

**LIFE IN THE MOFUSSIL;
OR, THE CIVILIAN IN
LOWER BENGAL. VOL. I**

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Life in the Mofussil; or, The civilian in Lower Bengal. Vol.I by G. Graham

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G. GRAHAM

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435
P. 4, 6, 76

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

VOYAGE OUT.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| The Start for India—The Siren—Death on Board—The Shark— Arrival in the Hooghly—The Ardent Lover—On Shore at Last | PAGE 1 |
|--|-----------|

CHAPTER II.

LIFE AS A STUDENT IN CALCUTTA.

| | |
|--|----|
| Spence's Hotel—Fresh Eggs—Examinations in Native Lan- guages—The Baital Punshahinshahi—The "Chummary"— A Calcutta Day in the Hot Weather—The Mall—North- westers—Competition Wallahs—Theatricals—Our Dinner Party—Dissolution of "Chummary"—Clubs—Snipe Shooting—Take Leave of Calcutta | 24 |
|--|----|

CHAPTER III.

JOURNEY UP COUNTRY.

| | |
|---|----|
| Bhaugulpore—A Mofussil Bungalow—Happy-go-lucky Progress to Patna—Stay at Patna | 54 |
|---|----|

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE AS ASSISTANT MAGISTRATE AND COLLECTOR AT MOZUFFERPORE.

| | |
|---|--|
| Journey Across the Ganges—Dak Bungalow—Drive to Mozuf- ferpore—Find my Quarters Lonely—First Visit to Cutcherry, and Investment in Office—First Case—Chuprassies—Intro- | |
|---|--|

LIB SETS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| duction to my Magistrate and Collector—Sworn in as Assistant Collector | 79 |
| CHAPTER V. | |
| <i>AT MOZUFFERPÖRE.</i> | |
| Formal Calls—Furniture—A Curious Operation—An Afternoon's Sport—A Revenue Case—A Sunday's Wolf-Hunt—End of Case of Lakshmee Telince—Mookhtyars and Witnesses—The Race-Meeting—Hot Weather—Native Christians—Native Visitors—A Social Contretemps | 110 |
| CHAPTER VI. | |
| <i>AT MOZUFFERPÖRE.</i> | |
| The New Police—A River Trip—Examination at Patna—Sonapore Fair—Shooting Party in the Nepaul Terai—Illegal Orders | 152 |
| CHAPTER VII. | |
| <i>ASSISTANT MAGISTRATE IN CHARGE OF DURBHUNGAH.</i> | |
| Take Over Charge from my Predecessor—Butwarra—A Difficult Case—Second Examination—Volunteer Cavalry—Public Meeting—"Izzat" Accident at Court—Invested with Full Powers—A Native Nobleman | 196 |
| CHAPTER VIII. | |
| <i>AT DURBHUNGAH.</i> | |
| Nundiput's House—An Assistant Superintendent of Police—System of Excise—Final Examination—Riot Cases—Indigo Sowing Case—Indigo Planters—Jugdeo Suspect—Nepaulese Case—A Tiger Party—A Narrow Escape—New Municipal Act—Bunwarree Lall and Public Works Department—Appointed to Nuddea—Regret at my Departure—Agricultural Show—Good-bye to Durbhungah. | 234 |

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CHAPTER I.

VOYAGE OUT.

THE START FOR INDIA.—THE SIREN.—DEATH ON BOARD.—THE SHARK.—ARRIVAL IN THE HOOGHLY.—THE ARDENT LOVER.—ON SHORE AT LAST.

How well I remember the 4th of October, 186-. It was a lovely evening, and I was seated, with one or two others of my own age, smoking the cigar of contentment on the poop of the good ship *Lady Ellenborough*, now anchored in the Downs, and waiting for the breeze which should enable her to make a start independent of tugs and all other such troublesome and expensive accessories, on her journey to Calcutta.

It was indeed the cigar of contentment that I smoked; for had I not passed the competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service sufficiently high to enable me to select Bengal as the field of my future career? had I not

scraped through the second examination in some mysterious way by the light of nature? and was I not now fairly launched in the world, with a prospect of novelty, excitement, and a fair competence before me?

All my competitors had gone, or were about to go, by the overland route, and I, in compliance with instructions from the India Office, had endeavoured to secure a passage which should enable me to leave England before the end of November; but the P. and O. officials had informed me very curtly that they could not supply me with such; that they could not let me know if any unforeseen vacancy should occur; and when I stated with a certain stiffness that I must find some other means of getting to my destination, had received the threatening announcement with the most blank unconcern. The opening of the Suez Canal has possibly made some alteration in this state of things.

