

FORBES ARCHIBALD

BARRACKS,
BIVOUACS AND
BATTLES

Archibald Forbes
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Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles:

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Archibald Forbes Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles

HOW “THE CRAYTURE” GOT ON THE STRENGTH

Mick Sullivan was a private soldier in G troop, 30th Light Dragoons, of some six years' service. Since the day old Sergeant Denny Lee 'listed him in Charles Street, just outside the Cheshire Cheese, close by where the Council door of the India Office now is, Mick had never been anything else than a private soldier, and never hoped or needed hope to be anything else if he served out his full twenty-four years, for he could neither read nor write, and his regimental defaulter sheet was much fuller of “marks” than the most lavish barrack-room pudding is of raisins. Nevertheless the Queen had a very good bargain in honest Mick, although that was scarcely the opinion of the adjutant, who was a “jumped-up” youngster, and had not been in the Crimea with the regiment. The grizzled captain of G troop, who was a non-purchase man, and had been soldiering for well on to twenty years, understood and appreciated Mick better. Captain Coleman knew that he had

come limping up out of that crazy gallop along “the valley of death” with a sword red from hilt to point, a lance-thrust through the calf of his leg, and a wounded comrade on his back. He had heard Mick’s gay laugh and cheery jest during that dreary time in the hollow inland from Varna, when cholera was decimating the troop, and the hearts of brave men were in their boots. He remembered how Mick was the life and soul of the gaunt sorry squad inside the flimsy tent on the bleak slope of Kadikoi during that terrible Crimean winter, when men were turning their toes up to the daisies by sections, and when the living crawled about half frozen, half sodden. Mick’s old chestnut mare (G 11) was the only horse of the troop that survived the winter, kept alive by her owner’s patient and unremitting care: if it was true, as fellows swore who found her cruelly rough – she was known by the name of the “Dislocator,” given to her by a much-chafed recruit, whose anatomy her trot had wholly disorganised – if it was true that in that hard winter she had frozen quite hard, and had never since come properly thawed, it was to Mick’s credit that she was still saving the country the price of a remount. There was no smarter man or cleaner soldier in all the corps than the harum-scarum Tipperary man; he had a brogue that you could cut with a knife; and there was nothing he would not do for whisky but shirk his turn of duty and hear his regiment belittled without promptly engaging in single combat with the disparager of the “Ould Strawboots.”

Mick did a good deal of punishment drill at varying intervals,

and his hair was occasionally abnormally short as a result of that species of infliction known as "seven days' cells." He had seldom any other crime than "absent without leave," and he had never been tried by court-martial, although more than once he had had a very narrow squeak, especially once when he was brought into barracks by a picket after a three days' absence, with a newspaper round his shoulders instead of stable jacket and shirt. No doubt he had drunk those articles of attire, but the plea that they had been stolen saved him from the charge of making away with "regimental necessaries," which is a court-martial offence. The 30th Light, just home from the Crimea, were quartered at York; and Mick, after two or three escapades which were the pardonable result of his popularity as one of the heroes of the Light Cavalry charge, had settled down into unwonted steadiness. He went out alone every evening, and at length his chum took him to task for his unsociality, and threatened to "cut the loaf."

"Arrah now," was Mick's indignant reply, "it's a silly spalpeen ye are to go for to think such a thing. Sure if it hadn't been a great saycret intirely, ye'd have known all about it long ago. I've been coortin', ye divil! Sure an' she's the purtiest crayture that iver ye clapt yer two eyes upon, aye, an' a prudent girl too. So that's the saycret, chum; an' now come on up to the canteen, an' bedad we'll drink luck an' joy to the woin'!"

Over their pot of beer Mick told his comrade the simple story of his love. His sweetheart, it seemed, was the daughter of a small shopkeeper in the outskirts of the city, and, as Mick was

most emphatic in claiming, a young woman of quite exemplary character. Thus far, then, everything was satisfactory; but the obvious rock ahead was the all but certainty that Mick would be refused leave to marry. He had not exactly the character entitling him to such a privilege, and the troop already had its full complement of married people. But if the commanding officer should say him nay, then "Sure," Mick doughtily protested, "I'll marry the darlint widout lave; in spite of the colonel, an' the gineral, and the commander-in-chief himself, bedad!"

Next morning Mick formed up to the adjutant and asked permission to see the colonel. The adjutant, after the manner of his kind, tried to extract from him for what purpose the request was made, but Mick was old soldier enough to know how far an adjutant's ill word carries, and resolutely declined to divulge his intent. After the commanding officer had disposed of what are called at the police-courts the "charges of the night," Mick was marched into the presence by the regimental sergeant-major; and as he stood there at rigid attention, the nature of his business was demanded in the curt hard tone which the colonel with a proper sense of the fitness of things uses when addressing the private soldier.

"Plase yer honour, sor, I want to get – to get married," blurted Mick, for the moment in some confusion now that the crisis had come.

"And, plase yer honour, Mr. Sullivan," retorted the chief with sour pleasantry, "I'll see you d – d first!"

“Och, sor, an’ how can ye be so cruel at all, at all?” pleaded Mick, who had recovered from his confusion, and thought a touch of the blarney might come in useful.

“Why, what the deuce do you want with a wife?” asked the colonel angrily.

“Sure, sor, an’ pwhat does any man want wid a wife?”

The regimental sergeant-major grinned behind his hand, the adjutant burst into a splutter of laughter at the back of the colonel’s chair, and that stern officer himself found his gravity severely strained. But he was firm in his refusal to grant the indulgence, and Mick went forth from the presence in a very doleful frame of mind.

At “watch-setting” the same night Mr. Sullivan was reported absent, nor did he come into barracks in the course of the night. The regimental sergeant-major was a very old bird, and straightway communicated to the adjutant his ideas as to the nature of Mick’s little game. Then the pair concerted a scheme whereby they might baulk him at the very moment when his cup of bliss should be at his lips. At nine in the morning about a dozen corporals and as many files of men paraded outside the orderly-room door. To each of the likeliest religious edifices licensed for the celebration of marriages a corporal and a file were told off, with instructions to watch outside, and intercept Sullivan if he should appear in the capacity of a bridegroom. Clever as was the device, it came very near failing. The picket charged with the duty of watching an obscure suburban chapel, regarding it

as extremely improbable that such a place would be selected, betook themselves to the taproom of an adjacent public-house, where they chanced on some good company, and had soon all but forgotten the duty to which they had been detailed. It was, however, suddenly recalled to them. A native who dropped in for a pint of half-and-half, casually observed that "a sojer were bein' spliced across the road." The moment was a critical one, but the corporal rose to the occasion. Hastily leading out his men, he stationed them at the door, while he himself entered, and stealing up to the marriage party unobserved, clapped his hand on Sullivan's shoulder just as the latter was fumbling for the ring. The bride shrieked, the priest talked about sacrilege, and the bride's mother made a gallant assault on the corporal with her umbrella; but the non-commissioned officer was firm, and Mick, whose sense of discipline was very strong, merely remarked, "Be jabbers, corporal, an' in another minute ye would have been too late!"

He was summarily marched off into barracks, looking rather rueful at being thus torn from the very horns of the altar. Next morning he paid another visit to the orderly-room, this time as a prisoner, when the commanding officer, radiant at the seeming success of the plot to baulk Mr. Sullivan's matrimonial intentions, let him off with fourteen days' pack drill. Having done that punishment, he was again free to go out of barracks, but only in the evening, so that he could not get married unless by special license, a luxury to which a private dragoon's pay does not

run. Nevertheless he cherished his design, and presently the old adage, "Where there's a will there's a way," had yet another confirmation.

One fine morning the regiment rode out in "watering order." About a mile outside the town, poor Mick was suddenly taken very ill. So serious appeared his condition that the troop sergeant-major directed him to ride straight back into barracks, giving him strict orders to go to hospital the moment he arrived. Presently, Mick's horse, indeed, cantered through the barrack gate, but there was no rider on its back. The sentry gave the alarm, and the guard, imagining Mick to have been thrown, made a search for him along the road outside; but they did not find him, for the reason that at the time he was being thus searched for he was being married. The ceremony was this time accomplished without interruption; but the hymeneal festivities were rudely broken in upon by a picket from the barracks, who tore the bridegroom ruthlessly from the arms of the bride, and escorted him to durance in the guard-room.

Mick had seven days' cells for this escapade, and when he next saw his bride, he had not a hair on his head a quarter of an inch long, the provost-sergeant's shears having gone very close to the scalp. He had a wife, it was true; but matrimonial felicity seemed a far-off dream. Mick had married without leave, and there was no place in barracks for his little wife. Indeed, in further punishment of Mick, her name was "put upon the gate," which means that the sentry was charged to prohibit her entrance.

Mick could get no leave; so he could enjoy the society of his spouse only between evening stables and watch-setting; and on the whole he might just as well have been single – indeed better, if the wife’s welfare be taken into consideration. Only neither husband nor wife was of this opinion, and hoped cheerily for better things.

But worse, not better, was to befall the pair. That cruellest of all blows which can befall the couple married without leave, suddenly struck them; the regiment was ordered on foreign service. It was to march to the south of England, give over its horses at Canterbury, Christchurch, and elsewhere, and then embark at Southampton for India.

Next to a campaign, the brightest joy in the life of the cavalry soldier is going on “the line of march,” from one home station to another. For him it is a glorious interlude to the dull restrained monotony of his barrack-room life, and the weary routine of mounted and dismounted drill. “Boots and saddles” sounds early on the line of march. The troopers from their scattered billets concentrate in front of the principal hotel of the town where the detachment quarters for the night, and form up in the street or the market-place, while as yet the shutters are fast on the front of the earliest-opening shop. The officers emerge from the hotel, mount, and inspect the parade; the order “Threes right!” is given, and the day’s march has begun. The morning sun flashes on the sword-scabbards and accoutrements, as the quiet street echoes to the clink of the horse-hoofs on the cobblestones.

Presently the town is left behind, and the detachment is out into the country. There had been a shower as the sun rose – the “pride of the morning” the soldiers call the sprinkle – just sufficient to lay the dust, and evoke from every growing thing its sweetest scent. The fresh crisp morning air is laden with perfume; the wild rose, the jessamine, the eglantine, and the “morning glory” entwine themselves about the gnarled thorn of the hedgerows, and send their tangled feelers straggling up the ivy-clad trunks of the great elms and oaks, through whose foliage the sunbeams are shooting. From the valley rises a feathery haze broken into gossamer-like patches of diverse hues; and here and there the blue smoke of some early-lit cottage fire ascends in a languid straightness through the still atmosphere. The hind yoking his plough in the adjacent field chants a rude ditty, while his driver is blowing his first cloud, the scent of which comes sluggishly drifting across the road with that peculiarly fresh odour only belonging to tobacco-smoke in the early morning. As the rise is crowned, a fair and fertile expanse of country lies stretched out below – shaggy woods and cornfields, and red-roofed homesteads, and long reaches of still water, and the square tower of the venerable church showing over the foliage that overhangs the hamlet and the graveyard. Then the command “Trot!” is passed along from the front, and away go the troopers bumping merrily, their accoutrements jingling and clanking, their horses feeling the bit lightly, tossing their heads, arching their necks, and stepping out gallantly, in token that they too take

delight in being on the road. Three miles of a steady trot; then a five minutes' halt to tighten girths and "look round" equipments; then up into the saddle again. The word comes back along the files, "Singers to the front!" whereupon every fellow who has, or thinks he has, a voice, presses forward till the two front ranks are some six abreast across the road. Now the premier vocalist – self-constituted or acclaimed – strikes up a solo whose principal attribute is unlimited chorus; and so to the lusty strain the detachment marches through the next village, bringing all the natives to their doors, and attracting much attention and commendation, especially from the fair sex. The day's march half over, there is a longer halt; and the kindly officers send on a corporal to the little wayside beerhouse just ahead, whence he speedily returns, accompanied by the landlord, stepping carefully between a couple of pailsful of foaming beer. Each man receives his pint, the officers' "treat"; and then, all hands in the highest spirits, the journey is resumed; trot and walk alternate, the men riding "at ease," until the verge is reached of the town in which the detachment is to be billeted for the night. Then "Attention!" is called, swords are drawn, the files close up, and the little array marches right gallantly through the streets to the principal hotel. Here the "billeting sergeant," who is always a day's march ahead, distributes the billets, each for a couple of troopers, and chums are allowed to share the same billet. A willing urchin shows the way to the Wheatsheaf, whose hearty landlord forthwith comes out with a frank welcome, and a brown jug in hand. Horses

cleaned and bedded down, accoutrements freed from the soil of the road, dinner – and a right good dinner – is served, the troopers sitting down to table with their host and hostess. The worthy Boniface and his genial spouse have none of your cockney contempt for the soldier, but consider him not only their equal, but a welcome guest; and the soldier, if he is worth his salt, does his best to conduct himself so as not to tarnish the credit of his cloth.

