

By the Mouth of a Witness

For weeks we had been threatened. "The streets will run with blood!" my newly-converted man servant had said to me before he gathered together his belongings and went back to his mother's hut and to the faith of his fathers.

All who could reach the place sought refuge at the British Embassy which was crowded to five times its true capacity. Most of us had dispersed with our servants at the first alarm—indeed, few of these had waited for dismissal—and while across the moat three thousand native Christians were crowded in the Wang Fu, in the Staff Buildings, the only non-Caucasian face among us was that of a little Mongolian girl of twelve, the adopted daughter of a missionary, who, in Western pinafore and stout leather shoes, prayed daily for the confusion of her own race.

The strain was great on all of us, and I am not ashamed to own that when, on the morning of the twenty-second, as I shaved myself, I saw peering into the glass from behind the grim, mask-like face of a hill Chinaman, the sudden quiver of the nerves which followed quite unmanned me. I stood staring like one fascinated until a lean, dark hand was laid upon my shoulder. Then, indeed, I moved. My shaving tray crashed to the floor as I sprang backward. With the motion the brown mask cracked and wrinkled into a laugh, and the apparition spoke with an English voice.

"Well, I shall pass in a crowd. Oh, hold on! No fireworks!"

"Who are you?" I asked, my pistol only half lowered.

"What, don't you know me? I'm Murray—if you remember who that is."

He closed the door as he spoke and settled himself on the bed like one quite sure of his welcome.

"Your nerves are not what they were, my friend," he remarked, irritatingly. "I shouldn't have troubled you, but I saw some ladies in the hall. I feared they would be frightened."

"Where have you been?" I asked.

"I? Here and there, where fate led me. In the streets of the city mostly, watching how our friend the Celestial makes war. Europeans are unpopular just now, but I have not been troubled. How does my outfit strike you?"

"You're too dark," I answered, critically, "and too tall."

"Oh, good enough! But I was neither too dark nor too tall a moment since, was I? I'm no colic. I'm a hill Chinaman; a boxer, if you please. The city's full of just such fellows. And I'll tell you another thing. When the next storm is brewed—and one's brewing—the most dangerous place in China will be right here between the walls of this legation. That's why I leave it in an hour."

The question which was first in the hearts of all of us that summer sprang to my lips in answer.

"But the relief? What chance of help from outside?"

"One in a thousand, one in a million, indeed. No, this word belongs to China, and, my lord, she's making the most of it! It's worth a few years of life just to see how she goes about it." He broke off and stared at me for an instant.

"See here, come out and have a look at it," he ended, abruptly.

"I? I have no disguise."

"I have a duplicate. I'll loan it to you for an hour. To tell the truth it's what I came for—to pick up a European comrade, though, of course, I'd no notion whom I should find. Come, will you try it? I'll bring you safe back before night."

"If I could be sure—" I began.

"Settled, then! My bundle's just outside. Get it, will you? I'd go myself, but your foreign devils are so bloodthirsty."

The bundle was one wrapped in coarse cloth, such as travelling Chinese often carry. Opening it, I was amazed at the completeness of the disguise it contained. We had a diffi-

culty in the arrangement of the queue and a dispute on the matter of complexion, but, when our work was done and I rose to survey the finished product, the sinister countenance the glass threw back at me would have defied detection.

We left the room by a side door. The long hall leading to the court was empty when we started down it, and it seemed that our exit would be uneventful; but we approached the last door it opened and a young girl came out from a side room. Coming from the brighter light, her eyes were darkened, and she advanced a step or two into the hall, smiling absently. Then, close before her, she saw us. She did not scream, as I had feared, but her clasped hands flew to her breast and her lips quivered with fast-whispered words.

"Miss Colter—" I began, but "Hush! Hush! Hurry!" urged Murray at my side, and we passed her at a run. As we came opposite "he light of consciousness faded from her eyes and she toppled back against the closed door, still in an attitude of prayer."

A moment later we had left the wall and, at cost of two or three hasty explanations, were before long standing outside the walls of the legation. The rifle practice had ceased that day, thanks, as we believed, to an imperial edict. The place was as quiet as a New England Sabbath, save that the body of a German soldier, horribly mutilated, lay in the middle of the street; and from experience we knew what menace lurked behind, the silence of the dismantled houses.

For a while we walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts.

Then, "That is the cause of it, the true cause. No wonder the natives feel as they do," Murray began aloud.

"What?" I asked.

"Why, that girl. You saw her. We frightened her, and what does she do? Gibber prayers and spring to an attitude of worship. The true way to placate an infuriated Buddhist!"

"But what would you have?"

"Not much. A little more toleration, perhaps. Now, saving I'm killed for the sins of my countrymen, I should be safe in any part of Peking to-day. I've burned incense before half the mud josses in the city. I'm a pretty good Buddhist and I'm a first-class Mohammedan. After all, what's in a name?"

The man in Peking who failed to defend his faith that summer was worse than apostate; he was a traitor. And something of this feeling must have found utterance in my answer, for Murray faced me with an outward gesture of the hands so truly Oriental that for a moment I half mistrusted him.

