

utterable despair, as the ladies stepped hastily into the carriage and the Major sprang to his saddle.

Rachel looked out and waved her hand, not forgetful even in that trying moment of her faithful nurse. Little Clement, too, clapped his hands and crowded, delighted at the prospect of a ride. When the carriage was out of sight the faithful fellow retired into the bungalow, and began quietly and methodically to gather together such things as he knew his mistress prized, though in the peril and anxiety of the moment she had taken no heed of them, but gladly left her home to the mercy of the spoiler in the hope that life would be spared. Leaving the bungalow behind, the carriage dashed down a leafy road, skirting the busiest streets, the Major galloping ahead, scarcely daring to hope that they would make good their escape. The massacre in the city had begun, but the interest of the insurgents was chiefly centred at the gates, which the Europeans were heroically trying to defend from the mutineers without. It was a forlorn hope. At the end of the road from the bungalow the fugitives had to cross a busier street in order to reach the ascent to the heights on which stood the Flagstaff Towers. Just as the carriage dashed across the square a stray bullet from an insurgent rifle knocked the Major from his saddle. The driver of the carriage, faithful to his charge, dashed on, and so spared the helpless ladies the sight of their protector's death. A sabre cut finished the work of the treacherous bullet, and one more brave English soldier was added to the list of the dead. This incident attracted the attention of a party of marauders passing along the road to the cantonment, and supposing the inmates of the carriage to be rich Europeans flying with their treasures of money or jewels instantly gave chase. The driver of the carriage, faithful even still to his dead master, and to the helpless women in his care, spurred on his horses and reached the tower gates, though himself wounded in his right arm by a bullet. The whole party, carriage and all, were at last withdrawn into the temporary refuge of the tower, where Mrs. Elton swooned away. Sir Randal Vane, overjoyed to see his wife in comparative safety, came from his place on guard to meet them.

"Where's the Major!" he asked quickly.

"Dead or mortally wounded, Randal," his wife answered, mournfully. "He was shot at, anyhow; and we could not wait to see. Poor Mrs. Elton," she added, glancing compassionately at her prostrate friend. "It might be better for her never to be restored. What chance of life have any of us?"

"Meagre enough, certainly," returned Sir Randal, fiercely tugging his grey moustache. "Mrs. Ayre, you set an example to us. Although this is your first experience of active service, if I may use such honourable words about this dastardly business, you look entirely self-possessed."

"There is no use making a fuss, and adding to the anxieties of our protectors," Rachel answered quietly. "Is there any news of the 54th?"

"They are at the Cashmere Gate yet, but it is a forlorn hope. We have no means of knowing what is going on, except by the firing. It's a work of death, anyhow," said the old man, unable to present a semblance of cheerfulness, for he was in despair. "Some may escape, we can't tell. All we can do in the meantime is to defend ourselves until help comes."

"Where is it to come from?" asked Lady Vane, with a fleeting, melancholy smile.

"Meerut. Our only chance is that Hewett will send after the mutineers, unless he is utterly demoralized or massacred."

"Is there any part of the ramparts from which we can see the operations at the Cashmere Gate, Sir Randal?" asked Rachel, as she slowly rocked her baba to and fro in her arms.

"Yes, my dear, if the atmosphere were clear, but you can't expose yourself there. Believe that Captain Ayre, wherever he is, is doing his duty as an Englishman and a brave soldier should. And if we have seen the last of him, a soldier's wife has to accept every hazard of war."

"Yes," Rachel admitted, with a droop of the lips. "But this is not war. If you will hold baba, Lady Vane, and Sir Randal will allow me and show me the way, I should like to go outside."

"Who so positive as a woman? Well, well, Lucy, take the little lad, and let her have her wish. This way, Mrs. Ayre; but I promise you you will see nothing but the smoke of the firing and the flames of the bungalows. The miscreants are in the midst of their fiendish work."

Rachel took the old soldier's arm, and he led her to the

ramparts, where the soldiers were busy preparing ammunition for their defence.

