

How I Was Married ;

A Tale of the Indian Mutiny.

By Hurkaru.

CHAPTER I.

The incidents of this tale took place nearly forty years ago, and yet it seems but yesterday since I first saw the lady, (soothing her grandson, Master Harry, yonder) when she was little more than a child herself—but yesterday, so happy have been nearly all those years, so bright has she made them. I cannot say that lady, my wife, could ever lay many claims to beauty, and I fancy she is better looking now in her declining years than she was in her youth, for how can it be otherwise with one who has always practised truth and kindness? No, even a fond husband, having a due regard for veracity, must admit that none of her features were faultless, except indeed her large brown honest eyes which were—and still are to me—the loveliest he can imagine out of heaven. But though her face was always homely, I have preferred it to every other, and it is with a thankful heart I count the years that it has blessed my home. I have often heard and read—as which of us has not?—of men who have fallen in and out of love half a dozen times, and I can recall several of my friends who have suffered from that common complaint very badly and have entirely recovered, but Kate Clevedale, nee Marsden, was the only “fair chaste and imprudent she,” who throughout my life has ever touched my heart. It is strange that events which robbed many of all they held most dear, should have been the means of making me the happiest of men. Nevertheless, as will be related presently, the dreadful mutiny, which removed numbers in such a fearful manner gave me the husband’s priceless crown. To those decrees, so incomprehensible, we can only bow our heads, as my dear wife had to bend hers, though I trust her life after the storm has not been unhappy, indeed her face which has smiled upon me through a long vista of years says as much, in spite of my short comings, and a temper, which must have tried her often. Few of us, certainly not I, deserve a pure woman’s entire heart, which of all earthly blessings is the most sacred.

I am the second son of the late Henry Clevedale of Neston Hall, situated on the banks of the River Dee near the quaint

old city of Chester, and at the time my story commences I was a Captain in the 167th Regiment of Dragoons, stationed at Meerut in the Northwest Provinces of India, less than forty miles from Delhi.

Only those who were in that country during 1857 and 1858 can realize the terrible time, and though I confess that England was not free from error, she did nothing which could justify the awful sequel. The first spark was ignited in March of the first mentioned year at Barrackpore in Bengal, but it was not until May following when the flame burst forth at Meerut, which spread through the almost entire length and breadth of British India bringing grief and desolation to many a home. Among the great we had to mourn Lawrence, Havelock, and Hodson, while singing “Te Deums” for the victories of Outram, Rose, and Campbell, (afterwards Lord Clyde).

CHAPTER II.

Among my friends who at that period belonged to my regiment I may name first and foremost the Assistant Surgeon, as he was then, John Stirling, who like the great Falstaff, was commonly Jack to his familiars. He was a Scotchman of about twenty-four years of age, medium height, but so thin that he appeared much taller than he really was. He had a pair of lantern jaws, not unlike those of the celebrated Don Quixote, but his laughing twinkling eyes entirely transformed what might otherwise have been a melancholy countenance. Jack is no longer thin and lantern jawed, but stout with a jolly, rubicund face, time having changed him as it does most of us. Another of my friends in those days was young Archie Churchill, a lieutenant in my own company, a goodlooking lad of twenty-one, but who from his airs you might easily suppose to be thirty at least. He maintained he was descended from John Duke of Marlborough, but I can testify that he was considerably more open handed than, from all accounts, was his illustrious ancestor. His conceit seemed to sit naturally on him, and though he would absolutely to patronize me, his Captain, occasionally when off duty, he was so perfectly affable, that instead of annoyance he simply caused me amusement. Archie’s faults however were on the surface, and would no doubt have rubbed off as he

grew older, but alas he met a hero’s death when little more than a boy with the pluck of a grayhaired veteran.

Kate Marsden was the only child of Colonel Marsden, commanding the 103rd Bengal Native Cavalry, she and her mother having arrived at Meerut in the beginning of May 1857, little dreaming of what was to take place within the next few days. It is a matter of history that the greased cartridges for the new English rifles was the origin of the mutiny. Colonel Marsden, who had been many years in India, cordially disapproved of forcing upon the Native troops an article which could only be obnoxious to their caste prejudices. It was an unmistakeable blunder, and one for which England paid dearly. But the Colonel was a rigid disciplinarian, and whatever his private opinion may have been, he did not allow that for one moment to interfere with what he believed to be his public duty. He would—nay had—represented the matter to the proper authorities, but meanwhile orders must be obeyed.

I had known Colonel Marsden for some time, and so little do we any of us foresee what a day may bring forth, I recollect he had invited me to dinner at his bungalow on Friday the 10th May to meet his wife and daughter. The previous day several of the Sepoys had been committed to gaol for refusing to use the new cartridges, and on that Sunday as Jack Stirling, Archie Churchill, and myself were quietly smoking our cheroots after tiffin, we were startled by a report of firearms, followed by unmistakeable Native yells. I bounded to my feet, and seizing my sword rushed out, when I perceived that the officers’ quarters of Colonel Marsden’s regiment, from whence the sounds had proceeded, were in flames! With an uncontrollable impulse, in spite of the bugle notes calling my own regiment to arms, I ran at full speed across the parade ground till I gained the front of Colonel Marsden’s bungalow, now rapidly burning to ashes, and there, on the threshold, lay the owner shot through the heart, while beside him was his wife, also dead. Many other officers and their wives were lying around, having met the same cruel fate, and at the door of one bungalow, I saw, merciful heaven! a babe literally cut in twain, as though the mandate of King Solomon had been carried out! I shudder