



"Walking slowly at the head of his flocks"

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

By Rudyard Kipling

Author of "Plain Tales from the Hills," "The Jungle Book,"
"Soldiers Three," "The Light that Failed," etc.

DRAWING BY W. L. TAYLOR

PART II

So let us melt and make no noise,
No tear-floods nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the Laity our love.—

A Valediction.



It was punishing work, even though he traveled by night and camped by day, but within the limits of his vision there was no man whom Scott could call master. He was as free as Jimmy Hawkins—freer in fact, for the Government held the Head of the Famine tied neatly to a telegraph wire, and if Jimmy had ever regarded telegrams seriously, the death-rate of the famine would have been much higher than it was.

At the end of a few days' crawling Scott learned something of the size of the India which he served, and it astonished him. His carts, as you know, were loaded with wheat, millet and barley, good food grains all, needing only a little grinding. But the people to whom he brought the life-giving stuffs were rice-eaters. They knew how to hull rice in their mortars, but they knew nothing of the heavy stone querns of the North and less of the material that the white man convoyed so laboriously. They clamored for rice—unhusked paddy—such as they were accustomed to, and when they found that there was none, broke away weeping from the sides of the cart. What was the use of these strange hard grains that choked their throats? They would die; and then and there very many of them kept their word. Others took their allowance and bartered enough millet to feed a man through a week for a few handfuls of rotten rice saved by some more fortunate. A few put their shares into the rice-mortars, pounded it and made a paste with fowl water; but they were very few. Scott understood dimly that many people in the India of the South ate rice as a rule, but he had spent his service in a grain Province, had seldom seen rice in the blade or the ear, and least of all would have believed that in time of deadly need men would die at arm's length of plenty, sooner than touch food they did not know. In vain the interpreters interpreted; in vain his two policemen showed by vigorous pantomime what should be done. The starving crept away to their bark and weeds, grubs, leaves and clay, and left the open sacks untouched. But sometimes the women laid their phantoms of children at Scott's feet, looking back as they staggered away.

Faiz Ullah opined it was the will of God that these foreigners should die, and it remained only to give orders to burn the dead. None the less there was no reason why the Sahib should lack his comforts, and Faiz Ullah, a campaigner of experience, had picked up a few lean goats and had added them to the procession, and that they might give milk for the morning meal, was feeding them on the good grain that these imbeciles rejected. "Yes," said Faiz Ullah, "if the Sahib thought fit, a little

milk might be given to some of the babies," but, as the Sahib well knew, babies were cheap, and for his own part, Faiz Ullah was of opinion that there was no Government order as to babies. Scott spoke forcefully to Faiz Ullah and the two policemen, and bade them capture goats where they could find them. This they most joyfully did, for it was a recreation, and many ownerless goats were driven in. Once fed, the poor brutes were willing enough to follow the carts, and a few days' good food—food such as human beings died for lack of—set them in milk again.

"But I am no goat-herd," said Faiz Ullah. "It is against my *izzat* (my honor)."

"When we cross the Bias River again we will talk of *izzat*," Scott replied. "Till that day thou and the policemen shall be sweepers to the camp if I give the order."

"Thus then it is done," grunted Faiz Ullah, "if the Sahib will have it so"; and he showed how a goat should be milked while Scott stood over him.

"Now, we will feed them," said Scott, "twice a day we will feed them," and he bowed his back to the milking and got a horrible cramp.

When you have to keep connection unbroken between a restless mother of kids and a baby who is at the point of death, you suffer in all your system. But the babies were fed. Each morning and evening Scott would solemnly lift them out one by one from their nest of gunny-bags under the cart-tilt. There were always many who could do no more than breathe, and the milk was dropped into their toothless mouths drop by drop, with due pauses when they choked. Each morning, too, the goats were fed, and since they would straggle without a leader, and since the natives were hirelings, Scott was forced to give up riding and pace slowly at the head of his flocks; accommodating his step to their weaknesses. All this was sufficiently absurd, and he felt the absurdity keenly, but at least he was saving life, and when the women saw that their children did not die they made shift to eat a little of the strange foods and crawled after the carts, blessing the master of the goats.

