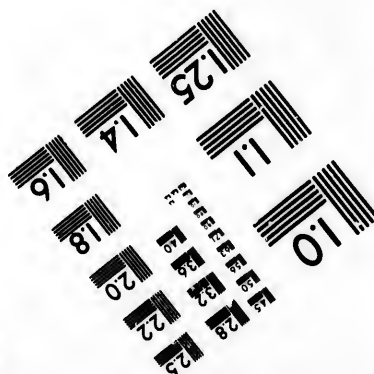
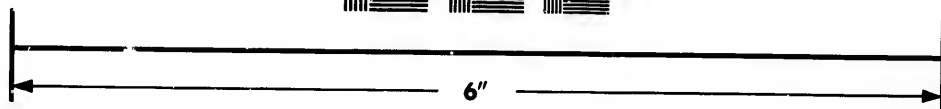
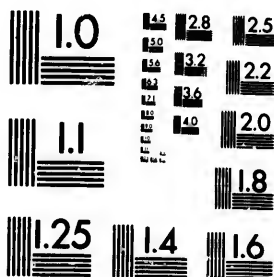


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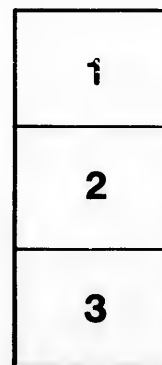
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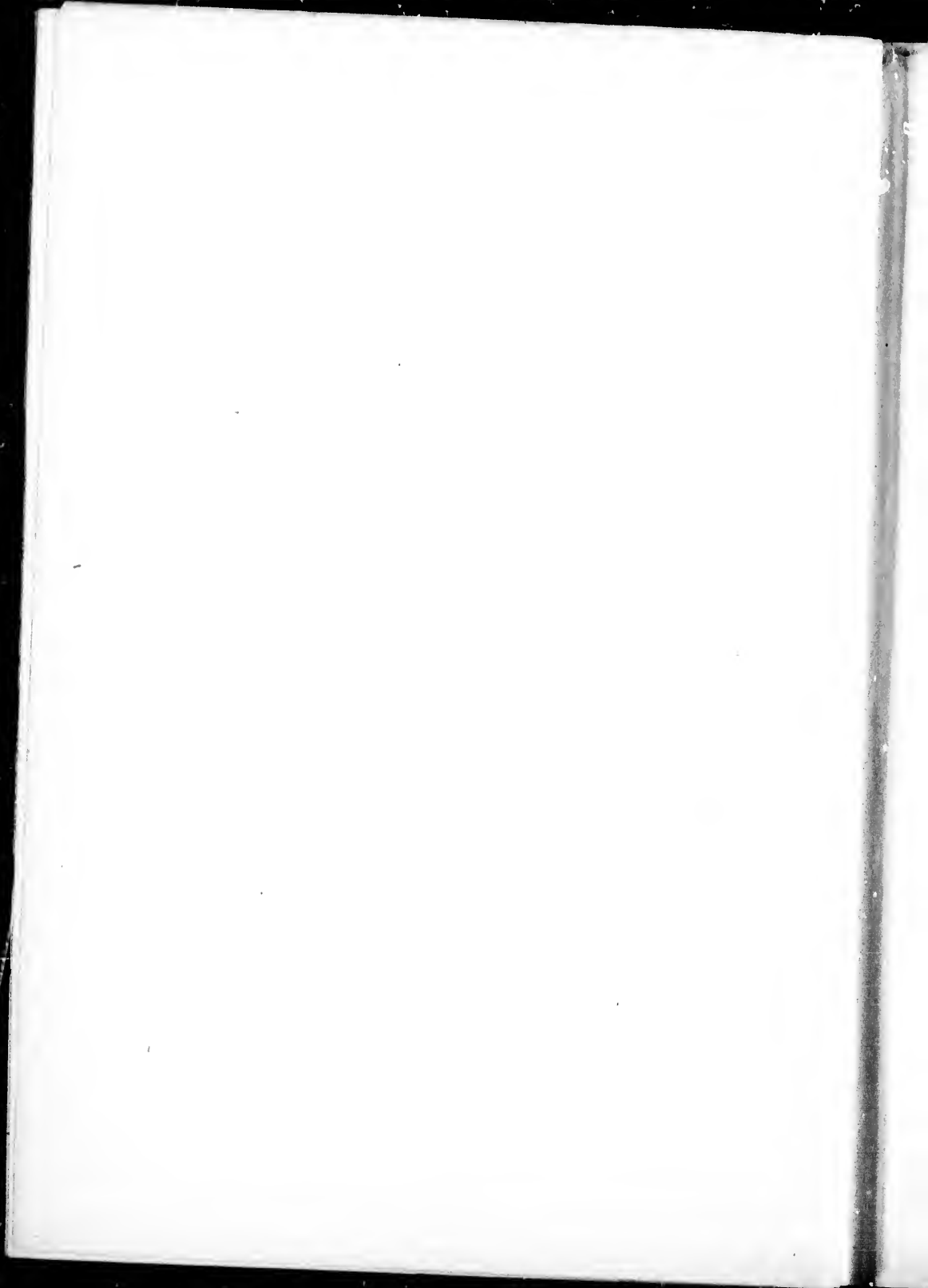
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THE MANDARIN





I at once began to haul up the anchor.

[Page 277.]

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RT

THE MANDARIN

BY

CARLTON DAWE

Author of "A Bride of Japan," "Yellow and White," "Kakemonos," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. LUDOVICI.



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THE MANDARIN.

CHAPTER I.

EASTWARD HO !

WHEN I came down from Oxford and beheld the world stretched out before me, vast, illimitable, I seemed to realise for the first time that I had become a man, a living part of that greatness which surrounded me. As far as I recollect I had no particular passion for any well-defined profession, though my excellent, but utterly unpractical, parents had decided, in their inscrutable wisdom, that I should adorn the law. With this end in view I worked consistently, in my spare hours, delving into musty records and bewildering utterances, all of which I loathed profoundly. I take it that one of the curses of our present system of education is that all intellects are served

alike; or by some equally idiotic freak of fate the fellow who would make an excellent sailor is trained for an archbishop. I don't think that I would have made a successful archbishop, and I may not have achieved distinction as a sailor; but if a ball was well pitched up I could bang it to the ropes with most men, or pull an oar with credit to my company. Indeed my sister Vi, who has a most reprehensible habit of telling the truth, informs me, and everybody else, that I learnt nothing but athletics at the university: as though a university existed for any other purpose.

Well, the world was before me now, so into it I flew with a hop, skip, and a jump; a mode of progression, by the way, of which I was rather an adept, thanks to a fair length of springy limb. I little guessed as I looked about me, wondering where next I should leap, that my first bound would land me in a strange country, among a strange, a callous, and a cruel people.

I was a man.

The aforementioned sister Vi denied it. Physically, perhaps—she always called me a gigantic brute, which was so like a sister—but to my possession of any other conspicuous quality she would not admit. I was a good

enough sort of fellow, and in a way I would do ; but as a factor in the economy of life (she was much given to the use of silly phrases and vague innuendoes), I was a mere nonentity. Of course I laughed, one always laughs at one's sister, and made some slighting allusion to argumentative old maids. But she only shook her head merrily, and a pretty head it was, and one upon which I knew many fellows had cast admiring glances.

And then there happened a thing which for a time made us forget our little amenities, which drove the law from my father's head and athletics from mine. And it was merely a letter asking me to pay a visit to my godfather, the Reverend Paul Ormsby, who had charge of a missionary station at Fong-Chin, in the province of Quang-Tong, in China. Some quarter of a century before he had been my father's dearest chum ; they were at the same college, they shared the same rooms : two closer or dearer friends it would be impossible to imagine. Then Mr. Ormsby, who like myself was intended for the law, unconsciously slid into theology, took orders, and having no wish for worldly advancement, elected to preach God to the heathen. That was more than twenty years ago, and from that day my father had

never set eyes on him, though during the whole of those years the friends had corresponded with unfailing regularity.

Before setting out Mr. Ormsby had taken unto himself a young wife, of whom it might be said that she worshipped two beings, God and her husband, if, indeed, the husband did not come first. The unknown life into which she was about to plunge had no terrors for her: her faith was sublime, her love great. And so the two dear people sailed away, and in the course of time a child was born to them, and this child was now a girl of twenty or thereabouts. No further addition swelled the good man's home circle, and for the next eight years his letters breathed the happiness which was his, and which he most assuredly deserved. Then one day a letter came. His wife had been nursing some fever patients, and the infection had seized her. Nothing serious as yet, but he prayed for the mercy of God. A month after it was all over. God's will be done.

Before her death he often spoke of coming back to the old country to renew old associations, but when she was gone he no longer entertained the idea. "My work is here," he said, "and here among my people I shall end my days."

This, then, was the man who now invited me to come out and see a bit of the world before I undertook the arduous task of trying to conquer it. He wrote :

"It is a long journey, my dear Paul" (which name I received in honour of him), "but I think you will find it a most interesting one. Perhaps the Mission will not have much to offer you in the way of excitement, and I know what young fellows are in that respect; but both Rose and I have entered into a solemn covenant to make your stay as little wearisome as possible."

As I read this out my mother looked at my father, and my father looked at me, and Vi cocked her pretty, perky head on one side and said, "Oh, my!"

"China is such a long way off," protested my mother.

Dear soul, the thought of my going alone almost paralysed her. If she could only go to take care of me, all might be well.

"And Paul is such a great booby," quoth sweet sister Vi.

But her I treated with contempt, and turning to my father told him that the thought of going out to China filled me with the most pleasurable anticipations, or words to that effect; and

the dad, who was a real good sort, expressed the belief that it would impart a necessary finish to my education. The mother, while she trembled for her poor lone child, raised no insuperable objections. Miss Violet cautioned me against falling a victim to the wiles of the yellow women, and dilated on mandarins, peacocks' feathers, the vermilion pencil and yellow jackets.

So that was arranged, and I wrote off at once to the missionary telling him that I should leave for China a month later, thinking it would take me all that time to prepare for such a long voyage. Naturally my thanks were abundant and sincere.

There was much hurrying hither and thither, much buying of unnecessary clothes and other encumbrances, many hands to be shaken, many farewells to be said; but I steadily plodded through the whole programme, and one sunny afternoon I might have been seen on the deck of a P. & O. steamer as she made her way down the Thames in the teeth of a strong tide.

As a description of the voyage out to Hong-Kong comes not within the scope of this work, I will pass over that pleasant but unexciting experience with due dispatch. Behold me

then duly arrived at that great port of South China, and snugly ensconced in a room on the second floor of the Hong-Kong Hotel. Here I found letters awaiting me, but, contrary to expectation, neither my godfather nor his daughter. At this I was just a little perturbed; but the letters, among which was a passport from the Viceroy of Quang-Tong, the province through which I was to travel, informed me that Mr. Ormsby was confined to his bed with a chill, and that his daughter insisted on staying behind to nurse him. I, however, was to come on to Canton, where I would be met by a trusty servant who would escort me to Fong-Chin. Ting-Foo, the aforementioned servant, would await the arrival of every boat, so that I need not fear being stranded in Canton. Therefore I spent a further three days in exploring the island, and then once more packed up my belongings.

The voyage up the river was free of incident, but I was in a strange new world, and I fairly revelled in my quaint surroundings. There were only some half-dozen saloon passengers, business men from Hong-Kong going up, and men from Canton returning. But we had some hundreds of coolies in the steerage, who were huddled together like

herrings in a barrel, and a noisy, ugly, ill-smelling lot they were—ripe for any crime, ready to commit any outrage for a few dollars. These people were duly locked in the 'tween decks, while men with carbines and revolvers stood guard without. For once on a time a similar load of coolies mutinied, murdered every white man aboard, ran the ship aground, and pillaged her. Ever since then the precious coolie has been carefully guarded.

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CHAPTER II.

MR. TING.

WE arrived at Canton shortly after noon, and as I stood on the upper deck watching the passengers disembark, my attention was drawn to a tall Chinaman who manfully fought his way to the ship through the living stream of his compatriots which flowed strongly against him. He was easily distinguishable, towering as he did a head and shoulders above the others, and the way he screamed, shoved, elbowed, and perhaps kicked, was a perfectly beautiful sight to witness. In one hand he held a letter, and as he looked my way he waved it excitedly, and I very naturally guessed that this prodigious war-horse was no other than the servant who had been sent to meet me, Mr. Ting-Foo.

I therefore watched his advance with renewed interest, and grew almost excited whenever he encountered any opposition in the form of a

nail-brandishing Chow. But gradually he stemmed the tide, and presently scrambled into smooth water on the jetty below me. Then again he flourished the letter, shouting meanwhile: "My allee same belong Mista Olmsby."

"Sabbee," I replied, for I had already picked up many of the quaint pidgin English words and phrases.

"You belong Mista Collingham?"

"Yes."

"All li."

At this Mr. Ting-Foo appeared to be extremely relieved, and with the sleeve of his coat wiped the perspiration from his streaming face, turning now and again to me with a grin which was almost idiotic. At the best of times he was not what one would call a distinctly handsome man, being gaunt, big-mouthed, and swarthy of visage; under the present conditions of heat and excitement his mobile mouth did not appear to advantage.

As soon as the gangway was cleared I waved for him to come aboard, and as he advanced to me across the deck I noticed that he moved with a slight limp. As I took the letter from him I made the necessary inquiry: "How is Mr. Ormsby?"

"Muchee more good than before. Welly muchee more good."

"And the Missee?"

"Missee Lose?"

I nodded.

"Welly muchee good. Missee Lose no 'ave been sick."

"Oh, indeed!" What was the use of trying to explain to him that I merely made a courteous inquiry

So I opened the letter and there learned all the news, written in a sweet hand by Rose herself. She was pleased to say that they were anxiously looking forward to my arrival; that the attack on her father had been but a slight one, and that she hoped he would be entirely convalescent long before I joined them at the Mission. As to the mode of my reaching Fong-Chin, I was to place myself entirely in the hands of Ting-Foo, who was a trusted servant, a Christian, and one who knew the river thoroughly. He and two men had come down in the Mission boat, the vessel which was to carry me back.

As I folded up the letter Mr. Ting approached me, an insidious smile on his quaint, good-natured face.

"You likee stop, look see Canton?"

"Anything worth seeing?" I asked indifferently.

"All depends," said he, and looking close at him I saw his ugly eyes twinkle merrily. Somehow I did not think that suggestive twinkle became one whom Rose had lauded in such solemn fashion. It was a heathenish, wicked twinkle, or I am no sinner.

"We'll see," said I. "But what about my baggage?"

"All li. My cally that to sampan."

So we went below, and I pointed out to him the leather box, which contained the whole of my belongings, the rest of my personal effects being left at the hotel in Hong-Kong. He picked up the box, heavy as it was, for it contained sundry presents for the missionary and his daughter, and with the greatest of ease swung it on his shoulder. I gathered up the smaller packages, and together we left the ship.

Once upon the jetty, we were besieged by guides, coolies, chair-men—a thick rabble of ugly, ill-smelling humanity—all importuning me in the shrillest of keys. But Ting strode through them, cursing and yelling as loudly as they, smiting with his free hand all who came within reach of him. His majestic stride, his contempt of numbers, filled me with a profound

admiration, and urged me to follow such a splendid example. So with my stick I rapped two or three fellows over the bare shins, and in this way removed sundry evil-smelling impediments of progress.

But presently Ting stopped and hailed a sampan, into which we rapidly tumbled, bag and baggage. Then he gave some word of command to the family—for a sampan is generally the floating house of a Chinese family—and away we shot along the still waters of the canals, along streets of house-boats, until we came alongside a large, clean boat which had a white band painted round it. On this band, at the bows, I read the word *Rose*.

Ting turned to me. "This all li—this belong missionally sampan. Sail welly good. Cally welly nice piecee sail. Can go Fong-Chin side two days."

"Two days to go a hundred miles?" said I.

"No sabbee long time," replied he, guessing my meaning, and not relishing my apparent sneer at the boat, or at his ability. "Suppose you 'ave got plenty wind, you go plenty quick; suppose you no 'ave got plenty wind, you no go plenty quick. Some placee the liver lun welly stlong; if can 'ave no wind, poor

piecee Chinaman get out and pullee, pullee; suppose can 'ave wind, the sampan sail welly nice."

"Oh, yes," said I. I usually said, "Oh, yes," when Mr. Ting got abstruse. "But what about to-day? Shall we start now?"

By this time we had transferred ourselves and our belongings from the sampan to the *Rose*, and as I put this question Ting cogitated deeply within himself. Then he looked up the river, then into the sky, and then round about him; but his eyes always passed mine without seeing them.

At last he said, as if speaking to himself, "My tinkum' 'ave plenty good bleeze to-morrow molnin'."

"What makes you think so?"

"Plenty sign, which Chinaman sabbee number one."

And he turned as if for confirmation to the two other boatmen. Of course it was, ask my brother if I'm a liar. They protested, and very glibly, that Mr. Ting was right—at least, I imagine such was the conclusion at which they arrived so unanimously. Ting turned to me, and again I saw that wicked, that most un-Christian twinkle in his eye.

"Canton welly fine place," he said. "Plenty bleeze to-morrow molnin'."

I could no longer mistake his meaning. The rascal badly wanted to show me the sights, or he had a profound wish to play some little game of his own. Well, I was not one to spoil sport, and even a Christian does not claim to be more than a man. Moreover, I had no insuperable objection to an increase of my store of knowledge.

"Then to-morrow molnin'," said I, "welly early."

"Sabbee," said he.

In the after-part of the boat was a well some eight feet in length by four in breadth, above which was stretched a moveable canvas covering, which could be opened or shut according to the state of the weather, or the wish of the traveller. This is the bed-sitting-room of the packet—the dining-hall by day, the bedroom by night. There are hundreds of thousands of Chinese who have no other home. Here they are born, here they live, and here they die.

Into this compartment my baggage had been stowed, and as I thought that I might possibly get some shooting as we went up stream, I got out my gun case, put the gun together, and placed the ammunition handy in

case of an emergency. I also saw to the revolver which my outfitter had prevailed upon me to purchase, declaring that such a weapon was a necessary adjunct to the tourist's equipment. Well, he might be right. It was a pretty little weapon and capable of firing six shots. I was a stranger in a strange land, and one never knows what may happen. So I stuffed a cartridge into each chamber, and slipped the loaded weapon into my hip-pocket.

Then, having arranged things satisfactorily, I filled and lit my pipe; and thinking that I would like a little exploration shoreward, I called to Ting-Foo; but that wily celestial was nowhere to be seen. I came out of my cabin and looked round; not alone was Ting-Foo gone, but the two boatmen had likewise disappeared. Surprised, and not a little angry, I began inwardly to fume, when on looking over the tilt of the boat I beheld, on a sampan which was moored some three boats' length astern, my two deserters, who were gambling with two other men, and, as befitted the pastime, shrieking and quarrelling like cats.

So, thought I, this is the way poor Mr. Ormsby has eradicated original sin; and I pictured that good man sending forth this

blessed trio, because they were the chosen ones of his flock. I had heard some strange stories of the duplicity of the yellow man; how he would often fool the missionary to the top of his bent, and here was a practical illustration of that cynical text. But at the same time I understood and appreciated that weakness which is called confidence.

So excited were the fellows in their game that it was some time before I could make them hear me. Then one came bounding across the boats, an apologetic smile of a particularly winning nature wrinkling his ugly face.

"Where's Ting-Foo?" I asked.

The man's tongue rattled off like a four-in-hand, but as I could not understand a word he said, I kept repeating the name Ting-Foo; and from sundry gestures I learnt that Mr. Ting-Foo had taken it into his head to go ashore, but whether for pleasure or provisions I could not say. I therefore dismissed the fellow, who went gibbering back to his friends, and in a moment the four men were deep again in their gambling.

I sat down and began to smoke rather savagely, but the time slipped by and the sun

had set before Mr. Ting put in an appearance. With the last rays of daylight he came, and as he staggered aboard he looked so ill that I really thought he was in deadly agony.

"Why, good heavens, Ting," said I, "what's the matter with you?"

As he tumbled into the cabin he muttered :

"Ting welly sick."

I gave him a drop of brandy, the generous warmth of which seemed to quicken his blood. He looked at me with a wan smile and murmured :

"Ting too muchee big piecee dam fool."

In an instant I saw what was the matter with him. He had been smoking opium.

"So," said I, assuming a look of much severity, "you have been at the pipe?"

His face lengthened to an embodiment of righteous protest ; a melancholy not unmixed with sorrowful reproach. "What—I?" it seemed to say. "Is it possible that one whom I have loved so fondly can think so ill of me?" But in reality he protested with all the vigour that was left him.

"No, Mista," he said, "Ting no touchee opium since he belong Chlistian man's joss. Missionaly, he say, opium welly bad. He say Ting no go top-side along o' angels supposee

smokee opium. My wantee go top-side along o' angels.

"Ting welly bad man," I said; "he speakee me lie." For there was no doubt whatever that the fellow was suffering from an overdose of the insidious drug.

His face took unto itself a beautifully pathetic look of reproach. I could see that my unjustifiable suspicions cut him to the heart. It was awful to think that a perfectly innocent man should be accused of such a heinous offence. He, Mr. Ting-Foo, the shining light of the Fong-Chin Mission, the irreproachable convert—he smoke opium! No wonder his face grew pathetic, that his eyes seemed heavy with unshed tears. It was the last cruel stroke laid upon him by an iniquitous world.

"My welly solly you no tink my speakee tluth," he said. "Ebber since my belong Chlistian man's joss my speakee nothin' but tluth. Ting welly much afraid he give you 'long impression."

"Not in the least," said I. "At present you are capable of giving but one impression. But you'd better tumble in and try and sleep it off, or you won't be ready to start in the morning."

He smiled with an almost offensive knowingness.

"You no sabbee Ting."

Truth to tell I did not, but I sabbeed enough to know that he was a subtle, many-sided rogue, and that he would probably beat me hollow at the diplomatic game of duplicity.

"Pelhaps not," said I, falling without trouble into the soft pidgin English, "but my allee same sabbee opium," and I seized his hand, which was cold and trembling, and looked him closely in the eyes.

He bore the scrutiny well, almost without blinking. Look as I might, I could make nothing of those black, soulless orbs. I think he saw his power, for something like the ghost of a smile flitted round the corners of his ugly mouth and lost itself in a knot of yellow wrinkles which ran up his face.

"No can pidgin to Canton," he said. "Canton too muchee welly dirty, too muchee welly bad smell. Ting, he belong welly delicate Chinaman; he smellee stink, him stomach get sick. You no sabbee Chinaman's stomach; you tinkum opium. Ting no touchee opium since he wolship Chlistian man's joss. Opium too muchee no good, too muchee makee mad, blakee blain."

"Makee sick?" I ventured.

He smiled, but it was a smile full of pity for me in my unbelief. Then his face grew serious and he looked me steadily in the eyes.

"You no speakee missionaly?"

"No, I will say nothing about it. But what of the other men?"

He smiled rather grimly.

"Suppose they speakee, my beatee them—and Mista Olmsby no believe."

I could quite imagine it. Of the three, Ting would probably be the most plausible liar. So knowing that if I battered until doomsday I would never make a breach in the impregnable wall of lies with which he had fortified himself, I bundled him into the cabin, and in an incredibly short space of time he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER III.

FAN-TAN.

ABOUT nine o'clock he awoke, and his waking aroused me, for I had been indulging myself. He sat up, yawned and stretched, and to my anxious inquiries declared that he felt "welly fit," which idiom struck me as being rather quaint. Indeed an English idiom on a Chinaman's lips gains a singular force of its own.

I arose and lit a pipe, and then the desire to explore the great city took hold of me, and I inquired of Mr. Ting if he felt equal to the task of showing me the sights; for to venture out alone in such a place would be to court dangers innumerable. Ting responded to the invitation with alacrity, declaring that he had often acted as guide to the "foreign devils" who had come up from Hong-Kong to see the sights; and he gravely hinted at the laxity of their manners, which hint likewise clothed the hope that I was not as the rest of the world.

This sounded well, coming from one who, but a few hours before, had rolled aboard sottishly stupid with opium. But I could not see his face, or probably I might have caught another glimpse of that merry twinkle. Mr. Ting was now a Christian, and, like many others, he thought hypocrisy was a necessary adjunct.

Well, we started out, and my guide led me from one place to another, though I knew that we should gravitate towards the Flower Boats as surely as the night was come. Ting hesitated, and then he began to pump me.

Poor fellow, though a Christian, and willing to render all duty to his master, his heathen soul still hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt. But he had been well grounded in the Mission School, and when I said, "Ting, I want to see the Flower Boats," he protested with the sorrowful ardour of a Baptist minister. The Flower Boats were too muchee wicked, too muchee go to hellee! And what would Mr. Ormsby say?

"But, my dear Ting," said I, "why should we tell him?"

By the light from a shop window I saw a smile on his face, and though, protestingly, he led me on, I knew that he was leading me down the broad path all the time.

We made our way over countless bridges—none of them too secure—and among many streets of boats, until at last we crossed a rickety bridge into a wider thoroughfare, and here we paused.

"These belong first chop Flower Boat," my guide explained, pointing down the canal. "Here come the mandalin, the welly lich, the welly bad. Plenty painted woman, plenty gamble, plenty evelyting lotten."

Come, thought I, this is getting interesting; but out of respect to the proselyte I held my tongue.

We took many peeps into the open doors as we walked along, and though we more frequently encountered black looks than pleasant ones, there were a few who surveyed me with the cold, sulky, stupid indifference of the Oriental. But we did not enter any of the house-boats until we approached the end of the canal. Then I forgot myself, and some subsequent trouble ensued.

Over the door of this particular house-boat a large red lamp was suspended, and as we passed underneath it the door opened for a moment and two men came out, one pale as death, the other talking excitedly. The glimpse I got of the inside revealed a large gilded

saloon with a table in the centre, round which was a crowd of men.

As the door swung to, Ting whispered in my ear, "Fan-tan."

I realised in a moment the meaning of the white face, and what had happened to the two men who had just staggered out from the hell. It was the old story; the curse of gold and the folly of man. Nevertheless I had a great longing to see this notorious Chinese game, to behold the emotions of the unemotional Chow. To Mr. Ting I put it, and he was about to protest in the fatherly style of the Mission, when a little way up the canal I heard a sudden splash.

"What's that, Ting?"

"Nothing," said he.

"But that splash?"

"You see piecee man come out—allee same white face."

"Yes."

"He ddown himself."

I started forward, but Ting seized me by the arm.

"No good. He no can be saved. Loossee all, makee die. What for can live? All takee same load one day."

This cold-blooded pessimism, so unlike what

I felt sure my godfather had instilled, made me shudder.

"Why, Ting," said I, "you're a brute."

"No blute, only you no sabbee. Chinaman, he no 'flaid to die like Chlistian man. He loosee all, he makee go. Pelhaps Chinaman's joss sabbee. Look, him fliend watchee ddown."

It was true enough. There, on the edge of the canal, seen but indistinctly, was the figure of a man, apparently in the act of watching intently. From the open doors came the sound of voices and the low tinkling of guitars. No one had heard the splash, or if he had, he had paid no heed to it. What was a suicide more or less?

At the same time some revellers debouched from a house-boat some few doors higher up, and amid much laughter and noisy cackle came towards us. Ting drew me back into the shadow, whispering, "You likee see Fan-tan?"

"Rather."

"All li. Wait."

The men advanced to the door, against which the foremost knocked softly in a peculiar fashion. A second or so elapsed, and then a shaft of light streamed out into the darkness, and as the men crowded round the door, Ting

seized me by the hand and led me forward, and we pushed our way in with the others.

At first my appearance did not attract any attention, all the players being deeply engrossed in the game, and this gave me an opportunity to inspect my surroundings.

It was a spacious saloon, wide and high, with much elaborate gilding and carving : innumerable lights twinkled behind quaint lamps of many colours ; embroidered silk hangings shielded little alcoves. Upon the walls, in gilded characters of the *wen-li*, were the wise and moral precepts of the great Confucius ; for your Chinese gambler, like his brother of the West, is not without the redeeming virtue of hypocrisy.

Round a table in the centre of the saloon some thirty or forty Chinamen were crowded, at the head of which sat an impassive Chow with a pile of bright cash before him, and a long stick in his hand. This was the man who counted. A little to the right of him sat another impassive yellow face. This was the banker. It was he who paid and received.

Fan-tan, like most great gambling games, is simplicity itself. A square sheet of lead is placed in the middle of the table, the sides of which are numbered from one to four. It is on one of these four numbers that you stake

your money, or you may put your stake on the corners and thus take your chance of two numbers, though then your winnings materially decrease. Then the man whose business it is to count, takes a handful of cash from the big, glittering pile before him, and with his long stick draws away four of the coins at a time, and whatever remains, be it one, two, three or four, that is the winning number.

Gradually it became known that a foreign devil was in the place, and the men turned round to look at me, some angrily, as though they thought my presence an impertinence; but the others for the most part surveyed me with a look of sullen indifference. I bowed and smiled, and told Ting to tell them that I hoped I was not intruding, but as I had a few dollars to lose I wanted to try my luck.

Whether this mollified them or not I can't say, but as I made for the table they opened out at my advance; and as I staked my first five dollars on No. 3 they watched me with the greatest of interest. Then first one put his money on the same number, then another, until almost everybody, with that belief in omens and superstitions which is the religion of the gambler, was on No. 3.

I felt that it was an awkward moment for me, for to a certain extent the warmth of my welcome depended upon No. 3 turning up. I therefore watched the slow-diminishing pile of cash with an eagerness which was not at all in keeping with my stake. Even the banker's impassive face expressed a momentary twitch of interest. Then, before the winning number was known, I saw the ghost of a smile flickering somewhere round his eyes, and I knew that No. 3 had not won. Indeed, as the little heap slowly dissolved, it was seen that two was the winning number.

The players grunted with disgust, but it was evident that I was a bad *fung-shui* to them, and they left me severely alone. Ting kept close to me, but I noticed that as the play progressed his lips grew white with excitement, and he trembled violently; and, thoughtlessly, I gave him a couple of dollars to play with. Then the real Chinaman came out. His eyes sparkled, his lantern jaws flushed a deep dark red; he could not speak, for the madness of the game had seized him. I was sorry afterwards, for at that moment I realised that I had lent him the wherewithal to travel the old heathen way.

But meanwhile I played on with varying fortune, for the spirit of the game had entered my blood, and I thought neither of the time nor of my surroundings. I smoked and drank tea to excess, until I began to feel quite dazed; and still the awful game held me fast, and I lost and won and won and lost, now plunging somewhat recklessly, and now punting in the mildest manner possible.

By degrees the room cleared, until only some half-dozen desperate gamblers remained. Then I stopped for a time to reckon up the cost of the night's work, and I found that I had lost about one hundred and fifty dollars. This was for me rather a big sum—at any rate, rather too big a sum foolishly to be thrown away. And yet, as if to augment my foolishness, I immediately resolved to throw away another fifty in search of it. It should be my last stake. If I won, it would clear me; if I lost, I should call myself some bitter names and go.

So from my sadly diminished store I drew out ten five-dollar bills, and planked them down on No. 1. For, in the manner of the gambler, I argued thus within myself: Number One is the first and best. Therefore it were wise to follow Number One. The man opposite, who

had had worse luck than I, a black-looking fellow, who had often pitted himself against me, scraped a considerable sum together, and put it all on No. 4. I laughingly accepted his challenge, but pointed out that mine was the larger sum. At this he scowled, and turning to his friends borrowed all they had left, which merely amounted to another ten or twelve dollars. This he flung on the top of the other, and glared across at me.

From the big heap of glittering cash he then filled his hands, placed the contents before the croupier, whose duty it was to count, and the game began.

With his long stick, which he hooked into the holes of the cash, the impassive yellow man began to draw to him four at a time. As the pile slowly diminished the interest grew. I believe I was a real gambler then for the first time in my life, and I did not like the suffocating, sickening sensation. As for my rival opposite, his horrid little eyes burned with a devilish lustre, and he made a distressing sound in his throat, as though trying to swallow some obtrusive lump.

It is remarkable with what facility these experienced players can count the cash and tell what will be the winning number long

before the last dozen is reached. Feeling that I could not compete with them in this respect, I evinced less curiosity, knowing that the result could only be a matter of moments. So, from the cash I turned to the banker, and I saw him look at me in a way that considerably reassured me. From the experience of that night I felt that I could place some reliance on his judgment, and in this instance my belief was well-founded. I looked and saw that there were five cash on the table. The croupier drew away four and one remained.

I had won one hundred and fifty dollars!

For a time my rival opposite could scarcely contain himself, so full was he of rage and disappointment. He and his companions eyed me as though I had been the cause of their downfall, and they moved away from the table, so as to be beyond the hearing of Ting-Foo, and began to whisper one among the other. But I was too full of myself and the game to pay much heed to them. Luck had come my way at last, and I was not going to abandon it. So to test things I left a hundred dollars down on No. 1, and Ting, like the true gambler that he was, followed the spirit of good fortune, and backed his opinion to the extent of a dollar. This time I handed

out the cash to the croupier, and, as Ting and I were the only two betting, the game at once proceeded. My rival and his friends came back to watch. It was interesting, this struggle between the bank and the foreign devil.

Slowly, under the soft manipulation of the long stick, the pile of cash dwindled away, until but one remained. I had won again, this time three hundred dollars. And so I played on and on, now favoured by fortune, and now experiencing a perverse run of ill-luck; but on the whole good fortune attended my efforts, and towards the end of the night I won quite three times for every time I lost. As the result a large pile of dirty bank-notes lay before me, and heap upon heap of cumbersome silver dollars. Indeed, for the first time I realised how utterly valueless in itself is money.

Ting, who had modestly followed my lead throughout the evening, had also passed the ordeal most successfully, and was the proud possessor of a fistful of good, if somewhat shabby, bank-notes. These, after being subjected to a close scrutiny, he folded up and carefully placed away in an inside pocket. This action recalled me to my senses. I looked at my watch. It was one o'clock.

"Time to be going, Ting?" said I.

"My leady."

"One more go—win or lose."

I reckoned that I had won nearly six thousand dollars, sufficient to carry without being encumbered with the silver money. So I heaped the latter all on No. 3, and it amounted in the aggregate to one hundred and four dollars. Ting grew excited and began to talk wildly, and one of the spectators advanced and entered into conversation with him, and I could see that he was dilating proudly on my courage and good fortune. But I told him to tell the banker that, win or lose, this was to be my last stake. The impassive yellow man nodded and the game began.

My rival and his companions, their sullen indifference giving way to a natural curiosity, now advanced and crowded round the table; while the one who had already made some conversation with Mr. Ting seemed bent upon furthering the intimacy. And Ting, who was like one drunk with excitement, laughed and talked like a child, and fairly beamed at me.

There was much hard breathing as the pile of cash diminished, though none of it came from me, as I had outgrown all interest in the fight. To me it was a matter of the utmost

indifference whether I won or lost. Yet my indifference but strengthened the love of that strange woman, Fate; for again she favoured me with one of her handsomest smiles. I had purposely put my money on No. 3, because that had been my most unlucky number all through the night, and now, as if to spite me, it actually returned me a winner.

"Thlee!" shrieked Ting, wild with joy.

It was a fact. Three had turned up. I had won again.

While the banker was changing the silver into notes, my rival and his friends took their departure, the man turning to me as he left the room, and saying something which I took to be good-night. I nodded and he passed out. But I did not like his face, or the look in his eyes as he spoke, and I turned, inquiringly to Ting.

"What did that fellow say?"

"Allee same, good-night."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sure? Think now."

"He also say, pleasant tlip to Fong-Chin."

"How did he know we were going to Fong-Chin?"

"My suppose 'im guess."

"You fool, you've been talking."

He looked ashamed of himself; angry too, and then most penitent.

"Welly leetle," he murmured apologetically.

"Did you say how we were going?"

"Pelhaps."

"Ting, you're an ass."

"Sabbee," said Ting.

I was anything but pleased at this discovery, and as I folded up my winnings and stowed them away, I felt rather nervous of setting out. That the man was a desperate gambler there was no manner of doubt, and I had enough money on me to make a ruined man attempt the risk of robbery; and robbery, if successful, meant the disappearance of the victim beneath one of the silent canals. I had seen what little notice was taken of suicide, and I guessed that the callous inhabitants of these watery highways would but cover up their heads at the cry of "Murder!"

It was with no feeling of pleasurable anticipation that I set out with Ting to face the night and its mysteries.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FREE-LANCES OF THE PE-KIANG.

THE darkness seemed intense as we emerged once more into the open air. All the lamps had been extinguished, the doors of all the houses were shut; there was no sound of human voices, no tinkling of guitars. The revel was over, the revellers had vanished like night shadows into the night. Perhaps behind some closely-drawn curtain the opium-smoker burnt the drug and dreamed of Paradise and that highest heaven which Buddha has promised the faithful; or the vicious, wearied to death, is pure once more in sleep. An occasional scintillation, coming from heaven knows where, flashed for a moment on the placid bosom of the water, a sign and a warning.

"My walkee first," said Ting. "This welly bad wedder."

So off he went, I keeping close behind him, and for further security I laid hold of

his blouse ; for I really could not see where I was going, and sometimes, so dark was it, I could not even see him. Moreover, there was always the pleasant knowledge that a false step might precipitate me into the canal.

In this way we went forward until we reached the end of the Flower Boats, and I was about to give a sigh of relief when Ting stumbled forward with a cry, and had I not had a firm grip of him he would most assuredly have fallen into the water. Indeed, as it was, had I not been possessed of more than ordinary strength, he would have gone and I on the top of him.

For a moment or two the poor fellow trembled so violently that he could not speak. Then he said :

“That allee same belong plecious queer. Blidge slippee-slippee.”

I stepped forward to examine it, and I saw that, either by accident or design, the bridge, a narrow footway for pedestrians only, had slipped from its support, and that Ting's weight had sent it dangerously forward. If we had both stepped upon it at the same time nothing could have saved us from being dashed into the canal.

As for myself, I could not believe that the insecurity of the bridge was due to accident. In some way I connected it with the man who had wished me a pleasant journey to Fong-Chin. I had between six and seven thousand dollars about me, of which he was perfectly well aware. Under any conditions such a sum may be considered respectable; to a ruined and desperate man it would seem a big fortune. What would have happened had we fallen into the water I cannot say, but I have since been able to form a shrewd guess.

