MR. RUDYARD KIPLING AT HOME.

WINNING THE VICTORIA CROSS.

BY RUDYARD KIPLING.*

Illustrated by GEORGES MONTBARD.

HE history of the Victoria Cross has been told so often that it is only necessary to say that the order was created by Royal Warrant on January 29, 1856, in the year of the peace with Russia, when the new racing Cunard steamer *Persia* was making thirteen knots an hour between England and America.

Any officer or man of the army, navy, reserve, or volunteer forces, from a duke to a negro, can wear on his left breast the little bronze Maltese cross, with the crowned lion atop and the inscription "For Valour" below, if he has only "performed some signal act of valour" or devotion to his country "in the presence of the enemy." Nothing else makes any difference; for it is explicitly laid down in the Warrant that "neither rank nor long service nor wounds, nor any other circumstance whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery, shall be held to establish a sufficient claim to the Order."

There are many kinds of bravery; and if you look through the records of the four hundred and eleven men, living and dead, that have held the cross, out of the seven hundred thousand or so who can compete for it, you will find instances of every imaginable variety of heroism.

There is bravery in the early morning when it takes great courage merely to leave the warm blankets; on foot and on horse, empty or fed, sick or well; coolness of brain that thinks out a plan at dawn and holds to it all through the long murderous day;

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bravery of mind that forces the crazy body to sit still and do nothing except show a good example; sheer reckless rejoicing strength that hacks through a crowd of amazed men and comes out grinning on the other side; enduring spirit that wears through a long siege, never losing heart, or manners, or temper; quick flashing bravery that heaves the lighted shell overboard, or rushes the stockade while others are gaping, and the calculating craftsmanship that camps alone before the sputtering rifle-pit, and cleanly and methodically wipes out every living soul in it.

Within the last forty years England has dealt with many different peoples and—excepting some foolish hill-folk in a place called Sikkim, who were misled into declaring war—they all, Zulu, Malay, Maori, Burman, Boer, the little hillsman of the North-East Indian frontier, Afreedi, Pathan, Biluch, the Arab of East Africa and the Soudani of the north country, and the rest, played a thoroughly good game. We owe them many thanks, for they showed us every variety of climate and almost every variety of attack, from long-range fire to hand-to-hand scrimmage, except of course the ordered movements of continental armies and the siege of armed towns.

The Victoria Cross.

It is rather the fashion to look down on these little wars and to call them military promenades, and so forth, but in reality no enemy can do much more than poison your wells, rush your camp, ambuscade you, kill you with his climate, fight you body to body, make you build your own means of communication under his fire, and cut up your wounded as a religious duty.

It is in these rough-and-tumble affairs that many of the later crosses have been won, though two hundred and ninety-three of the total were given for acts of bravery in the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny. That last was the worst.

The Crimea was fair fighting as far as the enemy were concerned—no one could wish for better troops than the Russians of Inkerman and the Alma—but our own War Office helped the enemy with ignorant management and brutal neglect. In the Mutiny of 1857 the Indian Empire seemed to be crumbling like a sand-bank in flood, and wherever there were three or four Englishmen they had to kill or be killed till help came.

No one talks of the Mutiny in India to-day, but sometimes a mild old gentleman who plays chess or paints china, or a dear motherly old lady, will tell tales that make you think. But it is not even good to think of the Mutiny. Hundreds of crosses must have been won then, with nobody near to see, for the average of work was high.

For instance—these are cases of decorated men—a man shut up in the Residency at Lucknow stole out three times at the risk of his life to get cattle for the besieged; later he extinguished a fire near a powder magazine, and a month afterwards put out another fire; then he led twelve men to capture two guns that were wrecking the Residency; next day he captured an outlying position full of mutineers; three days later he captured another gun, and finished up by capturing a fourth. So he got his cross.

Another young man was a lieutenant in the Southern Mahratta Horse and a full regiment of mutineers broke into his part of the world, upsetting the minds of the people. He collected some troopers, chased the regiment eight miles, stormed the fort they had taken refuge in, and killed, captured or wounded every soul there.

