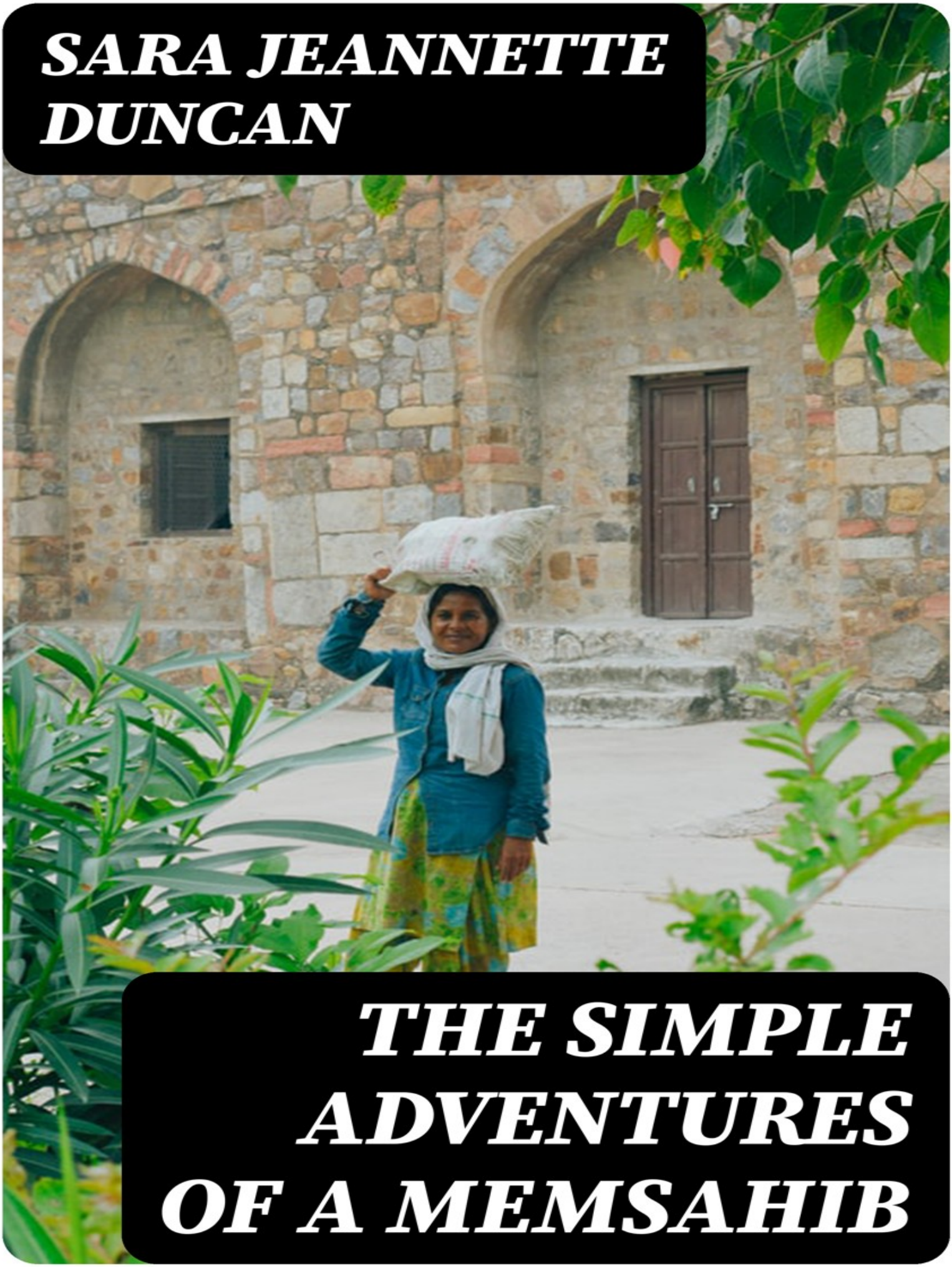
SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN



THE SIMPLE ADVENTURES OF A MEMSAHIB

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CHAPTER I.

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HELEN FRANCES BROWNE was formerly a Miss Peachey. Not one of the Devonshire Peacheys—they are quite a different family. This Miss Peachey's father was a clergyman, who folded his flock and his family in the town of Canbury in Wilts, very nice people and well thought of, with nice, well-thought-of connections, but nothing particularly aristocratic amongst them, like the Devonshire Peacheys, and no beer.

