

FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

BY COLONEL F. T. POLLOK.

India was formerly cursed with a fanatical sect known as Thugs, who killed their victims by strangling them. This is the narrative of a Scotch surgeon who was mistaken by marauding Thugs for a wealthy banker. They attacked his palanquin, killed his bearers, and left him for dead. He recovered consciousness, however, in time to join in the capture of his assailants.



WHEN I was a youngster, with my regiment, I made the acquaintance of a Dr. McP——, who had been christened by Bul-Bul “the Pride of Mucktul.” Although a very good fellow and generally liked; the older hands used to laugh at him and make fun of him, and though anxious to figure as a sportsman he had failed to shine—owing, I believe, to the fact that he had some of the very best hunters in India contending against him. A very curious adventure once befell him, and this I shall endeavour to relate, as told by him, using the first person singular.

I was officiating Residency Surgeon at Chudderghat, and became very friendly with the Princes and native Sirdars in the city, and more particularly with Bunselol, the principal Mahajun, or banker and money-lender, who had branch establishments in Secunderabad, Jaulnah, and Kamptee. In fact everybody, whether European or native, had more or less frequent dealings with him, and he had great influence with everybody.

One day Bunselol visited me and said he had heard that cholera had broken out at Jaulnah, where his favourite wife and children were. He had intended leaving for that city on a certain day, and had, in fact, posted bearers, but circumstances had arisen which made it necessary that he should postpone his departure, and he now wanted me to go there in his stead and look after the welfare of his family. The fee he offered was so large that I felt inclined to jump at it. “But,” said I, doubtfully, “how can I get away? I have no privilege leave due to me, and general leave is very difficult to get and will take time, and that will entail on me the loss of my allowances.”

“That is easily arranged,” replied the banker. “I’ll get R—— to do your work for you; he owes me a lot of money which he can’t pay, and he won’t refuse, especially as I will let him off

some of the debt and interest. I will go to the military secretary at once and get you three months’ leave in anticipation, and give you a cheque on my firm in Jaulnah, which will more than compensate you for any losses here. Moreover,” he continued, “I know you are partial to hog-hunting, and directly the cholera disappears you shall have the run of my stables, and on your return you will be able to laugh at Bul-Bul and the others.”

I had always longed to get a little shikar with men less noted than my friends at Secunderabad, and I knew Bunselol, though he seldom rode anything larger than an ambling Mahratta pony himself, kept a lot of Arab horses and elephants for the use of his friends. So finally I agreed to his terms.

“I’ll send you your leave in an hour or two,” added the Sowcar. “Be ready to start to-night at 8 p.m.” There was no time to lose, so I got two pittarabs (baskets covered with leather) packed, and was ready by the appointed time.

Punctually at eight a gorgeous palanquin and fourteen bearers, together with my leave—on “urgent private affairs”—arrived. I did not like travelling in such a conspicuous vehicle, but was told that Bunselol had no others available, the rest being under repairs, and as delay was impossible I had to make the best of a bad job and set out. Money will perform wonders everywhere; in India it will almost work miracles. The bearers were true to their tryst, and we travelled day and night, halting only for an hour or two in the heat of the day to partake of some food, so we went on merrily until we were well into the heart of the Nirmul jungle, when, just before daybreak, I was suddenly awakened out of a sound sleep by the palanquin being heavily dropped. Simultaneously the monotonous chant of the bearers ceased. Before I recovered my senses I was dragged out, a kerchief was passed round my neck, there was a wrench—and then came oblivion.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself lying under a dense bush in the midst of a forest, several men were digging a grave close by in the sandy bed of a rivulet, and a group of four or five men, whom I supposed to be Thugs, were sitting down near at hand talking.

for dear life into the depths of the forest. I soon found a track and followed it, and had gone but a short distance when I heard the galloping of a horse and threw myself under a thick bush. I recognised in the rider a Rohilla, and behind him were a score more, and he kept



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"How comes it, brothers," said one, "that we have made this fatal mistake? Did not our spies report that Bunselol the banker was *en route* to Jaulnah? And have we not tarried in this jungle to the great danger of our lives in order to waylay him? This was to have been our last venture, and the jewels the Mahajun carried with him would have enriched us for life. But look: what have we done? This is Bunselol's palanquin, but the occupant is a cursed Feringhee! They, as we know, never carry any valuables with them, so we are no richer, and more fuss will be made over the disappearance of this one Gorha than over fifty Sowcars, though each had the wealth of a dozen Bunselols."

The others assented gloomily, and the grave being reported ready the bodies of my poor bearers were thrown in. It was then discovered it was not deep enough to contain all of them. With many imprecations, and with injunctions to the diggers to hurry, the remaining Thugs walked away, and I found myself alone. Seeing the coast momentarily clear I crawled quietly away, and as soon as I got a little way off ran

shouting, "Douro, Douro, Mayne Sahib atta hi." I did not know what he meant, or what could bring him or his followers and Mayne the brigadier here. The news seemed too good to be true, and as soon as they had disappeared I ran on again.

