GODS OF WEALTH AND WAR

A TALE OF MODERN CHINA

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GODS OF WEALTH AND WAR

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To
the Memory of
THE MODERN MARTYRS
Native and Foreign
Crushed in Great China's
Gigantic and Gallant
Fight for Freedom

GODS OF WEALTH AND WAR

GREAT China is hoary in history and enlarged in experience. She knows widely and well the wrath of war and the waywardness of wealth. In her striking imagery she forms the first as a furious, armoured figure with double-edged and doubly-pointed poniard-simitar. The second sits with jagged sword suggestive also of grim struggle, yet alluring his victims ever on by a sparkling pearl which he hurls far afield. The pursuer must mount a tiger which stands accommodatingly ready, only to find at length that the bauble bursts into fragments as he would grasp it, and that the tiger then turns to rend him.

The vast land is in confusion and convulsion to-day. She is in violent conflict with floods and famines, robbers and revolutions, locusts and lawlessness, piracy and poverty, crime and cruelty, illiteracy and ignorance, drought and death. One might think her long experience as evidenced by her art and her present dire emergency would win all to united effort. Alas! Probably her worst enemy is the mad war for wealth on the part of multitudes of petty party manipulators and some would-be great Field Marshals.

To add to all this bitter, blighting struggle, Communism with its crassest message and cruelest methods has found its way into the fray and would spread its worst far and wide. This tale would tell, in part, the perils and persecutions through which this ancient and peace-loving people are passing.

J. L. S.

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I

THE LOCUSTS

"COMING! Coming! They're coming!"

It was little May Fay brought the news. I see her yet as she came running into the room, her eyes, hands, feet, all dancing, her bright crimson hair cord and brighter pantaloons flaunting tantalizingly to our tired eyes.

"On the bath-tub of Tang, the following was engraved, If you can renovate yourself for a single day, then do so from day to day. Yea let there be a daily renovation," I was droning from the Great Learning, and stopped short.

So did Wong Yung from his bench on the other side of the table. He punctuated the pause by a savage kick on my bare shins. That at another time would have led to a howl of rage and sudden revenge, but this time the pain and indignity passed unpunished, for May Fay was still advancing.

"They're coming! They're at the mouth of the Pass," she continued as she ran right up to me. "Lu-lu told Sow-sow, and I heard her tell mother!"

Old Teacher Tang tried to turn us back to our tasks again, as he brought down his flat stick with a warning whack on his wooden desk.

"Work!" he commanded sternly. "Get to work," and scowled hard over his big owl-like brass glasses.

"What's this? What's this?" boomed the deep bass voice of my military uncle, Wong, as he started up suddenly from his snoring.

"Locusts, sir! Locusts!" Wong Yung and I shouted together as we sprang to our feet. "They've found their way through."

Old Tang's stick tumbled to the floor and after it clattered his books, pens and ink-slab as he knocked over his desk in a vain effort to call us to order.

"Curses on their ancestors! . . . their ancestors! . . . their ancestors! . . . Curse 'em! . . . Curse 'em! . . . Curse 'em!" swore and spluttered Uncle Wong, as he

screwed himself around his stiff leg and backed up out of his big chair. Then he and his pilgrim's staff prodded their way over to his two big bronze gods of Wealth and War.

Old Tang gazed at us helplessly out of his bleared eyes. It needed no further sign that even his attempted iron discipline was at an end. Yung and I bolted. No one was wanted around when Uncle Wong burned incense.

We ran for the low wall at the south side of the garden, May Fay hard at our heels. From there we looked far down the valley, gazing along terrace after terrace of green rice fields, on down to the village and river, then up the slopes of bamboos, orange groves, chee-trees, lan-muh and evergreens on either side, but could see nothing unusual. We expected to behold some mighty cloud as broad as the horizon and as black as midnight come roaring and ravening across heath and heavens.

"Nothing," I commented in a tone of deep disappointment.

"Naw, nothing at all," echoed Yung. "You're just a young fibber," and he turned on May Fay who was clinging to the wall trying to verify her big sensation.

"Shut up," I retorted. "Hasn't she given us a holiday anyway?" and lifted the little figure a bit higher up the stones.

"Sow-sow said they were coming over the Pass," she protested tearfully.

Again we turned our eyes to the southeast where the hills dipped as they reached the plain.

"Blatherdash," growled Yung. "Blatherdash! . . . It's back to books again . . . and Tang and the Old-one will light on us to the limit. . . ."

But May Fay interrupted.

"Look," she cried pointing to a spot higher up on the hills. "What's that? What's that?"

"Smoke!" I ejaculated.

"Sure enough," admitted Yung. "They're firing the underbrush!"

May Fay hopped down and began to dance again with glee.

"Didn't I say they were coming? Didn't I say so?" she cried. "Now who's the fibber, Wong Yung? It's you. . . . It's you . . . The yellow-beetles are coming . . . there . . . there . . . there," and she ran behind me for protection.

Yung who loved a fight, more even than the prospective thrill of devastation by locusts, made a lunge for me, and we grappled. Just then, however, old Tang came panting up the path and we were immediately models of propriety.

"Where?" he inquired between breaths. "Where? . . . Where?"

"Over by the Pass," we all clamoured together, anxious to convince him. "Over to the southeast there, Sir! . . . See! The smoke's getting bigger all the time. They're firing the grass and low growth in the way, Sir, in order to try to stop them!"

The old figure stretched its long thin neck, screwed up its eyes excruciatingly in an ineffective attempt to see something more than a foot beyond its nose, pulled its spectacles to the very tip of the latter organ, and leaned far out,—but the results were negative.

"Wild words," he said testily. "Wild words! . . . Nothing but a few clouds . . . a bit of fog. . . . You two male pupils will do one hundred extra characters each to-day for this . . . and you young female will do double. . . ."

"But it's really smoke, Sir," Yung and I protested. "And it's growing bigger. . . . Just look at it now. . . ."

"And Sow-sow did say it was yellow-beetles!" protested May Fay, again trying hard to keep back the tears. "And she said Lu-lu said the Lo-los all said they were coming. . . . She did, Sir! . . . She truly did!"

"Wild words! Wild words!" repeated the old cracked voice. "Only a bit of fog . . . any one can see that. . . . Begone with you . . . to your books! . . ."

Yung and I hung our heads, Yung making gruesome faces behind the old man's back. Poor little May Fay began to whimper outright.

"Off with you," repeated old Tang sternly, and we were in submissive retreat, like sheep before the dog, when a wild something burst upon our ears.

"Clash! . . . Clang! . . . Crash!"

We two rushed back to the wall and leaned far out. Some one was beating a gong. That was a familiar sound. But who was making such clamour as this, and where? . . . and how? . . . and why?

A little group winding hurriedly down the crooked pathway among the rows of new green corn growth gave the answer.

"It's our warrior uncle on his mule," I called.

"And they've got out the war gong," shouted Yung.

"Lift me! Lift me up!" clamoured May Fay, and I pulled her to the top, where she cuddled close.

We quickly picked out the members of the band. Ahead ran the two Mas, the household braves in their red coats, bounding along over half submerged rocks, whirling around big boulders, leaping tiny streams, making a brave effort to look before and behind at the same time in their double duty of clearing the way and seeing that their master was duly following. Next came Hung with the great noise. Sure enough it was the war gong as Yung had declared. We could see its burnished sides as it swung in the sun, three feet broad of shining brass that filled the valley with its reverberations, and reëchoed far away among the hills.

After that rode Uncle Wong. Strikingly military to our young minds he appeared with his red-tasseled, white-cone hat, his short sack coat of silk, emblazoned before and behind by its tiger embroidered upon squares of satin. We could not well see his face but we could readily recall its awe-inspiring austerity upon such occasions,—and then there was that right leg of his, always so rigidly stiff. That alone gave him ever a few feet of grand military air which adamantized his whole anatomy when he rode.

Behind came the horse coolie Sung, swinging along at a lope possible only to one accustomed to long runs. Factotum Fang followed next on his small spotted mountain pony. It was always fun to watch him bob up and down whenever his mount broke from a walk into a trot or slow pace. How beautifully he bounced now, clinging to the mane with his right hand and hugging Uncle Wong's red wallet as firmly as he well could under his left arm.

After these trotted a dozen big braves, each with a new rifle and bayonet shimmering over his shoulder. "Body-guard," my uncle called them, though they carried his chair and did all sorts of general work when he played civilian or simple squire about his home. And in their midst ran Lu-lu. How we should like to have been with him. We shouted and he waved and

shouted back, though what he said we could not hear. How glorious it must be to be able to run about like that, with nothing to do but rush off to any excitement, and no books to repeat over and over endlessly.

I glanced about nervously at that thought to see what had become of old Tang. He was nowhere to be seen. He probably was back in the study again waiting for us, nursing his wrath to keep it warm. He must needs wait, for what prospective punishment could scare one from such a scene!

"Clash! Clash! Clash!"

"Clang! Clang!"

"Crash!"

On wound the procession, down through the corn, over to the side of the small south brook, then back and forth among the rice terraces.

"Clash! Clang! Crash!"

How the big war gong stirred our souls. The little gongs by the shrines only tinkled. The common ones for meals and the night watch but rattled. Even those in the temples though often large, were mellow and subdued. This seemed to hold the soul of some long imprisoned demon that now aroused and angry sent its mad defiance reverberating far and wide; over the entire countryside.

"Crash! Clang! Clash!"

All over the valley they heard it, and out from the clumps of trees on the slopes, the thatched cottages in the nooks, and the fields of rice, men could be seen to come forth, stand for a moment to catch the meaning, then run hither and thither. A few minutes later and they were crossing the valley by a hundred winding trails, all concentrating on the Pass.

"Look at the village," cried Yung. "There comes the militia."

"True," I corroborated. "True! I can see their flags!"

"Boom! . . . Boom! . . . Boom!"

Across and up the valley came another sound. It was the signal shots of the marching militia, to say they were responding, were on their way.

Yung and I could restrain ourselves no longer. We threw our arms high in air and shouted at the top of our voices. May Fay threw hers around my neck and shuddered.

"Let's cross over to the look-out," suggested Yung, and pointed across the valley to the tower.

"Good!" I agreed. "Good. . . . We can see it all from there!"

We clambered down.

"No! No!" I warned May Fay as I helped her to the ground. "You run in. . . . If the locusts get through, they'll bite you . . . and it may be the Lo-los will come too."

That was enough. She made for the great rambling house, her hands over her ears, her red hair cords and bright pantaloons again flaunting gaily as she ran down the winding walks and over the tiny bridges.

Yung and I did not trouble to follow the wall to the big entrance gate. That took too long. Our well accustomed fingers and toes clung to the "Zig-zag" down the steep wall, so we were soon out among the corn racing for the stream and then making the stiff ascent toward the tower.

Wong Yung reached it first. I was not a match for his longer legs and stronger muscles. Yet I pressed him hard and was in the narrow door in time to see his sandals disappear through the hatchway of the first loft. I took the notched log that served as a stair on the run, for the first story, took the second dog fashion by hands and feet, and was touching his heels with my hands as we clambered up the third.

Out on the narrow platform that served as roof our eyes sought the Pass. There it was, scarce a quarter of a mile away. We could see the men in ever increasing numbers swarming up from the valley, watch them as they spread out in ever longer lines among the shrubs and boulders, trees, great rocks and bits of open spaces that framed the opening, could note the constantly multiplying and widening fires that sent their wreaths of smoke slowly upward and hear indistinctly their calling to and fro. But we could see nothing of that for which we strained and stared all expectancy,—the locusts.

"'Tain't locusts, at all!" sneered Wong Yung.

"What is it then?" I parried rather reluctantly.

"Well 'tain't locusts, anyhow. . . . They'd be flying in flocks all over the sky, and they'd be hummin' away like forty thousand firecrackers!"

"How'd you know? You've never seen them!"

"I have too! Who hasn't seen yellow bugs?"

"Oh! Course! you've seen one, or ten or a hundred any year, but you've never seen and heard them like you say."

"Well, hasn't old Hung told about them lots of times?"

"Sure!" I retorted. "But it's something anyhow. . . . Look, there's old Hung now coming out by the mouth of the Pass, and he's commencing to beat again."

"Bang! Bang! Clang!" came the notes, rolling upward with relentless summons. "Clang! Clang! Crash!"

"It's the Lo-los!" whooped Wong Yung. "And they're summoning all the men to the fight."

"Naw!" I said. "They'd be firin' off guns, if it was that. . . . And what are they makin' so many little fires for?"

"Bet ye the Lo-los are crawlin' through the grass, and they're stoppin' their tricks!"

"Well, Uncle Wong won't expect us to be studyin' anyhow," I said. "Let's go and see."

Wong Yung took no urging. For answer he sprang down the hatchways and notched logs and again beat me to the opening. From there we raced to the south stream and followed it down till we reached the less used path leading to the Pass. Near the entrance we met Lu-lu.

"What is it?" We both shouted together as we came up.

"Locusts!" He grinned.

"But they're not flying?"

"No! They too young yet . . . just hoppin' . . . jumpin' . . . crawlin'. . . . Fightin' like mad."

Lu-lu was making no effort to stop them. They were coming from his own soil and doubtless he looked upon them in some way as part of his kith and kin, or at least as allies. . . . Why should he take part in their destruction? . . . It seemed retribution for the way in which our people had suppressed his people. . . . Who knew, it might be the wizards of his tribe who had called these up as avengers? He did not say anything like that. Indeed teams of horses could not have dragged such expressions from him. But as I got to know him better, I doubt not that some such thoughts were back of his glowing eyes. Just now he said nothing in words but followed us as we ran on toward the commotion.

We pushed our way here and there among friends and neighbours, talking, questioning, listening and at last found ourselves well to the front. Men were busy with choppers cutting down brush and dragging it forward. Others were digging trenches with their crude mattocks. Still others were rushing in and out with firebrands, igniting the dead grass of the previous year, the collected brushwood and even the trees where that was possible.

It was only then as we peered through the smoke that we beheld the enemy. There sure enough was just what Lu-lu had said, literally thousands, millions of little black creeping, crawling, hopping, leaping things apparently determined to get through our lines despite ditches and tramping and smoke and scorching. Hundreds were being destroyed momentarily and yet those at the rear came relentlessly, remorselessly on. Nor was this at one place alone. They had stretched themselves out in a line ever expanding up the mountain slopes on either side. I drew back astounded. How long could the struggle last?

"No end! . . . No end!" whispered Lu-lu in my ear, as he motioned to the ground beyond.

I peered through the smoke more closely. Yes, there they were coming on and on and on, over stones and rocks and trees and soil from the latter of which every leaf and blade had disappeared.

Something in that scene seized me. These were my enemies, the foes of my family, my clan, my people! I left Lu-lu standing there unanswered.

"Come on!" I cried to Wong Yung. "It's our fight too!" and a moment later we were tramping, stamping, carrying, firing with the rest.

The struggle lasted until high noon. Then the wind commenced to creep up the valley and through the Pass. It fanned our smouldering fires into flames that sent their tongues and heat and smoke ever higher. Our men began to redouble their labours.

"We've got 'em," they commented. "The Old Man of the Heavens is on our side this time!"

Their surmise proved correct. Some instinct told the bands of attackers that their assault was vain. They ceased to push forward and later moved off in slow retreat. Save for a few

thousands which had crawled up trees and from that vantage point leaped far out behind our lines, we had won a victory and that complete.

Wong Yung and I marched home behind old Hung and his big gong, radiant with all the pride of conquering heroes. A few men would prepare more fuel, guard the Pass still, and give warning should there be a return. For the present all was safe in the valley.

We met Lu-lu on the great steps as we ascended the fort. His eyes were downcast so I said nothing. But it was too good an opportunity for Wong Yung.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! We licked!" he taunted. "We licked your Lo-lo army. . . . Can't come sneaking through our lines."

"Shut up!" I growled. "Locusts aren't Lo-los . . . and they've likely eaten up all their stuff already. . . ."

"They are too!" Wong Yung persisted. "Locusts are Lo-los and Lo-los are locusts. . . . Locusts are Lo-los ancestors. . . . Don't they all eat grass and leaves and weeds and . . ."

Just then old Hung tactfully broke the tension by giving his big gong a warlike roll. It was to welcome my aunt Grace *with May Fay and others all standing at the big gates to greet* us. I turned a moment to wave back their greetings. When I looked again Lu-lu was racing down the steps in great bounds. I sought him out ere he entered the pen for the night. He tried to slip by me. He was naturally much embittered at the results of the day's struggle and the taunts of Wong Yung rankled deeply.

"Don't mind Wong Yung," I exhorted after a time. "He'll just laugh the harder if he thinks he has made you wince."

That way of looking at it seemed to help him some.

"That so," he said. "That so. You my good friend all right. . . . But they come again. . . . Not to-morrow . . . not come two, three many days . . . but they come."

"How do you know that?" I queried.

"Oh! Somebodies knows all right. . . . Somebodies knows," and he jerked his head toward his mountain home. "They say locusts go way long time, then after long time come

back home, then wait get big army, no enough eat, all come together, go away again."

He paused a moment, then continued, "Now have come back three year. . . . Last year not big enough, plenty rain, plenty grass, lay lot eggs. . . . This year all dry, hot. . . . Big hot . . . hatch out big army . . . not things eat . . . must get away . . . will come again . . . sure . . . sure!"

"Well. You warned us right yesterday. . . . I'll tell them what you say," and I hurried away to inform old Hung.

There was no need. Our people had had such experiences and they lived long. The last had been some sixteen years before and so scarce in my remembrance, but the older generation recalled it with ample detail. They therefore kept the guard at the Pass and continued to pile grass, leaves, sticks and brushwood high, preparatory to a possible later campaign.

One day, then two and three went by. Hot days they were of late spring. We three at our tasks droned away monotonously, stealing often to the open door that we might glance down the dark green valley and over to the notch in the hills where a slight curl of smoke said that our people were ever on the watch.

The fourth day came, then the tenth and the twentieth. We began to think of other things.

"All big bluff," Wong Yung sneered at Lu-lu. "Your ancestors have gone to their graves again."

This time, Lu-lu just grinned and was silent.

Ten more days of burning sun went by. It was high midday of the eleventh that we were suddenly startled by the firing of shots. We ran again to the rampart. They were from the direction of the Pass. They were signals of trouble and again old Hung with his war drum and my warrior uncle with his cavalcade rode forth, summoning the toilers from far and near. Wong Yung and I did not await a possible interference from old teacher Tang but bolted for the fray. Lu-lu joined us and we were among the first on the scene.

This time the locusts were not crawling, leaping, climbing, but swarming in dense clouds ten or twenty feet in air.

"Wing grown now," muttered Lu-lu, but we gave him little heed.

Hither and thither rushed our men igniting the long prepared material. Dry as tinder, it snapped and crackled and sent forth its flames and smoke in ever increasing volume. Alas! This time the wind was not for us but against us. It blew sparks and smoke into our faces and tongues and jets of fire drove us back from our own defense.

Over on the other side we could see the great army of invaders ever increasing, assembling apparently in serried ranks for the attack. As they did so they mounted higher, ever higher for the fray. It became apparent to all that our fires were almost useless. Many a great cloud was already three or four hundred feet in the air and the noise grew like the constant patter of rain on the roof. Even as we gazed despairingly they began to move steadily forward. There could be no doubt now, they had decided on our direction and would sail high above us.

But Uncle Wong and the older men had anticipated such an eventuality. Every gong in the valley had been secured and as the great cloud began to soar and spread, they were met with a deafening clang and clash of gongs, cymbals and drums that for the time drowned even the weird rasping and rustling of wings, legs and pinions.

A moment later and other resources came into play. Down in the village the makers of fireworks had been busy night and day. These with many a giant cracker were brought into play. What a commotion we were making! As boys we joined our shouts with the rougher notes from the throats of our men, threw sticks and stones in the air and raced wildly to and fro, long strings of crackers streaming out behind, sputtering and exploding at every leap. The dark mass overhead paid as little attention to our threats as though we had been welcoming them with loud Banzais!

Just where the Pass narrowed as it entered the valley, the little group about my uncle made their final stand.

"Bang! Bang! Fiz-z-z! Fiz-z-z! Fiz-z-z!"

A hundred rockets, prepared as for celebration, were fired right into the densest hoards. Colours, blue and green and red were lost in the cloud. Even the noise of explosion was muffled by the drumming above and about us. Yet who could doubt the effectiveness of our assault? Down came tumbling scores

and hundreds of the attackers. Confusion was evident in many a centre, and for a few moments the attackers halted. Were they prepared for such sacrifice, or would they yet consider discretion the better part of valour and retreat?

"Bang! Bang! Bang! Fiz-z-z! Fiz-z-z! Fiz-z-z!" Off went our rockets in ever increasing numbers and down came their warriors, ragged and broken.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" Even the blunderbusses and new rifles of the guard were called into play.

Was there ever before such a wild uproar? Clanging of gongs and cymbals, beating and rolling of drums, crackling of hundreds of crackers, detonating rockets, firing of guns, shouting and hooting of men wild with fear for their fields and orchards and gardens! And overhead, an ominous, monotonous rumble that at times reached almost a roar as an ever denser cloud through which no ray of sun at highest tide of summer day could even partially penetrate, paused on its deadly way.

They paused! But it was only for a passing moment. The ranks kept pressing forward from the rear and the living cloud was soon again forging forward, irresistibly, relentlessly, remorselessly bent on our destruction. The foremost flowed high out and over the Pass and began their descent upon the verdant valley. From the parched and untilled uplands of Lolo-land other clouds followed. We had lost the day and a great catastrophe was upon us.

"Every man to his fields," rang out the order from my warrior uncle. "The villagers will guard all public places. . . . Every man to his spot and slay, slay, slay!"

It needed no urging. The sun-burned sons of toil melted silently away. They well knew that the enemy would be there before them, and that thousands of tender green leaves and fruits and vines were disappearing before their insatiable onslaught. Wong Yung fell in with the cavalcade that hurried off to the fort. I knew there was little there to suffer save a garden with flowers and trees, so hurried across the valley to my old home. Lu-lu divining my destination stuck doggedly to my heels.

What a race it was! The great whirring clouds had widened as they defiled from the mountain gateway and had spread themselves far and wide as though each and all made for some

" prepared position." This somewhat thinned the air and made their presence upon vegetation and earth less conspicuous. Still even then they seemed to be sputtering about our faces, lighting upon our bare legs, arms, and necks, clawing their devious ways through our loose clothing and flying hair, or crunching under our sandalled feet, at every stride.

How they tickled and tormented, scraped and pinched and spattered us with their juices. We did not dare to speak lest they enter our open mouths. So we raced on brushing them off with hands and fingers, lashing them with twigs and branches and fighting them with feet and bodies in every contortion that could count.

What a battle we waged all that day and the following night! My father apparently knew what to do, as did our neighbours. Some went about with sticks and stones and shoes crushing all they could. Others as we had a more systematic way. The younger held old sacks while their elders swept them from vegetable plots or shook them from the branches of the trees where especially among the tender leaves of peaches and pi-pahs they at times hung in such numbers that the smallest limbs bent and broke under their weight.

And what buzzards they were! The small black crawling things we had seen but a few weeks before attempting to cross our fires, were now almost birds in dimensions. Many were fully three inches in length and five inches from tip to tip of wing. So they sputtered and fluttered and sprang and glutted while the sound of their gnawing filled the air.

It was a case of every one out. From the youngest child to the oldest dame, all were wanted. Even Lu-lu apparently forgot his restrictions about appearing in pen when the darkness fell, and his prejudice against aiding in the destruction of things emanating from his own soil, and wrought with a will. Fortunately for us the moon rose shortly before midnight so we fought on till morning, on and on without food or rest, until again the sun rose high over the hills, and shed its rays far and wide over our valley.

Then suddenly about nine, the great war gong began to beat once more far up on the castle hill. That was a signal this time for hundreds of other gongs throughout the valleys. Fireworks also came again into play, with the booming of giant

crackers and blunderbusses. The din of the day before was soon in full progress. What could it mean? I glanced toward the Pass. Were we to have yet others upon us, and was the fight to start all anew?

"Trying to raise them," was my father's reply to my queries.

Here and there as the din grew more deafening, dark groups could be seen gathering in the air of the valley. An hour or so later and they were moving slowly down the centre. How the shouts went up and the gongs rattled. They ceased not till we saw the clouds disappear, high over the village and across the turbulent river Tung making their way steadily toward south and east. True many remained here and there, but in the main they had departed, leaving only destruction in their wake.

Neither excitement nor hunger could keep me awake longer. I crawled over among the melon vines just where we had been standing and fell fast asleep, grateful that at last all was over and though sadly smitten, we were again the victors.

But my boyhood confidence had come too soon. When I awoke I found all busy about me. Men, women and such children as were not exhausted and asleep, were at it again. It was not the rattle of gongs and guns this time. It was the slow falling of the mattock, or more silent gouging of knives and sharpened bamboo in the soil.

"What is it?" I called to Lu-lu whom I found busy digging.

"Egg," he answered laconically. "Much egg!"

I bent over an old reed basket half full of something.

"Eggs?" I inquired incredulously.

"Ya! Egg! Much, much egg! Old hen locust lay egg all over," and he swung his arm in gesture to include the valley.

Queer, elongated, worm-shaped things they seemed. I looked at them as they lay there, but drew back from touching them even with the point of a straw.

"Each one, one egg?" I suggested. "Each one hatch out a big locust?"

"Naw!" retorted Lu-lu. "Naw! Each, much egg. One pod turn out twenty, fifty, hundred egg. . . . Just same pea-pod, but lot more."

I asked no more questions. It was easy to see why every one, everywhere, was so busily, anxiously in search of the hidden

menace. I forgot my squeamish sense of touch, even my hunger and was soon busy digging with Lu-lu, scratching about in sands, gravels, clays and beside rocks, wherever a miscreant might lie hidden. A great fire beside a big boulder on the hillside insured certain destruction and a fitting feeling of retribution.

All day the search went on, and the next day and the next. The flight of the winged army had remained with us but parts of brief days and a night. In that they had stripped our trees and vines and vegetables of their more delicate leaves but had on the whole done only comparatively slight damage. But should these slumbering millions awake who could tell our history? So on went the search for a week, then two.

One morning at the beginning of the third week, little black wingless things began to appear here and there hiding themselves under leaves and in denser clusters with an instinct that seemed uncanny. We tried to shake them off but they proved tenacious and tricky. By the next day there were clearly more. By the end of the week despite our most desperate efforts they were covering everything. Go on with our war of destruction we did, again slaying tirelessly night and day. These seemed to spring from the earth as though each grain of sand had suddenly become animate.

Small at first they appeared to double in size daily. Wingless or almost so, they kept bursting some outer covering and each time the wings became more apparent. Black or a dark grey, they appeared to grow more tawny, a characteristic which doubtless gave to them our country's name of the "Yellow-grub."

Had they confined themselves to our fields, gardens and orchards, that had been plague enough assuredly. But in their search for food they travelled everywhere. They covered the paths, clung to the stones, rocks and sides of the buildings, crept through doors, windows and chinks in the walls, into lofts, living-rooms, kitchens, attaching themselves to bedding, clothing, ceilings, and hopping into our boiling rice, our tea bowls, our soups. There seemed no place one could escape them, to stand, to sit, to eat, to sleep. They had possessed our land, our homes, our all. They were the conquerors, we the conquered, every one, everywhere at their mercy.

And what a vengeance they were taking. At first they followed their predecessors in attacking what was left of more tender leaves and plants. By the end of a few days those were gone. They concentrated upon the coarser leaves, until by the end of the second week not a vegetable could be found but was stripped to its stalk. By the third week they were attacking the tough leaves of trees and wild plants upon the hillsides. Thus by the end of a month, there seemed nothing green visible look where we would about our valley. Surely the end must come soon!

But it did not! Five weeks dragged wearily onward. They were devouring the stalks of the vegetables, the twigs, and even the bark of trees. All was gloom. Up at the castle on the hill, I found my warrior uncle all but beaten. The flowers had disappeared first, leaving little May Fay heart-broken for they were her special joy. Vegetables had passed early into the insatiable maws. They were making their way still farther up among dark evergreens and big hardwoods that had crowned the hill. Aunt Grace and May Fay were shut up, almost hermetically sealed, within one room. School was suspended, to the dismay of old Teacher Tang, and the warrior limped about savagely, swearing, storming, smiting the enemy with his big stick only to find them clinging more daringly to his hands, face and big red neck.

Even Lu-lu seemed oppressed. It was well that his people be avenged, his attitude seemed to say, but this was too heartless, too relentless a savagery. Only Wong Yung and the unfortunate Lo-los in the pen appeared to find a gleam of satisfaction. The former was free from school and could spend his time watching the destruction. The latter clanked about their cage, catching the larger grubs to roast them on a crude griddle, or boil them in salted water for future use. Indeed some of our own people driven to desperation tried them as food, after removing head, legs, and wings and declared they tasted not unlike our delicacy, the shrimp.

To me there was one bright incident that intervened to break the nightmare. It came in the form of great bevies of birds. The crow and the sparrow and lark we had ever with us, but now came birds of the mountains and of the southland from our great province of Yunnan, the land of the "Southern

Cloud." What gay plumage they bore as they flitted from rock to rock and branch to branch of the now stripped and fruitless trees.

Day after day and night after night we had been listening to the rasping of the marauders apparently bent not alone upon our ruin but taking a demoniacal delight in tantalizing us to the utmost with their triumph. What a thrill to hear these new notes ringing through our valleys. Alas! Despite their numbers and their notes of victory, they were all too few. It took but a few hours each day to fill them to satiety and then the afternoons and long hot nights had to drag themselves through to the grinding still of a myriad grim gluttons, that gorged and grew and knew no mercy.

Then after forty days, relief came and suddenly. The long scorching days of sunlight had heated our valley to suffocation. A breeze, then a wind sprang up and at length a gale raged down from the hills and higher mountains of Tibet like an avenging fury. The locusts seemed to catch even the earlier sounds as a summons to speed upon their ancestral way. As before they formed in dark groups in the centre. These grew with amazing swiftness until a great stream was moving forward in mid-air, carried by the swiftness of the wind. How we rejoiced as we saw them at last streaming far out upon the open plain. Alas! The very fury of the tempests that whirled and swirled their finally retreating forces turned somewhat to our undoing. It brought down many to abandon the flight and abide with us throughout the long summer, while it so tore and gored the frail wings of other multitudes that they covered our rice fields and choked our little streams. Then their foul stench floated afar for many a weary week to remind us that even in death they would encompass our ruin!

II

THE LAND AND ITS LAIRDS

THE scene is my native land of China. More definitely it is in her great Western province of the Four Streams, that is in our own tongue Sze Chwan. Still more accurately, should you desire such details, the spot is just near to the tumultuous Tung shortly before it joins its waters at the feet of the mighty rock Buddha at Kiating, the "Beautiful," with the tributary Min on its way south from the capital, Chengtu, to meet that mighty "Son of Ocean," the yellow Yangtse.

It is in this region that the haughty Himalayas, having tried in vain to reach the Heavens, at length come tumbling down from the turrets of Tibet to form plains and plateaus for my people. There as a last attempt at altitude stands the far famed sacred peak of the "Beetling Eyebrow," Mount O-mei, with its sheer precipice on the one side and its steep ascent dotted with endless Buddhist temples on the other.

To the north and east of this latter far-seen landmark lies the vast Chengtu plain with its web-like water system, predating the Christian era, and to-day, the home of teeming millions in city, town, and market-place, village, hamlet, and farm cluster.

To the west lies that tumult of far towering turrets and yawning canyons which comprises Tibet, and threading its way there through the tortuous Tung and its companion at times the old official highway from my country to Lhassa.

To the south lies a land of even more mystery, the land of the Lo-lo tribes. This latter is a sort of inland island, for my people in their advance through the centuries have flowed about it on all sides. Yet few have ever entered it or if they have so ventured, have done so never to return.

Almost at the base of the great sacred mountain, lies this valley of which I have spoken. It forms a double "V" or giant capital "W," for at the head the rocky mountain side projects itself slightly, forming a great separating bluff. Down either

side of this flows a stream, the north and south creek, we called them, very tiny indeed or quite dry in winter, to turn into wildly tumbling and tortuous torrents in the spring and summer seasons, as their sediment-laden waters rush roaring along. Halfway down the valley they join, sweep exultantly under the dragon-faced stone bridge in the village, then emerging, rush boldly out into the great Tung to be seized and swirled into oblivion.

According to our family traditions, my ancestors made their way to this wild western outpost from the far east. That furious madman and murderer, Chang Hsien-chung had with his hordes left the land desolate, and my people were among those forced in by compulsory immigration to fill the waste regions. Trekking to and fro, they had finally fixed on this valley as at once giving them advantages of plain and mountain slope and an abundant supply of water.

Our name being Wong,—that is "King,"—gradually gave its name to the place. The recess among the hills was named the Wong Family Valley and when later a small hamlet grew up for the sale and barter of goods, it was spoken of as the Wong Family Market or village.

The village was not, as one thinks of it now, a spot about which much beauty can be boasted. It had grown up rather irregularly. Men had come with their turnips, carrots, cabbage and other vegetables, had washed them in the stream and later exposed them for exchange on the bank. When later the bridge was built a similar situation had been created on the other side. Thus in my day both banks of the stream were still occupied by farmers with their truck, and back of these on either side stood long rows of one-storied straw or tile-covered shops.

To the stranger the scene upon a market day would doubtless have appeared primitive enough, but to us as boys, it was a source of endless wonder. There upon the river banks might be found men, women and children from all over the valley and hillsides assembled everywhere with their varieties of vegetables, and at special spaces, for the sale of pigs, cows, goats and water-buffalo, for the displays of rice, wheat, oats, corn and buckwheat, or for piles of firewood, rough hewn lumber and endless lengths of bamboo poles. Chickens, ducks and an

occasional goose squawked and quacked and cackled in their coops, while people bartered in high-pitched voices of price and protest, cows bawled, goats bleated, donkeys brayed and carriers of occasional sedan chairs swore and shouted furiously as they sought to make their way through the throng.

For the older marketers who wanted a spot where the hum and press was a trifle less intense, there were two rows of shops. There they might buy at leisure their strips of cotton cloth and occasional silks, secure the small round felt or big bamboo hats mostly used by farmers and hillsmen, fill their large baskets with brown paper parcels of tea, sugar, salt and tobacco, or sit down comfortably on the backless benches of the tea and rice shops, while they sipped and ate and smoked and swapped small talk and prices to heart's content.

The valley to me still, though I have since rambled somewhat widely, remains a thing of beauty. I recall it as one emerged from the village and allowed his eyes to traverse its length. Here lay the path by the stream. Then came the parting as the latter separated forking forth to show two sparkling threads far up among the fields and foliage to either side of the bluff. All over the valley my ancestors, with a patient toil at which I still marvel, had fashioned out the uneven surface into innumerable level fields with winding dykes, had terraced the hillsides in pursuit of the production of the ever precious rice plants, and had run seemingly endless tiny ditches, trenches and aqueducts hither and thither for the carrying of the life-giving water.

In the winter and early spring when the sky was clear and the earth dry, wheat and beans and the yellow oil plant, from which latter we secured our light and lard, especially flourished. In the later springtime and summer all was covered with the deep green of the rice blades, the lighter shade of the corn growth on the higher slopes and the blossoms of plum and cherry, apple and quince, orange and peach, pomulo and persimmon, pomegranate and pi-bah, in scattered profusion everywhere. Yes, it was strangely beautiful.

It had not been ever such. It had taken those hundreds of years to turn the crude materials of clay and sand, river and rock into such a picture. It had been a long, stern fight that had lasted for generations. Their weapons for the warfare had

been crude enough. They were but the old-fashioned iron chopper to fell trees, the clumsy mattock to grub the soil, the sickle with which to reap the grain, and, as prosperity came, the one-handled plow, the spiked drag and the stone roller to prepare the ground more properly. For companions in the struggle they had the red ox, patiently bearing burdens upon its back or plowing the hillsides, and the great brindled water-buffalo which pulled so slowly yet so powerfully as it plodded to and fro in the paddy fields of the plain.

Then there had at times been real war with the Lo-los, the aboriginal owners of the district. It was this that had built and still kept the small fort furbished. This stronghold was naturally situated on the rocky promontory formed by the shallow protrusion in the heart of the great " W." Thus it held a high and commanding position. From its vantage ground the whole valley could be surveyed almost at a glance, while from there as a source the sounds of the war drum could send forth its summons almost instantly.

Nor was this a mere matter of strategic theory. The fort had again and again saved the day and the destiny of the little colony. These Lo-lo bands might and did come upon the settlers at any time. Now they crept slowly down the sides of the valley and burst upon every unsuspecting home with startling suddenness. Again they came marching through the Pass, file upon file, shouting their war cries to challenge our people to pitched battle. When and where and how these attacks should break were always secrets securely guarded among their fastnesses, so we could but be ever ready.

At the sound of the big drum, therefore, the men rushed to their homes, seized gun or sword or spear or mattock or sickle and fared forth to the trysting place and to the fight. Should the struggle be prolonged another procession was also sure to appear. It was the scattered, straggling march of the women, children and aged driving their buffaloes and cattle or dragging their reluctant pigs and goats to the safety of the fort. It also required the provisioning of the stockade with rice, vegetables, corn and the securing of other necessities to withstand the indefinite siege.

The present lord of the castle, as I have indicated, was my warrior uncle. He was the oldest of five brothers, and had as-

sumed the headship of affairs due to the growing age of my grandfather. He was therefore occasionally addressed as "Squire" Wong, or Wong "The Great Man." As time went on, however, he was almost everywhere spoken of as Wong Wu, that is Wong the "Military Man," or Wong "the Warrior." His whole frame fitted the name as he was a big, burly, deep-chested man with a very thick neck that ran up behind and on both sides into an almost equal sized and very round head.

Military matters had long been uppermost in his career. He had served for a time under the old Manchu régime, still simulated their military uniform and revelled in all their rough and ready adventures, even to the smashed thigh which had laid him at death's door and left him a cripple for life. These years had taken him practically all over the Empire, so he had come in contact with not only rebellions and riots innumerable, but with the big Western powers up and down our Eastern coast. On the whole, he was inclined to praise these. He certainly admired their military accoutrement and abilities, and flattered himself that he had discovered their secret.

"They know how to do it," he used to repeat, as he hobbled up and down the squeaky guest room floor. "They know how to do it. . . . They're out for wealth as everybody knows . . . and to get wealth you must get territory . . . then you get the world working for you . . . and to get that you've got to learn war and weapons and how to win. . . ."

Old Teacher Tang would screw up his face at that.

"'Rulers of States do not concern themselves about becoming poor, but about the best ways of living quietly and contentedly,'" he would quote from the "Conversations" of Confucius.

He rarely got farther than that until my uncle was upon him.

"Piffle! Fiddlesticks! Blatherdash!" my uncle would cry, coming right up to the desk, limping and puffing, then towering high over the thin old form, belch forth his bellicose creed:

"Fiddlesticks!" I say. "Froth! Blatherdash! Bubbles! . . . Don't teach any stuff like that to my boys or you're fired! . . . Confucius taught that sort of drivel to people two thousand years ago! . . . It may have been good enough then for a lot of peasants and petty tribes, but it won't

work to-day! . . . Only old book moths like you believe that any more! . . . You've had generations of officials stuffed with such soft stuff. . . . But the army knows better . . . and those foreign devils know better. . . . Wealth's what everybody wants, and war's the way to get it. . . ."

Old Tang would bow his head at that, silenced but not convinced.

"Where'd we be with these Lo-los, if we listened to that lingo?" my uncle would demand as a parting shot. . . . "Yes! Where'd we be? . . . They'd have our heads and hides both by to-morrow morning! . . . Hoof it back to the capital and your own province of Shensi if you want to teach that trash. . . . Don't try any of it on these boys. . . . They've got to live right here on the frontier . . . be real fighters! . . ."

Then he would hobble away on his stiff leg, set an incense stick or two straight before his two grim gods of Wealth and War and mutter his way out of the door to the long balcony where he could overlook the plain, and the Pass.

Then old Tang would courageously continue his teaching. A fine cultured old gentleman I consider him now. He had come from our provincial capital, Chengtu, and brought a bit of refinement into our rough border life. He must have rebelled repeatedly against the indifference of his pupils and these tirades from his employer, but he had learned the great gift of patience and that together with his impecunious condition financially held him. But that I am sure was not all. He had a deep appreciation of the Sage, his Master, and doubtless considered it in part his mission to sow the latter's sayings and sentiments in our barren souls.

"Aunt Grace," as I learned to call her, was another dweller within the safer confines of the fort. She was not as might be supposed Uncle Wong's wife, but his younger sister. Uncle Wong in his wars had fallen in with a comrade named Lee who had proved in every way a boon companion and a brave compatriot. Fortune threw them together in many a fight, and it was to Lee that he largely owed his life at the time of his crash with a cannon ball. It was but natural that such a benefactor should visit his home, and the visit had ended with

a betrothal and later a marriage. So my Aunt Grace became Madam Lee.

Marriage had brought the young bride much leisure. As a campaign was at that time being waged against some rebels in mountainous Yunnan, she was left by her husband in the safe environs of the border city of Suifu. There she found for companions many another young officer's wife and a new interest.

"Oh! You must come. You just must come," her new friends urged. "This foreign teacher is perfectly lovely."

"And you learn music, to sing and to play a strange squealy thing they call an organ," chimed in some.

"And they have new needlework . . . and cooking . . . and they teach you to read and write our own language just as though you were a man . . . and how to reckon and a lot of queer things about the earth and flowers and other countries, you never dreamed of before. . . . You just must come. . . . Ask your husband if you may not, right away," added others.

So the youthful bride had sent to ask permission from her new lord to attend the foreign school. It took some months for a reply, but it came at length and on the whole was favourable.

"Try the school along with the wives of Major Mung and Captain Ho," the note agreed. "But never under any circumstance go alone. And keep away from their Worship Hall and especially the Hospital. The latter uses knives and cuts people up when they are sick."

So my Aunt Grace had gone with the élite in quest of the new education. With not a few of her comrades it was but a passing fad, but in my aunt it touched a deeper chord. She too sang some and tried her fingers on the funny keys that gave forth such peculiar tones when pressed, but her chief interest proved to be in the new studies of birds and flowers and the peoples of other lands, their countries, their customs and their histories. She learned to read rapidly and was delighted when her foreign teacher began to lend her books to be read by herself apart from her texts.

An interruption had come later. A little life came to join her own.

"We will call her May Fay! Fair Flying-one!" she wrote

her husband. "For she is so daintily fair and beautiful, never one so rarely so before, and she will fly and flit to and fro between us wherever you may be, carrying messages of laughter and love. You will agree I am sure, my lord!"

He did and heartily, and my aunt was full of happiness. She could not now attend classes at the new school but she could visit on occasions, and her foreign friend graciously supplied her with books. These Western people seemed to have no end of such and most interesting.

Then two great sorrows came in swift succession. The tireless teacher from over the distant seas suddenly sickened and had to be sent to her far-away home. She had in her eagerness overtaxed her body and must recuperate. To the consternation of all it followed that the school, so heartily welcomed, must close indefinitely, until the sweet lady should return, or a substitute be found. To many of the wives of the younger officers that meant a falling back upon gossip and ma-chang and an occasional theatre to while away the time. My aunt went on with her reading, but now there were no longer books from the wider world. She could but read our own lore, Taoist, Confucianist, Buddhist.

Later the greater crash came. It was the sad tidings that Lee had been wounded. That was startling. But the first messenger had little more than arrived when another had followed to say the wounds had proved fatal and her gallant husband was gone. Later still, a full month later, my uncle had arrived with the bier. Custom would require that both body and bride be borne to her husband's home and friends. But these were far away by the great eastern sea, and the son had been long absent. The wife therefore returned to her own old home bringing her sad burden with her. They buried Lee's body on the great hill just back of the old castle, that he might there sleep, if not with his own at least with his wife's ancestors, and where she and his little daughter might almost daily attend his shrine.

My uncle, the Warrior, who had received another wound in the fierce fight, was soon given honourable discharge. All went to live amid the ramparts, rooms and scattered structures of former generations, some recently reared, some almost in ruins, high up on the great and commanding rock.

Fortunately for my aunt it was discovered that her husband had not left her dependent. He had naturally charged my uncle with his concerns and when investigated these were found to include a rather unusually goodly sum safely placed away in one of the great banks at the coast. Thus my good aunt was free, not indeed to live a life of idleness, but to devote herself to the rearing of her little daughter, to procure and ponder books for herself and to do good deeds that made her name fragrant all down the valley.

As time went on she became deeply interested in a phase of the teachings of the Buddha. Her favourite was Pu-hsien, the God of "Universal Worth," the patron saint of our own great sacred mountain of O-mei. I do not think, however, that it was mere proximity that captured her allegiance. Buddhism is opposed to all destruction of life, and my aunt had deep cause for hatred of war, it having wrested her loved one from her. Nor was it simply that Pu-hsien appears in the form of a man, though she may have had her longings for such from many a precious memory. It was rather that Pu-hsien impersonates all that is worthy in intelligence and culture, happiness and kindness, and that he especially loves little children. He must, therefore, assuredly cherish her child and May Fay was the very core of my dear aunt's heart.

But she loved our Sage and his saying also. Indeed it was she who when her little daughter began to reach maturity persuaded my uncle to call a teacher. May Fay was approaching ten and Wong Yung my uncle's son was well on in his teens. To my aunt it was robbing both of their birthright not to know our long history and its lore. She had, therefore, in her usual quiet way inquired carefully as to a suitable teacher for their household and old Teacher Tang from the capital became the worthy choice. Many times too was she called in for the old man's protection for my military uncle was ever and anon persuaded that such teaching but made for fear and feebleness, and he wanted only fighters in his family. Men of honour, it should be added, for he equally despised the cad with the coward, but martial men, men of muscle and of might. He rather rejoiced to see his own boy growing up big and bellicose.

It was enlivening to watch my aunt challenge and calm him at such times.

"True! True!" she would agree. "Our father brought us up to worship the God of Wealth. His image is still in the old home . . . and wealth is good if it is won worthily and used wisely.

"And war? Yes. Our ancestors also made war, fought fiercely, but it was mainly war with chopper and mattock and sickle against woods and weeds and stubborn earth."

"And marauding, murdering Lo-los," my uncle would bluster and grow red.

"Yes! True again," the quiet lady would agree. "Our people had to defend themselves, but even there they did it best by simple concessions to their chiefs and friendship and fair play. We must learn the secret of that way also. To many all down our history I note it has seemed better than war. We must have that knowledge too."

Then my uncle would grunt furiously and go hobbling out.

"War may be necessary at times," she would add turning to us. "It may be we must still use it to guard our lives and possessions, but even wealth is not the end. No! No! The great end is neither war nor wealth but worth! "

Thus my aunt had her way with our teaching, but my uncle would listen to but one counsel for the Lo-los. He had brought back with him a score or more of modern rifles and with these he easily overpowered his ancient enemy. To give further guarantee of peace he had demanded that suitable hostages be given. A half dozen great hulking and unhappy wretches constantly confined within the old keep at the rear of the castle, and Lu-lu the big Chief's son were the result. The former sulked and soured and starved, if not for food at least for freedom. The latter had more of liberty being free each day until nightfall, but grew ever more embittered especially by the bullying of Wong Yung.

So my aunt would return to her rooms to commune with her God of Worth, and my uncle come back as regularly to worship his twain Gods of Wealth and War.

III

AN OLD SPORT AND ITS SEQUENCE

MY first meeting with the dwellers in the castle was a very simple but for me significant one. I had been out on the mountain side helping my elders cut the underbrush we used for fuel. As we worked, a thrush attracted our attention by his especially clear and challenging notes. So I hied me home for the big bird net. It took great caution and much cunning and calling but by night we had him ensnared and then transferred to a good wooden cage.

He proved not only a splendid singer but what mattered more to our way of thinking in those days, an unusually fine fighter. I tried him out on several others along the creek side near my home and then down at the village. He lost not a single battle.

That set me longing to climb the hill to the castle. I did not know the dwellers there in those days, or rather they did not know me. I had often seen my Uncle Wong ride forth on his fine mule followed by his band and considered him very fierce and awe inspiring. I had even ventured near to Wong Yung, his son, once or twice, but though I knew he was my cousin, I had never spoken or dared to claim relationship. Was not he the son of the great military man, the head of our clan, and was not my father but a farmer, the second and therefore unimportant brother?

But I knew that Wong Yung boasted that he had the best fighting bird in the valley, that he had put out more than one challenge for a duel with other would-be owners of champions, and that he had, according to report, always retained his title.

It was Lu-lu, the Lo-lo, who aided me in my ambition. Rambling all about the valley as he did, he heard of my treasure and watched its action knowingly. After a fine battle he followed me on the pathway home; stopping me in a semi-secluded spot among the mulberry trees, he began to whisper.

"Sell me that bird," he said and showed his white teeth ingratiatingly. "How much?"

"No! I won't sell," I answered.

"Why not?" he continued in his direct style of speech. "Why not? I catch you three, four for him. . . . Yes?"

"No! No! I want to keep him. . . . I like to see him win. . . . I can make more money on him than on half a dozen others."

"Then I catch you young fox . . . young bear . . . catch you young monkey, make lots of fun?"

"No! I'm not going to sell at any price," said I, readily judging from Lu-lu's attitude that my bird must be worth some big stake.

"No, you not sell him. . . . Not sell him anybody. . . . That quite right. . . . He best bird all up down the mountains. . . . No sell! . . . No! No sell! Not anybody! But you loan him me. . . . You loan him me one day . . . just one day. . . . I give you him back sure . . . and show you where wild squirrel live, eh? . . . show you where wild bee got lots honey . . . eh? Good? . . . No? You want money? . . . Then I give you one string . . . two . . . three . . . I think, maybe . . . ten strings cash . . . big cash!"

Then he stopped and eyed me closely.

"No," I parried. "You'd take him away into the hills, away back into Lo-lo land, or he might get killed and I'd never see him again. . . . No! I'm not going to either sell or loan him."

But Lu-lu stood straight in my path and his big black eyes flashed at me with a strange look I had never seen there before. I began to be afraid for not only was he bigger than I but was one of the tribesmen in the hills whom we both suspected and feared.

"Get out of my way and let me go home," I began in a higher voice and ready to call for help if need be. "Get out of my way, or I'll yell for my father."

"No! No!" he said and his voice grew lower still. "You good boy. . . . You be my good friend. . . . I help you some time, see!"

Then a new gleam seemed to flash forth.

"I got it," he said. "I got it. . . . You know Wong Yung. . . . He big bully. . . . He think he big man's

son, he beat everybody," and he gripped my arm with a hold that held like rawhide. "He blow all over no one lick him. . . . You lick him. . . . You lick him. . . . You smaller boy lick him well. . . . I help you. . . . We lick him we two. . . . Ya! Ya! . . . I your good friend. . . . See! . . . I call him come with his bird to big fight to-morrow! . . ." and Lu-lu whispered with such earnestness, his words almost hissed.

The thought of winning against Wong Yung, the champion of the valley and the son of the big uncle on the hill, thrilled me anew.

"But Wong Yung has won over everybody," I expostulated. "His bird will kill mine and then I'll have none . . . and he'll be blowing harder than ever."

"No! No! Never fear!" whispered Lu-lu. "I know bird. . . . I know all bird all over. . . . Yours finest fighter yet. . . . No fear. . . . To-morrow! Yes?"

Lu-lu's confidence must have been contagious. Before I well knew we were making arrangements. Lu-lu was to challenge Wong Yung to a bird duel right in the castle grounds. It was to be presumed that the bird for the time being was his. He would demand big stakes, and should we win, I was to get all. I thought Lu-lu would want a share, but he shook his head.

"Only smash that Wong Yung big bully head," he said. "Just smash big bully head good . . . good! That my pay."

Then I felt for the first time that Wong Yung and Lu-lu were enemies, that Wong Yung had done something to earn Lu-lu's hate, and it was bitter, savage, seeking revenge.

The next day Lu-lu was at my home down the glen at dawn. He gave me some pointers on feeding the bird on raw meat which he had secured and some rare insects. Then we gave it a bath and it came out looking superb.

Arrived at the castle Lu-lu led the way around to the back of the garden. The fight was to be quite private under the shade of a big persimmon tree. Only Wong Yung and old Hung, the drummer, were to be present, the latter a sort of second to Yung. Both smiled when Lu-lu presented me, a mere youngster, as his supporter.

Old Hung looked at my bird rather shrewdly, however, and

muttered something about a stiff scrap, but Wong Yung was full of confidence. My dark brown challenger seemed small and insignificant compared with his big white winner. We spent no time over preliminaries, so the fight was soon on.

We were all intent on the struggle when to my surprise others began to appear. Uncle Wong I at once recognized and his henchman Factotum Fang. Wong Yung was evidently sure of victory and had let his father and friends into the secret. In a few moments a half dozen others had arrived. Among them I noted Aunt Grace and little May Fay. The latter came racing ahead and insisted on being right up close to the large cage which formed the arena.

Unfortunately for Wong Yung, the result of the contest scarce ever seemed in doubt. From the first my brownie showed his superiority. Wong Yung's bird had apparently but one commendable virtue in such a fray, he could endure almost endless punishment. He pecked out savagely, struck with his wings, turned and parried and tried hard to send home his spurs. But brownie was rarely there. He seemed to flit about constantly just out of reach, yet ever ready to pull a feather from the big white neck, to seize the red comb for a short, sharp, pitiless wrench or to drive his pointed beak straight into the right or left eye of his enemy.

Most of the company squatting around said nothing. Uncle Wong and the ladies leaned forward on their stools but uttered not a word save an occasional grunt from the former. Wong Yung wanted to interfere once or twice but old Hung held him back. The most vocal spectator was May Fay. She danced about full of delight. Her sympathies were all with the "Wee-one" as she named my contestant. Once when the white bird succeeded in using its wings to good effect and sent the small brown bundle limp to the floor, she could scarce be restrained from upsetting the cage. Her enthusiasm, therefore, knew no bounds when finally the big bird made for a corner, sticking its bleeding head far out through the bamboo slats to avoid further torture.

"The wee one wins," she shouted. "Go it, Wee-one! Go it!" and she clapped her hands in glee as the white feathers flew about like snowflakes from the neck of the vanquished.

Wong Yung glared at her and muttered something savagely

under his breath. He did not dare to speak openly before Uncle Wong and Aunt Grace.

"Ha! Ha!" she retorted, evidently doubly overjoyed at his discomfiture. "Ha! Ha! Cousin Yung! You're licked! You're licked! You're licked! . . . Lu-lu's champion now."

Wong Yung's face grew dark with anger.

Lu-lu's white teeth showed a bit despite his attempts at self-control, and he shot me a glance of triumph.

"Beaten in a fair fight!" roared out Uncle Wong. "Come, pay up! How much did you bet?"

"Five strings of cash!" Wong Yung muttered.

"Ten," ejaculated Lu-lu, his white teeth snapping together. "It was ten. . . . Hung knows!"

The latter remained silent. He would not speak against his young master, but he too believed in a square deal.

"Ten, it was! Ten it'll be!" again roared Uncle Wong as he twisted around his stiff leg trying to gain his feet.

"I said five if one wins, ten if one kills," Wong Yung growled.

Old Hung still said nothing.

I slunk away. I did not want to be about if there was to be trouble. While the dispute went on I made my way over to the low wall that protected the garden from the precipice and busied myself hunting for worms and beetles for my bird. I could trust Lu-lu to see that he got full, satisfying revenge over Yung.

The strife did not subside immediately, so I wandered on some distance, kicking over dead leaves, twigs and rubbish as I went. The end of a small surface drain seemed a promising spot and I scratched about slowly, still listening to the squabble going on.

"Ten strings of good cash," Lu-lu was stating with strong emphasis on the good. The number was apparently settled, but Lu-lu was exacting the last ounce of sweet revenge.

Rooting about in the rubbish, I turned up something unusual. It was red in colour. As I brought it to the surface, I discovered it was some sort of paper. It was a book and I turned it over carefully. It proved to be a small, thin one with rather stiff red covers. It had been dampened a bit by the moisture but not seriously defaced. I looked inside, and was still more

puzzled. True I could not read at that time, but I could see at once that the characters within were not Chinese.

"Lo-lo words," I mumbled to myself, for I had heard from Lu-lu and others that the hill people had some sort of writing among their wizards.

So I closed it and made a dive after a worm which had wriggled out on the surface of the soil.

"Dan! Dan! Wong Dan!" I soon heard Lu-lu's voice calling me.

He met me as I hurried along the winding ways.

"Yung wants. . . . Don't sell! . . . Don't sell!" he whispered.

But the bargain was not to be argued. Just as I reached the group, little May Fay dashed forward and drew the strange book from my hand.

"Oh! Mother! Mother! Here it is. . . . Here it is," she shouted and running to her mother placed the book in her hands.

"Good! Good! Splendid!" cried Aunt Grace.

The delight of the latter was plainly evident. She turned the pages over hurriedly, blushed a bit, then hid it in her big sleeve.

"That boy had it," May Fay's voice was ringing out again. "That boy over there with Lu-lu. . . . Perhaps he stole it, mother, ask him . . . ask him."