To turn back was to lead to nothingness, unless we took to the water and swam; therefore to go on became a necessity. So I examined the bridge as best I could, and then pulled it towards me. It seemed to stand firmly; but again and again I tested it carefully before I ventured upon it. Then, loosening my revolver, I told Ting to follow me, and in two strides I was across, or rather half-way over; for in the middle of this canal a barge was moored, and the bridges from either side of the street led on to the barge.

Half-way over I paused and looked around. Ting was by my side muttering something to

himself, the meaning of which I did not know, but the purport of which I guessed. The landing on the further side was wrapped in complete darkness, a darkness into which I scarcely liked to venture; but realising the necessity of action, I tested the little bridge well before I ventured upon it. Then whispering my directions to Ting, whom I felt sure I could trust in any emergency, I sprang across into the darkness. At the same moment a couple of men rushed forward and made a dash at me, and the bamboo of one, as he brought it down with terrible force, slid off my shoulder on to the rail of the bridge, which it incontinently shattered. My precaution had been a wise one, and my sudden rush had evolved consequences entirely foreseen. Had I crept carefully along the bridge, there is no doubt that the bamboos would have beaten out my brains.

I immediately closed with the man nearest me—a wiry fellow who did his utmost to drag me into the canal; but if nature gave me nothing else, I have to thank her for some fair physical proportions. I knew, after a moment or two of struggling, that the man was mine. Though brave and fierce, he did not possess the least elementary notion of

science, and I back-heeled him with such force that his head fell with a sickening crash upon the boards.

Ting, in the meantime, had followed out my whispered advice to the letter, and often since I have upbraided myself for doubting him ; but at the time I was not quite sure of him, as, indeed, I could scarcely be on such a short acquaintance. Had he left me then I doubt if I should ever have seen Fong-Chin, or anything else this side of the grave ; but he did nothing of the kind. No sooner did he hear the blow descend than, with an excited shriek, he sprang across in my wake, and, as I grappled with one man, he seized the other. It was a short, sharp tussle between the two, and how Ting succeeded in beating his opponent I do not know ; but one thing I can say, just as I sprang forward to give him a hand, he stepped back and delivered a sounding blow on his adversary's face, and there followed a cry and an ominous splash.

Then he seized me by the hand, and immediately hurried me down the dark alleyway opposite, our footsteps, or rather mine, clattering noisily in the quiet street. Sometimes we stopped and hid in the shadows, listening intently for the footfall of a pursuer ; but, though

nothing approaching a noise reached me, I had an uneasy feeling that we were followed, and as we suddenly turned into a narrow street I drew Ting into the deep shadow of a projecting doorway, and laid my hand across his mouth.

Presently, without the least noise to herald his approach, a darker shadow slid out of the darkness, and was about to pass within a foot of us when I grabbed him by the shoulder. A startled grunt, a lightning-like twist, and behold, the fellow was speeding up the street swiftly and noiselessly as the wind. With an oath I started in pursuit, but I had not gone a dozen yards before the uneven pavement brought me clattering to the ground. When I picked myself up again the man had vanished in the darkness.

Ting came and wanted to know if I had "hult" myself, but even as he made the conventional kind inquiry, interspersed with two or three profound "sollys," he shook in a way which caused me to examine him closely, and then I found that the beggar, owing to my mishap, was nearly exploding with laughter. I felt savage enough to kick him, a grazed shin and the escape of the spy in no way lessening my anger; but fortunately, to the credit of my

own sense of humour, I caught a glimpse of something ludicrous in the disaster.

With careful steps we completed the rest of the journey, and reached our boat without further adventure ; but for greater security we set one of the men to watch until daybreak, which was but some three hours off. Then I crawled into my cabin, and, notwithstanding the excited incidents of the last few hours, was soon fast asleep.

When I awoke in the morning it was broad daylight, and through a chink in the canvas flap I could see the men cooking the breakfast. Then I tumbled out and had a wash, and by the time I had finished drying myself Mr. Ting, a couple of fowls in one hand, and a big parcel in the other, hove in sight. He had been abroad doing the shopping, and when I saw the fowls I thanked him with a grateful look. He grinned, but said nothing.

"Well," said I, "how do you feel, eh?"

"All li."

But he gave me a warning look, and then nodded towards the crew. I understood, and respected his wish for silence. Mr. Ting was a man with a reputation to maintain, and he was duly ashamed of his backsliding. He

seemed to think that he who eats Mission rice must of necessity be a hypocrite.

After breakfast the things were stowed away, the mast stepped, and, as if to prove how true a prophet was Mr. Ting, the wind blew sturdily from the south, filling our sail, and sending us scudding up-stream to join the parent flood, the Pe-kiang, or Great North River.

Of that day's journey there is little to relate. We passed numerous villages, and no end of craft going up and down stream. It was interesting in its way, but soon grew exceedingly monotonous, and I'm afraid I slept a greater part of the afternoon. When I awoke and looked at the water, I found that we were still scudding along at a fair rate; but when in turn I looked at the land I saw that our progression was but slow indeed—which meant that the flowing current was extremely deceptive. The wind, too, was gradually subsiding, and only one other boat, a craft somewhat similar in build to ourselves, which all day long had been sailing in our wake, made any effort to forge ahead. And even she, when at sundown the wind failed altogether, and we dropped anchor, gave up the hopeless struggle, and came to some five hundred yards below us.

We lay in comparatively shallow water, some

dozen yards from the left bank, and the crew began to make themselves comfortable for the night. Of course the first thing to do was to light the fire and bring out the cooking utensils, for the coolie must have his three meals a day, and those who imagine he lives on a handful of rice are mightily mistaken. After the meal comes the smoke; and while the three men sat forward smoking and chatting, I lay aft, smoking truly, but feeling desperately lonely. I could even imagine it would be a fine thing to be a Chinese—in China.

For a long time I lay in the gloom, thinking, and listening to the lapping of the water and the soft voices of the men, as occasionally they broke the silence with some fluently expressed thought. But their conversation gradually grew more desultory, more spasmodic, until it ceased altogether. Then there was no sound, save now and then the ripple of water, or the low moaning of a feeble gust of wind as it swept up the ever-throbbing bosom of the stream.

I took a last peep out. The night was very dark and still. There were many stars in the sky, but they seemed a long way off: the moon had not yet risen. There was nothing else to be seen. I could not distinguish the flat

bank a dozen yards away. Occasionally a frog croaked, and away to the south I thought I heard the strange cry of a night bird; but the air was full of the mysterious sounds of the night, and my pulses seemed to throb loudly in the stillness—as one who dives beneath the sea may hear the beating of his own brain.

And so I turned in once more and composed myself to sleep. It was a strange, out-of-the-way spot in which to find oneself, and I began to wonder what the old people were doing, and what Vi would say if she could see me afloat on the Pe-kiang in company with three Chinamen. Of course, she would have chaffed me and said rude things; but I knew that, if by some divine power of second sight she could see me as I lay there in the sampan, in the night, she would murmur, "Dear old Paul! God bless him!" For she was a sweet girl, in spite of her tongue, and her heart was of the purest gold. And so I thought some nice things of you, Vi; but what they were you shall never know.

And then, I suppose, I went to sleep, or if not, I was precious near it, for I began to dream of the missionary at Fong-Chin, and thought that he had come down on a swift horse to meet us. I saw him stand upon the bank and wave his arms excitedly, and I easily recognised

him from the photograph in my father's possession. And while he still gesticulated, I saw him deliberately walk into the water, as though his eagerness to greet me would not let him wait until I landed. Distinctly also came the gurgle and splash of a moving body. So real was it all that I actually arose to greet him. Half-awake I sat up, and stretching out my hands felt the roof above me. Then, bewildered as I was, I knew it was only a dream, and with a contemptuous expression I was about to throw myself back on the bed, when the real ripple of water caught my ear. In an instant I was wide awake and listening intently, and, after a few moments' duration, there came a sound, so like the sound in my dream, that I could swear it was somebody stepping into the water. Once more I felt for the roof, and, feeling it, knew that I was not dreaming.

Rising stealthily, though previously feeling for, and finding my revolver, I raised the flap of my cabin and peered out; but the night was still very dark, and I could scarcely see the width of the boat. Yet, feeling sure that all was not well, I pressed still further outward, and as I did I saw a white shadow pass before my eyes. Instinctively withdrawing, the blade

of a knife flashed by me, and with an ominous ring buried itself in the woodwork not many inches from where I knelt.

It was a close thing, but I don't think it flurried me much, perhaps because I hardly realised for the moment what it meant. I nevertheless quickly raised my revolver and fired point-blank at the space which I imagined was filled by the body of my assailant. A howl and a fearful curse repaid my promptitude and the accuracy of my aim. Then I throbbed with the excitement of battle.

My shot, and the subsequent howl of my victim, awoke the three men forward; I shouting out to Ting what had happened, bidding him prepare to repel the enemy. He screamed in return, "All li, all li, all li," and immediately there was a scramble for oars and boat-hooks.

It would be hard to say what followed, for the darkness was so intense that friend from foe could scarcely be distinguished. Yet, taking it for granted that those in the water were the enemy, I quickly emptied my revolver at every shadow I suspected; but only one sound, a painful, stifling sort of groan, repaid me. Then, while I turned to grope for an oar, or the first weapon of offence I could lay my hands

on, a man sprang upon my back, and, missing my neck, slashed his knife along my shoulder. Failing in his attempt, he curled his legs tightly round my waist, and dug his long-nailed fingers into my throat. But with a mighty effort I tore his hand away, the sudden movement bringing his knife with a clatter to the bottom of the boat.

His legs gripped me like a vice, and I dared not attempt to loosen them for fear that he would claw my eyes out, or tear my face to pieces. I pulled at his hands, I beat him as best I could; but his fingers, with their long, poisonous nails, were always about my neck and face, and I became possessed of the horrible idea that he was really carving my features; so, without the slightest hesitation, I threw myself violently down upon the thwarts, guessing that as I weighed a trifle over fourteen stone my adversary would not relish the impact.

But he was like a fiend out of the bottomless pit, a hell-eel, if there is such a thing; for, acting with a promptitude which I must admit was worthy of admiration, he slewed himself round my body and only received half of what I intended to give. I got the other half, and decidedly unpleasant it proved; but if my

manœuvre was not wholly successful at once, it ultimately led to success. His eel-like movement to escape my weight brought him more within reach of my hands, and as I forced him over on his back I soon had him at my mercy. But as he still continued to kick, bite, and generally behave like a wild animal, I beat his head upon the woodwork of the boat and rendered him senseless.

While this personal encounter was attaining such startling developments, the fight between my men and the besiegers still raged furiously. Shrieks and imprecations filled the air, varied by an occasional still more furious yell as one of the combatants received a job from a boat-hook, or a smack from one of the heavy oars.

I arose from my assailant and heartily cursed the darkness and the muddle of things. Blows were ringing round and about me, while the men in the water splashed and shrieked like a pack of demons. I laid hold of an oar and smote whenever I got the opportunity; but the enemy, as if knowing that I guarded the after part of the vessel, and, no doubt, fearing my revolver, concentrated their attack on Ting and his companions. How many of the enemy there were I could not tell, but I doubted not

that they out-numbered us by at least two to one.

Yet if they anticipated an easy victory they were manifestly surprised, for the men forward fought like furies and beat off every combined attempt to board. And then, even as I was taken by surprise, so was Mr. Ting. I heard him shrieking loudly with rage and excitement as he staggered towards me, locked in a man's arms ; but before I could rush to his assistance the two swayed, slipped, and then fell overboard.

I heard them fall with a sickening splash into the stream, and as there was no time to render him assistance, I sprang forward to take his place, and got some nice buffetings for my pains ; but I hope I gave somewhat better than I got. At any rate, the attack slackened for a moment, and our assailants drew off into the darkness. I sincerely hoped that they had had a surfeit of fighting. I was willing to believe that common-sense was the predominant attribute of the Chinaman, and that such sense would bring home the fallacy of further persisting in such a ruinous attack. But I feared—I feared it was but the calm before the storm.

Poor Ting was gone, but I still had the two

men forward, who, though beaten badly, still stuck to their posts. These children of the dragon, though ordinarily peaceable citizens, had still some of the dragon's blood in them; and it was heated now, and when heated it grew furious and raced like a Yang-tse cataract. I felt that there was still plenty of fight in them, and their devotion filled me with gratitude. If we came out of this alive I was determined to show that gratitude in some substantial form.

But in the meantime I wondered if I might not utilise this lull to replenish the empty chambers of my revolver, and no sooner did the thought come to me than I began to creep aft to put it into execution. Indeed, I had reached my baggage and was nervously fumbling for the ammunition when a cry from the men forward brought me scrambling back again. I looked, but could see nothing, though the besiegers at that moment burst out into a fierce cry of dismay, and made a great splashing in the water as though they were coming to us. I gripped my oar, prepared once again to assert the superiority of race, when the man who was kneeling near me uttered a strange cry, which I thought at the moment was one of glad excitement. Then, hurriedly seating

himself upon the bench, he did no less a strange thing than slip an oar into the rowlock and begin to pull like mad. Kneeling down I looked over the side, and my heart throbbed with thankfulness.

In some way or other our boat had loosened its moorings, and was now sliding swiftly down the stream, while every moment the cries of our assailants sounded farther away.

CHAPTER V.

A DETAIL OR TWO.

I WAS almost stunned by the gladness of this unexpected escape, and I felt every nerve of me thrill with unexampled delight. Yet when I looked at the man tugging furiously at the oar, I realised what the action meant, and added my strength to his. For, as we were drifting, one of two things must happen: either we should bump ashore and get stuck in the mud, or else drift down within striking distance of the boat which had anchored some five hundred yards below, and which I now had every reason to regard with suspicion. Indeed, what was more likely than that the enemy should have cut us adrift with a view to wrecking or bombarding us?'

Therefore I tugged with might and main to drive the boat's nose out into the middle of the stream, while the man, seeing that I had grasped the situation, sprang to the long steering-scuttle aft and worked with a right good will.

The other member of our crew crouched in a heap forward, muttering feebly. Poor fellow, he had been receiver-general with a vengeance.

But fortunately our united efforts were crowned with complete success, and we passed down stream without even seeing the enemy's ship. However, I still pulled hard with the object of reaching the opposite bank, and my friend aft, guessing my purpose, bent to with a will, and presently we felt our keel slide into the soft mud. Almost at the same moment the moon forced its way through a thick black cloud, and lit the water and the drear, surrounding country with weird, white fire.

By the aid of a couple of boat-hooks, pressed deeply in the mud, we made ourselves secure, and then for the first time we were enabled to take breath and look around. My shoulder twitched painfully, but a hasty examination showed me that the wound was not a serious one, the knife having taken a surface course down the breast. The blood had already caked and stopped the bleeding, so I thought it would be wise to let well alone.

As my friend aft seemed quite capable of taking care of himself, I turned with the intention of visiting the poor fellow who was groaning forward, and as with this benevolent

design I stepped across one of the thwarts, I placed my foot upon a man's face. A groan immediately followed, and I drew back with an instinctive feeling of dread. Until then I had forgotten my erstwhile Old Man of the Sea, whose head I had done my best to batter in. Carefully I stooped over him, and as he was still unconscious I seized some lashing and bound his arms. Not that he was likely any longer to prove dangerous, but I had not been accustomed to incidents of this nature, and I thought there might be wisdom in security.

I found the man forward in a condition pitiable in the extreme, but I could do nothing but dose him with brandy and water and bear him into the cabin aft. This I did, laying him on my own bed and making him as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Poor fellow, he seemed very grateful, and murmured incessantly in a low tone; but what he said I could not understand, though what he meant was not difficult to imagine.

Then I carefully lit my pipe and came out on the thwarts to wait for the first sign of day, and as I sat smoking and thinking, now of home, and now of poor old Ting, whom I pictured lying face down in the mud beneath the waters of the Pe-kiang, my man crawled

across to me and touched me on the shoulder, and then pointed away out mid-stream. And through the early morning mist I saw the shadowy outline of a boat glide down the river. Though unable to distinguish her with any accuracy, I had no doubt to whom she belonged, and with a feeling of intense relief I watched her disappear into the shadows. Then, and not until then, did I really breathe freely.

And still I sat smoking and longing for the day to break, strangely nervous to a degree. The reaction, I suppose; unavoidable, no doubt, and yet a thing of which a man is little likely to boast. Yet so it was. My nerves throbbed violently, and at every sound I made a desperate clutch at my revolver. The rustling of the reeds made me start and peer suspiciously over the side; the gusts of wind as they swept fitfully up the stream seemed to me like strange, half-human cries. Fact is, being unfamiliar with such things, the incidents of the last two nights had rather got upon my nerves. This encounter on the Pe-kiang was much more exciting than a bad wicket at Lord's.

Slowly the time crawled on, and desolate and mournful as death seemed that dark hour before dawn. The fire of my blood, having glowed at fever heat, had followed its natural

course and burnt low, and by comparison the smouldering flame seemed icy cold. My shoulder, too, throbbed painfully in the damp air, and I had recourse to the flask; but neither smoke nor fire-water could rob of its melancholy the chill stream and the dreariness of the surrounding waste.

But at the last the shadows began to open, and something ghostly dim from the east crept upon the river mists, and, like weak shadows that they were, they gave way at the first attack. And the dimness of the east grew grey, and then white with a pale pink shade, just as one sees the warm blood beneath the white face of a girl. But every moment the white flushed to a deeper, rosier red, and day flaunted her many coloured ribbons in the sky. Gold and grey, and pink and glorious red, and purple patches opening like vistas into eternity. And there were columns of gold which, reaching far up into the sky, seemed to support the vast azure dome of heaven, and behind them the opalescent curtains were withdrawn, disclosing new worlds of dazzling light.

Day was come, that wonder of wonders, whose approach we welcome with no cry of gratitude, but whose advent, when we think of it at all, we selfishly regard as our due. And

yet she has her devotees; the sailor who watches through the storm, the soldier on outpost duty, the sick man feverishly moaning through the never-ending night. These know what day is, these appreciate her, and perhaps she keeps her sweetest smile for them.

Though the east was all aglow, it was not yet possible to see very far either up or down the stream, but I turned to the prisoner who lay prone upon the broad of his back, and though his face was bruised and considerably swollen, it seemed horribly familiar. A closer look and I was sure of my man. Though he had doffed the attire of a Chinese gentleman, and now appeared in the ordinary garb of a coolie, I recognised in him my rival of the gambling hell, the fellow who had ironically wished me a pleasant journey to Fong-Chin. Pleasant journey, indeed, and to Fong-Chin. It was through no fault of his that I had not gone a little farther.

What to do with him I did not know, for to keep him was to be reminded eternally of a most disagreeable experience; and, as I had no intention of returning to Canton, I had not the least idea when I should be able to hand him over to the authorities. My man, seeing my indecision, yet guessing what troubled me,

touched the prisoner on the breast, and then pointed over the side. A remarkably easy solution, thought I ; but, my friend, it won't do. It's murder. And so I shook my head, and told him that I couldn't think of doing such a thing. The man had committed a crime and must answer to the laws of his country. And a bitter punishment would be his, not so much, perhaps, for trying to rob and murder me, as for infringing the laws of hospitality, and setting at defiance the pleasure of the Viceroy.

So, seeing that the fellow breathed freely, I let him lie there, and directed my energies towards preparing for a start. For with the day the wind had risen, and it blew freshly and in our favour. I spoke to my man, and pointed up the river, and though he may not have understood the words he easily comprehended the pantomime. The other poor fellow still lay aft, too much knocked up to move, and I greatly feared that for the rest of the trip he would take my place as passenger. As for Ting-Foo, I never expected to see him again, and I sent a prayer after his soul. I really believed his faults were inconsiderable, and that of virtues he possessed not a few ; the memory of him made my heart glow. Poor old Ting !

But even as I sentimentalised thus, I busied about with my preparations; for though the memory of Ting kept cropping up, I looked through it, as it were, to the city of Fong-Chin, and the missionary and his fair daughter. The man boiled the rice while I saw to the ship. Though we had lost our big anchor, and several yards of sound native rope, I discovered a smaller one forward, and this I soon bent to what was left of our cable. Then the man squatted down to his rice and I to my tea.

By this time the day was quite bright, the long stretch of river crisping and curling beneath the warm breeze. I looked carefully up and down stream, but saw nothing of the enemy. Above and below us the smoke rose from many villages, but beyond that there was no sign of man or woman.

Breakfast was not a very elaborate meal. My man fairly wolfed his dish of rice, while my portion of bread and meat did not linger on the road. Then, as I rose to hoist the sail, I was startled by a cry which came skipping across the water, and on turning round I saw a man on the opposite bank, about a hundred yards above us. Or rather, I should say, I saw a man's head and arms, the rest of him

being buried in the reeds. He was too far off for us to hear what he said, likewise too far away to be seen distinctly, and for the moment I did not think of my glasses. Just as I did the fellow plunged boldly into the river and struck out for our side.

Naturally my thoughts flew to Ting, and I felt my heart beat with hope. What, after all, if it should be he? I turned to my man and repeated, "Ting, Ting," pointing to the swimmer; and the man's eyes sparkled and he smiled idiotically, but I thought he was fully alive to the suggestion.

In the meantime the swimmer breasted the stream in gallant fashion, and though it ran strongly, he dug his head low into it and maintained his way. At first I thought the current would sweep him within a reasonable distance of us, but as he got out in mid stream it caught him and dragged him down, and I saw him making desperate efforts to elude its clutches. Now, I had swum enough against tides and currents to know with what persistency they attack a tired man, and how utterly remorseless is the smooth flow of the sea or the stream. And from certain strenuous efforts, spasmodic in the extreme, in which I had observed the swimmer indulge, I greatly

feared that all was not going well with him. And he had a long stretch of water still to negotiate.

Unconsciously I found myself kicking off my shoes ; my socks followed as a matter of course. Intent as I was on the swimmer, I seemed to say to myself that it would be a foolish thing to plunge into such a current with one's clothes on. As well tie a millstone round one's neck and jump overboard. I suppose it was instinct ; anyway it was rather curious.

Slowly, very slowly, the man forged his way along. The middle of the stream was passed now, but the swimmer was only abreast of us, and was assuredly losing his strength. Indeed, it was evident that if left to his own resources he would never reach our bank alive. This he at last seemed to realise, and, turning to us, he raised one hand as if for help. That moment showed us his face, and my man and I exclaimed almost with the same breath :

"Ting!"

And Ting it was, but with a face rendered hideous with pain and terror. With fingers that moved like lightning I literally tore my clothes off, and with a cry to him I leapt into the river. I felt the mud as I went down, but a few strokes soon took me into deep water.

Then, taking my bearings, I turned over on my side, and with a swift over-arm stroke went flying down the stream.

Swimming had always been a source of pleasure to me, and among men of moderate pretensions I was spoken of with respect. But I had never indulged in a sprint like this before. This was for no cup or medal, but for a human life, so I buried my nose deep in the water and launched myself forward with super-human energy.

And well it was that I did so, for Ting's strength was rapidly ebbing away, and he began to beat the water with a feeble waste of power. I saw it, and redoubled my energies ; but he sank while I was within a dozen yards of him.

It would be no exaggeration to say that I fairly sprang through the water, and as he came gasping and struggling to the surface, I seized him by his queue. He saw me, and a smile flickered across his pallid face. Then his eyes closed and he fainted.

This, under the present conditions, was about the best thing he could have done ; for had he struggled, or attempted to seize me, he would have rendered my task extremely difficult. As it was, I merely turned him on his back,

and, using his queue as a tow-line, swam slowly towards the shore.

Having only the use of one hand, and a double burden to bear, the task set me was not an easy one; but as I was usually in very fair condition, I succeeded, after much struggling, in touching the mud some considerable distance down stream. And I never before felt bottom with more gratification, for during the last five minutes a strange ringing of the ears assailed me, and I had begun to think some decidedly unpleasant thoughts.

I bore the naked Ting up on the bank and laid him on some moss, and chafed his chest and limbs; and I noticed several ugly scars upon his breast—scars which had long since healed, and that he had an ominous-looking blue wale upon his left leg, which, no doubt, occasioned the limp I had observed.

Presently he came round, and in a dazed sort of way sat up, and when he saw that he was naked he tried to cover the scars with his hands. Then, memory coming back to him, he seemed to realise what I had done, and in a profoundly impressive manner he thanked me. But I suggested that he should keep his gratitude for another time, as my particular wish just then was once more to get inside my

clothes. So I helped him to his feet, and together we wended our way back towards the boat, which could not have been less than half a mile away.

As we came within sight of it, Ting, who had been strangely mute during this journey, touched me on the arm.

I turned to him and he stopped.

"Skoosey me," he said, "you welly good to Ting-Foo."

I admitted as much without demur.

"My losee clothes in liver; too muchee 'eavy, makee sink. Liver welly stlong cullent."

"Well?" said I.

"No 'ave got."

That was patent to anyone with eyes.

"But 'ave got piecee clothes in box," and he nodded towards the boat.

"Well, come on board and put them on."

"No can come on board."

"Why not?"

He did not answer, but a look of pain and rage flashed in his eyes.

"You no sabbee?"

"No."

I believe the man's face flushed. At any rate it grew strangely dark and troubled.

"No likee piecee Chinaman see this," and

he touched the scars on his breast. "You no make talk?"

"Not I."

So Ting-Foo had something discreditable here, and wished to hide it. Well, whatever it meant, I was not one to blab his secret, so without more ado I went and got his clothes.

CHAPTER VI

FONG-CHIN.

IN less than half an hour we were once more under weigh, the wind spanking us up stream in rare form. Ting, luckily, was none the worse for his immersion, and after he had added to his strength by eating a good breakfast, I importuned him to relate what had befallen him from the time he tumbled with his adversary into the river.

He smiled as I put the question; the recollection of that cold douche seemed to awaken some pleasant memory.

"That one piecee tumble makee good start," he said. "My faller top side of udder fellow—hold him under—he stuggle, let go, I come top side all li. Him half ddowned, him no see; udders no can tell one piecee Chinaman from udder piecee Chinaman. My stealee folward, cuttee lope, makee ship go. Udder lascals welly angly; no can sabbee; tinkee you cuttee

lope. Then my tinkee follow—swimmee-swimmee. But me no fearee. Too muchee flightened swimmee-swimmee in the dark liver. No can pidgin when no can see. Then my glope ashore—step back, watchee-watchee. Plesently piecee lascal man glope ashore swearing welly bad; too muchee swear no good. Swear allee same English captain down Hong Kong side. My hide along o' bushes. Plesently follow welly soft; see lascal man go off to his boat. Some welly sick; cly and gloan welly splendid. Thlee piecee man no go back. Liver welly big and welly hungly. When the lascal man go, my follow long way down stleam; but no can see lascal man, no can see you. Then my allee same supposee you get on udder side. My walkee back, walkee back, waitee day. See you—tly swimmee. Clothes get too muchee 'eavy, dlop 'em in the liver. But my allee same ddown suppose you no come. You welly good Englishman. My allee same pidgin to you. Likee you first chop."

I patted his shoulder admiringly.

"You allee same belong good Chinaman. Englishman can pidgin to good Chinaman. My likee you first chop."

And, indeed, at that moment I saw nothing ugly in Mr. Ting's ugly face.

"You no speakee?" and he touched his breast.

Knowing to what he referred, I said, "No."

"One day my tellee you the stoly. You, my fliend: you savee me. Ting-Foo lemember."

"Oh, that's all right," said I. "But tell me, Ting-Foo, what we are to do with this prisoner?"

"One hour, we come along side o' town. Give him policeman. Policeman cuttee off his goddam head."

"You remember him, of course?"

"Lemember! No piecee forget. Him too muchee fan-tan. Fan-tan big piecee no good."

"Oh, indeed," said I.

Ting laughed, but he looked anxiously towards the little lacquer box in which he had stowed away his wicked winnings.

Just then our prisoner opened his eyes, and, as we watched him, we saw his dazed look turn to one of comprehension. Next he wriggled somewhat violently in the endeavour to sit up, but finding his exertions futile, a black scowl crept down from his ugly black eyes.

"Lascal," cried Ting, in tones of the deepest reproach, "what for you makee war, makee

kill? This piecee gentleman makee tlavel in your contemptible countly. Him glate man; him honour you and your dead-dog of a countly; him have got passport of the Viceloy, you dead pig, you lat, you flea, you bug," and so on *ad libitum*.

For like most of his countrymen Mr. Ting was an adept in the peculiar use of opprobrious epithets. But his English failing him, not a word of which his victim understood, he launched forth into what I supposed was the choicest Cantonese. How his tongue ran. Br—r—r like a sewing-machine. He jumped and shrieked and gesticulated. I thought he would have flown at the prisoner and torn him to pieces. But bless you, it was only the pretty way of the native. The Chinaman, like the London cabdriver, is a wonderful blackguard with his tongue; but the one rarely comes to blows, the other displays much confidence in the security of his perch.

At first the prisoner merely honoured Ting with a glare of sullen defiance. He was a gambler, and he bowed to the inevitable laws of chance. He had hazarded all and lost. Well, he might have won—there was a tiny grain of consolation in that. But all the same he would like to kick this dog who snarled at

his heels. And his look told Ting as much, and that worthy very naturally resented such an astounding piece of impertinence, and launched forth again and again. And so in time he broke down the sullen reserve of the prisoner, and as he saw his victim gradually yielding to the torture, his eyes sparkled, and his tongue went quicker than ever. At last the man groaned, then he grunted a disdainful "Wah," and the icy barrier of sullen reserve giving way, the stream of his eloquence flowed out in a perfect torrent.

Leaving the two pounding each other with mighty blows of words, I crawled to the sick man aft, whom, much to my surprise, I found looking remarkably well. His eyes sparkled brightly, and his poor battered face was flushed with an unwonted glow. At first I failed to realise this unexpected change, but a moment of close scrutiny explained all. He was listening to the quarrel forward, and fairly revelling in the torrent of abuse.

And without cessation that torrent raged until we were abreast of the town of which Ting had spoken. Here we landed and consigned our prisoner to the tender mercies of Chinese justice, and the parting between him and Ting was of the most affecting nature.

Here also we laid in some fresh water and provisions, also a new anchor with some thirty fathoms of native rope. Then, the wind still being favourable, we hoisted sail, and once more pursued our way.

Little of note occurred during the remainder of the journey. When the wind dropped we rowed, or were towed, and in this latter way we surmounted some rapids and other extremely difficult navigation. That night we anchored before a small village, amid some other boats, and at daybreak we were off again. Sometimes we sailed, and again we had to be towed, and I was just beginning to think the journey never-ending when a bend in the river disclosed the city of Fong-Chin.

Now we three able men worked with a will, and as the distance lessened I perceived the walls of the city, the junks and smaller boats that clustered thickly beneath the walls, and above all, on an eminence between us and the city, the *fung-shui*, or good luck of the place, the Pagoda of Ten Thousand Virtues.

We did not go up past the shipping, but entered a smaller stream, or tributary of the main river, which branched away to the left. This too was busy with boats laden with merchandise, and the sight of the "foreign

devil" caused much interest and amusement to the yellow men. Ting grinned idiotically, but when I asked him to interpret he shook his head. A further knowledge of the celestial has suggested that I was about to entrust Mr. Ting with an extremely delicate mission. However, the rascal carried himself with an air of conceit which proclaimed his prodigious pride in my exalted company.

Along this waterway we went for some little time until we crawled nearer and nearer the mud walls of the city. Then presently a straight stretch of water opened out, at the end of which we perceived a gate. Above this gate were two stone towers, and some half-dozen soldiers leant idly over the parapet, staring vacantly at the passing boats. Under the arch, which spanned the stream, we caught a glimpse of the city and of the numerous craft within.

"This belong South Gate," said Mr. Ting. "Must pay piecee toll."

This water gate was a somewhat cumbersome affair, built after the style of the ordinary lock gates, and as we glided by I was amazed at the solidity of the woodwork, which, to make it appear more formidable, was studded with nails, and clamped together with large strips of sheet iron.

The toll paid, we learned that one of the Mission boys had been down to the gate not an hour before, and that he had left a message for us not to delay our arrival. So we bent to with a will, turning now to the right and now to the left, following the erratic windings of a labyrinth of canals, until we found ourselves in a better part of the town; not that the appearance of the buildings was much better, but there was less noise and fewer ragamuffins. Here we drew into a landing-stage, and with a feeling of intense relief I stepped ashore, knowing that the unpleasant, if interesting, journey was ended at last. Ting looked at me and smiled in his own fascinating manner—a manner which seemed to say, "Well, you see, I have brought you thus far in safety. Is it not clever of me?" Which, after all, was really modest of him, when you come to recollect that some men take unto themselves the credit of a nation.

Ting and I at once set out for the Mission, he going before with my box on his head. Once in the streets my dress attracted universal attention, and as I marched along I became the cynosure of all eyes. Boys and men followed me, laughing hilariously at my outlandish figure, until I had a ragged army

of some hundreds in my wake. I asked Ting if they mistook me for a circus, and he turned on them, and in the most vehement manner denounced them for their rudeness. But they seemed to regard me as a huge joke, and retorted with violent gesticulations, shrill words, and idiotic yellow smiles. Conceiving this to be nothing but a demonstration of curiosity, I bade Mr. Ting march on; and whenever a too inquisitive person unduly pushed himself to the front, I stopped, looked him very gravely in the face, and bowed politely. This I found to have an instantaneous effect on the concourse, the too presumptuous personage immediately becoming the butt of the raillery of the rabble.

So in this manner we sped through street after street, until we came to an open space in which trees were planted, at the far or eastern end of which I beheld a commodious house. Towards this my guide led me, and I not unnaturally guessed that this was our destination. Indeed Mr. Ting smiled and nodded, and then went on with a swifter step. So this was the Fong-Chin Mission, that which but a few weeks ago seemed to me like a myth, and now here it was boldly staring me in the face.

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They seemed to regard me as a huge joke. [Page 76.

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A fairly high wall of brick and mud surrounded the Mission, and as we approached the gates, upon which Ting duly knocked, I noticed upon the pillars some flaring Chinese characters, which I afterwards learned were the Viceroy's proclamation respecting the rights of missionaries. Indeed, when the rabble which was following me realised where I was going, it gradually dwindled away into a dozen or so of little ragamuffins, who whined unceasingly for alms.

In answer to Ting's summons the gate was opened and we entered, and I found myself walking up a well-kept pathway to the house. On either hand there was a pretty patch of garden, and by the arrangement of the beds I saw that the Englishman had transplanted here a little bit of England. There was a smell of roses in the air, which reminded me of home. A few English voices, and an absence of curved roofs and grotesque sculpture, would have completed the delusion.

And presently, to my delight, the English voice came, and to my thinking it stole through the air like a ripple of music. And it said, "Welcome, thrice welcome to Fong-Chin." And behold, a woman stood before me, young, with the supple grace of youth; and the sun

sparkled on her face and in the northern blue of her eyes.

"Thank you," I replied, reverting to the commonplaces of civilisation.

Stepping towards me she frankly extended her hand.

"You are Paul?"

"And you are Rose?"

"Yes." Then a slight pause followed.

"You have had a long journey?"

"Very." Then another pause (in which I looked hard at her) which was more awkward than the first.

She smiled at my embarrassment, but very good-naturedly spared me any further confusion.

"Come and see father. He has been very anxious about you."

"He is better, I hope?"

"Quite, thank you; though his anxiety has not improved his condition."

"I'm so sorry."

"Naturally," and she smiled. "But come, we must not keep him waiting." Then she turned to the attentive Ting and began to jabber Chinese like a native. By the sheepish look on his face I guessed that he was being highly complimented, and as his modest

eyes caught mine I smiled. Had I not known him to be incapable of blushing, I might have suspected him of indulging in that reprehensible habit. Poor Ting! no one was more sensible than he of his own unworthiness.

Rose led me through a quaintly-designed porch into a commodious hall, which possessed some unique specimens of native carving. But it seemed rather incongruous to hang English pictures cheek by jowl with the grotesque and hideous monsters which predominate Chinese art.

She pushed back a door on the left, and entering the room, said, "Father, here's Paul."

"Bless my soul!" cried he, and the next moment he was wringing my hand with an almost boyish ardour. And doubly gratifying was that handshake, showing as it did a warm heart and a sturdy convalescence.

He was a fine specimen of the English gentleman, if perhaps a trifle thin and weary-looking. Clear, honest eyes of the deepest blue he had, so like his daughter's that the resemblance was startling: a pale intellectual face, a clear-cut chin and nose, and hair too grey for his years. Such was the Rev. Paul Ormsby, my godfather, the head of the Inland Mission at Fong-Chin. When I add that he

wore the ordinary costume of a Chinese gentleman, you may imagine that the incongruity of my surroundings appealed most strongly to me.

His welcome alone was worth the journey to Fong-Chin. It was "Dear, dear," and "God bless my soul," and "Fancy you being baby Paul. Why, lad, how much do you weigh? Fourteen two! God bless my soul! and over six feet? Well, well, well! And you are Jack's son. Dear old Jack! We were like brothers, Paul—closer than brothers could be. And now here are you, his son, a man; and here is my daughter a woman. You must take her back with you, Paul. It is time she saw something of her own race."

"I will go when you go," said his daughter, slipping to his knee.

I saw his honest eyes fill, but he patted her head gently and replied with a stout heart, "I cannot go. My duty is here with my people."

"And I cannot go," she said, "because my duty is here with my father."

Well, I hadn't seen anything like this before, for though my sister Vi was a good girl through and through, she was too thoroughly up-to-date to indulge in sentimentalities over such a commonplace thing as a parent. And had she seen that parent in Chinese costume

her behaviour would have been absolutely scandalous. But here all was so sweet, so calm, so different that I felt my spirit glow with delight, and the nerves at the back of my eyes tingle in a way that made me feel ashamed of myself. But, perhaps, it is the sort of shame a man is all the better for feeling. As I watched the golden face of this golden-haired girl—a face that sparkled like sunshine on a clear rivulet—I felt that I had entered an atmosphere as sweet as it was rare.



