

IV. The Mutiny.

The summer of 1857 began full of anxiety. The air was thick with rumours of impending trouble. In those days without railways and telegraphs, the isolation of Azamgarh may be imagined. The largest European family in the town was that of the Nibletts. It consisted of Mr. Philip Niblett, his wife, his sister, his mother-in-law and nine children, of whom the eldest was seventeen, the youngest only twenty months.

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Actual trouble broke out on the 3rd June. At 9 p.m. a shot rang out. This was the signal for the outbreak; and the Nibletts heard the sound of bugles and drums in the Lines. The troops had shot Quarter-Master Lewis; and bidden the other officers retire to Ghazipur, 45 miles away. The Collectorate Kutchery, not 500 yards away from the Niblett bungalow, had been fortified; but Philip heard the golendazes (that is the gunners) removing the two cannon, which had been placed there. Some of the troops now advanced to the Jail (also visible from the Niblett bungalow), and released the prisoners.

There was now no chance of defence. The senior European officers made off to Ghazipur. Those of lower rank concealed themselves as best they could. It is to the credit of the local troops and the local Indian population that Azamgarh did not witness the massacres, which characterised the Rebellion elsewhere. Philip Niblett's first impulse was to cross the river which flowed behind his bungalow; and then to make his way round to Sidhari, where he hoped for succour.

The family waded through water chest deep (fortunately it was the dry season). On the opposite bank a count was taken, Walter aged ten, had been asleep, and forgotten. His father had to go back, and pull him off his cot and to carry him also across the river. For a while they hid in the ravines, while aimless musket shots whizzed over them. They lost their way in the darkness; and in the early morning found themselves in Jafarpur, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the present Collector's bungalow.

With difficulty they persuaded two men to lead them to Sidhari. There they took shelter in an indigo factory belonging to one Sarju Pande.

The crying of baby George soon attracted attention. Hostile gangs came along; and the family received much ill-treatment. Apparently the Sidhari Babu doing nothing to protect them. Padma Pande, a servant of Sarju Prasad, went off to Balnadih, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away, and reported their plight to Balwant Singh, the zamindar of that village.

Balwant Singh sent four armed men to bring the whole family to his house. He kept them for $1\frac{1}{2}$ days, and treated them kindly. (When posted to Azamgarh in 1940, I unearthed Dasrath Singh, great grandson of Balwant Singh).

VI. Refugees.

On the evening of the 4th June, Ali Baksh, the Nazir of the Collectorate, learning the Niblett family was there, visited Belnadih. He took them back to Azamgarh, where he lodged them in a house belonging to one Bakshis Alo. He provided them with durries and some bedding, and even advanced them twenty rupees for expenses.

The people of the town were not unaware of an European family in their midst. On one occasion, curiosity took Philip to a meeting where the prospect of the return of the English was discussed. There was a dispute whether a hindu or muslim should take up the administration. Philip did not stay to the end. "I found all eyes turned towards me", he wrote later, "and few with a friendly look ---- and not deeming the place fit for me to remain, I returned to my family".

The following extract from a report Philip subsequently submitted is worth quoting in full -

"I cannot, however, conclude without stating that in consequence of the trouble we were in, the unusual hours we obtained food, and the food which only hunger made us swallow, and my little child having gone to bed fasting twice, has been the cause of the death of the poor thing, the food which he did take, disagreeing with him, and no medicine being procurable, the poor thing died from diarrhoea and griping. I cannot help but say shame to the Europeans, about twelve of them present, refusing to give my poor thing a Christian burial. It was suggested to me to dig a hole in the riverside and bury at dead of night. Mr. T. Luther, however, volunteered to go with me to the graveyard; and with him the Sergeant-

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Major and a few native friends (Nazir and others) we took the remains to the graveyard and gave it Christian burial".

On the 18th June, relief came in the shape of a column from Ghazipur, headed by two Chivalrous Planters, Messrs. Venables and Dunne. The refugees now came out; and on the 20th, the Nibletts with others left for Ghazipur, a place which escaped all trouble during the Mutiny.

On 27th June, Philip Niblett addressed a letter with a note (from which I have made the above quotation) to Mr. H.C. Tucker, Commissioner, 5th Division of Benares. He wrote as follows: -

"I beg to inform you of my safe arrival at Ghazipur with Messrs. Stonehouse, Smith and Martin and their families, protected by an escort under charge of Allam Singh, Jemadar. I reported myself personally to Mr. Rose (Collector of Ghazipur) who with Mr. Bachman, (Deputy Collector) have kindly provided for the convenience of my family and myself as much as they possible could....I beg your orders for the employment of my services till a Magistrate and Collector is sent to Azamgarh, when I believe I shall be required there again".