But Aunt Grace was in too happy a mood to enter upon a trial for theft. She called me to her and inquired who I was.

"My name is Wong," I answered as politely and as quietly as I could. "My name is Wong Dan. . . . I am the son of Wong-Er, down in the valley."

"Ah! Wong the second's boy," belched my big uncle, who stood near by.

"Wong the second's boy," repeated Aunt Grace kindly. "Then you're my nephew. . . . And where did you get the little book?"

I told her. There was a hesitation in the company which I did not understand.

"Show us the spot," demanded my uncle.

I led the way, and they were soon by the depression where the drain ran under the wall. As usual May Fay was ahead and was digging her fingers down into the stuff. A moment

more and the tiny hand held something. It was only a thin bit of paper, but apparently that too was important.

"That's the label off the cover," exclaimed my aunt.

"And that settles it," broke in my uncle. "It's plain the lad found it right there."

"What were you doing up here?" he demanded turning abruptly upon me.

I hesitated. What should I say? But Lu-lu came to the rescue.

"It's his bird, Sir," he hastened to answer. "That brown thrush is his. I just borrowed it for the fight. . . . He's the owner and came along to see the fun."

That seemed to give me a standing at once with my uncle. It was one thing apparently to have his son beaten by a Lo-lo. It was quite another thing to fall before his brother's son.

"Hah! Haw! Haw!" he laughed in his big voiced way. "So you're a fighter, too, sonny. . . . You've got some of the Wong blood and bone in you, eh?" and he put his hand on my head and turned my face up toward his big round, red one.

"Well, Yung'll make that twelve strings of cash. . . . Where is he?" But Yung had slunk away.

Later I learned the cause. It was the little red book. It proved to be Aunt Grace's account book with a great foreign bank in far-off Shanghai. Yung had learned that the book was in some way connected. Watching his opportunity he had filched it and disappointed at finding nothing save paper and strange characters had thrown it among the leaves and rubbish of the ditch. When investigation arose he had managed to prove an alibi and had laid the blame on Lu-lu. Ten days' detention in the guard house and a severe starving of the latter had revealed nothing. He had obstinately maintained his innocence, and was set free under suspended sentence for ten days in the hope that he might reveal the stolen property.

"Fetch him here," howled my uncle to old Hung. "No son of mine can crawl out that way. Fetch him here double quick!"

Hung returned soon to say that Yung had gone down the valley.

"Then fetch his cash," cried the man of wars, circling about his stiff leg in fury. "Fetch his cash, I say. I'll show him that it pays to pay up what he promised. Fetch all he has."

Hung returned again laden down with strings of heavy cash.

"How much?" stormed the still angry uncle.

Hung counted them out as he threw them slowly from shoulder to sward.

"Fifteen strings," he announced.

"Fifteen strings. Good! Take them all, boy. Take them all," he chuckled in a sudden change of mood, turning to me. "You're worthy of the Wongs. Take them all!"

I hesitated but Lu-lu as my backer began to gather them together.

My aunt was also most gracious. She could not thank me enough, she declared, for my good service in finding the book. It had cost her much worry and concern. She must give me something but what she could not just then decide.

May Fay's tribute was to seize my fingers, first of one hand, then of the other, and swing in circles about me, dancing jubilantly.

"They said 'twas me . . . and they said 'twas Lu-lu . . . and I know who it was. . . . 'Twas Wong Yung. . . . Wong Yung. . . . Wong Yung!"

But that was too much for my proud old uncle. He turned away. My aunt followed hushing May Fay as she went. Lu-lu gathered up the cash to the last string and motioned to me to follow. I did so, dangling my precious bird by my side. His feathers seemed still sadly dishevelled, but he hopped about his cage warily as though ready for another war.

We were well down the valley before Lu-lu ventured a word. Then he paused by a big boulder, and turned his face full upon me.

"Now you my good friend for always," he whispered. "Wong Yung big thief . . . big liar . . . big bully. You my good friend . . . always . . . always."

"But 'twas you," I began. "'Twas you told me to take the bird."

"No! No!" he broke in. "Bird no matter . . . money no matter. . . . Wong Yung lose fight, good! Wung Yung lose money also good! Good! Wong Yung sure sneak big thief. Old man know that now. . . . That most good! Yah!"

Lu-lu repeated that many times as we wound our way to my

home. He evidently deeply resented and doubtless rightly Wong Yung's trick of turning the theft upon him. Of his imprisonment and starvation he said nothing. The sting was that he should be suspected of being a common thief. Now the suspicion was on Wong Yung and his sense of justice was satisfied. Wong Yung was his enemy, I henceforth was to be his friend. It was impossible to persuade him to share the spoils. He would not receive a single cash.

"All yours," he insisted. "All yours. You win cash. I win much things. I still be your debt long time . . . very long time."

He showed his white teeth with evident pleasure, then he turned and loped off to the fort.

Naturally I saw much of him after our affair of the bird battle. But I was to see more. Scarce a week passed after that event when Aunt Grace sent word to my home that she was about to make us a visit. She came with fine gifts to my parents and words of much praise for me. Best of all she came to request that I be permitted to leave the labours of our little plots and go to live upon the mountain there to take up studies with Wong Yung and his teacher.

Personally I was rather hesitant. I loved the streams and sands and trees and birds and butterflies, loved them the more now that Lu-lu was leading me into some of his strange lore. Moreover, though I knew Wong Yung but slightly I had naturally taken some of Lu-lu's attitude toward him. But Aunt Grace assured us that both she and our great uncle were agreed that it should be done, that she was prepared to send me forward to high scholarship should I succeed, and that even Wong Yung had requested it. My parents, therefore, after some consideration agreed and I obedient to their wish was transferred to the circle on the great hill.

Lu-lu, long trained to conceal his opinions said nothing, though it was plain to me that he largely disapproved. However, little May Fay was all delight. She too shared the big guest room that was the scene of our studies, repeating as best she could the intricate characters and concepts, and it was worth much loss in songs of larks and sights of blue skies to hear constantly the lisping of her crimson lips and see the glad glances her dancing eyes gave. Even Wong Yung seemed re-

lieved to have some one share the attention of old Teacher Tang and as for the latter, it was evident from his tones, though his attitude proved unbending, that he appreciated my powers of memory and skill in the brush.

Thus the months ran speedily on and other autumns came and went and then winters and again a springtide was turning into summer when May Fay burst in that morning with her startling report that the locusts were upon us.

IV

DESOLATION BUT NOT DESPAIR

IT is difficult to conceive the consternation and suffering that this catastrophe brought us. I recall best my own old home on the north side of the valley, almost opposite the Pass to the south that led to Lolo-land. There it snuggled cosily into a nook just where the great slope rose from the valley floor and stretched away to the mountain and plateau above.

Outside our home, circling about it and climbing the slopes, clustered our orchard. There my brother, my cousin or I could lead quickly to trees of cherries and apricots, plums, yellow and blue, peaches, pears, and luscious persimmons, conical or square, pi-bahs with their little yellow bundles, pomegranates with their endless red seeds, pomeloes almost breaking their branches with great pumpkin-like fruits, oranges loose skin or tight, and row upon row of luscious grapes. Could any spot be more beautiful in springtide with its blossoms and breezes and slowly droning bees, or more bountiful in autumn when each fruit hung its burden down as though bowing to your coming!

Our farm lay just below us in the valley. It consisted of some twelve acres, and was considered a large holding. My wealthy warrior uncle held very much more, but he was the God of Wealth of the valley. We held just eighteen fields, each over a half acre in size, with its dyke and level bottom to retain the all-important water.

These fields and those of our neighbours running in endless winding curves and rising and falling tiers and terraces far and wide and up and down the valley formed a scene of ever changing crops and colours. In April the streams on either side as they came roaring down from the hills swollen with sediment-laden waters, were ingeniously turned aside into great ditches to span the valley at its upper end. Thus with little labour on the part of our people the fields are filled with water to proper levels. This completed, the valley appeared as a million miniature lakes, each with its calm surface mirroring the surround-

ing mountains, or the sun, moon, stars and sky, white wandering clouds or the grey expanse above.

A few weeks later and all had changed. Out from the small nurseries where the seed had been sown in richest soil and shoots had grown, thick, rank and tall, rice plants were brought in little sheaves. Then through the fields men and boys, and occasionally even our women in tubs, went plashing or pushing about, laying the sprouts in rows a few inches apart. What days of companioning, chattering and calling to co-workers they were! In a week the whole surface had been transformed into row upon row of green, to later completely cover the waters and mingle with endless borders of blue bean blossoms that lined and bedecked the retaining dykes.

By August the deep green slowly turned to yellow and gold. Again our people sallied forth. They were the halcyon days of harvest. They brought indeed long hours and much hard labour, but to the toilers themselves also large measure of hope and happiness. So they moved to and fro with their sickles, gathering the heavy sheaves, lashing and threshing them thundrously over the edges of big plank boxes and carrying straw and grain sacks slowly home, while the harvest songs that had come down from our ancestors for four thousand years filled and thrilled each home and heart.

September and again the scene had changed. The great grey water buffalo dragged the crude plow, or the toilers were busy with their rows of mattocks across the rice stubble. Soon rape and barley were sown, or hidden among the rice, the vetch which had been growing slowly now came forth to cover the fields, a rich fodder for pigs and cattle and fertilizer for prospective winter grains.

Late November saw these latter well sown. Slowly they grew through the sunshine months of winter, and by spring revealed themselves in field upon field of wheat and pease and beans, checkered here and there and everywhere with the flaunting flowers of the yellow oil-plant. When these appeared we knew that spring was upon us once more and with it the rice and rushing streams. But now all we had and hoped for was gone, gone with the grim reapers!

Our women too were to sit idly for a time where hands and feet and fingers had hurried daintily and deftly. At no season

were they usually quite so employed as in those days of spring when the tender leaves of the mulberry trees began to burst from the twigs. It was then that they searched the lofts for what seemed old bundles of brown paper and brushed away carefully the dust. Sheet by sheet these were laid in the sun, or even at times tied snugly about their own backs and bodies, to give warmth.

A few days revealed the reason. Little black wrigglers began to appear among the cottony stuff upon the paper's surface. No, not locusts! This time they were our oldest and best benefactors. They were the tiny tots of our silkworm. How they grew as day after day they devoured the tender leaves. Each week they seemed to rest for a day, only to burst and cast aside their vestments, and larger grown eat ever more voraciously. Four times or so of this, then at the end of a month, their energy seemed to cease. Their big sleek skins took on a yellow hue. They crept over the leaves, seeking the twigs and there right before our eyes wove themselves within a sort of bobbin of thread whose delicacy and beauty must ever remain baffling and bewildering to man.

Then how the nimble fingers of our women-folk flew. These cocoons must be plunged into boiling water, the delicate fibrils caught and reeled into a thread, these latter selected and skeined and weighed and then made ready for the market or the loom. It was their harvest, and they worked with a will. Last of all a few specially strong and well coloured specimens must be allowed to run their course. From these in time came forth a modest grey moth, that rather bewilderedly went about laying eggs on other sheets of brown paper prepared for the purpose, then died to be brushed aside, but leaving promised posterity to arise next springtide, whom our people would pronounce blessed. Alas! Alas! The mulberry branches were gaunt, bereft of all leaves. There could be no nourishment for the tiny silkworms this season—and our women wept disconsolately!

As for boys, our happiest days were usually with the ducks. It was ever an exciting time when some one called:

"Incubators! The incubators!"

Then we hurried away into the room reserved for implements and junk and bringing forth a series of old pots, proceeded to set them carefully in order in one end of the big kitchen. It

usually required two, a fair sized crock with a broken arc in which to set some charcoal, and another of an appropriate size to fit upon the top. Into this latter was placed a fitting quantity of straw, then a setting or so of eggs. The skill lay in knowing when and how to turn the eggs and how hot to keep the charcoal fire. But these once learned the chief thrill lay in being allowed to sit up and take turns through the night for the many days needed to aid nature in her process.

Once hatched and watched for a few days, the rest of the task seemed play. We carried our charges to the rice field and there instinct did the rest. They soon joined themselves to other broods and were floating, diving, feeding about, fully prepared to seek their own prosperity.

Throughout the summer they fended for themselves. Only when the rice began to ripen did we turn them aside for a time. Then as soon as the harvest was reaped they were again returned to their paradise, to run about everywhere, gabbling gleefully as they joined in the gleaning.

Soon followed the time for marketing. They were not killed and plucked and cleaned as some might suppose. Our people dealt with them in quite a different way. All ducks in the valley that were ready for market were gathered into groups of hundreds. These were then slowly driven forward by us boys with long bamboo poles. They were given plenty of time to pass from field to field as they made their way down the valley, eating their fill daily as they went slowly forward.

Thus by the end of the first day they were but a few small fields away. By the end of the week they had passed the village and were leaving the valley. By the end of a month they had passed far over the great plain to the east and had arrived at our prefectural city, Kiating, or some other big centre where there was a ready market. In this rather ingenious and inexpensive way the ducks had each and all paid their own transportation, picked up their living off the country through which they had passed and had now arrived at their destination, all fat and fit and ready for the pot.

Alas again! Here too hope vanished and we hung our heads and hushed our hearts. How could our fledglings live since all green things had perished! Indeed, despite our diligence and ingenuity at the best of times many of our people were

usually hard pressed by poverty, for though our fields gave much there were many mouths to fill.

I well recall at the end of the preceding year casting up rough accounts for my family. I had now been at school some time and thanks to old Teacher Tang had made some progress in writing, so felt greatly honoured when my father summoned me to sit down with him, my uncle and my grandsire to aid them with the abacus.

I recall too the final findings from our small farm and their united labours. The total for food for the year would be just $108. Ten people to exist on such a sum seemed impossible. It would be but ninety cents per person per month or three cents each per day. But both our men-folk and women made no demur.

"We will work it out somehow," my mother had suggested bravely. "You four men and three big boys can have $12 each or three and a third cents per day. We two women can get along on $9 each or two and a half cents, and the little niece here will fare well on $6, or one and two-thirds cents daily."

"Yes, there are many not so fortunate as we," agreed my grandsire. "We may well thank the good God of Wealth."

And they did. Many candles flickered and points of fragrant incense floated upward to him and to our ancestors as we worshipped that New Year's eve.

Now in the midst of our high expectations for another year, had come this wild catastrophe. What a picture of desolation it was. It imprinted itself indelibly upon my boyish memory. Rice fields no longer green with luxuriant growth but grey with water on which floated thousands of decaying locusts. Dykes where pease had bloomed in varieties of blue now barren as winter. Garden and orchard and vine and swaying bamboo all stripped and naked, and on hillside, dale or high plateau neither blade of grass, nor stock of corn, nor leaf to fern and bracken. All gone. The grim legions of destruction had wrought well their work of woe and desolation.

Little wonder that our people passed about for a time silent, half dazed by the dire scene and prospect before them. Small wonder that the poor people came pouring down from the uplands eager to tell of their unhappy plight, then stood dumb as they saw the rich valley equally destitute. Small wonder

that we boys after our first glow of triumph at seeing the hordes depart, went about questioning as to what our elders would and could do, and stamped our feet in desperation. We had yet to learn the unconquerable spirit and resource of our people!

In Western lands I'm told such a matter as a small valley of a few thousand people suffering would mean at most a head liner in some daily paper. Then the generosity of the public and the resources of the government would have trains and trucks and Red Cross contingents hurrying to the scene with ample provision in foods and fruits and funds for all the contingencies. As for us we have not yet approached such solidarity and coöperation. Not that our people are less charitable or considerate by nature, but the thought runs that each home and group unless bound by most intimate ties of blood, must shift for itself. So our neighbouring settlements out upon the plain but went their way, congratulating themselves that they had escaped catastrophe. As for the government, if the news even reached them, in county, district or provincial capital, they heard it but as one of many misfortunes, and wondered whether it would in any way affect the possibility of gathering the taxes in the autumn.

Each group must shift for itself. Our people knew it well and asked no aid! They had fought many a hard fight before and would somehow win again or at least die struggling. The black clouds of our destroyers had little more than disappeared in the distance that day, when my warrior uncle as chief "Protector-of-Rights," summoned his subordinate protectors to take counsel. I see them yet as they sat about the big round table in the castle guest room.

Old men they were in the main with faces deep wrinkled with years and fears and exposure to all suns and seasons. Two or three still wore the long queues of the old Manchu régime, but most had discarded the badge of submission and their grey hair was cropped close or hung loose about their heads. The long blue gown and sandals formed the usual garb, but a few more prosperous, and my father among them, affected a satin jacket and low shoes of dark cloth. Each sat silently, sipping the bowl of tea his host had provided, or speaking in low tones to his neighbour.

There were few preliminaries. When all had assembled and

sipped for a time, the warrior from his place at the head, raising his voice slightly, asked simply:

"What's to be done?"

There were no long tales of woe and appeals for aid. For some time each again sat silently. Then one ventured, with old-fashioned courtesy:

"Let the Great Man teach us!"

"Each will give his teaching," came my uncle's reply.

Then one by one they offered their counsel.

"The gardens may still be sown for late vegetables," suggested one.

"The dykes might yet grow a few beans," offered another.

"In some fields the water is deep. There the rice has still some stalk. It might be wise to rake these again and urge them to greater growth. The shallower fields on the higher areas seem ruined. They probably should be drained and sown with early rape or barley," this from my father.

These and other suggestions were considered and consented to quietly. A few more deliberations over details of co-operation and the groups were again winding down the great steps, and dispersing in the valley, each to make known the decisions among heads of families and others.

"Fight!" was the warrior's last word. "Wealth's the goal and war's the way." Each nodded assent as he went forth to the fray.

But the fight was to be both long and laborious. It was not an easy matter to dig again the gardens and plow again those fields in which the rice was ruined. It was not easy to replant the seeds or resow the grain. It was harder still for the men and women of the plateau to make long journeys out to the villages upon the plain and return with pole loads of vegetables for our people, and for themselves. It all meant long hours each day, extending far into the night, much bitter labour as we toiled with slow moving mattock in the midst of the midsummer's sun. It also meant much deprivation in such simple things as salt and tea and greens and meats, for now all must be saved to meet the losses in our already meagre incomes.

Worst of all the long heat that had brought the locusts continued. The summer rains had been unusually short. The

brooks upon either side of the valley diminished to a mere trickle then dried up and the few fish died in their pools. But water must be had for newly planted gardens and new sown fields, and equally so for the rice that might remain.

Fortunately for us down beyond the village the Tung still brought its waters from the far-off snows and glaciers of Tibet. That must be our source now. So day after day and night after night our people uncomplainingly sought its supply. Those who were strongest and hardiest of our men manned the pumps. These indeed were but crude concerns, three boards as a trough to make a runway, then rough wheels at either end and a series of paddles strung together to form an endless chain, and with these they must fill trenches from river and field. That meant to sit all day long at the endless treadmills creaking everywhere turning the wheels with weary legs and feet, while sweat and sun and friction blackened and blistered.

Yet hour after hour they toiled, until from the river's banks each tiny field far and wide up the long slope of the valley had its refreshing supply. As for our women and youths, we wrought as did the others with pole and bucket and ladle carrying the water from the fields to our gardens and higher areas. That too meant many a weary foot, backs and bones wracked with pain and shoulders covered with big welts of worn surface, but how could we do otherwise under such a war and with elders so worthy of our best?

It was a long stiff struggle but the well tended soil gradually responded to our labours. Trees and hillsides still remained bare of leaves and grass, but gradually green began to take the place of grey in garden plot and paddy field and on winding dykes. All had toiled bravely, bitterly, most had felt the stern scrimpings of sacrifice, and many had accumulated fresh debts for the coming years. Yet few, save those from the hills, had gone absolutely hungry and all felt the thrill of good days returning and of deeds that would live as a rich legacy in our local legends.

V

PLAGUES AND PHYSICIANS

WE had just begun to recover our spirits after months of bitter labour when a new disaster threatened us. This time it was plague. The departing locusts had left their dead behind to haunt and harry us even more cruelly than had their living. Their bodies had filled not only our fields but our wells, and poisoned our waters.

The dire scourge of dysentery came first. That was not a new visitor. Our people had known it frequently. Old Teacher Tang, who read the books on medicine as well as the classics, prescribed rhubarb. Fortunately that was securable. The people of the plateau knew well its haunts up among the hills and Lu-lu and I hurried here and there through the valley distributing it widely.

What pitiable sights we saw. Neighbours, their wives, their children stretched out upon crude beds, or floors or fields retching, purging violently. Whole families down together so that no one could give aid to the other save by extreme exertion. Big black coffins carried from the village for the elders, and hurriedly-made boxes for the younger generations, then a constant clang, clang of processions as they wound up the hillside to the left where stood the great clan cemetery.

A quack doctor on the street made harvest of it all. He hurried hither and thither selling all sorts of grim concoctions of weeds and barks, rocks and clays, ground skins and bones guaranteed to give relief. The Taoist priests, too, were busy all day long in their temples chanting prayers and ceremonies to their gods, selling charms to eager suppliants, or going forth at nights to aid the sorcerers in their capture of the devils that brought the disease. Busiest of all, however, were the geomancers looking out sites for graves where the souls of the departed might rest in peace.

Both my own family and that of my uncle were fortunately saved from these ravages. That was doubtless due to the fact that being better circumstanced our wells were covered with

caps of stone which preserved their purity. But a violent fever soon followed which brought even wider desolation.

Perhaps it was because I had gone so much among the people and so suffered most from exposure, that I was among our people the first of our family to succumb. It was some form of malaria. Possibly our rice fields being more than usually stagnant gave breeding grounds for ever greater swarms of mosquitoes. I know that I lay for alternate days shivering until my muscles, bones, teeth chattered and rattled, to be followed by hours of burning until my eyes swam in their sockets and my brain whirling and galloping in mad career.

My good aunt came again and again to visit me, bringing little May Fay who looked on piteously. Old Teacher Tang was also in daily attendance. He searched the ancient lore for guidance and subjected me to endless pinchings and pluckings until my every joint was black and blue, but still the fever did not abate. He even allowed, much against his literary prejudices, the Taoists to write special charms on yellow paper which I had to swallow. But still the fever raged. I think I should have died had it not been for Lu-lu. He at much cost in climbing went hourly to a spring among the steep crags and brought me fresh cool water. This I drank copiously and with it bathed my brow and burning body. Then one day after a time of torpor the fever broke and I was left weak and weary.

I was making slow progress toward recovery when Lu-lu brought other tidings.

"Small girl down," he announced.

"What, May Fay?" I demanded, aroused into energy.

"Ya! Old teacher there all time!"

Weeks later Lu-lu helped me up the hill. It was now my turn. I would aid my aunt and the little maid to my utmost. A strange feeling went through me at the thought that the latter could be ill, she who was all lilts and leaps and laughter! How could she succumb to any sickness? There seemed something impossible, incongruous in such a thing.

But I found it too true! There she lay on my aunt's porch, her big eyes unnaturally alight, her cheeks unusually bright and burning.

"I've got your fever, Dan," she tried to smile as though she were proud of it, but the effort seemed unreal.

I did not return home. Somehow I could not. May Fay seemed to search for me with those big dark eyes of hers, and I wanted someway to be near her, to aid her with little attentions and attempts at talk.

Old Teacher Tang true to his books tried to keep her within a darkened room.

"It is the fire element that is too strong," he explained to my aunt. "We are all made up of the five elements water, fire, metal, wood and earth. Whenever one gets too strong it destroys the others. . . . We must keep her away from the sun for that is fire too."

The treatment was not so serious on the days that the fever raged, but when on alternate days she shivered as though her little body would quiver into fragments, she pleaded piteously to be taken out into the warmth. I joined in the persuasion and my aunt yielded. It apparently helped her.

Emboldened by this success I dared to venture a further suggestion, even to the stern old man of whom we stood so greatly in awe.

"Water did me good, sir. . . . I'm sure it did. . . . Let us fetch her fresh water as Lu-lu did to me."

"Fresh water?" stared the old man astoundedly over his glasses. "Fresh water? Spring water? Did you say that? . . . And the barbarian brought it to you? . . . How dare he? . . . Small wonder your case held so long . . . and that you almost died? . . . No! No! Water 'tis true destroys fire. All the books teach that. But it must be the essence of water, and that is found in the water melon seeds. . . . That I gave you in abundance and it was that that saved you. . . . I am giving it her too in plenty. . . . Other water she may have but only hot in tea and medicines.

"Keep that barbarian away from her. . . . On the peril of her life," he commanded turning to my aunt.

But despite his warning, the barbarian's remedy prevailed. Lu-lu again sped secretly to and fro to the spring and under various pretenses we smuggled it to the parched and burning lips. A grateful gleam of understanding was sufficient reward.

Yet she too must be plucked and pinched and pulled upon muscles and skin and joints, and cupped by burning paper in a bamboo tube upon her forehead. Propriety demanded that this

be done within her room and by my aunt and Sow-sow. But the pitiful pleading of the familiar voice and the sobbing and ill-suppressed screams came through to the porch where I sat. I tried to shout encouragement for a time, and the little voice came back bravely. But it was of no use. In my weakness I felt my head grow dizzy and clammy perspiration creep over my body. Involuntarily, I staggered up and began battering at the closed door, then collapsed where I stood.

Some one came out and dragged me away. When I recovered old Hung, Lu-lu and Wong Yung were standing over me.

"He! He! Faint when a baby cries!" taunted Wong Yung as he saw my eyes open.

"Shut up!" commanded old Hung. "He's been sick," and pushed him aside.

Lu-lu said nothing, but he stooped over me, his eyes flashing, his white teeth grimly tight and gave me water from the gourd he had brought.

When I saw little May Fay again she was stretched out upon the veranda, her neck, her joints, her forehead all black with the pluckings, her figure motionless, her eyes shut as though in death. I spoke but she did not appear to hear. Then I snatched the gourd from Lu-lu's hand and boldly pressed it to her crimson lips. That revived her, but it was evident she was slowly sinking.

My uncle, old Teacher Tang and my aunt were soon in consultation. The old man was willing again to admit the Taoists and their charms. My uncle insisted upon calling in the sorcerers, and being persuasive they came. The head man was summoned from the village and arrived at dusk, bringing a half dozen assistants with him. After an ample feast during which none seemed to be in haste to commence his work of healing, they began their preparations.

"Hang the scrolls," ordered the chief sorcerer.

From a bundle wrapped in a bit of old matting, the assistants brought forth several and unrolling them arranged them about the porch next the sick room. Some I could readily see were words in high praise of their virtues, others were the gods they were about to invoke.

"And these?" I inquired from one of the assistants.

"The god of pestilence!" he exclaimed authoritatively.

I drew back a bit as he hung him in the place of honour at the upper end of the room. A wild hideous creature he was, with eyes and mouth widely distended, arms on high to hurl his thunderbolts and a string of skulls about his waist. Minor gods of equally hideous mien flanked him as assistants upon either side.

" Burn incense! " came the next command from the chief.

Each in turn came forward and after arranging his clothing and sobering his countenance in aspect of respect, burned some " cash paper " to pay his fees to the mighty, then prostrating himself three times three, ignited sticks of incense and candles in the tray before the god.

That too took time. Indeed it all seemed strangely leisurely to me who had high hopes that they might succeed in driving out the evil spirits they declared were torturing my little May Fay. She too lay there all expectation. They had brought her forth on her couch and placed her in a corner where the god might look down upon her not so much in pity as in high rage at the demons that thus dared to thwart him. She gazed at him while the fever glittered in her startled eyes.

" Chant," came the monosyllabic order.

The chief himself picked up a pair of brass cymbals while the others arranged themselves with drums, fifes, gongs, bells, and horn.

Slowly they began to drone forth some sort of weird, discordant dirge. For the first hour only two or three, and at times but one seemed to keep up the din. Then slowly others joined in more vigorously. The chief's voice which was never silent grew from a low monotonous drawl into ever more animated strains. What he said I could not understand. Familiar words and others foreign to my ear came jumbled together in utter confusion. They were part of the strange litany to the god before us. As he chanted he bowed more frequently to his deity. At times he alone postured and gestured. At others the whole company marched in faster circles, bowed and sang and beat their instruments in ever wilder clash and confusion.

By the end of three hours and as midnight approached all was chaos. The assistants were howling and clanging hideously. The chief was clashing his instruments in demoniac glee. Louder and louder he shouted. More and more wildly he clashed

his cymbals. Faster and faster he whirled and twirled. Then with a last mighty clash and crash of his disks, he leaped into the air with a piercing shout. The cymbals fell with a clang upon the floor as he leaped toward the bed, then began racing out into the darkness.

"Coming! Coming!" he shouted. "Catch them! Catch them!"

"Coming! Coming!" the assistants took up the refrain and also darted forth following their leader.

"The crocks! The crocks! The cloths!" some one shouted, and a couple scurrying back picked up three small jars and a bundle of rags lying near by.

Wong Yung, Lu-lu and I all hurried out in pursuit but could see nothing. All was darkness save for a few stars that twinkled far above. Only the dim outline of figures moving somewhere near the wall could be discerned. But before we were well aware the whole company were hurrying back. As they came into the light they held the crocks triumphantly on high.

"We've got them. . . . We've got them!" shouted the chief. "Two small ones and a big fellow with fiery eyes," and he laid his trophy at my aunt's feet.

"How are we to know?" queried my aunt skeptically.

"Didn't you see him come out?" shouted the challenged chief. "No? You couldn't see him? Well, I did. . . . He was just one big wisp of smoke curling up from the girl's mouth and the other little ones from her nostrils. . . . But they will trouble her no more. . . . We've got them safe here in the crocks. . . . More cloth!" he ended and began to tie the tops over with other layers of many colours.

"One layer and one colour isn't enough for these kind," he offered. "They can slip through anything with less than five."

Who would not be convinced by such a demonstration and such confidence? My uncle granted assent. My aunt remained silent. Only May Fay could not subside. She had raised herself from her couch as the din grew higher and joined her small shrill voice to the clamour. She kept talking interminably.

"They're gone! They're gone!" she exclaimed. "I saw them too. . . . I saw them. They ran away from my bed. . . . I saw them. . . . I saw them run! . . ."

"Ha! Ha!" agreed the chief. "The little one saw them too."

"Ha! Ha!" All the assistants agreed. "She saw them! Yes, she saw them! She'll be well in the morning."

My uncle paid them and they departed. After a long time my aunt succeeded in pacifying our little maid, and she slept, fitfully. . . . Next morning she was worse. Then my aunt made a decision that quite startled us. We must ascend the sacred mountain.

A few days before we had had a visit from a wandering Buddhist nun in quest of alms. She had sat for some time with my aunt and little May Fay.

"Ah! That she might but be carried to the holy mount!" I heard the visitor repeat over and over. . . . Our great god Pu-hsien, the God of Worth, is again at home there. This year he has revisited us. . . . Yes. He has come again. . . . No one can doubt it. . . . All the pilgrims saw him. . . . I saw him with my own eyes."

"What was he like?" asked my aunt eagerly.

"Like? Ah! He was tall, taller than our people, but he could speak our language . . . at least in broken words . . . and he had a different dress. His face shone with wisdom and with kindness. Ah, yes! He is the god of happiness, wisdom and universal worth."

"But there are many foreigners about these days," continued my aunt. "How do you know it was not one of those perhaps parading as a god?"

"True! True! Many foreigners come nowadays to our holy mountain. . . . Some are there now. . . . But they are whiter still and with high noses and voices. He was swarthy like the sons of India, and quiet and ever kind."

"Then he might have been a man from India, just a visitor to the mount. . . . Why say he was the god?"

"Ah! . . . That I have not told you yet," and the nun's voice sank into almost a whisper. "He leaped from the precipice. . . . He passed quietly, radiantly from temple to temple all up the great slopes till he arrived finally at the Golden Summit. . . . There he sought out and worshipped again and again the ancient bronze Buddha. . . . Then at high noon while hundreds of pilgrims stood all about to watch the

great Buddha ascend in glory upon the clouds, this stranger smiled benignly upon us, then without a word leaped far out right into the ascending Buddha's bosom."

"Killed himself on the rocks thousands of feet below," said my uncle.

"No! No! Not so!" continued the nun still speaking in tones of apparent awe. "Many have done that and their bodies have been found. . . . Crowds who had followed this holy one also went in search of him. . . . They searched the rocks far below for many days, but no trace has ever been found."

"That does seem wonderful," agreed my aunt sighing.

"But that is not all," went on our visitor. "Since then the ancient bronze idol at the summit has been especially responsive. . . . Great throngs have come to worship him . . . and many have been cured of their infirmities and of their diseases."

"Ah! Yes! Would that the little one might be borne there," again exclaimed the devotee. "He would surely be responsive to such a sweet child as this."

"Yes! Mother! Yes!" the little voice pleaded. "Take me! Take me! I'm so sick, so weary of lying here . . . so sore with the teacher's pulling, so tired of his medicines. . . ."

"Impossible!" said my aunt sadly. "You could not stand the long journey. . . . But could you not go for us?" she inquired anxiously, turning to the devotee. "Could you not go and make petition in our name to the ancient god?"

"That could be. That could be!" replied the nun, I thought a bit over anxiously. "That can be if the great lady so wishes, and will pay."

It required little argument. Will not the drowning one catch at a feather? The nun departed with many promises of ardent petition and all speed, also with a goodly lump of silver from my aunt's store. Three days or four should have been sufficient for her to climb the slopes of great O-mei, the seat of Pu-hsien's far famed greatness. But those days went by, and a week passed but still the fever lingered.

News of other healings, however, began to spread throughout our valley. Persons from our community had gone and re-

turned healed. It was when a woman well known to us and who had suffered long from swoons returned apparently fully recovered and presented herself to our company that my aunt no longer hesitated. Medicines, charms, sorcery had failed. Here was a sure source of healing. The nun had proved ineffective. She would bear her child there in person.

That decided, my inclusion seemed to be taken for granted. I was still somewhat weak from my illness and must also need the god's assistance. It is needless to say, the decision met with no opposition. Though I had often gazed upon the great peak to the north and west, and had heard endless tales of its wonders, I had never ascended its sacred summit. This to me would be a great adventure. That little May Fay should also be of the company and that I might aid her as she travelled toward recovery made my bliss complete.

There was, I discovered, one more factor needed. It was that Lu-lu be with us. As a hostage he must never leave the valley but report to be locked in with his fellows ere sundown. How could such a rule be changed? I did not dare approach my warrior uncle with such a request. But again my aunt's will carried the day and Lu-lu was allotted my special protector and aid. That, on the contrary, Wong Yung was to remain at home and study brought a gleam of understanding to both our eyes.

There was no delay after that. Next day at dawn the small body on a hastily improvised stretcher of bamboo poles with grass matting for awning was raised upon the shoulders of two hardy hillsmen. My aunt in a big four-bearer sedan followed. Lu-lu and I walked between to be within hailing distance of both, while a couple of pole carriers brought up the rear with baskets of bedding and clothes.

Slowly we swung down the great steps of the castle, over the small dry brook to the right and down the winding path of the valley. A grim silence seemed to brood over everything, a silence of sickness and death. Even in the village street all seemed hushed. The usual early assembly of carriers with their vegetables was missing and many of the shutters of shops were closed, the owners being doubtless wanderers out on the great plain in search of food and labour.

Down by the rolling Tung we found a raft awaiting us. Old Hung had seen to that. It was but a small float of poles cut

in the mountains and to be sold at the marts below. So our carriers simply stepped aboard, set down their burdens side by side and we were off.

At first our craft whirled and swirled as we swung out into the stream. But the channel once entered our raftsmen seized the long pole at the rear that served as rudder and sent us scudding upon our way. How the waters swished and splashed over our sides and came gurgling and gushing up among the poles beneath us. How the breeze blew, and how exciting to place bare hands and feet in the stream and feel the waters go racing through. Little May Fay seemed to revive at once and my aunt bathed her hands and feet and brow continually.

Swiftly the hours sped. Before we were well aware old familiar hilltops had disappeared and we were out among the dwellers of the great plain. How glorious the rice fields appeared in contrast to our sadly ravaged plots and hillsides! How lazily the water buffaloes and their drivers crept along the paths or through the fields! How luxurious the waving bamboos compared to our poles stunted and bare.

After several hours a pagoda appeared in the distance.

"Kiating, the prefectural capital," announced the pilot.

Round the bend we came and there sure enough before us stood the walls of the city with serried battlements and here and there a tower, the tile roofs of temples and towers showing high above.

"See that short pagoda in the city," we chatted.

"That's the White Pagoda," said the pilot.

"But why so short?"

"'Twas higher and they lowered it."

"Why?"

"It was bringing bad luck."

"Bad luck? To whom?"

"Bad luck to the students."

"How?"

The pilot shook his head.

"They were likely failing on examinations," volunteered my aunt.

"But what had the height of the pagoda to do with that?"

"Why, they say that it regulates the earth's pulse."

"Earth's pulse? Has the earth a pulse?"

"They say so."

"And what has that to do with students?"

"Well, the scholars say that when the pagoda is too heavy the pulse cannot beat, and when it is too light the pulse runs too fast, and so the good luck is borne away."

"How can they tell what height to build, and what weight?"

"There, there," said my aunt, "I only know what I hear them say. I have never studied such books. . . . You will have to ask Teacher Tang about that."

"There's a dragon down under the earth," suggested the pilot, anxious to help out. "Sometimes they get it on his head or his neck or some spot that hurts. Then he rolls over and makes trouble."

"Oh! That's earthquakes," I broke in. "We don't have earthquakes here."

"We do," supported his assistant, "we had a big one in the mountains just last month. It shook everything till the trees and boulders and snow on the slopes come roaring down like thunder. . . ."

"And swept the Wu family village and several other houses into the river," added the pilot.

"Alas! Alas!" exclaimed my aunt.

Then as the conversation swung to earthquakes, we interrupted again.

"And what's this new building with all the windows by the pagoda?"

"That?" said the assistant. "That's one of the things the foreign devils have been building. . . . Lots of people say it's too heavy and ought to be pulled down."

"Yes," agreed the pilot, "it's brought a lot of sickness to the place and a big fire last year."

"What is it for?" we inquired.

"They call it a hospital."

"Hospitals ought to heal people," mused my aunt glancing at the little listening form beside her.

"Well, that's the way they do. . . . Make a lot of people sick . . . then make money getting them in to cure them. . . . That's their scheme."

"Must do lots of business," suggested my aunt; "look at the size of the place."

"Yes. Lots of business," agreed the pilot, "but don't take her there. . . . They steal that round black spot in children's eyes and make them into pills. That's why their medicines are all in little balls."

May Fay hid her head under the covering. My aunt turned away with a look of disappointment. She recalled warnings of other days. We were soon absorbed in other things.

"Look there! Look there!" called Lu-lu.

We were sweeping past the city wall and many boats were appearing in the near distance. Beyond them lay a sudden rise of hills.

"Hills," I exclaimed.

"The other bank of the river," volunteered the pilot. "That's where the two rivers join."

But Lu-lu was still pointing.

"No! No! not hill! . . . See big man . . . big idol!"

I looked again and more closely. Sure enough, there in the midst of the sheer precipice that formed the shore line stood a gigantic figure with titanic head, reaching to the cliffs above and body and feet down to the waters below. Lu-lu's bright eyes had seen it first.

"What is it?" I asked excitedly.

"Buddha!" answered the assistant laconically.

"What Buddha?"

Pilot and assistant were too busy to answer further questions now. We had begun to enter the swarms of boats, and navigation of their strange craft demanded all their thought.

"Well, you see," answered my aunt, "that's just where the Min from the capital in the north and our Tung join. . . . There the waters are wild and swirling with the meeting. . . . There many a boat is upset and lives lost. . . . So the great Buddha has been put there to save them."

"Save them? Does he really?" I queried.

"Some, no doubt," she said slowly, "and the others he takes to his paradise in the Western Heavens. . . . He has been there for a very long time. . . . Even your grandfather says he was there when he was a boy and was then old. . . ."

We all looked at the great venerable figure so strong, so steadfast, so serene above the surging of the water that now

came so clearly into view. Even as a youth I felt something fascinate me in the face, so calm, so commanding.

But we were soon recalled by the shouting of the pilot and his assistant. They had attempted to land well up by a little gate, but the low state of the water made that impossible.

"Further down!" some one had shouted from the shore.

But the movement had been unfortunate. The front end of our raft struck and stuck in the soft mud. That caused the current to seize our stern and swing us out into the stream. There the waters racing toward the junction with the Min rushed us recklessly forward, whirling us helplessly round and round.

"Grab hold! Grab hold!" shouted the pilot as he sought to gain control with his long rudder.

Lu-lu and I leaped to his aid. The assistant at the same time ran forward pike in hand in an attempt to seize the stern of one of the many boats that now lined the shore. Our carriers too, who had been basking lazily on the logs, roused themselves and hurried to lend a hand. Our united strength proved too great.

"Snap!" went the long rudder pole, and on we spun dizzily.

"Amitta Buddha!" groaned my aunt.

"Amitta Buddha!" echoed the pilot as he gazed ahead.

"Amitta Buddha!" seemed to come back the response from the breakers as they lashed the feet of the mighty figure.

Little May Fay screamed as she sensed the danger and I instinctively leaped to her side.

'Twas then that Lu-lu did a deed of daring that remains ever indelible in my memory. Before any one knew his purpose he had run to the end of the raft nearest shore and leaped far out.

"Deserting!" the thought flashed across my mind.

"Well done," shouted the chairmen. "Swim! Swim! Swim!"

Then I saw something skipping along the surface of the water behind him. It was the end of the bamboo rope that had lain coiled upon our craft. He had it in his strong teeth and was striking out desperately.

"Swim, Lu-lu! . . . Swim for your life!" I joined in the chorus.

It was all over in a few minutes, though they seemed hours as he struggled forward. Reaching the end of a boat, he leaped aboard and wrapped his line around the stern post. It was taut in a trice and a sudden jerk sent us all to the deck. But the pilot was up again and with another pike rushed to the side of the raft as we crashed upon the boats in our swing.

Again a sharp cry of pain rang out and I saw him suddenly hurled back upon the logs. I ran to his aid. His pole had snapped in the impact and the sharp prongs of the splintered bamboo had pierced and held him. But there was no time to aid him then. I seized the end of a boat and clung desperately.

The rope strained and stretched but held. Soon the assistant had us grappled tight to the rear of the flotilla and we were safe. Our chairmen went to the relief of the pilot and bore him ashore, giving him over to some of the company he served, who carried him away, doubtless to his death. A little later and May Fay and my aunt were also ashore and I was dragging Lu-lu reluctantly into their presence.

" Brave boy! " said my aunt in a husky voice. " Brave boy! . . . You're worthy to be a chief's son," while little May Fay stretching forth a gaunt, feverish arm touched his feet in gratitude.

" Brave boy Lu-lu," she echoed.

All save he knelt down upon the shore and bowed many times toward the great calm figure that towered on the other side of the stream.

" The Buddha saves. . . . The Buddha saves. . . . The Buddha saves! " the waves seemed to say as they lashed and splashed and roared and thundered at his feet.

Then we paid the assistant a liberal allowance of tea money and hurried away.

VI

ASCENDING SACRED SLOPES

WE spent the night in a great inn in the city. What a pandemonium it was. Pilgrims swarmed the place, eating, drinking, smoking, chattering, calling in high voices for absent members, splashing the corridors and passages with water as they bathed their weary feet, wrangling with carriers who sought to overcharge them, bartering blatantly with endless hawkers of candles, incense, charms, cakes, as they stridently proclaimed their special virtues.

And the heat! Ah! What a change from our recent river and our home among the hills! It choked us as we breathed, or tried to breathe the heavy, fetid, saturated atmosphere. Outside in the courtyard, it seemed a heated oven. Inside the small dark rooms, it was a fiery furnace.

And the pests! Flies buzzed in great bevies about every table. Mosquitoes whined and pounced from every shady corner. Bugs and insects crawled among the matting and straw upon every bed.

Even then it seemed impossible at first to find accommodation. It was unavailing to appeal to the landlord. Every room was filled already. We tried the servants with promise of generous tips. That too was useless. Even the space along the corridors and under the low eaves had been sequestered, or sold.

But our people have a tender heart. A kindly old grandmother, noting my aunt's sad plight and pitying the small fever-pinched face of little May Fay came to the rescue. She and a daughter-in-law had a bed in one of the better rooms. They were both well, had been given great promises by the ancient idol as to posterity . . . would start their joyous journey homeward even in the twilight . . . the good Buddha would find them a spot somewhere . . . and they went.

Even then, the bed was but one small narrow framework strewn with straw in the midst of a crowded succession of others that lined each wall. Our poor little maid worn out with the

excitement of the day and the fever which racked her, pleaded for peace and quiet but that was impossible.

"Water! Water!" she moaned, and we found a little in the crocks to moisten her burning brow, but none could be found, though Lu-lu and I sought everywhere to cool her crimson lips.

My poor aunt sat there, stoically fanning, fanning, fanning, muttering many a prayer to the great heart of Buddha. Lu-lu and I stood by all night to relieve her. Our chair carriers slept in the streets. At last long, long streaks of light appeared in the darkness. It was break of day once more. We aroused our men and sought our way to the city gate and out. Just by the western exit we noted a big black doorway and the sign, "Happy News Hospital."

That we knew stood for the foreign devil's deception. So we covered the eyes of our little patient and hurried past.

How glorious to be out in the open country again. The soil and stones worn smooth by thousands of pilgrim feet, felt cool and satisfying under our tread. The breezes from the mountains still flowing down to the great plain met us and fanned our faces and half naked bodies. The green rice rustling below and the tossing leaves overhead, refreshed and inspired us. Hundreds of pilgrims hurrying homeward or pressing forward with us toward the Sacred Mount, all seemed filled with accomplishment or expectancy.

Yet even before noon we were again in despair. The summer sun had risen high and scattered his fiery arrows everywhere. Dust arose thick from the patter of passing feet. Rice fields sent forth dank odours of decay. Leaves hung drooping and motionless. Bodies seemed scorched and sweated, faces looked worn and weary. Of our small company, the hillsmen carriers soon groaned under the unusual heat and the new manner of bearing burdens. Unaccustomed to poles and cross bars their shoulders reddened, blistered, became swollen and chafed. After a few miles of walking I realized how flabby my own muscles had become and began looking about for conveyance.

At the next big village I saw a sedan chair being carried backwards which said it was for hire.

"Chair," I called.

The carriers responded with alacrity, and putting it down

beside me, removed the front curtain, and tilted the chair at a proper angle for entrance.

"Be seated, teacher. . . . Be seated," saluted the front bearer.

I was about to step in, when Lu-lu whispered in my ear.

"Ask price," he cautioned.

"How much?" I demanded.

"Not much. . . . Not much, teacher," both bearers responded cheerfully. "Just a little. . . . Please be seated."

"But how much?" I repeated.

"How far?" came the rejoinder.

"Next village," I replied at a venture.

"One dollar, teacher. . . . Only one dollar. . . . Please sit in," and they began to move a bit impatiently.

I had been to market too many times not to know the meaning of a first offer, so began to bargain.

"Twenty cents," I offered.

"Twenty cents?" they both laughed together. "Twenty cents . . . and rice so dear as this," and they put back the curtain in fine nonchalance.

"How much then?" I demanded.

"Ninety-five cents," exclaimed the front carrier, "not a cent less," and he raised the empty chair to his shoulder.

"Twenty-five," I ventured.

"Ninety cents," shot out the hind bearer as they began to move away. "Ninety cents, teacher. . . . That's less than the regular fare. . . . Ninety cents!"

I said nothing, and tried to look indifferent. Then the front bearer suddenly turned and putting down the chair again, removed the curtain with a fine show of finality.

"Get in quickly, teacher. . . . Quickly. . . . We'll make it eighty-eight," he whispered as though in strict confidence.

"Twenty-eight," I murmured in equal secrecy.

They left in high disgust. But they were soon standing again and from the opposite side of the street, one shouted, "Eighty-five."

"Thirty cents," I shouted back.

After some conversation they came. The bargain was fixed for that amount. Even thirty cents seemed to me quite a sum. If

the next village, as I presumed, was fifteen miles away, that would be two cents to each mile, and two cents was the price of two meals at home. All that I thought over as I swung along in the chair. But I was to have another surprise and a rather painful one.

We had gone scarce six miles and I had but nestled back comfortably ready for a doze, when I felt my chair touch the ground. A moment later and the front curtain was removed.

"Arrived," came the voice of the front carrier as he peered into the chair.

I shoved back the small shutter and looked out.

"But this isn't the village," I protested. "This isn't a market-place. . . . It's only a few shops by the roadside."

"Village? . . . Of course it's a village. . . . They have market here every third day," declared the carriers emphatically. "Ask any one. . . . Every one knows."

As I could see the rest of our company disappearing down the road ahead, I clambered out. The carriers had me at their mercy. I was a stranger. It would be useless to haggle. I counted out the thirty cents, and turned to start on.

"Thirty cents each! . . . Thirty cents each!" demanded the rear carrier. "Where's mine?"

"Not so! Not so!" I protested. "The bargain was to be thirty cents to the next village. . . . Now you put me down here, half-way and demand double."

"Who heard us agree to that?" demanded the bearer and he struck a stage attitude as he appealed to all and sundry. Well he knew that my people had gone and that strangers even though they knew better would not interfere. "Who ever heard us say that? . . . What was it?" he inquired blandly and with fine show of injured justice of the other carrier.

"Thirty cents each, of course. . . . Who doesn't know that? . . . This fellow only wants to cheat hard-working carriers."

"Pay up!" said the fellow, planting himself fairly in front of me.

I paid and picked up my small roll of clothing.

"Wine money! . . . Tea money!" they both shouted in unison, as I made to leave them.

By this time a crowd was gathering. I was alone and weary and ill.

"How much?" I inquired slowly.

"Ten cents each!" demanded the front bearer unabashed.

"There!" I said. "That's all I have," and I handed out the last few cash in the wallet about my waist.

"The bundle then," howled the rear bearer, as he suddenly reached forward and slid my rolled gown from under my arm.

I was at my wit's end, and looked about appealingly.

"Enough! Enough!" said a kindly voice, I never knew who.

"Enough! Enough!" echoed a number of others. But they did not dare interfere.

The chair carriers realized that they had gone as far as public patience would permit, so took up their chair and made off.

Footsore, distressed, penniless, and robbed of my belongings, I made my way out of the place. I was having my first lessons in a world outside my own. Those two and their ilk were also out in the great war for wealth, and the end justified the means. It was their method of warfare and they had won.

I did not think all that to myself just then. I was too weary and broken. I trudged along the dusty path as best I could, my joints aching, my muscles sore, my feet heavy and swollen, while the summer sun shone down piteously upon my throbbing head. Crowds of pilgrims passed me, walking, riding, but what were they to me? Many of them looked equally weary, and as for the others, was not each waging his own war? Why appeal to them? No one noticed my weakness, or if he did made no sign. What was I to them?

Thus I hobbled on and on. I must keep going. I must try to overtake our party at the next village. Would they wait for me there? Probably not. They thought I was safely riding and would arrive in due time. Then I must go on after that. Well, I must go faster now, faster still. I tried it and stumbled, but picked myself up and staggered on. I fell several times after that and people passing looked at me strangely. Drunk, they must have thought me. Then I came to a narrow ditch that crossed the path. I tried to make the extra effort to span it, but failed.

When I tried to rise again, I found all dancing, swimming,

gyrating about me. I sat down and covered my eyes. I opened them again in a few seconds but still all was whirling. Something had gone wrong with my vision. I tried to think of my new dilemma, but my brain refused to work. It was whirling with ever and anon a splitting throb that made me all but scream. . . . I must lie down for a moment. . . . Yes, that would be best. . . . It would be but for a moment . . . and then I would be up and on. . . . I must get on. . . .

How long I lay there I do not know. It was probably not a great time. I was awakened by a familiar voice.

"Dan! . . . Dan!" Lu-lu was calling. "Wake up! . . . Where chair? . . . Where chair?"

I groaned out something incoherently.

My next recollection was that of being bounced along upon a barrow. Lu-lu had hailed one passing and placing me upon it was hurrying me forward. There I bobbed and bounced and caught my breath repeatedly as we jolted and jiggled along. I must have fallen a hundred times were it not for the faithful Lu-lu who trotted along by my side, now holding me firmly, now scooping water from the irrigation streams to bathe my bursting brow, now trying to encourage me.

"All good now . . . steady, steady . . . now good level . . . care now, care. . . . Here more water. . . . Good? Ya, good. . . . Now not far . . . village come quick. . . ."

We arrived at length to find the company waiting. They had rested long on account of the heat and finding me still delayed, Lu-lu had volunteered to run back. The barrow ride had roused me again and I did my best to appear fit. How could I do otherwise before the little sufferer who was endeavouring to bear up so nobly? I did not even then tell of my treatment by the chair bearers but simply explained that I had had a touch of sun which was doubtless true. Lu-lu found a horse this time, and though it was a most cadaverous and disreputable beast, that troubled my body and exasperated my soul, I rode it in gratitude for the remainder of the day.

The inns of the small village at the foot of the great mountain proved impossible as we had arrived late. Perhaps it was better so. We spent the night in the courtyard of an old

temple. Many others of the pilgrim throng were in like circumstance so we were not alone. The priests, a couple of old men and boys did nothing for us, but they did not fail to keep the latter busy going in and out appealing for alms or to meet us next morning demanding exorbitant pay for the lodgings.

However, I had rested well under the open sky and cool breezes from the hills. I managed also to tell Lu-lu the truth regarding my loss of clothing and when I awoke in the morning found a well-worn but clean garment, a long blue cotton gown, lying by my side. He had made known the loss, minus the incident of my aunt and then effected a purchase at a pawn shop. Only May Fay now, seemed over weary. The long struggle of the day before had exhausted her and she lay there very limp and emaciated. Still we were about to begin the ascent and in our hearts hope ran high.

So we passed with the throng through the old south gate of the small O-mei city. At the Flowery Dragon bridge we paused a moment. Others were reading something, a sign. It read:

"To the Golden Summit of Omei by the Great Fragrant Road, Forty Miles, not less. . . . Go slowly. . . . Miss no Holy Shrine. . . . Who knows which Spirit may be most propitious."

That last clause caused worry to my aunt. At home she gave her whole allegiance to the God of Worth but what if he should prove inattentive to our needs or unwilling to grant the prayers for the recovery of our sweet maid? We had come with the very definite object of seeking him out, this Great Ancient Buddha which had suddenly become so compassionate away at the highest peak. But should we pass the other great and beneficent spirits and spots that seemed to multiply endlessly?

One could not pause for a moment by the road, or sit at a table for a sip of tea, much less spend a night in the company of the pilgrim throng without hearing the merits of hitherto unknown names and noted ones brought forth for comparison or praise.

"At the Cow Heart Temple the images are most responsive."

"Do not miss the small tablet at the Dragon spring. It is literally covered with red bunting in gratitude for its benefactions."

"Did you go to the Horse King Palace? . . . Ah! You

should have gone. . . . Many say no horses or people die for years to the one who has burnt incense there."

Thus ran the constant comments.

"Take the little one to the Dragon Son . . . to the Yellow Buddha . . . to the Clear Voice Cliff . . . to the Sleeping Cloud . . . to the Temple of Ten Thousand Years," came advice and admonitions to my aunt until she was all confusion.

The sign had said truly, "Who knows which Spirit will be most propitious?" Who dare risk omitting any, even the most insignificant?

We had entered but few, though there had been a goodly number passed on our way from the Prefectural City. Once we had paused at the Court of the God of Literature and I had gone in to burn some candles that he might aid me in my studies. But I was then too weary to think of such very earnestly, so I feared my prayer would be but casually heard.

But our real search was now to begin. All along the winding forty miles before us we knew were almost innumerable temples, shrines, tablets, sacred and mysterious spots. Who would guide us aright? Might we not come all this way and unconsciously miss the very saint or spot that would restore our loved one to health and happiness?

Still we started on bravely, determined to be all attention, to miss nothing. Our first place was that of the Returned Dragon. Here we entered carrying our little charge from god to god and urn to urn. Wherever we could see sign that incense had been burned, there we paused and worshipped, bowing our three times three, burning our cash paper, candles and incense, offering silently our petition:

"Oh! Great revered Spirit, be merciful. Heal our sick. We promise you to return with many gifts for you and your temple."

A little farther on and we entered the big outer doors of the Lord of SzeChwan. Him, we knew. He was the one who two thousand years ago established the great system by which our plain was everywhere covered with canals, making drought there impossible. Here we worshipped with deep fervour. Surely he who planned so well for food for his people would also be propitious in time of sickness.

We did the same at several small temples, in succession.

Then we came to one beside which great trees grew, a banyan, and beneath this a big stone tablet. "A man came down from Heaven here," read the great characters on the side. After worshipping, the others passed into the temple. I remained trying to decipher more of the inscription. What could it mean? "A man came down from Heaven?"

As I stood there a figure passed that had an air of familiarity. I looked quickly. It was a woman, a Buddhist nun with her grey garb and shaven head. Ah! I remembered her now, the one who had come to us so recently, the one indeed who had persuaded us of the efficacy of the Great Ancient One at the summit.

"Righteous maiden," I challenged. "Righteous maiden, whither bound?"

She tried to ignore me, but I was anxiously persistent.