"Well, what would you have?" he cried. "Granted a man should own an hereditary faith, where shall I get one? I was born a Scotch Dissenter. I'm by education a Catholic, by profession a member of the Church of England, and by belief—what? Oh, I have memories! Dim church and sculptured saints and all the rest, but what does it amount to? I tell you the faith par excellence is that one which keeps a man's skin whole and his head on his shoulders. No, don't point out the error of my ways. This is no time for converts. And look! Here comes our friend the Celestial."

From a side alley groups of Chinese were pouring out into the street, and all ahead of us the thoroughfare was crowded with such a mass of heterogeneous humanity as only Peking in all the world can show. Here and there was one walking alone and staring about him with the astonishment of a rustic. Oftener they walked in groups of two or three, chattering and gesticulating, and more than once we passed a street orator haranguing a knot of excited countrymen.

But these were eddies in a tide which set steadily forward. Shops closed as by magic at our approach; chair men and street vendors deserted their burdens to swell the tide of the advance, and a fringe of wide-eyed watchers lined either wall. It was the rising of all kinds and classes. The silk robe of the merchant pressed against the coarse blue cotton of the laborer—a very Babel of babble and speech, from which I could pluck only an occasional phrase. Murray, however, pushed forward with glistening eyes, winding in and out among the press in pursuit of a conversation or pausing in rapt attention in the lee of a group of listeners.

At length, "We have chosen a very day of days," he said aloud, speaking to my vast discomfort, in English. "The crowd is out after native Christians, and I fancy it will get them. We would better stop presently, though, and assume the role of on-lookers. Then, let either party win, we save our skins."

"That seems to be your principal concern," I answered, incautiously. Murray laughed.

"Yours, too. Else why so chose of that beautiful, laboriously-acquired Chinese? But we can keep on as you wish."

"Let us stop," I answered, shortly, and tried to suit the action to the word, but for a while the pressure of the crowd was so tremendous that escape was impossible.

At the intersection of two streets stood a palanquin abandoned by its bearers, and, seized by a sudden inspiration, I flung myself between its shafts. Murray followed, panting, and we clung to it while the mob swept by on either hand, a sea of gleaming eyes and fierce, eager faces, glistening with sweat and dark with passion.

It was the first time that I had faced them, and fear came upon me. I wrenched open the door of the palanquin and climbed nimbly in, closing it behind me. Murray himself, not unimpressed, couched between the shafts outside, and with my face at the window (the tiny window in front through which the bearer receives his orders) our heads were not six inches apart.

"We've a good place," commenced

Murray, irrepressibly, almost as soon as we were settled in our positions. "Hear the musket fire ahead? They'll be hailing the Christians through the streets presently, and then remember you're a Brahmin and your sympathy with the mob."

"Will they kill them?" I asked, horrified.

"It is highly probable. Indeed, why not? From your own expressions an hour ago, the man who deserts his religion deserves death. Well, this is one of those rare cases. By George, they're setting back already! Look out at your side window and see what's starting them."

"I can't see," I answered, after an effort. "Some one is standing against it."

"Good enough! You're safe while the press lasts. I can see myself in a minute." He was standing now, straining on tiptoe to overlook the crowd.

"I think—they're—got them," he said, slowly, a moment later. "Now for pandemonium!"

In the pause which followed an indescribable tumult filled the air, from which slowly I sorted the sounds according to their order; the rush and scuffle of thousands of sandaled feet, the fierce, stertorous breathing at excitement, the crack of musketry, the sharp "Ha! Ha!" of the victorious fanatic, and, above it all, appallingly distinct and clear, the shrieks of the victims. Then the first reflux of the mob swept us, and the sense of hearing was merged in that of sight.

The Christians were fighting still, though against inconceivable odds—fighting as men fight to whom defeat means death with torture. Now and then a group was borne, still contending, even below the palanquin, but for the most part the actual conflict went on far beyond and only the fragments, the spoil of the victors, passed us by.

After the first I had dropped down on the floor, staring at the rabble outside in a half-comatose condition. It is an awful thing to witness battle as a non-combatant. Hours seemed to pass before I heard a voice close beside me say, "They have pierced the inner sanctuary!" and at once a company of men burst through the crowd bearing, tossed high above them, the body of a woman.

Her face I could not see, but one round arm, heavy with silver bangles, hung at her side; and as she passed the rose-stained fingers clenched and tightened in a paroxysm of fear.

I saw, and reason left me. I sprang up from my place and wrenched and battered at the fixed door. I shouted threats to the deaf mob outside, and shrieked and prayed aloud in agony. Then the frenzy passed, and instantly I was conscious of the cool stare of Murray. He had stopped close to the low window and was watching me much as the entomologist might watch his wretched insect writhing on its pin.

"See here, Levin," he began, as soon as I was quiet, "you endanger both our lives by such an outburst. I warned you—"

"Be silent!" I interrupted, fiercely. "You, with your training and traditions, you let her pass within arm's reach and did not save her! Her blood be on your head; you are worse than the murderers!"