The former Miss Peachey is now a memsahib of Lower Bengal. As you probably know, one is not born a memsahib; the dignity is arrived at later, through circumstances, processes, and sometimes through foresight on the part of one's mamma. It is not so easy to obtain as it used to be. Formerly it was a mere question of facilities for transportation, and the whole matter was arranged, obviously and without criticism, by the operation of the law of supply. The necessary six months' tossing fortune in a sailing ship made young ladies who were willing to undertake it scarce and valuable, we hear. We are even given to understand that the unclaimed remnant, the few standing over to be more deliberately acquired, after the ball given on board for the facilitation of these matters the night succeeding the ship's arrival in port, were held to have fallen short of what they reasonably might have expected. But that was fifty years ago. To-day Lower Bengal, in the cold weather, is gay with potential memsahibs of all degrees of attraction, in raiment fresh from Oxford Street, in high

spirits, in excellent form for tennis, dancing, riding, and full of a charmed appreciation of the “picturesqueness” of India.

GOT MIDDLE-AGED LADIES OF WILTSHIRE CUPS OF TEA.

They come from the East and from the West, and from school in Germany. They come to make the acquaintance of their Anglo-Indian fathers and mothers, to teach the Bible and plain sewing in the Zenanas, to stay with a married sister, to keep house for a brother who is in the Department of Police. In the hot weather a proportion migrate northward, to Darjeeling, or Simla, in the Hills, but there are enough in our midst all the year round to produce a certain coy hesitancy and dalliance on the part of pretending bachelors, augmented by the consideration of all that might

be done in England in three months' "Privilege" leave. Young Browne was an example of this. There was no doubt that young Browne was tremendously attracted by Miss Pellington—Pellington, Scott & Co., rice and coolies chiefly, a very old firm—down from the Hills for her second cold weather, and only beginning to be faintly spoilt, when it so happened that his furlough fell due. He had fully intended to "do Switzerland this time," but Canbury, with tennis every Wednesday afternoon at the Rectory, and Helen Peachey playing there in blue and white striped flannel, pink cheeks and a sailor hat, was so much more interesting than he had expected it to be, that Switzerland was gradually relegated five years into the future. After tennis there was always tea in the drawing-room, and Helen, in the pretty flush of her exertions, poured it out. Just at first, young Browne did not quite know which he appreciated most, Helen who poured it out, or the neat little maid in cap and apron who brought it in—it was so long since he had seen tea brought in by anything feminine in cap and apron; but after a bit the little maid sank to her proper status of consideration, and Helen was left supreme. And Helen Peachey's tennis, for grace and muscularity, was certainly a thing to see, young Browne thought. She played in tournaments while he stood by in immaculate whites with an idle racquet, and got middle-aged ladies of Wiltshire cups of tea; but she was not puffed up about this, and often condescended to be his partner on the Rectory lawn against the two younger Misses Peachey. It made the best sett that way, for young Browne's tennis fluctuated from indifferent bad to indifferent worse, and the

younger Misses Peachey were vigorous creatures, and gave Helen all she could do to win with her handicap.

Mr. Browne—we must really get into the way of giving him his title—was not naturally prone to depression, rather the reverse; but when the two Misses Peachey came off victorious he used to be quite uncomfortably gloomy for a time. Once I know, when he had remarked apologetically to Helen that he hoped she would have a better partner next time, and she absent-mindedly returned, “I hope so indeed!” his spirits went down with a run and did not rise again until somebody who overheard, chaffed Helen about her blunder and produced gentle consternation and a melting appeal for pardon. That was at a very advanced stage of these young people’s relations, long after everybody but themselves knew exactly what would happen, and what did happen in the course of another week. It was a triviality, it would have had no place in our consideration of the affairs of a young man and woman who fell in love according to approved analytical methods, with subtle silent scruples and mysterious misunderstandings, in the modern way. I introduce it on its merits as a triviality, to indicate that George William Browne and Helen Frances Peachey arrived at a point where they considered themselves indispensable to each other in the most natural, simple, and unimpeded manner. I will go so far as to say that if Helen had not been there—if she had spent the summer with an aunt in Hampshire, as was at one time contemplated—one of the other Misses Peachey might have inspired this chronicle. But that is risking a good deal, I know, at the hands of the critics, and especially perhaps at

Helen’s. After all, what I want to state is merely the felicitous engagement, in July of a recent year, of Mr. Browne and Miss Peachey. Two tender months later, Mr. Browne sailed for India again, with a joyful conviction that he had done well to come home, that somewhat modified his natural grief. Helen remained behind for various reasons, chiefly connected with the financial future of the Browne family, and the small part of Calcutta interested in young Browne found occupation for a few days in wondering what Miss Pellington would have said if he had proposed to her. There was no doubt as to the point that he did not. Calcutta is always accurately informed upon such matters.

