

Ghoorkha regiment on ahead of them send back another cheer out of simple good comradeship and that contagion of stout-hearted spirit which is never so strangely marked as among old soldiers on the march. Let them grumble as they would at their "woman's work" in cantonments, their cheery pluck as they lead the way over such hills as they had to cross—those men of the Kuram force—is always conspicuous and always admirable. In illustration of this, General Roberts may well quote his gunners as Highlanders. But he goes on to say—and how reluctantly those who have read his despatches, remarkable among those of recent generals for their never-failing tribute of recognition to merit in the ranks, can understand—that,

With the infantry, matters were very different. The regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the 8th foot, is one that bears a name second to none, and which has distinguished itself on many a hard-fought field. It had been stationed at Rawal Pindi, one of the healthiest cantonments in Upper India, during the two years it had been in the country, and had had every opportunity given to it of recovering from the effects of a system which two years previously, had collected together in the battalion a number of untrained boys, unknown to each other and to their officers. The result proved that two years were not sufficient to remedy the evils of the system.

I was at Rawal Pindi while the 8th were there, and, if I remember rightly, I told you in one of my letters of the demoralisation of the regiment even when in cantonments. The reason was notorious in the station: What else can you expect from such a mob of boys" they said. Again, I saw the 8th on the march and it is miserable work recalling such a scene. On the first occasion they were on the high road the day was hot, and the hills were trying, no doubt. But the boys were in their shirt sleeves, their uniforms and accoutrements piled on the backs of the animals they were "escorting" or heaped upon the doolies which the native bearers were carrying. Some were smoking, some indulging in horseplay; but all were as unsoldierly as it is possible for British regulars to look. On the next occasion that I saw them on the march they were on their way to the front, and it was then that I was struck with the contrast which Sir Frederick Roberts has now brought forward with such terrible effect against the fatal system that gives us these boy soldiers.

The particular piece of road was, a very nasty hill, and the 8th were, apparently, thoroughly beaten by it. The complement of those who had fallen out was already so large as to have filled all the transport immediately available, and so others sat mopping their faces and looking utterly disheartened by the roadside, as the stream of native troops and baggage animals, cavalry and artillery elephants, wound up the way past them. A native regiment, the number of which I forget, but I know they were Punjabis, came striding along in capital form, and, as they passed one stalwart fellow, with moustachious that you could have hung your hat on said in Hindostani to the next man, "Wah-wahl if those are European soldiers, we had better put them into the doolies and carry them up the hill." But I had my revenge of them for the sneer, for very soon after I saw the same regiment halted to let the 72nd go by, and it was a sight all the nation should have seen, these Highlanders swinging along up the hill! But hear the gallant General!

To return to the 8th Foot. "When the regiment reached Kohat, about 100 miles from Rawal Pindi, my attention was drawn to the youthful appearance of the men; to a listlessness in the performance of their daily duty; and to the frequent admissions into hospital. After repeated and careful examinations, I was forced to represent to the Commander-in-Chief in India that I did not think the battalion was in a fit state for a campaign, and to request that another regiment of British infantry might be attached to my column. My request was so

far acceded to that a wing of the 72nd Highlanders was ordered to join me, also three guns of a field battery. With this addition the force under my command crossed the frontier on Nov. 21. 1878. The country presented no difficulties to the infantry soldier, the climate was all that could be wished, and no forced marches had to be made; but on arrival at Kuram, only seventy miles from our own territory, I found that the 8th Foot had dwindled down to a weak half battalion. Fortunately the 72nd Highlanders had been nearly eight years in India, and were composed of seasoned soldiers, very few of whom were on the sick list. Perhaps I shall be better understood if I give you figures. When we left Kuram, on Nov. 28, to attack the Afghan army on the Peiwar Kotal, the whole battalion of 8th Foot only mustered 366 men fit for duty, while the wing of the Highlanders had 330 men in its ranks. Now, gentlemen, I would ask you to reflect what would have been the fate of the Kuram field force if it had been called upon to storm and capture the Peiwar Kotal with the troops originally allotted to it. I have no hesitation in stating my firm belief that the force would have been annihilated!

How near a touch, indeed, that Peiwar fight was the country probably has never understood so well before, for General Roberts has assured it that but for a wing of the 72nd—that is to say, but for some 300 old soldiers—that very important victory might have proved a tremendous disaster. Yet General Roberts does not mean to say the 8th did not fight well. On the contrary, in his despatches of the day, he gives them a place of honour, and tells us that they were as brave as any. But nevertheless, had it not been for the presence of that one wing of disciplined veterans, the great fight at the Kotal might too easily have gone against us. In another part of his patriotic speech Sir Frederick Roberts reminds the country that bravery is not all the generals require in the men they lead. He said.

Young soldiers of eighteen or twenty may be, and probably are, individually as brave as their comrades of maturer age, and as well able to fight when everything is *couleur de rose*; but I will never admit that young soldiers, or those new to each other, are as reliable in times of difficulty as old and tried soldiers. What is it that has enabled a comparatively small number of British troops, over and over again, to face tremendous odds, and win battles against vastly superior numbers? The glorious annals of our regiments give the answer—discipline, *esprit de corps*, and powers of endurance—the three essentials which are absolutely wanting in the young soldier. Discipline enables a man to obey his leaders implicitly, and to rely as implicitly on his comrades, but it cannot be instilled into a young soldier in a few months, and the more short service men there are in a regiment the longer the process takes. *esprit de corps* is, as I said on a former occasion, the backbone of the British army. It is this feeling which teaches our soldiers to take in the traditions of their regiment; and consequently to take a pride in helping to keep up its good name. My lords and gentlemen, it must be remembered that fighting is not the only demand made upon our soldiers. It is, of course, the main object to be kept in view in any system of training; but all, especially British soldiers, must possess great powers of endurance. Without them they are really worth nothing. What is it that causes the long casualty roll during a campaign? Not the losses in battle, but the steady, never-ceasing disease, brought about by insufficient and badly cooked food, hard work, night duties, and by exposures to extremes of heat and cold. Against such trials only the strongest can bear up, and unless our regiments are composed of men, full grown, and of tried stamina, our armies, in point of numbers, weak enough, at the best for the work they have to do, must dwindle away very rapidly when they take the field. My lords and gentlemen, if you will only inquire for yourselves you will find that during the late Afghan war the boy regiments broke down without an exception."

Further illustration of this was afforded on another critical occasion—namely, that memorable march from