

and opened it noiselessly. The sentry was standing, leaning on his long matchlock, a few feet away. Suddenly a voice behind exclaimed, "Who is that?"

The sentry was in the act of turning round when Dick sprang upon him, and grasped him by the throat. No cry came from the man's lips, but the gun fell from his grasp as he clutched convulsively at Dick's wrists, and went off as it fell.

"Pick it up," Dick shouted, "and run."

He released his grip from the man's throat, snatched the bandolier from his shoulder, and, tripping his feet from under him, threw him heavily to the ground, and then turned to run.

The whole had occupied but a few seconds, but as he started a soldier ran out from the hut, shouting loudly. He had a gun in his hand. Dick changed his mind, turned, threw himself upon him, wrenched the gun from his hold, and, as the man staggered back, struck him with his right hand under the chin. The man fell back through the open door, as if shot. Dick seized the handle and closed it, and then ran at full speed towards the foot of the steps. They were but some twenty yards away.

"Up you go, Surajah. We have not a moment to lose!"

Dick sprang up the steps, Surajah following. As they reached the top of the wall, a shot was discharged at them by the sentry at the gate, who, ignorant of the cause of the sudden uproar, had been standing in readiness to fire. He was, however, too excited to take aim, and the bullet flew harmlessly over their heads. In another instant they sprang over the parapet.

"Lower yourself by your arms, and then drop."

The wall, like many others of its sort, was thicker at the base than on the top, and the foot projected two feet beyond the upper line, so that it was a sharp slide rather than an absolute fall. It was well that it was so, for although only some

twelve feet high inside, it was eight feet higher on its outer face, as a dry ditch encircled it. Both came down in a heap on the sand that had crumbled from the face of the wall. As soon as they picked themselves up, Dick exclaimed, "Keep along the foot of the wall, Surajah," and they dashed along until they reached the angle. As they turned the corner, they heard a burst of voices from the wall where they had slid down, and several shots were fired. Dick led the way along the ditch to the next angle, then left it and entered the village, and dashed along the street.

The sound of firing had roused many of the peasants; doors were opening, and men coming out. Exclamations of surprise were heard as the two figures rushed past, but no one thought of interfering with them. As they left the houses behind them Surajah said,—

"You are going the wrong way, Sahib; you are going right away from the ghauts."

"I know that well enough," Dick panted; "but I did it on purpose. We will turn and work round again. They will hear from the villagers that we have come this way, and will be following us down the road while we are making our way back to the ghauts."

"They ran for another hundred yards, then quitted the path, and made across the fields. From the fort and village they could hear a great hubbub, and above it could make out the voice of the officer, shouting orders. They continued to run for another quarter of a mile, and then turned.

"Now we can go quietly," Dick said, breaking into a walk; "this line will take us clear of the fort and village, and we have only to make straight for the ghauts. I think we have thrown them well off the scent, and unless the officer suspects that we have only gone the other way to deceive him, and that we are really making for the ghauts, we shall hear nothing more of them."

"It is capital," Surajah said. "I could not think what

you were doing when you turned round the corner of the fort and made for the village, instead of going the other way. But where did you get that gun from?"

Dick told him how it had come into his possession.

"It was not so much that I cared for the gun," he said, "as that I wanted to prevent the man from using it; if he had followed me closely he could hardly have helped hitting one of us as we went up the steps. By shutting the door we gained a few moments, for they were all in confusion in the dim light inside, and would certainly not learn anything, either from the man I pitched in among them, or from the sentry outside. I don't suppose any of them had an idea of what had happened until the sentry shouted to them that we had got over the wall. Then they rushed up and fired at random from the top, thinking that we should be running straight from it."

They walked along for a short distance, and then Dick said,—

"I have got my wind again now; we will go on at a jog-trot. I mistrust that officer; he had a crafty face, and as we said we belonged to a village down the ghauts, he may have a suspicion that we have been trying to throw him off our scent, and think we should be sure to double back and make for home."

They kept on their way, sometimes dropping into a walk, but generally going at an easy trot, until day broke.

