of the old days! How full of promise of the days that were to come!

He leaned out and smiled as he told a stolid private of the 64th that he was a friend. His uniform acted as a passport, the dak-harry crossed the drawbridge and crept through a narrow tunnel, and he found himself standing in the great inner parade-ground of the fort. A young officer approached.

"Do you wish to see the general? Whom shall I report?" he asked, eyeing the worn appearance and torn and blood-stained uniforms of Englishman and native.

"I am here from Lucknow," said Frank. "Will you kindly tell General Havelock that Captain Malcolm of the 3rd Cavalry has brought him a message from Sir Henry Lawrence?"

That was the first time he had done.

(To Be Continued.)

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