

## CHAPTER XIX

## FOUND AT LAST

THE next morning, early, Dick and Surajah set to work to perfect their disguises. They had before appeared simply as two young traders, well to do, and of a class above the ordinary peddling merchant. They now fitted on the ample beards that had been made at Tripataly. These were attached so firmly to their faces by an adhesive wax that they could not be pulled off without the use of a good deal of force. With the same stuff, small patches of hair were fastened on, so as to hide the edge of the foundation of the beard. Tufts of short grey hair were attached to their eyebrows; a few grey lines were carefully drawn at the corner of the eyes, and across the foreheads; and when this was done, they felt assured that no one was likely to suspect the disguise.

Ibrahim, who had assisted in the operation, declared that he should take them for men of sixty-five, and as, before beginning it, both of them had darkened their faces several shades, they felt confident that no one at the fort was likely to recognise them. When Surajah had put on the padded undergarment and converted himself into a portly-looking old man, and Dick the great horn spectacles, they indulged in a burst of laughter at their changed appearance, while Ibrahim fairly shouted with amusement. He was to stay behind in the wood when they went on, for it would but have added to the risk had he accompanied them, as, unless also completely disguised, he would have been recognised by the soldiers with whom he had talked during his twenty-four hours' stay inside the Tower walls. He was in the evening to proceed along the road, to encamp in the last grove he came to, at a distance of a quarter of a mile from the gates, and to remain there until they returned.

Under his garments Dick had wound a thin, but very strong,

silken cord that he had purchased at Bangalore. It was four hundred feet in length, and considerably increased his apparent bulk, although he was still far from emulating the stoutness of Surajah. The halters of the pack-horses were attached to the cruppers of the riding-ponies, and after a final instruction to Ibrahim that if at the end of four days they had not returned, he was to endeavour to find out what had happened to them, and was then to carry the news to Tripataly, they started for the fort. When they approached the gate, they were, as before, hailed by the sentry.

"We are merchants," Surajah said, "and we have with us a rich assortment of goods of all descriptions—silks and trinkets for the ladies of the governor's harem, and handkerchiefs, scarves, silver ornaments, and things of all kinds suitable for the wives of those of lower rank. We pray for permission to enter and exhibit our wares, which have been collected by us in the cities where they were manufactured, and which we can therefore sell at prices hitherto unheard of."

"I will send word up to the governor," the officer said. "It is a long time since we have been visited by traders, and maybe he will grant you permission. You had best go back to the shade of those trees. It will be a good hour before the answer comes."

"I think it likely they will let us in," Dick said, as they moved away towards the trees. "It is but a short time since things were sufficiently settled for traders to venture up here, and as Savandroog lies altogether off the roads between large towns, it is possible that none with such goods as we have, have come this way since the garrison took over Savandroog from the British detachment that occupied it."

In little over an hour there was a shout from the walls, and on approaching the gate again, they were told that the governor had given permission for them to enter.

"You are to be blindfolded," the officer said, as the gate closed behind them. "No one may ascend the rock unless he



consents to this. Your horses will be led, and beware that you do not attempt to remove the bandages until you have permission to do so."

It took nearly an hour to mount the steep road, and when they came to a standstill and the sub-officer who had accompanied them told them they could now remove their bandages, they found themselves in front of a small building, close to the commander's quarters. The packs were, by the order of the officer, taken off the horses by the soldiers who had led them up, and carried into the house; the horses were fastened in the shade to rings in the wall, and on Surajah pointing out the packs containing goods he wished to show to the ladies, two of the soldiers carried them across to the governor's house. The old officer himself came to the door.

"Enter, my friends," he said. "You are the first traders who have come up here since we took over the fort, some six months ago, and methinks you will do a brisk business if your wares are, as you sent up to say, good and cheap."

