

palace, the graceful and refreshing spots made by the acacias drooping over the flat roofs, the tall date trees, and the sluggish windings of the Jumna, with its picturesque bridge of boats and imposing fortifications, combined to form a unique and lovely picture; but it had lost its charm for these two women who sat busy at their sewing, and talking low and earnestly, with visible anxiety on their faces. One was elderly, a grave, sweet-faced English lady, whom we last saw before the altar in the old church at Studleigh, and who had amply fulfilled her promise to befriend the English girl, who that day became a soldier's wife. Rachel herself had changed: the climate of the east had tried her keenly. She was very slender, and the whitish muslin gown hung loosely upon her figure, and her face was much thinner, and had lost its ruddy hue. But there was a dignity and grace about her, intensified by a sweetness of expression and demeanour, which made her a lovely woman. Her health had been indifferent in India; she had long been delicate after the birth of her little son. Until lately her poor health had been the only cloud on her own and her husband's happiness, but now there were other and more pressing anxieties and forebodings, which not only blanched the faces of the frail women, but made the hearts of men quail in their breasts, not with craven fear for themselves, but with concern for the women and children who were dearer to them than their lives. The rumours of disaffection among the natives which had been lulled for a time had again broken out, accompanied this time by signs there was little mistaking. On that eventful Saturday night a council of English officers was being held in the Flagstaff Tower to consider the best measures to take in view of a revolt among the Sepoys at that station, their behaviour having lately undergone a somewhat suspicious change. They were arrogant and disrespectful in their demeanour towards the Europeans, and in cases of punishment for insubordination had been heard to mutter threats about a day of reckoning rapidly approaching when these insults to native pride would be amply revenged. Sir Randal Vane and Captain Ayre were among those present at the council, and their wives were anxiously awaiting their return.

"It is hard for you, my dear," said Lady Vane, with affectionate kindness. "The first years of your married life have been passed in anxiety, and even in a certain degree of peril. Are you never tempted to wish yourself back in that sweet, old farm-house at Studleigh?"

"I think of it pretty often, I confess," Rachel answered, with a smile and a quick, starting tear. "But I would not exchange my present life for the old way, Lady Vane. I seem to have really lived only since I came to India."

"You have taught some others how to live too, my dear," responded Lady Vane, significantly. "I thought it my duty some time ago to write a somewhat copious epistle to Lady Emily Ayre."

Rachel's colour faintly rose.

"On what subject?" she asked quickly.

"On the subject of the sister-in-law of whom she is not worthy," said the elder woman, with great energy. "Shall I tell you something of what I said?"

"I know it would be kind. You are always kind to me. Without you I could not have been so good a wife and mother as I have been. You have taught me everything, and shown me the highest ideal of a woman's duty."

"Nay, my dear, you are crowning me with your own laurels," said Lady Vane, shaking her head. "That is just what you have been showing to us every day since you came. I said to Lady Ayre that you had set an example to the young married women of our European colony in Delhi which cannot be over-estimated, an example of all a gentleman and a Christian wife and mother should be, and—"

"Oh, Lady Vane, hush!"

"My love, I am doing right to tell you this, because your spirits are down a little, and you are in the mood to be hard and unkind to yourself. There are times when a word of encouragement is as necessary to our fainting hearts as bread to the starving body. Oh, I shall not spoil you. If necessary, as you know, I can reprove you too."

"You have been very indulgent to me, dear Lady Vane. Geoffrey and I can never be grateful enough for the great kindness shown to us by you and Sir Randal."

"I wish, Rachel, that there was any possibility of getting you and that precious baby of yours away to the hills," said Lady Vane as she looked with undisguised anxiety in her companion's pale face. "Sir Randal is talking of sending me to Simla in June. Could you tear yourself away from Captain Ayre for two months, you most devoted of wives?"

"Yes, I could, for Clement's sake," responded the young

mother, quickly, as her glance wandered towards a clump of acacia trees in the garden, from whence came sounds of childish merriment. "How good and gentle Azim is, Lady Vane! I confess when I saw my baby first in his arms I had a curious feeling, but now I know he is safer than with me. I believe he would lay down his life for his charge."

"There are many instances on record of such devotion among the Hindoos. Long, long may these beautiful relationships between the Europeans and the native servants be maintained," said Lady Vane, gravely; and then a strange silence fell upon them, and though each knew what was occupying the thought of the other it was not put into words. A strange uncertainty had crept into European life in the old city on the banks of the Jumna—an uncertainty which had left its elements of apprehension and fear. It seemed as if they were waiting for some stupendous crisis, as if each step brought them nearer the edge of an unknown precipice. The council being then held in the Flagstaff Tower was the first direct acknowledgement that the state of matters in the city was such as to cause any anxiety. The ladies were still silent when Sir Randal and Captain Ayre entered the garden by a side gate, and came somewhat hastily up the path. They were talking earnestly, and both faces wore their gravest look. Rachel rose hurriedly from her chair, for a faint, curious sickness seemed to come over her, a prevision of immediate danger.

"There is nothing to harm you, my love," Geoffrey said, re-assuringly, as he laid his strong hand on her arm, and looked into her face with protecting tenderness. "Yes, we will tell you exactly how matters stand, and what we propose to do. We agreed in council, didn't we, Sir Randal, that though there was no imminent danger, we were justified in taking every precaution. The first is to remove the defenceless to a place of safety at once. You know that Major and Mrs. Elton had arranged to leave Delhi on Monday for Calcutta, Lady Vane?"