"Have you been to the Ancient God?" I insisted. "What did he say? . . . Our little maid is not yet better. . . ."

She glanced back at the temple and kept moving on.

"I don't know you," she said. "Leave me."

"But I know you," I urged. "We are from the Wong Family Valley . . . and our little maiden is ill . . . and you promised to pray for her at the Great Ancient One's feet at the summit. . . ."

"Mistaken," she snapped. "You're mistaken. . . . I don't know you. . . . I have never been to any Wong Family Valley. . . ."

"But it is you," I still maintained. "I know you by the . . . by the wart on your nose. . . ."

Again she glanced toward the temple uneasily. I thought she started a bit as my aunt and the carriers emerged.

"Here she is!" I called. "Here she is . . . the nun you sent to pray."

Several pilgrims gathered about. She could not well ignore us. Suddenly her attitude completely changed. She became most enlightened and enthusiastic at our presence.

"Oh! Yes! Yes! . . . Of course I know you. . . . I thought you said Hwang Family. . . . You said Wong Family. . . . Why! Yes! Yes! . . . I have just come down from the top. . . . I was going back to tell you of the response. . . . Where is it? . . . Where is

it?" And she began to search up her sleeve. "It is most propitious. . . ."

Just then her eye caught our little maid being carried forth all worn and racked by the fever.'

"Ah! The little one . . . the little one. . . . The fever must have been renewed. . . . The idol's message was most certain. . . . I cannot find it just now but I recall it. . . . It said:

"'When it comes to pass,
All will be well.'"

My aunt looked at her in silence.

"But she is not well," I interrupted.

"No! No! But she will be . . . she will be . . . does not the god say so?

"Come! Come," she continued approaching nearer my aunt. "I will prove it to you. . . . I will take you to the great shrine myself."

My aunt hesitated. She was evidently in perplexity. But the nun was ever more persistent and ingratiating.

"You are strangers here. . . . I am at home. . . . You need a guide. . . . You need some one to show you the most beneficent ones. . . ."

The last turned the tide. It was but too true. . . . We knew not where to ask and ask best. She took us in charge and led on. Under her guidance we passed several doors great and small. Then we came to one larger still.

"Here we must enter," said the nun.

"The Great Prostrate Tiger," I read from the broad gold lettered board over the doorway.

"Yes," said our guide. "Here a tiger sprang forth to attack the first traveller to ascend this sacred mount. Then when it discovered that the stranger was none other than the god, Pu-hsien, the sender of Universal Happiness, it fell prone at his feet and worshipped. . . . The temple is built on the very spot."

"Large," said little May Fay looking up wistfully at the buildings above.

"Yes. Yes. Very large," continued the nun. "It was built

at the especial command of an Emperor. . . . An abbot dwells here."

Again we entered and went from shrine to shrine, bowing especially long and low before this first image of the god himself.

"If a tiger will thus revere his power, surely the evil spirits of disease should tremble and depart," said our hearts.

We noted no change in our little maiden. What I could not help but observe, however, was that while formerly the priests had treated us simply as part of the pilgrim throng, now they singled out my aunt as special prey, appealing, exhorting, almost extorting, "Silver . . . Silver . . . Great Lady . . . Silver."

The gods spoke much of "Mercy" and "Pity" and "Compassion," but the priests thought apparently only of greed and gain. We visited the God of War in another spot near by. There sat the grim old giant, all clad in armour, and spear in hand, sword in belt. I gave him a candle for my uncle's sake. All these monks it seemed to me should have been of his temple. Were they not all, with one common impulse and accord, making war on helpless pilgrims?

It was high noon when we emerged, and we spent the hours till the sun sank low, ever climbing, ever bowing, burning incense to gods whose very names we knew not, ever praying, but for one thing. "Health! Health! Health! to our suffering little one."

Just at sunset we came to another big group of buildings.

"The Great Crag Temple," explained our guide. "Here is another abbot. Here many pilgrims stay for a night or for days for here is a spring of especially holy water, gushing right from the rock. . . . Even the foreigners come to this spot and pass the summer."

"Let us hope there are none here now," I said.

"No, they are a mile away, over at the New-Opened Temple."

"Newly opened," I repeated.

"Oh! We just call it that. . . . It's not new, not any newer than any of these. . . . It just got that name, likely scores of years ago."

"Take me to the water," said my aunt.

We turned aside to the small structure that sheltered the

spot. There it was, sure enough. There was no deception this time. Water, water, water, clear and pure and cool bubbling up and out into a big vat of stone slabs, long, and wide and deep.

How we all rejoiced and drank and worshipped the nameless old image that guarded the spot. As for May Fay she sipped and sipped and sipped and washed her thin hands and arms over and over, while my aunt bathed her fevered brow and neck and breast. Needless to say we tarried there gratefully and long.

Some one plucked my loose tunic. I turned quickly. It was only Lu-lu.

"Come," he whispered.

I followed as he led out to the main path and up a series of wide steps toward the main temple.

As we came to the top of the flight, a crowd could be seen but a few paces away.

"Foreign devil," whispered Lu-lu and his white teeth grinned good-humouredly.

"A foreign devil," I whispered back. "Let's get May Fay away at once," and turned to run.

"Wait! . . . Wait!" said Lu-lu as he gripped my garment. "No see us. . . . Let's see him. . . . Others are not scared. . . . See lot people!"

That seemed reasonable. . . . There appeared to be no immediate danger, so we stood there watching. But it was unsatisfactory.

"Who is it?" I asked of a couple of pilgrims who came from the crowd.

"Other nation man," came the reply.

"What's he doing?"

"Selling books," and they passed on.

"You stay here. . . . I not afraid. . . . I go see," said Lu-lu after a time, and he started.

Emboldened by his courage, I also crept cautiously nearer. I could see Lu-lu well up in the crowd, but I still hesitated. I listened. Some one was talking. Curiosity conquered and I climbed a small rock where I could see and hear more effectively. Lu-lu saw me and came back.

"That him. . . . That him!" he exclaimed in tones I thought startlingly loud.

"Whisht!" I cautioned. "Whisht! He'll hear you! Whisht!"

"No matter!" he replied. "He quiet. . . . Look, big one he."

"Yes! Isn't he big?" I agreed. . . . "Got big body."

"And big whisker on top lip," added Lu-lu.

"Not much hair on his head though," I noted.

"Give me cash. . . . I go buy book!" volunteered Lu-lu.

"How much?" I parried. "He likely wants a lot. . . . Foreigners are all after wealth."

"No! . . . No! He sell cheap. I hear him. . . . Only few cash. . . . One, two, five."

Again I yielded and handed over some coins. Lu-lu was back in a few minutes waving his books.

"Three," he chuckled. "Three. . . . You read," and he offered them to me, but I drew back my hand.

Just then a voice caught our attention. It was one of our own people. He had mounted on a table right in front of the big foreigner and was talking to the crowd.

"That's all the books for to-day, friends," he was saying. "Take them home and read them carefully, then pass them on. . . . The price is very cheap but the teaching is very valuable. . . . You'll find things there that even our wisest men never knew before."

He paused for a moment and began again.

"This is my foreign friend, Dr. Charles. We ought to be thankful to him, for though he has come to the mountains to rest he asks me to say that if any of you are sick, he will see you at once in the big room at the upper temple. . . . He can't heal you here. . . . His medicines and bandages and knives are all at the upper rooms. . . ."

"Knives!" I whispered hoarsely in Lu-lu's ear. "Did you hear that? . . . Knives!" and I bolted back.

Lu-lu followed fast but I beat him to the spring.

"Foreigners!" I whispered to my aunt. "There's a foreign devil right here in the temple. . . . I saw him . . . and he's a foreign devil doctor . . . and he's got knives. . . ."

"Go! . . . Let's go! . . . Let's go!" responded my aunt, as she began to summon the carriers.

"Better spend the night here," they urged, weary with their toil.

"Yes . . . stay here . . . right here," pleaded little May Fay. "It's so lovely, mother."

Even the nun added her persuasion, but my aunt's old fear still held. We moved out and hurriedly. Soon all were again toiling along the winding hillsides.

It turned out well, however. Not far on we came to a spot of rare beauty. There a mountain torrent thundering down split suddenly upon a great granite rock. There the spray flung itself far aloft making many a miniature rainbow as it danced in the moonlight. The span was covered by a couple of long stone slabs, and we crossed slowly. How cool it was!

"Here! Here!" called May Fay in a voice scarce audible above the swish and swirl of the stream. "Let's rest here!"

"Ah! Yes! These Flying Bridges are beautiful," agreed the nun. "We can rest here, then go to the Clear Voice Temple just beyond."

That was grateful news to all. There we spent the evening until the long shadows began to fall, then we went to the small cloister. It was hot there after the delight of the stream, but the sound of the racing waters filled the corridors with rumble and roar all through the night. Little May Fay seemed to rest as rarely before in our long journey, so all rejoiced.

During the night, we learned that an old priest lived there who had not been seen for years. Some said he was a Living Buddha. He had shut himself up in his room and not even the disciples who came and gave him small portions of food from time to time ever saw or spoke with him.

"He is attaining to Nirvana."

I did not know well what that meant then, but I observed that my aunt once more paid liberally for the privilege of placing the small stretcher down and worshipping before his doorway.

Next morning we again began to climb. I cannot recall all now, but we passed by the White Dragon, through the Golden Dragon Shrine and under the Spirit Guarding Loft during early hours, paused for a time in awe at the great image of Buddha at the White Clothed Palace, then entered the vast Temple of Ten Thousand Years.

We might well have spent the day there wandering about this elaborate and many roomed structure, but we hurriedly worshipped the images the nun suggested, especially the great life-size stone elephant, which she declared came in the flesh from India. Why an elephant could turn to stone or how it could aid us in our quest we did not question. We had need of all our strength as we now climbed the ninety-nine "Turns" of tortuous ascent ere we could rest at the Elephant's Bath.

We were nearing the great summit now, and all wished to push on. Temples, however, became ever more numerous. Flowery Severity, Lotus Rock, Piercing Sky, White Cloud, Thunder Cave, Amitta's Rest, the Emperor's Palace, Eternal Felicity, were some of the names that still cling to me. Each one meant more worshipping, more weariness, more supplication for silver, but no relief to our sweet maid.

Toward evening, we passed the Heavenly Gate and the bridge of the Seven Heavens, then another pagoda to Pu-hsien who gives Everlasting Happiness and after much winding through rocks and trees found ourselves in sight of the Golden Summit. Expectations ran high. The end of our long journey was at hand. We were soon to enter the presence of the Great Ancient One that had so recently become miraculously responsive to his petitioners. Though we were weary and worn with our wandering, we would proceed at once to the spot.

"Which is the palace of the mighty Pu-hsien?" inquired my aunt.

No one replied. We looked about for the nun who had so guided us. She had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. We inquired of one another. No one had noted her departure. We stood still for a time in wonderment.

"What sort of being is that?" I exclaimed.

"Strange! . . . Strange!" murmured my aunt. "She spoke like a human!"

We called but to no effect. Lu-lu ran back for some distance and reconnoitered in the temples and turns of the trail, but no traces could be found. Then we went slowly forward. She had probably returned to the priests en route to collect her share of the spoils.

We had little difficulty in finding the spot. Any one would gladly point us the way.

"In the temple of the Great Ancestor who opened this mountain," said an old man as we paused a moment. "That's Pu-hsien the god of Universal Happiness and Worth, himself. Years ago a great bronze pagoda built by imperial decree stood here. It was destroyed and vandals stole much of its precious contents. . . . Then this year after Pu-hsien came, a beggar grovelling among the débris was suddenly healed of a paralyzed leg and arm. . . . They sought for the cause and found an old image among the ruins. . . . The abbot at once identified it. . . . Yes. It was the great god of Universal Worth himself. . . . They took him at once and placed him in his own temple. . . . There he daily performs many miracles."

That was the one inspiration needed. We could scarce wait for him to finish his talk. We hurried forward as though just starting out upon our journey. Our weariness was forgotten.

"Oh! I'll be well, mother. . . . I'll be well in a few minutes now . . . and we'll be able to play again, won't we, Dan?" she continued, turning to me.

"Of course," I replied. "We'll run all over the mountain. . . . Let's hurry. . . . Hurry!"

VII

AT THE GOLDEN SUMMIT

AS we approached the great temple, the crowd thickened. Men were there and boys, but women and especially old women, each with a pilgrim staff, a long stick with the head of a dragon or the Goddess of Mercy carved at the top, greatly predominated. It was difficult to push our way through, and the stretcher upon which our little lass lay had to pause again and again, bound in by the bodies of the throng. Many, however, noting our precious load, pushed aside to make way. At last we were entering the wide doorway. Within stretched another crowd watching eagerly a scene at the altar.

"Boom. . . . Boom," went the big drum.

"Clang. . . . Clang. . . . Crash!" went the cymbals.

"Tinkle. . . . Tinkle," rang some little bells.

"Thud. . . . Thud. . . . Thud," resounded the hollow wooden knot called the Fish's Head.

"She's better. . . . She's better. . . . She's well. . . . She can walk!" came the murmurs as a woman rose and began to make her way through the crowd.

I had just time to watch her hobble past when our turn came. The bearers bore our little maid right up to the altar and there lowered her to the pavement. Lights twinkled, incense sent forth its fragrant smoke, candles flickered from a hundred sources.

"Boom. . . . Crash. . . . Tinkle. . . . Thud," again the drums and cymbals, bells and hollow wood gave forth their dissonance.

May Fay had raised herself on her elbow and was gazing at the small bronze idol that showed amid the smoke.

"Boom. . . . Boom. . . . Crash. . . . Thud. . . . Thud," the dissonance became louder and louder.

Suddenly the little maid sat upright, then leaped to her feet.

"I'm well. . . . I'm well," she cried and running a few steps to the side threw herself in her mother's arms.

We saw no more of the temple that night. We had no eyes to see more wonders. We half led, half carried our little lass away.

"See," she kept exclaiming, "the fever's gone. . . . It's gone. . . . Feel, Dan, feel," and she placed my hand on her forehead. It was cold and clammy.

We found a place on a porch, after a long search, for her and her mother. Lu-lu and I wandered forth too excited to sleep. A crowd seemed hurrying somewhere.

"The Thousand Lights," some one was saying. "They're wonderful to-night."

We followed and soon found ourselves leaning over a low parapet looking far down into space.

"This must be the precipice," I whispered to Lu-lu. "They say it goes down, down, down, ten thousand feet below."

"Uh!" was his brief rejoinder. "That where queer man . . . how you say . . . Ya, Pu-hsien. . . . He jump over there?"

"Guess so!" I answered. "He came . . .

"But look!" I broke off. "Look at all the stars twinkle down there."

"Stars not there. Stars up high!" he corrected.

We both glanced upward.

"Black as big pot," he muttered.

"But they're down there below all right," I recalled.

We both gazed again at the many twinkling points, seemingly as far below as stars appear high in the heavens. People were talking in low voices all about us and I listened.

"They're the Thousand Lights, and Pu-hsien makes them," I whispered a little later. "I heard some one say so."

"How dead man make light?" came the query.

"But he's not dead now. . . . He came alive and flew away," I explained.

"Uh," was his reply again. "No man fall ten thousand feet come alive again in my country."

"But he wasn't a man. . . . He was a god, you know. . . . See how he has cured May Fay."

Then he was silent. We stood there long looking at the hundreds of lights that twinkled so mysteriously. Enlightenment to-day says they are but the lights from a myriad farm

homes and villages that dot the plain far below, but to me they held all the awe and mystery of the spirit land.

We awoke late next day. Something in the high altitude had made us sleepy. We went at once to see May Fay. She was sleeping still. She had been too excited, too highly exalted to sleep until long after midnight, my aunt reported. Now she was sleeping but rather hectically.

Lu-lu and I went wandering again. We sought instinctively the precipice side peering far down to note if aught of the lights we had seen so gloriously might still be visible. Nothing was to be seen as such. In their stead now stretched far away farm homes each with its group of houses, surrounding wall and fringe of bamboo, fields upon fields in which the rice grew dark and dank, innumerable hamlets, villages, cities and towns, and winding hither and thither, branches great and small of the Min and our Tung, rushing eternally on and on, finally to mingle their waters turbulently at the feet of the Great Rock Buddha.

Something in the scene even as a youth gripped me. What teeming thousands of men my people were. How small our little valley tucked away in its crevice in the mountains seemed in view of such a vast expanse. . . . And what workers all! . . . How wonderfully they had seized the wild land and through endless toil and tenacity transformed it into such homes and shops and prospects of bountiful harvest. . . . It had taken long years of fighting though . . . struggle against wind and rain, and cold and heat and rocks and sands, weeds and pests, wild animals and wilder men. . . . Yes, my warrior uncle seemed right! All life was a war, and the goal was wealth. . . . Were not the chair-carriers, the nun, the army of priests, one and all out for wealth and making war upon us? . . . And yet the good God of Worth had healed our little sick one. Which God could be really supreme? . . . I was in perplexity.

I was aroused by Lu-lu.

"See!" he was saying, and his eyes gleamed with a strange new light as he spoke. "See! See! Over there big Tile Mountain? . . . Ya! . . . Over there my country . . . my country!" and he gesticulated with his hand toward the southwest.

"Pretty," I answered. "Very beautiful. . . . Great mountains . . . snow peaks . . . dark lines of trees!"

"Ya! . . . Ya!" he agreed and he stretched himself up as though in pride. "That my country. . . . My home!"

I had been looking to the east and north, he in the opposite direction. Well might he thrill at his inheritance. There stretching far away lay range upon range of glacier clad turrets, glistering in the clear sunlight, there ridge upon ridge of cedar, spruce and pine that told of wild animals enticing to the chase, and somewhere in among these high plateaus there dwelt his people, his father's crude palace, his mother, his home!

It is well that we were friends and that he did not turn his finger accusingly upon the great plain and upon me saying:

"And those plains, those waters, those fertile fields, those, all those once too were ours. . . . 'Twas your people, your ancestors drove us hence . . . robbed us of our rightful inheritance. . . . And now you even follow us into our hills, shoot us down as wolves and carry us off as prisoners to rot in your cells. . . . Who gave you such rights as that?"

While he stood there ecstatically gazing, such thoughts as those ran through my mind. I could only answer in part as would my warrior uncle, "The end is wealth, the way is war. Both fought and we won." But ever in the moment of their inception, even, my better thoughts rebelled at such a murderous theory.

If Lu-lu thought such things, he said nothing. He only gazed longingly upon his native hills and far towering peaks. I had to rouse him as I turned away.

"Look here," I said as I began to read some of the many monuments and signs which the hands of centuries had erected around the sacred summit. "See, this place is called 'The Throne of Ten Thousand Buddhas.' Who would think so many had trod this soil and rocks!"

Lu-lu made no reply.

"And this bronze tablet reads," I added as we moved farther on, "'Here spirits issuing forth from the vast Kuen Len Range are especially mysterious in power. Here Heaven bestows stars which conceived bring forth statesmen, possessors of highest

Imperial scholarship. Here are seven caves where the genii dwell and all are open.' "

I paused in strange wonderment.

" No genii in cave," broke in Lu-lu; " only bear, tiger, bat in cave. . . . Eat genii . . . everybody."

I had heard that in his country they had no idols, only little baskets they hung from the roofs filled with sticks and charms from the hands of their wizards to remind them of their ancestors, so I said nothing. How could he understand having never read our books? So others of the wonders of the Sacred spot I read to myself as I rambled on, tablets set up by Imperial decree, signs erected in dynasties long past and cast in bronze, pagodas placed by the beneficence of those who had received great blessings.

Here, however, was something more recent and about the great god Pu-hsien himself. Lu-lu might understand that, so I read:

" ' Pu-hsien, god of Universal Worth was known in the west in the days of the Han Dynasty. In the times of the Tangs he came hither and enlightened this spot. Again in the days of the Manchus and now in our day he has revealed himself. He of old was a king. From his holy body spring forth the thousand lights that illuminate the vast void below.'

" Listen to that," I exclaimed. " Do you understand now? It's the god of Universal Worth that sends the thousand lights we saw."

" Oh," was his rejoinder. " Why not come up light old temple, not stay way down in valley? Down there no good! "

I made no reply. There doubtless was an answer but it did not come to me. We went on our wandering, and reading.

" The Diamond Terrace," ran one sign.

" Buddha Appearance Cliff," ran a second.

What they signified I did not know.

" Observation of Glory Place," ran a third.

" What does that mean? " I inquired of some who were standing near.

" Glory? " one replied. " Why Buddha's Glory, of course, . . . It may appear here now any time."

" Where? " I asked eagerly.

" Why, coming up from below on the clouds. . . . It

comes every fair day about noon. . . . Just wait a while and you'll see."

It required no urging for me and Lu-lu agreed as a matter of course. We had not long to wait.

"There it is. . . . I can see it," some one exclaimed, and all looked eagerly in the direction he pointed.

Far down the sheer cliff side white clouds were rolling upward. How fleecy! How gorgeous! How inviting they appeared as they slowly arose from the depths far below! No wonder that some at times leaped forth as though to nestle in their pure and peaceful embrace.

"Ah!" we all cried together, for just at that moment the wonder never to be forgotten appeared.

There in the very midst of the fleecy whiteness came a giant head and around it in double circles, the glory and splendour of gorgeous rainbows. On! On! it came now fading, now glowing more gloriously, until we could all but see the features of the majestic being. No one moved or spoke. A conscious feeling of awe swept over our little group. Now it was but a few spans from my very feet. I drew back lest I touch anything so sacred, so holy. Then with a last look I saw the glory at the very verge of the rock and coming my way. Something almost irresistible seized me and tugged me forward. But Lu-lu's hand was upon me. I fell back at his feet and the white and dazzling haze floated on, above and about me.

Scrambling quickly up I could see nothing, no one, but I felt Lu-lu at my side and clung to him tenaciously. All were lost in the surrounding spray that sparkled and glinted like a shower of diamonds.

"Buddha Appearance Cliff. . . . The Diamond Terrace," the words of a moment ago flashed before me. Yes, it was even so! The Buddha had come in all his spotless glory.

Then slowly the mists divided, and solemnly moved away, far up and up into the blue vault that stood clear and calm o'erhead.

"Ah! Ah!" again exclamations broke from our lips.

Then the awe of it all was abruptly broken.

"Gung! Gung!" some one was calling. "Where's Gung Jung?"

The man who had spoken to us but a few moments before

was missing. Search was made all about. Neither sound nor sight spoke of him.

"Gone with the god in his glory," some one whispered, and that seemed the only explanation.

"Now what do you think?" I demanded of Lu-lu as we moved away. "Did you not see the Buddha as he rode upward upon the clouds? . . . Did not everybody behold his glory, radiating like diamonds? . . . And did he not try to draw me to himself?"

Before this convincing evidence even Lu-lu was dumb. How could he or any one now but believe in the Buddha and his wondrous presence in the place. "Yes," I meditated, "Aunt Grace is surely right. Not the gods of War and Wealth, but the God of Worth is supreme. . . . I must henceforth follow him." I hastened to tell her of the new wonder.

My faith was somewhat shaken and greatly saddened, however, when May Fay did not recover as rapidly as anticipated. On return that day we found her awake but still lying upon her couch. A slight fever had returned.

"But I'm better, Dan. . . . I'm really better," she persisted as she tried to rise. "I'm just resting here for a time, then I'll get up and see all the things you have told about."

Still the fever lingered that day, and the next had increased. We again carried her into the august presence of the Ancient One. Once more the drums and gongs and cymbals boomed and clashed and the incense and smoke rose up. But this time she made no leap, just lay there and smiled.

"Try the oracles," murmured an old priest at one side of the altar.

We agreed.

"Down upon your knees then," he commanded as he pushed a box holding some scores of numbered bamboo slips before me.

I obeyed. He picked up the two half cones that were to determine our lot and held them in his hand.

"What kind of lot do you want?" he demanded. "Weak lot, strong lot, or victory?"

"Victory!" I answered without hesitation.

He threw the wooden pieces from him. They fell both flat side upon the pavement.

" Weak," we all murmured.

He picked them up and threw again. This time they came as before.

" Weak again," we whispered.

The third time they fell both flat side up.

" Strong," we smiled. " It is coming."

The fourth brought the desired result. The priest seemed to throw more carefully and the half cones fell one flat side up, the other flat side down.

" Victory," we all exclaimed exultantly.

" Shake them," ordered the old priest.

Picking up the container with the numbered slips, I shook long and vigorously until at last one separated itself from the rest and tumbled forth. Seizing it eagerly I scrambled to my feet and we hurried to the side of the temple where the answers to such petitions were stored.

" No. 37," murmured an attendant as he took the slip from my trembling hand. Going to a great bureau full of pigeonholes he drew forth the appropriate response. I quickly paid the fee required and seized the message eagerly. Upon a small piece of paper embroidered about with clouds and dragons, I read:

" If the prayer is earnest, the response is sure."

We hurried back to my aunt and the little waiting maid with our oracle. It again filled all with joy and expectation. Who could doubt the sincerity of our prayers? Or who the power of the great god of Worth? The recovery of our precious one was sure. . . . Sure! So we carried her about from place to place to see the wondrous sights and waited—waited—for some assuring fact or word.

It was during those days of worshipping, wandering, wondering, waiting, that Lu-lu recalled our experience with the foreigner.

" Books," he said as we sat together by the Temple of the Sleeping Cloud one day, " Books," and delving down somewhere within his garment, drew forth three and placed them in my hand.

" Foreign Devil books," I said.

" Ya," he answered. " Read."

I hesitated, but my aunt nodded assent. I selected a small

one with a yellow cover. It was labelled, "Why Be Ill?" That query especially appealed.

It began by saying that there were many sick people in the world that might be well, that Chinese medicines could cure some but that Western doctors had discovered cures which saved thousands of others, and that prevention was even better than cure.

"Like to get us into their trap," I commented.

Then it began to tell of prevention of smallpox and tuberculosis and cholera and hookworm, all of which scourge our people. When it came to malaria we read more interestedly.

"Malaria is caused by a germ carried by mosquitoes," ran the statement. "Germs are exceedingly small things. . . . Mosquitoes carry them in blood drops in their beaks. . . . All mosquitoes should be killed. . . ."

"Malaria make by devils," was Lu-lu's comment. "Our wizards make him run."

"If mosquitoes had malaria in their beaks wouldn't they all die?" I ridiculed.

"Foreigners like to kill," soliloquized my aunt. "The good Buddha would save all life, even the tiny mosquitoes."

"And they whine so piteously for just a tiny drop of blood," joined in May Fay feebly.

That settled that treatise and we threw it aside.

The next bore the title, "The Best Way of Living." It claimed that one Jesus was the true way of living for everybody, and that those who lived his way gave and got the most out of life. That did not interest us much as youths so I gave it over to my aunt, who slipped it into her sleeve.

The third was called, "This Wonderful World." It had a picture of the sun and moon and planets and our earth. This latter, it said, was a big ball, and that the foreigner had been around it many times, that even Chinese were going around it now, and that all these others were just balls too, some of them larger, much larger than our earth.

Here again we ridiculed the idea. "Who couldn't see that the earth was flat with big mountains piled up for the homes of the gods. . . . Who didn't know that the sun and moon were each not much larger than a good sized tub. . . . Who hadn't heard that the stars were souls of dead people wander-

ing about up there waiting for a chance to drop down and be born again?"

Still the speculations of these foreigners were interesting and I slid the book into my pouch. I would take it home to show old Teacher Tang. Then we carried our little charge back into her shelter.

So the days dragged by. Pilgrims came and went, but we lingered on in hope that the cure would surely come. We sought out not alone the Great Ancient One but each and every god and dragon, tablet and pagoda, terrace and temple which any one, every one could suggest. Much time had been spent, much treasure exhausted. All possible sources of help seemed to have been solicited earnestly and many times, but the fever lingered. There was nothing more we could do. We must turn our steps homeward.

Thus one evening we paid our last visit to the Hall of the First Ancestor, worshipped long and earnestly at the shrine that had brought succour to so many. Still there was no abating of the fever. We could only hope and wait. The next morning at dawn we began our silent descent. There were still some temples upon the great Holy Hill that had not been visited on our way up. These we would seek on our way home. The "small road" began just below the Temple of the Elephant Bath and as we had ascended by the "great road" we turned to traverse the former.

It was the same weary round, images, shrines, special promises to help. What use appealing to all, yet who knew which might answer? Goddess of Mercy Hall, Pewter Tile Temple, the Nine Ancient Caves, Cow Heart Cloister, and endless others followed one another. We visited and became votaries at all.

Among the nine caves we wandered hither and thither stirring up endless bats, starting new smoke of incense amid ashes long since dead and damp, stumbling amid smouldering joss paper which wafted the prayers of those but recently departed. In one temple they told us in triumph of Buddha's tooth and its magic powers. To me now it seems to have been the molar of some giant mammoth, but then it was a part of the very god himself to be touched in trepidation and besought in profoundest reverence. In another they led us to a line of images and drawing back a yellow mantle revealed the skull of a man.

"This was once our abbot," they said addressing my aunt. "He attained to Nirvana here on this sacred hill and near to this very spot. . . . We lead but few into his presence. . . . None who entreat his aid are ever disappointed."

We were, for we worshipped, and paid, and went our way unaided. Yet had we not seen the Buddha himself rise riding upon the mists, had he not enveloped and embraced us, and had we not still the promise of the oracle?

"If the prayer be earnest, the response is sure."

Who save a benighted one like Lu-lu could doubt? We continued our quest. The prayers were earnest and many. The response must be sure and soon.

Joining again the great road we spent some hours enjoying the cool breezes and beneficent waters of the Flying Bridges. A new party approached. Who should be in their midst but our mysterious nun. She greeted us as though nothing unusual had happened. She had gone to worship at a special shrine sacred to her order, she said. Returning she could find no trace of our party but presumed we had safely reached our destination and went forth to be of service to others.

"And the little one had recovered? . . . Not fully? . . . Ah! That was sad. Very sad. . . . We must surely have missed some sacred spot. . . . Had we gone to the Great Ancient One? . . . The image in the Sleeping Cloud? . . . the Buddha as he arose in all his glory? . . . Had we worshipped at the Thousand Buddha Peak? . . . the Myriad Buddha Crag? . . . the White Dragon Pool?"

We had missed the latter.

"Ah! That explains it," she exclaimed. "That is one of the most potent of all. . . . A prefect of our own city of Kiating took his wife there and she was immediately well. It was a fever too. Then he returned to his city and at once sent workmen to erect a new temple building. That was but a few years ago and it is potent still."

To all this she added her exhortations: Surely some one had shown us the place. . . . Why had we not gone? . . . Why come so far . . . be so near . . . and depart without trying its efficacy? . . . We must surely return. . . . Why carry the little one home again unhealed?

We did not heed her and allowed her to depart with her new found protégés. But we hesitated as she passed from sight. The roaring of the streams, the cooling of their waters, the benediction of the breeze restored us. Hope and faith too revived. Slowly we turned and retraced our steps. Again the long weary climb to the Golden Summit.

There we found the White Dragon Pool hidden in its small dell amid trees and rocks. It was a quiet spot away from the pilgrim stream. Something there seemed to comfort, console our spirits. Only two or three priests shuffled silently to and fro.

"Why call this the Dragon Pool?" we inquired.

"The pool is yonder," came the reply, and he led us out among the trees to a spot where a sort of cistern had been hewn from the granite ledge.

"And the white dragon?" we asked after a time.

"There," he answered, gesticulating with his lips toward the farther side.

I looked but could see nothing.

"Lizards," said Lu-lu.

Then looking closer, I too saw them. There creeping or basking about on the rocks were half a dozen small greenish lizards scarce distinguishable from their background.

"But those are not dragons," I protested.

"Dragons," came the laconic reply.

"But dragons are great monsters that hide under the earth," I urged.

"They'll grow," he insisted, and it was useless to argue.

Despite our disillusionment we worshipped these tiny creatures, tarried for the night, then turned once more homeward. It was another fruitless quest. We rested again at the Spirit Water Spring. There was no foreigner to disturb our peace this time and our little maid was greatly refreshed and strengthened. Next day we pushed far down to the base of the Sacred Hill and out upon the open plain. Alas! With the heat and the turmoil, the fever returned in double fury. When about midday on the third stage we reached our Prefectural City at the juncture of the rivers, crimson lips and cheeks showed how the fires were burning. "Home to die. There is no hope," they seemed to say.

"The river will be more restful," my aunt soothed and we again sought the banks where the great rock Buddha held guard. As we wandered about bargaining among up-river craft on the turbulent Tung, a familiar figure met us.

"You?" I exclaimed. "I thought you were dead."

It was our pilot of the raft. There he stood, a little whiter than we had known him on our downward cruise, but healed and full of health. A moment later and he was showing us the spot where the broken pole had pierced his breast. Some of the scar was there still, but the wound was knit.

"He did it. . . . He did it!" he grinned, gesticulating toward the big hospital on the hill. "He put me to sleep and tied me with cloths . . . and then in a few days he took them off and I was well."

"He? . . . Who?" I demanded. "Not the foreigner?"

"Just that! Just that!" he said. "Dr. Charles did it."

We led the pilot back to our aunt and her little waiting charge. The miracle of the boatman broke down old prejudices and fears. That very night our little Fay was sleeping in a long ward amid many cots where a white clad nurse with a red cross upon her arm went softly to and fro. Lu-lu and I might not enter there, but found many an excuse to slip softly by the door and peep at the small sleeping form. We had heard too much of the wild ways of the foreigner with his strange source of pills and his savage slicing of victims with sharp knives, to leave all to the defense of our aunt. We were much reassured by her reports.

"No! No!" she whispered. "No black pills nor sharp knives. . . . Just a bitter white powder. . . . They let me taste it first. . . . And the fever has almost gone."

A few days later little May Fay came forth and sat in the shade of a great tree and chatted to us with some of the old time sprightliness. Then we felt our hearts indeed lighten and were ready again for our home among the hills. May Fay and my aunt would stay on awaiting full recovery. Lu-lu and I gave parting gifts and departed.

"Go slowly, Lu-lu. . . . Go slowly, Cousin Dan," called the little cheery voice as she waved us out of sight.

"Slowly. . . . Slowly!" we shouted back.

How little we knew the nature of our next reunion.

VIII

A TRAGEDY

IT was a joyous day when at last we came to our own village and began to enter our valley. The mountain climb had meant nothing save disappointed hopes to May Fay, but to me the constant climbing, the rare air and the changing scene had brought back health rebounding in every vein. Despite therefore the summer heat and the still dry watercourses that greeted us, the old home scenes seemed strangely welcome and beautiful. The creaking of the pumps, the swaying of buckets, the sheen of a thousand backs bared to the piteous glare still etched and echoed everywhere, but even these told of life and strength and struggle.

All along the way as we ascended we shouted to friends and familiars, calling them by well-known names, answering endless queries, giving many promises. There could be no doubt as to their anxiety for our little maid, and curiosity as to how she had so well recovered. We half feared to tell them that we had left her with the foreigner, but accompanied our information with many assurances.

Our greeting at my home and the castle on the hill was also most cheering. Our delay of a month had been more than they had anticipated, but that I had returned so well and with such good news readily satisfied all.

"Clever devils, those foreigners," was my uncle's comment. "Clever devils . . . they're schemers . . . and they know how to fight. . . . Devils themselves, they know how to drive out the devils that make fevers.

"But Grace will have to look out for her cash," he added. "That's what they're always after."

Old Hung and the other retainers about the place were also warm in their reception, and even old Teacher Tang gave me a slight bow of recognition.

To my surprise school was rarely in session. My warrior uncle was too busy, since the plague and drought, to keep his

accustomed seat in the study and his son was quite too subtle for continued study.

"Where is Wong Yung?" I inquired of old Hung when opportunity occurred.

"Yes? Where is he?" was the reply. "He manages to get away most every day."

"But what says Uncle Wu?"

"Ah! No one dares tell him. . . . He would beat too severely."

Alas for Wong Yung and for us! Our return that very day caused my uncle to recall the study and its program and when Wong Yung was found missing, the storm arose. It grew to greater fury when it was discovered that Yung was not even about the castle, and when he crept in late that night, it broke and the sounds of its thunderings resounded long and loud throughout the halls.

When Wong Yung appeared for the task next morning, he scarce greeted me. A scowl and a savage kick under the square table showed but too readily his resentment. However, I returned all with the full vigour of restored health which somewhat won back his respect, if not his good will.

"Wish you'd stayed away a year," he greeted when later we paused for our morning rice. "We've been havin' some swell time till you crawled back."

"What doing?" I asked ignoring the implied insult.

"Like to know, wouldn't you?"

"I'll know soon enough."

"Catch you. . . . Better not poke your dirty nose into our affairs!"

"Whose affairs?"

"Yes. . . . That's another thing you'd like to know, but you won't."

"Why won't I?"

"'Cause you're only a sissy. . . . You're just Aunt Grace's maid. . . . Just May Fay's wee amah! . . . Just wait till we get . . ."

He didn't get any farther than that. There were some broken bowls, and spilled rice with chopsticks lay about the floor when old Hung appeared and closed the scuffle. Possibly I got the worst of it from the standpoint of rules of the arena,

for he being stronger had me down. But it was taking all his spare time to keep me there, and a loose tooth kept him reminded for a few days not to let his tongue wag too freely.

"I know what," was Lu-lu's comment, when I confided the affair to him. "I see Hook-nose and Squint both hang round here. . . . Both here this morning. . . ."

"What doing?" I asked.

"Hunchin'," came the reply.

I knew well what he meant. They were the two Mas, both sons of the younger Ma, one of my uncle's Mohammedan guards. Hook-nose's nickname needed no explanation. He carried the badge of his ancestry prominently upon a thin, angular face surmounting a long, lanky body. Squint was also readily understood, for he had a cross-eyed affliction that kept him apparently peering everywhere save the direction his fat body was heading.

That they were "hunchin'" was also clear. They had no real business upon the Castle Hill. They were apprenticed to another Mohammedan who kept some cattle down at the village, and should be out on the mountain side tending his herd.

"What did they claim to be doing?" I continued, my suspicion aroused.

"Say come see dad."

"Good excuse," I commented. "They're the fellows . . . It's those two that Wong Yung has been mixing with while we have been away."

"Ya! Ya!" he assented.

"What are they up to?"

Lu-lu shook his head.

"Well, just to show Yung he's not so smart, we'll find out."

Lu-lu assented willingly.

The discovery was not, however, an easy matter. Wong Yung was now under his father's watchful care, with strict orders to Teacher Tang to report should he absent himself from his studies for a single hour. Old Hung was to exercise a similar surveillance during other times so chances of meeting his new associates seemed rare.

A week and more passed and I began to think that any escapades had been forgotten or renounced, when I noted something. It was that Yung had fallen asleep more than usual

in class. To nod once or twice an hour was a quite regular thing, especially if old Tang was having his smoke or himself stealing a silent nap. But this day Yung had evidently real difficulty in holding up his head even for a few minutes.

What could be more plain? He had not slept the night before, and why? The night had been quiet. There was no reason why he should not have had a full share of rest. He must assuredly have been awake for some unusual cause. What?

Lu-lu could not help me in answering that question as he according to rule must be locked in with his compatriots after sundown. I must make my own investigations. That after all should not be difficult. We slept together in the same room, so that all I need do was keep awake, if possible, and note his presence or departure.

Even that was not so easy as it seemed, nor did my opportunity come soon. I found it difficult to keep awake. Despite my best efforts I would drop off after an hour's endeavour, or if I tried to sleep first then I only wakened to find it broad daylight. One or two nights by dint of drinking strong tea and arranging my wooden pillow block at a peculiarly aggravating angle, I did manage to start awake at varying intervals, but the only result was that Wong Yung called to me to know what was the matter, and that I slept the following nights as though dead for a decade.

But one night something happened. I woke sufficiently to feel that some one was near me, was standing over me, silently, with bated breath. I felt that my rôle was to appear unconscious, so I turned my head slightly as though in sleep and soon began to breathe deeply. In the intervals of my own exhalations I heard the slow creaking of the big door on its wooden hinges. There could be no mistaking that sound.

I was up in an instant and by Wong Yung's bed. The wadded quilt was rolled in a great hump as though inhabited, but as I ran my hand over its surface it crumbled. He was not there.

With a few strides I was at the door and listening intently. There was not a sound save the cicadas with their long, shrill notes. Cautiously I inserted my fingers in the big flange and swung it with utmost slowness and care. I could now peer out

into space. It was as dark as a dungeon at midnight. Neither sight nor sound gave any hint of life. Everything was as silent, as unresponsive as the grave.

Emboldened I swung the door wider. Still no clue. I stepped out, one foot, then the other. Wong Yung had disappeared as though the earth had suddenly and completely swallowed him. I stood there some minutes listening so intently that the throbbing of my own temples seemed as the booming of old Hung's war gong. If Wong Yung were hidden near, he would surely detect me and my attempt to discover his escapade would be at an end. He would simply slip in and begin to pull to the door. . . . Then I stopped suddenly.

"What was that? . . . A faint glow over toward the front of the house? I blinked my eyes, and looked again. . . . It was nothing, nothing, or if anything only the involuntary flicker of something in my own orbs. . . . Yes. . . . No. . . . There it was again," so the thoughts ran riotously through my brain.

I stepped out cautiously upon the wide platform, my eyes fixed steadily on the spot from whence the illumination seemed to come. It was surely no deception. Some light was glimmering with ghostly dimness. I crept slowly forward, step on step. As I drew nearer I could see that it was from the big study window.

"Old Tang come there for a midnight smoke," the thought flashed through my mind, "and that's the dim flicker of his relighted pipe. Some glowworm, some firefly stuck to the paper window pane. Wong Yung? Wong Yung studying by the light of an oil lamp." The last suggestion so appealed to my risibility that I almost laughed outright . . . to think of Wong Yung getting up to study at midnight . . . to seek study at any time . . . it was almost too much for me.

Then I came back with a start. I was standing at the very window. Were Wong Yung outside he must see my shadow. I drew back again and stood still for some time, listening intently.

"Listen! There was a sound. There it was again. Outside? No! Within! It must be Wong Yung after all and he was up to some prank. Perhaps he was laying some trap for

me or for old Tang next day. . . . Plugging old Tang's pipe . . . sticking my bench with honey."

Again I approached the paper pane. I could not see through, but knew well what to do. Wetting the tip of my finger with some saliva I applied it to the thin sheet for a moment then fixed my eye to the small aperture.

What a sight met my gaze. Some one was stretched out full length upon the floor right under my uncle's idols of Wealth and War. It was a human form. There could be no doubt of that for occasionally he kicked one leg into the air bending it at the knee. He was quite evidently full length upon his breast, but where was his head?

I made my opening a little larger. Ah! Now I could see better. The head was down in a hole, an opening just below the altar . . . and the light was down there also. That was why it shone so dimly. . . . I gazed on and on, listening all the time intently. It was the sound of the foot falling occasionally upon the floor? Yes! That, and something else. Ah! There it was again. It was the sound of the clinking of coins. Coins? Yes, surely. The clinking of silver dollars . . . of that one who had heard it once could not be deceived.

It must be my uncle had money there. . . . Ah! That was the reason then why he sent us forth so sedulously whenever he worshipped his favourite gods. But some one was robbing him now. It must be Wong Yung. Wong Yung robbing his own father? Impossible! Yet it must be so. Who else could it be? What should I do? Raise an alarm and get Wong Yung into endless disgrace? I hesitated.

Then as I gazed the figure began to rise. It was not Wong Yung. It was too large for him. It was a full grown man. He moved slowly, awkwardly as he began to extricate himself from the hole into which he had thrust himself. Then another figure, the familiar form of old Hung, appeared from the shadows to lend a hand. Now as the light and head came to the surface, the truth flashed upon me. It was my warrior uncle himself. He had doubtless seized the occasion to recount his treasures. Why? Midnight no doubt, and he could trust to being undisturbed.

But I was not to continue my speculations and observations. He covered up the opening carefully, securely, by means of a

small door and round worship-mat of palm fibre which he slid over all, then began to struggle to his feet. His stiff game leg impeded him and he fell forward with a clatter.

'Twas fortunate he did so, for it saved the crash of another collision. Just as he fell, I too was knocked over by some sudden force. It was a person. There could be no doubt of that.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, and I was sure it was Wong Yung's voice. But he was up in a second and ran on.

I scrambled after him as quickly as I could and also made for our room. Our door was partly open as I had left it so I slipped in, closed it noiselessly and crept into bed. Over in his corner Yung already made pretense of deep sleep. It was quite evident that he was trying to play a part.

As I lay there my heart palpitating wildly, I thought once that I heard the door creak, and started up. But there was no repetition. It must have been my own or Yung's rickety bed, so I fell to speculating on the meaning of the scene I had witnessed, until nature reasserted her rights and I fell asleep. Waking next morning I found Wong Yung dressing. He spoke and acted as though nothing had happened and I accepted the silence, but the mystery remained.

I followed his example and dressed leisurely. An anklet, such as we use to retain our loose trousers, seemed missing and I paused in perplexity. Surely I had not dropped it during the night? Ah! There it was over by the door. Lucky it was not outside. So I quickly sauntered about the room completing my toilet until I could secure it without Yung's observation, then opened the door and went out.

The routine howling of our classics went on as usual that forenoon. Had old Tang been specially observant he might possibly have noted that his pupils were a trifle more diligent than on most occasions. Wong Yung certainly kept his eyes on his task most praiseworthily:

About three when we paused for our afternoon meal, Lu-lu came strolling around and I surmised he had something to say.

"Hook-nose, Squint both come last night," he whispered when we were alone.

"How do you know?" I demanded. "You were shut in?"

"Ya! Shut in! All take turn. Listen hard!" he replied his white teeth giving evidence of satisfaction.

"Where were they?"

"Over by low wall . . . here by keep . . . them near Zig-zag. I know voice. One . . . two . . . three . . . four."

"Whose?"

"One don't know."

"Who was the other?"

"Yung!" he jerked out. "Wong Yung sure thing! Know his talk—always."

"What did they say?"

"Couldn't hear that. Talk a while, then all go way."

I told even Lu-lu nothing of my discovery, but urged him to keep his eyes and ears open, and waited. For some days nothing more happened, then suddenly there was a great hubbub. Old Hung, the two Mas of the guard, a dozen henchmen great and small were hurrying, searching, here, there, and everywhere.

"One of the rifles missing," was the report. "One of the new rifles, the foreign style repeaters."

My warrior uncle was full of military pomp and rage.

"This is war," he shouted. "Time for martial law. Every one must be put under surveillance . . . every one searched. Some one is out for a fight. We'll show them."

So it was. The Lo-los in the keep, the guard in every quarter, the rooms of the women, our room where Wong Yung and I slept, the study, the garden, even old Tang's boxes which could not and would not possibly contain either shot or sentiment of war, were all subjected to exhaustive search. The order ran forth to the valley with its scattered homes and to the village and its many shops.

"An enemy is within the camp. Guns have been stolen. Every one must be suspected. Everything and everywhere searched."

My suspicions naturally ran to Wong Yung and his new associates. Yet I had no real evidence for accusation. Should I remain silent I might furnish a clue. Rightly or wrongly I said nothing, and waited. Our studies were again interrupted and I watched warily for Yung's surreptitious departure. But again he was wily. He joined ostentatiously in the search and appeared to be one of the most outraged at the incident. He hinted broadly that it was probably the Lo-los, not of course

the men in keep but some of their number introduced from outside by . . . well, any one could guess!

"Who was beaten by our guns? Who wants to get their hands on them? Who could tell them where the guns were kept?" he asked boldly. "And who was allowed to run about everywhere all day, peering where he would?"

There was but one answer to that last question, it was to suspect Lu-lu. But fortunately for him old Hung had had the latter for some reason under strict surveillance for several days, locking him in securely at night, so the suspicion could not well lodge.

I reported that to Lu-lu. He must be especially on his guard.

"Ya! Ya!" he replied. "He hate Lo-lo. Lo-lo wait!"

If Yung did not venture forth by day, it was all the more probable he would do so again by night, and I became increasingly watchful. Once, twice, thrice, I had a vague consciousness that he was awake listening, and once was even sure that he was about the room. But something evidently aroused his suspicion that I was not sleeping sufficiently soundly and he returned to his cot.

It came one night long after we had retired. It must have been in the early hours after midnight. I was sure I heard him move toward the door. I paid no apparent heed and began breathing heavily. Soon something said the door was opening, had closed, he was gone.

It took but a moment to assure myself that his cot was empty, then stealing to the door I sought to swing it open. It would not move. Wong Yung was not to be caught napping this time and had locked it from the outer side. Yes. I was foiled. What was I to do?

But Yung had forgotten one thing in his plans. He had failed to note the fact that our doors might be lifted from their shallow wooden sockets. I tried that. It worked and I was soon outside again in the darkness. I glanced toward the study. There was no glimmer of light there. I stole stealthily around to the other side and close up to the keep where the Lo-los were supposedly asleep.

The slow rasp of a cicada might have been heard. It was my secret sign to Lu-lu. He was at the bars in a moment.

"Out?" I whispered.

"Ya! Over wall!" he whispered back. "Go down Zig-zag."

I stole softly to the side of the rampart and peered over. All was dark and silent. Without returning to report I slid over the top and began to scramble down the rough stone side. I had done it many a time before by day in boyish bravado, so it was not difficult. My feet had just touched the bottom and my body had not yet turned when something must have struck me. I felt myself falling among the rocks.

When I came to consciousness, I discovered slowly that I was upon some one's broad back, held securely by my arms. An attempt to speak brought me a savage thrust in the ribs from a pistol.

"Shut up or be shot up," snarled a surly voice.

It was useless to resist, and we stumbled on. Gradually my eyes began to note objects in our path. There was the big flat rock by the bank, next came the now dry bed of the south stream itself. Then the big fellow that carried me began to struggle up the farther side. In a little time we came to the old pagoda-like look-out. To my surprise he dropped me there. A squat figure that I recognized as Squint entered first and I was ordered to follow. Inside all was darker still but a big hand that gripped my arm painfully, guided me to the ascent. Up we crawled landing after landing until we reached the top. There I was ordered to sit down in a corner. I could now see again though faintly. I was in the corner I noted, farthest from the hatchway. They were taking no risks.

The top of the look-out was surrounded by the projecting wall which formed a guard shoulder high. It had, however, loop holes in each of its four sides from which the plain and Pass were plainly visible by day. One of the group began to peer through the north slot which gave a view of the castle. Three other figures which I could now dimly discern stood about silently in the darkness.

"So far so good," said the big fellow as he turned away.

"Good! Good!" the others agreed with a soft chuckle.

"When the boss plans, there are no slips," again commented the big figure.

"Right you are," snickered some one I took for Hook-nose.

I looked about for Wong Yung. None of the figures seemed to answer to his size. The two Mas and two strangers evidently

made up the gang. Each had rolled himself a cigarette and puffed away silently. I was all ears and eyes for suggestions as to their plans and persons, but they seemed well drilled in discretion.

"Nothing yet," remarked the leader, as he turned again to survey the fort. "But it's early. They'll be hard to rouse."

"Early," all agreed.

"Yung's clumsy," ventured Squint.

"Shut your mouth," retorted the leader.

There was silence again, but my brain ran on from the clue. "Wong Yung was not then in the crowd. . . . He was expected to do something at the fort. . . . He must have gone back. . . . And they had trapped me. Why? What did they want with me? And who were they? And what was Wong Yung going to do next?"

"Nothing," the big fellow reported again and again, as he kept returning to the slit in the rampart. "Nothing! . . . Nothing!"

The crowd seemed to grow a bit fidgety as the time dragged on, and the leader ordered them to sit down.

"Go asleep," he growled, "but wake up smart when the kick comes."

An hour passed, then another. I myself fell off in a doze and lost track of time. I was awakened suddenly by a shuffle of feet about me. They were all up and apparently active. I tried to spring up, but a rough hand again sent me to my corner. It was apparently just turning dawn and I could now see the figures with some degree of clearness. There could be no doubt as to the two Mas. They seemed only half active, the strangers taking the chief part.

"They're coming all right," came the voice of the big leader. "They'll soon be in shape."

There was no response and all stood tense.

"Give her to me now," he ordered, and through the semi-darkness I saw to my surprise a rifle being handed over.

"My Uncle Wu's missing gun!" like a flash the thought came, but I made no sign. "What could they be about to attempt?" The thought of harm seemed utterly foreign to me.

"Sure she has three?" muttered the voice, and I thought he glanced my way.

He looked carefully at the rifle and its loads, then shoved it through the wall toward the fort.

"Stop," I tried to shout as I struggled up, but terror at the peril that seemed breaking paralyzed my voice.

I made no second attempt. The other three were upon me in a moment and I was struggling on the floor.

"Bang! . . . Bang! . . ." the sharp notes of the rifle rang out on the morning air.

"Got 'em!" chuckled the leader. "And this 'un's next!"

I saw the smoking muzzle of the piece turned straight at my head and made a last desperate lunge. Something roared deafeningly in my ear and spat stingingly into my cheek and face. Then consciousness vanished. It must have been but for a few seconds, however, for a moment later I found myself sitting alone upon the floor. The group had vanished and I shouted and struggled to my feet.

My face stung bitingly and I placed my hand to my cheek. Then I recalled the shot that still rang in my ears. I felt my head quickly for blood. There seemed no trace. A great wave of exultation passed over me at the thought that I was safe. He must have missed me as I lunged about. Then as I stood there still half dazed, a cry came to my ears.

"Help! Help!" some one was calling. "He's wounded! Help!"

I stumbled to the edge of the rampart and peered through. Down by the side of the brook I could see a group. Some one there was gesticulating and still shouting. I turned and made for the hatchway. On the second landing I stumbled across something in the darkness. Fumbling at my feet, my hands grasped it. There could be no doubt. It was a rifle, the rifle they had dropped in their flight. I clutched it tight, ran down the remaining approaches, then out into the open and made a mad dash down the hill toward the group. I thought some of the desperadoes might still be lurking to get me and rushed forward with great leaps.

"Quick," I shouted as I came near. "Quick!—There are only four of them . . . and I have the gun!"

They apparently gave me but little heed. There by the edge of the river bed sprawled some one groaning in agony. I ran down to him. It was old Hung.

"My shoulder! My shoulder! My shoulder!" he moaned. "They hit me . . . and it's smashed. . . . Get some water," he added, as he recognized me. "Water, Dan, quick!"

I did so, then ran toward the others. They were carrying some one, laying him out on the flat rock just above.

"Uncle! Uncle Wu!" I cried as I recognized the familiar face, and throwing aside the gun fell down beside him.

He half turned his head at the sudden cry and fixed his gaze upon me.

"You, Dan? . . . You?" he gurgled, then stretched himself out on the rock.

A moment later and he was gone.

I do not recall clearly what happened after that. Somehow the big body was borne up the side of the slope and steep steps and laid out on a stretcher in the familiar study. Some one led the mule from which he had so suddenly fallen, and some one went to old Hung's relief. I walked about dazed, benumbed by it all.

"There are four of them," I kept repeating. "Hook-nose and Squint are two. . . . The other two are big fellows and strangers. . . . I saw one of them fire. . . . He tried to shoot me, too, then they ran away." But no one appeared to have time or thought for catching the culprits then. All were too firmly held by the hand of death.

The hours and days that followed were full of clamour and confusion. My grandsire and father heard the fatal tidings and hurried to the scene. Then came neighbours and acquaintances, friends and strangers until the whole castle area was crowded from dawn to dusk. Never had we seen before such commotion, for never before had there been such a catastrophe. These had scarce begun to lessen when the priests, both Taoist and Buddhist began to appear, first ones and twos, then tens and scores. They marched and countermarched, chanted and postured, set up seemingly endless poles and flags, placards and paintings of their images. I was too busy with thoughts of other things to follow them in their ceremonies, though every one seemed satisfied that it was all necessary according to custom.

Then one day I was much startled to see a cavalcade ride up the stone steps and enter the castle area. Wong Yung met

them and escorted them into the great guest room where my warrior uncle lay in his vast slab coffin. It was the day of the erection of the spirit tablet and the officer in command was apparently to be guest of honour and perform the chief ceremony.

"Brigadier Bow. . . . Head of the Reorganization Army," the word began to be whispered about.

"What's that?" we inquired.

"Don't know. . . . Some call them 'Beyond-the-limit Party,' . . . just come in lately from down the great river . . . have taken the territory to the south of here."

More than that we did not know. At the ceremony the Brigadier made a long and fiery speech at which I noted some of my elders wagged their heads questioningly.

"The fate of the future is with our youth," I remember he shouted, beating the small table with his big sword. "The old have had their day. . . . They have been satisfied to be slaves . . . slaves to Capitalism, Imperialism, Tyranny. . . . But the youth of to-day are of more strenuous stuff. . . . They will have no traditional chains about their necks, whether of foreigner or old home fogey, unequal pacts or private property. . . . Down with the old, up with the new. . . . The youth of to-day give fair warning. . . . They will hesitate at nothing. . . . They hesitate not at blood and fire and sword. . . . Let him beware who stands in the way of freedom. . . . The grey hairs of age, the wailing of women, the nearest of family ties will count for nothing when they stand in the way of world revolution. . . . I have travelled far and wide in China, in India, in Japan, in the Soviet Republics and everywhere the proletariat is arming to demand its dues. They shall rule the world. . . . Sons of the shops and of the soil arise. . . . Shake off your slavery. All things are yours. . . . Your deliverers are at hand. . . . The hour has struck. . . . Be free!!!"

