

of brass-'atted blighters there which will say I've been absent without leaf. Never mind. I forgive them before'and. The evenin' of my life, an' please don't forget it." Then in a tone of most ingratiating apology to me: "I soaked it all in be'ind my shut eyes. 'I'm"--he jerked a contemptuous thumb towards Mr. Pyecroft--"e's a flatfoot, a indigo-blue matlow. 'E never saw the fun from first to last. A mournful beggar--most depressin'." Private Glass departed, leaning heavily on the escort's arm.

Mr. Pyecroft wrinkled his brows in thought--the profound and far-reaching meditation that follows five glasses of hot whisky-and-water.

"Well, I don't see anything comical--greatly--except here an' there. Specially about those redooced charges in the guns. Do you see anything funny in it?"

There was that in his eye which warned me the night was too wet for argument.

"No, Mr. Pyecroft, I don't," I replied. "It was a beautiful tale, and I thank you very much."

A SAHIBS' WAR

THE RUNNERS

News!

What is the word that they tell now--now--now!

The little drums beating in the bazaars?

They beat (among the buyers and sellers)

"Nimrud--ah Nimrud!

God sends a gnat against Nimrud!"

Watchers, O Watchers a thousand!

News!

At the edge of the crops--now--now--where the well-wheels are halted,

One prepares to loose the bullocks and one scrapes his hoe,

They beat (among the sowers and the reapers)

"Nimrud--ah Nimrud!

God prepares an ill day for Nimrud!"

Watchers, O Watchers ten thousand.

News!

By the fires of the camps--now--now--where the travellers meet

Where the camels come in and the horses: their men conferring,

They beat (among the packmen and the drivers)

"Nimrud--ah Nimrud!

Thus it befell last noon to Nimrud!"

Watchers, O Watchers an hundred thousand!

News!

Under the shadow of the border-peels--now--now--now!

In the rocks of the passes where the expectant shoe their horses,
They beat (among the rifles and the riders)

"Nimrud--ah Nimrud!

Shall we go up against Nimrud?"

Watchers, O Watchers a thousand thousand?

News!

Bring out the heaps of grain--open the account-books again!

Drive forward the well-bullocks against the taxable harvest!

Eat and lie under the trees--pitch the police-guarded fair-grounds,

O dancers!

Hide away the rifles and let down the ladders from the watch-towers!

They beat (among all the peoples)

"Now--now--now!

God has reserved the Sword for Nimrud!

God has given Victory to Nimrud!"

Let us abide under Nimrud!"

O Well-disposed and Heedful, an hundred thousand thousand!

A SAHIBS' WAR

Pass? Pass? Pass? I have one pass already, allowing me to go by the r el
from Kroonstadt to Eshtellenbosch, where the horses are, where I am to be
paid off, and whence I return to India. I am a--trooper of the Gurgaon
Rissala (cavalry regiment), the One Hundred and Forty-first Punjab
Cavalry, Do not herd me with these black Kaffirs. I am a Sikh--a trooper

of the State. The Lieutenant-Sahib does not understand my talk? Is there any Sahib on the train who will interpret for a trooper of the Gurgaon Rissala going about his business in this devil's devising of a country, where there is no flour, no oil, no spice, no red pepper, and no respect paid to a Sikh? Is there no help?... God be thanked, here is such a Sahib! Protector of the Poor! Heaven-born! Tell the young Lieutenant-Sahib that my name is Umr Singh; I am--I was servant to Kurban Sahib, now dead; and I have a pass to go to Eshtellenbosch, where the horses are. Do not let him herd me with these black Kaffirs!... Yes, I will sit by this truck till the Heaven-born has explained the matter to the young Lieutenant-Sahib who does not understand our tongue.

* * * * *

What orders? The young Lieutenant-Sahib will not detain me? Good! I go down to Eshtellenbosch by the next terain? Good! I go with the Heaven-born? Good! Then for this day I am the Heaven-born's servant. Will the Heaven-born bring the honour of his presence to a seat? Here is an empty truck; I will spread my blanket over one corner thus--for the sun is hot, though not so hot as our Punjab in May. I will prop it up thus, and I will arrange this hay thus, so the Presence can sit at ease till God sends us a terain for Eshtellenbosch....