On the whole I was not sorry to be compelled to apply to Messrs. Green, and was almost disappointed when the chief mate told me in the docks that the voyage would not occupy more than three months. Little did I think that those three months would be stretched into nearly five, and that long before one-third of the journey had passed I would have eaten any amount of humble pie to be allowed any corner on the deck of a P. and O. steamer, with a chance of a speedy end to the miserable monotony of a sea voyage.

There were thirty-six of us first-class passengers on board—eighteen of each sex; and the agent of the Company, who had come to Gravesend to see us off, had assured us, with a sort of paternal unction, that we were

a very pleasant party and ought to have an agreeable time of it.

It might be thought that this parity in numbers would have ensured tranquillity; but it certainly did not, for somehow or other we quarrelled frequently, and with great earnestness.

The placid evening turned into a blustering morning; the cigar of contentment very decidedly disappeared, and for a week or more we tacked from side to side of the Channel, without, as far as I could see, ever getting any further down it, until at length some less unfavourable deity sent us an easterly wind, which froze us all to the marrow, but enabled our pilot to leave us, and carried us well on into the mighty Atlantic.

I think it was about a fortnight after the pilot's departure that I came to the conclusion that woman's society was the greatest bliss upon earth, and, about three weeks later, that woman was the origin of all evil.

There was among us a little lady, a widow, young, decidedly pretty, with golden hair and blue eyes,—one who might have figured as the heroine in one of Miss Braddon's novels,—to whom a gallant lieutenant paid much attention, which attention, according to my inexperienced ideas, appeared to receive marked encouragement. Consequently I envied him much.

One beautiful moonlight evening I was on deck, leaning over the stern, looking at the phosphorescent coruscations in our wake, when I heard the soft rustle of a dress close by me, and on looking round, found the golden-haired siren by my side. We were, of course, on terms of ordi-

nary acquaintance, and made a few commonplace remarks on the beauty of the night. Presently she said,—there was some meal going on in the saloon, and, with the exception of the man at the wheel, we had the poop to ourselves,—

“What a comfort it is to be able to get away, even for a few moments, from the wearisome society of the same individuals day after day.”

To which I, thinking of the lieutenant, and inclined to be a little malicious, “Is it all wearisome?”

“All.”

“Without exception?”

“Without exception.”

“That is not very flattering to your fellow-voyagers, myself included.”

“You, Mr. Gordon, have not given me much opportunity of ascertaining whether your society is wearisome or the contrary.”

“Would you care to have such opportunity?”

Hesitatingly, and with an upward glance, “I think I should.”

“But,” said I, much flattered, “there is an obstacle; there is”——

“Oh,” with a petulant pout, “you mean Lieut. Ogle. His name ought to have been spelt with an ‘r,’ not an ‘l.’ He is a bore and a boor. How can you think his society could be any pleasure to me?”

“Well,” I began; but I thought it better not to say *what* I thought.

She continued, “Don’t think me too outspoken; but

it is such a relief to be able to speak to some one who *perhaps* may sympathize with the dull torture I have endured for the last ten days—*perhaps* would now help to rid me of it."

This with a long, full look of her very pretty blue eyes. "How?" I asked eagerly.

"Shield me with your companionship," she said; and her hand stole out towards mine, which grasped it fervently. Just at that moment we heard steps on the companion ladder, and separated.

As I entered the saloon, I saw the lieutenant seated at whist and apparently in high spirits; but I pitied him—yes, pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

The next morning I finished my breakfast hastily, so as to be early on deck and ready with all those little attentions that male passengers are in the habit of paying to their friends of the other sex on board ship, such as placing chairs, arranging rugs, etc., etc. These were all graciously accepted; and the lieutenant, on loitering up in the full confidence of possession, was surprised and displeased to find himself forestalled. Still more displeased was he, on offering his services for the usual morning walk on deck, to find mine accepted instead; and at dinner his brow grew black as thunder when he perceived that the fair one, by some mysterious influence over the captain, had managed to change her seat so as to be near me.

This state of things lasted for some days. The lieutenant ceased to proffer further attentions, and became sulky and moody. He was of a temper not subject to much control, I fancy; but was astounded, as well he