Than Mick Sullivan no soldier of the gay 30th Light Dragoons was wont to enjoy himself more on the line of march. But now the honest Irishman was silent and depressed. He was a married man. That of itself did not sadden him; he did not repent his act, rash as it had been. But he had married without leave, and his little wife was entitled to no privileges – she was not “on the strength.” Mick had prayed her to remain at home with her father, for he could not afford her travelling expenses, and even if he could, he knew, and he had to tell her, that they must part at the port of embarkation. But “the Crayture,” as Mick called her, was resolute to go thus far. Poll Tudor and Bess Bowles, accredited spouses, “married women on the strength,” took train at Government expense, and knew their berths on the troopship were assured. But for “the Crayture” there was no railway warrant, far less any berth aboard. March for march, with weary feet and swelling heart, the poor little woman made with the detachment, tramping the long miles between York and Southampton. Mostly the kind souls where Mick was billeted gave her bite and sup and her bed; now and

then the hayloft was her portion. Ah me! in the old days such woful journeys were often made; I believe that nowadays the canteen fund helps on their way soldiers' wives married without leave.

The troopship, with her steam up, was lying alongside the jetty in Southampton Dock, and troop by troop as they quitted the train, the men of the 30th Light were being marched aboard. Mick had bidden "the Crayture" farewell, and had drowned his grief in drink; as they marched toward the jetty, his chum reproached him on account of his unsoldierly condition.

"Arrah now," wailed Mick piteously, "sure, an' if it wor yersilf lavin' the darlint av a young wife behind ye, glad an' fain ye would be to take a dhrap to deaden yer sorrow. Whin I sed good-bye to the Crayture this mornin' I thought she'd have died outright wid the sobs from the heart av her. Och, chum, the purty, beautiful crayture that I love so, an' that loves me, an' me lavin' her to the hard wurld! Be gorra, an' there she stands!"

Sure enough, standing there in the crowd, weeping as if she would break her heart, was Mick's poor little wife.

"Hould me carabine, chum, just for a moment, till I be givin' her just wan last kiss!" pleaded the poor fellow, and with a sudden spring he was out of the ranks unobserved, and hidden in the crowd that opened to receive him. His chum tramped on, but he reached the main-deck of the troopship still carrying two carbines, for as yet Mick had not re-appeared.

The comrade's anxious eyes searched the crowded jetty in

vain. But they scanned a scene of singular pathos. The grizzled old quarter-master was wiping his shaggy eyelashes furtively as he turned away from the children he was leaving behind. There were poor wretches of wives who had been married without leave, as "the Crayture" had been – some with babes in their arms, weeping hopelessly as they thought of the thousands of miles that were to part them from the men of their hearts. And there were weeping women there also who had not even the sorrowful consolation of being entitled to call themselves wives; and boys were cheering, and the band was playing "The Girl I left behind me," and non-commissioned officers were swearing, and some half-drunk recruit-soldiers were singing a dirty ditty, and heart-strings were being torn, and the work of embarkation was steadily and relentlessly progressing.

The embarkation completed, the shore-goers having been cleared out of the ship and the gangway drawn, there was a muster on deck, and the roll of each troop was called. In G troop one man was missing, and that man was Mick Sullivan. The muster had barely broken off, when a wild shout from the jetty was heard. There stood Mick very limp and staggy, "the Crayture" clinging convulsively round his neck, and he hailing the ship over her shoulder. Behind the forlorn couple was a sympathising crowd of females sobbing in unmelodious concert, with here and there a wilder screech of woe from the throat of some tender-hearted country-woman of Mr. Sullivan. After some delay, Mick was brought on to the upper deck of the

trooper, where he stood before the lieutenant of his troop in an attitude meant to represent the rigidity of military attention, contrasting vividly with his tear-stained face, his inability to refrain from a frequent hiccough, and an obvious difficulty in overcoming the propensity of his knee-joints to serve their owner treacherously.

“Well, Sullivan,” said the young officer, with an affectation of sternness which under the circumstances was most praiseworthy, “what do you mean by this conduct?”

“Plase, sor, an’ beg yer parrdon, sor, but I didn’t mane only to fall out just for wan last worrd. It wasn’t the dhrink at all, at all, sor; it’s the grief that kilt me intirely. Ah, sure, sor,” added Mick insinuatingly, “it’s yersilf, yer honour, that is lavin’, maybe, a purty crayture wapin’ for yer handsome face!”

The touch of nature made the officer kind. “Get out of sight at once, you rascal,” said he, turning away to hide rather a sad smile, “and take care the colonel don’t set eyes on you, else you’ll find yourself in irons in double-quick time.”

“Thank ye, sor; it’s a good heart ye have,” said Mick over his shoulder, as his chum hustled him toward the hatchway. “The Crayture” was on the pier-head waving her poor little dud of a white handkerchief, as the troopship, gathering way, steamed down Southampton Water, and the strains of “The Girl I left behind me” came back fainter and more faint on the light wind.

Bangalore, up country in the Madras Presidency, was the allotted station of the 30th Light. The regiment had barely settled

down in the upland cantonment, when tidings came south of the mutiny of Bengal native troops on the parade-ground of Berhampore. Every mail brought news from the north more and more disquieting, and in the third week of May the devilry of Meerut was recounted in the gasping terseness of a telegram. The regiment hoped in vain for a summons to Bengal, but there was no other cavalry corps in all the Madras Presidency, and the authorities could not know but that the Madras native army might at any moment flame out into mutiny. In the early days of June a sergeant's party of the 30th Light was sent down from Bangalore to Madras to perform some exceptional orderly duty, and to this party belonged Mick Sullivan and his chum. A week later Sir Patrick Grant, the Madras Commander-in-Chief, was summoned by telegraph to Calcutta, to assume the direction of military operations in Bengal, consequent on poor General Anson's sudden death. The *Fire Queen* anchored in the roads with Havelock aboard, fresh from his successes in Persia, and it was arranged that the two old soldiers should hurry up to Calcutta without an hour's delay. Grant wanted a soldier-clerk to write for him on the voyage, and a soldier-servant warranted proof against sea-sickness to look after his chargers aboard ship. There was no time for ceremony, and Mick's chum, who was a well-educated man, was laid hold of as the amanuensis, while Mick himself was shipped as the general's temporary groom. The services of the pair ceased when Calcutta was reached, and they were attached to the Fort William garrison, pending the opportunity

to ship them back to Madras. But the two men, burning for active service, determined to make a bold effort to escape relegation to the dull inactivity of Bangalore. Watching their chance, they addressed their petition to Sir Patrick, as he sat in the verandah of his quarters in the fort "Quite irregular," exclaimed the veteran Highlander, "but I like your spirit, men! Let me see; I'll arrange matters with your regiment. You want to be in the thick of it at once, eh? Well, you must turn infantrymen; the Ross-shire Buffs are out at Chinsurah, and will have the route to-morrow. You can reach them in a few hours, and I'll give you a *chit* to Colonel Hamilton which will make it all right for you. One of you is a Highlander born, and as for you, Sullivan, if you talk Erse to the fellows of the 78th, they won't know it from Argyllshire Gaelic."

Three hours later the comrades had ceased for the time to be Light Dragoons, and were acting members of the Grenadier Company of the Ross-shire Buffs. Hart, the regimental sergeant-major, had presented them to Colonel Hamilton, who duly honoured Sir Patrick's *chit*, and had sent them over to the orderly-room tent, where they found the adjutant, that gallant soldier now alas! dead, whom later his country knew as Sir Herbert Macpherson, V.C.

"What is your name, my man?" asked Macpherson of Sullivan.

"Michael Donald Mactavish Sullivan, sor," responded Mick, with a face as solemn as a mute's at a funeral.

"What countryman are you?"

“An Argyllshire Tipperary man, sor,” replied Mick, without the twinkle of an eyelash.

“How came you by your two middle names? They are surely not common in Tipperary?”

“Och, yer honour, I was christened by thim two afther me grandmother, an’ she was, I belave, a pure-bred Scotchman. It is in dutiful mimory of her, rest her sowl, that I want for to jine the Ross-shire Buffs.”

“Well,” replied Mr. Macpherson imperturbably, “your dutiful aspiration shall be gratified.”

The chum answered the formal questions regarding himself, and then the regimental sergeant-major was directed to take the pair to the quarter-master sergeant, to receive the clothing and accoutrements of infantrymen.

Quarter-master Sergeant Tulloch, “Muckle Tulloch,” as he was called in the regiment because of his abnormal bulk, was, although a Scot, a man of humour; and it occurred to him that the new Irish Ross-shire Buff might furnish some amusement. Highland regiments do not wear the kilt on Indian service; indeed the tartans are not brought out from home. But there happened by some odd chance to be a Highland uniform among the quarter-master’s stores; and this Tulloch solemnly made over to Mick Sullivan, instructing him to attire himself in it at once, that its fit might be ascertained. The store had been temporarily established in the unoccupied house of a wealthy native, and Sullivan went into one of the empty rooms to don the unaccustomed garments.

Tulloch and the sergeant-major, as well as Mick's chum, stood listening to Mick fervently dealing the "quare blankets," as he struggled with the difficulties presented by kilt and plaid. At length it seemed as if he had accomplished the task somehow, and he was heard to stride to the farther end of the long bare apartment. The partly-open door revealed Mr. Sullivan, drawn up to his full height in front of a large panel-mirror. He certainly presented an extraordinary aspect. For one thing, the kilt, which had been made for a short man, was very much too short for Mick, and a yard or two of naked leg protruded from below it. Then he had fastened on the sporran behind instead of in front, and it hung down in the former region like a horse's tail. The plaid was put on something in the fashion of a comforter, and his lower extremities were encased in his long cavalry Wellington boots, from the heels of which the spurs stuck out fiercely. He had struck an attitude, and was soliloquising —

"Be the holy, Michael Donald Mactavish Sullivan, an' it's yersilf is the purty spicktacle intirely! Troth, an' it would puzzle that dacent woman your mother to idintify the fruit of her womb in this disguise. Sure an' it's a beautiful dress, an' the hoighth av free vintilation! Supposin' I was sittin' down on an ant-hill? Och, musha, an' pwhat would Tipperary think if she wor to see me this day? Faix," he went on, after a long scrutinising gaze, "it's mesilf is doubtful whether I'm pwhat ye would call dacent; but the divil a ha'p'orth care I," with a sudden burst of reassurance, "sure, if I'm ondacent, that's the Quane's look-out, may the hivins be her

bed!”

At this the listeners could not refrain from a burst of laughter, which brought Mick’s soliloquy to an abrupt conclusion. He became a little angry when he found he had been sold, and was not to have the kilt after all his trouble; but presently found consolation in the ant-hill view of the subject, and accepted his woollen doublet and dungaree trousers with a bland condescension. Next day the 78th began to move up country to the Allahabad concentration, and a few weeks later Havelock led out into the country of bloodthirsty mutiny that scant devoted vanguard of the British force which was to reconquer India.