"I heard something of it; but surely they have hurried on their plans."

"Possibly. Mrs. Elton is utterly prostrated with nervousness, and they leave quite a week earlier than they intended. We proposed as we walked down that they should take you and Rachel and the boy in their travelling carriage, which is large enough for four."

"Did you propose any such thing for me, Randal," said Lady Vane, with a humorous smile. "Did you think it likely that I would leave you in the lurch? It is quite different with Mrs. Ayre. She has her child to consider. But I have nothing but you, and I mean to keep by you to the last."

"You'll have to obey orders like the rest of us, madam," said Sir Randal, gruffly, but he turned his grey head quickly away from her, and his eyes grew dim.

"I am not amenable to authority, my love," responded Lady Vane, placidly. "But I am delighted to hear of such a chance for dear Rachel, Captain Ayre. I have just been urging upon her the necessity that she should have an immediate change. Have you no friends at any of the hill stations?"

"Don't ask him, Lady Vane," interrupted Rachel quickly, "nor put any such ideas into his head. Whatever may happen I shall not leave him, unless I am compelled to do so."

She drew herself up—her momentary fear gone—and in its place came a quiet strength and resolution which impressed them all. Rachel had awakened to the first duty of a soldier's wife, a calm and heroic endurance in times of anxiety or peril.

"If Mrs. Elton would take charge of Clement, Geoffrey, and take him home to England, I should send him," she said, suddenly. "I believe Azim would go with him."

"Home to Studleigh?" asked Geoffrey quickly.

"No, to Pine Edge," answered Rachel, with a slight pressure of her lips.

Lady Vane took her husband's arm, and led him down the verandah steps into the garden, so that for a few moments the young couple were left alone.

"Could you really part with the boy, Rachel," Geoffrey asked.

"I could. I have been fearfully oppressed all day with a sense of impending evil. If baby were safe I would not mind for myself. Besides this heat takes the life out of him. He has been so languid all day. Will you tell me, Geoffrey, quite frankly, what is the danger you apprehend, and what its consequence would be? It will be better for me to know exactly what may happen."

Geoffrey Ayre hesitated a moment. The nature of the danger was easily known; its consequences were such as not an Englishman in the city, soldier or civilian, dared face. It meant a handful of Europeans in the grasp of a mighty horde of Mohammedans, in whose breasts the instincts of a savage race had not been extinguished or much modified by the touch of civilization.

"There has been a revolt at Meerut, Rachel. A dak runner brought the news this morning; and he says the mutineers are marching on to Delhi," he replied briefly, but kept back the fact that the greater portion of the European residents in Meerut had been massacred. "If our Sepoys join the rebels it will go hard with us, we must admit that, dear, for we are only a handful."

"And have you any idea of the state the Sepoys are in?" Rachel asked, quite quietly still.

"Disaffected still, so far as we can judge or trust them," answered Geoffrey, somewhat gloomily. "The commandant ordered out the regiments this forenoon and told them the news, and exhorted them to stand true to their colours. They cheered him to the echo; but it is just possible that an Indian cheer and an English one may have different meanings. I wish you would take advantage of the Eltons' carriage, dearest. Such scenes and anxieties are not for you just now."

"When are they going?"

"On Monday morning."

"I shall go to Mrs. Elton now, and see if she will take baby."

"And you?"

"No, I shall stay here with you, Geoffrey."

"My darling, it will be terrible to part from you; but it would make my mind easier if you were away."

"And what about my mind, Geoffrey?" she asked with a slight, sad smile. "I should certainly die of apprehension about you. I came to India because I loved you, and that love makes it easy for me to share every risk to which you are exposed. Let it be as I say."

He put his arm about her slender shoulders and drew her to his heart.

"My wife, in such troublous times as these I could almost wish I had left you in safety at home. Do you not blame me?"

"I blame you?"

Never had her eyes looked into his with a more enduring and perfect trust. She touched his bronzed cheek with her white fingers, and that touch had the power to thrill him as of yore.

"Though this should be the last day of my life, Geoffrey, I bless the day I became your wife. There is no happier woman in the wide world than I."

It was an assurance passing sweet to the soldier's heart—an assurance recalled with sudden sweet vividness to his heart a few hours later, when the storm broke and he was where those who knew him expected him to be, in the very hottest forefront of the battle. To her life's end Rachel Ayre thanked God that in that last moment of confidence she had been moved to utter those true, tender, wifely words.

"It's going to be an ugly business, Lucy," said Sir Randal Vane to his wife in his gruff, practical way. "An ugly business. I suppose it will take the total extermination of the Europeans in different parts of India to convince that the European-headed Government at home that the military service in India is a perfect mockery of the name. Why, we've nothing but the Company's servants and a few English officers to cope with these Mohammedan devils. I beg your pardon, Lucy, but they're nothing else. Graves had them out this forenoon appealing to their loyalty. Loyalty! As well appeal to that rat's loyalty. It would be about as satisfactory."

"We must just be brave and trust in God," said his wife. "I suppose so. It's all that's left to us anyhow," responded Sir Randal, quickly. "There's no man's help in this forsaken place to be depended on. Before another sun-down it may be every man for himself with us all."

(To be continued.)

BROOKLYN MOTHER.—Is that one of those horrid dime novels you are reading?

Her Little Son—Yes'm.
Mother—Oh, dear! The next thing, you will be reading the New York papers.—*Brooklyn Life.*