

was crowned by a rampart of rocks which formed a small natural fortress, capable of affording some sort of protection to men and horses; and here the little force took up a position. Dickie Smith and his friend, an American scout of renown, crouched side by side in their places, watching with strained eyes as the light grew. But there was nothing to be done: the enemy, except for a few feeble flashes here and there, was nowhere to be seen, and though some of the men blazed away with great energy, there is little satisfaction to be gained from wasting good ammunition on rocks and brushwood, when all that you possess is in the belt on your shoulder, and the chances of a further supply are extremely remote.

'Get clear before it is lighter,' said Luke Carnaby, and a man and horse slipped silently away to the rear. Another man followed on foot. Should the swift messenger for help fail the slower and less conspicuous one might fare more fortunately.

The two vanished into the shadows, and at the same moment the rifle shots out yonder ceased as suddenly as they had begun. The first shafts of sunlight turned the far mountains rosy, and bending lower, brought hill after hill out of obscurity: the misty shadows of the kloof were dispersing, its thousand innocent inhabitants, furred and feathered, came forth to a morning world fragrant and dim with dew. But still the enemy made no sign, and Luke Carnaby, straining his eyes through his field-glasses, knew that the silence boded him no good.

'That Portuguese, Basto,' said Dickie. 'Eh?'

'Umph!' grunted his neighbor, who was a man of few words.

'Queer thing,' said Dickie. 'That fight in the Stormberg, you remember. How did the Boers know our plans? And now again. Queer thing.'

'Where's Basto now?' asked the other.

'Went on patrol yesterday and hasn't come back. Dashed queer thing,' mused Dickie.

'A pity,' said the American. His mouth closed grimly, but he opened it again to say, 'I guess I'll know him again when I see him.'

'And in the meantime,' Dickie added, 'he has set us up here to make a target for our friends opposite. Never knew Carnaby taken in like this before. Strikes me we are in a bit of a hole.'

He laid his rifle across his knees, and began fingering the sights. 'Twelve hundred,' said the American, nodding at the opposite slope. Dickie fired at random into the maze of rocks and bristles, and Luke Carnaby looked round over his shoulder.

'Steady there with the ammunition,' he said quietly.

It was one of those moments which force a man to realise that, however clever he may be at his work, he is still only human. The enemy, who he, Carnaby of Carnaby's Scouts, could at that moment have proved conclusively to be thirty miles away, was all about them, obviously well informed of their position and movements, and probably laughing in his unwashed sleeve at their stupidity. Luke, raging behind a calm exterior, saw himself completely outwitted, bested at all points, by what agency he could not then stop to think. He chafed bitterly under the inaction which he knew was the only possible course for him to pursue.

He turned round to say something to his men, when all at once they were ducking and bending to avoid a spluttering volley which was poured in on them from the other side of the kloof. An answering volley echoed from their rear.

The noise of the rifles went thundering along the hills and waked them roughly from the repose of years. But the great blue mountains looked on gravely from afar, and took no part in the struggle of these men, blood-brothers as they were, fighting, they scarcely knew why, for a cause which was no more to them than a name. The blue mountains had looked on other fights as meaningless perhaps, in the dead dark days of blood and savagery.

The Boers dodged on foot about the rocky slope. When one of them showed for a moment, which was seldom, he was instantly the mark of a dozen rifles; but for the most part the English reserved their fire, seeing, even without their leaders' somewhat emphatic hints on the subject, the futility of expending cartridges on an almost invisible enemy. Slowly but certainly the cordon grew closer. In the rear the Boers, under cover of a projecting spur, had drawn within a few hundred yards; but here they did not command the English position, though they effectually cut off retreat.

In front things were still more serious. The Boers advanced with consummate skill, creeping from rock to rock and from bush to bush until they reached the bottom of the kloof. Here was open ground for a space, and here the English concentrated a desperate fire; but in vain. Boer after Boer rolled over; a dozen figures lay on the narrow strip of grass; but still others came on undaunted, and as fast as they reached cover they began to come up the hill.

Again the fusillade stopped, and now the air was full of other sounds. The groans of the wounded Boers lying below, the shriek of an injured horse close behind him, smote on Dickie's ear out of the sudden stillness. The horse was plunging about amongst the others, creating dire confusion, and it was necessary for someone to go and put an end to its sufferings with a bullet. Dickie arose from his crouching position among the stones, and walked across to do so, and when he came back he remained on his feet looking eagerly down the hill, his tall young figure dark against the sky.

'Lie down!' cried the American in the gruffest of bass voices. His hand closed like a vice upon Dickie's ankle, and in a moment that young gentleman was measuring his length upon the ground. 'You young fool!' said the American sternly. 'Go and make a target of yourself somewhere else if you must—not just alongside the finest scout in the British Army!'

Dickie jeered at him, and got on his feet again as soon as possible, for something of considerable interest was going on below. A tall Boer had popped out from behind a rock quite close to them—so that they could note distinctly every detail of his rough and

ragged dress—and was calling on them in bad English to surrender. He slipped back behind his shelter just in time to avoid the shower of bullets which, by way of reply, whistled indignantly about his ears.