YOUNG BROWNE’S TENNIS FLUCTUATED FROM INDIFFERENT BAD TO INDIFFERENT WORSE.

The dreary waste of a year and four thousand miles that lay between Miss Peachey and the state of memsahibship

was relieved and made interesting in the usual way by the whole Peachey family. You know what I mean, perhaps, without details. Miss Kitty Peachey “etched” Kate Greenway figures on the corners of table napkins, Miss Julia Peachey wrought the monogram P. M. in the centre of pillow-shams with many frills, their Aunt Plovtree, widow of a prominent physician of Canbury, at once “gave up her time” to the adornment of Helen’s future drawing-room in Kensington stitch, and Mrs. Peachey spent many hours of hers in the composition of letters to people like John Noble, holding general councils over the packets of patterns that came by return of post. Mrs. Peachey was much occupied also in receiving the condolences of friends upon so complete a separation from her daughter, but I am bound to say that she accepted them with a fair show of cheerfulness. Mrs. Peachey declared that she would wait until the time came before she worried. As to both the wild animals and the climate she understood that they were very much exaggerated, and, indeed, on account of Helen’s weak throat, she was quite in hopes the heat might benefit her. And really nowadays, India wasn’t so very far away after all, was it? It was difficult, however, even with arguments like these, to reconcile the Canbury ladies to the hardship of Helen’s fate, especially those with daughters of their own who had escaped it. Helen listened to the condolences with bright eyes and a spot of pink on each cheek. They brought her tender pangs sometimes, but, speaking generally, I am afraid she liked them.

In six months it was positively time to begin to see about the trousseau, because, as Mrs. Plovtree very justly

remarked, it was not like getting the child ready to be married in England, where one would know from a pin or a button exactly what she wanted; in the case of Indian trousseaux everything had to be thought out and considered and time allowed to get proper advice in. For instance, there was that very thing they were talking about yesterday—that idea of getting Jaeger all through for Helen. It seemed advisable, but who knew *definitely* whether it was! And if there *was* an unsatisfactory thing in Mrs. Plovtree's opinion it was putting off anything whatever, not to speak of an important matter like this, till the last moment.

The event redounded to the wisdom of Mrs. Plovtree, as events usually did. It took the Peachey family quite six months to collect reliable information and construct a trousseau for Helen out of it; six months indeed, as Mrs. Peachey said, seemed too little to give to it. They collected a great deal of information. Mrs. Peachey wrote to everybody she knew who had ever been in India or had relations there, and so did several friends of the Peacheys, and the results could not have been more gratifying either in bulk or in variety. As their Aunt Plovtree said, they really could not have asked for more, indeed they would have had less difficulty in making up their minds without quite so much. "*Do* be advised," one lady wrote, with impressive underlinings, "and let her take as little as she can *possibly* do with. It is impossible to keep good dresses in India, the climate is simple *ruination* to them. I shall never forget the first year of my married life on that account. It was a *heart-breaking* experience, and I *do* hope that Helen may avoid it. Besides, the *durzies*, the native dressmakers, will copy

anything, and do it *wonderfully* well, at about a fifth of the price one pays at home." Which read very convincingly. By the same post a second cousin of Mrs. Plovtree's wrote, "If you ask me, I should say make a special point of having everything in reasonable abundance. The European shops ask frightful prices, the natives are always unsatisfactory, and your niece will find it very inconvenient to send to England for things. My plan was to buy as little as possible in India, and lay in supplies when we came home on leave!"

"In the face of that," said Mrs. Plovtree, "what are we to do?"