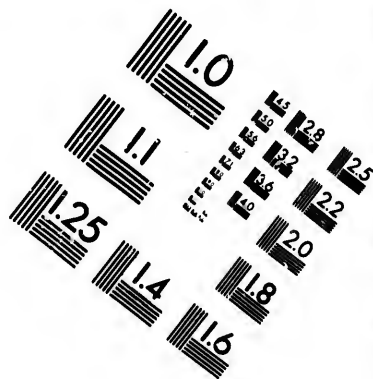
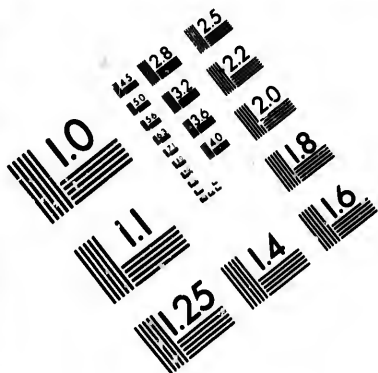
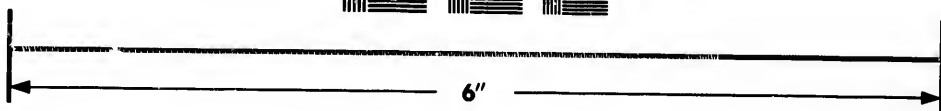
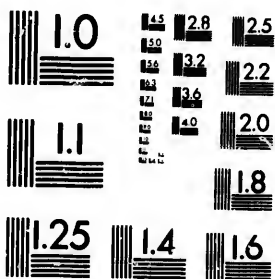


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CHAPTER VII.

WHICH CHIEFLY CONCERNS THE TRANSFORMATION OF A BARBARIAN.

AT dinner that night I met Miss Arbuthnot, one of the Mission workers. She was pale, languid, and looked like a woman with a perpetual headache. From the despondent current into which her talk ran, I soon saw that she was sick to death of the hopelessness of her calling, and that nothing but a misguided sense of duty held her to her post. Seven years ago she had left England full of a divine resolution, burning with enthusiasm. China was the great field for the new, good work. The heathen had but to know the glorious truth. His conversion would follow as a matter of course. But as a matter of course it did nothing of the kind. The Mission of Fong-Chin, established over twenty years, held at the present time some dozen

doubtful converts of both sexes. Among the most devout was the worthy Ting-Foo.

"Slow work, my lad," said Mr. Ormsby, as he almost apologised for his scanty flock; "but I have great hopes for the future. We have a singular race here—a race deeply imbued with the most appalling superstitions, and I admit that Christianity seems to clash with some of their most cherished traditions. But the good work moves forward, and the truth diffused must light the dark places of their hearts."

It was sweet to hear the good man speak so cheerily—sweet to note his kindly eye, his true believer's face. I did not dare to breathe a word of what I had heard concerning the failure of missions, and the hopelessness of converting the Chinaman. It would have seemed like a sacrilege to pollute the pure belief of a soul so transcendently beautiful.

But Miss Arbuthnot, whose blood had been soured and watered by malaria, and whose mind had been embittered by its environment, could not sit by and hear any good said of the Chinese.

"Nothing can light the dark places of their hearts," she said, "because they have neither heart nor soul. Ignorant to a degree, hide-

bound with prejudice, and callous beyond all understanding, they were born to be the butt and the slaves of superior races."

A troubled look swept across Mr. Ormsby's face, and I knew that this shrewish outburst pained him deeply ; but he answered gently :

"We must not forget that if to the pioneer falls all the toil, to him also should be given the greater glory. By dying Christ set us the great example."

The lady tossed her head somewhat disdainfully, as though she had her own opinion about the wisdom of that act. Then she brought forth a grievous catalogue of offences against the people who would not submit to her gentle ministrations. To begin with, they were a nation of liars, and no Chinaman was ever guilty of doing a disinterested act of kindness. Indeed, the converts made a pretence of accepting Christianity merely to better their own hopeless lot.

Mr. Ormsby gently demurred. He believed there was some sound faith among the converts, even though their number was small ; and with some pride he instanced my old friend Mr. Ting. Now, I had a sneaking regard for Ting, whom I considered to be a fellow of infinite courage ; but that he was in

any sense a religious man, or a person from whom all trace of original sin had been eradicated, was a belief I could not entertain. Therefore I said nothing when I saw Miss Arbuthnot's thin lips curl. She may have been the last person in the world who ought to have entered the field as a missionary: but she could see.

When she left us, Mr. Ormsby rose to the occasion and was full of apologies for her. She meant well, poor thing, and she had worked hard; but she was not suitable to the life. On the whole, he was not sorry to think that she was leaving them in a fortnight. Perhaps in England she might—well, well, he had no wish to talk scandal; but he really did not think the climate suited her. She was not strong enough for work.

But Rose, as we walked up and down the moonlit garden, was more confidential, and I learnt that the missionary and his daughter really regarded Miss Arbuthnot as something of the nature of an incubus, and that they looked forward with considerable relief to the date of her departure. With her in the house there was not that unanimity of feeling which should belong to a well-conducted Mission.

For a long time Rose and I walked round

and round the garden, she chatting incessantly of the old country; I smoking and revelling in the cool night. Though she spoke English perfectly, it was with a most charming little accent; or if it could not exactly be called an accent, it was with a pronunciation rather different from what we use—a tone, a slight inflection which set one wondering. Of course, she was perfectly ignorant of this, and I would not have mentioned it for worlds. It was enough for me to listen to the soft tones which the night mellowed sweetly.

Coming from an atmosphere of at homes and dances, it was delightful to drop across this bit of human nature; and though she longed with all a woman's ardour for those empty frivolities, I was glad that she did not know them. But she made me speak of them, of London, the theatres, the opera, and the thousand and one things which go to the making of a great city. I tried to drag in cricket, but she did not grow enthusiastic over that noble game. She had once seen men playing it on the ground in Hong-Kong, but she didn't think she cared much about it. I had also seen the players of Hong-Kong. I looked at the stars and smiled.

Before I arose next morning Mr. Ormsby

appeared at my door with a bundle of clothes on his arm, and after a cheery good-morning, and the kindly-expressed wish that I had slept well, he began to spread the clothes across the foot of my bed, smiling and chatting with the most delightful amiability. When he had quite finished he favoured me with a quizzing smile.

"Well, what do you think of them?"

"Gorgeous," I said, for they were of pretty flowered and embroidered silk, and quite worthy of at least a mandarin.

"I'm glad you like them. Hope you'll find them comfortable."

"Eh?" said I, reading a fearful meaning in his words.

"I may add," he continued suavely, "that I really think you will find them extremely comfortable. The shoes may be a little troublesome at first, but you'll soon get used to them."

"You mean," I gasped, "that you want me to wear those things?"

"Why not? You'll find them excellent in every particular. And look, here is one of my best pigtails."

He heid up a small brimless hat to which was attached a long black queue.

"But, good heavens, sir, I can't wear a pigtail."

"Well, of course, it won't impose on the people, but they will thoroughly appreciate the difficulties under which you labour."

"Of course, you're not joking?"

"Joking, my dear Paul!"

His puzzled look left no doubt of the seriousness of his intentions.

"I mean, sir, I shall look rather ridiculous."

"Oh, I understand," and the good man laughed at the great discovery. "Ridiculous! Not in the least. Remember we are in China, the land of colossal absurdities."

"You think it necessary?"

"Decidedly, if you wish freely to move about the city. What was your experience coming here?"

"It seemed as though we had the total population of ragamuffins at our heels."

"And how did you construe that ovation?"

"The curiosity of the people to see a white man."

"Partly, but more to see his barbarous dress."

I smiled as I thought of the very superior persons in Savile Row who honoured me by preparing my habiliments.

"But will not these people feel insulted if they see me masquerading as a Chinaman?"

"Would you feel insulted if you saw a Chinaman going along Piccadilly dressed as an Englishman?"

"No. I should think him a wise man."

"My dear Paul, the retort is obvious."

Truly, the idea was not to my liking, though it needed scarcely a moment to convince me of the soundness of Mr. Ormsby's argument; and once convinced I rather looked forward to the sensation. To be in China was one thing, but to ape the Chinaman showed a deplorable lack of caste. But as I have said, a little reflection soon rid me of any such nonsensical ideas, and I submitted to the degradation with some amusement.

So, after my tub, Mr. Ormsby came and dressed me, and he declared that I made a magnificent Chinaman, which eulogy might have been received in two ways. But I knew which way it was meant. As he regarded me his eyes fairly beamed with pride and admiration.

Undoubtedly I was a colossal Chow, almost as wide as a door. Being of a dark, rather sallow complexion, and clean shaven as well, I believe I might have passed at twelve paces for an indifferent Chinaman. My little cap was extremely saucy, and my queue was what a

celestial lady might have termed a perfect darling. Mr. Ormsby was delighted with the transformation, and he led me down to breakfast in triumph.

Rose had not yet put in an appearance, but the anæmic Miss Arbuthnot fixed me with a frigid stare.

"Good-morning," I stammered, feeling exceedingly sheepish.

"Good-morning," she answered coldly, dwelling on the word with an emphasis which made it perfectly detestable.

"I think it will be a nice day," said I, hoping to propitiate this grim goddess, whose eyes were crawling over me like a pair of black beetles.

"Yes," she answered laconically. Then, after a somewhat lengthy pause, "What have you got those things on for?"

I looked at the missionary, and he said he thought it desirable. She replied by saying that she thought it ridiculous; that I didn't look in the least like a Chinaman, and that she thought this kowtowing to prejudice was a most potent sign of weakness. Poor Mr. Ormsby clasped his head and turned away with a sigh. Miss Arbuthnot was in one of her argumentative moods.

But luckily at that moment Rose came rushing into the room, and her presence was like the advent of sunshine and sweet air. In her hands she held some freshly-gathered flowers, and I have since thought some pretty things of the analogy of flowers and girls; but then I could do nothing but stare at her and simper foolishly.

"Oh," she cried, when she caught sight of me, "how splendid!"

"You think I'll do?"

"You are magnificent."

I turned to Miss Arbuthnot with a winning smile, and in reply received a frigid curl of her pale lips.

"But—but—is this all you?" asked Rose.

"All me?"

"I mean—you're so large."

"Like an elephant," snapped Miss Arbuthnot.

"But still I like you all the better for that," said the girl. "A large body means a large soul."

It was very clever of her, and I duly admired it. And it was so magnificently feminine.

"Then what a soul a hippopotamus must have," suggested the amiable Miss Arbuthnot.

Rose flushed a little, but she buried her face

in her hands as Mr. Ormsby said grace. Then we fell to with an avidity which proclaimed a prodigious appetite ; one which apparently engaged all our physical and intellectual faculties, as none of us replied to Miss Arbuthnot's very impertinent remark. That lady glowered triumphantly across the table, and smiled at Mr. Ormsby's heroic efforts to take another turning. Malaria and single-blessedness are not a happy combination.

After breakfast I was shown round the Mission, where I beheld the dozen converts of whom my good friend was so proud. To me they seemed to be anything but proud of themselves ; indeed, I thought they had that shrinking, criminal look about them which might be defined as a sort of shame. Luckily Mr. Ormsby's enthusiasm was so great that he did not notice my lack of it.

On crossing the compound I met Ting-Foo, and it amused me greatly to see the amazed look of that wily one. Then he began to grin, but quite respectfully.

" Well, Ting, will I do ? "

" First chop," said he. " Makee good Chinaman, but piecee big. What plovince you belong ? "

Though I knew it was only his joke, it suited

me to reply with a semblance of sincerity, so I said :

"I come from Ning-Po, in the province of Che-Kiang."

He started, and his face grew pale under his yellow skin. His eyes seemed to jump right into mine as though they would explore the very workings of my brain. Then, as the missionary called to me, Ting sidled off with an imploring look.

As Mr. Ormsby and I walked together, my thoughts reverted to Ting, and I suggested that he seemed a very intelligent fellow.

"Most intelligent," was the reply ; "I find him invaluable in many ways. I am proud of him ; he is a grand subject, a magnificent object lesson. Before he sought grace he was a gambler, an opium smoker, and heaven only knows what not."

"And now ?"

"Quite reformed, my dear Paul. An excellent example of the efficacy of truth."

I thought of one or two things, but I held my breath.

"By the way, is he a native of this province ?"

"No. He comes from Ning-Po, in the province of Che-Kiang."

I started. The coincidence was certainly extraordinary. What had made me hit upon that particular town and province? Was it inspiration, or thought-transference, or what? And why had Ting looked at me in that singular fashion? Had Ning-Po and the scars on his chest anything in common?

An hour afterwards Mr. Ormsby, Rose, and I set out to see the sights of the city, and everywhere we were received with a good deal of respect and courtesy. Some of the street people smiled good-naturedly when they saw me, but I was not followed, or in the slightest way molested, and I congratulated myself upon having donned celestial attire. Though my queue was the result of the monstrous growth of one night, it did not excite undue merriment—except on one occasion. Being tall, I happened to strike a low-swinging sign with such force that my hat was knocked off, and with it went my pigtail. All those who beheld the accident fairly doubled themselves with laughter, and roared as heartily as a box full of children at a pantomime. And, entering into the spirit of the thing, I condescended to play the clown. Twirling the hat in my hand, as though greatly excited over the dire mishap, I suddenly clapped it on my head, the back to

the front. This, of course, brought the pigtail streaming down my face, just as though it was growing out of my forehead.

The shrieks of laughter that followed this bit of fooling were beautiful beyond all words, and made me almost regret that I was not an actor. Vi always said I had an undeveloped comic vein, though, like so many comic men, I would insist upon taking myself seriously.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MANDARIN.

THE next day Mr. Ormsby fished out our huge visiting cards, having already had some printed for me, and we prepared to make a formal call upon Wang-Hai, the taotai, or magistrate, of our part of the city, and consequently a most exalted individual. Of Wang-Hai I had already heard much from the good missionary, who described him as a man of much capability, broad in his views, and not at all inclined to treat Christianity with that contempt which was the prevailing characteristic of his countrymen. Indeed, he led me to believe that Wang might have embraced Christianity, had it not been for the worldly advantages he enjoyed. Assuredly the man was seeking the truth; but, unlike us real Christians, he would not sell all and give it to the poor. Still, he was a truth-seeker, and he who seeks shall find. There was hope for Wang.

Rose would not go with us, and when

pressed for a reason declared that she had some important work to which she must attend. But I thought there was something underlying this refusal, and as I looked at her she flushed ever so slightly. I admit, not having the prescience of the omnivorous novel-reader, that the real reason did not strike me—at least, not until I had seen Wang-Hai.

On our way Mr. Ormsby once more began to dilate on the virtues of this remarkable mandarin, who, though he dealt out justice with a strong hand, was nevertheless a paragon of official rectitude. True, stories had been told of him which did not redound to his credit; but of what ruler had scandalous stories not been told? He was a good friend to the Mission, and to him the members of that little flock owed that freedom of person, and protection of law, which they undoubtedly enjoyed. Perhaps he had not always been so charitable or well-disposed, but that was before the search-light of truth had penetrated the dark places of his heart—before he had personally met the missionary and his daughter. Now things were very different, and Rose could wheedle a concession out of him with the least possible effort. As he said this,

the good man laughed quite pleasantly in a self-congratulatory manner.

The Yamen, the official residence of the mandarin, stood on a slight eminence some little distance from the Mission. It faced south, like most of such places, and was a building of a commanding presence. Round about it was a high wall built of heavy blocks of granite, which presented an imposing appearance. And yet I guessed instinctively that the rest of the wall would not be quite so formidable; for the Chinaman, adopting the wise method of the ostrich when it buries its head in the sand, looks only to the bolting of his front door. He cannot conceive anything so contemptible as an attack in the rear.

We sent in our cards, and were very graciously received by the great man in his private room. Here tea was immediately served in strange little cups without handles, and our host was good enough to ask many questions concerning me. Indeed, I thought he eyed me somewhat closely, though with an air of perfect good-breeding. Being unable to understand a word that was said, and always conscious of being dressed for a fancy ball, I was not particularly well at ease. Moreover, I fancied that as his strange little eyes wandered over

my person they twinkled mischievously; though I must add this to his credit, that he made no open sign of amusement or contempt.

Altogether he was a good representative of the Chinaman, tall and well-proportioned, and had it not been for his ugly little slits of eyes he might have passed for a handsome man. His nose was aquiline in mould, and his mouth, though large and full, exhibited no distinctive or remarkable characteristic. But his well-fed, almost plump, appearance gave him a decidedly feminine aspect, which contrasted strangely, and not pleasantly, with his firm nose and his repellent eyes.

To give him his due, I must repeat that he treated me with the utmost courtesy, showing the polite and polished manner of a cultured gentleman; and yet I did not like the man, and I felt conscious of showing to a disadvantage. Instead of finding him the usual indolent, ignorant, supercilious Oriental, he proved to be an active, affable, and extremely courteous host, who waited upon us with an amiability and grace which showed how highly he appreciated the honour we had conferred upon his contemptible house by condescending to visit it.

When we arose to go, he apologised most

profoundly for not sending us back in a manner which befitted our state, but he feared the gossip of the city, that gossip which might reach higher places. And though he mentioned not the Son of Heaven, the Emperor enthroned at Peking, the thought of that august one was enough to make him lower his voice. He believed the God of the Christians was a great God, but he was not yet officially recognised.

On our way back Mr. Ormsby very naturally asked me what I thought of Wang; to which I replied as evasively as possible, saying that I thought he was rather a fine-looking fellow.

"It will be a magnificent triumph," he said, "a magnificent triumph."

"What, sir?"

"The conversion of Wang."

I thought so, too, but I believed as much in it as I did in the millennium. Both, perhaps, were probable, but still a long way off.

"But, sir, he would lose his position."

"And what would he gain?" he cried enthusiastically.

I knew what he would gain on earth; what he would gain in heaven seemed highly problematical.

"Are men so self-sacrificing?"

"If they be true men."

I wondered, judging from his point of view, how many true men there were in the world. I thought of my lord bishop in his luxurious palace, and wondered when he was going to leave it all to follow the footsteps of his Master. But I said nothing, for I saw how blindly sincere he was, and I would not for the world have said a thing to destroy his pure faith in human nature. Therefore I mumbled the hypocritical hope that Wang would yet see and embrace the truth. But in my own sceptic mind I did not doubt the worldly wisdom of Wang. The standard of self-sacrifice reaches the same high level all the world over.

Rose received us somewhat anxiously I thought, but to her father's rhapsodies, in honour of the mandarin, she turned but a sadly-attentive ear. No doubt Wang had many virtues, but she had apparently grown a little weary of them. There is such dreadful monotony in perfection.

But later on, as she and I sat in the cool shade of the verandah, I gained from her a wholly different idea of Wang, and I was pleased to find that we held somewhat similar views respecting him. Indeed, had I been more observant, I might have seen more than I did ; but

at the time I never suspected the true state of things. And she, lacking the experience of her sisters of the world, with nothing but her woman's wit to help her, was too modest to broach the subject. But of his leanings towards Christianity she entertained the most profound doubt, though with an admirable delicacy, which I thought was truly delightful of her, she refrained from mentioning those doubts to her father. It was a house of cards he was building, but she would not breathe upon the foundations.

Though passionately devoted to her father, and her father's daughter in all that was best and noblest in him, she had outgrown the weaker side of his nature. He was an enthusiast pure and simple, thinking no wrong, believing no wrong, and finding a dozen excuses for it even when brought before him. She, on the other hand, though at times sharing deeply in his enthusiasm, brought a more critical faculty to bear upon the subject, with a result which was not wholly in agreement with him. Years of successive failure could not damp his wonderful enthusiasm. "The light will come," he used to say, "the light will come." And sometimes she thought she saw the glory of heaven in his face ; at others she read an inspired pro-

phesy in his words. But the day was long in breaking, and the chilliness of the morning made her shiver. Then came the acrid Miss Arbuthnot, with her pessimistic wail of "Never, never, never."

All this I gathered from what she said, though she had no intention of leading me to believe that she was not in complete harmony with her father. Indeed, had it not been for the exalted Wang, I doubt if I should so soon have shared her confidence; but, though I knew it not at the time, matters were moving briskly in that quarter, and a little more penetration on my part, with a judicious mixture of questioning, might have turned that confidence into a confession.

The next day Wang returned our visit, but unostentatiously. Mr. Ormsby received him with the grave dignity befitting an official of high rank, and tea, cakes, and sweetmeats were handed round. Again I pretended to take an interest in him and his sayings, though, of course, I didn't understand a word. Yet that did not prevent my listening politely, or cutting in with a word or two, just to show that I was an intelligent human being.

But the official, away from his office, did not seem able to forget his officialism. His big

yellow face, so amiable at his Yamen, now assumed an indifferent, sullen air of fatigue, and I saw him look wearisomely round about the room, now staring out of the window, and now watching the door with a curious listening expression of countenance. And all the time the dear old missionary chatted away amiably to his illustrious visitor, his kind face alight with the spirit of grace which ever shone about him. But the surly, yellow-faced Confucian listened as a rich man might to the conciliatory talk of a poor relation. He was obviously bored, but boredom was a part of his official life.

Then of a sudden his dull face lightened, its heavy impassiveness vanished as if by magic, and he turned attentively to the door, a ready smile on his lips. As Rose appeared he sprang from his seat and crossed the room to meet her. From that moment he ignored our presence and devoted himself to her with an assiduity which I could see she found embarrassing, but which she had not the courage to resent. As for me, I simply would not realise the meaning of it. A Chinaman dare to think that an English girl could find him attractive? And such a girl, such a delightful piece of womanhood? It was ridiculous. As though a white woman, who was worth the name, could

so far forget herself as to look upon a coloured skin with any other feeling than that of passive toleration or feminine curiosity.

I stood back against the window and watched Wang's animated yellow face with an acute feeling of resentment, unjustifiable, no doubt, and perhaps a little impertinent. To me Rose seemed to speak Chinese like a native, and as they laughed and chatted together my anger at being ignorant of the language made me long to punch the mandarin's head. But fortunately I remembered who he was, and the deference due to a man of his exalted rank. Therefore I did my best to appear at ease, and when he bowed to me at parting I honoured him with a most grave and dignified sweep. I thought he smiled somewhat superciliously, but perhaps it was only my jealous fancy.

When he was gone Rose turned an interrogating pair of eyes to mine, sweet wistful eyes, ethereally blue; but I dared not take upon myself the liberty of questioning her actions. And when she asked me what I thought of him, I bluntly answered, "Not much," at which she blushed ever so slightly and smiled.

Then, just at that moment, Mr. Ormsby returned, full as ever of enthusiasm for the

illustrious Wang, but I observed that he failed to strike a responsive note in either of his listeners.

An hour or so after I encountered Ting in the compound, and during our conversation I purposely mentioned the mandarin's name. At the time I was not watching him very attentively, but indifferent as was my glance I could not fail to notice the start he gave. When I looked straight into his eyes I saw that they were ablaze with anger.

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Plenty much. Him belong bad man, him belong plenty cluel bad man."

"Is he liked in the district?"

"Too muchee cluel, too muchee squeeze. Makee lich man."

"But all Chinese officials do that."

"This one belong bad Chinaman, bad Manchu. Tolture poor man, lobbee lich. Make plisoner—beatee—cuttee—ugh!"

And he burst forth furiously into his native lingo, and his long sinewy fingers twirled in the air as though eager to plant themselves in Wang's throat.

"Is he married?"

"Plenty mallied, plenty wiffee. Him bad man. Some day my speakee, tellee you plenty."

But I was too full of my own thoughts justly to value the vehemence of Ting. Mine was the innate selfishness of the world. What did it matter how many suffered so that I escaped?

CHAPTER IX.

THE DINNER AT THE YAMEN.

THREE days after we received a formal invitation to dine at the Yamen, an honour of which we were, or should have been, extremely proud. Frankly, I was indifferent, but Mr. Ormsby looked upon it as a singularly happy omen, and we, perforce, had to pretend that we were pleased. He was a dear, good man, with one of the kindest and sweetest natures imaginable, but over-zealous—an indiscriminate worker. He had set his heart on the conversion of Wang, and he had no doubt whatever, that as soon as the mandarin saw the true way he would pursue it. Therefore, though but a humble repairer of the road of truth, he could do his duty, and see that his section was kept in good order.

And so he missed no opportunity of meeting the magistrate, and an answer was returned to the Yamen accepting the kind invitation. Of course the compliments on either side were in

the best manner of the Chinese. Wang spoke of himself as "your ignorant and presumptuous nephew," and described his high official residence as his "mean and contemptible abode," which the missionary in the "fullness of his exalted condescension would demean himself by honouring." Having some sense of the ridiculous, Mr. Ormsby expended a prodigious amount of labour in concocting his reply, and when it was complete Rose declared it was a masterpiece, containing as it did a minimum of absurdity with a maximum of compliment.

The day before the dinner Miss Arbuthnot took leave of us, and here once again Wang gave proof of his friendly feeling towards the people of the Mission, for he placed at her disposal one of his own boats and some of his own men. It was not a very sad leave-taking. The one was all anxiety to be gone, the others waiting calmly for her to go. We all three walked with her down to the river, down to the very stage at which I had landed, the coolies trotting on before with the baggage. She spoke of the Mission work, yet with the same hopeless ring of pessimism; though sometimes I thought her voice, as she regretfully alluded to what might have been, sounded marvellously soft and true. The husk was rough but the

kernel was sound. Indeed, there was some heart in the woman, and, at one time, there must have been enthusiasm also. But she had none of the altruism of the missionary, and the small flame of her enthusiasm had died out in the stagnant, hopeless air of her environment.

"You ought to be coming with me, Rose," she said. "This is no place for you."

"So I try to impress upon her," said the missionary.

"And I am an obstinate, wilful creature," was the reply. But she slipped her arm through his and smiled up at him, and the love of her young eyes kindled the flame in his.

"Nevertheless," said Miss Arbuthnot, "I repeat this is no place for you, no place for any civilised Christian," with a meaning look at the missionary. "The people are fast bound with the chains of prejudice and tradition, and no earthly power can break them."

"It is not on earthly power we depend," said Mr. Ormsby gently.

"Or is it not possible that being, presumably, rational men and women, they resent being told they are wrong?" I ventured.

"They're wrong, of course," said Miss Arbuthnot, "though in their own way they may be rational men and women. What I

have realised is the hopelessness of missionary enterprise, and I think it would be better for you, sir, and your daughter as well, if you were to realise it also."

He shook his head with a sweet smile.

"I must stand by my people."

And by the way his daughter clung to him, I knew that she was thinking, "And I will stand by you, oh, my father." Miss Arbuthnot shook her head despondently. The missionary was as hopeless as the mission.

All the same, we seemed a small party as we walked back, and I knew that some kindly thoughts were following, and would follow her, on her voyage down the Pe-kiang. Indeed, quite involuntarily as it were, Mr. Ormsby exclaimed, "God bless her! She was a good woman." Rose at once launched forth into a catalogue of the lady's virtues, of which no one seemed to have had an inkling before. It is the awful cynicism of life over again. A man must die to have his virtues known.

On the afternoon of the day on which we were to dine with Wang, Rose suggested to her father that she had no particular wish to visit the Yamen, and begged that he would take her excuses to the illustrious official. But the worthy man, not seeing deeply, protested quite strongly

against such a breach of good manners. As a matter of diplomacy alone, would it be wise? Nothing but illness could justify her non-appearance. Was she ill? A headache? Well, well, she must rest for a couple of hours. There was something in their lives beyond mere social forms. If they worked and schemed, was it not for the good of the Mission and the glory of God?

I thought she never looked lovelier than she did that night. A slight flush had warmed her usually pale cheek, and her ruddy, golden hair gleamed weirdly in the lamp-light. I thought of all the girls I knew, and though some of them were undoubtedly "smarter," I recollected none who could be compared with her in natural gifts.

Wang received us with a peculiar dignity which was highly impressive, which augured ill, I thought, for the festivity which was to follow. Naturally I expected to be more or less dull, for there is nothing more conducive to physical and mental discomfort than an ignorance of the prevailing language; but at the same time I could watch Wang—and think. That he intended to give more food for reflection I had no doubt, for after he had handed round a tray of sweetmeats, preparatory to the

announcement of dinner, he sat himself beside Rose, and looked at her in a way that made me long to kick him. And truly she was a wondrously white creature, and though I resented the impertinence of his stare, I had small cause to blame him. Never could he have seen anything so singularly beautiful, and if he worshipped, egad! was it more than I was doing myself?

It was a little after eight o'clock when we sat down to a dinner which did *not* consist of birds'-nest soup, shark cutlets, puppy dogs and mice. The soup was vermicelli, and the fish was capital; and fowls and rice, bamboo shoots, sweetmeats and fruit made up a simple and pleasant meal. For our benefit some exceedingly good champagne was uncorked, and Wang drank it with a zest which made me think well of the heathen.

After dinner came another resource of civilisation in the shape of a good cigar, and Wang proved himself such a capital host that I began secretly to upbraid myself for my lack of generosity. Then the musicians and dancers were announced, and though I thought the music hideous and the dancers grotesque little monsters, I had still enough liberality in my nature to admire the princely Wang. Tea

followed once more, and after a cup or so I went out into the hall and lit a cigar. From the hall to the open door was but a few steps ; a few more steps took me into the cool air of the garden.

It was a lovely night, clear and warm, a great yellow moon filling the air with golden shadows. Around us the city lay still as death, a sort of weird stillness, it seemed, which was almost uncanny.

I walked round and round the various paths, enjoying my cigar and knowing that I would not be missed, thoughts here, there, and everywhere, until at last my more than half-burnt cheroot warned me that I had been absent some time. I therefore returned to the house, and as I approached the porch I caught the low murmur of an impassioned voice. Listening, I heard Rose reply in Chinese ; then the man spoke again, this time in a louder key. She answered, and a shuffling of feet followed. I stepped forward and saw that Wang had got his arms about her, and that she was struggling to free herself. As soon as she saw me she cried out, " Paul ! help ! "

The words had scarcely left her lips before I had seized Wang by the back of his neck. My hand coming into contact with his queue, I

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My hand coming into contact with his queue, I caught it and jerked him
violently against the wall. [Page 115.]

caught it and jerked him violently against the wall, which he struck with a dull thud.

I fear I scarcely realised what I was doing, but had it been the Emperor himself—the so-called Son of Heaven—I would have treated him in a similar manner—and paid for it afterwards. But at such moments one hardly stays to count the cost, which in its way is sometimes a pity.

Wang lurched unsteadily towards me, his eyes gleaming vindictively in the half light, and I, nothing loth, prepared to receive him. But Rose, rapidly regaining her presence of mind, rushed in between us with a shrill "No, no!" My hands fell, and Wang stood still, and we glared across at each other like two mistrustful dogs. Then she touched my arm, and seeing an imploring look in her eyes I half-turned round and beheld Mr. Ormsby advancing into the doorway. He came to the threshold, and peering out, said, "Rose, where are you?"

Strange his soft voice sounded with its tender tones. It crept into the warm night like a cool wind; it fell like balm upon my throbbing heart.

"Here, father."

There was just a little quiver of the night

wind in her voice. Not enough for an unsuspecting parent to notice.

"It is time we thought of going. Where is Mr. Wang?"

She turned to the mandarin and said something in Chinese, and that worthy immediately advanced within the missionary's line of vision. Then began a series of flowery compliments, of facile excuses and absurd regrets, all according to the formula of celestial etiquette. Among Western peoples Wang would be called a gentleman, perhaps a man of honour. Under certain conditions it is so easy to be either. If at times he misbehaved, it was because he was strong enough to defy convention. When he pleased, his behaviour would bear comparison with the most circumspect.

As he stood there in the hall smiling his yellow, oily smile, poor Mr. Ormsby fairly beamed on him, doubting not that the heathen was at last within measurable distance of the throne of grace. And how the wily infidel played on the poor, unsuspecting Christian; how he enjoyed the joke I saw by his yellow smiles. Rose turned aside and hung her head, and now and again Wang directed a triumphant glance towards her, and once or twice he looked at me from out the corners of his horrid

little eyes. But I had an obstinate mood on, and stared him down. I would have knocked him down with as little compunction.

At last we managed to tear ourselves away. Poor Mr. Ormsby shook hands effusively, but Rose and I merely bowed. Wang bowed in return, and I saw the lamplight gleam on his smiling, yellow face. It was such a self-conscious, self-satisfied smile that, had I been a few years younger, I would have flung something at him, the grinning monkey. I was annoyed, because I felt that this slant-eyed son of Confucius was winning all along the line.

But it was absolutely painful to listen to the missionary rhapsodise the Confucian. Yet he did not know, and Wang had given him no cause to doubt his sincerity. Poor Mr. Ormsby's one weakness was the justification of his Mission, and of late the converts had been very shy. The gathering of Wang unto the fold would be an epoch-making event; that it meant official ruin to the convert came not into the count at all. Mr. Ormsby was angling for a very big fish.

"Well," said he, "what are your impressions of the night?"

"Varied," I replied.

"I suppose so. Must have seemed very strange. Quite an experience for you, eh?"

"Quite," I said.

"Wang makes a capital host—a capital host. Of course the meal wasn't real Chinese, but that only shows the remarkable tact of the man. Knew our insular tastes and prejudices, and studied them accordingly. I think you were half-inclined to consider the Chinese gentleman as a joke, eh? What do you make of him now?"

"I was quite wrong. He is not a joke."

"Ha, ha," he laughed, "we shall get you into our ways presently. Then you'll find that we are not so much to be pitied, though we do live out of London. I was pleased with Wang to-night—more pleased than usual, and," turning to Rose, "I should say somebody else found him exceptionally attractive. Upon my word," and he laughed pleasantly at the thought, "if he were a white man, and single, I should begin to fear—"

"Oh, father!"

The protest broke from her like a startled cry, and in the dark I felt my face burn. But he, unconscious of what had happened, continued to blunder on in his own dear, stupid fashion until the Mission gates loomed up out

of the dark before us. Then, having no further wish to hear the praises of Wang prolonged, I pleaded weariness as an excuse, and hurried off to bed. The palm that Rose slipped into mine, as we said good-night, was burning hot ; the pressure she gave me was more eloquent than words.

CHAPTER X.

A STREET SCENE.

I THOUGHT incessantly of her that night, and longed heartily to free her from her unpleasant predicament. An importunate heathen lover on one hand ; on the other a father blind to the verge of imbecility. Much as I respected, much as I loved Mr. Ormsby, I felt not a little annoyed with him, and I was determined to ask for Rose's consent to speak. It might dispel a fond delusion ; but better that than wait until it became a mania. I understood now how Ting-Foo, the opium-smoking, gambling, swearing, fighting Ting-Foo, became a "number one Chlistian man." I could also understand the contempt with which the Chinese regarded the missionary and his converts. I could see Wang's little black eyes looking through and through the white man, the simple barbarian who had come to teach the wily Confucian. It was enough to make the great green dragons that guarded the entrance to Wang's Yamen shake with laughter.

After breakfast the next morning, as soon as Rose and I found ourselves alone, we began to talk over the incidents of the previous night; and seeing that I was serious, and very much in earnest, much of her reserve thawed, and she made a confidant of me. And though she blushed to own it, and hoped I would not think any the worse of her for the confession, she admitted that she had been half afraid of Mr. Wang for some time.

"And your father has no suspicion, of course?"

"Of course not, poor dear. Didn't you hear him joke about it? Oh, I thought I should have died."

"I guessed how you felt. I was glad the darkness hid my own face."

"I am glad you understand. It is so dreadful to have no one who understands."

"But if he knew?"

"He must not know," she answered quickly.

"It would pain him frightfully. He is an angel, Paul. He could not understand, and not understanding, he might doubt."

"So that being an angel has its disadvantages?"

"In this world, yes."

"And yet, at the risk of being thought

unsympathetic, I must repeat, he ought to know."

And should, if he were an ordinary man. But he is not. I tell you, he would not understand, and it would hardly become me to make him. Girls are fanciful, vain, greatly given to trifling with the imagination. You know how easy it is for people to talk. My father forgets that all men are not cast in the same mould."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"What can I do but wait and watch—and trust to mother-wit?"

"Dear Rose," I said, "I do not wish to be an alarmist, but I believe the mandarin to be a vindictive brute, and I do not like the thought of your being left here with no more powerful protector than your father."

"It must be, Paul," she replied; but all the same I seemed to detect a tone of regret in her voice.

"Why must it be? Why can't you come back with me? My people would make you very happy, and in time we might prevail upon your father to abandon this hopeless task and come back too."

"Never. His heart, his life is here. He would not go to be made Archbishop of Canterbury—unless he was sure that he could be of

more service in England. To you this life may have a blank, dreary, hopeless outlook ; but there is something strangely Christ-like in it that appeals to him. He is the one among many, and he was made to bear sorrows. That's why I cannot go with you, dear Paul ; not that I have not the wish."

Well, I could not be angry with such a daughter, whatever in my selfishness I may have thought ; for if I deplored that peculiar feminine characteristic which raised obstinacy to a virtue, at the same time I hope I duly admired the happy illustration of filial love.

Just then Mr. Ormsby joined us, and after he and Rose discussed her new duties—for, now that Miss Arbuthnot had gone, a double duty devolved upon the girl—he turned to me, more out of compliment, I think, than anything else, and asked how soon we ought to return the mandarin's hospitality. I looked at Rose without replying, and though she grew a shade paler, her eyes burnt into mine with a steady radiance.

"I'm afraid I'm but a poor authority on Chinese etiquette ; but I suppose the longer the delay the more important he will think you ?"

For this I received a grateful look, and I felt that I was on firm ground.

"Ay, to be sure; but long delay cools the heart. One must be precise with an official. Anyhow, I will leave a card on him to begin with. We hold our Mission on a precarious tenure, friend Paul."

"And the English warships cannot come up the Pe-kiang," added his daughter significantly.

"That is an uncharitable thought," he said. "I believe I have heard Miss Arbuthnot express a somewhat similar idea. The English warships are a mighty force, but I know of a force that is mightier," and he left us, his face aglow with the light of an enthusiast.

All the same, I felt proud of those warships, and would have given much to see the white ensign waving before the walls of Fong-Chin.

"Of course he will invite the mandarin?"

"Decidedly," she answered.

"Well?"

"My dear Paul, if I have been brought up in a heathen land, I have not been brought up by a heathen."

"Forgive me. I know women are resourceful, and you are the most resourceful of women. But if he should come, we shall probably have another invitation to dine at the Yamen."

"You forget. He will not come while you are here."

"And when I am gone?"

She sighed. "Am I a prophet?"

"Damn him!" I muttered.

