

Robbery Under Ground



AN ORIENTAL EPISODE

by R. L. POCKOCK

Da-Siao-Tung is the native name for a cinnabar mine in central China which has been worked for centuries by the primitive methods known to the native miners. With fire they cracked and loosened the solid rock and with hammer and mallet they chiselled it out bit by bit, until the mountain, in which the deposit of cinnabar lay in horizontal formation and which forms a wedge with perpendicular sides between the fork of a great canyon which cuts deep into the hill-studded plateau of Wen-Shan-Chiang, the place of "ten thousand hills," was drilled with passages like a rabbit warren and hollowed in places into great chambers, inside which could be put a good-sized church and inside those to which the daylight could penetrate whole families built their huts and passed their lives.

Many a fight and many a murder has taken place in the dark recesses of the underground city, where the human ants worked and quarrelled and fought as only a horde of Chinese with their quick child-like passions can work and quarrel and fight.

As the workings of the mine grew larger and larger, so the horde of workers grew more and more numerous, until, at the time that the "foreign devil" mining engineer came and saw and coveted the mines for his "foreign devil" company many a hundred men, women and children were directly dependent for their means of subsistence on the ore which they mined and sorted and treated in the Da-Siao-Tung.

Small wonder then that it was not at first an easy matter to reconcile them to the change of ownership and the change of working methods when the "foreign devils" had made their bargain with the Chinese government and the Chinese owners, and came to take possession of the mine which had been worked by the latter and their ancestors many and many a generation before the coming of the "foreign devil out of the sea."

By degrees, however, those of them who were employed to carry on the work of extracting and treating the cinnabar ore by modern methods under the management of the foreign owners, who bought the mine and sent their engineers and overseers to work it, recognizing that they were better paid and better treated under the new management than under the old way before the coming of the whites, gained confidence in their new masters and worked willingly and well, and, although the men actually engaged in the workings than before, the community generally in the mining town adjacent to the workings was more prosperous and richer in this world's goods, good wages regularly paid without "squeezes" and without deductions, shorter hours, and better working conditions soon brought the Chinese to see that they were really better off than under the old system, and the company came to have a force of orderly, good-natured workers who never gave any very serious trouble.

Cinnabar dust, however, in that part of the world is much as gold dust here, good as cash, and the clean, red cinnabar used to be panned out by the natives in just the way that a gold miner pans out the yellow metal, and, exchanged in the market for copper cash or goods, a small quantity of it was comparatively valuable and easily secreted in the folds of a girdle or a turban; consequently, pilfering was common, and the custom was to search all the miners and coolies as they left work to prevent the loss by stealing becoming serious. Chinese here may have learnt that honesty is the best policy, even as some of them there came to learn it, but speaking generally, the Chinese there were only honest through fear of the consequences of being found out to be the reverse.

Pilfering was a matter of everyday occurrence, and provoked little notice, punishment followed detection and the incident was speedily forgotten, but robbery under arms was a much more serious affair.

The penalty for armed robbery in China is death, and the Chinese, naturally an exceedingly ingenious people, have exercised their usual



COOLIES SORTING ORE

ingenuity in devising different ways of carrying out the death sentence. The popular idea is that criminals are executed in China by decapitation; so they are sometimes, but there are other ways of doing away with the undesirable, such as the cage (in which the victim has just room to stand with a cord round his neck and a certain number of bricks under his feet, of which one is removed each day until the end), and other still more revolting atrocities, the details of which are hardly pleasant reading, so that it will be apparent that an armed robber is usually a pretty desperate character who will do his utmost to elude capture.

On the other hand the Chinese soldiers, the equivalent of our policemen, are usually pusillanimous to a degree and best described by the one expressive Chinook word "culis." Their efforts to capture desperadoes are not usually very sincere, and the robbers are more often than not given plenty of time to get out of the way and comparatively seldom brought to book for their crimes. Consequently China is overrun with them, in the wilder districts especially.