The Presence knows the Punjab? Lahore? Amritzar? Attaree, belike? My village is north over the fields three miles from Attaree, near the big white house which was copied from a certain place of the Great Queen's by --by--I have forgotten the name. Can the Presence recall it? Sirdar Dyal

Singh Attareewalla! Yes, that is the very man; but how does the Presence know? Born and bred in Hind, was he? O-o-oh! This is quite a different matter. The Sahib's nurse was a Surtee woman from the Bombay side? That was a pity. She should have been an up-country wench; for those make stout nurses. There is no land like the Punjab. There are no people like the Sikhs. Umr Singh is my name, yes. An old man? Yes. A trooper only after all these years? Ye-es. Look at my uniform, if the Sahib doubts. Nay--nay; the Sahib looks too closely. All marks of rank were picked off it long ago, but--but it is true--mine is not a common cloth such as troopers use for their coats, and--the Sahib has sharp eyes--that black mark is such a mark as a silver chain leaves when long worn on the breast. The Sahib says that troopers do not wear silver chains? No-o. Troopers do not wear the Arder of Beritish India? No. The Sahib should have been in the Police of the Punjab. I am not a trooper, but I have been a Sahib's servant for nearly a year--bearer, butler, sweeper, any and all three. The Sahib says that Sikhs do not take menial service? True; but it was for Kurban Sahib--my Kurban Sahib--dead these three months!

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Young--of a reddish face--with blue eyes, and he lilted a little on his feet when he was pleased, and cracked his finger-joints. So did his father before him, who was Deputy-Commissioner of Jullundur in my father's time when I rode with the Gurgaon Rissala. My father? Jwala Singh. A Sikh of Sikhs--he fought against the English at Sobraon and carried the mark to his death. So we were knit as it were by a blood-tie, I and my Kurban Sahib. Yes, I was a trooper first--nay, I had risen to a Lance-Duffadar, I

remember--and my father gave me a dun stallion of his own breeding on that day; and he was a little baba, sitting upon a wall by the parade-ground with his ayah--all in white, Sahib--laughing at the end of our drill. And his father and mine talked together, and mine beckoned to me, and I dismounted, and the baba put his hand into mine--eighteen--twenty-five--twenty-seven years gone now--Kurban Sahib--my Kurban Sahib! Oh, we were great friends after that! He cut his teeth on my sword-hilt, as the saying is. He called me Big Umr Singh--Buwwa Umwa Singh, for he could not speak plain. He stood only this high, Sahib, from the bottom of this truck, but he knew all our troopers by name--every one.... And he went to England, and he became a young man, and back he came, liting a little in his walk, and cracking his finger-joints--back to his own regiment and to me. He had not forgotten either our speech or our customs. He was a Sikh at heart, Sahib. He was rich, open-handed, just, a friend of poor troopers, keen-eyed, jestful, and careless. I could tell tales about him in his first years. There was very little he hid from me. I was his Umr Singh, and when we were alone he called me Father, and I called him Son. Yes, that was how we spoke. We spoke freely together on everything--about war, and women, and money, and advancement, and such all.

We spoke about this war, too, long before it came. There were many box-wallas, pedlars, with Pathans a few, in this country, notably at the city of Yunasbagh (Johannesburg), and they sent news in every week how the Sahibs lay without weapons under the heel of the Boer-log; and how big guns were hauled up and down the streets to keep Sahibs in order; and how a Sahib called Eger Sahib (Edgar?) was killed for a jest by the Boer-log. The Sahib knows how we of Hind hear all that passes over the earth? There

was not a gun cocked in Yunasbagh that the echo did not come into Hind in a month. The Sahibs are very clever, but they forget their own cleverness has created the dak (the post), and that for an anna or two all things become known. We of Hind listened and heard and wondered; and when it was a sure thing, as reported by the pedlars and the vegetable-sellers, that the Sahibs of Yunasbagh lay in bondage to the Boer-log, certain among us asked questions and waited for signs. Others of us mistook the meaning of those signs. Wherefore, Sahib, came the long war in the Tirah! This Kurban Sahib knew, and we talked together. He said, "There is no haste. Presently we shall fight, and we shall fight for all Hind in that country round Yunasbagh. Here he spoke truth. Does the Sahib not agree? Quite so. It is for Hind that the Sahibs are fighting this war. Ye cannot in one place rule and in another bear service. Either ye must everywhere rule or everywhere obey. God does not make the nations ringstraked. True--true--true!"

So did matters ripen--a step at a time. It was nothing to me, except I think--and the Sahib sees this, too?--that it is foolish to make an army and break their hearts in idleness. Why have they not sent for men of the Tochi--the men of the Tirah--the men of Buner? Folly, a thousand times. We could have done it all so gently--so gently.

Then, upon a day, Kurban Sahib sent for me and said, "Ho, Dada, I am sick, and the doctor gives me a certificate for many months." And he winked, and I said, "I will get leave and nurse thee, Child. Shall I bring my uniform?" He said, "Yes, and a sword for a sick man to lean on. We go to Bombay, and thence by sea to the country of the Hubshis" (niggers). Mark

his cleverness! He was first of all our men among the native regiments to get leave for sickness and to come here. Now they will not let our officers go away, sick or well, except they sign a bond not to take part in this war-game upon the road. But he was clever. There was no whisper of war when he took his sick-leave. I came also? Assuredly. I went to my Colonel, and sitting in the chair (I am--I was--of that rank for which a chair is placed when we speak with the Colonel) I said, "My child goes sick. Give me leave, for I am old and sick also."

