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THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF

WANG FOO

By SIDNEY C. PARTRIDGE

THE GOLDEN CARP

No European student of China and its ways has ever successfully completed the list of the many and various uses to which its wonderful plant, the bamboo, has been put. There certainly is no more remarkable illustration in nature of the adaptation of a plant to man's needs than is furnished by this graceful and pliant grass—for, strictly speaking, it is really that, and not a tree. It grows anywhere and everywhere, and with such rapidity that its progress can be easily marked from day to day with the naked eye. Indeed one of the awful punishments of the early code was to tie a culprit securely down over a pointed sprout and allow it gradually to force its way through his prostrate form, thus killing him by inches. From the cradle to the grave it is the Celestial's faithful friend and servant. He is rocked in it in his infancy, fed with it in his childhood, supplied with every variety of utensil from it in his manhood, and finally carried on it to his last "happy home." His house, his furniture, his tools, his books, his chop sticks, his nets, his pipes—the staff that sustains him and the rod that smites him—are all part and parcel of the same heavenly plant. No wonder that they gratefully speak of it as one of the gods' best gifts to man. Over sixty varieties, no two of them alike, are mentioned in the native books, and the literature on the subject is inexhaustible.

"Bamboo encouragement" is a familiar term to every Chinese school boy. He knows that when a little gentle stimulus is needed to make him "back" his books more thoroughly, the ever-ready "graceful grass" in the teacher's hands will furnish it on the moment. In this he is at a little disadvantage as compared with the American boy, who can see the rod and sometimes dodge it for he recites with his back to the instructor and—unless there be a convenient mirror at the back of the school room, which there never is—the chastening and stimulating bamboo does its fatal work before he can avoid it. The Chinese professor of the native lore takes no chances with his game, and and he generally aims pretty straight. And this is how it comes to pass that a few judiciously administered blows—even in later life—to bring out the truth, are popularly known as "Bamboo encouragement."

"The prisoner seems to be a little modest or diffident about answering my questions," a magistrate will say in a native court; "he needs a little encouragement." And the lictors proceed forthwith to "encourage" him with some fifteen or twenty well-directed blows, which generally has the effect of loosening the strings of the tongue and enabling him to incriminate his neighbors.

These introductory remarks explain the peculiar phraseology of the suggestion which Tak-Loy, assistant compradore of Royve and Co.'s warehouse, made to Mr. Royce himself when the latter accused the head wharf-coolie of stealing.

"There surely is a lot of thieving going on right here under our very noses, and you can't tell me that he doesn't know about it. Of course, he knows all about it and is getting a big squeeze out of it himself. But I can't get any satisfaction out of it. He swears the tallies are all right when they leave the gang-plank, and all right again when they get to the go-down with the rice-bags, and yet we are neary a thousand pounds short on the Chip Sing's cargo alone and she's a small boat, don't you know."

"Mr. Loycee," replied the compradore,' I think more botter we encoulage he how fashion you tinkee?"

"Encourage him! Why, good heavens, what do you mean? Make him steal more?"

"Please you s'clase me. No stealee more. My tinkee China school encoulage, all same bamboo."

"Oh, you mean to beat him, do you? Is that what you call your bamboo encouragement? Well, how are you going to do it without all of us getting into the Mixed Court and paying more than the whole thing is worth?"

"P'laps more better you talkee policeman first. S'pose he can savvee, all light, s'pose he no savee, more better bamboo that number one coolie."

"All right, we'll put the police on this the first thing tomorrow morning."

Chief Detective Morehead of the Shanghai Office was engaged in a private conversation with Wang Foo, the famous detector of crime, when Mr. Royce's card was sent in from the outer room. Mr. Wang had been requested to come up from Hong Kong (at the earnest solicitation of Dr. Cortelyou, the U. S. Consul) and co-operate with the local police in their attempts to solve the mystery of the murder of an American subject, and they were discussing the details of the crime just at this moment.

"We will have to suspend the conversation for a while, Mr. Wang, for this gentleman has come to consult me about a complicated robbery case and I know he is anxious for an immediate interview.

"Certainly," replied the gracious Chinese guest; "would you like me to call again a little later in the day?"

