

The House of the Twin Dragons

A Romance of Adventure in the Time of the Boxer Uprisings in China

By E. A. TAYLOR

IN the background the mountains of Shan-si were piled like blue and purple clouds. In front the plain was a sea of warm yellow-hued grain, barley, wheat and maize; and scored by the straight line of the canal, whose waters flashed blue between the vivid green of its banks.

An island in its fields of grain, the village of the Tien clan rose—Tasopeng, Straw-Hut, so named because the ancestor of the Tiens had sometime in the days of the Vikings founded the settlement by building a straw hut, where now his descendants lived in their houses of sun-dried brick and stone, a community of very prosperous Chinese farmers.

Max Lee, young, Canadian, and the surveyor of a projected Chinese railway, lounged in front of the Tasopeng inn, watching lazily the beauty of the large, fair land before him. One thing he missed in Tasopeng that had given a touch of eastern gorgeousness to other farm lands he had passed—the fields of flame-coloured poppies, flower of fire dreams and magic, of shame and death. For the Tiens were Christians, and in Shan-si a Christian must never grow a poppie on his land, and if he works out as a labourer, it must be in the grain fields where the work is heavier, and the pay only one-third as much as for gathering the opium crop.

"Christianity is evidently more patriotic than profitable here," thought Max. Then he forgot questions of faiths as a girl came up the street. She was young, and her purple-black hair was piled high to show her maidenhood. She was probably a Christian, for she stepped lightly on her unbound feet. Her dress was the usual dark-blue robes with bright embroidery, but Max only noticed the oval, perfect face, with soft, cream-tinted skin, scarlet lips, and lustrous dark eyes, gravely innocent as a child's, yet with the smouldering passion of the East in their depths.

Out of the corn a young man rode on horseback, Tien Lein Fang, or Fan, as they nicknamed him in the western college, where he had been Max's classmate; they were working together now in Tien's clan village.

Tien was a good-looking young man, and rode superbly, yet as the girl saw him, her face seemed to grow hard and yellow, and her eyes narrowed. He cantered by as if he did not see her, but as the two surveyors sat at supper, eating long strips of dough boiled in water flavoured with pepper and onions, from dark-blue china bowls with white dragons coiling round them, Max, who was curious, asked Tien who the girl was.

"Miss Kwang Huai," answered Tien; "she is visiting here with her mother. Her family have their root at Erhlung, the house of the Twin Dragons, near Tien-Tsin."

"Huai is your name for the locust tree, isn't it?"

"Yes, they were in bloom when she was born." Tien paused, then went on in his careful English, "The Kwangs are very anti-foreign, but Miss Kwang Huai's father was interested in Christianity, and at his death his widow was baptized, and given employment by the missionaries in Peking. Her daughter was educated at their girls' school, where she now teaches, though she is not a Christian, and is very friendly with her grandmother, Kwang T'ai-t'ai, Lady Kwang, as they call her, she being the eldest of the clan at Erhlung."

"THE man who pays us our wages is a Kwang, too, his excellency, Kwang Fuh Siang. Is he a relation of Miss Huai's? He was in to-day."

"He is her second cousin," replied Tien. "Did he leave any instructions?"

"No, he only talked about the spur line he wants run into the mountains, to reach his coal mines. I showed him the plans of our survey, the line can only go through the Quanyi Pass, and that is already



"Tien rushed out from the tall stalks."

—Drawn by Arthur Lismer.

occupied by a graveyard. So for your 'feng-shui,' which I take it means always consider the dead before the living, the pass is closed."

"What did he say then?" asked Tien, rather gravely.

"Oh, he asked what would be done in such a case in the West, and I told him, move the dead with all proper ceremony, and run the line through. He seemed to think it might be managed here, and took the plans away with him. What is it, Fan? You look as if you had caught me in a forgery."