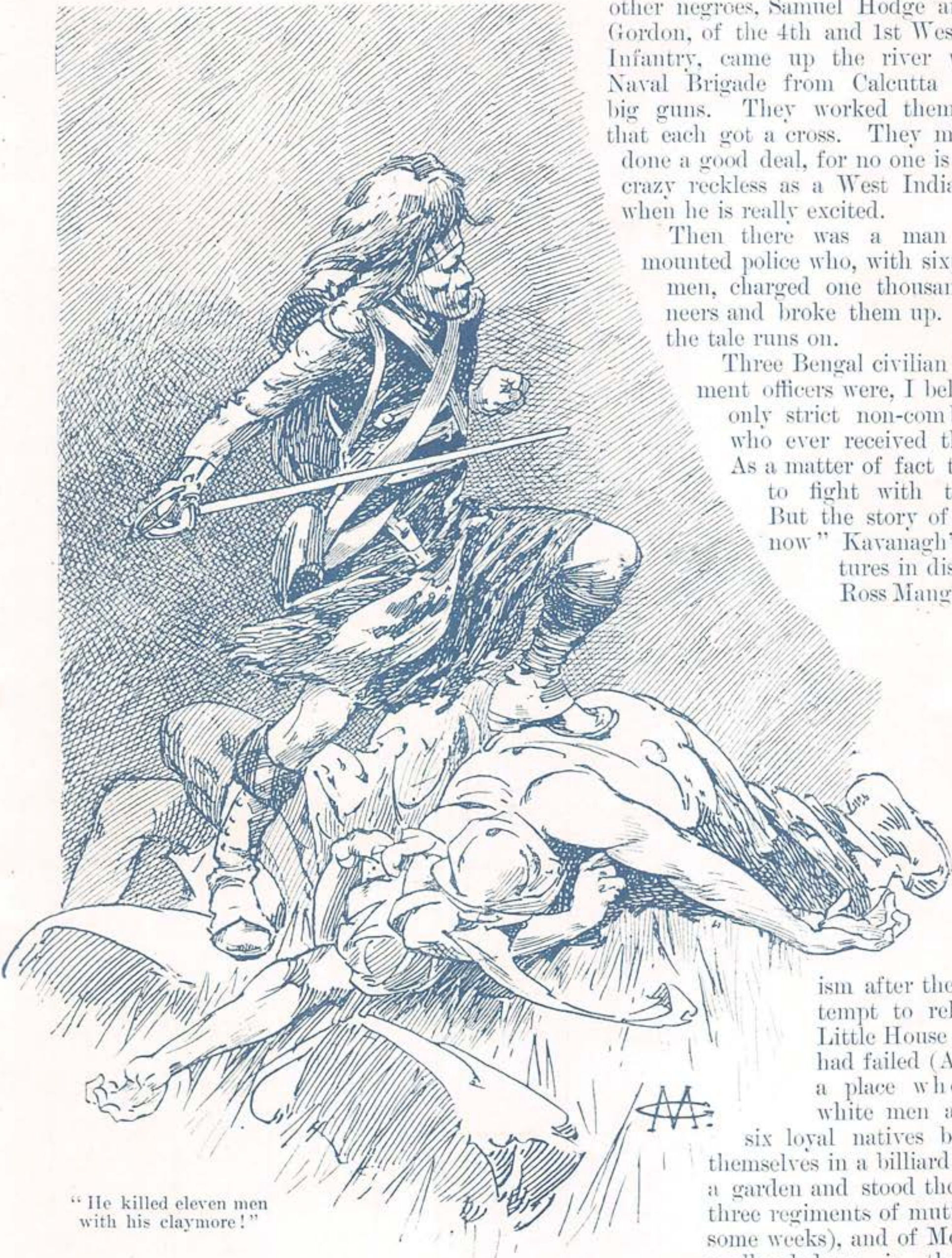
Then there was a lance-corporal, who afterwards rose to be lieutenant-colonel. He was an enduring kind of man for he won his cross for taking a hand in every fight that came along through nearly seventy consecutive days.