The Flagstaff Tower being built on a height, commanded a magnificent and uninterrupted view of the city and all its gateways. It was, however, as Sir Randal had predicted; there was nothing to be seen but the smoke of the battle, lit here and there by the lurid flames of the burning bungalows. A strange din and tumult filled the air, and the whole scene was indescribably weird, and calculated to inspire horror and fear.

"Where are the 54th, Sir Randal?" Rachel asked, after a moment's contemplation of the scene.

"Yonder, where the smoke is thickest, my dear. You see, you can discover nothing yonder. I doubt not your hero is doing his duty. My God, what is that?"

A fearful report, like the roar of an earthquake, or the explosion of a volcano, rent the air, and a mighty tongue of fire shot up to the sky, lighting for an instant the sombre-laden atmosphere, and causing every object to stand out with startling vividness.

"It's the Residency. They've blown it up," cried the gunners, but in a moment the truth burst upon them, and they gave a faint cheer.

"Some of the brave boys have blown up the magazine! Heaven grant that a thousand of the dogs have gone up with it! Anyhow, they can't shoot us with our own ammunition now," cried Sir Randal. "It's like a thing Geoffrey Ayre would do. I never saw a cooler hand in an emergency."

Rachel shook her head and crept away from the ramparts. She had seen enough. There remained in her mind not the shadow of a doubt that her husband had lost his life in that struggle against fearful odds.

She found that baba, unconscious of the perils surrounding his innocent life, had fallen asleep, and that Lady Vane had laid him down in order to assist in attending some of the wounded who had just been brought in. Rachel sprang forward as she recognized in one poor, shattered form Geoffrey's own Colonel, who could doubtless give her some news of him. "I asked him, my love," Lady Vane answered, reading the intense questioning in the young wife's eyes. "He was uninjured the last time the Colonel saw him, and fighting like a lion. If he should be wounded they'll bring him here, if possible. Look at these poor fellows, and what can we do for them? We have nothing to alleviate their suffering. Surgeon Paine has been killed going back to the laboratory for the things we need. Oh, Rachel, Rachel, God help us all!"

If women's tears, or the agony of their compassion could have healed them, these wounded heroes had not long been prostrate.

That dreadful day was but the beginning of sorrows for the Europeans in the old Mohammedan city.

CHAPTER VIII.—IN DEADLY PERIL.

We may go back a few hours, and follow Captain Ayre through the perils of that awful day. When he left Rachel in the early morning he walked across the cantonments, and found his brother officers making preparations for battle. The natives of the 54th betrayed no immediate signs of insubordination, and obeyed their orders quietly, and with apparent readiness. Directly the news was brought that a small number of mutineer cavalry from Meerut were crossing the Jumna by the Bridge of Boats, Colonel Ripley gave orders to advance to meet them. This order was quietly obeyed, and for a time all went well.

Geoffrey Ayre, field officer for the week, hoped that in the moment of action at hand his men would not fail. The influence of his personality was very great, he knew they loved him; but he depended on it too much. The mutinous mania is one which speedily crushes out all better feelings, because it appeals so powerfully and irresistibly to the basest passions of the human heart. The British officers hoped, by intercepting the approaching mutineers before they obtained entrance to the city through any of the gates, to crush the insurrection in its infancy. Even the most despondent among them had no idea how completely and silently the seeds of treachery and rebellion had been sown within the city, and that before the first blow had been struck every movement and its probable result had been considered. They had forgotten to look to the state of matters within the Royal Palace of Delhi itself. At the Cashmere Gate the mutineers were to meet their first repulse. Without a moment's hesitation Captain Ayre ordered his men to fire on the rebels, but not a musket moved.