"Not at all; I want you to remain right here, if you kindly will, for I am sure you will be interested in this case, and I have no doubt you may be of some very practical help to us. Won't you stay?"

"Always at your service and that of the Department, Mr. Morehead."

Mr. Royce entered and after having been introduced to Wang Foo, expressed himself as especially pleased that he could be present at the interview. The three gentlemen took seats and the officer motioned to Mr. Royce to begin.

He gave a full and detailed account of what had taken place on the wharf and in the go-down and ended up by saying that he had no doubt whatever that some very skillful thieving was going on all the time—and that the head wharf-coolie was in league with the gang—but in spite of the most careful watching, not a trace of anything could be found. As an illustration, he cited the case of the "Chip Sing" with five hundred bags of rice. Every bag was examined on leaving the ship and a bamboo tally given for it to the coolie, who carried it across the wharf to the go-down, and who then handed his tally to the compradore and received his few coppers cash in his hand. There was absolutely no chance for any tampering with the bags, for they were watched from the time they left the ship until they were deposited on the go-down floor. Now for the mystery:—the bags were weighed at Swatow on leaving and then the iron hatch was securely locked; they were weighed again on being taken out of the go-down at Shanghai and they were several hundred pounds short! Not a human being had had access to them on board the ship—the mate swore to that, for he held the keys—and they had been constantly and securely locked on shore. The only possible suggestion was rats, but rats unfortunately cannot gnaw through the steel plates of a steamer or the galvanized sides and floors of a warehouse; and, then, rats always leave traces of their work in the holes in the bags and the scattered grains of rice lying about.

"You are quite sure the bags were all intact?" inquired the Chief.

"Absolutely so—every one of them is examined to see that no strings have been cut, when it is brought ashore."

"It certainly looks like ghosts, Mr. Wang, doesn't it?" turning to the quiet but very interested listener.

"Yes; you know the Chinese believe that hungry ghosts are particularly fond of rice, especially of this fine Swatow variety," smiled the man of mystery in reply. "But—they like it cooked, not raw, and they never cook it themselves, so you see they are dependent upon their human friends to secure it and cook it for them. Ghosts are made the scape-goats for a good deal in China, as they are in England, but they are never guilty of purloining guncooked food; that, I am obliged to say in their defence, is a purely mortal pastime. So, Gentlemen, I am afraid we shall have to rule out the ghosts as well as the rats."

"What theory or explanation have you to offer, then, Sir?" inquired Mr. Royce.

"It would be impossible for me to offer any explanation off hand, sir:—whatever conception I may already have formed mentally—without a careful survey of the scene of the supposed robbery and the privilege of an interview or two with the parties most nearly concerned. Perhaps Mr. Morehead would do me the honor to show me over the scene tomorrow."

"Delighted to do so, Mr. Wang, at any hour that may suit Mr. Royce."

When the same party of three met a few evenings afterward, Wang Foo took from his sleeve the leather-covered note-book in which he had entered the data of the robbery and, accepting the Manila cheroot which his host tendered him, leaned back in his chair and looking at Mr. Royce in a strange, quizzical way, asked slowly but distinctly:

"You say that every bag of rice was weighed carefully at Swatow and again at Shanghai?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And you found a difference of several hundred pounds?"

"Yes, Sir; in fact, nearly a thousand on the consignment."

"And you have taken every precaution a dnmade every effort to find the loss, but without success?"

"Indeed we have, Sir, but the leak goes on as merrily as ever."

"I dislike to seem discourteous in differing with you, Mr. Royce, but there is one precaution you didn't take."

"And pray, what is that?"

"You weighed the rice-bags—but you omitted to weigh the coolies!"

"Weigh the coolies? What do you mean, Sir?"

"Why, simple this; the excess weight of the gang of coolies at the close of the day would be about equal to the weight of the stolen rice. It's like the law of specific gravity, you know; the weight of the article is equal to the weight of the water which it displaces."

"Do you mean they stole it and hid it in their clothes, then?"

"I most certainly do, Sir."

"Well, when and how did they steal it? Solve that mystery for me and I will acknowledge you are indeed a wonder."

