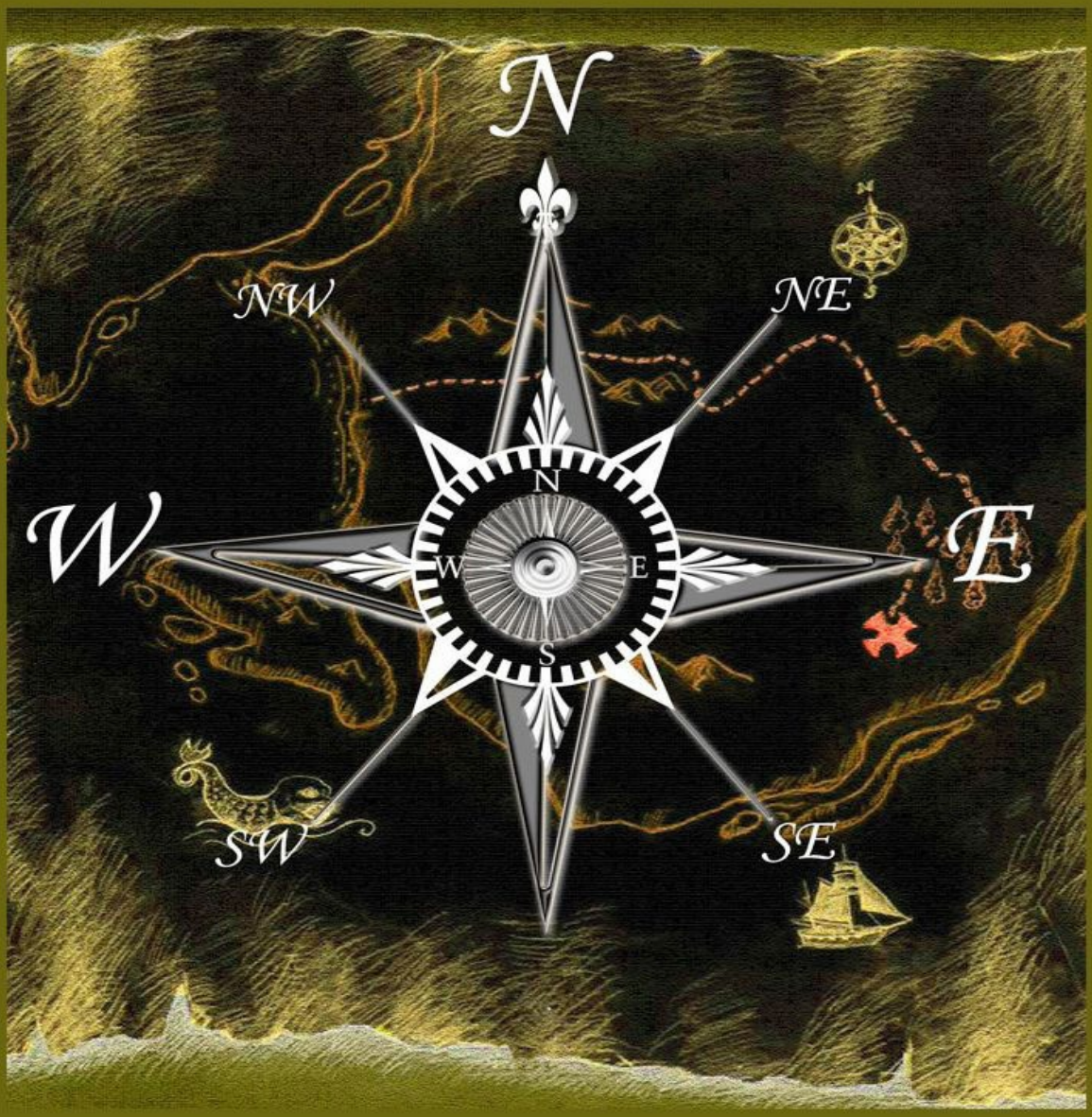
JULES VERNE



THE STEAM HOUSE

ILLUSTRATED EDITION

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Jules Verne

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Jules Verne – A Biographical Primer