I reflected little upon what he said at the time. I was more intent upon the appearance of a couple of his henchmen. Something about the big, thick neck and heavy jaw of his chief aide especially attracted me, but for the time I could not recall the connection. So after a time they rode away and I could only wonder.

My aunt's arrival next day created a new interest and source of information. I informed her of our strange visitors. She shook her head seriously.

"Who are these 'Over-the-limit ones'?" I inquired.

"'Over-the-limit'?" she repeated. "That means Maximalist, Bolshevist, Communist. They have created much trouble in our east destroying, looting, slaying, dispossessing people of property. . . . Let us hope they will be at their best, not at their worst here."

But even that warning weighed little with me. I was soon away for a talk with little May Fay. Despite the tragedy that overwhelmed us I could not but rejoice to see her cheeks aglow again and her dark eyes sparkle with health. A new gown too from the city set off her lithe figure in a new light and I felt a strange thrill steal over me as I discovered she was no longer a child but a maiden, winsome and wise.

"Two strangers did it," I whispered to her as we stood by the old rampart in the twilight. "The two Mas were with them . . . and Wong Yung knows something. . . . I can't tell you now but I will soon."

"When?" she questioned looking at me full-eyed and squarely in the face.

"Wait till this is over," I replied. "Then I am sure my father and our grandsire will investigate."

"Oh! Dan, do punish them!" she pleaded, and the sparkling tears rolled down her flushed cheeks. "You know they always trust you, not Yung!"

"Wait!" I repeated and clenched my hands hard.

She patted my arm with her small, shapely hand as we stood there and with the grim old tower in full view, I held it a moment, and swore in my youthful fervour to bring justice to pass.

"I'll stand by you, Dan," she whispered with equal confidence. "You know we two are always pals."

I stroked her jet black locks then, and as I looked far down into the depths of her deep, dark eyes, I made a great discovery.

"I . . . I like you, May Fay," I murmured.

"And I've always loved you, Dan," she confided and laid her head for a fleeting moment on my breast.

An eternity seemed to pass as we stood there. Then Aunt

Grace came searching for her treasure and we went quietly away together.

A few days later and we laid the old warrior to rest with his fathers. Even poor old Hung who had been sent to the hospital for Dr. Charles' attentions could not remain away for that occasion but stole back, still weak and weary.

Again there was a mighty concourse. A multitude assembled from far and wide as we dragged the great coffin up the mountain slope to the rear of the fort. To my astonishment Brigadier Bow and his cavalcade were again present and honoured the occasion by firing a salute over the grave. I was even more astonished to find that they did not ride back to camp after the ceremony but evidently at Yung's request decided to remain the night in the old castle. I was more than astonished. I was astounded, at a turn of his head, to recognize in the Brigadier's chief aide, as he moved about, one whom I was sure I knew. . . . I crept away to my room. . . . The time had not come for a disclosure. . . . But I was certain I saw in him none other than the man who had fired the fatal shot. . . . My warrior uncle's murderer!

IX

ON TRIAL

IT was a strange scene that met my gaze as I opened my eyes that night. Two figures were standing by my bed illumined only by the dim light of a small, old-fashioned oil lamp which they had stuck in the wall.

"Who? . . . What?" I gasped as I sat up, suddenly wide awake.

"No noise," ordered the figure nearest me, and I noted something bright glitter in the hand of the other.

"I'm Brigadier Bow," went on the voice, "and I've come to ask you a few questions. . . . To lay before you a proposition."

And the other, it flashed upon me, was the individual I learned they called Jowl Jaw . . . the man I suspected. . . . Yes, I could see his profile now as he turned a bit in the flickering light, . . . and the thing he held was a dirk.

"I'm told you were in the tower the morning of a certain shooting?" Bow continued.

I made no reply.

"You're a wise chap, eh? . . . Don't believe in talking too quickly. . . . Well, that's a good sign. . . . The question is, can you keep your mouth shut?"

Still I was silent.

"Look here, Dan," the voice went lower still. "Look here. We know more about you than you think we do. . . . We know you're a bright chap and we can make good use of you . . . make you an officer, one of the inner circle in our intelligence department. . . . Our Reconstruction Army is out to capture this whole country, then we will change everything and everybody. . . . We're going to smash all down and build up from the base. . . . It's the only way out. . . . All this private property's got to cease, whether farmer or merchant. . . . All these old codgers have to get out of the way or be put out. . . . This is no time for senti-

ment but for action. . . . This is the day for the young man, and you're young and have brains."

Then he paused. He had been apparently getting off one of his harangues.

"How old are you, Dan?" he asked in a voice of intimacy.

"Seventeen," I answered slowly.

"Seventeen," he repeated, "and Yung's eighteen and an ass. . . . He's no good for anything but a dupe . . . a tool. . . . You're the type of chap we want . . . and you're sweet on that little girl, eh? . . . Ha! Ha!" he chuckled softly. "Didn't know we knew you so well? . . . Well, there isn't anything we don't know or can't find out if we want to. . . . Perhaps you didn't know that Yung wants her too. . . . Sure he does, but he's been afraid of the old dad. . . . Now that he's safe out of the way he can have her . . . unless you say you want her . . . and will come along and play the game."

Then he eyed me again intently. I met his gaze without flinching.

"We thought Yung was the key man and were ready to bump you off with the old ones, but it's clear you've got the savey and the stuff. . . . He can easily disappear," and again he seemed to study me.

"Nice little lump, that May Fay . . . sprightly as a sparrow . . . plump and warm . . . and the mother's not old, must be only in her early forties . . . and rich, eh? . . . Got a heap in the bank in Shanghai. . . . Yes, we know all about that too. . . . Say, Dan. Here's the game. . . . You come on in and take the little one and I'll edge up to the mother and make it right . . . then we'll divide on the bank roll. . . ."

He stopped there, for he evidently saw me flinch, both in eye and muscle. Then he stiffened up again.

"But those are matters of detail. . . . The question is are you game or are you not? . . . Answer me quick and straight."

"Game for what?" I muttered.

"Don't wabble with me, son. Will you come with us and keep your mouth shut, or will you not?"

"Keep quiet as to who shot my uncle?" I demanded.

"That's the word . . . or it'll be quick work," and he glanced toward his aide.

"Never," I shouted. "He did it," and I pointed toward the murderer.

Jowl Jaw was on me in a moment and his great hand grappled my naked neck. Again I saw the dirk flash as he raised his right arm aloft, and closed my eyes for the thrust, at the same time throwing up my left arm in defense. But it was not my strength that stopped the blow. Bow too had intervened. He had quickly thrown himself forward and turned the descending arm aside, so that it fell piercing my wadded quilt and deep into the wood beneath.

"Hold, you devil," Bow was hissing. "Hold! I say! . . . How dare you strike until I give the word of command. . . . Let him up! Quick! Or I'll have you courtmartialed!"

Slowly I felt the talons loosen their grip upon my throat and I gasped to recover my breathing.

"Then you refuse my offer," said Bow attempting to resume his air of cold diplomacy. "You mean to squeal? . . . That's your final word?"

"Final," I struggled out the answer. "I'll have nothing to do with debauchers and butchers."

"Fool," he hissed. "Hold him fast here," he continued, turning to Jowl Jaw. . . . "I have something to teach not only this idiot but others of his ilk. . . . Don't let him off that bed. . . . I'll call for him when he's wanted."

Then he swaggered out of the room, his sword scabbard dangling at his side. Jowl Jaw released his dirk from its strange sheath and with it still in hand sat down upon my bed.

"Roll over," was his only comment, and punched me toward the wall.

Long hours I lay there. They seemed ages as they passed. My whole life came up before me . . . my babyhood about the old home . . . my boyhood all up and down the glen . . . the coming of my uncle . . . the coming of the Lo-los . . . the coming of Aunt Grace and little May Fay . . . the coming of the locusts . . . the coming of the day when we went to the Sacred Mountain . . . the coming of the dawn when the fatal shots rang out . . . the coming of the funeral after the long days of chanting and

clamour . . . the coming of love to my life as I looked down into two great dark eyes bedewed by tears . . . the coming of Bow to the Ancestral ceremonies, to the burial and then to my room. Over and over they flashed before me. . . . And now this had come. . . . What would come next?

What a strange offer this Bow had made to me. . . . They were going to reconstruct everything. . . . I was to be one of their officers . . . one of the intelligence staff . . . a spy. . . . What uncanny information they seemed to have. . . . They knew things I had not known. . . . They apparently knew me and my love which I thought a secret even to my little maid herself. . . . They knew that Yung also wanted her. Was that truth or only a subtle trap to tempt me? . . . They knew that good Aunt Grace had a big sum in the banks at Shanghai. . . . How could they have discovered that? . . . And he promised me position and property and the possession of my loved one. . . . Yes, but at what a price? . . . What a price?

I was to condone the appropriation of my aunt's money. . . . I was to condone the murder of my uncle. . . . I was to condone the forcing of my aunt and little loved one into alliances. . . .

I squirmed at the very thought of such scurrility, such baseness. The brute at my side gave me an angry blow with his elbow that might almost have broken my back.

It recalled to me my helplessness. Refusing was I? Surely. . . . But what use this resistance? . . . What would it avail my uncle, my dear aunt, my sweetheart should the glittering blade have gone home? . . . That would have given no aid in avenging the murder, only added another to the list. . . . That would provide no power to the protection of two helpless women, only provoke their tormentors to more unbridled villainy. . . . The blow had missed and I was still alive. . . . Why not meet cunning with cunning . . . subtlety with subtlety. . . . My uncle would surely agree to that. . . . That would be war against an enemy and demanding war methods. . . . I would wait till morning, then when Bow came again, smile knowingly, thank him for his offer and intervention in my behalf . . . assure him I was

only half awake when he had talked the matter over. . . . That now I saw, as he said, that I was a "Fool." . . . Let him set me wise, and see how well I could serve the cause. I opened my eyes to note the flight of time. It must be morning. The first rays of light were just stealing through the crannies by the great doors.

I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come. The debate still ran on and on in my soul. Would that I might be free but for a few moments to talk it over with my father, my mother, my grandsire, my aunt, aye or the little maiden with the great trusting face turned toward mine. Ah! The lips were moving.

"Oh! Dan, do punish them!" they were saying. "You know they always trusted you, not Yung." How could I be unfaithful?

Yung! Yung! Ah! What a "dupe" he was. . . . Bow had used him as his tool, had filled him with this new madness. He had disobeyed his father, been sternly punished, cherished revenge. . . . Then Bow had led him step by step until he had slain his own sire or so entrapped and ensnared him that he could not speak when he found him slain. . . . And Yung wanted her. . . . Had been possibly bribed largely through hope of her. . . . The base villain . . . he should not have her. . . . I would live if only to defeat his dastardly aim. . . . I would live. . . . I would live. . . .

And then again would come back the face, the soft hand upon my arm, the dear touch of the dark tresses under my hand, the deep eyes and rich lips pleading.

"Oh! Dan, do punish them. You know they always trusted you!"

"Trusted you. . . . Trusted you. . . ." How could I break faith with the living . . . and with the dead?

Thus my thoughts ran ever more wildly on and on. Something continually argued that I should meet Bow and his brigands upon their own grounds. . . . "It takes a thief to catch a thief, a villain to vanquish a villain, a devil to outdo a devil. . . . Turn their own weapons upon them . . . trick them in their own treachery . . . catch them in their

own craft . . . outwit them in their own wile. . . . Do a temporary wrong that you may do a timeless good. . . ."

Then as constantly something other seemed to say, "Sully not your soul. . . . Make no compromise with such cunning and crime. . . . Speak out the whole truth, cost what it may. . . ." My aunt and little May Fay seemed to smile at that.

Thus the morning hours dragged on until I could see that it was high day. Jowl Jaw had risen and paced the floor restlessly walking backward and forward from my bed to the door. I tried to turn once to ease my aching back and bones. He was on me in a flash.

"Stay put," he snarled and again gave me a cruel thrust in the groin with the hilt of his dirk. I groaned and remained motionless.

It must have been nigh unto noon when a heavy knocking called my jailer to the door. There a few words in low tones passed, and soon he came striding to my side.

"Get up!" he growled.

I turned over slowly and brought myself to a sitting position, muscles and nerves and bones sending hot darts of protest all about my frame.

"Hustle!" he snapped and snatching me by the shoulder dragged me to the floor and stood me roughly on my feet.

I reached out for my long gown that lay across my couch.

"No togs! . . . Beat it!" he snarled and shoved me forward barefooted and in my native pajamas toward the entrance.

A moment later and I was being pushed through the doorway and along the wide piazza toward the study at the front of the square, Jowl Jaw's big fingers gripping me firmly by the locks at the back of my head, half lifting, half hauling me forward as though I had been some snapping canine. Then through the familiar door I was thrust to find myself standing dumbfounded before a small sea of faces. For a moment I stood dazed, then slowly recognition came. They were neighbours, old and young, from all up and down the valley, swarthy sons of toil whom I had known from childhood, the elders sitting about on low benches, the middle-aged and youth standing with drooped heads, or leaning about the walls, with here

and there unfamiliar faces and figures in soldiers' uniforms distributed quite evidently as guards.

"Grandsire," my mind said surprisedly, "and my father . . . so you are here . . . what can it all mean? . . . No women . . . only the men . . . that is well if I am to be flogged or otherwise disgraced. . . . Ah! There is one . . . just by my side, my right hand could almost touch you. . . . My aunt, my Aunt Grace . . . and there with her great eyes full upon me, eyes full of brimming tears again was . . ."

I did not complete the thought. Again the rough hand was on me, this time gripping tight my neck.

"Face your superiors," Jowl Jaw was growling, as he swung me round with my back full upon the eyes that brimmed with sympathy. "Face your superiors. . . . Down with you!" and he dug his long talons into my skin as he forced me to my knees.

"We are met here to consider a most serious charge," a voice began.

I looked up. There sat Brigadier Bow in my warrior uncle's great chair, the latter perched on some sort of platform. A couple of secretaries and some guards in flamboyant uniform were also arrayed above me.

The voice was still going on and I listened.

"In a matter so serious as this, though military law does not demand it, we have chosen that all elders and others should be present, thus full justice will be meted out and the proper party discovered and dealt with. In this case it is reported the prisoner has a version of the shocking disaster which has befallen this community in the sudden shooting of its chief citizen. Being assiduous at all costs to discover the truth we will hear his story first.

"I charge you," he proclaimed in a loud voice, and pointing straight at me, "to give your evidence without evasion or equivocation. . . . Proceed!"

I paused bewildered. What could he mean, this imposter who but a few brief hours before had stood by my bed threatening me with direst results did I not seal my lips? What did he mean now demanding that I reveal the truth of things? I tried to speak, stammered and stopped.

"The prisoner hesitates," again came the strident tones. "The elders of the people will note these things."

"Hesitate? . . . What?" I responded.

"Hesitates to name the guilty parties!"

"What guilty parties?" I parried, still trying to sense the situation.

"Ah! Then you do not know who committed this atrocious crime," Bow continued and I thought his eyes looked at me knowingly. "You do not know the murderer of our chief magistrate, and this rumour that is going about that you have important evidence to give is a false report . . . you may stand up."

Then the thought that he was endeavouring to dismiss me and my story flashed upon me.

"Know the murderer? Decidedly I know the murderer," I shouted as I sprang to my feet. "There he is. . . . That fellow with the thick neck and heavy jaw. . . . Seize him, everybody. . . . Seize him," and I sprang full force upon Jowl Jaw.

But the big ruffian was too well trained for a novice such as I. His big fist shot forth and I found myself crumpled upon the floor.

"Seize him!" a familiar voice shouted. I knew immediately it was old Hung.

"Seize him!" went up a shout from a score of throats and my people began to move forward.

"Order! Order!" Bow's stentorian tones could be heard high above the rising din. "Guards to the fore! Order! . . ."

A shot rang out. . . . Some one near me screamed. . . . It was a woman's voice. . . . I raised my head to see little May Fay limp at her mother's feet. I tried to rise, to lurch forward to her side, but big hands were once more upon me and digging viciously into my scalp and shoulder. I was down again and struggling desperately. But again it was an unequal struggle. The big fingers gripped my arm with a knowing twist and grappled at my throat. As they slowly relaxed and breathing returned I found the room once more in deadly silence.

"Any one shot?" I heard Bow demanding.

"No one, sir," some one replied, "only a warning."

"The young lady not injured?" went on the familiar voice, but with a note apparently of deep solicitude.

"No one injured," came the reply.

"Only scared stiff," snickered a secretary.

"Then order in the court!" thundered Bow. "We will not have such unseemly conduct. . . . Place the prisoner again before us!"

Jowl Jaw quickly dragged me to my knees.

"Do we understand then, that you have some one whom you accuse?" demanded my judge as he tried to again attain composure.

I told my story then, slowly, deliberately. A wave of calmness and courage stole over me and despite my rough handling, I spoke fearlessly, without faltering, hiding nothing. I told of my suspicions that Yung knew something of the missing money and modern gun, of lying awake to watch him, of his stealing forth and my following, of the discovery of a light in my uncle's room and the scenes there, of being knocked down by some one who ran into our room and of my finding that Yung was there on my immediate return.

I then traced the night of the tragedy, of Yung again venturing forth and of the incidents of my pursuit. Something said that Lu-lu's part was of little importance and that it would serve no end to bring in a helpless alien, so I made no mention of his small share. But I told of my belief that Yung had descended the wall by the Zig-zag in the stones so well known to us both, of my own descent, my sudden unconsciousness and the return to find myself being dragged up the slope to the old look-out. I affirmed that I recognized in my captors the two youthful Mas and less clearly two others. Then I bore witness to the long wait, of the coming of a party along the path, of the two shots at others and the one at myself, and the retreat, leaving me alone. I related my joy at finding myself unwounded, of my hurried descent, of the finding of the rifle and then the scenes at the brookside, where I found Hung in agony and my warrior uncle mortally wounded.

"And now I vow," I cried in clear tones that reëchoed through the old room, and unopposed I rose to my feet as I said it, "I vow to my superiors and comrades of many years, to my aged grandsire and my honoured father, to the dead who

cluster there in the sacred shrines of my ancestors, to that tablet that so recently incarnates the spirit of the slain, and to High Heaven that knows my heart and holds my destiny, I vow," and I rose to my full height and pointed my finger straight into his bloodshot eyes as I said it, "I vow eternally that this man is the murderer!"

A profound hush held the crowd at my outburst. The great Brigadier gazed at me in silence. Jowl Jaw seemed dazed and gaped at me over-awed, his great jaw wide open. My old grandsire and father looked at me in never-to-be-forgotten pride.

"You are worthy of us and of your ancestors," their steady eyes seemed to say. "Fear not, you have spoken the truth and boldly."

"Brave boy, Dan," came a whisper intended for me alone, from a little heart that beat ever true. "Brave boy!"

That brought Bow back to the realities about him.

"Ha!" he hissed, forgetting for the moment his high rôle. "Ha! So this stripling would serve not only as witness but as judge also in this grave matter. . . . But we will have other evidence. . . . The prisoner will kneel to the left while we hear other testimony. . . ."

The words were scarce uttered until Jowl Jaw was upon me again. With a twist of my arm which he knew so well to give, I was again on my knees on the hard floor and facing the tribunal.

"Wong Yung," called Bow.

He came forth from a corner by the door. To my surprise he was under guard.

"Playing some devil's game with Yung too," ran my thoughts. "What can it be?"

But Bow's big voice had again recaptured its confidence and was booming away.

"This young gentleman we have thought well also to keep a prisoner, as in its determined search for justice the Reorganization Authorities are no respecter of persons," he orated. "Still in respect for a dead father we will permit this youth to stand in our presence. . . . Wong Yung, you have heard what the previous witness has testified against you. . . . To bring out the whole truth in this deplorable case the court has some questions to ask you.

"You had heard of your deceased father's losses in money and munitions before the fatal day?"

"Of course," said Yung sulkily.

"And you were grieved at your father's loss, doubtless deeply so?"

"Sure."

"And you were anxious to aid him in catching the culprit?"

"Yah!" and Yung hung down his head, gluing his eyes upon the floor.

"Was it to aid in this you left your room at night?"

"Um!"

"And when you saw a figure at your father's window, you thought of course it was the robber?"

"Of course!"

"And you tried as a brave son to knock the man down?"

"Um!"

"You mean you did?"

"I did," and Yung shifted his foot uneasily on the boards.

"That was a very courageous thing, and no one will condemn a youth of your age for doing the next, namely, running as fast as you could to your room. . . . You thought they would hear the noise of the fall and catch the thief."

"Thought so."

"Did you notice when Wong Dan returned?"

"I noticed," and he glanced uneasily at me.

"You didn't sleep much the rest of the night?"

"No."

"You have heard Wong Dan admit that it was he that was at the window and he that you knocked down. . . . You must have suspected that?"

"I did."

"And you must have connected him with the robbery?"

"Um," and again Yung glanced my way.

"Yung's lying, mister," sang out a young clear voice behind me. "He's lying. He always shuffles his feet like that when he's lying . . . and he's lying now. . . . Just look at him . . . look at him."

The helpless Yung hung his head still lower and reddened to the roots of his hair, but the great Brigadier sensed the situation quickly this time and came speedily to his aid.

"We must ask the young lady that she do not interrupt," he said in his suavest tones. "She will be given an opportunity to testify later, if she so chooses."

"But he's lying right now. . . . Look at him," May Fay continued naively. "And you're leading him on . . ."

"I must ask you, madam, to restrain this irresponsible exuberance on the part of your daughter," spake Bow hurriedly in sonorous tones. "Such remarks under less generous auspices would be severely dealt with."

My aunt placed a restraining hand upon her daughter's shoulder.

"But, mother, they're trying . . ." The rest of the words were drowned by the big voice above.

"You were morally certain Wong Dan had some connection with these thefts but you did not tell your father your suspicions?"

"No."

"That doubtless your elders will also readily understand. . . . You did not wish to inform upon your own cousin, your fellow student and your pal? Is that not so?"

"Um."

"Pal?" I heard May Fay whisper in derision.

"But you have heard Wong Dan, with evidently little consideration as to your comradeship, declare that you went out a second time, in fact the very night of the tragedy. . . . Did you and if so why?"

Wong Yung looked up at his questioner quite evidently in doubt as to what to reply. If Bow had coached him before, he had apparently forgotten his rôle. But the wily court came again and speedily to his rescue.

"Zealous for your father's goods and also for the good name of a chum you possibly thought to try him out again. . . . We understand your hesitancy in saying so . . . but this is a case where we must have the truth and the whole truth. . . . Is that not right?"

"Right!" repeated Yung somewhat dubiously.

"Right. . . . Ah! . . . You tried to shield a friend. . . . That we will not hold against you. . . . Speak out boldly. . . . And Wong Dan came forth as you surmised . . . and where did he go?"

"To the wall."

"Ah! To the wall. . . . Yes, he has admitted that. . . . But did you note his movements elsewhere? . . . Did you suspect his association with others?"

"The Lo-los," Yung blurted out, as though suddenly recalling something of real interest to him.

"The Lo-los in the guard-house. . . . Ah! . . . He was speaking with them then. . . . He did not tell us that. . . . He apparently did not think it wise to inform us of his choice of companionship on dark nights."

"Yung must have been just over the wall . . . had not yet descended, and so heard me," came the thought as my mind flashed back the scene.

"And you heard some of this conversation, or was it too low?"

"Too low."

"Low, yes! . . . Whispered doubtless . . . doubtless very secret at such a time. . . . He whispered with the Lo-los, your enemies and your father's enemies in the dead of night . . . then he went to the wall?"

"To the wall."

"And over?"

"And over."

"Few but you two ever ascended or descended there. . . ."

"None."

"None others of whom you know?"

"None."

"And he did not return?"

"Uh."

"And then you rightly considered it your duty to tell some one. . . . Whom did you inform?"

"Old Hung."

"Ah! The old coolie Hung. . . . You wished to save your revered father the shock of such suspicion and so decided to communicate through the old servant?"

"Uh."

"True filial piety surely . . . and you went together to arouse your father?"

"Uh."

"What did he say when you both informed him of your

suspicions? . . . Was he ready to believe you? Or did he greatly hesitate? "

"Hesitate."

"Hesitated! . . . Ah! Assuredly. . . . Who could or would be ready to consider such treachery possible of a relative . . . a nephew so close of kin . . . a boy so graciously and generously befriended . . . yet villainous!" he hissed and glared at me. "But let us follow this irresistible course to a conclusion. . . . They found Wong Dan gone . . . searched for him for a time . . . waited, hoping against hope that he would return. . . . Needless to ask you about such steps as those. . . . They must be apparent to all," and he swept a look around the room. "Then at dawn they decided to follow his path."

He paused a moment to observe the effect upon his audience and upon me. I met his gaze, never wavering.

"They thought he had gone in the direction of Lolo-land. . . . That was natural after his secret tryst with those in the guard-house and from the course you saw him taking?"

"Uh."

"Thank you. You have been a very material aid in clearing up this dastardly deed. Your tender conscience will naturally rebel against seeming to testify against a comrade, but the public opinion of this court and of all right thinking citizens will be with you. You may stand aside . . . and I think," he added, "it will be the judgment of all here that you should be no longer held under even mild and nominal restraint . . . so I order that you be at once set free."

Wong Yung grinned a ghastly sort of smirk and slouched away toward the door.

"Liar! . . . Coward!" I heard May Fay salute him as he passed.

X

THE VERDICT

"WE have now come to the most serious part of this astounding case," went on Bow pompously. "The question is, who actually fired the fatal shot, who, in short, is the murderer?

"The prisoner has declared that two young men named Ma were present in the tower at the time. Have these been apprehended?"

"They are here," responded a clerk.

"Bring them before the court," almost roared Bow in an effort to impress his authority.

Hook-nose and Squint came through the crowd, pushed along by a couple of guards. As they stood before the dais I noted that they were heavily manacled.

"Down," came the order from the guards and they shuffled to their knees.

"The comrades of this community will note the thoroughness with which crime is dealt with by the Reconstruction Authorities," advertised the court. "Having heard the story of the prisoner even before uttered in our presence, all precautions have been taken to see that not one of the possibly guilty or those who have evidence to give, escape." . . . He then proceeded with due impress of thoroughness to ask questions as to the age, parentage and occupation of the twain before him.

"Ah! So you are the sons of one of the guard of the deceased?"

They agreed.

"And he had custodianship of these guns?"

He had.

"That is you would be bringing your own father into grave difficulties did you take one?"

They assented.

"H'mm!" commented the court as he looked around. "Yet you sleep here upon the place with your parents?"

"No!"

"Ah! Then where were you upon the fatal night?"

Both were very certain, absolutely so, that they had been together the whole night in an old shack on the hills with their flocks.

"Were others with you?"

"There were."

"Who?"

They named a couple of others, and these were summoned. They were strangers to me and I doubt not to the whole valley. They gave no names, were not called upon to do so, and spoke with an accent certainly not of our locality. They were peasants from a distance, they claimed, and were up among the hills gathering rhubarb and other herbs as drugs. They had slept with the two Mas for several successive nights and were quite sure both were home upon that occasion.

"But what proof have you that these two did not slip away while you slept?" inquired the court most assiduously.

That was readily answered. They had all been gambling, gambling far into the night, in fact both recalled that the cocks had been crowing before they finally desisted. The evidence was apparently most convincing.

"The elder Ma heard something," one detailed. "'What's that?' he said. 'Sounds like a shot,' says I. 'Heard something like that a minute ago myself,' says my partner here. Then we all listened. A cock crew not far away. 'That's what it was,' says the elder Ma. 'We'll have to turn the goats out now.' Then the younger Ma went out to tend the goats and as he opened the door, sure enough any one could see it was growing daylight."

"Who are they, mother? Where do they come from? I'm sure they're lying too," came random whispers from a loyal little lass just behind, in tones that the court must readily have heard, but the Great Man had no ears for such trifles, and the trial proceeded convincingly and convictingly on its inevitable way.

A few other witnesses were called. They testified that they had found an occasional track in among the corn. These had led apparently from the foot of the wall to the tower. From there they again could occasionally be seen. They had led

toward the Pass, but had disappeared when the grass and rocks had been reached.

Bow hurried on. "Very bungling lot of criminals evidently," he remarked. "But every step shows the matter more clearly. Have you other witnesses?"

The clerk whispered something.

"Ah! Yes! Very important! Yes! . . . The guard here who has been accused by the prisoner of being the murderer" . . . Jowl Jaw's big boot stepped so cruelly upon my ankle that I well nigh fainted with pain, but I held my lips tight.

"Step forward," commanded Bow.

The brute's whole weight came upon me as he obeyed, and I groaned, but uttered no cry. I would not give such satisfaction to my enemies.

"Down!"

The great hulk floundered to the floor right by my side. I put out my hand for protection.

"That this court demands all details," Bow continued, "is evident to all. But here in justice I must not delay. To question this person would be transparent waste of time. He is a member of my own bodyguard and as such is within my call continually night and day. On the fatal night, as always, he slept on a couch at my own door. That night I was at the city of Chien-way, many miles from here. I assure you he was with me. . . . The tale of the prisoner is, therefore, false according to my own knowledge, a most clumsy and fantastic tale. It is quite accountable, however, to those of you who know certain youthful types and will recall that the guard in this case has been put in charge of the prisoner and has no doubt exercised the usual careful caution in seeing that he did not escape. . . . Further delay would be but to trifle with pressing justice. . . . Stand forth and resume your duties as a faithful servant of the new order."

Jowl Jaw climbed clumsily to his feet. As he did so my hand touched something. Instantly the thing's identity flashed through my mind:

"The dirk!"

I clutched it with an instinct too quick for reflection. In a fraction of a second I had it up my loose sleeve. Before Jowl

Jaw had regained his feet I had transferred it under the tight cord of my loin girdle and could feel its cold steel against my flesh. A moment later and I was all composure, still kneeling resignedly before the dais. Jowl Jaw, apparently in his commotion, did not note its loss.

"The coolie Hung," Bow's voice bellowed in his most impressive tone.

"Hung! . . . Hung? . . . Poor old faithful wounded Hung? . . . What could they wish with him?" ran my thoughts. But already he was stepping slowly forward, and despite his still feeble condition was down upon his knees.

"You were the intimate servant of the deceased?"

"I was," came the honest reply.

"You knew where he kept his money and were with him on the very night that while counting it, the prisoner came peering at the window. . . . The prisoner says so, so it will be needless for you to deny."

"I was."

"You heard the disturbance by the prisoner being knocked down, and you hurried out to ascertain the cause. . . . Confess it."

"I did."

"As you went along the gallery toward the boys' room you picked up something—It was this, and it's yours," he cried dramatically flashing my garter before my face.

I made no reply, but the incident came back with growing clearness. Old Hung also made no answer, indeed there was no need.

"Silence as of old gives consent. . . . We will not ask either of these to incriminate himself. . . . We do not need their words. Their deeds speak too loudly. But their mutual silence must assuredly make it plain that there has been collusion between them."

"But the Warrior bade me say nothing," spoke out old Hung at length finding his tongue.

"He bade you? . . . He bade you!" reiterated Bow, apparently confused at the unexpected. . . . "Ah! That is what you say. . . . But unfortunately we have not the dead here for confirmation. . . . And if he did . . . even if he did, what more clear than that he wanted to hush

the matter for the moment until he could catch the thief red-handed. . . . You are dismissed. . . . Keep him under close guard."

Old Hung looked at me and mumbled something, but I could not catch the words. The court was again filling the spaces too fully with his flamboyant sentences, and again I listened.

"Other witnesses?" he demanded.

"None!" came the voice of the clerk.

"Nor assuredly are more needed," began the court quite evidently squaring himself for another harangue. "What further evidence is required? The very conception of the crime, so clumsy and crass, must be clear to all. An old coolie trusted to the utmost by his master decided in his stupid skull that he will have some of his employer's money. He is too narrow in his outlook to do a big thing. No, he will steal but a few dollars, a small lump or two of silver, thinking they will never be missed.

"But a subtle youth of unsuspected criminal type detects the old scamp in his petty pilfering. Indeed it is quite possible incited him or inveigled him into committing the act in the beginning. That is an equally plausible and possible induction. The youth just then wants, especially wants money. Why? It must be apparent to any one who has sat in this court to-day that as so often in sudden outbreaks, there is a woman in the case. The youth has fallen in love, his first love. No eyes need look far for the cause."

"Oh! Mother!" I heard a whisper, but the big voice boomed on.

"They had been on a trip together. They had become intimate there. He must have new toggery, garters and other decorations to plume himself properly, little treats also of course to give his new love. . . ."

"Utter falsehood," . . . I managed to flash forth, but my words were quickly silenced by a great hand that crashed down upon my lips, causing something warm to ooze forth.

"Silence. You have had your say, aye and your wild will too long. Your betters now must speak and act. Bind the prisoner and see that he breaks forth in this unseemly manner no more."

My hands were roughly drawn behind my back and securely

fastened. The brute Jowl Jaw took good care to retain one end of the rope in his big fist, reminding me of my helplessness from time to time by cruel jerks. I could feel the dirk point at my side press into my thigh each time he forced me forward, but rejoiced that its point was so keen. My turn would come. . . . But when? . . . and how?

"But the old magistrate who has guarded so well his funds detects the theft," my accuser continued. "Then the youth takes a wild romantic plunge. The old coolie will be surely discovered, that will involve him. He will then lose the maiden and all standing among relatives and friends. He will ally himself with the clan's inveterate enemies, the Lo-los. That is easily done. He has for long made a companion not of his splendid cousin, though the latter has proffered it repeatedly, but . . ."

"Lies . . . lies . . . lies," I heard again a little voice behind me.

"Proffered it repeatedly," reiterated Bow by way of silencing the speaker, "and met with nothing but ingratitude. This youth preferred the company of coolies and barbarians. The Lo-lo brat readily brings more of his brood. Their plan and price include the new guns. They sneak through the Pass and to the very base of the wall. There the climb being difficult, this youth supplies them with but one. Through the vigilance of a loyal son, he is stopped and again the theft detected."

There he paused and looked approvingly at Yung.

"One might think that this cousin's forbearance in informing would awaken some pangs of remorse and reform. . . . They quite evidently did the opposite—even when knocked down by his cousin to demonstrate that all was detected and must be desisted in or revealed, he replies by a more desperate plot. He will rid himself of his noble uncle who had so assiduously sought his welfare, rid himself of the old coolie who might easily tell too much. . . ."

"Let me tell it now," broke in old Hung. "All know whether I speak truth."

"Fetch that old fool forward and let him kneel on the chains here before us until he learns the value of silence," shouted the Brigadier, quite losing his temper and pretended poise.

They dragged the old man out of the corner where he had

been guarded and throwing some rusty chains on the floor forced him to kneel upon them. He groaned as his thin old knees and ankle-bones met the hard, rough iron, and leaned toward me for support. I quickly noted his need and placed my shoulder to his side. That steadied him and the court, apparently satisfied, proceeded.

"The rest of the vile and vicious plot and its dastardly consummation needs no elucidation," Bow again rolled on. "This utterly callous youth knows he will be followed. He hides with his murderous band and waits for his victims. They are not long in coming.

"The shots ring out. The first strikes down the man whose wealth he hopes to use, whose place he hopes to usurp. The second strikes the old coolie, his accomplice and his dupe. He will run no risks. Doubtless a third was intended for the noble son and heir, but the dim dawn or some other good hand of destiny shielded him.

"The Lo-los, cowards that they are, then flee, leaving the youth to shift for himself. He, left behind, thinks to rush in immediately and claim his victim's heritage. He seizes the rifle and rushes forward, doubtless still hoping to strike down the remaining obstacle to his fiendish ambitions. There, by the brave bearing of his would-be prey, he is foiled and then begins to invent the base story we have this day heard, involving the honour of his best of friends and brave protector.

"Thanks, however, to the assistance and assiduity of this new Administration, you have this day seen such perfidy probed to the utmost, revealing the stark and naked facts, and that you will agree most promptly, and," with a higher and more challenging raising of the voice, "you will now note the appropriate punishment meted forth. . . . Has any one aught to say why justice should not take its due course?" he cried, rising in his seat.

"None!" piped up a clerk.

"None!" thundered the Brigadier as he brought down his sword scabbard with a resounding clang upon the platform. "None! Assuredly none after such evidence. . . . We will proceed."

I was paying little heed to his declamation. Long since it was but too evident that he meant to carry out his threat toward me

and I concerned myself in preparing for my own defense in my own way. The words of our Sage kept coursing through my brain,

"A son should not sleep under the same heaven with the murderer of his father. . . ." Yung would not revenge him. . . . Who else knew the murderer as I . . . and he had been a father to me. . . . Yes I would revenge him. . . . I would . . . I would. . . . Heaven had put this man in my hands . . . and the very dirk which he meant for my destruction in my grasp. . . . Heaven, the Sage, my soul all cried Revenge! . . . Revenge! . . . Revenge! . . . and I was young and my blood was hot.

I felt the dirk dig deeper into my flesh as I swayed to and fro. . . . Ah! that my hands were loose even now. . . . Then I thought of old Hung at my right. . . . I dug my elbow into his side to gain his attention. . . . Watching my chance I motioned with my eyes that he place his hand upon my leg. . . . Then I waited . . . the moment came when Bow was engrossed in his perorations.

"Put your hand up my body," I whispered close to Hung's ear.

Slowly he obeyed as though seeking an easier spot to rest. At length he felt the blade.

"Cut my bands then slip it me," I whispered again. "Go cautiously."

The old faithful needed no prompting. I bided his decisions. Meantime Bow was going gloatingly forward.

"The new régime of reorganization demands the right to set up its own principles of justice and forms of punishment and these will be brought into effect at the appropriate time and place, but inasmuch as this dastardly deed was performed in a district where the old law of the Manchu still holds sway and the citizens continue to think largely in those terms, we will adhere in the main to its standards and systems.

"First then as to the felon Hung. It is clear to this court and to all that he was not the actual murderer but the accomplice in this matter. Now an accomplice, even in the lowest form, must be bastinadoed with the heavy bamboo. One still more intimately associated with the crime must be banished for a term of years or for life; one who has been an accomplice of

the first degree," and he looked down at poor Hung with a Satanic grin of satisfaction upon his face, "one guilty of abetting a crime in the highest form shall be," and again he paused to give full effect to his words, "shall be strangled without mercy until dead."

Old Hung slowly collapsed at the tragic words of doom. I felt his weak old frame go limp against mine . . . and at the same time his hand gradually steal along my side. . . . I thrilled at the thought of what was passing in his mind. . . . As unobtrusively as possible I gave an encouraging nudge and remained stoically calm.

But again the voice recalled me. No! This time it was another's and from another quarter. It was my father's tone, there could be no mistake. He who had sat so apparently unruffled throughout the long harangues now had risen and was speaking slowly, with his usual measured words. At first they were full of old time courtesy:

"Great and exalted one, princely soldiers and brothers," he was saying, "I, a most unworthy and despicable one would humbly crave permission to say one word. This small valley of ours has rarely if ever before in its history had such a distressing incident. When such things have occurred they have first been considered by our headmen and then gone to our magistrate in the district. . . ."

He got no farther. Bow for a moment nonplussed had risen in his place, his face flushed with sudden rage.

"You dare question our authority, you windy wastrel?" he belched.

"I do," replied my father, his grave face turned full upon the Brigadier.

"And I do also," came the quivering voice of my grandsire as he struggled to his feet.

"And I . . . and I . . . and I . . . and I," came from a half dozen and more of the elders as they rose in their places.

"We too," shouted several of the young men and they began to move to the front.

"Guards!" shouted Bow.

Those by the walls clicked their rifles and others began to pour through the wide doors.

"Slash 'em! . . . Slash 'em! . . . Shoot the first man that dares to stir," he roared. "We'll show them who has the authority here."

The elders thus confronted stood there stolidly, and spoke constrainingly to our youths. . . . Meantime I could feel old Hung slowly examining my bonds. . . . Bow had won again. . . . There was silence.

"No such unseemly interruptions shall change the decisions of this court," chortled Bow. "The coolie Hung is hereby sentenced to be first bastioned two hundred blows with the big bamboo and then strangled till he dies. . . . Hear that, you old Imperialists. . . . Your ninny interference only makes justice more sure and sudden.

"And now for this other malefactor," he continued, casting his eyes with all the cruelty he could master upon me, "the law for the ordinary murderer is that he shall not only be punished but disgraced by execution. Thus, his head removed, he will never be able to fully adjust it but carry it in his hands as a badge of his degradation throughout the regions of the damned and through all eternity.

"But here we have no ordinary murder. This is the case of slaying a near relative. Were it a father then who does not know that the slayer shall be slowly sliced to death and his whole family exterminated."

He paused, and glared at my father and grandsire, then at me. . . . I felt old Hung's hand still slowly fumbling about my wrists and grinned back at my adversary.

"You dare to laugh, you demon-born dastard," belched Bow again, "then hear the decision of this court," and he bent forward as though to deal his master blow. . . . As he did so I felt my wrists fall apart, the rope slowly recede and the dirk's handle quietly pushed within my hand.

"The fate of the family which has been responsible for the rearing of such a monster we leave for later decision," he declared unctuously rolling his words and eyes as he glanced toward my sires. "Their attempts to subornate justice here in our very presence will assuredly be adequately rewarded. As to you," he volleyed, turning what he doubtless considered his full vengeance upon me, "as to you, there will be no delay. Let the full clan law have its course. . . . You will be . . .

buried . . . in your coffin . . . alive! . . . Thus does the murderer of an uncle die."

"Let the real murderer die first then," I shouted, and springing to my feet with a suddenness that must have surprised all, I swung the dirk in the air and leaped toward Jowl Jaw striking straight for his thick red neck. . . . Then a great blackness came over me and I felt myself sinking down, down, down.

As I came slowly back to consciousness, some one was calling into my ear:

"Dan! Dan! Dan!" the voice sounded as though from far away. "Dan! Oh! You're not dead, Dan! . . . Dear Dan! Don't die! . . . Don't die!"

Something familiar in the tones seemed to rouse me, and I made an effort to speak.

"It's me, Dan! It's me," the voice I now recognized kept calling. "It's me, Dan," and I felt warm arms about my neck and warm tears plash down my cheek.

"Take her away, madam," I heard the coarse voice of Bow commanding. "This is no longer a place for ladies. . . . Guard, remove these women."

"Then we must take the boy with us," I heard my aunt's firm words.

"Rush them out," I heard Bow storm. "Rush them out . . . no dallying."

I felt the warm arms cling closer, seeking to grasp me tight as they struggled to retain me, then a cry of pain, and they relaxed. . . . I tried to open my eyes, to arise, but the effort was too great. . . . I sank back, my head throbbing wildly.

"Lie there, you dog," came still another voice, and a vicious kick told me too well who was present.

Jowl Jaw still lived . . . stood above me. . . . Ah! Yes! . . . Alas! Alas! . . . He or some one had again been too many for me. . . . They must have stunned me with a blow. . . . All about me I could hear calls of familiar voices . . . shouting . . . cursing . . . blows . . . shots. . . . Then the darkness came over me again and though I struggled I felt some irresistible force driving me again down, down, down!

I was mercifully saved the scenes that followed. What they were I can only conjecture. When I came to consciousness I felt myself being lifted and carried clumsily forward. It was but a short distance, however, and then I felt my body squeezed into some narrow space. I opened my eyes, but all was dark save for the glimmer of a light that threw weird shadows above me.

"A ceiling," I noted to myself. "Then I am still within walls. . . . Ah! The ceiling! . . . Yes! There could be no mistake even in the semi-darkness. The big rough boards that I had so often gazed at as I 'backed' my lines over to old Teacher Tang could not be mistaken. There was the familiar crooked whitewashed pole that served as sleeper, and there the bit of red paper we used to stop the crack, and there the knot-hole that Yung and I peeped through the day we hid from the old man in the loft. I smiled to myself as I thought of the way old Tang peered and perked and puckered up his poor old short-sighted eyes trying to make out the mystery when we dropped a sparrow's egg we had found, down upon the desk near his head. . . . Yes, it was the old ceiling and I was in the old familiar study. . . . There seemed something friendly about that. . . ." Then I came more widely awake. Some one was speaking.

"The lid," said a gruff voice which I did not recognize.

"Here. Give a hand," said another which I could not mistake. It was the hoarse guttural of Jowl Jaw.

"The glue," came again the first voice, "bring the glim closer."

The light lifted and I could see the weird faces come nearer. Then the soft swishing of a brush began. Some bit of the burning stuff sprayed my face and I started wide awake. It was then that the significance of all swept over me and I shuddered. Yes. It was the old room and this was the sequence of the scenes that came flashing back. The crowd had gone and the awful threat that I be buried alive had begun. I shrieked in sudden desperation.

"Help!" I screamed with all the power of pent-up terror. "Help! Help!"

Then a couple of great hands were down upon me, gripping my cheeks and lips and throat. I tried to shout still. The

sounds but died in a guttural gurgle as the vise-like fingers gripped with fiendish firmness. I attempted to swing my head free. 'Twas vain. The big hands dashed me back upon the hard bottom of the box, bringing black clouds once more to float before me. I strove to move my hands, my legs, my body. All were securely bound. I began to gasp for breath.

"Don't finish him," I heard the voice. "Don't spoil the fun."

"Curse him," snarled Jowl Jaw. "I'll stop his squeaker for him," and his nails dug more savagely into my skin.

"Plug him then. . . . Here, plug him," and a moment later I felt the hand over my mouth relax, and a cloth forced between my teeth.

"The glue on't will give him something to chew . . . and hold 'im tight when it dries," went on the voice, and he chuckled.

"Ram it down then," Jowl Jaw snorted and suited his fist to his words.

It was useless to struggle, and I lay there gasping desperately. The swish of the brush again went on and the dark faces moved gruesomely above me. Jowl Jaw's grip had relaxed on my throat, but I felt something sharp pressing there.

"Here! Don't stick 'im," the brush man commanded. "I got something better than that. . . . You're too savage in this sort of thing . . . wait till I show you something that'll make him squirm proper."

Jowl Jaw grunted but I still felt the dirk point pressing upon my neck.

"Here, give a hand," went on the voice.

Jowl Jaw moved away and a moment later I felt a thud upon the box. It was the thick lid being lifted into place and a little later I felt the motion as it was slowly shoved along its grooves.

"Hold a second," chuckled the voice. "We'll give 'im a bit of breakfast," and I felt something poured down over my forehead and face, then my hands and feet.

"What's that?" growled Jowl Jaw.

"Just a bit of oil. . . . You'll see why in a minute. . . . Now shove . . . there . . . just leave a trifle space till I tell you."

There was a pause, then the voice ran on. "What do you

think of these? . . . Bring the glim and have a look at them. . . . Ha! Ha! Ain't they beauties? An' they're starved proper. Wait till they get at the oil, eh? " and again he chuckled.

Jowl Jaw uttered a grunt of apparent approval. Then I felt something drop into the box and rush rapidly over my body and about my head.

" Now shove 'er home."

There was a squeal as he did so. I recognized it at once.

" Rats," came the grim knowledge. " They've placed them within to gnaw me." I was alone in the awful silence. There was a strange solace in that. I was free from Jowl Jaw and my tormenters at last. . . . The rats would gnaw me later . . . suffocation would come . . . doubtless I would struggle then and writhe with pain. . . . But for the present all was quiet, peace, rest. I would snuggle down and go to sleep . . . perhaps the suffocation would have stupefied me by the time I awoke, and the rest would not matter. . . . At any rate those fiends in human form would trouble me no more. . . . That seemed the first consoling fact. Better suffer the last from the rodents and from nature, however cruel, than from demons such as Bow and his brutal gang. Then I tried to shut out all thought of the inevitable, and tried to sleep.

In my half dreaming, kindlier thoughts came that would not down. I felt a pair of little warm arms about me. . . . They were pressing me tight, and warm tears seemed again to fall upon my cheek.

XI

THE ESCAPE

I WAS still awake. Where was she now, my fairy Fay? . . . What had become of her when they forced her and her mother forth? . . . Who would protect them now? . . . Yung? . . . Ah! The very thought of him made me squirm. . . . I felt a rat run up to my head and down again as I did so. . . . Yung! That tool! That traitor! And the vilest of villains! . . . He wanted her? . . . The suggestion seemed to pollute her presence in my memory. . . . And who would hinder him now? . . . Old Hung was faithful, but he?

"Strangled! Stark dead somewhere by now," came the thought of the sentence and its dire sequence.

Aunt Grace? . . . Ah! If the wretched Bow's insinuations were true, she too was in equal peril. . . . My father? My grandsire? Then the recollection of their stand within the court and the covert threat also returned. . . . Who, then who? Something within seemed to answer, "You! You!"

Again I struggled and again a rat scurried up and down the box. The cords about my wrists and ankles were commencing to bite bitterly and the filthy rag in my jaws pained and choked me. I could taste the slimy glue they had placed upon the rag. Glue! Boiled cow's hoofs. Many of them long time dead, diseased cows at that. Water-buffaloes' skeletons lying in decay and dirt. I retched at the thought. Did the rag loosen a bit at that? I tried hard with my tongue to push it forth. It gave a bit at the corners. I worked away at that at intervals. At times it seemed to yield slightly, at length it bunched in a great impossible ball. Something tickled my feet as I strove. It was the rat. . . . Ah! They had begun then their nibbling. This was their first. . . . I kicked out with both feet, violently. That jerked my pinioned arms and wrists, till I groaned at the sharp pain.

But my toes had touched something. It felt smooth and soft

like the skin of the rodents. I found that I could hunch my body a bit along the bottom. I did so until my feet touched the end of the box. Ah! There it was again. It was one of the rats. I put my foot against it and pressed with all my power. It did not squirm or move. Strange I had killed it, or it must have been dead already. I felt with my toes more cautiously. It dangled to and fro. I swung it back and forth like the pendulum of a clock, once, twice, a dozen times, wondering, wondering. What could have happened? What this queer mystery?

Then slowly it dawned upon me. It must have attempted to escape as they were pushing to the lid? Yes, that must have been it. "And it gave a sudden squeal and all was over. . . . What a queer thing life is! Alive one moment, bounding hither and thither to be free, then crash and the thing is dead. . . . Would that it had been my body, my head. . . . It would be all over now."

All over, but would it? What were the strange scenes I had seen on the Sacred Mount, O-mei, during our journey there? Hells where the victims were endlessly tortured . . . their hair torn out with iron combs . . . their flesh gnawed by dogs . . . great hot stones hung about their necks . . . dressed in clothes of fire . . . their brains pecked by huge birds . . . their fingers ironed by hot irons . . . their bodies boiled in oil. . . .

I shuddered a bit as the images danced before me. . . . Would I go there? Was that what awaited me after death in this narrow box? . . . Well, if it were it would be grim satisfaction to await Yung and Bow and Jowl Jaw and their ilk later. If I had to pass through such tortures both now and then, it would be some consolation to see them writhe and squirm. If I had any influence with the ten Kings that were said to rule there, I would see that their record was well kept and their reward paid to the full.

My toe touched the dead rat again. Ah! It was that that set me thinking. Strange the thought that had arisen over a dead rat! But it was dead and its mate at least was alive. . . . We must fight it out yet. . . . I felt it crawling slyly toward my imprisoned hands as I meditated. They were more fast than my feet. I felt them firmly wedged behind my

back. If he attacked me there I would be all but helpless. . . . He was nibbling there now. I tried to crush him by my weight. He did not run as before. He simply retreated to the top of my body and waited. . . . Had he discovered that I was helpless? If so the battle would soon be on. I waited. So apparently did he!

Now he was crawling cautiously along my abdomen and breast. I could feel the sharp points of his claws pierce my thin cotton clothing. He reached my neck and began to nibble at the grease congealed there. . . . I tried to roll my head, to wriggle, to snort. . . . He paused a bit but went confidently on. . . . Ah! He had discovered my secret. I was powerless and he knew it. . . . I had hoped that the poisoned air would have overpowered me or him before this stage arrived. . . . Why had it not? It must already be hours since they had shut me in. . . . How long could a box thus sealed support life for two? . . . It must be sealed for they had used glue to hold it fast. . . . Could it be that there was an opening somewhere? I stirred about to see if I could note a gleam of light anywhere. . . . What use? It was darkness outside anyway . . . midnight. . . . My toe touched the dead rat again. Yes, he was still suspended there, his head doubtless stuck fast in the crack. . . . Crack? . . . Was it possible there might be one there? . . . That would allow for a bit of air coming and going. . . . I felt a sudden start of joy at the thought. . . . I might live on thus for hours . . . a day or more. . . . Who could tell what might happen in that time? . . . My friends would hear of my fate and some attempt would surely be made. . . . If I could only keep alive. . . . I would! . . . I would!

Then something suddenly recalled me. It was the sharp teeth of the rat on my throat. He had found one of the spots where the villain Jowl Jaw had sunk his nails and something there gave him a new flavour. . . . I shook my body with all the violence I could command. . . . The rodent desisted there but began following the grease up to my cheek. . . . I could feel its rough toes and tongue.

Jowl Jaw! Jowl Jaw! . . . What a demon he was. . . . He and his companion. . . . There must surely be

punishment for such devils of human kind as that! . . . Hell! Hell! Yes, there should be, must be some time, somewhere a punishment for such accursed creatures, and some spot where those who were their victims received true justice. . . . Heaven? Perhaps! Old Teacher Tang taught us that our Sage spoke little of such things.

"While we do not know of life, what can we know of death?" he often quoted to us.

But Aunt Grace believed in such. . . . All the Buddhists did . . . and had I not myself seen the Buddha ascend, touch me, pass by to the upper world? . . . I began at that to beg the good Buddha to have pity upon a little lass I loved more dearly than my own life . . . upon my good aunt, my grandfather and my sire . . . upon myself. Then again I started. . . . No! Not the rat, though it kept licking away with its rough tongue. . . . I startled myself. . . . I had been praying. . . . That shocked me. . . . I had often gone through the form before, scores, hundreds of times as we ascended the Sacred Mount and in my own home as a child. . . . But this was real prayer. I was really begging, besecching aid for myself and those I loved.

I tried to stop. . . . Something about it seemed to confuse me, but I could not. I even found tears coursing down my cheeks as I implored the Mighty One to spare but a bit of His mercy for me and mine.

"Oh! God of all Worth," I wept. "Behold me in the midst of this darkness. . . . You know the truth I have spoken. . . . You see the torture I am sure to suffer. . . . Only you can save now. . . . Save! Save! Save!"

And the only seeming answer was the rat as it gnawed ever closer to my nose and eyes. I shook my head again with the strength of terror. It did not even leave me, but sinking its sharp claws into my cheek clung to its prey. I tried to drive the great ball again from my mouth, to wriggle loose my feet, my hands, my head. The only result was to strike the latter against the hard boards above, below, about me, then to sink back exhausted . . . the rat seemed clinging, gnawing even more greedily.

How long this fight went forward I do not know. To me it appeared to be ages. Over and over I thought out the scenes of

my life, of these last few days, of the dear arms about my neck, of the present struggle and the immediate and awful future. . . . Then again I stopped. What had happened? Nothing! No. . . . Yes. It must have been something. . . . Where was the rat? It had suddenly stopped its gnawing and had scampered away. . . . I could feel it there at my feet. . . . It was springing up and down. . . . It was trying to get out of the crack perhaps. . . . Why?

It must be it had heard something. I tried to listen. . . . Was that a sound? No. It was but my own rough breathing and the throbbing of my temples. Again I lay back and listened. . . . The rat did not return but began to gnaw desperately at the crack at my feet. . . . Ah! He had had enough and wanted to get away. . . . If he could only gnaw his way through . . . but that was impossible through those great three-inch slabs. . . . He would return again and renew the attack. . . . Perhaps if I lay quiet I could become suffocated by then. I prayed for that. . . . Surely the good God of Worth could grant at least that small request. . . . I lay there trying to shut out all sense, and memories.

What was that? My body had been jarred. . . . The box had moved. . . . It must have done so. . . . Not only had I felt it. . . . The rat had done so also and was running here and there about my head, over my body, across my face. Something was happening . . . there it was again.

What could it be but people in the room? People? Who? . . . Then my heart failed again. Yes, who could it be but they? They . . . Jowl Jaw and his mate, and probably others come to guard a while, to see that all was safe, to listen a bit no doubt and regale their wicked souls as they thought of the anguish and agony that was going on within. . . . Come? Probably they had never left, had just lain down there by the side of the box, and now were up for a casual moment. . . . They would soon retire again, and then the rat would calm its fears and return.

But the rat did not seem to share my conclusions. It crouched high up trying apparently to hide among my hairs. . . .

The box moved again . . . then again. . . . What were they doing? . . . Another awful thought came over me. . . . It was dawn. . . . It must be though I could see no trace of light. . . . Or even if not they were going to carry me forth . . . forth? Yes! Carry me forth. . . . Then there would be a swaying to and fro for a period as they bore me somewhere, a thud as they put me heavily down . . . a long succession of thuds as they heaped some stones and clay above me . . . and then? . . . and then? I shut my eyes tight and tried to stop my fancy as it ran on and on.