'Not yet!' shouted Luke Carnaby, feeling in his pockets for revolver cartridges. Luke's face showed still that look of quiet self-possession which in the hour of danger gives a man power over his fellows; but his deep-set eyes were blazing, and his heart was sick with the horrible passion for revenge which seizes the best of men, when he has watched friends and comrades stricken down beside him.

The Boer put out his head again. 'I am sorry,' he said in his own quaint tongue. 'We do not want to shoot any more of you.' He disappeared once more, and how or when he subsequently slipped away no one had leisure to notice; for at that moment a deeper, more distant thunder broke through the intermittent crackle of the rifle fire, and away over a hill to southward, plain for all anxious eyes to see, came a puff of smoke with a yellow flash in the heart of it. Carnaby's Scouts looked at each other and laughed, and a cheer broke from their parched throats.

'And that's all right,' said Luke's lieutenant, standing at his elbow. 'By Jove, I didn't think it possible that our express would get through.' He sighed and emptied the last treasured drops from his water-bottle. Then he bent down to twist a blood-stained handkerchief tighter round his leg, just below the knee. 'Never would have believed it,' he repeated, as he picked up his rifle and straightened himself.

Luke glanced round to where five motionless figures lay side by side close behind him, their broad hats over their faces; glanced behind these at the rough shelter of branches with which an attempt had been made to protect a dozen wounded from the blazing sun. 'They will have to make haste,' he said; and even as he spoke his companion gave a little start, a little gasp, and rolled over at his feet.

Luke looked at him once, and turned away, his brain whirling as the horrible, feverish desire for revenge shook him again. The enemy, willing enough before to play a waiting game, knew that they must soon be outnumbered and came pressing on. They exposed themselves recklessly and gave Luke many opportunities; and three or more of them fell before he filled his magazine for the last time, and flung the empty bandolier aside. He was still untouched, but that last effort on the part of the Boers scattered the dead and dying thick around him. There was no longer time to carry them to the rear: they lay where they fell, and the sight and sound of them kept their leader's passion at red heat.

The shells were bursting on the nearer heights: and those Boers who had guarded the rear began riding past down the hill, in full retreat. At this the fire from below ceased abruptly, and Carnaby's Scouts rose to their feet and sent a quavering cheer after the retreating enemy.

Away across the kloof they could see the Boers climbing the hill to the hollow where they had left their horses. A shell, bursting noisily at the bottom of the kloof, hastened their movements. Then another dropped unpleasantly near the Scouts, filling their little fortress with smoke and dust.

'I say,' shouted Dickie Smith, wild with excitement, to the Boers galloping past. 'I say, I wish you would go back and ask those chaps of ours to take care what they're about. They're shelling us!' Receiving no answer to this request, he began cheerfully to sing the Volkelied.

"Heft Burghers, lieder," he chanted at the top of his voice. A young Boer, riding some distance behind his retreating comrades, turned his head to look: and as he did so his horse, struck by a rifle-bullet, dropped dead under him.

Man and horse rolled over for 20 feet down the hill-side, and then lay still. Luke, sparing a glance for them as his eyes swept the prospect, thought that the rider too was killed: but after a few minutes the latter began with some difficulty to extricate himself from his dead steed, and presently stood upright.

His comrades had none of them observed his mishap, and were long since out of sight. The English, busied with their wounded, took no heed of him: and presently, finding himself almost uninjured, he began to climb up towards the spot where he had fallen, and where his rifle still lay. He picked up the rifle and sat down on a stone, considering what to do next.

Dickie, having done his share towards aiding the wounded, returned to his post near Luke. The two stood watching, as shell after shell burst on the hill from which the Boers had made their first advance. The gunners had found the range now: their missiles dropped with pitiless accuracy, and men and horses fell to every shot.

The Dutch boy watched too. He saw his friends flying and falling as the shells burst amongst them, and his eyes narrowed and grew hard. He looked to see if his rifle had been injured by its fall.

But nineteen-year-old Dickie felt his heart swell with triumph. Since daybreak he and his companions had held their own; for many hours, and at the cost of many lives, they had kept their position; and now it was over and the victory was to them. He sprang on a rock and waved his grimy old hat round his head, and shouted at the full pitch of his voice, 'God Save the Queen!'

At 50 yards it was an easy shot. Dickie dropped like a stone. The smile was still on his face as he lay, but his eyes, turned on Luke, widened piteously. 'God Save the Queen!' said Dickie again: and died.

The Dutch boy crouched low, clutching his rifle. He saw Luke's face for a moment, white and terrible, with blazing eyes—the face of an avenger. But the long kloof grasses closed softly over his head as he fell, and it was with tender thoughts, of fragrant earth and blue-eyed lobelia blossoms, and of a purple butterfly that fluttered for a moment above him, that his childish life ebbed away.