Spite of cruel heat, sunstrokes, cholera, and the exhaustion of long marches, the little column pressed on blithely, for the stimulus of hope was in the hearts of the men. But that hope was killed just when its fulfilment was all but accomplished. To the soldiers, spent with the fighting of the day, as they lay within but one short march of Cawnpore, came in the dead of night the woful tidings of the massacre of the company of women and children, the forlorn remnant of the Cawnpore garrison whom the Nana Sahib had spared from the butchery of the Slaughter Ghaut. Next morning Havelock’s little army camped on the Cawnpore *maidan*, and Mick and his chum, accompanied by big Jock Gibson, one of the 78th pipers, with his pipes under his arm, set out in a search for the scene of the tragedy. Directed by whispering and terrified natives, they reached the Bibi Ghur, the bungalow in which the women and children had been confined,

and in which they had been slain. With burning eyes and set faces, the men looked in on the ghastly and the woful tokens of the devilry that had been enacted inside those four low walls – the puddles of blood, the scraps of clothing, the broken ornaments, the leaves of bibles, the children's shoes – ah, what need to catalogue the pitiful relics! Then they followed the blood-trail to the brink of the awful well, filled and heaped with the hacked and battered dead. Sullivan lifted up his voice and wept aloud. His comrade, of dourer nature, gazed on the spectacle with swelling throat. Big Jock Gibson sank down on the ground, sobbing as he had never done since the day his mother said him farewell, and gave him her Gaelic blessing in the market-place of Tain. As he sobbed, his fingers were fumbling mechanically for the mouthpiece of his pipes. Presently he slipped it absently into his mouth. As the wind whistles through the bare boughs of the trees in winter, so came, in fitful soughs, the first wayward notes from out weeping Jock's drone and chanter. At length he mastered the physical signs of his woe, or rather, it might have been, he transferred his emotion from his heart into his pipes; and as the other two left him, he was sitting there, over the great grave, pouring forth a wild shrill dirge – a pibroch and a coronach in one.

An hour later, to a group of comrades gathered in a little tope in front of the tents, Mick Sullivan was trying, in broken words, to tell of what he had seen. He was abruptly interrupted by Jock Gibson, who strode into the midst of the circle, his face white

and drawn, his pipes silent now, carried under his arm.

“Comrades,” began Jock, in a strange far-away voice, “I hae seen a sicht that has curdlet my bluid. The soles o’ my brogues are wat wi’ the gore o’ women an’ bairns; I saw whaur their corpses lay whummled ane abune anither, strippit and gashed, till the well was fu’ ow’r its lip. Men, I can speak nae mair o’ that awesome sicht; but I hae brought awa’ a token that I fand – see!”

And Jock pulled from out his breast a long heavy tress of golden hair cut clean through, as if with a slash of a sharp sword that had missed the head. As he held it out, it hung limp and straight in a sunbeam that fell upon it through the leaves of the mango-trees. The rough soldiers bared their heads in the presence of it.

Old Hamish Macnab, the Kintail man, the patriarch of the regiment, stepped forward —

“Gie me that, Jock Gibson!”

Jock handed Macnab the token from the place of the slaughter.

“Stan’ roun’ me, men!” commanded Macnab.

The Highlanders closed about him silently, impressed by the solemnity of his tone.

Then Macnab bade them to join hands round him. When they had done so, he lifted up his voice, and spoke with measured solemnity, his eyes blazing and the blood all in his old worn face

“By the mithers that bore ye, by yer young sisters and brithers

at hame in the clachan an' the glen, by yer ain wives an' weans some o' ye, swear by this token that henceforth ye show nae ruth to the race that has done this accursed deed of bluid!"

Sternly, from deep down in every throat, came the hoarse answer, "We swear!" Then Macnab parted out the tress into as many locks as there were men in the circle, distributing to each a lock. He coiled up the lock he had kept for himself, and opening his doublet, placed it on his heart. His comrades silently imitated him.

All the world knows the marvellous story of Havelock's relief of Lucknow; against what odds the little column he commanded so gallantly fought its way from Cawnpore over the intervening forty miles; with what heroism and what losses it battled its way through the intricacies and obstacles of the native city; till at length, Havelock and Outram riding at its head, it marched along the street of death till the Bailey-guard gate of the Residency was reached, and greetings and cheers reached the war-worn relievers from the far-spent garrison which had all but abandoned hope of relief. Before the advance from Cawnpore began, Mick Sullivan and his chum, remaining still nominally attached to the Highland regiment, had joined the little force of irregular cavalry which Havelock had gathered from the infantrymen who could ride, while he waited at Cawnpore for reinforcements. As scouts, on reconnaissance duty, in pursuits and in sheer hard fighting, this little cohort of mounted men had its full share of adventure and danger, and the Light Dragoon comrades had great delight in

being once again back in the saddle.

When the main column had pressed on into the Residency, the wounded of the fighting in the suburbs and native town had been left behind in the Motee Mahal along with the rearguard. On the morning after the entrance, a detachment of volunteers sallied out to escort into the Residency the doolies in which the wounded still lay inadequately cared for. The return journey from the first was much molested by hostile fire, many of the native bearers bolting, and leaving the doolies to be carried by the escorting Europeans. The guide became bewildered, and the head of the procession of doolies deviated from the proper route into a square which proved a perfect death-trap, and has passed into history as "Doolie Square." The handful of escorting soldiers, of whom Mick's comrade was one, fought desperately to protect the poor wounded lying helpless in the doolies; but the rebels drove them back by sheer weight, and massacred a large proportion of the hapless inmates. Too late to save these, the fire of the escort cleared the square, and fortunately no more doolies entered the fatal *cul-de-sac*. Suddenly the little party holding their ground there became aware of a great commotion in the street, just outside the archway which formed the entrance to the square. Pistol-shots were heard, and loud shouts in Hindustanee mingled with something that sounded like a British oath. A sally was at once made. Darting out of the square through the archway, the sallying party fought their way through the swarm of Sepoys outside to where a single European swaying a cavalry sabre, his

back against the wall, and covering a wounded boy-officer who lay at his feet, was keeping at bay, now with a dexterous parry, anon with a swift sweeping cut, and again with a lightning thrust, the throng of howling miscreants who pressed around him. The foremost man of the sallying party, cutting down a Pandy who turned on him, sprang to the side of the man with the dripping sabre in his hand.

“Look if the lad’s alive,” were the first words of Mick Sullivan, for he was the man with the sabre.

Mick’s chum, for he it was who had headed the rescuers, stooped down, and found the young officer alive and conscious. He told Mick so.

“Thin hould me up, acushla, for it’s kilt intirely I am,” and poor Mick threw his arm over his chum’s shoulder, and the gallant fellow’s head fell on his breast.

The Pandies were massing again, so the little party, carrying Mick and the officer, struggled back again into their feeble refuge inside the square. The youngster was seen to first, and then Dr. Home proceeded to investigate Mick’s condition.

“Och an’ sure, docthor jewel, ye may save yersilf the trouble. I’m kilt all over – as full of wownds as Donnybrook is of drunk men at noightfall. I’ve got me discharge from the sarvice, an’ that widout a pinsion. There’s niver a praiste in an odd corner av the mansion, is there, chum?”

The chum told him the place was not a likely one for priests.

“I’d fain have confissed before I die, an’ had a word wid a

praiste, but sure they can't expect a man on active service to go out av the wurld as reg'lar as if he were turnin' his toes up in his bed. Chum," continued the poor fellow, his voice becoming weaker as the blood trickled from him into a hollow of the earthen floor, "chum, dear, give us a hould av yer hand. Ye mind that poor young crayture av a wife of mine I left wapin' fur me on the quay av Southampton. There's some goold and jools in the dimmickin' bag in me belt, an' if ye could send them to her, ye would be doin' yer old chum a kindness."

The chum promised in a word – his heart was too full for more. Mick lay back silent for a little, gasping in his growing exhaustion. But suddenly he raised himself again on his elbow, and in a heightened voice continued —

"An', chum, if ever ye see the 30th Light again, tell them, will ye, that Mick Sullivan died wid a sword in his hand" – he had never quitted the grip of the bloody sabre – "an' wid spurs on his heels. I take ye all to witness, men, that I die a dhragoon, an' not a swaddy! Divil a word have I to say against the Ross-shire Buffs, chaps – divil a word; but I'm a dhragoon to the last dhrap av me blood! Ah me!" – here honest Mick's voice broke for the first time – "ah me! niver more will I back horse or wield sword!"

And then he fell back, panting for breath, and it seemed as if he had spoken his last words. But the mind of the dying man was on a train of thought that would still have expression. Again he raised himself into a sitting posture, and loud and clear, as if on the parade-ground, there rang out from his lips the consecutive

words of command —

“Carry swords!”

“Return swords!”

“Prepare to dismount!”

“Dismount!”

A torrent of blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell forward dead. Mick Sullivan had dismounted for ever.

* * * * *

When the great mutiny was finally stamped out, Mick Sullivan's chum got himself sent back to the 30th Light, down in the Madras Presidency. He delivered his poor comrade's dying message to the regiment, and told the tale of his heroic death; and how Outram had publicly announced that, had he survived, he would have recommended Mick for the Victoria Cross. From colonel to band-boy, the 30th Light was deeply moved by the recital. The regiment subscribed to a man to place a memorial-stone over Mick's grave in the cemetery inside the Lucknow Residency, where he had been laid among the heroes of the siege. The quarter-master took temporary charge of the “goold and jools” which were Mick's legacy to “the Crayture,” and the colonel himself wrote home instructions that every effort should be made to find the little woman and have her cared for.

One morning, about a month later, the colonel and his wife were taking their early canter on the Bangalore *maidan*. As they crossed the high road from down country, they noticed, tramping through the deep dust, a white woman with a child in her arms. She dragged herself wearily; the pale fagged face, and the wistful upward look at them as she trudged by, moved the good heart of the colonel's wife.

"Speak to her," she said to her husband; "she is a stranger, and forlorn."

"Where are you bound for, my good woman?" asked the colonel; "have you come far?"

The woman set down the child, a well-grown boy, who looked about two years old, and with a long sigh of weariness replied —
"I've come from England, sir, and I am on my way to the 30th Light Dragoons to find my husband."

"That little chap is quite too heavy for you to carry. What is your name, young one?"

The urchin sprang to "attention," saluted with rigid accuracy, and gravely replied —

"Mick Sullivan, Tir!"

"Good God!" whispered the colonel's wife; "it's Sullivan's widow — it's 'the Crayture' herself. Gallop to barracks for a gharry, and while you are gone, I will tell her. God pity her!"

And the kind lady was out of the saddle, and had the boy in her arms, and her tears were raining on his face, as the colonel rode away on his errand.

When the gharry arrived "the Crayture" was sitting by the wayside, the skirt of her dress drawn over her face, her head on the shoulder of the colonel's wife, her boy gripped tight in her arms.

The Mem Sahib carried the poor thing to her own bungalow for a day or two; and then good-hearted old Bess Bowles, the trumpeter's wife of G troop, came and took her and her boy away to the room that had been prepared for her in the married quarters. Perhaps it was not exactly in accordance with strict regulations, but the colonel had put the widow woman "on the strength" – she was no longer an unrecognised waif, but had her regimental position. Her ration of bread and meat her husband's comrades of G troop contributed; the officers made a little fund that sufficed to give her soldier's pay. She earned it, for a week after she "joined," the surgeon found her in the hospital, in quiet informal possession of the ward in which lay the most serious cases; and when next year the cholera smote the regiment, the rugged old Scot pronounced her "worth her weight in gold." She has long ago been a member of the sisterhood of army nurses. I remember her out in Africa during the Zulu war, and since then she has smoothed soldiers' pillows in the Egyptian campaigns; but she is still, and will be till the day she dies, a supernumerary "on the strength" of the 30th Light. She never married again;

she is an elderly woman now, and the winsomeness of the days when we knew her as “the Crayture” has gone; but the quiet faithful courage that sustained her on the weary line of march and the forlorn-hope expedition to the East, is staunch still in her honest heart. The sergeant-major of to-day of G troop in the 30th Light – I call the corps by its old familiar name still, but they are Hussars now – is a straight, clean-built young fellow, with a light heart, a bright eye, and a quaint humour. His name is Mick Sullivan, and he is the son of “the Crayture,” and of the man who died in the porch of “Doolie Square.”