The corners of her mouth twitched curiously as I began to apologise. To this day I cannot rid myself of the belief that she was laughing.

But in due time Mr. Ormsby did send an invitation to the illustrious Wang, who in turn replied by thanking him for the honour he would confer upon his idiotic and contemptible nephew. Wang declared that it would be the height of his ambition once more to drag his degraded and ignominious body beneath the illustrious roof-tree of his exalted uncle, but he feared that the honour would be too great for the despicable and despised worm whom an exalted condescension deigned to notice. If, however, when the stress of business was somewhat relieved, the magnanimous uncle would condescend to renew the invitation to his imbecile and utterly unworthy nephew, he might hope to degrade with his contemptible presence the exalted board of his illustrious relative.

Perhaps Mr. Ormsby was a little disappointed, but he could not quarrel with such a pretty series of celestial compliments. Rose and I, reading between the lines, under-

stood. Her look said, "I told you so." Trust a woman for reading the heart of man.

Well, with that we tried to forget the existence of the illustrious Mr. Wang. I found something much more agreeable about the Mission, and I never once heard Rose complain of his absence. No doubt Mr. Ormsby indulged in much regretful musing, but in this instance we left him to grieve alone. Mr. Wang might be a heathen, and worse, but we could not weep on that account.

And so a week sped along, during which time, in company with my old friend Ting, I explored a greater part of the city. He and I had become capital friends, and he took me into the by-ways and showed me things, the existence of which poor Mr. Ormsby never dreamed. Ting seemed to have a fancy, or instinctive intuition, that I had a special predilection for everything that was low, and before he showed me anything particularly revolting he always introduced it with a series of exceedingly knowing winks and grimaces. And even when I protested, he received my protestations with a delightfully oleaginous smile which convinced me of his sincere belief in my superb hypocrisy.

But one day, Ting being in request, I accompanied Rose on one of her missions of charity, and on returning through the city we were subjected to an unpleasant experience, and one which was fated to have far-reaching results.

It happened in this way. The city of Fong-Chin, like its great neighbour in the south Canton, is a network of close, ill-smelling alleys, in which there is little light and less room. Indeed, there is scarcely space enough for two chairs to pass each other, one, as a rule, having to back in the nearest siding, just as the ships do in the Suez Canal. Well, Rose and I being in one of those crowded alleyways, presently heard a great bustle behind us, and on turning round we beheld the people pushing forward, laughing and chatting excitedly. Behind them again came the beating of a tom-tom and the sharp cracking of whips.

"A mandarin making an official call," explained my companion.

Presently the official chair loomed in view, and I saw the people crouch down with many outward signs of respect, while the more humble indulged in a violent demonstration of the kowtow. The lictors, or men with the whips, whose duty it was to clear the way for

their illustrious master, came on shouting and lashing at every too obtrusive body ; and even as I contemplated with pity the cringing aspect of these miserable wretches, I felt a lash curl round my own legs.

Naturally this quickly awoke me out of my philosophic reverie, and I swung towards the too officious flunkey with an oath. The man started back and looked half afraid of what he had done ; for, judging from my dress, he had mistaken me for a Chinaman. Seeing his blunder he was apprehensive.

This commotion brought the procession to a check, for I had taken up a position in the middle of the road, and the lictors were afraid to advance. I sputtered and carried on to an extent which must have made the wondering onlookers regard me as a mad barbarian. But finding my harangue unavailing, I made for the mandarin's chair and poked my head in at the window. To my disgust the placid yellow face of Wang confronted me.

With a disdainful gesture, as though he did not recognise me, he waved me away, at the same time calling in shrill tones to his bearers. Annoyed beyond measure, I laid my hand on the chair and retarded its progress ; for I was determined that this yellow-faced rascal should

recognise me, and that he should see I was treated with that respect which the Viceroy's passport guaranteed. Instead, however, of turning my way, he leant out through the other window and called to someone. Almost immediately after I felt the whip laid sharply across my shoulders.

I need hardly trouble to explain that this last indignity entirely robbed me of all discretion. I jumped at the fellow and caught him a blow in the face that sent him clattering to the pavement. The other lictor, shrieking excitedly, raised his whip to strike, but I rushed at him and he fled howling. The beater of the tom-tom sidled away behind the mandarin's chair; the bearers stood grinning like so many excited monkeys.

By this time the narrow street was blocked with an ugly, excited populace, and I saw when too late that I had raised a nice hornet's nest. I looked about, almost hopelessly, and with a brave, if somewhat anxious, face Rose stepped to my side. Now, more than ever, I regretted my imprudence, though I should never have forgiven myself if I had borne the whipping patiently.

In the meantime Wang, his head out through the window, began to shout excitedly,

and the people immediately assumed a threatening attitude.

"He is exciting them," whispered Rose. "They are getting dangerous."

Hemmed in on all sides, there was nothing left but to beard the lion in his den; so seizing Rose by the hand, and telling her she must interpret, I advanced once more to the mandarin. His face was white with rage, and his ugly little eyes shone ominously. In his look there was hate, and contempt, and a dozen other disagreeable things; but so long as he confined himself to looking evil things I would not complain.

"These people are likely to disturb the the peace," I said. "You had better order them to disperse."

My effrontery amazed him. As Rose translated he looked hard at her, a wondering look of dismay, as though he failed to hear aright—as though he failed to recognise her. Then he smiled, and a cruel, cynical smile it was.

"Who is this person?"

He really said "barbarian," only she used the milder word out of respect to my feelings.

"I have the Viceroys passport," I answered boldly, "and claim your protection."

"You will show it," he said.

That was just what I could not do, as at that moment it was in my trunk at the Mission. He saw my hesitation and smiled.

"Forward," he cried to his bearers; and then in a louder key, so that those near him could hear, he added, "This barbarian is a mad liar." With that he moved off.

The crowd opened for him to pass through, then closed again, and, scowling, faced me. All the same, had Rose translated this last remark I doubt if I should have parted with Mr. Wang just then.

Things now began to assume a serious aspect. The people, justly believing in the mandarin's tacit permission to riot, gradually closed in upon us. Ugly, excited faces scowled on every hand, and I saw with considerable alarm that the space between them and me was gradually contracting. Then someone at the back cried out at the top of his voice, others took up the cry, and the mass surged inwards. Fortunately for me I did not know that they were crying "Kill the foreign devils," "Death to the barbarians." Such an unnecessary injunction might have unnerved me. But at the same time I did not like that inrush, and though I could not check it, I snatched a

heavy bamboo from an over-curious coolie, who, in my opinion, had approached quite near enough to be pleasant, and stood on guard.

This act further raised the ire of the people. The hubbub increased ; everyone seemed to be shrieking at the top of his voice. I looked at Rose and smiled in a hopeless manner. Her face was very pale, but her great eyes were blazing indignation.

"Hadn't you better cut into one of these shops?" I said.

"If you will."

Nothing would have pleased me better ; but when I attempted to do so I was indignantly repelled.

"They will not have me but they cannot refuse you."

"I shall stay with you," she said.

Dear girl, she did not know how her presence impeded me. It was the old, true comradeship which in all ages has made men love each other. I will stand by my friend. Well, what if my heart beat a throb or two faster? Wasn't there enough on hand to make any man's pulses leap?

Not being able to retreat, there was nothing left but to advance right into the heart of the enemy ; so, edging in front of her as much as

possible, I gripped my bamboo firmly and strode forward. In my heart I did not believe that they would really attack us, and as they gave way I began to congratulate myself on my foresight; but that selfish congratulation proved extremely delusive. The people only wanted the keynote, the word of command, and presently they got it in the shape of a dead rat, which struck me full on the chest, and left a disagreeable memento of his visit. A perfect volley of sticks, stones, and filth followed, which so amazed and angered me that I charged the crowd, laying about me with considerable vigour. This brought us a moment's respite, and I stole a hasty look at my companion. A stone or a bamboo splint had grazed her cheek, and the tiniest stream of blood was trickling down her face. I stooped, solicitous, when all at once I felt a jerk at my pigtail. Turning round, I saw a barefooted ragamuffin dash off, dangling my hat behind him; for, my queue being fastened to my hat, the loss of one meant the loss of the other.

A roar of laughter followed this amusing feat, the discovery that my pigtail was false being enough to convulse these simple celestials. As for myself, I did not see the humour of the thing. It is easy enough to laugh at

our friend Jones; but a man always feels a bit of a fool when the laugh is against him.

I was in no mood for jesting, and I never had a sufficient sense of humour to appreciate being baited, so I looked serious and strode on, my brave companion by my side. She never flinched a whit; but with clear, defiant eyes faced the excited throng. I knew the last thing these Easterns must see is the sign of fear on the white man's face; but even had I felt the presence of that unpleasant quality, I doubt if I would have had the courage to show it before such a companion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONTINUATION OF AN UNPLEASANT ADVENTURE.

STILL moving forward, now striking, and now being struck, we by slow degrees accomplished the passage of this street. Sometimes, when the crowd declined to give way, I had to charge it, and then I made good use of that strength with which I have been favoured. It was a stout bamboo, this weapon of mine, as thick and hard as a fair-sized water-pipe, and when it came down on a shaven skull, or a none too thickly clad shoulder, it produced an ominous and deadly sound. Sometimes I too felt the weight of a bamboo, for it was hard to protect both front and rear at the same time; but fortunately the people for the most part contented themselves with hooting and pelting us with unconsidered trifles.

But presently we emerged into a more open thoroughfare, and Rose saying, "Now, Paul, quick—quicker," we started forward at a more

rapid, but still I hope a dignified, pace. The crowd, noting the movement, hurried after us with louder yells, and some dangerous missiles began to whiz about our ears. Then of a sudden Rose lurched forward with a gasp, a startled cry which she tried to stifle, and I saw that she had been struck in the back by a large stone. This was more than flesh and blood could bear.

"Are you hurt?" I shouted, scarcely looking at her, my eye marking the ruffian whom I believed to be the author of this outrage.

"N-no," she gasped.

"Then run for the Mission. I am going to go for these fellows." With that I turned round and made straight for the mob, never staying to note if she had followed my advice.

My objective was the ruffian above-mentioned, and when he saw me fix my eyes on him and raise my bamboo, he tried to slink in away behind the crowd; but though a volley of rubbish was discharged at me, much of which stuck and smelt, it did not check my advance, and I brought him clattering to the ground with a skull-cracking blow.

Of the scrimmage that followed I have not recollection enough to describe in detail.

There was much howling and shouting, and my weapon was continually in contact with something softer than itself. Occasionally, too, I felt a stinging in the face, and something worse in the body; but I was so full of anger that my fury would not let me notice these things. Probably, for all I know to the contrary, I cursed with the best of them; at all events, I laid about with considerable vigour and rapidly cleared a space before me. The crowd fell back—a sullen, hideous throng; half-a-dozen wretches painfully crawled away, throwing terrified glances over their shoulders to see if I was coming.

Then I turned about, and to my consternation saw that Rose was still standing where I had left her. A few strides brought me to her side.

“Why are you here? Why didn’t you run for the Mission?”

Her big eyes sought mine, but even then I did not see what was in them.

“And leave you?”

I was still blind, perhaps through excitement, perhaps through natural stupidity. At any rate, I blurted out:

“Of course. That’s what I wanted you to do. You might have been safe by this.”

"But I'm not afraid."

"But I am."

And I took her by the hand and led her forward at a sharp pace.

Our assailants, seeing us move, gathered courage and came on once more. We slipped into a side street, and, once hidden from view, ran. The crowd immediately came howling at our heels, but Rose, who knew every inch of the way, dashed down one alley, into another, out into a third, and so on, the shouts of our pursuers drawing nearer and nearer. Then at length we emerged into a broader thoroughfare, and I saw by my surroundings that we were on the straight run for home.

Left to myself I might have found little difficulty in outpacing our pursuers, but with my companion I feared that such a result was impossible. Indeed, one look at her pale face assured me of the pain she was suffering, so I immediately stopped and slipped an arm under hers.

"Are you going to faint?"

"No," she gasped, "no!"

And a decided negative it was.

As soon as the mob caught sight of us they raised a great shout of triumph, and once more the filthy missiles began to fly. Where or

how it was going to end I had not the least idea. It was evident that no one loved the foreign devils who ate little Chinese babies and neglected the sacred rites of ancestor worship. Those who knew better were utterly indifferent, or were afraid to mix themselves up in the strife. Moreover, it was no affair of theirs. And the rumour ran, and as it ran it grew. I had been caught trying to entice a plump baby to its doom ; I was a big savage who drank the blood of Chinese babies ; I had already killed a dozen men ; official permission was given to hunt me down.

These were a few of the things said about me, gathered by Rose from the multitudinous cries ; and strange as it may seem, such rumours were no sooner heard than credited by these ignorant and fanatical people.

But in the meantime the crowd rapidly increased, swelled by the riff-raff who came pouring up out of the alleys like so much vermin. Sticks and stones once more began to rattle about our ears, and I feared greatly that some unlucky blow would seriously injure my companion. Therefore I said :

“ Rose, you must go on ahead.”

“ And you ? ”

“ I will follow.”

"Promise, Paul."

"I promise."

I fell back a step and she went on, and I was glad to see that she did not loiter on the way. Indeed, as the distance between us lengthened, I felt quite elated, knowing as I did that I had not slackened my pace. But presently, to my horror, I saw her stop dead. Then she began to gesticulate violently, but I had no time to watch her further, for the enemy began to press me in the rear, and so threateningly that I feared they meant a desperate attack. Well, there was nothing to do but keep them off as long as I could, and then—

Then I heard a shrill cry behind, and fearing I was about to be attacked from that quarter, I threw a sharp glance over my shoulder and beheld a big Chinaman come bounding towards me. I turned, prepared to receive this desperate assailant, when to my great joy I recognised Ting.

"All li," he shouted excitedly. "Can do."

Welcome as the sun in winter was the advent of Mr. Ting, and I think he saw in my eyes the look of relief, for his gaunt face flushed pleasantly.

"What for they makee this liot?"

"Ask them. We've had a devil of a time."

"Goddam," said Ting.

Then he stepped in front of me and faced the angry throng, who, checked for a moment, once more began a threatening advance. First of all he shouted in a moderate sort of way ; but when they bawled their replies at him he grew excited, shook his fist at them, and screamed until his face grew livid. The reply was another volley of the filth of the street, which so bespattered my champion that he retreated upon me growling and wiping his eyes.

I turned and waved to Rose to proceed, for she still stood as though loath to leave us, and then Ting and I began slowly to retreat, he looking round for some weapon of offence. But nothing appearing to suit his purpose, he presently slipped into an undertaker's shop and emerged almost immediately with the heavy lid of a coffin. This he shouldered in dauntless fashion, and though it was an unwieldy weapon it was gruesomely symbolical. And to me it seemed as though the people regarded it with a certain amount of reverence or superstition, for they fell back as a stage devil does before the sign of the cross. Ting turned to me grinning hideously, and together we beat a dignified retreat.

As we approached the Mission, the crowd, egged on by a few of the more desperate characters, recovered its senses, and fearful that we should escape, renewed the assault. But the coffin-lid and the bamboo rose and fell, and those who felt the weight of either reeled back with an oath or a groan.

Our objective was, of course, the Mission, so that even when we gave ground we in a way were gaining our point. This last attack, being successfully repulsed, brought us within measurable distance of the gates, and as I was rapidly calculating how quickly that distance could be covered, I saw the gates open and Mr. Ormsby come forth.

I waved for him to go back, as I was afraid of the temper of the crowd; but fear being foreign to his nature, he advanced towards us with the most sublime indifference.

"Go back, sir," I shouted, "go back!"

But he seemed to hear me not, or to ignore my warning, and rapidly Ting and I fell back to him. A glance at the gates showed me Rose standing like a sentinel on duty.

"What is the meaning of this, Paul?" he said.

"A long story, sir. Let us get back."

"What!" he said. "Show the white feather?"

"But, sir, the numbers."

Fearlessly he advanced towards them and lifted up his hands, and for a short space they listened quietly as he spoke. Then one made some jeering remark, and others took up the chorus. Next a stone was flung, and then the missionary was bombarded with as little ceremony as I had been. Poor man, he stood like one dumbfounded, utterly failing to realise the meaning of the act; and the people saw his amazed impotence, and howled at him, and advanced within striking distance. Then was it I seized him by the arm, and much against his will hurried him towards the gates. Ting with his coffin-lid bravely brought up the rear, and when a dozen yards from the goal Rose rushed out and relieved me of her father. Then Ting and I, side by side, slowly retreated, the crowd pressing closer as they saw us slipping from their clutches.

I saw, situated as we were, that we should never gain the shelter with security, so I touched Ting on the shoulder, and pointed towards the enemy. He grinned an acknowledgment of my meaning, and, as if set in motion by the same spring, we flew at the mob.

Taken so suddenly, we were on them almost

before they realised it, and the coffin-lid and the bamboo did such execution that we soon cleared a small space before us.

"Now, Ting," I shouted, "run!"

Together we turned, and together we flew for the gate, which we reached, entered, and slammed to just as the foremost of our pursuers threw themselves upon it. Angry shouts followed; there were fierce rattlings upon the solid woodwork; a volley of refuse came flying across the wall, but we were safe and could afford to smile at this indignity.

Upon examination I found that our little party were in a terrible plight, though they appeared much worse than they really were. True, we were all dishevelled, and more or less bleeding, while I felt sore from head to heel; but none of us had received any serious injury. It was the thought of the attack, more than the attack itself, that made us look so woebegone.

Leaving Ting and another of the Mission men to guard the gate, Rose and I escorted Mr. Ormsby into the house, and after a little necessary stimulant, we began to discuss the situation. Then it was that the mandarin's nefarious doings were brought to light, and I know not which pained Mr. Ormsby more, the

hypocrisy or the rascality of Wang. Poor Mr. Ormsby, he had known all his life that this was a wicked world, he had denounced it often enough, though that was merely as a matter of form ; everybody did the same. He had not really meant it, or had not meant it in the way he meant it now. He was justly indignant, and was determined that the matter should not end here. He would lay the case before the viceroy ; he would petition the governor ; he would present a memorial to the Emperor. But when we came to think it out, and duly to consider the ways of the corrupt officials, and the detestation of missionaries, we decided to do nothing but report the occurrence and await the issue.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH CAUSES SOME CONSTERNATION.

FROM that day it was war between the mandarin Wang and ourselves. He denounced us to the viceroy as a danger to the peace, and we reported him to the governor as an official incapable of controlling the people beneath him. But nothing came of petitions and denunciations. We had certain rights under the sacred proclamation of the Emperor, that Son of Heaven whose slightest wish is holy writ to the vast millions beneath him, though he is but an alien and an usurper. Wang, on the other hand, being one of the governing gang, had very little to fear : which is much the same all the world over. If those in high places do wrong, hush up the scandal. The disgrace reflects upon the governing gang, and the governing gang don't like reflections.

But the tone of the people changed. For fully a week after this none of us ventured outside the gates without bringing back some

story of insult or of threat. The people jeered openly at us, and once or twice they assembled before the Mission raising angry cries. Our converts were treated with the scantiest of ceremony if they dared show themselves, and on Ting, and the men who had fought in the boat with me, devolved all the outside work of the Mission.

As for Mr. Ormsby, he went about as before, albeit with a less cheerful face, for Wang had dealt him a cruel blow, and he felt acutely his own want of foresight. But hope was not yet dead—at least, hope for the millions. Sometimes, if thought took too black a shape, he remembered the Great Example, and prayed for strength and for forgiveness. How dare he cavil at the direst, darkest outlook? Christ died for him.

Rose, too, was brave almost to rashness, and went about as heretofore, as though no harm could possibly befall her. Perhaps she knew the people better than I, or, not knowing so much of the world, she had a profounder belief in human nature. Whenever I said anything she laughed, and if I protested with any seriousness she always pointed to her father as an example.

"Your father is a man of whom anyone

might be proud," I said ; " but may he not also be wrong ? "

" My dear Paul, if we once let them think we are afraid, life will become perfectly intolerable. "

" But do you think it wise, this going about among them ? Remember what they are, what they are capable of doing. "

" Remember also what we are. "

I knew Mr. Ormsby's old argument—a soldier must advance at the word of command. And what am I but a soldier of the Cross ? And the daughter had pondered long over this fallacious well, and had drunk deeply thereof.

" Dear Rose, I know what you are, what your father is, but that is no reason why you should be careless. "

" It would be fatal if we once showed the white feather. "

" I am no advocate of cowardice. I only ask you not to be rash. "

" My dear Paul, you would not have me neglect my duty ? "

" I would have you take no unnecessary risks. "

" Upon my word, " she said, with a smile, " you are very careful of me. "

"I admit as much," I answered boldly.
"And what then?"

"Simply, my dear Paul, that I am not accustomed to this sort of thing." And she looked me squarely in the face with clear eyes.

I was nearly saying something in reply, but those clear eyes frightened me. They were so open, so frank and fearless, that I dared not cloud them even with a suggestion. There was a loftiness in the look which subdued me. She was a pure sunbird, sailing far above me and my common thoughts.

"Well," I mumbled, "it's painfully evident that you want somebody to look after you."

She laughed lightly.

"And that somebody is necessarily you?"

"I wish it was."

A thoughtful shade for a moment swept her face. Then the sun of her eyes shone out brightly once more.

"I promise," she said, "I will be very careful."

And so another week passed, by the end of which period our persecutors had ceased annoying us, and we pursued our avocations free of that state of alarm which was fast becoming unendurable. Indeed, I was beginning to entertain the hope that Wang and his creatures

had decided to bury the hatchet, when a thing happened which set the Mission in a state of the direst consternation.

Rose had taken my injunction to heart, and for several days had borne herself with the utmost prudence. At least, so she declared, though I had some doubt of her confining her peregrinations to main streets and open spaces. She always laughed merrily at my alarms, though I nevertheless escorted her whenever it was possible for me to do so. Yet one day she went out after tiffin, and at tea-time had not returned. This, though unusual, was not necessarily alarming. Indeed, her father, whom I found translating a Chinese classic, bore the news with the utmost equanimity. She would be back at sundown. No doubt she had been unexpectedly detained.

But sundown came without bringing her, and my anxiety increased. I suggested that I should go in search of her, a suggestion which the missionary, without opposing, received with an alarming indifference. Rose knew her way about Fong-Chin with the best of its citizens, and wherever she was, she was doing God's work.

I hope, in the broad meaning of the word, that I am a truly religious man, but with

religious fanaticism I have but scant sympathy. To hear this foolish man declare that because she was doing God's work no harm could come to her, was enough to make a better man than I rankly blasphemous. And yet so good was he, so pure in his belief, that I could not give utterance to a bitter thought. Instead, I went out into the compound and hunted up Ting-Foo, and in as few words as possible explained her absence and my doubts.

Mr. Ting looked very serious, a hideous scowl clouding his ugly face whenever I mentioned the mandarin Wang. He listened attentively, growling out a "wah," or an "ugh," whenever I grew emphatic, and when I had finished he said, "That mandarin Wang belong dam bad man."

"Divil a doubt of it," said I; "but what are we to do?"

"Go makee look see. Wang belong dam big piecee logue. He makee taotai Ning-po side. Welly cluel, welly muchee squeeze, welly muchee tolture."

"So he had a bad reputation in Ning-po?"

"Welly bad, sir. Plenty Ning-po man catchee him, pay him piecee for piecee."

There was a singular gleam in Ting's eyes

which at another time I might have studied more intently, but I was too full of this disappearance of Rose to pay much heed to the vapourings of a coolie, even though he belonged to the Reformed Church. Rather was I for acting at once upon his proposal, to go makee look see. So I re-entered the house, found Mr. Ormsby, and learnt from him the places which Rose would probably have visited, though he protested as before that while my anxiety did me credit, I was not to fear. She was doing good work and would be paid accordingly. Then he went back to his translation of the Chinese classic.

I met Ting at the gate, and together we began our search. Here and there we got news of her. She had left a tract here, she had called there, and in this way we traced her almost to the northern gate, and there we lost her. The guards knew nothing, had seen nothing; none of the stall-holders or shopkeepers could recollect seeing her. She had disappeared completely, perhaps, as one suggested, on the back of the five-clawed imperial dragon.

Nothing remained now but to return home, and this we did, rapidly as possible, my heart throbbing more painfully with every step

I took. There was the hope, and the very thought of it made every pulse quiver with apprehension, that she was at home waiting to smile at me for my fears. I only prayed it might be so. I was willing to bear a Himalaya of ridicule for such a cause.

It was almost dark as we neared the Mission, and I hurried forward to reach it ere the day died. In answer to our summons the gate was quickly opened, and I almost feared to put the question: "Has she come?" But Ting spoke, and turning to me said: "This piecee idiot no sabbee. No can tell."

I dashed past him and flew into the house, and as I approached the study I saw that the door was partly open. Mr. Ormsby must have heard my footsteps, for, as I gently pushed open the door, he said:

"It's getting very dark, my dear, and these characters are most bewildering. Will you bring the lamp?"

"It is I, sir," I said. "Has Rose come?"

He swung round and peered curiously up through the shadows.

"Eh! You, is it? Bless my soul, I thought it was the child."

He arose and began nervously to collect the pages of manuscript.

"You have not seen her?"

"No"—bewilderingly—"I don't think I have. But she is safe, be sure of that. No harm can come to her."

"You have a profound belief in the philanthropy of fate?"

"Eh?" said he, looking up sharply.

"Sir," said I, for I saw that his faith forbade a realisation of the probabilities, "your daughter is missing—she may be in great danger. Are we to stand here and wait?"

"Great danger!" he echoed. "My dear boy, do you really think so?"

"I only pray that I may be wrong."

"Then," said he, rousing himself, "we must do something, Paul. We must go in search of her."

"I have searched. I have traced her near the northern gate. There I lost her."

"The northern gate," he mused. "What was she doing there? That is quite out of her beat."

I began to tremble. If the northern gate was beyond her jurisdiction, so to speak, what was she doing there? Strange thoughts fluttered through my brain, but I knew they were thoughts so utterly beyond the comprehension of the missionary that I tied them to

my tongue. Hopeful by nature, and ever willing to see the better side of things, the suggestion of human depravity would have been but a wasted effort. Men must be stirred by a deep sense of wrong before they act basely.

"We must do something, Paul," he said. "What do you propose?"

"We cannot do better than go at once to the Yamen. It is not pleasant to have to ask a favour of Wang, but he is the only person who can help us now."

"To Wang, then," said he. "Where is my hat?"

I got him his hat with its pendant pigtail, and as I handled the glossy hair I gave birth to the wish that it was on Mr. Wang's head—and that wish was not according to the principles of the creed.

We found Ting waiting for us at the gate, and we at once set out for the Yamen with all dispatch. By the time we arrived there it was quite dark. Mr. Ormsby and I went up to the gate and knocked loudly, Ting keeping well in the background. He admitted that he had no particular love for magistrates and their ways. The wise man kept outside the walls of a Chinese Yamen.

After we had expended some five minutes in a vain assault, the gate was slowly opened and a surly porter demanded our business. Then a wrangle followed. Mr. Ormsby would see the magistrate. The flunkey declared that it was after official hours, and that his master would see no one. Of course the man wanted a bribe, but this was not the way the missionary had taught the natives to respect his authority.

"Tell the magistrate that I have serious news for him, and that if he will not listen I will go at once to the governor."

This seemed to stir the man. Even the doorkeeper of a Yamen, great though he be, may go too far. The master he guards so zealously would, if it suited him, beat him for his incivility. Perhaps the thought of this, in conjunction with the well-known stubbornness of foreigners, had its effect on this slit-eyed dragon. He mumbled ungraciously beneath his breath and then shuffled off.

In a minute or so he returned, kow-towing in the most obsequious manner. His august master would esteem it a great honour if we would condescend to speak with him. We nodded, and he led us forward with that pomp befitting our exalted superiority.

Wang received us with due official gravity,

in which, perhaps, there was just a suspicion of well-bred indifference; but he no sooner heard our story than he expressed the utmost concern, sent at once for his secretary, and told him to issue orders for an immediate search. The police should be communicated with at once—all the men in the Yamen were at our disposal. We were only to give our commands.

"You will not delay?" said Mr. Ormsby.

"Not one moment," he answered.

Indeed he was solicitous, and suggested many things which had escaped us, entering into our troubles with a warmth which disarmed criticism. And it was no light thing to meet us there and discuss in such a manner a subject which was so near to us all. I admired the yellow creature with his inscrutable face and his soft lips. I know no man who could have emerged so triumphantly from the ordeal, and I watched him with eyes which were none too friendly.

Though he paid little heed to me, seeming, indeed, to ignore my presence, it was not possible that he could altogether refrain from looking my way. Sometimes I gave him the opportunity by turning aside, and then I knew that his ugly little eyes were creeping and crawling all over me. Wang and I were like two

dogs who meet in the street. We did not fight, we did not even growl, but we perceptibly stiffened, suspiciously watching each other.

He saw us to the door, and bade us a courteous good - night. The porter kow-towed to the ground as we passed out.

"What a pity we have quarrelled with him," said Mr. Ormsby. "This would not have happened."

"Probably not," said I, expressing somewhat ambiguously my thought.

"I do not think he bears any animosity."

"I hope not."

Here Ting joined us, and I explained to him what had happened. Then we three walked on for some time in silence—a silence which at length was broken by the coolie.

"My makee thought," he said. "You allee same walkee Mission side. My joinee you plesently."

With that he slipped from us and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. TING PROPOSES.

MR. ORMSBY started in surprise.

"What is that fellow going to do?"

"I haven't the least idea. He is trustworthy?"

"I always thought so; but now—"

And in this way the good man first began to doubt.

"I believe he has your interests at heart. He is fond of you, and, if I am not mistaken, devoted to Rose. I saved his life in the Pe-kiang. I suppose a Chinese is not without some sense of gratitude?"

"He was in the gutter when I found him. No, no, I must not lose faith."

After this we walked on through the gloom in silence, each busy with his own painful thoughts. Occasionally my companion broke the stillness with "Paul, Paul, what shall I do?" or "Heaven help me!" or "God protect my poor lamb!" Coming suddenly as

they did, and pealing out through the night, these sentences, pregnant with despair, seemed to set even the shadows shivering. And my own impotence was such that I could have cried aloud in my wrath. Was she dead or alive, in captivity, or the victim of an accident? How was I to tell? Who could say?

On we walked, faster, faster, for again came the feeble hope that she might have reached home during our absence. I know the same thought animated us both, though each feared to breathe it to the other. Yet it was with a quickened pulse that we saw the Mission wall loom up out of the darkness.

Of course we were disappointed. The black cloud was in the sky, and it waved its shadow over us. Mr. Ormsby threw himself dejectedly into the chair before his precious classic, and his fingers wandered aimlessly among its leaves; but though the book stared at him with open face I doubt if he saw a letter: though he fingered his MS., it was as one whose thoughts are afar off.

I left him there and went over the house once more—a forlorn hope—which came back badly shattered. Of course she was not there; but I knew not what to do, and yet

do something I must. So I lit my pipe and went down into the garden anxiously to await the arrival of Ting.

My impotence was maddening. She was in danger and I could not help her. Somewhere out in the city she was, alive or dead, and yet here was I practically chained within four walls, as helpless as a beast in a cage. Like a beast I paced the narrow limits of the garden, listening for every sound, stopping for every step. The rustling of the leaves filled me with nervous apprehension, and even amid my sighings for her I heartily cursed Ting for his delay.

At last, after waiting considerably more than an hour, the culprit put in an appearance, and so glad was I to see him, and so eager to hear him speak, that I forgot my anger.

"Well, what news?"

"My tink 'ave got news."

"What—what?"

"You sabbee that bad mandalin, Wang?"

"Yes, yes, of course," I answered impatiently.

Fancy the dull fool asking me if I knew Wang.

"Wang 'ave got piecee countly house. Tonight he go makee visit. Sabbee?"

"Sabbee plenty," I said; "but what has that to do with us?"

"Wang welly bad man. He makee go to him countly house thlough the nolthern gate."

"Well?"

"You no can pidgin? Missee Lose last seen by the nolthern gate. Wang belong big lumpee bad man."

It must have been he who thought of me as a dull fool, but I did not dream that the mandarin would dare proceed to such an extreme measure. I drew close and seized him by the arm.

"You believe that he—that he has carried her off?"

"Plenty stlange tings happen," he answered nonchalantly. "What for he go him countly house so late?"

After all, it was feasible enough. Wang was a man quite capable of playing a desperate game. And he had this advantage over the ordinary criminal; the law was invested in him—he was the law. Lord of a vast district, he set the machinery moving which regulated its conduct. If he wished to succeed, he invariably did; if he failed, he could always rate his underlings. But in this respect is Asia so very different from Europe?

"Why did you not follow him?"

"My tly plenty hard, but soldier man thleaten to shootee-shootee. Wang, he belong big man, soldier open the gate; my belong little man, soldier no open gate."

"But is it not against the rules to open the gate after sunset?"

"Plenty lules for poor man, plenty lules for lich man; but lich man blakee-blakee."

And in this again there is a universal brotherhood of man.

I was fast getting to appreciate the powers of Mr. Ting. I had retained a profound admiration of his heart; now I was in a fair way to admiring his head. Therefore I said:

"Taking it for granted that the mandarin has carried Miss Rose to his country house, what do you propose to do?"

It was not dignified, this coming to a coolie for advice; but I wasn't thinking of dignity just then. I wanted ideas, and I cared not from whom they came.

"My plopse that we go makee sleep. To-morrow we go look see Mr. Wang's countly house."

"I cannot sleep, Ting. I must go outside and look for her. Think, she may be dying—she may be dead."

"Suppose she dead, well, allee same good-bye," replied the wretch; "suppose she dying, well, allee same good-bye soon. What for no makee sleep?"

"Ting, you savage," said I, "if you talk like that I'll throttle you with your own pigtail. Go to sleep if you can. I am going out to look for her."

"Welly good," said he; "suppose you makee go, suppose I makee go. Allee same, big piecee dam lubbish."

"You needn't come," said I, meaning to show him that he was not indispensable.

"Must go," said he disdainfully. "You no sabbee Fong-Chin."

And in that "you" I read something more contemptuous than Mr. Ting dared utter.

Of course, I professed my ability to pursue my quest alone, but it ended in our leaving the Mission together. I could see that he was quite convinced of the futility of our search, and he joined it with a very bad grace; but seeing me obstinate, and retaining some memory of benefits conferred, he consented to play the part of martyr.

After three hours weary searching of endless streets we once more arrived at the Mission, and as I escaped that awful "I told you so," I

was glad that Ting was not an Englishman. Truly, he had set out with a bad grace, but once fairly started he led me from place to place with an eagerness which was beyond reproach. And at last when we crawled home, defeated and utterly worn out, he did not even say, "I told you so."

Upon meeting Mr. Ormsby in the morning, I greeted him with a better face, declaring that there was always hope until we knew the worst ; though, to be candid, I felt little of the hope I was striving to instil in him. I thought he looked frightfully ill, and certainly ten years older. He, too, moaned pitifully at his own impotence ; but his faith was still whole, his belief that of a little child. Now, mellowed as it is by time, his faith seems wonderfully sweet and pure ; but, then, having an inkling of what was before me, I grew impatient. And yet weeping and praying may have an indirect effect upon the man of action. Heaven may value he who prays as much as he who acts.

After breakfast, Ting came to me and propounded a plan upon which he had duly slept. At first I did not agree to it, because it enjoined inactivity upon me ; but a little serious consideration showed me its wisdom. It was this. He would go without the city walls,

journey to Wang's country house, and reconnoitre. I in turn was to stay within doors until within an hour of sunset. Then I was to make my way to the northern gate, avoiding observation as much as possible, pass out, and walk straight on until I came to a small stone bridge. Between that bridge and the gate Ting would meet me. If he did not I was to understand that he had failed, or that he had only partly succeeded, and I was to re-enter the city and wait for news.

Naturally I had hoped to play a part in this adventure, but taking it for granted that Wang would consider activity upon our side as probable, it would be impossible for me to pass out through the gate unobserved. For though I dressed as a Chinaman, it was a make-believe which would not have imposed upon a child. Therefore I reluctantly consented to follow the plan laid down by Ting, and I enjoined on him the greatest circumspection, dilating on the power and wickedness of the mandarin.

"My sabbee Wang," he said grimly; "one day Wang sabbee me. My waitee piecee long time; my waitee piecee longer time. All li. Shall get top side in the end."

"You don't love Wang?"

His eyes gleamed cruelly. Then he grinned

a ghastly wild-cat grin which showed every one of his ugly teeth.

"Wang belong big man," he answered bitterly; "coolie must love big man. One day my speakee you—speakee you cluel stoly."

With that he turned on his heel and set off on his adventure, while I rejoined Mr. Ormsby. That at some period of their lives Wang and Ting had come in contact with each other I did not doubt, and I thought of the cruel wales on the coolie's body, and wondered if Wang had sentenced him to receive the torture. If so, there might be something to say on both sides, and Ting's reputation might not prove as white as snow. Not that I was likely to quarrel with him on that account. He hated my enemy, and he was serving me. I was not an unreasonable man.

As soon as the Yamen opened for public business, Mr. Ormsby and I presented ourselves at the door, and to my surprise were admitted with but little delay. We were shown into a private room where, some five minutes later, Wang joined us. He received us with the utmost affability, and expressed his deep regret at having no satisfactory news to impart; but he had set in motion the elaborate machinery of the law, and he hoped to send

us a cheering report within the next few hours.

As the missionary interpreted, Wang stole some curious glances at me from out the corners of his little black eyes ; but I too had my game to play, and it would not do to let him think that I suspected him. Therefore I listened with what calmness I could command, and even tried to smile approval on the yellow liar. But for all that I think we understood each other. He had an oily mouth, but the oil that burnt in his eyes gave a cold, cruel light.

There was something about the smile with which he honoured me at parting that told of a secret triumph. I could only read it in one way, and that was not pleasant for me ; but I too had a secret hope, and perhaps I showed a gleam of it. He came very close and looked me earnestly in the face. Then his lips curled contemptuously, and he turned away with a consummate sneer. When next I saw him he had forgotten his haughtiness and his high officialism.

At another time, or under other conditions, I doubt if I could have kept my hands off his sneering mouth ; for not being accustomed to that sort of thing I rather resented it. But fortunately I was not all impulse. If im-

petuous upon occasion, I could also bide my time when the necessity arose. My common sense would not permit me to dash my head against the walls of the Yamen.