And the Colonel, making the word double between English and our tongue, said, "Yes, thou art truly Sikh"; and he called me an old devil--jestingly, as one soldier may jest with another; and he said my Kurban Sahib was a liar as to his health (that was true, too), and at long last he stood up and shook my hand, and bade me go and bring my Sahib safe again. My Sahib back again--aie me!

So I went to Bombay with Kurban Sahib, but there, at sight of the Black Water, Wajib Ali, his bearer checked, and said that his mother was dead. Then I said to Kurban Sahib, "What is one Mussulman pig more or less? Give me the keys of the trunks, and I will lay out the white shirts for dinner." Then I beat Wajib Ali at the back of Watson's Hotel, and that night I prepared Kurban Sahib's razors. I say, Sahib, that I, a Sikh of the Khalsa, an unshorn man, prepared the razors. But I did not put on my uniform while I did it. On the other hand, Kurban Sahib took for me, upon the steamer, a room in all respects like to his own, and would have given me a servant. We spoke of many things on the way to this country; and Kurban Sahib told me what he perceived would be the conduct of the war. He

said, "They have taken men afoot to fight men ahorse, and they will foolishly show mercy to these Boer-log because it is believed that they are white." He said, "There is but one fault in this war, and that is that the Government have not employed us, but have made it altogether a Sahibs' war. Very many men will thus be killed, and no vengeance will be taken." True talk--true talk! It fell as Kurban Sahib foretold.

And we came to this country, even to Cape Town over yonder, and Kurban Sahib said, "Bear the baggage to the big dak-bungalow, and I will look for employment fit for a sick man." I put on the uniform of my rank and went to the big dak-bungalow, called Maun Nihâl Seyn, [Footnote: Mount Nelson?] and I caused the heavy baggage to be bestowed in that dark lower place--is it known to the Sahib?--which was already full of the swords and baggage of officers. It is fuller now--dead men's kit all! I was careful to secure a receipt for all three pieces. I have it in my belt. They must go back to the Punjab.

Anon came Kurban Sahib, liling a little in his step, which sign I knew, and he said, "We are born in a fortunate hour. We go to Eshtellenbosch to oversee the despatch of horses." Remember, Kurban Sahib was squadron-leader of the Gurgaon Rissala, and I was Umr Singh. So I said, speaking as we do--we did--when none was near, "Thou art a groom and I am a grass-cutter, but is this any promotion, Child?" At this he laughed, saying, "It is the way to better things. Have patience, Father." (Aye, he called me father when none were by.) "This war ends not to-morrow nor the next day. I have seen the new Sahibs," he said, "and they are fathers of owls--all--all--all!"

So we went to Eshtellenbosch, where the horses are; Kurban Sahib doing the service of servants in that business. And the whole business was managed without forethought by new Sahibs from God knows where, who had never seen a tent pitched or a peg driven. They were full of zeal, but empty of all knowledge. Then came, little by little from Hind, those Pathans--they are just like those vultures up there, Sahib--they always follow slaughter. And there came to Eshtellenbosch some Sikhs--Muzbees, though--and some Madras monkey-men. They came with horses. Puttiala sent horses. Jhind and Nabha sent horses. All the nations of the Khalsa sent horses.

All the ends of the earth sent horses. God knows what the army did with them, unless they ate them raw. They used horses as a courtesan uses oil: with both hands. These needed many men. Kurban Sahib appointed me to the command (what a command for me!) of certain woolly ones--Hubshis--whose touch and shadow are pollution. They were enormous eaters; sleeping on their bellies; laughing without cause; wholly like animals. Some were called Fingoes, and some, I think, Red Kaffirs, but they were all Kaffirs --filth unspeakable. I taught them to water and feed, and sweep and rub down. Yes, I oversaw the work of sweepers--a jemadar of mehtars (headman of a refuse-gang) was I, and Kurban Sahib little better, for five months. Evil months! The war went as Kurban Sahib had said. Our new men were slain and no vengeance was taken. It was a war of fools armed with the weapons of magicians. Guns that slew at half a day's march, and men who, being new, walked blind into high grass and were driven off like cattle by the Boer-log! As to the city of Eshtellenbosch, I am not a Sahib--only a Sikh. I would have quartered one troop only of the Gurgaon

Rissala in that city--one little troop--and I would have schooled that city till its men learned to kiss the shadow of a Government horse upon the ground. There are many mullahs (priests) in Eshtellenbosch. They preached the Jehad against us. This is true--all the camp knew it. And most of the houses were thatched! A war of fools indeed!

