

The extra rigour with which the prisoners were guarded had led Nessus to suspect that a prisoner had escaped, and a month having passed without his seeing Malchus, he determined on making an attempt at flight. So rigorous was the watch that there was no possibility of this being done secretly, and, therefore, one day when they were employed in repairing the foundations of the wall outside the city Nessus seized the opportunity, when the attention of the guards was for a moment directed in another quarter, to start at the top of his speed. He had chosen the hottest hour of the day for the attempt, when few people were about, and the peasants had left the fields for an hour's sleep under the shade of trees.

The Roman guard had started in pursuit, but Nessus had not overrated his powers. Gradually he left them behind him, and, making straight for the Tiber, plunged in and swam the river. He had followed the right bank up to the hills, and on the second evening after starting made his appearance at Capua. When he heard the plans of Malchus he announced, as a matter of course, that he should accompany him. Malchus pointed out that, with the rewards and spoils he had obtained, he had now sufficient money to become a man of importance among his own people. Nessus quietly waived the remark aside as if it were wholly unworthy of consideration.

The cavalry who were to accompany Malchus were light-armed Numidians, whose speed would enable them to distance any bodies of the enemy they might meet on their way. With them were thirty led horses, some of them carrying a large sum of money, which Hannibal had directed should be paid to Malchus from the treasury, as his share, as an officer of high rank, of the captured booty. The rest of the horses were laden with costly arms, robes of honour, and money as