

OUR EMPIRE STORY  
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CHAPTER XXV THE MUTINY—CAWNPORE

At Cawnpore Sir Hugh Wheeler was commander. When he saw the danger coming he sent to Sir Henry Lawrence at Lucknow for help. But Sir Henry himself had few enough soldiers, and could spare only fifty men. Then Sir Hugh asked an Indian prince, called the Nana Sahib, to help him.

The Nana was the adopted son of the last Peshwd of the Mardthas, to whom, you remember, the Company paid a yearly sum of money, after he had given up his kingdom to them. When the Peshwd died, the Company thought there was no need to go on paying the money, for the Nana was not really his son, and had no true right to it. This made the Nana angry, for he thought that he should have had the money. Still, he pretended to be friends with the British. Now he promised to help Sir Hugh, and he came to Cawnpore with some soldiers. But as soon as the mutiny had fairly broken out, his men joined with the mutineers against the British.

At Cawnpore the sepoy broke open the jail, sacked the treasury and magazine, and burned and plundered everywhere. But they did not attack the white people. Having finished their work of destruction, they started to join the other rebels at Delhi. But this did not please the Nana. He called them back, and the siege of Cawnpore began.

The place where the white people were gathered for refuge was poorly protected. It was an old hospital. Round it was a crumbling mud wall not four feet high. Within it were gathered nearly a thousand people, but scarcely three hundred were soldiers, and nearly four hundred were women and children. Without the wall there swarmed thousand upon thousand of sepoy, well drilled and well armed, for they had all the heavy guns and ammunition of the magazine. It needed only courage for them to overleap the poor weak wall, and put every white man and woman to death. But courage failed them. They knew of what stern stuff their white masters were made, and they dared not overleap that wall. So they raged and yelled without, and night and day the flash and roar of guns, and the scream and crash of shells, continued with no pause. Again Sir Hugh sent to Sir Henry Lawrence begging for help. But this time Sir Henry, with a breaking heart, was forced to refuse. He could not spare a man. So without rest, or pause, or shadow of relief, the siege went on. The sepoy aimed with deadly sureness. The low mud wall gave little shelter, and day by day the ranks of the defenders grew thinner and thinner. Yet in hunger, thirst, and weariness, they fought on. Food began to fail, A handful of flour and a handful of split peas a day was all each man received. Water was more precious still. It could only be had from a well within the fire of the enemy's guns. And many a man laid down his life to bring a bucket of water to still the wailing of a chUd or the groans of a dying comrade.

Three weeks passed, weeks of sleepless horror amid unceasing noise, and constant hail of bullets. The June sun blazed from a brazen sky. The air was heavy with smoke, and bitter with the taste and smell of gunpowder, the heat wellnigh unbearable. Women and children drooped and faded. Men set then- teeth, and, gaunt and grim, fought on.

At length the Nana Sahib proposed terms. He promised, that if the British would give in, he would send them all in safety down the river to Allahabad. There was not a man within the walls who would not rather have fought to the last. But they thought of the sad-eyed women, and the little listless children, and they gave in.

So early one morning, a dreary procession of weary women and children, of hopeless, wounded men, made their way to the river.

There, some native boats awaited them, covered with thatch to keep off the heat of the sun. The wounded were lifted in. Men, women, and children followed. Then suddenly from the banks the sound of a bugle was heard. Throwing down their oars the native rowers leaped from their places and made for the shore. Almost at the same moment the thatched roofs burst into flame, and from the banks a roar of guns was heard, and a hail of bullets burst upon the boats.

The boats, stuck in the mud, were an easy mark. Leaping into the river the white men tried to push them off, but in vain. One boat alone got free, and of its crew only four lived to tell the tale. The others were murdered where they stood. Not a man escaped, and those of the women and children, who were still alive, were led back to the terrible town from which they had just been set free. There they were shut up in a place called the Savada house. Later they were taken to another called the Bibigarh. Here they were treated as slaves, and made to grind the corn for the Nana. And so in slavery and imprisonment the terrible weeks dragged on.

Meanwhile, through the burning heat of an Indian summer, a British army was toiling on towards Cawnpore. It was led by General Havelock, as brave a soldier and as good a man as ever lived. Like Cromwell, he taught his men both to fight and to pray, and 'Havelock's Saints' were as well known as Cromwell's Ironsides had been.

When the Nana Sahib heard that they were coming, he made up his mind to complete his work. So he ordered the sepoy to fire upon the women and children through the windows of the Bibigarh. But even the sepoy turned from such cruel work, and they fired upon the roof and did little or no hurt to the women within the house. But the Nana could always find people cruel enough to do his bidding. In the evening five men went into the house armed with long knives. For a little time terrible screams were heard. Then all was still. The men came out, and the bodies of the poor women and children were thrown into a well.