THE FATE OF “NANA SAHIB’S ENGLISHMAN”

One fine evening in September 1856, young Mr. Kidson entered Escobel Castle by the great front door, and was hurrying across the hall on his way to the passage leading to his own apartments, when his worthy old mother, who had seen from her parlour window her son approach the house, ran out into the hall to meet him in a state of great agitation. It was little wonder that the aspect the young man presented excited the good creature’s maternal emotion. The region around his right optic was so puffed and inflamed as to give the surest promise of a black eye of the first magnitude in the course of a few hours; to say that his nose was simply “bashed” is very inadequately to describe the condition of that feature; his lower lip was split and streaming with blood; and he carried in his left hand a couple of front teeth which had been forcibly dislodged from their normal position in his upper jaw. He was bareheaded, and he carried on his clothes enough red clay to constitute him an eligible investment on the part of an enterprising brickmaker. “Guid be here, my ain laddie!” wailed the poor mother in her unmitigated Glasgow Doric, “what’s come tae you? Wha has massacred my son this fearsome bloodthirsty gait?” “Oh, hang it!” was the genial youth’s sole acknowledgment of the maternal

grief and sympathy, as, dodging her outstretched arms, he slunk to his rooms and rang vehemently for hot water and a raw beef-steak.

Young Mr. Kidson's parents were brand-new rich Glasgow folks, who in their old age of vast wealth had recently bought the Highland estate of Escobel, in the hope to gratify Mr. Kidson senior's ambition to gain social recognition as a country gentleman and to become the founder of a family, an aspiration in which he received but feeble assistance from his simple old wife, who had a tender corner in her memory for the Guse-Dubs in which she was born. Their only son, the hero of the puffed eye and the "bashed" nose, had been ignominiously sent down from Oxford while yet a freshman. At present he was supposed to be doing a little desultory reading in view of entering the army; in reality he was spending most of his time in boozing with grooms and gamekeepers in a low shebeen. A downright bad lot, this young Mr. Kidson, of whom, in the nature of things, nothing but evil could come.

While he was skulking into the privacy of his "den," an extremely pretty girl was sobbing convulsively on the breast of a stalwart fair-haired young fellow, whose eyes were flashing wrath, whose face still had an angry flush, and the knuckles of whose right hand were cut open, the blood trickling unheeded down the weeping girl's white dress. She, Mary Fraser, was the daughter of the clergyman of the parish; the young man, by name Sholto Mackenzie, was the orphan nephew of the old

laird of Kinspiel, a small hill-property on the mountain slope. The two were sweethearts, and small chance was there of their ever being anything more. For Kinspiel was strictly entailed, and the old laird, who was so ill that he might die any day, had a son who had sons of his own, and was in no position, if he had the will, to help on his dead sister's manchild. Mary Fraser and Sholto Mackenzie had trysted to meet this evening in the accustomed pine glade on the edge of the heather. The girl was there before the time. Young Mr. Kidson, listlessly smoking as he lounged on a turf bank, caught a glimpse of her dress through the trees, and promptly bore down on her. There was a slight acquaintance, and she returned his greeting, supposing that he would pass on. But he did not – on the contrary, he waxed fluent in coarse flatteries, and suddenly grasping the girl in his arms was making strenuous efforts to snatch kisses from her, undeterred by her struggles and shrieks. At this crisis Sholto Mackenzie, hearing the cries, came running up at the top of his speed. Young Mr. Kidson, fancying himself a bit as a man who could use his fists, had not the poor grace to run away. While the girl leant half fainting against a tree there was a brief pugilistic encounter between the young men, as the issue of which Mr. Kidson was disabused of a misconception, and presented the aspect which a few minutes later brought tribulation to his mother. As he carried himself and his damages off, he muttered through his pulped lips with a fierce oath that the day would come when his antagonist should rue the evening's work. Whereat the antagonist laughed

contemptuously, and addressed himself to the pleasant task of calming and consoling his agitated sweetheart.

Before the grouse season closed the old laird of Kinspiel was a dead man, and there was no longer a home for Sholto Mackenzie in the quaint old crow-stepped house in the upland glen among the bracken. What career was open to the penniless young fellow? He had no interest for a cadetship, and that Indian service in which so many men of his race have earned name and fame was not for him. In those days there was no Manitoba, no ranching in Texas or Wyoming; the Cape gave no opportunities, the Argentine was not yet a resort for English youth of enterprise, and he had not money enough to take him to the Australian gold-diggings or to the sheep-runs of New Zealand. He saw no resource but to offer himself to the Queen's service in the capacity of a private soldier, in the hope that education, good conduct, and fervent zeal would bring him promotion and perhaps distinction. By the advice of a local pensioner he journeyed to London and betook himself to the metropolitan recruiting centre in Charles Street, Westminster. No Sergeants Kite now patrol that thoroughfare in quest of lawful prey; nay, the little street with its twin public-house headquarters is itself a thing of the past. About the centre of the long wooden shanty recently built for the purposes of the census, stood the old "Hampshire Hog," with its villainous *rendezvous* in the rear; nearer the Park on the opposite side, just where is now the door of the India Office, the "Cheshire Cheese" reared its frowsy

front. In the days I am writing of, recruits accepted or had foisted on them the "Queen's Shilling," received a bounty, gave themselves for twenty-four years' service, and were escorted by a staff-sergeant to their respective regiments. Now there is neither Queen's shilling nor bounty, and the recruit, furnished with a travelling warrant, is his own escort to Ballincollig or Fort George. What scenes had dingy Charles Street witnessed in its day! How much sin and sorrow; too late remorse, too late forgiveness! In many a British household has Charles Street been cursed with bitter curses; yet has it not been, in a sense, the cradle of heroes? It sent to battle the men whose blood dyed the sward of the Balaclava valley; it fed the trenches of Sebastopol; it was the sieve through whose meshes passed the staunch warriors who stormed Delhi and who defended Lucknow, who bled and conquered at Sobraon and Goojerat.

Sholto Mackenzie had eaten Queen Victoria's rations for some six months, had been dismissed recruits' drill, and become a duty soldier, when the order was issued that the "30th Light," the regiment into which he had enlisted, was to go out for its turn of service in India, and of course the young soldier went with his regiment. Those were the days before big Indian troopships and the Suez Canal; reinforcements for India went out round the Cape. Sholto's troop was accompanied by two married women who were on the strength of the regiment. Nowadays the soldier's wife adorns her room in the married quarters with cheap Liberty hangings, and walks out in French boots and kid gloves. Mrs.

Macgregor and Mrs. Malony lived each her married life and reared her family in a bunk in the corner of the troop-room of which she had the “looking after.” Such a life seems one of sheer abomination and barbarism, does it not? Yet the arrangement had the surprising effect, in most instances, of bringing about a certain decency, self-restraint, and genuinely human feeling alike in the men and the married woman of the room. Neither Mrs. Macgregor nor Mrs. Malony had ever been abroad before; and both evinced a strong propensity to take with them copious mementoes of their native land. Mrs. Macgregor, honest woman, had manifested that concentrativeness which is a feature in the character of the nation to which, as her name indicated, she belonged. She had packed into a great piece of canvas sheeting a certain feather-bed, which, as an heirloom from her remote ancestors, she was fond of boasting of when the other matrons were fain to sew together a couple of regimental palliasses covers, and stuff the same with straw. In the capacious bosom of this family relic she had stowed a variety of minor articles, among which were a wash-hand jug of some primeval earthenware, a hoary whisky decanter – which, trust Mrs. Macgregor, was quite empty – a cradle, sundry volumes of Gaelic literature, and a small assortment of cooking utensils. Over those collected properties stood grimly watchful the tall, gaunt woman with the gray eye, the Roman nose, and the cautious taciturnity. Of another stamp was Mrs. Malony, a little, slatternly, pock-marked Irishwoman. Her normal condition was that of a nursing-mother – nobody

could remember the time when Biddy Malony had not a brat hanging at that bosom of hers which she was wont partially to conceal by an old red woollen kerchief. Biddy was a merry soul, spite of many a trial and many a cross – always ready with a flash of Irish humour, just as ready as she always was for a glass of gin. She had not attempted the methodical packing of her goods and chattels, but had bundled them together anyhow in a chaotic state. Her great difficulty was her inability to perform the difficult operation of carrying her belongings “in her head,” and after she had pitchforked into the baggage-van a quantity of incongruous *débris*, she was still in a bewildered way questing after a wicker bird-cage and “a few other little throifles.”

Embarking along with his comrades and reaching the main deck of the troopship, Sholto found the two ladies already there – Mrs. Macgregor grimly defiant, not to say fierce, in consequence of a request just made to her by a sailor for a glass of grog; Mrs. Malony in a semi-hysterical state, having lost a shoe, a wash-tub, and, she much feared, one of the young Malonys. Matters were improved, however, when Sholto found the young bog-trotter snugly squatted in the cows’ manger. The shoe was gone hopelessly, having fallen into the water when its wearer was mounting the gangway; and Mrs. Malony happily remembered that she had made a present of the missing wash-tub to a “green-grosher’s lady” in the town of embarkation.

Sholto had been made lance-corporal soon after the troopship sailed, and served in that rank during the long voyage with

so much credit that when the regiment reached Bangalore the colonel of the 30th Light gave him the second stripe, so that he was full corporal in less than a year after he had enlisted. During a turn of guard duty about three months after he joined at Bangalore, he happened to hear it mentioned in the guard-room that a new officer – a cornet – had arrived that day, and had been posted to the vacancy in the troop to which Sholto belonged. The new-comer's name was not stated, and beyond a cursory hope that he would turn out a good and smart officer, Corporal Mackenzie gave no further heed to the matter. Late the same night, he was relieving the sentry on the mess-house post when the merry party of officers broke up. Laughing and chatting they came out under the verandah, a little more noisy than usual, no doubt because of the customary "footing" in champagne paid by the new arrival. As they passed Sholto, a voice caught his ear – an unfamiliar voice, yet that stirred in him an angry memory; and as the officers lounged past him in the moonlight, he gazed into the group with earnest inquisitiveness. Arm and arm between two subalterns, his face inflamed with drink, his mouth full of slang, rolled the man he had thrashed among the Scottish pines. As he grinned his horse-laugh Sholto discerned the vacuum in his upper teeth which his fist had made that evening; and now this man was his officer. The eyes of the two met, and Kidson gave a sudden start and seemed about to speak, but controlling the impulse, he smiled a silent smile, the triumphant insolence of which stung Sholto bitterly. Verily his enemy was his master;

and Sholto read the man's nature too truly not to be sure that he would forgo no jot of the sweet revenge of humiliation.

Very soon the orderly sergeant of the troop fell unwell, and Sholto had to take up his duty, one detail of which was to carry the order-book round to the bungalows of the troop-officers for their information. This duty entailed on Sholto the disagreeable necessity of a daily interview with Mr. Kidson. That officer took the opportunity of throwing every imaginable slight on the corporal, but was careful not to give warrant for any specific complaint. But it was very bitter to be kept standing at attention for some ten minutes at a time, orderlybook in hand, until Mr. Kidson thought fit to lay aside his book, or to desist from pulling his terrier's ears. Often the cornet was in his bedroom; and while waiting for his appearance Sholto noticed how ostentatiously careless his officer was as to his valuables – a handful of money or a gold watch and chain left lying on the table amid spurs and gloves and soda-water bottles.

