

**THE SIEGE OF SUNDA GUNGE.**

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

On the 1st of July, 1857, the Indian mutiny was at its height. For ten days the little British station at Sunda Gunge had been besieged by the insurgent Sepoys.

The station was divided into two portions: the lower, consisting of the Indian village, and the upper, part of which, including the magazine and the British residency, was strongly fortified. Within this portion the English residents had retired on the first signal of approaching danger. The rebels fortunately possessed only one small piece of cannon, which had proved quite ineffectual against the walls of the enclosure. Provisions were not scarce, and up to the present moment the garrison had entertained strong hopes of being able to hold out until relief arrived.

Suddenly a new and unexpected danger had arisen.

The buildings inclosed within the fortifications formed an open square. In the middle of the square was the well which supplied the garrison with water. About five o'clock in the afternoon a group of several persons were standing in the shelter of an archway which opened into the square, and gazing with looks of consternation and dismay in the direction of the well.

The cause of their alarm was singular. The town was situated at the foot of a range of hills, and from one particular point upon the slopes outside the walls the well in the middle of the square was visible. This the Sepoys had at length discovered. Their single piece of cannon was at once posted at this point, and brought to bear exactly on the well within the town. The result of this proceeding is self-evident. If one of the garrison should now venture into the square for the purpose of fetching water, he would run an imminent risk of being blown to atoms by a volley of grape shot.

The group of spectators looked in silence at the well. The same thought occupied the minds of all. There were women in the garrison—delicate English ladies, girls and children—and within the room set apart for the purpose of a hospital wounded men were moaning for water. Water, at all costs, must be had—even in face of a vigilant enemy and a loaded cannon. But how?

Over a fringe of mango-trees and the roofs of some low bungalows to the right of the square, a knot of dusty figures could be descried at a certain point on the hillside. The dark point marked the spot where the cannon was posted. Even as the spectators looked toward it the cannon boomed—there came a puff of smoke and a flash of fire—and at the same moment the ground about the mouth of the well was torn up by a fierce hail of shot. The gunners were trying their range, and what is more, it was only too evident that they had found it.

The spectators looked significantly at one another. Four of the group were English soldiers, the rest were natives. Of the latter, two were water-carriers, each of whom carried about his waist a large hollow belt of skin, capable of containing several gallons of water. The duty of these men was, in ordinary times, one of no particular danger. But now the case was altered. There they stood trembling, their dusky faces turning to a sickly yellow, as they stared at the space of shattered greenery which the storm of shot had torn up all round the mouth of the well. The other natives were all Sikhs, and these, with the impassive courage of their race, looked on calmly and betrayed no emotion.

Of the Englishmen, two were private soldiers; the other two were officers—Colonel Daxilas, the officer in charge of the garrison, and a young lieutenant, St. George Vane. The colonel was a tall, gray man, grave, stern and martial. The lieutenant was a young man of not more than five or six and twenty, with blue eyes, fair mustache and careless, handsome features, much bronzed by exposure to the sun.

The colonel was the first to speak. "This is an awkward business, Vane," he said. "We might drive these towards the well, but they will certainly be blown to pieces, and we shall get no water. And at night, with this moon, it is as light as day. One could see a mouse stirring."

"True," said Vane reflecting, "yet—try! one of us might go out alone and try to bring in water. If they hit him, as they most likely will, three of the others can be ready to rush out, and may bring him in and the water as well, before they have time to load again," and he looked inquiringly at the colonel's face, eager to learn what he thought of the proposal.

"The cannon is not the only danger," said the colonel. "They have rifles there as well."

"True," said Vane, "but a rifle at that range would most likely miss—a shower of grape is different."

The colonel hesitated. No commander likes to send brave men on desperate ventures. But he could see no other scheme which would not involve much greater risk of life with still less prospects of success. And they must reach the well in some way—the necessity was vital. If once their supply of water were cut off their chance was gone. They could not last twelve hours.

Vane had kept his eyes fixed upon the colonel's face.

"Let me try," he said, eagerly. "Give me a few men—a score will volunteer—and we will laugh at these black scoundrels yet."

The colonel hesitated—but only for a moment. There was no man in the garrison whom he valued and trusted more than St. George Vane. He knew well the danger of the proposed adventure, and he knew well, also, that Vane, if he were allowed to undertake it, would

never rest until his task succeeded, or he himself were killed in the attempt. But in warfare private feelings must give way to the general good. After a moment the colonel laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and said, briefly:—"Try!"

II.

An hour or two later Vane entered his own room.

It was a large apartment, situated at the back of the walled enclosure, which, on account of its size, had come to be used by the officers as a common room. Its windows opened on a wide veranda,

which extended the whole length of the building, having the windows of other rooms also opening upon it. The largest of these rooms had been set apart for the use of the ladies of the garrison, and as the veranda was cool, shady and retired, they were often accustomed to sit there in preference to breathing the close heat of the room within.