At the end of five months my Kurban Sahib, who had grown lean, said, "The reward has come. We go up towards the front with horses to-morrow, and, once away, I shall be too sick so return. Make ready the baggage." Thus we got away, with some Kaffirs in charge of new horses for a certain new regiment that had come in a ship. The second day by terrain, when we were watering at a desolate place without any sort of a bazaar to it, slipped out from the horse-boxes one Sikander Khan, that had been a jemadar of saises (head-groom) at Eshtellenbosch, and was by service a trooper in a Border regiment. Kurban Sahib gave him big abuse for his desertion; but the Pathan put up his hands as excusing himself, and Kurban Sahib relented and added him to our service. So there were three of us--Kurban Sahib, I, and Sikander Khan--Sahib, Sikh, and Sag (dog). But the man said truly, "We be far from our homes and both servants of the Raj. Make truce till we see the Indus again." I have eaten from the same dish as Sikander Khan--beef, too, for aught I know! He said, on the night he stole some swine's flesh in a tin from a mess-tent, that in his Book, the Koran, it is written that whoso engages in a holy war is freed from ceremonial obligations. Wah! He had no more religion than the sword-point picks up of sugar and water at baptism. He stole himself a horse at a place where there lay a new and very raw regiment. I also procured myself a grey gelding there. They let their horses stray too much, those new regiments.

Some shameless regiments would indeed have made away with our horses on the road! They exhibited indents and requisitions for horses, and once or twice would have uncoupled the trucks; but Kurban Sahib was wise, and I am not altogether a fool. There is not much honesty at the front. Notably, there was one congregation of hard-bitten horse-thieves; tall, light Sahibs, who spoke through their noses for the most part, and upon all occasions they said, "Oah Hell!" which, in our tongue, signifies Jehannum ko jao. They bore each man a vine-leaf upon their uniforms, and they rode like Rajputs. Nay, they rode like Sikhs. They rode like the Ustrelyahs! The Ustrelyahs, whom we met later, also spoke through their noses not little, and they were tall, dark men, with grey, clear eyes, heavily eyelashed like camel's eyes--very proper men--a new brand of Sahib to me. They said on all occasions, "No fee-ah," which in our tongue means Durro mut ("Do not be afraid"), so we called them the Durro Muts. Dark, tall men, most excellent horsemen, hot and angry, waging war as war, and drinking tea as a sandhill drinks water. Thieves? A little, Sahib. Sikander Khan swore to me; and he comes of a horse-stealing clan for ten generations; he swore a Pathan was a babe beside a Durro Mut in regard to horse-lifting. The Durro Muts cannot walk on their feet at all. They are like hens on the high road. Therefore they must have horses. Very proper men, with a just lust for the war. Aah--"No fee-ah," say the Durro Muts. They saw the worth of Kurban Sahib. They did not ask him to sweep stables. They would by no means let him go. He did substitute for one of their troop-leaders who had a fever, one long day in a country full of little hills--like the mouth of the Khaibar; and when they returned in the evening, the Durro Muts said, "Wallah! This is a man. Steal him!" So

they stole my Kurban Sahib as they would have stolen anything else that they needed, and they sent a sick officer back to Eshtellenbosch in his place.

Thus Kurban Sahib came to his own again, and I was his bearer, and Sikander Khan was his cook. The law was strict that this was a Sahibs' war, but there was no order that a bearer and a cook should not ride with their Sahib--and we had naught to wear but our uniforms. We rode up and down this accursed country, where there is no bazaar, no pulse, no flour, no oil, no spice, no red pepper, no firewood; nothing but raw corn and a little cattle. There were no great battles as I saw it, but a plenty of gun-firing. When we were many, the Boer-log came out with coffee to greet us, and to show us purwanas (permits) from foolish English Generals who had gone that way before, certifying they were peaceful and well-disposed. When we were few, they hid behind stones and shot us. Now the order was that they were Sahibs, and this was a Sahibs' war. Good! But, as I understand it, when a Sahib goes to war, he puts on the cloth of war, and only those who wear that cloth may take part in the war. Good! That also I understand. But these people were as they were in Burma, or as the Afridis are. They shot at their pleasure, and when pressed hid the gun and exhibited purwanas, or lay in a house and said they were farmers. Even such farmers as cut up the Madras troops at Hlinedatalone in Burma! Even such farmers as slew Cavagnari Sahib and the Guides at Kabul! We schooled those men, to be sure--fifteen, aye, twenty of a morning pushed off the verandah in front of the Bala Hissar. I looked that the Jung-i-lat Sahib (the Commander-in-Chief) would have remembered the old days; but--no. All the people shot at us everywhere, and he issued proclamations saying that