After leaving the mandarin we went back to the Mission there to relate our dearth of news, and a doleful journey it was. Poor Mr. Ormsby scarcely spoke a word all the way, and when I ventured to console him he would not be consoled. It was always a groan and a sigh, or a supplicating cry to heaven. Where was she? Was she living or dead? If he could only know. It was our helplessness that weighed so heavily upon us: a maddening, brain-bursting impotence which could find no relief in words.

I went out again during the morning, taking one of the other men with me; but it was chiefly by way of not appearing idle. I expected little, and I was justified in my expectations. All my hopes were centred in Ting and our meeting at sunset.

Carefully I made my preparations for that journey, seeing to my revolver and an extra round of cartridges. I even armed myself with some sandwiches and a flask of brandy and water. Then I joined Mr. Ormsby in the garden, where I found him excitedly pacing up

and down, hatless, and apparently oblivious of everything but his own great sorrow. I did my best to comfort him, though I could not quite smother the strained, hopeless ring in my own voice. Then I told him that I was going to look for her, that I had an idea, and, though it might come to nothing, I meant to see it through to the end.

"And that idea?" said he.

"I would rather not tell you, sir. If it succeeds, you shall know; if it fails it can bring you no conceivable happiness."

"Well, good-bye, my boy, and God go with you."

"He will, I am sure." And I meant it, too.

Then we shook hands, and I turned away, but as suddenly swung round again.

"By the way, sir, if I should not come back to-night you must not be alarmed."

"But you must come back," he said, looking me anxiously in the face.

"If possible. But I may not be able to."

"Why? Where are you going?"

"Outside the walls."

"Outside the walls?"

But I nodded and turned away, having no wish to enter into details.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPY.

ONCE outside the Mission I made all haste towards the northern gate, for I had cut the time somewhat, and I feared that Ting might be waiting. Arrived there I passed out with a donkey, a cart, and a batch of market gardeners. Of course my appearance excited the usual amount of attention, and the Tartar soldiers at the gateway laughed loudly at my artificial pigtail; but I had grown accustomed to these little amenities, and as a rule they meant nothing but a babbling of good-natured chaff. Had they even meant otherwise it mattered nothing, as I could not understand them.

Naturally my first thought was to look out for Ting, but though there were many people round about the gate I failed to recognise him, and as he also failed to approach me I very properly concluded that he was not there. So without more ado I took the road that stretched

straight before me, and kept my eyes open for the stone bridge of which he had spoken.

This was a busy road, the near approach to sunset, and the consequent shutting of the gates, stirring to unwonted activity this lethargic people. Carriers and merchants of every description passed me, some coming from the city, others going to it. The rich man, the poor man, the beggar and the thief all jostled each other good-humouredly in this last half-hour of the day.

I peered keenly into every face as it came along in the hope of recognising Ting, and received some good-natured badinage for my pains. Indeed, everybody seemed in a good humour ; there was shouting and laughing and cracking of jokes all along the road, which made me think that the life of the Chinese is not quite what sentimentalists would have us believe. Indeed, is not the government of any country quite good enough for its people ?

Presently the road took a dip, and I saw a dry creek before me, which I presently perceived was spanned by a stone bridge ; but to my disgust there was not a single human figure between it and me. At this I was both distressed and annoyed, but not doubting that my annoyance was ungenerous in the extreme, I

immediately banished it and housed regret in its place. However, I would go as far as the bridge, aimless as seemed the journey. As it was, I had come too far to regain the gate ere the sun set. Candidly, I was not pleased, and nothing but a serious accident to Ting would make me overlook his neglect.

So I slackened my pace and marched on moodily until I was awakened out of myself by the swishing of bare feet behind me. Hastily I looked over my shoulder, hoping; but it was only a coolie with a bamboo and two baskets. The bamboo he carried in native fashion across his shoulders, a basket attached to each end by means of thin cords.

The end of my journey was within a couple of dozen paces, and I was just thinking of retracing my steps when the coolie with the baskets overtook me. Looking a little to the right I saw the first basket project itself with such unjustifiable proximity to my side that I was about to give it more room when the coolie said in a voice that made me thrill :

"No tulnee lound, sir—no makee look see. Walkee—walkee !"

Fortunately I was able to obey, though the knowledge that Ting was the disguised coolie added not a little to the novelty of the business.



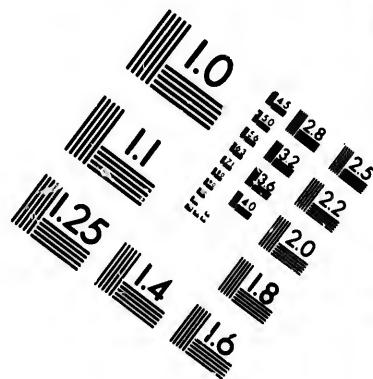
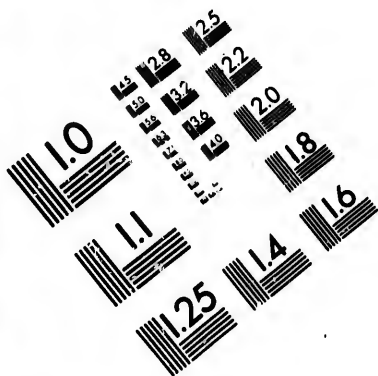
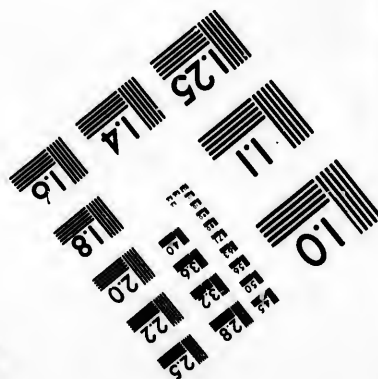
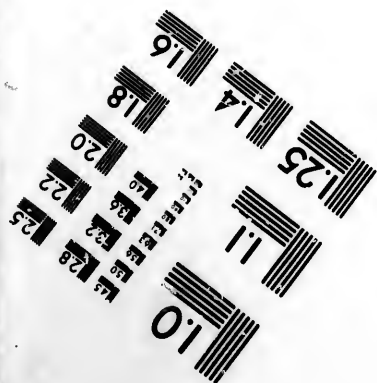
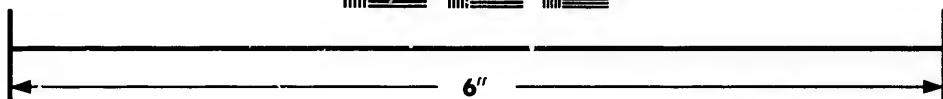
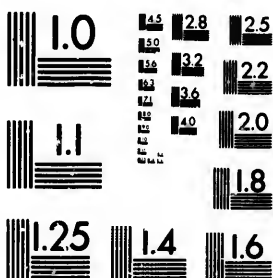


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Therefore I kept my eyes straight before me as I said :

“ What’s the matter ? ”

“ Piecee man follow you. Watchee close.”

“ What are we to do ? ”

“ Makee net, catchee fish. By ’n bye all li. You follow me, piecee fish follow you.”

“ Good. What news ? ”

“ My tink this light load.”

The right road ! Every pulse in me gave a throb of delight, I hugged myself consumedly ; I could have hugged Ting—even the spy who was following.

But in the meantime, with just a half-glance from the corner of his eye, Ting shot past me and trotted up the middle of the dusty road, I keeping a reasonable distance behind. But I was puzzled to know what manner of man this spy might be, and filling my pipe I suddenly turned round to light it, my action showing that I wished to avoid the wind. As I did so, a man some fifty yards off also slackened his pace in a way that raised my suspicions. He was barefooted, and apparently a coolie ; indeed, except that he carried no load, there was nothing to distinguish him from the ordinary pedestrian. I noticed that he wore a

big cane hat, a reddish-brown blouse, and a pair of blue trousers.

As I stopped rather longer than I intended, I saw that he too gradually came to a stand-still: then, turning his face from me, he looked back along the road as though expecting someone. I immediately pursued my way at a more rapid rate, Mr Ting by this time being some distance ahead. As I gradually overhauled him I eased down a little, and as I admired the resource and intrepidity of this man, I was filled with conjecture concerning the result of this adventure. Bursting as I was to hear his story, I was yet constrained to play this waiting game, a victim to fear, hope, and a bewildering uncertainty. And all the time the spy's noiseless footsteps seemed to ring loudly in my ears.

With a sudden gesture I stopped as if to attend to my shoe; but though I stooped low I stole a glance backward as I bent. There was my friend of the brown blouse still the same distance away. Persevering wretch! I have loathed these secret service people ever since.

The day began rapidly to dwindle as we passed through a village of some pretensions, and I had to quicken my pace in order to keep Ting well within sight. Taking it for granted

that I was following, he never once turned round, but unconsciously swung on through the village and out on to the highway once more. Again I hurried forward, for the night was growing thicker, and Mr. Ting and his baskets were beginning to assume weird, shadowy proportions.

In this way we went on for nearly a mile, until in a lonely spot Ting suddenly disappeared by the wayside. I advanced cautiously, now hopeful and now apprehensive; but though I was puzzled, I still had some faith in the resource of the yellow man. Follow me, he had said, and I might be trusted to carry out such a simple order. Yet when I came opposite the spot at which he had vanished I saw no road—nothing but a tangled and apparently impenetrable mass of shrub and creeper. Into this he had plunged. For what reason?

One thing seemed almost certain. He could not expect me to follow him into such a labyrinth. Had he intended as much he would have made some sign. At least I read it in this way, and taking it for granted that I was right, I walked on slowly, as though nothing had happened. But I was on the alert for every sound; excitedly my blood

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"Don't kill him, Ting," I said.

[Page 177.]

began to flow. I knew quite well that presently something would happen.

And it did. I had not gone very far before a half-stifled cry reached my ears. Turning round I beheld two figures struggling in the roadway, and guessing their identity I hurried back without hesitation. As I reached them, Ting brought his adversary crashing to the ground, and with his long fingers seemed to press the life out of the man. I looked closer and recognised my friend of the brown blouse.

"Don't kill him, Ting," I said.

"Why not? Him belong Wang's vermin." And at the thought of Wang the sinewy fingers stiffened and pressed deeper into the spy's throat. The fellow uttered a groan and fell back fainting.

"You must not kill him," I said, laying my hand on Ting's shoulder.

He looked up at me sullenly, and in the strange half light his eyes gleamed with a greenish flame.

"You no sabbee him spy? He come watchee—then go speakee Wang. Wang come makee can catch. What for no can kill spy?"

But I would not argue the matter with him, giving him to understand once and for all that

I would not allow murder to be committed. He growled ominously, for the blood was in his eye, and he seemed worked up to a pitch of excitement I had never noticed in him before, not even when we fought so desperately against the free-lances of the Pe-kiang.

"All li," he said at last; "if no can kill, must makee safe." With that he extracted a cord from somewhere beneath his blouse, and dexterously fastened the spy's arms behind his back, turning the unhappy wretch on his face in the dust the better to facilitate the binding. And whether the movement, or the suffocating sensation awoke the man, I know not, but he suddenly flung himself round with a cry. In an instant Ting's hand was over the fellow's mouth, and as he still continued to struggle he received a sounding box on his right ear which effectually silenced him. Then, swift as thought, Ting gagged the man with his own pigtail.

The sound of voices in the distance caused us hurriedly to drag the fellow to his feet, and making for a little opening on our left, we escorted our unwilling prisoner along it until we heard the voices pass and then die away.

As we stood for a moment to listen, I

questioned Ting as to his intentions regarding the prisoner, and he informed me that there was a cemetery close by which he thought would prove a suitable resting-place for our companion. Doubting not that to a great extent our own security rested on a proper care of this man, I could not oppose any plan Ting might suggest so long as he stopped short of homicide. We therefore resumed our journey, the path widening as we advanced, until we found ourselves among the tombs. Here I took charge of the prisoner while Ting hopped about among the graves like a ghoul. I guessed instinctively what he was looking for, and hoped that he might not find it; the prisoner watched him with eyes that started in horror.

Presently he came hopping towards us through the gloom, and he seemed so ghoulish and uncanny that he positively made me shiver. Grinning hideously, he laid hold of the man by the neck and pushed him forward, and in this manner we went until we came to a standstill at the foot of a newly-made grave. Here Ting whispered fiercely in the man's ear, at the same time giving him a push forward. But the fellow evidently expected something of the kind, and instead of taking a header into the

abyss, he lurched on one side and fell. Ting, baulked of his prey, sprang after him, and was about to roll him into the grave when I interfered.

"You brute," I said, "are you going to bury the man alive?"

"Muchee best ting," he answered nonchalantly. "This beast belong mandalin's dog. He makee flog, makee tolture. What for he live? Suppose my bully him he no more makee tolture for poor man."

"It must not be," I said.

"What for no can be? My lember once hearee Mista Olmsby pleach. He say, one piecee eye for one piecee eye, one piecee tooth for one piecee tooth. That come out of Chlistian man's joss book. What for no do what Chlistian man's joss book teachee?"

"Look here, Ting," I said, "you're a hardened heathen and I'm not going to argue with you. You may secure the man if you like—indeed, I think it necessary—but I'm not going to let you make a fiend of yourself by doing what he does. After all, he is only a servant who does the bidding of his master."

"Sabbee," said he, with a hideous grin, "my wait for master."

With that he began to bind the spy's legs,

and when he had finished we laid the man upon his back in the grass between two graves. Ting shouted an uncivil good-bye to him, and together we left the burial-ground.

"You no sabbee that fellow," he said. "Him welly cluel man and no makee fit to live. My know plenty stoly, hear plenty tale how he beatee, floggee, makee tolture. Him watchee you, my watchee him. Wang welly clever man, pelhaps. Pelhaps poor man welly clever sometimes, eh?"

And he chuckled consumedly as he strode on with his giant hops.

"Perhaps," I answered.

By this time we had entered the high road once more.

CHAPTER XV.

A VISIT TO A COUNTRY HOUSE.

"AND now," said I, "the news?"

This adventure of the spy had kept us so long apart, and so busy when we did meet, that I could only glean from Ting the most unsatisfactory scraps of information; but now I had him to myself, and as we walked along the desolate road he told me all he knew. It was not much, but quite sufficient to whet my purpose. He had not seen Rose, but, in the guise of a hawker, he had done some judicious questioning, and the conclusion at which he had arrived was that Mr. Wang knew where the girl was hidden. The mandarin had been to his country house last night, and he was expected there again that evening. In some way it was necessary to gain admittance to the house.

Certainly all this did not sound extremely promising, but when the situation is desperate the imagination clothes the faintest hope with

the most tangible reality. At all events, vague as seemed the outlook, I fully believed that the mandarin was at the bottom of the mystery, and I meant to become better acquainted with him and his house.

We swung on for about another mile in silence, and then branching off to the right began to ascend a narrow path, which in the darkness seemed to me to wind in the most fantastic manner. After pursuing this for some little time, Ting suddenly bore away to the right, and presently we entered a small plantation of pines. How he found his way about was a perfect mystery to me, but after much dodging in and out among the saplings and branches, he came to a sudden standstill and whispered, "This belong piecee wall."

It was so dark I could not distinguish an object half-a-dozen yards off. Therefore great was my surprise when upon stretching out my hand I felt as a solid that which I had taken for a deeper darkness. I looked blankly up into the night, a horrid chill creeping over me. The devil take it! We seemed to be floundering deeper and deeper into our slough of despond.

But the imperturbable yellow man was not dismayed. Whispering to me to stand still he

slipped from my side, and I heard his stealthy tread as he stole away in the darkness.

In a few minutes he returned, and whispering that it was "all li," he seized my hand and led me carefully along by the wall, I stepping almost as softly as he. In this way we went on for some little distance, and then with a muttered exclamation my guide came to a standstill beneath a tree. He patted the tree and pointed upwards, and I saw that its branches overhung the wall, and then I realised his intentions. The rascal! He was as cunning as he was bold.

"Makee climb," he whispered. "Sabbee?"
"Sabbee."

With that he embraced the tree, and went up it like a great monkey. Then carefully he worked his way out along the bough, and presently I saw him perched straddle on the wall. Then I essayed the task, which I found more difficult; for being a heavy man I had never gone in much for gymnastics. However, after considerable scrambling and shin-rubbing, I reached the bough, and stayed to take a breath before I ventured further. I examined this support as carefully as the darkness would permit, and found it to all appearance solid enough; but, as I have said, I was

a heavy man, and when I got half-way across the bough began to sway and creak ominously. It swayed and creaked more the further I advanced, and just as I thought it was about to collapse altogether it came down on the wall, which, acting as a support, steadied the thing and allowed me to finish my journey with comparatively little anxiety.

Ting whispered his approval, and without more ado began to slide over the wall. First went his feet, then gradually his body, until he hung by his hands. A brief moment of suspense followed, then came a dull thud as he reached the ground. Listening intently I heard the assurance come up, "A' li."

With that I shuffled over to the place where he had been, and went through exactly the same performance. As the wall was some ten or twelve feet high the fall was not a great one. Letting go, I came down softly on a thick growth of grass, the uneven surface of which caused me to go spinning backwards. But Ting, as if anticipating something of the kind, had placed himself near at hand, so that when I lurched back he caught me in his arms. Steadying me a bit, I soon regained control of my equilibrium. Then he whispered, "Can do?"

"Can do," I replied.

As far as I could distinguish objects in the darkness, we seemed to be in a back or kitchen garden. Numerous trees and shrubs surrounded us, and among these we stole carefully, Ting making for some apparently well-known objective, I following as close to him as circumstances would permit. And with an unerring instinct he led the way, and presently we emerged into a more open space, and in the distance I saw the feeble flicker of a light.

"That light belong inside," he whispered. "Must be welly careful."

No need for the advice, thought I. I had no particular wish to alarm the household of Mr. Wang, much preferring to do my business in a secret and burglarious manner.

As we watched we saw the light disappear, and then Ting touched me on the shoulder, and as if impelled by the same thought we stole forward. As usual he led the way, his bare feet enabling him to move without the slightest noise: I followed almost as noiselessly.

I had no doubt whatever that he was making direct for the place where we had seen the light, and presently the outline of the house

began to shape itself in the gloom. The window was a corner one, and towards this corner I now saw that we had been advancing all the time. But when we reached it we found that it was raised some six or seven feet from the ground, and that a sort of platform or terrace stood betwixt us and it. This we mounted by means of a flight of steps which we discovered a little to the left of us, and then carefully made our way over to the window.

Thus far the adventure had proceeded in the best of all possible manners, though I scarcely dared hope that we would achieve our end with as little trouble. Indeed, was not the whole future utterly problematical? I did not even know that Rose was in the house; though of that, thanks to the faith of Mr. Ting, I had no doubt. That is, unless she was dead. I admit that now I had reached the goal, come within striking distance, as it were, the thought of death plagued me unconscionably, and I began to quiver with fear. I had questioned Ting but little on this subject, not wishing to expose my fears, and he had ridiculed the idea of murder, giving a reason which to me was almost more horrible. If it were so, and I

ever laid my hands on the mandarin, there would be one rascal less in the world.

But in the meantime we crouched by the window, peering intently into the dark, listening eagerly for the slightest sound. Yet for a long time we neither saw nor heard anything, and I was beginning to believe that the room was abandoned for the night, when the door suddenly opened and a man carrying a lamp entered. This he placed carefully on the table in the middle of the room, and then turned round and with an anxious face watched the door through which he had entered. I thought I recognised him as one of the secretaries I had seen about the Yamen; but of this I would not be sure. Anyway, it did not matter much as he was not the man I wished to see.

Perhaps a minute or more passed, and then I saw the man prick up his ears while his face assumed a look of abject sorrow. Then, like a whirlwind, Wang bounced into the room, and at once attacked the man with angry words and gestures. My heart gave an extra throb or two at the sight of him. Then it stopped, and my blood ran evenly. Presently the mandarin and I were coming to an understanding.

Continuing to harangue the fellow, Wang

worked himself into a violent passion. His naturally impassive face grew flushed and excited, and his little eyes fairly blazed with anger. Every tone of his voice was heard distinctly, and I envied Ting being able to understand, though I pitied the poor wretch who had to bear his fury.

At last he imperiously waved the man from him; the fellow bowed humbly and quitted the room, while the great man, still jabbering and gesticulating to himself, began rapidly to pace to and fro. From end to end of the room he walked, now coming towards us and then suddenly swinging to the right about. This he did some half-a-dozen times, when Ting touched me on the arm. Then as the mandarin swung about once more, my companion rose to his feet and noiselessly passed in through the open window. I followed him, but not so noiselessly, and Wang, hearing me, turned round and faced us.

He started, and turned pale; but quickly mastering his emotion, and not recognising me as I stood back by the window, he cried out sharply, "Who are you?" moving, as he spoke, towards the door. But Ting, ever ready, anticipated him. With a couple of giant hops he sprang across the room and placed himself

Wang

between the mandarin and the door. At the same time he drew a knife from beneath his blouse.

Wang fell back, his face suddenly blanching, and looked about him despairingly ; but at one exit stood Ting, his face absolutely black with anger, a formidable knife in his hand, at the other a gigantic Chinaman blocked the way. The mandarin looked curiously from one to the other, and then honoured me by advancing a step or two in my direction. To satisfy his curiosity I also advanced, and the light, falling on my face, enabled him to recognise me. He drew back with a slight exclamation, and, so I thought, the ghost of a smile. Then he said, assuming with considerable success his official air, "Why have you forced yourself into my house?"

Ting interpreted.

"Need you ask me?"

"I ask you to know the meaning of a course so unusual."

"The missionary's daughter is missing. I have come to ask you where she is."

"But if I cannot tell you?"

"I shall find a way of forcing you."

He scowled darkly.

"You forget that I am a high official in the

city; that this house is full of my servants; that one word from me will place you in my power."

"But you are not in the city now; and if you utter that word it will be your last," and I drew forth my revolver, and let the lamplight gleam on the polished barrel. Moreover, if he had done that which I believed him capable of doing, the fewer people he had about the house the better for him. Therefore I did not quite credit that boast of the house being full of servants.

"I see," he said, his lip curling scornfully, "you are a thief and an assassin."

"Neither, I hope; but when vermin crawls in the way one sometimes tramples it to death. I have come, believing you able to account for the disappearance of Miss Ormsby. What do you know of it?"

"Nothing," he answered sullenly.

"And if I do not believe you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is my misfortune."

"Liar, and son of a liar," cried Ting, whose face was hideous with passion, "speak!"

The mandarin surveyed the coolie with a look which was superbly contemptuous. But an after-gleam of rage robbed that look of some

of its loftiness. It said, If I only had you within the precincts of the Yamen.

"Speak," reiterated Ting, "speak, dog, and son of dog. Speak, vermin, devil, hell! Or do you want us to force you?"

At this the mandarin's yellow face paled perceptibly.

"I have done all I could for the girl. I know nothing."

"We will soon see," said the coolie. "When your excellency wants to make a prisoner speak, what does your exalted officialism do?"

"I but invoke the law," said the mandarin.

"You lie, dog! You torture innocent men, you beat innocent women until they confess to crimes they never committed. I know you, O Wang-Hai, and I but intend to put your own theories into practice."

"You!" said the mandarin. "By what authority?"

"The only authority that men respect. Might!"

"Do you forget who I am?"

"It is because I remember, O Wang-Hai." With that he began to unwind from beneath his blouse a rope which was coiled about his body, a piece of which he had already used upon the spy. Turning to me he said, "You

makee watch, sir. Blow him blain out supposum move."

Nothing loath, I advanced to Wang and presented my pistol at his head, while Ting duly admonished him on the necessity of keeping absolutely still. His eyes glared, his mouth twitched convulsively, but he never spoke a word. This outrage on his personal dignity stupefied him. The gods had indeed fallen upon evil days.

Ting, in the meantime, dexterously bound the man's hands behind him, and, though he submitted to the indignity without demur, he ate us up with burning eyes. Then he was forced into a chair, and Ting laid sacrilegious hands on his holy person, and was about to open the neck of his coat when a timid knock was heard outside. Instantly he desisted, and then looked threateningly at the mandarin, whispering something. Wang choked down his indignation, and after a momentary struggle, as though he uttered the words with the greatest difficulty, he said :

"Come in."

With a swift, kangaroo hop Ting sprang beside the door, which, opening, gave admittance to the man whom we had just seen with Wang. As soon as he entered the room he began to

speak, but he had not uttered many syllables before he stopped suddenly, seeing a stranger present. As he did so, Ting sprang at the door and closed it, and as the man wheeled swiftly round the coolie's knife flashed before his eyes.

“ Make a sound and you're a dead man.”

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CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE LOST WAS FOUND.

THE poor wretch was so paralysed with fear that he almost collapsed at Ting's feet, and I was afraid that the only sound he was likely to make would be a cry of terror. That crime, however, fortunately for himself, he refrained from committing, and the redoubtable coolie set him up against the wall, and held him there with the mere power of his will. Then he turned to me, grinning excitedly.

"My makee light guess. Missee Lose here."

"Here! How do you know?"

"This fellow makee talk. Then see you, makee stop. 'Ave makee plenty say."

"Question him."

Ting turned to the newcomer, and a conversation to this effect followed.

"You broke off in the middle of your report to the mandarin. Continue."

Looks passed between master and servant,

but Ting had an eye for both of them. Not a glance passed he did not see, not a gesture. To me it seemed as if he even read their thoughts.

"Your excellency frightened me," said the man. "I have forgotten what I was saying."

Ting smiled grimly. That abject "excellency" tickled his coolie soul. It was worth living for.

"Let me refresh your memory," he said. "As you entered the room you exclaimed, 'She says she would rather your ex—' and there you broke off. What were you going to say?"

The man compressed his brows as though striving to remember.

"I have forgotten, your excellency."

"Think."

Again the brows went together, but again the stupendous effort proved a failure.

"I am sorry, your excellency, but I cannot."

I thought I saw the ghost of a smile flicker over the mandarin's face. I believe Ting also saw it, for in an instant his brow grew as threatening as a thundercloud.

"Then give me your ear, dog, and let me help you to remember," and, suiting the action

to the word, he seized the man by the ear and flourished his ugly knife.

In a moment the fellow was on his knees howling for mercy.

"Perhaps you remember now," said Ting.

"I might, if your excellency would release my ear."

"Well?"

The ear was released, but the knife still circled in horrible proximity to the face.

"I was bearing a message to his excellency the mandarin from one of his—ladies."

"Dog," cried Ting, "would you trifle with me?"

And this time the blade made a slight incision in the ear.

"Forgive me, your excellency," cried the man, whom the blood terrified. "I am a dog and a liar to trifle with your excellency, to whom the gods have justly awarded ten thousand merits in heaven. I come from the missionary's daughter, the white woman whom his excellency the mandarin loves beyond all reason."

"Good, you have saved your ear."

"May the imperial five-clawed dragon carry your excellency to heaven, and may the Emperor wash your exalted feet."

Ting smiled grimly. His exalted feet. The bare, dirty feet of a coolie! But it was grand to have a man licking the dust in this manner. For a moment or so he experienced the delight and shame of kingship.

"How many servants are there in this house?"

"Two, your excellency."

"Men or women?"

"Women."

"They have retired?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Where are the men who brought this dog?"
nothing to the mandarin.

"In the village, your excellency."

"And they return?"

"In the morning, your excellency."

"Good."

Then he turned to me and repeated the whole of this conversation, stopping at the end of it and interrogating me with a look.

"We must go to her at once. This fellow shall show us the way."

"Sabbee. Can makee this piecee fellow do anything. Him muchee flightened. But first of all makee him plisoner."

With that he uncoiled another length of rope from his waist, and in a trice the fellow's arms

were secured. Then once more he turned his attention to the mandarin, secured that worthy's feet, and then bound him in his chair.

"You belong safe," he said. "My wantee speakee you plesently."

The mandarin submitted to the indignity with an execrable grace; but his eyes shone with a dark hope. If he kept still he might yet live to behold this insolent coolie within the precincts of the Yamen. Once there—once there! But probably some such thoughts occurred to Ting. He knew well enough what to expect if he fell into the mandarin's power, and it may be taken for granted that he had no intention of courting such a fate. To my knowledge he had always hated yamens: he would hate them more than ever now.

Looking round to make sure that Wang was now securely fastened, I closed the window, and took up the lamp preparatory to setting out in search of Rose. Ting wound one hand round the prisoner's pigtail, and held a knife in the other. Then, addressing a few words of warning to the fellow, he urged him forward, leaving me to bring up the rear. The mandarin looked after us with eyes that shone furiously. But of his safety we had no doubt, and

so we left him alone in the dark with his thoughts.

Our guide led us along a narrow passage which opened into a broad hall, at the end of which he stopped before a door and bowed. Ting spoke to him, and then turned to me.

"All li," he said, and nodded towards the door.

"She is in there?"

"Yes."

With a beating heart I stepped up to the door and knocked; but no answer being returned to my summons, I rapped again, this time more loudly. And presently I heard a voice, a voice speaking in Chinese; but it was hers, and my heart leapt at the sound.

"Rose!" I cried; but my voice was so charged with excitement that it sounded strange in my own ears.

"Who are you?" she answered.

"Paul!"

"Paul?"

"Yes. Open the door."

"I cannot. I am a prisoner."

Well, it didn't take me long to make up my mind. I retreated three or four paces, and shouting, "Stand back," I hurled my fourteen stone against the barrier. There was a horrid tearing and cracking of woodwork, and the

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I sprang across to her, and flinging my arms about her, I kissed her passionately.
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door gave way. I came stumbling in after it, but as the room was in darkness I could not see her. Ting, however, to whom I had given the lamp, entered with his prisoner, and I beheld Rose standing in the far corner of the room. But I was so filled with joy at seeing her that I saw nothing unusual in her surroundings, and I sprang across to her, and flinging my arms about her I kissed her passionately once, a dozen times, murmuring such endearing terms as "darling," "dearest," and many others of which I have now no recollection. And this was, perhaps, the first knowledge she had of my love. Indeed, it was in this manner that I first discovered it.

But though she received my caresses without repugnance, she made no effort to return them, and I saw that for some reason or other she kept her hands behind her—her back to the wall. And this caused me to thrill with apprehension, for I thought that she was merely submissive in her gratitude, and I wanted something more. So I looked closely into her face, and I saw the tears running down her cheeks.

"Paul," she whispered, "undo my hands."

"The light, Ting, quick!"

A closer examination showed me that her arms were triced up behind her back, and in

such a manner that the cord which bound her was passed over a strong hook which had been driven into the woodwork. This resulted in a species of torture as simple as it was cruel; for the cord was so arranged that every time she swayed the whole weight of the body was brought upon the wrists. If she had fainted, or otherwise grown too weary to stand, she might have suffered the extreme agony of dislocation, perhaps even of death.

With a slash of my knife I cut the cords and she fell fainting in my arms. I gave her of my flask, I chafed her brow, her hands. I examined her wrists and found them black and swollen, with a great blood-coloured band round each. I stroked them gently—I kissed them—I drew her closer to me and kissed her back to consciousness. And there was only one thing in the world for me then—this sweet woman with the deathly face.

Then her eyes opened, and when she recognised me she smiled, and I said "Oh, my love, my love," and I kissed her wondering eyes and pressed her still closer. And she nestled against me of her own free will, and her poor maimed hands went round my neck, and her lips murmured something that was meant for my ear alone.

"Dear one," she said, "I have suffered, but thank God it is all over now. I despaired—I thought I should die—but God is good."

"And beyond this?"

"Nothing, dearest; but he threatened, and I was fearful of what was to follow."

"He shall be paid," said I, and I looked at Ting. He nodded grimly. His ugly face was fiercer and uglier than ever.

"Good Ting," she said, "you, too, have come to help me. I thank you."

"My belong you and missionaly," he answered. "Sabbee?"

"Sabbee," she said.

"All li, can do. I go look see," and away he went, driving his prisoner before him.

Then, when I thought her equal to the task I got her to tell me how it happened that she had fallen into the hands of Wang, and I found that we had been correct in tracing her near the northern gate. A woman had come to her and told her that in a certain house there lived a man who had heard Mr. Ormsby preach, and who in consequence had begun to cry aloud for a greater knowledge of Christ. Would she go and see him? Dreaming nothing of treachery, and being only too pleased to render service where it was needed, she followed the woman

through many streets until they entered a house which was built within the shadow of the city wall. Here she was shown up some rickety stairs into a poorly furnished room, and the woman entering with her sat down and began to talk. And she talked and talked saying she expected her husband to return every moment; but the moments slipped into minutes, the minutes to an hour, and he came not. Then Rose, promising to call again, prepared to go, but the woman intercepted her, and then it dawned upon the girl that she had fallen into a trap.

But she had confidence in herself, born of her strange manner of living and a natural courage, and when she was about to assert her superiority the woman called loudly and a man entered the room. He was an evil-looking fellow, and bore in his hand a whip, and with this he threatened to beat her if she proved obstreperous in any way. And he sat down in her presence, and to her protestations returned rough answers.

And gradually the darkness grew, and when the city was quiet the man gagged her, and led her down into the street, where a chair was waiting. Into this she was bundled, some words were spoken in a hurried whisper, and

away the bearers went at a swinging trot. Once they stopped, and there was much hurried whispering; then the chair went on again, stopping some ten minutes later, when the gag was considerably removed from her mouth.

The rest can easily be imagined. She was brought to Wang's house, and there subjected to the ignominy of having to listen to him, with the threat of imprisonment and death if she remained obstinate. The torture of tricing her up had been inflicted more as a warning than a severe punishment. Wang was a man who had been accustomed to command. She should know what a Chinese mandarin could do to the people who thwarted him.

Well, it was all over now, and as I kissed her again and again, I thanked God that I had arrived so opportunely; but it was a cruel, treacherous tale to hear, and I wondered how I could best punish the chief instigator of the outrage. For my soul was black with passion, and I could have condoned any punishment that might be dealt out to the wretch. High official he might be, but he was in my power now, and I was in no Christian frame of mind. Of one thing I was certain; after this incident Fong-Chin would be no place for me, nor

Rose, nor her father. Wang might not proceed to extreme measures and publicly prosecute, but for us there would be no more security neither by day nor night.

But in the meantime we were forced, at least for a few more hours, to make use of what hospitality his house afforded; for we could not re-enter the city until the gates opened, while to wander about the countryside would not only lay us under suspicion, but would be mighty inconvenient. This I explained in answer to Rose's inquiry why we did not leave the hateful place, and I was further entering into details when a piercing cry came from an adjoining room.

I bounded to my feet and drew my pistol, but a deadly silence followed the awful cry. I looked at her and she at me, and I saw fear and wonder in her face. Then, just at that moment the cry came again, and motioning her to stay where she was, I bounded out into the hall and rushed in the direction whence the cry had issued.

It was the room in which we had left the mandarin Wang.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VENGEANCE OF TING.

ALONG the hall I rushed, guided by a dim light which swung somewhere overhead, and as I made for the passage which led to the aforementioned room, I ran full tilt against a human figure. Immediately I started back, fully expecting a stab from a knife, but this not coming, I advanced again and closely inspected the object.

It stood bolt upright in the middle of the passage and began to moan pitifully ; and on approaching quite close I saw that it was Wang's man, the secretary from whom Ting had extracted the confession. But what was he doing there, and why did he moan in this manner ? Advancing, I pushed him from my path, when instead of giving way he swayed a little and came back again, a pitiful moan accompanying the movement. Wondering, I looked closer, and then the apparent mystery was explained. The fellow had been made

fast by his pigtail to a beam overhead, and there he stood, his scalp drawn tightly when his feet rested upon the ground. It was torture, but torture applied with a certain amount of delicate consideration. While the man stood still he suffered little inconvenience ; but if he swayed so much as an inch, he must have experienced a throb somewhat akin to being scalped.

For a moment I hesitated, then I passed on. No doubt Ting had some excellent reason for this piece of ingenious cruelty. And it was no time for the scattering of rosewater. The man was safe, and how much he was tortured depended entirely upon himself.

Therefore I passed on, a pitiful moan following me along the passage ; but it was not the occasion for a display of sentiment. First to be considered was our own safety.

As I opened the door at the farther end a curious sight presented itself. By the dim light of a candle which burnt upon a table hard by, I saw the mandarin, still bound to his chair : before him, stripped to the waist, a knife in his hand, stood Ting, talking volubly and gesticulating like a maniac. Advancing closer, I saw that Wang also was in a like state of nudity, and that he was bleeding from an

incision across his chest. Nor was this the worst, for a still closer inspection showed me that both his ears had been cut off.

Horried, I rushed forward and laid my hand on Ting's bare shoulder, and with a cry he sprang round at me and lifted his knife. But recognising me he dropped his hand and grinned like a death's head. And of all the livid, hideous faces I ever saw his was the most hideous. Such a picture of fiendish hate and joy I had never imagined: the sickly, awful grin lent to it the mad look of an idiot.

"What have you been doing, Ting? What does this mean?"

His black eyes shone green in the strange light. The candle light fell upon the wales with which his body was scarred.

"You sabbee Chlistian man's joss-book?" he shrieked excitedly.

"Sabbee," I said, though I did not know it as well as I ought.

"It speakee so: One piecee eye for one piecee eye, one piecee tooth for one piecee tooth. My believe along o' Chlistian man's joss-book. That swine 'ave makee the lesult." As he spoke he pointed contemptuously to the ghostly Wang.

I walked over to the light, intending to get

a better look at the victim, and as I stretched out my hand for the candle my little finger came in contact with something wet. I drew back with a shudder, and on looking down saw that I had touched a human ear, from the dying veins of which the blood still oozed slowly. However, I seized the candle and held it before the mandarin's face, and I have since come to the conclusion that my nature must be much harder than I ever imagined, or the sight I beheld would have turned me faint.

Wang was still bound in his chair. His clothes had been literally hacked from him, and, as I have said, he was bleeding from a wound on the chest. But his face looked more horrible still, for from the place where each ear had been cut off, the blood still dripped and splashed him on either side. And as if this was not pain and ignominy enough, his pigtail had been roughly cut off, and was now used as a gag to smother his own cries.

"You fiend!" I cried, shaking my fist at Ting.

He scowled horribly, but answered:

"My no belong fiend. This man makee fiend, makee hell. He debbil, he all the debbils in hell."