Then there were two brothers who earned the cross about six times between them for leading forlorn hopes and such. Then there was a private, of "persuasive powers and cheerful disposition," so the book says, who was cut off in a burning house with nine companions while the mutineers were firing in at the windows. He cheerfully persuaded the enemy to retire, and in the end all ten were saved. He was a man worth knowing.

Then there was a little man of the Sutherland Highlanders, a private who rose to be

major-general. In one attack near Lucknow he killed eleven men with his claymore—and they all fought!

Even he was not more thorough than two troopers who rode to the rescue of their colonel cut off and knocked down by mutineers. They helped him to his feet, and they must have been angry, for the three of them killed all the mutineers—about fifty.



"He killed eleven men with his claymore!"

Then there was a negro captain of the foretop, William Hall, who, with two other negroes, Samuel Hodge and W. J. Gordon, of the 4th and 1st West Indian Infantry, came up the river with the Naval Brigade from Calcutta to work big guns. They worked them so well that each got a cross. They must have done a good deal, for no one is quite so crazy reckless as a West Indian negro when he is really excited.

Then there was a man in the mounted police who, with sixty horsemen, charged one thousand mutineers and broke them up. And so the tale runs on.

Three Bengal civilian Government officers were, I believe, the only strict non-combatants who ever received the cross. As a matter of fact they had to fight with the rest. But the story of "Lucknow" Kavanagh's adventures in disguise, of Ross Mangles' heroism after the first attempt to relieve the Little House at Arrah had failed (Arrah was a place where ten white men and fifty-six loyal natives barricaded themselves in a billiard room in a garden and stood the siege of three regiments of mutineers for some weeks), and of McDonnel's coolheadedness in the retreat down the river, are things that ought to be told by themselves. Almost anyone can fight well on the winning side, but the men who can patch up a thoroughly

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bad business and pull it off in some sort of shape are to be respected.

Army chaplains and doctors are officially supposed to be non-combatants—they are not really—but about twenty years after the Mutiny a chaplain was decorated under circumstances that made it impossible to overlook his bravery. Still I do not think he quite cared for the publicity.

He was a regimental chaplain—we have one or more to each white regiment, and in action they generally stay with the doctor—and he seems to have drifted up close to a cavalry charge for he helped a wounded man of the 9th Lancers into an ambulance. He was going about his business when he found two more troopers, who had tumbled into a water-course, all mixed up with their horses, and a knot of Afghans were hurrying to attend to them.

The record says that he rescued both men; but the tale, as I have heard it unofficially, declares that he found a revolver somewhere, with which he did excellent work while the troopers were struggling out of the ditch. This seems very possible, for Afghans do not leave disabled men without the strongest sort of hint, and I know that in nine cases out of ten, if you want a coherent account of what happened in an action, you had better ask the chaplain or the Roman Catholic priest.

But it is very difficult to get details. I have met perhaps a dozen or so of V.C.s, and in every case they have explained that they did the first thing that came to hand without worrying about alternatives. One man headed a charge into a mass of Afghans—who are very good fighters so long as they are interested in their work—and cut down five of them. All he said was, "Well, they were there, and they wouldn't go away. What was a man to do?—write 'em a note?"

Another man I questioned was a doctor. Army doctors, by the way, have special opportunities for getting crosses, and they make the most of them. Their duty compels them to keep somewhere near the firing, and most of them run right up and lie down, keeping an eye on the wounded.

It is a heartbreaking thing for a doctor who has pulled a likely young private of twenty-five through typhoid fever, and set him on his feet and watched him develop, to see the youngster wasted with a casual bullet. It must have been this feeling that made my friend do the old, old, splendid thing that never gets stale—rescue and attend to wounded under fire. He got his cross, but all *he* said was, "I didn't want any unauthorised consultations—or amputations—while I was medical officer in charge. 'Tisn't etiquette."