The bales were taken into a room, the soldiers retired, and in a minute the commander's wife, accompanied by three or four other ladies, entered. Dick and Surajah, after salaaming profoundly to the veiled figures, at once began to unpack their bales. The assortment had been very judiciously made, and to women who had for more than six months been deprived of the pleasure of shopping, the display was irresistible. In their desire to examine the goods, the ladies speedily lifted their veils, and, seating themselves on cushions they had brought in with them, chattered unrestrainedly, examining the quality of the silks which Surajah and Dick, squatting behind their wares, handed for their inspection, comparing the colours, asking each other's advice, and endeavouring to beat down the terms Surajah named. In the first place he asked the prices marked on small labels attached to each article, but suffered himself, after the proper amount of reluctance and protests that he should be a ruined man, to abate his terms considerably,

although the ladies were evidently well satisfied that the goods were indeed bargains.

It was a long time before the ladies could make up their minds which to choose among the many silks exhibited for their selections. When this had been settled, the pack containing delicate muslins was opened, and the same scene gone through. It was altogether four hours before the purchases were all made, and even then the boxes of trinkets remained unopened, the governor's wife saying, "No, we will not look at them. We have ruined ourselves already. To-morrow, when our husbands know how much we have spent, you can show the trinkets to them, and try your best to get them to buy. These things we have been getting are our own affair. It is for them to make us presents of ornaments if they are disposed to. This evening you must come in again. The ladies from the other fort will be here then."

The purchases made were paid for, the bales again fastened up and carried across to their room. The governor met them as they went out.

"I suppose you have been ruining us all?" he said good-humouredly. "Well, it is a dull life up here, and the ladies have but few chances of spending money."

"We are to see the ladies from the other fort this evening, my lord," Surajah said. "Have we your permission in the meantime to go and sell in the soldiers' quarters? We have goods suited to the needs of their wives also, as well as those for the ladies."

"Certainly. You can go about as you please up here; it is only as to the approaches that we have to be careful. But wait in your room for a short time; I will have food sent over to you."

In a few minutes a servant brought across a large dish of pillau and several cakes of sweetmeats, the latter being, as he informed them, the special gift of the governor's wife. There was no occasion for them to start, as they had intended, after



their meal, for the news of their coming had spread, and by the time they had finished, a number of women were waiting outside; until sunset they were busily engaged in selling their goods—for the most part bright cotton cloths, red silk handkerchiefs, and cheap silver trinkets. Soldiers sauntered in and out: for these they had provided a store of pipes, tobacco, tobacco-boxes, knives, and muslins for turbans; and as the news spread that these were to be obtained, the number of soldiers increased, until the room was quite crowded with them as well as by many natives engaged in the work of rebuilding the fortifications. Surajah did the selling, while Dick's part of the work was receiving the money and giving change.

As he was stooping over a tray in front of him, piled with copper, picking up the change for silver coin, he heard a man ask Surajah for a pound of his best tobacco and a pipe. There was something in the accent that caused him to look up sharply. As he did so he started; the blood rushed to his head so violently that a mist seemed to pass across his eyes, and his hand shook so that he dropped the coins he was counting. Forgetful of the dark stain on his face, he bent forward over the tray again to conceal his emotion, forced himself to pick out the right change, and then, handing it to its owner, again looked up.

The man who was standing before Surajah was broader and taller than those around him. The sun had darkened his face until its shade approached that of his companions, and yet there was no mistaking the fact that he was a European. A heavy moustache and beard, streaked with grey, concealed the lower part of his face. Dick dared not gaze on the man too earnestly, and could see no likeness to the picture on the wall at Shadwell; but, allowing for the effects of hardship and suffering, he judged him to be about the age of his father.

The man was evidently on good terms with the soldiers, one or two of whom were chaffing him on his purchase.



DICK AND SURAJAH VISIT THE FORT DISGUISED AS MERCHANTS



"Will nothing but the best tobacco satisfy you?" one laughed.

"Nothing; and even that won't really satisfy me. This stuff is good enough, when rolled up, for cigars, and it does well enough in hookahs; but I would give all this pound for a couple of pipes of pigtail, which is the tobacco we smoked at sea."

Again Dick's heart beat rapidly. This man must have been a sailor. He could not restrain himself from speaking.

"Have you been a sailor, then?" he asked.