The morning after an exceptionally long wait for Mr. Kidson's emergence from his bedroom, Sholto was returning from the horse lines when the regimental sergeant-major met him and ordered him to his room under arrest. In utter bewilderment he begged for some explanation, but without success. When he reached his cot, he casually noticed that his box was open and the lock damaged, but he was too disturbed to give heed to this circumstance. Presently a sergeant came and escorted him to the orderlyroom. Here he found the colonel sitting in the

windsor arm-chair with the discipline book open before him, the adjutant standing behind him, and on the flank Mr. Kidson and the sergeant-major of his own troop. The colonel, if a stern, was a just man; and in a grave tone he expressed his concern that so heinous a charge should come against a young soldier of character hitherto so creditable. Sholto replied that he had not the remotest idea what the nature of the charge was. The old chief shot a keen glance at him as he spoke —

“Corporal Mackenzie, you are accused of stealing a gold watch and chain, the property of Mr. Kidson. What have you to say to this charge?”

The lad’s head swam, and for a moment he thought he was going to faint. Then the blood came back to his heart and flushed up into his face as he looked the colonel straight between the eyes and answered —

“It is a wicked falsehood, sir!”

“Then of course you deny it?”

“I do, sir, if it were the last word I had to say on earth!”

“Mr. Kidson,” said the old soldier in a dry business tone, “will you state what you know about this matter?”

Thus enjoined, Kidson briefly and with a certain nervous glibness stated that after Corporal Mackenzie had left his quarters on the previous afternoon, he had missed his watch and chain. That morning he had renewed the search unsuccessfully. He had previous suspicions of Corporal Mackenzie having from time to time stolen money from off his table. He had reported

the matter to his troop sergeant-major, who had at once searched Corporal Mackenzie's kit, with what result the sergeant-major would himself state.

The sergeant-major for his part had only to testify that having been spoken to by Mr. Kidson on the subject of his loss, he had taken another sergeant-major with him, and searched Corporal Mackenzie's box, where he had found the missing watch and chain, which he had at once handed to the adjutant, who now held it.

The evidence was strong enough to hang a man.

"Corporal Mackenzie," said the colonel, with some concern, "the case seems very clear. What you have to say, if anything, you must say elsewhere. It is my duty to send you back for a district court-martial."

Sholto was confined in a room adjacent to the quarter-guard for a few days, when he was brought before the court-martial, which heard the evidence against the prisoner, to whom then was given the opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses. But the president would not allow interrogations tending to establish animus on Mr. Kidson's part against the prisoner, and finally poor Sholto lost his temper, and exclaimed with passion —

"Your permission to cross-examine is nothing better than a farce!"

"Perhaps," retorted the president, with a grim smile, — "perhaps you may not think the punishment which will probably befall you a farce!"

Sholto's defence was in a sentence – the assertion of his complete innocence. He had known Mr. Kidson in other days, he said, when as yet both were civilians, and they had parted in bad blood.

A member of the court demanded that Mr. Kidson should have the opportunity of contradicting this assertion, if in his power to do so; whereupon that officer emphatically swore that to his knowledge he had never seen Corporal Mackenzie in his life before he joined the 30th Light there in Bangalore. So Sholto was put back to wait for many days while the finding of the court-martial was being submitted to the Commander-in-Chief.

One evening Mick Sullivan his comrade brought him his tea as usual – the good fellow never would let the mat-boy carry his chum his meals. He stood looking at Sholto for a while with a strange concern in his honest face; and then he broke silence —

“Sholto, me lad, it's me heart is sore for you this day. Yer coort-martial will be read out to-morrow morning! Aye, and – and” – his voice sank into a whisper – “the farrier-major has got the ordhers for to rig the thriangles. It's to be flogged ye are, my poor fellow!”

Sholto sent his chum away abruptly; he could not talk, he could hardly think; all he could do was to wish himself dead and spared this unutterable shame. Death came not, but instead the morning; and with the morning came Mick with a copious dose of brandy, which he entreated his comrade to drink, for it would “stun the pain.” “Every fellow,” he argued, “primed himself so before a

flogging, and why shouldn't he?"

But Sholto refused to fortify himself with Dutch courage; and then poor Mick produced his last evidence of affection in the shape of a leaden bullet which he had beaten flat, and which held tight between the teeth, he knew from personal experience, was a great help in enabling a fellow to resist "hollerin' out."

Presently the escort fell in and marched the prisoner to the riding-school. Sholto found there two troops of the regiment drawn up, in front of them a knot of officers, among whom he noticed Mr. Kidson, and in front of them again the colonel, with the court-martial documents in his hand. The lad's eye took in the doctor, the farriers – each with his cat – and the triangle rigged against the wall under the gallery. The sergeant of the escort ordered him to take two paces to the front, remove his cap, and stand at attention. And so he stood, outwardly calm, waiting for his sentence.

"Proceedings of a district court-martial" – the colonel began, reading in a loud voice from the scroll in his hand. To Sholto the document seemed interminable. At last the end came. "The Court, having considered the evidence brought before it, finds the prisoner, No. 420, Corporal Sholto Mackenzie, G troop, Thirtieth Light Dragoons, guilty of the said charge of theft, and does hereby sentence the said prisoner to be reduced to the rank and pay of a private dragoon" – here the colonel paused for a moment and then added – "and further to undergo the punishment of fifty lashes."

The regimental sergeant-major strode up to Sholto, with a penknife ripped the gold lace corporal stripes from the arm of his jacket, and threw them down on the tan. Then the colonel's stern cold voice uttered the word "Strip." There was a little momentary bustle, and then Sholto was half hanging, half standing, lashed by the wrists and ankles to the triangles, while the farrier-major stood measuring his distance, fingering the whip-cords of his "cat," and waiting for the word "Begin"!

Suddenly a wild shriek pealed through the great building from the gallery above the head of the man fastened up there to be flogged.

"Arrah musha, colonel dear!" followed in shrill accents – "for the love of the Holy Jasus and the blissed Vargin, hould yer hand, and spare an innocent man! I tell ye he's as innocent as the babe unborn, and it's mesilf, Bridget Malony, an honest married woman on the strength, that can pruve that same! Ochone, colonel dear, listen to me, won't yez?"

All eyes were concentrated on the little gallery. It was a sort of gazebo, built out from the wall at the height of about ten feet, and the only access to it was from outside. Bending eagerly over the rail, attired in nothing but a petticoat and a chemise, her hair streaming wildly over her shoulders, and with a round bare place like a tonsure on the crown of her head, which gave her a most extraordinary appearance, was visible Mrs. Malony. She had been struck down by a sunstroke the day Sholto was put under arrest, and had been in hospital ever since.

The general opinion was that the good woman was crazy: but Mrs. Malony knew her own mind – she had something to say, and she was determined to say it. She had just finished her wild appeal to the colonel, when she cast a hurried glance over her shoulder, and then, indifferently clad as she was, nimbly climbed over the rail, and dropped upon the tan. At that moment a couple of nurses rushed into the balcony, but they were too late. Mrs. Malony had got the “flure”; straight up to the colonel she ran on her bare feet, and broke out again into vehement speech.

“I swear to yer honner the corporal is as innocent as my little Terence, what should be at his mother’s breasht this moment. He is, so help me God! There is the rapscallion uv a conspirator,” she yelled, pointing a long, bare, skinny arm at Mr. Kidson; “there is his white-livered tool!” – and up went the other arm like a danger-signal pointing to the sergeant-major. “Hear me shpake, sor,” cried the woman, “and sure am I ye’ll belave me!”

“Nonsense,” said the chief, “you are mad or drunk, woman! Here, take her away!” and he beckoned to the nurses.

But the major, a Scotsman, intervened.

“At least hear her story,” he argued; “there must be some reason in all this fervour of hers. I know the woman; she is no liar.”

“Well, what have you to say, Mrs. Malony?” said the colonel.

“One moment, sir!” interposed the major, and there passed a few words in an undertone between him and the colonel – then the latter spoke aloud.

“Mr. James,” said he, addressing the adjutant, “take Mr. Kidson outside and remain there with him, and you, Sergeant-Major Norris, take charge of Sergeant-Major Hope. Mr. James, you will see that the two are kept apart.”

And then Mrs. Malony gained her point and was allowed to tell her story. She had been “doing for” Mr. Kidson, she said, ever since he joined. The day before Sholto was put under arrest, when she was in the lumber-room of Mr. Kidson’s bungalow, she overheard the plot concocted between him and the sergeant-major. Early next morning, when the regiment was out at “watering order,” she had watched Sergeant-Major Hope go to Corporal Mackenzie’s cot, pick the lock of his trunk, take out his holdall, and therein place Mr. Kidson’s watch and chain. An hour later, when she was on her way to the bungalow of the “praste” to ask “his riverence’s” advice as to what she should do, she received a sunstroke, and was insensible for several days. When she recovered consciousness she had forgotten everything that happened for a day or more before her accident until that morning, when she happened to hear the attendants gossiping amongst themselves that Corporal Mackenzie was to be flogged that day for stealing Mr. Kidson’s watch and chain. Then everything flashed vividly back into her memory, and she had made her escape from the hospital and reached the scene just in time.

Mrs. Malony spoke with amazing volubility, and the telling of her story did not occupy more time than a few minutes. When

she was done, and stood silent, panting and weeping, the colonel turned to the sergeant of the guard and ordered the prisoner to be unfastened and marched back to the guard-room. While Mrs. Malony had been speaking, nobody had noticed Sholto, and when they went to cut him loose, they found that he had fainted. The parade was dismissed; and the colonel, the major, and the adjutant adjourned to the orderly room. Mr. Kidson was ordered to be brought in. He met Mrs. Malony's accusation with a flat and contemptuous denial, desiring with some insolence in his tone to know whether the colonel could think it proper to take the word of a crazy Irish barrack-room slut before that of an officer and a gentleman. "That depends on circumstances, and whether I happen to accept your definitions," was the colonel's dry comment, as he formally put Mr. Kidson under arrest, and having ordered him to his quarters, called for the sergeant-major to be brought in. This man was a poor faint-hearted rascal. He was ghastly pale, and his knees trembled as he flinched under the colonel's searching eye. On cross-examination he broke down altogether, and at length, with many protestations of remorse, confessed the whole truth, and that Mr. Kidson had bribed him to co-operate in the scheme to ruin Corporal Mackenzie. This wretched accomplice was in his turn sent away into close arrest, and Mr. Kidson was re-summoned into the orderly room and informed that his sergeant-major had confessed everything.

The two field-officers were fain to avert from the regiment the horrible scandal, even at the cost of some frustration of justice.

The option was given to Kidson of standing a court-martial, or of sending in the resignation of his commission within an hour and quitting the station before the day was out. Then and there the shameless blackguard wrote out the document, made an insolent sweeping salaam all round, mounted his tat, and rode off to his bungalow. As he was crossing the parade-ground he encountered Sholto Mackenzie, who had just been released by the colonel's orders, leaving the guard-room a free man and surrounded by a knot of troop-mates, conspicuous among whom was Mick Sullivan, half mad with delight. As Kidson passed the group with a baleful scowl, the trammels of discipline snapped for once, and a burst of groans and hooting made him quicken his pace, lest worse things should befall. In two hours more the disgraced man was clear of the cantonment.

