

man of honour could not do. He could not break his promise to an interior—a superior was another matter, since in that case the offender had to pay for his choice honestly. But he had promised Peroo—his interior—to come. So here he was, and that was an end of it!

It seemed more than once during the next few hours as if the end had indeed come. But somehow Peroo's deterrent hand and voice extracted those wild uncertain feet, that weary wooden brain, from ditches and despair. Still, it was a very sorry figure which Peroo's own hasty footsteps left behind, safely quartered for the day in a shady bit of jungle, while he ran on to overtake the rear guard if he could. The start, however, had been too much for his lameness and he was a full hour late at his work; which, of course, necessitated his putting in an excuse. He chose drunkenness as being nearest the truth, was fined a day's wages, and paid it cheerfully, thinking the while with more complacency of the sleeping figure he had left in the jungle.

The afternoon sun was slanting through the trees before that figure stirred, and George Offord woke from the long sleep which fatigue, super-added to his usual sedative, had brought him. He felt strangely refreshed, and lay on his back staring at the little squirrels yawning after their midday snooze in the branches above him. And then he laughed suddenly, sat up, and looked about him half-confusedly. Not a trace of humanity was to be seen; nothing but the squirrels, a few green pigeons, and down in the mirror-like pool behind the trees—a piroor edged by the percolating moisture from the water with faint spikes of sprouting grass—a couple of egrets were fishing lazily. Beyond lay a bare sandy plain, backed by faint blue hills—the hills where fighting was to be had; and close at hand were those three good-conduct stripes!

That night Peroo had not nearly so far to go back along the broad white road; yet the step which came echoing down it, if steadier, lagged more. Nor was Peroo's task much easier, for George Offord, in the abject depression which comes to the tippler from total abstinence, sat down in the dust more than once, and swore he would not go another step without a dram. Still, when a hour after dawn, he was once more dozing in a shady retreat with a pot of water and some dough cakes beside him, while Peroo, in luck, was getting a lift in a country gig, to the third camping ground.

But even at the second, where the sleeping figure remained, the country was wilder, almost touching the skirts of the hills; and so, when George Offord roused himself—as the animals rouse themselves to meet the coming cool of evening—a ravine deer was standing within easy shot, looking at him with head thrown back, and wide, startled nostrils scenting the unknown.

The sight stirred something in the man which had slept the sleep of the dead for years—that keen delight of the natural man, not so much in the kill, as in the chase, not so much in the mere chase itself as in its efforts, its freedom. He rose, stretching his long arms in what was half a yawn, half a vague inclination to shake himself free of some unseen burden.

But that night he swore at Peroo for leading him a fool's dance; he threatened to go back. He was not, he said, so helpless as all that! He was not a slave; he would have his lot of rum, like any other soldier, or go—

"Huzoor," interrupted Peroo, de-fiantly. "This slave is aware that many things necessary to the 'Huzoor's' outfit as a soldier remain to be produced. But with patience all may be attained. Here, by God's grace, is the rifle. One of us—Smith-sahib of G Company, 'Huzoor,' found freedom to-day. He was re-annoitering with Griffiths Major-sahib, when one of those hell-doomed Sweenhs—whom heaven destroyed—shot him from behind a rock.

Private George Offord seemed to find his feet suddenly.

"Smith, of G Company!" he echoed, in a different voice.

"Huzoor!" the sahib whom the "Huzoor" thrashed for thrashing this slave."

"Poor chap!" went on George Offord, as if he had not heard; "so they've nicked him; but we'll pay 'em out—we'll—" His fingers closed

mechanically on the rifle Peroo was holding out to him.

It was a fortnight after this, and the camp lay clustered closely in the mouth of a narrow defile down which rushed a torrent swollen from the snows above; a defile which meant decisive victory or defeat to the little force which had to push their way through it to the heights beyond. Yet, though death, maybe, lay close to each man, the whole camp was in an uproar because Major Griffiths' second pair of "putties" had gone astray. The other officers had been content with one set of these woolen bandages, which in hill climbing serve as gaiters and help so much to lessen fatigue; but the major, being methodical, had provided against emergencies. And now, when with that possibility of death before him, his soul craved an extreme order in all things, his clean pair had disappeared. Now the major, though silent, always managed to say what he meant. So it ran through the camp that they had been stolen, and men compared notes over the fact in the mess tent and in the canteen.

In the former, the adjutant, with a frown, admitted that of late there had been a series of inexplicable petty thefts in camp, which had begun with the disappearance of Private Smith's rifle. That might perhaps be explained in an enemy's country, but what the deuce anybody could want with a pair of bone shirt studs!

"And a shirt," put in a mournful voice.

"Item, a cake of scented soap," said another.

"And a comb," began a third.

The colonel, who had, till the present preserved a discreet silence, here broke in, with great heat, to the adjutant—"Upon my soul, sir, it's a disgrace to the staff, and I must insist on a stringent inquiry the instant we've licked these hill men. I—I didn't mean to say anything about it; but I haven't been able to find my toothbrush for a week."

Whereupon there was a general exodus into the crisp cold air outside, where the darkness would hide inconvenient smiles; for the colonel was one of those men who have a different towel for their face and hands.

The stars were shirring in the cleft between the tall shadowy cliffs which rose up on either side; rose in vague masses of shadow on which—seen like stars upon a darker sky—the watch fires of the enemy sparkled here and there. An enemy powerful, vigilant; and yet beside the camp fires close at hand the men had forgotten the danger of the morrow in the trivial loss of the moment, and were discussing the major's "putties."