Jules Verne (1828–1905), French author, was born at Nantes on the 8th of February 1828. After completing his studies at the Nantes lycée, he went to Paris to study for the bar. About 1848, in conjunction with Michel Carré, he wrote librettos for two operettas, and in 1850 his verse comedy, Les Pailles rompues, in which Alexandre Dumas fils had some share, was produced at the Gymnase. For some years his interests alternated between the theatre and the bourse, but some travellers' stories which he wrote for the Musée des Familles seem to have revealed to him the true direction of his talent—the delineation, viz., of delightfully extravagant voyages and adventures to which cleverly prepared scientific and geographical details lent an air of versimilitude. Something of the kind had been done before, after kindred methods, by Cyrano de Bergerac, by Swift and Defoe, and later by Mayne Reid. But in his own particular application of plausible scientific apparatus Verne undoubtedly struck out a department for himself in the wide literary genre of voyages imaginaires. His first success was obtained with Cinq semaines en ballon, which he wrote for Hetzel's Magazin d'Éducation in 1862, and thenceforward, for a quarter of a century, scarcely a year passed in which Hetzel did not publish one or more of his fantastic stories, illustrated generally by pictures of the most lurid and sensational description. The most successful of these romances include: Voyage au centre de la terre (1864); De la terre à la lune (1865); Vingt mille lieues sous les mers (1869); Les Anglais au pôle nord (1870); and Voyage autour du monde en quatre-vingts jours, which first appeared in Le Temps in 1872. The adaptation of this last (produced with success at the Porte St Martin theatre on the 8th of November 1874) and of another excellent tale, Michael Strogoff (at the Châtelet, 1880), both dramas being written in conjunction with

Adolphe d'Ennery, proved the most acceptable of Verne's theatrical pieces. The novels were translated into the various European languages—and some even into Japanese and Arabic—and had an enormous success in England. But after 1877, when he published Hector Servadac, a romance of existence upon a comet, the writer's invention began to show signs of fatigue (his kingdom had been invaded in different directions and at different times times by such writers as R. M. Ballantyne, Rider Haggard and H. G. Wells), and he even committed himself, somewhat unguardedly, to very gloomy predictions as to the future of the novel. Jules Verne's own novels, however, will certainly long continue to delight readers by reason of their sparkling style, their picturesque verve—apparently inherited directly from Dumas—their amusing and good-natured national caricatures, and the ingenuity with which the love element is either subordinated or completely excluded. M. Verne, who was always extremely popular in society, divided his time for the most part between Paris, his home at Amiens and his yacht. He was a member of the Legion of Honour, and several of his romances were crowned by the French Academy, but he was never enrolled among its members. He died at Amiens on the 24th of March 1905. His brother, Paul Verne, contributed to the Transactions of the French Alpine Club, and wrote an Ascension du Mont Blanc for his brother's collection of Voyages extraordinaires in 1874.

The Steam House

Book One - The Demon Of Cawnpore

Chapter I

“TWO THOUSAND POUNDS FOR A HEAD.”

“A REWARD of two thousand pounds will be paid to any one who will deliver up, dead or alive, one of the prime movers of the Sepoy revolt, at present known to be in the Bombay presidency, the Nabob Dandou Pant, commonly called…”

Such was the notice read by the inhabitants of Aurungabad, on the evening of the 6th of March, 1867.

A copy of the placard had been recently affixed to the wall of a lonely and ruined bungalow on the banks of the Doudhma, and already the corner of the paper bearing the second name—a name execrated by some, secretly admired by others—was gone.

The name had been there, printed in large letters, but it was torn off by the hand of a solitary fakir who passed by that desolate spot. The name of the Governor of the Bombay presidency, countersigning that of the Viceroy of India, had also disappeared. What could have been the fakir’s motive in doing this?

By defacing the notice, did he hope that the rebel of 1857 would escape public prosecution, and the consequences of the steps taken to secure his arrest? Could he imagine that a notoriety so terrible as his would vanish with the fragments of this scrap of paper?