At the moment when Vane entered two figures were sitting on the veranda, not far from his own window—two girls. One of these was a tall, slight girl, pale and light-haired—not handsome, nor even remarkable, except for her eyes, which were large, gray, serious, and, when at rest, deep rather than bright. Her companion, on the other hand, was a girl of singular beauty—a girl with dark hair, dark eyes rather full red lips, and skin of soft and flower-like bloom. The name of the pale girl was Mary Sulland; that of the beautiful one was Lenora Dundas. The latter was the colonel's daughter; Mary Sulland was his ward. Before the mutiny they had lived, together with an old English servant, Mrs. Jessop, in the colonel's bungalow, outside the fortified enclosure.

The characters of these two girls we will leave to reveal themselves as we proceed, only recording the relations in which they stood to St. George Vane, who had known them both since they were children.

Like all men of her acquaintance, Vane admired Lenora greatly, and sometimes half believed himself in love with her, and whether he were really so or not, he had been accustomed for years to call himself her worshiper. On the other hand, though he liked Mary Sulland very warmly, and would have done anything in his power to give her pleasure, he never told himself that he was in love with her, nor even thought about it.

Both the girls, on their side, regarded Vane with feelings far different from those of ordinary interest. But it is characteristic of each that while Lenora never forgot that Vane was a rich man, Mary Sulland never gave the fact a thought, nor would have considered the subject of much interest if she had.

The two girls were now alone on the veranda, anxious, restless and uneasy. It is true that at that moment nothing alarming was either to be seen or heard. No noise of war was in the air; scarcely a sound disturbed the evening silence. In the earlier days of the siege there had been continued assaults upon the walls, but these had now been given up as hopeless, and, except for the distant humming of the human swarms among the huts and bazaars of the Sepoys round the walls, the place was still. But "over all there hung a cloud of fear"—a sense of impending danger, as of the sword hanging by a single thread; the cruel uncertainty as to what is going to happen, which makes the peculiar horror of a passive siege. In such a situation the ear is always listening, the nerves are ready to start at every sound, and the mind is kept stretched constantly upon the rack.

Vane, on entering the room, had no knowledge that the two girls were at that moment on the veranda, so near to his own window. He had just been round the station, and had got together with some difficulty half a dozen men who could be spared from active duty at the watch-posts on the walls; and these, as he had given orders, were now collected about the door of the room, awaiting his arrival. Four were English, two were Sikhs—every man of them, as Vane knew well, to be trusted to the death.

These men he now placed on one side of the table, while he himself stood on the other. Then, in a few words he explained to them the nature of the service for which they were required; adding that he only wished for volunteers, and that any man who disliked the duty might retire at once. Not a man stirred, however. The Sikhs saluted gravely; the British soldiers, true to the immemorial custom of their race when called upon to face a special danger, broke into a cheer.

Vane looked round him, and his eyes glistened; but he said simply:—"The man that goes out first will run by far the greatest risk. Who will undertake that duty?"

There were, as already stated, six men present, besides Vane himself. Six right hands immediately saluted—there were six competitors for the privilege of being the first mark of the Sepoys' cannon. Vane smiled.

"We must draw lots, I see," he said. Opening a shallow drawer in the table, he took out of it a pack of cards.

"Here are seven of us," he continued. "I am going to deal these cards all round. Whichever of us receives a certain card—we will say the knave of spades—will be the man selected." A hush fell on the six spectators—a hush of rising interest. Except for the slight fluttering noise made by the falling cards, not a sound was to be heard. Strange that there is something in suspense which affects the mind more strongly than the actual danger. These men had volunteered, without a space of hesitation, to face the risk of death. Yet not one of them could look on without a tingling of the blood, as they waited for the card to fall which carried a man's life!

Such was their absorption that they did not see two faces which came suddenly peeping in upon them through the window of the room.

The two girls on the veranda had been startled by hearing all at once the sound of voices in the room close by them. From their position they could not overhear every word that passed. They heard the short speech in which Vane announced to the men the danger which threatened the well, and the duty which was expected from them; they heard his appeal for volunteers, and then the cheer which followed. So far they had remained motionless, eagerly drinking in the details of the proposed adventure; but when Vane took out the pack of cards in order to select a man by lot, to listen, without seeing, was impossible—and in a minute the two faces came peeping in at the window in the manner just described.

From this position they could see clearly every card as it was dealt. The cards fell slowly, one by one, before each man in turn. The deal went round—card by card, as it appeared, the focus of nine pairs of eager eyes. The second deal went round—no knave of spades as yet appeared. The fourth began; would that complete the circuit of the seven? The pack was growing thin, and expectation deepened now with every card. Where was the knave of spades? It must come soon! Again the cards went round.

No! Not quite. As the last card of the round fell upward on the table, a thrill went through the nerves of the spectators. The two girls at the window shrank back suddenly, as if they had been shot. There was the fatal card at last! The lot had fallen to Vane himself!