"Give the women something to live for," said Scott to himself, as he sneezed in the dust of a hundred little feet, "and they'll hang on somehow. But this beats William's condensed milk *benao* (arrangement) all to pieces. I shall never live it down."

He reached his destination very slowly, found that a rice-ship had come in from Burmah, and that stores of paddy were available. Found also an overworked Englishman in charge of the shed, and, loading the carts, set back to cover the ground he had already passed. He left some of the children and half his goats at the famine-shed. For this he was not thanked by the Englishman, who had already more stray babies than he knew what to do with. Scott's back was supplanted by stooping now, and he went on with his wayside ministrations in addition to distributing the paddy. More babies and more goats were added unto him; but now some of the babies wore rags and beads round their wrists or necks. "That," said the interpreter, as though Scott did not know, "signifies that their mothers hope in eventual contingency to resume them officially."

"The sooner, the better," said Scott, but at the same time he marked with the pride of ownership, how this or that little Ramasawmy was putting on flesh like a bantam. As the paddy-carts were emptied he headed for Hawkins' camp by the railway, timing his arrival to fit in with the dinner hour, for it was long since he had eaten at a cloth. He had no desire to make any dramatic entry, but the accident of the sunset ordered it that when he had taken off his helmet to get the evening breeze, the low light should fall across his forehead, and he could not see what was before him; while one waiting

at the tent door beheld with new eyes a young man, beautiful as Paris, a god in a halo of golden dust walking slowly at the head of his flocks, while at his knee ran small naked Cupids. But she laughed—William in a slate-colored blouse, laughed consumedly till Scott, putting the best face he could upon the matter, halted his armies and bade her admire the kindergarten. It was an unseemly sight, but the proprieties had been left ages ago with the tea-party at Amritsar Station, fifteen hundred miles to the north.

"They are coming on nicely," said William. "We've only five-and-twenty here now. The women are beginning to take them away again."

"Are you in charge of the babies then?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jim and I. We didn't think of goats though. We've been trying condensed milk and water."

"Any losses?"

"More than I care to think of," said William, with a shudder. "And you?"

Scott said nothing. There had been many little burials along his route—many mothers who had wept when they did not find again the children they had trusted to the care of the Government.

Then Hawkins came out carrying a razor, at which Scott looked hungrily, for he had a beard that he did not love. And when they sat down to dinner in the tent he told his tale in few words, as it might have been an official report. Mrs. Jim snuffled from time to time, and Jim bowed his head judiciously, but William's gray eyes were on the clean-shaven face, and it was to her that Scott seemed to speak.

"Good for the Pauper Province!" said William, her chin in her hand as she leaned forward among the wine-glasses. Her cheeks had fallen in and the scar on her forehead was more prominent than ever, but the well-turned boy's neck rose roundly as a column from the ruffle of the blouse which was accepted evening-dress in camp.

"It was awfully absurd at times," said Scott. "You see I didn't know much about milking or babies. They'll chaff my head off if the tale goes up North."

"Let 'em," said William haughtily. "We've all done coolie-work since we came. I know Jack has." This was to Hawkins' address, and the big man smiled blandly.

"Your brother's a highly efficient officer, William," said he, "and I've done him the honor of treating him as he deserves. Remember, I write the confidential reports."

"Then you must say that William's worth her weight in gold," said Mrs. Jim. "I don't know what we should have done without her. She has been everything to us." She dropped her hand upon William's, which was rough with much handling of reins, and William patted it softly. Jim beamed on the company. Things were going well with his world. Three of his more grossly incompetent men had died and their places had been filled by their betters. Each day brought the Rains nearer. They had put out the famine in five of the Eight Districts, and after all the death rate had not been too heavy—things considered. He looked over Scott carefully, as an ogre looks over a man, and rejoiced in his thews and iron-hard condition.

"He's just the least bit in the world tucked up," said Jim to himself, "but he can do two men's work yet." Then he was aware that Mrs. Jim was telegraphing to him, and according to the domestic code the message ran: "A clear case. Look at them!"

