

HOURS IN HINDOSTAN.

The Good Lesson.

THERE is nothing in the world more thoroughly tedious and annoying than having the charge of a treasure-party; yet he who enters the Company's service, and is unlucky enough not to have been appointed a staff-officer, is tolerably sure of having to escort specie from place to place during some eight months in every year. Without an English person to speak to, sleeping nightly under canvass, obliged to start every morning at about three o'clock, to avoid the heat of the day, the wretched subaltern is forced to trudge some twelve miles per diem through ugly jungles and sandy plains, during more than half the time he continues to be a lieutenant.

I was myself an officer of this rank when I was in India. Consequently I often partook of the above unpleasant duty. It was when thus employed that I one evening caused my tent to be erected near Augherdeep, and had already ordered my Bobichi to cook my dinner, when a party of natives from the neighbouring bazaar called me from my tent. To my small surprise, I found they acted as an escort to a young European, who had evidently committed some heinous crime, as they had tightly and strongly bound him with cords. To the unhappy prisoner I turned for an explanation; but his manner was so incoherent, so violent, that I could learn but little from him, and I sought the solution of the mystery from a quiet, respectable Baboo, who appeared to be the chief of the party.

"The unhappy gentleman," said the old man, "while sleeping on the deck of his boat, which is fastened to the shore a little below our village, was struck by a *coup de soleil*, and instantly went raving mad. His servants, who appear much attached to him, put him on shore, and have placed him under our care, with strict orders to prevent him injuring any one, as they feared to keep him on board."

The captain, who by this time seemed partly to have recovered his senses, asked in a tone of suppressed passion, "What do the rascals say?"

"Don't you speak, Hindostaunee."

"Not a word—not a word, or they dare not treat me thus. But by all that is sacred, I'll trounce them yet for their conduct. In the meantime be good enough to order them to take off these cursed cords, and then tell me what they say,"

He was instantly released, and I began to explain what the Baboo had told me. Before

it was half done he started off in a tangent so violent that the men again attempted to put on the cords; when, before I could interfere, the furious young man had knocked down the old chief, and three of his principal followers. I instantly directed two of my sepoy to advance, to whom the apparent madman quietly submitted himself.

"Oh! sir," addressing himself to me,—“oh! sir, it is all very well. If *you* choose to join these robbers, and take their part, who doubtlessly would have murdered me had you not come up, it is all very well. You have the might on your side, and consequently the right; but, as sure as I stand here, so sure will I report you, and ask for a court-martial on you as soon as I arrive a Berhampore, where my father commands.”

I confess he startled me. General Gaskell, the commandant at Berhampore, was my oldest and my best friend and patron. I therefore motioned to the soldiers to stand back, and asked him whether he was in earnest in this assertion.

"Earnest, sir; of course I am."

"You mean to say you are the boy I have so often nursed in my arms, and who is expected in India by the next fleet."

"I am Tom Gaskell, if that is what you want to know; and, as I suppose I must submit to a regular cross-examination, I had perhaps better tell you who and what I am at once. I am a cadet going up to do duty with the Tenth Native Infantry. I came out by a single ship, instead of waiting for the winter-fleet; and here is my commission as an ensign," and he handed me the said document.

The black people around us seemed to be surprised at the prisoner's mildness; and I really began to feel that I had been rather hasty, and sought a still farther explanation from the young ensign, who now began to recover his good-humour.

"Upon my life I cannot tell anything about it, except that yesterday I thrashed my crew and servants all round for having awoken me by their cursed noise at six in the morning, and that they soon afterwards told me the man who had gone on shore for provisions had returned, and said there was famous shooting near the village. Upon which I landed; but no sooner did I get to the spot that they had pointed out, than I was seized, and carried to an infernal go-down, where I lay all last night, and was marched up and down all the morning through the native bazaar, while every one kept salaaming to me in mockery."