Yes! I was right. The box was moving. . . . I could even hear something down at my toes . . . something grating . . . the ropes no doubt as they rubbed against the sides.

Then things happened with a swiftness that made my mind go out in a wild whirl. A whiff of something reached my face and I unconsciously took a deep breath. It must have been a bit of fresher air. . . . Ah! It was from outside. The clearer atmosphere was filtering through the crack. . . . Then of a sudden I felt the rat rush from my hair, right over my face and body and with a squeal leap for the crack. . . . I waited for it to return . . . but it did not. Instead I thought I heard a whisper. . . . No! It was not words. It was the slow grating sound again. . . . I raised my head to see if light were coming in . . . blessed light. . . . Oh! To catch just another glimpse of it ere the dense darkness came again and forever.

My head touched the top board. . . . The thing was moving? . . . What a strange fanciful hallucination! I felt it again with my forehead. . . . It *was* moving. It really was or I was wild.

A moment later and the lid slipped silently and completely off. . . . Ah! the vile demons. They could not leave me to my fate. There was not enough to feed their savage souls in thinking that I suffered all the tortures of the damned. . . . They must see me squirm, hear me groan and shriek, be able to guffaw and curse at my consternation. . . . But . . .

"Dan! Dan!" a familiar voice was at my ear. "Dan. . . . You dead, Dan, not dead?" It was the voice of Lu-lu.

What happened after that for a time I cannot recall. I know the big rag that choked me was torn from my jaws, that I was lifted out and my bandages quickly cut from my ankles and wrists. . . . I wanted to lie there, sit there on the floor, but Lu-lu was urgent.

"No time! No time!" he kept saying. "Run to wall. . . . Run to wall."

I knew well what he meant. It was that I get to the Zig-zag on the wall where he and I knew so well to ascend and descend, and make my escape. I tried to rise, to stand, but my legs failed me.

"Fill up box. . . . Fill up box," he was urging, then talked low in a language I could not understand, but knew to be Lo-lo.

There were others then in the room, though I could not see them, and they were Lo-los, and Lu-lu was with them. That could mean but one thing. . . . They had in some way broken prison. But I had little time to think of that.

"Go! Go!" Lu-lu was at my side again. "We fill up box . . . close lid. . . . They think you still inside. . . . Hee! Hee!" and he chuckled involuntarily. "Run! Run!"

I staggered to my feet and found I could move forward. Familiar with the place I made for the big doors and began to fumble for the wooden bolt. . . . It was unbarred and I attempted to swing the door in. . . . Alas! It was locked without. . . . We were still trapped . . . and who could tell how many guards slept just outside the portal? But it was no time to hesitate. . . . I hurried back to Lu-lu.

"Door barred outside," I whispered.

"Smash!" he retorted. "Must smash."

"No! No!" I ejaculated. "Get the men quick. Lift it off its peg hinges."

"Good boy!" he returned. "Take this," and I felt a number of things cold and round placed hurriedly in my hand.

"Moneys," he whispered. "We come up through floor. . . . Find lot moneys down there."

I hesitated. It was my warrior uncle's horde, and they were taking it. For a moment I felt like shouting out against such treachery. Then the meaning of it came. Better these than

the robber rabble who had seized all. Moreover Lu-lu was again pushing me forward and I yielded.

"Must get off doors quick," he said, "then get guns."

I made no protest but felt my way forward. My feet were coming back to their strength and the excitement was arousing me.

The big door was swung noiselessly from its hinges and I could see the men peering into the darkness without. Soon they had slipped through and I followed leaning a bit on Lu-lu for support.

"To wall," he urged. "Men get guns then come."

I obeyed and soon found myself at the rampart and sliding over in the old familiar way.

"Creep quick," urged Lu-lu. "I go back show men way."

How I got down the rough stones I cannot explain. At times I felt that my strength must fail. My wrists and fingers seemed occasionally to go numb and I made ready to tumble to the depths below. But ever as I did so my foot reached a firmer ledge and I clambered down and down. I was still as I well knew several feet from the bottom when I could hear some one behind me. His feet overtook me as I hesitated.

"Faster. . . . Got one gun," came Lu-lu's voice and I half fell, half felt my way to the bottom.

"Run now," he exhorted. "Run to Pass. . . . All come in minute."

I started to run as rapidly as I could toward the brook. That would take me in the right direction. I reached its banks and began to climb the opposite side. Then the thought that I must pass the tower and its haunting memories caused me to turn farther down the stream. I had not gone a dozen paces when I heard what made my blood run cold.

"Bang!" rang out a shot followed almost immediately by a shriek.

It was no time to wait. I ran on down the stream.

"The Lo-los are detected," ran my thought. "It is sure capture to go that way." So I ran farther down.

Then I checked myself. That way lay the village and the great Tung. The shot would be sure to arouse the valley. Safety seemed to lie rather in the opposite way. Familiar with the place from childhood I took a small path that would soon

lead me across the valley. My old home was there. . . . I could hide yonder until some safer way opened.

Other shots and other shrieking and shouting were filling the air. In the midst I heard another familiar sound ring out from the old walls.

"Clang! Clang! Crash!" it echoed and reëchoed. It was the great war drum once more. How weird and wild it reverberated in the darkness.

On I ran, my fears giving me new strength. Here and there as I looked, dim flickering lights could be seen in the darkness. Then one appeared on the cross roads right before me.

"Some old neighbour watching his crops," I meditated. "But again it might not."

It was well that caution possessed me. As I stood there, I heard not the voice of a familiar friend, but the deep revilings of some of Bow's soldiers. He had sent them forth apparently to picket the valley, and they cursed violently at being thus aroused. As I listened to them another voice was raised, in the distance:

"Lo-los! Lo-los!" it was shouting. "To the Pass, every one. . . . To the Pass!"

The men roused themselves at that and shouldering their guns and accoutrements began to move. They were coming straight up the path toward me. To step aside into the rice fields was my first impulse, but a momentary thought told that that would be doubly dangerous. It would be next to impossible to hide there as the rice was stunted through the drought, and there was the possibility that some noise or my tracks would lead to my detection.

Weak as I was I ran back while they followed fast. Glancing behind I could readily see what the end must be. They would be upon me in a few minutes. I determined to make believe that I was one of their friends running with them.

"Hurry," I cried pausing. "Hurry up there. . . . What's the matter with you to-night?" and changing my tones as much as possible I berated them loudly.

They came up and began to push by.

"Come on there. . . . Come on!" I scolded.

To my surprise and satisfaction even the man with the torch never lifted his eyes as he passed, but hurried guiltily ahead.

After a few more parting words of persuasion, I paused and began to retrace my steps. As I passed on toward the north of the valley the thought of going home under such circumstances seemed perilous. If guards were thus in the valley, would they not also be about the homes, probably quartered there? I made for the nearest slope and quietly dragged my weary body upward. Half-way up I reached a familiar ledge. Behind the clumps of bushes I recalled a pocket under an overhanging rock and made for it.

A couple of burning spots faced me as I drew near. They were the eyes of some animal debating my right to the retreat. But it ran off as I advanced and I quickly claimed its couch. I could feel the rock warm beneath me where it had been lying. I stretched myself out to rest a moment and reflect. But there was little opportunity for the latter.

The random shots which had been firing broke again into a blaze. I could tell from the reports that it was about the Pass.

"Lu-lu and his men there forcing their way through," I thought, "and I hurried their enemies forward. . . . Still they were going anyway . . . and others were possibly there. . . . What would happen? . . . Would Lu-lu and his few followers all be captured? . . . Probably! . . . Then despite their ruse of filling the box, the truth would soon be out. . . . They would torture them as to the plot . . . and some one would tell the whole tale."

"It was some rare fortune that had guided me away from the Pass, and I was here . . . near my home. . . . I would steal in there at the early dawn? . . . But wait. . . . Would it be wise? . . . The villains would surely search for me there . . . would probably torture my people to deliver me . . . better leave them in ignorance of my whereabouts. . . . Yes! That were best. . . . Utterly disappear for a time. . . . Disappear! But where?"

I could give no answer but arousing myself again crept from my lair and clambered on up the steep side of the mountain. I would avoid the possibility of detection even by my own.

* * * * * * * *

What had happened over on the Castle Hill after my trial,

I learned long afterward. In the confusion that followed my attempt to destroy the murderer of my warrior uncle, old Hung was wise enough to mingle with the milling mass and watching his opportunity passed through the doors and out into the outer crowd. From there after a time he had made his way unnoticed to the pen where Lu-lu and his Lo-los famished, had told the former of my plight and the new danger to all under Bow and his brigands. Familiar with the spot he succeeded also in smuggling to them some old choppers urging that they make their escape through the wooden bars as soon as night should fall, return to their people and rouse them to rush to our relief.

Poor old Hung! His heart rather than his head must have spoken when he considered that our ancient enemies would thus suddenly be transformed to friends. But his action brought forth fruit in a way he little foresaw. There was assuredly one loyal heart among them. Lu-lu began to plan for my release. 'Twould be useless to attempt to hew their way out. The first few strokes of a chopper upon the wooden bars and Bow's guards would be upon them. Some other way must be found. After a time he had it. They would dig their way under the walls that ran below the rooms of the compound and from there seek an exit.

Nightfall had scarce arrived when they began. The thought of freedom and long constraint urged them on with a wild yet canny vigour. They pried loose their chains, made a way under the stones and dug a tunnel for all to pass. The adjoining room they found roughly floored and could hear members of the guard cursing and carousing above. Exit there was impossible, so Lu-lu knowing well the outline of the structure led the way forward. After that they dug through other walls, hindered each time by some outer circumstance. Then came the thought of forcing a way thus to the great study where I was confined and of making a sudden rush upward and, in the general confusion prevailing, bring my rescue to a successful issue.

Several surprises awaited them there. They found all quiet in the room above and feeling about for a possible opening stumbled upon the trap-door which my uncle held so long secret. There too they came upon rolls and lumps of some-

thing which it took little handling to conclude were silver dollars and sycee.

What a find! They quickly piled it upon the floor and scrambled out, to later discover the great coffin and effect my release. It was a small roll of these that Lu-lu had placed in my hand and girdle.

But another part of the plan proved less successful. They must have some of my uncle's modern guns to make their feat complete. While I descended the wall some stole toward the room where these were secreted. Again the action began well. All the remaining guns and several bandoleers of cartridges had been safely carried to the wall, when a delay occurred. Only Lu-lu knew the way up and down these treacherous rocks. He must therefore carry down the guns and then return to guide the feet of his fellows in their descent. The delay proved too long. A sentry making his rounds found the doors of the old study loose, raised the alarm and a crowd came rushing to the spot. Lights began to flicker here and there and then a cry and the escaping Lo-los were discovered.

To their honour two of the Lo-los still above the wall stood their ground and though all the guns had gone down fought with hands and choppers to the end. But the end was sure. One was thrust through and died almost instantly, the other rather than be captured leaped the wall and was dashed to death on the great rocks below. Lu-lu and the rest of the band rushed for the Pass carrying their precious loot with them.

At the Pass they found themselves opposed by an ever-increasing band of Bow's braves and a stiff fight ensued. But after much firing, the wild Lo-los scaled the rocks in another less familiar part and made good their escape. It was this last conflict that I heard as I lay for a time in the ledge of the rocks on the hills opposite.

Poor Lu-lu! Despite the rejoicing among his men as they found themselves free and on their native heath once more, and despite the honours he knew his people would pile upon him, his heart was sad. What had become of me his friend for whom he had ventured all? He held his men hovering about the Pass until daylight broke and for many hours after scouring the plain to see if trace of me might be detected. After a time some of his men returned.

"Soldiers spear old men, young men, women, children, any one, all trying to escape," they reported.

Then Lu-lu turned toward his native fastnesses. Alas! I must assuredly be among the slain. What clearer than that I had attempted to steal through the Pass, been readily captured and pierced without pity?

XII

FLIGHT

ALL was confusion as dawn broke over the old Castle. Bow's soldiers filled the spaces along the walls, and scanned the hills and Pass for a supposed Lo-lo raid. They had not detected the real source and suspected that several scores at least of the hillmen had in some strange way taken part in an attack. They had early discovered the loss of the arms and Bow and those near him were in desperate dudgeon over the disappearance of the silver. Under such circumstances the small episode of one unfortunate and his fate in the great coffin was of little concern.

"Take that thing out," Bow had bellowed as they searched about for remaining treasure.

Jowl Jaw summoned a few coolies among the followers and they carried it forth. Some of our old servants guided them up the crest of the hill and laid it on the outskirts of our plot. Jowl Jaw thumped the box soundly with the butt of a gun he carried, but listen as he would there was no response.

"Try the lid," he growled.

They tried it. The glue by this time had taken full grip and it did not move.

"Cover the cursed thing up," he commanded, and they did so.

A new mound mingled with the many of my ancestors, and the tide of the world rolled on.

Another new circumstance filled Bow with rage. The men of the valley had not assembled at the beating of the big war gong. Only his own braves had rallied to the supposed Lo-lo attack, and he was furious.

"Summon the elders," he snorted. "I'll make those old carrions creep."

His henchmen hurried away. Slowly the heads of families made their way to the hilltop. Few words they spoke as they met en route but their attitudes expressed grave apprehension. My father was one of the throng, but the old grandsire went no

more. The scene of the previous day had proved too much for him and though my people knew it not he lay upon his couch not to arise again.

"Evil days! Evil days!" he moaned at times. "Alas that these eyes of mine should live to see my offspring so destroyed, defiled, and I helpless. . . . Evil days! Evil days! . . . What will the ancestors say when I meet them by the Yellow Springs? . . . Evil days! Evil doings!"

The elders assembled, Bow swept in in full military attire accompanied by his guard. Having seated himself upon the temporary throne of yesterday, he wasted no time in the usual polite preliminary courtesies, but at once began:

"So you voluntarily relinquish your leadership, you cattle," he broke forth. "We sound the rally and you send no followers to the fight! . . . Well, it may appease your petty attempt at defiance to know that the Reconstruction Régime had deposed you previously. It was only our generosity that did not apprise you of it earlier. . . . As to your cowardly cowherds, their coming or not coming mattered nothing. My brave men have beaten off these wild barbarians and their carcasses strew the ground," and he looked about upon his guard with a fine gesture of pride.

"But here is the point. Now prick up your dirty ears that some meaning may penetrate your obtuse skulls. . . . The point is that this money is gone . . . and your lethargy and laziness have allowed it. . . . Now you're called upon to make it good and with liberal interest and speed. . . . Hear our orders. . . . Stand up," he roared, "that I may see that you are awake."

Our elders rose slowly and with dignity.

"Faster, you dogs," he glowered. "Now listen. . . . Two of my trusty guards will attend each one of you as you pass out that door. By sundown this evening you will be back here with them, each bearing one thousand ounces of silver or the guards will be here with what silver they can find in your stinking shacks on one end of their guns and your hollow head on the other. . . . Begone, and be quick. . . . Out with them, guards!"

The crowd of browbeaten, defenceless men filed slowly through the big doors and shambled off down the valley, hounded

hopelessly on by fate and the fiends at their sides. Yet each went determined to bring forth as little as possible of any small hidden store. . . . Bad as this Bow might be, he surely had not thought of carrying out such a threat. . . . They would produce one-tenth . . . one-hundredth of what he demanded, and he would surely as others of old be satisfied. They were to learn, and that swiftly alas! that the old make-believe days were past, that a new and cruel communist cortie of which they had never even vaguely heard before was in their midst, murderers and marauders with whom the old considerations of honour, virtue, life weighed nothing so it lay across their wild lusts for levelling, loot and lewdness.

That night returning with but a small proportion of the requisition, Bow again herded them forth adding to his extortionate and terrorizing demands the sound of the big bamboo upon many an aged back and head. When on the third night many were still short, the grim spectacle of heads carried upon poles up and down the valley, made the whole people shiver and cower in awe. Who ever in the oldest traditions, save Chang, the Butcher, and he a madman, had treated the populace and their hoary-haired leaders with such wanton cruelty as this?

My old grandsire died that night, mercifully spared the last crushing blow, for my father was among the slain. A few faithful friends secured rough boxes and laid them to rest in the bushes back of our old home, there to await a better day when they might sleep with their fathers.

But these things meant nothing to Bow and his ilk. They rather rejoiced in the despair and desolation they wrought, and wrote long despatches detailing their successes to those higher up, located far down the great river.

A day or two later and again those remaining of families were assembled.

"The Reorganization Régime demands that all titles to property whether new or old be brought immediately into our court for investigation and redivision," he announced, and again sent his henchmen to see that the orders were summarily obeyed.

The people brought them. Who dared disobey under the shadow of such awful tragedy? Old and worm-eaten documents they were, torn and yellow and mildewed, many of them

recording the right of the first ancestors who had entered the valley. Cautiously each drew the precious documents from his sleeve or wallet and deposited them at the usurper's feet.

"All here?" Bow blustered.

"All here!" responded a secretary.

"Then trundle this trash outside," he snarled.

Others among the henchmen obeyed, piling the precious papers recklessly in the midst of the old garden, and there while all stood about in breathless silence, they saw these priceless evidences of the past leap into flames.

"Thus perishes all private property," announced Bow, from his position on the porch. "Henceforth there are no proprietors. . . . This Government will grant the fields to such as faithfully serve it. . . . To your homes!" and again he hounded the unfortunates forth.

But it was only for a time. A few days later and they were back once more. This time it appeared it was apprehension of the Lo-los.

"These wild barbarians are again preparing for an attack," Bow announced. "Through your callous cowardice the guns were lost. . . . We must have more and that immediately. . . . More guns and munitions and men. . . . Each family must have at least one gun and provide two men. . . . No time to lose, so out with you and at it. . . . Be back here in five days or be ready to pay the price," and with this sinister threat they were again dispersed.

Some were already fortunate in possessing old guns with bits of cord for fuse, others sought them out upon the plain or in the far-away city. It was an almost impossible task in days when everywhere robbery and riot were rife and men held their rifles as they did their lives. But it was a case of life or death to my people also, and they obeyed in terror of consequences. Those who were successful were immediately drafted into Bow's battalions. Those who pleaded inability were beaten brutally and forced to act as servants to the soldier rabble, or possibly more fortunately, had their heads paraded on poles about the valley. Thus the reign of terror went on. No one knew what a day might bring forth. No one dared to complain. The very walls seemed to have ears and whisper their secrets to Bow through his emissaries and spies. Of the sufferings of our

women I may not speak. The silent torture of their days and nights must remain a horror ever sealed hermetically.

* * * * * * * *

As for me the month found me far away. I hid much by day at first, and travelled by night lest some one recognize me and report. Later I became more bold and went quietly forward, skirting the mountains and venturing little into the villages and towns.

Everywhere I went I found fear of robber raids, and that for good reason. Few places there were that had not been looted again and again. The result was that the real owners had either been carried off captive and held for ransom or fled to hide in the great cities, leaving their fields to wretched tenants who had nothing worth the taking. Water buffaloes for plowing, cattle for carrying burdens, pigs, chickens, grain, furniture, almost everywhere seemed gone, only the soil, the mattock and half-naked men remained.

As I had fled with but my inner garments for clothing, I tried after the first few days to obtain a gown. Doubtless I might have secured such had I ventured into the towns and their pawnshops, but that I did not dare. I chose rather to inquire cautiously at the country homes.

"A gown?" was the invariable answer. "No one has that to sell here. . . . These are all," and they showed the tatters in which they stood.

Fortunately the days were still reasonably warm, and I did not greatly need such protection save at nights. At length I succeeded in securing one, much too large and badly patched, from a woman washing by a stream.

"None! None!" she at first resolutely maintained.

It was only when I showed her one of the silver dollars which Lu-lu had bestowed upon me that she yielded. Doubtless some grown labourer went next to naked for a time. I had some remorse about that, but I must have one. I could not but note the suspicious glances levelled at me whenever I appeared so scantily clad. Had I carried a gown over my arm or in a bundle upon my back there would be no need of questioning, for scores of my people travelled thus. But to have inner clothing alone seemed to demand an explanation. Indeed one group

of men chased me for some fields with their mattocks. Fortunately for me I was fleeter of foot and the hills proved a welcome hiding place. Though, therefore, I wore my new garment little by day, it served as a sign of respectability.

At the Irrigation City I found myself at the end of the great plain that forms the central part of my native province. From there I followed the Min River into the mountains. A new idea possessed me. I saw that the travellers in every case seemed to have merchandise. Those coming out of the hills bore hides, wool, timber, ladles, honey. Those returning carried back cloth, rice, salt, hoes, tea. I went back to the city and purchased a pole and a few scores of straw sandals. These would do double duty. They would pass me as a merchant and provide me with proper footware for eventualities. Fortunately I had still a few dollars in my pouch.

A half day from the city and I came to the foot of the great pass up which I climbed wearily until well-nigh dusk. Arrived at length at the temple that crowns the top, I deposited my load and went forth to rest. I had come to the great divide. Before me lay the endless range of mountain peaks with far below the river, winding tortuously to and fro, roaring, raging, foaming, frothing to be free. Behind me lay the great plain where the same waters spread far and wide through endless streams, canals and ditches, the work of my people in centuries long gone by.

My heart saddened as I looked away over the spreading towns, villages and farm clusters behind me. I too had come to the dividing of the ways. I was leaving all, cast forth from my native soil by an accursed system. I knew nothing then of the tenets of capital and labour, bourgeoise and proletariat, but I knew the villain Bow and his murderers, and bitter thoughts filled my breast.

"What were they doing away yonder in the hazy distance to the south?" I asked. "Who next was suffering from their cruelties? . . . My father? My grandsire? . . . My family? Would they too be hunted down for having dared defy the tyrants' authority? . . . And my aunt and little May Fay? . . . Ah! Who would protect them now? And here was I running away from them all . . . thinking only of my own safety . . . caring only for my own life. . . . What would my warrior uncle think of such cowardice? . . .

What would the little dark-eyed maiden with the wealth of silken tresses say?

"Oh! Dan, do punish them," the words came again haunting me. "Punish them, Dan. . . . You know he and mother always trusted you!"

"Trusted me"? Yes! and now I was betraying the trust . . . fleeing, basely. I loathed myself at the thought. . . . Why had I not died in the box? The rat or the fetid atmosphere would have done its work by now, and I should not be here, a traitor, a coward!

"Well, I could still go back. . . . Yes, and I would. . . . I'd go back and . . . what? . . . That was the question. . . . I had stood by the truth. . . . I had refused the bribes of the sinister Bow. . . . I had even tried to avenge the murderer of my worthy uncle. . . . What more could I do for the present? What?"

Long I sat there pondering these things. By degrees the low winds as they blew up the pass cooled and comforted me. The great moon arose in stately splendour above the mighty peaks and rode calm, serene into the vaulted sky. A strange sense of some mighty power controlling all, the stars, the mysterious ranges before me, the vast plain and her numberless people below, stole over me. . . . A phrase of our great Sage often voiced by old Tang came again:

"'Tis Heaven bred the manhood that is in me! What can my enemy do?"

"Yes! Yes! Heaven had put some measure of my country's Sage in me too. . . . I had struggled. . . . I had been defeated, but was not dead. . . . The forces arrayed against me were too mighty now for me, a mere youth. I would now only bring sure and swift suffering upon myself and mine were I to return. . . . I would on . . . on somewhere and wait. . . . The mighty Heaven that sent the silvery orb so irresistibly upon her way might be guiding me now. . . . I would rest and then on."

I did. The next morning I shouldered my sandals and pushed down the pass on the other side. A few days later and all had changed. I might well have been in another world. I found myself up among the hillsmen, followers of one King Soh, a fief of my country. To them the great tragedies that

were happening upon the vast plains but a few spans of space away seemed of little concern. They were busy with their bits of corn and with the hunt.

A tiger had been molesting their herds, had carried off several goats and mauled a man. They were determined to secure his capture. The day of my arrival I found them busy digging a long trench on the mountain side. Offering my sandals for sale I sat down and watched. The trench completed they dug a cavity in the centre of the trench more deeply into the mountain. Then they lined both cavity and trench with the stones and boulders lying everywhere about the slope, leaving small doorways at either end of the latter. Logs and brush well weighed down by more stones furnished a roof. All that was but the work of a couple of hours as there were many and willing hands.

During the excavations others arrived, struggling up the mountain side from the King's palace with rude doors and a dog. The doors were set in place so that a slight motion would cause them to drop into position. A couple of men crawled within with poles and ropes and in a short time showed how readily it would be done, should the tiger but walk within.

"Ah! But will he?" I inquired.

"Wait!" was the laconic reply.

I waited and soon after saw a portion of the cave roof lifted and the unhappy dog dropped inside. He began at once to howl piteously. The tribesmen chattered away for a time in a language I could not understand, then turned apparently well satisfied and sauntered down the hill. I followed trusting to find a better market at the door of the chief's residence. I was hospitably received and spent the night there. The dog was doing his duty. He howled and whined far into the night when sleep overtook me. When I awoke next morning all was excitement, and shouting.

"Tiger! Tiger!" some one tried to inform me. "Tiger . . . come quick."

I followed them up the hill. Every one in the small fort-like village seemed on the way. When I arrived I found that the King himself was there, garbed in the rough skin gown of the mountaineer and gesticulating fantastically as he directed the course of the capture.

A great rope net was set at one end of the tunnel. Several men mounted the roof ready to act. A gun was fired. Up came the door and out rushed the great cat with an angry snarl of defiance. He took but one tragic leap, then rolled over and over down the slope, constantly more entangled in the net and belaboured at every point by hooting, howling villagers with their big clubs. Even the King joined in the wild attack, shouting and swinging his stick more vociferously than they all.

At the bottom of the slope I found the tiger lying out supinely, the ropes still securely twined about him. More shouting followed and soon a smith arrived with a native sledge of rough iron and an equally crude attempt at an iron bar. With these, while a couple of braves held down the head, the big cat's tusks and then his talons were cut or crushed and all were ready to see him freed. Ropes were secured about his neck and legs and body, then the net was removed and to my surprise he crept slowly forward completely cowed. When I left he lay by a post in the King's palace surrounded by laughing people and a pack of barking dogs.

What a relief after the months of turmoil to be in the midst of these simple scenes. I determined to make my way further in and on. Up another small side stream, I found myself suddenly confronted by a primitive castle. A wide and high stone wall narrowed at one corner into the foundation for a four-story structure. On the top fluttered flags and streamers of various sizes and hues. I thought the place must be in special fete, but later learned that these were but strips of cloth covered with prayers, a petition to the gods ascending each time the frail fabric fluttered in the breeze.

Arriving at the wide gateway in the wall, I found it closed. Continued rapping and calling brought no response. Apparently the place was deserted though the bleating of goats within made me suspicious that some one must be near. So I sat down and rested. Ere long a voice sounded and I looked about. At first I could not tell whence it came. Then looking up I saw a head far out over the rampart at the top of the structure.

"Go away! Go home!" the speaker was challenging in broken Chinese.

"Sell sandals!" I called back. "Want to sell sandals!" and

in a sudden inspiration stuck out my tongue to full length and scratched my head pronely, as I had seen some Tibetans doing in salutation on the road.

The movement was magic. The head almost immediately disappeared, a big shout went up, answered by a voice evidently already at the crack of the doors. In a few minutes I was within and being greeted most cordially. Later I learned my detention arose from the fact that a band of soldier-robbers retreating from the plain had raided the place and they were fearful that I might be a straggler from the band. But now all was hospitality. I was taken up past the goats and pigs and dogs and children in the yard, and past the women-folk on the second and third floors to the very top.

"Food! Food!" was the first salutation, and my host proceeded to fill a big wooden bowl with parched barley. Then from a sort of churn he poured forth a strange smelling concoction that looked like tea. To my surprise, however, my host began to pour it on my barley, then with a similar preparation for himself sat down to dine.

"Eat! Eat!" he suggested with a smile.

I looked about for some chopsticks, but none were to be seen. Glancing up I noted that none were needed. My host simply plunged his fingers into the mixture and squeezing a lump into shape so that it could reach his mouth, began to munch away joyously. I had always been trained to be courteous and so attempted to follow his example. It was real relief when he finished and summoned me to follow him elsewhere.

"Buddha! Buddha!" he said. "I lama," and ushered me into a side inclosure.

The place was dark and the odour of burned incense and butter again offended my senses, but the scenes as they slowly unfolded were even more repelling. These were of the sect of the black lamas, and the images were to me hideously dark in their indecencies. Gods and goddesses in extreme attitudes surrounded the walls. Yet the priest's feeling was clearly that of reverence. I left him only after repeated evidences on his part of good will.

"Strange thing religion," I meditated as I again swung along among the summits and by the surging streams. . . .

"Strange that such a repulsive religion should exist! yet stranger still that somehow from its spirit it should produce a devotee so cordial and courteous! Better that assuredly with all its benightedness than the brutal lust for wealth of Bow and his godless group, with their absence of all sentiments of humanity and hospitality!"

"Beware the Black Water people," a kindly acquaintance in one of the villages that dotted the valley had warned me. "They are ever at war among themselves and slay at sight any stranger that comes their way. . . . Three merchants who went among them ten days ago attempting to sell cloth were robbed and then murdered."

I naturally gave the place a wide berth. I had no desire for war!

Thus I made my way to the market town of Sung Pan and there disposed of the last of my sandals. Beyond that I was told lay the great grass land where only hides and coarse wool were used for shoes and clothing. I had lived and done well with my barter, so adopted a new rôle. This time I secured some needles, thread and other small articles that could readily be placed in a bundle and ventured forth.

I found myself more and more among Tibetan tribes, but as our countrymen had been there for many years I was not especially conspicuous and was treated with kindness. By the edge of a stream I found a couple of upright wooden barrels each upon a pivot spinning around and around.

"Prayers," a fellow traveller explained. "The lamas write them out by millions or print them with boards. . . . The barrels are filled with them. . . . Each time one goes round they send innumerable petitions to their gods."

"For what?" I asked.

"Chiefly that more souls be not born!" he replied.

"Poor wretches struggling so hard for life, well might they plead for no more return to this world," I meditated. "Yet their existence seemed bliss compared with the bitterness caused by Bow's unbridled band."

Far up among the mountains I found a big monastery with many lamas. The great gilded dome of the main building could be seen shining in the morning sun from afar. There a fair was in full course. I joined a group and pushed still farther north.

"Avoid the great grass lands," they advised. "The wild Golok live there, and with them also life is very cheap." How friendly even these barbarians seemed, warning even a stranger of danger.

On the mountain side as we camped one night, we found ourselves near the mouth of a cave. But a little space in and the entrance was blocked with a wall of stones. Curiosity led a couple of us on and we climbed through a small irregular opening. To our astonishment we found it inhabited. The dweller was a solitary lama.

As our eyes became more accustomed to the light we sat and looked at him. What a wretched being he was, covered with an old yak skin garment that but partly wrapped him round, hair matted with dirt and vermin, body filthy with itch and dirt. The stench of the place rose up as he moved.

"What do you here?" I ventured as our eyes became more accustomed to the light.

He made but a muttered reply.

"He does not understand your Chinese," said my companion, then plied the same question in Tibetan, and got a brief response.

"He's here to secure peace," said my friend. "He seeks for Nirvana!"

I looked about while my companion talked. Bones, some of them suspiciously human, strewed the spot. A bowl stood near. I picked it up cautiously and put it down in haste. It was the top of a human skull. . . . Other vessels stood about.

"Human breasts," my companion declared, "and that's a human skin on which he sits. . . . He says he must hold flesh in contempt if he would attain release."

"Release from what?" I inquired. "Surely nothing could be worse than this foul spot! . . . Nothing? Ah! yes! Many things! Poor wretch, deceived as he was, he sought what I sought. Peace! . . . He sought release from a mere delusion of reincarnations. . . . I sought rest from a grim reality, man's fiendish cruelty to his fellows!"

XIII

SCURRILOUS SCHEMES

WHILE I thus wandered amid these wild but peaceful mountains and their people, strange scenes were being staged in the old castle on the hill in the now distant homeland. For a month and more, Bow was busy with the elders of the valley. He must rob them of all power, wealth and prestige. Dared any one oppose him then the head, howsoever hoary, must pay the price or be paraded upon a pike up and down the familiar paths.

During those days my aunt and little May Fay lived quietly in their rooms. They could not but hear whispers of the tragedies about them, yet did not dare to venture upon inquiries, much less to visit in the valley lest they call attention to themselves and their helpless condition. Even the deaths of my father and grandsire had to be passed by with a few smuggled messages of sympathy and small presents sent through the old and trusted Sow-sow.

By the end of that time Bow had seemingly secured full possession and was ready for other things. One evening at dusk, being in a happy mood, he called Yung into his presence.

"Ah! My comrade Yung!" he began with great effusion. "You are doubtless enjoying the new liberty these days. Great days, eh? Great!"

"Great!" assented Yung rather sullenly, as was his custom.

"Great to see those old carrions crumble up and cringe, or take the short cut, eh?"

"Uh!" asserted Yung, whether of assent or dissent, it was difficult to decide.

"And you've found your place as head of your squad exciting, I doubt not," Bow ran on in apparent glee. "Fine fun catching these clodhoppers and their females when they try to flee?"

"Uh!"

"They squeal a bit when we use them rough, eh? Well, glad to see you're game for that. That's the way to rise in the

Reorganization Régime. Got to smash everything from the biggest bourgeoise down before we can build all again from the bottom. Got to get everything in common . . . everything, wealth and workers and women."

"Women," grunted Yung.

"Ah! Ha!" chuckled Bow. "Ha! Ha! Ha! I see what you're thinking about, my young man. And let me see. Just let me see. We had been talking about that before, hadn't we?"

"Uh-huh!" and Yung squirmed about sheepishly.

"Of course we had. Of course we had. Yes! Yes. Where is the plump dame and her spitfire offspring? Still with us, no doubt. No, I had not forgotten. I gave strict orders to guard them. Good lookers, eh? The lady and the youngster need some real experience of life. Well, we're prepared to show them a bit. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Then he fell to whispering something to Yung that seemed mightily pleasing to both.

"To-night . . . to-night, no delay," he wound up. "You go right ahead. I'll see that the dame don't trouble you or any one else," and with another guffaw he pushed Yung toward the door.

"Guard," he called as Yung slunk out. "Guard! Here!"

Jowl Jaw hulked in.

"Take this card to the lady, tell her that business of great moment requires that I see her here at once, and alone . . . strictly alone."

Bow did not return to his seat but began to pace up and down the room, pausing now and then to smooth his rather long black hair and twirl his sparse moustaches so that they might stand out more pointedly. He had plenty of time to do this, also to flick his high cavalry boots, straighten his sword belt and brush his buttons. The lady was apparently in no hurry to obey his behest. After considerable waiting Bow called a second guard and demanded that he ascertain the cause of the delay. He returned to say that the lady refused to come without a maid servant as escort. Bow swore vilely at that.

"Curse these old customs," he stormed. "Curse 'em! I'll knock that out of her though. What do I care if there are a hundred females? Tell her to fetch a score of maids," he

added sobering. "But see to it that that young huzzy stays home."

There was again a delay but in due time my aunt and her maid arrived. Bow was all blandishments.

"Ah! My lady," he began with a great attempt at old custom courtesy, "this most unworthy one has dared to invite your ladyship into our lowly presence. Please to be seated," and as custom demanded he showed her to a chair at the upper end of the room. My aunt accepted with dignity, and waited for him to begin.

"Ah! Ah! I trust your ladyship has not been in any way disturbed by the exigencies of these days. It is a most disagreeable thing, this having to deal with the old order, but . . . but . . . you know the sharper the blow the less the pain . . . and naturally we would avoid all undue suffering."

He paused as though expecting words of agreement. My aunt made no reply.

"Much of this program of course greatly shocks some of us who have been raised in refined circles," he continued, "and at first much strains our more delicate susceptibilities . . . but the state must ever come first."

Again a pause, a rather awkward one, and still no comment.

"One becomes very weary of these strenuous days," he half sighed, "and longs not a little for the amenities of home, but I suppose a soldier should not complain."

He rose at that and began to pace the room. The silence continuing he sat down a little nearer to my aunt's position.

"It is rumoured that your ladyship reads and reads widely," he smirked.

"A little," came the reply.

"What, one wonders, does a lady such as you think of these new customs now sweeping the world?"

"Rather poorly of most."

"You will agree, however, I am sure, that many of the old were servile and silly not to say severe and repressive of liberty," he leaned forward as he spoke in an attempt to become more confidential.

"Possibly a few," answered my aunt.

"A few? Many, my dear madam. Many! Many!" he was seemingly becoming enthusiastic.

"And none more than those which have impeded the natural rights of your own fair sex."

My aunt was again silent.

"Take marriage for example," he tried to put a bit of jocularity into his tone. "Take marriage. We men in old China had it all our own way. . . . Women were not treated as our equals. Indeed some would say as our servants, our slaves. Now the new order is remedying all that . . . remedying it drastically, some, I fear at first blush, would say too drastically . . . but heroic matters require heroic measures."

Still silence.

"You of course have heard of the new freedom in foreign lands. . . . In . . . Ah! . . . Ah! Russia for example. . . ."

"You called me here 'twas said on important business," came my aunt's reply and she rose as she spoke. "I must beg to be excused, as the conversation does not interest me."

"Ah! Yes! I must beg madam's pardon for the delay," Bow hastened to change his approach. "I was just coming to the subject. . . . I trusted a few light remarks would not hinder us. It is so rarely that we soldier folk have an opportunity to converse with fair ladies of our own class that we must be forgiven if our words and manners seem rather rough and uncouth. I had thought a little levity might serve to introduce a rather serious subject. Pray be seated, my lady. Pray be seated again."

My aunt obeyed and waited while Bow shuffled about for a beginning.

"It was about the new order, madam," he commenced, trying to assume an air of great deliberation. "Naturally madam understands the basic principles underlying this great new world order of things?"

"There are many claims to newness that affect the world," remarked my aunt evasively. "Mostly not for its good."

"True, madam. True!" replied Bow. "We have all sorts of parties and cliques. Quite too many, you will say. Quite so . . . quite so! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! We have the Nationalists and the Youth Group, also the Leftists and our own world-renowned Internationals or Communists."

"I have heard the latter much spoken against," remarked my aunt rather bluntly.

"Bravely spoken, madam," Bow hastened to agree. "Naturally those who have do not desire to be disturbed by those who have not, so the capitalists heap all manner of opprobrium upon our organization, but the fight is everywhere going our way."

"Yes?"

"Ah! Madam well knows that. Who does not know of the way we have won in great Russia and of the Union of Soviet Republics that have been already formed about our powerful leader . . . and now we are out to work with her for the smashing of Imperialism everywhere."

"Imperialism? I thought most lands were now republics or limited democracies?"

"True politically, but they have but changed their names not their natures. They are still imperialistic in their attitudes and actions toward all the suppressed peoples of the world. They are out to oppress us, exploit us, enslave us, mentally, legally, especially economically."

"Does the use of raw resources long useless, the starting of new industries to give employment, the exchange of goods between nations mean enslavement?"

"Ah!" Bow parried. "I see that madam has been reading. But alas! reading only one side. It is the proletariat that should develop our resources, own the industries, get the profits from all commerce. As it is now all profit goes to the capitalists, these foreign dogs, the Imperialists."

"We have had many millions of proletariat in our land for many thousands of years; why did they not start such things centuries ago?"

"Science, my dear madam, science. They did not know the way until its advent."

"And who developed science?" asked my aunt quietly.

"Why, the scholars, madam."

"Yes, the scholars with the aid of the capitalist, and the same capitalist has taken the initiative and risk in developing industry and commerce. They, therefore, should get at least credit for that."

"Credit, madam? You're too tender hearted there. They

did it all from sheer selfishness and deserve no thanks. They cared nothing for science or for society. They thought only of their own pockets and their own pleasures and even if you could show a few that gave a bit later to so-called philanthropies, they did it for fame and power. Moreover, whatever mite of good they did, their day is done and their end due, far overdue," and Bow braced himself for the harangue he loved so well.

"But perhaps some are needed to give progress a start in our land as in others?" queried my aunt. "Some one must find the way here and finance us in our feeble beginnings."

"The proletariat under our guidance will do that, madam," broke in Bow. "To them all things belong. They supply all the labour and to them must go all the profits. Only the peasants and artisans shall have a place in the new order. Only they are producers. We must uproot all banks and business of the foreign Imperialist."

"And to which class will you belong?" ventured my aunt.

"I? Why I!" Bow faltered. "I am a soldier."

"Then they too will be necessary in the new order?"

"Necessary until we have smashed the Imperialist Governments abroad and the nefarious Nationalist group at home."

"And teachers will be necessary at least for agriculture and mechanics to instill your party propaganda?"

"Assuredly. Assuredly. We will stress the education of the masses but exterminate utterly the present capitalist control and creeds."

"And you will find a need of doctors and lawyers and merchants and musicians, artists, and architects, supervisors and supervised, tasks menial and tasks more genteel?"

"No! No! Madam, all will be equal. All will be comrades."

"You think a change in name will change human nature?"

"Nay! Nay, my lady. We are not so shallow as that. We are really going to change society from the foundation up."

"How?"

"Ah! That is a big question," replied Bow again preparing for a disquisition. "You see we are a mixed nation: Chinese, Manchus, Tibetans, Mongols and tribes of various names. Now we plan to unite our land on the principle of racial self-deter-

mination. Each race will work out its own peculiar destiny and will give to and receive of the benefit of all."

"The Lo-los for example will be set free to work their own will, or destiny as you say?"

"Surely, madam, surely!"

"And what if they demand this valley as the possession of their ancestors and attack us if we refuse to accede. Not this valley alone of course, but all this western region?"

"Ah! We will have to hold them under tutelage first."

"By force of arms evidently?"

"Doubtless for a time."

"And that is not what do you call it, 'Imperialistic'?"

"Certainly not, my lady." Bow bristled up a bit. "Certainly not. You see each unit will be self-governing, and within each unit there will be representation according to classes, the farm group by itself, the smiths by themselves, the carpenters, the masons, the coolies each by themselves."

"Class distinctions clearly drawn and class consciousness everywhere?"

It was Bow's time to be silent.

"Possibly, but not as the world is to-day. Now the cursed capitalist class is most self-conscious and has seized all the power, oppressing all others."

"But may not your artisan or peasant group far outnumber the others and therefore oppress the rest in your novel scheme?"

"Perhaps, but they should, for they are the producers, but in the end all things will be adjusted. Then all unjust laws and levies and illegal taxes and intolerances will be swept away."

"And the Golden Age will again dawn?" suggested my aunt softly.

"Ah!" cried Bow taking it that he had finally won his cause. "You may well say that, madam. Then each and every worker will work less hours, have higher wages and be fully protected against unemployment. Then there will be no toiling peasant but all property will be with the state. Then even we poor soldiers will be relieved of this strenuous life and be able to enjoy the amenities and some of the amorous delights of life with the fairest of the fair. You, I see, are going to make a splendid Communist."

"I am a Communist in several ways already," replied my aunt ignoring subtler allusions.

"A Communist already?"

"Yes, I share with you a hope of a better day for society when all will indeed be comrades, coöperating together for a common good, when all will be truly workers, each contributing of his best and sharing according to his noblest needs."

"Splendid! Splendid!" almost shouted Bow. "My dear lady. You will be a mighty power in our party. But you will need . . . ah! Some one to appreciate and promote your ideas and ideals. . . . Some one to, ah! protect you in these stormy times. My dear madam, may I offer," and Bow began to rise.

"Now it is my time to beg you to be seated," continued my aunt calmly. "I wish to add that a society I have learned much to appreciate of late has tried your scheme, tried it perhaps too soon and consequently failed."

"Failed how? Who?"

"The early Christian Church noting the distress caused by inequalities of rich and poor tried Communism at least of possessions. No one claimed that anything he had was longer his own but was ready to divide all for the common cause. And it worked for a short time and then it failed. Why? A man named Ananias came in and cheated and lied and his wife, no stronger in character, abetted him in both. That's what killed Communism then, and that's what is bound to kill your cause again. It is bound to die, not because your ideals are all warped and wrong, but because you lack the material in your manhood, the morale with which to build. Do you think to usher in a millennium of progress by murder, a Golden Age by gruesome atrocities?"

"You insult us and me, madam!" said Bow attempting an attitude of hauteur.

"And you have not hesitated to insult me, your guest and fellow-countrywoman. But we will allow that to pass. Much more reprehensible, you are seeking to gain your ends by finesse, force and fraud, arming all the robbers, molesters and marauders. Some of your ideals may some day triumph but it will not be by your process, and you and your murderous methods and men will long since have passed into oblivion."

"Christian, eh? Christian," snorted Bow fumbling with his sword. "And you dare to speak thus of us and of our cause. Christian! Of all accursed mouthings and pratings! Christian! No! Sit there, you wobbling wench!" and seizing my aunt's arm as she attempted to rise, he thrust her back with brutal curses.

Old Sow-sow screamed and ran toward her mistress.

"Shut up, you strumpet," Bow snorted, as he smote her with his open palm.

What might have ensued must be left to fancy. Just then the door of the old room swung open with a bang and Wong Yung came rushing in.

"Brigadier! Brigadier!" he panted. "She's . . ."

Then noting his aunt's presence he hurriedly whispered something to Bow which led to more loud cursing and reviling.

Contemporaneous scenes in another part of the old castle had caused the interruption. May Fay sat alone after the departure of her mother and the maid. It was quiet in the little inner parlour and she wanted no company even of servants to disturb her reveries. It is not difficult to surmise upon what they dwelt. That last scene in which I had, as I then thought right, attempted to redeem the honour of my family by sinking the dirk into Jowl Jaw's great neck and its sequel when I lay helpless upon the floor with her arms about me, could not die from her memory. Indeed she did not wish it to die. I was dead, she deemed, but in her soul I should live and live forever. Not one shade of that final scene and of many others of fond association should fade from her thought. So she sat there mechanically moving her needle in and out of her embroidery as the memories came and went and the two small clocks, one on either side of the table, ticked on.

As she sat there something began to creak. It was some one walking, slowly, in the larger room without. It must be her mother returned and she, leaping up, ran lightly forward to welcome her.

"Mamma," she called softly as she swung back the doors from the small circular opening. "I'm in here, mamma. . . . What did he want?"

The room was dark as she peered forth.

"What? Who?" she cried as she retreated.

"Me!" said a voice and a familiar figure appeared in the opening.

"You, Yung," cried May Fay. "You, Yung! What are you doing in here? How dare you?"

"Now none of your actin' this time, sissy," Yung blurted out in a voice intended to be a fine imitation of Bow and his ilk. "You're my prisoner and the sooner you learn it the better." He had evidently been practising his part.

"What do you mean, Yung?"

"Mean? You'll soon learn what I mean. You're not dealin' with a baby like Dan."

"Don't you dare say one word against him, you coward, or I'll . . ."

"You'll? Ha! Ha! What can you do? I've got you where I've wanted you for a long time, and if you don't do as you're told and that quick you'll be where he is. Come here!" and drawing a great black pistol he started toward her.

"Mother!" shrilled the little terrified maid. "Mother!"

"Mother, eh? Yes! Howl for your mother. She's always been against me too. But the Brigadier's fixin' her now so she won't squeal and I'm here to fix you."

"Killing mother too. Oh! Yung! Yung! You," and she fell upon the floor in a little shuddering heap.

"That looks better," jeered Yung as he slumped slowly toward her.

Shoving his pistol in his belt, he bent over and began to lift her. Something electric seemed to touch her. She was up in a flash, had released his grasp, and sprang from him. But Yung was not to be outwitted. He backed toward the door and again drew his gun.

"More slick tricks, eh?" he growled. "That'll be the last one on me."

Then May Fay's whole attitude seemed to change suddenly.

"Oh! Yung, Yung!" she sobbed. "Uncle's gone and Dan's gone and now mother's gone . . . and there's only you and me left, Yung . . . and you're my cousin. . . . I know you wouldn't harm me, Yung. I just know you'll protect me against Bow and Jowl Jaw and all these vile wretches. Come over here, Yung, and sit down and let us think it over," and she sat down, drawing another bench near her.

Yung lumbered over and drawing the stool still nearer, sat down.

"Yung! Cousin Yung! They're only fooling you, these people. I'm sure they are."

"Not they. . . . They're just the kind I like . . . and they're heaps better to me than ever the 'old one' was, that old thick neck, that tyrant."

May Fay shuddered at the allusion to his father.

"And they appreciate my courage. They all do. Say, I don't squirm at anything . . . and that's right. And they've given you to me . . . all of you," and bending forward he grasped her by the arms drawing her toward him.

"That's right, Yung. That's right. We should be for each other. That's just what I'm saying, too," and she patted his flushed cheek with her dainty hand. "But the other that I'm saying is true too, Yung. They'll give me to you for a while . . . and then when they please they'll separate us. Think of that, Yung . . . just think of that."

"Not much," Yung chortled.

"And you really like me, Yung, boy. . . . Really, truly?" and she ran her fingers through his long thick hair.

"Uh!" grunted Yung and held her closer to him.

"Then listen, Yung! Listen! Women know men in a way that you men do not." Then in a whisper close to his ear: "Bow has been smiling at me. He has done it every time we met and in a way that mamma knows and I know."

"Uh!"

"Don't let's trust him, Yung dear. He's a stranger . . . and I'm sure he'll try to trick us . . . separate us sometime."

"Uh! What about it?"

"Ah! I knew you liked me, Yung. I knew you'd trust me," and again she patted his cheek. "Listen. . . . Listen close. . . . Who knows who are hearing these days? We must fly together. Run away . . . away from these vampires, and live happy . . . just me and you, Yung . . . just us two!"

"When?"

"Now, Yung, now! Right now! I'll run and get my cloak," and again suiting her act to the word she slipped from his grasp

and ran trippingly to the door, pausing there just a moment to wave him a coy, " Just wait! "

Yung waited long! He sat there, a fine glow of satisfaction spreading over him. Occasionally he stroked his own hair and cheek. Something wonderfully thrilling had touched there and there. Yes. The little witch was wise. Bow must admire her. Who didn't? Dan had, and she had admired Dan . . . but he was out of the road now. It would be more difficult to handle Bow. Bow had a way of getting what he wanted. He had the mother now? Yes, but he had smiled at the daughter too. He had seen him at that. That was a fact . . . and she, the little midget that no one would think knew anything . . . knew some things . . . she had seen it too and suspected Bow. . . . Yes! It would be wiser to get away . . . get away, but how? They hadn't thought of that! No, they hadn't. Since the Lo-los made their escape special guards had been placed all about, especially at the gates. There was the Zig-zag in the wall where the Lo-los had gotten away. Yes, he knew that well and could scale it . . . but that too was specially guarded. Run away? Yes. She was right, but how? How?

He stopped stroking his head and rose up to think. He began to pace the floor and paused at the door once or twice to peer out into the dark room. She was not there. No, she would not be there. That was not where she kept her gowns. Where would she keep them? This was her room right where they had been. And she had run out to get a wrap! Foolish little canary bird, she had been excited and flitted the wrong way.

" May Fay," he called carefully into the darkness. " Where are you? Your things must be in here! "

There was no answer. He felt his way noiselessly out into the dark room, then thought better of it and returned for the light. Where could she have gone? She must be in her mother's private room on the other side. He tiptoed as noiselessly as he could to the opposite door and rapped. No response. He tried to push the door open. It was barred within. Then a wave of anger began to pass over him. She had slipped from him and was hiding inside . . . hiding there until the mother returned.

"Ha!" he gulped. "I might have known you'd try your tricks. But no tricks work this time. Open that door and quick," and with a fine string of the curses he had been learning in his new career, he began to pound and throw his whole weight upon the door.

The noise soon brought a guard. He rushed in and ascertaining the cause lent his weight. A few thrusts and they were through. A gust of air greeted their efforts as the door flew open and extinguished their small light.

"Curses on their ancestors," growled the guard.

"Light it," muttered Yung. "She'll not get through here till you get back."

"Come quick, quick, little one," he whispered, in an attempt to be subtle. "Come quick before he returns."

Only a swish of something in the darkness gave answer, and he waited.

"You're not killing yourself . . . strangling yourself, you huzzy?" bawled Yung, another possibility seizing him. "Stop it! Stop it or I'll shoot."

Again only the strange swish for answer.

"Kill yourself that way and I'll cut your head off, and your body into big hunks," Yung threatened, "then you'll go headless and in hunks all your days of darkness. Quit it! Quit it!" and passing in he tried to thump his way toward the source of the sound.

Just then the guard returned with the light.

"Where?" growled the guard.

"Where?" echoed the astonished Yung, grasping a bit of flapping paper by the half-open window.

Both rushed outside and raised the alarm. Yung in his excitement burst in upon Bow at his brave audience with my aunt. All was soon confusion, and men with lights were running, shouting, searching everywhere. Then from the gateway a great guffaw resounded.

"What?" demanded Bow as he bore down upon them.

Then he too chuckled gleefully. Jowl Jaw had passed out just a few minutes earlier with "some wee kicking wench in his arms!"

"Haw! Haw! . . . Haw! Haw! Haw!" and the great Brigadier returned to his much earned rest.

XIV

PEACE AND PERIL

FAR away to the north of my homeland and all unconscious of its tragedies, I with my new companions was slowly making my way forward. I was in another province at last, one which, though so near my own, was separated effectually by the great barriers we had passed. It was the province of Kan-su, noted alike for its mountains and its largely Mohammedan population. Among these I could surely find refuge from all pursuers, and I began to seek for some chance of a livelihood. It came rather strangely.

We paused one day at a temple at the head of a small valley. As we sat there resting the familiar droning of voices repeating the old classics of Confucianism came to my ears. I wandered there through some unconscious attraction, offering some of my still unsold wares to the old teacher. Something in my speech attracted him and he guessed that I was no regular peddler.

"You are a student?" he challenged.

"A poor one," I answered falteringly.

"You have read the four Books?"

"Somewhat."

"And the five Classics?"

"Meagerly."

"And you know some modern studies?"

"Very few."

"'Tis well," exclaimed the old man. "'Tis well. You must relieve me here. . . . I thought to avoid all misfortunes by coming hither, but now my house is in trouble. I must go thither to its relief," he added after a pause.

"Where?" I inquired somewhat fearing that he might say my own province.

"'Tis far!" he answered. "'Tis far. In the capital of my province of Shensi."

"In Si-an, then?" I ventured.

"Ah! Yes! Yes! In our ancient capital," he murmured.

"Alas! That it has fallen upon such evil days, the capital which since times immemorial has been so famed, so glorious," and the old man swayed as he drifted off into memories of centuries long since.

"When must you go?" I recalled him.

"Immediately," he replied. "See here is the letter, and the messenger awaits my reply."

It needed little urging. Was not I looking for work, occupation of any sort, and here was an offering much to my choice. There was little need that I inquire about remuneration. The tattered clothing of the half dozen urchins who had forgotten all to listen to our talk, told that little need be expected. The surmise proved true. I was to get my food and a small gratuity from time to time if the homes could afford it. It was little indeed, but here was a home and a hearty welcome by the poorest of people who yet longed that their children might gain even a trifle of the great traditional culture of the Sacred Books.

There the weeks went by uneventfully and grew into months. The old teacher did not return, nor even send a message. Wild rumours of unrest reached us from time to time to say that the lands to the north were suffering, but we in our secluded valley listened as though they had been from another planet. They did not touch our scanty fare of corn and buckwheat and so seemed of no concern. What mattered so long as there was something to fill empty maws and an old patched quilt to keep out the worst of the cold!

How utterly poor these people were! I had thought we knew poverty in my old valley with our small fare at best of one cent a meal, later cut down to half of that by the devastations of the locusts and the drought that followed. But to these unfortunates even that would have been luxury.

The old temple where I lived was indeed a dilapidated structure that had been in existence for four hundred years. Its walls were of stone gathered from the hillsides and its roof of tiles carried toilsomely up on the shoulders of men, from the town by the river far away. Doubtless in those distant days the place held many priests. . . . These faring forth on begging expeditions far and wide, had returned each month with substantial rewards, until at length the abbot felt confident in calling workmen and the structure was slowly reared. He must

have been a great man in his day. His grave could still be seen on the small flat in the slope, substantially builded with hewn stone.

But alas, for posterity! In my day much of the wall of the temple and most of the roof had fallen. Some rows of idols which doubtless he and his successors had set in state were now exposed to sun, snow and whining wind until most were armless, legless, headless or crumbling to dust at the foot of their thrones. The staff of the place consisted of but two forlorn creatures, one of whom made a pretense at keeping the lights before the images burning and the other, his underling, at cooking meals. Both spent their multiplicity of leisure hours and their paucity of cash in smoking the paste from the pretty but pernicious poppy.

For a schoolroom I had a space under the main roof, right in front of the chief idol. There worshippers occasionally interrupted as they beat the old sadly battered drum to rouse the god, then knelt to present their incense and petitions. A narrow room near by, windowless and low, held a rickety bed where I slept at nights.

My evenings I spent often with the parents of my pupils and their neighbours. The height of their hopes and the wretchedness of their hovels both greatly puzzled me. How could such souls live in such surroundings? Their houses were but lowest of shacks to prevent their being blown away by the storms that ever and anon raged up the ravines. The sides were of small branches plastered over sparingly with mud. Much of the latter was an extravagance few could afford as it was needed for the greater necessity of growing food. The roofs were of corn-stalks, weighted down by stones to delay departure. A single opening usually served for both door and windows and the floor was of rock or ashes.