His own head was very nearly amputated as he was tying up an artery—it was blind, bad bush-fighting, with smoke-puffs popping in and out among high grass, and never a man visible—but he only grunted when his helmet was cracked across by a bullet, and went on twiddling the tourniquet.

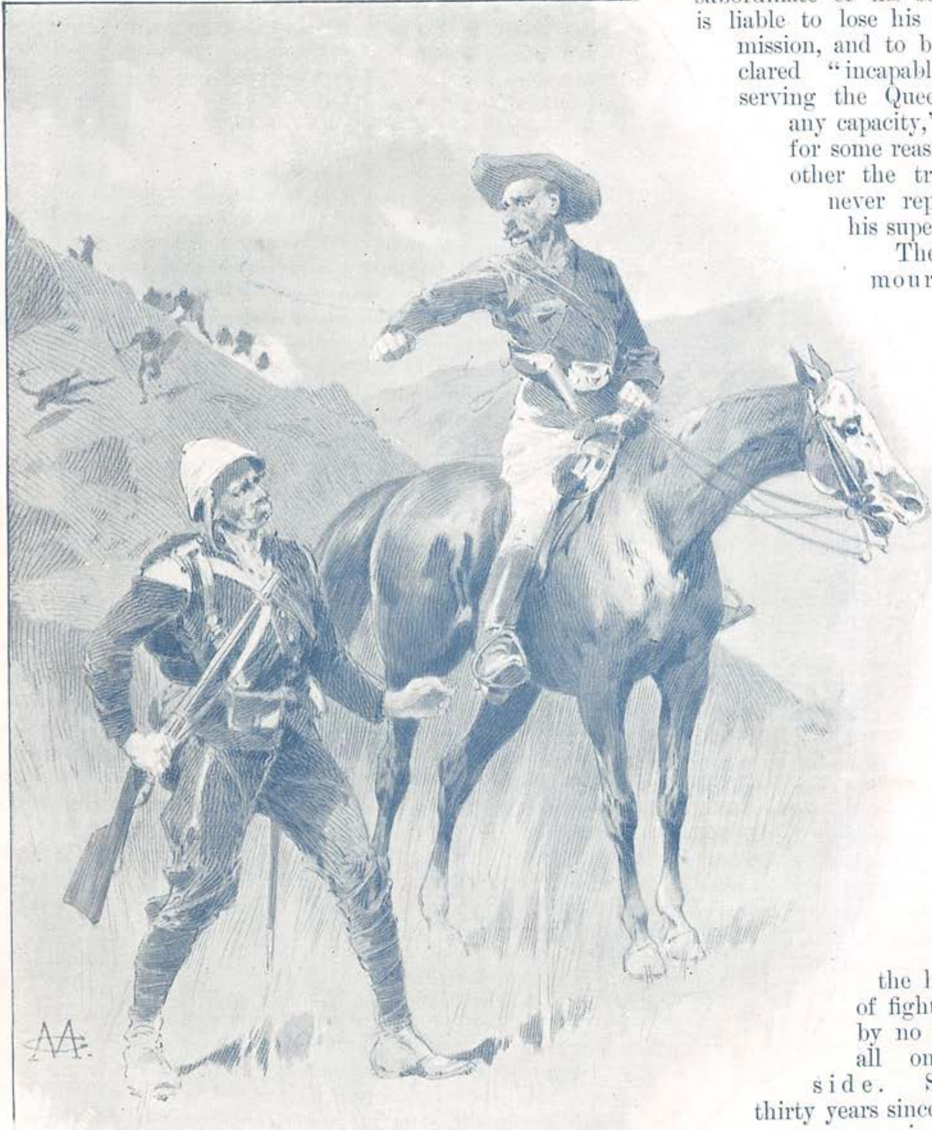
As I have hinted, in most of our little affairs our enemy knows nothing about the Geneva Convention or the treatment of wounded, but fires at a doctor on his face-value as a white man. One cannot blame them—it is their custom, but it is exceedingly awkward when our doctors take care of their wounded, who do not understand these things, and try to go on fighting in hospital.