Ladies wrote that Helen would require as warm a wardrobe as in England; the cold might not be so great but she would "feel it more." She must take her furs, by all means. They wrote also that when they were in India, they wore nothing more substantial than nun's veiling, and a light jacket the year round. They gave her intense directions about her shoes and slippers—it was impossible to get nice ones in India—they were made very well and cheaply in the "China bazar"—they lasted for ever if one took care of them—they were instantly destroyed by mould and cockroaches when "the rains" came on. She would require a size larger than usual, on account of the heat; she must remember to take a size smaller because she would use her feet so little that they would decrease somewhat, everybody's did. She must bear one thing in mind, they were quite two years behind the fashion in India, so that it would be advisable to date her garments back a little, not to be remarkable. In another opinion there was this advantage, that in taking a fashionable trousseau to India, one could rely upon its being

the correct thing for at least two years. The directions in flannel, and cotton, and linen, were too complicated for precise detail, but they left equal freedom of choice. And choice was difficult, because these ladies were all ex-memsahibs, retired after fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years' honourable service, all equally qualified to warn and to instruct, and equally anxious to do it. They had lived in somewhat different localities in India, ranging from seven to seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, in the Northwest provinces, in the Punjab, in Southern India, in Beluchistan, and none of them had spent more than an occasional "cold weather" in Calcutta, but this triviality escaped the attention of the Peachey family, in dealing with the matter. India, to their imagination, was incapable of subdivision, a vast sandy area filled with heathen and fringed with cocoanut trees, which drew a great many young Englishmen away from their homes and their families for some occult purpose connected with drawing pay in rupees. So the Peacheys put these discrepancies down to the fact that people had such different ideas, and proceeded to arrange Helen's trousseau upon a modification of all of them. When this was quite done Mrs. Plovtree remarked with some surprise that with the addition of a few muslin frocks, the child had been fitted out almost exactly as if she were going to live in England. There was the wedding dress, which she might or might not wear upon the occasion, it would be indispensable *after*wards; there was the travelling dress chosen primarily not to "take the dust" and secondarily not to show it; two or three gowns of incipient dignity for dinner parties; two or three more of airier sorts

for balls—but at this point I must refer you to the ladies' papers. Turn over a few of their pages and you will see Helen's trousseau illustrated with skill and imagination, but with trains, I am bound to add, more prehensile than Helen ever wore, the habit of the Peachey family being to follow the fashions at a safe and unaggressive distance. Among the photographs of the brides which accompany you may even find one fairly like Helen. These young ladies have always struck me as bearing a charmingly subdued resemblance to one another, probably induced by the similarly trying conditions under which their portraits are published. And certainly in the lists of presents appended you will find many, if not all of those that the Rev. Peachey packed with his own clerical hands in large wooden boxes, for consignment to the P. and O., indeed I fancy a discriminating inspection of the advertisements would reveal most of them. As the Rev. Peachey himself would say, I need not go into that.

Helen was the first bride that Canbury had contributed to India, in the social memory. Two or three young men had gone forth to be brokers' assistants or civil servants or bank clerks, and an odd red-coat turned up periodically in the lower stratum of society on furlough, bringing many-armed red and yellow idols to its female relatives; but Canbury had no feminine connections with India, the only sort which are really binding. Helen's engagement had an extrinsic interest therefore, as well as the usual kind, and Canbury made the most of it. There was the deplorable fact, to begin with, that she could not be married at home. Canbury gave a dubious assent to its necessity; everybody had a dim understanding

of the exigencies of “leave,” and knew the theory that such departures from the orthodox and usual form of matrimonial proceeding were common and unavoidable. Yet in its heart and out of the Peachey and Plovtree earshot, Canbury firmly dissented, not without criticism. Would anybody tell it why they had not gone out together last year? On the face of it, there could be no question of saving. The young man was not in debt, and received a salary of five hundred pounds a year—had not Mr. Peachey’s curate married Jennie Plovtree a month after they were engaged on two hundred, and no expectations whatever! Or why, since they had made up their minds to wait, could they not have put it off another year! Surely in two years Mr. Browne might scrape enough together to come home again! Canbury thought it possessed a slight opinion of a young man who could not come after his wife. Privately Canbury upheld the extremest traditions of chivalry, and various among Miss Peachey’s young lady friends, quite unconscious of fibbing, confided to each other that “they wouldn’t be in Helen’s place for anything.” In the rectory drawing-room, however, these stringencies took a smiling face and a sympathetic form, sometimes disappearing altogether in the exaltation of the subject’s general aspects. Helen was told it was very “brave” of her, and Mrs. Peachey was admired for her courage in letting her daughter go. At which she and Helen smiled into each other’s eyes understandingly. Then Canbury began to search the aforesaid advertisements in the ladies’ papers for mementoes suitable in character and price, and to send them to the rectory with as hearty wishes

for the happiness of the future Brownes as if they had behaved properly in every respect.