Within was usually but a single room, save in the autumn when some of the surplus corn-stalks were stored away in the form of partitions or additional lining to the walls, these to disappear gradually as the winter wore on and the stalks went to feed occasional fires. But they required little space. A small corner was sufficient for the crude fireplace of rubble stone and soil with an oval pan for frying. Another small spot in the center did for the square table with its crude benches one on

each side, while spaces along other walls gave room for an occasional box, basket or crock. Such luxuries as beds were conspicuously absent. They were fortunate who had a wadded cotton quilt or two to break the winter blasts. Cold was one of their cruellest adversaries. Lack of food was another mighty foe that stalked ever menacingly near.

I slowly learned their story.

"It was but a few years ago," one related. "We did not live here then, but well to the north and west. One day while the sun was shining brightly and all was well and joyous, the earth began to tremble. We stopped our work and looked at one another in a bit of astonishment. Each felt a little dizzy, queer, faint, then my cousin began to laugh and we all joined in. 'Just the old dragon yawning or stretching himself,' he said, and we went on with our talk and task.

"Then came a mighty tremor. We all staggered to and fro as though we were suddenly drunk and an old man in the row fell down. . . . When we caught ourselves again we could hear some one shouting over at my house. It was some of the women. They had run out into the open and were calling.

"'Come! Come! Come home!' the voice shrieked. 'The tiles are off and the chimney's down.'

"We were starting for home when again the earth about us began to heave up and down in mighty waves and the surface shivered as though it were some great monster shaking the storm from its hide. We were all down and struggling to gain our feet. Then a terrific roar filled the air. Something was crashing, rushing, grinding. From my hands and knees I looked about.

"Incredible! Impossible! The great mountain mass above was moving down as though it had been a vast rolling river. Trees in long lines were tumbling over and disappearing, great projecting rocks and boulders that had been landmarks from the days of my childhood were tossing about, bounding as balls toward the bottom of the valley. Where was my brother's house? . . . and this neighbour? . . . and that? . . . and the little village on the slope? . . . Again incredible. They had vanished or were moving swiftly down, down.

"I looked about me for my cousin and companions. They

too were gazing wildly at the awful scene. I shouted to them and again tried to rise, but was as quickly dashed back to the earth. What? The very ground under me was in motion and we were sprawling about like spiders. 'Swish!' we too were sweeping down the slope along with stones and soil and endless stuff making a devious route to the river below.

"Fortunately we paused before we reached the bank. But much of the rubbish had not. It swept into the waters and they in turn rose and ran riot over the ruins. I pulled myself out and looked for my companions. My cousin and the old labourer were near me and I hastened to their aid. The first I extracted from a heap of rock, badly bruised and crushed but still alive. The other lay very still in death.

"Later and for many a weary week and month we viewed the ruins. The whole great mountain side had rocked to the mighty quake and toppling forward had rolled recklessly, remorselessly into the vale below, carrying forests and fields, cattle and chickens, homes and helpless humanity in a wild mêlée to destruction. There it all lay piled about, a pitiable confusion. Alas! Alas! for the chaos that had been comfort and cheer to me and mine and our ancestors for centuries."

The old man paused.

"But why did you not remake your home?" I suggested.

"Remake it? Remake it?" he repeated. "Aye, gladly one would have done that. But it was hopeless. Only rocks remained, barren rocks where once had been our corn fields. It was useless, hopeless. Then we gathered the few survivors of our families. Mine had fared better than most, and made our way south and still south, searching for a spot where we might sojourn."

"And you came here?"

"Aye! Here. . . . Here!" and he looked about with a sigh.

"And the old teacher?"

"Ah! Yes! We had known better days, and men of culture had risen from our numbers. Men who had become officials in distant provinces. So we sought him and pled that one come. The old scholar heard and hastened. You have our story," and again the old head bent low.

"Help these, our boys," he added. "Help them out to the

wider world. I had a brief taste of knowledge myself. I would that they might attain."

The appeal needed no further exhortation. I worked with a will to aid the sons of such stock, and even the stormy days of winter sped by with a zest. "Sped by" I have written, yet there was many a long day and many more long, long nights when I lay awake dreaming, dreaming, thinking, thinking, wondering, ever wondering as to the fate of those now so far away.

"Fool! Fool! Fool!" something seemed to say. "Why did you not close with the great braggart Bow? You could see through all his schemes. You could readily have outwitted him, outdone him in cunning, possibly, probably become head of some division of that ribald band, then sold them out, saved yourself and those near to you, dear to you. Fool! Fool! Fool! that you have been."

Then I would groan and toss to and fro and wish I had never lived, decide almost that I would not. The mountain stream or the precipice not far away should swiftly end all my mistakes and my misery.

But ever and anon another voice seemed to speak: "Nay! Nay! That assuredly would be to act the fool! You are still young. Life is still long. Justice may wait for a time but will come some day, somehow, if you will but be true."

"Be a warrior for the highest worth," came the voice of my sage aunt.

"Dan! Dan! Oh! Dan! Be true! Be true! You know they always trusted you," pleaded a small, sweet maiden, and in fancy I bent over and kissed the tears away, then when the day dawned rose up boldly and went on with my work.

* * * * * * * *

Alas! What scenes were going forward in the old home valley and on the crest of the hill of happy memories. When Yung burst in with his report that May Fay had somehow disappeared, my aunt had but meagerly heard and comprehended. She had, however, quickly availed herself of the confusion to pluck her old maid by the sleeve and quietly disappear.

"Fay! Fay!" she called softly, as she reëntered her rooms. "Fay, little girlie. Fay-Fay, little daughter. Mother's home again."

But no voice came back and she passed on quickly from room to room. True Yung had implied that she had disappeared, but that could only mean that she had possibly been at the doorway looking out and had run away when Yung approached. She could at most be but hiding somewhere within the apartments, in one of the rooms . . . among the boxes . . . about the beds, rolled up possibly motionless in one of the great wadded quilts, as well a girl might do.

"Fay-Fay, little dear one. . . . Do not fear. . . . It's mother, little loved one. . . . Mother that's calling," she reiterated in louder tones as she went eagerly from one possible spot to another.

Then after a time she came to the window still swung ajar. There she paused a moment, then moving slowly forward tried it, swung it open wide. . . . Yes, it was possible . . . possible. . . . She might have passed out . . . or some one had entered that way. Some one had entered? Who? What? Some of the significance of what had been proceeding quickly flashed to her woman's instinct.

"Yung. Yung. Yes, he knew. It was he who had burst into Bow's presence. It was he had been the intruder here also. The renegade, the reprobate . . . the vile one . . . and he had revealed that she had escaped. Fay-Fay must be outside then . . . hiding somewhere in the great fort enclosure," . . . she hurried to her door and out.

There in the yard she saw lights, torches, candles, lanterns passing hither and thither and voices calling. She hurried to join in the search.

"What are you seeking?" she inquired cautiously of a group of three over by the wall.

"Girl gone," came the laconic reply.

She asked no more but followed them at a short distance.

"Fay-Fay, my lassie! Fay-Fay, little hiding one," she kept repeating restrainedly, as other ears were listening. "Come out now. . . . All is safe. . . . Come here to mother."

Then after a time had come the ribald roar from the great gateway.

"What? . . . What?" she asked eagerly of the serving maid who had joined her. "Go and inquire."

The maid returned quickly.

"They say one went out carrying off a girl," she reported. "And that it was the Number-one guard."

"Number-one guard! . . . Number-one guard!" she groaned. "Jowl Jaw! Jowl Jaw," and sank on the stones in the darkness.

"Haw! Haw! . . . Haw-haw-haw!" went up the howls of hilarity at the joke old Jowl Jaw had played.

Something in the ruffian roar stung other sensibilities in the mother and springing to her feet she rushed toward the entrance.

"Let me through! Let me through," she shouted.

A keeper sobered by the surprise stepped forward and began to pull the bar.

"Stop her!" shouted some one, and Bow might have been seen moving off gleefully to his quarters.

But instead of my well-poised aunt, who rarely spoke above moderation, some new creature had appeared. She dashed at the guard and with a sudden thrust sent him sprawling. Then grasping the bar she slid it back with a bang and began to swing the big doors. But other guards had been too well trained to long yield to surprise. They were upon her in a moment, seizing, tugging, ruthlessly dragging her down and away.

"It's my daughter! . . . My daughter! . . . My little girlie daughter!" she shouted as though no one could do otherwise than respond to such an appeal, but the brutes only chuckled the louder and clutched her more rudely as they lugged her back to her rooms.

Some of the scenes that followed I cannot dwell upon. They are too grey, too gruesome. Bow had played his game ruthlessly, relentlessly. He had not reckoned on one thing. Human nature has its limits. My poor aunt's nerves, so carefully cultured and controlled, had given way. They might thus imprison her poor body, but her proud and sensitive soul would break its bounds. They carried her back to her room and kept her there grimly guarded. To and fro, to and fro, she paced her small apartments, ever searching, ever crooning, ever crying out in agony:

"My daughter! It's my daughter! My dear one!"

Bow and his braves expected a pretty scene in the morning at which they would again howl heartily. Old Jowl Jaw would

prowl back at midnight, or in the darkness sometime and the girl then or later would reappear. But the darkness gave place to dawn without knock at the big gates. Daylight came and some of the more curious peered out over the ramparts, or swept the scene around and about the big approach with their glasses but saw no trace of the big hulking form or his fair captive.

Even the bold Brigadier came to inquire and investigate. When noon brought no news or rumour, he even sent a squad to search the immediate neighbourhood. They examined every path, explored the fields, made rigid inquiries at the Pass and down the village.

"Roads and fields too dry to show any tracks," was the report. "As for the Pass and the village, guards there are positive no one has gone through."

Next day the whole force was on the qui vive.

"Must find the old brute," was Bow's fine appreciation of his body-guard. "He's too valuable a silencer to let slip."

They paid little attention to a maid more or less, but a man who could murder at command was not to be lost, so the search went forward with a systematic thoroughness. They examined all homes and wells and watercourses. Suspects were dragged from various places. They even heartlessly led my poor aunt forth to cry her bitter, bereft appeal wildly, weirdly up and down the valley and its slopes, but no trace or echo came back to tell the whereabouts of murderer or sweet maid. The earth had swallowed them up. Both had utterly vanished.

"The devils and their lictors have got old Jowl Jaw at last," muttered some of his ilk.

"The warrior has come for vengeance and dragged his murderer off to the Judgment Hall at the Yellow Springs," whispered some of our valley folk.

"A good god or goddess has swept down and rescued the sweet maid," declared many of our women.

"Some of those accursed Lo-los in this thing," swore Bow and set his guards not only at the Pass but all about the slopes. Then he went carelessly on with his work of communizing the community.

The old guard-house which had contained the Lo-lo hostages was already full of unfortunates, half starved and famishing. These he held chiefly in hope that a few more dollars might be

discovered in some hidden spot of their homes. Down the valley cries came forth nightly from wretched women and children suffering from the bands quartered in their homes.

"Must crush the spirit of the old before we can create the new," Bow orated when any one suggested compromise. "Besides headquarters demands good reports or no pay," he occasionally added.

Having gathered all the coin possible, another ingenious device came from his band of advisers. It was a brilliant idea and Bow adopted it at once. It was to take the old silver and copper, whether in bullion or coins and by smelting them down recoin them much impared in substance and size.

"Capital! Excellent!" Bow smiled till his long fangs appeared and the thing was begun.

Then night after night upon the high castle hill a strange glare might be seen and day after day, a great smoke rolled toward the sky. It was the fires of wood and coke and coal and charcoal, as they did the debasing deed.

Small coins not worth more than a fraction of their nominal value, spurious silver with which our people could not trade beyond the valley, began to pour forth through the soldiers and camp followers. Poor unfortunates with no one to pity! Let one of our merchants go to the Prefectural City to buy a roll of cotton cloth, then true silver or its equivalent in cash must be given. Alas! He had already been robbed of all such wealth, and now had handfuls of nothing save debased currency which no regular seller would receive or receive only at enormous discount. Returned home with his cloth a squad of half drunken soldiers would appear to offer or demand that he receive other worthless exchange.

Not a few of the small merchants on the street tried to close their shops and go out of business. This Bow and his brutes refused to permit. Every shop must be opened and business conducted as usual until the new order was ready to carry on through the People's Shops. Woe unto the merchant who refused. His small remaining stock was immediately declared to be public property and one of Bow's experts sent in to dispose of the goods at any price they would bring.

It would seem impossible that any one could survive such a system, but no one knows my people who has not seen them

under adversity. The majority by banding together managed by means only known to themselves to eke out a type of trade and possessed their souls in patience.

The benign Brigadier's next decree was even worse chaos. The news came in that another detachment were using paper money. Again there was rejoicing in his camp. The amount of old cash and bullion had a limit, however spurious might be the product produced, but here there was no such inconvenient restriction. Paper cost next to nothing and outside that the small pieces of printing boards were the only requisite. These latter were readily carved to stamp various sums in the name of the new régime and soon bits of frail paper were floating about the valley bearing demands for cash, dollars, taels indiscriminately. Gardeners with their baskets of vegetables, farmers with their small stores of grain, hillsmen with their bundles of wood or charcoal, merchants with their remaining cotton or sandals, all must give their products for such worthless tokens. Naturally trade was paralyzed and the impoverished merchants sat daily behind their counters, broken in heart and business, utterly helpless under Bow's scurrility and spies.

Lo-los and locusts! Drought, destruction and despair! What a vale of desolation our bounteous valley had become. Yet our community was but one of a myriad where equal or worse tyranny in the name of the new liberty worked its wretchedness, far and wide over our fair land.

XV

AT THE MERCY OF THE MOSLEM

AWAY in Kan-su, in my new abode, things also had taken a new turn. Spring had brought consternation, for no rain had fallen, and that meant distress not alone for the farmers but the great masses in city, town and village always so near the border line of starvation. Worst of all race-religious unrest began to arise between the Mohammedan population and our own Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian people.

"Another Moslem rebellion brewing." The rumour began to reach even our remote regions. "Out against more opium tax."

"Heaven help us," was the usual response as my older neighbours passed it on.

"They came here in the days of the Tangs," my old friend informed me. "Then they rolled in as floods in the days of Kublai and his Mongols, and there has been friction and fighting ever since. . . . In my boyhood all was furor until Yacoob Beg was destroyed. . . . But some fires die slowly, and here they have smouldered ever since. . . . It will take but little to again fan them into flame. . . . Ah! for love, not hate! "

Such sentiments seemed strange to me. I recalled the two Mas of my warrior uncle's body-guard. Big hearty men they were, with hooked noses and eyes that ever looked pleasantly at me. But I also knew that they could dart fire at times and were slow to cool when aroused. I thought too of the sons of the younger brother. Yes! though the fathers had ever been so loyal, there were doubtless possibilities of treachery also. . . . Those youths had abetted Jowl Jaw on the fatal night and had sworn away my life. . . . I began to comprehend their difference as friend and foe. It was not left long to theory.

"They are rising. . . . They have risen in our own city," ran the successive rumours.

My neighbours began to look askance and to plan for flight into the fastnesses through which I had passed. They were

even then too late. One morning while my boys were busy at their books and the droning of their voices filled the temple, a wild shout caused all to start with unwonted suddenness.

"They come! They come! The Whay-whay come!" whispered the terrified old priest as he stuck his head in at the door.

No one needed to tell us who the Whay-whay were. That was the colloquial everywhere for the Moslem.

"Go!" I called to the half dozen youths about me, and hurried to the outer door to catch the cause of the sudden alarm.

Even as I thrust forth my head, hoofs came clattering into the outer court of the temple.

"Huzzai," shouted the first rider.

I darted back, but there could be little doubt of my detection. I ran to the schoolroom. The boys had vanished. I hastened to follow them through a winding way we well knew toward the back of the building. The old priest blocked my way as I ran. He was gesticulating.

"Hide here! Here!" he was saying, and pointed to a couple of boards he had slid from a panel under the great idol.

He clambered in as he spoke, and I instinctively crept after him. Then with our hands we quickly slid to the boards behind us. It was evidently a secret spot known only to the priests and their neophytes.

"Huzzai! Huzzai!" already the voices were clamouring within the building and the clatter of hoofs rang on the stone flagging about.

I paused to peep through the narrow crack of our partition, but the old priest plucked me by the clothing and led me on.

"In! In!" he whispered.

We crawled slowly forward, winding here and there until I was lost in the darkness. We were somewhere at the base of the great, ancient idol, that I judged by the stone and mud structures all about us. There we paused. We seemed securely hidden from sight, but the sounds without still reached us.

"Smash! Smash!" we could hear the command high above the clamour.

"Smash! Smash!" the crowd took up the cry, and soon we listened to the crash and clash of blows as they resounded and reëchoed about. From the way the foundations throbbed and

trembled, it was clear that the big idols above were rapidly doomed to destruction. But it was not to be the work of a moment. The wealth of an earlier age had been poured forth in their construction and they held out tenaciously.

"What folly," I meditated. "What frenzy, that even the gentle Buddha should thus incite men to wrath and to war."

But the fury went ever increasingly forward. The numbers must have grown. The noise of falling material, the shouting of men and the stamping of steeds grew ever more riotous. Then suddenly there was a pause. The crashing and clatter ceased. Some one was calling, crying for mercy.

"Save life! Save life!" It was the voice of one of my lads, and I raised mine in reply, but the old priest's bony fingers were instantly upon my mouth and throat.

"Mercy! Mercy!" again came the cry.

"Ha!" came the response, and an awful tremor passed over me as I thought I heard a dull thud on the slabs above us.

"Huzzai! Huzzai!" went up a shout from the maddened crowd, and then the sound of breaking and of blows went on with a din that was devilish.

Alas! Alas! That was not the last of the cries for mercy. Others soon began to follow in sickening succession. The cries of little children, the piercing hopeless cries of women, the significant silences where there were no cries of men, my neighbours. Again I strove to call out, to make my way to their assistance. The old priest clung to me with the tenacity of despair. I calmed myself. He was right. Any attempt to give aid would be but another dull thud upon the slabs before the ancient altar of peace where the Placid-one had so long looked down. I dug my teeth into my lips, my nails into my hands and waited. Surely justice would follow somehow, sometime, and I might bear a part!

Something moist after a time began to drip slowly down upon us. At first I drew back in horror. Then I let it fall. An awful silence filled my heart.

"Our blood be upon you, if we are not avenged," each seemed to say in its silent fall and each drop went through my scant clothing into my very soul.

How long the accursed frenzy went forward I cannot say. I seemed to be myself in a sort of delirium. At times I was back

once more in the narrow box with the rat gnawing, gnawing ever more greedily, gruesomely at my neck and face. Then I would awake to find it was the talons of the old hysterical priest sinking into my flesh and the falling of more débris, the last wails and shivering thud of another death. But silence reigned at length. There was a cry, "Out! Out!" and the clatter of hoofs as they withdrew from the slabs.

They were dying away when a new sensation came with compelling force.

"Smoke!" I tried to mutter, but the old talons closed again firmly.

I wrenched his bony hand from my mouth and drew a long breath. Yes. It was smoke. There could no longer be doubt of that.

"Fire!" I hissed into the old man's ear, and struggled to be free.

"Fire?" he repeated, and relaxing his hold began to grope outward again. I followed, pushing him frantically forward. We came to the wooden partition. It was already ablaze but I gave it a sudden pull in the way I recalled it required, then kicked it outward. Idols, altars, oil lamps, studding, struts, complimentary boards from ancient worshippers, lay about in utter confusion, and in their midst, a sickening sight of trunkless heads and headless trunks of those who had been my neighbours, schoolboys, friends. A couple of men were still throwing oil upon the mass, and flames were spurting up yellow and red amid the blackened smoke clouds. Others were spraying the woodwork and great doors. It was evident the whole awful shambles was to be buried, blotted out in flames.

The old figure again clutched and held me. For a moment I yielded.

"Why not?" flashed the thought. "Why not retreat and allow the grim flames full play? . . . Death? . . . Aye . . . but 'twere death also to rush forth? . . . Even so it were a joy to meet death as another martyr with my comrades rather than to perish miserably, a coward caught in hiding."

That or some instinct for life seized me and with a sudden jerk to free myself I sprang through the small opening, and out among the ruins. Another wild leap and I was upon the nearest

man, hurling him into the midst of the flames, then rushing forward with a frenzy for the second. He was ready for me. We gripped and struggled, how long I know not. The others came and I was down.

Big fingers gripped my throat and face, big knees went into my body and bowels, big feet kicked and big fists pummelled and beat me.

"To the flames with him," snarled one. "No time for the knife," and they seized me by limbs and shoulders and began to swing me for the toss that would send me far in among the spurting fires.

But the fight for life was strong within me. I wriggled and struggled and tugged as though possessed. Just as the final swing came I tore loose one foot and dragged it along the paving stones. The fling fell short and I sprawled out among the fringe of débris and dead.

"Curse him," called a big fellow. "Carve him up quick," and drew a short sword from his belt.

"Game, eh?" growled a second. "Why not save him for the show?"

"Grit sure," ejaculated a third. "Yes. Let's keep this one for the crowd."

There was no time to parley. I felt myself dragged from the heap and hurtled out of the temple. There after a few words with some one who was evidently a leader I was bound hand and foot and thrown across a horse. A big fellow swung up behind to see that I made no escape.

Despite my predicament I could not but gaze at the ruin about me. Not a soul save the marauders was to be seen. The poor huts of wattle and corn-stalks still sputtered in flame, or lay in heaps of smouldering stuff and ashes. The old temple was roaring like a furnace and the cracking of tiles and timbers sounded like the reports of a thousand pistols. A few chickens, a couple of lean cows and a bundle of wretched quilts and pots seemed the only things worth saving. These latter were soon gathered together and started down the slope.

"Go!" trumpeted a leader with long hair and black moustaches, and the whole troop started off at a gallop, leaving the loot to follow.

There was little opportunity to meditate or mourn my lot

as we clattered down the mountain side. My arms, my legs, my body shot exquisite pain throughout my whole frame at every leap. Even then I could not but note the destruction that had been accomplished, corn fields scorched, homes in ashes, people and pigs indiscriminately slaughtered and left to fester or to the dogs and flies.

A few hours later, though it seemed to me ages, and we were galloping through the narrow gateway and narrower streets of the small city. Crowds of people, mainly women and children lined the way.

"Huzzai!" shouted the returning warriors.

"Huzzai!" shrilled the spectators, and pointed at me with their long lips, or pelted me with whatever came nighest, as we passed.

More turning and twisting here and there, then my guard rode into a wide court which I at once recognized as the magistrate's Yamen. There he quickly leaped to the ground, threw me to the pavement as though I had been a senseless sack and left me while he went for orders. I managed to roll away from the horse's hoofs which were so perilously near, but recognizing that it was useless to struggle, lay still and silent. I had short time to wait. He was back in a moment and drawing a knife slashed the ropes that bound my feet.

"Up!" he growled, emphasizing his command with a kick.

I scrambled to my feet and staggered about as best I could.

"Here," he snarled and seizing me by the shoulder, shot me ahead of him toward a passage.

A moment later and I stood before the palisades of the prison. A guard pushed open a big iron lock, scraped back a rusty chain, slid up one of the poles and shot me through. More rasping as the fastenings were again replaced and the guard and my conductor went off together. I squatted down by the opening and began to look about me.

"What a spot!" I murmured, as my eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness. Already the stench of the place had come up into my nostrils and great flies were filling my ears with their droning. Before me I could see bare, dank bits of soggy earth, broken by patches of dirty and mouldering straw. I peered about to see if there were other prisoners. I could see the roof above where a few rays of light struggled

through the dark tiles. Slowly the walls also came into vision, high structures of box bricks with ever and anon a bolt of rusty iron and a ring. "Many an unfortunate left suffering there," flashed the thought.

As I peered into the darkness at the back of the dismal den, something stirred, or was it imagination? I took a step forward, then another and another, cautiously.

"Who?" I inquired low and guardedly.

There was no reply. Again I went forward, my vision gradually adjusting itself. Then suddenly I paused. The form of a human being began to outline itself. It was upon the wall. I turned and looked about to see if there were others. No. I looked back at the palisade that formed the front to note if the guard were there. None. Then I again fastened my eyes on the form before me. The head was on one side and hanging low over the breast. The arms were behind the back. "Tied," I conjectured, "like my own." Then my eyes ran down to the feet. The toes were just touching the soiled straw below.

"Strung up," again ran my thought, and I felt my way slowly forward.

My surmise proved correct. As I advanced to one side I could see that the unfortunate was suspended to one of the rusty rings by ropes about his wrists and arms. I drew closer still and touched his shoulder. The head swung slowly around to the other breast and a moan escaped the lips.

"Who are you?" I whispered near to the ear.

Only some confused guttural sounds came in response, and again the head swung wearily. As it did so I could see something coloured upon the shoulder. Ah! It was the shoulder straps of an officer. Another glance told that they were those of an ensign. A closer view of his head soon told why he did not reply. A portion of the rope cunningly knotted had been inserted firmly between his now swollen jaws.

"An unfortunate like myself," I thought. "Some one probably more brave who by his courage won their hate with added intensity and also waits here for more exquisite torture."

But I must pass over the wretched hours that followed. Why recall and recount slow creeping moments, minutes, hours of agony which could not be alleviated? Needless to say I tried, tried with all the ingenuity I could master, all the strength I

could muster. I sought with my own poor tired hands so securely tied about my back to reach his and undo them. That was impossible. He was strung up beyond my reach. Then I attacked the cruel ropes with my teeth. That too after many attempts had to be abandoned. The gnawing and tugging gained no headway and only caused deeper moaning and groaning and swaying of the sufferer's head. The one bit of relief I could apparently afford was to kneel upon the ground and allowing the young ensign to stand upon me thus relieve some of the weight and wretchedness. This I did again and again till my own bones ached and my back felt as if it were literally worn through with the poor feet that pressed so piteously.

All through that long summer's afternoon and then far into the night I continued, while flies and mosquitoes, beetles and bugs clung and stung and buzzed and bit in growing numbers. I was crouching thus when I was startled by some one calling my name.

"Dan! Dan!" a somehow familiar voice cried repeatedly.

I aroused myself from my posture. I had been dreaming surely. It was my head down upon the ground that had sent the blood surging unnaturally? Yes. I could feel it coursing through my ears and temples. Again I bent low, but again the tones came louder, more insistent.

"Dan! Dan!" they were saying. "Come here and come quickly!"

"Fay-Fay," I called out suddenly. "Not you, Fay-Fay? Surely not you?" and I scrambled out from under my weary load with a haste that again brought hoarse mutterings from the unfortunate above. But I paid little attention to that. I had been dreaming much of the dear one as I lay there hour after hour. It seemed the one sweet source of strength that eased my dull throbs of pain and enabled me to endure. Over and over again I had recalled every scene that memory would bring of our childhood, days and moments in the garden, the old schoolroom, the valley, the sacred mountain, her sickness, my eager strength. It was little wonder that now her voice should come to speak to me.

Half credulous, half doubting, I crept forward toward the palisades where the dim light from the open made them

obscuredly visible. I paused and looked along the line. Was it possible, or was it again an illusion? Some one was there.

Yes, crouching close to the stakes, I could see the outlines of a form and I wormed my way forward, also crouching low on the inner side.

"Who?" I whispered eagerly, intensely. "Not you, Fay-Fay? . . . How? . . . What? . . . Surely not you?" and I tried to thrust my face through the stakes.

"Hisht, Dan! Hisht!" came the tones again, and I recognized that they were those not of woman but of man. "Over this way a bit. . . . There," and at the word a hand seized me and drew me through an opening in the barrier.

"It's Ma-er!" came a whisper right at my ear.

"Ma, the Younger. . . . Ma, the Mohammedan guard of my uncle. . . . Ma, the father of the two renegade sons," flashed my thoughts.

"You here?" I whispered back. "You here? . . . How?"

But his big hand was upon my lips.

"Not a whisper," he muttered.

Then I felt him quickly slit my cords and as my hands fell limp at my sides, slip a long gown over my head, into which he had to insert my powerless arms. Another tug and he was pushing me along the wall and through the darkness before him.

"The ensign! The unfortunate!" again came my memory, and I tried to pause, to say a word, to turn back. But Ma's big body rushed me along with a pace and a power that were irresistible.

Here and there we wound along corridors and small sheds, or crept through darkened lanes, while voices called and hoofs clattered all about us. Then he suddenly slid me into a building and leading me forward placed my hands upon a small ladder.

"Up!" he motioned with a shove, and I climbed obediently.

I had scarce reached the top when I felt the rungs vanish from beneath my feet and I was alone. I stood there long waiting for him to again appear, but he came not. Then the yearnings of youth came over me and I crept farther in and slept.

I found myself on waking, in an old loft of an empty house. All day and for many days I saw no one. Some one came shufflingly at night to place some food, only to slip as silently away. Then one night, I heard my voice again called from the top of the ladder. It was Ma-er once more.

"Search is over," he whispered, and we descended, to grope our way along alleys and corridors, then to the top of the low city wall.

"How are my people in the old castle?" I whispered as we stood there in the darkness.

"Dead," he whispered back. "All dead!"

"Not my father, my grandsire, my aunt?" I murmured.

"Yes! Dead or dying, all. . . . I ran away before they could kill me."

"And the little mistress? . . . Little May Fay?" I asked eagerly.

"Carried off . . . then thrown into the river," he muttered, and pushed me toward the edge.

"This is all I can do, Dan," he ended. "You'll have to make it yourself now."

I wanted to say something, many things, but again he stopped me and handing me the end of a rope hurried me over. The descent was but the work of a moment and the rope disappeared above, and he was gone. How he came to my rescue I can only surmise. He must have found his way back to his native province while I was busied with my school. He had sought to escape the cruelty in the name of Communism that was carrying away my people and his sons, only to enter the vortex of his fanatical sect at home. He must have discovered me somewhere, at the old temple or en route to the dismal pen. How he succeeded in getting through and effecting my release I know not. He must surely have known the place or the keepers and bribed or outwitted them.

The fate of the young ensign remains to me also unsolved. Did he die before the dawn? I pray at times that he did. Or was he still alive and dashed to death at the heels of some wild horse as were so many others? If so, I am sure that his release came soon, for life was ebbing low. Doubtless a similar fate would have been mine, while an infuriated rabble looked on with frenzied joy.

As it was I groped my way through a narrow moat, found the fields and was for the moment hidden safely among the surrounding hills ere the dawn broke. I was, I found, in the garb of the peasant of the region, thanks to Ma's solicitude, and so ventured to move slowly forward and deeper into the recesses. A week's wandering brought nothing save a haunting sense of being ever hunted and of ever increasing hunger. I did not dare to go near a hut lest my speech or some other trait betray me. For food I had nothing save the few berries and roots and bulbs I could discover. I had managed, however, to cross a divide and could see a town and some villages far below.

I clambered cautiously down the winding ways and carefully entered a small hamlet seeking food. I had scarce reached the street when I was seized by a couple of soldiers. They had seen me approaching seemingly surreptitiously and their suspicions were aroused. I struggled for a moment but finding it useless desisted and was hurried toward the centre of the group of shops where a captain of the picket faced me.

"Down!" he commanded, and I fell upon my knees.

"Who are you, and what are you doing around here?"

I could see that I was suspected as a spy, but could notice that their attitudes changed as I told my story.

"A plausible tale," remarked the captain, "but what proof have we?"

I showed my wrists still raw from the ropes about them. That apparently brought conviction.

"And you're willing to help in punishing these rebels?"

I had no hesitation there. Thoughts of my unhappy neighbours, my pupils, the old priest, the young ensign came up before me and I accepted with alacrity and fervour.

"Then take him to the Colonel and let him tell his tale there," came the order, and I was soon en route elsewhere, but not before I had begged for and received a portion of food. The latter was not sumptuous, a bit of moon cake, a sort of hardtack and tea, but it greatly refreshed me.

The Colonel's quarters were in an old temple in the near-by town. There my speech of SzeChwan gave me even greater credence and I could see that I was taken into favour. The Colonel questioned me long and minutely, then remarked:

" Evidently you can be of considerable service to your country just now, Wong. I'll send you out with the scouts immediately."

" Considerable service to your country," those words found a sure mark in my soul and fired me with great emotion. I thanked him and promised my best.

That was the beginning of a long acquaintance with good Colonel Chang. To me he seemed somewhat a reincarnation of my old warrior uncle, and I served him with sincerity. Chin, the chief of the information branch, looked me over and decided I needed no change of costume.

" Nothing could be a better disguise than those old duds," he remarked. " They'd take you for a Moslem farmer anywhere. . . . Just look out our own fellows don't shoot or string you," he added with a laugh as he turned me around.

I was soon out upon the road again with a couple of companions. To my satisfaction we were heading back to the very city where I had been incarcerated and so strangely escaped. It was an easy matter to return the way I had come and we were soon within sight of the low walls and sending back word as to conditions. A few days later and light troops had followed over the same unusual route and began to drive in parties of the enemy. Then the main body came rapidly and unexpectedly across the narrow defile now undefended and a siege began. The Colonel called me in and praised me for my good services. I was again elated.

" Just keep up that courage and that canny common sense," he commended, " and you'll let us at them." Then he questioned me in detail as to locations within the walls. I had unfortunately little to communicate, but could at least contribute something.

A few days later I was able to again approach him and this time with fuller information. With a companion I had entered the place as a refugee and after apparently aimless rambling here and there, escaped over the wall by night at the very spot Ma had so surreptitiously let me free. A coil of rope tied to a bastion had sufficed for support. That pleased the Colonel immensely and he promoted me to the head of a squad on the spot. I had won my place among my fellows and my heart was glad. Something seemed to tell me that the spirit of my warrior uncle and of another would approve.

"We always trusted you, Dan," came a whisper from somewhere, and I swore to prove true.

A few weeks later and through our efforts our soldiers were over the walls. Then a sight I had never beheld before began. I pass it over. It was too revolting, too gruesomely sad to give me a sense of glory. Shots and shrieks and gashes and groans, parties fleeing here, flying there, cheers and curses, fires and smoke and writhing figures, or faces lying ghastly silent that a moment before had scorned death and shouted loud their defiance. What a day it was, for all day from dawn to dusk the devilish work went on. Our men had manned the walls and controlled the gates.

"Not a man must escape," had been the Colonel's orders, and our forces sought and slaughtered everywhere, while the enemy also fought wild and snarling like wolves at bay.

"Unconditional surrender," were the terms we carried when as darkness fell a few came near to parley. Hopeless at last they obeyed. Next morning another order was given.

"Every male from sixteen to sixty shall march out and assemble in the moat by the city wall."

The Moslems, to the credit of their courage, obeyed to a man, though they must have surmised what it meant. The sun shone forth in all its splendour as our forces closed in on the now unarmed mob. I crept away. It was not a part of my duty to join in the fray. When I returned later old Moslem men and mere boys were sullenly, solemnly shovelling the earth over hundreds of dead fathers, sons and brothers.

"Not a Moslem asked for mercy," reported one of my companions.

"Brave men," I meditated. "Brave men. . . . Men whose courage was worthy of some great cause. Would that such valour and fervour had been turned to the welfare of all and not to that destruction. Ah! for the reign of the God of Worth and the utter banishment of the God of War!"

Alas! It brought me little consolation that I saw our good Colonel later decorated and that we were all praised through him for our victory. I sought through the dead that day for one face, that of my old friend, Ma-er. I found him nowhere, or if I did, failed to recognize his then distorted features. Perchance it was well, but I spoke of my sorrow to our Colonel.

"His people began the murderous business, and he chose to share with them," he remarked. "That's war, my lad! It's war," and he turned to other things.

Even that was not the end. We went on thus for months to come. Finally the revolt was stamped out. Then for other months we followed bands of desperadoes of all sorts who scurried here and there, cutting off our troops where scattered bands might be found, and robbing pitilessly the now helpless enemy or the few remnants of our unhappy and hungry people who had escaped the marauding Mohammedans.

Poor Chin, our chief scout, had been captured in one of our daring reconnaissances. We found his body later wrenched, racked, mutilated almost beyond recognition in an effort no doubt to extort information. I had been but ten feet from him when he was seized. He was taken. I escaped unharmed. A week later I was promoted to his position. Again something within me rebelled. I seemingly was securing advancement at the price of his suffering, his bravery, his blood.

Worse still for my doubting state, it was now my duty to send other brave fellows forward where I could not but know that some, perchance all, could not return alive. I often went myself rather than risk such splendid men but that could not be countenanced and even met with a reprimand from my Colonel.

"That's all right for peace, Wong," he said sternly, "but in war the leader must be kept alive. . . . If your brain gets blown out now, it only means that hundreds of our fellows may suffer, perhaps sometimes lose the battle, even the campaign."

I bowed. He was right, but the task was not the less irksome. A great joy welled up in me when the word came that the campaign was over, and that we were to return from the front.

XVI

IN THE LAND OF THE LO-LOS

FAR away in his native fastnesses Lu-lu had reached his home. The day of his arrival was a gala one. Indeed it was the second day of the great autumnal fete when chiefs and clansmen from all parts of Lolo-land assemble together for feasting, riding and feats of strength and valour.

High up in their eyrie ranges a valley had been found which well suited such demonstrations. There the slopes though rocky and broken by many a spur rose somewhat gradually in spots while the short stream lay dry and largely level. The former, therefore, made a natural amphitheatre for the assembled spectators, while the stream bed, after a week's labour by the slaves made a suitable course for the fiery steeds and their riders.

Many hundreds had met for the occasion. Native chiefs and their sons, the "black bones" or aristocracy of the assembly, big lanky, leathery men naturally occupied the front benches, that is more accurately, sat squat upon the ground in the foreground, though a few preferred to pace to and fro to observe and be observed more freely. These aristocracy were always readily distinguished, however, by their bamboo sandals, felt socks and leggings wrapped in puttee style, and especially by their great black cloaks which hung loosely to their knees and their long hair which was curled in a peculiar horn above their foreheads.

The slaves, or "white bones" on the contrary usually wore the hair loose, had white cloaks, if cloaks at all, and went often barefooted save in winter, when the snow demanded some sort of felt covering. These crouched or walked about in the rear save when wanted for service by their masters.

Women were also there in numbers. There were no such restrictions with them as with their Chinese sisters, my countrywomen. Here they mingled freely, flaunting their "tams," "poke-bonnets," braids of hair, necklaces of shells and silver

ornaments and their long many-pleated gowns, according to feminine fancy. They too wandered here and there chatting among themselves or sat down with their lovers quite on an equality, smoking and discussing the merits of the events.

The tests for archery, scaling of cliffs, hurling of stones and several similar deeds of skill had been concluded the previous day. These had been followed by a preliminary feast of corn cakes and dried meat. To-day, however, the greatest event of the races was in progress and big steaming pots scattered about at the lower end of the field gave abundant evidence both to sight and smell what good things were in store.

"They come! They come!" all were shouting, and milling about in high excitement.

Away at the end of the valley a group of horsemen could be seen, rising and falling as they approached, the sand of the stream bed following in a great cloud. In but a few moments they were scampering by, the young men their riders, rising in their short stirrups to show their skill and daring. A great shout went up from the crowd as the winners of the heat returned, riding proudly at the head of the column. They were scampering off for the second trial when:

"Zip! Zip! Zip!" the unmistakable sound of bullets began to sing over their heads, followed by the report of as many rifles.

Consternation and confusion reigned everywhere. The women and slaves raced for the undergrowth on the crest of the opposite hill. The men sought shelter in the river bed or behind the crags and rocks, quickly drawing their short swords as they went. The youth on horseback scampered off to where some buildings lay to secure further arms. Then voices from the hills began to call and figures came into the open.

"Free!" they were shouting. "Free, and with their guns." Then the figures began racing down the slopes helter-skelter in their hilarity, rapidly firing shots and shouting as they came nearer.

With answering cries the crowd halted here and there or crept cautiously out from their cover. They could scarce reassemble before the captives were in their midst and were telling their tale. Needless to say there was no further thought of horses and riders that day. But the great cauldrons boiled even more merrily and men and women feasted and danced

and went delirious with delight. Their men were again free and best of all had secured the deadly guns.

"The young chief! The young chief!" the cries began to ascend, as the story became better known, told from his comrades' eager lips.

It seemed all but incredible that Lu-lu had so outwitted the wild despoilers of even the old warrior, their conqueror, and had brought off most of their men together with money, munitions and especially the modern guns that had been their undoing.

"Lu-lu! Lu-lu! The young chief!" the cries continued and they sought him out in the presence of his parents and friends.

Then they set him upon the victor's horse, paraded him hither and thither that he might be seen of all, demanded that he speak to them, tell them again of how it had all happened, circled him about in silence as he spoke, or cheered him continuously as he went to and fro. Meanwhile the maidens of the tribes coyly shot at him their gayest glances and pelted him with wild flowers from hill and dale. Finally they feasted him far into the night. Indeed there was little sleep, parties going gaily to and fro, until the sky reddened and again it was day.

The race so strangely interrupted was again resumed. The riders once more scampered away to their places, the tough little horses tossing their manes gaily in the breeze. This time there was a new racer in the ranks. It was the old chief's stallion and upon it sat the young chief. Lu-lu had protested the affair, he was but arrived and, moreover, had in the many months that had passed lost some of his ability and agility required for such sport. But again the company would not be persuaded and calls for the young chief prevailed.

The dash down the sand and pebbles warmed his blood, however, and soon he was racing wildly with the rest. Something in the presence of so many witnesses, the cavorting of the cavalcade and the freshness of the mountain air stirred his whole being. He had apparently thrown off the days of exile and was back again, one with the souls of his people. Still he held his steed well in check and rode usually rather conspicuously at the rear of the race. Even this was not lost on

the crowd and they cheered him but the more vigorously. Later in the day came the great event of the concourse.

"The trophy! The trophy!" went up the cry.

This was a race especially for the young bloods of the band. Far up on the hillside the maidens had placed each a string of shells with which she was wont to adorn her person. These were laid upon the ground as though, tradition had it, the maiden herself lay helpless there. The youths upon their horses were to race thither, alight or if skillful, sweep far down and secure the trophy, then bear it back to the dark-eyed damsel waiting in the valley below.

"And the girl goes oft with her garland," ran the comment which showed how commonly a wedding followed the winning of the wreath.

Naturally there was great excitement. The maidens first made their way to the top of the hill and amid much lilt and laughter left their strings of shells, each pretending to place hers so that she would assuredly force the rider to alight and be last in the race. Their return was a signal to the horsemen to retreat to the top of the opposite hill that there might be no whispering confidences as to where certain wreaths were to be found. So they galloped gaily away, Lu-lu and his mount again in their midst.

There was no delay. A few minutes later and they were speeding down the slope and through the crowd ready for the sharper climb. Lu-lu and his horse, it was observed, was again well to the rear as he passed, but all cheered him lustily, and many a maiden's eyes flashed deeper as she saw him start the steep ascent.

"Faster, Lu-lu! Faster!" cried some in their ill-suppressed desire.

Was it that he heard their cry and gave freer rein to his steed or was it the greater strength of the shiny stallion that now showed its prowess? At any rate it soon became apparent to all that Lu-lu and his black were gaining.

"The young chief! The young chief's winning," went up the shout.

They were already half-way up the ascent and there were but two in advance, a sturdy bay and a big piebald.

"Harder, blackie! Harder!" shrilled the voices, and the

stout steed seemed to hear and spread his strong haunches as he sprang upward leap on leap.

By the time the crest was reached, the piebald was behind and the bay but a pace ahead. Both riders bent low as they arrived. For a moment there was a pause.

"Snatch the shells, Lu-lu! Snatch them! Quick!" arose the chorus.

It was not Lu-lu's first attempt at such manœuvres. He and his comrades had practised improvised ones of stones or flowers many a time in make-believe banter. But his competitor was more recently prepared. Both horsemen swept down as they arrived and immediately the rider of the bay raised his trophy high in air and swung his horse for the descent. Lu-lu had evidently not been successful, but his black followed the lead of his fellow and also swung for the descent. As he swung he was still seen groping for the garland. But a moment later he also raised his arm as signal of success and the race was on.

The bay too proved to have its friends as they came dashing wildly down.

"Come on, bay! . . . Come on, blackie!" alternated the shouting.

The bay's rider was also skillful and swung nimbly about the crags and boulders that strewed the slope. Lu-lu and his black seemed to reck little for these and took many of them at great bounds. Half-way back and they were all but neck and neck. Another boulder and the black was ahead.

"Lu-lu! Lu-lu!" again rose the cry.

"First choice to the young chief," shrilled some one, and the girls blushed becomingly.

But the bay was not to be beaten. She sprang ahead again with a great leap and again they ran neck and neck, their manes flying wildly, the froth from their mouths floating away on the wind. A dozen more leaps and they would be at their goal, and the crowd parted to see the victor pass.

A crag lay just across their path. The bay again swayed aside and Lu-lu could be seen seeking to turn his black. But the stallion's blood was up. With one mighty leap he sprang into the air and horse and rider poised high above. The crowd waited breathlessly. That leap if successful would win the race.

"Blackie's got it. . . . Lu-lu wins," already the shout was rising, when:

"Click!" just the sound of the gallant black's hind hoofs as he descended, and a moment later horse and rider hurtled into the river bed below.

There was a sickening thud, a wild cry from the crowd and all rushed forward. The shining black lay quivering in the sand. The body of the young chief spread out silent, bleeding by his side.

"Dead! . . . Dead!" rose a wild wail from the women.

A great silence fell upon the gala throng. Lu-lu's mother ran forward and bent over her boy, moaning bitterly. The old chief stood silent in his great cape looking down upon the face of his son, then summoned his men who bore the body down the valley and up another slope to his stronghold. There sorcerers and medicine men summoned worked their charms and healing magic. Down in the valley the throng broke up into little bands and wended their way by divers paths and passes, hither and thither across the crests to their homes.

"He will die! The young chief will die!" moaned the maidens.

"He brought home the guns! . . . He rode bravely!" commented the men, as they thought of many another who had died gallantly fighting for what they deemed the rights of their race.

Lu-lu's fellows in exile and escape took their silver and guns and made their way to the great chief's stronghold, there to await their superior's commands and the future which the fates might hold for the son. That too the whole clan and many a neighbouring community awaited with sustained suspense. Alas! Was this so sudden a triumph to end in saddest tragedy!

* * * * * * * *

Meantime Brigadier Bow and his brutal henchmen flourished. True Jowl Jaw had been lost, but he was little mourned by even his superior who soon found an almost equally fiendish and flexible tool in one familiarly known as the "Lopper." This euphemism came doubtless from the fact that captives were usually known in the gang as "Leaves." A man was a "big leaf," a woman or girl a "flowery leaf," a child a "small

leaf," while an old person passed as a "withered one." His right to be entitled the "Lopper" probably came from the method of the poor of our people going about surreptitiously lopping off leaves for food or fuel in times of stress. This lean, long-necked creature had, however, especially earned his high title by a deed of revolting cruelty. A merchant down in our village had managed to escape the net and safely protected in the Prefectural City had sent clandestinely for his wife, small son and two daughters. The Lopper soon discovered this through his spies and demanded that the merchant pay one thousand taels for each by way of ransom.

This was refused and the Lopper abetted by Bow and the band showed his hideous hand. A few days later a poor carrier stopped in front of the shop where the merchant was staying, put down a couple of big square oil tins and then went quietly off. He did not return. When late that evening the shopkeeper and others came to examine the cans they made a gruesome discovery. Two gory heads filled each can. To the horror of the poor merchant he recognized in them his two daughters, his wife and only son.

Thus the Lopper needed no special training to step into the shoes of his departed pal. It was to him that my poor aunt was delivered in her extremities.

This settled satisfactorily Bow went on with his campaign of "levelling the ground before building." Wealth was still the pressing need, and convinced that he had secured all that could be obtained by plunder and torture, by debased coinage and worthless paper, he decided upon a new source. Our unfortunate valley had just begun to recover from its scourge of locusts and the succeeding drought and men were proceeding to prepare the fields for the winter's sowing of wheat, pease, beans and oil plant when they were crushed by another command.

"All suitable fields will be this season sown in opium," ran the word. "Officers will indicate in each case what plots will be so planted. Should any one evade this, a tax equal to double the amount produced by the field under this required crop will be imposed and the evader properly punished."

Thus ran the posters put up by the new power here and there conspicuously all about the valley. The unfortunates bowed

their heads and prepared to obey. Resistance only meant arrest and cruelty. A few labourers who had listened to a previous order that they were to seize what fields they chose, as all was now common, thought they might be especially exempt and approached Bow with a long petition as to the need of the fields for food.

"Out with you, you carrion," was Bow's greeting as he perused the paper. "Out with you ungrateful scum and scabs. . . . Who gave you the land you till? . . . Was it not our generosity? . . . To your fields at once and obey your instructions. . . . Seize that fellow," and he pointed to their spokesman. That unfortunate found himself hurried to the keep for prolonged punishment. The others slunk away to their fields.

Bow had been highly praised from headquarters for his brilliant achievements and had been ordered to prepare for the capture of the Prefectural City. To this end he was now bending his efforts, so money must be had at all costs. What to him was the suffering of the people? To this end Yung again came to his favourable attention.

After the night when May Fay had so mysteriously disappeared, Yung was in disgrace with this high dignitary.

"You blundered again, you idiot," was Bow's comment when Yung came to him for consolation. "We have no use for boobs. . . . Get out and redeem your reputation or we'll drop you in the discard."

Yung had slunk away. He fumed for a time but after some weeks of sulking decided it were better to again ingratiate himself with his superiors. An idea came to him as he wandered about the old garden. Something in a depression of the stones by the wall suggested it. He began to slink about my aunt's apartments. He did not dare to face her, poor soul. In her half-demented state she went about night and day bemoaning the fate of her daughter, beating her breast, calling, ever calling for a voice that gave no reply. Thus she wandered from room to room, from court to court, out into the spaces about the fort and at times even into the fields.

"Fay-Fay! Fay-Fay," she called endearingly. "Don't fear now, dear one. . . . It's mother that's calling. . . . Come on out, little one. . . . Mamma has come back."

Again at times she rushed hither and thither, shouting wildly or accosting every passer-by, accusing them of complicity in carrying away her child. Bow kept himself carefully guarded on such occasions. Yung also studiously avoided her alert eyes. Only the patient serving-maid and the long-necked Lopper trailed her from place to place. It was their duty to keep her guarded, and this they did, with closely applied vigilance, the one impelled by loyalty, the other motivated by sheer lust of gain.

Yung watched until she was safely out in the fields then took his way to her rooms. There he began to search about. He did so many times, but each time apparently met disappointment. Then he wormed his way again one evening into the presence of Bow.

"What now, you?" demanded the latter.

"You want more money?" blurted Yung.

"Money? Where? How?"

"She's got lots."

"She! . . . Who?"

"My aunt."

"Ha! So you have been busy again exerting yourself for the common . . . good. . . . We knew of the boodle long ago but can't get at it now . . . how? . . . Sit down here and tell about it. . . . Don't speak too loud."

"It's in a book."

"In a book? Bank book and check book . . . that sounds probable . . . but where?"

"But I can't find it."

"Ha! Been looking for it, eh? Where?"

"In her rooms."

"How do you know it's there?"

"I found it once . . . and they took it from me. . . . That was a long time ago. . . . But she has it still. . . . I've seen her with it."

Bow sat up and purred pleasantly.

"H'm! H'mm! . . . Now you've made a real discovery, son! A real discovery. . . . Just keep quiet as to what you have said. . . . You may take charge of your squad again to-morrow. . . . I'll give the proper order. . . . H'mm. . . . Yes. . . . Yes! . . . That will do—

that will do. . . . You may go now . . . and call the Lopper to report here . . . immediately! "

Yung lumbered off well pleased. To join his squad meant life again, loot and other things of good luck. He called the Lopper as he went past.

"How's the withered-one? " Bow was asking with a fine show of benignity, as he and his henchman whispered together a few minutes later.

"Still jabbering! " said he of the long neck.

"Any use holding her? " queried Bow significantly.

"None! She's wild. Hopelessly wild. . . . She's not even good carrion," and he snickered significantly.

"Get any pay out of her? "

"Pay? She hasn't anything but old clothes and books and we've already dealt them off. . . ."

"Dealt them off? " and Bow leaned forward more intent. "Didn't see a small red book . . . a bank book among the others? "

Now it was the Lopper's time to stare.

"Deal off a bank book! Not much! " he declared. "No such luck as that! "

Then Bow straightened up and began to harry him.

"Think you're clever, eh, Lopper. . . . Thought you'd get by with a dodge like that. . . . You're sometimes clever, but not this trip. . . . There's a red covered bank book or a check book there. . . . Either you've been asleep and missed them or you've been stupid enough to think you could hoodwink me. . . . I want them by this time to-morrow. . . . Don't stop to lie. . . . Get them, I say, or I'll get you."

The Lopper slipped away, his long neck swaying his snake-like head uncannily.

XVII

A FROZEN AND FAMISHED CITY

AWAY in the north my column was slowly winding its way among hills and valleys as we crossed from the scenes of our struggles with the Mohammedans in Kansu to its neighbouring province in the east, the ancient land of Shensi. My heart thrilled as I felt my feet touching its sacred soil. Old Teacher Tang had taught me much of its history. He had been born there and was naturally filled with its lore.

"Shensi is one of the earliest homes of our dark-haired race," he used to repeat. . . . "From there, on the upper waters of the great Yellow, we went forth to drive back or absorb other aboriginal peoples and slowly possess our present land. . . . It was there my ancestors the great Tangs ruled. . . . From there Tang's Greatest Emperor extended our domains until they encompassed not only our present lands but stretched far west almost to the border of Europe. . . ."

"And Tibet?" May Fay would query, for she always liked to hear the story repeated.

"Yes. We extended then our sway over Tibet," the old man would answer. "Not so much by conquest as by an alliance. It was then that after many years of fighting that the Great Emperor seeking peace rather than war gave his fair daughter the Princess Wen to the ruler of that land. . . . There she exerted a great influence for good and a sincere friendship lasted throughout her lifetime and for many a year to come."

"And the Great Emperor favoured religion," my good aunt would frequently suggest as she looked about on our group.

"Surely, surely!" the old man would agree. "He welcomed to his capital not only our own great teaching of the Sage, but gave a place to the Taoists, and the Buddhists. Indeed, he even allowed teachers from the west, the Mohammedans, Manicheans, Zoroastrians and Nestorian Christians to make

known their views in his capital at Si-an, then called Chang-an, or 'Perpetual Peace,' so that the latter greatly flourished. There is still a famous Nestorian Tablet in the city attesting the fact. . . . I have seen it with my own eyes. . . . Indeed the Great Emperor was too liberal toward many, so Han-yu had to reprove him for his idolatry."

"A daring man that, to reprove an Emperor?" we would interject.

"You may well say that. . . . It was a great age of writers. It was then and there that lived our greatest poets, Li Tai-peh, Du-fu and others whose collected poems number almost fifty thousand. But the greatest writer of all was Han-yu. . . ."

"In poetry?"

"No! No! He wrote chiefly in prose. . . . And such sentences and high sentiment! . . . When the Emperor welcomed a reputed bone of the Buddha into his palace, Han-yu could no longer restrain himself but poured forth his heart. . . ."

"Executed?" we would query.

"No, the Great Emperor even in his anger was generous. Han was banished to be a Governor in the far southeast. . . . There he turned to help the uncultured people so that they still venerate his memory. . . . So well did he work that the Emperor later recalled him and crowned him with highest literary honour."

"No schools then!" Wong Yung would blurt out.

"Schools?" the old man would wither him with his glance. "Ah! 'Twas then there were real schools. It was then that the great system of examinations was established so that all officials must be scholars and not as in these degenerate days when men rise by militarism and murder. . . . Then in the capital was a Great University to which not only our own youth rallied but seekers after knowledge found their way from Tibet, Korea, Japan and other strange lands."

I repeated these things to Dr. Fuh as we wended our way. Dr. Fuh was a new acquaintance. I had come across him when one of my company had been severely wounded. As we worked together over the broken body before us, I could not but note that the young physician was beyond measure

sympathetic and that he spoke the familiar phrases of my own province with all its peculiar accents.

"You are SzeChwanese," I accosted him, when he had finished his ministrations.

"Right from Kiating!" he replied.

"My own Prefectural City!" I exclaimed.

Then a real friendship began. He told me little at the moment. We were both too busy with our wounded, but now on our long march we had abundant opportunity.

"Yes. I was born in the old city of Kiating and began my studies in the hospital there," Dr. Fuh confided one day as we rode together.

"The hospital there?" I repeated. "Then you know the foreign doctor Charles?"

"Dr. Charles?" he answered brightening. "Ah! I am not surprised that you know him. Who in that region has not come under his services? . . . Yes. I have the honour to be one of his pupils. I started in as one of his boys in a small choir, then as one of his class of nurses, and later as a medical student in prospect. . . . Thanks to his assistance, since then I have completed my work at the Christian Medical College in Chengtu and following that have been in the great foreign medical college in Peiping, our ancient capital. . . . Then the Christian General Chang Chih-chiang, under Field Marshal Feng appealed to me to join his staff in this needy section. . . . So I am here. . . . And you?"