To suppose such a thing would have been madness. The notices were affixed in profusion to the walls of the houses, palaces, mosques, and hotels of Aurungabad. Besides which, a crier had gone through all the streets, reading in a

loud voice the proclamation of the Viceroy. So that the inhabitants of the lowest quarters knew by this time that a sum, amounting to a fortune, was promised to whomsoever would deliver up this Dandou Pant. The name, annihilated in one solitary instance, would, before twelve hours were over, be proclaimed throughout the province.

If, indeed, the report was correct that the Nabob had taken refuge in this part of Hindoostan, there could be no doubt that he would shortly fall into the hands of those strongly interested in his capture. Under what impulse, then, had the fakir defaced a placard of which thousands of copies had been circulated!

The impulse was doubtless one of anger, mingled perhaps with contempt; for he turned from the place with a scornful gesture, and entering the city was soon lost to view amid the swarming populace of its more crowded and disreputable quarter.

That portion of the Indian peninsula which lies between the Western Ghauts, and the Ghauts of the Bay of Bengal, is called the Deccan. It is the name commonly given to the southern part of India below the Ganges. The Deccan, of which the name in Sanscrit signifies “south,” contains a certain number of provinces in the presidencies of Bombay and Madras. Chief among these is the province of Aurungabad, the capital of which was, in former days, that of the entire Deccan.

In the seventeenth century the celebrated Mogul Emperor Aurungzebe, established his court in the town of Aurungabad, known in the early history of India by the name of Kirkhi. It then contained one hundred thousand inhabitants. Now, in the hands of the English who rule it in the name of the Nizam of Hyderabad, there are not more

than fifty thousand. Yet it is one of the most healthful cities of the peninsula, having hitherto escaped the scourge of Asiatic cholera, as well as the visitations of the fever epidemics so much to be dreaded in India.

Aurungabad possesses magnificent remains of its ancient splendour. Many artistic and richly ornamental buildings bear witness to the power and grandeur of the most illustrious of the conquerors of India, the renowned Aurungzebe, who raised this empire, increased by the addition of Cabul and Assam, to a marvellous height of prosperity.

The palace of the Great Mogul stands on the right bank of the Doudhma. The mausoleum of the favourite Sultana of the Shah Jahan, the father of Aurungzebe, is also a remarkable edifice; so likewise is the elegant mosque built in imitation of the Tadje at Agra, which rears its four minarets round a graceful swelling cupola.

Among the mixed and varied population of Aurungabad, such a man as the fakir above mentioned easily concealed himself from observation. Whether his character was real or assumed, he was in no respect to be distinguished from others of his class. Men like him abound in India, and form, with the “sayeds,” a body of religious mendicants, who, travelling through the country on foot or on horseback, ask alms, which, if not bestowed willingly, they demand as a right. They also play the part of voluntary martyrs, and are held in great reverence by the lower orders of the Hindoo people.

This particular fakir was a man of good height, being more than five foot nine inches. His age could not have been more than forty, and his countenance reminded one of the handsome Mahratta type, especially in the brilliancy of his

keen black eyes; but it was difficult to trace the fine features of the race, disfigured and pitted as they were by the marks of small-pox. He was in the prime of life, and his figure was robust and supple. A close observer would have seen that he had lost one finger of his left hand. His hair was dyed a red colour, and he went barefoot, wearing only a turban, and a scanty shirt or tunic of striped woollen stuff girded round his waist.

On his breast were represented in bright colours the emblems of the two principles of preservation and destruction taught by Hindoo mythology: the lion’s head of the fourth incarnation of Vishnu, the three eyes and the symbolic trident of the ferocious Siva.

There was great stir and commotion that evening in the streets of Aurungabad, especially in the lower quarters, where the populace swarmed outside the hovels in which they lived. Men, women, children, Europeans and natives; English soldiers, sepoys, beggars of all descriptions; peasants from the villages, met, talked, gesticulated, discussed the proclamation, and calculated the chances of winning the enormous reward offered by Government.

The excitement was as great as it could have been before the wheel of a lottery where the prize was 2000£. In this case the fortunate ticket was the head of Dandou Pant, and to obtain it a man must first have the good luck to fall in with the Nabob, and then the courage to seize him.

