

[Tommy Atkins in Burma]

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The episode described in this article reappeared some months later as the second of the Mulvaney stories, 'The Taking of Lungtungpen', *CMG*, 11 April 1887.

The British had been fighting in Burma since late in 1885.

Private Thomas Atkins of to-day may be five foot four in his ammunition-boots, less than thirty-three inches round the chest, and hard to keep in hand; but he has still a good deal of the spirit that sent his predecessors of the Light Division up the shot-torn vineyards of the Alma. Twenty soldiers in the Ninghyan district are ordered to cross a river and burn a village. The boat in which they are to cross is pointed out to them. Unfortunately the boat has its bottom knocked out of it by dacoits. Obviously it is the duty of the party to return and point out this distressing fact to the authorities. But the party continues to go on; and a detachment of five men and a bugler, a small boy, take off their garments and proceed to swim the river; losing one man as they cross. Then, clad as was Lady Godiva on a certain memorable occasion, they walk up the bank, advance upon the village, wherein, for anything they know, there may be a hundred dacoits, and set it alight. Luckily the village is deserted, and the dacoits are flying further into the jungle; so no one is hurt, and the little band returns naked, but not ashamed, having done what they were told to do. The idea of Thomas, whom a paternal Government has supplied with a rifle and a uniform, discarding these trifles, and running about the country with nothing on in pursuit of dacoits, is very ludicrous; but the little affair has its more solemn side, and it is impossible not to admire the reckless bravery of the four men and the bugler of the 2nd Queen's on the Sittang river.