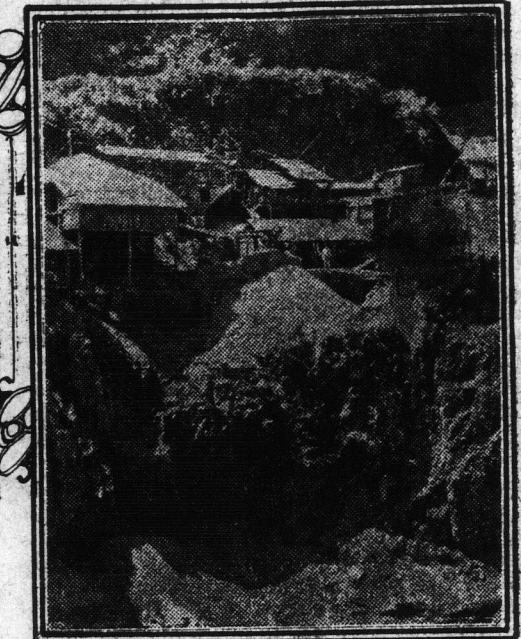
Life in the foreign compound of the mining company operating the Da-Siao-Tung was more or less monotonous; as said, the capture of a petty thief trying to smuggle a small quantity of stolen cinnabar out of the mine concealed in his clothes was of too frequent occurrence to provoke comment, but there was certainly "something doing" when one evening at dinner, I, who was at that time in charge of the working of the Da-Siao-Tung, was disturbed by a messenger in hot haste from the mine about half a mile away, to say that there were six armed robbers in the workings and that, if we made haste, he thought we could catch them as he had seen them without their seeing him. I should be explained here that we were not working a night-shift at the time and that at night the mine was left in charge of a few soldiers who had their quarters inside the entrance. Walls had been built at the two main entrances of a height sufficient to prevent scaling, the ramifications of the old workings were extensive, and the mountain side was honeycombed with holes and openings, few of which showed on the plans of the mining company in their London office. It was through one of these old entrances that the robbers had made their way, and, in making his rounds, one of our watchmen had seen their light up in one of the richest stopes before they had been able to discover his, and, putting out his own, had been able to get a clear view of them without arousing their suspicions; they, on the other hand, trusted so implicitly to the usual capacity for sleep of the average Chinese night-watchman, and his reluctance to clash with men of their kind if it could possibly be avoided that they had left no one to act as sentinel, and were working away at the task of collecting as much as possible in the time at their disposal of the rich broken ore on the floor of the stope.

Knowing the ways of the wily Oriental, we were hardly sanguine of making a capture, it seemed so much more likely that the soldiers in charge of the mine at night had been squared, and that this visit to the compound was just a bluff to "save their face" when it should be discovered next morning that the rich stope had been looted, but still there was a possibility that the tale was right, and so the rest of the dinner was allowed to look after itself while I hurried aloft

down to the mine accompanied only by my "boy," a former soldier who had also been an executioner at an earlier stage of his career,



TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES



CONCENTRATING WORKS AT MINE



THE AUTHOR AND ONE OF THE ORE SORTERS

and was one of the few Chinese soldiers I came across in my sojourn among them who seemed to be afraid of nothing.

It should have been explained that the compound in which the white men of the mine staff lived was supposed to be protected by a company of soldiers, in the pay of the company but under the command of a Chinese commander, of the rank (bought as usual with hard cash) of general in the Chinese army. It was the duty of this gentleman of rank to try and to punish all ordinary malefactors caught committing misdemeanors in the employ of the company, and of course by rights it was his job to undertake such an expedition as the present and do his best to catch the offenders and bring them to book. Although the men under his command occupied quarters inside the compound wall, the commander had a house in the native town about half-way between the mine and the compound, and the man who brought the message had given him the tale on his way to the compound, so that as I with my ex-executioner attendant hurried down to the entrance of the mine I overtook the commander with the eight or ten men he had collected to accompany him just outside; now this commander was a big man and had to do things decently and in order; the escape of a robber was a much less serious affair than any slight risk to his personal safety or interference with his comfort. Those who know the Chinese of the interior will be well acquainted with the old-womanishness, to coin a phrase to fit the meaning it is desired to convey, of the average Chinese gentleman. In the present case the commander and his squad had proceeded down to the mine with large lanterns going ahead and with no attempt whatever at secrecy or quietness, his excellency was unaccustomed to walking and was carried to the scene in his chair by coolies, his progress was necessarily slow, so that, if the robbers had not been so absolutely confident of being unmolested as not to leave a man to keep "cave" at the entrance and warn them of the approach of the enemy, they would have had ample time to receive warning and make good their escape.

In this case though, they had been just a little too cocksure and had left none on guard, which piece of bravado proved their undoing. Before leaving the compound, the mine interpreter, a Shanghai man with a great contempt for the local native and absolutely no fear of him, had been told to get two or three men together and hurry down to the other main entrance at the opposite end of the mine,

which penetrated the mountain from one side to the other, and to wait there in order to intercept the robbers if they tried to force their way out at that end. This entrance was protected with a padlocked door and stone wall too high to be scaled without a ladder, so that to carry out these instructions was an easy matter and entailed no danger.

