

Thus ended a brief but adventurous cruise among the Cyclades. They are islands so seldom visited that it has been thought worth while to place this little account on record, that others, who find themselves in that neighbourhood, may haply follow our example. A good dragoman is the chief requisite, for the dialect of the islands is very different from the language talked on the mainland, and there are, of course, constant emergencies, from which it needs native shrewdness and familiarity with the manners and customs of the islanders to extricate the traveller.—*St. James's Magazine.*

THE ROMANCE OF THE KOH-I-NOOR.

Of things remarkable some are treasured for their intrinsic worth, and others for the associations, historical or otherwise, which time has grouped around them. The subject of this sketch possesses both these claims to fame. Of itself it is one of the most valuable and beautiful of gems, while the romance of its history clothes it with a lustre other than its own. Tradition commences the story of its marvellous career more than three thousand years ago, when it is said to have been worn by Carna, Rajah of Angar, who fell in the "great war." By some accounts the gem is connected with an ancient legend of the Talmud, which ascribes its creation to the Hindoo god Krishna, though another theory, with the same show of reason, declares it to have been discovered in the bed of the Godavery, near Masulipatam. Apart from traditions, however, it is more than probable that at a very remote period the Koh-i-noor was in the possession of the Hindoo priesthood, and possibly adored the shrine of the deity to whom its creation was ascribed.

But leaving this doubtful basis of legendary lore for the more solid ground of absolute history, we find the really reliable account of the stone to commence about the year 1531. In the "Memories of the Mogul Baber," written about that time, it is affirmed to have passed into the treasury of Delhi, after the subjugation of Malwa by Ala-uddeen, about the year 1304, and is described as weighing the equivalent of 184 carats of modern weight. Here the gem remained after the death of Baber until the days of the Great Mogul, when in 1738, Nadir Shah, incensed by the protection afforded by the Mogul to a number of Afghan refugees who sought refuge from his vengeance within the walls of Delhi, laid siege to the city, and ultimately forced its surrender. As usual in uncivilized warfare, the town was sacked, and the rich collection of gems and jewels acquired under the Mogul sovereigns passed into the hands of Nadir Shah. This accomplished, the Nadir restored the Great Mogul to the throne of the despoiled city, to hold the same in vassalage to himself. The Nadir having noticed a fine diamond in the turban of the Great Mogul, and not wishing to acquire it by force, suggested to his new vassal that they should exchange turbans in token of friendship, and in this way the Koh-i-noor passed into the hands of Nadir Shah.

On the death of Nadir by assassination the Koh-i-noor came into the possession of his nephew, Ali Rokh Shah, a man of small capacity and little vigour, who presented it to Ahmed Shah El Aldahy, a most successful soldier, as a reward for military services rendered to him. From Ahmed Shah the stone descended to his sons, Shah Soujah, the eldest, being its next possessor. Runjeet Singh, the younger son, however, a fierce and violent man, renowned in war, and consequently popular with the army, greatly coveted his brother's dominions, and notwithstanding the fact that Shah Soujah had rewarded his military services by making him King of Lahore, declared war against his brother, and ultimately conquered him. Shah Soujah fled to Cabul, of which city Runjeet allowed him to be styled king, and in his flight managed to carry off the Koh-i-noor. Runjeet, however, had not forgotten the brilliant gem, and he determined by some means to obtain possession of it. To this end he adopted a truly Eastern method, and "made a feast," at which he invited the attendance of his brother, but Shah Soujah suspecting the designs of Runjeet, took the precaution to have a crystal made of the same size and shape as the Koh-i-noor, which he wore on his person in place of the original gem.

Arrived at the Court of Runjeet, the stone was almost immediately demanded of him, and after some show of resistance the counterfeit was delivered to the avaricious monarch. Runjeet was delighted with his new treasure, and Soujah was allowed to depart for Cabul with the Koh-i-noor still in his possession. The deception, however, was but short-lived, for the king's lapidary soon detected the cheat, and Runjeet's rejoicing was turned into mortification and hate. The palace of the Soujah was immediately invested and searched from top to bottom, and at length, through the treachery of a slave, the gem was found beneath a heap of ashes. Upon the death of Runjeet the stone came into the possession of Khurruck Singh and Shew Singh successively, both of whom were killed after reigning but a short time, "battle, murder, and sudden death" seeming to be inseparable from its possession.

