

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a sudden commotion at the edge of the crowd ; the dead silence was broken by shouts and cries. For a moment I thought that even these brigands were mutinying against a scene which resembled some savage heathen sacrifice, and which the behaviour of the victim rendered yet more ghastly. He—and I am positive it was not bravado—had crossed one leg over the other, and, having taken out a book, was quietly reading it, while waiting for the blow. But Flamenka and I looked forth across the hollow. And then more loudly and more fiercely rose the shouts into yells of rage and terror, as a troop of Hussars rode on at a quick trot through the broken circle, using their sabres as they came.

It was a surprise ; and it was smartly done. The brigands, thrown into a panic by the onset, fled in every direction ; and, as the ground cleared, my heart leaped to recognise my friend Phil in front of the Hussars. He must have escaped, then, from the ambush ; he must have fallen upon help and rescue by one of those chances which are always befriending those who make a point of throwing chances away.

"They're safe, the horses—both of 'em," he shouted at me as soon as he came within hail. A bullet whistled past my ear ; and the last I saw of Mannocho was his disappearance into the copse