The fakir, apparently the only person unexcited by the hope of winning the prize, threaded his way among the eager groups, occasionally stopping and listening to what was said, as though he might hear something of use to him. He spoke to no one, but if his lips were silent his eyes and ears were on the alert.

“Two thousand pounds for finding the Nabob!” exclaimed one, raising his clenched hands to heaven.

“Not for finding him,” replied another, “but for catching him, which is a very different thing!”

“Well, to be sure, he is not a man to let himself be taken without a resolute struggle.”

“But surely it was said he died of fever in the jungles of Nepaul?”

“That story was quite untrue! The cunning fellow chose to pass for dead, that he might live in greater security!”

“The report was spread that he had been buried in the midst of his encampment on the frontier!”

“It was a false funeral, on purpose to deceive people.”

The fakir did not change a muscle of his countenance on hearing this latter assertion, which was made in a tone admitting of no doubt. But when one of the more excited of the group near which he was standing began to relate the following circumstantial details, his brows knit involuntarily as he listened.

“It is very certain,” said the speaker, “that in 1859 the Nabob took refuge with his brother, Balao Rao, and the ex-rajah of Gonda, Debi-Bux-Singh, in a camp at the foot of the mountains of Nepaul. There, finding themselves closely pressed by the British troops, they all three resolved to cross the Indo-Chinese frontier. Before doing so, they caused a report of their death to be circulated, in order to confirm which they went through the ceremony of actual

funerals; but in fact only a finger from the left hand of each man had been really buried. These they cut off themselves when the rites were celebrated."

"How do you know all this?" demanded one of the crowd of listeners.

"I myself was present," answered the man. "The soldiers of Dandou Pant had taken me prisoner. I only effected my escape six months afterwards."

While the Hindoo was speaking, the fakir never took his gaze off him. His eyes blazed like lightning. He kept his left hand under the ragged folds of his garment, and his lips quivered as they parted over his sharp-pointed teeth.

"So you have seen the Nabob?" inquired one of the audience.

"I have," replied the former prisoner of Dandou Pant.

"And would know him for certain if accident were to bring you face to face with him?"

"Assuredly I would: I know him as well as I know myself."

"Then you have a good chance of gaining the 2,000£!" returned his questioner, not without a touch of envy in his tone.

"Perhaps so," replied the Hindoo, "if it be true that the Nabob has been so imprudent as to venture into the presidency of Bombay, which to me appears very unlikely."

"What would be the reason of his venturing so far? What reason would induce him to dare so much?"

“No doubt he might hope to instigate a fresh rebellion, either among the sepoys or among the country populations of Central India.”

“Since Government asserts that he is known to be in the province,” said one of the speakers, who belonged to that class which takes for gospel everything stated by authority, “of course Government has reliable information on the subject.”

“Be it so!” responded the Hindoo; “only let it be the will of Brahma that Dandou Pant crosses my path, and my fortune is made!”

The fakir withdrew a few paces, but he did not lose sight of the ex-prisoner of the Nabob.

It was by this time dark night-time, but there was no diminution of the commotion in the streets of Aurungabad. Gossip about the Nabob circulated faster than ever. Here, people were saying that he had been seen in the town; there, that he was known to be at a great distance. A courier from the north was reported to have arrived, with news for the Governor, of his arrest. At nine o’clock the best informed asserted that he was already imprisoned in the town jail—in company with some Thugs who had been vegetating there for more than thirty years; that he was going to be hanged next day at sunrise without a trial, just like Tantia Topi, his celebrated comrade in revolt.

But by ten o’clock there was fresh news. The prisoner had escaped, and the hopes of those who coveted the reward revived. In reality all these reports were false. Those supposed to be the best informed knew no more than any

one else. The Nabob’s head was safe. The prize was still to be won.

It was evident that the Indian who was acquainted with the person of Dandou Pant had a better chance of gaining the reward than any one else. Very few people, especially in the presidency of Bombay, had had occasion to meet with the savage leader of the great insurrection.