He looked and listened. All that William was saying was: "What can you expect of a country where they call a *bhistee* (a water-carrier), a *tummi-catch*?" and all that Scott answered was: "I shall be glad to get back to the Club. Save me a dance at the Christmas ball, won't you?"

"It's a far cry from here to the Lawrence Hall," said Jim. "Better turn in early, Scott. It's paddy-carts tomorrow; you'll begin loading at five."

"Aren't you going to give Mr. Scott a day's rest?"

"Wish I could, Lizzie. 'Fraid I can't. As long as he can stand up we must use him."

"Well, I've had one Europe evening at least. By Jove, I'd nearly forgotten! What do I do about those babies of mine?"

"Leave them here," said William—"we are in charge of that—and as many goats as you can spare. I must learn how to milk now."

"If you care to get up early enough to-morrow I'll show you. I have to milk, you see; and by-the-way, half of 'em have beads and things round their necks. You must be careful not to take 'em off, in case the mothers turn up."

"You forget, I've had some experience here."

"I hope to goodness you won't overdo." Scott's voice was unguarded.

"I'll take care of her," said Mrs. Jim, telegraphing hundred-word messages as she carried William off, while Jim gave Scott his orders for the coming campaign. It was very late—nearly nine o'clock.

"Jim, you're a brute," said his wife that night, and the Head of the Famine chuckled.

"Not a bit of it, dear. I remember doing the first Jandiala Settlement for the sake of a girl in a crinoline, and she was slender, Lizzie. I've never done as good a piece of work since. *He'll work like a demon.*"

"But you might have given him one day."

"And let things come to a head now? No, dear, it's their happiest time."

"I don't believe either of the darlings knows what's the matter with them. Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it lovely?"

"Getting up at three to learn to milk; bless her heart! Oh, ye Gods, why must we grow old and fat?"

"She's a darling. She has done more work under me—"

"Under *you!* The day after she came she was in charge and you were her subordinate, and you've stayed so ever since; she manages you almost as well as you manage me."

"She doesn't, and that's why I love her. She's as direct as a man—as her brother."

"Brother's weaker than she is. 'Always coming to me for orders, but he's honest and a glutton for work. I confess I'm rather fond of William, and if I had a daughter—"

The talk ended there. Far away in the Derajat was a child's grave more than twenty years old, and neither Jim nor his wife spoke of it any more.

"All the same you're responsible," Jim added after a moment's silence.

"Bless 'em!" said Mrs. Jim sleepily.

Before the stars paled, Scott, who slept in an empty cart, waked and went about his work in silence: it seemed at that hour unkind to rouse Faiz Ullah and the interpreter. His head being close to the ground, he did not hear William till she stood over him in the dingy old riding-habit, her eyes still heavy with sleep, a cup of tea and a piece of toast in her hands. There was a baby on the ground squirming on a piece of blanket, and a six-year-old child peered over Scott's shoulder.

"Hai, you little rip," said Scott, "how the deuce do you expect to get your rations if you aren't quiet?"

A cool white hand steadied the brat, who forthwith choked as the milk gurgled into his mouth.

"Mornin'," said the milker. "You've no notion how these little fellows can wriggle."

"Oh, yes, I have." She whispered, because the world was asleep. "Only I feed them with a spoon or a rag. Yours are fatter than mine. And you've been doing this day after day, twice a day?" The voice was almost lost.

"Yes, it was absurd. Now you try," he said, giving place to the girl. "Look out! A goat's not a cow."

The goat protested against the amateur, and there was a scuffle in which Scott snatched up the baby. Then it was all to do over again and William laughed softly and merrily. She managed, however, to feed two babies and a third.

"Don't the little beggars take it well?" said Scott. "I trained 'em."

They were very busy and interested, when lo, it was broad daylight, and before they knew, the camp was awake, and they knelt among the goats, surprised by the day, both flushed to the temples. Yet all the round world rolling up out of the darkness might have heard and seen all that had passed between them.

"Oh," said William unsteadily, snatching up the tea and toast, "I had this made for you. It's stone-cold now. I thought you mightn't have anything ready so early. 'Better not drink it. It's—it's stone-cold."