"As soon as it gets a little lighter, Surajah, we will go up on to one of these rises, so as to have a good look down over the line we have come. If they are following us, we must go on at the top of our speed; if we see nothing of them, we can take it quietly. Of course, they can't have been following our steps, but it is quite likely that some of the villagers may know that the ghauts can be climbed at the point where we came up. You know we noticed signs of a path two or three times on the way up; in that case, if the officer really did think of pursuing us, he would take one of the villagers as guide."

Half-an-hour later they ascended a sharp rise, and threw themselves down on its crest.

"I don't think that there is the least chance of their coming," Surajah said carelessly; "when they had gone some distance without overtaking us on the road, they may possibly have suspected that we had turned and made this way; but by the time they got back to the village, they would know well enough that there was no chance of overtaking us."

Dick made no answer. He had a sort of uneasy conviction that the officer would at once suspect their plan, and that pursuit would have commenced very shortly after they had re-passed the fort. For some minutes no words were spoken. No signs of life were to be seen; but in so broken a country, covered in many places with jungle or wood, a considerable body of men might be coming up unperceived.

Suddenly Dick grasped Surajah's arm. "There they are. You see that I was right. Look at that clump of bush half a mile away, well to the left of the line we came by. They have just come out from there; there are ten or twelve of them."

"I see them," Surajah said; "they are running, too, but not very fast."

"We will crawl back till we are out of their sight, and then make a run for it. They must have got a guide, and are, no doubt, taking a more direct line than we are, for we may be a good bit off the stream we followed as we came along. I have not seen anything I recognise since it got light, though I am sure we have been going somewhere near the right direction. Now we have got to run for it."

They dashed off at a rate of speed much higher than that at which they had before been travelling, keeping as much as possible in ground covered from the sight of their pursuers, and bearing somewhat to the left, so as to place the latter directly behind them and to strike the path Dick had no doubt their pursuers were keeping.

"It is no use running too fast," he said, a few minutes

later. "There is a good long way to go yet—another ten miles, I should think; and anyhow, I don't think we can get down that steep place before they come to the edge of the cliff above. You see, we are not certain as to where it is. We might strike the cliffs a mile or two on either side of it, and I have no doubt they will go straight to the spot. I expect the man they have got as a guide has been in the habit of going down the ghauts, and knows his way. If it were not that we are in such a hurry to get to uncle with the news about Tip-poo, it would be much better to turn off altogether and stay in a wood for a day or two. They would not stop very long at the top of the ghauts, for they cannot be sure that we are going that way at all, and when a few hours passed and we didn't come, the officer would suppose that he was mistaken, and that we really kept on in the line on which we started."

They trotted along for some time in silence, and then Surajah said,—

"Do you not think that it would be better for us to make for the pass to the left? It is twenty miles off, but we should be there by the evening, and we should surely find some way of getting into it below where the fort stands."

Dick stopped running. "Why not go the other way and make for the pass we know?" he said. "It can't be more than fifteen miles at the outside, and once below the fort we know our way, and should get down to the village twelve hours sooner than if we went round by the other pass."

"It would be the right plan if we could do it," Surajah agreed; "but you know the rocks rise straight up on both sides of the fort, and the road passes up through a narrow cleft with the fort standing at its mouth. That is why I proposed the other pass."

"I think we had better try it, nevertheless, Surajah; we should not be more than three hours in going straight there, and shall have ample time to follow the edge of the precipice for the last five miles. We may discover some break where

we can get down ; if we should find it impossible to descend anywhere, we must sleep till sunset, then strike the road above the fort, go down at night and manage to slip past the sentry."

"The only thing is, Sahib, that it seemed as if the fort lay right across the entrance to the gorge, and the road went through it."

"It did look like that, Surajah ; certainly the road went through a gateway. But there must be a break somewhere. We could see that in the wet season a lot of water comes down there, so there must be some sort of passage for it ; and if the passage is big enough for the storm water to go through, it must be big enough for us."

Surajah agreed, and they turned off from the line that they had before been following ; no longer hurrying, but walking at a leisurely pace. They were not pressed for time ; there was no chance whatever of pursuit, and as they had been going for some six hours at the top of their speed, they were both feeling exhausted.