Wang Foo put his long hand up his right-hand sleeve and drew out therefrom a slender piece of bamboo about eight inches long. It was hollowed out and the end was sharply pointed like a pen. Attached to it was a long bag resembling a stocking with a very small leg and a very large foot.

"Here, Gentlemen, is your solution. You see this is neither 'rat' nor 'ghost;' on the contrary, it is something very simple and human. The coolie who carries the rice-bag has this apparatus concealed beneath his clothing. The bag is fastened around his waist and the bamboo is concealed in his collar. When he is given the bag on the ship, he places it on his right shoulder and steadies it with his right hand, his left hand grasping the tally-stick which the compradore collects. Now for the trick—with his right hand under the bag he pushes the bamboo pipe up through the meshes until he reaches the grains of rice and then they begin to flow slowly but surely down through the tube unto the stocking. The rocking motion of his body as he walks assists the flow—like good exercise for the dyspeptic—and before he reaches the go-down he has several pounds inside his garments. He then draws the bamboo down into his collar and no one is ever the wiser."

"Did you ever see anything clever than that, Mr. Morehead?" asked the merchant.

"It certainly beats me," was the Chief's brief but emphatic answer.

"And, pray, what do they call this diabolical invention, Mr. Wang?"

"I am told," replied the Detective, with a rather significant smile, "I am told that they call it 'The little bamboo assistant or encourager.' Your compradore suggested a little 'encouragement,' did he not?"

"Yes, but not exactly that kind."

"True, not exactly that kind, but still of the same bamboo, was it not?"

"Yes, I believe it was—a wonderful plant, when all is said and done, Mr. Wang, is it not?"

"One of heaven's best gifts to man," replied the Chinese scholar, as the ancient saying goes:

"How restful by the waters cool,
To watch its graceful waving!"

"As far as the case itself is concerned, Mr. Wang," remarked Dr. Cortelyou, the Consul to his visitor from Hong Kong, "it seems clear enough to the American eye, but you know I haven't been here four years without realizing that in every one of these international rows, 'there's always a little nigger in the wood pile,' as we say in the United States. You are familiar with that phrase, are you not?"

When the stoker struck him he cried out "Swim up the dragon pool, you golden carp! Swim up the pool!"

"Oh, yes indeed, Sir, though I am told that in Boston they express the same sentiment a little differently."

"Ah, how is that?"

"I believe they say that 'there's a lurking suspicion of a diminutive son of Africa's having concealed himself in the accumulated kindling,' or something to that effect."

"Diminutive son of Africa is very good," laughed the Consul.

"Yes, you know the difference between Boston and Chicago, for instance, in the mode of expression reminds me of the difference between the classic language of the literati of China and the vernacular of the provinces sometimes. I suppose you find it so in every country, do you not?"

"As far as my limited travels permit me to judge, I believe you do—but to go back to our case: the evidence all shows that there had been bad feeling between the second mate and the stoker for some time, owing to some row on shipboard, and it finally culminated in this Hongkew scrimmage when Jackson attempted to throw the fellow into the creek and he had to hit him back, as he says, in self-defense. Of course, Jackson was drunk at the time, for he and some of his cronies had been imbibing at that 'Happy Anchorage' place near the bridge and I suppose when he came out and saw the stoker he thought it would be a good chance to get even with him on shore. Now when men are under the influence of liquor, they generally come through all right, as you know, when a really sober man would succumb, but in this case he must have fallen very heavily on the pavement, for the doctor said his skull was fractured when they picked him up."

"Well, where is your nigger in the wood-pile?"

"Why, just here, Mr. Wang, and this is really the reason why I have sent for you; the jin-rik-sha coolie and the others all testify that when the stoker struck him he cried out: 'Swim up the dragon pool, you golden carp; Swim up the pool,' and in spite of all my efforts, I cannot find anybody who can explain these words. Now, what had Jackson to do with a dragon pool and why did the stoker tell him to 'swim up?' There seems to be some mysterious hidden meaning in these expressions and the more I think of them, the more I am convinced that there's some connection between them and the murder."

Wang Foo looked very thoughtful for a moment. "Have you inquired of the missionaries?" he asked.

