

THE RED YEAR

A Story of the Indian Mutiny

BY LOUIS TRACY

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," "The Captain of the Kansas," "The King of Diamonds," etc., etc.

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CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"Put away your pistol," she said, fixing her fine eyes on Malcom, with a softness in their limpid depths that had never been there before. "If we can contrive, my plighted husband and I, you will not need it tonight. I was rejoiced to hear that you were within our gates. We are beaten, I know it. We have lost a kingdom, become wretches like Nana, the Dundun Punt of Bithoor, have forgotten their oaths and preferred drunken revels to empire. Were they of my mind, were they as loyal and honorable as the man I hope to marry, we would have driven you and yours into the sea, Malcom sahib. But Allah willed otherwise and we can only bow to his decree. It is Kismet, I am content. Say, then, if you are sent in safety to your camp, will you in return guarantee the two lives I ask of you?"

Malcom could not help looking at Akab Khan before he answered. The handsome young soldier had folded his arms, and his eyes dwelt on Roshina's animated face with sad fidelity that bespoke at once his love and his despair.

Then the Englishman placed the revolver in his belt and bowed low before the woman who repeated such confidence in him.

"If the issue rested with me, Princess," he said, "you need have no fear for the future. I am only a poor officer and I have small influence. Yet I promise that such power as I possess shall be exerted in your behalf, and I would remind you that we English neither make war on women nor treat honorable enemies as felons."

"My father is a feeble old man," she cried vehemently. "It was not by his command that your people were slain. And Akab Khan has never drawn his sword save in fair fight, not with diffidence, but with the certainty of success."

"I can vouch for Akab Khan's treatment of those who were at his mercy," said Malcom, generously.

"Say, sahib, you repaid me that night," said the other, not to be outdone in this exchange of compliments. "But if I have the happiness to find you again, I have faith that you will save me against my will. I cannot forget that I lead some thousands of sepoy who have faith in me. You have been examining our defenses all day. Sooner would I fall on my sword here and now than that I should connive at the giving of information to an enemy which should lead to the destruction of my men."

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"Then I must tell you that I cannot accept your help at the price of silence. When I undertook this mission, I gave my word. I am still prepared to abide by it. Let me remind you that it is I, not you, who can impose conditions on the four hundred British soldiers."

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The nawab bowed again, and assured the presence that there would be no lapse on his part. Akab Khan had turned away. His attitude betokened rejection, but the Princess, not the first of her sex to barter ambition for love, was radiant with hope.

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When Chumru came out of the mess after supper he found Malcom waiting for an audience. Chumru, still wearing the servant's livery in which the famous brigadier had let him, was waiting for the general was not apt to waste time in talk, and he had a singular knack of reading men's thoughts by a look.

"Glad to see you back again, Major Malcom," he cried. "I hope you were successful."

"It is for you to decide, sir, when you have heard my story," and without further preamble Frank gave a clear narrative of his adventures since dawn. Not a word did he say about the very things he had been sent to report on, and Nicholson understood that a direct order would undo him. When Frank ended the general frowned and was silent. In those days men did not hold honor

lightly, and Nicholson was a fine type of soldier and gentleman.

"Confound it," he growled, "this is awkward, very awkward," and Malcom felt bitterly that the extraordinary turn taken by events in the palace was in no fair way towards depriving his superiors of the facts they were so anxious to learn. Suddenly the big man's deep eyes fell on Chumru.

"Here, you," he growled, "was caught said to thee whereby thou hast a scruple to tell me how many guns defend the Cashmere Gate?"

"Huzoor," said Chumru, "there are but two things that concern me, my master's safety and the size of that jaghir your honor promised me."

Nicholson laughed with an almost boyish mirth.

"By gad," he cried, "you are fortunate in your friends, Malcom." Then he turned to Chumru again. "The jaghir is of no mean size," he said, "but I shall see to it that a field in addition to your jaghir, you may make known."

Frank listened to his servant's enumeration of the guns and troops at the Lahore, Mori, and Cashmere Gates, and he was surprised at the accuracy of Chumru's mental note-taking.

"I need not help me to reason, I will," he said, "but I can help me to reason, I will," he said, "but I can help me to reason, I will."