The young man laughed lightly as he threw down the pack.

"That settles it," he said; "I go first. You will meet me at the archway in half an hour from this time; it will then be dusk, and we will give ourselves what chance we can. I shall go out alone; the rest of you will wait under cover of the archway, and will rush out the moment they fire at me. If I fall, two of you must bring me in—Sanderson and King can do it. The other four must try to get a bucketful of water each—there will be time for that. I think, though it will be sharp work. Remember, at the archway, with all ready, in half an hour."

III.

The men saluted and filed out. Vane was left alone. He turned, and was about to seat himself at the table, when to his surprise he saw a figure standing in the window of the room. He looked again—and saw that it was Lenora.

What could have brought her there he knew not; the truth he did not guess. Wondering, he took a step or two in her direction, and was about to ask her what she wished, when she came hurriedly forward and stood beside him.

"St. George," she said, "you must not go—you shall not go. Tell me you will not; promise me."

As she spoke, he thought for the first time, of the veranda; she knew what he was going to do. He would much rather that she had not known; but he answered simply, "It is my duty, Lenora."

"Duty!" she repeated with impatience. "Oh, yes—but do not go! Send some one else; surely there are plenty of men. Do not go, St. George." She laid her hand upon the young man's arm, and looked up into his eyes.

Great is the power of beauty—though it be the beauty of Dellore. It could not make a man like Vane forgetful of his duty, or shake for more than a moment his natural resolution. But as he looked down at the lovely lips which tempted him, he did not turn at once away. And yet her words jarred on him. He felt no surprise; he knew Lenora well; but he would have chosen that the girl to whom he gave his love, though she might part from him in agony of mind, would not have him shrink his duty in face of danger. Love might be dearer to her than life, but honor should be dearer than either.

He was on the point of speaking, when there appeared at the window of the room another figure. They both looked up and saw it. It was Mary Sulland. Her face

was very pale, and as she came forward a close observer might have seen that she was trembling. But her eyes shone with a strange light, and when she spoke her voice, though low, was thrilling in its distinctness. Her first words showed that she had not overheard, or had not understood what had already passed between Lenora and St. George.

"We know where you are going," she said with shining eyes. "Lenora shall not be alone in bidding you Godspeed before you go. I have come to do so, too"; and, as she spoke, she looked as a Spartan maiden may have looked when she sent her lover forth to death or glory.

At the first sound of her voice Vane started. Their eyes met, and one might have thought that some reflection of the light in hers had flashed into his own. Without a word he took her hand and pressed it to his lips. Then with the same action of farewell to Lenora he turned away to go, reached the door of the apartment, and was gone.

The whole scene was over almost in a moment. Yet scenes as brief have often been the turning-point of lives—and so it was to be with these.

(To be Continued.)



A man cannot straddle the fence when it comes to the question of good health or ill health. Either he marches under the flag of health or the banner of death. It is the simplest thing in the world to gain and keep health, if men and women only will. For that reason it is almost incredible that men and women will continue to neglect their health even after they must realize that they are marching under the banner of death.

The great majority of diseases have their inception in indigestion, biliousness and impure blood. Among these diseases are deadly consumption, nerve-racking, brain-wrecking nervous prostration and exhaustion, body-torturing rheumatism, insanity, breeding neuralgia, emaciating malaria and all manner of disfiguring blood and skin diseases. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery is a cure for all these diseases, if taken in anything like reasonable time. It is not a cure-all, but cures the diseases mentioned for the reason that they are caused and aggravated by the same disorders. It makes the appetite keen, the digestion perfect, the liver active, the blood pure and builds firm flesh and healthy nerve fiber. Don't be wheedled by a penny-grabbing dealer into taking something else.

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**PERSONALITIES.**

John B. Duke, the millionaire cigarette maker, says that he never smoked cigarette in his life.

Herbert Gladstone declares that the story recently published that his father had learned to ride a bicycle is a hoax.

The tallest policeman in the world is said to be William O. Robinson of Knoxville, Ia., who is 7 feet 11 inches in height.

Albert Abeille, a brother of the man whom Edward Parker Deacon shot in Nice a few years ago, recently blew out his brains in Paris.

S. F. Smith, who was recently elected mayor of Davenport, Ia., is the eldest son of the late Dr. S. F. Smith, the author of "America."

Carmen Sylva has received the decoration for arts and science from the emperor of Austria. She is the first woman to win this distinction.

It is said in London that the young Duke of Manchester, whom rumor has reported engaged to so many different girls, will really wed the eldest daughter of William Waldorf Astor.

Norway's storthing has voted a lump sum of 4,000 kroner (\$1,080) each to Nansen's 12 companions and 8,000 kroner a year for five years to Captain Svendrud, who is to command the next expedition in the Fram, planned for 1898.

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