Farther to the north, or more in the centre of the country—in Scinde, in Bundelkund, in Oude, near Agra, Delhi, Cawnpore, Lucknow, on the principal theatre of the atrocities committed by his order—the population would have risen in a body, and delivered him over to British justice. The relatives of his victims—husbands, brothers, children, wives—still wept for those whom he had caused to be massacred by hundreds. Ten years had passed, but had not extinguished the righteous sentiments of horror and vengeance. It seemed, therefore, impossible that Dandou Pant should be so imprudent as to trust himself in districts where his name was held in execration.

If, then, he really had, as was supposed, re-crossed the Indo-Chinese frontier—if some hidden motive, whether projects for new revolt or otherwise, had induced him to quit the secret asylum which had hitherto remained unknown even to the Anglo-Indian police—it was only in the provinces of the Deccan that he could expect an open course and a species of security. And we have seen that the Governor had, in point of fact, got wind of his appearance in the presidency, and instantly a price had been set on his head. Still it must be remarked that men of the upper ranks at Aurungabad—magistrates, military officers, and public functionaries—considerably doubted the truth of the information received by the Governor.

It had so often been reported that this man had been seen, and even captured! So much false intelligence had been circulated respecting him, that there began to be a kind of legendary belief in a gift of ubiquity possessed by him, to account for the skill with which he eluded the most able and active agents of the police. The population, however, made no doubt that the intelligence as to his appearance was reliable.

Among those now most convinced that the Nabob was to be found was, of course, his ex-prisoner. The poor wretch, allured by the hope of gain, and likewise animated by a spirit of personal revenge, began to set about the undertaking at once, and regarded his success as almost certain.

His plan was very simple. He proposed next day to offer his services to the Governor; then, after having learned exactly all that was known of Dandou Pant—that is to say, the particulars on which was founded the information referred to in the proclamation, he intended to make his way at once to the locality in which the Nabob was reported to have been seen.

About eleven o’clock at night the Indian began to think of retiring to take some repose. His only resting-place was a small boat moored by the banks of the Doudhma; and thither he directed his steps, his mind full of the various reports he had heard, as, with half-closed eyes and thoughtful brow, he revolved the project he had resolved to carry out.

Quite unknown to him the fakir dogged his steps; he followed noiselessly, and, keeping in the shadow, never for an instant lost sight of him. Towards the outskirts of this quarter of Aurungabad the streets became gradually

deserted. The chief thoroughfare opened upon bare, unoccupied ground, one circuit of which skirted the stream of the Doudhma. The place was a kind of desert beyond the town, though within its walls a few passengers were hastily traversing it, evidently anxious to reach more frequented paths. The footsteps of the last died away in the distance, but the Hindoo did not remark that he was now alone on the river’s bank.

The fakir was at no great distance, but concealed by trees, or beneath the sombre walls of ruined habitations, which were scattered here and there. His precautions were needful. When the moon rose and shed uncertain rays athwart the gloom, the Hindoo might have seen that he was watched, and even very closely followed. As to hearing the sound of the fakir’s tread, it was utterly impossible. Barefoot, he glided rather than walked. Nothing revealed his presence on the banks of the Doudhma.

Five minutes passed. The Hindoo took his way mechanically towards his wretched boat, like a man accustomed to withdraw night after night to this desert place.

He was absorbed in the thought of the interview he meant to have next day with the Governor; while the hope of revenging himself on the Nabob—never remarkable for his tenderness towards his prisoners—united with a burning

desire to obtain the reward, rendered him blind and deaf to everything around him; and though the fakir was gradually approaching him, he was totally unconscious of the danger in which his imprudent words had placed him.

Suddenly a man sprang upon him with a bound like that of a tiger! He seemed to grasp a lightning flash. It was the moonlight glancing on the blade of a Malay dagger!

The Hindoo, struck in the breast, fell heavily to the ground. The wound, inflicted by an unerring hand, was mortal; but a few inarticulate words escaped the unhappy man’s lips, with a torrent of blood. The assassin stooped, raised his victim, and supported him while he turned his own face to the full light of the moon.

“Dost know me?” he asked.