"That's awfully kind of you. It's just right. It's awfully good of you, really. I'll leave my kids and goats with you and Mrs. Jim, and, of course, any one in camp can show you about the milking."

"Of course," said William, and she grew pinker and pinker and statelier and more stately as she strode back to her tent, fanning herself with the saucer.

There were shrill lamentations through the camp when the elder children saw their nurse move off without them. Faiz Ullah unbent so far as to jest with the policemen, and Scott was purple with shame because Hawkins, already in the saddle, roared.

A child escaped from the care of Mrs. Jim, and running like a rabbit clung to Scott's boot; William pursuing with long, easy strides that gave the lie to the saying that "women and cows should never run."

"I will not go—I will not go!" shrieked the child, twining his feet round Scott's ankle. "They will kill me here. I do not know these people."

"I say," said Scott in broken Tamil. "I say she will do you no harm. Go with her and be well fed."

"Come!" said William panting, with a wrathful glance at Scott, who stood helpless and as it were, hamstrung.

"Go back," said Scott quickly to William. "I'll send the little chap over in a minute."

The tone of authority had its effect, but in a way Scott did not exactly intend. The boy loosened his grasp and said with gravity, "I did not know the woman was thine. I will go." Then he cried to his companions, a mob of three, four and five year olds waiting on the success of his venture ere they stampeded, "Go back and eat. It is our man's woman. She will obey his orders."

Jim collapsed where he sat. Faiz Ullah and the two policemen grinned, and Scott's orders to the cart-men began to fly like hail.

"That is the custom of the Sahib-log when truth is told in their presence," said Faiz Ullah. "The time comes that I must seek new service. Young wives, espe-

cially such as speak our language and have knowledge of the ways of the Police, make great trouble for honest butlers in the matter of weekly accounts."

What William thought of it all she did not say, but when her brother, ten days later, came to camp for orders and heard of Scott's performances, he said laughing:

"Well, that settles it. 'He'll be *Bakri* Scott to the end of his days.' (*Bakri* in the Northern vernacular means a goat.) 'What a lark! I'd have given a month's pay to have seen him nursing famine babies. I fed some with *conjee* (rice-water) but that was all right."

"It's perfectly disgusting," said his sister with blazing eyes. "A man does something like—that—and all you other men think of is to give him an absurd nickname, and then you laugh and think it's funny."

"Ah," said Mrs. Jim sympathetically.

"Well, *you* can't talk, William. You christened little Miss Demby the Button-quail last cold weather, you know you did. India's the land of nicknames."

"That's different," William replied. "She was only a girl, and she hadn't done anything except walk like a quail, and she *does*. But it isn't fair to make fun of a man."

"Scott won't care," said Martyn. "You can't get a rise out of old Scotty. I've been trying for eight years and you've only known him for three. How does he look?"

"He looks very well," said William, and went away with a flushed cheek. "*Bakri* Scott, indeed!" Then she laughed to herself for she knew her country. "But it will be *Bakri* all the same," and she repeated it under her breath several times slowly and seemed to whisper it into favor.

When he returned to his duties on the railway Martyn spread the name far and wide among his associates, so that Scott met it as he led his paddy-carts to war. The natives believed it to be some English title of honor, and the cart-drivers used it in all simplicity, till Faiz Ullah, who did not approve of foreign japes, broke their heads.

There was very little time for milking now except at the big camps where Jim had extended Scott's idea and was feeding large flocks on the useless Northern grains.

There was paddy enough now in the Eight Districts to hold the people safe if it were only distributed quickly, and for that purpose no one was better than the big Canal officer who never lost his temper, never gave an unnecessary order, and never questioned an order given.

Scott pressed on, saving his cattle, washing their galled necks daily, so that no time should be lost on the road; reported himself with his rice at the minor famine-sheds, unloaded and went back light by forced night-march to the next distributing centre to find Hawkins' unvarying telegram: "Do it again." And he did it again and again, and yet again, while Jim Hawkins, fifty miles away, marked off on a big map the tracks of his wheels grid-ironing the stricken lands. Others did well—Hawkins reported at the end they all did well—but Scott was the most excellent, for he kept good coined rupees by him and paid for his own cart-repairs on the spot, and met all sorts of unconsidered extras, trusting to be recouped later on.