Meanwhile at our end the Chinese commander proceeded to take up a perfectly safe position where there was no fear whatever of the miscreants seeing him if they sallied forth. He took from his "boy" a fearful-looking sword of enormous dimensions and hid himself securely in a little blind drive where he was perfectly safe, explaining that if the robbers came he would be able to jump out upon them.

This was quite to our liking, as we meant, if possible, to effect a capture, and did not want to be hampered with any such useless encumbrances inside the workings, as this commander would undoubtedly have proved to be. Some of his retinue were armed with percussion muzzle loaders and we had no desire to have them following us along narrow passages in the semi-darkness of a mine, lit only by the candles we were carrying, with these weapons pointing at the small of our backs; they were therefore instructed to line up at the entrance and stop all or any who should appear and try to pass, while the writer and the old-time executioner started into the mine, the former with a big Colt's 45 revolver, and the latter with the weapon of his former office.

Crawling quietly and carefully through hundreds of feet of narrow and low passages, peering carefully into every corner, we proceeded, until, in the heart of the mine, we entered the big chamber off which led the working in which we hoped to catch the robbers at work, though greatly fearing that we were on a wild goose chase and that they had long since taken the alarm and made good their escape. As luck would have it, they had not been alarmed, and, as we came round the last corner, we caught the glimmer of a light in the rich stope which was at about eighteen feet higher level than the main chamber and was reached from it by a ladder.

Hastily screening our own lights, the executioner performed a master stroke by crawling forward noiselessly in sandaled feet and calmly removing the ladder. Hardly had he done so before we heard voices and saw a light coming towards the chamber from the opposite end. This was a puzzler, we, of course, supposing it to be some of the robbers; the executioner, however, recognized the voice of the interpreter and told me so. I was thus enabled to concentrate my attention at once on the spot where the ladder had been, just in time. The robbers, hearing the voices, rushed to the jump-off to find the ladder removed, and to look straight into the barrel of the big Colt held well in the light of a candle.

It was a bloodless victory. The native has a vast respect for foreign firearms, and the writer knew enough of the local dialect to be able to make himself clearly understood when he shouted to them that the first man who made any movement to try and climb down would be shot. The interpreter came up with the reinforcements, being by no means contented to obey orders and stay at the entrance to prevent an attempt at egress, and the robbers, six in number, were caught like rats in a trap.

The first command was for them to throw down their arms to the floor of the chamber. After a show of reluctance cut short by a very voluble flow of Chinese from the interpreter, so voluble that I was unable to follow it, but which was apparently very persuasive in its eloquence, down came three ten-foot long spears and three murderous-looking knives of horrible proportions. These were grabbed by our men and promptly thrown down a winze to make sure. Unarmed, the villains were made to come down the ladder one by one and their hands securely tied behind their backs, when they were marched in triumph to the compound and thrust in durance vile to await judgment; word being sent to the brave commander, still lurking in his ambush at the entrance, of the successful capture.

This doughty individual was charged with the duty next day of conveying the prisoners to the prefect of Tung-Zen-Foo, the prefectural town about a day's journey away, who, very much to my own relief, decided partly at the request of the European manager not to visit them with the extreme penalty of the law, allowing them to escape with their

A NATIVE MINE IN THE VICINITY



DA-SIAO-TUNG, MINE ENTRANCE

THE FRENCH HEROINE

The heroine of French novels has always differed from those of any other nation. She has been extreme always. Either she belongs to the upper ranks of life, where the trammels of conventionality may be carelessly ignored, or she was altogether beyond the pale of law and order. A few of the latest women novelists are endeavoring to alter these conditions. Their aim has been to invest the Frenchwoman of the bourgeoisie or middle classes with sufficient romance to render her attractive to the modern novel-reader. To some extent the example of a certain group of English writers has been followed, and recent French heroines are placed in circumstances similar to those feminine types who have been presented to the British public as embodying the aspirations and ideals of the middle-class heroine of today.

The Bride and Her Dot

In France the women of the bourgeoisie have always enjoyed a certain liberty and something of an independent position, because of the dot provided by their parents. Even modern novelists do not leave this dot out of their calculations. In the average household the dot comes from sources that English people would scarcely have worked to the same advantage. To use types from real life is permissible as a side issue to the novelist's creation. A peasant woman in the South of France had made a success of growing mushrooms, and she bequeathed her mushroom tunnels to her granddaughters. The girls were infants when the grandmother died, and the parents rigorously set aside the revenue from the mushrooms. They educated their girls and set them in the way of earning a good income as teachers, and the girls plainly look forward to the time when, if still earning their own living at 40, they will be in a position to retire as rentieres.