He asked the question with such manifest simplicity and sincerity, that, though a thousand tortures would not have withdrawn it under other circumstances, I found myself telling my story in broad outline.

"Ah! Yes!" he commented, as I closed. "These Communists! I meet them everywhere these days. . . . Not a few of them are young men like ourselves of real patriotism. . . . Moreover their aim of sharing more fully the good things of life with our poor struggling masses is much to be praised. . . . It is their methods that are most repellent. . . . These lend themselves to the revolting cruelties and baseness you have met with under the man Bow. . . . You are but one of thousands suffering thus to-day."

"We'll have our turn sometime," I muttered half to myself.

"Revenge?" he queried, turning his quiet eyes full upon me. "Yes. That they say is sweet, but 'tis also said that two wrongs never make a right. Revenge but leads to counter vengeance, and so the strife goes on until both sides are silenced by destruction or death. . . . I think we have a better way!" and again he looked at me.

"What?" I asked rather sullenly.

"Love your neighbour as yourself," he quoted.

"Christian," I said suspiciously.

"Yes," he replied quietly. "Christian perhaps in its best known and most positive phrasing, but Confucian and Buddhist and Taoist also in its sentiment. . . . What surely all these great religions teach at their best should not be ignored. . . . Is there a better rule that the race has discovered?"

I was silenced but not convinced. I made some excuse to check my mule and for a few days studiously avoided my fellow provincial. But circumstances came to throw us continually together. The state of the people as we passed seemed especially so to do.

"Utterly sad!" he remarked to me as we passed through a village one day.

A few older children, boys and girls, were running by our side dogging us persistently, their great hollow eyes appealing even more than their feeble voices.

"Cash! Cash!" cried a few, but more regularly it was, "Food! Officer! Food! We're famished for food. . . . Mother's dead. . . . Father's dying. . . . We have had no food for months. . . . Food! Good officer! Food! . . . Food! . . . Food!"

And so the cry went on and on as we rode. Men slunk away silently, sullenly. Women went about with baskets grubbing for roots, leaves, bark, dried grass, anything that could be chewed. The aged and little children sat by the sides of the street sunning their emaciated skeletons.

"Food! Good officer! Food!" went on the cry.

I noticed that Dr. Fuh had early emptied his haversack of the small store of hardtack he carried. I could not but follow his example. Many in our company did likewise. But still the hopeless cry went up.

"Food! Great soldiers! Food. . . . Food. . . .

Food! . . . Do you not see we're starving . . . dying! "

It was but too true. Only the dogs and rats seemed fat and satisfied. The source of their supply as they fought here and there over a bone was not difficult to discover. That was the story of not one but practically all the villages and towns we passed as we penetrated the province. Out in the countryside among the endless hills, the desolation was even more drear. There the shacks and homes seemed all but deserted. Men, women and even the beasts and birds had fled. Here and there a few wretched creatures of human form could be seen groping and grubbing for roots of grasses, weeds and shrubs. All semblance of cultivated crops, gardens, even trees had disappeared. Over all the wind moaned drearily, carrying with it the dust of uncultivated fields far and near, or the still more stifling sands from the great Gobi which decade after decade spread its deadly pall over a dying land.

Down the valley of the historic Wei as we followed its many windings conditions seemed even worse still.

" This should be the garden of the province," remarked Dr. Fuh as we wended our dreary way. " Forty-five counties all through this central region and they say forty-two are like this. . . . Alas! The poor people. . . . There has been no rain here for three years."

I could make no reply, but hundreds of our men as well as the young doctor and I went hungry as we marched along. Our very hardtack stuck in our throats in the presence of such suffering.

There was much rejoicing when at last we entered the ancient capital of Si-an. There, though beggars gathered thick about the gateways, the streets seemed filled with busy people. Shops were opened along the thoroughfares and business appeared to proceed somewhat normally.

" Little sign of distress here," I assured my comrade.

" Wait," was his only reply.

Our reception that evening quite bore out my suggestion. Our coming had long been awaited in military circles and the public places were bedecked with embroideries and bunting.

" The heroes return."

" Welcome our defenders."

"Banzai! Banzai! To those who dare to die!"

So ran the sentences on many a scroll and pennant as we passed along. We suddenly discovered that we were considered as conquerors and that a great public demonstration was to be given in our honour, both men and officers, but no feasting as usual was to follow.

Of the public celebration I can recall little. We were marched hither and thither headed by a big military band, until we were weary in muscle and mind. Even the few cakes distributed that night seemed strangely incongruous after the spectacles we had seen, though we ate them with gusto. Then followed long speeches by superior officers and leading citizens until one almost forgot the bloodshed, the butchery, the sickening sights and sounds and smells that had made up the bitter struggle.

In the midst of it all my name was suddenly called.

"Captain Wong! Captain Wong!" my fellow officers were shouting, and those beside me began to lift me up and push me forward.

While I had been brooding, our General had made some flattering references to our scouting work and my comrades began to shout my name. I shuffled forward and stammered through some random remarks, I could never afterward recall what. But it mattered little. I was vociferously applauded and afterward presented to our General while the great company stood at attention and cheered roundly. I was just stepping back to return to my place when some one tapped me on the shoulder.

"Miss Liu requests your sword, Captain," the speaker explained. "She's next," and before I well knew what was happening in my bewilderment, they had removed my belt and straps and placed me in a seat upon the platform.

If my small performance had elicited cheers, they were as whisperings compared with these that echoed and reëchoed with the number that followed. While I squirmed about trying to feel at ease, a young lady tripped lightly to the piano that stood to one side of the stage and after playing a few notes, arose and burst into song. It was our old camping song, that which had comforted and cheered our hearts after many a dreary day of marching or more dreary day of fire and sword and deadly fusillade. How strange, yet how wondrously sweet it sounded from a woman's lips. Only those can know who have heard it

night after night from the rough throats of men, grim with the gruesome work of slaughter.

But it was not her voice alone that appealed. Here in our midst was a woman evidently one of the rarest of our race, perfect in every grace, pure in every gesture, a passionate patriotism pouring forth from every swing of the old song. Even the roughest of our motley band must have felt some new wild impulse fill and thrill him to the fullest as she sang. And when in the chorus she slipped my sword from its scabbard and swung it glittering above her glossy head, the great crowd could no longer restrain their pent-up powers, but rising to a man sang it over and over. Then at length she herself paused and motioning them quietly back to position, bowed her way gently, modestly, behind the curtains.

"Miss Liu presents her compliments," some one was saying at my side. "She says that your blade must hold magic," and a youth was handing me back my sword.

"It is enchanted now,—and forever," I blundered forth.

A mad impulse seized me to follow the youth and request to be presented, but I checked myself at such an incongruous thing. None the less I was burning with curiosity. Who could she be, this maiden that could so stir the souls of men? That I inquired of my friend Fuh a half hour later.

"A stranger to me also," was his reply, "but some here say she has travelled far, studying in Europe and America."

"And what does she here?"

"Who knows?" and he shrugged his shoulders. "All may not be gold that glitters. . . . Beware of blandishments." Then he walked away.

I retired that night to new quarters there to seek to shut out the scenes that had so recently danced before me and to bring my thoughts back again to my old home in the hills. Memories soon came streaming back and in their midst ever a little form that clung to me with twining arms.

"Be true, Dan. . . . Be true!" the words came. "We have always trusted you!"

Then I banished a new and dazzling figure from my fancy and slept the sleep of peace.

"Gone, sweet Fay. . . . Gone," I repeated sadly, "but your soul still lingers to sustain me."

A month of aimless wandering about the city showed the silent struggle everywhere growing worse. In the companionship of Dr. Fuh the real conditions of the people soon became apparent.

"Awful the disasters of this drought," I muttered as we passed along and saw the suffering down many a side street and alley.

"Not drought alone," he whispered. "The people know how to anticipate such a catastrophe from long and bitter experiences. . . . But war in the east took millions of tons of food from the province. . . . It has not been drought alone but war."

A week later both he and I had reason to know the dire nature of the disaster even more intimately. I received word to report to my good Colonel.

"Congratulations, Captain Wong," was his greeting. "Your abilities at spying out conditions are again rewarded. . . . You are appointed to our Red Cross Squad. . . . Whom would you have to assist you?"

"Dr. Fuh," I said without hesitation, and a couple of days later we were out and at it.

"One of our first duties is to ascertain accurately the conditions," I suggested.

Fuh nodded his assent. We began to question the costs of necessities.

"Wheat $16 per bushel. . . . Millet $14 per bushel. . . . Flour $32 per cwt. . . . Coal $120 per ton. . . . Charcoal $300 per ton," ran some of the staggering prices.

"'Tis plain none of these things can be food or fuel for the populace," was Fuh's comment.

"How many to be fed and kept from freezing?" we next inquired, for it was evident, as the winter broke, that the latter question was of equal gravity with the former.

"Six millions in the Wei valley alone, and most of them crowding into the city," was our nearest answer to accuracy, for no special statistics could be found.

"Those millions to feed and at such costs!" I exclaimed. "And what are our resources?"

That was not readily ascertained, but from various sources

we found sums approximating $100,000 and over from our countrymen in Peking, Shanghai and other centres, also several times that sum from our own Government in Nanking. Even our scattered citizens in America, Britain, Canada, Australia had heard of the plight of the province and had sent their gifts great and small.

"Surely a bright spot in the midst of such suffering," Dr. Fuh commented. "There was a day when our people had little sympathy for those outside their own immediate families. Now they are ready to share though scattered all over the world."

"And the foreign nations are helping generously too," he added, "Americans, Canadians, British. . . . There is also a liberal donation from a group in Japan where the school children have given of their small savings."

"And Russia?" I queried. "They are loud in protestations of friendship for our people."

"Nothing that I have heard of," he answered shaking his head slowly. "They have great contributions wrung from their people for propaganda and munitions and other military affairs that, like your Bow and his ilk, bring despair and desolation and death, all preliminary they claim of course to a new era of advance. . . . Russia's contribution springs from the spirit of Communism, these of other nations from the spirit of Christ. . . . Where better will one see the difference of the two than in this unhappy plight?"

"Well, we have a couple of millions in funds anyhow," I turned the topic. "That should go far. . . . It's a big sum."

"Two millions of dollars among thrice two millions of peoples, means but one-third of a dollar each," Fuh suggested, "and flour's worth that much for a single pound."

"But we'll soon fetch in more," I parried.

"Ah! You are a newcomer in this section, Captain. . . . This is not like our native SzeChwan with its many rivers and mighty Yangtse. . . . Here they have the Yellow 'tis true but that is largely unnavigable. . . . As to railways we are some hundreds of miles from the end of such."

"But carts," I retorted, "and mules and men's backs."

"Yes. These can do some and they will, but a man would

well-nigh eat his own load before he could arrive here, to say nothing of sending him out to the source . . . and as to the carts and mules they too have been almost wholly commandeered by the military and taken to the scenes of war in the east."

The prospects were gloomy indeed, but we went at it with a will. Already our citizens and the Christians in the missions were starting work, and we gave them all the aid we could. Some of the missionaries, I could not but note, were especially skillful and sacrificing. They had seen such service in other centres and were able to organize energetically and effectively. Great caldrons were set up in certain sections where gruel was prepared and given out gratuitously. In others flour and water and a bit of salt were baked into hardtack and a cake given to the needy. Hundreds of hungry people thronged the centres from dawn to dusk, their very eyes devouring the meagre fare as it passed from hand to hand.

Then winter came on apace and the hundreds grew to thousands. The care of the famishing became more desperate. One day in despair I went to my sympathetic Colonel.

"Why do we not send our troops away?" I suggested. "That would save much in the way of provisions."

"And then what would happen?" he queried.

"What?"

"What think you those thousands of starving men with their women and children crying daily for food would do?"

I waited.

"That there are already bands of banditti everywhere roaming the countryside, you well know. What has driven them to it? Desire for rapine might explain the case of a few, but with the many it is poverty, starvation, cold. Already we have sent east all the soldiers we dare. To send more would be disaster. Indeed we may have to recall some already sent. The remnant of provisions we have and our saving of civilization depend upon the troops we still retain.

"And what think you the men are getting in the way of rations?" he continued.

"Each man a pound per day," I replied.

"Nay, you and yours get that for they are on duty, but the rest get but twelve ounces."

"Why, we give even the starving beggars ten ounces," I protested.

My Colonel nodded sadly.

"But where does the government get its funds to carry on?" I inquired after a pause.

"Taxes," he replied laconically. "Taxes!"

"Taxes?" I exclaimed. "Taxes, in such a land as this?"

"Yes, Captain. . . . Seems absurd, doesn't it? . . . But again there's no alternative. . . . If there is to be a semblance of law and order there must be government, and that must be supported. . . . Of course these taxes are as light as possible and they fall upon these who are still able to pay even out of their restricted means."

"Some seem still to be able to gamble and smoke opium and run dens of vice," I exclaimed rather daringly.

"True," he answered hesitatingly. "These things exist and we tax them for it. They would do it clandestinely if we attempted to close them, so as alternative we tax them heavily to help a better cause."

I reported our conversation to Dr. Fuh.

"Degrading, isn't it?" he assented. "But does it not show that even the best of good will in Governors and Governments cannot do all. . . . We must dig deeper into the desires and motives of men."

So the weeks dragged on. Snow had been falling and covering the ground to unusual depths. The poor ragged populace that had dragged themselves about during the days of November now found themselves plunged into winter with its cruel frost and its whirling, drifting snows. How they shivered in every limb as they stood in line or squatted squalidly in the snow waiting for their slow turn for the gruel or cakes. Bare heads and hands, bare feet and legs, even at times bare backs! How could they endure? Dr. Fuh did his best to aid in cases of gangrene and fevers and other gruesome consequences, but the cause was too great for a cure.

Daily my squads of Red Cross assistants went their rounds. Scarce a street but had its stark figures lying somewhere waiting, stiff and lifeless. The dogs usually indicated where. Others were met at shop fronts and doorways to usher us silently in, to as silently depart with a body bundled up in rope and

matting. A supply of coffins was not even to be considered. Neither could graves be dug in such a period. My men bore their bundles forth and buried, or attempted to bury them in the great city moat. Alas! Only the snow could be had for covering from the carrion dogs. And the moat was filling fast.

XVIII

A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

ONE bitter day while going our dismal rounds, a girl's voice accosted us.

"Officer! Officer!" she called. "Do come here," then she darted inside the gateway again and was lost to view.

I paused while my men proceeded with a customary call just ahead. We had often passed the place and I had noted its high portal, narrow double doors, devoid of the usual gods, and with the sign "Superior Scholar" from the old Manchu régime still securely set in its upper supports. The doors had always been closed, however, and I had concluded casually that it must be the home of some of the more fortunate, who, warned in time, had deserted the place and departed from it to a happier community.

I entered more than usually curious as to the cause. The maiden met me in the space before the inner gate. I could not well see her features, but her voice was low and modulated.

"Oh! Officer," she began, "please do not ask me any questions now, and above all things do not tell grandfather I called you. . . . But," and her voice quivered a bit as she spoke, "but, Officer, we're in sore distress. . . . You will know when you see. . . . Grandfather's just inside the guest room of the upper court. . . . Make him believe you called as a matter of routine . . . and don't let him bow you away. . . ."

Then before I could reply, she slipped gracefully through the inner doorway and was gone. Something in her voice seemed to bring back memories by its peculiar cadence, but it was no time for reveries, and following her through the opening I entered the narrow courtyard and made my way toward the upper room. I allowed my sword to rattle a bit on the pavement as I proceeded that I might attract attention. But I arrived at the upper door without being accosted. There I halted and tapped gently, then with firmer hand.

Listening intently I thought I heard some one stirring within, but there was no response. I knocked still more loudly. Listening again I could hear feet approaching slowly and I waited. Then quietly a side door opened and an emaciated face surrounded by long grey hair and scanty grey beard peered out upon me. I saluted.

"All is well, sire?" I inquired.

"Well! Quite well. You may assure your superiors that all is well," came the words from a deep, hollow throat, and the head began to withdraw itself.

I recalled my cautioning at the gateway. I stepped forward quickly ere he could disappear.

"The Government is very cautious these days," I improvised. "I fear I must detain you a moment at the risk of discourtesy."

"Ah! There must be others in greater need. . . . Go to them . . . to them . . . assure the governor that with us all is well. . . ."

Before I could interject other word or action, the grey hairs disappeared, the small door closed and I heard the wooden bolt slide into its slot. It seemed useless to make further attempt for the present. Moreover an uncertainty came over me as to the sudden appearance and disappearance of the maiden. What could it all mean? I was not to be caught, if some trap were intended, and turning on my heel, I started down the courtyard. I opened the small inner door and stepped into the vestibule. The maiden was there again.

"Oh! Officer," she began and great tears stood in her haggard eyes as she spoke. "Please pardon my abruptness . . . but I know who you are. . . . You're Captain Wong. . . . I've seen you pass here many times as I watched through the chinks of the doors, but hesitated to call you. . . ."

"And you are?" I interrupted a bit coolly still, wondering at the situation.

"Our name's Liu, Captain. . . . I'm the granddaughter," she answered with simplicity. Then some strand of recognition came upon me; some pulse of recollection beat in my memory, recalling the girl's identity.

"Not Miss Lucile Liu? . . . the singer?" I broke in, and memories of the maiden at the great reception, swaying our

soldiers as she sang, my sword glittering above her head, flashed again.

"So they call me at times," she replied in a low voice. "But Captain, do not speak of that now. . . . We're in distress. . . ."

Dr. Fuh's words of warning also came floating back as she spoke. What could she mean, this sing-song girl, bringing me thus into a situation where I was not welcome?

"Many in distress these days, Miss Liu. . . . Tell your grandfather to report it at Headquarters," I said rather curtly, and turned to pass out.

"Oh! Captain Wong! Captain Wong!" she cried as she thrust herself before me. "You surely cannot understand. . . . My brother's dying in there and grandfather refuses . . ."

"Dying?" I repeated and paused.

"Yes . . . dying . . . dying . . . and grandfather refuses to ask for aid . . . or allow me to do so," and she looked at me with great pitiful, pleading eyes, that could not but disarm suspicion.

"Come then," I exclaimed. "We'll try again."

She followed close as I ascended the court. This time as the old grey head appeared, I did not pause for invitation but with brief ceremony pushed past and into the room. The old figure stood aside stiff and sullen.

"Government business," I explained half apologetically.

"No business for the Government here," came the hollow voice. "You're needed elsewhere."

I looked about in the semi-darkness of the room. It was almost filled with smoke and I could see but indistinctly. The room, I noted slowly, was void of furniture, the usual chairs and small tea tables that lined such walls had disappeared. Over on the wide kang that served as both seat and bed something moved. Looking closer it seemed a human form.

"Some one ill?" I inquired as though unconscious of the rebuff, and started forward.

The old form was immediately at my side and his long thin hands were gripping my arm and shoulder.

"Stop! Stop!" he gurgled. "The Government has crushed our living. . . . They shall not now curse our dying. . . .

Get hence and tell your tyrants that the House of Liu requires nothing now. . . . Nothing now! " he repeated. . . . " But . . . but " . . . and his thin fingers dug more deeply into my flesh . . . " they will hold them to account some day before High Heaven! "

I turned and looked. The old figure was tottering with weakness but his eyes glistened with a strange light. I had seen such before in the sad struggle. He was crazed by cold and hunger and remorse.

" The House of Liu has a long history, and may well be proud of its record," I began to say appeasingly, then paused. Something in the old man's eye brought strange memories.

" You have lived in the mountains of Kansu," I said suddenly.

" Kansu! The mountains of Kansu! " the old man repeated, and his eye took on a milder gleam. " What do you know of the mountains there? "

" You gave your school in trust to me," I exclaimed, for I felt I could not be mistaken.

" My school! My school? Ah! . . . But you are a soldier? . . . You belong to the Government! " and again the fire began to burn.

" I am but a soldier by circumstance," I replied. " It was I whom you trusted then. . . . Can you not trust me now? "

The old man reeled as I spoke. It was my turn now to seize his thin arms and steady him to the kang.

" Lucy! . . . Lucy! " the old voice called as he hobbled forward.

She was in and at his side in a moment.

" This is the youth of whom I have spoken," he muttered hoarsely. " He, they assured me, he has a true heart. . . . Listen to him."

I laid the old form out gently upon the platform.

" Throw a quilt about him," I said, turning to the maiden.

" They are gone," she replied as she bent her shapely head, " but I will warm him," and crouching at his side she placed her arms about the shrunken form.

I turned to the other strange shape by his side. It was a mound of old tattered clothing and sacks and bits of cotton wadding from quilts of other days. I drew these gently aside

and looked down. It was the face of a young man. I felt an exposed arm. It was cold as a corpse. I strode over to where the attempt was being made to keep warmth going in the kang. Bits of a bed and rungs from a chair showed at what cost the struggle had been carried on. I shoved them in and the smoke rose higher.

"When did your brother last take food?" I inquired, as I again approached Miss Liu.

"Yesterday," she replied quietly.

"Have you tried to-day?"

"There is none!" came the reply and big tears fell on the form before her.

I hurried for Dr. Fuh and my relief squad. We were soon again on the scene. The doctor though wearied with much service worked with a new zest as I told him of the strange circle and my discoveries. But it was all too late. The old scholar revived under our services, but the grandson was carried out next day, another light load to lie with ten thousand nameless ones in the long trench.

A week went by and by dint of aid from the missions and from our own stores I managed to bring in daily a few supplies. Most of these the old man refused to receive, declaring stoically that they would not live by the gifts of a Government that had so wronged them. Fortunately Miss Liu was not so obsessed; she showed herself to be much more approachable, and from her I gradually gained their story.

"It was our difficulty here that called my grandfather home," she explained one day. "My father was sent as magistrate to one of the mountain districts. For a time all went well. . . . Then this famine came and all was distress in his district. . . . Still the Government demanded the taxes."

"How much?" I inquired.

"Not much in ordinary times," she replied, "but in such times as these impossible. . . . It is ten cents and a pound of grain for every acre in the county."

"And he has gone to prison," I added, for I knew well what had been the history of many a magistrate in similar circumstances.

"Prison. . . . Yes," she faltered, "but that is not all . . . a gang of exploiters are about. . . . They declare

that he has misappropriated funds and are bringing pressure for payment. . . . They daily threaten execution."

That such things were but too true, I well knew. A score of magistrates were in prison for failure to remit and half a dozen had been reported as executed.

"That your father is innocent I have little doubt," I assented. "It is not men of your stock who defraud. . . . But what are their demands?"

"That I do not know," she said tearfully. "That my grandfather refuses to tell me. . . . He simply says that we must die together, that the Government has become our murderer," and she shuddered as she spoke.

"You have enemies?" I suggested after a pause.

"Who has not in days such as these?" she answered.

"And yours?"

She hesitated a moment, then gazing steadily into my eyes:

"You are our only hope. . . . I will tell you all. . . . We are pursued by those who would gladly crush us, see us disgraced, gloat over our death. . . . My father was one of the first students to go to America some decades ago to study Western learning. He returned to our land to be sent abroad on many missions and as aide in our embassies. . . . He would have us, my brother and I go with him. . . . Abroad we as children studied and travelled and thought naught of the cares of life. . . . My brother was bent on law, I on music and art. . . ."

"And you succeeded rarely," I interjected, recalling her triumph.

She bowed with quiet poise.

"But with my father it was otherwise. . . . He found himself surrounded with our countrymen of various factions, some of them exiles, each clamouring for his aid and adherence. . . . He became a believer in the overthrow of the old régime and returned to further the Revolution. . . . That in time succeeded, but alas! our revolutionary leaders have broken into many parties. . . . He joined with the Nationalists and here has found himself in the unpopular ranks. . . . Moreover his enemies have turned forces against him to crush him utterly. . . . Recently a group has come here from the east. . . . My grandfather refuses to tell me their de-

mands. . . . He simply reiterates that we must die together."

It was useless to go to the old man. He persisted in eating almost nothing, and his eyes glowed with a strange wild light. He could speak of nothing save to rave betimes at a system that had brought him and his to ruin. I would go to my good Colonel and seek his solution.

"Be brave," I smiled as I departed.

"Courage begets courage," she smiled back, and I walked away more confident in that I felt her eyes were upon me, her thoughts and faith following me.

My Colonel apparently anticipated me. I met an orderly with a note commanding my early presence. I went immediately. He looked grave as I entered, and spoke at once.

"What can this mean, Captain?" he queried as he handed me a slip of paper.

I read:

"Keep your snooping subordinates in their proper places. Change Wong's command at once, or look for trouble.

(Signed) P. P. P."

I looked up greatly perplexed.

"What?" I half gasped.

"Yes. That's the question, Captain," he said courteously but full of seriousness. "What have you been doing out of the usual these days?"

"Nothing, sir," I answered frankly. "Tending strictly to the starving and suffering according to orders."

"No truck with women-folk?" he asked slowly and looked at me hard.

"None! Absolutely none," I flashed back, and I could see him flush a bit as I met his gaze steadily.

"Pardon the question, Captain," he was speaking again. "I thought I knew you. I also know some of these ghouls."

I still stood looking at him in astonishment and half indignation. He proceeded.

"You're a brave chap, Wong. . . . But these fellows will not be thwarted. . . . They stop at nothing. . . . It may be absolutely innocently on your part but you've crossed

their purposes somehow. . . . I can only think of some woman . . . some girl. . . ."

Then the face of the maiden I had just left and of her old grandsire came flashing before me. I told the whole story as briefly yet as fully as I could.

"H'mm! That's it, then! That's it!" said the Colonel slowly. "And I unfortunately happen to know a supplement that doubtless has not reached you . . . probably has not reached Miss Liu herself?"

It was now my turn to question.

"Come a bit nearer," he answered my gaze, and motioned me to a seat beside him on the heated kang. "You have not heard of this P. P. P.?"

"No!" I replied.

"They claim to be Purchasers for the People's Party," he went on. "They are here to secure supplies for the great army in the east. . . . They took the grain last year."

"Supplies from this starving centre!" I exclaimed.

"Yes!" he answered, looking down. "Yes! Alas! It is starvation that creates this a centre for certain supplies."

"Which?"

"Women!"

The word came with slow emphasis, and his fine head dropped a little lower at the admission. But, beyond doubt, his meaning was clear.

"The carts?" I exclaimed.

"The carts!" he replied.

Then I recalled the scene of but a few days previous. Out at our eastern gate I had been attracted by a crowd of our soldiers. They were laughing, chaffing as a line of a dozen or more lumbering carts drawn by mules made their way through. It took little questioning to discover who were within. The allusions of the soldiers told that.

"Refugees," they chuckled with knowing looks. "Female refugees being rescued. . . . Flowers, roses . . . pinks being transferred to the hothouse," and they nudged one another.

I had heard of such traffic. It was common report that girls in their 'teens and women in their twenties were being bought and sold for ten and twenty dollars each to be later "distributed" in the east for hundreds and even thousands according

to their attractiveness. But though I had noted suspicious circumstances I had not seen it before so openly in evidence.

"Carts . . . a dozen carts, and their mules," ran my thoughts. "Carts and mules in fine condition where none save wrecks and skeletons can be found to haul food and fuel to our stricken people. . . . And such infernal merchandise. . . . Our maidens, our young matrons being wrung from parents and husbands, doubtless at times by fairest of lying promises and persuasions, or more often by the snarling wolf of starvation and slow but certain death."

I had rushed away to talk it over with Dr. Fuh.

"Do something!" the latter had replied. "Aye! Gladly, if one could. But even the Government here are helpless. . . . They are not alone in the clutches of famine, but of poverty, so take a big tax from such accursed traffic. They are also tied, held helpless by the bargaining of some one at Headquarters. . . . Go there, ask them and they will doubtless reply that this is war and that war demands men and munitions and money and flesh and blood. . . . Aye, war knows nothing save to win at any price and even our women's purity must be a part."

I groaned.

"Just so!" Fuh had added. "What you have is what all our vast citizenship needs, even more than rich harvests and new constitutions at home and real sovereignty and revised covenants abroad, and that is revived and reconstructed consciences, the conscience and the consciousness of the Christ."

I had walked away then, but now as I stood confronted by circumstances that were closing upon me and those I honoured I recalled his words.

"And what's to be done, Colonel?" I demanded leaping up.

"Aye! What?" he repeated. "What? . . . As I said I know another factor to all this. . . . It is this same gang of ghouls that have the father in prison. . . . It is they that even now are holding the threat of death over his head. . . . It is they," and he lowered his voice to a whisper . . . "It is they who are demanding that this charming and cultured daughter be given into their accursed clutches, as the price of his liberty and his life."

"Never!" I cried, and forgetting all discipline, I rushed at

the good Colonel as though he himself had pronounced the sentence to such a doom.

"Steady, boy! Steady!" he smiled as he beheld my anger. "It takes caution as well as courage to win in this world, you know."

We talked together for some time, but to little avail.

"We are but military men, you know, Captain. . . . It is ours at times to obey even unreasonable things unreasoningly. . . . Your body in the big ditch out there will not count much . . . will cause little investigation . . . and will not save the girl. . . . But here's my card. . . . Use it for any authority it can give you. . . . Only remember if you're caught . . . It may be my unpleasant duty to line you up and give the command to fire!"

I thanked him and saluting went out. I tried to find Dr. Fuh, but failing hurried straight to the home with the great sign of scholarship above the gates. My enemies had taken no chances. I found a guard placed there and a sentry pacing to and fro amid the snows. Approaching I asked for the officer in charge. He informed me that the place had been seized and that he had orders that none should enter.

"Who is within?" I inquired.

"I do not know. . . . The doors were sealed on our arrival," came the reply.

There was nothing to be gained by again reporting to my Colonel. Dr. Fuh was out somewhere on duty. I must trust to myself. As I went slowly away my mind was working wildly. The Colonel's card was my only hope. . . . What could I do? . . . What could it do? . . . I must get within those old walls and at once . . . but how? Then a thought came and I was away down the almost deserted side streets at a bound.

A half hour later and with the aid of the card as permission I was back with a messmate of the engineers and two of his men. It was not a difficult matter for us to find a deserted house to the rear leading to the common separation walls. A half hour later still and we were through the wall and into a room apparently the kitchen at the rear.

It was twilight and I opened the door cautiously and peeped out. All was deserted. My companion and I explored noise-

lessly. Once I thought I heard a voice and we halted abruptly and listened. It was but the men on guard at the gate. I made for the guest room where the old grandsire must surely be found if not departed. I opened the door and stole forward toward the kang where the sad bundle had lain on my first visit. The room seemed empty and the kang was cold, though a bit of burned board still smouldered in the ashes.

I started for the other side. One step, two, three, four. Then in the twilight my foot pressed something soft and yielding. I could not see. I stooped down, then started up again with a shudder. My hand had touched something stark, cold, human. I had grown accustomed to death and in the open it no longer held any terror to me. But here in this spot of memories, I trembled. My companion came up and gave me assistance. A moment only was then required.

"The grandsire," I whispered and we tiptoed out. He had no need of help.

We called the two men to our aid and together we searched the old home. We found the maiden's room and even dared to light a candle. A torn book, bits of broken glass, a wisp of torn cloth, told unmistakably of some sudden struggle.

"Lucile! Lucile!" I heard my own voice whisper, then startled at my words. "What wild thing was this I had spoken? . . . Uttered a name that was nothing to me. . . . Nothing? . . . My head whirled in confusion. . . . My heart beat wild in consternation. . . . Nothing to me? . . . What? Had I forgotten little May Fay? . . . My own Fay and her tragedy so soon? . . . I reeled there in the dim candle light. . . . 'She's mine!'" I felt rather than heard myself mutter grimly and plucking my companion by the sleeve we hurried away.

"They're gone sure," he ejaculated when we were again out in the street. "I hope they're nothing special to you."

"Nothing," I repeated and again checked myself with a start. Then I thanked them for their assistance and was off on another quest.

This time I was with my old comrades of the scouts. It was easy even without the Colonel's card to enlist their aid. They were eager for the adventure as I whispered the secret to one or two. They soon were in touch with the police and other sources,

but the hours dragged wearily on and no word came. I had found Dr. Fuh by this time and he added his skill by way of many suggestions, but still the research seemed fruitless.

"Must have got clear of the city before dusk," Fuh muttered in dismay.

"But the guards at the gates say 'No,'" I retorted, for I could not admit defeat.

"If they're once out only the wind speeding in all directions would find them," he added evidently hoping to prepare me.

"Then I'll be the hurricane to hound them to the four seas," I hurtled back, and Fuh looked at me bewildered. He little knew, as indeed I scarce knew myself the new fury that had seized me.

How the night wore on! My comrades worked with a will, but man after man returned to give the same report, "No clue."

I was preparing to be lowered by ropes over the wall, to follow the trail to the east, the route the carts had taken on the former occasion, when an old companion rushed in with a message. "A suspicious stir to the north," he whispered.

Then events happened with a swiftness I myself can scarce recall. Some one came a moment later to say that the north gate was for some mysterious reason to open early. A quarter of an hour later and we were there with a squad of a half dozen horsemen. As a cart lumbered in from an alley, we pounced upon it.

There is one moment that I will ever recall. My heart bounds still as the memory returns and will till it beats no more. It was when leaping from my steed I plunged without parley into the cart and drew forth a maiden, the maiden, into the light of early dawn.

"Lucile! Lucile!" I murmured, as I held her in my arms.

"Oh! Captain! Captain!" she could only murmur back, and clung to me passionately.

"This way," it was Dr. Fuh who recalled me. "No time to lose now . . ." and he hurried me to my horse where he aided me in raising the precious burden carefully to my saddle.

"Where?" I inquired. I had not planned the next step in my eagerness.

"Follow!" Fuh was apparently asserting the right to com-

mand, and we were soon cantering along amid the stones and snow. My precious burden shivered as I held her close.

I paid little attention to our windings. When the cavalcade came to a sudden stop, I looked up half bewildered to find ourselves before the mission compound. But Dr. Fuh was down and already pounding vigorously at the great black doors. A few moments later and we were riding through and Fuh was in earnest conversation with one of the workers from the Western world, a man whom I knew as one of his intimate friends.

"Let the young lady come with me a moment," said the worker, and accompanied by the doctor they departed.

I waited wonderingly. Ere long Fuh and the foreign worker were back again and I waited anxiously while the doctor clambered a bit hesitantly to his horse. I started forward to inquire concerning Lucile. Some one seized me by the sleeve. I turned to discover apparently one of the servants of the compound.

"A moment . . . don't speak," the voice was saying. "You'll discover the reason, but these in the streets must not . . ."

The voice seemed familiar. I turned and looked at the person again full in the face.

"Fuh," the name came to my lips but I checked myself in time. It was the doctor, and his voice went on.

"You will discover before long who the Dr. Fuh is that rides with you, but the street will be full of eyes and some of them spies. . . . They must delay at least for a time seeking her here. . . . Ride then for life, both yours and hers and ours. . . . Make for our own old province, SzeChwan. . . . Keep away from the cities. . . . They have telegraph. . . . Go, you must make your own plans now. . . ."

"But can she ride?" I faltered.

"Try her. . . . I guessed it from the athletic figure she is. . . . She says she has ridden whole days in England and America. . . . But go! . . . Don't come back alive . . . and may the good Lord preserve you both," he added the latter gravely as I leaped to the saddle.

"Come, Doctor," I said with an attempt at sharpness, as I rode close to the new physician. "Let's off. . . . You follow me and the men next."

There was no reply but I noticed the horse swing in with a fine precision. We were soon clattering along the streets again. The Colonel's card brought the opening of the great gate without delay and we were soon away, my heart bounding with a wild joy as we reached the suburbs and then the open road beyond. My squad, I noted ever and anon, were following close.

Dr. Fuh's ruse worked well, at least for me and the maiden for whose freedom and future we struggled. The good doctor himself and his foreign friends did not fare so well. We had not departed an hour before a beggar came whining to the gate and slipping past the old gateman made his way into the yard. But Fuh and his friends were watchful and the attempt failed.

A short time later and runners from a yamen appeared at the gates demanding to know of the gateman as to what Chinese were within the walls. He answered truthfully to the best of his knowledge, but his replies gave them little satisfaction.

That afternoon a card came from a high official asking politely for the pleasure of the foreign pastor at a feast. The latter went, but though the subject of a stranger in his home was skillfully introduced several times, he as skillfully evaded the topic.

Next day a servant was seized and when fear and bribery failed to bring forth the confession they wished, they resorted to torture. Under their cruelty he cried out that there was a stranger in the place. That was sufficient. They were sure now of the whereabouts of the fugitive. Their own brutality had led further to their undoing and we were still farther upon our way.

Poor Fuh himself came in for the worst trials. He quietly slipped out that night and donning another uniform was going about his work. The following morning he was suddenly seized in a side street, furiously beaten and then dragged to our Colonel for punishment. The latter immediately threw him into prison and made a fine display of official indignation. Within the walls the Colonel saw that he was well guarded from dangers without as well as within. . . . Then he quietly started an agitation for his release, the demand for the services of physicians being so great. The scheme worked well, and ten days later Fuh was again at liberty, being careful, however, to venture nowhere without his squad.

Even the Colonel himself was called in and questioned by a superior officer regarding the use of his card in the case, but succeeded by his genial manner in nothing more severe being meted out than a mild reprimand for carelessness in allowing subordinates a too free use of his power.

The gang, however, were not to be robbed of their prey and the profits so certain in such a prize. They attempted to stir up the populace against the mission by circulating stories as to girls and women being kept there for evil purposes. Indeed, one rumour ran that the missionary, under cloak of the gospel, used his home as a trade centre before the unhappy cargo was shipped away, thus attempting to attribute their own villainy to others. The missionaries through their labours for relief were at that time, however, quite too popular with the public for such slanders to secure a hearing and that too failed. Then one day all unexpectedly, a band of thieves pursued apparently by infuriated sufferers rushed along the street, burst into the unsuspecting compound and before order could be restored, succeeded in penetrating everywhere. That ended the suspicion as to the mission. It was quite evident that the girl had escaped. All too late they turned to track us now days distant, they knew not where.

Meantime we had made good progress in our mad gallop southward. The desolation of the land at times tormented our very souls, and threatened us with extinction. The country seemed all but deserted. Here and there in the villages we found no food to be secured at any price that ordinary mortals or even our horses might eat. In others the perishing inhabitants not only had devoured everything capable of being masticated, but had hauled down most of their wretched huts hunting for remnants of fuel amid poles and rafters to keep a few fires smouldering. One village we found deserted of all, even its very dogs. Only a rat scurrying here and there spoke of the life that had been.

Yet somehow we managed to struggle on. Now and then we were able to exchange a horse with some soldier outpost. Here and there we found corn or millet or buckwheat that might be bought at a price. Once, twice, thrice as we rode, members of our band of six grew weary or expressed a wish to go no farther and were, after consultation, excused. We were but three when

we at length reached the boundaries of my native province and the last of our guard asked permission to return. I spoke a moment apart with my maiden.

"Can you trust me, Lucile?" I questioned after explaining the situation.

"Trust you, my Captain?" she smiled back, saluting smartly as she spoke. "My trust is long tried and found true. . . . Where else should I put my trust?"

Hope rose high after that. The thought that we were again in my own SzeChwan seemed to speak anew of safety. Moreover now that we were alone we could converse together, a thing which we did rarely lest our men might note a maiden's accent or action in some unguarded moment. Indeed, I doubt not that some had suspected it, but all had carefully kept their secret at least from me. It was not theirs to question.

"We are on my own soil now, Lucile!" I exclaimed as I rode by her side. "Do you not sense security?"

"I have had many invitations to visit your fair province," she replied cheerily. "But never dreamed that it would be in this manner."

"Invitations?" I repeated. "And from whom, pray?"

"My grandfather had friends in the capital," she said softly. "They often urged that we come."

"But the road was far?" I suggested.

"Yes, far and dangerous . . . and he said they were very worthy but poor."

"Their name?" I asked casually.

"Tang," came the answer.

"Tang!" I echoed in surprise. "Why, that's the name of my old teacher. . . . The one who taught me all through my childhood. . . . What a wonder if he should be relative of yours!"

We laughed together over the merry thought, then coming back to realities rode cautiously on. But the hours as they passed could not but fill us with new emotions. We had been leaving the stern winter behind us. Here and there as we descended among the valleys spring was touching all with her subtle warmth and charm. Bamboos began again to rustle in the winds, grass appeared in the glades, streams gurgled and gambolled along our pathway, birds sang and flitted among the

trees. Then crossing a ridge one day we came suddenly upon a farm landscape.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" cried my physician, forgetting her anxiety and assumed sex all in one breath.

"Truly my land at last!" I echoed the sentiment.

There before us lay the familiar terraced fields of my boyhood winding in whimsical widths and lengths, to left, to right, and ever down and down. From their narrow dikes beans burst forth in ribbons of purple and at their great hearts tossed golden heads of wheat, deep green of yet unripened grain and the flaunting tufts of yellow oil plant.

"Assuredly a land of plenty," she murmured as her deep eyes took in the far view. "And to think that my people perish just yonder, beyond the ranges."

We rode on in silence again for a time. I would not, could not break in on the sacred spots she must then be recalling. But even such could not hold her soul long pensive amid such scenes. Ever and anon a song stole all unconsciously to her heart and lips, and I found myself riding closer, listening, laughing into her dancing eyes.

A few days later and we came near a city on my own soil. It was the old and picturesque Bowning nestling peacefully amid its hills. We did not avoid such a centre this time. There seemed no need of that now. The question was where to go.

"Better the mission again," counselled my physician. "They seem the one sure centre of honour and harmony in these unhappy days."

"Agreed," I answered with an alacrity that surprised one, then after a pause, "Is it not strange that these foreigners should thus form an oasis here and there in our dreary and disastrous desert?"

"Not so strange perhaps, if you knew the source," she said gravely.

"What? Do you mean that you also are a Christian?" I demanded abruptly.

"In spirit," she replied quietly, "though I have never joined their society. . . . Father refused us permission for his own reasons . . . but mother was buried in a Christian churchyard . . . and it calmed my brother in his sufferings."

The tears started as she spoke, and we rode into the city in silence.

There was a hearty welcome at the mission, even before we had explained our plight. When later our story was told the kindly folk vied with one another in hospitality. Lucile was taken right into the home of some unmarried ladies, and I was given quarters in a school dormitory near by. I scarce knew my maiden when she next appeared. They had dressed her out in gayest of foreign style with a few ribbons here and there and many a ripple in her raven hair. Delicately, deliriously beautiful appeared her bare arms and throat and her whole body seemed to move to some new rhythmic music.

"See how they have decked me," she exclaimed as she came tripping into one of the courtyards. "This is what I wore for a dozen years. . . . It makes me think of America and Canada and Britain," and she gave her hair a toss and her skirts a swirl that sent my heart leaping wildly.

"Oh! Wear it! Wear it always," I exclaimed as I gazed with unrestrained admiration.

"But my Chinese robes were more beautiful," she sighed, "ere they went for our necessities."

Then I recalled the maiden that had captivated all hearts as she swayed and sang, my sword glittering above her.

"You are ever beautiful, Lucile," I stammered, "even in our badly battered old army uniform."

She turned and fled back to her new friends. But she apparently did not forget, for a few days later when we again started upon our journey, she appeared in the old outfit. One of the mission ladies was travelling our way and that made matters easier for us both. Still I could not but note that Lucile declared for her horse in preference to a now possible chair, which gave us once more long rides together.

Warnings against robber bands were frequent, but though they looted others and at times carried unhappy travellers away for ransom they allowed us to pass. They doubtless took us as escort for the missionary lady, our companion, and we made no attempt to undeceive them. Again the missionary and the good will they had engendered proved our protection, and I pondered the fact as we went our way.

How speedily the days were going. One by one the cities

passed: Mienchow, Hanchow, Shintu. Each were but names before to me. Now they stood for hospitality most bountiful and open-hearted, as in each a mission group welcomed us and speeded us on our way.

We were out on the big north road now. Another day would find us at the great capital Chengtu. How the roads teemed with traffic. Sedan chairs with their carriers were passing to and fro. Coolies with their baskets, and bundles of goods at either end of their poles swung past or paused to scrape the sweat from their panting bodies beneath some tree. Pushers of barrows went slowly, toilsomely on, the squeaking of their wheels commingling with the squealing of the upturned porkers that frequently formed their cargo.

Lucile was all delight.

"What a land of plenty!" she exclaimed. "How lovely these crates of coal, these great black pigs and even the sweat streaming from those weary workers appear, after our dire days." Then she turned her eyes to the fields where the rice still stood in its dense seed beds and men and youth sang songs of springtime, as they transplanted the stalks row on row in the sparkling waters. Songs again sprang from her lips, and her heart seemed full of joy. Her eyes did not change their lustre, but seemed to gleam deeper, darker still when, riding by her side, I took her small hand for a moment in mine and whispered: "Lucile! My Lucile! I love you!"

XIX

CONSTERNATION

FAR away to the west of the great capital the sacred peaks of Mt. O-mei shine forth at times resplendent. Behind and beyond her golden summit stretches the land of the Lo-los. There in the home of the great chief lay Lu-lu badly crushed and broken but still breathing. The mother and women might wail but the old chieftain held council with his braves.

"Where are the others?" he inquired of those so recently returned from captivity.

"Lost! Chieftain! Lost!" they replied. "Those two are lost. . . . One died by the high wall . . . the other in the corn field."

There was a long silence. Each knew well what their chieftain was thinking. It is a tradition with their tribes that the bodies of their "Black Bones," their "Blue Bloods" in the language of other lands, must not be permitted to decay but must be transformed by fire. Thus in battle, though the bodies of the "White Bones" or slaves may be found by scores or hundreds upon the field, a body of this higher class is rarely discovered. It must be borne away at any sacrifice. When in emergencies such an one falls ill on a journey, death seems imminent and rescue impossible, then a pyre must be made beside the sick. Should he be unable to himself ignite it as he nears the end then even a stranger passing by will see that the sacred fires are kindled and the dead body consumed.

"They must be found," said the chief at length.

All gave silent consent.

"Who will go?"

There was no lack of volunteers. With the guns now it would be easier, and all were anxious that their comrades receive the sacred rites. Four were selected and but a little later set out on the perilous task.

Arriving at the borders of their territory, they crept down into our valley by tortuous and sheer descents which my people

considered impossible. Certainly Bow's guards scattered here and there about the Pass were ready to make oath that no one had or could gain access. They little knew the skill of these tribesmen in scaling cliffs and secreting themselves in nooks and crannies where even an eagle might be thought to tread in peril. Thus the four had reached the valley and secured one of the badly battered bodies of their comrades while the bandit band slept or gambled at their posts all unconscious that an enemy was nearer than miles away.

Startled by the unexpected opening of the castle gates the four had made their way to the old tower, their trysting place. The last of their band had little more than arrived when another form came struggling up the winding path from the brook-side. He was panting hard and had good cause, for something he was carrying squirmed and struggled frantically.

"Squirm again, will you?" they heard Jowl Jaw mutter. "I'll crack your cursed neck for that."

There was a slight pause, a muffled cry and the burden lay very quiet as the man stumbled into the opening. A moment later and there was a succession of thuds as from a blow, and a heavy fall. Jowl Jaw was down, was gagged and bound in a trice and a moment later a couple of the mountaineers were trussing up his big hulking body as they pressed toward the hills. The other two bore the limpid form of little May Fay and the dead body of one of their fallen comrades. The other must wait. It could not be found to-night, but they would surely find it later. These captives would furnish a fitting substitute should they fail.

An hour later found them up the cliffs where comrades waited with willing hands and backs. Next morning all were safely back in their old abode awaiting the assembling of their chieftains and their decrees. Jowl Jaw, again conscious, lay on the ground, rolling his bloodshot eyes in fury. May Fay was still as in death.

Fortunately as the dawn broke, some of the old hostages recognized her, then all was changed.

"'Tis the young chief's friend," said one, and the word passed from mouth to mouth.

Then they picked her up tenderly and carried her to the castle of the great chief. There they laid her in the same big room

with Lu-lu. A fire of brushwood crackled in the centre and sent its clouds of smoke aloft toward the opening in the roof. Dogs of varying size stretched themselves out before the blaze. Near by on a bed of skins lay the youth, the medicine men of the tribe crouching on either side and crooning their weird charms and prayers. That was the men's side of the great common room. They laid May Fay on the other and gave her over to the care of the women.

Lu-lu had already partly recovered consciousness and noted the unusual stir.

"What?" he whispered feebly. "What now?"

"Another wounded one," they parried.

"Wounded one? . . . A woman then. . . . Who?"

"Sleep, my son! Sleep!" counselled his mother. "Ask not now. . . . We will tell you anon."

He rested for a time but his pain soon aroused him, and again he demanded knowledge of the wounded. Acceding to his request they carried her gently to his side.

"Fay! Fay!" he cried in consternation. "How hurt Fay? . . . How?"

Something in the voice seemed to reach her and she turned a trifle in her strange sleep. From that on the young chief seemed to forget his own suffering in anxiety for the little captive that had so unexpectedly followed him into his high home. Her condition and not his own aching back and brow and bones seemed to call for attention and demand that he forget himself for her recovery.

His hopes were slowly realized. She did not recover rapidly. For long the vicious wrench that Jowl Jaw had given seemed to becloud her brain. Then as her senses slowly revived the shock she had received still held her. She looked about blankly at the strange surroundings and appeared all unconscious of her past and present. Then one day she smiled a bit as Lu-lu called her name. That was the beginning of better days. She recognized him after a time and would have no other near her. They doubtless appeared foreign and forbidding.

Winter came on apace. Lu-lu limping about the great enclosure could not go forth to the hunt with the others and remained constantly about the castle. They chatted much. It was now impossible to go into the old valley, the rocks were

too treacherous and any such adventure could be tracked among the hills. What went on below they could but roughly surmise. May Fay naturally grieved much for her mother, but they comforted her as best they could, and exhorted her to courage.

"In spring," Lu-lu would repeat, "in spring we surprise her. . . . She think you dead now, in spring know we keep you all safe. . . . You better here, not there? . . . She also think so?"

Thus she was in part assured, and the time sped on. As they both recovered more, they ventured forth on sunny days to watch the snowy peaks glisten in the light, went for long slides on the steep hillsides in rough native toboggans, or even ventured to track the fox and rabbit with the less venturous huntsmen. When stormy days forbade such sorties then the captive maid mingled with the women of the tribe, learning by degrees their strange language and customs, or herself turned teacher and taught Lu-lu to trace the tantalizing characters of her own county, a task she found much more interesting than in the classrooms of old Teacher Tang.

As to Jowl Jaw his life had for the time being been spared him. Hitched firmly by clanking chains to three other slaves he had ample opportunity each day to put his great neck to real use, hauling out wood from the hills. For this purpose a "White Bones" hitched him and his comrades up daily, forcing them to trample through great drifts and dangerous undergrowths, sparing not the lash should they falter or prove feeble, and forcing them each night into a deep pit from which access could not be had until a roughly notched log was put down at dawn next day to serve as ladder. Then they ascended to eat their meagre meal of hominy, before being again hurried off to the hauling. Jowl Jaw glared and glowered savagely when at times the little captive maid crossed his path, but fortunately she knew nothing of his presence and a sharp cut from the driver's lash brought the brute back to a realization of existing circumstances.

* * * * * * * *

Over in the old fortress of my fathers, the Lopper, illustrious successor to the grim ghoul was busied with other things. Stung with his master's taunts that he had been slow and stupid in

ferreting out possible sources of treasure, he bent himself still more strenuously to his task.

My unfortunate aunt was again brought before Bow and his band for investigation. They questioned her as they thought most tactfully about her financial affairs and a book containing her bank account in some eastern city, presumably the great port of Shanghai. In her strange psychic state she spoke wildly.

"I am penniless, penniless, a pauper utterly without resources," she would declare at times in pitying tones. "Only let me go that I may fare forth to beg my way and find my daughter."

At other times she would boast of prodigious wealth: "Yes! I have millions, ten thousands of millions locked up in a bank in Japan. . . . Only restore to me my girlie, my sweet little girlie, and you may have it all . . . all . . . all!"

On still other occasions she sat grimly silent. They even locked her for days in her rooms seeking to starve her, force her by threats and promises to reveal her coveted books. She had apparently forgotten all details as to both these and her deposits. Relief was to come at length from a wholly unexpected quarter.

Old Trooper Hung after his aid to Lu-lu and his Lo-los had slipped silently out of the throng. Weak and weary with the ordeal, he had found his way through the unguarded gates and down the old stream side toward the village. Whither should he go in such an hour of extremity? He thought naturally again of the good Dr. Charles and the hospital from whence he had hastened to our assistance and resolved to seek once more its kindly aid. In this determination he found his way to the shore, was fortunate enough to secure a place upon one of the descending rafts and in the course of another day was again within hospital walls.

It was well that he had made the decision. Despite the skill of the kindly physician and his staff, the old man's life was long in the balance. The effort he had put forth and the rough handling he had received had been too much for his weakened frame. One day, months later, as he convalesced satisfactorily, thoughts of the old hill and its household came back to him. Who were now left and what could he do for their rescue?

"Doctor! " he whispered feebly one morning, "Doctor, when may I go again? "

"Weeks yet, I fear," smiled the physician. "You've had a hard fight, you know."

That was all that day, but a few days later he again delayed the friendly foreigner as he made his rounds.

"I must go, Doctor," he said struggling to rise. "I must go back to my friends. . . . They are in trouble . . . deep trouble . . . and they need me."

To the kindly heart extended toward him he then told his story. The good doctor was deeply moved. He was accustomed to extend his healing art not alone to those in physical distress but to the wider ill of unhappy humanity. He went to his friend, the Commander of the Prefectural City. The latter heard him sympathetically. He had good reason to do so for both he and his men owed much to the services of the hospital on the hill.

"Vampires that they are," exclaimed the Commander. "There is little that one can do directly, but a way may be found. . . . Needless to assure you we will do our best."

"There is at least a good woman there and a little girl her daughter that should be brought forth at once. . . . I know the lady well. . . . She is worthy of your special effort."

"Then it shall be made, Doctor," and the latter returned to reassure his old and faithful patient.

The chance came a little later. Some of Bow's braves were captured in a raid and were slated for execution before the firing squad. It was then that the Commander sent an offer of exchange. Bow did not long hesitate. The woman was useless to him as a demented wreck. Again a great guffaw went up as two of his henchmen returned in exchange for the "crazy one" and an ill-used peasant girl they passed off as her daughter.

"They're welcome to their bonny brides," sneered Bow significantly, and the crowd chortled over their supposed cleverness.

* * * * * * * *

We had little difficulty in finding our way at Chengtu, even though our foreign lady had left us at Mienchow en route. We found almost any one in the vicinity of the great capital apparently well-informed and willing to give information as to

the abode and activities of the " Westerners." At the entrance to the big north gate, we paused a moment and riding up, I saluted the officer in charge of a small military guard. He returned it with sharp precision.

" Would you be so gracious as to inform me where I will find the mission? " I began with my best old time courtesy.

" Which one? " he answered smartly but with a smile. " They are north, south, east, west and centre here."

" You know them well? " I returned.

" I ought to. . . . I've been to most of them . . . and I visit a friend in Dr. Charles' hospital almost every day."

" Dr. Charles? " I exclaimed. " I knew a foreign physician of that very name once, but he was in our Prefectural City, Kiating."

" The same! The very same! " he assured me, his face lighting up still more brightly. " He's here now . . . been here for some time, and all the city's talking about his skill. . . . Our General Den had him to a feast just last week."

" Where shall I find him? " I interjected.

" Just follow this wall to the east Drill Ground," he directed, " then turn south and ask for the street of the Four Sacred Sages. . . . You'll find the hospital and a whole score or more of other buildings right there."

His directions were explicit and we soon found ourselves within the hospital compound and inquiring for the good physician. His welcome, despite my so slight claim upon him, was as cordial as though I had been one in high authority or a friend of long standing.

" I am one of the Wongs from the Wong Family Valley, but a few days away from your old home in Kiating," I began to explain.

" Wong Family Valley? " he checked me. " Ah! they have had a bitter time. . . . I had a serious case from that quarter . . . a Lady Lee came to me from there under peculiar circumstances. . . ."

" A Lady Lee? " It was now my time to make interjection. " Why, that's my aunt. . . . How is she? . . . Where is she now? "

" Greatly suffering from shock," he assured me. " But re-

covering slowly, so I hear, under the care of friends at our old home."

"And her daughter?" I hastened to add, as the picture of a little dancing maiden came before me.

"Ah! You know then?" he said gently. "Yes! That's the trouble. . . . She, good lady, seems to recover, but the uncertainty as to her daughter's fate sends her again into despair and semi-dementia."

That was but the first of many brief conversations. Learning further of our needs, and the character of my companion, he took her immediately to a friend's home and gave me a shelter for the time among his nurses. There again I was to hear continually of his skill as a surgeon, and even more of his sympathy of spirit as a friend.

Among these nurses I began to inquire for knowledge of my old Teacher Tang. The name they agreed was common enough, indeed too common for easy discovery of individuals. Unfortunately we had no city directories in our great centres of population and our only hope was usually through the police.

