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ALLAN QUATERMAIN; OR— A FROWNING CITY.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD. Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Dawn," etc. Published by the ROSK PUBLISHING COMPANY, and for sale by all the Book-sellers. Copyrighted.

By this time the dense masses of the enemy's left, composed almost entirely of Nasta's swordsmen, were across the little stream, and with alternate yells of "Nasta" and "Sorais," with dancing banners and gleaming swords, were swarming up toward us like ants.

Again I received orders to try and check this movement, and I also the main advance against the chief of our army, by means of cavalry charges, and this I did to the best of my ability, by continually sending squadrons of about a thousand squares out against them. These squadrons did the enemy much damage, and it was a glorious sight to see them flash down the hillside and bury themselves like a living knife in the heart of the foe.

And so notwithstanding all that we could do, the enemy drew nearer, till at last he hurled himself upon Good's force of seven thousand five hundred regulars, who were drawn up to receive them in three strong squares. About the same time, too, an awful and heartrending roar told me that the main battle had closed on the center and extreme left. I raised on myself in my stirrups and looked down to my left; so far as the eye could see there was a long, dazzling shimmer of steel as the sun glanced upon falling sword and thrusting spear.

To and fro swung the contending lines in that dead struggle, now giving way, now gaining a little in the mad yet orderly confusion of attack and defense. But it was as much as I could do to keep count of what was happening to our own wing, and as for the moment the cavalry three fallen back under cover of Good's three squares, I had a fair view of this.

Nasta's wild swordsmen were now breaking in red waves against the sullen, rock-like squares. Time after time did they yell out their war-cries and hurl themselves furiously against the long, triple ridges of spear points, only to be rolled back as billows are when they meet the cliff.

And so for four long hours the battle raged almost without a pause, and at the end of that time, if we had gained nothing we had lost nothing. Two attempts to turn our left flank by forcing a way through the wood by which it was protected had been defeated, and as yet Nasta's swordsmen had not, notwithstanding their desperate efforts, entirely failed to break Good's three squares, though they had thinned their numbers by quite a third.

As for the chest of the army where Sir Henry was with his staff and ordered, it had held its own with honor, and the same may be said of our left flank.

At last the attack slackened, and Sorais' army drew back, having, I began to think, had enough of it. On this point, however, I was soon undeceived, for splitting up her cavalry into comparatively small squadrons, she charged us furiously with them, all along the line, and then once more rolled her tens of thousands of sword and spearmen down upon our weakened squares and squadrons; Sorais herself directing the movement, and fearless as a lioness heading the main attack. On they came like an avalanche—I saw her golden helmet gleaming in the van—our counter-charges of cavalry entirely failing to check their forward sweep. Now they had struck us, and our center bent in like a bow beneath the weight of their rush—it parted, and we had not the ten thousand men in reserve charged down to its support. It must have been destroyed. As for Good's three squares, they were swept backward like boats upon an incoming tide, and the foremost one was burst into and lost half its remaining men. But the effort was too fierce and terrible to last. Suddenly the battle came, as it were, to a turning-point, and for a minute or two stood still.

Then it began to move toward Sorais' camp. Just then, too, Nasta's fierce and almost invincible Highlanders, either because they were disheartened by their losses or by way of a ruse, fell back, and the remains of Good's gallant squares, leaving the positions they had held for so many hours, cheered wildly, and rashly followed them down the slope, where the swarms of swordsmen turned to envelop them, and once more flung their spears upon them with a yell. The ranks on every side, which remained of the first square were quickly destroyed, and I perceived that the second, in which I could see Good himself mounted on a large horse, was on the point of annihilation. A few more minutes and it was broken, its streaming colors sank, and I lost sight of Good in the confused and hideous slaughter that ensued.

Presently, however, a cream-colored horse with a snow-white mane and tail burst from the ruins of the square and came rushing past me riderless and with wide streaming reins, and in I recognized the charger that God had been riding. Then I hesitated no longer, but taking with me half my effective cavalry force, which now amounted to between four and five thousand men, I commended myself to God, and, without waiting for orders, I charged straight down upon Nasta's swordsmen. Seeing me coming,

Good was there by me smiling beamingly, and being warned by the thunder of my horses' hoofs, the majority of them fled round, and gave us a right warm welcome. Not an inch would they yield; in vain did we hack and trample them down as we ploughed a broad red furrow through their thousands; they seemed to recede by hundreds, driving their terrible sharp swords into our horses, or severing their hamstring, and then hacking the troopers who came to the ground with them almost into pieces. My horse was speedily killed under me, but luckily I had a fresh one, my own favorite, a coal-black mare Nylephia had given me being held in reserve behind, and on this I afterward mounted. Meanwhile I had to get along as best I could, for I was pretty well lost sight of by my men in the mad confusion of the moment. My voice, of course, could not be heard in the midst of the clanging of steel and the shrieks of rage and agony. Presently I found myself mixed up with the remnants of the square, which had formed round its leader Good, and was fighting desperately for existence. I stumbled against somebody, and glancing down, caught sight of Good's eye-glass. He had been upon his knees. Over him was a great fellow swinging a heavy sword. Somehow I managed to run the man through with the same I had taken from the Masai, whose hand I had cut off; but as I did so, he dealt me a frightful blow in the left side and breast with the sword, and though my chain shirt saved my life, I felt I was badly hurt. For a minute I

fell onto my hands and knees among the dead and dying, and I turned sick and faint. When I came to again I saw that Nasta's spearman, or rather those of them who remained, were retreating back across the stream, and that Good was there by me smiling beamingly.