“It is he!” murmured the Indian; and the dreaded name would have been his last choking utterance, but his head fell back, and he expired. In another instant the corpse had disappeared beneath the waters of the Doudhma.

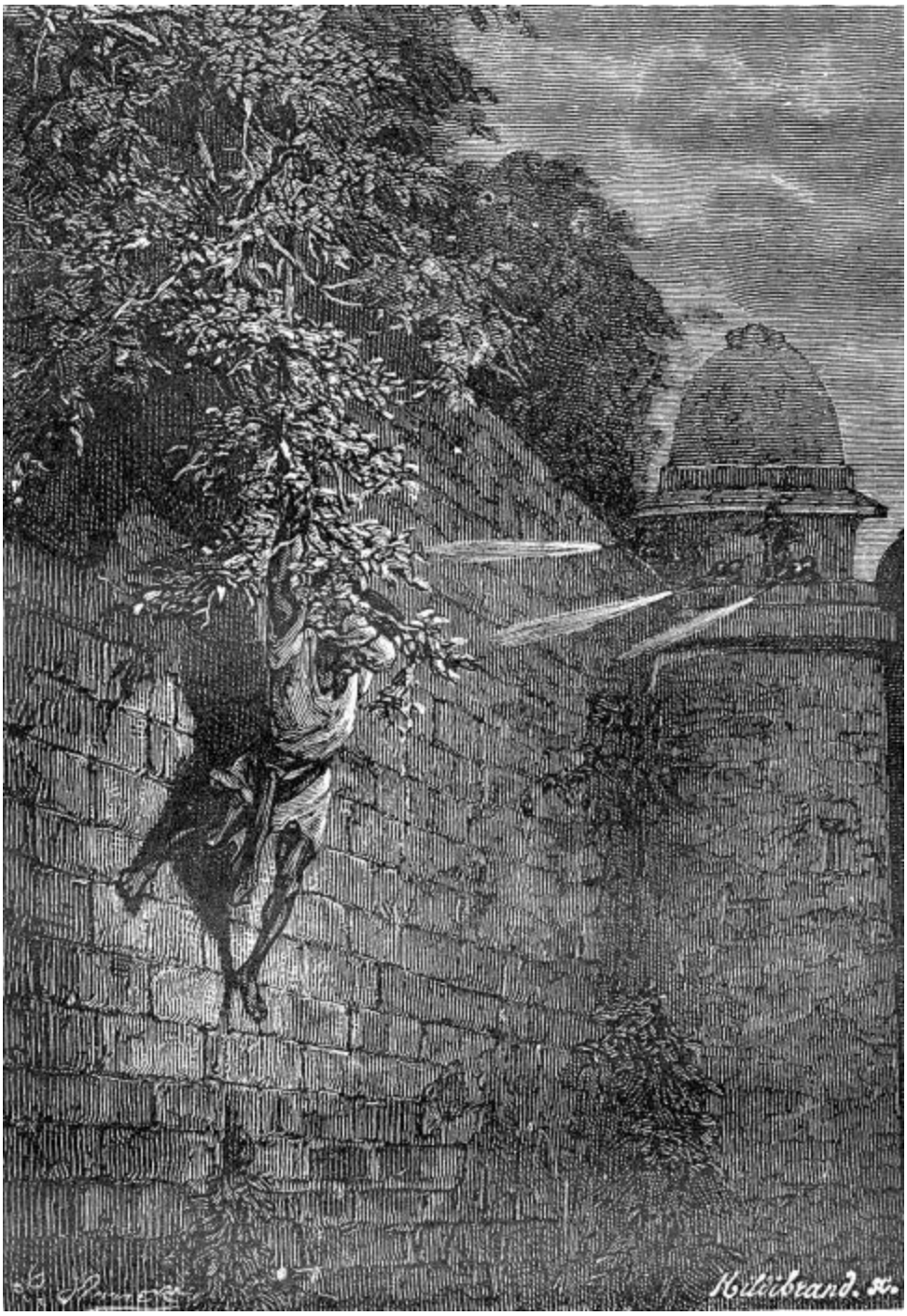
The fakir waited until the noise of the plunge had passed away; then, turning swiftly, he traversed the open ground, and passing along the now deserted streets and lanes, approached one of the city gates.