"There is an assistant of that name out at the University," came the contribution of one of the cheery circle. "He is a writer for Professor Clifford. . . . He might know something of the particulars of his clan."

In this simple way I was again ushered into the presence of my old teacher, and Lucile found a kinsman who received her with unbounded delight. A week of welcomes slipped speedily by. Then it was arranged that she should be a resident of the Women's Hostel at the College, and serve as assistant instructor, her knowledge of English being, her new friends assured her, almost perfect. Professor Clifford in turn took a deep interest in my story as I unfolded it one evening in his quiet study. I discovered in him a great friend and an advocate of peace, and I warmed to him immediately.

"We should be able to turn the astuteness required for scouting into the great cause of peace . . . and chemistry." He added with a smile, "Would you be willing to assist me with my tubes and tests for a time? . . . I find myself in need of some one in a simple way."

Thus the way opened up for both Lucile and me. It was delightful to find ourselves amid these scenes of peace and

plenty, after the deadly wars and more deadly winter through which we had passed. Here was a great campus where roads and paths, bordered by trees and flowers and rippling streams, ran not at random but regularly and by design. Here big squares stretched invitingly, luring youths and maidens when the day's work was done to sports and romps and quiet strolls. Here stately buildings systematically arranged, brought the tested experience of the long history of man to enrich our heritage. Here homes and hostels dotted and fringed the whole, where students and instructors mingled together in mirth or in serious mood, living out the greatest teachings of all time. It seemed to me an ideal world after the wretchedness of the past.

"This must be a glimpse of the Golden Age of which our sages speak," I said to Lucile one evening as we sat by a bubbling stream.

"Bigger and better than that," she replied. "Were we to see the Elysian scenes of those early Emperors, they would prove drab and squalid compared to the peace and progress here."

"Your foster father, my good Teacher Tang, would scarce agree to that," I parried.

"Nay, but his is a dreamland of what he deems has been. . . . This is all those and greater dreams come true," she replied and I could see the deep meditation on her brow reflected in the calm waters below. "What a day it will be for our great race," she went on thoughtfully, "when the scene and spirit we see here become the common place upon our soil!"

"True! True!" I hastened to agree. "But it will not come of itself. . . . We must fight for it!"

"Fight for it with all these weapons of the higher wisdom. . . . Aye! and with the character that is the Christ," she added pensively.

Then we sat long in silence. I agreed but somehow I could not lead myself to speak such words. It was to me as though I were being disloyal to our Sage and to the spirits of my ancestors. The forms of my fathers floated up before me and seemed sternly forbidding. . . . What would they say should I deny their long traditions and accept this new teaching from the Western world?

"Confucius too pictured a time of peace and plenty," I murmured after a time.

"Pictured it. Yes! " she agreed, "but neglected to give us the power . . . that alluring and dynamic power that comes through faith and coöperation with the All-Father."

And again we were silent, while the bubbles and blossoms swirled gently by at our feet.

An address in the great hall of the college also held me. "All men desire to live. Millions of men have longed to live at their best," urged and argued the speaker. "The sages of all lands have sought the ideal way. . . . Many had found it in part. . . . The Christ has shown us the route at its fullest, its highest and best. . . . He is the true Way of Living. . . . He has not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

Professor Clifford also greatly aided me as we chatted together, working amid his rows of tubes and weird apparatus.

"All the world is energy," he said one day. "All these substances and elements here are but one energy in various forms. . . . They are not, however, a mere dead chaotic energy. . . . They are shot full of purpose from the lowest to the highest. . . . We ourselves are this work of the world at its best. . . . But the end is not yet. . . . We humans of all the great forms can comprehend, control and cooperate in that end and thus are ourselves, both its chief means and aim."

"What then is that end? " I queried.

"Let him who is greatest among you, be as him who serves," he answered. "Men fully fitted for service, in helping humanity toward the highest."

"Like Dr. Charles? " I suggested.

"Like him," he murmured, "and like unto that greatest Servant of man, his Master."

Then we both went on silently with our work, but I was meditating deeply.

Time sped swiftly in such surroundings. There was a short holiday at Easter week and while professors and students went to their homes, or here and there in organized groups of various quests, I after consulting with Dr. Charles went down to our Prefectural City. There I found my aunt, my chief concern.

At first she stared at me, a far-off look as though I had been

a stranger or had not existed. Then as I spoke to her slowly of things of the past, a new light began to gleam through her eyes.

"Not Dan!" she murmured. "Not Dan! My boy Dan. . . . No! He's dead. . . . Long dead. They slew him first. . . ."

"They thought so, dear aunt. . . . They thought so," I interjected. "But I escaped. . . . Some day I will tell you how. . . ."

"Escaped?" she broke in. "Impossible. . . . The dead cannot rise. . . . Not yet? . . . Ah! would that I knew she was dead. . . . My little girlie. . . . My lost one."

"She is dead, dear aunt," I said. "I met Ma-er afar from here . . . and he told me so."

"Ma-er," she repeated. "Ma-er. . . . What does he know? . . . Yes, they say she leaped into the river, but where then is the ghoul who seized her? . . . Where is he? . . . Show me him. . . . No! No! He has her still somewhere in his lair . . . somewhere . . . somewhere . . ." Then she began to wring her hands and lament wildly, and though I tried again and again I could not comfort her. I came away in deepest distress. . . . My aunt's harried question began to haunt me too. May Fay may indeed have leaped or been thrown into the Tung. . . . The foul fiend Jowl Jaw was quite capable of that. . . . But that he should thus or in any manner destroy himself . . . that was impossible! . . . He was too great a coward for that. . . . Where could he be? . . . The mystery held me as I returned to my new home in the capital.

There a new series of events engrossed me. I went at once to report to Dr. Charles and was startled to be told that he was ill.

"The doctor himself ill?" I exclaimed. "Impossible!"

"But he is," one of the nurses whom I knew assured me, "and seriously. . . . Worse still all feel convinced that an immediate operation is necessary and he is the only surgeon here."

I found the assertion but too true. Not only the hospital staff but the whole community were in consternation. At length

in desperation they decided to send for a fellow surgeon days away across the country. The roads were known to be a mess of springtime mud, in places the floods had swept away the frail bridges and in certain centres near the mountains bandit bands held sway. But that was the only hope. When they came to ask for volunteers, I had little trouble in proving my qualifications. Had I not ridden for days down from our neighbouring province, and were not Lucile's mount and mine now well rested from their long journey?

A recent recruit from the far western plains of America also made good his claim and we were soon away. I found him a rider worthy of his land. There seemed to be no road so mired or steep, no plunge of horse or firing of guns too sudden or reckless to unseat or unsettle him. On we rode by day and by night. Our only questions were the ability of our steeds to stand the strain and the sickening possibility as to whether or not the surgeon we sought might be absent.

"He is the only medical man, either physician or surgeon, they say, in this whole great northern area of twenty millions," my companion explained. "The chances of finding him home are but one in a hundred. . . . However, his hospital is there and that may hold him." We both prayed hard to the same Heaven and rode recklessly on.

At length we reached the strange city, and the gateway of the foreign hospital.

"Hurray!" called my companion just ahead. He had inquired and been assured that the physician was there. A few minutes later and we were explaining our emergency. He delayed only to make a hurried canvass of his own cases and give a few instructions to his group of nurses and assistants, then securing new mounts from a military commander and friend, we were again away.

How we chaffed at delays, at roads where the poor beasts could at best but stagger forward through the morass, at streams where the bridges having gone we had to seek a possible place to ford the waters, at seemingly endless pauses for broken girths, inquiring guards, food and water and rest for our mounts. These which in ordinary travel we would take as a matter of routine, now seemed to tantalize at every turn, for ever the thought of a cot in the distant city came before us. There,

one upon whom a thousand lives hung, lay himself wracked in pain, and then ever the bitter possibility that the crisis might have come and our relief be too late . . . too late!

But the mad ride ended. At last we were at the gates of our city, then clattering through the stony streets, and finally in through the familiar gates through which daily the stream for healing wound.

"He lives," I called back to my companions, for I was ahead this time, and was the first to make the inquiry.

"Thank God for that," murmured the new physician as he pushed past and dismounted.

A few minutes later and he was in the operating room. Dr. Charles had himself directed that all be in readiness and every assistant had obeyed with a will. Then we who could not be admitted stood without in the corridors while the critical task went forward. We listened eagerly to each brief message that came as nurses slipped silently in and out.

"All ready." . . . "They have begun." . . . "Only local anesthetic at first." . . . "Dr. Charles himself is directing the operation. . . ."

I caught a glimpse once as the door swayed for a moment. There lay the familiar form upon the table where he had so often brought relief and new lease of life to others. Supports were beneath his broad shoulders with his head raised higher still, and from this vantage point he was directing in measured tones the swift and skillful fingers of his fellow surgeon.

"More serious than they thought." . . . "Must give general anesthetic." . . . "He seems sinking."

Slowly again came the brief messages, while the group that crowded the corridor stood on and on in speechless hope and fear.

"He is rallying again." . . . "The operation is over." . . . "There is hope . . . good hope."

A little later and the great firm face and form came forth and was rolled silently down our parted ranks. It seemed strange not to see his own fine manly figure following solicitously as was his custom. In his stead this time came others and we listened eagerly to their words as they passed:

"Serious complications." . . . "Should have been sooner." . . . "Always hope." . . . "Pray."

We obeyed the latter with a will. I had been little drilled on such but I cried out in my heart for his restoration:

"Oh! God of the Christians, save this Christ-man in Chengtu to-day!"

We tried then to depart, to think of divers things. There were other duties and we well knew that he would have put those first, but our steps seemed to lead ever back to the wide corridor and to one ward where clustered the silent groups, waiting, waiting.

"Sleeping." . . . "Sleeping." . . . "Aroused once but again asleep!" came the bits of whispered news from the bedside. . . . And our hearts responded, "'Tis well!"

"Awake again, fully awake." . . . "Talking to his nurses and the new surgeon." . . . "Urging that they operate on some wounded soldiers." . . . He had his way and we saw them again enter the operating room while a succession of grim forms were wheeled in and out.

Then the surgeon was summoned hurriedly.

"Sinking," the word ran along our ranks.

A few minutes later and we were all within the ward. The end was near. He knew it well, he who had seen so many pass the great portal. He would have all about him now as the other doors swung wide for his departure. He smiled at each as we entered, and seemed to have a familiar word for most. Mine was of my aunt.

"A noble soul," he said feebly. "Would I might have served her better."

After a time his own soul seemed to go on many preparatory voyages. At times he was with friends and family in a far "home land," and he called each fondly by name sending a last message. At times he was back in his operating room directing his staff. Once he seemed to be by the bedside of a suffering child speaking with utmost sympathy. At the last he was in the spot dear to his dreams, before his college students, and was ending his course:

"And this in closing, classmates. . . . Put Jesus and the Christ-spirit foremost . . . the spirit of service and sacrifice . . . ever and strenuously first . . . always first."

And as the voice seemed to die in the distance, those invisible doors and the smiling lips slowly closed and forever.

A few days later and the whole populace from great Governor and guard in gaudiest uniforms and flapping banners, to vilest beggar in filthiest rags, seemed to issue forth to pay their respects to their dead. They stood till the last post was sounded and the last sod laid upon the mound in the silent college cemetery, then as a great unguided concourse, each groping his way for himself, crept slowly, sorrowfully back into the grim, sombre city.

"Whither now?" each silent figure seemed to say. "Whither now in times of suffering and sorrow?"

It was well for us that good news came from the north, for Lucile's sensitive soul was all but shattered. This great sorrow which she shared with me and her students, added to her constant grief over the possible fate of her father in a distant prison, began to break her long sustained poise. True she would not acknowledge it to me or even to herself, as we strolled together amid the lagoons and lawns of the great campus, but I could see it slowly descending in a growing weariness and an ever more apparent languidness of look that filled her dark eyes as she smiled. The welcome words came in a message from Dr. Fuh, given in trust to a soldier who was travelling south. They ran:

"Search concluded vain. . . . P. P. P. at length temporarily give up pursuit . . . but keep watchful . . . friends persecuted a bit but now at peace. . . . Miss Liu's father informed . . . still carefully guarded but crisis past. . . . Hope higher as springtide breaks."

It was but a brief message, sewn carefully in the lining of an inner garment, but we paid the man generously and reread it a hundred times.

"Then he's safe. . . . He's safe," Lucile would repeat. "And he knows I'm safe too."

"Yes!" I would repeat as I stroked her glorious black locks. "Yes! my sweetheart! Your father is safer in confinement under the Colonel than if he were at liberty . . . and as for you, you are safe so long as my strength shall last."

Then her old smile would come again and the languor vanish away. Emboldened at such times I would press the great love

I felt for her, urging that we plight our troth. But she as repeatedly restrained me, averring that her father must first consider. Still I noted that she was not indifferent as to my future.

"Here is your opportunity," she would repeat. "You love to study, then study here where the West brings her best to our people. . . . Perhaps some day you will serve our land as has good Dr. Charles!"

I thrilled at such words and assured her that I would make the attempt, if the fates permitted.

'Twas well I added though unwittingly that last proviso, for another crisis was at hand. With the Communists constantly on the aggressive in the eastern part of our country and triumphant in their terrors in my native valley and other centres of our own province, it was impossible but that there should be persistent efforts to stir up agitation in the capital itself. This they had sought persistently to do but with only small success. Failing to rouse the workmen and farmers or alienate the soldiers, they had turned their efforts upon the students gathered as they were from all sections. Among these they succeeded better, appealing to some with a vaunted idealism of saving the poor, and to others by their love of power. Thus being promised high positions when the new world revolution should be achieved, and being poor themselves, not a few were ready to give at least lip service for the loaves and fishes. Still others more pliant were transported to Leningrad and given courses in the so-called Sun Yat-Sen University.

Having failed in their attacks on their own countrymen by means of strikes in schools, processions in the streets and boycotts of merchants, they next turned upon the small colony of self-sacrificing strangers in the capital. Even there abusing them as "Western Imperialists," "Foreign Spies," "Running Dogs of the Capitalists," and attempted bribery and duress of servants appeared to weigh little with a body so firmly settled in the good will of all. More dastardly methods must be adopted so they determined at length to inaugurate a reign of terror.

Then scenes of sadness occurred in sickening succession. A beautiful young American girl was dragged one day from her rickshaw and brutally choked and clawed, indeed would have been done to death had it not been for the loyalty of a servant

and the timely aid of strangers. Later a talented woman, graduate in music and arts of a Canadian college, was slain in the streets. These outrages far from driving the little heroic band into headlong flight, or turning my people against them, had knit the bonds of fellowship more firmly. It led rather to the combing of the city and its suburbs for such fiends, so that they fled and all again for a time was peace.

But such agitators cannot long be at rest. Remuneration ceases when "results" are not reported. Shortly after our arrival in the capital we were shocked to hear that one posing as partly blind had gained entrance to our hospital and while the sympathetic physician was bent near making his critical examination, had attempted to sink a dirk into the specialist's own eye. Fortunately the blow missed its mark but a cruel scar showed how dastardly had been the attempt. Still the little band of workers but renewed their faith and amid the sympathy of many friends went steadily forward. They little knew where the next blow was to fall.

We had been at work late in the laboratory. It was nearing the closing of the spring term and we worked with a will, that all should be left in order for the medical and science classes. Professor Clifford left me to make a few final arrangements and close cupboards and doors.

"Still one call to make," he announced as he sprang on a wheel he usually rode, and whirled away in the hazy starlight.

A half hour later, I had arranged things as I thought to his satisfaction and was making my way along one of the winding streams to my abode. I paused for a moment at a familiar spot. It was there some stray violets grew and there that Lucile and I often sat as we chatted together, she watching with that limpid smile of hers as I plucked the flowers at her feet. Stooping down I plucked a few again. I would send them to her at the dawn. Filled with thoughts of her delight, I wandered on till I came to the miniature bridge before a building. A slight sound reached my ear. I looked cautiously.

"What was that groping there by the roadside?" It was but a few paces ahead and I pushed carefully forward. As I drew near, the sound again came faintly. Some one was moaning, groping there upon the ground? Yes. There could be no doubt now, though the figure was still indistinct. I reached

it and bent down. . . . It was a man. . . . What? His clothing showed him of the Western world. . . . Could it be one of our foreign teachers? . . . Then a mist rose before my eyes and passed. High Heaven! It was . . . It was my own friend and benefactor.

"Professor! . . . Professor! . . . Professor Clifford," I called, but there was no answering word.

My mind still refuses to recall the scenes that followed. I somehow staggered to my dormitory and notified my fellows. They in turn spread the alarm and soon a number had gathered by the silent figure. Later they lifted him up and bore him to his home and then to the great hospital. There every effort that skill and soul could make was made, but the end came. Dr. Clifford's spirit rallied once to inquire wonderingly what had happened, then murmured gently—and passed.

Police came from many quarters and soon found abundant clues with which to construct the story. My benefactor had gone to make his call, had been riding across the bridge when some one concealed by the hedge had struck out with a carrying pole. Then as the body fell, others had leaped forward with knives, plunging them often and deep. The wheel was gone but the motive could not have been robbery. Watch and some money were still there. There could be but one conclusion. It was again the dastardly hand of the crudest Communist in a campaign not of altruism but assassination.

That was to be another crisis not only for our community but for me. Why should I thus stand by while others innocently suffered? I thought again of my wretched people in their secluded valley. There they bowed mutely to the brutal blow with no one to raise hand or voice in their behalf. I went to Lucile with a great resolve in my heart.

"I must back to my people, sweetheart!" I announced. "Gladly, only you know how gladly I would stay here by your side. . . . But you do not need me now, while yonder," and I pointed to where the white dome of sacred Mt. O-mei glittered in the sunlight, "yonder my people lie crushed by this same cruel tyranny. . . . The blood of my ancestors cries to me from their native soil."

Lucile sat long in silence, then:

"But you go not in hate," she murmured. "Hate has ever eaten up its host! "

"No! No! No! " I protested, looking steadfastly into that beautiful face. "I go filled and thrilled with a new force, a new fire, love for you, my Lucile, love for my suffering kith and kin, love for the great cause of peace and good will which has brought these our Western comrades from far afield to this our needy land. . . . But give me your benediction, that I falter not in the great fight."

Then she placed her hand softly upon my bowed head. I took the other tenderly. This time she did not withdraw it. I raised it reverently to my lips, then springing to my feet saluted as of old.

"Go," she whispered. "And the God of peace go with you! "

A few paces and I could not but turn again. Her eyes met mine once more and two souls seemed but one in that parting gaze.

XX

A BOLD ADVENTURE

A FEW days later and I was again back in our old Prefectural City. There I eagerly sought out my aunt. I was rejoiced to find her much changed for the better. She recognized me more readily this time and I told her my strange story.

"Ah! Dan! Dan!" she murmured. "You are indeed a brand plucked from the burning. . . . I do not know what His purpose may be, but in part it must be that you comfort me. They have taken all else. They have robbed me of my health and my wealth and my heart's dearest treasure. Ah! That you could assure me that she is really dead. Then would I gladly depart to be with her." Then after a pause: "She loved you, Dan. . . . A mother, you know, sees all things. For her dear sake you must now be to me not only a nephew but a son, a son! You will not again leave me. You are all that is left."

"But, dear aunt, should I not venture forth to find her true fate?" I parried.

"Ah! Yes! Yes! That would indeed be worthy of you, my son," she swayed. "But it must not be yet. Not yet. You might be lost . . . and then . . . and then . . . this awful nightmare might come again . . . would again surely seize me. Not yet, my son. Not yet!" and she held my hand firmly in her grasp while her eyes seemed to once more take on a strange wild gleam.

I was to venture forth sooner than I had thought. I went from my aunt to the Commander of our Nationalist troops. My acquaintance with Dr. Charles soon gained me an audience, for he was eager to hear details of the last days and heroic death of one so gifted and gracious.

"And you have seen service?" he interrogated after our talk together.

Then I told him my experiences in the great northwestern provinces. He listened attentively.

"Your skill as a scout could be of great value to us just now," he commented, looking at me questioningly.

"Then I am at your command," I replied eagerly.

I made my peace with my dear aunt as best I could and appeared next morning for orders. Commander Chen scarce recognized me. I was disguised as an old and feeble beggar.

"Perfect," he commented. "Perfect but very precarious. You have not heard," he continued, "the recent program of our adversaries?"

I listened.

"No? Then our latest is that they have added two new classes to their lists for extermination. Not only the wealthy or well-to-do, plus those of us who are naturally their military and political foes, but now also those who are seriously diseased and the weak and aged poor. You would well qualify for either of the latter class," he added with a faint smile.

"Short cut surely to their Communist goal of no poverty," I commented. "Just snick off heads!"

Commander Chen smiled again. "True," he nodded. "True. Theories trouble little if they trammel or threaten them . . . and these men are out to get us at any cost. Just now they are meditating something. We can only surmise what. We want exact information. Can you supply it?"

"Give me one of your best as a companion, and I will try," I answered.

"Report to Captain Loh, and take your choice of his men," was his reply.

A few hours later and we were on our way. I had found my man, one of the men of my own valley, a sturdy countryman. We were dressed out not as beggars, but as guileless coolies with our poles and baskets, returning from market. I learned the latest in prices and conditions as we tramped along. My comrade Yoh was to act the elder as a labourer on the farm, I was a cousin from the city streets, out to aid in the spring's planting.

Our carefully-thought-out ruse was to prove of little value. We were to learn the plans of Brigadier Bow all too readily. We had gone but a short distance beyond our own lines when

three men suddenly stepped out upon us from a thicket. We began to make our protest as arranged but they took no pains to question us. We were simply bound together with our own ropes and driven off by one of the three at the point of a bayonet.

A mile or more on and we were ushered into a great farm compound. This we found already full of people, men, women, children, young and old, from the countryside. The soldier took no trouble to undo our bonds, but as others were apparently free we soon wormed our way toward the centre of the throng and persuaded a kindly hand to aid us.

"What does it all mean?" we began to inquire.

No one seemed prepared to give an answer. They only knew that they had been driven in roughly from their homes and fields. A few hinted that a similar move was being made all over the plain. What could the meaning be? We asked that of others and of ourselves, all that day and all that night, as we huddled together unprotected from the rain which fell heavily. The next morning at dawn we had in part our answer. Squads of soldiers appeared at the entrance and we were ordered out. As we went, we were again roped into long lines, each tethered body and neck to his neighbour. We were evidently to be driven forward to some new and tragic fate. The men met it stoically. Some of the poor women screamed and struggled hysterically. The little children cried bitterly as they clung to us. Their reward was but blows and curses.

Ours being one of the groups nearest the Prefectural City was to learn its purpose among the earliest. After a straggling march we found ourselves lined up in the open before the old wall, while a company of our captors began an attack upon one of the ramparts. Bow's brutal plan was but too obvious. We were to form a living barricade, from behind which his braves were to bombard the enemy. Here and there some of our ranks fell down either from fright or protest at the cowardly strategy. They were as quickly restored by prods from the bayonets behind.

The city defenders rallied to the walls and for a time we could note their consternation. An hour later and they were evidently meeting the new strategy by calling out their sharp-shooters and these began to take their regular toll of our captors.

By noon it grew so great that we were ordered to retreat, a movement we managed with difficulty as we tried in many cases to drag our wounded and dead with us. We found the rear ground full of country folk similarly bound as we withdrew. It was evident that Bow meditated a general attack upon the city.

Fortunately for us the guard was not so strict that night. The bulk of our people thoroughly cowed made no movement to escape, but my companion and I felt that something desperate must be done. We found little difficulty under the cover of darkness in undoing the rough knots about our wrists and throats and began to steal quietly forward. Out of earshot of our captors we essayed to take counsel.

"You will find your way by some means back into the city," I finally concluded. "Warn Commander Chen that to-day was only a skirmish evidently to try out a deep laid scheme and that he may expect the whole plain to come rolling down upon him, hoping no doubt that by some nefarious strategy and sheer force of numbers, regardless of the slaughter to the innocent, to capture the city at one staggering blow. Warn the mission workers also, and see you personally that my aunt is safe. It will not require two of us to bear that message. The commander will doubtless send to the capital for aid. It may be too late. I'll try to make trouble in some other quarter. We must both take courage and caution in our teeth. Good luck and good-bye." Then I began to creep off to the right while he wriggled his way forward.

I had not gone far when I found myself suddenly rolling down a slope. I tried hard to grasp the grass and bits of shrubs for I realized that I was still in no man's land and that our own troops or those of the enemy could not be far away and would hear the swish of my movements. I was not mistaken. I heard a low voice of challenge not far from me to the right. It was evidently the enemy.

"G-r-r!" I growled low like a dog in a way I had learned long ago in boyhood days. The ruse apparently worked. I lay quietly at the bottom of the slope but could hear no further sound.

Then I began to feel my way forward once more in the darkness. Again I came to a sudden stop. I had touched something that sent a thrill through my whole frame. It was something

soft that gave under my hand. I felt again cautiously. There could be no doubt this time. It was a human body . . . a thigh.

I had long since lost my fear of death, having dealt with poor frozen and starved bodies so frequently, but this sudden meeting in the night brought back primitive responses and I shivered. Something told me instantly that the body was dead. I felt again. There was no mistake. I ran my hand along the leg. The lower part was wrapped around with a puttee. He was a soldier. Not one of our own surely? I felt for his head. He had long hair. Our regulars would be decently barbered. His bandoleer was still upon him. Possibly his rifle was not far away? After a short search I found it.

Then a sudden suggestion born of many emergencies seized me. It was no sooner mine than I began to act. As rapidly as possible I slid the body from its uniform and accoutrements and divesting myself of my own, donned these. It should not be difficult, I reasoned, at such a time as this when all was confusion to pass for one of the enemy troops, especially when so many of my own district had been forced into their service. My language was all in my favour. I crawled forward for some distance then turned deliberately toward the enemy. As I expected I was quickly challenged.

"Who?" came the half-whispered demand.

"Me," I whispered back in my best accent.

I was soon in their midst and muttering a jargon that was beyond suspicion. After that it was easier going. Before the dawn broke I was well to the rear. Fortunately for me Bow was apparently still unready for his attack, and many bodies of troops moved to and fro during the following day. I made good use of this to worm my way ever nearer to my own native valley. By evening I reached our village at the opening of the gorge. It was all but deserted. I had little difficulty in secreting myself in one of the empty structures. Peering out at times I could see riders speeding to and fro from the direction of the old castle on the hill.

"Bow then is taking no risks," I meditated. "He is keeping his 'Great Headquarters' still safely these miles away among the hills."

The darkness had little more than fallen when I was on

again. How familiar the old path was! It seemed but yesterday that I had sped along it as a boy, carefree and fearless. Now I was returning a scout, a spy on my own soil to be seized and summarily snuffed out should I be discovered.

"Fool! Fool!" came my thoughts as I stole along in the darkness. "Who sent you on this mad errand? Who set you this wild gamble with death? Why could you not stay content in the distant capital? There all was peace and plenty. There she lives whom you love!"

I paused for a moment on the familiar path, creeping aside while a horseman went clattering by.

"Fool? Yes, perchance," something within me seemed to answer. "But here was an accursed force that had ruined the homes of my ancestors, that had brutally assassinated its real benefactors, that was even now preparing dastardly designs for the destruction of our Prefectural City, and its peaceful citizens . . . and yonder lay the arch enemy and his emissaries."

Stooping down I kissed my native soil. Something of its spirit seemed to strengthen my soul as I again sped forward. An hour later and I was slowly clambering among the rocks that led to the Pass. Would it be guarded? Must my new formed purpose be destroyed at this last desperate stage? I came at length to the narrow path where a single man might have guarded against an army and peered anxiously into the darkness. I could see the remnants of a fire right in the centre of the narrow path and after a time decided that there were human forms sprawled out on either side. What was the next move? Rush forward firing my rifle . . . attempt to creep stealthily by . . . try some ruse of a wounded comrade . . . these and other schemes flitted across my mind. All were suddenly swept aside.

Some move of mine must have been audible, not to human but to canine ears. With a howl a great dog sprang from the fireside and came rushing down upon me. That was a signal to others and soon I was surrounded by a bristling pack. Nothing save boldness could again save the situation, so I shouted lustily:

"Down with your dogs, men! Quick! I carry a message!"

Deep muttering and cursing followed and the curs were driven snarling aside.

"A drink," I demanded as I made pretense of fatigue.

They poured forth some strong tea from an old jug, rubbing their eyes sleepily as they did so. I noted that there were but three and that they were old men. Bow had apparently taken his best for the meditated attack.

"Sleeping, eh?" I demanded sternly. "Well, I'm here to tell you that the Lo-los may be restless again at any time, and that you are to redouble your vigilance."

They eyed me for a while in the dim light. I let it fall full upon my face and uniform as I blustered on.

"Here you and you," I ordered, clicking my rifle as I did so, "spread out there at intervals down the gorge, and you," I commanded, pointing my muzzle rather menacingly near the third, "follow me this way ten paces."

Thanks to Bow's bullying type of discipline, they obeyed without a word. I marched up the Pass, the man following at my heels. A few steps forward and he paused. Without looking back, I strode on alone. I was through, and felt like raising a great shout or breaking into a maddening run. I did neither, but stamped steadily on as though going farther in.

"Keep a sharp lookout," I shouted sternly back.

The man made no reply, but I then quickened my pace as I plunged into the winding way among the hills that I well knew followed. By midnight I came to where the timbers began, stole aside from the rough trail, clambered steadily to the top of the ridge and finding a smooth spot amid trees and rocks stretched myself out. I had slept little for three nights and needed rest before my next move. Moreover, I was now in the land of the Lo-los, our proverbial enemies. Though I had known a few in captivity slightly and Lu-lu, should he live, well, I did not know these people in their native fastnesses. It would surely be best to wait until the morning's light and get a full view before going farther forward. I was soon asleep.

I awakened with a start. A tree had come crashing down beside me. There had apparently been hacking for some time before but my slumbers had held me. Now I saw a man spring up the trunk and proceed to lop the branches. I crept quickly around the rock and slipped my soldier outfit quietly from my body. It would be dangerous to appear thus, especially in the uniform of Bow's brigands. So I hid them securely in a crevice. It would be safer to simulate one who had lost his way in search

of, say, medicines, so pulling a few weeds into a bundle I stumbled down the slope, then came again forward.

Following a crude path, I came suddenly face to face with a big grizzled form that blocked the way. He reviled me in my own tongue as I staggered back. Then I looked again. Impossible! Yet there could be no mistake. I had seen those glaring bloodshot eyes somewhere before. But where? A thrill of terror shot through me.

"Jowl Jaw!" I cried. The words seemed somehow to come first and the consciousness to follow. Otherwise I had surely schooled myself sufficiently in control. A gleam of recognition seemed to blaze from his bleared sockets. Another guttural oath and he made a savage lunge forward, only to be as suddenly jerked backward and off his feet, as the heavy chain and log he dragged asserted their weight. In a flash I had thrown away the bundle of pretended medicine herbs I held and was upon him. Both hands gripped his great neck and my knee sunk deep into his abdomen.

"Where is she, you he-devil?" I shouted. "Where is the young mistress you carried off? Where? Quick! Speak truth for once before you die!"

His great eyes glared at me and his lips blackened as he tried to speak. I released my grip and he attempted to roll over but his arms encumbered by a rusty chain held him down. I had him at last at my mercy and could have strangled him, but I wanted first his secret.

"Speak, you murderer," I roared into his ear as bending low I again began to tighten my hold. "Speak quickly or your blackened soul will have reached the Yellow Springs. Where is she? Where? Where?"

So engrossed was I with the villain within my grasp that I forgot all else. I was aroused by suddenly finding myself upon my back by Jowl Jaw's side. Some one had seized me by the shoulders and dragged me down. But still my only thought was of him. He arose on his knees and powerless as to his hands, made a mad dash at me with his great bushy head. He fell snarling full upon me, and began to grapple for my throat with his great yellow teeth. But again a hand went forth and seizing him by the long hair hurled him aside.

A moment later and I was jerked to my feet. A big Lo-lo was

glaring at me and gibbering away in a language I could not understand. I uttered the only words of his language I could recall.

"Lu-lu," I panted. "Lu-lu . . . want Lu-lu."

He glared at me again and somewhat released his hold. A couple of others came running through the brush, and seeing my advantage I kept up my plea. They consulted together and a little later, my hands firmly tethered behind my back, I was being rapidly marched away with a big tribesman at my heels.

"Hold him," I shouted as they shoved me along. "Hold that brute," and I glared hard at the villainous Jowl Jaw.

But my words were doubtless lost on all save my enemy himself. He answered my glare with added hate and growled something I could not hear.

I scarce noted the winding path we followed as we wound hither and thither and up and down tortuous cliffs and grim ravines. We met but few inhabitants. Our wars had been too destructive for growth. Here and there we passed a group of youths guarding goats or a tribesman on his way to the hunt. A few muttered words to these and on we went. I did not take the trouble to note their attitude, whether that of friend or foe. I was too intent on reaching my goal.

"Jowl Jaw!" my thoughts kept running. "Jowl Jaw. . . . The fiend still lives. . . . Lu-lu must know him . . . will know him now. . . . Let me but get Lu-lu's ear and we will soon have the brute before us. . . . Then we will know the story . . . then the murder will out . . . then the grave will give up its dead!" . . . "Lu-lu . . . Lu-lu . . . want Lu-lu," I kept repeating, and my guard pushed me steadily forward.

Late that afternoon we came to a wider valley. Shacks here and there dotted the hillsides and small groups of men and women came into view. Down this we passed and began to turn up the slope again. Glancing ahead I could see a larger group of low buildings surrounded by a stone wall. Half-way up we crossed a small gurgling stream. I stepped aside, knelt down and took a deep drink. As I stumbled to my feet I noted a group of women by the bank. Some of them had evidently been washing clothes. One in their midst was dressed similarly to those in my own country, and I unconsciously gazed at her.

Yes, there could be little mistake, my mind seemed to say. The form, the face, the features were those of my own kind.

"Pardon my rudeness," I began in my own tongue, "but I want to find a youth named Lu-lu."

The woman startled a bit at the words, hesitated a moment as she looked about on the others, then spoke:

"The young chief is up yonder," she said and motioned with her head.

Something in the toss of that head and hair held me. I looked again, then with a great leap went splashing through the stream.

"May Fay," I shouted. "It's you. . . . It's you. . . . It can be no other!"

I tried to embrace her but my arms were firmly held. No struggle could move the rope. She drew back startled, and my guard leaping across the stream seized me roughly, and flung me aside. May Fay and her attendants began to retreat.

"Oh! May Fay! May Fay!" I persisted. "It's Dan! Your own Dan. . . . Don't go. . . . It's me! . . . Truly me! . . . I'm not dead! Look, I escaped their clutches. . . ."

She turned, and brushing aside the women that surrounded her, came a step closer.

"Look once in my eyes, May Fay," I continued passionately. "Just look once. . . . You will surely know your own Dan."

She gave one long searching look and then to the consternation of all, ran forward with a little cry and threw herself upon me. . . . How long we stood there by the edge of the stream I do not know.

"Dan! Dan! . . . Dan!" she kept repeating as she hugged me ever closer. "Oh! Dan . . . Dan! . . . Dan!" and she looked again and again in my face to reassure herself. "Oh! Dan! . . . Dear Dan! . . . It's you. . . . It's truly you!" and I could feel her little loyal heart throb wildly as she pressed clingingly to my breast.

The small circle stood about gazing curiously, laughing, sobering, gesticulating, talking in broken snatches. Then one of the women stepping forward pushed the guard aside and with a few deft pulls freed me from my bonds. . . . I wrapped

the little form tenderly in my arms and kissed the dark tresses passionately.

At length there was another stir in the circle. Some one was entering and it began to widen. I looked up and my eyes met another familiar face.

"Lu-lu! Lu-lu!" I cried, and still clasping the little form firmly stepped forward to greet him.

He knew me at once.

"Boy Dan!" he shrilled and his white teeth seemed to shine even more brightly than of old. "Big boy Dan . . . back . . . back!" and he broke off into a string of something in his own tongue that his Chinese could not express.

I threw one arm around him and we stood there laughing, weeping, trying to say something . . . everything . . . anything . . . and saying nothing. Then May Fay suddenly wriggled herself from my embrace. Darting somewhere, she was back in a trice and thrusting something right into my very face.

"Take him! . . . Take him!" she was calling.

I put out my hands and seized a little bundle . . . a couple of little dark eyes were opening wide. . . . It was a baby.

"It's little Dan!" May Fay was thrilling. "It's little Dan! . . . Hold him tight."

"Ya! . . . Ya!" Lu-lu was echoing. "Leetle Dan! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha!"

It took little acumen to sense the situation. It was their son. He had been named in my honour. . . . I do not often weep, but I felt something hot roll down my cheeks as I pressed the little bundle tighter. . . . One tear fell fair upon his small brown forehead. . . . I tried to encircle all again as I whispered a broken benediction.

At length we wandered up to the old Chief's stronghold, the wondering circle greatly enlarged following at our heels. The story of May Fay and Lu-lu was speedily told. Mine lasted far on into the night and early morn. They had thought me long dead . . . had been drawn together largely through my memory . . . had married at length . . . and had honoured my name with their first little mite of humanity.

I had to trace a long route with many an adventure excluded.

It was when I came to gently unfold the fact that a good aunt and mother still lived that I feared my little maiden-mother's frail heart would burst. . . . Lu-lu and his men had frequently and secretly searched the old scenes for her existence. . . . For a time she was there, then suddenly disappeared. In such times of tragedy they could assign but one cause. . . . Death! . . . That was the common course!

It was a scarce less happy hour when I related the finding of Lucile and our flight together. Then when I told of my great love for her, little May Fay crept up closer to her Lo-lo lover, and placing her hand in his, gave me a great look of understanding.

"And she loves you?" she asked confidingly.

"Ah! That I dare not say. . . . She has never said so in words," I replied.

For answer, she threw her arms about her husband's neck, then turning with a radiant smile:

"Only shallow women speak much of such things," she said.

But I had more arduous work to do, and I had not hesitated to put it well to the fore. I had early told of the cause of my coming and Lu-lu had already sent forth the order that his warriors be summoned. The coming of the dawn brought them in from many a hill and dale. Big stern fellows they were and in the thought of the task before them, silent as the grave. They sat about in their long cloaks, but the folds no longer concealed simply their knives and arrows. With the advantage gained by the half dozen rifles wrung that night from the old castle, they had made good their opportunities of the years and now possessed a full hundred and more of the more deadly weapons. They still knew little of drill, but the skill of their native manœuvres and the accuracy of their aim left no doubt of efficiency. By noon we had said our farewells and were on our winding way to the border.

I had almost forgotten the murderous Jowl Jaw in the joy of my new-found friends. I saw him again now as we passed along. For a moment I paused and the impulse came to make some dire request of the young Chieftain. But my blood had cooled. I watched him there as chained securely he tugged at the rough logs of firewood, a common ox lugging away at his load.

"No danger of his escape?" I asked.

Lu-lu only laughed.

"That look to me best way. . . . Let brute be brute," he said.

I nodded my assent and we passed on.

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Meantime Bow had been busy. He had heard of the nefarious shooting, looting, burning, slaying in Changsha and other centres in the east, and was not to be behind his ilk in gain or glory, so his diabolical devices ran true to form. We had sensed the situation fairly accurately. His first day's display was but an experiment on a small scale. Two days later and the city found itself suddenly surrounded at dawn. A great multitude of helpless men, women, and children had all night long been driven into the suburbs east, west, north, south and were swarming about in streets, houses, boats and rafts. Mingled among these were Bow's bandit band in plain clothes, while others were hidden in various enclosures.

Just as the dawn began to break long lines of unfortunates bearing broken pieces of furniture, rafters, windows, doors, benches, wood, coal, grass, and looted tins of kerosene oil began to press toward the city gates. The aim was evidently to burn these and then pour into the city. Bow at the same time trusted that our Nationalist Commander would hesitate to fire upon such a mass of humanity, and even if he should who cared? They were but the great "stupid multitude" to be sacrificed when policy or plunder might so demand.

Thanks to our warning Commander Chen was somewhat prepared for such an eventuality. When, after much sacrifice, the gates in places were pierced, the attackers found before them, not a clear entrance to the city beyond but other great walls built substantially of stones and bricks gathered from the streets. Thus foiled Bow began to fire all the suburbs, in part to spread terror to the citizens, in part to conceal his movements as he drove the unfortunates armed only with ladders to attempt the scaling of the walls. Heaps of wretched humanity at the foot of the latter showed the hopelessness of this attack, but Bow hounded them on.

All day they fought with varying fortune. Then as night

began to fall a more serious assault threatened. The herd of unhappy peasants began to undermine the walls and by burrowing and blasting to break great breaches in the defending ramparts. Commander Chen had early wired to the capital for aid, but none had yet arrived. He tried these again, urging his emergency. They were everywhere cut. He sought to send men out over the walls. They were immediately detected, seized and executed before the very eyes of the defenders and that with revolting cruelty. The siege was indeed becoming desperate. Over by the western gate where stood the great mission hospital, a great portion of the wall had fallen and the attackers were from sheer weight of numbers winning their way through.

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Meantime our band of long cloaked figures had pushed forward through the day and ere darkness fell that night were waiting in silence its coming. Lu-lu and I together with a few old warriors of the "Black Bones" quietly made our plans. These were simple and soon matured, so all sat down to rest. I had recovered my own rifle and accoutrement and as May Fay had insisted that I too have one of the great cloth cloaks, I could not well be distinguished from the silent warriors each squatting in his seemingly miniature tent about me.

But my thoughts were not as theirs. Across the darkening vale from us, lights began to twinkle. They were in the grim old castle. They brought back to me many a scene of the days now seemingly so long gone by. . . . There was the classroom again with little May Fay tripping, skipping to and fro, her red hair cords and pantaloons twinkling gaily as she moved. . . . There was Wong Yung. . . . Ah! How long since I had even thought of him. . . . Some good trick of memory had almost obliterated his very image and his infamy. . . . Then there sat old Teacher Tang seeking still to instil within us the sayings and strivings of the "Superior Man" as conceived by our great Sage . . . and my grim old warrior uncle? Yes, he paced to and fro, twirling himself about his stiff leg and announcing still his conviction that the end of all was wealth and the way was war. . . . There too was my good Aunt Grace quietly arguing her point that the goal was worth not wealth, the way there, honest and ever higher work.

How academic those discussions all seemed then. How dire the doctrines of wealth and war seemed now. Even my grim old uncle had never dreamed that men would arise who would take his doctrines so diabolically. . . . Ah! They had done him to a cruel death . . . had captured the shallow soul of his only son . . . and I too had all but fallen their victim. . . .

Then my thoughts whirled me far away. . . . I was once more tramping the far hills in terror . . . teaching quietly in the old temple. . . . Alas! War with its terrors came even to that quiet spot and Mohammedan horsemen were baptizing me with my pupils' blood. . . . War! War! and I turned away from the scenes of burning villages, sacked cities and heaps of slain. . . . The snows of Shen-si then swept before me. . . . I shivered. . . . Alas! Alas! Cold and hunger and homeless humanity . . . crunching of feet as my small corps carried their stiff and silent burden to the trench where already lay long lines of corpses. . . . Aye! and that again was war, had not food been forced from the multitude who grew it to fill the maws of marching armies? . . . War! War! War! and its goal of wealth which ends but in desolation and woe!

Then other scenes came and stayed. . . . The first was but a flitting one . . . a beauteous maiden danced for a moment flashing my sword and singing as I had never heard song before. . . . Then sombre days of suffering, of fight, and flight and a haven at last in the great college centre of my own SzeChwan. . . . How thoroughly she seemed to fit that latter setting. . . .

"Ah! Lucile! Lucile!" I murmured. "Not wealth but you and such as you among women and men of real worth are the end. . . . My dear aunt was right. . . . The way is not war but work, sincere, sacrificing service, such as the lives of the professor of science and the great surgeon so supremely revealed! . . . They had sighted the end and shown the way. . . . Let us join our lives and follow that path somewhere, anywhere so long as we face the goal."

I awoke with a start. Some one was shaking me gently. It was Lu-lu.

"Up!" he was saying. "Time come. . . . Up!"

XXI

THE WINNING WAY

I RUBBED my eyes and looked. Ah! There were the lights twinkling still over in the old castle. There doubtless sat Bow and his "Supreme Staff." We must make a desperate effort. 'Twas war again and I loathed it. . . . But for the present I knew no better way. Such villains knew no form of right but might, no better way to win than by brute force.

"This track!" said Lu-lu as he plucked my cloak.

I fell in behind and he guided my feet as we scrambled and slid and leaped by turns far down the sheer and ragged rocks. Who could conceive that humans would ever dare descend such precipitous sides? But we made it, and were soon creeping cautiously across the old valley. We paused a moment by the grim tower with its many memories. Lu-lu was dividing his men. Then we descended to the stream. It was full of water now and its friendly roar seemed to rise to ever higher pitch, as though to hide our movements. I placed my hand reverently upon the big rock where my warrior uncle had suffered, and swore to be true once more.

I can scarce recall the hour that followed. I remember clambering up the zig-zag stones of the old wall at the spot we so well knew in days of youth. I claimed the right to go first. Lu-lu followed, guiding the picked men hard at our heels. I had scarce slipped over the rampart when a sentry flashed his light upon us. After that much seems a blur. It is blessedly so. Are not all fights the same in substance?—shots and shouts and shrieks, bayonets and blood and poor crumpled up broken bodies . . . friend and foe rushing, racing, raging here and there like wild boars or jackals, frenzied humans suddenly become fiends!

To us the end was never in doubt. We had no thought of anything but victory. It came suddenly. Some of our adversaries tried to escape through the great gates but were met by a withering volley. Some sought to leap the walls, and were captured or tumbled to their doom far below. Others gave up

hope and ran out calling for mercy. Then the round up came and the search for the leaders. To our consternation Bow was not among the captives, nor yet among the slain. A few questions from his followers elicited the assurance that he had been present with his staff and so the search continued.

A band such as ours could not long be balked. They found him at length, hidden beneath a big bundle of wadded quilts in the women's quarter. We had let loose the prisoners early in our struggle and a dozen willing hands seized him, dragging him from his hiding place, and leading him into the old guest room where I had once been the accused and he the accuser. There Lu-lu and I had set up a speedy tribunal. When he came into the full light we could scarce but break into laughter. He was dressed in the garb of a woman, that of a Buddhist nun. The mysterious creature who had once been our guide up the Sacred Mount of Omei had found her way back to the fort and had there become a high devotee, or something, to Bow and his new régime. He had shown his fine chivalry by now assuming her rôle as a means of attempted escape.

"Who are you?" I demanded, as though he were to me a stranger.

"A simple servant, Sir," he simulated the attitude trying to hide his identity.

"Bow! . . . Bow! It's Bow himself!" howled half a dozen voices, for the prisoners knew him well, even if I had not.

"Then I demand that this rabble be dismissed, and that I be treated with all courtesy as an officer and prisoner of war," he snarled assuming at once an air of high hauteur.

"And who am I?" I asked looking hard into his shifting eyes. "Who am I to treat you in the manner you suggest? And who are you to deserve it?"

He gave me a searching look, but his eyes showed no recognition.

"I have never harmed the Lo-los," he protested, looking around questioningly upon the sullen forms that filled the place.

"Nay, you slew two and would willingly have slain others . . . and you have slain your fellow citizens of China without number, tormented their women, tortured their men, even now are attempting to seize and sack a city that you may satisfy your passions for loot and lust."

"Simply the fortunes of war, Sir," he interrupted trying to stem my flood of accusation.

"No! Not in times of aggressive war alone, but like a ghoul murderer in days of peace you had the head of this valley slain, and his aged councillors beaten and butchered, his kinswomen carried off into shame and hounded into insanity, and a youth of their clan buried alive in his coffin, because he would be true to their cause."

"Who are you?" he called, his big eyes staring wildly.

"Me?" I shouted, rising to my full height on the dais above him. "Me? . . . I am perchance that youth's ghost come hither from the Yellow Springs to avenge his death and the destruction of his clan."

His long legs shook beneath him, and he began to plead for mercy.

"Down," I thundered, "and ask forgiveness not of me but of High Heaven."

"It's Dan! It's Dan! It's Dan himself," whispered some of the prisoners, who had known me in other days.

"Dan? Dan!" moaned the unhappy wretch. "'Twasn't me, Dan! 'Twas him! 'Twas Jowl Jaw! Jowl Jaw!"

"Yes! Jowl Jaw the murderer hand. . . . You the murderer heart!" I retorted, then my anger mollifying, "But another will pass judgment upon you, not I. . . . I will send you to-morrow as soon as your troops are driven from their iniquitous siege, to the Commander of the city. . . . He will show you what mercies the law of your bleeding land may mete out."

Freed thus from fear of immediate fury, Bow leaped to his feet and began a tirade as of yore.

"My armies shall not falter," he shouted. "They will capture the city and the land yet. . . . The red flag will fly everywhere . . . and the workers and peasants triumph."

"That workers and peasants in our land and in all lands should nowhere be oppressed but have their full share of the best, I too would sacrifice my life," I broke in. "But that best will never come through brutality, butchery and blasphemy. You to win would turn men into a great organized machine whose end would be property. We would mould men into a free society whose chief purpose would be personality. You

would hold men in terror to a military scourge. We would have them give glad assent to the highest mutual service. You would grill them by an arbitrary Government. We would have them follow the guidance of the God of all. . . . But such sentiments are doubtless lost on you. . . . Keep him closely guarded," I ordered and again a score of hands seized him and led him cursing away.

Next day brought good news. The report of the capture of the old castle and of the chief and his staff soon reached the city, and Bow's underlings, far from rallying to his rescue, fled precipitously. The siege of the city was raised and citizens of street and countryside were soon rejoicing together. Later in the day I started Bow under strong escort to Commander Chen. The latter was spared a dismal duty. Somewhere en route, despite the effort of the guard, the mad multitude seized their prisoner. I never asked for details of the orgy that followed. It is said Bow's head decorated a spear-point as a great rejoicing populace carried it from centre to centre, while his carcass was flung to the dogs. . . . The Lopper we sent to join Jowl Jaw in his feeding of Lo-lo fires.

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It was a great day when mother and daughter were again united. I was absent as they wept and rejoiced their first hours together, but when I returned to the old castle I found them seated in the sadly scarred garden of many memories, little Dan cooing coyly in his grandmother's arms. Those tiny fingers seemed to hold the healing necessary for her distracted soul and the old sweet self swiftly returned under their magic touch. She seemed to demur a bit for a time that her daughter should wed a Lo-lo, be a sojourner in a strange land, even though a chieftainess and wife of a friend and favourite such as Lu-lu. But I recalled to her memory once again that great episode of our history.

"Remember Tai-tsung, the great first Emperor of the Tangs, dear aunt," I said. "He thought it high policy to bestow his beloved daughter, the Princess Wen, upon the then King of Tibet."

"And history has justified the gift," she replied smiling. "That little lady made peace possible for many a decade and

introduced a higher culture among the peoples of those far-flung ranges."

"And our little princess?" I interrogated.

"True, Dan! True!" she said as a far-off look filled her eyes, "and if she should succeed, the sacrifice *will* be sweet."

She went off holding little Dan a bit more tightly to her bosom.

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There was another home coming much more difficult to relate. It came some days after peace again reigned in our valley. One morning just at dawn a group of my own kith and kin came pushing forward a tall hulking youth in a much soiled army uniform.

"Wong Yung!" I said as I stepped forward. "Wong Yung. It is you?"

He drew back in his old sulky way.

"Who're you?" he demanded gruffly.

"Don't dissemble, Yung," I said quietly. "You know me well. . . . I'm Dan. . . . Your cousin of old," and I tried to honour him with a salute.

He did not return it, but stared at me sullenly.

"Liar!" he mumbled after a moment of silence. "Dan's dead and rotten long ago."

Then a new thought flashed through my mind. . . . Yung must know me, yet for some sinister motive was casting a doubt on my identity. . . . What better moment than then for evidencing my escape—there in his very presence and with our kindred all about us?

"We will not argue," I answered. "Facts speak louder than words. . . . Keep him," I added to his guards, then turning to the others:

"You know my reputed grave among the others?"

Several nodded their assent.

"Carry the old coffin here. . . . You need not fear. . . . It contains neither baneful devils nor bones."

An hour later and we stood around the big black box while a carpenter opened it warily, softening the glue gradually with heated water. At length the sliding lid gave way. The crowd encircled it in awesome silence. Yung and I stood at the very

foot that we might be the first to discover its contents. Slowly the cover was removed. It revealed nothing in the main but the small skeleton of a rat and rocks and stones. A great sigh of relief went up from the encircling group. I looked at Yung. His eyes were glued upon the coffin and his whole frame trembled.

"The devils!" he glared at length. "The devils. . . . There it is now?" and lunging forward he pulled out a little object in red.

"Aunt Grace's bank book," I gasped, and involuntarily snatched it from his grasp.

Yung sought to seize it again, but I readily restrained him. Others meantime had made a different discovery. The rocks were not all of common sheen. Several here and there shone with an unmistakable grey.

"Silver! . . . Silver! . . . The warrior's silver!" the words were already passing from lip to lip.

I looked. There, sure enough were great chunks of the precious metal poured into solid lumps as was the olden custom. The Lo-lo prisoners that night of their escape must have piled these in plentifully as part of their hurried ballast.

"Mine! . . . All mine!" growled Yung, as some one drew a great chunk from the heap.

"You may thank Lu-lu's men for any," I answered; "but for them Bow would have all this. . . . It must now be safely stored for the common good."

"Not that hunk," Yung snarled, and springing forward he seized the big chunk from the man's hand.

Then before we knew it, he had darted through the circle. He ran not for the gate but for the side of the garden.

"The Zig-zag! . . . The rock-way," I shouted, rushing forward.

But Yung was too well advanced. He reached the edge and was over ere I could gain the spot. I swung myself forward to follow him. As I did so I could see him stepping warily down, still clutching the silver lump. Then suddenly he slipped, clung a moment, then fell far below. A deep curse came rolling upward as he made the awful plunge.

That was Yung's last word. I followed him down the Zig-zag rocks to find him gasping for breath, but still grasping his deadly

burden. We carried him back by the big gates. As we toiled up the great stone steps his body went limp in our arms. We laid him out in his old room and gave what honours we could to the dead for the great warrior's sake. Then, the grim coffin cleared of its contents, we laid him therein and carried him to his grave. Few mourned but many lamented, as we gave him a last resting place amid his ancestors.

Poor Yung! My feelings toward him, as we laid him away, were but those of pity. He had taken the wrong turning of the way. Our grandsire had sought wealth but his way was that of honest toil. The warrior had sought it too and deemed war the sure way to the goal, but war ever with honour. Yung, alas! followed after wealth in its grossest form and wed himself to war in its crassest, cruellest fashion, fit victim of Communism as in our country at its worst. . . . Again I thanked my good aunt and High Heaven fervently, as we turned away, that for me the end was not wealth but worth.

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The remainder of my tale is readily told. My return to the great capital was an occasion of supreme joy. Lucile, who had awaited me long, never seemed so radiantly beautiful, so glad, so gracious. She had good news from the north. Spring had returned again and with it new hope of harvest. There, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Fuh and my good Colonel, her father had been carefully guarded, then released and later restored to his official post. Best of all, having heard my story from the lips of such persuasive friends and especially from Lucile's own so plausible pen, the father had returned a favourable reply to my plea, and we gave ourselves each to the other in fullness of love.

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The harvest comes on apace again in the old sheltered valley of the Wongs. This time no flight of crackling locusts, no devastating drought, no plague, no curse of Communist banditti becloud or threaten us. From the small streams water flows as of yore in abundance and the waving fields of rice are slowly turning from green to gold. Up from the bosom of great mother earth arises once more the creaking of heavily ladened barrows, the long clear cry of birds unmolested in their brooding, the

happy calls of youths and maidens as they stray amid the rustling bamboos or gather new fruits from the old orchards, and not less loud though inaudible to these human ears, a deep-souled pæan of praise from my long suffering people, both living and dead, that at last order reigns inviolate throughout our native valley.

Down in the little village, the merchants have once more resumed the buying and barter they so dearly love. There in the markets, products of the farm are again offered and men as of old are bargaining up their sleeves or sitting quietly at the close of day, smoking together the pipe of content. Thanks to Dr. Fuh who has now returned to be head of the hospital in the Prefectural City, there is a regular dispensary in our narrow street, where passing ills are healed. Thanks to my Lucile there is a flourishing school where daily our sons and daughters share in the inheritance of all the nations in the sciences and the arts. And thanks to my good aunt there is another modest structure where weekly a great message is proclaimed: "Let he that is chief among you be as he that doth serve."

The curse and cry of Communism in its darkest degree still, alas, rave and ravage throughout many sections of our unhappy land. But in our quiet valley, though we are not returning wholly to the old and are essaying even some Communist ideals we are trying to attain these in that other way. It is the well travelled way of millions of this old world's dwellers, the way they have rediscovered in many a land after many a bitter battle leads nearest to the long cherished dream of our own Sage and of the Saviours of all races, "The nation prosperous, the people at peace." It is the way of unselfish worth joined in united work, following after that fullness of life for each and all, preached and personified by the Prince of Peace!

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