"Ay, I was a sailor, though it is many years ago now since I saw the sea."

"We got some English tobacco at Madras," Dick said, not hesitating for once at telling an untruth. "We sold most of it to the Feringhee soldiers on our way up, but I think I have got a little of it still left somewhere in the pack. I am too busy to look for it now, and we shall soon be going to show our goods to the officers' wives; but if you can come here at nine o'clock I may have looked it out for you."

"I can't come at nine," the man said, "for at half-past eight I am shut up for the night."

"Come at eight, then," Dick said. "If I am not back, come the first thing in the morning, before we get busy."

"I will come sure enough," the man said. "I would walk a hundred miles, if they would let me, for half a pound of pigtail."

"Get rid of them, Surajah," Dick whispered, as the man shouldered his way through the crowd; "make some excuse to send them off."

"Now, my friends," Surajah said, "you see it is getting dusk. It will soon be too dark to see what you are buying, and we have been selling for eight hours, and need rest. At eight o'clock to-morrow we will open our packs again, and every one shall be served; but I pray you excuse us going



on any longer now. As you see, we are not as young as we once were, and are both sorely weary."

As time was no object and the work of purchasing would relieve the tedium of the following day, the crowd good-humouredly dispersed.

Surajah rose and closed the door after the last of them, and then turned to Dick. He had himself been too busily engaged in satisfying the demands of the customers to look up, and had not noticed that one of them was a white man.

"What is it?" he asked, as he looked round. "Has the heat upset you?" Then, as his eye fell on Dick, his voice changed, and he hurried towards him, exclaiming anxiously, "What is it, Dick? What has happened?"

For Dick was leaning against a bale by the side of him, and had hidden his face in his arms. Surajah saw that his whole frame was shaking with emotion.

"My dear lord," Surajah said, as he knelt beside him and laid his arm across his shoulder, "you frighten me. Has aught gone wrong? Are you ill?"

Dick slightly shook his head, and, lifting one of his hands, made a sign to Surajah that he could not at present speak. A minute or two later he raised his head.

"Did you not see him, Surajah?"

"See who, Dick?"

"The white man you last served."

"I did not notice any white man."

"It was the one you gave a pound of the best tobacco to. Did you not hear me speak to him afterwards?"

"No. I was so busy and so fearfully hot with this padded thing, it was as much as I could do to attend to what they said to me. A white man, did you say! Oh, Dick!" And as the idea struck him he rose to his feet in his excitement. "Do you think—do you really think he can be your father?"

"I do think so, Surajah. Of course I did not recognise his face; nine years must have changed him greatly, and he has

a long beard. But he is about the right age, and, I should say, about the same figure, and he has certainly been a sailor, for he said to one of the soldiers that he would give that pound of tobacco for a couple of pipes of pigtail, which is the tobacco sailors smoke. I told him that perhaps I might be able to find him some in my packs, and asked him to come here at eight o'clock this evening; if I was not in then he was to come the first thing to-morrow morning; but of course I shall be in at eight. You must make some excuse to the ladies. Say that there are some goods you wish to show them in one of the other packs, and ask me to go and look for it."

"Oh, Dick, only to think that after all our searching we seem to have come on him at last! It is almost too good to be true."

Great as was Surajah's confidence in Dick, he had never quite shared his faith that he would find his father alive, and his non-success while with the army, and since, had completely extinguished any hopes he had entertained. His surprise, therefore, equalled his delight at finding that, after all, it seemed probable that their search was likely to be crowned with success.

"Of course we will manage it," he said. "I will put aside that narrow Benares cloth-of-gold work for trimmings, and you can be as long as you like looking for it. They will be too busy examining the other things to give it a thought after you have gone out."

"I can be back at half-past eight," Dick said, "for the man told me he was locked up at that hour. If it had not been for that, I should have arranged for him to come a little later. But of course I shall have opportunities for talking to him to-morrow. There is some one at the door."

Surajah opened it, and a soldier entered with their evening meal and a request that they would go across to the governor's as soon as they had finished it, as the ladies had already assembled there. They hurried through their food, and then