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Modern History Sourcebook: Elisa Greathed: An Account of the Opening of the Indian Mutiny at Meerut, 1857

Sunday, the 10th of May, dawned in peace and happiness. The early morning service, at the Cantoment Church, saw many assembled together, some never to meet on earth again. The day passed in quiet happiness; no thought of danger disturbed the serenity of that happy home. Alas! how differently closed the Sabbath which dawned so tranquilly. We were on the point of going to the evening service, when the disturbance commenced on the Native Parade ground. Shots and volumes of smoke told of what was going on: our servants begged us not to show ourselves, and urged the necessity of closing our doors, as the mob were approaching. Mr. Greathed [her husband], after loading his arms, took me to the terrace on the top of the house; two of our countrywomen also took refuge with us to escape from the bullets of the rebels. Just at this moment, Mr. Gough, of the 3rd Cavalry, galloped full speed up to the house. He had dashed through the mutinous troops, fired at on all sides, to come and give us notice of the danger. The nephew of the Afghan Chieftain, Jan Fishan, also came for the same purpose, and was, I regret to say, wounded by a Sepoy.

The increasing tumult, thickening smoke, and fires all around, convinced us of the necessity of making our position as safe as we could; our guard were drawn up below. After dark, a party of insurgents rushed into the grounds, drove off the guard, and broke into the house, and set it on fire. On all sides we could hear them smashing and plundering, and calling loudly for us; it seemed once or twice as though footsteps were on the staircase, but no one came up. We owed much to the fidelity of our servants: had but one proved treacherous, our lives must have been sacrificed.

After some time, the flames got the ascendant, and the smoke became intolerable. Just as the fire threatened our destruction, we heard the voice of one of our servants calling to us to come down. At all risks, we descended. Our faithful servant, Golab Khan, seeing our perilous situation amidst the increasing flames, and that every moment was precious, with his characteristic presence of mind and quickness, had suddenly thought of a plan by which to draw away the mob, who, after having satisfied themselves with all the plunder they could get, were every moment becoming more eager in their search for us. He boldly went up to them, won their confidence by declaring himself of their faith, and willing to give us up into their hands. He assured them it was useless to continue their search in the house; but if they would all follow him, he would lead them to a haystack, where we had

been concealed.

The plan succeeded; and so convinced were they that what he had told them was the truth, that not a man remained behind. In this interval we got safely down. Not a human being was to be seen near the house; but we had only just time to escape into the garden when the mutinous crowd returned, madder than ever at the deception that had been practised on them. Golab Khan's life was now almost as much at risk as our own; but he happily escaped. In a very few minutes after our descent, the house fell in with a crash, and we thanked God for His merciful preservation of us.

The remaining hours till dawn were not without anxiety. We were sitting quietly in the bright moonlight, on a "charpoy" which one of the servants had brought out, when an alarm was given that they threatened to search the garden for us. The gardener concealed me under a tree; my husband stood near, with his revolver in his hand. The alarm proved false, and I was glad to be released from my hiding-place.

Never was dawn more welcome to us than on the 11th of May; the daylight showed how complete the work of destruction had been. All was turned into ruin and desolation, and our once bright happy home was now a blackened pile. Sad was the scene; but thankfulness for life left no place for other regrets. With the morning light the mob had all dispersed, and we had no difficulty in making our way to the dragoon lines, where we were most cordially welcomed by our friends, Captain and Mrs. Cookson. They had felt the greatest apprehension as to our fate, knowing that as we were out of cantonments no help could have been given us. We had been utterly cut off from all communication through the night, and sad was the tale of murder and bloodshed we now heard, and terrible the anxiety for those at Delhi, when it was found that the telegraph wires had been destroyed by the Sepoys, before any knowledge of what was occurring had transpired. The mutineers got away during the night, and pursuit was useless. The morrow confirmed our worst fears; but of that hideous massacre all has been made known.

The artillery depot, with its large enclosure, was converted into a fort, and became a home for every one; many families occupied the rooms in the long range of barracks, and the space between was filled with tents. Here we found shelter, and with the aid of "tatties" and thermantidotes, felt little inconvenience from the scorching sun and hot blasts. strength and spirits seemed to rise with the exigencies of our position; no complaints were heard; heat and comparative discomfort were alike disregarded; all were cheerful and ready to help others, and those who had lost all, had their wants generously supplied by those who had been less unfortunate. Our position was perfectly secure and well guarded, and became every day more strongly intrenched. Active preparations at the same time went on in organising a field force. At length all was in readiness, and the order for the march was hailed with delight; sanguine were our hopes that a fortnight, or at the most three weeks, would see our gallant little army on its victorious return. With many and oft-repeated good wishes and prayers, we saw them depart. On the night of the 27th May they marched away.

Source:

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