But I was already easing Wang of his gag, and slashing the cord that bound his arms;

and when I had done this, I drew his torn clothes up over his body as best I could. And he must have seen the pain in my face, for his wild, bloodshot eyes looked up into mine like those of an animal stricken to death. And yet he did not speak, he did not utter a sound, but sat staring at me like one half-dazed. And I could not help contrasting this pitiable creature with the high official whose word was law to tens of thousands ; whose nod or frown meant happiness or misery to all who came in contact with him. And now here he was, a poor, mutilated, contemptible creature, mastered by one of the very worms he had hitherto trodden upon as dirt. An Alexander without his army, a Caesar without his legions : what are they more than you or I ? All his royalty could not save the head of the traitor king.

I turned to Ting and began to upbraid him, and he listened to me humbly enough ; for now that his fury had abated he seemed somewhat more amenable to reason, and appeared to realise that the theory of the eye for the eye and the tooth for the tooth was anything but reputable. But when I stopped to draw breath, he, coming close to me, said, touching the scars on his chest, "Once before you've seen?"

"I have seen." That day on the Pe-kiang came back. I remembered how eager he was to hide the wounds, how fearful he was I should tell.

"Suppose you 'ave makee thought?"

Truly I had. He could only have come by them in one way, that was, at the hands of justice. Justice only treated those accused of heinous offences in such a manner. Therefore the conclusion to be drawn from such premises was that he was guilty of a heinous offence. But I was not so perfect that I blamed a man for past sins. It was not my business to pry into my neighbour's antecedents

"Yes, I have thought," I answered.

"But you no connect Ting-Foo with the glate mandalin, Wang-Hai? Yet both belong Ning-po side in the plovine of Che-Kiang."

I saw his meaning in a moment, and I gasped out, "Then he—"

"He makee this. That debbil, that dog, that hell!—he makee this. I play, I gloan, I cly. He laugh, he makee say, beat, bear. I bleed, my blain burst, I faint. He makee me come to life with the whip. He squeezee my finger till he blake the bone," and he held up the little finger of his left hand which fell limply; "he clipple me," and he touched his

leg, the leg which caused him to limp; "and all the time he makee sit, makee laugh. My tinkum go to gloy, but no can die. Then pain, sorrow, all go. I makee live, I makee live for one day. When he come Fong-Chin side, my come Fong-Chin side. I waitee one piecee long time. My joinee Chlistian man's joss because him plenty safe; but allee time my tinkee, One day, one piecee day."

"But if he did this there was a cause?"

"Cause!" he laughed bitterly. "Chinaman always makee plenty cause. You sabbee Taiping? Taiping 'ave got plenty lebel. Pelhaps you sabbee glate lebellion? Why not glate lebellion? This piecee Emperor belong Manchu, no belong Chinamen. I belong Chinaman. All Chinaman, except officials, belong lebel; that is, all good piecee Chinaman who tink. One piecee spy denounce me. This man tink I have got glate secret. No have got glate secret, but no can plove. He no believe, he makee tolture; my makee levenge."

So this was his story. There was an air of truth about it which I felt bound to accept, and though my training would have forbidden me to take such a revenge, I almost acknowledged a kind of frightful justice in it all. Considering the education of the Chinaman, which

seems to develop rather than retard the callousness of his nature, there was nothing improbable in Ting's story, nothing revolting in his revenge. It is not so long ago since our forefathers did the same sort of thing, and, no doubt, they looked upon themselves as civilised gentlemen.

Well, I could do nothing, and I have no wish to pass judgment on the mandarin or his accuser. It may be taken for granted that the little love I bore the former softened somewhat my tone towards the latter. Heaven knows, the one had caused me misery enough, and there was someone waiting in the other room, the memory of whose wrongs stirred my bitterness. But from whichever point it was approached the business looked black and bad, and I feared for the end which had not yet come.

"Miss Rose must not see him," I whispered.

"All li."

"She must not know."

"Sabbee."

The mandarin, here fixing his eyes on me, muttered something.

"What does he say?"

"Water. Him wantum dlink."

I gave him of my flask, and with a strip of his shirt bound up his hideous face. He

looked at me steadily with painful, wondering eyes. Mercy he had not known, pity he could not understand. But perhaps there is something of humanity even in a Chinaman.

"You must not touch him again, Ting."

"All li. 'Ave done. He lember—I forget."

"Cut down that other fellow who is hanging outside, and lock him up somewhere. He is only this man's creature. Do not harm him."

"All li."

"We must stay here till daybreak."

"Sabbee."

"I can trust you?"

"Plenty tust me now. My day 'ave come."

I thereupon left the room, and glad enough was I to shut out the sight of that dreadful figure in the chair, though even now, as I close my eyes, I see it all as plainly as though it were happening over again; and often it obtrudes itself upon happier scenes, and awakes a flood of uneasy recollections.

Rose sprang anxiously across to me as I entered the room, and sought to know the reason of the cry.

"You have left me so long," she said, "I am very frightened."

"I am so sorry; but you must not be frightened. There is nothing to fear."

"Ting?"

"Quite safe."

"And—he?"

"Safe under the guardianship of Ting."

"But that cry was horrible."

"Think no more about it. You will not hear it again."

"You are keeping something from me."

"Trust me, dear, in this."

"Yes, yes, I trust you; but this house frightens me. When are we to go?"

"At daybreak."

"And that is—"

I looked at my watch.

"About two hours hence. Try to sleep."

"Dearest, I cannot sleep. I am too frightened."

As in me the excitement calmed down I caught something of her fear, realising to the full the extent of this awful business. Wang was a man of substance and position, and as such was not to be attacked with impunity. That he would devote himself to revenge I did not doubt; the probable nature of which caused me no little alarm. But of one thing I felt certain; after this Fong-Chin would be no place for me or for my friends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE MISSION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the sweet companionship of Rose, the time dragged slowly onwards. At first we had plenty to say to each other, but for a long time after we sustained a desultory sort of conversation, which at length died away into questions and answers, and then long silences.

With the first gleam of daylight I sprang to my feet and went and called Ting. I found him on his back in the hall, snoring as complacently as though surrounded by a loyal bodyguard. He started suspiciously as I touched him with my toe, and his hand flew to his belt, but recognising me he laughed.

"Tink you belong my dear friend Wang."

"Have you slept well?"

"My 'ave slept welly sweet."

"No dreams?"

"No dleams—except one piecee nice one."

Incorrigible rascal! He was only waiting for me to ask of him what he had dreamt, but I declined thus to play to his vanity.

"Get up," I said; "it's time we were moving."

"Can do," he replied regretfully, "but my makee sweet dleam."

He, however, arose, shook himself, and then declared that he was ready to start. "But bleckfast first," said he.

"Breakfast! Good heavens! you surely don't want any breakfast."

"Ting welly hungry."

Hungry I might have been, but I could not have eaten in that house.

"Very well, go; but come back quickly. We ought to start at once. By the way, what did you do with—?" and I pointed towards the room.

He grinned. "The plisoners Always do same ting with plisoners, Keep 'em safe."

"Well, hurry up. I don't want to stay here longer than I can help.

Yet when, some five minutes later, he returned with a goodly supply of bread, meat, and fruit, I fell upon the viands with avidity, having forgotten my repugnance to the house. I also prevailed upon Rose to eat, for I feared that the troubles she had undergone might yet be the cause of her breaking down.

The sun was just beginning to rise as we

left the villa ; but this time we went boldly by the front door—a marked contrast to our entrance a few hours previously. Rose and I passed out first, Ting carefully closing the door behind him. Then that intrepid one advanced to act as guide, and in a very short time we had cleared the grounds of the villa, and the gate had swung to behind us.

I breathed freer ; we all three breathed freer. Then, reckoning the journey to the city, and the time it would most probably take, I grew alarmed. True, the chair coolies were not likely to put in an appearance at the villa for the next two or three hours ; but if the female servants were to awake, discover their master and his secretary, and release them, what was to prevent an immediate pursuit of us?

“Ting,” I said, stopping suddenly, “those servants ought to have been secured.”

He grinned consumedly. “All li. Can do.”

“What do you mean?”

“‘Ave make.”

“You mean you have secured them?”

With a dirty forefinger he tapped his ugly nose.

“What you tink?”

For fear of attracting attention we skirted the village on its eastern side, striking the main road some half mile further on. Here, as the day grew brighter, we joined the long procession of gardeners and merchants who were making for the city with their various wares, and when I beheld the great gate looming up through the clear air, I pressed Rose's hand, and with joy she returned the pressure. But when we reached the gate we found that our arrival was somewhat premature, and an unpleasant half-hour was passed waiting for admittance. I kept an anxious watch upon the road, expecting every moment to see the mandarin's chair come bobbing along; but luckily fortune once more stood our friend. Slowly the gates opened and we passed in without molestation.

The day being yet young there were fortunately few people about, and we duly reached the Mission without mishap. I leave you to imagine the joy with which Mr. Ormsby received his daughter, though later on that joy became clouded with grief as he listened to a recital of our adventures. As there was no longer an excuse for hiding anything, I gave him a particular account of what had befallen us, not even forgetting Ting's revenge. Con-

sternation filled his face as I spoke, and I saw that he regarded the outlook with much of my hopelessness.

"This is very bad, very serious," he said.

"I fear that Wang will seek a cruel retaliation."

"That is natural enough. But what are we to do?"

"There is but one thing. We must seek some way of conciliating him."

"And if that fails?"

"We are in the hands of God."

I could not help replying, "The hand of man is sometimes laid heavily upon his brother.

"You doubt?"

"I think, sir, that the mandarin will not rest until he has been fully revenged.

"We shall see."

"Why should we wait to see? Surely even you must recognise the hopelessness, not to say the danger of remaining here?"

"And what then?" cried he suspiciously.

"Why wait for his revenge? He has a great debt to clear. Unless I mistake my man, he will pay in full."

"I see what you mean; but it is impossible. My duty is here with my people. They be-

lieve in me : I cannot shake their trust. I have chosen this life and I must cling to it. But there is no reason why you should stay. Indeed I might suggest that you take Rose with you. If you can get her as far as Hong-Kong you may probably be able to prevail upon her to go to England."

"I would not dare suggest such a thing to her. We must wait until this affair blows over."

But it did not blow over and I knew that it would not. Some two hours after our arrival a couple of magistrate's officers called to see the missionary, and upon being shown in, they demanded that Ting and I should forthwith return with them to the Yamen, there to be interrogated by the mandarin on a matter of the utmost importance. Naturally I declined. Ting was not asked, but I knew enough of his sentiments to answer for him. Visit the Yamen! Never again of my own free will would I set foot within its precincts. I could imagine the vengeance of Wang when supported by the authority of State.

The two men went away shaking their heads and muttering ominously.

"It has come," said Mr. Ormsby.

"Not yet ; but it is coming. Let us prepare for it."

So I went out and saw to the fastening of the big gate. While there Ting joined me, and I told him what had happened.

"My 'ave see," he said. "See two piecee Yamen men. Makee guess. Wang 'ave come?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Pity you no let my slit him dam thloath. Dead men makee no wlong."

I was almost sorry I hadn't. My interference may have done credit to my heart, but it reflected little on my head. This setting free of our dearest foe was almost a crime.

"What do you think he'll do next?"

"No can tell. Suppose we makee leady?"

Not bad advice, thought I, and with that we went the round of the compound, examining the wall, seeing how we could best put the Mission in a state of defence. But the survey did not inspire much hopefulness. The gate badly wanted strengthening, while the wall in many places presented no insuperable obstacles to a successful assault.

Ting shook his head.

"This place takee one week to makee stlong."

"We must waste no time. But first let us rest. I am nearly dead for want of sleep."

"My makee sleep, too," he said.

I must have slept a long time, for it was almost dark when I was awakened by a loud crash. Springing from my bed, half-dazed, I looked about me in wonder, and by the fast dying light saw some broken glass lying on the floor. As I stepped across to it my toe struck a large stone. In a moment I was wide awake, and going to the window I looked out and saw a crowd of people surging before the gate. Whether they saw me or not I cannot say, but just then they began to hoot and groan, and a shower of stones came flying over the wall.

Fully realising the meaning of this demonstration, I hastily beat a retreat from the window, loaded both my revolvers, and jammed an extra box of cartridges into my pocket. Then I opened the door, and found the house in an uproar. Here and there rushed the women and children, groaning, screaming, their faces white with terror; and as I passed by they clutched at my coat, begging me to save them, for they all knew what fate awaited them if the mob succeeded in entering the Mission.

I, however, passed on into the hall, and there I found Mr. Ormsby, Rose, and Ting, with the two men who had come up the Pe-kiang with me.

"I must apologise. Why did not somebody come and call me?"

"I was just about to send Ting," said Mr. Ormsby. "The attack is very sudden."

"I have heard of these attacks before. There is danger?"

"I fear so—unless they can be got to disperse."

Guessing who had caused them to assemble, I said :

"They will not disperse."

The missionary looked me blankly up and down. He could fight for the Lord, but not with carnal weapons.

"Then what shall we do?" he asked.

"There is only one thing to be done. Put our house in order, and give them a warm reception when they enter."

Ting grunted a note of assent. The smell of battle filled the nostrils of the old war-horse and made him beautiful to look upon. I turned to Rose and met an approving look.

"What weapons have you in the house?" I asked.

"None," said the missionary.

I had expected this. Powder and ball were the last things to which he would have thought of trusting. I drew Ting aside and told him

where he would find my gun and ammunition. As this would probably be a serious business, it was as well to treat it seriously. Off he went with a long hop, and a deadly smile round the corners of his mouth. Ting had absolutely no contempt for powder and ball.

But in the meantime the barbarians began to thunder on the gate a performance which they varied by despatching showers of stones against the house. Behind us was the wailing of women, about us the men stood pale-faced and nervous to a degree. Then Ting came back with the gun and several rounds of ammunition, and while Mr. Ormsby took Rose into the library, I initiated my redoubtable friend into the mysteries of loading, etc. I also handed him one of my revolvers, remarking :

“The missionary and Miss Rose.”

He grinned, “Alli. Sabbee.” He handled the weapon like one perfectly well acquainted with its mechanism and its uses. I was certain of one good man.

As Mr. Ormsby emerged from the library the assault on the gate was renewed, but this time much more fiercely. Indeed, judging by the dull thuds, and the way the gate creaked, I knew that they were swinging some heavy weight as a battering-ram. But the curious

thing was the ominous silence with which the mob worked. True, occasionally there was some shouting ; but for the most part the work was carried on in a way which proclaimed that an utter absence of noise was necessary. I guessed, too, what this meant, and who had given the order.

But the gate, not being in the best of condition, began to yield to the strenuous blows which were dealt upon it, and I knew that in a few minutes at most we should have the mob pouring up the pathway to the house. Therefore I ordered Ting to take up his position on one side of the porch, while I stood at the other. One of the other men was to hold the door ready to slam it to in case we were forced to beat a hurried retreat. But Mr. Ormsby, overhearing the order, advanced and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"My dear Paul, let us try to conciliate them first."

"As well try to conciliate a typhoon."

"I think you wrong them. Why should they harm me? I have never done them wrong."

"This is not a matter of right or wrong. It is a case of revenge."

"Nevertheless—"

But his words were drowned in the cry that was raised by the people, for at that moment the gate gave way, and with shoutings and fierce gesticulations the mob surged in. But after advancing a few yards up the path they stopped, seeing us standing there coolly awaiting their arrival. Then I turned to Ting.

"Don't fire until your man is close enough for you to make sure of hitting him. Then take the one on your side."

"No, please, don't fire at all," said the missionary. "I will disperse these people." And before I could stop him he was down the steps, and marching straight towards the mob.

"Come back, sir," I shouted; "for God's sake, come back!"

He turned round with a brave smile.

"Don't be alarmed. They know me well, and will not harm me. Stay where you are," as I made a step forward. "I must let them see that I have confidence in them."

With that he continued his march, nor did he stop until he was within striking distance of the foremost, a villainous-looking lot of the lowest class. Then he raised his hands, the palms outwards, and said:

"My children, what want ye?"

And they shouted:

"The barbarian and his accomplice. Death to the barbarians."

And they advanced upon him threateningly, and hustled him somewhat until he was forced to retreat.

Night was now distinctly darkening the air, and the people, forgetting their reserve, broke out into a wild yelling and hooting. A volley of sticks and stones came flying towards us; but from the pillars which supported either side of the porch Ting and I gained considerable protection. I saw the rabble trample down the pretty flower-beds and destroy all the shrubs which came within their reach, and the way they laughed and yelled showed the delight they took in their work.

But all these things were as nothing to that which was going on before me. The missionary, pressed back and back, striving with pacific gesticulations to still the tumult, was at length struck in the face by a heavy stone. For a moment he straightened himself—then he staggered forward right into the midst of his foes. A howl of exultation followed, and as he fell to the ground three or four men threw themselves upon him, and I heard the dull, heavy stab of the knife as he was pierced again and again. Almost at the same moment a shrill

scream came from the library window, the cry of, "Father, father! Save him!"

Instinctively I opened fire, and I saw one man drop and another run away howling. Then I rushed down the path, Ting by my side, and the welcome popping of his pistol cheered me. The crowd fell back with cries of terror and anger, and I, rushing forward, caught up Mr. Ormsby and carried him back to the house. A dash was made to intercept our retreat, but Ting wheeled round and fired point-blank at the leader, who threw up his arms and dropped.

This momentary check enabled us both to reach shelter.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BAD HALF-HOUR.

THE big door was immediately slammed to and secured, and as I laid Mr. Ormsby in the hall, Rose came rushing out from the library, and before I could stop her she was on her knees beside him, stroking his head and calling him by the most endearing names. But the ears heard them not, the lips moved not, the eyes returned no answering gaze. For Mr. Ormsby was already quite dead, stricken sorely in at least a dozen places. Like that sweet mediator, his Master, he had died as perhaps even he might have wished.

By the dim light of the lamp which Ting here lit, I saw some dark ominous pools begin to form on the floor, and with gentle force I lifted Rose and held her face aside as I nodded for Ting to take away the body.

"Let me go with him," she said. "I will die too, my father—oh, my, father!"

But I held her fast.

"Dear Rose," I said, "be brave. Your father is with God."

Here a noise at the door awoke us to the stern necessity of our own case. The mob had tasted blood and was eager for more. I reloaded my revolver and then took up my gun. But we were in a desperate plight, and I thought that before many minutes were over we might be journeying after Mr. Ormsby.

Presently I beheld Ting advancing down the hall loading his revolver as he came.

"Where is udder piecee man?" he cried.

Looking round I saw that we three were quite alone, the others having vanished.

"Gone," I answered bitterly. "The rats have deserted the sinking ship."

He swore horribly, cursing them and their progeny for all eternity, and he looked round in a way which augured ill for anyone whom he might find hiding. But the noise at the door was here resumed, and I knew that the battering ram which had demolished the gate was again brought into requisition. I therefore extinguished the lamp and led Rose back to the extremity of the hall, and kissing her, returned to Ting. All I could say was, "Courage, dear, courage," though heaven knows I had little hope. The yelling mob once

masters of the house, there was nothing to save us from their fury, and I had seen enough and read enough of the Chinaman to imagine what our fate would be. Once the door gave way, and with every stroke it shivered and shook in the most ominous fashion, there was absolutely nothing to save us from death: perhaps death sudden, perhaps also by the torture. I had only one wish then—that it would be sudden.

Here Ting advanced and slipped a dozen cartridges into my hand. Thoughtful beggar! He had been to my room and replenished his store

"The door will give way presently," I said, more by way of a hint than any value I attached to such an obviously superfluous remark; for Ting was a man of ideas, and I thought that he might have some views as to an ultimate retreat.

"Sabbee," he answered grimly. "Send some of these debbils back to heli then."

As he spoke the door gave way with a crash, and as the darkness outside was lighter than the darkness within, we saw without being seen. My gun was already to my shoulder, and I only waited for our assailants to crowd the doorway so as to enable me to give them

both barrels. What would follow I hadn't the least idea, and I had no inducement to think. If they would give me time to reload I might be able to account for a few more of them. That was all.

They fell back before the yawning orifice which the absent door created, while Ting and I gave no sign of life. I had previously counselled the utmost prudence, enjoining upon him to reserve his fire, and I must admit that he carried out my instructions to the letter. But though for a moment or so the darkness checked them, they soon recognized that it was only darkness, and they were men with the blood in their eyes, and consequently stood in no dread of a shadow. Therefore, uttering the most ferocious cries, they swarmed into the doorway, and as they did so I let go both barrels.

The explosion filled the place with a noise which completely drowned the savage hubbub ; but presently through the gloom and the smoke there came fierce cries of agony and the wailing of men in deadly pain. Like lightning I ejected the empty shells and jammed home two more cartridges, and almost before the sound of the first discharge had died away I had sent another roaring volley into their midst. Again came

the shrieks and the cursings of the wounded, but, unchecked by these mishaps, the maddened mob pressed forward through the smoke, and guided no doubt by the flashings of my gun, rushed upon us. It was give and take then with a vengeance. Rapidly I emptied my revolver, and with success I knew, and then seizing the gun, I laid about me with a right good will. Beside me in the gloom there was a tall figure which struck and cursed, cursing with every blow.

It was hot work while it lasted, but foot by foot we drove the enemy back until the hall was once more clear, except for those who lay still, or moaning, on the floor. These we passed carefully, for your fallen enemy not unfrequently has a knife in his hand, which upon a pinch he can use with much desperate energy.

"Well, Ting?"

"All li," answered that worthy.

"Rose," I whispered, "you are safe?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Not a touch." Which was hardly the truth. Indeed I had received some very memorable touches, and had a smarting in the side which was an unpleasant reminder that the enemies' knives were sharp. But it was nothing serious.

The blows I had received meant nothing more than bruised flesh and sore bones. Quite enough, I admit, especially to one who has a liking for his own skin. It must be delightful to be one of those fellows who think as little of a broken head as I would of a broken tea-cup. But perhaps it's when the head belongs to somebody else?

Though driven back from the door, the howling still went on in front of the house, and occasionally I beheld a darker shadow dashing through the darkness. But gaining knowledge from experience, they withdrew beyond reach of our arms, doubtless to attack us from another point. I seized the opportunity to reload both my weapons, cautioning Ting to do likewise. But that worthy replied with a laugh, "'Ave done." Grim fiend that he was, I almost fancied that I could hear him chuckling in the darkness. Like me he had grown hopelessly desperate. Die no doubt he must. He knew it. He accepted his fate without a murmur. But they must kill him, not carry him captive to the Yamen. Though he had no fear of death, he shuddered at the thought of Wang.

We were not left long wondering from which point they meant next to attack us. Ting touched

me on the arm and half turned me round, my face towards the library door. Listening, I heard voices in the room and the shuffling of many feet. Then came a smashing of furniture and a breaking of china, and I knew that the devils had begun their work of spoliation. Had it not been for Rose, I doubt if my prudence would have been strong enough to restrain my anger. Ting likewise grew fearfully excited, that I knew by his breathing and the restless movement of his feet; and at last he whispered, "What for no makee lush?" But I ground out, "No, no!" and held him back. It would have been sheer madness to attempt to rush that crowded room, though had it not been for the girl who crouched in the dark I might even have sought that way to oblivion. As it was, I could not recklessly rush upon my death, though I had a horrible dread that the end was not far off.

But even had we attempted to force the library we were already too late. I heard the crowd piling the broken furniture against the door, and while yet I wondered what this new movement portended I became aware of the smell of smoke. This was something I had not expected, and its coming filled me with dismay. I leaned forward, clinging wildly to

a despairing hope; but it was a hope not fated to be realised. Not alone was the smoke growing denser and more stringent, but as I leaned forward I distinctly heard the crackling of fire. The wretches had set fire to the house! Almost at the same moment the demoniacal yells burst forth once more, clearly indicating that the enemy believed they had trapped us at last.

"Well, Ting, what now?"

"Makee lun," said he. "No can sabbee makee loast pig."

"Run where?"

"Out thlough the back gate. Same place as the other fellow makee bolt."

He of course referred to the way taken by the other converts, who had bolted at the first sign of the enemy.

I sprang to Rose.

"They have set fire to the house. We must go."

She laid her cold hands in mine.

"And leave him?"

"Dear, how can we help him now?"

"But this is horrible."

"Better this than that his body should fall into their hands."

She bowed her head in silence, but Ting cried out at that moment:

"Quick, sir, quick. The fire makee come."

I looked and saw that the flames had already eaten their way through the interstices of the door, and I knew that in a few moments the whole passage would be ablaze. The mob evidently knew so, too, for with harsh cries they once more congregated before the porch waiting for the flames to light up the dark hall, and so disclose our hiding-place. Then the choice of but two evils would be left us: either to stay there and be burnt to death, or to rush out upon the expectant enemy.

Luckily there was one other evil left, though for the time being our assailants seemed to have forgotten it. As the first sheet of flame burst into the hall we three disappeared down a smaller passage on our left, and hurrying along this soon found ourselves in the kitchen, a commodious apartment flagged with stone. On a table at the other side of the room a solitary candle burnt dimly, and just as one observes trivial things at serious moments, I made a mental note of the polished pots and pans, a kettle that sang merrily on the stove, and a half-plucked fowl which the cook had been preparing for dinner.

Ting sprang across the room, we just behind him, but as he reached the door he suddenly

stopped, then quickly began to back upon us. Almost at the same moment half-a-dozen hideous rascals crowded into the doorway, and I saw the dim light of the candle play upon their polished blades. Instantly Ting's revolver went up, and stepping before Rose I shouldered my gun. But the men, rendered desperate, had no intention of falling like beasts in the shambles. With fearful cries they swept in upon us, and we hastily opened fire. But though we brought some down, others burst through, and emboldened by fear or revenge furiously attacked us. I had no chance to draw my revolver, so, swinging the gun, I laid about me with a right good will ; not that I was particularly anxious as to the result of this immediate encounter, for I knew that our enemies had no firearms. The fear was that others, attracted by the noise, might make their way round to the back, and so cut off our avenue of escape. Therefore we attacked in turn, and as only two men were left of the six we speedily drove them back upon the door, when they incontinently turned tail and fled howling in the darkness.

Quick as thought we were out and slipping down the back garden towards the little gate which led into the street. This was the way

the converts had fled, and by this we hoped to reach the shelter of some dark street or alley-way. Taking Rose by the arm I hurried her breathlessly along, and at last, to my unbounded relief, the gate came in view, and there was no sign of the enemy.

Seizing the handle I pulled, but the gate gave not. I hastily examined the bolts; they were all open. I pulled again, but with the same success. The gate had been locked from the outside! The converts, as they fled, had sought to make their escape doubly secure by locking the gate after them. Wise of them, but it meant death to us.

I whispered to Ting:

"The gate is locked."

I looked at the huge lock, the massive screws and staples that bound it, for I was thinking of my fourteen stone, and if I could utilise it as a battering-ram. But the gate opened inwards, and I knew that its frame was imbedded in stout timber. Therefore my weight hurled against the door would bring not the slightest pressure upon the lock. This I saw, and regretted that I was not on the other side of the wall.

Meanwhile the howling before the Mission

still continued without cessation, and though we stood in the deep darkness of the night and the wall, I feared that every moment would precipitate some wanderers into our midst. For presently, when the novelty of the burning front had worn off, some of the more restless spirits would be sure to find their way round to the back. Then the discovery of the dead or the dying men would point the way we had gone.

But here Ting, who, knife in hand, had gone down upon his knees to inspect the lock, arose with an oath. He always swore whether he was glad or sorry. Mr. Ormsby had broken him of much of his heathenism, but it was not within the power of man entirely to revolutionize him.

"The piecee key still lemain."

"You are sure?"

"Look."

I looked and saw without a doubt that the key remained in the lock. In locking the door the converts had completed their work; the key could take care of itself.

"You must get over, Ting."

"All li."

The wall was about ten feet high, and was thickly studded with broken glass. In suggest-

ing that Ting should get over I had only thought of his being the lighter and more agile man; when I recollected what the attempt meant I suggested that I should try first. But even as I spoke he glided from my side and disappeared into the darkness in the direction of the house.

"Where has he gone?" Rose whispered.

"Heaven knows," was my reply; but I had faith in him, though in my despair I hurled myself against the gate. The thing stood firmly, as firmly as though it were a part of the solid wall.

And now, away back over the Mission, an ominous glare began to fill the sky, and presently the first tongue of flame licked its way up through the roof, and at the sight of it the howling of the mob increased. Just then Ting slid out of the shadows and came towards us.

"All li," he said cheerily. "'Ave got piecee blanket."

And true enough the rogue had a big double blanket over his arm, the use of which was instantly made obvious.

"Now you makee back," he said. "My see can do."

I leant against the wall and bent my shoulders,

and he instantly hopped on to my back like a great monkey.

"Can you manage?" I shouted.

"Plenty manage," came the reply.

With his pistol he broke all the sharper points, and across the whole he spread his blanket, which he had already doubled. Then, telling me to stand firm, he sprang, and when I looked up I saw him safely astride of the wall; saw him much too plainly, for the glare of the fire shone full upon him. Almost at the same moment some of the mob came clamouring round to the back of the house, and by the sudden fury of their yells I knew that he was seen.

"For God's sake, Ting—quick!"

And back came the ever cheery, "All li."

I put Rose behind me and waited for the rush. If Ting failed us now, nothing on earth could save us from the fury of the mob. And he was only a Chinaman with his own skin to save. He was free, with a wall between him and his enemies. I have since regretted, almost with tears, those ungenerous thoughts; but I was in a desperate strait, and fear bred doubt. Nor was I relieved as I saw the dark shadows dashing towards us. I saw them quite plainly, and I think they saw me, for they

pressed on with harsher cries. Ahead of the others came two men. I fired as steadily as I could, and both shots told. The foremost threw up his arms, stood stock still, and then fell. The other slid away, howling, into the shrubbery. But those remaining came rushing on, and just as I prepared again to shoot, the gate opened and Ting pulled Rose through. I followed, slamming the gate after me.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PASSAGE OF THE WATER-GATE.

NOR was I a moment too soon, for just as I snapped the lock the foremost of our pursuers flung themselves upon the gate. The howling which followed spoke of the keenness of their disappointment, the extent of their rage. But fearing they might follow our example, I did not leave the key in the lock. On the contrary, I withdrew it and flung it as far as I could. Then we ran helter-skelter, Ting leading the way. It seemed to me that he took us by all the most dismal by-streets and alleys he could find ; but I trusted implicitly to his guidance, and ran on until Rose, whose arm I had held all this time, began to draw her breath with evident pain. Then I called to him to stop, and the run became a walk.

We were now far beyond sight or sound of our pursuers, though away behind us I saw a dull glare in the sky, the cause of which was not difficult to guess.

"Where are you taking us, Ting?" I asked.

"You sabbee the canal?"

"Well?"

"You sabbee the sampan—the *Lose*?"

"Sabbee."

"You sabbee this belong welly dangelous business?"

"Sabbee," I answered impatiently. Good heavens! it needed no ghost to tell me that.

"Wang, he makee this distulbance. What for you no lettee me slit him dam thloat?"

"Because I was an infernal fool!"

"Sabbee," said the yellow man. Then he continued, "Wang makee glate levenge. He sabbee you no die, he find you. Fong-Chin wellysmall place when mandalin makee search."

"He is right," said Rose. "We cannot stay in the city and hope to escape him."

How on earth we were to get out I had not the least idea. All the gates would be locked, the soldiers on guard. One might as well abandon the thought at once.

Ting, who seemed to read my thoughts, said in a low, meaning voice:

"Suppose we makee tly to get out?"

"By all means, if there is half a chance."

"No half a chance," he said. "Pelhaps qualter."

"That will do."

"Welly good. You sabbee the water gate?"

"Sabbee."

"Suppose we can get thlough, we makee Canton side."

"How is the gate guarded?"

"Tartar soldier."

"Many?"

"Sometime ; sometime no. Makee look see."

It was a desperate attempt, but the only one open to us now. If we did not try it we might as well march back to the Yamen and give ourselves up to Wang. That being out of the question, and I having reached that crucial state when nothing much matters, we once more stepped out with something like alacrity. There was an object in view, a point to gain—that was something in an apparently pointless existence.

After many windings and numerous alarms, for we suspected every shadow, every sound of pattering feet, we at last emerged upon the canal, and then stood back in the shadow, while Ting went scrambling among the sampans in search of the *Rose*. It was not pleasant waiting there—listening, listening ; starting

at every cry, suspicious of every sound. The seconds seemed long, long minutes, and with the passing of each my anxiety increased. What were the feelings of my companion I did not dare imagine; but I held her hand in mine and pressed it, and she nestled closer to me, a delightful movement which needed no words.

But presently out of the gloom we saw the shadow of a boat advance. It came closer, closer towards the landing-stage, and then a low whistle sounded. We immediately stepped out of the shadow and hurried forward; the *Rose* nosed up to the steps and Ting hopped ashore.

"Hard makee find," he explained. "Some piecee fellow shift her."

"That's all right, Ting."

Indeed, but for him we should never have found her at all. I helped *Rose* in, and was just about to follow, when on looking up I saw a couple of men standing watching us. They were half-hidden in the gloom, so that I could not tell whether they were coolies or larks. I touched Ting, and he looked round; but, whatever his thoughts, he said nothing. I jumped in quickly and he followed. When I looked up again the men had disappeared.

Ting seized the long steering-scutt astern, while I sat myself amidships and rowed my very hardest, and between us we sent the somewhat cumbersome craft along at a fair pace. Of the many turnings we took I have but a bewildered notion—yet when we entered into the broader stream and received the flow of a rain-swollen tributary, we made such capital progress that Ting whispered to me to take in my sculls. This I did, and looking ahead peered intently into the gloom, and presently the formidable shape of the water-gate rose before me. Imperceptibly we drew near, until almost every outline stood out distinctly in the night. We waited one, two minutes, but saw no sign of a living creature. Across the other side of the river, away in the north-east of the city, a fierce glare lit the sky—the glare of the burning Mission ; and the soldier, who ought to have been doing sentry go up and down the platform, was evidently over on the far side of the bridge watching the fire.

This platform, which was protected by a parapet, was reached by a flight of wooden steps which ran up from the river, and at the foot of them we made fast. But half a dozen steps up there was a formidable iron gate,

and this had to be opened, or surmounted, before one could reach the platform above. How to pass it was the question, and even when once passed, there was the danger of several soldiers being on guard. But we had not come so far to stop at a thought. It was our last, our only chance.

Ting and I both got out and examined this formidable structure; but, as we expected, it was carefully locked. It was composed of solid iron bars some ten or twelve feet high, each bar being three inches apart. This, while it allowed the man on guard to see anyone who approached, also enabled him to shoot through it if the necessity arose. Not that such a thing was likely to happen, for after prohibited hours no one was permitted to approach within a hundred yards of the gateway. For our defiance of the law circumstance alone was responsible.

Feverishly we examined the gate; but nothing coming of it, Ting touched me on the arm and then pointed upwards, whispering in my ear, "Can do. Soldier watchee fire. Suppose he come you makee shoot." With that he felt in his belt, for his knife I did not doubt, pulled himself together, as it were, seized the bars with his hands and his

great toes, and went up the gate like a monkey. In an incredibly short space of time he reached the top, and then he began to fumble somewhat, finding the bars spiked. Now if the soldier happened to take it into his head to make a journey back along the platform, Ting was as good as lost. Perched as he was on the top of the gate like a rook in a stripped tree, there was not the slightest hope of his escaping detection. I was on pins and needles of anxiety, and to me in my excited state he seemed needlessly to linger in that dangerous position. But fortunately the guard came not, and in a way I prayed that the Mission might blaze stronger and stronger so that it held him watching.

But Ting, drawing himself up by his hands, as it were, drew his knees up under him, and got his toes in on the bar that held the gate together. Then carefully he turned round; again the same tremendous strain rested on his arms, and presently he began safely to descend the gate on the inside. As he reached the ground he put his face against the bars and grinned at me. Then he turned away, and silently as a shadow disappeared in the night.

I crouched in the darkness beside the boat, holding it fast, yet ready to jump into it at a

moment's notice. Rose sat still beneath the tilt. The glare in the east was fast dying away. I pictured the brave Ting creeping up, up through the darkness, and I prayed to heaven that one false move might not wreck our chance. Oh, the agony of those moments! My imagination grew heated with excitement, my brain throbbed with the pressure of fears. What was he doing? Had any unknown obstacle suddenly presented itself? Would he fail? If so, the best thing for Rose and me was a plunge in the river.

But presently a low cry, or rather a low moan, reached me, and my heart stood still; for I could not tell from whose throat that moan issued. Was it from the sentry's, or from Ting's? I almost cried aloud, "Ting, Ting!" but some instinctive prudence checked the utterance. Then overhead I heard the patter of feet, violent gaspings for breath, and half-stifled curses, and presently two men, fighting desperately, lurched across the platform. I could only see their heads and shoulders above the parapet, but I guessed what it meant, and who those two men were, and I knew that the one was trying to scream was not Ting-Foo. Then they rolled away again beyond my sight,

and I suffered all the agony of most painful conjecture.

What was happening now I dared not even guess, but presently a dark shadow appeared on the edge of the parapet; the next moment it toppled over and fell with a splash into the stream. Instantly I pushed the boat off and jumped into her, and I saw a man floating face upwards on the water, and the face was not that of Ting. Some moments of another sort of anxiety now followed; then came the creaking of machinery, and slowly, with a slowness which was an agony in itself, the great gates began to swing back. Beyond lay the open water—freedom! Once in the current of the Pe-kiang we might consider ourselves safe. In Canton, Wang would not dare touch us. The English guns could speak there. Luck had come our way at last.

But we were not yet out of the wood, for to my horror I heard the quick splash of oars and the hum of excited voices away astern. Intently I listened to make sure, but there was no longer any doubt of it. A boat was coming, and for one reason only I felt certain, and the cursed gate crawled open like a snail. No longer studying discretion, I shouted, "Quick, quick!" But energy seemed wasted

on that ponderous machinery. Though the space got wider and wider, the thing moved so slowly, so killingly slowly. And all the time the boat astern drew nearer and nearer until I began to distinguish the voices, and Rose whispered :

"It is Wang's men."

Then it was that I shouted loudly, not caring who heard me now.

"Come, Ting—quick! That will do."

And he almost immediately poked his head over the parapet and shouted back :

"All li."