he did not fight the people, but a certain army, which army, in truth, was all the Boer-log, who, between them, did not wear enough of uniform to make a loincloth. A fool's war from first to last; for it is manifest that he who fights should be hung if he fights with a gun in one hand and a purwana in the other, as did all these people. Yet we, when they had had their bellyful for the time, received them with honour, and gave them permits, and refreshed them and fed their wives and their babes, and severely punished our soldiers who took their fowls. So the work was to be done not once with a few dead, but thrice and four times over. I talked much with Kurban Sahib on this, and he said, "It is a Sahibs' war. That is the order;" and one night, when Sikander Khan would have lain out beyond the pickets with his knife and shown them how it is worked on the Border, he hit Sikander Khan between the eyes and came near to breaking in his head. Then Sikander Khan, a bandage over his eyes, so that he looked like a sick camel, talked to him half one march, and he was more bewildered than I, and vowed he would return to Eshtellenbosch. But privately to me Kurban Sahib said we should have loosed the Sikhs and the Gurkhas on these people till they came in with their foreheads in the dust. For the war was not of that sort which they comprehended.

They shot us? Assuredly they shot us from houses adorned with a white flag; but when they came to know our custom, their widows sent word by Kaffir runners, and presently there was not quite so much firing. No fee-ah! All the Boer-log with whom we dealt had purwanas signed by mad Generals attesting that they were well-disposed to the State.

They had also rifles not a few, and cartridges, which they hid in the

roof. The women wept very greatly when we burned such houses, but they did not approach too near after the flames had taken good hold of the thatch, for fear of the bursting cartridges. The women of the Boer-log are very clever. They are more clever than the men. The Boer-log are clever? Never, never, no! It is the Sahibs who are fools. For their own honour's sake the Sahibs must say that the Boer-log are clever; but it is the Sahibs' wonderful folly that has made the Boer-log. The Sahibs should have sent us into the game.

But the Durro Muts did well. They dealt faithfully with all that country thereabouts--not in any way as we of Hind should have dealt, but they were not altogether fools. One night when we lay on the top of a ridge in the cold, I saw far away a light in a house that appeared for the sixth part of an hour and was obscured. Anon it appeared again thrice for the twelfth part of an hour. I showed this to Kurban Sahib, for it was a house that had been spared--the people having many permits and swearing fidelity at our stirrup-leathers. I said to Kurban Sahib, "Send half a troop, Child, and finish that house. They signal to their brethren." And he laughed where he lay and said, "If I listened to my bearer Umr Singh, there would not be left ten houses in all this land." I said, "What need to leave one? This is as it was in Burma. They are farmers to-day and fighters to-morrow. Let us deal justly with them." He laughed and curled himself up in his blanket, and I watched the far light in the house till day. I have been on the border in eight wars, not counting Burma. The first Afghan War; the second Afghan War; two Mahsud Waziri wars (that is four); two Black Mountain wars, if I remember right; the Malakand and Tirah. I do not count Burma, or some small things. I know when house signals to house!

I pushed Sikandar Khan with my foot, and he saw it too. He said, "One of the Boer-log who brought pumpkins for the mess, which I fried last night, lives in yonder house." I said, "How dost thou know?" He said, "Because he rode out of the camp another way, but I marked how his horse fought with him at the turn of the road; and before the light fell I stole out of the camp for evening prayer with Kurban Sahib's glasses, and from a little hill I saw the pied horse of that pumpkin-seller hurrying to that house." I said naught, but took Kurban Sahib's glasses from his greasy hands and cleaned them with a silk handkerchief and returned them to their case. Sikander Khan told me that he had been the first man in the Zenab valley to use glasses--whereby he finished two blood-feuds cleanly in the course of three months' leave. But he was otherwise a liar.

That day Kurban Sahib, with some ten troopers, was sent on to spy the land for our camp. The Durro Muts moved slowly at that time. They were weighted with grain and forage and carts, and they greatly wished to leave these all in some town and go on light to other business which pressed. So Kurban Sahib sought a short cut for them, a little off the line of march. We were twelve miles before the main body, and we came to a house under a high bushed hill, with a nullah, which they call a donga, behind it, and an old sangar of piled stones, which they call a kraal, before it. Two thorn bushes grew on either side of the door, like babul bushes, covered with a golden coloured bloom, and the roof was all of thatch. Before the house was a valley of stones that rose to another bush-covered hill. There was an old man in the verandah--an old man with a white beard and a wart upon the left side of his neck; and a fat woman with the eyes of a swine

and the jowl of a swine; and a tall young man deprived of understanding. His head was hairless, no larger than an orange, and the pits of his nostrils were eaten away by a disease. He laughed and slavered and he sported sportively before Kurban Sahib. The man brought coffee and the woman showed us purwanas from three General Sahibs, certifying that they were people of peace and goodwill. Here are the purwanas, Sahib. Does the Sahib know the Generals who signed them?