"It's wot I say all along," reiterated the romancer of G Company. "It begun ever since Joey Smith was took from us at No. Two camp. It's 'is ghost—that's wot it is. 'Is ghost lay'in' in a 'trew-so.' Jest you look 'ere! They bury 'im, didn't they? as 'e was—decent like in pants and coat—no more—Well! since then 'e's took 'is rifle off us, an' a great coat off D Company, and a knapsack off A—"

"Don't be lavin' out thim blankets Et tuk from the store, man," interrupted the tall Irishman. "Sure it's a testimony to the pore bhoy's character, anyhow, that he sh'ud be wantin' thim where he is."

"It is not laughing at all at such things I would be, whatever," put in another voice, seriously, "for it is knowing of such things we are in the Highlands—"

"Hold your second sight, Mac," broke in a third. "we don't want none of your shivers to-night. You're as bad as they blamed niggers, and they swear they seen Joey more nor once in a red coat dodgin' about our rear."

"Well! they won't see 'im no more, then," remarked a fourth, philosophically. "for 'e change 'is tailor. Least-ways 'e got a service 'khakee' off Sergeant Jones the night afore last; an' the sergeant 'e took 'is Bible oath to 'ave it off Joey Smith's ghost w'en 'e got time to tackle 'im, if 'e 'ave ter go to 'ell for it."

Major Griffiths meantime was having a similar say as he stood, eye-glass in eye, at the door of the mess tent. "Whoever the thief is," he admitted, with the justice common to him, "he appears to have the instincts of a gentleman; but by gad, sir, if I find him, he shall know what it is to take a field officer's gaiters!"

Whereupon he gave a dissatisfied look at his own legs, a more contented one at the glimmering stars of the

enemy's watch fires, and then turned in to get a few hours' rest before the dawn.

But some one a few miles farther down the valley looked both at his legs and at the stars with equal satisfaction. Some one tall, square, straight, smoking a pipe—some one else's pipe, no doubt—beside the hole in the ground where on the preceding night the camp flagstaff had stood. That fort-night had done more for George Offord than give his outward man a trousseau; it had clothed him with a certain righteousness, despite the inward conviction that Peroo must be a magnificent liar in protesting that the "Huzoor's" outfit had neither been gifted to him or bought honestly.

In fact, as he stood looking down at his legs complacently, he murmured to himself, "I believe they're the major's, poor chap—look like him somehow." Then he glanced at the sergeant's coat he wore and walked up and down thoughtfully—up and down beside the hole in the ground where the flagstaff had stood.

So to him from the dim shadows came a limping figure.

"Well?" he called, sharply.

"The orders are for dawn, 'Huzoor,' and here are some more cartridges."

George Offord laughed—an odd, low little laugh of sheer satisfaction.

It was past dawn by an hour or two, but the heights were still unwon.

"Send some one—any one," gasped the colonel, breathlessly, as he pressed on with a forlorn hope of veterans to take a knoll of rocks whence a galling fire had been decimating every attack. "Griffiths, for God's sake go yourself, or get some one ahead of those youngsters on the right, or they'll break—and then—"

Break! What more likely? A weak company, full of recruits, and a company with its officers shot down, and before them a task for veterans—for that indifference to whizzing bullets which only custom brings. Major Griffiths, as he ran forward, saw all this, saw also the ominous waver. God! would he be in time to check it, to get ahead?—that was what was wanted, some one ahead! no more than that—some one ahead of the youngsters!

There was some one. The tall figure of a man ahead of the wavering boys.

"Come on! Come on, my lads; follow me!" rang out a confident voice; and the major, as he ran, half blinded by the mists of his own haste, felt it was as a voice from heaven.

"Come on! Come on! Give it 'em straight! Hip, hip, hurrah!" An answering cheer broke from the boys behind, and with a rush the weakest company in the regiment followed some one to victory.

"I don't understand what the dickens it means," said the colonel, almost fretfully, that same evening when, safe over the pass, the little force was bivouacking in a willow-set valley on the other side of the hills. Before it lay what it had come to gain, behind it danger past. "Some one in my regiment," he went on, "does a deuced plucky thing—between ourselves, saves the position; I want, naturally, to find out who it was, and am met by a cock-and-bull story about some one's ghost. What the devil does it mean, major?"

The major shook his head. "I couldn't swear to the figure, sir, though it remind me a little, but that's impossible. However, as I have by your orders to ride back to the top, sir, and see what can be done to hold it, I'll dip over a bit to where the rush was made, and see if there is any clue.

He had not to go so far. For in one of those tiny hollows in the level plateau of pass, whence the snow melts early, leaving a carpet of blue forget-me-nots and Alpine primroses behind it, Sergeant Jones and the small party

going to make security still more secure, came upon Peroo, the water-carrier, trying to perform a fearful travesty of the burial service over the body of George Offord.

It was dressed in Sergeant Jones' tunic and Major Griffiths' "putties"; and the sergeant knelt down beside it, and smoothed the stripes upon the cuff with a half mechanical, half caressing touch, and the major interrupted Peroo's protestations with an odd tremor in his voice.

"What the devil does it matter," he said, sharply, "what he took besides the pass! Stand aside, man—this is my work, not yours. Sergeant! form up your men for the salute—ball cartridge."

The major's recollection of the service for the burial of the dead was not accurate, but it was comprehensive. So he committed the mortal remains of his brother soldier to the dust, confessing confusedly that there is a natural body and a spiritual body—a man that is of the earth earthy, and one that is the Lord from heaven. So, following on a petition to be saved from temptation and delivered from evil, the salute startled the echoes, and they left George Offord in the keeping of the pass, and the pass in his keeping.

Perhaps the major, as he rode campwards, wondered vaguely if some one before the Great White Throne wore a bad-character suit, or whether Wisdom understood the plea, "I've had a very checked life—I have indeed."

But Peroo had no such thoughts, needed no such excuse. It was sufficient for him that the "Huzoor" had once been the protector of the poor.

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