

A Veteran of the "Forties."

By E. B. VAUGHAN.

Illustrated by the Author.

SPARE, ruddy, bright-eyed, about the middle height, with abundant white hair and whiskers, and there you have the man, alert and hard-working even to-day, who was fighting for his country only thirty years after the battle of Waterloo; a link connecting us irreverent moderns with the days of the duke and the makers of history a hundred years ago.

There are older men in the world certainly, but very few are there who would so easily carry the honours of his experience, nor are there many left who shared in the dangers and glories of the Sikh Campaign on the Sutlej River in the years of 1845-46 and who still walk upright and able with almost the energy of youth, for there is no half pay slouch in the bearing of our old pensioner, who, when encountered by a stranger, glances keenly and enquiringly, and raps out his questions crisply as one long used to the habit of authority. He holds but three medals, and he saw only one campaign, but, as one of those three medals testifies, the short spell of fighting was long enough for him to show himself to be composed of the stuff of which British soldiers generally are made, for in that campaign he performed the feat which gained him the medal for conspicuous gallantry. His other two are respectively for good conduct and for the Sutlej campaign, the latter being one of the rarest if not the rarest medal to be seen on the breasts of their winners and wearers.

As a lad of seventeen Thomas Hilditch had for some years endured fretfully the grinding monotony of existence in a Manchester cotton factory in an era long before the passing of the Factories Act had lightened the toil and brightened slightly

the lives of the operatives; and so in the face of evident slavery for a lifetime, and inwardly bent on being a soldier, he betook himself on the 12th January, 1843, to the neighbourhood of the recruiting office instead of the cotton mill, and renounced the dismal echoes of its uncongenial surroundings for the jovial companionship of military comrades. Thus he enlisted in H.M. 80th regiment of foot, having given himself twelve months' seniority in order to join by reporting his age as eighteen years. Even then Private Hilditch's ideas of soldiering were thoroughly in keeping with the essential conditions of military life, cleanliness, order and discipline, and he, as the following will show, amply fulfilled at least one of these conditions. Standing in the ranks on the early morning parade at the depot, he attracted the attention of his colonel, who called him out with, "Come here, youngster! How long have you been soldiering?" The colour-sergeant replying for him said, "He has been here for a fortnight, sir!" whereupon the colonel said to the other recruits, "Look at him; some of you have been here six months, and you can't get near him. He's a pattern of cleanliness to you all; fall in!"

Thus early brought under his officers' notice he was on the high road to promotion when opportunity offered. His first turn on foreign Service was in Sydney, New South Wales, when his regiment was sent to guard the convicts, and where he was for the most part employed as colonel's orderly, being picked out for reasons of smartness, cleanliness and general efficiency. Sometimes there was pretty rough work with the convicts. Some of them were, to quote his own words, "so damn wicked they stole the bread out of his knapsack." Once