They swore the land was empty of Boer-log. They held up their hands and swore it. That was about the time of the evening meal. I stood near the verandah with Sikander Khan, who was nosing like a jackal on a lost scent. At last he took my arm and said, "See yonder! There is the sun on the window of the house that signalled last night. This house can see that house from here," and he looked at the hill behind him all hairy with bushes, and sucked in his breath. Then the idiot with the shrivelled head danced by me and threw back that head, and regarded the roof and laughed like a hyena, and the fat woman talked loudly, as it were, to cover some noise. After this passed I to the back of the house on pretence to get water for tea, and I saw fresh fresh horse-dung on the ground, and that the ground was cut with the new marks of hoofs; and there had dropped in the dirt one cartridge. Then Kurban Sahib called to me in our tongue, saying, "Is this a good place to make tea?" and I replied, knowing what he meant, "There are over many cooks in the cook-house. Mount and go, Child." Then I returned, and he said, smiling to the woman, "Prepare food, and when we have loosened our girths we will come in and eat;" but to his men he said in a whisper, "Ride away!" No. He did not cover the old man or the fat woman with his rifle. That was not his custom. Some fool of the Durro

Muts, being hungry, raised his voice to dispute the order to flee, and before we were in our saddles many shots came from the roof--from rifles thrust through the thatch. Upon this we rode across the valley of stones, and men fired at us from the nullah behind the house, and from the hill behind the nullah, as well as from the roof of the house--so many shots that it sounded like a drumming in the hills. Then Sikandar Khan, riding low, said, "This play is not for us alone, but for the rest of the Durro Muts," and I said, "Be quiet. Keep place!" for his place was behind me, and I rode behind Kurban Sahib. But these new bullets will pass through five men arow! We were not hit--not one of us--and we reached the hill of rocks and scattered among the stones, and Kurban Sahib turned in his saddle and said, "Look at the old man!" He stood in the verandah firing swiftly with a gun, the woman beside him and the idiot also--both with guns. Kurban Sahib laughed, and I caught him by the wrist, but--his fate was written at that hour. The bullet passed under my arm-pit and struck him in the liver, and I pulled him backward between two great rocks atilt --Kurban Sahib, my Kurban Sahib! From the nullah behind the house and from the hills came our Boer-log in number more than a hundred, and Sikandar Khan said, "Now we see the meaning of last night's signal. Give me the rifle." He took Kurban Sahib's rifle--in this war of fools only the doctors carry swords--and lay belly-flat to the work, but Kurban Sahib turned where he lay and said, "Be still. It is a Sahibs' war," and Kurban Sahib put up his hand--thus; and then his eyes rolled on me, and I gave him water that he might pass the more quickly. And at the drinking his Spirit received permission....

Thus went our fight, Sahib. We Durro Muts were on a ridge working from

the north to the south, where lay our main body, and the Boer-log lay in a valley working from east to west. There were more than a hundred, and our men were ten, but they held the Boer-log in the valley while they swiftly passed along the ridge to the south. I saw three Boers drop in the open. Then they all hid again and fired heavily at the rocks that hid our men; but our men were clever and did not show, but moved away and away, always south; and the noise of the battle withdrew itself southward, where we could hear the sound of big guns. So it fell stark dark, and Sikandar Khan found a deep old jackal's earth amid rocks, into which we slid the body of Kurban Sahib upright. Sikandar Khan took his glasses, and I took his handkerchief and some letters and a certain thing which I knew hung round his neck, and Sikandar Khan is witness that I wrapped them all in the handkerchief. Then we took an oath together, and lay still and mourned for Kurban Sahib. Sikandar Khan wept till daybreak--even he, a Pathan, a Mohammedan! All that night we heard firing to the southward, and when the dawn broke the valley was full of Boer-log in carts and on horses. They gathered by the house, as we could see through Kurban Sahib's glasses, and the old man, who, I take it, was a priest, blessed them, and preached the holy war, waving his arm; and the fat woman brought coffee; and the idiot capered among them and kissed their horses. Presently they went away in haste; they went over the hills and were not; and a black slave came out and washed the door-sills with bright water. Sikandar Khan saw through the glasses that the stain was blood, and he laughed, saying, "Wounded men lie there. We shall yet get vengeance."