CHAPTER II.

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TO Mrs. Peachey, one very consoling circumstance connected with Helen’s going to India was the good she would probably be able to do to “those surrounding her.” Helen had always been “active” at home; she had been the inspiration of work-parties, the life and soul of penny-readings. She often took the entire superintendence of the night school. The Canbury branch of the Y. W. C. T. U. did not know how it should get on without her. Besides playing the organ of St. Stephen’s, in which, however, another Miss Peachey was by this time ready to succeed her. Much as Mrs. Peachey and the parish would miss Helen, it was a sustaining thought that she was going amongst those whose need of her was so much greater than Canbury’s. Mrs. Peachey had private chastened visions, chiefly on Sunday afternoons, of Helen in her new field of labor. Mrs. Peachey was not destitute of imagination, and she usually pictured Helen seated under a bread-fruit tree in her Indian garden, dressed in white muslin, teaching a circle of little “blacks” to read the Scriptures. Helen was so successful with children; and so far as being tempted to its ultimate salvation with goodies was concerned, a black child was probably just like a white one. Of course, Helen would have to adapt her inducements to circumstances—it was not likely that a little Bengali could be baited with a Bath bun. Doubtless she would have to offer them rice or—what else was it they liked so much?—oh yes! sugar-cane. Over the form of these

delicacies Mrs. Peachey usually went to sleep, to dream of larger schemes of heathen emancipation which Helen should inaugurate. Mr. Peachey, who knew how hard the human heart could be, even in Canbury, among an enlightened people enjoying all the blessings of the nineteenth century, was not so sanguine. He said he believed these Hindus were very subtle-minded, and Helen was not much at an argument. He understood they gave able theologians very hard nuts to crack. Their ideas were entirely different from ours, and Helen would be obliged to master their ideas before effecting any very radical change in them. He was afraid there would be difficulties.

Mrs. Plovtree settled the whole question. Helen was not going out as a missionary, except in so far as that every woman who married undertook the charge of *one* heathen, and she could not expect to jump into work of that sort all at once. Besides, the people were so difficult to get at, all shut up in zenanas and places. And she did not know the language; first of all, she would have to conquer the language; not that it would take Helen long, for see what she did in French and German at school in less than a year! For her part, she would advise Helen to try to do very little at first—to begin, say, with her own servants; she would have a number of them, and they would be greatly under her personal influence and control. Mrs. Plovtree imparted an obscure idea of Helen’s responsibility for the higher welfare of her domestics, and a more evident one that it would be rather a good thing to practice on them, that they would afford convenient and valuable material for experiments. In all of which Mrs. Peachey thoughtfully

acquiesced, though in fancy she still allowed herself to picture Helen leading in gentle triumph a train of Rajahs to the bosom of the Church—a train of nice Rajahs, clean and savoury. That, as I have said, was always on Sunday afternoons. On the secular days of the week they discussed other matters, non-spiritual, and personal, to which they were able to bring more definiteness of perspective, and they found a great deal to say.

MRS. PEACHEY HAD PRIVATE CHASTENED VISIONS, CHIEFLY ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS, OF HELEN IN HER NEW FIELD OF LABOUR.

A friend of young Browne’s had gone home opportunely on six months’ leave, and his recently acquired little wife would be “delighted,” she said, to wreak her new-found dignity upon Helen in the capacity of chaperone for the voyage out. But for this happy circumstance, Helen’s transportation would have presented a serious difficulty, for the Peacheys were out of the way of knowing the ever-flowing and returning tide of Anglo-Indians that find old friends at Cheltenham and take lodgings in Kensington, and fill their brief holiday with London theatres and shopping. As it was, there was great congratulation among the Peacheys, and they hastened to invite Mr. and Mrs. Macdonald to