"Yes, I have had a number of them in here with their Chinese teachers and all that I can find is that 'The carp swims up the dragon pool' is a phrase which is used to signify literary ambition. They tell me that it hangs on the walls of Chinese schools and is engraved on the slabs of ink and painted on the covers of the books and all that sort of thing. The idea seems to be that as the carp struggles up against the current of the stream, so the scholar ought to struggle onward and upward against all obstacles."

"They are quite correct, Mr. Consul; it is one of the most treasured phrases in our literary life, and would be instntly recognized by any Chinese scholar."

"True, but what in the world has a literary phrase to do with a couple of sailors and a street fight? That's what puzzles me. They are about the last words in the world you would expect to hear from the lips of a second mate—to say nothing of an ordinary stoker."

"Yes, Sir, they are hardly part of the language of the sea, though a good many native sailors would remember them from their early schooling, as they learn these sayings very early in life."

"Still," persisted the Consul "I am perfectly convinced that there was some special reason for the use of the words and that when we find that reason we shall have some additional light thrown on the case. Now, Mr. Wang, I appeal to you. You are the only man in China who can help me out, and I shall never rest content with the evidence until I do."

"Be assured, Sir, that I shall do everything in my power to assist you, but, as you well know these things take time. I hope to see you again in—shall we say a week?"

"A week from tonight, Mr. Wang, and my good wishes go with you."

When Wang Foo reached the home of the basket-maker, where he always stayed while in the Settlement of Shanghai, he enjoyed with them the humble evening repast of rice and eggs and pork and cabbage, with some choice Hong Kong pickles which they had saved in his honor, and after the tea and pipes he mounted the little stairs to the upper room and gave himself to thought—and work.

A gentle knock was heard at the door and, opening it, he saw before him little Toy Ching, the basket-maker's son.

"Is the honorable guest very busy just now?" he timidly asked.

"Not at all, litie prince; pray enter and be seated."

The lad entered but reverently remained standing—he would not dare to sit in the presence of the scholar.

"Would the Venerable Elder-born hear him 'back' his morning's lesson?"

"With pleasure. Give me the little book."

It was the eighth chapter of the Analects and the subject was. "The Three Duties of a Gentleman." Carefully they went over the words together: "to banish from his bearing all violence and levity; to set his face ever to the truth; to purge his speech of all that is low and base."

"I fear I have greatly worried the Teacher," Toy Ching said, as he bowed his thanks and bade his guest goodnight.

"To teach without being weary—is not that true joy?" replied the gentle scholar as he bade his pupil depart in peace. "Stay a moment; what have you painted on the cover of the book?"

The boy held up the volume to his gaze, and Wang Foo read these golden words:

.."The Carp Swims Up the Pool."

The sailor, the stoker, the carp and the pool—what was the mystic spell that had linked these four together? That was the problem and he would beginto try to solve it on the morrow.

The partitions between the upper stories of the ordinary Chinese houses in the Settlement are not always of brick or even of plaster, but of thin boards so full of cracks and knot-holes that they have to be pasted over with paper to secure even a semblance of privacy. This, which would be most objectionable to European tenants, does not seem to disturb the native mind in the least. They seem to accept the condition of things very philosophically and the fact that domestic squabbles occasionally occur does not in the least affect their serenity of mind, even though several families enjoy the proceedings together. Once in a while, however, things are said and done that if overheard are apt to cause trouble, and such was the case on the evening when the Chang family, at a certain number in the Lucky Star Alley, discussed its private plans in the full hearing of the Choo family, who rented the adjoining apartment. Now it happened that the eldest son of the Change was a close literary rival of the eldest son of the Choos, and they were both soon to take their departure for the great examinations at the capital. To whom would the coveted honor go? To a Chang or to a Choo? Perhaps to one—possibly to neither.

Every encouragement had been given them by their relatives and friends and all sorts of good wishes had been tendered them. They had both burned large quantities of midnight oil in perfecting their studies and as far as the public mind was concerned, both were equally well fitted for the contest. There remained just one all-important thing, viz: the consulting of the soothsayer at the temple and the selecting of the lucky day and hour for the departure. This detail was duly attended to and the young men set off for the capital.