About noon we saw a thin, high smoke to the southward, such a smoke as a burning house will make in sunshine, and Sikandar Khan, who knows how to

take a bearing across a hill, said, "At last we have burned the house of the pumpkin-seller whence they signalled." And I said: "What need now that they have slain my child? Let me mourn." It was a high smoke, and the old man, as I saw, came out into the verandah to behold it, and shook his clenched hands at it. So we lay till the twilight, foodless and without water, for we had vowed a vow neither to eat nor to drink till we had accomplished the matter. I had a little opium left, of which I gave Sikandar Khan the half, because he loved Kurban Sahib. When it was full dark we sharpened our sabres upon a certain softish rock which, mixed with water, sharpens steel well, and we took off our boots and we went down to the house and looked through the windows very softly. The old man sat reading in a book, and the woman sat by the hearth; and the idiot lay on the floor with his head against her knee, and he counted his fingers and laughed, and she laughed again. So I knew they were mother and son, and I laughed, too, for I had suspected this when I claimed her life and her body from Sikandar Khan, in our discussion of the spoil. Then we entered with bare swords.... Indeed, these Boer-log do not understand the steel, for the old man ran towards a rifle in the corner; but Sikandar Khan prevented him with a blow of the flat across the hands, and he sat down and held up his hands, and I put my fingers on my lips to signify they should be silent. But the woman cried, and one stirred in an inner room, and a door opened, and a man, bound about the head with rags, stood stupidly fumbling with a gun. His whole head fell inside the door, and none followed him. It was a very pretty stroke--for a Pathan. They then were silent, staring at the head upon the floor, and I said to Sikandar Khan, "Fetch ropes! Not even for Kurban Sahib's sake will I defile my sword." So he went to seek and returned with three long leather ones, and

said, "Four wounded lie within, and doubtless each has a permit from a General," and he stretched the ropes and laughed. Then I bound the old man's hands behind his back, and unwillingly--for he laughed in my face, and would have fingered my beard--the idiot's. At this the woman with the swine's eyes and the jowl of a swine ran forward, and Sikandar Khan said, "Shall I strike or bind? She was thy property on the division." And I said, "Refrain! I have made a chain to hold her. Open the door." I pushed out the two across the verandah into the darker shade of the thorn-trees, and she followed upon her knees and lay along the ground, and pawed at my boots and howled. Then Sikandar Khan bore out the lamp, saying that he was a butler and would light the table, and I looked for a branch that would bear fruit. But the woman hindered me not a little with her screechings and plungings, and spoke fast in her tongue, and I replied in my tongue, "I am childless to-night because of thy perfidy, and my child was praised among men and loved among women. He would have begotten men--not animals. Thou hast more years to live than I, but my grief is the greater."

I stooped to make sure the noose upon the idiot's neck, and flung the end over the branch, and Sikandar Khan held up the lamp that she might well see. Then appeared suddenly, a little beyond the light of the lamp, the spirit of Kurban Sahib. One hand he held to his side, even where the bullet had struck him, and the other he put forward thus, and said, "No. It is a Sahibs' war." And I said, "Wait a while, Child, and thou shalt sleep." But he came nearer, riding, as it were, upon my eyes, and said, "No. It is a Sahibs' war." And Sikandar Khan said, "Is it too heavy?" and set down the lamp and came to me; and as he turned to tally on the rope,

the spirit of Kurban Sahib stood up within arm's reach of us, and his face was very angry, and a third time he said, "No. It is a Sahibs' war." And a little wind blew out the lamp, and I heard Sikandar Khan's teeth chatter in his head.

So we stayed side by side, the ropes in our hand, a very long while, for we could not shape any words. Then I heard Sikandar Khan open his water-bottle and drink; and when his mouth was slaked he passed to me and said, "We are absolved from our vow." So I drank, and together we waited for the dawn in that place where we stood--the ropes in our hand. A little after third cockcrow we heard the feet of horses and gun wheels very far off, and so soon as the light came a shell burst on the threshold of the house, and the roof of the verandah that was thatched fell in and blazed before the windows. And I said, "What of the wounded Boer-log within?" And Sikandar Khan said, "We have heard the order. It is a Sahibs' war. Stand still." Then came a second shell--good line, but short--and scattered dust upon us where we stood; and then came ten of the little quick shells from the gun that speaks like a stammerer--yes, pompom the Sahibs call it--and the face of the house folded down like the nose and the chin of an old man mumbling, and the forefront of the house lay down. Then Sikandar Khan said, "If it be the fate of the wounded to die in the fire, I shall not prevent it." And he passed to the back of the house and presently came back, and four wounded Boer-log came after him, of whom two could not walk upright. And I said, "What hast thou done?" And he said, "I have neither spoken to them nor laid hand on them. They follow in hope of mercy." And I said, "It is a Sahibs' war. Let them wait the Sahibs' mercy." So they lay still, the four men and the idiot, and the fat woman under the thorn-tree,

and the house burned furiously. Then began the known sound of cartouches in the roof--one or two at first; then a trill, and last of all one loud noise and the thatch blew here and there, and the captives would have crawled aside on account of the heat that was withering the thorn-trees, and on account of wood and bricks flying at random. But I said, "Abide! Abide! Ye be Sahibs, and this is a Sahibs' war, O Sahibs. There is no order that ye should depart from this war." They did not understand my words. Yet they abode and they lived.