When I could run no longer, and was almost in despair, expecting the Thugs to recapture me, I heard the voices of Europeans. They were advancing towards me, and I could hear the clattering of horses' hoofs and the rattling of swords. Presently, who should appear but my friends Mayne and Henegan. Seeing me they pulled up, and Mayne recognising me said, "Halloa! What are *you* doing here? What is the matter with you? Why, you are as pale as a ghost, and your neck is all awry as if it had been stretched."

I could scarcely articulate, but I managed to stammer out that there were both Rohillas and Thugs in the jungle, and that I had just escaped from the latter. Mayne gave orders for a led horse to be given me, and ordering his irregulars to spread out he led the centre and Henegan the right, and I went with the left. We soon came

upon the enemy and, whilst hotly engaged, one of their chiefs rode up and, ordering his men to desist, advanced to Mayne and said, "Sahib, we surrender—you have conquered. We have good news to give you. Our advance guard has captured a gang of Thugs who have just killed Bunselol the Sowcar, and we offer them to you as ransom for our lives."

One moment we had been hacking away at each other, the next the two parties were fraternizing as if they were the greatest of friends. Mayne understood them thoroughly,



"ONE OF THEIR CHIEFS RODE UP TO MAYNE."

and saying, "Very good, I accept your terms. Keep your swords," rode on. We soon came upon the Thugs, bound securely together and guarded by a party of our whilom adversaries.

A few words are here necessary to account for the opportune appearance of the brigadier and his irregulars on the scene. Mayne had that morning attacked a strong fort held by a party of insurgent Rohillas. His infantry being badly beaten and poor Bosworth killed, the brigadier had dismounted his troopers and, leading them to the attack, had stormed and captured the stronghold, putting the enemy to flight. The Rohillas, comparatively fresh, never dreamt of being pursued; but they did not know the man they had to deal with.

Mayne had already distinguished himself in Afghanistan, the Sutlej, and the Punjab; and he was also a born leader of men. A portion of the retreating Rohillas had come upon the palanquin and had stumbled over the newly-made grave, and guessing at once that there must be Thugs about, had searched for them and captured the whole gang.

A more rascally set it would be almost impossible to depict or to meet, and, as I had heard them lamenting, they were very nearly the last of the Thugs, as Sleeman and his assistants had made a clean sweep of most of them. The Rohillas, as is well known, are mercenaries: brother will fight against brother, father against son; it is a mere matter of business. The fight over, the adversaries bear no ill-will, and will sit down and eat together.

Henegan, a gallant Irishman, happened to be out shooting, and meeting Mayne's little force had joined it as a volunteer and fought bravely in the ranks; but instead of getting kudos he got reprimanded by the authorities for meddling in what did not concern him. Mayne had no wish to deal harshly with his late opponents, and he was delighted at the capture of the gang of murderers. A Sowar was sent off to procure a fresh set of bearers for me, and, whilst I continued my journey to Jaulnah, Mayne returned in triumph to Bolarum.

It seems that I owed my life to the ambition of a neophyte, who, anxious to distinguish himself, had taken it upon himself to

become the executioner of the Sowcar. In his hurry, and owing to the gloom of the early morning, he had mistaken me for the banker, and in operating upon me had failed to give my neck the fatal twist, as although I was rendered insensible the vertebræ had not been sundered.

It is extraordinary how quickly news travels in India. There were no railroads or telegraphs in those days, yet it was reported in Jaulnah that the great Mahagun was dead! The astonishment of his people, therefore, may be imagined when I arrived in his state palanquin, explained all that had occurred, and presented my letters and cheque.

The reports of cholera had been greatly

exaggerated ; there was really no need for my services, but I was given a bungalow to live in and regaled royally for two months. I often got away for a few days, and did fairly well in hunting, for the men I was pitted against were

and gave me a handsome *douceur* for the risk I had run from the Thugs, besides the fee he had promised, so I found myself almost rich, and begged him to invest the money for me, which he did, greatly to my advantage. The Thugs



"I DID FAIRLY WELL IN HUNTING."

but moderate hands at sport, very different from those I had been accustomed to meet ; and, besides, I had the pick of the banker's horses, elephants, guns, and rifles.

In returning I met Bunselol in Hingolie, surrounded by quite a bodyguard. He was en route to Jaulnah. He told me that my narrow escape had been a lesson to him, and that he had engaged these men to protect him. He behaved most generously,

were duly hanged ; most of the Rohillas took service, filling up the gaps in the ranks of the irregular cavalry which they themselves had caused. Others became followers of native princes, and a few, no doubt, went back to their predatory habits. I myself have never quite got over that fearful wrench. I often dream that I am again in the clutches of the Thugs, and I wake up shivering and bathed in a cold perspiration.

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