But how was he to come? To descend the steps and climb the gate would mean the loss of two or three precious minutes—minutes which would enable our pursuers to come up with us. This was something we had not foreseen, and I ground my teeth in the very impotence of my rage. To be so near freedom, and then to lose it! The thought was maddening, nor did the cry that broke from our pursuers, as they caught sight of us, render me more amenable to reason.

Ting also heard that cry, and he left me no longer in doubt as to his intentions. Mounting the parapet, he stood for a moment as if measuring the distance ; then he sprang into

space. I instantly rowed to where he had struck the water, and when he came to the surface I seized him, and with little difficulty dragged him on board. Then, without waiting to thank me, he sprang aft to the big steering-scuttle, while I put every ounce of my weight into the work. But scarcely a couple of strokes had been taken when he caused my heart to leap to my mouth.

"Quick, sir, quick!" he cried. "*The gate is closing!*"

I dared not credit such an awful piece of intelligence, and though I pulled like a mad thing, I threw a glance over my shoulder at the goal which was but a few yards off, and saw to my horror that the space was rapidly growing smaller and smaller.

There was no doubt of it, the gate, moved by some motive power of which I could not guess, was shutting of its own accord. But there was no time for thought or conjecture of any kind. All that was left us now was the hope that we might be able to squeeze through before the two huge wooden jaws met, and with that intention I pulled as I believe man has never pulled before. But it was a heavy boat, and though the distance was but a few yards, to me the thing seemed to crawl. Yet I daresay it

was a very respectable crawl, the best the *Rose* had ever done under such power. Ting, steering as straight as a dart, brought us fair between the huge jaws of the monster, while I rapidly unshipped my oars. Our pursuers uttered a furious yell as they saw us escape them.

But we had not yet passed through. The gates, gaining momentum as they went, came to with a suddenness which was quite surprising, and before we seemed to realise what was happening, they caught us in their wooden jaws and held us fast. Here was a crowning piece of misfortune, and one that was enough to make the most hopeful look life blankly in the face. Truly fate fought hard for Wang.

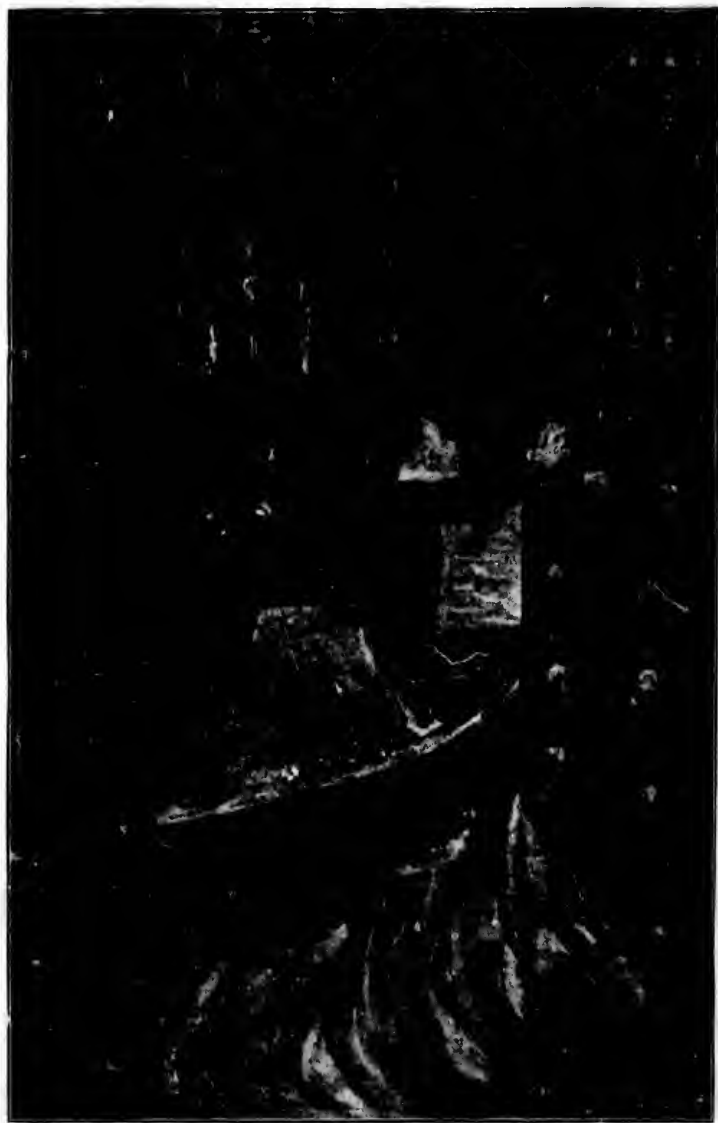
At first I thought that that mysterious machinery which had set the gate in motion would so force the jaws together that we should be bitten in two; but when I found that this was not the case, and that beyond a creaking and a groaning, the boat was strong enough to resist the pressure, I quickly came to another conclusion as to the cause of this secret movement. Ting had evidently failed to fasten the wheel, or whatever machinery worked the gates, and the current, rendered somewhat stronger by the recent rains, had

set them in motion. This no doubt was the real reason, as I was presently to prove ; but in the meantime I was more concerned with the thought of how to get out of the scrape, especially as our pursuers, seeing us caught, uttered a series of triumphant yells.

Quickened by their cries, and their dreadful proximity, and thinking of her who sat with white face beneath the tilt, I formed a sudden resolution, a last desperate effort. I think I have somewhere mentioned that even my sister Vi admitted that I had a full share of brute strength. Brute strength, indeed ! A gracious gift from heaven I call it. Well, I was now about to test the glory of that strength. Kneeling on one of the thwarts I seized a gate with each hand and began to press outwards. The width of the boat enabled me to get full purchase, and I strained until I thought my arms would break. At first the cumbersome thing absolutely refused to budge, but the steady pressure told, and just as I thought my wrists would give, I felt the great jaws move. Then, though a moment before I would not have thought I had it in me, I discovered an extra pound or so of pressure : the gate swung back some three or four inches, and Ting, who was on the alert, rapidly pushed the boat through.

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The gate swung back.

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A savage yell of disappointment greeted our release, a sound which tingled strangely in my ears as I almost collapsed across the thwart. But it was no time for fainting or giving way to weakness, so I pulled myself together and seized the oars, intent upon lengthening the distance between Fong-Chin and ourselves. As I did so, Ting, who had sprung to his place in the stern, uttered a shrill laugh of derision, to which our pursuers replied with howls and execrations. And the cause of it was that the gate, caught once more by the current, had swung to in such a way that it prevented our enemies from following us.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE JOURNEY DOWN STREAM.

As we stole farther down the stream their yells grew fainter, until at length they died away altogether. But enough noise had been raised to create a disturbance, and I doubted that our pursuers would leave us in peace. Therefore, as peaceable persons, it behoved us to increase the distance between such antagonistic forces, and filled with this laudable resolve I tugged with all my fast-returning strength, while Ting wriggled and twisted like an eel at the great scull aft.

In this manner we cut quickly down to join the main stream, no word passing between Ting and I, and only a few sentences with Rose.

"We are safe now, dear. Lie down and try to sleep."

"Oh, Paul, I think I shall never sleep again."

"Courage, my dear one. Be brave."

"I will try ; but it is so hard."

And then silence again. It was just like my stupidity to counsel sleep, as though sleep could come to a whirling brain, to a body in which every nerve was athrob. But perhaps my heart was better than my head. I know I meant it kindly, however impracticable it may have been.

So on we dashed down the stream, up which I had come with such different feelings but a few weeks before : past long, silent rows of sampans and houses that loomed up darkly in the night. Sometimes we rested for a moment to listen for sound of our pursuers, but nothing coming to warn us of their approach, we fell to with a steady, a more contented stroke, and presently Ting left his scull and came scrambling forward.

"What's the matter?"

"A bleeze. Makee sail. Plesently we lun into the big liver."

"How far?"

"One hunded yard."

This was good news. A fair breeze would take us down to Canton long before nightfall. That is, if we had luck and courage enough to attempt the journey. But there were many dangers in night travelling, and we dared not



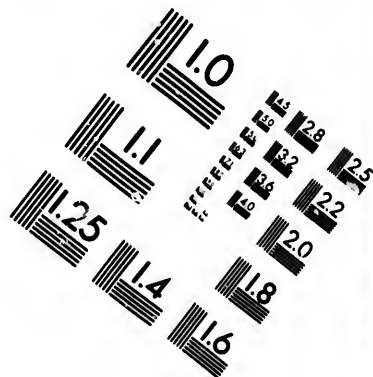
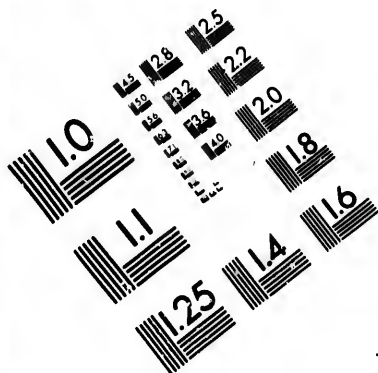
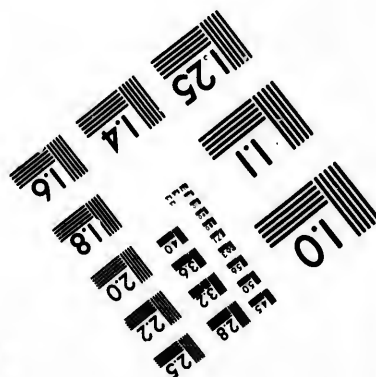
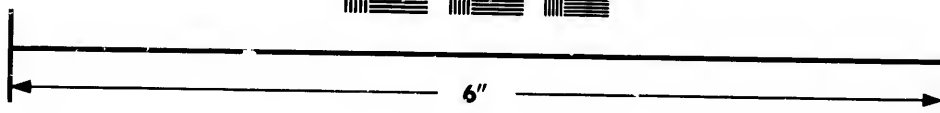
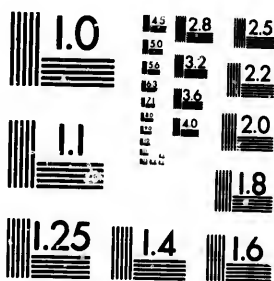


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risk the chance of sailing in the dark. To wreck our boat now would be to crown our misfortunes. This I pointed out to Ting as together we stepped the mast, but he only answered, "All li." I hoped it was all right, and I had latterly developed a wonderful belief in his powers; but at the same time I did not like this reckless skimming over dark waters. For, however much appearances may belie me, I still hold to the fact that I am a prudent man.

There was now no need for me to row, so I sat keeping a good look-out while the little craft went spinning on her way to join the great river. Darkness was about us, it is true, but Ting was at the helm, and that fact filled me with a profound sense of security, not unlike that which a boy feels in the dark as he touches his father's hand. Presently he gave a grunt of satisfaction and ported his helm; the wind caught us, a fair burst proclaiming that we had reached the waters of the Pe-kiang. Down the big river we went at a rare pace, and I knew that for a considerable distance we had an open course. Therefore I relaxed my vigilance for the moment and lit a pipe, and the sense of security, of dangers past, lent to the tobacco a heavenly flavour.

We had two or three close shaves as we

went flying along, for the river junks, not anticipating anything so unusual as our mad flight down the stream, were anchored higgledy-piggledy ; but we always managed to see them in time, and so avoid a collision. And in this way we went on until Ting called to me to lower the sail. We had come to the end of our course, and to my intense regret I learnt that we should have to anchor until daylight. True the rapids were not very dangerous, and Ting whispered that if I liked to risk it he would try ; but I thought better of it. While we had the boat and the river beneath us there was some hope ; if we wrecked the one the other was worse than useless. Therefore, much against my inclination, I decided that we would not risk the passage ; so, bringing the boat closer into the bank, we anchored.

At the first blush this anchoring seemed to me like tempting Providence. Undoubtedly our one duty was to get as far away from Fong-Chin as possible, each precious minute meaning so many precious yards ; and yet the risk of passing the rapids was so great that I dared not undertake it. It was unfortunate, but unavoidable. Maddening as was the thought of our impotence, it would have been a madder thing to attempt that dangerous passage.

But it was a night of frightful anxiety. I thought the day would never come. I sat gloomily staring into the dark, picturing the pursuit and the vengeance of Wang; for I could not rid myself of the idea that our flight from the city would not satisfy his craving for revenge, and I thought of him carrying his hatred to the most extreme lengths. Nor was there much to wonder at in that. I hope I am a Christian, and neither better nor worse than my fellows, but if a man cut off my ears I would follow him until we met, and then I would kill him. But perhaps I am not a very good Christian after all.

Ting curled up beneath the thwarts, and snored complacently; Rose, I hoped, was sleeping. At all events I did not disturb her. My conversation could not have lessened her agony. Sleep was her best medicine. I prayed that it might be dreamless.

I could not sleep a wink, though obviously in so much need of it. Brain and nerves kept throb, throb, in horrible unison. I smoked numberless pipes, picturing the gloom with many strange scenes. But through and above all loomed the one thought—day, day. And at last it broke grey and cold over the sleepy world, and as soon as there was light enough

for us to see I leant over and gently prodded the ribs of the sleeping Ting. He awoke with a smile, and to my abrupt "Get up," he answered cheerily, "All li." It was always "All li," as though everything was always all right. I was beginning to like the optimistic rascal, yellow and ugly as he was. It was something to have as companion a fellow who received each facer with a smile. Nothing seemed to disconcert him. It was all li. Everything would come out right in the end.

The screen which formed the cabin aft being still down, he and I set to work as noiselessly as possible for fear that we should wake Rose ; but no sooner did we begin to stir than the canvas parted, and a pale face gave us good-morning.

"I thought you were asleep."

"Did you?"

"Well, I hoped so."

"We are going to start?"

"Yes ; Ting says there is light enough."

Here that worthy, who had hauled up the anchor, came shuffling round to his old place in the stern. He saluted Rose and grinned.

"Good-molnin', Missee. Hope can do?"

"Can do, Ting."

He scrambled round aft, while I took out

the sculls and began to row. The wind of last night had died completely away, so that we had to depend upon the current and our own exertions. Out into the middle of the stream we steered, between rough banks which gradually rose higher the farther we descended. Here the current ran faster, and presently precipitated us into the rapids, down which we scudded in rare style, Ting manipulating the craft with a precision and a stoicism worthy of Cæsar's pilot "dignified by fate." This passed, the river banks dwindled once more, and presently we were gliding down a smooth stream, through a pleasant country.

By this time the sun had begun a clear course above the hills to the left, and, all immediate danger being past, the inner man began to assert himself. Then it was that I remembered I had eaten nothing since the mid-day previously, and that knowledge seemed to stir some refractory spirit within me. Moreover, if I had eaten nothing, I recollected that my companions must be in a similar plight. Metaphorically, as well as physically, we were all in the same boat. I therefore began an immediate search for victuals, but succeeded in discovering nothing beyond a small keg of fresh water. Of this Ting and I partook sparingly. Cold

water on an empty stomach is not particularly invigorating of a cold morning. Rose would not touch it, declaring that she was neither hungry nor thirsty. Was she sure? Sure, of course, and she sought to give me confidence by smiling. But her white face was very sad, and the pathos of that smile was pitiful.

Ting informed us that there was a considerable village some three or four miles further down, and that there we should be able to buy food. It was not my intention to risk a landing anywhere, but I feared that circumstances rendered such a course imperative. The one great drawback to this admirable engine of man is that it requires such a prodigious quantity of fuel to set it going. Not that the engine might not have gone for many more hours without firing up, but it would have been an engine with a diminishing power, perhaps with not power enough for the final run. So it was decided that we should risk a little for the sake of obtaining food.

We rowed on in silence for some time, making the most gratifying progress towards our goal. Rose, who sat by the break of the cabin, occasionally put a question. For the rest there was nothing but the swish, swish of our oars and the ripple of the little waves as they fell back from

our sharp bows. I watched, with a legion of varying emotions, the white face before me. I saw the pain in her eyes. I almost fancied I could see the blue veins about her temples throb. And if to her my looks seemed full of meaning, to me her looks were equally charged with pathetic interest. Sometimes I saw in her eyes that sweet, solicitous look which I had always associated with my mother—a yearning, motherly look one might almost call it—the purest light of love.

“Paul.”

“Yes.”

“You burnt a lot of tobacco last night.”

“How do you know?”

“I saw you.”

I mumbled something about not being able to sleep, and something more about not wanting any; and, boy-like, to show that I was still going strong, I put in a dozen powerful strokes. But I thought of her lying there watching me, and my pulses ran a bit quicker at the thought.

“Why didn’t you speak to me?”

“Shall I tell you the truth?”

“Of course.”

“I believed you might be happier if you thought I was sleeping.”

Well, what could I say to such a dear girl? If it hadn't been for that heathen in the stern I might have made a fool of myself. Wang—the presence of fifty Wangs would not have stopped me; but they say that no man is a hero to his valet, and somehow I had not the moral courage to brave Mr. Ting's insinuating grin. It was a covert innuendo that grin—a vague suggestion which might have meant a dozen things, each one of which was horribly applicable to your case.

But in the meantime we worked our way steadily along, until in a hollow where the river made a bend we caught sight of the village of which Ting had spoken. Half-a-dozen small junks lay moored just off the landing-stage, and I suggested that instead of risking a journey ashore we should buy some rice from the boatmen. Ting's intelligent face beamed in a perfectly idiotic manner, from which sign I guessed that he had long since thought out a similar plan. Well, it didn't much matter. I cared for nothing so that we got what we wanted.

As we dropped down quietly among the junks I saw that the crew of each vessel had come to the side to watch us, evincing an uncommon interest in our arrival. Strange as

it was, and unaccountable as was the sensation, I had an instinctive intuition that our coming was expected. The men stopped in the middle of their work to look—the women and children crowded eagerly to the side. Heads went together, and excited whisperings followed. Anxious as I was, and eternally on the lookout for something unpleasant, I experienced a most disagreeable sensation. I looked at Ting to see if he was struck by appearances, but he had wreathed his visage with a most seraphic smile, and looked the most perfectly innocent and inoffensive Chinaman that it was possible to behold. He was a delightful blend of utter sweetness and guilelessness—a being in whom the least confiding person would not hesitate to place complete confidence.

Rose, at her own suggestion, had withdrawn into the cabin and dropped the curtains, while I, who was still dressed in my Chinese clothes, might pass for a native if I did not speak or let them get too full a view of my face; for I had neither the eyes nor the cheekbones of your true Mongolian, without which no European could hope to pass for a Chinaman.

Inshore the current was very slack, and we approached with a quiet grace and dignity which was ill in keeping with my strange

whirring of nerves. Ting steered for the nearest junk, and as we majestically swept by its bows he asked a big, gaunt Chinaman, who was working forward, if he had any rice to sell. The fellow returned a surly negative. Had he provisions of any sort? Another surly shake of the head and a curiously-penetrating look at me. And as we steered down among the different junks they all had the same tale to tell, and they told it in the same cold, suspicious manner. I questioned Ting with a look, but he grinned unpleasantly and turned the boat's head out into the stream.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"This place no 'ave got lice," he said, and again he grinned in a way that raised my suspicions.

"Nonsense. Though the junks may have run short of rice, we shall be able to get some ashore."

"No 'ave got lice ashore."

"What do you mean?"

He nodded towards the village and the junks.

"Wang's man 'ave makee speak."

So Wang's emissaries had already strewn our path with dragon's teeth. To land would probably have been fatal, since the river folk

were warned in such a manner. Indeed, might not the men have purposely refrained from selling us food in order that we might be driven ashore in search of it? It was not a pleasant thought, and I viewed with no little misgiving the next stage to Canton.

Unfortunately the breeze had died completely away, and a sweltering sun made the river stagnant and suffocating, especially as it gradually began to narrow between two high banks. Here, however, it was somewhat swifter, and I took in my oars. Ting gripped the steering-scuttle firmly and fixed his eyes dead ahead. And I, watching him intently, saw them waver and then look up; and by the shade of annoyance which crossed his face I knew that he was either thinking or seeing something unpleasant.

Following his gaze, I saw that we were approaching a steep bend, upon the ledge of which I caught the glimpse of a man. I looked at Ting and he looked at me and nodded, and when I drew out my revolver and examined it, he nodded still more approvingly.

I slipped past Rose and joined him.

"An ambush?"

"Plobably. Piecee man makee wait top side. What for?"

"Well, what for?" said I, hoping that I did not know.

"Boat makee go close. Man stand top side." There was no need to finish. It was evident that the man on the top-side was there for no good purpose.

"We must go on?"

"Can do."

In as few words as possible I told Rose of our suspicions, which she had already guessed, and impressed upon her the necessity of keeping concealed. Then the boat swung on to the danger spot.

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CHAPTER XXII.

SOME THINGS THAT HAPPENED.

As we approached it Ting begged me to keep beneath cover, but this I would only consent to do if he sought partial shelter himself. Thinking it would be foolish to waste valuable time in useless argument, he said, "All li," slipped half of his body into the well, still retaining control over the steering-scutt.

Peering ahead, I saw that we were within a few yards of the bend, and I held my pistol ready in case some obstacle in the shape of a man should present itself once we had rounded the corner. Almost at the same moment a shot rang out behind me, and on looking round I saw the smoke clinging to the barrel of Ting's pistol. This was immediately followed by a rushing in the air, and I beheld a huge boulder skim just across our bows. Had it struck us, we should have been sunk without doubt. But it was followed by something that did strike us—the body of a man. It

came whizzing in the wake of the boulder, struck the after part of our vessel with a dull thud, and fell over into the river.

The ready wit and sure aim of Ting undoubtedly saved the situation, for as we passed beneath the headland a shower of large boulders churned the water over which we had just sped into a white froth. The shot and the sudden disappearance of the man had disconcerted the enemy. When they recovered we had slipped from their grasp. Ting sprang up on his old perch and shouted derisively, bringing about our ears a volley of small stones, many of which struck us some sounding blows. But beyond a certain inconvenience they did us no great bodily injury, and soon we were once more in the open river.

That danger past, I mechanically took to the oars again, but the heat and want of food were surely robbing me of all strength and energy. I pulled, but in an aimless fashion. My mind was anywhere and everywhere but in the work. Food was becoming more and more of a necessity.

Ting saw and nodded his head, and a couple of miles farther on we came across a cluster of huts on the left bank, before which we dropped anchor in shallow water. Here Ting declared

that he would get food if he had to steal it, so without more ado he slipped over the side and waded ashore, several noisy urchins running down to the water's edge to greet him. With a presentiment of impending calamity I saw him disappear up the little street. As he did so, Rose drew my attention to a boat which was coming down the stream in our wake. An ordinary boat, of course. What was a boat more or less? Only we feared anything that came from the direction of Fong-Chin.

I sat watching the narrow street up which Ting had disappeared, trying to possess my soul in patience; but his absence seemed never ending, and I feared that his rashness had led him into trouble, or that the emissaries of Wang had succeeded in laying hands on him. Indeed this latter fear grew so alarming that I was mentally projecting an excursion ashore in search of him, when I beheld a man come flying down the narrow street and make straight for the river. After him came the village, men, women, children, dogs—a straggling, shrieking mob. Of course the man was Ting. I guessed as much even before I recognised his hop. Under his left arm he had a bundle, in his right hand he held some-

thing which glistened strangely in the sun. Notwithstanding his limp he outdistanced his pursuers, and before he took to the water he turned round and waved the glistening thing defiantly. Then he turned his face our way and with a mighty hop sprang a good dozen feet into the stream, the howls and execrations of his pursuers following him, a deafening volley.

Recognising the advisability of an immediate clearance, I at once began to haul up the anchor, a task which I succeeded in accomplishing just as Ting came alongside. He at once flung inboard the glistening thing and the parcel which he had carried under his arm; slewed the boat round, her nose down stream, gave her a good shove, and leaped aboard as she slid off. Then he stood up in the stern, and leaning on his long scull put his finger to his nose, an accomplishment which he had learnt from his western brother.

A howl of rage followed, as though the people understood the delicate allusion, and a shower of stones came sailing our way. Some of the more venturesome entered the water and advanced towards us with threatening cries and gestures; but they caused us no concern, as a couple of stout pulls would easily send us

clear of them. I then examined the aforementioned glistening thing, and found to my delight that it was a roast leg of pork, the crackling being done to a beautiful shimmering brown. The other article which Ting had carried under his arm proved to be a loaf of bread.

"Well," said I, turning to him, asking a question which I knew to be superfluous, "what did you do to cause the disturbance?"

"Welly ignolant people," said he deprecatingly. "'Ave got welly nice loast pork. Sabbee you likee loast pork. Makee offer one, two, thlee dollar. No can do. My makee lush, catchee pork, makee lun. Ignolant people follow, makee chase. No can pidgin to ignolant people."

"I sympathise with you, Ting; also with the people who lost their dinner.

And as we were not yet beyond a stone's throw of the crowd, I hastily wrapped three dollars, all that I had left, in a piece of rag and threw them towards the people. The bundle, impeded by the rag, fell a dozen feet short of the bank; but I was glad to see that one of the men near whom it fell succeeded in grabbing it. Then I turned with a clear conscience to the roast pork.

It was cooked to a turn, and though we had to eat it without condiments of any description, I never really knew until that moment that roast pork was such an appetising dish. Ting and I ate voraciously, even the coarse bread tasting sweet, but Rose merely trifled with her food, and I watched her pale face with increasing anxiety. I feared she was getting ill, and gave expression to my fears; but she always answered bravely enough that she was quite well, though the smile which accompanied that assertion seemed to me full of a profound weariness. Sometimes I thought the face was almost too white, the eyes too clear, too piercing; there was in them an unnatural keenness and brilliancy which was something more than human. Her soul looked me in the face through wide blue eyes; looked through me and beyond me, seeing something that I could not see.

All that day we watched anxiously for the breeze which was to blow us into Canton, but never a ripple rose upon the surface of the water. Mercilessly the sun beat down upon us, and the water, by sending back the burning rays, rendered the glare almost intolerable. I pulled away in dreamy fashion, animated by the vague idea that we must get on, on. But

I put little heart into the work and scarcely more muscle. My brain throbbed and my limbs grew flaccid, and Ting, who had more than once turned an inquiring eye my way, at last suggested that I should lie down. At this I immediately demurred, but he quickly overcame my scruples. There was no sign of wind, and without it there was no chance of reaching Canton before nightfall ; and when he declared that rest was what I needed, I could not deny him. Rose was already fast asleep beneath the tilt—she had been so for an hour or more ; so without any further protestations I stretched myself beneath the thwarts and soon lost consciousness.

When I awoke the sun had already set, and the darkness had begun to steal down from the distant hills. I felt greatly refreshed and altogether another man. The tired fingers had renewed their strength, the limbs had lost their flaccidity. The illness I had feared seemed to have passed completely away.

Rose was sitting at the break of her cabin, her eyes dreamily scanning the bank. But when I spoke to her she turned quickly, and I saw that she too had profited by her sleep. Her face was brighter when she spoke ; her eyes had lost that wondering look which had

so alarmed me. I said, "You are better?" and she replied, "Yes, yes, quite another girl!" I opened my lungs and drew in the cool air: then I accordingly rose and stretched myself.

Ting still stood in his place in the stern, mechanically pushing and dragging the great scull through the water, and I verily believe that he had stood there doing this same work for hours. He was a man of leather whom nothing seemed to tire, a man with a skull impervious to the sun, with a temperament which nothing but a Wang could ruffle.

As I caught his eye and nodded, he jerked his head backwards, and on looking past him I saw a boat slowly creeping through the shadows. A closer inspection awoke a thought, and I remembered the craft to which Rose had drawn my attention. Could this be the same one?

"Has she been in sight long?"

"Many hour."

"What you make?"

"No likee. No sabbee why he no pass. 'Ave got plenty men. Makee leach Canton side supposum like."

I looked hard, but could make nothing of the ship, while Rose declared that it was the one which had come in sight while Ting was

foraging in the village. If so, why had it not passed us? Naturally my thoughts flew back to the mandarin. Power and riches were arrayed against us, and hate and vengeance set the machinery moving.

When the night came on we still continued our way down the stream, not daring to anchor for fear of an attack ; but however fast or slow we went we could not shake off the ship behind. Sometimes we saw it come rushing through the gloom, at others we heard only the splashing of the oars. Once it came so close that it might have touched us had not Ting shouted out a shrill warning. A surly answer came back, and the thing sheered off.

But it was a decidedly unpleasant experience, and I began to find the suspense insupportable. Rose was put under shelter for protection, and I insisted upon Ting quitting the stern, where he made an excellent target, and coming amidships with me, where we took turn and turn about at the oars, the one watching while the other rowed.

In this manner another hour or so passed, when presently Ting, who was keeping watch, made it known that the enemy was approaching. I whispered to Rose to keep up her courage, and she answered, with a steady voice :

"I will try, Paul. But we must not part. Promise me."

"I promise."

Then I went back to my place on the bench, but with an awful tightening round the head.

We were not kept much longer in suspense. Presently Ting cried out in a sharp voice, and almost immediately after I saw a boat come out of the gloom almost dead astern of us. Ting's cry was but the ordinary warning for them to look out, or sheer off, but instead of doing so they came on. Again he warned them, but they paid no heed to the warning. Then he fired. But even this did not bring about the desired result. Amid shrill cries the crew redoubled their efforts, and presently the strange boat and ours were rubbing side to side. Then an attempt was made forward to board us, an attempt which Ting and I successfully repelled, but at a cost which seemed like sure defeat. For, taking advantage of our activity forward, someone had attacked the vessel aft and knocked a great hole in her side.

Rose's cry of "The boat is sinking" first made me realise the extreme gravity of the situation. Then I, who had hitherto reserved my fire, in an excess of rage emptied my revolver into the midst of our opponents. An

immediate shrieking followed, and the boat at once sheered off into the darkness. Some of her crew had evidently been hit, and very badly. But we had not escaped them. They could afford to wait their time.

And that it would not be far off I feared too profoundly. Our boat was fast sinking—it might be doubted if she would float another minute. An axe, or some such instrument, had caused the damage—a gaping hole which it would be sheer futility to attempt to plug. There was only one thing to do, and that must be done quickly. We should have to take to the water!

Rapidly I explained the situation to Rose, and asked her if she was afraid.

"It is our only chance?" she whispered.

"Our only chance."

"Then I am not afraid."

Without demur she let me lower her into the water, and with firm fingers she clung to the boat, while I rapidly prepared to follow. In a few seconds I too was clinging by her side, and as soon as Ting joined us we let go, as with a strange soughing and bubbling sound our little ship sank.

As Rose could not swim Ting caught her by one arm, I by the other, and with her between us we struck out for the opposite bank.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ADVENTURE AT THE VILLAGE.

WHEN the boat sank we were much nearer the right than the left bank, but without previous arrangement we instinctively struck out for the further shore, taking it for granted that our pursuers would credit us with more sense. It is reasonable to expect that a drowning man will cling to the nearest support, and the right bank being the nearer of the two, it was highly probable that we would make for it. It followed then as a matter of course that if we succeeded in reaching land, the right bank would be the one on which to search for us. It might also be considered doubtful if we should succeed in reaching land at all.

Being possessed of these thoughts I swam steadily on through the darkness, and I doubt not that Ting, who was swimming splendidly, was possessed of somewhat similar ideas. To Rose, who lay motionless on her back, I whispered cheering words at intervals; and

though she only answered in low monosyllables, her sweet voice added a stronger impulse to my determination.

It was so dark that I could scarcely see half a dozen yards ahead, so that I knew not how far we were from the shore ; but the water was warm, and the current bore us along with little exertion. When my right arm grew tired I changed sides with Ting and swam with the left, but I was not equally good with both hands, and I soon found myself feeling for bottom. Then we changed again and took things not quite so leisurely, the wish to reach the shore growing with every stroke. Truth to tell, my clothes were a fearful encumbrance, while the dead weight of the heavily-dressed girl can well be imagined. I strained anxiously through the gloom, I often impeded my progress by feeling for bottom, for my mind was beginning to get uneasy. Ting, too, I knew, was pulling himself to pieces. He breathed heavily, expelling the air from his lungs in hard gasps. I dreaded every moment to hear him acknowledge defeat, to feel him let go. I prayed for a glimpse of the bank, and yet I was half glad that I could not see. Suppose it was a hundred yards away !

And she, all unconscious of my agony of

mind, my exhaustion of body, lay still as death upon the water, answering only when I gasped out some word of encouragement. But was she unconscious of it all? Had she no knowledge, no intuition of what I was suffering? I could not believe it possible. Hers was too sensitive and delicate a soul. Even she must have noted the difference in my stroke.

But things rapidly reached a climax. My brain began to thud, my arms grew heavy and seemed to lose all their dull, mechanical action. I was just conscious that I beat the water in a futile manner, when I heard Ting give a little cry. This so startled me that some of my lost power returned and I called to him to struggle on.

"What for struggle?" he replied. "'Ave makee bottom."

I let my feet drop, and to my joy felt them sink into the thick mud. Up, up to the knees I went, but I thought that mud the grandest carpet on which I had ever trodden. I placed Rose on her feet and slipped my arm round her waist.

"Courage, dear," I whispered. "We are saved."

"Yes," she said. Then she suddenly hung

heavily in my arms and I knew she had fainted.

Between us, floundering and stumbling through mud and water, we bore her to the bank; but I could do nothing to restore her save chafe her hands and face. Added to which, her wet clothes caused me an almost intolerable anxiety. I had visions of fevers, plagues, and heaven only knows what not, and I thought some hard things of that fate which had forced so many unkind attentions upon this delicate girl.

But luckily her swoon was not of a serious nature, and when she had fully recovered consciousness she immediately warned us that it was not advisable to stand about in our wet clothes, and asked what we thought of doing next. Admiring her courage beyond words, I seized her hand and pressed it to my lips. Of all the sweet, brave girls in the world there seemed to me none equal to her. Wet, worn out, despondent as I was, she came like a light in the darkness, a gleam of pure, warm sunshine into the cavern of my despair.

Ting said he knew of a village which, if he had not lost his bearings, was situated in the valley hereabouts, a valley which presented the big river with a tiny sluggish tributary. In search

of this tributary we therefore immediately set out, and after going for a little distance found ourselves stumbling down a slight incline. Carefully treading our way, we presently struck the little stream. To follow it up soon became a matter of comparative ease, as we were fortunate enough to discover a well-worn track. Then when the track opened out and we saw that we were entering the one street of the village, we called a halt and debated our plan of action.

It had been my intention to enter the village and buy some dry clothes, but when I felt in my pockets I had absolutely not a penny left. My last three dollars had been hurled ashore to pay for the roast pork. When I mentioned my dilemma to Ting, he only laughed and said :

"Can do."

"What do you mean?"

"'Ave got plenty."

"You?"

"All li. You sabbee fan-tan?"

"And you have it with you?"

"All li," and he tapped his chest.

"Ting, you're a jewel."

"Sabbee," he grinned. "My belong dimant."

We passed stealthily up the village, not

wishing to disturb the dogs, hoping that we should see some open door or some welcome light ; but we were almost out at the other end before luck favoured us. Then, just when we least expected it, a door beside us opened and a woman appeared. We instantly drew back into the shadow, and the woman, coming out a few paces, looked intently down the street. At the same moment Ting stepped out and confronted her. She gave a scream and sprang to the door, but he shoved his shoulder in beyond the post and prevented her amiable intention of shutting us out.

No doubt she thought we were thieves and worse, and for a long time we failed to banish her fears ; but when Rose spoke to her, and she saw our sorry plight, and from our manner read our amicable intentions, she proved a reasonable creature, and was quite willing to bargain with us for dry clothes. Ting produced his money, which he carried in a waterproof bag suspended round his neck, and I handed her a ten-dollar bill, perhaps the largest sum of money that she had ever seen.

The effect on her was magical. She produced a heterogeneous mass of odds and ends, from which she demanded that we should choose the best, and in five minutes we were

all clothed anew in things which, if not always too fresh, were warm. Rose looked the quaintest little figure in her Chinese rig, while I was conscious of feeling the most uncomfortable, as I had to don a suit many sizes too small. Ting was not fitted to perfection, but he bore his misfortune with philosophical indifference. He was not much of a dandy.

We learnt from our hostess that her husband was out on business, but to Ting's somewhat impertinent inquiries respecting that business, she was mute. However, she was expecting him every moment, and it was her anxiety in regard to him which had brought her to the door. When he entered some ten minutes later, and saw us each with a steaming bowl of rice in his or her hand, his amazement was almost comical. But his wife soon explained things and set matters right, and then he began to congratulate himself upon our honourable condescension in visiting his contemptible hovel.

He was a brawny, surly-looking fellow, with a black, forbidding cast of face, one whom a man of the world would instantly mistrust ; but when one is under an obligation to a man, one ought to feel charitably disposed towards him. We had invaded the privacy of his domestic

hearth, and we could hardly expect him to fawn on us.

By his look I guessed that he was connected with the river, and, my surmise proving correct, I suggested that we should engage him to take us to Canton. But Ting scowled darkly at the suggestion.

"No tlustee. No can pidgin to this fellow."

"But can't we make it worth his while to be honest."

"Wait till to-morrow molnin'; then makee talk. Liver no safe; load muchee better."

"Do you think it wise of us to stay here?"

"No," he said.

"Then why stay?"

"Suppose we go, makee loseum load."

"But why not get this fellow to guide us?"

"No tlustee. Now makee sleep, makee stlong to-morrow."

With that he curled himself up by the fireplace, that side nearest the door, while Rose and I sat in the half-shadow opposite. The husband, a small taper beside him, squatted smoking on the mat upon which his wife lay, and I noticed that now and again he leant over her, and that they spoke in whispers. Then his eyes wandered our way, and I thought they shone like points of green fire.

After a good half-hour of this dreamy silence, during which I heard the regular breathing of Mr. Ting, the gentler sighing of Rose, I too felt my eyelids grow heavy, when a movement opposite caused them to flicker and open; and I saw the man rise from beside his wife and move softly towards the door. But just as he was about to raise the latch Ting suddenly sat up and arrested the man's hand, and a conversation to the following effect ensued.

"Hark!" said Ting.

The man drew back with a scared face.

"What is it?"

"Wolf!"

"I did not hear it."

"Perhaps not, but I did."

"Nonsense! There are no wolves about here."

"Nevertheless," said Ting, rising, "I heard a wolf cry."

"Pooh," replied the man, "a dream. You were sound asleep."