Theoretically, the Government should have paid for every shoe and linchpin, for every hand employed in the loading; but Government vouchers cash themselves slowly, and intelligent and efficient clerks write at great length contesting unauthorized expenditures of eight annas. The man who wants to make his work a success must draw on his own bank-account of money or other things as he goes.

"I told you he'd work," said Jimmy to his wife at the end of six weeks. "He's been in sole charge of a couple of thousand men up North, on the Mosuhl Canal, and he gives one less trouble than young Martyn with his ten constables, and I'm morally certain—only our Government doesn't recognize moral obligations—he's spent about half his pay to grease his wheels. Look at this, Lizzie, for one week's work! Forty miles in two days with twelve carts; two days' halt building a famine-shed for young Rogers. (Rogers ought to have built it himself, the idiot!) Then forty miles back again, loading six carts on the way and distributing all Sunday; then in the evening he pitches in a twenty-page Demi-Official to me, saying the people where he is might be 'advantageously employed on relief work,' and suggesting that he put 'em to work on some broken-down old reservoir he's discovered, so as to have a good water supply when the Rains come. 'Thinks he can caulk the dam in a fortnight. Look at his marginal sketches—aren't they clear and good? I knew he was *pukka* (thorough) but I didn't know he was as *pukka* as this."

"I must show these to William," said Mrs. Jim. "The child's wearing herself out among the babies."

"Not more than you are, dear. Well, another two months ought to see us out of the wood. 'Sorry it's not in my power to recommend you for a V. C.'"

William sat late in her tent that night reading through page after page of the square handwriting, patting the sketches of proposed repairs to the reservoir and wrinkling her eyebrows over the columns of figures of estimated water supply.

"And he finds time to do all this," she cried to herself, "and—well, I also was present. I've saved one or two babies."

She dreamed for the twentieth time of the god in the golden dust and woke refreshed to feed loathsome black children, scores of them, wasters picked up by the wayside, their bones almost breaking their skin, terrible and covered with sores.

Scott was not allowed to leave his cart work, but his letter was duly forwarded to the Government, and he had the consolation, not rare in India, of knowing that another man was reaping where he had sown. That also was discipline profitable to the soul.

"He's much too good to waste on canals," said Jimmy. "Any one can oversee coolies. You needn't be angry, William; he can—but I need my pearl among bullock-drivers and I've transferred him to the Khanda district, where he'll have it all to do over again. He should be marching now."

"He's *not* a coolie," said William furiously. "He ought to be doing his regulation work."

"He's the best man in his service, and that's saying a good deal; but if you must use razors to cut grindstones, I prefer the best cutlery."

"Isn't it almost time we saw him again?" said Mrs. Jim. "I'm sure the poor boy hasn't had a respectable meal for a month. He probably sits on a cart and eats sardines with his fingers."

"All in good time, dear. Duty before decency—wasn't it Mr. Chucks said that?"

"No, it was Midshipman Easy," William laughed. "I sometimes wonder how it will feel to dance or listen to a

band again, or sit under a roof. I can't believe I ever wore a ball-frock in my life."

"One minute," said Mrs. Jim who was thinking. "If he goes to Khanda he passes within five miles of us. Of course, he'll ride in."

"Oh, no, he won't," said William.

"How do you know, dear?"

"He won't have time."

"He'll make it," said Mrs. Jim with a twinkle.

"It depends on his own judgment. There's absolutely no reason why he shouldn't if he thinks fit," said Jim.

"He won't see fit," William replied without sorrow or emotion. "It wouldn't be him if he did."

"One certainly gets to know people rather well in times like these," said Jim dryly, but William's face was serene as ever, and even as she prophesied, Scott did not appear.

