

March, and consequently later than is usual for moving troops, as the days begin to get very hot on the plains of the Carnatic about that time of the year. But ours was special duty; and as we should only march in the very early morning, we did not fear the inconvenience of the midday heat; but looked upon the whole thing as rather a lark, and welcome change from the monotony of garrison duty. As to the cholera, not one of us gave it a thought. Not likely it would touch one of us!

It was on the second day after leaving Arcot that Private Thomas Atkins, who was on my right file, suddenly had to fall out. I expected him to join the ranks before long, but did not trouble myself about his absence. It was not until we had reached camp and had finished breakfast that I heard anything more about him. I then learnt that he was buried. I knew cholera was awfully sudden in its attack and effects, but I had not imagined the possibility of its carrying off a healthy man quite so rapidly. Of course immediate interment must take place in case of death on the line of march. I had liked Atkins much, but I fancy his death and burial were so sudden that the rest of us failed to realize the truth of what had happened to our comrade and half expected to see him turn up again. Anyhow, we soon forgot the incident.

Late in the afternoon I was listening to a description of Vellore by one of our fellows who had been there, and speculating on the chance of seeing the crocodiles which Tipu Sultan had placed in the moat round the fort as the best possible sentinels to prevent prisoners from escaping or any of his troops attempting to desert, when suddenly I felt spasms and sickness.

"Hollo! old fellow, how blue you look!" remarked a companion sitting next to me; and as he spoke my comrades shrank terror-stricken from me. It needed no doctor to tell me what was the matter. The cholera had seized me!

I was hastily conveyed to the temporary hospital, where our assistant surgeon already had several cases of the disease under treatment, and I was laid on a charpoy. I rapidly passed from the first to the second stage of that malady, and by 9 o'clock at night the incessant vomiting and purging had reduced me to a condition of weakness approaching insensibility. I was consumed by a burning, raging thirst, but the dresser disregarded all my entreaties for a drink of water. The system of treatment for cholera in those days allowed the patient nothing more than just to have the lips moistened occasionally with weak brandy and water; and this simply aggravated the torture and thirst. Now-days champagne is given and the sufferer is now allowed to drink pretty freely.

The hospital was, of course, only a pandal, hastily constructed with palmyra leaves, with a large cuscus mat at the entrance at each end. Two large chatties of water were placed just outside each entrance,

from which a coolie from time to time threw a pannikinful on the cuscus tathis, so that the wind, blowing through the wet mats, might cool the temperature inside the pandal. This result certainly was attained, but at the cost of intensifying the pangs of the patient, whose thirst was tantalized by hearing the splashing of the water.

I had begged, swore and menaced at intervals, but no one paid the slightest heed to me, and I was sinking into that condition of torpor which is the immediate precursor of the third and fatal stage of cholera, when I heard voices in the pandal. The assistant surgeon was making his last round for the night, accompanied by the hospital dresser. With a violent effort I aroused myself and eagerly listened for their approach. I wanted to hear my fate pronounced.

They stopped at length where I lay, and the doctor examined my body.

"Mottled," I heard him remark to the dresser. I was nearly deafened by the singing or rather drumming in my ears, so I lay perfectly motionless so as not to let a single word of what they might say escape me, if possible.

"He is insensible already," the doctor continued, "and will not last long. So Wetherall will make six."

"Make six!" I said to myself; "make six what?"

"Six corpses, of course, for burial at daylight tomorrow morning," a voice seemed to laugh out with fiendish exultation.

The dresser said something which I could not distinctly hear, but the answer enlightened me as to the subject they were discussing.

"Oh, yes, there will be room enough; in fact, for two more, if necessary."

They had gone and the place was in darkness save for the glimmer of a cocoanut-oil lamp. I heard the scratching of mumootles just outside the pandal.

It was the noise made by the camp-followers who were digging a common grave for six of us, leaving room for two more if necessary!

I felt utterly stunned and quite indifferent as to my fate, which of course I considered settled after what the assistant surgeon had said. My tongue was like a piece of dry leather in my mouth, which had long since ceased to yield any saliva to relieve the agonizing burning of my throat and palate. I could not have made any sound had I attempted to do so; but I did not try, for the attendants were all stretched on the ground fast asleep. I felt I was deserted—left to die.

I was beginning to wander, I think, and was back again in the bright green English meadows, picking daisies with my little sister, and so I should have passed away. But just at that moment, the coolies who had finished digging the grave—my grave—passed the entrance to the pandal; and one of them, with more consideration than his class usually show, threw a pannikinful of water on the cuscus tathi.

It was like a galvanic shock to me. I resolved to have a drink at

any risk. I had to die, so what matter if I hastened my death an hour or two by drinking cold water! At least I should be relieved from the torture of thirst and die happy.

I tried to get up, but I was too weak to stand and fell down at once. Then I reflected that I was more likely to be seen if I walked, and if detected in my attempt I should be brought back, and perhaps be strapped down to die. So I tried to crawl.

I was about ten minutes dragging myself the forty feet from my cot to the entrance, and I wriggled under the cuscus tathi like a snake.

There were the chatties before me!

The first I seized was empty, and the disappointment nearly made me swoon; but the second was brim full. I threw my arms around it and dragged myself to it. I plunged my head into the delicious, limpid water, and devoured, rather than drank, huge mouthfuls of the cool and heavenly fluid. I felt my stomach swelling with the enormous draughts I swallowed; but I laughed and drank again and again. I recked naught of life or death then.

At length I could drink no more, and then discipline asserted itself. I knew I had no right to be out there, and I thought if I were missed from my cot I should be reported. So I crept back the way I had come, and I shortly after fell into a profound sleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and saw the assistant surgeon and dresser standing beside me.

"How is this?" asked the doctor. "Wetherall ought to have been dead!"

"Please, sir," said I, "I am feeling much better, and have no wish to make the sixth this morning."

He knew I had overheard his remark on the preceding night; he smiled sadly, and said, "I am sorry to say there were six without you. But I cannot understand how it is you are alive. Most extraordinary!"

I rapidly recovered; and, as I had never indulged in the pernicious country arrack sold to soldiers out here, I was soon quite strong again. I was made sergeant very soon, and remained upward of twenty years, serving with different regiments out here; but it was some time before I told anyone how I recovered from my attack of cholera. However, I told the doctor one day all about it; and, though he said the cold water ought to have killed me, I observed the poor fellows who were in the hospital with cholera got an extra allowance of water.

All my people were dead or scattered, and I had no wish to return to England, so I took my pension, and the bounties I had obtained, added to my savings, enabled me to buy this bit of land. I am doing well, and have all a man can wish for to make him happy—Black-wood.

In matrimony, the prudent mate with their equals.