There is a rather funny story of a wounded Soudani—what the soldiers called a "fuzzy"—who was carefully attended to in hospital after a fight. As soon as he had any strength again he proposed to a native orderly that they two should massacre the wounded in the other beds, and when the doctor came in he was trying to work out his plan. The doctor had a very unpleasant scuffle with the simple-minded man, but at last he slipped the chloroform bag over his nose. The man understood bullets and was not afraid of them, but this magic stuff that sent him to sleep cowed him altogether, and he gave no more trouble.

So a doctor's life is always a little hazardous, and besides his professional duties he may find himself senior officer in charge of what is left of the command if the others have been shot down. As doctors are always full of theories, I believe they rather like this. Some of them have run out to help mortally wounded men, because they know that a dying man may have a last message to give, and it eases him to die with a friend to hold his hand. This is a most noble thing to do under fire. Chaplains have done it also, but it is part of what they suppose to be their regular duty.

Another V.C. of my acquaintance—he is anything but a doctor—once saved a trooper whose horse had been killed. His argument was rather original. The man was on foot, and the enemy—Zulus this time, and they are beautiful fighters—was coming down at a run, and he said very decently that he did not see his way to perilling his officer's life by double weighting the only horse there was.

To this his officer answered: "If you don't get up behind me I'll get off and I'll give you such a licking as you've never had in your life!" The man was more afraid of fists than assegais, and the good horse pulled them both out of the scrape. Now, by the regulations, an officer who insults or threatens with violence a subordinate of his service is liable to lose his commission, and to be declared "incapable of serving the Queen in any capacity," but for some reason or other the trooper never reported his superior.



"I'll give you such a licking as you've never had in your life!"

The humour and the honour of fighting is by no means all on one side. Some thirty years since there was a war in New Zealand against the Maories, who, though they tortured prisoners and occasionally ate a man, liked fighting for its own sake. One of their chiefs cut off a detachment of our men in a stockade where he might have starved them out. He found they were short of provisions and sent in a canoe full of pigs and potatoes with the message that it was no fun to fight weak

men, but he would be happy to meet them after a full meal.

As to honour, the Boers in South Africa did a very pretty thing. The war against them was one of the many bright jewels in England's crown cut and set by Mr. Gladstone, but it is some consolation to remember that they beat us horse and foot from one end to the other. They were splendid fighters in their own way—at nine hundred yards, lying down behind a long rifle with their horse ready in the background.

After one battle, in which they had wiped out an English regiment and killed a general, they were at some pains to find the general's sword and return it to his widow saying that the Lord was on their side, and they had killed a brave man and were sorry for it.

We got very little out of that war except the knowledge that it paid to shoot straight. Two or three men won the cross for saving wounded under fire. One officer, after seven of his mess had been killed at Laong's Nek, picked up a wounded comrade who was shot dead in his arms, but he went out again and saved two more men. Much the same kind of thing happened at Wesselstroom and Hajuta—both defeats for us. The only good thing in the whole wretched business was that we abided by the issue of the first fights instead of turning on an entire army corps and ruining the Boers utterly, as some unwise people thought was our duty.

There are many cases in which men, very young as a rule, have forced their way through a stockade of thorns that hook or bamboos that cut, and held on in the face of heavy fire for just so long as served to bring up their comrades. Those who have done this say that the getting in is exciting enough, but the bad time, when the minutes drag like hours, lies between the first scuffle with the angry faces in the smoke and the "Hi! get out o' this!" that shows the others are tumbling up behind. They say it is as bad as the old Rugby Union game of football, when you get off the ball just as slowly as you dare, that your own side may have time to come up and shove.