spend a short time at the rectory before the day on which the ship sailed. Mrs. Macdonald was extremely sorry that they couldn’t come; nothing would have given them more pleasure, but they had so many engagements with old friends of her husband’s, and the time was getting so short and they had such a quantity of things to do in London before they sailed, that—the Peacheys must resign themselves to disappointment. Mrs. Macdonald hoped that they would all meet on board the *Khedive*, but held out very faint hopes of making acquaintance sooner than that. It was a bright agreeable letter as the one or two that came before had been, but it left them all in a difficulty to conjure up Mrs. Macdonald, and unitedly they lamented the necessity. What Mr. Macdonald was like, as Mrs. Plovtree observed, being of no consequence whatever. But it was absolute, and not until the *Khedive* was within an hour of weighing anchor at the Royal Albert Docks, did the assembled Peacheys, forlorn on the main deck in the midst of Helen’s boxes, get a glimpse of Mrs. Macdonald. Then it was brief. One of the stewards pointed out the Peachey group to a very young lady in a very tight-fitting tailor-made dress, swinging an ulster over her arm, who approached them briskly with an outstretched hand and a business-like little smile. “I think you must be Mr. and Mrs. Peachey,” she said; “I am Mrs. Macdonald. And where is the young lady?” Mr. Peachey unbent the back of his neck in the clerical manner, and Mrs. Peachey indicated Helen as well as she could in the suffusion of the moment, taking farewell counsels of her sisters with pink eyelids. “But you mustn’t *mind* her going, Mrs. Peachey!” Mrs. Macdonald went on vivaciously, shaking hands with the group, “she will

be sure to like it. Everybody likes it. *I* am devoted to India! She'll soon get accustomed to everything, and then she won't want to come home—that's the way it was with me. I dare say you won't believe it, but I'm dying to get back! You've seen your cabin?" she demanded of Helen, "is it forward or aft? Are you port or starboard?"

The Peacheys opened their eyes respectfully at this nautical proficiency, and Helen said she was afraid she didn't know, it was down some stairs and one turned to the left, toward the end of a long passage, and then to the right into a little corner.

"Oh, then you're starboard and a little forward of the engines!" Mrs. Macdonald declared. "Very lucky you are! You'll have your port open far oftener than we will—we're weather-side and almost directly over the screw. So much for not taking one's passage till three weeks before sailing—and very fortunate we were to get one at all, the agent said. We have the place to ourselves though, one can generally manage that by paying for it you know—one comfort! How many in your cabin?"

"Three of us!" Helen responded apprehensively, "and it *is* such a little one! And the one whose name is Stitch has piled all her rugs and portmanteaux on my bed, and there's nowhere to put mine!"

"Oh, the cabins in this ship are not small," returned Mrs. Macdonald with seriousness. "She's got a heavy cargo and they're pretty low in the water, if you like, but they're not small. Wait till you get used to it a little. As to Madam Stitch, just pop her bags and things on the floor—don't hesitate a moment. One *must* assert one's rights on shipboard—it's

positively the only way! But there are some people to see me off—I must fly!” She gave them a brisk nod and was on the wing to her friends when Mrs. Peachey put a hand on her arm. “You spoke of the ship’s being low in the water, Mrs. Macdonald. You don’t think—you don’t think there is any danger on that account?”

Little Mrs. Macdonald stopped to enjoy her laugh. “Oh dear, no!” she said with vast amusement, “rather the other way I should think—and we’ll be a great deal steadier for it!” Then she went, and the Peacheys saw her in the confused distance babbling as gaily in the midst of her new-comers as if a thought of the responsibilities of chaperonage had never entered her head.

“Helen, I believe you are older than she is!” exclaimed the youngest Miss Peachey.

“I don’t like her,” remarked the second succinctly. “She giggles and she gabbles. Helen, I wish some of *us* were going with you.”

“She doesn’t seem to mind travelling,” said the Miss Peachey with the prospective claim to the title.

“Dear *me*, Helen!” began Mrs. Peachey almost dolorously, “she—she seems very bright,” changing her comment. After all they must make the best of it. The Rev. Peachey clasped his stick behind his back, and tapped the deck with it, saying nothing, with rather a pursing of his wide shaven lips, Helen looked after Mrs. Macdonald helplessly, and her family exchanged glances in which that lady might have read depreciation.

“Your roll-up, Helen?” exclaimed Mrs. Peachey.

“Here, mamma.”

“You have seven small pieces, remember! *Have* you got your keys? Are you sure you are dressed warmly enough? It will be some time before you get to India, you know!” Mrs. Peachey had suffered an accession of anxiety in the last ten minutes.