In a quaint little town in the sunny South, too, a huge snail stretches over a shop door out of a gilded shell. Underneath is written "Escargots" (vine snails). Within the shop there is nothing to be seen but at certain seasons a stout and smiling elderly peasant. Her daughters were so well dowered that they married into the bourgeoisie, and now have good, comfortable homes, with large banking accounts. In her early years this woman was left a widow with two children and a very modest income. She went into the vineyards and gathered the vine snails, considered a delicacy in France, and sold them to such good account that she very soon established herself in the little shop with the gilded spail as a sign. Her business grew and grew. Women and children came from miles round bringing baskets of vine snails, which she bought for a trifle and sold at a profit in her shop. Gradually she supplied the neighboring towns. Still the business waxed prosperous, until today the baskets of vine snails have increased manifold.

It is with women of such practical spirit, such capacity for turning small things to account, when they go to the realities of middle-class life for their heroines. The French girl of today has similar tastes to those of the English. Life in Paris, in a little flat, is a trifle more picturesque in its suggestions than in London, if, for a young girl, it is hedged about with more difficulties. The French girl who goes in for artistic work appears to find a congenial atmosphere more easily, and it is, to all appearances, less difficult for the writer, even of limited income, to form a salon and to find herself the centre of an admiring crowd, sought after by society, flattered, and over-estimated.

In France the state schools offer good opportunities to women, but, as judged from the pictures of writers of today, the life is more grey and dull than the life of the English school mistress. This, as suggested, might arise from the lack of imagination in the women themselves. Women novelists show how frequently as a school mistress the French woman of very humble origin may raise herself by dint of sheer hard work and ambition to a considerable position. In France, as in England, there are scholarships that give sufficient opportunities to students to improve their chances. From simple and obscure villages they enter for the state examinations. They find their way to Paris to study at the Sorbonne.

THE

(By Sir Ray Lankester.)

A very beautiful kind of mon at Felixstowe is the troglodytea, which has a attached to a rock or stone floor of the pool, on the bands its thin, long, raylike dark brown and white, and yellow. As soon as you into the sand, and is very. The most beautifully color ones are the little Corynones, which you may find jewels, each composed of and creamy pink and lilac surface of slabs of rock at Channel Islands. One of facts in natural history is little things live in the of fish or crab, has ever when you turn over that demonstration of the truth statement that many a ge- rene is concealed in the depths of ocean! A splen Weymouth Dianthus, so dredged up in Weymouth six inches long, and has small tentacles arranged around the mouth. It is bright salmon-yellow color. When kept in an aquarium its disc on the glass wall slowly moves, allows piece come torn off and remain. These detached pieces be- mouth, and grow to be anemones.

If the disc were spread to little anemones without they remained in continuity we should get a composite animal, made up of many connected at the base. This a whole group of polyps, anemones. They grow like, or "encrusting" many hundreds and even thousands each with its mouth and their inner cavities and be- are the "coral polyps," of old writers, of so many further feature of great "coral" is the production of calcite or limestone, which the surface of the adhesi- formed in deep, radiating to the soft animal from a deposit of calcite is contin- "stock," or "tree," and anemone-like animals die, ter is left, and is called "co- ly this white coral shows surface, which correspond discs of the soft sea and which deposited the hard common group (represent- coast by the so-called "found growing on the ov- low-tide rocks) the hard not form cups for the m- which secrete it, but take- porting central or axial- branched tree (sea-bush- fleshy mass of polyps are the case with the precious of the Mediterranean (w- "undersold" actually in- markets by a similar re- usually offered as the gen- is not!).

On the British coast find coral-forming polyps consisting of two or three anemone-polyps united a group of hard calcite cup- Balanophyllia) is not un- at a few fathoms depth, to the Norwegian fiords, where you have 300 fath- order to get really luxuri- beautiful Lophophelia while the North Fjord near Sta- shrub-like masses of a fo- white marble cup stand- an inch long and two-thi- and the stems giving sup- of clinging growths (a- pleura!) and sheltering worms and starfish.

But these, beautiful nothing, so far as mass- of growth are concerned the reef-building corals, the tropics. There the- glomerated sea anemone hundreds of tons of sol- mile of sea bottom from build up reefs, islands, at- rock. They get the cald seaweeds and shell-mar- whelks, and microscopic the sea—the water of the it ready in solution for- gets it from the rivers an- away and dissolve the- now raised into mountain- itself dissolving again in- ing creatures have so cal- it. Sea water or fresh v- bionic acid gas dissolved stone and chalk—it be- "hard." Neutralize the- (as is done in the well- for softening water), a-