The throne and its valuables next devolved upon a son of Runjeet Singh, a feeble youth, whose mother for some years acted as regent. In 1845, however, while under the regency, matters assumed so serious an aspect that the British authorities were compelled in self-defence to assume a share in the government of the kingdom, and in 1849, after every other expediency had

been tried in vain, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, formally annexed the Punjab to the British dominions. The terms upon which Dhuleep Singh resigned for himself, his heirs, and successors all right, title, and claim to the sovereignty of the Punjab, were as follows:—That the property of the State should be confiscated to the Honourable East India Company, that the gem called the Koh-i-noor should be surrendered to the Queen of England, and that H. R. H. Dhuleep Singh should receive an annal pension of four lacs of rupees for the support of himself and his relatives, conditionally upon his remaining obedient to the British Government, and residing at such place as the Governor-General might select.

In this way the Koh-i-noor became a British possession, and on June 3, 1850, it was presented to Her Majesty the Queen. In the following year the gem was exhibited at the Great Exhibition, where it attracted a great deal of attention. Shortly after this the authorities determined on having the gem re-cut, and the late Duke of Wellington placed it on the mill for that purpose.* The wisdom of thus destroying the identity and depreciating the value of this remarkable stone has been much disputed, and doubtless there was much to be said in favour of maintaining the form in which it passed through its romantic history. Prior to its re-cutting it ranked second only to the Orloff of European gems, but now it ranks sixth, the Mogul, the Orloff, the Grand Tuscan, the Regent, and the Star of the South all taking precedence of it both for weight and purity. Let us hope that having passed through experiences of so much war and bloodshed, the remainder of its existence may be spent in peace.—*Excelsior.*

[* Two diamond-cutters being brought from Holland, where alone the art is at present kept up. A small steam-engine was erected for the purpose of cutting the gem, and the cost of the operation was £8,000. The Hindoos have a superstition that it brings ruin and disaster upon its possessor.—*Ed. CAN. SPEC.*]

A LIFE'S OPPORTUNITY.

BY FELTON LEA.

"Uncle Ralph, I think I will play truant this afternoon, if you will not look very threatening," said Noel Brandon as he dropped lazily into his accustomed chair in the office. "I believe my father may be here to-morrow and then good bye to holidays. Will you give your leave and blessing?"

"Noel, you are not fitting yourself to follow in the steps of your father. This half-work, three-quarters-play sort of going-on will ruin your business prospects as sure as my name is Ralph Brandon. My boy, it really is time you had a fixed purpose in life. This shilly-shallying only needs time to wreck you as it has so many before you."

"For pity's sake, Uncle Ralph, do not sermonize; I cannot stand it. Mamma does that enough, and I feel all the better, or rather worse after listening, though she never 'riles' a fellow with what she says; but I am like a cat rubbed the wrong way when anyone else 'tries it on'; so if you think it such an awful dereliction of duty just to take an afternoon now and then, why, I submit. So here goes. What is my part in the programme? I am sick of adding up figures, making bills of lading and the whole thing,"—and to judge from Noel Brandon's face, there was something very serious likely to result from his ailment.

"Look here, Noel," said his uncle facing him, and drawing up his tall well-knit figure to its utmost height, "I am disappointed in you, I tell you candidly. Hear me out, sir, for I shall not interfere with you again. I judged from the promise of your schoolboy days, you were worthy to carry on our firm. I need not tell you what the world thinks of Brandon Bros. The name is enough. For generations it has stood firm in its strict integrity, and looked upon the struggles of others, seen their downfall, but no panic, no calamity has so much as touched us, and now for once in your life think,—how will it fare in your hands?"

"If ever there was an unlucky fellow under the sun, it's me with a vengeance," said Noel impetuously, and with a bound he cleared the back of his chair, lighting on the table right in front of his astonished relative, who drew back his head in time to avoid a collision. "It's no good" continued Noel, grasping his uncle by the shoulder and making him an unwilling prisoner by the further addition of pinioning his legs as he made an impromptu foot stool of them for his own. "I tell you, sir, you shall hear me," and his imitation of his uncle's manner was perfect. "How dare you ask me such a question? What are you going to do,—emigrate? And what is going to become of your father, eh? Are you going to desert the old hulk and expect me to pilot her through all weathers. I guess you are not quite so far gone as that," and such a boyish laugh echoed again and again through the room, that the reserved, dignified Mr. Ralph Brandon unbent a little, as he adroitly regained his liberty, and then standing erect said: "You know my meaning well enough—so long as Gilbert and Ralph Brandon can hold a pen and charter a ship, this office will never see their place vacant; but we want our boys to be ready to take the command when the time may come for their need, and Noel, my dear nephew, you are drifting into uselessness. Without system no