"Near go that," he shouted, "but all's well that ends well." I assented, but I could not help feeling that it had not ended well for me. I was sorely hurt.

Just then we saw the smaller bodies of cavalry stationed on our extreme right and which were now reinforced by the three thousand sabres which we had held in reserve, flash out like arrows from their posts and fall upon the disordered ranks of Sorais' forces, and that charge decided the issue of the battle. In another minute the two enemy were in slow and sullen retreat across the stream. Then came another hill, during which I managed to get my second horse, and received my orders to advance from Sir Henry, and then with one fierce, deep-throated roar, with a waving of banners and a wide flashing of steel, the remains of our army took the offensive and began to sweep down, slowly indeed, but irresistibly, from the positions they had so gallantly held all day.

At last I was free to attack. On we moved, ever the piled-up masses of dead and dying, and were approaching the stream, when suddenly I perceived an extraordinary sight. Galloping wildly toward us, his arms tightly clasped around his horse's neck, amidst which his blanched cheek was tightly pressed, was a man arrayed in the full costume of a Zu-Vendi general, but in whom, as he came nearer, I recognized none other than our best Alphonse. It was impossible even then to mistake those curling black mustachios, those eyes, those teeth, those lips, those hands, and those feet, which were cut down, till at last somebody caught his horse's bridle, and he was brought to no just as a momentary halt occurred in our advance to allow what remained of our shattered squares to form into line.

"Ah, monsieur," he gasped out in a voice that was nearly inarticulate with fright, "grace to the sky, it is you, Ah, what I have endured! But you win, monsieur, you win; they die, the laches. But listen, monsieur—I forget, it is no good, the Queen was murdered to-morrow at the first light in the palace of Milosia; her guards will leave their posts and the priests are going to kill her. Ah, yes! they little thought it, but I was eusebened beneath a banner, and I heard it all!"

"What?" I said, horror-struck; "what do you mean?" "What I say, monsieur; that devil of a Nasta, he went last night to settle the affair with the archbishop (Agon). The guard will leave open the little gate leading from the great stair, and go away, and Nasta and Agon's priests will come in and kill her. Themselves, they would not kill her."

"Come with me," I said, and shouting to the staff officer next to me to take over the command, I snatched his bridle and galloped as hard as I could for the spot, between a quarter and a half a mile off, where I saw the archbishop flying, and where I saw a man that I should have known as being the archbishop's bodyguard, clearing his path of dead and dying men, and splashing through pools of blood, on past the long, broken lines of soraismen, to where, mounted on the white station Nylephia had sent to him as a parting gift, I saw Sir Henry's horse towering above the generals who were still in the advance began again. A look I saw that his eyes were as bright and keen as ever. Beside him was old Unsiopogas, his ax red with blood, but looking quite fresh and unharmed.

"What's wrong, Quartermain?" he shouted. "Everything. There is a plot to murder the Queen to-morrow at dawn. Alphonse here, who has just escaped from Sorais, has overheard it all," and I rapidly repeated to him what the Frenchman had told me.

Curtis' face turned deadly pale and his jaw dropped. "He gasped, and it is now sunset; it dawns before four, and we are nearly a hundred miles off—nine hours at the outside. What is to be done?" "An idea entered into my head. 'Is that horse of yours fresh?' I said. 'Yes; I have only just got on to him—when my last was killed, and he has been fed.' 'So is mine. Get off him, and let Unsiopogas mount; he can ride well. We will be at Milosia before dawn, or if we are not—well, we cannot help it. No, no; it is impossible for you to leave now. You would be seen, and it would turn the fate of the battle. It is not won yet. The soldiers would think you were making a bolt of it, quick, now.'"

In a moment he was down, and at my bidding Unsiopogas sprang into the empty saddle. "Now farewell," I said. "Send a thousand horsemen with remounts after us in an hour, if possible. Stay, despatch a general to the left wing to take over the command and explain my absence."

"You will do your best to save her, Quartermain?" he said in a broken voice. "Ay, that I will. Go on; you are being left behind." He cast one glance at us, and, accompanied by his staff, galloped off to join the advance, which by this time was fording the little brook that now ran red with the blood of the fallen.

As for Unsiopogas and myself, we left that dreadful field as arrows leave a bow, and in a few minutes had passed right out of the sight of slaughter, the smell of blood and the turmoil and shouting, which only came to our ears as a faint, far-off roaring, like the sound of distant breakers.

TO BE CONTINUED

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