After proceeding for two miles, they came upon a small stream. Here they sat down, lighted a fire, mixed some flour and water—for although the ghee had been taken from them when they were disarmed, they had been allowed to retain their supply of flour for their sustenance in prison—and made some small cakes. These they cooked in the glowing embers ; they could not be termed a success, for the outside was burned black, while the centre was a pasty mass. However, they sufficed to satisfy their hunger, and after an hour's rest they again went forward. It was not very long before they stood on the edge of the rock wall ; they followed this along, but could nowhere find a spot where a descent seemed at all possible. After walking for an hour they saw a road winding up a long valley below them.

"That is our road," Dick exclaimed. "That clump of houses, Surajah, must be the one where we generally turned. I know that from below these rocks looked as steep as walls, so

there is no chance of our finding a way down anywhere between this and the fort."

Surajah nodded ; to him also the ascent of the ghauts had seemed impracticable.

"It is no use following this line any more," Dick went on. "We may as well strike across until we come on to the edge of the pass somewhere above the fort ; find a place where we can descend easily, and then lie down and sleep till it is time to make our attempt."

In another hour they were looking down on the road, a mile or so above the fort. The slopes here were gradual, and could be descended without the least difficulty, even in the dark.

"There ; do you see, Surajah, the water-course runs along by the side of the road ; there is a little water in it now. You know we used to meet with it down below, and water our horses at a pool close to that ruined village. When we start we can follow the road until we get close to the fort, and then crawl along in the water-course and take our chances. If we should find it so blocked up that we can't get through, we must then see how we can get past the place in some other way. If the gate is only barred, no doubt we should be able to overpower the sentry, and get the gate open before any alarm is given ; if it is locked, we must do the best we can. We may calculate upon taking the sentry by surprise, as we did in the prison, and on silencing him at once ; then we should have time to break up some cartridges and pour the powder into the keyhole, which is sure to be a big one, make a slow match, and blow the lock open. We could make the slow match before we start, if we had some water."

"Shall I go down to the stream and get some ?"

"You have nothing to carry it up in, Surajah ; and besides, some one might come along the valley."

"We shall only want a little water. I will take off my sash and dip it in the stream ; that will give us plenty when it is wrung out."

"At any rate, Surajah, we will do nothing until it is getting dusk. See! there are some peasants with three bullocks coming down the valley, and there are four armed horsemen riding behind them. We will go back to those bushes a hundred yards behind us, and sleep there until sunset; then we will make our way down to that heap of boulders close to the stream, manufacture our slow match, and hide up there until it is time to start. We want a rest badly; we did not sleep last night, and if we get through, we must push on to-night without a stop, so we must have a good sleep now."

The sun was low when they woke; they watched it dip below the hills, and then, after waiting until it began to get dusk, started for the valley. No one was to be seen on the road, and they ran rapidly down the slope until they reached the heap of boulders. Surajah tore off a strip of cotton six inches long by an inch wide from the bottom of his dress, went forward to the stream and wetted it. When he came back they squeezed the moisture from it, broke up a cartridge, rubbed the powder into the cotton, and then rolled it up longways.

"That will be dry enough by the time we want to start," Dick said. "I hope we sha'n't have to use it, but if there is no other way we must do so."

They remained where they were until they thought that the garrison of the fort would be for the most part asleep; then they crossed the stream and walked along by the side of the road, taking care not to show themselves upon it, as their figures would be seen for a long distance on its white, dusty surface. Presently the sides of the valley approached more closely to each other, and just where they narrowed they could make out a number of dark objects, which were, they doubted not, the houses occupied by the garrison. They at once took to the bed of the stream, stooping low as they went, so that their bodies would be undistinguishable among the rocks. They could hear the murmur of voices as they passed through

the village. Once beyond it they entered the gorge. Here there was but room enough for the road and the stream, whose bed was several feet below the causeway; a few hundred yards farther the gorge widened out a bit, and in the moonlight they could see the wall of the fort stretching before them, and a square building standing close to it.