In the previous article it has been told how in the early days of the great mutiny Mick Sullivan and his comrade were transmogrified from cavalymen into members of that gallant regiment the Ross-shire Buffs – the old 78th Highlanders – and did good service in the “little fighting column” at the head of which Havelock fought his way up country from Allahabad to Cawnpore. It was on the afternoon of Havelock's first fight, the sharp action of Futtehpore, that Sholto Mackenzie and Mick Sullivan were lying down in the shade of a tree waiting for the baggage to come up. Futtehpore town had been carried by a rush, and there had been some hand-to-hand fighting in the streets – for the mutinied Sepoys dodged about among

the houses and had to be driven out. There was a delay in following up the fugitives; for a waggon-load of rupees had been upset in the principal street and the temptation of the silver caused the soldiers to dally, while others straggled in search of food and drink. Meanwhile the mutineer cavalry rallied beyond the town. Palliser's Irregulars were sent forward to disperse the formation, followed by such men of our infantry as could hastily be mustered. Among those who went forward was Sholto Mackenzie. Palliser's native troopers were half-hearted and hung back when their chief charged the Sepoy horse, with the result that Palliser was dashed from his horse, and would have been cut to pieces but for the devotion of his *ressaldar*, who lost his own life in saving that of his leader.

"Did you notice," said Sholto to his comrade as they rested, "the squadron leader of the Pandy Cavalry that handled Palliser's fellows so roughly out yonder?"

"Bedad, an' I did not!" replied Sullivan. "Every divil av thim was uglier than the other, an' it's their own mothers should be ashamed to own the biling av thim!"

"Look here, Mick," said Sholto, "I'll take my oath I saw that dog Kidson to-day, in command of the Pandy Squadron!"

"Kidson!" ejaculated Sullivan in the wildest astonishment. "It's dhramin' ye are! Sure Kidson must be either prowlin' somewhere in Madras, or else on his road home to England!"

"I tell you I am as sure I saw him to-day as I am that I see you now. It was he who dismounted Palliser and cut down the

ressaldar. I am convinced it was he and none other!”

“Well, if you’re so sure as that, it’s no use to conthradick ye. Plase the saints, ye may get a close chance at him soon, and then — Lord pity him!”

Mick’s aspiration was fulfilled. The “close chance” came to Sholto a few days later, in the heart of the battle of Cawnpore. The Highlanders had rolled up the Sepoy flank by a bayonet charge, had shattered their centre, and captured the village on which it rested. The mutineer infantry of the left and centre were in full rout, their retreat covered by a strong body of native cavalry which showed a very determined front.

Sholto and his comrade were close together in the ranks of the Ross-shire Buffs, when the former suddenly grasped the latter’s arm, and in a low earnest voice asked —

“Mick, do you see that officer in charge of the covering squadron of the Pandies?”

Sullivan gazed long and intently, and then burst out —

“By the holy poker, it’s that treacherous blackguard Kidson!”

“Right, Mick, and I must get at him somehow!”

“Wid all my heart, chum, but it’s aisier said than done, just now, at any rate. You must mark time, and trust to luck!”

Just then Barrow came galloping up at the head of his handful of horsemen, and besought the chief to let him go at the mutineer sowars. But Havelock shook his head, for Barrow’s strength all told was but eighteen sabres. But a little later Beatson, the Adjutant-General, who, stricken with cholera and unable to sit

his horse, had come up to the front on a gun-carriage, saw an opportunity after the General had ridden away, and took it on himself to give Barrow leave to attack. The flank of the grenadier company of the Highlanders, where Sholto stood, was close to Beatson's gun-carriage, in rear of which his horse was led, and a sudden thought struck the young fellow. Stepping forward with carried rifle, he told Captain Beatson that he was a cavalry soldier, and noticing the led horse, begged eagerly to be allowed to mount it and join the charge for which the volunteer cavalry were preparing.

"Up with you, my man!" said poor dying Beatson. "Here, you shall have my sword, and I don't want it back clean, remember!"

Sholto was in the saddle with a spring, and made the nineteenth man under Barrow's command; a mixed lot, but full of pluck to a man. As he formed up on the flank, there reached his ears honest Mick's cheery advice —

"Now, Sholto, me dear lad, keep yer sword-hand up and yer bridle-hand down, an' remimber ye reprisint the honour an' glory of the ould 30th Light!"

Barrow threw away his cigar, gathered up his reins, and with a shout of "Charge!" that might have given the word of command to a brigade, rammed his spurs into his horse's flank and went off at score, his little band close on his heels. Hard on the captain's flank galloped Sholto Mackenzie, a red spot on each cheek, his teeth hard set, his blazing eyes never swerving from the face of one man of that seething mass on which they were riding.

“Give ’em the point, lads!” roared Barrow, as he skewered a havildar and then drove right in among them. The white-faced man with the black moustache, who was Sholto’s mark, rather shirked out of the *mêlée* when he saw it was to be close quarters; but Mackenzie, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with his bridle-hand well down, and Beatson’s sword in full play, drove his way at length within weapon’s length of the other.

“Now, liar and perjurer!” he hissed from between his teeth, “if you are not coward as well, stand up to me and let us fight it out!”

Kidson’s answer was a lurid scowl and a pistol bullet, which just grazed Sholto’s temple. Lifting his horse with his bridle-hand, and striking its flanks with his spurless heels, the latter sent his sword-point straight at Kidson’s throat. The thrust would have gone through and out at the further side, but that the sword-point struck some concealed protection and was shattered up to the hilt. The renegade Briton smiled a baleful smile as he brought his weapon from guard to point, as if the other was at his mercy. But this was not so; with a shout Sholto tightened the curb-rein till his horse reared straight on end, striking it as it rose with the shattered sword hilt. The maddened animal plunged forward, receiving in his chest the point of Kidson’s sword; and Sholto on the instant bending forward fastened a deadly grip on the other’s throat. The impetus hurled both of them to the ground, and now, down among the horses’ feet, the close-locked strife swaying and churning above them, their struggle unto the death was wrought out. Kidson struggled like a madman; he bit,

he kicked, he fought with an almost superhuman fury; but the resolute grip of the avenger never slackened on his throat. Sholto held on with his right hand, groping about with his left for some weapon wherewith to end the contest. At length his grasp closed on the hilt of a dropped sword; – and a moment later it was all over with the man whom the survivors of Havelock’s Ironsides speak of with scorn and disgust to this day by the name of “Nana Sahib’s Englishman.”

THE OLD SERGEANT

The scene of my little story is a sequestered hill-parish away up among the brown moors and sullen pinewoods of northern Scotland, and the date of it is full forty years ago, when I was a boy living in the grey old manse down in the sheltered glen which was the only picturesque “bit” of all the parish whose minister my father was. It was a curiously primitive region. Its crofters and farmers lived out their lives and were laid in the old graveyard up on the hillock – hardly a soul of them having ever been twenty miles outside the parish bounds. There was a vague lingering tradition concerning a scapegrace son, long since dead and gone, of old Sandy McCulloch of the Calternach – how the daring young ne’er-do-well had actually left his native land, made his way to India – we boys used to look up the map of India in the manse atlas – had married a “begum” there, and had finally been poisoned off by that mysterious female. This tradition had engendered a fine wholesome terror of begums, and all kinds of adventures that haply might involve matrimonial connections therewith, with disastrous results to follow. So our young men stayed at home and tilled the sour cold land laboriously but contentedly. There were a few exceptions, it is true. Now and then a young fellow would take the Queen’s shilling, and go out from among us on a career of soldiering. They seldom came back, for Cardwell’s name had not yet been heard in the land,

and short service in the army was a reform undreamed of. When a man 'listed then, it was nominally for life; actually, until his bodily vigour was so impaired that he was held no longer fit for service, and then he got a pension for the remainder of his days. But what with hard service abroad, what with cholera in Hindustan and Yellow Jack in the West Indies, what with poor fare in barracks and on noxious crowded transports, no great proportion of the soldiers of those days managed to keep alive long enough to attain the pensioned period. There was but one army-pensioner in our parish, and he is "the old sergeant" of my story.

They were grand old specimens, those veterans of a bypast era. To them the credit of their old regiment and the honour of the service were dearer than anything else in all the world. They had a great self-respect that had been instilled by the discipline they had undergone, and by the dangers they had passed through. They had a single-hearted loyalty to the Crown they had served, and a manly belief in the country which their strong arms and ready weapons had helped to save. It is no doubt all right in a military sense that there are no old soldiers among us now; but of this I am sure, that in a good many respects the country is the worse for the want of them.

There was a Sunday morning of my boyhood which I remember as if it were yesterday. The Sunday school, held in the grey old schoolroom on the edge of the wood in the centre of which stood the parish kirk, had just been dismissed. The

bell had not yet begun to ring, but it was the custom of the great straggling parish to hold its grand weekly palaver, summer and winter alike, on the little wood-encircled open space around the kirk, during the half-hour before the simple Presbyterian service began. To this end, the folk who were to constitute the congregation were gathering, coming in by twos and threes along the various paths centring on the kirk. Good old Willie Duffus, the elder from the far-distant Forgie district, had climbed and descended the bleak shoulder of Muldearie, had picked his devious way across the moss, had forded the burn, and was now so close at hand that I could discern the weather-beaten fluffiness of his ancestral beaver, and the resplendent brass buttons on the mediæval blue coat which had not been new when it had been his grandfather's wedding-garment. Johnny Mills, the cripple tailor, who was wont to carry his goose and ironing-board from farmhouse to farmhouse, and to accept his food as part of his poor pay, came shambling up the dykeside from his hovel in the kailyard under the old willow-tree. With an air of rustic patronage which he could well afford, since most of the poor folk were in his books, Sandy Riach, the "merchant" of the Kirktown, came strutting up the path from the little wooded hamlet. The farm lads, with their straw-coloured or red hair cut square in the nape of the neck, brilliant as to chest in their scarlet or blue plush vests studded with big white bone buttons, clumped kirkward in their heavy hobnailed boots, exchanging now and then a word of clumsy badinage with the lasses in their tartan shawls, and

the rig-and-fur stockings and stout shoes they had put on after wading the burn down in the hollow. Old Maggie Dey, as she wended her slow way leaning on her stick, would stop now and again for a confidential whisper with a good-wife; for Maggie was the parish “howdie” — *Anglice*, midwife — and had officiated at the introduction into this vale of tears of more than half of the population of the parish. Just on the rise of the “manse-brae” I could discern my mother’s bonnet as she climbed the steep knoll, with a little cohort of my younger brothers and sisters by her side, walking orderly, as beseemed the day and the occasion.

Ha! there was old Robbie Strachan nailing up a notice on the half-open church door, and now he was unfastening the bell-rope from its hook high up on the porch wall, preparatory to the statutory twenty minutes’ tolling of the clangorous old bell up there on the stumpy belfry. We boys, keenly alert, were watching Robbie’s every motion, rejoicing in the prospect of one of our chiefest weekly joys; for Robbie when he was in a good humour would let us have the rope and do the ringing, all save the peremptory final peals known as the “ringing in,” while he conversed sedately with a knot of his cronies.

Robbie Strachan, the bellman and “kirk officer” of our parish, was a tall, gaunt old fellow, lean-faced and high-featured, straight still as a pine, although in his time he had put in forty years of hard soldiering. His regulation mutton-chop whiskers, white as snow, just reached the corners of his grim old mouth, the rest of his lined visage closely shaven. You would have known him

at a glance for an old soldier, by his balanced step, his square shoulders, and his disciplined attitudes; he stood proclaimed yet more plainly by the well-brushed threadbare trews of Gordon tartan that encased his lean and wiry nether limbs. Robbie had been a sergeant in the local regiment, the gallant Ninety-Second, and in its ranks had borne the brunt of many a stubborn fray. He had worn the brogues from off his feet in Moore's disastrous retreat on Corunna, and had helped to bury that noble chief "by the struggling moonbeam's misty ray and the lantern dimly burning." He had been in the thick of the fierce bayonet struggle in the steep street of Fuentes de Oñoro, had climbed the ridge to the desperate fight of Albuera, and had taken a hand in carrying the bridge of Almaraz. A wound had kept him from Salamanca, but he was in Graham's front line on the day of Vittoria, and had many a tale of the rich plunder that fell to the conquerors in that short, sharp, and decisive combat. He had heard the bullets patter on the rocks of Roncesvalles, had waded the "bloody Bidassoa" under the shadow of the lofty Rhune, and was only hindered from being in at the death in the final desperate struggle on the glaciis of Toulouse, by having got a bullet in the chest as he waded up to the knees behind Picton through the marsh which Soult vainly imagined protected his front at Orthez.