It was the last day of the third session, the most critical time of all in the Chinese mind, and the one when they needed the utmost concentration of thought on the literary tasks before them, when Chang, the father, announced to his family in the upper room that he was going to "seek the omen of the golden carp" upon the morrow.

"If the carp swims up the dragon pool, our son will win" he cried: "it is the unfailing omen of the gods of literature. If he swims down—he fails. At exactly noon the carp will give the answer."

Through the cracks of the partition the Choos had overheard it all! A hurried secret consultation followed and it was resolved to thwart the plan of the Changs at any cost. Early in the morning Choo, the father hastened to the Temple of the Golden Carp outside the Eastern Gate. He sought the head priest and thus addressed him, in the privacy of the inner court:

"Venerable Father which way swims the Golden Carp tomorrow?" pointing to the rock-work pool before them.

The old priest eyed him carefully—"One cannot tell beforehand the ways and whims of the Sacred Fish," he answered. "He may swim up; he may swim down; 'tis not for mortals to control him."

"Listen!" said old Choo, as he opened out before him a palm filled with silver coin, "tomorrow at exactly noon he swims down the pool, not up—you understand?"

The priest's eyes glistened as he saw the coin. He hesitated for a moment, then seized the proffered bribe. "Silver may sometimes change the course of gold," he said; "is it not so written in the Book of Changes?"

Punctuality was not of paramount importance at the Temple of the Golden Carp and so it came to pass that it was exactly noon by the ancient time-piece of the Temple when the city time was only eleven, and this was also the reason why the aged priest mistook the sailors for the Changs when they presented themselves at the Dragon Pool.

"That fortune-teller in the other temple is a villain and a cheat," exclaimed the stoker, "I follow my aged father's guidance and seek the omen or the Golden Carp. If he swims up, then I slay Jackson—if he swims down then the second mate slays me! Watch him closely, for my life depends upon it!"

They stood in silence before the pool while the great golden fish lay quietly at the bottom of the water. The old priest seized a gong and struck it twice, then blew a shrill note or two upon a little pipe. The fish suddenly started and rising almost to the surface shot down like an arrow to the further end of the enclosure.

"He swims down! He swims down!" cried the sailors, and rushing out into the roadway, jumped into their jin-rik-shas and started for the river.

Just an hour later, old Chang appeared at the Dragon Pool and watched the priest go through the same performance. The Golden Carp swam up!

"The Omen! The Omen! He wins, he wins!" he cried with joy. "My son shall wear the Golden Button of the Second Degree; honor at last has come to the family of Chang."

Wang Foo, the Consul, and Inspector Gubbins were closeted together in the inner office when the time came to unravel the tale. The man of mystery explained it all. He showed how the stoker's family, after listening to his tale of the mate's cruelty, had made him swear on the altar of his gods to avenge the insult to the family name; how he had decided to meet Jackson somewhere while on shore and fight it out with him, if need be, to the death; how he had been driven at last to consult the great Omen of the Golden Carp and how, when the mate attacked him, he had shrieked out the words, "Swim up the Dragon Pool!" fearing the man would drown him in the river. He told the story of the Changs and Choos and how the mistake in time had led the priest to mistake one party for the other, and had saved the day for both.

"Mr. Wang," the Consul said, as he rose and took his hands, "you have done a splendid work for truth and justice in clearing up this mystery. We know more about the Chinese people and their ways and thoughts today than we ever did before. I thank you."

"But just how did you get hold of this gold-fish-temple connection with it?" asked the Inspector with some interest.

"Oh, that came about quite naturally. Some teachers in the school my little friend attends told me of it and the sacred fish, and I thought I would look it up. I happened to notice the old clock was an hour off, so that led the old priest, for a few coins to tell me the story—you see, I was disguised as a brother priest myself and that threw him off his guard."

"And how do they work the gold-fish trick? I mean, how do they make him swim up or down?"

"Oh, I learned that in the old temple at Foo Chow, where they train them. It takes five years or more to train a carp like that. You see, one blow on the song means 'Up' and two blows means 'Down.' The wooden post that supports the gong goes deep into the earth and connects underneath with the pool; tais enables the sound to be carried through the water—the fish couldn't hear it through the air—that's what mystifies the people."

"Just one question more, Mr. Wang,

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