Outside Cawnpore the British met the Indian troops. After a desperate fight the Nana was defeated. His army was scattered, and he, struck at last with terror, galloped wildly away through the darkness, and was seen no more.

It is supposed that he died miserably in the jungle. The day after the battle the British marched in triumph into Cawnpore. But when they saw the ghastly Bibigarh and the still more ghastly grave of those they had come to save, these war-worn men burst into sobs and wept like children. These things happily are now long past. An angel guards that once awful spot, and a garden blooms where those poor women died.

## CHAPTER XXVI THE MUTINY—LUCKNOW

The Union Jack floated once more upon the walls of Cawnpore, but there was still much to do ere the Mutiny should be over. 'Soldiers,' said Havelock, 'your general is satisfied, and more than satisfied, with you. But your comrades of Lucknow are in danger.' And with the memory of Cawnpore in their hearts, Havelock and his men marched on to Lucknow.

But Havelock had to fight his way there. He lost so many men and used so much ammunition that at last he was not strong enough to take Lucknow. He was obliged to turn back to Cawnpore and wait until Sir James Outram joined him with more troops. Outram was a gallant soldier, 'without fear and without reproach,' and together these two brave men marched to help their comrades.

At Lucknow the British had taken refuge in the Residency. This was a number of houses and gardens surrounded by a wall. It was not very strong, but it was far better than the old hospital at Cawnpore. Sir Henry Lawrence, the governor, was a wise and careful man. Seeing the storm coming, he did everything he could to meet it. He gathered stores of food and ammunition, and strengthened the defences of the Residency. But alas, at the very beginning of the siege. Sir Henry was killed.

One day a shell burst into the room where he was talking with some of his officers. There was a blinding flash, a fearful roar, and the room was filled with dust and smoke. In the deep silence which followed, some one asked, 'Are you hurt, Sir Henry?' For a moment there was no answer. Then quietly he replied, 'I am killed.'

So brave Sir Henry died. 'If you put anything on my tombstone,' he said, 'let it be only, "Here lies Henry Lawrence who tried to do his duty. May the Lord have mercy on his soul."' Then with his last breath he urged his men never to give in, but to fight to the end. The terrible summer days dragged on—days spent amid all the noise and din, dust and smoke of war, nights of anxious watchings, broken with sudden alarms. The houses were shattered and riddled with shot, so as to be scarcely any protection from the burning sun or from the enemies' guns. Food was scarce, clothes were in rags. But still the men fought and watched, and the women prayed and waited, and endured. And like an emblem of their dauntless courage, all through the siege the Union Jack floated from the highest tower of the Residency. It was faded and patched, tattered and riddled with holes, the staff was splintered with bullets it was broken again and again. But a new staff was always found, and up went the gallant flag once more, a defiance to the foe.

At last one morning, distant firing was heard. As the hours passed the sound came nearer and nearer. Then the garrison knew that at length help was at hand. The excitement and suspense were awful. But there was nothing to be done but to wait. It was not until it was growing dark that amid the clamour of fighting the sound of the British cheer was heard, and louder still, shrill and piercing, the scream of the bagpipes, and the yell of charging Highlanders. A few minutes more, and British soldiers were seen, fighting their way through the streets to the Residency gates.

Then from the battlements rose a deafening cheer. Such a cry of joy it has not often been man's lot to hear. It was the first cry of returning hope from hearts that had grown hopeless. It was a sob, and a prayer, and an outburst of thanksgiving, all in one. And as the gates were opened, and the men, weary, dusty, bloodstained, rushed through, women sobbing with joy ran to throw themselves upon them, happy to touch their bronzed hands or war-worn coats. With tears running down their cheeks the rough soldiers lifted the children in their arms. From hand to hand they passed the little ones, kissing them and thanking God that they had come in time to save them. It was a scene of wild, sweet joy and almost unutterable relief.

But after all the siege of Lucknow was not over. Havelock and Outram had not men enough with them to cut their way back through the swarms of sepoy, and bring all the ladies and children to safety. So the siege began again. It was not until two months later that Sir Colin Campbell landed in India, and cutting his way through the rebels, really relieved Lucknow.

Scarcely a week later Sir Henry Havelock died. Greatly sorrowing, his men buried him in a garden near the city, his only monument being a tree marked with the letter H.

Before the relief of Lucknow, Delhi had been taken, and now the mutiny was nearly over. There was still some fighting, but gradually it ceased. Lord Canning made a proclamation, offering pardon to all who had not actually murdered the British. Most of the rebels laid down their arms, and once more the country sank to rest.

It was now decided that India should no longer be ruled by the Company but by the Queen. So the great Company, which had begun in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, came to an end in the reign of Queen Victoria. This was proclaimed to all the people of India on the 1st November 1858. Now, instead of Governor-General, the ruler of India was called Viceroy. And Lord Canning, who had been Governor-General throughout the mutiny, became the first Viceroy.