Robbie was but a corporal when he went down at Orthez, but he was full sergeant on that wet June morning of the following year when "Cameron's pibroch woke the slumbering host" to range itself in "battle's magnificently stern array!" Bullets had

an unpleasant habit of finding their billets in him, and he was knocked over again on the forenoon of Waterloo when hanging on to the stirrup-leather of a Scots Grey in the memorable charge of the "Union Brigade" and shouting "Scotland for ever!" in unison with the comrades of horse and foot hailing from the land of cakes. The army surgeons in their cheery manner pronounced him as full of holes as a cullender, and were for invaliding him then and there as unfit for further service; but Robbie stoutly pleaded that he would be as good a man as ever when his wounds were healed, and triumphantly made good his words. So he had put in fifteen years' subsequent soldiering, and had heard the British drum-beat all round the world, ere, some ten years before the date of my story, he had been retired with a sergeant's pension for life and something additional for wounds. He was an old man now, but he carried his years well, and was still a good man in the harvest field, or with the spade. Most of his work with that implement was done in the manse garden, and we manse boys used to spend hours in listening to his stories of his old fighting days, while he made the drills for the garden peas, or dibbled in the kail plants in the plot behind the gooseberry bushes.

An exemplary man in a general way, Sergeant Robbie had his little failings; but for which he would have been an elder of the parish instead of being but the bellman and kirk officer. He was rather quick-tempered, and when moved to wrath, he swore in a manner which conclusively proved he had been with the army in Flanders. Then again, occasionally, on pension days mostly,

he would take more whisky than was good for him. When he got “fou,” it was always in the light of day, and so he exposed himself. As he marched home from the little public-house down at Blackhillock, with “the malt abune the meal,” his effort to appear preternaturally sober was quite a spectacle. Always stiff of attitude, he was then positively rigid: he would sway, but it was the swaying of a ramrod; when haply he fell into the ditch, there was no collapsing in a limp heap – he went down all of a length, as if there was not a joint in all his long body. But these exhibitions were comparatively infrequent, and were excused in the eyes of the parish censors because of the hole in the sergeant’s head made by the Waterloo bullet.

He and his old wife, who had seen a great deal of the world from the top of a baggage-waggon, but who was a most worthy domestic soul, lived together in a cottage at the back of the wood. The couple had an only son. When the youth grew into a strapping lad, Robbie had marched him down to Gordon Castle, to take counsel concerning his boy’s future, with his patron the Duke. It was in Robbie’s strong arms that the Duke – then Lord March – had lain, when the surgeons probed unsuccessfully for the bullet that pierced his chest on the day of Orthez, and which His Grace carried in him to the grave. As the result of this conference, Robbie had taken his son into Aberdeen, and enlisted him in his own old corps, the Gordon Highlanders. I remember the young fellow coming home on furlough, and the sensation among the simple folk as he swaggered up to the kirk

in his flowing tartans and with the ostrich-feather bonnet on his handsome head. Old Robbie was a proud man that day, for his son had the corporal's stripe already on his arm, although he had been barely three years a soldier.

If I have been over-minute in the attempt to depict Sergeant Robbie, I advance the double excuse, that he was among the prominent figures of my youth time, and that the type is now as extinct as the dodo. The old man stepped out from under the kirk wall with the bell-rope in his hand, and we boys darted forward to make our request that he would hand it over to us and let us do the ringing for him. But there was a strange stern expression in his face that gave us pause. "No the day, laddies," was all he said, as he took post at the corner of the stone dyke, and began to sway the chafed old rope. We stood silently by, in wonder at his mood. We had known him cross; but he was not cross now: in the gloomy set face and the unwonted silence there was something quite new and strange to us. And yet another strange thing, his wonted cronies held away from him this morning. There was something mysterious in the air. The people, as they gathered in the open space outside the kirk, formed little muttering knots. From these, every now and then, a person would drop out, and strolling up to the kirk door in a seemingly purposeless way, would stand there a while looking up at the notices displayed on it, and then saunter back to the group he had left, or drift into another. It was curious that, no matter wherever you looked, every one seemed to be stealing

furtive glances at Sergeant Robbie, standing out there by himself swaying the bell-rope with his long lean arms. And furtive as they were, the old man was clearly conscious of those glances. His face grew harder, grimmer, and more set; yet once or twice gazing up at him in my bewilderment with a boy's curiosity, I thought I noticed a quivering of the muscles about the close-gripped lips.

The "ringing in" was finished, and the congregation had passed into the kirk. As Sergeant Robbie, carrying the big pulpit Bible, strode up the aisle in front of the minister, it seemed to me that I had never seen him carrying so high that old white head of his, with the cicatrix of the Waterloo bullet in the gnarled forehead. Every eye was on the old fellow, and he knew it, and bore himself with a quiet courage in which somehow there came to be felt an element of pathos. It was curious again how all eyes centred upon him when in his extempore prayer the minister besought "consolation for those who were in sore trouble and mourning over the falling away of one near and dear to them." Robbie stood straight and square, his face fixed – only his lean brown throat swelled for a moment as if he were resolutely forcing down a spasm of emotion. Tibbie his wife stood by his side, and when the old soldier laid his hand on her shoulder she quelled with a strong effort her rising sobs.

The simple service ended, the people streamed out through the door that Robbie had thrown open; we of the manse party were the last to emerge. It was part of Robbie's duty, as kirk

officer, to “cry” to the dispersing congregation all notices placed in his hands for purposes of publicity, the duplicates of which he had previously nailed on the kirk door. The kirk officer in those primitive regions was the chief medium for giving good advertisement. As we came out Robbie was standing in the centre of a large circle, calling out in his high falsetto the particulars of a “displenish sale.” “Fower good stots, three milk kye, a pair of workhorses, farm implements, household furniture,” and so on.

This finished, there was a pause. Sergeant Robbie folded up the sale advertisement; as he did this his hand was trembling so that it fell to the ground. He stooped, picked the paper up and put it in the rear pocket of his coat; then from out his breast-pocket he pulled a folded blue document. He braced himself firmly, came to rigid “attention” as if he were in the presence of his commanding officer, and slowly opened out the blue paper.

“Dinna read it, Robbie!” “Dinna read it, sergeant!” came from a dozen voices in the sympathising circle around him. “It’s no necessar’ – ye needna, ye maunna read it,” cried the senior elder, James Cameron, of the Gauldwell, with a sob in his thin old voice.

It was as if the sergeant heard no word of dissuasion. He had opened out the paper and was holding it between his hands, standing there braced at “attention” and fighting down the working in his throat that momentarily was staying his voice.

Behind him, as he thus struggled, broke out the piteous wail “Oh, my laddie, my laddie!” from the very depths of poor

Tibbie's heart, followed by a burst of loud sobs.

The sergeant did not turn to his wife – boy as I was, I remember it struck me that he dared not.

“Belnabreich,” he said to an old farmer standing directly in front of him, “Belnabreich, tak’ her hame, tak’ her awa’ frae this, in the name of God!”

Old Belnabreich moved towards Tibbie, but before he reached her she got the mastery of herself again.

“Thank ye, Belnabreich,” she said, “ye’ve a kind heart; but I’m gaun tae bide here, whaur my man is. We’ve come through muckle thegither, and we’ll thole this disgrace thegither, and syne him an’ me, bairnless noo, will tak’ our sorrow hame thegither.”

The water was standing in the sergeant’s eyes, but the spasm was out of his throat now, and in a steady strong voice that carried far, he read out the print on the face of the blue paper. And this was what it befell him to have to read:

Whereas No. 1420, Corporal Peter Strachan of the 92nd Regiment, age twenty-four years, height five feet eleven inches, complexion ruddy, hair red, eyes blue, distinguishing marks none, enlisted at Aberdeen on the – day of – 1844, born in the Parish of Auchterturff, in the County of Banff, and resident in said parish before enlistment: Deserted from the said regiment at Montreal, Canada, on the – day of – 1848: The lieges are hereby warned under pain of law against harbouring the said deserter, and are strictly enjoined to give immediate information to the nearest police officer should they become

cognisant of his whereabouts, to the end that he may be apprehended and duly punished.

Alastair McPherson, Col., Comg

Gordon Highlanders

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

The sergeant uttered the final invocation in a loud firm tone, and a graceless callant in the background, unwitting of the tragedy of the situation, cried “Hurrah.” Otherwise there reigned a dead silence, as the old man, turning to his wife, gave her his arm with a certain courtliness rare among north country husbands of the humbler classes, and conducted her out of the little throng. The pair were allowed to get out of hearing ere the little stir of comment and condolence set in – it did not last long, for most of the folk had to trudge some distance to their homes. I remember watching the lonely couple as they wended their way along the path by the side of the wood, the dumpy huddled figure in the duffle shawl leaning against the tall spare form in the quaint old blue coat that had once belonged to the Duke, and the threadbare tartan trews that were a relic of the old

regimentals.

From that Sunday old Sergeant Robbie was an altered man. Never more did he cross the hill for the once cherished "crack" with his Peninsular friend the Duke. Never more could the lads entice him to a dram in the Blackhillock public-house. He duly came to his work in the manse garden, but we boys hung about him in vain for stories of his old fighting days; a great silence had fallen upon the old man. His lean figure began to lose its erectness, and soon you scarcely would have known him for a veteran soldier. There remained one link only between him and my father, the interchange of the snuff-mull. But there were no more of the genial little chats that had been wont to accompany the give-and-take. From that Sunday Robbie was a man of monosyllables, and even my mother could not penetrate his grim reserve. He became yet more laconic after he lost Tibbie, who never held her head up from the day she knew of her son's disgrace. The poor old woman faded out within a couple of years, and Robbie had no longer the consolation that comes from having sorrow shared. After her death he gave up his duties as bellman and kirk officer, and scarcely left his cottage except to attend church. When I went to say farewell to him before leaving home to go to school, I found him sitting in front of the fire, staring blankly at the smouldering peats. That was the last time I saw the old man.

A year or two later a letter from home told me that old Robbie had heard from his son. The deserter, it appeared, had made

his way to Chicago, had gone into some business in that stirring place, and was making money fast. He had written home begging his parents – he had not heard of his mother's death – to come out to him in America, and had enclosed a draft for an ample sum of money to pay the charges of the voyage and journey. The stern old man would hold no terms with the son who had disgraced his parents and dishonoured his uniform. He told my father curtly that he had folded the draft in a blank sheet of paper, and sent it back by return of post.

The tough old soldier, weary of life as he was, lasted a few years longer. At length one day the parish was stirred by the news that he had been found lying dead in a ditch some three miles away from his cottage, about half-way between it and the village of Keith. And before that day was done, the parish throughout its length and breadth knew also that Robbie's son, the deserter, had been apprehended and carried off to jail by Neil Robertson, the head of the county police.

The strange details were gathered piecemeal. A niece, a girl, who had come to live with the old man in his later feebleness, told that one night late a knock had come to the cottage door. The old man had opened it himself and was confronted by his son. She had overheard their brief colloquy. The son had begged the father to forgive him, and to leave home at once with him for America; he had a conveyance close by, and they might start immediately. The stern father had bidden the son begone out of his sight. He would not let the young man pass the threshold of the cottage, and

told him plainly that if he did not quit the neighbourhood without an hour's delay, he would inform against him. With that he had shut the door in his son's face, prayed with tears and groans for two hours, and then lain down in his clothes. Before daylight the son had returned to the cottage, having, he told her, spent the night in the adjacent wood, and from outside the window had adjured his father to see him, if but for a moment. The old man would speak no word, lying silent in the press-bed opposite the fire; and as the day dawned the son had gone away, calling out to his father that he would come back again at night. The old man had lain late, groaning and praying in bed; about noon he had got up, read a chapter of the Bible aloud, and taking his stick had gone forth. She had hoped he was gone to look for his son; but he never came back, and the next thing she heard was that he had been found dead. The son had returned at night, but she had "steekit" the door, and made no answer when he called.