Tien hesitated, his inborn Chinese ideas of politeness making him unwilling to tell a friend anything unpleasant, then he said, slowly: "Nothing, I hope; but there is a growing unrest in these northern provinces. Men like Kwang Fuh Siang, in their haste to develop the country's resources, and make themselves rich, are pushing railways on too quick, I fear. In China we obey our elders and fear the dead, and old people dislike change, and ignorant ones are easily made afraid. If this fear really takes hold of the country, the elders at Erhlung will call our official to account, and he to save himself with them, will repudiate us and all our work."

Max did not take his friend very seriously; it was not the first time he had thought him prejudiced against their employer, and now he wondered if Huai's dark beauty could possibly be a factor in the situation.

After supper Tien started out to call on Mrs. Kwang. He had made many calls there since she came to the village, really to show him her daughter and arrange for the many preliminaries to a Chinese marriage. And Huai would listen to her suitor with red lips pouting, and eyes cast down. She showed very plainly her dislike to him, yet the more distant she seemed, the more he desired her, and he was half tempted to force her into marriage with him. He could do it, as the bride's consent is not asked at any point in the ceremony. The first preliminary, to send a go-between from his family to Huai's, to formally ask her name and the date

of her birth, had been duly observed. Then all his relations had been punctiliously asked to give their consent, and had promptly done so. Next, armed with their permission, he needed to ask that of the bride's family, and he was sure they would not reject him. Certainly they hated everything foreign, including Christianity, but they were, like all respectable clans, very jealous of the honour of their women. And beautiful Huai had always been sensitive, most to the charms of nature reflected in the strange, weird land of her birth. She knew as yet little of western customs and ideas, though she was beginning to learn.

SO Tien sat with the two women that evening, and after a polite talk to gentle Mrs. Kwang, he said to Huai, in English, "Miss Kwang, I have here the letters in which my relations give their consent to our marriage. Are you willing that I should send them to Erhlung?"

Huai's eyes blazed. "Why do you ask me?" she said, scornfully. "You do not need to. But you may know this, I hate you, and if I am given to you I will kill myself before I will let you touch me."

"In that case," Tien answered, calmly, "I will leave you the papers, it may amuse you to destroy them. But I would like to know if it is anything I have done, or that you have heard of me, that causes your hate."

"I should hate any man who wanted to marry me," said Huai, crossly. The new wine of western ideas was fermenting in her brain, threatening to burst the old vessels of reverence for customs. She felt at war with herself, yet insisted in her thoughts that she hated everything foreign, including her handsome lover, who also was a Christian.

Max was asleep that night, and his friend very wide awake, when a villager hurried into the inn, and a few minutes later Tien called Max—"Feng-Fai station has been burnt by a mob," he said, "all the tracks torn up, and Davis and Markham murdered. And they will be at Tasopeng by dawn to look for us."

A moment Max looked at him stupefied, then sprang up, alert, and ready to meet the danger. And it was very real that terrible June of 1900, when murder, mad and blind, swept through north China. "Feng-shui," fear of the dead—of everything they could not understand, had taken hold of the people, and from their fear and hate the Boxer rising was born. The empress, and men like Kwang Fuh Siang, had moved too quickly, though they knew the greater East is like dynamite, liable to wreck the world if it is subjected to shock. And it was against them that the Boxers had first plotted, but by adroit management they had turned the tide of fury against the foreigners who served them. Traps had been set, and men like Max Lee had walked fearlessly into them. The plan of the pass, with its blue line through Quanyi cemetery was the death warrant of many a man.

THE wave of insanity and murder rose higher, it engulfed missionaries and native Christians. And now in July the red storm raged round the Legations in Peking, with thunderous cannon and thousands of frenzied fighting men. At Tien-Tsin, eighty miles from Peking, great guns were crashing, too. The allied forces of the white men were bombarding the forts there, so that they could land and march inland to the relief of the Legations.

Max Lee, crouching among the corn beside a canal near Tien-Tsin, listened and felt afraid. For a month Tien and he had lived like hunted beasts, hiding, or fleeing this way and that, knowing that death would be something to be prayed for if they fell alive into the hands of their foes. Now Tien had gone to buy food, promising to be back at dusk,

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