The Rains fell at last, late but heavily, and the dry gashed earth was red mud, and servants killed snakes in the camp where every one was weather-bound for a fortnight—all except Hawkins, who took horse and plashed about in the wet rejoicing. Now the Government decreed that seed grain should be distributed to the people as well as advances of money for the purchase of new oxen, and the white men were doubly worked for this new duty, while William skipped from brick to brick laid down on the trampled mud, and dosed her charges with warming medicines that made them rub their little round stomachs; and the milch goats throve on the rank grass. There was never a word from Scott in the Khanda district, away to the southeast, except the regular telegraphic report to Hawkins. The rude country roads had disappeared; his drivers were half mutinous; one of Martyn's loaned policemen had died of cholera, and Scott was taking thirty grains of quinine a day to fight the fever that comes if you work hard in heavy rain; but those were things Scott did not consider necessary to report. He was, as usual, working from a base of supplies on a railway line, to cover a circle of fifteen miles radius, and since full loads were impossible he took quarter loads and toiled four times as hard by consequence, for he did not choose to risk an epidemic which might have grown uncontrollable by assembling villagers in thousands at the relief-sheds. It was cheaper to take Government bullocks, work them to death and leave them to the crows in the wayside sloughs.

That was the time when eight years of clean living and hard condition told, though a man's head were ringing like a bell from the cinchona, and the earth swayed under his feet when he stood and under his bed when he slept. If Hawkins had seen fit to make him a bullock-driver that, he thought, was entirely Hawkins' affair. There were men in the North who would know what he had done; men of thirty years' service in his own department, who would say that it was "not half bad," and above, immeasurably above, all men of all grades, there was William in the thick of the fight who would approve because she understood. He had so trained his mind that it would hold fast to the mechanical routine of the day, though his own voice sounded strange in his own ears; and his hands when he wrote grew large as pillows, or small as peas at the end of his wrists. That steadfastness bore his body to the telegraph-office at the railway station and dictated a telegram to Hawkins saying that the Khanda district was, in his judgment, now safe, and he "waited further orders."

The Madrassee telegraph-clerk did not approve of a large gaunt man falling over him in a dead faint, not so much because of the weight, as because of the names and blows that Faiz Ullah dealt him when he found the body rolled under a bench. Then Faiz Ullah took blankets and quilts and coverlets where he found them, and lay down under them at his master's side, and bound Scott's arms with a tent-rope and filled him with a horrible stew of herbs and set the policeman to fight him when he wished to escape from the intolerable heat of his coverings; and shut the door of the telegraph-office to keep out the curious, for two nights and one day; and when a light engine came down the line and Hawkins kicked in the door, Scott hailed him weakly but in a natural voice, and Faiz Ullah stood back and took all the credit.

"For two nights, Heaven-born, he was *pagal* (delirious)," said Faiz Ullah. "Look at my nose and consider the eye of the policeman. He beat us with his bound hands, but we sat upon him, Heaven-born, and though his words were *tez* (hot) we sweated him. Heaven-born never has been such a sweat! He is weaker now than a child, but the fever has gone out of him by the grace of God. There remains only my nose and the eye of the constabell. Sahib, shall I ask for my dismissal because my Sahib has beaten me?" and Faiz Ullah laid his long thin hand carefully on Scott's chest to be sure that the fever was all gone, ere he went out to open tinned soups, and discourage such as laughed at his swelled nose.

"The district's all right," Scott whispered. "It doesn't make any difference. You got my wire? I shall be fit in a week. 'Can't understand how it happened. I shall be fit in a few days."

"You're coming into camp with us," said Hawkins. "But, look here—but—"

"It's all over except the shouting. We sha'n't need you Punjabis any more. On my honor we sha'n't. Martyn goes back in a few weeks; Arbuthnot's returned already; Ellis and Clay are putting the last touches to a new feeder-line the Government's built as relief-work. Morten's dead—he was a Bengal man though. You wouldn't know him. 'Pon my word, you and Will—Miss Martyn—seem to have come through it as well as anybody."

"Oh, how is she, by-the-way?" The voice went up and down as he spoke.

"Going strong when I left her. The Roman Catholic Missions are adopting the unclaimed babies to turn them into little priests; the Basil Mission is taking some and the mothers are taking the rest. You should hear the little beggars howl when they're sent away from William. She's pulled down a bit, but so are we all. Now when do you suppose you'll be able to move?"