The brigadier laid a kindly hand on Frank's shoulder.

"You forget that you have brought me the most important news of the day," he said. "The enemy is defeated before the first ladder is planted against their walls. They know it, and, thanks to you, now we remain in sleep. Myself, I am not to take Delhi, but to screw up my chin to make the effort."

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The Explanation.

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nine out of every ten mutineers they encountered were soldiers and not slayers of women and children.

At last, in the darkness, the columns reached their allotted stations and halted. The engineers, carrying ladders crept to the front.

Nicholson placed a hand on Jones' shoulder.

"Are you ready?" he asked, with the quiet confidence in the success of his self-imposed mission that caused all men to trust in him implicitly.

"Yes," answered Jones.

Nicholson turned to Malcom and two others of his aids.

"Tell the gunners to cease fire," he said.

Left and right they hurried, stumbling over the broken ground to reach the batteries, which were thundering at short range against the first crumbling walls.

In No. 2, which Malcom entered, he found a young lieutenant of artillery, Frederick Smith Roberts, working a heavy gun almost single-handed, so terribly had the Royal Regiment suffered in the contest waged with the rebel gunners during the night.

Almost simultaneously the three batteries became silent. With a heart-thrilling cry the rebels hurled a volley to cover the advance of the ladder-men, and the first step was taken in the actual capture of Delhi.

The loud explosion, followed by a signal to the other columns. The second, gallantly led by Jones, rushed up to the Water Bastion and entered it, but not before it had been fired at by the rebels.

On Jones' right, Nicholson, ever in the van, seemed to lift his column by sheer strength and courage. He was a heavy gun, heavy stones, grape-shot and bayonet thrusts, while the rebels, swarming like wasps to the breach, inspired each other by hurrying threats and cries at the Nazarenes. But to stop Nicholson and his host they must kill every man, and he was not a man to be killed.

Then his voice sank to a deep growl.

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The last of the Moguls was driven from the halls which had witnessed the grandeur and pomp of his imperial predecessors, and the great city passed into the hands of the new race that had come to leaven the decaying East. It was a daily-bought triumph when, on September 11, the conquering army lost sixty-six officers and eleven hundred and four men. Between May 31 and September 20 the total British casualties were nearly four thousand.

Malcom soon learned that the Princess Roshina had fled with her father and brothers. Probably the death of Akab Khan had unnerved her, and she dared not trust to the mercy of the victors.

Frank was among the first to enter the palace. After a few fanatical ghazas were made an end of, he hurried towards the Martine school, at the Sikh school, where he found a young man, a leader with the man whom they had left in the little cemetery at the foot of the Ridge.

It is on record that from the end of the line came a yell of welcome and recognition. The 3rd Highlanders remembered what Campbell had done in the Crimea, and their joyful slogan brought a flush to the bronzed face of the old war dog when he learned the significance of their greeting.

Next morning began a three days' battle. Perhaps there was never an action so spectacular, so thrilling, so amazingly earnest, as the continuous fight which brought about the Second Relief of Lucknow. At the Alumbagh, at the Dilkusha, at the Martine school, at the Sikh school, Bagh and the Shah Nujef, were fought fiercely-contested combats that in other respects were unimportant, but which, in the history of the time.

The taking of the Shah Nujef alone was a bloody and heroic episode. It was a mosque that stood in a garden, bounded by a high and stout wall and protected by jungle and mud hovels. Its peculiar position, joined to the number of guns mounted on its walls and the thousands of sepoy who held it, made it impossible to storm by direct assault. It was the pressure of a mob, intent on rescuing Bahadur Moghul, the heir apparent, and his brother, that led to the capture of the place.

After that his duties took him to the Ridge, and he was not until long after dark that he heard how Hodson had captured the King and shot the royal princess with his own hand. This tragedy took place on the 20th of September. The British, whether the wretched monarch retreated when it was seen that Delhi must fall, or Hodson claimed to be an executioner, not a murderer, he held that he acted under the pressure of a mob, intent on rescuing Bahadur Moghul, the heir apparent, and his brother, that led to the capture of the place.

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