This gate was closed for the night just before he reached it, and a military guard occupied the post, to prevent either ingress or egress. The fakir could not leave Aurungabad, as he had intended to do. “Yet depart this night I must, if ever I am to do it alive!” muttered he.

He turned away, and followed the inner line of fortifications for some little distance; then, ascending the slope, reached

the upper part of the rampart. The crest towered fifty feet above the level of the fosse which lay between the scarp and counterscarp, and was devoid of any salient points or projections which could have afforded support. It seemed quite impossible that any man could descend without a rope, and the cord he wore as a girdle was but a few feet in length. He paused, glanced keenly round, and considered what was to be done.

Great trees rise within the walls of Aurungabad, which seems set in a verdant frame of foliage. The branches of these being long and flexible, it might be possible to cling to one, and at great risk, drop over the wall. No sooner did this idea occur to the fakir, than, without a moment’s hesitation, he plunged among the boughs, and soon reappeared outside the wall, holding a long pliable branch, which he grasped midway, and which gradually bent beneath his weight.



When the branch rested on the edge of the wall, the fakir began to let himself slowly downwards, as though he held a knotted rope in his hands. By this means he descended a considerable distance; but when close to the extremity of

the bough, at least thirty feet still intervened between him and the ground. There he hung, swinging in the air by his outstretched arms, while his feet sought some crevice or rough stone for support.

A flash!—another! The report of musketry!

The sentries had perceived the fugitive and fired upon him. He was not hit, but a ball struck the branch which supported him, and splintered it.

In a few seconds it gave way, and down went the fakir into the fosse. Such a fearful fall would have killed another man—he was uninjured. To spring to his feet, dart up the slope of the counterscarp amid a storm of bullets—not one of which touched him—and vanish in the darkness, was mere play to the agile fugitive.

At a distance of two miles he passed the cantonments of the English troops, quartered outside Aurungabad.

A couple of hundred paces beyond that he stopped, turned round, and stretching his mutilated hand towards the city, fiercely uttered these words: “Woe betide those who fall now into the power of Dandou Pant! Englishmen have not seen the last of Nana Sahib!”

Nana Sahib! This name, the most formidable to which the revolt of 1857 had given a horrid notoriety, was there once more, flung like a haughty challenge at the conquerors of India.

“What do you think of India?”

Chapter II

COLONEL MUNRO.

“MAUCLER, my dear fellow, you tell us nothing about your journey!” said my friend Banks, the engineer, to me. “One would suppose you had never got beyond your native Paris! What do you think of India?”

“Think of India!” I replied, “I really must see it before I can answer that question!”

“Well, that is good!” returned Banks. “Why, you have just traversed the entire peninsula from Bombay to Calcutta, and unless you are downright blind—”

“I am not blind, my dear Banks; but during that journey you speak of I was blinded.”

“Blinded?”

“Yes! quite blinded by smoke, steam, dust; and, above all, by the rapid motion. I don’t want to speak evil of railroads, Banks, since it is your business to make them; but let me ask whether you call it travelling to be jammed up in the compartment of a carriage, see no further than the glass of the windows on each side of you, tear along day and night, now over viaducts among the eagles and vultures, now through tunnels among moles and rats, stopping only at stations one exactly like another, seeing nothing of towns but the outside of their walls and the tops of their minarets, and all this amid an uproar of snorting engines, shrieking steam-whistles, grinding and grating of rails, varied by the

mournful groans of the brake? Can you, I say, call this travelling so as to see a country?”

“Well done!” cried Captain Hood. “There, Banks! answer that if you can. What is your opinion, colonel?”

The colonel, thus addressed, bent his head slightly, and merely said, “I am curious to know what reply Banks can make to our guest, Monsieur Maucler.”

“I reply without the slightest hesitation,” said the engineer, “that I quite agree with Maucler.”

“But then,” cried Captain Hood, “why do you construct these railroads at all?”

“To enable you to go from Calcutta to Bombay in sixty hours when you are in a hurry.”

