

however, attributed it to the passengers smoking near crates of earthenware, which was packed in exposed straw. Water was instantly thrown upon the fire, but almost immediately after part of the vessel burst into flames. The anchors were instantly let go, to keep the ship to the wind and the fire to the stern. Two boats were also got out, but the cruel fire came on the rest before the lashings could be either loosened or cut.

Losses at sea have been and will continue to be, but their number may be reduced by forethought, care, and increased study of meteorology. Passenger-vessels must not be overloaded; fire annihilators must be always carried; too great speed must not be sought, to overtax the engines; dead-weight must be prudently distributed. No reckless selfish greed of base men hasting to be rich must be allowed to render our merchant and emigrant vessels less fit than they used to be to safely brave the dangers of the treacherous element in which our brave sailors get their living, and too often meet their death.

HOW I GOT MY VICTORIA CROSS.

"YOU want to hear how I managed to get the V. C., do you, old fellow? Well, send over to the Buttery for another tankard of beer, and I will tell you all about it; it's dry work talking, and your Brasenose malt is perfection."

"Now for my story:—"

"It was near the close of a glorious summer day in the plains of India, if you know what that means; the sun had just gone down blood red in a cloudless sky, the thermometer stood at 110 degrees in my tent, and not a breath of air was stirring. I had only just returned to camp after a pretty hard day's work, and had fallen asleep on my cot, booted and spurred as I came in. I had at that time, as you may remember, the command of a body of Sikh horse which I had raised myself, and was, moreover, Acting Deputy Quarter Master General, and Head of the Intelligence Department to the Cis-Nerbudda Moveable Column under Major General Sir George Percy, K. C. B., so had work enough on my hands. On this day I had been in the saddle from daybreak till late in the afternoon, scouring the country for miles in advance of the column, and had wound up by a hard gallop of half a dozen miles with a troop of mutineer Sowars at my heels. Imagine my disgust at being roused up by a big black-bearded Sikh orderly, with, 'Sahib, the General sahib wishes to see you immediately in his tent.' I jumped up, soused my head in the big brass basin which we Indians carry with us everywhere, pulled on my blue *Meersai*,* and rushed off to the General's tent, not in the best of humours. As soon as I entered, however, I saw there was something serious the matter, and I had not been routed out for nothing. The General was seated at his camp-table looking very grave, and with an open letter in his hand. By his side was Colonel A—, second in command to J—, his Adjutant General. Sir George handed me the letter as I came in. 'Read this, Llantaine; it has just been brought in by a disguised Sepoy from Shahrangpur.' It was from Major L—, who had long been beleaguered in that place with the officers, women, and children of his own regiment and a few fugitives from neighbouring stations. It was written in Greek characters, and ran as follows: 'Only twenty men fit for duty, provisions very short; we cannot possibly hold out more than five days longer.' Few words and simple, but full of awful meaning."

"The difficulty is this," said the General, turning to Colonel A—, "Shahrangpur is, you know, only some thirty miles to the eastward, and we might reach it in time to save them, but then we must leave Bharagur to itself for at least a week, and I don't know in what state they are there, or how long they can hold out; the number of Europeans there is three times as great as at Shahrangpur, and they have a large treasury and magazine in the fort. Llantaine

has sent six spies at different times with letters to Bharagur; the two first came back with their ears and noses strung round their necks, and the others never came back at all. All our information goes to show that the enemy are in great force round the place. I dare not divide our small force; if we march to relieve Shahrangpur, we risk losing Bharagur, and as this letter shows, if we attempt to relieve Bharagur, Shahrangpur must fall into the enemy's hands, and there will be Cawnpore over again. What do you advise, A—?"

"The Colonel's face worked strangely, and when at last he answered, it was in a thick husky voice."

"My wife and children are at Shahrangpur, General, but the safety of Bharagur must not be risked."

"There was silence for some minutes, and as we looked at each other, our faces gathered blackness."

"By God!" exclaimed Sir George, "this is a fearful position to be in. I'd give a year's pay to know how things really are at Bharagur."

"By this time my mind was made up."

"All right, General, write a cheque, and give me till noon to-morrow, and if I'm in luck you shall have the information you require."

"What do you mean, Llantaine? You won't get any one to go to Bharagur after the way your poor devils of spies were treated?"

"I don't want anyone to try, General; if the thing is to be done at all, I must do it myself."

"It's only twenty miles from here to Bharagur as the crow flies, and I know every inch of the country, as I had charge of this district for two years before the row began."

"Nonsense, Llantaine, you'll get cut to pieces as sure as fate, and do no good either. We must think of some other plan."

"He either fears his fate too much, General—you know the rest. If the niggers are to have my scalp, they may as well take it now as a year hence. Anyhow, I'll risk it."

"There was a little more discussion, but as no better plan could be hit on, I carried my point and left the tent, to make my arrangements. Colonel A—followed me out."