Presently rode down five troopers of Kurban Sahib's command, and one I knew spoke my tongue, having sailed to Calcutta often with horses. So I told him all my tale, using bazaar-talk, such as his kidney of Sahib would understand; and at the end I said, "An order has reached us here from the dead that this is a Sahibs' war. I take the soul of my Kurban Sahib to witness that I give over to the justice of the Sahibs these Sahibs who have made me childless." Then I gave him the ropes and fell down senseless, my heart being very full, but my belly was empty, except for the little opium.

They put me into a cart with one of their wounded, and after a while I understood that they had fought against the Boer-log for two days and two nights. It was all one big trap, Sahib, of which we, with Kurban Sahib, saw no more than the outer edge. They were very angry, the Durro Muts--very angry indeed. I have never seen Sahibs so angry. They buried my Kurban Sahib with the rites of his faith upon the top of the ridge overlooking the house, and I said the proper prayers of the faith, and Sikandar Khan prayed in his fashion and stole five signalling-candles,

which have each three wicks, and lighted the grave as if it had been the grave of a saint on a Friday. He wept very bitterly all that night, and I wept with him, and he took hold of my feet and besought me to give him a remembrance from Kurban Sahib. So I divided equally with him one of Kurban Sahib's handkerchiefs--not the silk ones, for those were given him by a certain woman; and I also gave him a button from a coat, and a little steel ring of no value that Kurban Sahib used for his keys, and he kissed them and put them into his bosom. The rest I have here in that little bundle, and I must get the baggage from the hotel in Cape Town--some four shirts we sent to be washed, for which we could not wait when we went up-country--and I must give them all to my Colonel-Sahib at Sialkote in the Punjab. For my child is dead--my baba is dead!... I would have come away before; there was no need to stay, the child being dead; but we were far from the rail, and the Durro Muts were as brothers to me, and I had come to look upon Sikandar Khan as in some sort a friend, and he got me a horse and I rode up and down with them; but the life had departed. God knows what they called me--orderly, chaprassi (messenger), cook, sweeper, I did not know nor care. But once I had pleasure. We came back in a month after wide circles to that very valley. I knew it every stone, and I went up to the grave, and a clever Sahib of the Durro Muts (we left a troop there for a week to school those people with purwanas) had cut an inscription upon a great rock; and they interpreted it to me, and it was a jest such as Kurban Sahib himself would have loved. Oh! I have the inscription well copied here. Read it aloud, Sahib, and I will explain the jests. There are two very good ones. Begin, Sahib:--

In Memory of

WALTER DECIES CORBYN

Late Captain 141st Punjab Cavalry

The Gurgaon Rissala, that is. Go on, Sahib.

Treacherously shot near this place by

The connivance of the late

HENDRIK DIRK UYS

A Minister of God

Who thrice took the oath of neutrality

And Piet his son,

This little work

Aha! This is the first jest. The Sahib should see this little work!

Was accomplished in partial

And inadequate recognition of their loss

By some men who loved him

Si monumentum requiris circumspice

That is the second jest. It signifies that those who would desire to behold a proper memorial to Kurban Sahib must look out at the house. And, Sahib, the house is not there, nor the well, nor the big tank which they call dams, nor the little fruit-trees, nor the cattle. There is nothing at all, Sahib, except the two trees withered by the fire. The rest is

like the desert here--or my hand--or my heart. Empty, Sahib--all empty!

"THEIR LAWFUL OCCASIONS"

THE WET LITANY

When the water's countenance
Blurrs 'twixt glance and second glance;
When the tattered smokes forerun
Ashen 'neath a silvered sun;
When the curtain of the haze
Shuts upon our helpless ways--
Hear the Channel Fleet at sea;
Libera nos domine!

When the engines' bated pulse
Scarcely thrills the nosing hulls;
When the wash along the side
Sounds, a sudden, magnified
When the intolerable blast
Marks each blindfold minute passed.

When the fog-buoy's squattering flight
Guides us through the haggard night;
When the warning bugle blows;