"It's all up with us, Geoff.," the Colonel whispered, and wheeling his horse round before the dusky body of men, he

exhorted them once more in a brief, passionate appeal to stand true. His words received a sudden check, for one of his own servants, a man whom he had befriended and trusted to the uttermost, gave him a sabre thrust in the back. I was the first taste of blood, and with a yell the savage instincts of the race rose, and in a moment the handful of gallant English soldiers were surrounded. They fought dearly, not for life, for that they knew was forfeited, but the thought of the dear defenceless ones within the city nerved each arm with a desperate courage. Colonel Beresford was speedily left for dead, and in the midst of the mêlée was borne away by his body-servant, assisted by one of the Sepoys, whose fidelity returned at sight of his kind colonel's white face and bleeding form. Between them they managed to convey him without further molestation to the Flagstaff Tower. Geoffrey Ayre, with his lieutenants and sergeants, fought bravely on; and when he fell at last his sword had despatched half-a-dozen of the mutineers. Scarcely waiting to see whether their victims were really dead, the insurgents, in company with the now revolted 54th and the gate-guard, marched on into the city. Geoffrey opened his eyes feebly, and tried to raise himself on one arm. Close by a young ensign, a mere boy, who had tasted battle that day for the first time, was kneeling on his knees with his hands clasped before him.

"Harry!" said the Captain, in a faint whisper; but there was no response; and when by a further effort Geoffrey began to crawl round nearer to him, he saw that he was dead. With a groan Geoffrey Ayre fell back, and relapsed into unconsciousness, lying with his face upturned to the merciless sun, the bright hair, which Rachel had so often caressed, clotted on his brow. When he awakened again there was someone bending over him, and he felt a hand stealing into his watch pocket. Already the human jackals were prowling about to rob the dead. With a muttered exclamation the wounded man tried to raise himself again, and his hand stretched out seeking for his sword. But the murderer was before him, and so Geoffrey Ayre died by a treacherous hand, his own sword the weapon which dealt the blow. There were many such scenes, and many even more horrible, witnessed in the old Indian city that bright May day—scenes which go to make up one of the darkest pages of British history.

Meanwhile, in the Flagstaff Tower, the refugees waited in a state of painful uncertainty, not knowing how far the mutiny had spread, nor anything, indeed, of what was happening in the city. It was evidently, however, in a state of revolt and commotion, and there was no hope left that any Europeans who had trusted themselves to the mercy of the insurgents could have escaped with their lives. To add to the horrors of the day, the scum of the populace and the wild gipsy marauders from without the city followed in the rear of the Sepoys, and finished the work of destruction they had begun. By three o'clock in the afternoon there was scarcely a living English person in Delhi save those in the tower, and the whole plain on which the city stood was like one vast conflagration with the flames of the burning bungalows. It became apparent to the refugees in the tower that they could not long hope to escape the attention of the mob. The building itself stood on a good site, and was very strong. They had two guns and a plentiful supply of ammunition; and the commandant was not without hope of being able to hold the place till aid should come from without. The ladies, themselves, instead of giving way to fear or nervousness, kept up bravely, and even volunteered to assist in keeping the guns loaded, but, before the day closed, it became apparent that the tower could no longer be considered as a refuge. Part of the 38th regiment, the main body of which had already followed the mutineers, was in the tower, and the wretched inmates watched them with a fearful and agonizing interest, wondering how long they could be depended on. Since the colonel had been brought into the tower there had been no further news from without. In one of the inner apartments of the tower, towards the close of that terrible day, the women were gathered, sitting quite quietly, with white, grave faces, which yet indicated the highest courage and endurance. Rachel kept poor baba close in her arms, and sometimes even smiled in response to his childish chatter, but between them few words passed. Major Elton's delicate wife, whose nerves had been shattered by the anxieties of the past weeks, appeared to have become imbued with a new and amazing fortitude. Her pale, worn face betrayed no signs of fear, and she was even able to impart courage to others. Rachel could not but look at her sometimes in simple wonder. Lady Vane was satirical and indifferent, accepting these extraordinary circumstances with philosophy, and expecting nothing but death. So they sat huddled together, a melancholy band, waiting the develop-