They stood looking at each other in the common misery of coming separation, casting about for last words and finding none of any significance, for people do not anticipate an event for a whole year without exhausting themselves on the topic of it. Helen would keep a little diary; she would post it at Gibraltar, Naples, Port Said, and Colombo; and they were to write overland to Naples, and by the next mail to Calcutta, which would reach before she did. These time-worn arrangements were made over again. Helen thought of a last affectionate message to her Aunt Plovtree and was in the act of wording it, when a steward with a yellow envelope inquired of them for “any lady by the name of Peachey.” The contents of the yellow envelope had telegraphic brevity. “Good-bye and God bless you! J. Plovtree.” Helen read, and immediately took out her handkerchief again. “Just like Jane!” said Mrs. Peachey, sadly, with her eyes full, and Mr. Peachey, to cover his emotion read aloud the hours at which the message had been received and delivered. “Forty-two minutes” he announced “fairly quick!” Helen proposed a walk on the quarter-deck. “The luggage, my dear child!” Mrs. Peachey cried. “We mustn’t leave the luggage, with all these people about! James, dear, it would not be safe to leave the luggage, would it! You and the girls may go, Helen. Your father and I will stay here.”

AUNT PLOVTREE.

“Oh, no!” Helen returned reproachfully, and clung to them all.

The crowd on the deck increased and grew noisier, people streamed up and down the wide gangway. Cabin luggage came rattling down in cabs, perilously late, the arm of the great steam-crane swung load after load high in air and lowered it into the hold, asserting its own right of way. “That’s one of your tin-lined boxes, Helen,” exclaimed Mrs. Peachey, intent on the lightening of the last load, “and oh, I’m *sure* it is not safe, dear! James won’t you *call* to them that it is not safe!” But the long deal case with “Miss Peachey, Calcutta,” in big black letters on it was already

describing an arc over the heads of the unwary, and as it found its haven Mrs. Peachey made a statement of excited relief, “I never saw such carelessness!” said she.

A number of ladies, dressed a good deal alike, arrived upon the deck in company and took up a position near the forward part of the ship, where the second class passengers were gathered together, producing little black books. From these they began to sing with smiling faces and great vigour, various hymns, with sentiments appropriate to long voyages, danger, and exile from home. It was a parting attention from their friends to a number of young missionaries for Burmah, probably designed to keep up their spirits. The hymns were not exclusively of any church or creed—Moody and Sankey contributed as many of them as the *Ancient and Modern*, but they were all lustily emotional and befitting the occasion to the most unfortunate degree. The departing missionaries stood about in subdued groups and tried to wave their handkerchiefs. One or two young lady missionaries found refuge in their cabins where they might sob comfortably. The notes rang high and bathed the whole ship in elegy, plaintively fell and reveled in the general wreck of spirits and affectation of hilarity. It began to rain a little, but the ladies were all provided with umbrellas, and under them sang on.

“While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.”

“What idiots they are!” remarked the youngest plain-spoken Miss Peachey when it became impossible to ignore the effect upon Helen’s feelings any longer. “As if they couldn’t find anything else to sing than *that*!”

“Oh, my *dear*,” rebuked Mrs. Peachey, drying her eyes, “we may be sure that their motive is everything that is good.” Whereat the youngest Miss Peachey, unsubdued, muttered “*Motive!*”

“H’all this for the cabin, miss?” asked a steward, grasping a hat-box and a portmanteau. “I don’t *quite* know ‘ow that there *long* box is a-going in, miss. Is it accordin’ to the Company’s regillations, miss?” Mr. Peachey interposed, with dignity, and said that it was—the precise measurements. It came from the Army and Navy Stores, he was quite sure the size was correct. The man still looked dubious, but when Helen said, regardless of measurements, that she must have it, that it contained nearly everything she wanted for the voyage, he shouldered it without further dissent. He was accustomed to this ultimatum of seafaring ladies, and bowed to it.

Mrs. Peachey began to think that they ought to go down to the cabin and stay beside the luggage, there were so many odd-looking people about; but she succumbed to the suggestion of being carried off; and they all went up on the quarter-deck. Mrs. Macdonald was there—they might see something more of Mrs. Macdonald. They clung to the hope.