Most men, after they have been shot over a little, only want a lead to do good work; so the result of a young man's daring is often out of all proportion to his actual performances. For instance, when your Lieutenant Cushing torpedoed the rebel ram *Albemarle* he only risked his life—it was all that he had about him, of course—but he could have risked it just as much on an open deck in an engagement. Still, that particular way of risking made it possible and easy for the crew of the launch to follow his lead and do ten times more than any one of them would have dared alone.

All courage does not lie in furious valour. Here is a case which never won notice because very few people talked about it—a case of the courage of Ulysses one might say.

A column of troops, heavily weighted with sick and wounded, had drifted into a bad

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place—a pass where the enemy, hidden behind rocks, were picking them off at known ranges as they retreated. Half a regiment was acting as rear-guard—company after company facing about on the narrow road and trying to keep down the wicked flickering fire from the hillsides. And it was twilight, and it was cold, and it was raining, and it was altogether horrible.

The rear-guard began to fire too quickly and to hurry back to the main body too soon, and the bearers put down the ambulances much too often and looked off the

road for possible cover. Altogether there were the makings of a very nasty little breakdown—and after that would come the slaughter.

A boy I knew was acting in command of one company that was specially bored and sulky, and there were shouts from the column in the dark of "Hurry up! Hurry there!" neither necessary nor soothing. He kept his men in hand as well as he could, hitting down the rifles when they fired wild, till someone along the line shouted, "What on earth are you fellows waiting there for?"

Then my friend—I am rather proud that he is my friend—hunted for his pipe and tobacco, filled the bowl *in* his pocket, because he didn't want anyone to see how his hand shook, lit a fuzee and shouted back between very short puffs, "Hold on a minute! I'm lighting my pipe."

There was a roar of rather cackly laughter, and a regimental joker said, "Since you *are* so pressin', I think I'll 'ave a pipe myself."

I don't believe either pipe was smoked out, but—and this is a very big but—this little bit of acting steadied the company, and the news of it went along the column, and even the wounded laughed, and everyone felt better.

Whether the enemy heard the laughing, or was impressed by the one—two—three—four firing that followed it, will never be known, but the column came to camp at the regulation step and not at a run. That is what I call the courage of the much-enduring Ulysses, but the only comment I ever heard on the affair was the boy's own, and all *he* said was, "It was transpontine but necessary."

Of course he must have been a good boy from the beginning, for little bits of pure inspiration very seldom come to, or are acted upon by, slovens, self-indulgent or undisciplined people. I have never yet come across a V.C. who had not the strictest notions about washing and shaving, and keeping himself quiet and decent on his way through the civilised world.

Indeed it is very curious, after one has known hundreds of young men and young officers, to sit still at a distance and watch them come forward to success in their profession. The clean and considerate man always seems to take hold of circumstances at the right end.

One of the latest and youngest of the V.Cs. I used to know distantly as a beautiful being whom they called aide-de-camp to some big official in India. So far as an outsider could judge, his duties consisted in wearing a uniform faced with blue satin, and in seeing that everyone enjoyed himself at the dances and dinners. He would wander about smiling, with eyes at the back of his head, introducing men who were strangers, and a little uncomfortable to girls whose dance-cards were rather empty; taking old and uninteresting women into supper, and tucking them into their carriages afterwards; or steering white-whiskered native officers, all covered with medals and half blind with confusion, through the maze of a levée into the presence of the viceroy or the commander-in-chief, or whoever it was that wanted to see them.