“I am never in a hurry.”

“Ah, well then, you had better take to the great trunk road and walk!”

“That is exactly what I intend doing.”

“When?”

“When the colonel will agree to accompany me in a pretty little stroll of eight or nine hundred miles across the country!”

The colonel smiled, and without speaking again fell into one of the long reveries from which his most intimate friends, among whom were Captain Hood and Banks the engineer, found it difficult to rouse him.

I had arrived in India a month previously, having journeyed by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, which runs from Bombay to Calcutta, *via* Allahabad. I knew literally nothing of the country. But it was my purpose to travel through its northern districts beyond the Ganges, to visit its great cities, to examine and study the principal monuments of antiquity, and to devote to my explorations sufficient time to render them complete.

I had become acquainted with the engineer Banks in Paris. For some years we had been united by a friendship which only increased with greater intimacy. I had promised to visit him at Calcutta as soon as the completion of that part of the Scinde, Punjab, and Delhi railroad, of which he was engineer, should set him at liberty.

The works being now at an end, Banks had some months leave, and I had come to propose that he should take rest by roaming over India with me! As a matter of course he had accepted my proposal with enthusiasm, and in a few weeks, when the season would be favourable, we were to set off.

On my arrival at Calcutta in the month of March, 1867, Banks had introduced me to one of his gallant comrades, Captain Hood, and afterwards to his friend Colonel Munro, at whose house we were spending the evening. The colonel, at this time a man of about forty-seven, occupied a house in the European quarter; it stood somewhat apart, and consequently beyond the noise and stir of the great metropolis of India, which consists in fact of two cities, one native, the other foreign and commercial.

This English quarter is sometimes called “the city of palaces,” and certainly it abounds with palaces if the name

is to be applied to every building which can boast of porticoes and terraces. Calcutta is a rendezvous for all the orders of architecture which English taste lays under contribution when constructing her colonial capitals.

As to the residence of Colonel Munro, it was a simple “bungalow,” a dwelling of one story raised on a brick basement, and having a pointed pyramidal roof. It was surrounded by a verandah supported on light columns. The kitchens, offices, coach-house, stables, and out-houses, formed two wings. A garden shaded by fine trees, and bounded by a low wall, enclosed the whole.

The colonel’s house was evidently that of a man in easy circumstances. There was a large staff of servants, such as is required in Anglo-Indian families. The furniture and every household arrangement was in the very best taste and style. In everything about the establishment might be traced the hand of an intelligent woman, whose thoughtful care must have originally planned the comforts and conveniences of the home, but at the same time one felt that this woman was no longer there.

The management of the household was conducted entirely by an old soldier of the colonel’s regiment, who acted as his steward or major-domo. Sergeant McNeil was a Scotchman, who had been with him in many campaigns,

not merely in his military capacity, but as an attached and devoted personal attendant.

He was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts, of tall and vigorous frame, and manly, well-bearded countenance. Although he had retired from the service when his colonel did, he continued to wear the uniform; and this national costume, together with his martial bearing, bespoke him at once the Highlander and the soldier.

Both had left the army in 1860. But instead of returning to the hills and glens of their native land, both had remained in India, and lived at Calcutta in a species of retirement and solitude, which requires to be explained.

When my friend Banks was about to introduce me to Colonel Munro, he gave me one piece of advice. “Make no allusion to the sepoy revolt,” he said: “and, above all, never mention the name of Nana Sahib.”

Colonel Edward Munro belonged to an old Scottish family, whose members had made their mark in the history of former days.

He was descended from that Sir Hector Munro who in 1760 commanded the army in Bengal, when a serious insurrection had to be quelled. This he effected with a stern and pitiless energy. In one day twenty-eight rebels were blown from the cannon’s mouth—a fearful sentence, many times afterwards carried out during the mutiny of 1857.

At the period of that great revolt Colonel Munro was in command of the 93rd Regiment of Highlanders, which he led during the campaign under Sir James Outram—one of the heroes of that war—of whom Sir Charles Napier spoke as “The Chevalier Bayard of the Indian Army.” Colonel