"I can't come into camp in this state. I won't," he replied pettishly.

"Well, you *are* rather a sight, but from what I gathered there it seemed to me they'd be glad to see you under any conditions. I'll look over your work here, if you like, for a couple of days, and you can pull yourself together and Faiz Ullah can feed you up."

Scott could walk in a doubtful sort of a way by the time Hawkins' inspection was ended, and he flushed all over when Jim said of his work in the district that it was "not half bad," and volunteered further that he had con-

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sidered Scott his right-hand man through the famine and would feel it his duty to say as much officially.

So they came back by rail to the old camp but there were no crowds near it, and the long fires in the trenches were dead and black and the famine-sheds were almost empty.

"You see!" said Jim. "There isn't much more to do. I'll call you my Personal Assistant till you are fit to go North if that will ease your mind at all. Better ride up and see the wife. They've pitched a tent for you. Dinner's at seven: I've something to do here."

Riding at a footpace, Faiz Ullah by his stirrup, Scott came to William in the brown calico riding-habit, sitting at the dining-tent door, her hands in her lap, white as ashes, thin and worn, with no lustre in her hair. There did not seem to be a Mrs. Jim on the horizon, and all that William could say was, "My word, how pulled down you look!"

"I've had a touch of fever. You don't look very well yourself."

"Oh, I'm fit enough. We've stamped it out, I suppose you know?"

Scott nodded. "We shall all be returned in a few weeks. Hawkins told me."

"In time for Christmas, Mrs. Jim says. Sha'n't you be glad to go back? I can smell the wood smoke already"; William sniffed. "We shall be in time for all the Christmas doings. I don't suppose even the Punjab Government would be base enough to transfer Jack till the new year."

"Seems hundreds of years ago—the Punjab and all that, doesn't it? Are you glad you came?"

"Now it's all over, yes. It has been ghastly here. You know we had to sit still and do nothing, and Sir Jim had to be away so much."

"Do nothing! How did you get on with the milking?"

"I managed it somehow—after you taught me."

Then the talk brought up with an almost audible jar. Still no Mrs. Jim.

"That reminds me, I owe you fifty rupees for the condensed milk. I thought perhaps you'd be coming here when you were transferred to the Khanda district, and I could pay you then; but you didn't."

"I passed within five miles of the camp, but it was in the middle of a march, you see, and the carts were breaking down every few minutes, and I couldn't get 'em over the ground till ten o'clock that night. I wanted to come awfully. You knew I did, didn't you?"

"I—believe—I—did," said William, facing him with level eyes. She was no longer white.

"Did you understand?"

"Why you didn't ride in? Of course, I did."

"Why?"

"Because you couldn't, of course. I knew that."

"Did you care?"

"If you had come in—but I knew you wouldn't—but if you had, I should have cared a great deal. You know I should."

"Thank God I didn't! Oh, but I wanted to! I couldn't trust myself to ride in front of the carts, because I kept edging 'em over here, don't you know?"

"I knew you wouldn't," said William contentedly. "Here's your fifty."

Scott bent forward and kissed the hand that held the greasy notes. Its fellow patted him awkwardly but very tenderly on the head.

"And you knew, too, didn't you?" said William in a new voice.

"No, on my honor, I didn't. I hadn't the—the cheek to expect anything of the kind, except . . . I say, were you out riding anywhere the day I passed by to Khanda?"

William nodded, and smiled after the manner of an angel surprised in a good deed.

"Then it was just a speck I saw of your habit in the—"

"Palm grove on the Southern cart-road. I saw your helmet when you came up from the nullah by the temple—just enough to be sure that you were all right. D'you care?"

This time Scott did not kiss her hand for they were in the dusk of the dining-tent, and, because William's knees were trembling under her, she had to sit down in the nearest chair, where she wept long and happily, her head on her arms; and when Scott imagined that it would be well to comfort her, she needing nothing of the kind, she ran to her own tent, and Scott went out into the world and smiled upon it largely and idiotically. But when Faiz Ullah brought him a drink he found it necessary to support one hand with the other, or the good whiskey and soda would have been spilled abroad. There are fevers and fevers.