"All the same, it woke me."

"I tell you, it was a dream," and again the man moved as though he would raise the latch.

Ting intercepted him.

"You must not go outside. It would be

dangerous. Do you want to leave your wife a widow?"

"I assure you you are wrong. There are no wolves in these parts, and I particularly wish to go outside."

"I cannot allow you to be so reckless; I cannot bear to think of that moon-faced divinity being left a widow. Why are you so rashly inconsiderate?"

"When I approached my door this evening I heard voices. Not knowing who had condescended to honour my contemptible hovel, I left outside the package I was carrying. It is that package I have just remembered."

"And what does the package contain?"

"Roast pig," said the man.

"No wonder the wolf howls through the village. Beware! Would you tempt heaven? Go back to your mat and pray for the soul of that roast pig."

The man was silent for a moment, turning over the words in his mind, the subtle irony of which he seemed unable to comprehend. Then he said:

"Who are you that thus seek to restrain a man in his own house?"

"One in whom the love of all men is strongly developed. List! Hear I not the footsteps

of the wolf even now? Nearer and nearer he comes. Ah, brother, your roast pig has gone."

But the man, instead of answering, drew himself up quickly, and a knife flashed in the dim light. With a hissing noise he threw himself at Ting. But that wary one, having long foreseen this movement, was prepared for it. Quick as thought he caught the up-lifted hand with his left, and seized the man's throat with his right: then with a sudden twist he had the fellow off his feet. In falling on him Ting took good care to bring his knees into the man's stomach. A groan followed, and then his victim lay quite still. But Ting, still kneeling on him, had not yet finished. First he very excitedly harangued the unconscious man in the floweriest of flowery language, and gaining but slight satisfaction from this, he seized the man's pigtail and deliberately cut it off, well-knowing that, short of fleshly mutilation, nothing is more degrading to the Chinaman than the loss of his queue.

I was extremely annoyed at this unhappy development, as I had hoped to quit at least one place with some degree of security; but it seemed as though fate had expressly forbidden us a clear path, and there was nothing left for

us but to remonstrate stoutly with her. Rose, trembling painfully, sprang to her feet. The man's wife glared at us from her mat. Ting turned to me and smiled, but it was the pale, dangerous smile that I had seen upon his face two or three times before.

"This dog makee go outside, call him fliend. Sabbee?"

"Sabbee."

"My belong big fool, makee show money. The woman makee talk, the man makee do. Bad man, dam bad lascal."

With that he turned the fellow over on his face, and without more ado bound his hands behind him. Then he addressed the woman:

"Welly solly, missis. You belong cat, 'ave got claws, makee sclatch. My belong welly wise piecee Chinaman—welly wise Chinaman cuttum cat's claw. Sabbee?"

And then in very fluent Chinese he made known his intention. The woman glared savagely, but that did not ruffle the placid smile of the good Ting. He calmly cut a length from the rope with which he had bound her husband, a coil of which hung on a peg near at hand—a piece of plunder beyond all doubt—and in the most gentlemanly manner possible bound her hands behind her, a punish-

ment which she richly merited. Then he politely informed her that if she cried out or made the least disturbance he would be under the painful necessity of cutting out her tongue—a warning which he also administered to her husband as soon as that worthy regained consciousness. Then he turned to Rose and me.

“’Ave makee all li. Now can makee sleep.”

“But don’t you think we had better go?” I suggested.

“Too dark. Makee lose the load. First ting daylight.”

And without further explanation he threw himself on the floor, and in an incredibly short space of time was apparently sound asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT HAPPENED IN CANTON.

WITH the first gleam of light we were up and away, having previously bound the feet as well as the hands of our host and hostess. Ting was for gagging them as well, but as the house was an isolated one, I reckoned that we could depend upon two, perhaps three hours' start before they were likely to be released; on the other hand it might mean five or six. Consequently my humanity got the better of my wisdom, though a strong doubt assailed me as I left the door.

The dim dullness of early day greeted us as we stepped out into the sharp air, and like three shadows we glided on into the morning. Ting led, declaring he knew the lay of the land, and once we were really clear of the village we put our best foot foremost. Anxious as had been the last few hours, we had previously eaten and rested fairly well, so that we still had a considerable amount of energy to expend.

As the day broke we found ourselves pacing a wide, undulating plain, following a track which had been worn smooth by countless bare feet. Guessing that this led to some town or village, we pushed on as fast as we could go, and in the course of half-an-hour, as we passed round the base of a rather steep hill, a fair-sized village opened before us. Here we rested at an inn and procured some food, and learning that Canton was still some thirty *li*, or ten miles, distant, we succeeded in hiring two ponies, all that the village possessed. As soon as the bargain was transacted we set off, having no wish to remain in the neighbourhood a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. Rose, of course, mounted one of the ponies, while Ting and I took it in turns to ride the other. The owners ran behind anathematising their poor beasts.

In this manner we duly arrived at the city of Canton, and at once proceeded to the British consulate, to the chief of which I briefly told our story. He had, of course, not yet heard of the murder of Mr. Ormsby and the sacking of the Mission, the details of which he took down in a very practical and unconcerned manner. He was not a pleasant mannered man, but given certain conditions he knew what was the

right thing to do, and he accordingly did it. His wife, a thin, weary-looking woman, promised readily, if not with alacrity, to lend Rose a change of clothes. The consul declared his willingness to do the same by me, but for very obvious reasons he could not, as he did not stand much more than five feet high. I, however, had no objection to remaining in my coolie rig. The boat from the south, which was due that evening, would sail the day after to-morrow, and I could very well put up with the slight inconvenience until I reached Hong-Kong, where I still had a trunk full of things.

When the official had at length grasped the full significance of the story, the man seemed to think it little short of marvellous that we should thus have escaped the vengeance of Wang.

"But," said he meaningly, "you are not yet out of the wood. Believe me, this mandarin will not rest satisfied until he has had his pound of flesh. He is rich, he will use his riches prodigally; he is powerful, and he will set his power in motion. If he is the member of a secret society, which is not impossible, as this empire is honeycombed with such, it is not improbable that he will invoke its aid. No doubt you have heard of the far-reaching influence of these societies? My dear fellow,

I don't want to frighten you, but my advice is—lie low. I shall be very pleased if you and your party will stay here with me until your departure. I do not think it would be wise to recommend you to an hotel. We fly the flag, you know, and that is a sort of safeguard, though it does not protect us from the irresponsible marauder. But in the meantime we must try and get you some European clothes. I shall be going out in an hour or so, and I will send some in."

I thanked him cordially, and withdrew to the little room which he had so kindly placed at my disposal. There a cold collation was brought to me of which I partook heartily. A bath followed, after which I felt on much better terms with fortune. Learning that Rose was still with the consul's wife, and that Ting had already made himself at home in the kitchen, I threw myself on the bed with a decidedly pleasant feeling of security, the first I had experienced for a long time.

But I was not fated to enjoy my rest, for presently a servant came to announce that a man was at the door with some European clothes, and he wished to know if I wanted to buy any. Guessing at once that the man had been sent by the consul, I told the servant to

show him up, and presently, bundle in hand, a strange little figure with big horn spectacles entered the room, bowing respectfully at every step. I noticed that his hands were very yellow and dirty, and that they had cruel-looking nails.

I spoke to him and he spoke to me, but as neither understood the other, our oral negotiations soon came to an abrupt end. I then motioned for him to undo his pack, and he immediately laid bare a miscellaneous collection of clothing. I was not fascinated by the tone or cut of the things, and there was a musty smell about them which proclaimed a long acquaintance with damp shelves; but on the whole I thought I might manage to rig myself out so as to look not an absolute disgrace to my nationality.

The man lifted the things one by one, and carefully laid them on the bed so that I might see them to advantage; which necessitated my stooping low over them, as the bed was in the darkest part of the room. Not thinking the view a satisfactory one, I moved the things over to the dressing-table, where there was more light, and began critically to examine them. Indeed I had just decided on my purchase when an entirely unforeseen event occurred.

Attached to this dressing-table there was a mirror which reflected the length of the room behind me, and as I looked into it I saw distinctly the man squatting beside his open bundle. But the curious thing was that while one hand stole stealthily inside his blouse, his face was turned towards me, and I saw his little black eyes gleam through his big horn spectacles. Alert now, for of late I had passed through too much to neglect the least significant sign, I watched him, but without moving a muscle; and presently I saw the hand withdrawn from the blouse, and after it came the gleaming blade of a knife.

What to do now required some reflection, for it was just possible that the knife also was for sale, but my stay in China had robbed me of much of my confidence in my brother man, and I was inclined to think the worst. I therefore continued watching even while I fingered the clothes, and as I stooped, apparently the better to examine an article, the fellow rose swiftly and noiselessly to his feet, and his hand went up to strike. Instantly swinging round I confronted him, and, seeing that he was discovered, he sprang at me, hissing furiously. But I stepped aside and seized a chair. He turned again, snarling like a beast, but instead

of springing at me he hurled the knife fair at my face. But guessing his intention, I used the chair as a shield, and the knife struck it with a sickening thud. Then, seeing that his attempt had failed, he turned and bounded through the open window out into the back yard. I sent the chair crashing after him, and followed it almost as swiftly ; but he sped like a cat across the yard and through the back gate. When I reached it he was nowhere to be seen.

Locking the gate, I strolled thoughtfully back to my room, fully convinced that China was no place for me. For I had no doubt whatever that this attempt might be ascribed to the far-reaching influence of the mandarin. The devilish ingenuity of these yellow men, and the speed with which they formulated their plans, was appalling. No doubt our arrival at the consulate was perfectly well known to them, and, knowing the state of my wardrobe, what was more natural than that I should require European clothes? Once the consul had gone abroad the way was clear. I had defeated them this time, but from what quarter was I to expect the next attack?

When the consul returned, I informed him of what had occurred, and he looked very serious,

"It is evident that you are a marked man," he said consolingly. "It is as I feared. This Wang is a determined rascal with great power, and while you are on Chinese soil you must be suspicious of your own shadow. By the way, are you armed?"

"I have a revolver, but no ammunition."

"Then you had better take in a supply. Keep your eyes open, and be prepared to shoot on sight."

"You would advise me to stay within doors?"

"Decidedly. Your presence here is known, your arrival was known. The consulate will be watched night and day. You would not be able to budge five yards without having a man at your heels. I shall warn my men to subject all comers to a strict surveillance; but I should also advise you to be particularly careful, and to keep away from open windows and unfrequented places. And, whatever you do, don't see anyone again without first consulting me or my wife."

There was no fear of that. I had had enough of the Chinaman to last me a lifetime.

"You will do me the favour," I said, "of not mentioning this to the ladies? It might only upset them, and Miss Ormsby has been subjected to terror enough."

"Not a word until after you have gone. My wife is also a highly nervous woman, and she might—well, she might regret her hospitality." And seeing me look embarrassed he laughed, and said, "There, there, don't think of it. Naturally a firebrand is a dangerous thing to shelter. But I've brought you in some clothes. They're in that parcel. You might see if they'll fit."

I thanked him, took up the parcel, and went to my room; and there, finding the clothes fit well enough, I put them on, and once more presented the appearance of a decent member of society. Then I sent for Ting, and to him I related my adventure with the clothes man. I found that he agreed in every particular with the consul. Our position was a highly dangerous one, and necessitated the utmost caution. Indeed, strangers had already been round to the back of the house making inquiries of the servants; and, though he believed they were devoted to their master, he was dumb at the thought of bribery.

Well, with the consul's permission, we decided that he and I should sleep in the same room, and later on, when we found that Rose was next door, we arranged with her a series of signals in case she should be disturbed dur-

ing the night. But, fortunately, that night passed without mishap, and with a feeling of infinite relief I beheld the day dawn. Then, noticing Ting curled up on the floor, I turned over and went to sleep.

All that day we kept strictly within the seclusion of the consulate, never so much as poking our noses outside. On the following morning at eight o'clock the ship would sail for Hong-Kong, and once aboard her we might reasonably expect to reach our destination in safety. Ting, whose restless spirit would not permit him to keep still, occasionally came to us with scraps of information. The busybodies were still making inquiries, and he already knew at least two spies by sight. Indeed, as he spoke he led us carefully to the window, and made us stand behind the curtains.

"What can see?" he asked.

"Nothing but a blind beggar with a dog."

"Welly good," and he began to grin.

"Do you mean to say that he is a spy?"

"What you tink? Look."

At first the man appeared to be nothing more than a beggar. In one hand he held a little tin can for cash, with the other he held the dog by a leader. Now and again he cried out piteously for alms. To add to his misfortunes,

he limped in a most painful manner. But as he slowly passed before us his head turned our way, and I knew beyond doubt that he was peering in at the windows. Slowly he went by, his head still screwed in the one direction. It was now self-evident that the fellow was watching us from under the dark shadow of his big hat.

The day dragged slowly along, but the rest and the excellent food did us all a world of good, and, before retiring that night—the last we were to spend in the hateful city—I myself saw to the bolts and bars in Rose's room. And then I prayed that this one night might be passed in safety. I had no fear of what the morrow would bring forth.

For a long time I could not go to sleep; but when I did it was to doze heavily, and dream unpleasant things. Now I was swimming the Pe-kiang, pursued by a herd of alligators, the faces of which, as they approached, grew hideously like Wang's; and now again I was jumping with the mandarin from the top of the water-gate. Every road I took led me to him, every face I saw bore a fearful likeness to his, and in the midst of one of my most exciting adventures I was awakened by a loud scream.

It came from I knew not where, and I sat up, dazed, trying to think where I was. Just

then the quick signal sounded on the wall, and seizing my revolver I sprang from the bed. Rose was in danger!

Ting leapt with a like alacrity to his feet, and shouting to him, "Follow me," I unlocked the door and darted out into the passage. As I did so something hissed beside my ear and buried itself in the wall. I fired, and the would-be murderer fled howling down the dark hall.

Being unable to follow him I shook the handle of Rose's door, and finding it still locked I immediately burst it open. I called but received no answer. I sprang to the bed, it was empty. Dashing across to the window I found it wide open, and as I stood there, for the moment paralysed with fear, I heard hasty steps on the gravel outside. Then three shots were fired in quick succession, and I heard Ting yell, "This way, sir!"

With a bound I was out into the grounds, and rushing in his direction discovered him kneeling and holding something white in his arms. To spring forward and take it from him was the work of a moment. It was Rose, in her nightgown, the bosom of which was saturated with a warm fluid which I knew was blood.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COOLIE WITH THE CRUTCH.

To lift her up and bear her into the house, which was now all astir, was but the work of a few moments. I feared that she had been badly wounded, perhaps fatally, and though I knew she was not dead, I could not tell how far from death she was. Therefore, when the lamp was brought, I hastily examined her, and to my delight found no wound. Indeed I soon saw that she was in nothing more serious than a swoon, and I could have cried aloud in my joy. There were undoubtedly blood stains upon her nightdress, but, thank God, the blood was not hers.

I must admit that the consul and his wife acted very well during this ordeal, for it was not likely that either would feel particularly grateful to us. Yet during this crisis the man's indifference thawed, and he was nothing like the same unsympathetic personage with whom I had first come in contact. His wife, too, threw

off her lethargy, and bustled hither and thither with all the force of latent energy, and it was chiefly owing to her exertions that we succeeded in bringing Rose round to consciousness once again.

I shall never forget the glad look of surprise with which she first saw and knew me, or the tender little cry, "It's you, Paul! Oh!" How is it possible to explain the delight of such moments? Only at such a time does a man feel what a woman is to him. I couldn't speak, because I felt that there was no occasion for words; but I pressed her close and felt her sweet arms circle about my neck.

There was of course no more sleep that night. The consul brought out his whisky and cigars, and the women put on dressing-gowns and came and kept us company, and Rose told her story in a few brief words. She was awakened out of a sound sleep to discover two men in the room. At first she thought she was dreaming, but seeing the window open and the moonlight streaming in, she shrieked. The men immediately sprang at her, but, remembering my injunction, she instantly signalled upon the wall. Then she was seized, pulled out of bed, and borne through the window. At the same moment my fusilade upon the door

began, and one of the men, fearing he would be taken, suggested that they should kill her; but the other hastily answered, "No, no. He must have her alive." With that they hurried forward through the garden, and she, half-dead as she was with fright, was yet conscious that, the garden once passed, her chances of being rescued would considerably lessen. Just then she heard a pistol shot to the right of her, and she felt the man who was carrying her stagger. But he persevered for a few steps more and then fell, bringing her down with him. It was the blood of this man (whom we found in the morning beneath a shrubbery, shot through the face, quite dead), which had stained her nightdress.

Ting's story was quite as brief. When he saw me rush from the room, he opened our window, jumped out, and slipped round to the front, with what result we know. It was he who intercepted the enemy and brought down the man, and once more I expressed myself as being his eternal debtor. He laughed curiously and admitted that he liked piling up my obligations. And he called my attention to a certain morning on the Pe-kiang, a morning on which a white man saved a yellow man's life; but I laughed at him and told him that he had long

since paid the debt. He smiled in a singular manner and shook his head, and I thought his strange eyes had a look in them which was closely akin to tears. Confound the rascal! I was beginning to do something more than like him.

Breakfast was served early that morning, and a little after seven o'clock we set out for the steamboat, *Rose*, the consul, with two of his men, and myself. Ting, thinking it would be wise to get aboard secretly, had gone about the business in his own peculiar manner; and though I did not like parting with him, I felt that he was quite clever enough to be left to his resources.

Well, we reached the steamboat without molestation, and I heaved a tremendous sigh of relief as I handed *Rose* up the gangway. This looked like the end of our troubles. In seven or eight hours at most we should be in Hong-Kong, when we might naturally expect once more to breathe in safety. Luck had not been so dead against us after all.

I was almost boisterous as I shook the consul's hand to say good-bye. I thanked him a thousand times for his kindness, gave him my address, and begged that he would make use of me in some way. But he only laughed, and said I was perfectly useless to him.

"At any rate," said I, "you'll be glad to see our backs."

"Perfectly true," he answered. "Now I shall be able to sleep in peace."

"But, seriously," said I, "may not this incident have other consequences?"

"I think not," he replied. "This fellow has no quarrel with me. I am merely an instrument at the disposal of distressed tourists, a political machine without a distinctive personality. You and your friends are his particular regard."

"At any rate, I am glad that our going will enable you to sleep in peace."

"And so am I. And yet, do you know, you rather woke us up a bit. On the whole, I may think of you once or twice when I get back."

"Do," and we shook hands once more the best of friends. Indeed at bottom he was a good sort of fellow, and if his manners were a bit rough on the surface he was a good white man underneath.

As I turned from him I came face to face with a tall, dignified-looking Chinaman, who bowed politely and smiled at me in the most agreeable manner. I started, suspicious in a moment. Had the fellow been listening to our conversation? I looked at him again, and

again he smiled, saying in pidgin English, "Good-day." He was well-dressed, and was evidently a well-to-do gentleman of the merchant classes. I smiled and answered "Good-day." It was absurd to suspect every shadow.

Rose and I then stationed ourselves well forward, where we could see the coolie passengers come aboard; but though we saw many cross the gangway we caught no sight of Ting. The moment of our departure drew horribly near. The sailors had even taken their stations on either side of the gangway preparatory to drawing it inboard. The stream of coolies was rapidly lessening. They came up in little batches of twos and threes, and then in singles. Then the whistle blew. The captain shouted out something in unintelligible sailor lingo. The men ashore began to loosen the warps, while the men at the gangway prepared to haul it aboard. Then, as is usually the case, some late arrivals came scrambling aboard, one of whom walked with a crutch and seemed to get along with difficulty. He was the last to mount the gangway. In another moment we had severed our connection with the shore.

We went back to the upper deck, feeling utterly despondent, for we were sure if Ting

were aboard he would have given us some sign of his presence. I greatly blamed myself for letting him out of my sight, and I confess that when I pictured him in the hands of Wang I felt like going back to Canton to search for him. But that being now impossible, I consoled myself with the hope that he was hidden away between decks with the other coolies. If not, I was afraid I had seen the last of him.

We had not more than eight or nine saloon passengers, among whom were two Chinamen, my polite friend being one. There was also a globe-trotter and his wife, who had come up to Canton to see the sights, and with these Rose and I entered into conversation, and later on we all four went down to breakfast together. Not that I wanted any, nor she either; but the pleasant, chirpy, chatting of our new friends, free as it was of suspicion or alarm, came as a great relief after the strained and intolerable life we had of late been living.

I dawdled a bit with breakfast, and then got up, ostensibly to smoke a pipe, leaving Rose with them; but in reality I wished to see if I could discover any sign of Ting. The coolie passengers, however, were all kept under lock and key, a man with a loaded carbine standing

outside the barred door which led to their quarters. I approached this door as close as was compatible with a reasonable curiosity and took a peep in. The place was crowded with a most miscellaneous collection of ragamuffins, the odour from which being such as even to startle one accustomed to Chinese smells. I saw no one bearing the least resemblance to Ting; but as I was about to turn away I noticed the coolie with the crutch, the one who had been the last to come aboard. And what was more, he seemed to regard me with a fixed look of attention. He was close up against the bars, his eyes eagerly peering through them, and, suspicious as ever, I turned and stared him in the face. As I did so he looked down and made a sign with his head. Following the action, my eyes came to a level with his hands, one of which was clutching a bar. As I looked, I saw the fingers relax, and a little ball of paper fell to the deck and rolled towards me.

It was but a tiny pellet, not much bigger than a pea, and, filled with curiosity, I stooped and picked it up. As I did so I looked to see if this action met with the approval of the coolie with the crutch, but he had disappeared. Turning round I found my dignified Chinese friend quietly regarding me from a distance.

I immediately slipped the pellet into my pocket and pulled out my pipe. As I did so the Chinaman approached and offered me his cigar case; but as I really preferred a pipe at that time of the day, I very politely refused. At this he seemed somewhat disappointed, and begged of me to try one of his cigars, assuring me that they were first chop; so that to please him I took one and promised to smoke it later.

Then he began to talk, chiefly to air his English, I thought, which, if not fluent, could be understood. He informed me that he was a Cantonese merchant who was on his way to Hong-Kong to transact some business. On this particular occasion he was going to try and introduce something new to the market,—a special kind of rice whisky which was manufactured in Canton,—and he wanted to know if I thought there was any chance for it. How could I tell? I would have to taste it first. Would I honour him by tasting some? I answered, "Yes, with pleasure." Whereupon he produced a sample bottle from his inside pocket and presented it to me, begging I would let him know what I thought of it. I assured him that I would not forget, at which, bowing with his accustomed dignity, he slid off on his soft-soled shoes.

During the whole of this conversation I was incessantly fumbling at the little pellet in my pocket, and when he had gone I turned away and carefully began to unroll it. It was but a small square of thin rice paper, yet folded so carefully that it was a marvel how it had been compressed to its present dimensions. However, when I opened it, I discovered nothing but one of the feeblest attempts at drawing that I had ever seen. At first I was not quite sure what the figure represented, for the lines were very indistinct and the paper much crinkled; but on looking closer the thing seemed to take the form of a man, a Chinaman, dressed in the long frock of the better classes. In a very amateur hand he held something, but what it was I could not at first make out. It looked like a stick, but a stick with a suspicious curve. I looked and looked but could not understand its significance. Then it suddenly flashed upon me that it was meant for a knife.

In an instant I jumped at the meaning of the whole message. The man with the crutch was a friend, and his feeble drawing contained a potent meaning. I was to be on my guard. Immediately my thoughts flew to my dignified acquaintance who was going to place a new whisky on the Hong-Kong market. I took

out his sample bottle and looked at it, I felt for his cigar, and the sudden rush of thought that came to me made my brain throb.

Good God! Was it possible?

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST ATTEMPT.

KNOCKING the ashes from my pipe, I instantly re-entered the saloon, my thoughts travelling to Rose and my carelessness in leaving her out of my sight. As I crossed the door I saw her sitting on a lounge deep in conversation with a Chinaman, not the one who had so assiduously cultivated my acquaintance, but the other; for perhaps you will remember I said there were two in the saloon. I passed swiftly across to her, my sudden appearance startling her somewhat. I also thought my advent did anything but please the Chinaman.

But she greeted me with a smile, and, nodding towards the man by her side, said:

"This gentleman knew my father."

"Indeed. He does not come from Fong-Chin?"

"No. He is a merchant from Chungking, but he seems to have been everywhere."

"Can he speak English?"

"I think not." She turned to the man and asked him. He replied voluminously, as is the way of the Chinaman. "No, he does not speak English," she said.

"Then how did he know you spoke Chinese?"

This was evidently a problem of which she had not thought.

"Perhaps he didn't know," she said.

The man was an intelligent, good-looking fellow, dressed with the becoming gravity and dignity of a Chinese gentleman in good circumstances. He strained obviously at my words, but there was a look in his face that did not altogether meet with my approval. Indeed, I was not so sure that he did not understand us. So I asked Rose to come up on deck, and bowing politely to our celestial friend we quitted the saloon.

Once on deck I began to question her in a way which quickly raised her suspicions.

"You mean," she gasped, "that you suspect him?"

"I suspect everybody. Look here."

And I unfolded the scrap of paper and showed her the rough outline of drawing. Of course she could make nothing of it, but when

I told her the story of the lame coolie her face blanched suddenly.

"Paul, is it possible that this man is a spy of *his*?"

"At present anything is possible."

"But, Paul, if you could only have heard how feelingly he spoke of poor father, and how he deplored these periodic outbursts of the people. I should never have dreamt of suspecting him. Look, he gave me these sweetmeats."

As she spoke she held out three little brown squares of her favourite sweet-stuff—the kind of sweet that I had seen her eating times out of number at the Mission.

A horrid shiver swept from the back of my neck right down my spine, and of a sudden my forehead grew damp with a cold sweat. For a moment I was paralysed with fear. Then I rudely snatched the sweetmeat from her.

"Tell me," I gasped, for my tongue clung so tightly to the roof of my mouth that I could scarcely utter a word, "have you eaten any of this?"

But instead of answering she turned a scared face to mine, and cried out:

"Paul, Paul, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. Tell me quickly, have you eaten any of this sweetmeat?"

"No, dear. Why?"

"Thank God!"

"Why, what is the matter with it?"

My relief was so great that I slipped my arm round her shoulders and squeezed her very hard.

"I do not know that anything is the matter with it. We shall see when we get to Hong-Kong. I thank God that you haven't eaten any, that's all. While we are on this ship you must neither eat nor drink anything that I do not give you. I believe we are surrounded by spies—spies working to the order of our enemy in Fong-Chin."

And I there and then told her of my dignified merchant friend, his cigar and his rice whisky. It had been my intention to keep this a secret from her, but it all helped to illustrate the theory which I had constructed upon the shaky lines of my lame friend's drawing.

She nestled closer to me and asked appealingly :

"Paul, what shall we do?"

"We have had our warning. If we fail to profit by it, so much the worse for us. We must suspect every sound, every movement, every shadow."

"I am very frightened," she said.

"You are the bravest little woman I know.

Courage. We have escaped too many dangers to fail now that the end is in sight. Soon we shall be in Hong-Kong, surrounded by our own people. The police once warned, we shall be beyond the reach of Wang and his spies."

Which, to my own way of thinking, was not exactly true; for neither police nor governments can suppress the individual plotter. But I had to say something to reassure her, well knowing that she could not enjoy even a comparative peace while these secret attacks were being directed against us.

So, having made up my mind to keep her near me while we remained on the boat, I filled my pipe, and together we began to promenade up and down the broad deck. Presently my dignified merchant friend appeared, and seeing me smoking a pipe, he once more advanced and opened his cigar case, and while he offered me one he asked how I had enjoyed the last. I looked closely at him as he put the question, but his face retained the unruffled, passive look of the Oriental; there was no sign in those inscrutable eyes which indicated the direction of his thoughts.

"No," I said; "I only smoke cigars after dinner."

"You 'ave dlink the lice whisky?"

"Not yet, but I hope to report on it before we leave the ship."

"All li. I makee my address Canton side. Suppose you likee, you givee me order."

"Certainly. But hadn't you better give me your Hong-Kong address?"

"Will give," said he, and with a pleasant smile he shuffled off.

Rose drew closer to me as she whispered:

"And you think he, too, is a spy?"

"I am convinced of it."

Hopelessly she shook her head. To her there was no way out of the tangle. Later on we were joined by the tourist's wife, a chatty, good-natured little woman, who immediately took Rose by the arm and began to walk her up and down.

"I hope you don't think two is company?" she said.

Naturally we both blushing protested that such a thought never entered our minds. Then she explained that her husband, who had been up late the night before seeing the sights, was now fast asleep in the saloon, and that consequently she was left without anyone to speak to. Would we take pity on her? Being humane we did, and, after we had walked up and down for some time, she dragged Rose

below to see some curios which had been purchased in Canton.

Rose looked at me, and I smiled a warning assent ; not that we suspected this good-natured little Englishwoman, whose honesty was written in sprawling letters all over her wholesome face. So away they went below, and I continued to walk up and down for some time longer. In less than two hours now we should be in Hong-Kong harbour. Every revolution of the paddles lessened the long waterway. The great ship throbbed—throbbed in unison with my pulse. It seemed as though the engines knew that they, too, were going home.

I leant on the rail a little forward of the port paddle-box, and looked over the side. There was no one on this upper deck except myself and the steersman forward ; but he was ensconced in a little pilot house of his own, and could neither see me, nor be seen by me. I saw with satisfaction that we were making excellent progress through the water. Soon the island would open up ; then would come the shipping, that peaceful symbol of the might of my race, and then rest. Peace ! The days free of anxiety, the nights void of fear ! The Jack ashore, and the white ensign afloat ! My eyes almost filled at the thought of them. No-

thing in the world is so dear to the patriot as a glimpse of his flag flying in a foreign land.

Something moved beside me, and I looked up. Not more than two yards away was my dignified Chinese friend. His right hand was inside his blouse, a position which at once filled me with suspicion. I immediately slipped my hand into my pocket, and clutched my revolver. There was only a little lining and a thin piece of tweed between him and a bullet.

Impassively, as though he had not noticed my action, he stood thus for a moment or two, and then slowly withdrew his hand, and in it he held nothing more formidable than the cigar-case which he had offered me on two previous occasions. Smilingly he held it out, but I shook my head and turned to go.

"What for you no smoke?" he said, apparently resenting my very courteous refusal.

Not liking his tone, I answered rather sharply :

"I smoke when it suits me."

"When it suits me," he echoed. "What you mean when it suits me?"

It was, perhaps, a harmless enough question, but his tone was not calculated to allay my irritation. Nor did my suspicions decrease as

I beheld the other Chinaman mount the ladder
aft and come rapidly towards us.

"What the devil's that to do with you?"
said I.

"Foreign swine," he cried, "what for you
speakee me like that!"

And without a moment's hesitation he flung
himself upon me. I fired, but in my excite-
ment I must have missed him, for he flew at my
throat, and set his ugly claws deep into my flesh.
I tried to draw the revolver, but it got jammed
in some way, and before I could extricate it the
other man was upon me. Instantly abandoning
the thought of using it, I brought both my
hands into play, and a frightful struggle en-
sued.

My merchant friend still clung desperately to
my throat, and as he had the use of his two
hands, while I had only the use of one—the
other being busy with my second adversary—
the result was anything but favourable to me.
He tugged at my flesh as though he intended
to tear it to pieces, while the other fellow,
warned by one blow I had struck him, watched
his chance, and rushed in under my guard, and
instantly I was grappling at close quarters with
the two.

Now came a fearful struggle in which I knew

I should be vanquished if I failed to loosen those fearful fingers round my throat ; so, for the moment ignoring my second adversary, I hit round with great force, and caught number one a swinging blow on the jaw. His hands instantly relaxed, and I shook my throat free. But almost immediately recovering himself, he came at me again, rendered more furious by the blow.

It now became quite evident that their intention was to force me over the rail, so that I might fall in front of the paddle-box, and I braced myself to resist the onslaught. And here my more than ordinary strength stood me in good stead. While they tore at me, and scratched, and spit, and howled, I seized each man by the throat, and, bearing them both to the ground, sought to beat out their brains on the deck. But they were as slippery as eels in my grasp, and though I gave them some sickening knocks, I could not stun either.

Then a hideous fear crept over me. I felt that my strength was going ; that I was powerless to deal them the final blow. Unless help came, the wretches would get the better of me. So I clenched my teeth and fought furiously. But they clung to me like hell-cats, and by clinging to my arms hampered me frightfully.

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Seizing him by the throat I forced him back. [Page 331.]

And to make matters worse, by incessant wriggling and twisting, one of the men succeeded in scrambling to his feet, and breaking free of my tired grasp. Instantly I was up and at him, for I feared that he would stab me. And, indeed, my surmise had been correct, for the first use he made of his freedom was to fumble hastily for his knife. But I sprang at him before he had time to draw, and his hands shot out to protect himself.

Desperate and maddened with rage, I now attacked him with almost incredible fury. Beating his hands down, I drove him back to the side of the vessel, and seizing him by the throat forced him back, back, until his body described an acute angle across the rail. Then I put forth all my strength, and the next moment he disappeared over the side. He had fallen in front of the paddle!

I looked round, and much to my amazement beheld my dignified merchant friend mounting the rail on the opposite side. Then he ran out along the paddle-box, and without so much as a glance in my direction, took a header overboard. I rushed across and beheld him come to the surface some yards away, and he immediately struck out for the bank.

On the steps of the forward gangway stood the captain of the ship, a revolver of heavy calibre in his hand.

"Hullo," said he, "what does all this mean?"

Leaning against the rail I gave him a brief outline of our story, and showed him the sweetmeats, the rice whisky, and the cigar, the latter, by the way, being much the worse for my scuffle. He expressed amazement at my story, but after a short discussion we came to the conclusion that it would be better to keep the secret to ourselves. The two men were gone, and with them all danger, and no one was apparently the worse. However, I gave him the sweetmeats, the whisky, and the cigar, and he promised to have them analysed as soon as we arrived in Hong-Kong.

Thus ended the last attempt of the mandarin Wang.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"ALL LI."

I WENT below feeling a free man at last. I had no fear of Hong-Kong now, for these two men were surely the last emissaries of the mandarin. Before he could know of the failure of his mission, Rose and I would be aboard ship well on our way to England.

I found Rose and our tourist friends down in the saloon, and in honour of my freedom I broached a bottle of champagne. Then we all went upon deck to view the shipping and the gradual opening up of the town, and there we stayed until the vessel was safely berthed.

As our tourist friends were going to the Hong-Kong Hotel, we made up a little party and went together, the only cloud that shadowed the happy occasion being the absence of Ting. Rose was full of grief, and you may imagine how I felt. Poor old Ting! And after all we had gone through together.

I watched the file of coolies pass from the

ship to the wharf, and as I did so I thought of the man with the crutch who had given me the warning, and I looked about in the hope of seeing him, for such a service could not be allowed to go unrewarded. Unfortunately, he was nowhere in evidence, and as our little party passed from the ship I feared that I had seen the last of him.

But that was not to be. Not fifty yards from the wharf someone touched me on the arm, and looking round I beheld the cripple. I smiled a welcome and asked him if he spoke English.

"Just a leetle piecee—Mista Paul."

"Good God! It's Ting!"

The cripple smiled, but put his finger to his lips.

"By'n by makee speak."

"Very well. Follow us to the Hong-Kong Hotel."

"Sabbee." And away he hobbled in the crowd.

When we reached the hotel Mr. Ting was awaiting us at the entrance, and I immediately installed him as my servant. His story was brief, as usual, and to the point. He had come aboard disguised as a cripple, because he knew Wang's men would watch for a man who

limped. He had noticed my dignified merchant friend and his companion; he watched them as they watched Rose and me, and they had duly aroused his suspicions. Then he was sorry that he had not gone boldly aboard so that he could have warned us, but his chance came, as we have seen, and he made good use of it. His eyes opened with amazement when I told him of the sweetmeats and the whisky; but he was somewhat recompensed by the end of the story.

"That makee gland fight," he said, his eyes glistening at the thought of it, old war-dog that he was. "Suppose I know but no can get, it makee my blain go mad. You 'ave got welly magnificent stlength. Lemember how ycu hold the water-gate? That was all li."

"All li," I answered. Indeed just at that moment fortune seemed in one of her most amiable moods.

"All li," he said, "ebelyting is all li."

Yes, everything was all right.

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A somewhat delicate matter next absorbed my attention, and in a way it caused me considerable trepidation; but as becomes a hero, I

braced myself for the ordeal, and tackled the task in the blunt, straightforward way of heroes. Not that I thought this was the more heroic, but I was utterly incapable of any other method.

"Rose," I said, "I love you and you love me. Will you marry me now, or wait until we get to England?"

And she said, looking straight into my face with clear eyes, "Dearest, it shall be when you wish."

I wonder if it would be hard to imagine for which date I decided?

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Well, we were duly married the next day, and the day after we set sail for the Old Country by one of the P. & O. steamers, and I do not think that three happier people than Rose, Ting, and I sailed the wide ocean at that moment. We had undergone much, but we had learnt to love, and the dangers we had passed through had cemented that love in an indissoluble union. Indeed, Ting is as popular in England as he was at the Mission, and when he goes through the village he is an infinite source of curiosity to the natives. But I often wonder how many of those who laugh at him

imagine a tithe of his strange story, or the sort of man he really is.

Of course there was the usual newspaper report of the attack on the Mission, with a short biography of the Reverend Paul Ormsby. This same newspaper also understood that the Government was about to protest strongly; but as the protests of the British Government usually amount to nothing but protests, nobody was likely to be a penny the worse.

I forgot to add that before I left Hong-Kong the captain of the Canton boat brought me the report of the Government analyst on the suspicious gifts of our Chinese friends. The cigar had been put by for a closer analysis, but it was believed that death had been introduced into it in an extremely ingenious manner. As for the sweetmeat and the whisky, there was enough deadly poison in them to kill half a dozen men.

But, thank God, it was not written that we should die in that way. Indeed, when I look around me, at my pretty home, at my wife, to whom peace has brought a fuller loveliness, I almost think that my visit to the Far East must have been a dream. And just then a tall, gaunt Chinaman, who walks with a limp, comes running round a corner of the garden, a little

fair-haired boy on his shoulder, and I hear a well-known voice in quaint pidgin English cry out, "All li, Mas'r Paul."

No, it is no dream. It is "all li."

THE END.

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cry