He answered quite unmoved. "Worse than the murderers? Why, I grant you that. Those murderers are really superior fellows from their own standpoint. As for the girl—oh, very well, I will be silent. Only try to get back your senses, my dear fellow."

He turned away to watch the mob and I remained my head sunk in my hands, trying vainly to shut out both sight and sound.

Of all that passed us by that day I have no wish to write. The afternoon shadows lengthened and the sun lost itself in a bank of western clouds and still the horror went on uninterrupted, and still we watched motionless from our places.

"Why, they're looting the churches!" said Murray, suddenly, in a tone quite new to him; and, following his gesture, I saw where one in the mob, a grotesque figure in flowing vestments, danced and sang in triumph. Others bore altar dressings and lighted candles, and behind these, high above the press, towered the mighty crucifix. I am not a Catholic, but the sight sent my heart knocking at my throat.

"It's a plot!" cried Murray, excitedly, and his eyes were mere points of light. "They're doing it to make the Catholics reveal themselves. I tell you it's a plot!"

"But what does it matter?" I answered. "We're not Catholics."

"No, but one has a natural dislike to see good property—My God! I can't stand that!" He flung up his arms, hands clasped like a diver, and plunged into the crowd.

The cross had fallen to the earth, and one man ground his heel upon it, another with an unimagined insult, spat in the pictured face. Then Murray reached them. Above the tumult I could hear his cry:

"Back! Stand back, you dogs!" In his excitement he was speaking in English. "No, I will have no help! Don't lay your heathen hands upon it. Mother of God, assist me!" And again the great Christ wavered above the mob!

But the weight was more than he could sustain. It toppled slowly back until it rested slanting against the wall behind. So far the mob looked on unresistingly. Thanks to his English, they believed it a renewal of their orgy of disdain. But now, when Murray's tall form sank from sight, and I divined that he had knelt before the symbol, an angry hissing murmur ran through the street from side to side, and all the crowd surged forward in one impulsive step.

It was this which roused him to his danger. He was on his feet in an instant and peering over the heads of the people.

"Stand back!" he shouted, this time in Chinese, and for a moment they obeyed him. Before the moment was over he had found what he sought.

"Chee!" he called, sharply, and a man near the palanquin started violently from his attitude of spectator.

"Chee, come here!"

"Murray!" cried the man, and rushed forward, fighting his way with shoulder and elbow. But half-way to the cross he stopped, doubt and hesitation chasing each other over his lean face. Murray encouraged him with voice and gesture.

"Chee! You know me! Why, are you afraid? Come on, I say!"

"What would you have?" asked the other, still hesitating.

"This," he indicated the cross. "It is mine, and I am going to take it away with me. Go and find me men to carry it."

For a moment it seemed as if the very audacity of the proposal had proved its safeguard. The one called Chee again moved forward, though this time slowly, and the press, pushing and muttering, opened up a path before him. But a dozen steps from his destination he halted.

"Well, what is it? Don't you know me?" sneered Murray at him, and the very breath of the mob was hushed to hear his answer. When it came its form was fatal.

"I knew you," he said, slowly. "when you scorned that sign—I render freely; the words will not bear a translation—as I did. I knew you when you believed with me that we could drive this Christian scum into the sea. But since the driving began I have not seen you. Where have you been? What do you believe?"

And, like the chorus in a devil's opera, from a dozen throats the question was hurled back.

"What do I believe?" repeated Murray. "You want to know? Well, I'll tell you."

He looked down at the ground and up and around him. The men in the back ranks were already growling out their impatience. From the end of the street the roar of renewed plundering rolled up to us like a wave; everything was violence and death, and lust for death, and willingness to brave it for a faith's sake. Murray looked, and I swear a new soul came to the man. Up went his head and his clenched hands.

"I believe in God." He made his answer clearly. "In God the Father, maker of heaven and earth, and in His Son—" With an inexpressible sound of fury the mob was upon him. To most of them the words were meaningless, but not the dullest could mistake the tone and look.

They swept upon him, eager and panting each to be first in the sweep of his long arms. And Murray met them, chanting the defiant psalm of his new-found faith.

"And the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God."

In such a stress the creed was born. He was raised. He did not ascend. Surely the Christ, whom he had believed, doubted, scoffed at, and for whom he was to die, was with His martyr in that hour.

I saw him clearly a moment later. He had shaken off his assailants and stood erect. His clothing and disguise were torn away and the blood flowed from a wound in his shoulder. He passed his hand across his eyes like one awakening from sleep; he looked down at his mangled flesh.

"And I believe in the resurrection of the body; and in the life to come," he uttered, slowly, and with the words, fell forward to the ground.

Then the mob closed in between, and one who also believed these things, and should have joyed in death for their profession, groveled upon the floor of the palanquin, sobbing aloud. For Murray was dead; he had died in the faith. And I yet lived, and was ashamed. And how was I to regain the embassy?—Pearson's Magazine

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Calendar for November 1906. Includes days of the month, days of the week, color of vestment, and feast days such as All Saints, Twenty Second Sunday After Pentecost, etc.

Altar Furnishings advertisement. Includes address: 123 Church St., Toronto. Contact: W. E. Blake, Mfr. and Importer Church Vestments.

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