

ing tumultuously, bumping into broken timber and river craft, turning in the eddies and rocking like a chip on the waves.

We scarcely spoke as we held fast to what seemed firmest, expecting every moment to be rolled over and submerged. The awe of the situation, the roar, and our sense of helplessness struck us mute, as we whirled along in deep darkness at the mercy of the waters. Time and again we fouled with junks.

We must have been carried eight or ten miles, when we grounded among brushy tree-tops on something which we concluded might be the roofs of brick or mud houses. Wright and I laid hold of the brush, while Frost again went to the furnace. He and the engineer still hoped to steam away. But the screw was found to be foul of something, and could not be started.

Day broke at length over a vast turbulent expanse of water, covered with trees, great quantities of timber, houses, many groups of people perched on roofs, and scores of poor wretches clinging to various driftwood. These people shouted mournfully to each other for assistance.

One great shed which had somehow held together came drifting toward us, black with human beings, dogs and cackling poultry. It rocked and rolled from side to side as it drove toward us. If it struck the launch that would be our end. But it grounded three hundred

feet away, swayed—swayed down and rolled completely over. There was one despairing howl, and they all went under together! Then a score of black heads rose in the muddy water, swimming hard and screaming as they were swept by out of our reach.

Our attention was soon caught by a vast pack of drift, including much timber, many houses, scores of carts and barrows, broken boats, a half-filled junk, trees, fodder and thatch. All kept together, and came driving on till we were caught in the mass, carried away from the tree-tops and swept along for a mile or more, when the launch's bottom struck an obstruction.

Immediately the pressure of the pack against her broadside, from behind, rolled her over on her beam-ends.

Wright and I jumped for our lives, and fell on the floating timber, over which we scrambled to the side of one of the floating houses. As I clutched the bamboo eaves of the house, I heard an explosion like a cannon behind me, and turning saw a cloud of steam as the water reached the furnace, and the launch rolled over.

Out of that steam cloud we heard Lee Wung calling wildly. It cleared in a few seconds, for the launch had sunk. We then caught sight of Lee Wung, holding on amongst the drift stuff, but could see nothing of Frost, the young Chinese engineer, or the cook.

Pulling a long bamboo roof-pole out of the house, we extended it to Lee Wung, and towed him to the house eaves.

We shouted Frost's name again and again, and for a time were quite unmanned to have lost him. We never saw him after we jumped and the launch rolled over. Nor did we see any more of the two Chinese.

The tragic death of a fellow-countryman, our true and tried friend, so depressed us that we lost our nerve, and for a time quite despaired of pulling through.

#### CHAPTER V.—DOWN THE YANG-TSZE.

Frost was dead, and we seemed unlikely to survive him many hours. The house to whose eaves Wright, Lee Wung and I clung floated on, swaying alarmingly.

When Wright had climbed upon the roof, we lifted our mandarin patron up after him; but when I attempted to follow, the house rolled over toward me and dipped us again. But we contrived to ascend once more, and to steady the rickety structure.

Fully a hundred floating houses were in sight, and upon most of them were perched little groups of the miserable people. At a distance of half a mile the upper three stories of a pagoda rose out of the water. As we drifted nearer several Taoist priests could be seen on the galleries. Lee Wung shouted to them, announcing his rank, and bidding them come to our assistance; but no attention was paid us till our mandarin had recourse to his "crystal button," the badge of his official rank—a good-sized diamond set in a jade ring. This he flashed in the sunshine, twice slowly, then five times rapidly, following a kind of signal code.

At last a sampan put off from the pagoda, containing two pleasant old priests and two "scholars," or temple students, who rescued us from our dangerous perch and rowed us first to the pagoda, where we found thirty people with no food.

We passed hundreds of houses all overflowed save the roofs, and all covered with people who begged us to take them off. Lee Wung coolly advised them to drown themselves.

"The whole river is out," he told them. "You can get no crops this year. You will starve if you do not drown."

Heartless as this advice sounded, it was based on the evident fact of the situation. Many of the people clearly realized this, for they were jumping into the water. Off one house in particular we saw six drown themselves, one after another.

Toward eleven o'clock we were landed near Sun Sing Tu, a walled town, where we obtained food and sedan chairs for our trip southward toward Nankin, which we reached on the 22nd of the month. Thence Lee Wung set off with us by river steamer for Shanghai.

Here we heard that six thousand laborers had been drowned at the breach on the night of our adventure, with probably a hundred thousand of the inhabitants of the Honan plain. Lee Wung himself was reported drowned, along with three American engineers. Our Chinese patron took no trouble to contradict the report of his death, and smiled with great satisfaction.

At Shanghai he bought a small tug of an English firm, and on the 29th of the month we set off up the Yang-tsze again for Sz'chuen. Lee Wung was not in good spirits; the Yellow River fiasco had put him in a bad humor, and the discomforts of our narrow quarters on the tug disturbed his luxurious tastes; but we cheered him a little by portraying the great possibilities of our discovery of petroleum on the To Chiang.

We reached the provincial home of the Wung family on the 14th of September, and on the following day Wright and I returned to the salt-works on the To Chiang. There we found the process of evaporation going on much as in July, and the oil-well which we had drilled still quiescent under the cap.

But a dangerous change in public feeling had occurred. The Chinese proprietor of the public house in the village gave us to understand that