But it was worse—much worse—the strained, eye-shirking talk at dinner till the servants had withdrawn, and worst of all

when Mrs. Jim, who had been on the edge of weeping from the soup down, kissed Scott and William, and they drank one whole bottle of champagne, hot, because there was no ice, and Scott and William sat outside the tent in the starlight till Mrs. Jim drove them in for fear of more fever.

Apropos of these things and some others William said: "Being engaged is abominable, because, you see, one has no official position. We must be thankful we've lots of things to do."

"Things to do!" said Jim when that was reported to him. "They're neither of them any good any more. I can't get five hours' work a day out of Scott. He's in the clouds half the time."

"Oh, but they're so beautiful to watch, Jimmy. It will break my heart when they go. Can't you do anything for him?"

"I've given the Government the impression—at least I hope I have—that he personally conducted the entire famine. But all he wants is to get on to the Luni Canal Works, and William's just as bad. Have you ever heard 'em talking of barrage and aprons and waste-water? It's their style of spooning, I suppose."

Mrs. Jim smiled tenderly. "Ah, that's in the intervals—bless 'em."

And so Love ran about the camp unbuked in broad daylight, while men picked up the pieces and put them neatly away of the famine in the Eight Districts.

* * * * *

Morning brought the penetrating chill of the Northern December, the layers of wood smoke, the dusty gray-blue of the tamarisks, the domes of ruined tombs and all the smell of the white Northern plains as the mail train ran on to the mile-long Sutlej Bridge. William, wrapped in a silk-embroidered sheepskin jacket trimmed with rough astrakhan, looked out with moist eyes and nostrils that dilated joyously. The South of pagodas and palm trees, the over-populated Hindu South, was done with. Here was the land she knew and loved, and before her lay the good life she understood, among folk of her own caste and mind.

They were picking them up at almost every station now—men and women coming in for the Christmas Week, with racquets, with bundles of polo-sticks, with dear and bruised cricket-bats, with fox-terriers and saddles. The greater part of them wore jackets like William's, for the Northern cold is as little to be trifled with as the Northern heat. And William was among them and of them, her hands deep in her pockets, her collar turned up over her ears, stamping her feet on the platforms as she walked up and down to get warm; visiting from carriage to carriage and everywhere being congratulated. Scott was with the bachelors at the far end of the train where they chaffed him mercilessly about feeding babies and milking goats, but from time to time he would stroll up to William's window and murmur: "Good enough, isn't it?" and William would answer with a sigh of pure delight: "Good enough, indeed." The large open names of the home towns were good to listen to. Umballa, Ludianah, Phillour, Jullundur, they rang like the coming marriage-bells in her ears, and William felt deeply and truly sorry for all strangers and outsiders—visitors, tourists and those fresh-caught for the service of the country.

It was a glorious return, and when the bachelors gave the Christmas Ball William was, unofficially, you might say, the chief and honored guest among the Stewards who could make things very pleasant for their friends. She and Scott danced nearly all the dances together and sat out the rest in the big dark gallery overlooking the superb teak floor, where the uniforms blazed and the spurs clinked and the new frocks and four hundred dancers went round and round till the draped flags on the pillars flapped and bellied to the whirl of it.

About midnight half a dozen men who did not care for dancing came over from the Club to play "Waits," and—that was a surprise the Stewards had arranged—before any one knew what had happened the band stopped and hidden voices broke into "Good King Wenceslaus," and William in the gallery hummed and beat time with her foot:

"Mark my footsteps well, my page,
Tread thou in them boldly.
Thou shalt feel the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly!"

"Oh, I hope they are going to give us another! Isn't it pretty coming out of the dark in that way? Look—look down. There's Mrs. Gregory wiping her eyes!"

"It's like Home, rather," said Scott. "I remember—"

"Hsh! Listen!—dear." And it began again:

"When shepherds watched their flocks by night—"

"A-h-h!" said William, drawing closer to Scott.

"All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.
'Fear not,' said he (for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind),
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind."

This time it was William that wiped her eyes.

(CONCLUSION)