"God bless you, Llantaine, and bring you safe back," said he, wringing my hand: and as I looked at him I saw the tears standing in his eyes. It took me rather aback, for the old fellow was no great friend of mine, and was a regular Tartar, to boot."

"All right, Colonel, never say die. I shall live to plague you yet, I hope."

"I sent at once for my Rissaldar,* and in five minutes he was in my tent."

"I am going for a ride to-night, Shere Singh, let your son with Bulwunt Singh, and four other good men be ready in an hour, and look you, see that they are well mounted, and their arms in good order."

"They are always ready for work, sahib," said the old Sikh, as he saluted and went out."

"I slept like a top for nearly an hour, and awoke feeling game for anything. Tatoo was beating as I rode off with my small party, and the moon did not rise till nearly midnight, so we had good three hours of darkness before us. For the first ten miles we rode hard along the high road which crossed a large barren plain, destitute alike of village and trees, and here I knew we were not likely to come across any of the enemy; but after that the country became cultivated and thickly peopled, and we were obliged to make our way as best we could, skirting villages, feeling our way through large topos,† in many of which we saw fires burning, and not a few horses picketed. It was evident enough that the rebels were strong in cavalry, and had scattered them well over the country between us and their camp."

"At last, we arrived, without any adventures, within half a mile of Bharagur. The enemy were apparently in very strong force all round the Fort, and their watch-fires were blazing in every direction. It was manifestly unsafe for us to go on any further, so I halted my men

in a dense patch of jungle, with strict orders not to move on any account unless discovered and attacked, until my return, unless, indeed, I were absent more than three hours, in which case they were to make the best of their way back to camp. I left my horse, of course, with them, and stripped, keeping on only a waistcloth, in which I stuck my revolver, and stole off, sabre in hand, towards the north face of the Fort opposite to which we were, as I knew that the only entrance was on that side. Favoured by the darkness I crept along under cover of mounds and bushes, until I gained the north-east angle of the ditch; the entrance to the Fort was nearly at the other end of this face, but I could not get opposite to it, as the Sepoys had a strong picket there, and their sentries were pacing up and down to within a few yards of where I was. Here, then, it became necessary for me to take to the water. Crouching beneath a bush, I took off my sword and left it there, but kept my 'Colt' on, as I knew from experience that it would stand any amount of wet. Now I was all ready, and had nothing to do but to get into the moat; but somehow I was rather backward in going forward; the water looked horribly black and ugly, and by no means inviting. I knew that crocodiles were as thick as thieves there, and it now occurred to me for the first time how extremely probable it was that one of them might take a fancy to me. Never before had I fully appreciated the deep wisdom of old Falstaff's reflections on honour,—honour pricked me on, sure enough, but would it pull me through if one of the scaly gentlemen down below should lay hold of my leg? The idea was by no means pleasant, and I must admit that I funked horribly. But it was now too late to draw back, and the more I looked at the water the less I liked it, so at last, with something between a curse and a prayer, I dropped quietly in. Ugh! how fearfully cold it felt, though the night was warm enough. I am a tolerably good swimmer, and struck out manfully, but I seemed to be crawling through the water. 'Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte' was by no means true in my case; I had some three hundred yards to swim, and by the time I had got half-way I was, if possible, in a greater funk than when I started. I swam with my beard over my shoulder, expecting every moment to hear the rush of some huge mugger,* or to see its horrid jaws rising above the water. Every ripple startled me, and I could hear my heart thumping against my ribs. At last I reached the other bank safe and sound, scrambled up it sharp, and being lucky enough to find the European sentry a little less ready than most of them with his rifle, succeeded in persuading him that I was not "a nigger," in time to escape lead or steel. In a couple of minutes I was surrounded by half the garrison, and had told my story. It was received with a wild hurrah, which startled the gentlemen on the opposition benches not a little, and brought down on us a shower of bullets, which luckily did no damage."

"Tell Sir George," said the old brigadier, "that we have lots of food and ammunition, and can hold out for a fortnight if necessary; but stop, I will give you a note to him."

"After taking it, and a peg of rum, I was ready to start again. As I was saying 'good-bye,' one of the rifles sang out—"

"By the bye, Llantaine, if you should get knocked over going back, the General will be in as big a fix as ever; you had better let one of us go with you, two fellows are better than one, and I am your man."

"Just then a Sepoy stepped out of the crowd."

"Let me go with the sahib, a black man may get through where a white one cannot."

"He was an Oude man, a 'Pandy,' and a Brahmin, but had stood by his officers like a man, and looked like one who might be trusted; so I accepted his offer at once, and he stuck a copy of the brigadier's letter into his turban. A shake of the hand all round, a chorus of 'God bless you,' and 'Good-bye, old fellow,' and we were both in the water, swimming like fishes. Strangely enough I did not mind it a

* Loose tunic much worn by Indian officers at Service.

* Native officer of Irregular Cavalry.
† Clumps of forest-trees.

* A crocodile.