They did see something more of Mrs. Macdonald—a little. She interrupted herself and her friends long enough to approach the Peacheys and ask if all Helen’s luggage was on board, “wedding presents and all?” jocularly. Mrs. Peachey replied fervently that she hoped so, and Mrs. Macdonald said, Oh, that was all right then, and Was she a good sailor? Oh, well, she would soon get over it. And oh, by the by—departing to her beckoning friends again—it was all

right about their seats at table—Miss Peachey was to sit by them—she had seen the head steward and he said there would be no difficulty. Having thus reassured them, “I’ll see you again,” said Mrs. Macdonald, and noddingly departed.

The first whistle shrilled and bellowed, and a parting stir responded to it all over the ship. Mrs. Peachey looked agitated, and laid a hand on Helen’s arm. “There is no cause for haste, mamma,” said the Rev. Peachey, looking at his watch. “We have still twenty minutes, and there is a quantity of freight yet to be got on board.” The missionary ladies began a new hymn,

“Oh, think of the friends over there!”

“Only twenty minutes, my love! Then I think we ought really to be getting off! My darling child——”

The whistle blew again stertorously, and the gangway began to throng with friends of the outward-bound. The dear, tender, human-hearted Peacheys clustered about the girl they were giving up—the girl who was going from their arms and their fireside an infinite distance, to a land of palm-trees and yams, to marry—and what a lottery marriage was!—a young Browne. They held her fast, each in turn. “I almost w-wish I w-weren’t go—” sobbed Helen in her mother’s embraces. “Helen!” said the youngest Miss Peachey sternly, with a very red nose, “you do *nothing of the sort*! You’re only too pleased and proud to go, and so should I be in your place!” Which rebuke revived Helen’s loyalty to her Browne if it did not subdue the pangs with which she hugged her sister.

At last the gangway was withdrawn and all the Peacheys were on the other side of it. It rained faster, the missionary ladies still sang on, people called last words to their friends

in the damp crowd below. A box of sweets was thrown to a young lady on the main deck—it dropped into the black water between the ship and the wharf and was fished out with great excitement. The Peacheys gathered in a knot under their several umbrellas, and Helen stood desolately by herself watching them, now and then exchanging a watery smile. They cast off the ropes, the Lascars skipped about like monkeys, the crowd stood back, slowly the great ship slipped away from the wharf into the river, and as she moved down stream the crowd ran with her a little way, drowning the missionary ladies with hurrahs. In the Peacheys' last glimpse of their Helen she was standing beside little Mrs. Macdonald and a stout gentleman with a pale face, rather flabby and deeply marked about the mouth and under the eyes—a gentleman whom nature had intended to be fair but whom climatic conditions had darkened in defiance of the intention. Mrs. Macdonald tapped the gentleman in a sprightly way with her parasol, for the Peacheys' benefit, and he took off his hat. The Peachey family supposed, quite correctly, that that must be Mr. Macdonald.

CHAPTER III.

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HELEN thought the prospect of England slipping away from her in the rain as the ship throbbed down the river, too desolate for endurance, so she descended to her cabin with the unavowed intention of casting herself upon her berth to

weep. Miss Stitch was there, however, and Mrs. Forsyth-Jones, who occupied the berth above Miss Stitch's, and the steward, which seemed to Helen a good many, and she retreated.

"Oh, come in!" both the ladies cried; but Helen thought it was obviously impossible. She wandered into the long dining-saloon and sat down in one of the revolving chairs; she watched a fat ayah patting a baby to sleep on the floor, looked into the ladies' cabin and went hastily out again, for already the dejected had begun to gather there, prone on the sofas and commiserated by the stewardesses. Finally she made her way upon deck again, meeting Mrs. Macdonald in the companion-way. "Are you all right?" asked Mrs. Macdonald cheerfully; but, before Helen had time to say that she was or was not, the lady had disappeared.

The deck was full of irresolute people like herself, who sat about on the damp benches or walked up and down under the awning, still with the look of being fresh from town, still in gloves and stiff hats, and land-faring garments. They put their hands in their pockets and shivered, and looked askance at each other, or made vain attempts to extract their own from the steamer chairs that were heaped up astern, waiting the offices of a quartermaster. An occasional hurrying steward was stopped a dozen times by passengers thirsting for information. Barefooted Lascars climbed about their monkey-like business among the ropes, or polished the brasses on the smoking-cabin, or holystoned a deck which seemed to Helen immaculately clean before. She found a dry corner and sat down in it to consider how much more familiar with the ship many of the people