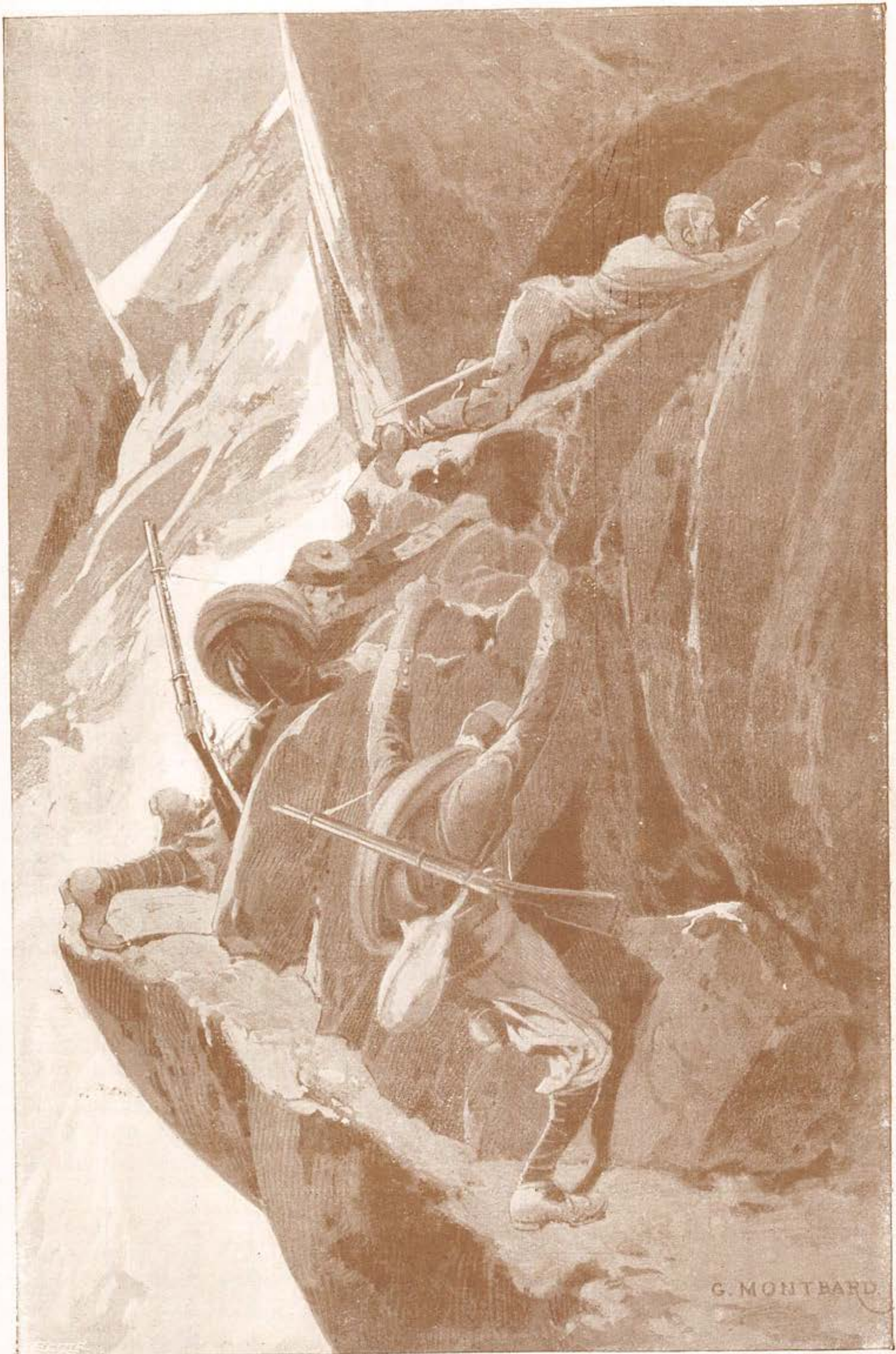
A few years later his chance came, and he made the most of it. We were then smoking out a nest of caravan-raiders, slave-dealers and general thieves who lived somewhere under the Karakorum mountains, among glaciers about sixteen thousand feet above the sea-level. The mere road to the place was too much for many mules, for it ran by precipices and round rock curves and over roaring, snow-fed rivers.

The enemy—they were called Kanjuts this time—had fortified themselves in a place as nearly impregnable as nature and man could make it. One position was on the top of a cliff about twelve hundred feet high, whence they could roll stones directly on the head of any attacking force. Our men objected to the stones much more than to the rifle fire. They were down in a river bed at the bottom of an icy pass, with some three tiers of cliff-like defences above them, and the Kanjuts were very well armed. To make all pleasant it was December.