"That is the guard-house, no doubt," Dick said in low tones; "it is too close to be pleasant if we have to attack the sentry."

Very carefully they picked their way among the rocks until close to the wall; then Dick gave a low exclamation of disappointment. The stream ran through a culvert some twelve feet wide and ten feet high, but this was closed by iron bars crossing each other at intervals of only five or six inches, the lower ends of the perpendicular bars being fixed in a stone dam extending across the bed of the stream. Dick waded across the pool formed by the dam, and felt the bars, but found them perfectly solid and strong.

"It is no good, Surajah," he said, when he returned. "There is no getting through there. There is nothing for it but the gate, unless we can find the steps up to the top of the wall and get up unnoticed. Then we might tear up our sashes longways, knot them together, and slip down. The first thing to do is to have a look round. I will get up close to the wall; it is in shadow there."

Entering the pool again, he climbed up the steep bank, which was here faced with stones. He stopped when his eyes were above the level, and looked round. There was the gate twelve feet away, and to his delight no sentry was to be seen. He was about to whisper Surajah to join him, when he heard voices. They came from above, and he at once understood that instead of a man being posted behind the gate, two were on guard on the wall above it. He beckoned to Surajah to join him, and when he did so, whispered what he had discovered.

"If the gate is only barred we are all right now, Surajah,

except that we shall have to run the risk of being shot by those fellows on the wall. We shall be a pretty easy mark on that white road by moonlight. Our only plan will be to keep close to the wall when we are through the gate, get down into the bed of the stream again, and then crawl along among the rocks; the bottom will be in shadow, and we may get off without being noticed; the only fear is that we shall make a noise in opening the gate. Now let us try it."

Keeping close to the wall, they crept to the gateway; this projected two feet beyond the gate itself, and standing against the latter they could not be seen, even in the unlikely event of one of the sentries looking down. The only risk was of any one in the guard-house coming out. This, however, could not be avoided, and they at once began to examine the fastenings of the gate, which consisted of two massive bars of wood running across it; these, by their united strength, they removed one after another. But when they tried it they found the gate still immovable.

"The beastly thing is locked," Dick said; "there is nothing to do but to blow it open."

He broke off the ends of three cartridges, poured the powder in at the keyhole, and then inserted the slow match.

"Stand in the corner there, Surajah. I will go down to the stream again to light the tinder. The noise is less likely to be heard there."

He stole back again, sat down at the edge of the water, placed his tinder-box in his lap, took his turban off and put it over his hands so as to deaden the sound, and then struck the steel sharply against the flint. The first blow was successful. The spark fell on the tinder, and at once began to extend. He listened intently. The men on the wall were still talking, and the sound had evidently not reached their ears.

CHAPTER VII

BESIEGED

DICK hastily clambered up the wall, ran to the gate, blew the tinder, and then applied it to the slow match. A moment later this began to fizzle.

"Round the corner of the wall, Surajah!" he exclaimed, running back himself. A few anxious seconds passed, then came a sharp explosion; in an instant they ran up. The gate stood two or three inches open; it yielded to a push, and they ran out. Loud shouts were heard from the men above, and a hubbub of cries from the guard-house.

"Run, Surajah! We must risk it. Keep on the edge of the road, and dodge as you go. The chances are they will run down below to see what has happened."

At the top of their speed they dashed down the road. No shot was fired from the wall, Dick's conjecture that the first impulse of the sentries would be to run down below having been justified. They were a couple of hundred yards away before two shots were fired from the gate. The bullets whistled by harmlessly.

"We are all right now," Dick cried. "They can scarcely see us, and we shall soon be out of sight altogether."

Five or six more shots were fired a few seconds later, as the men from the guard-house reached the gate. On looking back when they had gone another hundred yards, they saw a number of figures on the road.

"Not quite so fast, Surajah," Dick said. "It is going to be a long chase now. We have got three hundred yards start, and they won't be able to load again, running at full speed."

For a time their pursuers gained somewhat upon them; then gradually they began to straggle, as the effect of the speed at