Neil Robertson, the head of the county police, furnished the sequel of the sad story. The old sergeant had come to his house in Keith as the short day was waning, and said he had come to do his duty and formally lodge the information that Peter Strachan, a deserter from the 92nd Regiment, had been to his cottage that morning, and that he believed him to be still in its neighbourhood. Robertson, knowing the relationship, had been reluctant to take the information, but the sergeant had sternly bidden him do his duty, as he was doing his. The old man was quite exhausted, Robertson testified, and he had begged him to

take some rest and had offered him refreshment. But he had declined either to rest or to eat and drink, and had gone straight away. The life had gone out of the old sergeant as he was sadly trudging homeward, having done what he held to be his duty, as a true liegeman of the Crown, in whose service he had fought and bled.

THE GENTLEMAN PRIVATE OF THE “SKILAMALINKS”

It was in the autumn of the year 1856 that a squadron of that gallant Light Cavalry Regiment familiarly known as the “Skilamalinks” crossed Sheffield Moor, rode down Snighill, and proceeded along the valley of the dirty Don to the old cavalry barracks in the angle made by the divagation of the upper and lower Western roads. The “Skilamalinks” had followed Cardigan in that glorious, crazy gallop up the long valley of Balaclava, and when the eventful twenty-five minutes were over, their gallant array had dwindled to a weak troop, in which there was scarcely a scatheless man and horse. The bitter winter on the Chersonese had yet further thinned the handful that had escaped the Russian cross-fire, and there was a time when the “Skilamalinks” could barely furnish for duty a weak picket. But when the cruel winter ended, reinforcements came pouring in so freely that before the battle of the Tchernaya the regiment was near its full strength. It had returned to England, dismounted, early in 1856, had spent the summer in south of Ireland quarters, engaged in reorganisation and breaking in the remounts which had been sent to it, and in the autumn it had got the route for Yorkshire, headquarters at York, with out-quarters at Sheffield, and, if I remember rightly, at Leeds. Captain Jolliffe, the senior captain

of the regiment, was in command of the Sheffield squadron, and it was as a lance-corporal in that fine soldier's troop that I, No. 420, Arthur Fraser, rode into the cramped little barrack-yard at the fork of the roads. My moustache is snow-white now, and, as I walk, I limp a bit from the Cossack lance-thrust through the calf of the leg which is my souvenir of the memorable Light Cavalry charge; but when I dismounted in the Sheffield barrack-yard thirty-five years ago, there was not in Queen Victoria's army, although I say it, a more strapping young fellow than Lance-Corporal Arthur Fraser, of A troop in the "Skilamalink" Hussars.

It is many a long year since I last saw the dense smoke under whose pall Sheffield breathes hard over its grindstones, and no doubt there are many changes in the dingy, rough, cordial town. When I last soldiered there our quarters were in the fine new barracks, a mile beyond the ramshackle old structure at the fork of the roads. The young soldiers took delight in the airy spaciousness of the former, whose front looks across to the public-house famous in my day for the tenpenny ale one glass of which made a fellow garrulous, and whose flank overhangs the beautiful valley which has long since recovered from the devastation wrought by the bursting of the great dam high up in its throat; but the old soldiers still nourished pleasant memories of the cramped old quarters nearer to the heart of the town. For aught I know, those may have been demolished long ago, and the Sheffielder of to-day may know them no more; but

when our out-marching squadron on its way to Norwich last rode along the lower road toward Snighill, we oldsters looked rightward at the dingy tiled roofs, and at the little windows of what had been our troop-rooms, but which were now let out to civilian inhabitants who cultivated scrawny geraniums and reluctant fuchsias in stumpy little window-boxes. And as I gazed my heart swelled and the water came into my eyes, for the scene recalled the memory of a tragic occurrence which had for years cast a gloom on my life.

Most people are aware that nowadays no inconsiderable number of young gentlemen are serving in the ranks of the army. These are mostly men with a specific aim. They are fellows who have failed to get into the service as officers either through the front door of Sandhurst, or through the easier side door of the Militia. So they enlist, work hard, and keep steady, while their connections meanwhile are exciting all the influence in their power to further their promotion to commissioned rank. But it is not so generally known that in the old purchase days there was quite a considerable leaven of gentle-manhood in the ranks, without any such specific anxiety for promotion as actuates the gentleman-ranker of to-day. The gentleman-ranker of the old days – so far back as the Peninsular War he was common enough in the army – for the most part enlisted because he had come to grief in some fashion or other. Nowadays, a fellow who has done this has many resources other than the ranks. You find him in the Australian bush, in a mining camp of the Western

States, in a Florida orange garden, on a ranche in Texas, or in the “fertile belt” out beyond Winnipeg. He may be prospecting in the Transvaal or galloping after steers in the Argentine. I have shaken the hand – and a deuced greasy hand it was – of a broken baronet doing duty as cook in a New Zealand timber-cutting camp, and have had a hackman at Portage la Prairie who was the son of a noble marquis, and had himself a courtesy title. For the broken gentleman of the Crimean war time there were no such opportunities of obscurity and possible redemption. The alternatives for him were utter blackguardism or the ranks of the army. When he chose the latter he invariably went for cavalry, ignorant or regardless of the harder work devolving on that arm; and almost invariably it was a light cavalry regiment in which he enrolled himself – always under a false name. The “Skilamalinks” were a favourite corps with gentlemen recruits under a cloud. Its chief was proud of this preference, and showed kindness to the waifs of good family. In my day they were invariably posted to A troop, which Captain Jolliffe ruled so kindly and yet so firmly, and which went in the regiment by the name of “the Gentlemen’s Troop.” When possible the gentlemen were always quartered together in the same troop-room, and were on their honour to behave creditably and show a good example in every respect. There were twelve of us, I remember, in one of those low-roofed attics above the stables in the old cavalry barracks of Sheffield. The corporal in charge of the room was the son of a great squire and M.P.; his mother the daughter of

a Scotch marquis.

My chum was a stalwart and handsome young fellow, who had joined on the same day I became a "Skilamalink." He was reticent as to his antecedents; but he had confided to me that he had held a commission in an Indian native cavalry regiment, had come a mucker over high play at Simla, could not bring himself to face his mother (who was the widow of a clergyman of small means), had thrown up his commission, come home, and had 'listed for "the Skilamalinks" at the old "Hampshire Hog" in Charles Street, Westminster, on the very day he landed. As we rode back together from out the hell of slaughter on the morning of Balaclava, Charlie Johnstone (of course a "purser's" name) had killed the Cossack who had speared me, and cut down another who was in the act of skewering me from behind. Farther up the valley I believe I saved his life when the cannon-shot that bowled over his horse broke his leg, and when, lame though I was, I managed to carry him on my back up to the cover of Brandling's battery on the Causeway Ridge. So you may believe we were friends and comrades, and had a love for each other "passing the love of woman."

My chum was not a very social person, although always on perfectly good terms with his comrades of the "gentlemen's" barrack-room. He had frequent accesses of gloom, caused, I assumed, by the sudden shipwreck he had made of a career that must have been very promising, for he was a man of strong intellect, highly accomplished, a fine linguist, and well versed in

military history and the science of war. When the shadow fell upon him, he used to spend much of his time in the stable with his mare. She was rather a notable animal. Desperately wounded as she was in the retreat from the Balaclava Charge, she had pulled herself together, reached the rallying-place of the Light Brigade, and formed up on the flank of the troop to which she belonged. She had recovered from her injuries with extraordinary rapidity, and had withstood with singular fortitude the hardships and starvation of the terrible winter; and she now among all troop horses in the regiment was the only survivor of the famous Charge. The dreadful Crimean winter had left its mark upon her. Before that evil time her nature had been gentle, and her paces smooth and easy. But during the worst of it, too weak to stand, she had long lain embedded in frozen mud and snow. She had risen, indeed, out of this misery, and had regained strength and shapeliness, but ever after she was the roughest trotter in the regiment. And with the ease of her paces had gone, too, the mare's temper. She had become a vicious and dangerous savage, to approach which was unsafe for any one save only the trooper who had ridden her in the Charge, to whom she was uniformly gentle and affectionate. Johnstone would sit by her for hours at a time on the manger at her head, or on the hanging bale by her side, talking in low tones to the old jade, and she listened to him for all the world as if she understood him, which, indeed, I am sure, he more than believed that she did.

Christmas Day in the army is the great festival of the year. The

preparations for its adequate celebration are commenced days in advance. I hear – but I do not know whether it is true – that the cost of the Christmas dinner is now defrayed out of the canteen fund. But in our day – at all events in the cavalry regiments – the captain of each troop took, and was proud to take, that obligation upon himself as regarded his own men. There used to be quite a little ceremony about the matter. Some ten days in advance the troop sergeant-major would go round the barrack-rooms, and make a little speech in each room. “Men,” he would say, striking an attitude, “our worthy captain has commissioned me to inform you that he will have great pleasure in having the men of his troop eat their Christmas dinner at his expense, and that he will also contribute toward the celebration of the day half a gallon of stout per man, which he regards as an adequate allowance if his men, as he anxiously desires, are to keep reasonably sober, and not discredit him and themselves by getting drunk.” Cheers would follow this intimation, and a sarcastic old soldier might interject the remark, “The captain don’t know, Sergeant-Major, how strong A troop heads are. We could drink a gallon per man, and never turn a hair!” Whereunto the honest sergeant-major would retort, “Ah, Lucas, we know what a power of suction you have without showing the drink, but remember it’s not a fortnight since when you were walking pack-drill for being as drunk as a boiled owl.” Lucas thus suppressed, the sergeant-major would proceed: “Now, men, take a day or two to make your minds up what you prefer for dinner – geese, turkeys, roast pork, veal –

whatever delicacies of the season you may fancy, and then let the orderly corporal know your choice, so that he may give the order in good time. The materials for the plum-pudding – they are – of course you know.”

Then the artistic genius of the room would betake himself to mural decorations, representations in colours of the banners of the regiment, the captain's coat-of-arms, such legends as “A Merry Christmas to all!” “Long life to our worthy Captain!” “The ‘Skilamalinks’ take the right of the line!” and so forth. Adjacent plantations are harried of Christmas trees, holly, and mistletoe, and each room becomes an evergreen bower. Christmas Eve is the period of busy labour, skill and triumph on the part of the pudding-compounder, whose satellites pick raisins of their stones, chop the lemon-peel, and heroically refrain from taking surreptitious sips of the brandy destined to invigorate the pudding. Volunteers are ready with their clean towels to serve as pudding-cloths, and then a procession marches to the cookhouse, where the puddings are consigned to the copper over which the conscientious compounder holds his long vigil. It is a pleasant time when on Christmas Day the bountiful fare is spread on the barrack-room table, and when the captain goes round the rooms, and says a few genial words to the men standing at attention while they listen. Then the oldest soldier, nudged by his mates, takes one pace to his front, halts, comes to preternaturally rigid attention, and shoots out the words, “Captain Jolliffe, sir” – then stammers painfully for the space of about a minute, and finally

blurts out – “wish to thank you, sir – most liberal dinner, stout, sir – drink your health, sir – proud of our captain, sir – wish you and yours Merry Christmas and many of ’em!” “Same to you, men,” replies the captain – genially tastes the stout which the cheekiest man tenders him in a stoneware soup basin, and with, mayhap, the words “Be merry but be wise” clanks out of the room, followed by a cheer.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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