This ex-aide-de-camp was a good mountaineer, and he was told off with a hundred natives, goorkhas and dogra sikhs, to get into the top tier of fortifications, and the only way of arriving was to follow a sort of shoot in the cliff face which the enemy had worn out by throwing rocks down. By daylight, in peace and with guides, it would have been good mountaineering.

He went in the dark, by eye, and with some two thousand Kanjuts very much at war with him. When he had climbed eight hundred feet almost perpendicularly he found he must come back because even he and his cragsmen could find no way.

He returned to the river bed and began again in a new place, working his men up between avalanches that slid along and knocked people over. When he got to the top he had to take his men into the forts



"He went in the dark, by eye, and with some two thousand Kanjuts very much at war with him."

with the bayonet and the *kukri*—the little goorkha knife. The thing was so bold that it broke the hearts of the enemy and practically ended the campaign, and if you could see the photograph of the place you would understand why.

It was hard toe-nail and finger-nail mountaineering under fire, and the men behind him were not regulars but what we call the Imperial service troops—men raised by the semi-independent kings and used to defend the frontier. They enjoyed themselves immensely, and the little aide-de-camp got a deserved V.C. The courage of Ulysses again; for he had to think as he climbed, and until he was directly under the fortifications one chance-hopping boulder might just have planed his men off all along the line.

But there is a heroism beyond all for which no V.C. is ever given, because there is no official enemy nor any sort of firing, except maybe one volley in the early morning at some spot where the noise does not echo. It is necessary from time to time to send unarmed men into No-man's-land and the Back of Beyond, across the Khudajantakdan mountains.

The understanding is that if the men come back, so much the better for them. If they do not—and people disappear very mysteriously at the Back of Beyond—no questions will be asked.

They tell a tale of one who, many years ago, strayed into No-man's-land and met a very amiable set of people who asked him to dinners and lunches and dances. All that time he knew—and they knew that he knew—they were debating whether they should suffer him to live till next morning, and in what way they should wipe him out. The thing that made them hesitate was that they could not tell from his behaviour whether there were five hundred Englishmen within a mile of him, or no Englishmen within five hundred miles of him, and as things stood they could not very well go to look.

So he danced and dined with those pleasant merry folk—all good friends—and talked about hunting and shooting and so forth, never knowing when the servants behind his chair would turn into the firing-party. At last they decided, without rude words said, to let him go; and when they had made up their minds they did it very handsomely. They gave him a farewell banquet and drank his health, and he thanked them for a delightful visit, and they said, "*So* glad you're glad! *Au revoir!*" and he came away looking a little bored.

Later on, so the tale runs, his hosts found out that their guest had been given up for lost by his friends in England, and no one ever expected to see him again. Then they were very sorry that they had not put him against a wall and shot him dead. That is a case of the cold-blooded courage worked up to after years of training—courage of mind forcing the body through an unpleasant situation for the sake of the game.

And when all is said and done courage of mind is the finest thing anyone can hope to attain to. A weak or undisciplined soul is apt to become reckless under strain (and this is being afraid the wrong way about) or to act for its own immediate advantage. For this reason the Victoria Cross is jealously guarded, and if there is any suspicion that a man is playing to the gallery or out pot-hunting for medals, as they call it, he must head his charges and rescue his wounded all over again as a guarantee of good faith.

Men are taught to volunteer for anything and everything, going out quietly after, not before, the authorities have filled their place. They are also instructed that it is cowardly, it is childish, and it is cheating to neglect or scamp the plain work immediately in front of them, the duties they are trusted and paid to do, for the sake of stepping aside to snatch at what to an outsider may resemble fame or distinction.

The Order itself is a personal decoration, and the honour and glory of it belongs to the wearer; but he can only win it by forgetting himself, his own honour and glory, and by working for something beyond and outside and apart. And that is the only way you ever get anything in this world worth the keeping.